MAX ANGER'S SONG

Come hither, comrades, with your six-packs of ale,
To sneer at our rulers and see how they fail;
On the lives of the rich pile a mountain of grief,
For its cuttin' 'em
and guttin' 'em
that bring us relief!

So fill up a glass, for their ways shall soon pass;
When they're dead we'll remember their stink and their gas!

John Kennedy's brains were red, so they say;
But what's their splitt blood when we're happy and gay?
I'd rather help slaughter the rich while I'm here,
Than be passive, hard-working - and dead half a year!

So comrades, let's kiss,
On their graves we shall piss;
In hell there's no bosses or time-clock like this!

In nights filled with riot and burning and shooting,
This city's been conquered by arson and looting!
Social unrest is sweeping the nation,
There's a pig-roast down at the old police station

So let's give a hand to a mutinous band,
'Cause I'm merry while I tarry
On top of The Man!

JUSTICE
THEIR WORD TO DEFEND THEIR WORLD

INSIDE: LA Uprising, British Justice, Ecodefence, Early Trade Unions, Anti-Fascism, Recession, Drugs, Democracy and more...
The Los Angeles riot was the biggest in American history. There were of course negative aspects. But fighting between members of the working class was low, despite the best efforts of the police. The rebellion saved lives. Initially, the media were so floored by the uprisings, they produced a wealth of evidence that there were examples of class resistance. Subsequently, they have been trying to make out it was all race.

In a racist society, class struggle often takes an apparently racial form. For example, if a particular ethnic group run the grocers' stores in poor areas, they are likely to be the first to be attacked. The fact that some rich people had rioted, it seemed, was being ripped off in racial terms should be opposed, but does not invalidate the basic class nature of the struggle. As Willie Brown, a prominent Democratic Party politician in the State Assembly, and no friend of the class war, put it in the SF Examiner: "For the first time in American history, many of the whites, Hispanics and Asians were all involved." The police agent that black people burnt down 'their own' neighborhoods. But the working class has no neighborhood. These 'communities' are always divided up into shopkeepers and proletarians: two classes with irreconcilable interests. The riots expressed that antagonism against all the talk of neighborhoods and communities, and a black lefty councillor had his office burned down. The old ploy of 1965, 'Black Owned', didn't work. Capitalist enterprises of all races were attacked. Unlike the '65 Watts revolt, the riots spread over a wide area of LA. More than 5,500 buildings were burned. People shot at police dogs. Seventeen government buildings were destroyed. The Los Angeles Times building was attacked and partially looted.

The riot stopped short of a full-scale insurrection. Shortage of guns was certainly not the problem, and probably not absence of organization. The police were easily overwhelmed, and the military did not appear until the rioting had abated. Gang members with megaphones tried to turn the uprising into a war against the rich. "We should burn down their neighbourhoods, not ours. We're going to take it to Hollywood and Beverly Hills" - man with megaphone, London Independent, 3 May. A few blocks from the mansions of the rich, burnt-out storey testify to how close the riot came to attacking the enemy class directly. But such an attack would have been repelled by police, crack army units, and the rich themselves. Perhaps the rioters realized that the time had not yet come. Class organization needs to develop a lot further before this happens.

"On Sunset Boulevard on Thursday evening, I watched children with mobile phones coordinate their way". London Guardian, 2 May. The movement of their gangsters with the arrival of police and fire trucks, warning looters when police were on the streets. Therewasan unprecedented feeling of togetherness. Liquor stores were looted. Before the stores were torched, people got out hoses to defend their houses against the danger of fires spreading. Old people were evacuated. This was a family occasion. Carloads of people turned up at a clothing factory, and men and women and children loaded up and drove off. There was two days of continuous looting involving thousands of people, mostly black and Latino, who went down the street people. The police were nowhere to be seen - "there were no arrests in my area". Essential items were redistributed, to the effect that some people had had nothing. As far as the beating of truck driver Reginald Denny goes, some of the people who beat him had just defended a 15-year old against being beaten by the police. This of course is not being mentioned in the media.

