

# flux

*A magazine of  
libertarian socialism*

*Issue 4  
Spring 1992  
75p*



# Editorial

Smiling men in grey suits clutching babies and shaking hands with internationals. Briefcases bulging with answers and programmes; polls swiftly contradicting and proving nothing. Expert predictions and publications of facts; interviews with ordinary people and opportune documentaries. The time has come again for that great and elaborate roadshow of rhetoric, lies and hypocrisy. Democracy at its worst, we are proudly presented with the General Election.

This edition of *flux* arrives amidst frantic electioneering and media manipulations. Questions and agendas are being set and politicians try to reassure us that they know best. Whilst the Conservative Party argue that the main issue in the election is income tax, the Labour Party cite the dwindling health service as the voter's main concern. One party says that the British public will not tolerate a penny increase in income tax and the other says it will. One party says that the N.H.S. is safe in its hands and the other says it is not. Both parties converge in their belief that elections provide genuine indicators of what the people want. So in an atmosphere of panic, trickery and hype we are urged to place our X. May the best man (sic) win.

Elections have to be fair though. Thus when Ashdown's extra-marital relations were recently hijacked by the media both Kinnock and Major loudly applauded his courage and strength. Of course behind the scenes the two were gleefully rubbing their hands. Kinnock and Major's ambiguity is not surprising - it is fine if you are not in the limelight but as soon as the spotlight shifts you too could be caught with your trousers down. Another example of politicians preserving their own interests. The fact that neither of the two main parties are in favour of electoral reform greatly demonstrates this insidious alliance - maintaining the status quo because it keeps others out.

Unlike elephants voters, it is assumed, have short memories. This explains the flurry of activity prior to elections. Thus we have seen the (temporary) shelving of the Asylum Bill, so-called reductions in hospital waiting lists, a £75 million injection into the Social Fund, proclamations that stiffer action will be taken against 'bail bandits' and convenient announcements of public sector pay increases. And predictable responses are heard from the opposition - we can do more and better. All are anxious about wrong moves and inappropriate verbatim. All tiptoe around every issue, particularly on contentious matters like immigration and law and order. Pragmatism wins votes and vote-winning requires compromise. So regardless of intent what we are left with are political parties whose manifestos are transparently similar. Whilst advertising agencies are paid millions to market *difference* the person in the street comments upon the indistinguishability of the policies promised. As revolutionaries we too have to face questions of compromise. In the last issue of *flux* there was featured an article explaining some of the reasons for not voting. In this edition we print a letter detailing arguments for voting against the Government.

Also in this edition we have the second part of "Understanding the Irrational". This part focuses upon ideology and how our expectations and understandings are shaped by dominant ideas and representations. This is apt when considering our notion of democracy. Again and again democracy is a word used to describe the political system in Britain - cite recent remarks by the government concerning removing the addresses of M.P.'s from electoral registers (because of threats from the I.R.A.): "We don't want to undermine the democratic processes of this country"; "Of course one of our main considerations is to preserve democracy".

Other articles give attention to those issues which are not sold as election matters. Thus the article on homelessness examines the government's response to the thousands of repossessions currently being undertaken by banks and building societies. Similarly the increasing poverty experienced by students is discussed, in an article looking at student activism in the 1990's. Ecological concerns are debated in a critique of the "Green Movement" whilst political veganism is explored in a separate article. Continuing with the theme of what is democracy, the piece on 'Holidays in Hungary' contemplates the perceptions of (Western) democracy in the light of what Hungarian people have experienced as socialism. Here we note how East and West converge in their distaste of this nine-lettered noun. Hungarian people hate it because they've been told they have experienced it, whilst the Labour Party shun it to keep in with the Right crowd.

Nevertheless, on both sides of the continent, as elsewhere, grass-roots activism is still alive and kicking - fighting for social, economic and political justice. Maybe 'socialism' isn't a useful word anymore, but that working class tradition is far from being eliminated.

The *FLUX* Collective,  
April 1992

# *A Home is for life, not just for Christmas.*

Homelessness is one of those things which, it seems, the public can only stomach at Christmas time. Rather like pickled gherkins and repeated showings of The Wizard of Oz. Too much of anything is not good for us - certainly too much of anything horrid. Predictably the post-Christmas blues has set in and the country now retreats to the more important things in life, like attending to excessive overdrafts and fighting off loan sharks. Out with plum pudding, turkey and pink champagne. In with Weightwatchers, Holidays in The Sun and Cream Eggs. Out with homelessness.

With consistent detail the media gave us the plight of homeless people throughout the month of December. We were given the tragic, the pitiful, and the downright unnecessary. All for a period of four weeks. Christmas, it would appear, is a time to be housed.

Of course this is rubbish and the sentiment fostered does nothing to combat the vast housing problem we have in Britain today. Newspapers are sold, documentaries watched and we are all urged to put our coppers in the next tin collecting for the homeless. We just have to give a little more. But who is responsible for homelessness and for the purported "housing crisis"?

In a society organised around profit at all costs homelessness is inevitable. Housing, just like any other capitalist commodity, is determined by the money we have and the choices we are given. Whilst 66% of households are buying their houses thousands of people roam the streets each night cold and hungry. Many people without homes have been in state care either as children or as adults. Thus, for example, in 1989 40% of homeless young people in central London had been in care. Similarly many adults without homes have been discharged from mental hospitals in the name of 'community care' and left with no support or accommodation. But the bulk of homeless people do not become homeless because they have problems; they have problems because they are homeless. Try getting a job (or keeping one) if you're homeless. Try looking after your kids in bed and breakfast. Try registering with a g.p.. People without homes face a multitude of difficulties because they are homeless. And their problems are greatly exacerbated by government policy and dominant ideologies concerning housing. One such dominant ideology is that buying one's house is preferable to renting. The opportunity to buy accommodation is ill-fitting to these people's circumstances - who would give someone in a hostel or bed and breakfast a mortgage? Whilst owner-occupiers are given enormous subsidies in the shape of mortgage interest relief those people who do not want to - or cannot afford to - buy have to rely upon a dwindling council sector or the private marketplace for their housing.

## ***Below flux gives an historical overview of British housing policy.***

It was the Conservatives who first introduced legislation to provide direct housing for the "working classes" in 1890, and the Liberals who made the first explicit commitment to municipal housing in 1919. The 1919 Act followed the First World War where, among other things, the proletariat were promised "homes fit for heroes". Council housing was to be for all working class people, it was to be viewed as a welcome and viable alternative to renting from unscrupulous landlords (sic). The 1920's and 1930's saw some difference in emphasis between Conservative and Labour, the Conservatives beginning their policies of selectivity whilst the Labour Party held onto the universal principles of municipal provision. Similarly Labour initiated slum clearance, which was to follow, in varying forms, right through to the 70's. It was in the 70's that Labour began backtracking, espousing the need to be more selective in the provision of council houses, a reversal of previous commitment but linked with other cutbacks blamed on the world oil crisis and the economic slump at home. Labour argued that they were being pragmatic in the face of adversity whilst the Conservatives made no apologies for their ideological opposition. Both were working within the machineries of capitalism and both had to maintain their electoral appeal. In 1977 Labour introduced the first major piece of homelessness legislation which was very radical for its time. The Act was updated by the Conservatives in 1985, five years after their "Right to Buy" legislation was passed. Thus local authorities have statutory duties to house (certain categories of) homeless people but, at the same time, they have obligations to tenants who wish to buy. All part of the "home-owning democracy" as dreamed up by Thatcher herself. If you are homeless through intention then your local council does not have to house you. Similarly if you do not fit a priority group then there is no obligation on the council to offer you immediate accommodation. And accommodation can be anything from a 'hotel' to hostel to bed and breakfast. Choices, if any, are limited.

Municipal (council) housing has survived only just and is now seen to be the resting place for only the very needy. Here we see both major political parties pursuing policies of selectivity, the Tories continuing their anti-welfare programme whilst Labour whimper behind with no clear commitment. Indeed any examination of housing policy will see little real difference between the two parties (See previous page).

Undoubtedly those that take the desired path (owner-occupation) are rewarded whilst those that don't are punished. And even owner-occupation does not guarantee a secure home. Despite the government's rhetoric that the majority of us own our homes 80,000 houses were repossessed last year? Why? How? Because we don't own them at all - building societies and mortgage lenders do. Despite the radical beginnings of building societies, we are everyday witnessing the callous and punitive practices of throwing debt-ridden families onto the streets. And to mask the degradation and greed of it all reluctant building societies are shown as only wanting to help. There is no alternative but to evict. Well,



up until recently. Now the government has schemed up a system whereby building societies will be assisted out of their uncomfortable positions and home-ownership will again be A Good Thing. So when we lose our jobs our mortgage payments from the Department of Social Security will go direct to the mortgage lenders. Thus their repayments are guaranteed and we are not tempted to squander. However, what is forgotten is that the D.S.S. will only pay half of mortgage interest repayments for the first six months - so who pays the rest? The government is also supporting building societies in renting out repossessed properties, thereby guaranteeing revenue for houses that would have lain empty in a time when houses are hard to sell. Local authorities - i.e. councils - are to choose the people who are to occupy



such houses for limited periods of time (currently purported to be one year) and to then refer these people to the building societies. Of course such a scheme does nothing to solve homelessness and merely puts people in the front door whilst simultaneously kicking others out of the back. But it does buttress the mortgage lenders - the unscrupulous landlords (sic) of the 1990's and maintains the illusion that governments can make things better.

Proudhon said all property was theft and identified the absurdity of buying something which logically belongs to no-one. In this sense is buying one's house an illusory, time-wasting exercise? Colin Ward recognises our need to belong and identify space as our own and advocates direct control of the places we live. Here he argues that people who owner-occupy are more likely to feel joined to, and in command of, their living spaces. But he especially commends the actions of squatters who break all the rules of capitalism by living somewhere for free. Again we have pathetic promises from both Labour and Conservative that during the next Parliamentary session tighter legislation will be introduced to punish and criminalise squatters. A harsh and punitive measure which shows a contempt for anybody not following the rules. More abhorrent is their obvious preference for people without homes to be sleeping in shop doorways than in properties which have stood empty for years at a time. Yet another example of the way in which governments solicit to the fancies of capitalism. That is not to say that capitalism needs owner-occupation to survive. In comparison to other European countries, Britain has the highest owner-occupation rate. Historically, however, there has been an insistence in this country equating property rights with political rights. Subsequently this has become integral to bourgeois capitalist ideology. Such an ideology, which emphasises home ownership at all costs, legitimates the widespread suffering of people who lose their homes and of people who have never had homes. It also explains why homeless people are only newsworthy during the Christmas period. Meanwhile, on the election trail, Major and Kinnock give us the real issues.

Carolyn Willow

## HOLIDAYS IN HUNGARY

The writer of this article spent five weeks working in a school at Győr, during November and December 1991. Most of the people spoken to were teachers.

Before 1989, Judit told me, there was a lot of cynicism but with it a lot of humour. Political jokes were commonplace and satirical cabaret popular. Now, she says, there is still a lot of cynicism: but she hasn't heard a political joke for ages. Cynicism and satire, now that's a potent mix: but humourless cynicism - that's depressing.

This account is not meant to be theoretical. It's a snapshot account based on conversation and observation. All I want to do is give a flavour of how people - some people - are feeling two years after the 'Democratic Revolutions' of 1989. It's scope is certainly narrow: a handful of people in one town in one country - but ....

1989 saw tremendous optimism. It was a festival. The Soviet Empire was packing up to leave and the 'end of Communism' seemed to promise all manner of possibilities. There were 'freedoms': to travel, to read whatever you liked, to publish, to not study Russian. 'Freedoms', some trivial, which offered choice and release from a dishonest and inefficient bureaucracy. More materially there were expectations of prosperity: of a standard of living commensurate with 'democratic' institutions - in which the dusty Trabants would be replaced by new motorcars that went

places - fast. It also meant the restoration of some kind of Hungarian identity - which for over 40 years had been swamped by Soviet tanks in the name of a spurious 'proletarian internationalism'. And then, finally free from the East, Hungary could find renewed self-esteem in association with the 'advanced' and prosperous 'democracies' of Western Europe.

So much for the expectations. The reality, post-1989, has of course been rather different. And the optimism of that time has corroded into a bitter pessimism.

What they hadn't expected, Zsuzsa said, was unemployment, inflation and insecurity. At least under 'Communism' they knew where they were and where they'd be in a few years time. They could plan, for example. They knew that in 2 or 3 years time they'd be able to afford a holiday abroad or buy a Trabant. Under the 'Kadar doctrine' - "those who aren't against us, are with us" - people were pretty much left to get on with it; and they paid little due to the establishment's 'Communist' rhetoric. If not affluent, daily life was at least

reasonably secure.

