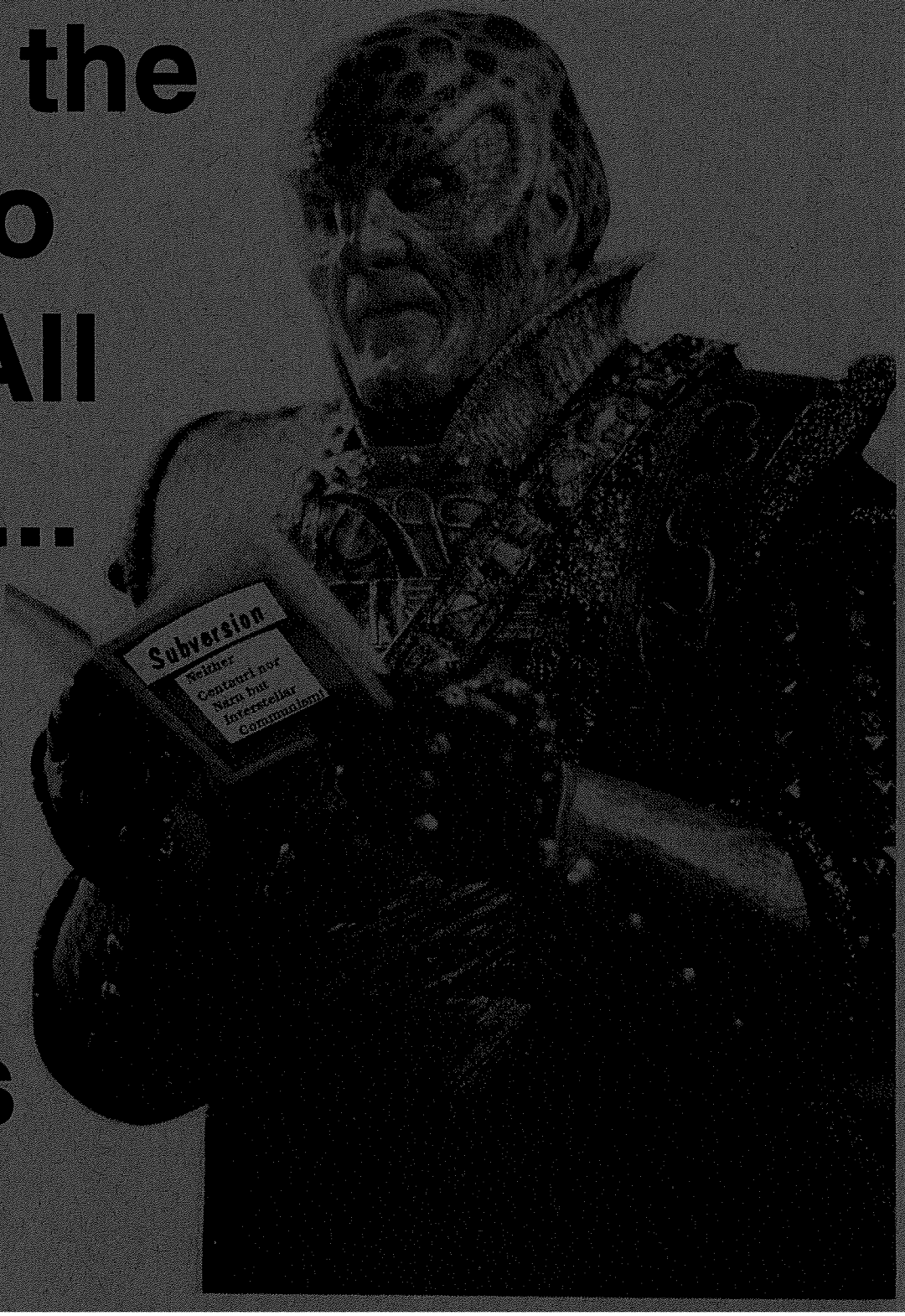
Subversion

Issue 16 FREE!

Fight the War to End All Wars...



Fight the Class War!

Subversion 16

For those who don't know, SUBVERSION believes in the creation of a society without classes or state power. A society without national boundaries, inequality or oppression. A society without money where all goods are freely available to all.

We believe such a society can only be created by the revolutionary overthrow of the state and the ruling class, by us, the working class.

SUBVERSION's activity consists of participating in the struggles of our class, and arguing the case for our revolutionary ideas.

Our principal focus of activity is our magazine, SUBVERSION, but we engage in a variety of other activities, depending on what's happening in the class struggle.

Since the last issue of the magazine we have produced a leaflet for, and attended various anti-criminal justice bill events. We organised, jointly with the Anarchist Communist Federation, a conference entitled "Beyond Rank and File Trade Unionism - 2" in London. We also attended various political network meetings (see report on page 15) and smaller political meetings.

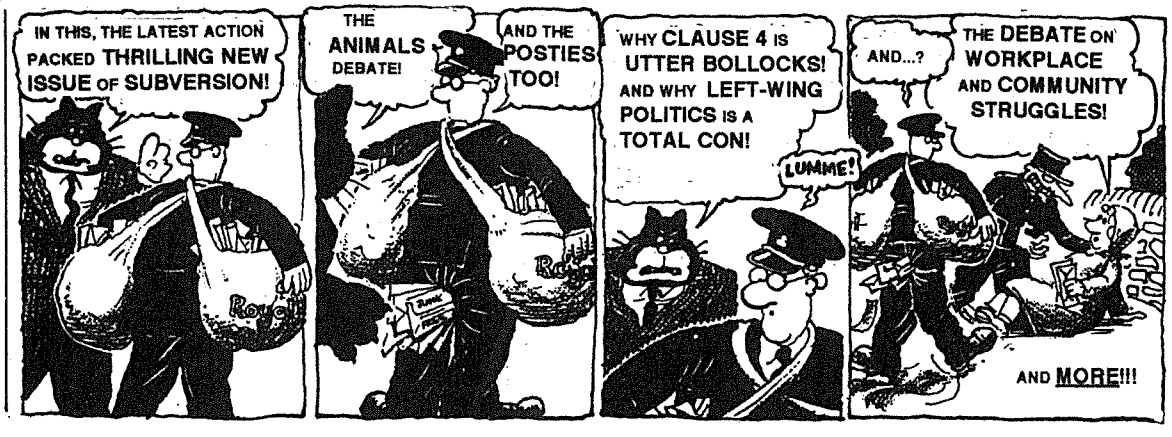
Our member who produces the magazine "Proletarian Gob" continues to express his stimulating "political rants" therein. At a recent Solidarity Federation (ex Direct Action Movement) public meeting in Manchester we were banned from distributing Proly Gob because they found a couple of articles "offensive", so there's a good recommendation for you!

Just recently we have organised a new series of our own public meetings in Manchester, and are planning another joint day-school with the ACF towards the end of the year, probably in Leeds.

We hope you will find SUBVERSION 16 thought-provoking and informative. If you want to help you can: write letters contributing to the debates in the magazine; take extra copies to give to your friends or other people (e.g. at work or at meetings or demos you may attend) or of course through financial contributions.

If you want to receive back copies, or any of the pamphlets we have produced, write to us at the group address.

If you consider yourself close enough to us politically to want to meet us, either just to find out more about our views or to discuss the possibility of working together, then don't be shy, write to us!



Posties Again ..... A Tale of Two Cities

The Unreasonable Brigade

London..Wildcat Strike

As you are probably aware, last January there was a wildcat strike of postal delivery office workers in London that brought out around 15,000 workers. This was a short, but inspiring action. Postal workers have been facing a concerted attack on them by management for some seven years or so. This has come through mechanisation and under the guise of what is known as Total Quality Management. First we were made to feel part of the business by having "Team Talks". Now, for example, we're virtually forced to fill in questionnaires about how to improve management's effectiveness!

Postal workers have a good history of wildcat action. In the last year alone there have been about 75 illegal walkouts across the country. Management aim to subdue this sort of behaviour and to make Royal Mail look appealing to potential sharebuyers (although this last prospect is shelved for now).

Because UCW headquarters did not "repudiate" the illegal walkout in London, Royal Mail were able to sue the union, who were ordered to pay a £7,500 fine and legal costs of some £100,000. UCW General Secretary, Alan Johnson, who is paid well over £50,000 a year, was understandably a bit perturbed about risks to union funds. The poor dear said: "We must ensure union branches always act constitutionally on industrial relations issues". It is pretty easy to see why union leaders (Scargill is a famous example) are so concerned about union funds. There are 170,000 UCW members and we each pay £1.71 per week to the union. This is a fuck of a lot of money they get each week! You'd be tempted to think that with those sort of resources we'd be on a lot more than our gross basic pay of £176.91 (outside London) a week by now!