LAPD 187

"The rebellion was community. It was liberation" - woman from South Central.

We have done what we can to find out more about what happened and what has happened since. This is some of the information we got from our few contacts in the LA area. The rebellion started among black people, spread immediately to involve Latinos in South Central (which is about 42% Latino) and Pico Union, and then brought in unemployed white workers from Hollywood in the north to Long Beach in the south and Venice in the west. East LA was only spared because of a massive show of force by the Sheriff's Department. Everybody came out onto the streets. There was an unprecedented feeling of togetherness. Liquor stores were looted. Before the stores were torched, people got out hoses to defend their houses against the danger of fires spreading. Old people were evacuated. This was a family occasion. Carloads of people turned up at a clothing factory, and men and women and children loaded up and drove off. There was two days of continuous looting involving thousands of people, mostly black and Latino, who went down the street. The police were nowhere to be seen - "there were no arrests in my area". Essential items were redistributed, to the effect that some people had had nothing. As far as the beating of truck driver Reginald Denny goes, some of the people who beat him had just defended a 15-year old against being beaten by the police. This of course is not being mentioned in the media.

Since the rebellion, young men who have spent their whole lives unable to visit the next street because it is on another gang's territory, continue to fight. "As a woman, I feel much safer on the streets." Welfare mothers from 4 different areas have come together to fight the welfare cuts. This is a remarkable new development. When these women demonstrate outside welfare offices, the ruling class knows that behind them stand over 100,000 insurgents. The number of participants is definitely into 6 figures. We know this because there were around 11,000 arrests (5,000 blacks, 5,500 Latinos, 600 whites), and the vast majority of rioters and looters were able to get away scot-free. There has been a downturn in the drive-by gang shootings which plagued the area. Of those killed during the uprising, most were not even participants, they were simply bystanders. The police assassinations have never stopped. There were much worse incidents before the Rodney King beating, for example, in Compton, police killed two suspects on their knees in cold blood. The police are desperately trying to undermine the gang truce. They need the working class of South Central shooting each other.

There are two theories why the media repeatedly showed the Rodney King video. One is that the ruling class as a whole wanted to provoke a riot in order to justify repression. A more plausible explanation is that forces within the ruling class opposed to Daryl Gates wanted to generate support for a law which would enable the mayor to control the LAPD Chief. Either way, they got more than they bargained for.

Defendants campaigns are in a terrible state. There is no coordinated campaign based on defending all those arrested. The campaigns which do exist are concerned with particular defendants, or particular aspects of repression, e.g. racism. Liberal lawyers have refused to defend rioters, and concentrated on those arrested on peaceful demo. Anyone in the USA who claims to be a revolutionary should be involved in trying to defend imprisoned insurgents. Failure to do so immensely weakens the struggle, as we discovered during the miners' strike in Britain during 1984/85. Peasants in the Philippines were cut down by the state a lot. Those arrested were told that they could either plead guilty and be let free with a felony conviction, or wait in prison for a trial. Many took
FROM THE GULF WAR TO THE CLASS WAR

There's a difference between frustration with the law and direct assaults upon our legal system.
George Bush, 3 May 92.

The Los Angeles riot was the biggest in American history. There were of course negative aspects. But fighting between members of the working class dropped during the riot and has subsequently stayed low, despite the best efforts of the police. The rebellion saved lives. Initially, the media were so floored by the uprisings, they produced a wealth of evidence that they were examples of class struggle. Subsequently, they have been trying to make out it was all race.