Now, such security is a luxury enjoyed by only the few. Most people's horizons are set low: on keeping pace with inflation by taking 2 or 3 jobs, on holding onto jobs which were under threat, on simply getting by. Twelve hours a day at work is commonplace, said Tomas. And he complained of only seeing his daughter for half an hour a day and that everybody was tired. For sure, compared with neighbouring Romania conditions in Hungary were really not that bad. But that was hardly the point.

At the same time, Zsuzsa said, there had been no 'revolution' in the state institutions. Much of the old state apparatus was still in place. And much of the old nepotism, for historical reasons known in Hungary as the "Gentry System", had returned.

In fact, the only person I met who might be described as 'optimistic' was the editor of the local regional paper. He was as proud of his Rover car as he was of his association with British business (the paper he edited had recently been bought up by the owners of *The Daily Mail* and he was packing his editorial team off to Britain to learn British management and editorial techniques - which augurs well for a democratic press!).

The problem with Hungarian people, he said, was that they had been asleep for 40 years, and now they were going to have to wake up! And he had always been anti-Communist.

It didn't add up, others said. But now, with aspirations for the future frustrated, so many people were denying their past



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associations: there was a risk of Hungary sinking into a psychodrama of denial, blame and recrimination. Without a future that made promises, the past was there as a substitute to pull over and poke at.

But the editor's significance is more fundamental. He is representative of the new Hungary. Rather than Hungary taking its place alongside the western capitalist "democracies", western business was buying into Hungary and shaping it into its hinterland. The emergent elite (though how emergent they *really* are, people found it difficult to tell) is establishing itself as a class of business agents for the West: into what used to be known as a *comprador bourgeoisie*. These, presumably are the "winners" of society that President Goncz talked of in an interview on Danish TV.

The question, then, was where to now? And the answer: that most working class people are too shaken up with today to worry about tomorrow.

If they had little idea about where they wanted to go next, they certainly worried about where they might find themselves next. There was concern, especially, that the waves of national and ethnic conflict that were breaking in the wake of the Soviet collapse might drag Hungary into war. Romania

was making territorial claims against the Ukraine, there was tension between the Czechs and Slovaks in Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia had collapsed into civil war. There were significant Hungarian minorities in Romania, the Ukraine and elsewhere...their position might become vulnerable....'democracy' has brought more than just economic uncertainty.

And what about 'Socialism', I asked. Zsuzsa said that socialism was Stalinism and all else was utopia and theory. Looking back at 1956 she acknowledge that its aspirations were both socialist and democratic. But that was then and it had been defeated by Soviet tanks and Western indifference. The powers that mattered were too big. Zoltan said that I "should try living 10 years under Communism". Every discussion on Socialism became deadlocked in an argument on Stalinism.

When I came back someone said it was unfair to pick up on the lack of direction the people I'd met seemed to exhibit: wasn't it just the same here in Britain? And I agree that it's true. The malaise there is merely part of a global malaise.

In Hungary, socialism and its icons have been utterly compromised by the experience of Stalinism. What hasn't been

compromised has been the need to struggle. And where that struggle leads depends very much on the resources available to it. But popular aspirations are being frustrated at every turn. And the price of transition into a Western-dominated fully market economy will be paid by the ordinary working class people of Hungary. If socialists are to relate to the struggle that will inevitably ensue (and Socialism - or whatever we choose to call it - means nothing if it's not a part of a struggle from below), the lesson to be taken up there is the same as it is here in Britain: there is no point in trying to recycle failed remedies, and old images - however some might try to rehabilitate them - have had their day. And for inspiration, the insurgent workers of Hungary 1956 offer more than any amount of retelling of the Bolshevik seizure of power.

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Recommended reading: *Hungary 1956*, by Andy Anderson, Phoenix Press. This is an account of the Hungarian workers uprising against Stalinist bureaucracy, which brought to the fore a demand for a democratic socialism based on the power of the Workers Councils.

# Understanding the Irrational

## Part 2: the IDEOLOGICAL level

This article is the second in a series. The first (in Flux 3) criticised the psychodynamic psychological theories which dominate the libertarian and orthodox Left. It explained that these ideas were left behind long ago by radical thinkers within psychology, in favour of a much more explicitly SOCIAL approach. The article ended by providing a framework of LEVELS OF EXPLANATION to slot theories into.

### 1. Introduction: Levels of Explanation

The preceding article explained the need for a framework to slot psychological theories into, to avoid misusing them - for example, by trying to make them explain something they were never meant to. The framework is provided by the idea that different psychological theories operate on different levels of explanation <sup>(1)</sup>.

Level:

- 1 Ideological
- 2 Positional
- 3 Interpersonal
- 4 Individual

Level 1 looks at broad social and cultural patterns; level 2 explores the psychological factors which arise from people's status, roles and positions within society; level 3 is

where the influence of personal relationships of a more or less intimate nature can be explored; and level 4 examines the psychology of the individual.

On each level, different psychological theories can be applied - which means that there might be more than one explanation for things that happen. When this happens, social explanations - that don't rely on "facts" about individuals, such as "He's just a mad bastard" - are usually best; but ultimately we decide which explanation is best according to what we need it for: in exactly the same way, you *could* describe the workings of a car engine in terms of particle physics - you just probably wouldn't bother because ordinary mechanics is much more helpful!

Notice that as we move from level 1 to level 4, our explanations for people's actions come closer to being located inside their heads. But we start at level 1, the level of ideology, so as to reverse the normal hierarchy of explanation which usually starts with the individual, the person taken out of their social context. Using this framework forces us first of all to consider the social reasons for people's actions, before we are able to dismiss them as idiosyncratic, deviant or wrong.

### 2. The Ideological Level: what is it?

Psychological theories operating on this Level explore the large scale ideas about people and societies which shape the way that we think. They look at culturally

defined, commonly held ideas about the world, identity and self - ideas such as gender, race, sexuality, social class, age, nationality. They explore how these

commonly-held ideas can shape the ways that we think and communicate together. Since most communication and thought requires language, theories of the Ideological Level show the importance of everyday language in both reflecting and sustaining the power relationships within society. They also help us to think about ways of fighting back.

The framework makes it obvious that large-scale influences on the Ideological Level, such as class, race and gender, don't act directly on individuals because they exist at the opposite end of the framework.<sup>(2)</sup>

Gender stereotypes, for example, are common throughout our culture, so all individuals who are part of it will be influenced by them. But between the ideological level (Level 1) where these stereotypes exist, and the individual (Level 4), are two more levels where psychological factors operate. So, the influence of gender stereotypes upon an individual will never be direct: it will always be modified by factors that operate on the intermediate levels. This is why we can say that commonly held ideas about gender certainly will influence people, but can't say *how* their influence will be seen.<sup>(3)</sup>

An example: Class Consciousness

To show how this framework of Levels of Explanation can be applied, and bring out some of the implications of its use, this section examines a psychological idea well known on the activist Left, and shows how we must re-think it in the light of this framework: the idea of class consciousness.

Amongst activists the notion of class consciousness is a widely accepted psychological theory that operates on the Ideological Level. Simply put, it refers to the extent to which the working class view the world in terms of their interests as a class - crudely, it is a measure of their collective combative attitude towards the ruling class.

The theory evolved because, for the most part, the international working class stubbornly persist in failing to recognise their role as the engine of revolution. Those segments of the class that do come to see the world in such terms - often, though by no means always, as a result of coming into direct conflict with the ruling class - are said to have had their consciousness "raised".

From our perspective the concept is deeply flawed, since until class consciousness is achieved then actually knowing what the interests of your class are could be a problem: but that's where the vanguard Party come in - they'll tell you. Lenin was quite explicit about this: the working class by themselves could never develop anything more than a reformist "trade union consciousness", and so they needed the guidance of the class conscious vanguard to help them become revolutionary.

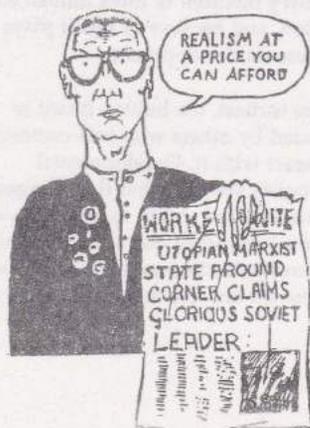
#### Mutually dependent mythologies

For the Leninists, the question of how the vanguard Party get their knowledge and so achieve class consciousness barely arises: painstaking application of the correct Marxist analysis will inevitably lead to the (one) correct position.

Its important to realise that the myth of the objective truth (as revealed by the correct Marxist analysis) is an important counter-balance to the idea of class consciousness. In fact, the two ideas support each other: they are mutually dependent mythologies, and each needs the other to remain credible.

By saying that objective truth is a myth, we aren't saying that chairs and tables don't exist. The "objective truth" being criticised is the kind that claims, for example, that Saddam Hussein was "objectively anti-Imperialist"<sup>(4)</sup> during the Gulf War. "Objective" truths of this kind presuppose entire systems of values, and reduce the complexity of political life to single dimensions. Whether it might be advantageous to treat a murderous capitalist like Saddam as though he were a comrade is - for those whose politics can embrace such wheeler-dealing - a strategical or tactical

## FULL MARX



decision to be kept under constant review: but there's nothing either "objective" or "true" about it.

#### Know Truth, Know Consciousness....

If it couldn't be certain in its knowledge of the truth, the Leninist Party would have no reliable measure of the level of consciousness the working class had attained. Whatever the issue, the Party position, which (according to the Party) must be right since it is the result of the correct Marxist analysis, becomes a benchmark, and the attitudes and activity of the class are judged against it.

#### ...No Consciousness, No Truth

At the same time, the belief that the working class by themselves can never be more than reformist helps to sustain the Leninists (at those inconvenient times when working class people disagree with them) in the belief that they are right: that their clockwork Marxism has given them exclusive access to the truth. If most of the working class, most of the time, are reformist, then most criticisms of the Party can simply be shrugged off.

So these two ideas - Marxism as the way to objective truth, and the belief that class consciousness can only be achieved by members of the (Marxist-Leninist) vanguard - work together. And between them, they have been used to justify some of the worst manipulations (and in the case of "communist" states, repressive actions) of the non-libertarian Left. Yet both are deeply flawed.

#### Outdated Determinism

The deterministic strand in Marx, the idea that Marxism can lead to one objective truth, is an idea rooted in the science of the 1840's. But by the 1940's, even physics (which studies particles and events that share one crucial feature - their lack of life, of consciousness) had been forced to drop its deterministic stance and to view the world in terms of probabilities. Since physicists find this useful, it only seems sensible that Marxists - whose subject matter is living breathing people organised into shifting, dynamic conscious and self-reflective cultures, classes and societies - should give it a try.

Modern social psychology shows that the concept of class consciousness is also deeply flawed. As it is commonly used, it suffers from two major problems:

- (i) it implies a one-dimensional scale of rising awareness and activity, as though real people don't often hold contradictory positions
  - (ii) it is an idea that exists on Level 1 of the framework we are using, yet it is usually applied to situations occurring on Levels 2,3 and even 4.
- Both of these problems are set out more fully below.

#### One-dimensional consciousness

The theory of class consciousness implies that people's political awareness develops in a straight line: that involvement in struggle inevitably raises people's awareness in a general way so that, whilst there may be individual aberrations, there is an overall progression up the scale.

Yet experience in the real world is rarely like this. Even in the throes of struggle, most people don't have consistent, worked out positions. There are many examples of this:

- during the Gulf War, many active non-paying members of our local anti-poll tax group supported the British troops
- in 1968, London dockers famed for their industrial militancy marched in support of Enoch Powell following his infamous "Rivers of Blood" speech
- a friend's working class parents vote Tory at every election, although they despise the rich and priveleged, because "they're the ones who know how to handle money"
- even after Orgreave, conversations with striking miners in the 1984/5 strike showed many of them still arguing that the police were necessary to the smooth running of society

This list really could be endless, but even from these few examples it should be clear that any simple "barometer" idea of class consciousness is unrealistic, for the obvious truth is that the same people will say these contradictory things *at the same time*.

Some people might object that they have a comrade who was once a Sun reader, but that in the course of struggle this person's consciousness was raised and they are now a committed activist and know all the aspects of every relevant political theory.

Yet this objection simply confirms the point: such changes in class consciousness only happen to a handful of *individuals* - and even then, people who totally and permanently change their lives and ways of thinking as a result of struggle are in a tiny minority. The vast majority of the 14 million people who refused to pay their poll tax, for example, had no more than a temporary change to their political awareness, and even then only around specific issues such as the power of central government or the need for workable local democracy.