Well, you might if you thought the unions were on the side of the workers instead of where they really are: in the bosses' camp, on the side of the ECONOMY (i.e. capitalism).

You see, the unions and the bosses are the voice of REASON in society. We, the majority, the working class, have tendencies towards irrationality, extremism, and even outright lunacy. When we retaliate we are threatening the bosses "right to manage"; when we say we want to carry on working and receiving a wage when the bosses have introduced machinery or other working practises to replace us with, or they just want to close our works down, we are flying in the face of the laws of the market, the economy; when we say we want more money we are threatening inflation, interest rates, economic stability and growth, and God in Heaven Himself. The brutal fact of our continued exploitation is partly disguised and justified by "economic" hocus pocus. "Market forces", "keeping down inflation", "the threat of interest rate rises", these phantoms serve to mask and make more palatable the very real jackboot that bears down on the back of ou necks.

We have to be kept in line, our irrational and extreme tendencies have to be curbed, and the Unions have proved their worth in this regard time and time again, ad infinitum, and for ever and ever.

We have to understand that Unions play an important part in the Economy (as a controller and manipulator of labour, as well as the fact that they are major shareholders in other businesses). It is the Economy that we must smash. The class struggle, the road to communism, is the fight for a society in which there are no classes, no exploitation, and no economy.

ONLY WORKING CLASS LUNACY AND RANK UNREASONABLENESS CAN BRING DOWN THE ECONOMY!

SOUTHAMPTON POSTIES STITCHED UP - AGAIN

On February 1st a mass meeting of delivery staff voted to reject management plans to force them to do two deliveries on their second turn. This vote committed the union (UCW) to ballot for strike action. Not happy with this result the union immediately called a 'special meeting' back at the canteen. This was calculated to wear people down as not all delivery staff would have been willing to go all the way back to town after their second delivery. Not suprisingly hardly anyone turned up, the vote was retaken and the decision to reject 'two in one' working was reversed - much to the relief of the UCW and Post Office bosses.

The situation in Southampton is probably representative of offices in a lot of other places. The Mechanised Letter Office is said to be like a prison. In the delivery office

casualisation is making greater inroads. There are delivery workers who have been there for two and a half years who are still on six monthly contracts, with all the lack of security and benefits that implies. In Southampton overall there are 83 vacancies which are to be filled by casuals.

There seem to be contradictory approaches among workers to what is going on, reflecting differing traditions of struggle or the lack of a tradition. There is the shrinking number of 'career' postmen who have never known any other job for 20 odd years. In many cases a pride in the job is a barrier to adopting a more combative attitude. Southampton has never been a hotbed of militancy. There are also many ex-dockers who tend to be more resistant to management demands and more critical of the union, though they tend to be resented by the 'older' hands partly because of a reputation for 'laziness' (no bad thing!) and envy at perceived large redundancy payments from the docks. There are also the younger posties. Among them are those with a militant attitude, although the majority don't seem to give a shit - according to one worker. There does seem to be a lack of a tradition of struggle and not many appear to be willing to initiate it.

Across all these arbitrary divides - and a gross oversimplification of the attitudes of postal workers in Southampton - there seems to be an attitude of 'what the fuck can you do?' A mixture of extreme demoralisation and extreme anger. The UCW has helped to feed this. There are those who automatically associate any fightback with union action, so the consistent 'betrayals' of the UCW can be quite demoralising for them. As yet, in Southampton, as in most other places and most other jobs the attitude is not current that workers should do thing for themselves outside the existing channels. There is a need for a generalised intervention through discussion, leaflets, stickers, etc. that can go beyond reaching those who would be attracted to 'radical politics' anyway and make communist politics and autonomous class struggle the 'natural' goals of any future movement. How that is done is another matter, though the attitude that the daily class struggle will bring forth its own contradictions and solutions seems lacking

SUBVERSION NOTE: *This article was sent to us by a contact in Southampton. It should not, therefore, be assumed that we necessarily agree with everything in it. For example, we find the ending overly pessimistic.*

BACK ISSUES

We have copies of the last six issues of Subversion available, plus a few of earlier issues.

If you want a copy, then send a 25p stamp to our group address, stating which issue you want.

Total Quality Control
How to Exploit Your Workforce More

Last year the bosses brought in a firm of management consultants to look at the administration of the organisation where I work. No doubt some of you will have had the same experience recently too. If there's one group of people who never seem to be out of work it's those callous scum whose job it is to devise ways for the bosses to exploit us in more "efficient" and "effective" ways (two buzzwords in management jargon).

The fashion currently among many employers (as it has been for the past few years) is for the introduction of 'TQM' - Total Quality Management. Like all new strategies brought in at work by the bosses this is partly a response to the past struggles of the working class and partly a response to competition among the bosses themselves.

STRAIN

In this instance the organisation was not in the usual situation of losing in its struggle against its competitors and seeking to sack lots of its employees. Instead, every aspect of the organisation was expanding at a very rapid rate...except the number of workers who were expected to carry out this increased level of activity. The question was, therefore, how to screw greater "productivity" out of the existing workforce. Never mind that we had already been experiencing a greater and greater burden and intensity of work over the past few years, and that in the bosses' own words everyone was working "under increasing and nearly intolerable strain".

BRAINSTORMING

The details of the specific organisational changes which the management consultants came up with needn't concern us here; what is more interesting is the way in which they set about doing their job.

One of the main ways of gathering the information on which the final proposals for change were based was through "brainstorming" sessions, in which everyone in the organisation, from top to bottom, was supposed to participate, generating suggestions for improving the way things were done. Yes, hard though it was to believe, us thick shits who are usually expected to unquestioningly obey orders and keep our opinions to ourselves were actually being asked what we thought for once! Too bad that it was only to find out how we ourselves thought we could be exploited more thoroughly.

DISPENSABLE

Yet techniques like "brainstorming" tacitly acknowledge that while we could get along just fine without the bosses, they can't survive for a single moment without us. This was admitted repeatedly in the management consultants' documents: "The project team [i.e. the top bosses] will not be telling you the 'right' answers since neither they nor the consultants have enough knowledge to do this"; "The outcome is determined by everyone in the process; after all you are the best people to propose what the outcome should be"; etc, etc. (So isn't it funny how the bosses suddenly forget how dispensable they are when they are justifying the vast material privileges they enjoy over us - privileges based on wealth which is created by our hard work and invention and then stolen from us).

RESPONSES

Now it would be heartening to report that where I work the management consultants were greeted with defiant cries of "Shove your brainstorming sessions up your arse", or if not that exactly, at least that they were met with sullen non-cooperation. Sadly however this was not generally the case. Nearly

780 workers were supposed to participate in the brainstorming sessions and over 1500 different ideas for change were produced - a response with which the bosses were well pleased.

Evidently we need to think hard about how we can combat "brainstorming", "quality", and other similar management strategies. One way is simply to keep your mouth shut and not contribute anything (but tell your colleagues what you're up to, and why, and encourage them to do the same).

Apparently though some companies have wised up to this and impose "quotas" on the sessions i.e. everyone has to come up with at least a certain number of suggestions. In these circumstances, what you could do is take advantage of the usual "rule" of brainstorming that there is (supposedly) nothing which you are not allowed to say. For example where I work the management consultants stated: "All ideas are valid and can range over any subjects to improve processes and the environment in which people work, both inside and outside each individual office and the scope of the project". Now that sounds to me like an invitation to suggest all sorts of fanciful ideas which will be no use at all to the organisation but which you can waste a lot of time talking about!

We'd like to know what else other workers who have experience of this might suggest, particularly in the way of collective resistance, rather than just what we can do as individuals. But we also have to recognise that there are certain underlying reasons why people can go along with exercises like brainstorming apparently with such enthusiasm.

MOTIVATION

For the bosses, the primary motivation in what they do is concerned with its exchange value, and only after that with its use value; in other words, they are not particularly bothered how shoddy the goods they market are or how poor the services they sell are, so long as they can make a profit out of them. For us as members of the working class, our motivations are actually not all that different. We want to get the highest price for our labour power and don't particularly care how little or badly we work to 'earn' it.

Yet at the same time it can also be very demoralising to have to do a job, day in, day out, which is boring, or wasteful, or shoddy, especially when you can see straight away how easily it could be made more interesting, or efficient, or better. Although the profit motive often thwarts these efforts, it is this urge to find ways to feel that we are not completely wasting our time that the management consultants seek to exploit; for according to them, "It is our experience that people want to do a good job and take pride in what they do...mistakes and the like are not made on purpose".

COMMUNICATION

However, despite their pleasure with the outcome of the "brainstorming" exercise where I work, the bosses haven't always been so successful in getting us so involved in perfecting our own exploitation. Two years ago an attempt was made to set up permanent voluntary groups of workers from among the various categories of staff to pass information up and down the organisation and come up with ways of solving any problems which arose. The buzzword then was "communications": tell the workers why decisions are made and they will respond positively, improving morale and motivation, and developing, as the bosses expressed it, "a sense of community and identity" and "a sense of belonging and ownership".