In a racist society, class struggle often takes an apparently racial form. For example, if a particular ethnic group run the grocers' stores in poor areas, they are likely to be the first to be attacked. The fact that some rich and powerful hand of being ripped off in racial terms should be opposed, but does not invalidate the basic class nature of the struggle. As Willie Brown, a prominent Democratic Party politician in the State Assembly, and no friend of the class war, put it in the SF Examiner: "For the first time in American history, many of the demonstrations, and much of the violence and crime, especially the looting, was multiracial - blacks, whites, Hispanics and Asians were all involved." The press all expressed horror that black people burnt down 'their own' neighborhoods. But the working class has no neighborhood. These 'communities' are always divided up into shopkeepers and proletarians: two classes with irreconcilable interests. The rioters expressed that antagonism against all the talk of neighborhoods and communities, and a black lefty councillor had his office burned down. The old ploy of 1965, 'Black Owned', didn't work. Capitalist enterprise of all races were attacked. Unlike the '65 Watts revolt, the riots spread over a wide area of LA. More than 5,500 buildings were burned. People shot at police houses. Seventeen government buildings were destroyed. The Los Angeles Times building was attacked and partially looted.

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"On Sunset Boulevard on Thursday evening, I watched children with mobile phones coordinate the movements of their gang with the arrival of police and fire trucks, warning looters when police were on their way". London Guardian, 2 May. The organization which is normally associated with drugs was used by the proletariat to its own ends.

"After drawing up a formal truce based on the Camp David agreement, the Crips and the Bloods signed a deal with the National Korean-American Grocers' Association to employ and train gang members, some in management positions. However, not much has come of this. After the Watts rebellion of 1965, there was still room for reform. A black bourgeoisie was created. Now, this is no longer possible. The state of California is bankrupt, and the federal government is not into giving money to the poor. On the contrary. The August/September welfare checks will be down on the previous ones. The last traditional blue collar auto plant in LA shut in August. Rubber, steel and auto have now all gone. A program known as "Weed n' Seed" is what is on offer. The Weed part is to get the cops to sell drugs, and arrest people who buy them, then offer them immunity in return for informing. This threat is difficult to resist because of the draconian drug laws, which include imprisonment for a first offence and seizure of all your assets. The Seed part is to introduce "Free Enterprise Zones", wherein there are no safety or pollution laws, no minimum wage, etc. These enclaves of Third World exploitation are already being built. This is what the bourgeoisie has to offer behind the "rebuild LA" rhetoric.

LAPD 187

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Since the rebellion, young men who have spent their whole lives unable to visit the next street because it is on another gang's territory are free to do so. "As a woman, I feel much safer on the streets". Welfare mothers from 4 different areas have come together to fight the welfare cuts. This is a remarkable new development. When these people demonstrated outside welfare offices, the ruling class knows that behind them stand over 100,000 insurgents. The number of participants is definitely into 6 figures. We know this because there were around 11,000 arrests (5,000 blacks, 5,500 Latinos, 600 whites), and the vast majority of rioters and looters were able to get away scot-free. There has been a downturn in the drive-by gang shootings which plagued the area. But those killed during the uprising, most were not even participants, they were simply bystanders. The police assassinations have started again. There were much worse incidents before the Rodney King beating, for example, in Compton, police killed two suspects on their knees in cold blood. The police are desperately trying to undermine the gang truce. They need the working class of South Central shooting each other.

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D e f e n d a n t s campaigns are in a terrible state. There is no coordinated campaign based on defending those arrested. The campaigns which do exist are concerned with particular defendants, or particular aspects of repression, e.g. racism. Liberal lawyers have refused to defend rioters, and concentrated on those arrested on peaceful demos. Anyone in the USA who claims to be a revolutionary should be involved in trying to defend imprisoned insurgents. Failure to do so immensely weakens the struggle, as we discovered during the miners' strike in Britain during 1984/85. Pleas for support were ignored by the state a lot. Those arrested were told they could either plead guilty and be let free with a felony conviction, or wait in prison for a trial. Many took...
Mayday! Mayday!