Sadly for the Leninists, this is the way of our complex society. Consciousness does not only develop unevenly across the class as a whole, it develops in different directions and to different degrees within individuals and



groups. Given this, what use is it to order people along one single, non-existent scale?

### Levels of Explanation

If the class are fighting back we could say that their consciousness is high, if they aren't we could say their consciousness is low. But this is so obvious, why should anyone need to bring consciousness into it in the first place? The non-psychological idea of class conflict will do perfectly. But although this is the only valid way to use the term (since it exists on the Ideological Level it can only be used to refer to class in general terms), it hardly ever is used this way.

But more often, the idea of class consciousness is used to refer to individuals or small groups. And this is a clear case of psychological theory misapplied: notions of class exist on the ideological level of explanation, and can't simply be applied to individuals.

### Conclusion

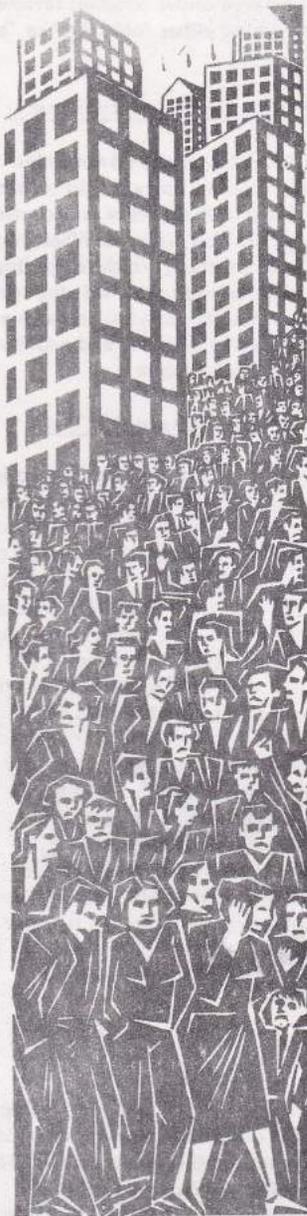
The theory of class consciousness has often been criticised by libertarians, because it so conveniently supports the Leninist position. This doesn't mean that class (and other factors such as race, gender and sexuality) isn't important to libertarian socialists: far from it, it is crucial. It just doesn't work in the simple, mechanical way that many Leftists seem to think. But criticisms have been hindered by the lack of any other way to explain people's apparently irrational behaviour.

The framework of Levels of Explanation shows that the theory of class consciousness is deeply flawed and not very useful. But it also paves the way for an understanding of how class and other factors DO operate. This calls for an understanding of how individuals (Level 4) and their society (the Ideological Level, Level 1) interact. Future articles in this series will cover the processes at work on Levels 2 and 3, the Levels that come in between the individual and society. The rest of this article describes how ideas on Level 1 - the Ideological Level of Explanation - can be used by individuals (on Level 4) to structure and understand their experiences.

### **3. Individuals and Societies**

Modern societies are complex things. So complex that we come to need ways of understanding them that aren't rooted directly in personal experience. Take, for example, our "democracy" (a large scale idea, whose psychological dimension is on the Ideological Level, Level 1): how do we come to know and make sense of that?

The first part of the answer is: not through experience. Direct control and democracy, at the local or the national level, in the community or in the workplace, even in the political organisation which is the vehicle for change - is almost always severely limited.



But being denied any real experience of participating in a democracy, of having a say in decisions, does not mean that the decisions taken will not affect us. The state and its institutions are constantly taking decisions which shape and change the course of our lives. Decisions taken by bosses and local councils are "closer", and perhaps more immediate in their effects, than those taken by the IMF or heads of state - but they are no more under our control.

And it is precisely because these decisions will affect us that we need a way of understanding them. We need to be able to talk with others about how these decisions affect our lives, so that we can make sense of the things we experience. But how? How do we do this?

At first glance this seems like a silly question. We think about what goes on, and then we tell other people - and that's it. But where do these thoughts come from?

Psychodynamic psychological explanations (criticised in the preceding article) would claim that these thoughts spring from the internal psychodynamics of the individual.

Whilst social factors and external events provide the material and might even slightly modify attitudes, the real source of opinions, thoughts and ideas is deep within the individual.

Psychodynamic psychologists say the fact that a few individuals will take a progressive stance and be critical of our so-called democracy, whilst the majority will take a reactionary stance, reflects the simple truth that the majority are alienated, repressed and lacking in class consciousness.

But, as libertarian socialists, we would do better to reverse this perspective. We say that the only reason we understand society in the way we do is because we only have the resources of this society to draw upon. And not surprisingly, capitalist societies maintain a range of ways of thinking and understanding around a consensus which, if not actually 100% supportive of capitalism, certainly doesn't present it with any great threat<sup>(3)</sup>.

Let's be quite clear about this. Most people's experience of democracy, of decision making and the operation of power, is at best second hand: out of a country of nearly 60 million people we have 675 MP's and at most a few hundred thousand local councillors. So people are forced to understand the workings of democracy by second hand means: conversations in pubs and at work, reading the papers, watching TV. And all of these ways of understanding have one thing in common: they are mediated by - they happen through - language.

### **4. The Importance of Language**

There are two basic reasons why language is important.

- (i) it provides both the raw materials and the tools for most of our thinking
- (ii) language isn't neutral - it is itself shaped and molded by the dictates of hierarchical power and the odious values of capitalism.

Both of these points need further explanation.

#### Language and Thought

Language is essential for rational thought. Without the concepts and structures that language provides, critical or analytical thinking would be impossible.

However, language isn't only something that becomes important when we start trying to produce magazines like this one. Language is the primary medium of most human social interaction, and because of this it plays a key role in human development.

From the earliest, the human infant is surrounded by others who will communicate and interact with it. Developmental psychologists now say that the emergence of consciousness, the ability to be self aware, arises as a product of our activity within these communications and social interactions with these others. Crudely put, we only learn

to be a certain kind of person by being treated as though we already are a certain kind of person, and responding accordingly.

So as individual consciousness is formed in social interactions, and since language is a major component of social interactions, this means that the beginnings of language learning are interwoven with the beginnings of conscious thought. So, before we were even aware of it the language that surrounded us was influencing the kind of person we became - and therefore the kinds of thoughts we were likely to have <sup>(6)</sup>.

### Language isn't neutral

The fact that language is crucial for both the development of consciousness and the ability to think critically becomes even more important when the partisan nature of language is revealed.

For language does not simply reflect the world. We don't use language like a code, simply translating into it what we want to say. We don't look at ourselves and the world, then search for the best set of objective words to describe what we see there, as though language was just a mirror that reflects reality.

Language is never neutral. It is like a set of building blocks which we put together in different ways. But when we do this, we don't just make the best model we can of something that already exists. When we do this, we actually create what exists.

Of course, this isn't to say that there's no material reality. Things like trees and cars will continue to exist whether we talk about them or not. It is the *how* of their existence that is shaped by language, not the fact of it.

Saddam Hussein's "objective anti-Imperialism", mentioned earlier, illustrates this: describing the Gulf conflict in these terms "created" a reality where Left activists should logically support the Iraqi forces, rather than simply opposing the war on pacifist grounds. If we accept the "fact" that Iraq is fighting imperialism, then it follows logically that Iraq is on the same side as us.

The fact that few Left activists were persuaded, however, highlights another important fact: that although language plays a part in structuring our experience, we use it as much as it uses us. Language can lead our thoughts to water, but it can't make you think.

And it isn't just individual words or phrases that lead our thoughts in certain directions: the socially acceptable ways we are able to put them together, the socially embedded, lived structures of everyday language are also hugely powerful. For example, a newspaper article that begins "John Smith, a former mental patient, was today convicted of the murder of..." would not be unusual. But imagine your surprise if you read: "John Smith, a former mental patient, was today

elected as Member of Parliament for ..."

So language, from single words to larger patterns of use, is influenced by capitalism. Since language is essential for thought, thought can easily be tainted by capitalism's poisonous touch. By both helping to shape the people we are, and by influencing the direction of our thoughts, the language of everyday life helps capitalism to maintain a consensus around the desirability of its own existence.

### 5. A materialist position

Before the dyed-in-the-wool materialists reading this suffer a fit of apoplexy, let's state clearly that we *aren't* saying language or ideas determine how society develops: they don't. But it also should be obvious, by now, that we aren't just talking about language and ideas.

This is because language, and the ideas it carries, don't just float around waiting to be picked up. Instead, people use language and

ideas all the time, to both make sense of their lives and to communicate to other people what they think and feel.

Once this happens, and particular ways of talking and thinking about the world become so accepted that people see themselves in terms of those ideas, then it is no longer just the ideas contained in language that we have to consider. For through this process ideas can become real, material influences that will interact with other material circumstances and events, and so play their part in the outcome of events. Nationalism is perhaps the most obvious example of this.

### 6. Societies and Individuals

So, with both the importance and the limits of the influence of language established, let's return to the problem of how ideas on the Ideological Level of Explanation actually do influence individuals.

We've already said that most people understand society in the way that they do because they only have the resources of this society to draw on. These resources are based in language and the ideas it carries and, sadly, most people most of the time just use the ideas that are around - which in a capitalist society will usually be biased in favour of capitalism.

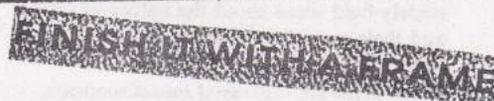
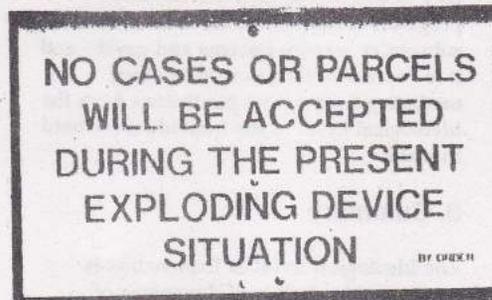
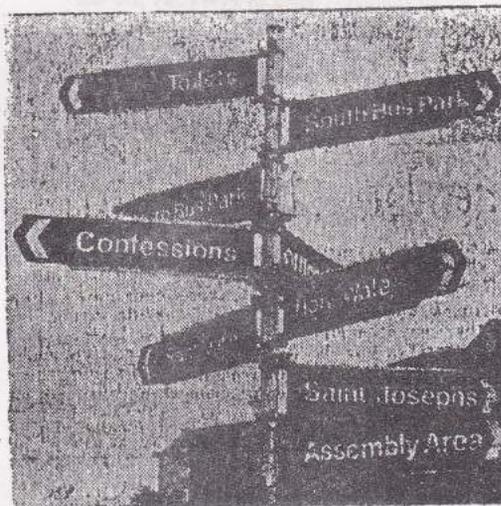
To maintain that bias the capitalists forever offer us more ideas, seemingly new ways of thinking that reproduce the same old values. This happens in newspapers and books, TV shows and films: but the process is often at its most blatant in television commercials. The bland bliss of the Oxo family, the high romance of the Gold Blend lovers and the down-to-earth practicality of the Radion home-video makers, are typical of the simplified and stupefying images we are offered.

TV adverts aren't the only source of ideas about our society and how we relate to it. But because of their gross contrast with everyday life, the example of TV adverts shows clearly how the language and ideas of capitalism affect us. Here's how:

We all know that no-one really believes the adverts. Yet people watch them, and we know that they help businesses maintain or even increase sales and market share. But that isn't their only effect.

TV adverts illustrate clearly how capitalism sells us ways of being as well as simple products, ways of seeing the world as well as things to look at. The Oxo family, the Gold Blend lovers - these adverts sell *lifestyle*, not freeze-dried granules. And of course, we all know that people aren't taken in by it: and this brings up two vital points.

The first point is that people aren't simply taken in because beneath the sales pitch is the gritty reality of capitalism, the reality of money worries, poor housing and shitty jobs, of bad-tempered children and parents so



exhausted they couldn't manage a cup of Gold Blend even if they could afford it.

The second point builds on one that was made earlier: language and ideas play an active role in social life, and through their repeated use in social interaction, communication and thought, they come to be part of our ways of viewing the world: but through this repeated use they are also changed.

### Ideas and Reality meet - and mix

So the material reality of capitalism forces a wedge between the syrupy world of TV advertising (in this example) and the experience of daily life in 1990's Britain. But this doesn't purely and simply lead to revolt, and nor does it simply lead to passive acceptance. Instead, there is an interaction between the harshness of the material world and the slickness of the adverts, so that what emerges is something different.

The language and ideas that most people end up using to understand their everyday lives are neither purely the sugary toxic creations of the capitalist state, its institutions and media collaborators: but neither are they simple reflections of the bleak reality of the council estates. They are something in between, curious and *irrational* mixtures of both.