This strategy failed, because not enough people could be bothered volunteering for the groups (hence the management consultants had to be brought in to try a different approach). Perhaps people aren't so gullible as to believe that in a situation where we have no real control over what happens to us at work, and where we are constantly encouraged to compete against each other, any sense of 'ownership' or 'community' which developed could be anything other than a completely false sense of community and ownership.

Subversion On Line...

If you've got a computer and a modem, then you can contact Subversion through a couple of Bulletin Boards.

These are Arkham BBS in London, telephone 0171 738 5596 and 0171 738 5557 and Andy's BBS in Manchester, telephone 0161 343 4730.

When you phone up, choose the Message Area. For Arkham, you choose message area 6 and then select the Libertarian Echo. With Andy's you just select Message Area and then choose the Libertarian Echo. Leave a message for LOUIS ROBERTS.

This Echo is open to anyone to use. We use it for details of our meetings and for short articles.

If you leave a message on this Echo, we will reply within a couple of days, rather than the weeks it can take if you write to our box number.

Both these BBS are very friendly and are well worth supporting. They both have stacks of interesting files and carry discussions from all over the world.

We are currently trying to sort out an e-mail address. In the meantime you should be able to contact us at: louis.roberts@p0.f151.n254.z2.fidonet.org

We are sending copies of our magazines and pamphlets to Spunk Press. They can be contacted by e-mail at : spunk-info-request@lysator.liu.se With all e-mail it is essential to type the address exactly as printed here - don't get mixed up with UPPER and lower case!

The Struggle for Edinburgh Unemployed Workers Centre

Auld Reekie Anarchy

INTRODUCTION The following article was sent to us by a contact in Edinburgh. It is a good illustration of the anti-working class nature of the Labour Party and Trade Union bosses. The struggle also demonstrates the futility of playing the bosses' democracy game and the need for independently organised, collective direct action to defend working class interests.

Auld Reekie's unemployed got an early Christmas gift from the Labour-run Regional Council when, at dawn on 1st December, police and bailiffs battered down the barricaded back door of the former Edinburgh Unemployed Workers' Centre and evicted the rudely-roused occupation nightshift onto the capital's frigid streets.

The Centre's emergency phone-tree was immediately activated and within an hour scores of unwaged activists had gathered before and behind the building to prevent removal vans and council workers from plundering and boarding up Scotland's only autonomous, unfunded, self-managed community centre. By noon about 70 protesters were standing-off 9 vanloads of Lothian's finest and had determinedly but peacefully blocked 2 attempts to move the vans to the Centre's doors.

But at 2pm the police attacked in force, moving a hidden second line up behind the picket which they then encircled. As the circle tightened, protesters were knocked to the ground and some were crushed against walls. 21 were arrested and taken to the city's notorious St Leonards' Station, home of the Special Branch and scene of numerous mysterious cell deaths. Most of those arrested were charged with breach, some with police assault. All were held in soundproofed single cells for up to 12 hours before being released on cognisance of attending court. During their incarceration, despite the stifling isolation, the unbowed protesters mutinied in concert, the men beating out a tattoo on their cell doors while the women's wing was rent by a 'scream-in', causing vociferous rage in their captors.

The sprit of resistance remained unbroken, but the 6-month occupation of the Centre had been smashed, by the Labour council. The Labour council might have won the battle, but the war rages on. The conflict has its roots in a transfer of power within the management board, from 'Labour movement' bureaucrats to the non-aligned grassroots unemployed activists who actually used and ran the Centre. Here's the story...

AND SO IN THE BEGINNING

The Edinburgh Unemployed Workers Centre Trust was set up in 1981 on Labour/Trade Union guidelines as part of that movement's miserable response to mass unemployment. Originally situated in the basement of the Trades Council building where it functioned as a small resource centre and where it was clique-riddled, the EUWC moved in the mid-80s to part of a disused church off the city's Royal Mile. Funded by the Region, and in a more accessible situation, the EUWC attracted unwaged activists and broadened out, and became known as 'the Centre'.

THERE WAS THE LABOUR PARTY

The Centre was, theoretically speaking, managed by a board of seven trustees. A full-time paid worker was employed by them, an ex-TU official who soon became the focus of a sycophantic clique. But the day-to-day running of the Centre and its activities were decided by users-group weekly meetings. The users group contained two broad factions - the 'Labour movement' clique and a growing band of independent unwaged activists, who were involved in the fight against welfare cutbacks, formed a thriving Claimants Union and became highly active. The Centre became a focus for the anti-Workfare campaign. Then came the Poll Tax.

In 1989 the Centre moved to a three-storey disused school, owned by the council, in Broughton Street, on the fringe of the city's affluent Georgian New Town. Things looked promising, but the internal differences were increasing. The Labour controlled council was sending the bailiffs in against Poll Tax refuseniks. At the same time the Centre was an organising base for independent anti-Poll Tax activists. The Labour council was not happy, especially when the Centre's trustee board had four 'independents' elected to it from the users group, leaving the party bureaucrats in a minority of three. The Regional Council then cut off all the Centre's funding.

TRUSTEE WARS

By the end of 1991 the money was almost gone. The Centre's future became the subject of increasingly acrimonious rows among the trustee board. The war began in February 1992. One weekend when the Centre was empty, the three Labour trustees changed all the locks. Uniquely perhaps, the unemployed found themselves locked out. They were quick to rally and attack. Next month the users group and the majority of the trustees smashed back into the building, and reopened it for the unwaged public to use as was intended. On re-occupying the building, they discovered that the Centre's printing press had been used to produce a Labour Party manifesto, lucratively exploiting the Centre's charitable tax status.

Within weeks the ousted Labour clique was back. Their heavies broke in one Sunday morning in March. They weren't after the building this time, choosing instead to plunder all the Centre's equipment - £25,000 worth of computers, presses, cameras, washing machine - the lot, including the charity's accounts and minute books. They even took the teabags.

The pigs remained aloof from what they saw as 'a civil matter'. Legal aid was repeatedly denied to recover the

stolen equipment which had all been bought with public money for public use, and was now locked in garages or installed in a party-run centre in Dalkeith, near Edinburgh.

AGAINST THE CENTRE

The persons responsible for the theft were Labour councillors Tony Kinder and Des Loughney, both of them members of the Region's social work committee - the Centre's landlords. The third was Jim Milne, boss of the Dalkeith centre where some of the stolen equipment was installed. The redundant paid worker, George Wilson, was involved. Des Loughney is also secretary of Edinburgh & District Trades Council. These were powerful enemies, and they were soon to exercise that power.

Without any funding or equipment the Centre users chose to fight on. The building was opened right up, space rented to a wide variety of non-aligned political and community groups. The upstairs hall was used for successful gigs. The money came in, the Centre survived. The council's attempt to strangle it had failed. So they adopted a new ploy.

At a social work committee meeting in February 1993, with two renegade trustees attending, it was suddenly remembered that a clause in the Centre's lease had been inadvertently left out. The clause stipulated that the Centre could not be used for fundraising activities of any kind, without express permission. The gigs were stopped and the bills accrued, but the Centre fought on, and survived.

SOCIAL WORKERS MOVE IN

With the five-year lease running out, the building was gone over by a sarcastic and hostile social work inspectorate in early 1994. The subsequent social work report, entitled 'Application for Lease Renewal, EUWC' was a blatant concoction of contrived and artificial evidence, accusing the Centre of being a firetrap and operating an unhygienic cafe. It recommended that the lease not be renewed.

The Centre collective swung into furious action and soon, using official documents, had blasted the damning report to smithereens in a glare of press publicity and a sympathetic piece on STV's news-show 'Reporting Scotland'. Deputations took evidence to the social work committee of the council. But the evidence was ignored, and the vile report adopted.

The lease expired in June 1994 but with a loud and unanimous "Fuck you!" the users decided to occupy, and started on fortifications. The war was heating up.

An article in the first issue of 'Scottish Anarchist' which, like its parent body the Scottish Federation of Anarchists, originated in meetings at the Centre, described the situation after the lease's expiry thus:

"The once-familiar wooden doors are Derried now 'neath steel, sheets of steel shaped and bolted on by blacksmiths who refused all and any payment. 'Our donation to the Centre' said they. Solidarity lives.

"But the doors are open twixt noon and four every day bar Sunday, and the Centre is inhabited around the clock, seven days a week. Within opening hours a busy vegan cafe, famously cheap and substantial, is the hub of Centre activity and behind the chatting diners poster-festooned walls advertise gigs, meetings and actions, while the skirting tables sag beneath the mass of flyers and brochures explaining anti-VAT on Fuel, Criminally Injustice Bill, Stop the Fascists, community arts, homelessness, hunt sabs, gay rights, claimants' issues, women's issues, Poll Tax arrears, AIDS, Parks for the People...