A comrade in the Bay area describes the events: "I sat up late that night listening to the news reports and call-in talk shows on the radio. Everyone was hysterical. Everyone but a few white smirks condemned the not-guilty verdict. But as far as I could see, the rioting was concerned, most people heard, of all colors, and mostly working-class, were concerned with how to stop the violence, with the idea that destruction and appropriation of property is morally wrong, and that we should pray for peace. As the uprising progressed, however, I heard more and more voices declare that their only regret was that "we are doing it to ourselves...we ought to be going into the rich areas!" Throughout the next few days and continuing the vile American tradition, issues of race and class were confused, juggled, cut through, and the rich areas invaded and trashed in the downtown area of Market Street. April 30th, more than a hundred stores were looted and trashed, and the rich scumbag lair of Nob Hill was invaded and cars smashed up. One of the main hotels had its windows smashed by a gang of youths chanting "The rich must die." These actions were echoed across the Bay in Oakland and Berkeley.

As I watched the looting a man came up near me and began taking photographs. I approached him, and politely suggested that we shouldn't take pictures because the police might use them to identify people. But they're looting!!" he responded incredulously. I was hurt. Here I stood, confronted with the very real claws of the leftist counter-revolution. I had given him the benefit of the doubt, hoping against naive hope that we were all class-conscious revolutionaries in action. I tried to get some support from the police in action against this enemy-within, but no one was listening. My confrontation with this vigilante cop heated up quickly and it looked like he was about to throw a punch when some guys came up from the crowd to break up the fight: "Let's fight them, not ourselves!" they implored. "But he's taking pictures of looters in order to turn them into the police!" I insisted. Like an angelic chorus of choirboys, these 'alternative' looking students, to whom they were, all announced in harmony, "THAT'S OK, WE ARE AGAINST LOOTING HERE!" speaking for the mob as if they were its appointed moral guardians. You can imagine the demoralizing blow such an encounter could wield. I was alone in the crowd. The looters, my only hope for support, were not concerned for such "political" matters, just wanting to get out with their jewelry scooping as fast as they could. I went on to a more successful endeavor.

The march had left Market Street, the main drag through the Financial/Shopping District. Blocking our path was a thin nervous line of blue. They stopped us for 10 minutes or so, as we teased and poked them with kicks and verbal abuse. Our comrades to the left were invading around them, and the police, before long, were shunted to the side. They were left behind as the proletarian army advanced down Commodity-Spectacle Boulevard whooping and revelling in the attack. I first retired upon a Jewelry store which had already taken a great deal of damage. A few of us, I, and probably almost all blacks, mainly older, stood there pondering the possibilities. Occasional shouts of "The cops are coming!" made us hesitate, but it became obvious that we were safe. The marching crowd seemed to have doubled in size so rapidly that I kept my finger on the police. Police! But it was nothing...behind me a deep, black voice joyfully urged, "Pull it down, white boy, pull it down!" and I tore the thing onto the sidewalk, scooping up the goodies.

As the march continued, several blocks later, the pig squad attempted a diversionary tactic by parking about twenty men along a wall that the march was passing. They were hailed with abuse, but it was more of an afterthought than a first priority. With that hesitation that our law-enforced life in this society conditions in us, we had this line of cops surrounded. Sure, they were screamed and hissed at, kicked and occasionally whacked with a stick or stone, but how were they able to intimidate us, who completely outnumbered them, into not kicking the shit out of them?

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Odd bits of construction material on the sidewalks were instantly put to proper use, deposited through shattered glass into the Government offices lining the Financial District. As in LA, black youth were picked on and chucked it, screaming "Burn baby burn!!". All the young hooligans at the the forefront of the assault had zealously given themselves over to the task of destruction, joy mixed with nervous fear. I was one of the first whites to join them. I recalled making eye contact and trying to demonstrate my positive agreement and collusion in their actions. These were the voices that had given the police the excuse to turn on the youth. The young street youth brought up by "F*ck tha' Police" rap culture and the worsening urban conditions of the 80s. They looked hurriedly around as they saw us coming over, not knowing what to do. We took hold of them enthusiastically... and within minutes all social barriers seemed to melt away in the attack on our enemies. Unfortunately, I was still acquainted with a treacherous element of law-abiding idiots who proved to be enemies within.