So family life, for example, can be both like the adverts and not like them. Its like them because when good things happen people often use the language of advertising and capitalism to make sense of them (not because they especially want to, but because that's all that most people have access to). But life's also not like the adverts because many things that happen - incest, abuse, drug problems, unemployment, poverty, illness - have less of a place in the language of capitalism. At such times we either resort to other languages, other ways of understanding the world - or we are left speechless with our pain: mute, inarticulate, literally, "lost for words".

## 7. Discourse Analysis

Psychologists today call these ways of understanding *discourses*<sup>(7)</sup>, and the study of them is called *discourse analysis*<sup>(8)</sup>. The word "discourse" is used in many different ways: for psychology, *discourses are simply language based sets of ideas that we use to help shape and interpret our experiences.*

Through discourse analysis, the role of language in the operation of power can be made apparent. In fact, earlier in this article we looked at a very simple example of discourse analysis: the example of the mutually dependent mythologies of "class consciousness" and "Marxism as the path to objective truth". The term "mythologies" was used earlier, but discourse is more correct because it includes all language based sets of ideas, even those with a firmer base in reality than either the discourse of "class

consciousness" or the discourse of "objective Marxism".

Discourse analysis helps us explore ideas that exist on the Ideological Level of Explanation, and find out how they might influence individuals. In this example, the discourses of "class consciousness" and "objective Marxism", far from being redundant because they are wrong, are shown to be very useful for the Leninists as devices to insulate their theory from disproof, to help them to maintain their credibility and power, and to help the centre of the Party keep control over the edges.

People use other many other discourses, too: ideas of class, race, gender, sexuality, nationality - all those large-scale ideas on the Ideological Level of Explanation - are organised into discourses.

Many discourses exist in between the poles of two opposites. However, reflecting their origins in the clash between ideas offered to us by the ruling class, and ideas which grow out of the experience of everyday life (an experience which can never be entirely free of the influence of ruling class ideas, as section 4 of this article shows), the opposite poles of many discourses aren't forced, in any rational way, to be opposites at all.

An extremely relevant example of this is the discourse which sees capitalism and communism (the kind of communism which we would call *state capitalism*) as being the two opposite poles which define the possibilities for social organisation. Within this discourse libertarian socialist solutions, which reject both the state and the market, simply never arise.

Finally, it is important to realise that discourses are used flexibly: a discourse of "femininity" could be used in a reactionary way to sneer at women drivers, in a progressive way to ridicule sexism, or in a subversive way by lesbians and gays) - and it is because of this, as well as other mediating factors, that predictions from the Ideological Level to the Individual are hard to make.

## 8. Summary

The Ideological Level of Explanation is where the psychological dimension of widely-held ideas about the nature of people and their society are best understood<sup>(9)</sup>.

These ideas are organised into discourses, which are used by people in everyday life to explain and understand themselves and their world. We have looked briefly at discourses of gender, democracy, class consciousness and objective Marxism.

When people use discourses they usually do so to achieve effects, since discourses often both facilitate and conceal power relationships: the use by Leninists of the "class consciousness" and "objective Marxism" discourses to help maintain their

own position illustrates this.

It should have become apparent (though it was never explicitly stated) that discourses are historically and culturally situated, and that as part of the social fabric they will change their meaning and their shape as social change itself occurs. So whilst discourses might be relative and contradictory, they are never arbitrary.

Finally, the adoption of a discourse model has many more implications for political theory and practice than have been discussed here: the concept and workings of ideology, for example, is challenged by this approach.

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## Notes

<sup>(1)</sup> This framework is drawn from the work of Wilhelm Doise: see his book "Levels of Explanation in Social Psychology" (Cambridge University Press, 1985)

<sup>(2)</sup> This isn't the only reason. Gender stereotypes are often inherently contradictory - see the lyrics of most country & western songs (and section 8 of this article). Material circumstances and psychological interactions on the other levels will condition which of these contradictory elements individuals are influenced by.

<sup>(3)</sup> None of the above should be taken to mean that gender stereotypes and ideology can exist independently of the humans who are influenced by them.

<sup>(4)</sup> See, for example, the Gulf War special issue of "The Next Step" - 18/1/1991

<sup>(5)</sup> Although this resembles the Gramscian concept of hegemony, its closer still to the Situationist theory of the "Spectacle", because the importance of ideas which seem to challenge capitalism, as well as those which clearly support it, are emphasised together.

<sup>(6)</sup> The preceding paragraphs are a poor summary of the life's work of Vygotskii, a Russian psychologist in the aftermath of the revolution who tried to develop a psychology of child development and education adequate to the needs of a post-revolutionary society. His ideas were far too radical for Stalin, who suppressed them. Vygotskii died in 1934, and his work didn't come to the attention of the West until the early 1960's, where it now underpins much current work on the psychology of child development.

<sup>(7)</sup> Not always, they don't: they very often call them *interpretive repertoires*. But everywhere else the term "discourse", which is easier and shorter, is used - and that's why I've used it here.

<sup>(8)</sup> Further reading on discourse analysis in psychology can be found in: "Discourse and Social Psychology" - Potter & Wetherell, Sage Books, London, 1987; and "Discourse Dynamics" - Ian Parker, Routledge, London, 1991.

<sup>(9)</sup> The best "overview" of the social psychology of the Ideological Level of Explanation is Billig et al "Ideological Dilemmas", Sage, London, 1988. Its fairly accessible to non-psychologists, and is essential reading if you want to know more about the ideas put forward here. However, don't expect a revolutionary manifesto: its a psychology textbook!

John

# CORRESPONDENCE

The following two letters were received in response to Issue 3 of *FLUX*. We have heard from reliable sources that some other people wanted to write but never got round to it. Don't be shy - we badly need the feedback!

## In and Against the State

### *From Doubting Thomas, Bangor*

Simon's article, 'Vote Labour & Still Die Horribly', refutes some of the sillier arguments against not voting: & I agree with a lot of what he has to say. There are still some, not as many as there were but still some, who peddle the crass "If you don't vote Labour then you're giving up on Politics" line. However, I'd like to make a number of points - in the interests of debate of course.

1) I think it's unfounded optimism that disinterest in the "democratic" charade is necessarily progressive. I'm not sure how progressive is being measured, & he gives no guides, but I think it's difficult to draw any firm conclusions from disinterest & abstention. People might not need 'middle class liberals' to articulate their frustrations; but the articulation of frustration isn't in & of itself necessarily progressive. Racism, & at the extreme end fascism, are amongst other things expressions of frustration, but they're certainly not progressive for that.

In any case first who are these disinterested abstentionists? & in what direction does this disinterest point? What are people saying & doing that suggests a 'progressive' content to their "politics". Give me evidence. I'd have thought that the best we could say is that they're a pretty mixed bag

(different constituencies, different interests), & that the political situation is less certain than it was 20 years ago. But the former activists who can no longer bring themselves to vote Labour are not the same as the floating voters who know that party competition is so much hot air; & are not the same as the socially excluded poor of the inner cities, etc. etc.

2) Why does voting legitimate the system? Doesn't this argument suggest that political consciousness - how people think, feel & act politically - is reducible to one symbolic act: that of voting? But just as god moves in mysterious ways its wonders to perform, so do people move in ways contradictory. Put simply, it's the old question of doing one thing & saying another. I'm sure that the majority of the 14m non-payers during the peak of the Poll Tax campaign voted in 1987. Thus people might well 'accept' the "democratic" framework of this society, whilst at the same time perhaps being deeply cynical about the promises made within it, but the important thing is that when that system came into conflict with basic instincts & needs it was disregarded. Acceptance is fickle & you no more legitimate the system by voting than you do the wages system by asking for a pay rise or the bureaucratic welfare state by applying for a D.S.S. loan.

3) The argument hinged on the question of voting Labour, but isn't that rather Anglo-Centric.

What about the SNP or Plaid Cymru? Now, voting for 'independence' or 'autonomy' from Westminster isn't going to change the world but perhaps there's something to be said for political movements which effectively aim at undermining the centralised, Westminster based identity of the British Ruling Class. Perhaps also the kind of independence that such movements represent - independence within a larger community - has a progressive tinge to it. It's not revolutionary, sure, but in there is a critique of centralised, alienating political power. I waver on this one but it's worth a thought.

4) I think it's inadequate to argue that despite the slight improvements that might come with a Labour Government the massive inequalities would remain: supported by that Labour Government. Who says otherwise? But what is insignificant to the pensioner, or the person unemployed whose DSS loan is turned into a non-repayable grant, or the inner city Black or disabled school student whose education is going to become even more impoverished because of ideologically motivated changes in school organization. This is to say nothing of the negative consequences of continued privatisation which increases exploitation worsens working conditions & divides workers into smaller competing units. In terms of your potential strength it does make a difference which boss you work for! I'd certainly never suggest that a different Government is going to transform the overall direction of British Society: nevertheless in terms of potential minor benefit, & because a different government might be less adept at following through smooth marketisation, there are reasons for at least voting against the Tory Party.

5) Simon's argument reduces the 'Trot' position to a party building

tactic & in the process fails to engage with what is significant in that position. The Labour Party still has roots - if very much weakened- in something we can call the Labour Movement. This movement is not simply a puppet with strings attached to Labour Party Headquarters at Walworth Road, but is a contradictory movement of different ideas, organizations, relationships & interests. Whilst the Tory Party have been in office the whole debate within that movement has been reduced to one of being 'anti-Tory'; & Labour leaders have been effective in holding back any radicalism on the grounds that winning the next election took precedence over everything else. Were the Tory Party not in office that line would lose its seeming plausibility. On a rather different terrain the conflicts & internal contradictions within that movement might be opened up. Whether or not that implies 'join the Vanguard' appears very much on who's doing the arguing. Of course, a Labour Government, & any other government, might well simply result in further disillusionment (it depends how much people realistically expect) & the return of a new Tory one. It might; but I can't help but feel that such a line of reasoning is simply pessimistic.

Whichever way how so abstentionists suggest that those internal conflicts are to be helped to the fore? Unless the whole Labour Movement is to be written off of course.

7) In advocating abstentionism does that mean we never vote, for anybody, under any circumstances? & if so doesn't that mean that a libertarian-socialist politics becomes just another abstract dogma "Thou shalt not..."

To be honest, I'm not entirely convinced. I probably will vote - but only against the Tory Party; & with no expectations of any Government. But what I would argue strongly

is that a politics that seeks the transformation of society from the bottom (how unfashionable!) cannot ignore the differing effects that what happens 'at the top' can have. & even if only as a kick to the system, a symbolic statement to the Ruling Class, it's worth getting the Tory Party out. Of course this doesn't mean I'll be out canvassing for the Labour Party - or for any party - & I accept the possible contradictions of my position. Though I would suggest that these are only contradictions in terms of the political choices offered within the capitalist 'Democracy' - choices which I neither want nor accept. In the meantime the 'task' - to use good Trotsky jargon - is to help generate new radical socialist movements.

### Riots

**From David, Bristol**

*While I enjoyed the two articles on the recent riots they were a kneejerk-reaction to the predictable media/ruling class response - that defended the right to riot and TWOC-ing. While these may appear to be a legitimate expression of anger/frustration and alienation from the system in themselves they are not class conscious or revolutionary acts.*

*Like so many leftist arguments your stance ignores the reality of shitting on your own kind, rendering our crappy neighbourhoods even crappier and making everyday life for working class people ever more difficult.*

*If our response has anything to offer then we need not only to look at the (well documented) reasons outlined in FLUX No.3 but also at the realities of this*



*reaction and how it affects people in real-life - rather than how we would like it to be in our under-nourished revolutionary imaginations!*

*We need to look seriously at 'anti-social behaviour' like stealing from your own kind and street attacks - and effective ways of dealing with it ourselves in our daily lives - rather than look to social workers/police - if we are looking for collective action in taking control of our own communities.*

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**Write to FLUX  
at this address:**

**Box A  
The Rainbow Centre  
180 Mansfield Road  
Nottingham**

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# THE POVERTY OF STUDENT LIFE REVISITED (AGAIN!)

As the pre christmas wave of student discontent fades in to the background the issue of student poverty has failed to obtain a high profile outside the "ivory towers" of the education world, this state of affairs is worrying, as the implications of recent changes in the legislation governing higher education and student funding are widespread. The most fundamental problems are those of access to higher education and more insidiously, changes in the nature of what is learned and how, thus whilst cynically claiming successes in increasing student numbers, pointing to "access" courses for mature student pre entry qualifications as a widening of scope for non standard students entry into degree courses. The reality of the new regime in universities and polytechnics is less funds to cope with more students. This has led to rapid increases in course sizes<sup>1</sup> and the consequent educational problems such as the removal of much discovery based learning in favour of rote learning from increasingly overcrowded lectures, the rapid deterioration of already inadequate library resources, and in many areas expansion of tutorial group sizes has meant twenty and more students in rooms designed for ten or twelve at most, (I along with others have repeatedly left tutorials rather than sit on the floor)<sup>2</sup> with a consequent change of emphasis from student led interactive tutorials towards mini-lectures held without the active participation of the students. This trend is deeply worrying because (particularly in the arts and social sciences) any space for (almost invariably student initiated) dissent from the norm and or "radical" approaches to a subject are squeezed out under pressure to maintain order and coherence in increasingly over-large tutorials.