"Above the cafe the pine-beamed mezzanine floor is being transformed into a snug reference library and reading room, while next door the Centre office advises callers, who phone in or drop in, on benefit rights. There's a well-equipped children's playroom and a basement darkroom.

"Upstairs, one end of the large hall is carpeted with defenders' sleeping bags while the other end is a mass of art and craft odds-and-ends with which the Creative Resource Network makes the puppets and props for its street theatre. The door of the small room opposite bears a hand-drawn sign - 'Cheap Claes Shoap'.

"The atmosphere is busy, cheery and sociable. No-one gets paid. Anyone can get involved. But when the doors are locked and blocked and the Centre quietens down, ears are cocked and nerves steeled for the baying of the bailiffs and the grunting of the pigs"

MUCKY STUFF AND FANS

On 1st December, as described, the shit hit the fan. It was, in a sense, a major victory. A collective of mainly unemployed folk had unprecedentedly occupied a building five minutes from the centre of Scotland's capital and had held out for six months, after having exposed the Labour bosses as liars and cheats. (In Scots law, squatting has always been treated as criminal trespass). Eventually the local state, Labour Party controlled, had been forced to send in scores of police and have 21 people, mostly unwaged, arrested and charged. It was a massive loss of face, especially with council elections looming large. Less than a fortnight after the eviction and arrests, hundreds demonstrated outside the shut-down Centre, which was by then well-graffiti'd: 'Viva la Centre!', 'Vote Labour-Vote Tory'.

THE NEXT STEP?

What now? The Centre collective has regrouped in temporary premises and is still conducting a range of activities - including how to get the Centre back. A spokesman says: "We are asking community groups not to accept any offer of the premises. If they do they would be co-operating with the Region in closing the Centre down. We'll take peaceful action against any group who try to use the building. What's at issue here is the right of ordinary people to take charge of their lives".

Resistance to the harassment of claimants is being organised, with regular leafleting of benefit offices. A new initiative from the centre is involvement in the direct action against the building of the M77 in Glasgow, weekly minibuses travelling through to join the inhabitants of Pollock Free State and the nearby council schemes in defiance of the tree cutters and JCBs.

Of those arrested on 1st December, two women and a man are soon to be tried, one woman on two charges of police assault, breach and resisting arrest.

Centre users demonstrated outside the year's first meeting of the Regional Council on 1st February. After the meeting, Cllr Brian Cavenagh, who had been instrumental in shutting down the Centre, boasted to the press and TV cameras that the council had just given£2,000 towards the publication

continued on page 11

Workers Control, Communitarianism, "New" Labour

Bollocks to Clause Four

The Miners lead the way

What a sight, 239 miners, relatives and their supporters marching up the hill singing triumphantly (in Welsh), the Internationale and the Red Flag, as Tower Colliery was re-opened under 'employee ownership'... just as their predecessors had in 1947, when the coal mines were nationalised! Each miner had invested £8,000 of redundancy money and in addition collectively taken on huge additional debts to launch this new venture.

Tyron O'Sullivan - NUM official, a driving force behind the buy out and now personnel director (no change there really!) said of all this, in confused comment to the press:

"...yesterday was a triumph for a different kind of socialism and for a fight back against old-fashioned state capitalism."

"...this is what I call real nationalisation".

"Making a profit has never been a problem for socialists...here we've got equal shares."

Ann Clwyd, Labour MP, added for good measure:

"It's not the Union Jack that's going to be raised over this pit but the Welsh dragon."

So there you have it. The 'new venture' is 'real socialism' not 'state capitalism', but also at the same time it is 'real nationalisation'. It also apparently combines the best spirit of both workers' internationalism and Welsh nationalism!

One of the miners on the other hand (not one of the new directors) had a more pragmatic view:

"I don't really feel I'm an owner of the pit. I don't see myself as a capitalist but as a lucky man who can go back to work at last after nine months."

Well fair enough - but for how long? At Monktonhall colliery a good deal further along the road with its own employee buyout they've just gone on a wildcat strike in a dispute very reminiscent of the old NCB days.

Slime in a suit

What's it all about then?

Certainly nationalisation either as part of the so-called 'mixed economy' or in its recently deceased full-blown form in Russia and Eastern Europe, has been no friend of the working class. It can as O'Sullivan initially suggested best be described as (one form of) "state capitalism", with all the usual trappings of money, markets, wages, profits and hierarchy.

Of course, O'Sullivan and his ilk fought to save nationalisation despite this, because they had a niche within the old system to protect. The revelation that it was really a load of crap only came after the battle had been lost and he'd got himself a new niche in the workers' company.

Nationalisation of the coal mines and other key industries in the past had its role to play, but for capitalism not the workers. As Victor Keegan, a supporter of past nationalisation put it:

"... because public ownership provided a humane and efficient umbrella for the rundown of the mines that would have been impossible to achieve with the old owners."

Well, we're not sure redundant miners and their families would agree with the 'humane' part of that, but you get the drift.

Apart from anything else, nationalisation in Britain involved generously buying out the old owners, largely with government bonds on which the state continued to pay interest. So profits in the re-structured industry went into the state coffers and then out again to the capitalists the state borrowed from. The new coal industry also continued to provide a secure source of power to the rest of capitalist industry in the post-war period and released capital investment for the reconstruction of other sectors of the economy.

So-called revolutionaries like Militant and the SWP of course saw through this and demanded 'nationalisation without compensation'. The fact is this would prove disastrous if carried out by an isolated national government, as a result of market isolation and military intervention. In the case of Russia where the state nationalised industry already taken over by the workers or abandoned by its capitalist owners, the party bureaucracy simply substituted itself

for the old bosses at the expense of the workers and then sent them off to fight a war on their behalf.

Mr. Blair and the Modernisers

When you think about it, that nice Mr. Blair is right - nationalisation is out of date. It served its purpose (for capitalism) in the past, but in a world of major economic power blocs, like the European Union, NAFTA and APEC etc. spanning many countries, and with industry hungry for huge sums of capital investment beyond the scope of nationally-based organisations to provide, nationalisation is a hindrance to the expansion of capital.

There's another problem though. Nationalisation (or public ownership, if you prefer) whether by the central or local state (sometimes called municipalisation) was dead useful to capitalism to get its own way, while kidding workers that they were on the road to socialism, or at least a 'fairer' society. Tories as much as Labour recognised the value of all this. There was pretty much a consensus between them in post-war Britain, backed up by the common assumptions of Keynesian economic philosophy.

Now they need to perform the same sort of trick without nationalisation, which is where the Tories' 'people's capitalism' and the Labour Party's re-definition of socialism and the debate on Clause 4 come in. We are witnessing the emergence of a new consensus.

The New Fools' Gold

We now find the Labour Party very interested in promoting employee ownership schemes. For inspiration, they are looking to the widespread systems of co-operative ownership in Europe, particularly in the agricultural sector, the employee ownership of industry in the USA (like TWA and North West Airlines) where some 10, 000 companies are at least partially owned by those who work in them and even to some older established systems in this country like the consumer Co-operative Society and the John Lewis Partnership. Other ideas about worker share options and worker directors are also being explored.

• Managed by the NCB - but certainly not on behalf of the people

It's a short step from this to suggesting, as Andrew Bennett MP and the Guardian's Victor Keegan do that workers' investment in pension funds and more directly in the likes of British Gas etc. is already well on the way to some new form of social ownership.

Stephen Pollard, head of research for the Fabian Society (didn't they have something to do with the original clause 4?!) now says that, on paper at least, Britain already has 'common ownership' via the Pension and Insurance Fund Industry. Socialism really has come 'like a thief in the night' after all! Of course for Daily Mirror pensioners the thief wasn't 'socialism' but Robert Maxwell.

Andrew Bennett, who by the way thinks it's a mistake to re-write clause 4, has already re-written it in his own mind by referring to "...shared ownerships" of the means of production, distribution and exchange" in line with the new philosophy.

Turning in his Grave

Peter Hain MP, being a bit more of an intellectual, tries his hand at providing a few historical precedents in support of the new approach when he says:

"An alternative libertarian socialism, embracing figures as diverse as William Morris, Tom Mann, Robert Owen and Noam Chomsky, stresses decentralised control, with decision making in the hands of producers and consumers."

Though his real reason for opposing nationalisation is the more mundane one of its "costing too much."

Hain obviously isn't a Radio 4 listener, otherwise he would have heard the serialisation of William Morris's "News from Nowhere" in which the view of Socialism as a moneyless, wageless, marketless society of free access is made quite clear. In this story of a futuristic society, the Houses of Parliament are put to good use as a store for manure. So in one sense at least things are the same - the contents of that place still stink!