And she completed the discussion's degeneration: "No, you're a racist!" No one else in her group, 3 or 4 black men, said a word. Black churches throughout the SF Bay Area attempted to gather people together into a strictly pacified, doggie position. As in LA and elsewhere, they had little success...

The next day there were the mass arrests of about 650 people who were coming to the announced demonstration at 24th and Mission streets. Most of them were charged with "conspiring to riot", but they were held in jail: 'I voted for Hongisto!' There was much talk among the prisoners of the prospects for revolution. Most were totally supportive of rioting and looting.

In San Jose, students looted and attacked police cruisers with rocks and bottles. Police were shot at by youths rioting in Yampa, Florida, and in Las Vegas rioters burned a state parole and probation office and shot at police, who just managed to save the casino area from the anger of the mob. A number of confrontations between police and local people continued for the next 18 days.

In Seattle, a burning vehicle was pushed into police ranks, the interstate highway was closed for 2 hours, and there was loading of looting, smashing and burning. Similar events occurred in Atlanta, where tear gas failed to stop the rioters. There were smaller riots in numerous locations across the nation. At a march in New Brunswick of 1,000 people on 1 May a truck driver piled through a crowd, but quickly retreated as a large angry crowd quickly materialized. It is possible that the attack on the truck driver in LA was sparked off by a similar provocation.

Until the uprising, under the law in California the state had to arrange suspects within 72 hours of arrest or let them go. The California State Assembly voted unanimously to "temporarily" extend the arrangement period. The bill was flown on a National Guard airplane to be signed by State Supreme Court Justice
the former option, which means continuous police penitentiary. Other pleaded guilty because this would result in six months in a county jail, rather than risk the possibility of being found guilty and being exposed to the horrors of a federal penitentiary.

The political significance of the LA uprising can be illustrated by the fact that the police chief, Richard Hongisto, had also been on hand to hear the complaints of the liberal-activist crowd in the financial district. Most were totally supportive of rioting and looting.

As I watched the looting a man came up near me and began taking photographs. I approached him, and politely suggested that we shouldn’t take pictures because the police might use them to identify people. But they’re looting!” he responded incredulously. I was hurt. Here I stood, confronted with the very real claws of the leftist counter-revolution. I had given him the benefit of the doubt, hoping against naive hope that we were all class-conscious revolutionaries in action. I tried to get some support from those around me to fight against this enemy-within, but no one was listening.

My confrontation with this vigilante cop heated up quickly and it looked like he was about to throw a punch when some guys came up from the crowd and break up the fight: “Let’s fight them, not ourselves!” they implored. But he’s taking pictures of looters in order to turn them into the police! I insisted. Like an angelic chorus of choir-boys, these ‘alternative’ looking students, or revolutionaries in action. I tried to get some support from those around me to fight against this enemy-within, but no one was listening. The march continued. Several blocks later, the pig scanned a diversionary tactic by parking its cruiser with rocks and bottles. Policewomen were shot at.

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Malcolm Lucas. This is the epimeme of democracy in action. In a democracy, the ruling class and their hired orchestras of lackeys brag that the difference between a democracy and a more open form of despotism is that under democracy there are rules that limit the degree to which our rulers can screw us. But when the rules don’t work, they show how meaningless they are by changing them.

**BRITISH JUSTICE ON THE RUN**

"This is one of the dirtiest, evilist, corrupted, perverted systems in the world." Paddy Hill of the Birmingham 6.