More overt is the nature and effects of changes to the student funding package. These changes involved the total removal of access to any welfare benefits save for the disabled and single parents (and one or two loopholes<sup>3</sup>) and the permanent freezing of grants at their 1989/90 levels a full grant being some £2,200.

This leaves students with a grand total of approximately £42.40 per week by way of "income" should they be unable to find work (and how can they, with three million other people looking), freeloading off affluent parents, or run up huge debts<sup>4</sup>. In some parts of the country this is barely enough to pay rent, even a conservative (Ho Ho!) estimate of rental levels must assume costs of between £25 and £35 a week for the average student leaving £7 to £17 a week to live on which is so outrageous it hardly merits belief, little wonder that mature students and students from "disadvantaged" backgrounds, where present, are dropping out like flies, that increasingly few are applying and therefore that such people (often those who have worked hardest to get there) are becoming increasingly rare within the student population. Thus as admissions rise and academically able but poor people (more often young people with poorer parents) find that they can't afford to go, the necessary entrance qualifications are reduced to fill the increasing number of places with people who can afford to become students. How very quaint and nineteenth century.

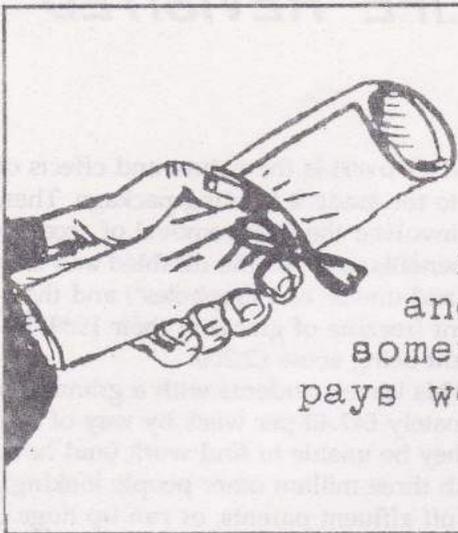
What then is being done to oppose this reconfining of education to the middle classes?

As mentioned at the beginning of this article, during the pre christmas period occupations began to break out on campuses nationwide and even made national news programs (if fleetingly).

As we go to press students in Middlesex polytechnic have been in occupation for three weeks (so far) and five other (one day) occupations have come to our attention, this in the week when some 30,000 students attended a march in London to protest against student poverty, anti poverty activists attempted sit down protests during the march (at Park Lane and Knightsbridge) but were foiled by stewards (believed to be executive members of local student unions) re-routing demonstrators around areas with sit downs, doing a policing job so effective as to make the large metropolitan police presence on the march somewhat superfluous.

The role of the N.U.S. in





Here's your degree,  
mate. Now shove off  
and disappear into  
something really dull that  
pays well. Go and administer  
something.

student activity against poverty and the deteriorating state of educational facilities and teaching methods is to be questioned, whilst organising a demonstration nationally, this was very badly publicised and extreme care appears to have been taken to avoid mass participation and the likelihood that anything newsworthy might happen.

Meanwhile in local student union offices the attitude to poverty and those who campaign against it appears to vary; from utter passivity to outright hostility to campaigns and their supporters (with the odd honourable exception). In Nottingham Polytechnic the president of the students union publicly declared that "students are no longer interested in demonstrations" (presumably as a means of articulating demands and airing grievances) a mere two weeks before 500 plus of the students she claims to represent duly travelled the 120 miles to London to do so. Yet it seems that this local executive are prepared to spend any length of time 'phoning around the executives of other area student unions all over the country frantically looking for dirt to throw at those who are advocating sit ins (in doing this they seem confident that their view has the support of other union officials on other campuses), in the most recent union general meeting (the only input the "rank & file" student gets) they put student poverty at the bottom of the agenda and declared the meeting inquorate immediately before its debate (having earlier declared it quorate) and ended the meeting forthwith despite widespread protest.

What then are the prospects for further student action to combat these further deteriorations in higher education?

The first point to note is that almost without exception the first obstacle to student activism is likely to be the local students union and as such attempts to pressure them into action are likely to be fruitless, not only is autonomous

organisation preferable in this sort of campaign the issue is forced by students unions who see themselves as providers of leisure services to the student population rather than an organisation to represent the views and best interests of students. An absence of help from such an organisation is no loss!

Whilst the numbers of students actively fighting against poverty and deteriorating conditions is increasing, the levels of poverty involved are such that those students unable to ameliorate the impact of this problem by parental means (and therefore most likely to be protesting) are disappearing from student ranks at an alarming rate as they are rapidly forced out of the system through their poverty, furthermore (as previously noted) new student intakes are less and less likely to contain students reliant on statutory funding and thus appreciative of the true levels of serious poverty in their midst, however if strong links are made between this issue and those of overcrowding, resource loss, declining educational standards and increasing political interference in (theoretically) independent institutions; and given that these issues are indeed closely linked forming a wholesale systematic attack on those (few) aspects of the educational system which are in fact worth preserving (and indeed building upon); such as commitment to access by means of merit, full and open access to the necessary tools and texts and the necessity to build a politically open and free education system. If these links are made successfully there is potential to raise awareness and concern in the student body as a whole, which should push activity and involvement beyond the confines of what on most campuses is a minority of activists motivated by anger at the poverty of both themselves and others and/or left wing party considerations. The latter of these motivations is a somewhat mixed blessing within student activist groups, on one hand their campaigning experience, and local political and practical knowledge, on the

other hand is the tendency to push the party line and also attempts to dominate student groups in order to use them as platforms for party propaganda. More often than not such political manipulations are recognised for what they are, and as such given short shrift by most students.

The future of militant student action is now hanging in the balance. If it is to be successful it needs a broadening of aims to include issues not directly connected to student poverty, and includes the need amongst left party activists to eschew explicit line toeing, which is rejected by the majority of students who (regrettably) regard themselves as apolitical, this will not change through propaganda rather through their own thoughts and actions.

Rob

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1. On the course I attended there has been a 50% increase in student numbers over a 3 year period, two other courses (picked at random) both show increases of 40% over the same period.

2. This article was written before the recent uproar concerning overcrowding in Swansea university and concerns Nottingham polytechnic (Trent polytechnic before the recent market orientated legislation changes) which has a wholly unremarkable record in terms of increases in student numbers.

3. e.g. a female student with a male claimant as a partner may be able to obtain Housing Benefit through her partners claim, I know of two such cases though this may be a result of mis-application of regulations by the housing departments of the council involved.

4. Remember whilst the student loan is on "soft terms" it adds little more than £10 per week to student funds and thus extensive extra finance must be sought, yet most banks wont lend much to such obviously bad credit risks.

*Rob is an ex social sciences student at Nottingham Polytechnic (having left due to financial problems and political problems with the department) and a former anti poll tax activist.*



## NAZI SCUM - get off our streets!

On 22nd February thousands of protesters demonstrated their contempt for the British National Party. The march through Welling in London was organised by the Rolan Adams Family Campaign in conjunction with Anti-Racist Alliance, and coincided with the one year anniversary of Rolan Adams' vicious murder by a gang of white youths and men. Rolan Adams was just 15 years old. Following his murder, the British National Party openly celebrated the growth of 'white power': yet another example of their despicable brutality. The BNP have their headquarters in Welling, courtesy of the local council. When pressed to explain the BNP's presence in Welling the council responded by stating that the property is a bookshop, not a meeting place for fascists. Obviously the council is choosing to ignore the fact that the obscene literature being promulgated by these scum contravenes the Race Relations Act 1976 - i.e., it is inciting racial hatred. This just shows that councillors pick and choose which legislation to take seriously.



A month earlier - on 18th January - up to 10,000 people protested against the Government's racist Asylum Bill. The Bill purports to tighten up the law making it more effective in distinguishing between the genuine, deserving refugee, and the undeserving, fraudulent. Another form of racist scapegoating which perpetuates the myth that those seeking a safe place to live are merely out to abuse and cheat. The Asylum Bill is currently being shelved, the government stating that it has not the time to pursue it through Parliament. This is nothing more than a tactical manoeuvre, deferring the Bill's enactment until after the general election.

Unsurprisingly the Labour Party have stated that they do have reservations about the Bill but that they will not oppose it. The Asylum Bill - and those prepared to enact it - reminds us that racists and fascists don't always shave off their hair and tattoo their foreheads.

Carolyn Willow

# VEGANISM

A lot of ill-informed criticisms have been and are being made of veganism and animal rights activism. Is it merely "lifestyle politics"? Worse, is it a distraction from "true" revolutionary politics? Following a debate in the FLUX Collective, some of us decided to provide what we consider good reasons for taking veganism seriously, as part of the wider revolutionary struggle.

Whatever else may be claimed of veganism, it is first of all an animal rights stance. That is, in various ways, animals are exploited and slaughtered in totally unnecessary ways. Consider some of the central issues.

## Some Facts...

This year Britain will have slaughtered 450 million chickens, 32 million turkeys, 19 million sheep, 13 million pigs, 8 million ducks, 3 million rabbits, and 3 million cattle. [Source: *The Guardian*, October 14th, 1991.] The excessive cruelty which accompanies these mass productions is well documented. And like any other capitalist production system, every attempt is made at profit-maximising, which means cutting corners in health and safety. The result of these growth hormones, unsanitary conditions and illegal practices is what you eat.

Despite the persistent

propaganda of the meat lobby, these facts are gaining widespread recognition, so that now about 6% of the British population are vegetarians. The vegan argument, far from being the crackpot philosophy of a few extremists (what they used to say about vegetarians), merely follows the logic through. For without the meat industry, the dairy industry could not be sustained.

## Milk production

For example, for a cow to lactate she must be constantly bearing calves...who are then packed off to the veal-crate industry (for export to Europe) or the domestic beef market. And the milk-producing cow only has about five years before she is killed for low-grade meat (mince, burgers, etc.). She is in no way a natural animal just waiting to be milked: genetically tampered with, through selective breeding and other methods, to have permanently distended udders, she is in almost constant pain from inflammatory

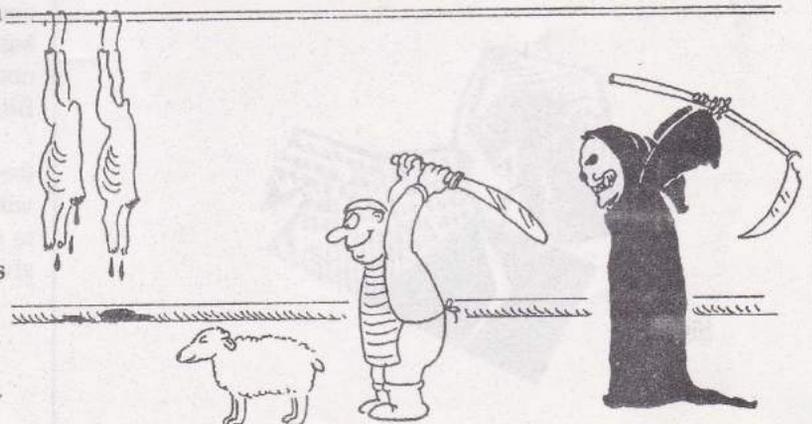
sores. Parallel facts of routine exploitation and barbaric practices apply to the production of wool - especially sheep-dipping and mulesing [Source: *The Vegan*, Winter 1990.].

Other practices vegans and others oppose, are the scientifically unsound use of animals to test the toxicity of perfumes and drugs, and the more contentious issue of medical dependency on vivisection to develop cures for human diseases.

## Capitalism and the Third World

The details of the above would fill a book. But what can already be seen is that as soon as you start talking about reasons for veganism you bring in wider issues: the power of multinational food and drug companies; the realities of intensive capitalist production; and so on. This brings us to the strong relationship between the meat industry and Third World exploitation.