Ownership and Control

Apparently behind Hain's support for New Labour's ideas is his belief that "control is as important as ownership" (in fact he opposes one to the the other). But this differentiation only makes sense if 'ownership' is perceived in a purely formal or legalistic sense. In the real world, ownership can only be defined in terms of control. Private ownership means exclusive control of something by a private individual, group or section of society to the exclusion of all others.

In Russia for instance, where the state used to own most industry and agriculture, the "people" were legally the owners, but it was the bureaucracy which had exclusive control of the means of production and therefore they who in PRACTICE owned the means of production.

Equally, a workers co-op whilst instituting common ownership amongst its members (if we ignore for

the moment the rights of its creditors), is a form of private ownership as against the rest of society.

So long as the relationship between workers co-ops (or any other forms of worker controlled units) is governed by money and the market or indeed by any means of equal EXCHANGE, then so long will people as a whole fail to exert conscious social control over society as a whole. So long as production remains primarily geared towards exchange on the market rather than towards directly satisfying peoples self-expressed needs them "common ownership of the means of production and distribution" will not have been achieved.

Furthermore, in time, the pressures of production for the market inevitably take their toll of any innovative attempts at equality within individual co-ops or other similar set-ups.

As an aside, you'll note that we don't talk about common ownership of the 'means of exchange' since as you have probably already gathered we consider this to be a totally contradictory statement. You can't exchange that which is held in common or the products of that held in common.

Thus, Clause 4 is in both theory and practice a statement of state capitalist aims and has nothing to do with socialism in its original sense. Labour's 'new' ideas are a just a mixture of traditional and worker-administered forms of capitalism regulated by the state. Just a different form of state capitalism really!

Just remember, painting America's TWA airline red didn't make it part of a communist transport system!

See also the following related texts:

'Pit Sense or No Sense' SUBVERSION 15

'Anarchist Economic?' SUBVERSION 12

'The End of Anarchism - workers and peasants collectives during the Spanish Civil War' SUBVERSION REPRINT

'Labouring in Vain' SUBVERSION PAMPHLET

[Extract from Guardian]

When opened, Siglo XX (20th century) was Bolivia's most modern mine. Its hospital was one of the best in the country and the company town even boasted a theatre.

Ten years ago Bolivia, crippled by 24,000 per cent inflation and crashing world tin prices, began a pioneer structural adjustment programme. It involved shrinking the state sector, balancing the books - and ignoring the social cost. All but three of the mines were closed, including Siglo XX, and 27,00 miners were laid off.

They faced a choice between moving to the slums around the capital, La Paz, to work as street vendors, or picking coca leaves. But 5,000 decided to set up a cooperative and continue working the mine.

One was Liborio Salvatierra, age 42, who says the clock has been turned back 100 years: "We had technology here, now we have to work manually. We had medical assistance and safety engineers, now there are accidents all the time. Gas collects because there's no ventilation, roofs collapse."

Mr. Salvatierra says that, when the cooperative was set up, the government promised technical and medical aid, and finance. But nothing came.

"They closed the mines because the miners were so well organised politically, we were the bulwark of the union movement, now they have marginalised us, we are no longer citizens," he says.

Subversion on Disc

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They are available on Mac or PC format.

If you want an one, send a disc and £1.00 or no disc and £2.00 to our Manchester address.

The Animal Debate

The articles on the "animal question"on the two following pages are the resultof a debate which has been going on in SUBVERSION on a subject where we have a high level of disagreement.

Both articles are the views only of the individual members who wrote them.

However, there are large chunks of both articles that most of our members would agree with.

We expect these articles to set the cat among the pigeons, and participation in this debate from our readers is of course most welcome.

The debate continues inside SUBVERSION, and one point in particular where strong disagreement has been expressed since the articles were written is on point number 8 in the second article (HORSE SENSE, page 12).

Some members argued that you couldn't say animals murdered, raped, waged war or did anything that was *bad* at all since all of these are human concepts, which animals could not understand.

The author of the article responds that, as humans, we cannot stand outside our position in nature anymore than as workers we can stand outside our position in society (such attempts at "value free objectivity" are thought experiments of limited practical value). Both as workers and indeed as humans we have values which we impose on the universe.

The fact that animals may have no values and no understanding is irrelevant -what is important is the fact that we have them as humans.

(The animal rightist position criticised in the above mentioned point 8 is based on the same human-centric approach, whether they realise it or not!)

We have no doubt that the debate will continue!

Calf Wars ~ Veal Spiel

PAWS FOR THOUGHT

The sight of young,days old animals, stuffed into lorries and driven for hours before being unloaded onto boats and planes for delivery to other lorries and more miles, before ending up in veal crates and the like, is truly revolting.

It is hardly surprising that for thousands of angry people, often seeing the places they live in used for this trade, that merely grumbling about it is not enough. Their actions in trying to stop it are often brave and at times heroic, and it would be wrong of us to say otherwise.

If they gain nothing more from it, then they will at least learn some simple truths about the nature of the state and its police. No more will they be able to pretend that the police are there to protect them from crime. They will see that the police are there to protect the rights of property of capitalists.

Cruelty to any living thing is despicable and demeans those carrying it out. It brutalises and makes other cruel acts easier to carry out. This kind of trade is typical of a society which exists solely to screw as much profit out of every aspect of life as is possible. It is part of the way that capital makes our lives brutal, nasty and less than human. As such libertarian communists should oppose it. However,there are problems with the whole "animal rights" issue.

The first problem is xenophobia - the hatred of foreigners. This whole issue has got bound up with arguments about the way "the French" and "the Europeans" treat "our" animals. As such it runs parallell with the whole debate within the ruling class about the position of Britain within the EEC. It also forms a useful weapon for the state in negotiating its position in relation to other European states. It is an attitude which sells newspapers, which accounts for part of the reason that they have sided with the animal rights lobby. It is also hardly surprising that right-wing Tories have latched onto it. Alan Clarke, for example, is a vegetarian and was present at the funeral in Coventry, along with Bridget Bardot, of Jill Phipps, the woman killed by the lorry.

A second problem is that there is no such thing as rights, animal or human. The idea of inalienable rights is part of the lie that the state uses to justify its domination of society. It rests on the myth that we all agree to be ruled by the state and that we all have a stake in this society. The argument goes, that in exchange for giving up aspects of our freedom, for agreeing to let others decide how we live our lives, for accepting the domination of the bosses and bureaucrats, we are granted "human rights" which cannot be taken away.

This idea originated with capitalism, and was used as a justification for capitalists and MPs killing kings. Before that time there was no such notion.

The reality, of course, is that we have agreed to nothing. We are born as wage slaves and spend our lives struggling against the attempts of capital and the state to dominate evry aspect of our lives. What pass for "human rights" are a reflection of the state of the class struggle between bosses and workers. We have a "right" to organise because workers fought for it. We have a "right" to free speech because workers fought, were imprisoned and died for it. The same goes for everything else.

Animals are incapable of struggling for anything. If there are no "human rights" other than that which we have struggled for, how can there possibly be any such thing as "animal rights"? What there is,in reality,is human compassion.

Now, compassion may be a beautiful emotion, but we can think of not one single instance where compassion has led to significant social change. That comes when human beings act out of self-interest. When workers see that it is in their self-interest to do something then they act as a social class. It is then that social change occurs. This has been true for all history and will continue to be true in the future. Class struggle teaches workers that one person's individual self-interest can only be fulfilled when the self-interest of all is gratified. To argue otherwise is to lead people down a blind and futile alley, at the end of which can only be despair and demoralisation.

It is right to fight this trade because it makes our lives meaner and less fulfilling. But in doing so, workers must beware their false friends, in the press and the state, who want to use them for their own ends. We certainly cannot fight for the non-existent and impossible "rights" of animals.

For ourselves!

Auld Reekie

Continued from Page 7

of a booklet called 'Surviving on the Streets of Edinburgh' which is being distributed to homeless people.

Some of them used to sleep in the Centre, which now lies locked and empty, guarded around the clock by security firm heavies. When asked by journalists about the Centre's future, Cavenagh replied: "It's a secret".

Death to all politicians! La lutta continua!

Contact the Centre c/o Peace & Justice Centre, St John's, Princes Street, Edinburgh (mail only). Tel 0131 557 5846 (12-4, Mon-Fri).

BAMBI LIB!

HORSE SENSE: Fifteen Theses to Set the Fur Flying

1. Human beings do not have rights, and neither do animals. The concept of Rights is a mystical notion akin to religion, in that it involves a disembodied thing that exists "out there" that we all allegedly possess as part of our nature. Recognition by human beings of the supposed objective existence of these "Rights" then determines how we relate to each other, or how we should relate to each other, according to this belief.

2. But this is a superstitious belief, like belief in God, or the Tooth Fairy. As such, it serves to obfuscate, not to elucidate.

3. If for superstition we substitute fact we must say that Rights do not exist. All freedoms or gains that people have (had) were fought for. To the working class people who are the oppressed and exploited of present day society, we say: you have no Rights but you have a class interest - fight for it!

4. Animals cannot struggle. Indeed, they are totally incapable of recognising such a concept.

5. Humans struggle on their behalf. It can only ever be that way.

6. As working class revolutionaries we participate in social struggles on the basis of common class interest. But animals have no class interest. Any action taken on their humanitarianism.

7. This humanitarian attitude is an extension of our fellow-feeling for our own species. Accordingly, the more an animal ressembles us, the more people tend to regard it. This is the Bambi Syndrome - people like fluffy bunnies more than tarantulas.

8. Our predilection as a species for caring for the welfare of other species is an extremely rare quality in the animal kingdom as a whole. Contrary to the view of some of the nuttier animal rightists that humans are a blight on the Earth and that the "innocent animals" are so much better than us, it's the other way around - what animal would be capable of Humanitarian (sic) feeling or action on behalf of other species? What carnivorous animal would forego meat, even if it were able? What are the (supposedly human) vices that do not exist (often in more virulent form) among other species? Murder? Carnivores and others do it. Rape? Orang utans do it. Warfare? Chimpanzees do it, with extreme brutality.

The fact is that humans are on the whole BETTER than the other species we share the planet with. Ironically, are animal activists themselves not living, two-legged proof of this?

9. The fact that animals are INFERIOR to humans, in the above way as in other ways, does not mean that we should disregard them, or ignore their welfare.

10. There are a number of different issues involved in the treatment of animals, which have different solutions: a: Blood sports b: Medical testing c: Other testing d: Food, clothing and the like e: Unnecessary cruelty in b through d above.

11. These issues shade between at one extreme blood sports, which are pure sadism with no possible justification, through non-medical testing (e.g. for cosmetics) which few people other than the most callous would justify, through medical experiments which can be argued to be justified in principle if they avert human death and misery, at least until alternatives exist (the fact that much testing may be medically unnecessary is a separate issue), to use of animals for food etc. which has been part of our "nature" (inasmuch as such a thing exists) for as long as humans (or semi-humans) have been on the planet, and which nearly everyone accepts.

12. Whereas the demise of blood sports may come in the relatively near future, use of animals for food can only realistically be expected to disappear as a result of technological and social change: in a future socialist society there will be not only the technological advance of proper, nutritious and appetising meat substitutes that will exist by then (if not sooner) but also the ability of society as a whole to make rational decisions about what it does, rather than letting everything be determined by what's profitable for the capitalists. Under capitalism, animal use will never end if it's profitable.

13. If you want a veg(etari)an society, then, support the struggle to establish Socialism! And stop bothering ordinary working classs people who eat meat in the here and now, many of whom find it hard through the circumstances of their life to go "veggy" (and who already have enough to worry about!).

14. The treatment of animals is only INDIRECTLY a class issue: e.g. sadism has no place in a socialist society and people who engage in blood sports are scum who deserve to die. But activism on this issue is only worth doing if there's nothing more important going on - i.e. class struggle!

15. As was said above, concern for animals is a Humanitarian issue, and there is nothing at all wrong with that, so let's proclaim it as such unashamedly. But let's not confuse it with class interest, class solidarity and class struggle.

Class of 95
Workplace or Community?

We received two letters around the theme of community and workplace struggle from two of our regular contacts operating under the titles of Trotwatch and Communist Headache.
We publish here an extract from the first with a short reply:

Dear Subversion,

Thanks for issues 14 and 15 of the paper - nearly all of which have now been distributed. A lot of good stuff in both. I'd like to talk to you more about your particular class theory. Despite what maybe something of a conflict of emphasis between the Revolutionaries in the Workplace article, and your editorial reply to Mark in the current issue, I understand that, generally speaking, you perceive workplace struggles as the primary site of class struggle: because this is the place where surplus value is extracted. I'm not convinced by the apparently inherent distinctions which you see as separating and distinguishing work from community struggles, however. And while a vast amount of capitalist bollox (both academic and populist) has been churned out about the much maligned and feared underclass, I think you dismiss the idea a little out of hand.

The nature of employment, the organisation of work, and the management of the workforce are, without doubt, currently being re-shaped. Some of the changes the capitalist class is seeking are being contested - sometimes more consciously so than others - other changes are being forced through in the face of minimal opposition, despite the potentially devastating impact that they threaten.

Its not necessary to accept the post-Fordist class-is-dead bollox to understand that if the nature of capitalist work is being overhauled (evidenced by the growth pf part-time work; team working; short term contracting; sub contracting; the growth of personal contracts; the loss of long-term security for many workers; the emergence in some sectors of a core-periphery split amongst workers employed by an operation) then the structure of the working class - and relations between sections of it - may also be redefined as these materials conditions change. In light of this, I think it would be useful for you to discuss the controversy of the underclass more fully in a future issue. You may of course argue that the real spread of such changes is minimal, and that growth of long term unemployment and precarious temporary work is more the result of cyclical rather than structural changes in western capitalism. Whatever, I'd like to see you elaborate your critique.

Trotwatch

REPLY:

The issues you raise were the subject of much discussion at recent SUBVERSION meetings. We are still a long way from drawing definite conclusions but there are some points we'd like to make.

You rightly detect some differences, at least in emphasis, in various articles that have appeared in SUBVERSION recently.

Our starting point is a recognition that it is the division between the working class - those excluded from control of the means of production and exploited by the minority capitalist class, which does control the means of production, which is at the heart of the contradictions of modern society .

It is the struggle between these two classes (alongside and connected to the struggle between different groups of capitalists) which is the motor of change in capitalism and which provides the potential for its revolutionary overthrow and the creation of a communist society.

However the nature and composition of the working class has changed over time in the process of this struggle, and is set to change still further. To be effective as a conscious revolutionary minority we need to better understand these changes. Ignoring for the moment the misplaced use of the term community, it is our view that the polarised community versus workplace debate is false and misleading.

There is a strong case to be made for understanding the whole of the capitalist physical terrain, as the workplace, in so far as production has become more physically dispersed while at the same time more socially integrated.

To illustrate this simply, take a situation where one workplace might contain integrated production, from design, through processing, transport to sale and incorporating in-house training and medical attention etc, to a situation where each of these elements is carried out by different organisations in widely different locations, the workers none-the-less remain part of the same process contributing to the same end product.

In a broad sense capitalist production is much more social in practice than ever before. Thus the whole of the working class is exploited by the whole of the capitalist class in a very real way - it isn't just a marxist theoretical abstraction. Process workers, transport workers, teachers, hospital workers, communications workers, houseworkers etc etc all play a part in the production and reproduction of capital.

But of course struggle in practice has to start somewhere, either in a particular workplace or a particular geographical area. Whatever the starting point, it is important both for limited gains in the short run and ultimately for the revolutionary overthrow of the system, for struggles to extend both geographically and socially. It is the socially integrated nature of capitalism as described above which provides the material basis for struggles to extend and change character in the process - to become revolutionary.

Has the socially integrated nature of capitalism and the common interests of the working class as a whole been broken by the emergence of a so-

called underclass? In parts of Africa, South America and elsewhere, huge numbers of people have been driven off the land through war, famine and commercialisation onto the fringes of major urban connurbations. None of this is new, but capitalism has found it more and more difficult to integrate these people into the production process and in some cases has created generations who have no experience of wage labour.

For those in the worst conditions such as some of the semi-permanent refugee camps, it is difficult to see any collective struggle emerging that might form the spark of anything wider. On the other hand, there is experience of collective struggle among some of the shanty town dwellers of South Africa which are more hopeful.

In Europe, North America and elsewhere there has also been a growth of long term unemployment, often concentrated in certain inner-city areas and extending to second generations. Whilst there are some similarities between the situation of these two groups of people, there are important differences. Firstly in numbers, the long term unemployed here are a much smaller proportion of the working class. They are also still at this stage more socially integrated into the wider working class. Ironically it is precisely the extension of more general insecurity among the working class through the extension of short-time working, part-time working, temporary contracts,home-working etc combined with the states social programmes which may well limit the growth of any permanent hard-core group of long term unemployed.

These same trends may well also see a shift in emphasis from mass struggles focussed on the individual workplace to a more generalised geographical focus, although at this moment in time there are still, across the world, plenty of large workplaces that will continue to provide important starting points of struggle.

Clearly some groups of workers are more likely to enter into struggle than others at particular points in time. Equally some struggles have more potential to extend than others, depending on their objective relationship to the process of capitalist production and reproduction.