Meat production is notoriously energy-wasting: it takes 2.8 kilograms of grain to produce 1 kilogram of chicken meat, 6.9 kilograms of grain to produce 1 kilogram of pork meat. As the demand for meat has led to highly intensive farming methods, meat

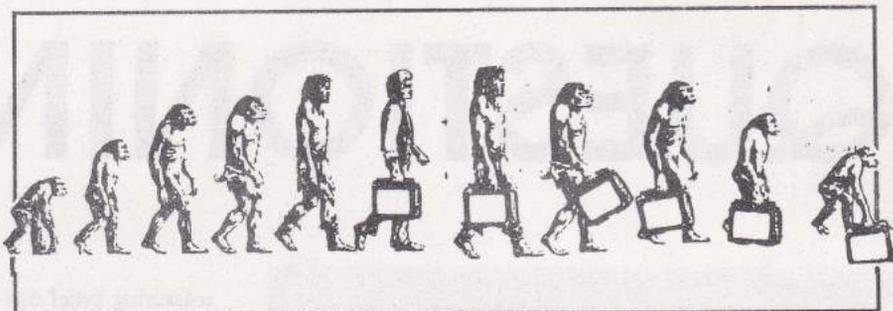


producers have had to look to Africa and South America to find suitable places to grow low quality grain as animal feed. The multinationals have simply muscled in, forced the indigenous population to grow grains which are not part of their staple diets. The result is short-term profit, transforming fertile land into desert and large areas into famine zones. A further development in the rapaciousness of the meat industry is the destruction of 20 million hectares of tropical rainforest since 1970, to create new cattle pastures which are rapidly exhausted.

### Left Responses

Many revolutionaries refuse to admit this connection between the meat industry and exploitation of the South by the North. For example, in the latest *Subversion* they claim that "Ethiopian peasants don't starve because Americans eat beef - they starve because they don't have enough money to buy food with". This attitude is both simplistic and ahistorical. Again *Class War* recently argued that most people in the world eat meat: in fact it is not part of the diets of most cultures, and never was. It is time we stopped assuming that what we take as normal will apply elsewhere.

But given all the above, should it motivate you to give up meat and animal products? I think it should, for not only is it easy to do (the idea that being vegan is hard or expensive is simply false), but it recognises that lifestyle is important to revolutionary politics - if it is combined with a broader analysis and activism - and for two reasons. First, consumer boycotts do have an effect. An example is the decimation of the fur trade, by successful attacks on shops linked to a propaganda campaign which turned consumers away. Of course this won't destroy capitalism or multinational colonialism, which is always capable of adjusting to



changing markets. But this brings in the second reason: by committing yourself, as far as possible, to non-oppressive and non-exploitative practices, you are making links which lead to a critical analysis of other forms of exploitation and how they can be contested in everyday life. Politically radical ideas (the same is true of politically reactionary ones) emerge out of ongoing practices, they are not created in a vacuum. The way you live conditions the way you perceive and understand your environment. By responding in concrete ways to perceived injustices, you are struggling to provide the possibility of linking with other subcultures and communities which contest society's values on its margins - such as the squatting movement, gay and lesbian communities, and so on.

### Evangelical Vegansim

Having said this, I want to distance myself from what could be called 'evangelical veganism': those who demand that everyone gives up meat tomorrow, and that those who don't are scabs and traitors. That this sort of position should arise is not surprising - equivalents are to be found in cultural feminism and leninism. Like them, it is both imperialist and elitist. Veganism should be premised on spreading the facts, and organising around perceived exploitations, given the particular situation. The argument that says "Eskimos shouldn't eat meat" is ethnocentric, not to mention being practically ludicrous. And an approach which results in the vanguardist cell structure of the

ALF, which is losing public support by effectively taking other people's decisions for them, is counterproductive. This is not to say one cannot have sympathy for the activities of the ALF. Animal rights is in the peculiar position that the animals being terrorised cannot fight for themselves. We have to undo our acts of oppression ourselves, and this is what motivates people to liberate animals from laboratories and to stove in butchers windows.

If everyone stopped eating meat tomorrow, we wouldn't be free. But if we want a truly libertarian society we must challenge all forms of oppression which perpetuate objectification, exploitation and cruelty. For there is no originary oppression which, if destroyed, would have a liberating domino effect on all the others. If, as is necessary, economic power is wrested from the ruling class, but without thinking about how animals may still be exploited by that economic power, then we are still allowing cruelty and hierarchies which are psychologically damaging, blocking our way to a completely liberated society. That is why veganism is a significant factor for revolutionary struggle in advanced capitalist countries, but is by no means an answer to global oppression.

### Further reading

Larry Law, *Animals* (Spectacular Times)  
Tom Regan, *The Case for Animal Rights*  
Carol Adams, *The Sexual Politics of Meat*

Simon Scott

# QUESTIONING

*The following article was passed on to us by one of our many(!) subscribers. We have included it here as it complements Simon's article on 'Veganism'. Although originally written with a French audience in mind, we think it applies equally pertinently to the current situation within the British Green movement.*

If the protests of groups and individuals calling themselves "ecological" are no less partial than those calling themselves "proletarian", this does not imply that the damage done by pollution should be accepted as a fatality. Capital is a system of production and reproduction which has been caused by human beings, not an abstract notion which might give the impression that we have no choice in the matter. But will adding a filter to the factory smokestack be sufficient to put an end to the oppression which work exerts on wage slaves who are obliged to waste their lives in order to earn a living? Obliging petrochemical industries to stop dumping wastes in the river will not stop the numerous people who take tranquilizers (which even today are known as "urbanizers") on a daily basis from being poisoned, or from being poisoned by the antibiotics produced by the same industries, which people need today to handle modern life and its accompanying psychological and physical damage. Will getting rid of leaded gasoline be enough to give us back the pleasures of walking, of taking our time, of being...

The minor improvements which the ecologists have obtained here and there can bring about immediate positive effects. We are not indifferent to anything which is capable of slowing down the accumulation of industrial wastes, the disappearance of animal and plant species or of diminishing the nuclear menace ... But these improvements are only permitted because they are ultimately useful to capitalism in that they allow the state a breathing space; the accompanying social peace guarantees that consumer goods are produced, that the machine keeps running without jamming and that money - the only valuable of any importance in a world defined but capital - is generated in a logical manner. Ecology's narrow outlook, with its goal of lowering the level of pollution through laws and minor reforms without questioning the world in which we are mired in an all-encompassing way, consists of according the state the benefit of a state of innocence concerning industrial development's relationship to the process of environmental degradation. That the state has a moral role to play is accepted, paving the way for a

reassuring belief that a separation exists, that it is the state's duty to modify the course of events and that this is within its power. Those who accept this approach refuse to acknowledge that the state, whatever its political shade, represents an expression of the development of capitalism, with the social relations and the practical and moral consequences which this implies. It also conceals that every law which is implemented by the state assures its future ... and our impotence.

Therefore, those who dream of an ecological state, consciously or not, are elaborating a project whose goal (again!) is to prevent the major catastrophes while prolonging the lesser ones eternally. That is why discussing ecology is often limited to evoking nuclearism, concealing other dangers which are less media-oriented but just as ominous. Nuclearism

*"Anyone who attempts to criticize progress, or to denounce the misdeeds of modernism, quickly finds him or herself accused of wanting to return to the Stone Age."*

has the power to create shock value and incarnate a real threat of irremediable destruction on a vast scale. It is also a reflection of a choice which has been made by society, that of a world in which anything at all must be sold and people must be made to buy. Nuclear energy, we are told will free us from the hazards of the petroleum market and spare us the humiliation of candles. Long live the electric fairy, who keeps the wheels of industry rolling, mass-producing the gadgets which are supposed to mitigate the emptiness of our lives. Caught in this trap of progress, we have been robbed of our very lives; the role of the products of every sort which surround us is to distract us from this dispossession. And to give a new shine to Progress and dispossession, why not an ecological state!

Life would continue to be a rat race. But if relations were a bit chilly, as compensation we could rest our work-exhausted eyes by contemplating a nature park on a video screen. But why all this work? Because, like today's concrete/steel/atomic state, an ecological state would be a life-killing machine. It would remain a nation-state; a kind of national ecotopia.

Readers might feel that we are going too far by bringing together the words ecology and state in this manner. But let there be no confusion: certain greens are already quivering



# ECOLOGY

with joy at the thought of such a state and are psyching themselves up by filling in those presently in power about how they intend to manage the national burden. Thus, concerning the Iran-Iraq conflict, Michel Delore, the European spokesman for the greens, proposes measures which would allow France to extricate itself from "The Napoleonic dream of spheres of influence ... which is contrary to its true

*"From factory production to industrial mechanicalness, from automation to word processing and robots, a cycle which has rendered humans inessential has come into being."*

interests" in order to "offer a positive contribution to a lasting solution to fundamental Mediterranean problems and thus avoid a variety of inconveniences" (quoted in *Vert-Contract*, No.40, 1987).

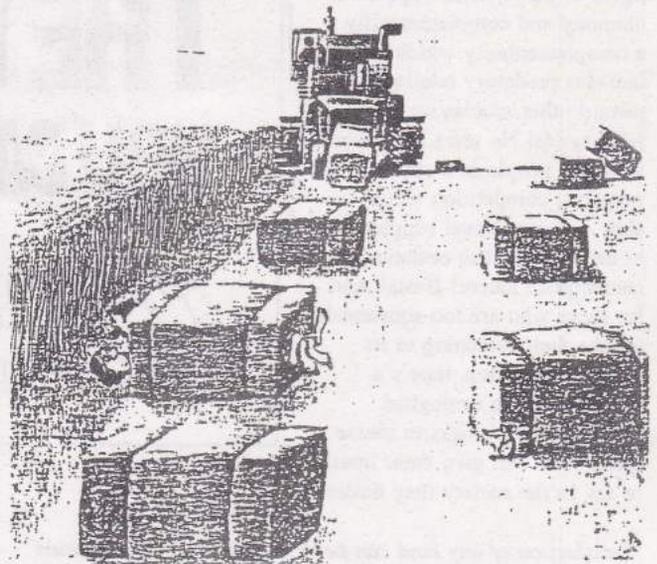
## Green Politics

Ultimately ecology's political fringe is in bed with everyone who aims to run a state, and contemplates the economy and politics with the same adoration.

The "greens" support an ecological economy which would function according to "economic laws", and wish to "liberate the country from the agony of unemployment"... but what is the economy? It seems to be a question of a neutral idea. Since it is everywhere, the economy has become indivisible and uncriticizable. It has penetrated the remotest corners of our daily lives. It is the monster holding us in its claws. Killing the economy would be like an act of patricide, like attacking the last god that everyone still respects.

The economy is synonymous with isolation. Life is divided into different sectors (home, work, education, consumption) and these fragments of existence are administered by specialized (business, administrative, industrial, and recreational) apparati. Economic laws imply that the ways in which human relationships are expressed are based on inequality, competition, and the domination of certain people - inequality, competition, and domination which themselves justify the laws in question by presenting them as inevitable and as having always existed. From an economic viewpoint, other people appear matter-of-fact or are usually only of interest because of their productivity, power, or money. The economy reduces us to possessors of labour power or capital or to representatives of pressure groups. If we can't stand it, we are labelled weak or unfit. As communication between people becomes more and more difficult, every exchange must be controlled by money or the media ... when it is not simply a question of confrontations between gangs.

Without a doubt, there is not question of getting involved in the political game that has been accepted by the greens if one wishes to question society's anti-ecological logic. Having proclaimed a desire to reconquer life, they have simply ended up congratulating themselves for passing laws and have accepted parliamentary logic in its entirety. This is self-reassuring and gives one a clear conscience ... without changing anything at all. Parliament may very well accept the recycling of glass and aluminium while at the same time people continue to waste eight hours a day in the factories. The state's mega-computers may quite conceivably be used to plan a more rational use of natural resources, while at the same time erasing any trace of suspicion about the computers themselves. And when will the armed forces bring back the so-close-to-nature and minimally polluting cavalry! Translated into political terms, our dreams become bills and our hopes become economic measures. The political involvement of different ecologists and environmentalists is a reflection of the superficial critique of the relations upon which industrial civilization is based. If ecology criticizes the excesses of



civilization and its "abusive" commercialization of nature, it questions neither the validity of market relations nor the states which implement them. As long as they continue to ask states and international institutions to propose "solutions" to the present predicament, the ecologists' "anticentralism" will only favour the despotic state. And as long as they continue to propose civil defence (of what and against whom?), they will constitute an impediment to the questioning of militarism and nationalism as such.

## Ecology, Environmentalism ... and Reformism

What is seductive about ecology is that it was supposed to finally unmask civilisation ...! Faced with a monster that is devouring us a little more each day, the desire to survive appears elementary ... and therefore indispensable. No need to wonder whether all of this garbage of progress can be

legitimately questioned! It is of greater interest to wonder whether what alienates us does not remain entirely intact behind our rejection, carefully concealed behind a "realistic" sense of resignation.

The destruction of our environment will be halted! Natural reserves will be created! The specialists will find solutions ... besides, the Green parties are already working toward them! We can finally heave a big sigh of relief!

Everything needed to avoid the real problems, to flee any kind of all-encompassing questioning is already in place, particularly the question of how the battle against the forces which have destroyed and domesticated numerous animal species and an increasing number of human beings - and which are even in the process of challenging the foundations of human life - could be fought from a perspective which is different from the one animating these forces.

For those who wish to reconcile the natural world and democratic society, the human species (and its "environment") is simply a juxtaposition of atomized groups and individuals whose relationships have been reduced to legal and economic formalism - as if anything within nature (including, as far as we are able to ascertain, traditional primitive societies) has ever been based on abstract, legal rights of this type as opposed to harmony and complementarity - a complementarity which includes predatory relationships toward other species on order to fulfil needs! No tears for a world in which people in a state of perpetual competition would be able ... as a spiritual supplement, to earn the right to ecstatically contemplate nature! Basta! And for those who are too squeamish to take their reasoning to its logical conclusion, here's a definition of an ecological preserve which ought to please them. This will give them lines to say in the society they desire ...!

*"Satisfaction of any kind can be drawn only on the condition that nature has previously been marketed, transformed into a national park, into an ecological preserve, a biological window, or a museum of the future. Actually, if nature was left to its own devices, it would not be of particular interest; nor, in any case, could it constitute a determining factor in a process of individual enrichment. On the contrary, meaning must first be given back to nature, which can then be offered as something to be enjoyed. It is only under these conditions that it inevitably becomes satisfying. This will entail an immense reconversion of nature similar to the reconversion of any industrial complex. What will the social cost be of such an operation? Not much, really. And what costs there are will only result from preventive measures and ecological propaganda. It will only be necessary to create a buffer zone, or better yet, a screen between people and nature which would prevent it from being damaged."*

- Enrico Berlinguer (Pier Franco Ghisleni). *Lettres aux heretiques* - Editions du Rhododendron.

Provided that the principle of the pursuit of growth (industrial,

demographic, or of the media ...) is in no way questioned, a passing remark about widespread environmental destruction can be permitted! Everything remains very polite and the byword is "not getting bogged down in utopian thinking."

What is the difference between those who are implementing growth which is fatal to the health of humanity and those who have nothing to offer (and generally to sell!) beyond expert advice or therapy? The same shopkeeper's mentality reigns, the same greed concerning possibilities of opening up new markets, including the proposed therapeutic solutions to the conditions which oblige people to live in an artificial manner. And with people's resignation lending a hand, nature itself is comfortingly presented as the universal therapist! Therefore it is not simply a question of opening up a new market, but of the possibility of convincing people that what is causing the damage is external to themselves; that their illness is not produced by human activity - including their own - but by minor managerial mistakes, or for the "radical environmentalists", by certain deteriorating productive apparati, excrescences that it would be sufficient to cut out in order to allow a healthy organism to survive! All this thanks to the belief that the sickness is not to be found in this society

as a whole (including the projects which tend to breathe new life into it), but only because nature is being polluted, the wrong political choices are being made, etc ... Now that civilization's democratic domination has led people to cut themselves off from everything that surrounds them, including other human beings, the only remaining choices are either totally refusing this domination or identifying with it. And tomorrow what remains of what we still call nature will be its representation as commodities and recreation industries!

Green politics is ultimately a guarantee of a moratorium on social change. We desire neither

a green army nor a green state nor green money. An ecological perspective which could contribute to changing this world by allowing the interaction of all forms of life will have to go beyond green politics of this type.

Interrogations  
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France

- translated by Michael William

#### Note

For reasons of space we have not reprinted the first section of this article. If you would like to receive a copy of the full article, please send a SAE to:

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# REVIEWS

*The Samson Option: Israel, America and The Bomb*, by Seymour Hersh. Faber & Faber 1991. Price 15.99 hbk.

The hype surrounding *The Samson Option* has, of course, a lot to do with Robert Maxwell's

alleged betrayal of Mordecai Vanunu (who photographed Israel's nuclear programme) to Mossad (the Israeli intelligence service). Maxwell served a writ on Hersh and then went overboard. But don't read this book if you expect to find out more about Maxwell. He didn't top himself because of any revelations here.

For *The Samson Option* is far more serious than that, and more important. It examines Israel's secret development of a nuclear potential since the late 50's. Briefly, Israel constructed a secret underground facility at Dimona, in the Negev desert, initially in intensive collaboration with the French. There followed illicit shipments of uranium ore from South Africa, culminating in a successful nuclear bomb test, jointly with South Africa, in the Pacific Ocean in 1979. Hersh narrates this history in the light of U.S. foreign policy.

As he shows, the unwritten U.S. policy on Israel, until Vanunu's expose, was: 'Don't tell the President they've got the bomb - then he won't have to take difficult policy decisions'. (The paradox is that the various Presidents actively connived in this policy.) A good example of the lengths to which this would go was on the joint Israeli-South African bomb test. By luck this was picked up on the American VELA spy satellite, which monitored nuclear explosions and had a 100% success record.

"The American bureaucracy had been in training for more than thirty years in looking the other way when it came to the Israeli nuclear programme, and every

part of the system instinctively sought to find a way to avoid calling the Israeli-South African test a test." (p.275)

They did this by setting up a panel of experts, who through excessive nit-picking cast technical doubt on the findings. This was enough for the Administration to categorically deny that anything had happened. It was business as usual.

The book is full of such fascinating detail on international and domestic politics, presented in an accessible manner. Hersh draws upon a host of formal and informal sources to provide a convincing argument that the U.S. must have known about the developing production from the 60's, but decided to ignore it. Choosing to emphasise the American side seems wise, given Hersh's nationality and contacts. It is classic investigative journalism.

But this is where it also has its weaknesses. For other than in exceptional circumstances journalists will not analyze their own society from a perspective of broad explanatory models - for example capitalism and imperialism (conversely, they are very willing to do so with alternative social structures such as 'communist' countries).

This gets Hersh into self-confessed difficulties. For example, by 1968 President Lyndon Johnson had received a detailed CIA report concluding that Israel had a chemical reprocessing plant. In the same period, top-level negotiations were going on over the sale of American F-4 Phantom bombers to Israel - planes with the range to carry nuclear bombs to Soviet cities. All his advisers "favoured tying the F-4 sale to Israeli acceptance of the NPT [Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty]" (p.191). In the end Johnson buried the report and sold the F-4s without conditions. Hersh admits that "there is no ready explanation for Johnson's refusal to deal with the Israeli nuclear bomb" (p.192).

Johnson was under no domestic pressure - Nixon had just won the Presidential elections - and had no great liking for the American Jewish community due to their hostility towards the Vietnam War.

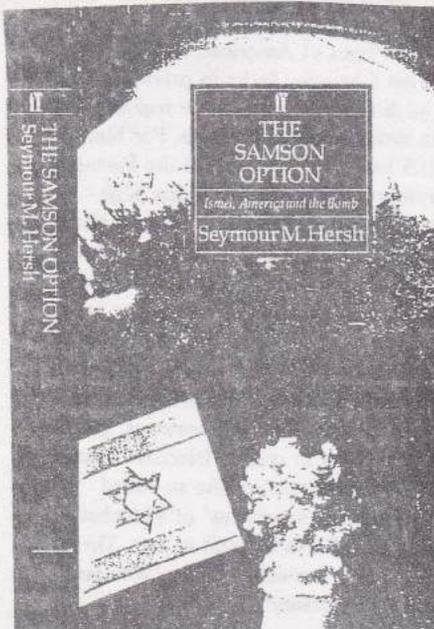
But Hersh is not asking the right questions here. We have to turn to other writers to provide a broader analysis. Noam Chomsky is a useful example: a contemporary of Hersh who has written extensively on the Arab-Israeli conflict in the light of American foreign policy. What Chomsky lacks in private sources (he is not a journalist), he makes up for in astute political analysis. For him, the U.S. economy is based on the Pentagon system. Tax-payers subsidise high-technology research into armaments; this research is then fed into the commercial sector to produce luxury items for sale at home and abroad. The computer industry is a good example of this. At the same time, the capitalist need for ever-expanding markets for its exports, as well as cheap natural resources, gives the impetus to create 'friendly' climates in foreign countries (the so-called 'fledgling democracies' of Pinochet's Chile, El Salvador, and so on). These conditions are achieved by "whatever means necessary".

In the Middle East, the vital interest is access to Arab oil at cheap prices. For political and historical reasons, America has armed and funded Israel to be its surrogate in the Middle East, a modern day Sparta which is strong militarily but totally dependent economically (Chomsky argued in the mid-80's that Israel received unconditional U.S. aid of \$1000 per capita - one-third of America's global aid budget and 48% of its military aid).

Given this crude sketch, Johnson's decision becomes rational. Political leaders of capitalist countries are always beholden to the business community, and must make decisions that favour capitalist development. The sale of high-technology armaments to an ally makes strong economic sense, ensuring

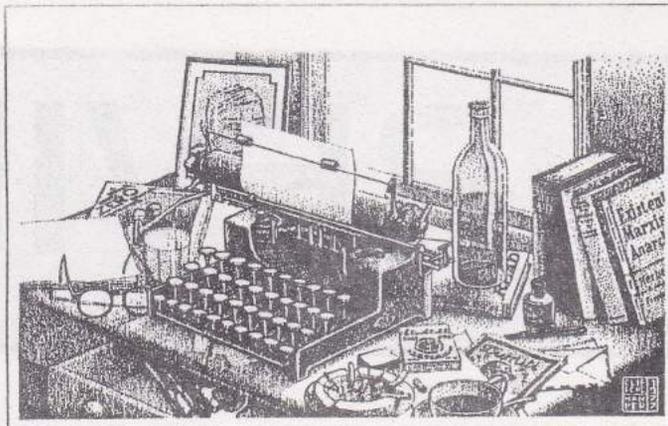
American hegemony in a crucial region of the world.

Though I basically agree with the thrust of Chomsky's argument, its tendency is to oversimplify and become reductive of real and important contradictions. The importance of Hersh's account is that it shows the considerable influence political identity has upon foreign and domestic policy decisions. Israel basically saw itself as a country surrounded by enemies, with America an unreliable and fickle ally. The nuclear option arose out of this. And Israel's willingness to follow such an enormously expensive development ("upward of \$500 million a year, more than 10 percent of the Israeli military budget" [p.136]) was helped by the fact that many of the political leaders were survivors of the Holocaust. Hersh quotes a senior Israeli official:



"For those of us who lived through the Holocaust, we knew one thing - it will never happen again" (p.226). This is the meaning of 'The Samson Option'.

Hersh goes a long way in showing how perception, built up historically, socially and institutionally, conditions how people react at state and interpersonal level, having a profound effect on policy decisions. From bureaucratic obfuscations to top-level rows and deals, how people think and feel has an impact on the way capitalism, for example, develops. No economism can get to grips with this fact adequately. But at the same time it is necessary to bring in wider explanatory frameworks, since obviously social and economic structures and forces condition how people and places have developed too. There is give and take both ways. Struggle against



those with power, local, national and international, needs to recognise this if it is to use its energy effectively.

But in the end Hersh is not really an expert on Middle East affairs (he seems to depend on "tuition" [p.321] from an American political scientist, Benjamin Frankel). Although his Epilogue discusses the Israeli threat of nuclear retaliation during the Gulf War, he has no political awareness of how the American military intervention has changed the balance of forces in the entire region. The U.S. has acquired stronger footholds in some of the crucial oil-producing regions, such as Kuwait and Saudi Arabia. It is too soon to say how much this will affect its policy in the Middle East, but already there is a marked cooling in its relationship with Israel on the issue of the Palestinians and the occupied territories. At the moment Israel is continuing with its belligerent imperialistic attitude. Whilst the world ignores the facts of Israel's nuclear capability, intransigence and frustration in the region could explode into frightening results.

In the end, though undoubtedly a readable and invaluable document, this book remains on the level of intrigue and scandal, in the style of Watergate and Contragate. It is a contagion of Western investigative journalism that it does not seem to recognise the real political significance of what it occasionally uncovers.

Simon Scott



SPOT THE MISSING POINT, by Laurens Otter.

The DAM is to be applauded for having brought out a smart & eye-catching pamphlet as an introduction to anarcho-syndicalist strategy. It should attract a large readership & could well bring a number of new people to syndicalism. It rightly explains that the reformist policies of the unions were inadequate for resisting the Thatcherite onslaught on the workers. That such reformism was built into a movement which only exists to gain better conditions within capitalism. It sketches - though inadequately - the revolutionary industrial unionist alternative, & stresses, cogently, the need for work canny, stay-in & other imaginative forms of struggle, to be decided at the workplace; the need for the greater democracy that syndicalism should provide; & the fact that militancy, class solidarity & vital democracy are essential to each other, dismissing the militant pretensions of those who try to impose their will - in the name of a spurious militancy - on the rank & file.