It seems to us that broadly speaking struggles focussed on work, wages and working conditions and on the social wage, whether in the form of benefits or services in kind will continue to be the backbone of class struggle.

In the past and up to the present day these struggles have taken the form of strikes, riots, occupations, rent strikes, mass boycotts and non-payments etc. New forms of struggle may arise reflecting the charging nature of work and its physical location.

Struggles focussed on other issues such as opposition to road building (the arteries of the production process) have less obvious potential for extension - though argument among revolutionaries on this still rages (see Aufheben no. 3 for a discussion of this).

At the other extreme for instance the opposition to live cattle exports, whatever you think of it, is clearly quite peripheral to the development of mass opposition to capitalism.

It also seems true that the more peripheral a struggle, not only is there less potential for extension on a class basis, but the opposite is true, they are more open to co-optation for capitalist interests.

The issue, in summary, is not where a struggle starts but what is its potential for extension geographically and socially - what is its potential to influence the wider class movement.

See also: New Technology and the Changing Composition of the Working Class. (Next issue)

For previous discussion of some of these issues see SUBVERSION issues number 12, 13, 14 and 15, still available from the group address.

Friends and neighbours:

If you liked **Subversion** then why not read **ORGANISE!**, paper of the Anarchist Communist Federation, c/o 84b Whitechapel High Street, London E1 7QX.

COMMUNIST HEADACHE, PO Box 446, Sheffield S1 1NY

Some communists in Liverpool can be contacted at: PO Box 182, Liverpool L69 1UU

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REPORTS: NORTHERN ANARCHISTS AND REVOLUTIONARY SOCIALISTS?

During January last, members of SUBVERSION attended two conferences in the north of England.

The first, in Manchester, was advertised as a launch meeting for the Northern Anarchist Network. We argued, with some support from a member of the A.C.F., that useful practical co-operation could only be based on agreeing some basic revolutionary political positions. Unfortunately, this approach was rejected. While we had expected opposition to this from members of the East Midland Anarchist Federation, whom from past experience we know to be dominated by liberal and leftist ideology, the small majority of class struggle, anarchist-communists present were also sadly unwilling to support us. Although participants clearly thought it worthwhile organising a meeting separate from single issue campaigns and the general swamp of radical politics, they ended up being unable or unwilling to define exactly how they differed from the rest.

Having lost our main argument, we did our best to ensure that the new network at least provided some space for genuine political debate, but we doubt if it will end up being anything more than an information exchange.

The second conference we attended was the fourth national conference of the Revolutionary Socialist Network held in Wigan. This network was originally set up in the wake of the collapse of the Eastern Block regimes and the general confusion this caused among leftwingers. It was a genuine attempt by some to open up debate and discussion amongst those from widely differing political backgrounds, who all none-the-less were willing to challenge the old orthodoxies of the left. As such it initially attracted not only ourselves but a wide spectrum of people from anarchists and left communists, through disillusioned Labour and trade union supporters to ex-Stalinsists.

Unfortunately, many who continued to attend the meetings were in the end more interested in finding new reasons to support re-packaged left-wing dogma than to genuinely re-examine, in a radical way, their previous ideas and practices.

The Wigan Conference was not only smaller than the previous three, but even more dominated by esoteric groups of neo-trotskyists and holier-than-thou, rank and file trade union types.

The Network may struggle on but genuine revolutionary socialists will need to look elsewhere for means to debate and co-operate together.

The following is a leaflet we distributed at the RSN conference. It could perhaps have been just as useful at the Anarchist Conference:

"THE REVOLUTIONARY ALTERNATIVE TO LEFT WING POLITICS."

THE REVOLUTIONARY ALTERNATIVE TO LEFT-WING POLITICS

****

The Left has not failed. And that is one of the greatest disasters ever to befall the working class.

Most people think that the Left is the movement of the working class for socialism (albeit riven by opportunism and muddle-headed interpretations on the part of many in its ranks).

Nothing could be further from the truth.

We in Subversion (and the wider movement of which we are a part) believe that left-wing politics are simply an updated version of the bourgeois democratic politics of the French revolution, supplemented by a state-capitalist economic programme.

Consider:

In the French revolution, the up and coming capitalist class were confronted not only by the old order, but also by a large and growing urban plebeian population (the working class in formation, artisans, petty traders and the like), who had their own genuine aspirations for freedom from oppression, however incoherent.

Bourgeois democracy was the device that enabled the capitalist class to disguise their own aspirations for power as the liberation of everyone outside the feudal power structure.

The notion of the People (as though different classes, exploiters and exploited, could be reduced to a single entity) was thus born.

The notion of Equality and the notion of Rights possessed by all presented a fictitious view of society as a mass of individuals who all stood in the same relations to the law - completely ignoring the difference between the property owners and those whose labour they exploit.

And, above all, the notion of the Nation - that the oppressed class should identify with those of their opressors who live in the same geographical area or speak the same language, and see as alien those of our class who are on the other side of "national borders".

By means of this imaginary view of society, capitalism was able to dominate the consciousness of the newly forming working class. Bourgeois democracy is the biggest con in history.

Consider also:

As capitalism developed more and more, the material position of the working class forced it to engage in struggle despite its bourgeois consciousness - thus enabling this consciousness to be undermined.

The existing capitalist regimes often came to be hated. Thus there was a need for a more radical version of bourgeois democracy with a more specifically working class image. Left wing politics fulfulled this role in the 19th and 20th centuries, first in the form of Social Democracy or Labourism and then in the form of Bolshevism: Both of these variants managed to dress up support for capitalism in working class language, and became major players in the full development of capitalism (this was especially true in Russia, where State Capitalism, introduced by the Bolsheviks, a supposedly working class party, was the only way capitalism could be developed.

So what does Leftism consist of?

At first blush it seems to be about supporting the struggle of the workers, but when you look more closely everything is on the terrain of capitalist politics. The main features of Leftism are:

Support for radical capitalist parties

Such as the Labour Party in this country and the ANC in South Africa (precisely because its goal is to widen bourgeois democracy - the vote etc.),and support for **Parliament**. Some "revolutionary" groups who don't support the Labour Party nevertheless still support participation in parliament - thereby helping in practice to uphold the ideology of bourgeois democracy.

Support for State Capitalism

Already referred to above, State Capitalism (a term with various meanings, but here we mean the form of society that developed in Russia and its imitators) collects all property into the hands of the state. And this is a capitalist state, not a "workers' state" because capitalist property relations still exist - wage labour, money, the market - and of course the workers do not control the state. The state, indeed, confronts the workers as the "collective capitalist", extracting surplus value from them for the ruling bureaucrats, who are themselves the "collective bourgeoise".

Let us be clear about this: the only way capitalism can be dismantled is for the working class to immediately abolish money and the market, and distribute goods according to need (albeit with scarce goods being rationed for a time if necessary). Those who argue that this cannot be done immediately are in fact arguing for retaining the very core of capitalist social relations - if that is done the revolution is as good as dead.

The idea that state capitalism is not capitalism doesn't merely justify support for anti-working class dictatorships like Russia, China, Cuba etc., but creates the very real danger of such a society being created in any future revolution.

Support for Nationalism in its "radical" form

Left wing groups routinely advocate support for weaker, e.g. "third world", nation states - meaning the governments of nation states, against stronger ones (Iraq in the Gulf War, etc.). This is described as anti-imperialism (!) as though the victory of the weaker country would do more than slightly alter the ranking of states within the world imperialist pecking order. Imperialism is a historical stage of capitalism and opposing it, as opposed to opposing capitalism itself via working class revolution, is meaningless.

The most common form of this "radical" nationalism consists of so-called "national liberation movements", such as the IRA, who don't yet have state power. As soon as they do come to power they always crush the working class - that is, of course, the nature of bourgeois state power.

Often the line will be used that, even if one disapproves of nationalism, that nevertheless nations have a right to self-determination, and one must support their rights. A purer example of bourgeois democratic double-talk could not be imagined: Rights are not something that actually exists, but are a bourgeois mystification (see above). The working class should not talk about its rights but about its class interest. Talking about a right to national "self-determination" (as though a geographical grouping of antagonistic classes can be a "self"!) is like saying that workers have a "right" to be slaves if they want to, or a "right" to beat themselves over the head with a hammer if they want to. Anyone who supports the "right" to something anti-working class is actually helping to advocate it, whatever their mealy-mouthed language.

Siding with the working class against all capitalist factions necessitates opposing all forms of nationalism whatsoever. Any wobbling on this will lead the working class to defeat yet again.

Support for Trade Unionism

Seemingly the most working class activity of all, Trade Unionism is above all a movement to reconcile the workers to capitalism. Its stated aim is to get workers the best deal within capitalism, but it's not even that:

The mass of workers have bourgeois consciousness, but because capitalism forces them to struggle, they can resist despite that consciousness and thereby begin to change that consciousness.

Struggles of the working class are the seeds of revolutionary change. But because Trade Unions are made up of the mass of workers (with bourgeois consciousness) and exist all the time - i.e. when there's no class struggle (and although the day-to-day life of workers can well be called a struggle, we are of course talking about collective struggle) the said Unions inevitably fail to challenge capitalism, and furthermore become dominated by a clique of bureaucrats who rise above the passive mass of workers. These bureaucrats get their livelihood from the day-to-day existence within capitalism that is Trade Unionism. They are thus materially tied to it. That is why when struggle breaks out, the Union machine sabotages it and stabs workers in the back in the time honoured tradition. This will always be the case - the workers can never sieze the unions. The very nature of Trade Unionism produces anti-working class bureaucratic control.

We believe the workers must create new structures, controlled from the bottom up, to run every struggle that occurs, outside and against the Unions, if the struggle is to go forward. Left wing groups' support for Trade Unions is just one more way in which they help shackle the working class to capitalism.

And last but certainly not least, advocacy of the Leadership of "revolutionaries" over the working class

This division between a mass of followers and an elite of leaders mirrors the divide in mainstream capitalism (and indeed all forms of class society) between rulers and ruled, and serves well the project of constructing state capitalism, after the future revolution.

None of this means that all workers will come simultaneously to revolutionary ideas, because to begin with only a minority will be revolutionaries, but their task is to argue their case with the rest of their fellow workers as equals.

What the left do however, is to perpetuate the sheep-like mentality workers learn under capitalism and harness it to their aim to be in charge after the revolution. We say that if anyone is in charge, if the working class does not lead itself, and consciously build a new society, then it will fare no better than in Russia and China and all the rest.

We believe that all left wing groups, whether Stalinist or Trotskyist (or Maoist or Anarchist or whatever they call themselves) are merely radical capitalist organisations who, if they ever came to power, would erect new state capitalist dictatorships in the name of the very working class they would proceed to crush.

This is not a matter of the subjective intentions of their members, whose sincerity we are not questioning here, but the objective result of their policies.

This is why the Left has not failed. Its aim was never more than to save capitalism by disguising it as something it was not - just as the original form of bourgeois democracy did in an earier age.

In opposition to the Left there exists a political movement, consisting of both groups and individuals, some of whom might call themselves Communists, while some might call themselves Anarchists (the Marxist-Anarchist split is an outdated historical division that bears no relationship to the real class line, which cuts across it), but who all stand united against the fake radicalism of the Left, and for a genuinely communist alternative. We in SUBVERSION are a part of this movement.

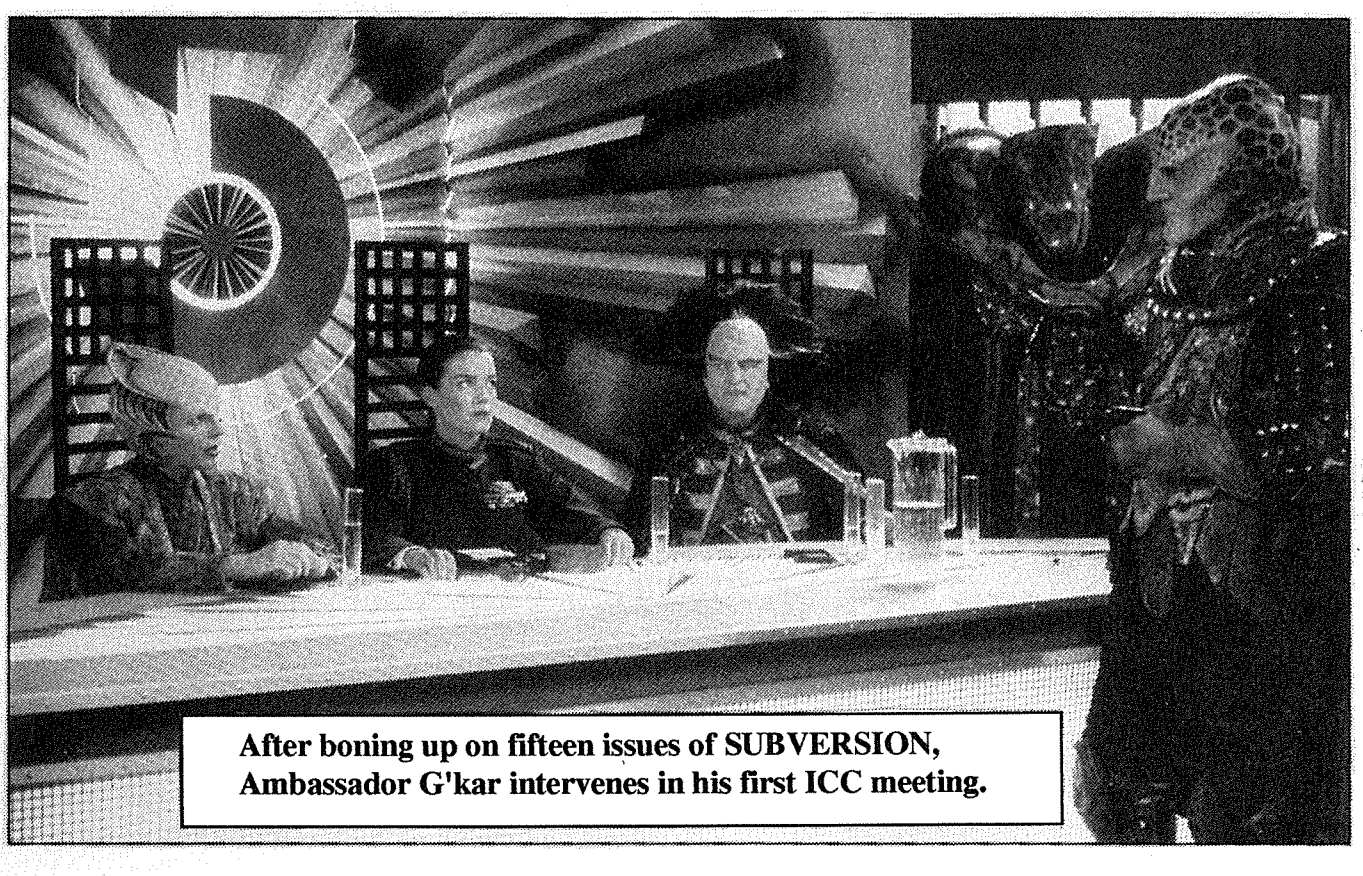
What is the Alternative?

We believe that, despite the obstacles put in its way by both Right and Left, the working class has the power to destroy capitalism for real, and create a society without classes, without the state, national boundaries, oppression or inequality. A society not based on money or other forms of exchange, but on collective ownership of, and free access to, all society's goods on the part of the whole of humanity.

This society, which we call Communism or Socialism or Anarchism interchangeably, will be the first truly free society ever to exist.

The social movement that will create this society will grow from the existing struggles of the working class. As part of this process, our class must surmount the barriers put in its way by bourgeois ideology, including left wing ideology. Our task in SUBVERSION is not to be leaders (see above), but to be part of the process of creation of a revolutionary working class movement that will put an end to our world's long history of oppression and exploitation, and begin the long history of the free, world human community to come.

If you would like to contact us, or receive a copy of our magazine SUBVERSION, then write to: Dept. 10, 1 Newton St., Piccadilly, Manchester M1 1HW.



After boning up on fifteen issues of SUBVERSION, Ambassador G'kar intervenes in his first ICC meeting.

WHAT WE STAND FOR

We meet regularly for political discussion and to organise our activities. The following is a brief description of our basic political principles:

- We are against all forms of capitalism; private, state and self-managed.

- We are for communism, which is a classless society in which all goods are distributed according to needs and desires.

- We are actively opposed to all ideologies which divide the working class, such as religion, sexism and racism.

- We are against all expressions of nationalism, including "national liberation" movements such as the IRA.

- The working class (wage labourers, the unemployed, housewives, etc.) is the revolutionary class; only its struggle can liberate humanity from scarcity, war and economic crisis.

- Trade unions are part of the capitalist system, selling our labour power to the bosses and sabotaging our struggles. We support independent working class struggle, in all areas of life under capitalism, outside the control of the trade unions and all political parties.

- We totally oppose all capitalist parties, including the Labour Party and other organisations of the capitalist left. We are against participation in fronts with these organisations.

- We are against participation in parliamentary elections; we are for the smashing of the capitalist state by the working class and the establishment of organisations of working class power.

- We are against sectarianism, and support principled co-operation among revolutionaries.

- We exist to actively particpate in escalating the class war towards communism

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Subversion,

Dept 10, 1 Newton Street, Manchester M11HW