But in a pamphlet that has this there are notable omissions: while the pamphlet is clear that we need both a more

"Winning the Class War: an Anarcho-Syndicalist Strategy", by DAM. Price £1.00

militant & democratic unionism without craft divisions & organized at the point of production, & a clear vision of revolution & a future society which can only be built when workers have taken over the ownership & control of industry, there is no suggestion as to how this will be done;

while the pamphlet (page 14) recalls: "At the turn of the twentieth century, Britain had a large revolutionary (syndicalist) union current" it gives no further details;

while the pamphlet makes clear the distinction between a rank & file movement that is only committed to militant "business unionism" & one with a revolutionary objective, & while it talks of creating industrial networks as a first step there is no clear description of what it means by the latter & no suggestion as to how syndicates (revolutionary industrial unions) can come into existence, whether this be from the networks or in some other way.

Sorel may have considered that the concept of the social general strike amounted to a motivating myth, - (a deliberately oversimplified vision of the social transition which workers would adopt when they were first considering a revolutionary strategy, but which they would recast in the course of struggle, "achieving the same end by a million lesser struggles") - but the basis of syndicalism has always been that workers should occupy & take-over factories locking the bosses out; & that the point of revolutionary industrial unionism is that it is the ideal organization for such "taking & holding", & for running industry which the libertarian socialist reorganization of society takes place. The omission of this seems curious; especially as the only hints as the means of social change & these only in illustrations suggest insurrection, a means for which an industrial union organization would be less useful than a party.

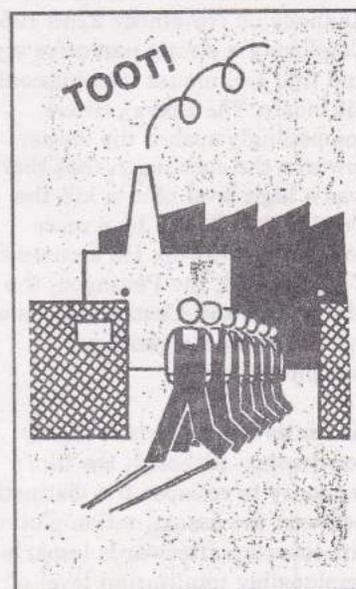
The pamphlet refers to Britain's syndicalist past, but gives no details of this; the reference is presumably to the fact of which syndicalists are with good reason proud - that from about 1908 until 1919 there was a workers' upsurge, initially inspired by the ideas of Continental Syndicalists & of the American IWW, which created the shop stewards' movement, the first Trades Councils, the South Wales Miners', the Engineering Union, the Clyde Workers' Committees & the Irish T&GWU. Again the omission is curious; until one notes that it might be thought to clash with an "all or nothing" attitude; which is characterised by its attitude to rank & file movements. These are dismissed as either (NALGO action group) militant trade unionism, or as Marxist plots to manipulate workers. The crucial point which is to be seen by any study of the "Syndicalist Upsurge" in Britain - as indeed by studying the foundation of the French CGT or the American IWW - is that workers in a period of militancy burst the limits that their own organizations impose, & transform these into organizations of a new type.

There had been organizations existing before the British Syndicalist Upsurge dedicated to copying the IWW or the CGT, few workers were attracted, & since then most British syndicalists have agreed that the creation of rank & file movements within TUC unions, rather than the attempt to create separate unions was the authentic British expression of syndicalism. Consequently traditionally British syndicalists have while insisting that a syndicalist movement is essentially one which workers will shape to their own use, & therefore it cannot be confined to any pre-defined limits - that the most likely way such a movement will come into existence is by a revival of rank & file organization, of shop stewards' committees, trades'

councils & so forth. The DAM pamphlet does not even mention these.

The DAM's alternative strategy for building an industrial union movement lies through the creation of industrial networks; but other than to say that these would have the aim of creating an anarcho-syndicalist union, that they would not be merely a network of contacts & that the combined economic/political outlook of such networks would be new; no clear idea is given as to what such industrial networks would be. The description - such as it is (pages 18 & 19) - except for occasional lip service to federalist decentralism, could have been written, about their proposed industrial activity, by a serious Leninist group.

One wonders why these omissions. Obviously the DAM rejects the traditional concepts of how to achieve a syndicalist movement; & they might well argue that however good Tom Brown's pamphlets, that those of use who worked with him did not achieve a new upsurge, & that therefore they are well justified in turning away from his strategy. But the pamphlet gives no hint at looking at real live workers & their organization. It sets out all the time to emphasize how far apart the DAM is from all existing organization. Of course they are



right in saying that a revolutionary is in orthodox trade unions but not of them. But it is quite a different matter when it comes to existing shop floor organizations, which for all their faults do organise workers at the point of production, do depend on face to face democracy, & are the centre of spontaneous working class activity. The pamphlet treats workers as entirely passive, if that were fair syndicalism would be an impossibility.

Laurens Otter

"Winning the Class War" is available from DAM, PO Box 29, SW PDO, Manchester M15; or PO Box 239, Glasgow G3 6RA. Price £1.

Film: *JFK*.  
Dir: Oliver Stone.  
USA 1991.

In Oliver Stone's latest film, he reconstructs the belated and unsanctioned investigation, by New Orleans District Attorney Jim Garrison, into the assassination of President John F. Kennedy on November 22nd 1963. Employing a strong narrative style and film techniques (reminiscent of his biopic, *The Doors*), Stone compellingly rushes the viewer towards the conclusion that there was a high-level plot to kill the President, followed by a more widescale cover-up. He accuses the CIA, the FBI, the Pentagon, the Mafia, and anti-Castro Cubans of complicity in the two-tier conspiracy.

As far as it goes, this is highly convincing - although the film's tendency to collapse the distinction between the assassination plot and the cover-up afterwards imparts an implausibly totalitarian level of

conspiracy. In particular *JFK* works very well as a political dissection of state management, and the way in which shadowy figures take crucial decisions behind closed doors. But where it leaves a bad taste in my mouth is its crude mythologising of John F. Kennedy. As the film points out, the really important question is *Why shoot the President?* Stone's thesis is that Kennedy was planning to break up the CIA and FBI, which would then become more directly controlled by the military (he and Robert Kennedy had publicly vowed to do to do this); but more crucially, that he was going to pull out of Vietnam by 1965, and push to end the Cold War. Such a policy would have presented an enormous threat to the military-industrial complex which directed the economy. They needed Vietnam and nuclear weapons expansion to justify huge defence budgets and resources. By getting rid of Kennedy and installing the more hawkish Johnson, militarisation and its economic benefits were secured.

Stone's portrayal of Kennedy is unequivocal: a social reformer and civil rights champion; and a peacenik who had made a secret deal with Khrushchev to end the Cold War. The infamous Bay of Pigs debacle, when Kennedy ordered a disastrous invasion of Cuba in 1961, is depicted by Stone as an early political error, later redeemed by making a secret deal not to invade Cuba. And the CIA's involvement in training anti-Castro militia is given as proof that they were trying to undermine and discredit Kennedy's secret deal. In short, Kennedy was ahead of his time. Which is why he had to be eliminated by what Stone describes as a coup d'etat.

But is this accurate? Conspiracy theorists tend to cite the unavailability of classified documents as proof that there's something suspicious going on. Whilst I don't doubt this, it is also the case that, since the documents Stone cites as 'proof' will not be made public until 2029, his own speculations are also hard to

challenge. But we only need to look at the public record to question Stone's characterisation of Kennedy.

In Cuba, there is clear evidence that Kennedy sanctioned the "secret war" against Cuba following the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962 (probably the closest we have been to full-scale nuclear war). This was a war of terrorism, ranging from blowing up factories and crop-poisoning in Cuba, to widespread propaganda and economic sanctions in America.



Kennedy's civil rights credentials are also dubious. It should not be forgotten that the rise to political power of the Kennedy clan (and Kennedy probably rigged the Presidential elections which brought him to power) was financed by their millionaire father, a known anti-Semite. Like most members of the Democratic party, Kennedy was part of the white male establishment who cynically professed his commitment to blacks and Jews whilst doing nothing concrete to empower them. His contempt for women is well-documented.

But the most serious falsification of history is over Vietnam. It was not Lyndon B. Johnson who started the 'real' Vietnam War, as the film claims. In 1962 Kennedy ordered the invasion of South Vietnam with a massive bombing campaign targeting the rural areas (85% of the population). It was this which mobilised the anti-war movement in America: Kennedy's decision constituted a huge escalation from what until then had been a proxy war using mercenaries and "military advisers". What is more, the public documents unequivocally show that Kennedy blocked all

moves by the National Liberation Front to negotiate peace.

The record clearly shows Kennedy to have taken the most aggressive foreign policy stance for a decade, initiating another huge militarisation programme to revive the domestic economy. Far from being a liberal social reformer, his first loyalties were to the business community which sanctioned his Presidency: the middle-class. To do otherwise would have been political suicide. All his domestic and foreign policies confirm his role as legitimator of global capitalism.

So why the falsification? Oliver Stone has made a lot of money out of his exploration of the American involvement in Vietnam: his political commitment and sincerity is not in question. But he is obsessed with the idea that the many genocidal atrocities committed or sanctioned by the U.S., rather than being the outcome of global capitalism and the colonisation of exploitable "friendly" markets (and therefore entirely **rational** by these criteria), are instead the rabid fulminations of an unaccountable military-industrial complex. He retains the myth that Amerika is basically democratic as long as the President remains in charge. Kennedy was the incorruptible hope who could have led the U.S. into a cleaner, brighter future.

Near the end of this very long, well-crafted but manipulative film, Garrison claims that the cover-up of Kennedy's assassination is leading America into fascism: nobody is accountable to the people and truth is as expendable as life. Stone fails to recognise that this is true of **all** government, whatever its political colour. The history is there for all to see. Ironically, it is Stone's yearning for the mythic father-leader who will save us from evil which is a closer precursor to neo-fascism.

*JFK* is thought-provoking and convincing when it uncovers the lies and murders following Kennedy's assassination. But the question remains: *Why was the President shot?*

Simon Scott



This book presents us with a celebrated collection of working class resistance between

1981 and 1991. Starting with the Brixton riots in 1981 and ending with the rioters and ram-raiders of 1991, a clear chronicle of events and happenings is given. The Royal Family, the Miners' Strike, Yuppies, the Poll Tax, Fascism and Sexism are only some of the themes covered. As ever, Class War's message is crude but straight to the point: whether it be the police, fascists, the Royal Family or rapists there is only one solution - **death**. And there is an acute intolerance for anything less - a particular contempt is shown for 'We Shall Overcome' types who spend their time linking arms and lying on roads pretending to be dead. Lentil hotpot and vecon is certainly not part of their revolutionary struggle.

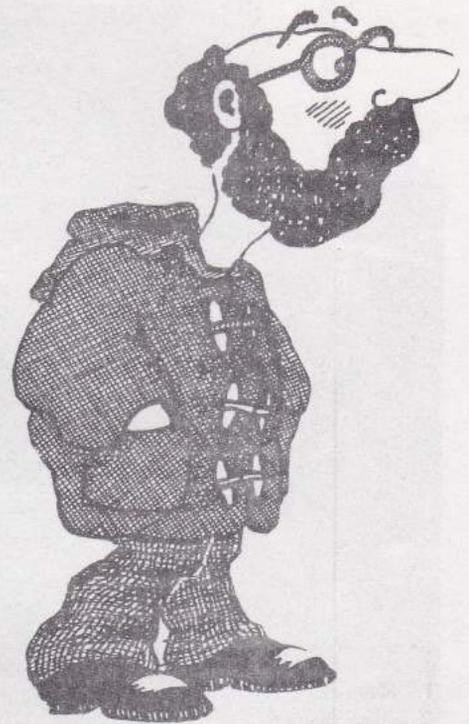
This is not a book which once picked up cannot be put down. The predictability of the tone, style and comment make stretched reading. It is, however, a good book for Class War beginners: a thorough overview of Class War's politics under one cover. The reprints of posters are especially entertaining - same old favourites!

Notably the last section talked about rape and sexism whilst the penultimate piece focused upon fascism and racism. This positioning is irritating but not really surprising given the class emphasis of Class War.

This book is funny and amusing. Of course not everything is to be taken literally. Just because the book

exhibits a profound loathing for social workers does not mean that there's vigilantes of Class Warriors out there linching the nearest bearded men wearing tank-tops. Similarly Class War's characterisation of the working-class is not to be taken too seriously. All in all this book is worth a read; for underneath the jovial humour are many not-so-jovial home truths.

Carolyn Willow



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