The release of the Guildford 4 in 1990 began a series of spectacular successful appeals against false convictions obtained by police threats, torture, and fabricated evidence. The Maguire 7 and the Birmingham 6 acquittals followed. Then the Tottenham 3 were released, followed by Stefan Kuczynski who was sentenced for 16 years for the sexual assault and murder of a school girl, after police had forced him to sign a confession. Needless to say, he was brutally mistreated by other prisoners. The growing state of the legal establishment came too late for Derek Bentley, hanged in 1953 for allegedly telling his comrade Chris Craig to shoot a cop, after police had faked a confession. Craig was too young to hang, so they hanged Bentley, aged 19, instead. Now he is likely to get the rare and coveted prize of a posthumous pardon from the Queen. The West Midlands Serious Crimes Squad was disbanded after an avalanche of appeals against its convictions.

Millions of working class people know that the police are persistent liars, but never before has it been so openly acknowledged. The state’s need for reform was well summed up by Judge Verney in April when he defended a South London police force. After 30 months in jail for framing a man’s head and shouting “You black bastard, this will teach you to mess about with the police”, Verney perceptively noted "nothing could be more calculated to ensure disrespect". The exposures of police frame-ups have undermined faith in the system. Juries have in the last two years swung from convicting people on the grounds that they are Irish to letting free open IRA supporters like Debbie Ellis. The state would prefer it if the people who actually committed crimes like the Birmingham pub bombings were in jail. The reason for this is that exposure of the infamy of the so-called criminal justice system could lead to a major attack on it during the next upsurge of the class struggle in Britain. At present the prison criminal justice system is not easy. The Appeal Court initially tried to avoid acquitting the Irish victims altogether, then freed some of them on technical grounds, avoiding any criticism of the police or other judges. Finally, quashing Judith Ward’s conviction after 18 years of imprisonment for planting bombs, the Appeal judges admitted that the state did not have a solid case against her so they convicted the new Lord Chief Justice Peter Taylor, and a police doctor, were all involved in inventing and suppressing evidence during her trial.

The Royal Commission, set up to repair the system after the Birmingham 6 acquittals, will have to try to change the spirit de corps of the police. Royal Commissions are not whitewashes, they are attempts to reform some aspect of the state which is in serious trouble. But attempts to professionalize the police will only meet with resistance, even during periods of relative class peace. During upurts, when they are under attack, the police tend to move to the right, self-righteously defending their difficult job against the reforms of the establishment and the bricks and mortar of the proletarian revolution by refusing to change their operating methods. When, after the Brixton riot, the government decided it was not going to issue the British police with American weapons, the police were outraged.

Improvements in conditions for prisoners do not necessarily dampen the struggle, as was shown by the riots at Moorland prison in Yorkshire in August 1991 and January 1992. New facilities, including computers and a well-equipped recreation room, were wrecked by the ungrateful miscreants.

In a word, the British state is in trouble. Our attitude is that we want to maintain Socialism as an alternative to the system, and can only win by talking about it. Just because the state is so vulnerable to attack in this way, we must argue that there will no more be Justice in capitalist society than there will be a fair day’s pay for a fair day’s work.

**JUDGE NOT THAT YE BE NOT JUDGED**

Whatever the trials and tribulations of Justice in Britain and the USA, it is still extending its power over the rest of the world. The New World Order has established a rapid expansion of the rule of law in time and space. The concept of retrospective legislation - putting someone on trial for something which was not illegal when the deed was done - was established through a campaign against so-called Nazi war criminals. Following unification, ex-East German border guards were tried for shooting people trying to escape. In South Africa, the war against Justice, consider the following demand from Women Against Violence Against Women in London: LIFE IMPRISONMENT NOW! (for someone who allegedly killed his wife). They urge supporters to write to the Home Secretary, "demanding that the government enforces its own law, and inform him of how disgusted you are that his pathetic electioneering is being supported by the LAPD and ORDEAL platform is today setting murderers free, unpunished".

On a more serious note, this quote from Pashukanis’ Law and Marxism succinctly summarizes why Justice is inseparable from the exchange economy:

"Deprivation of freedom, for a period stipulated in the court sentence, is the form in which
Malcolm Lucas. This is the epitome of democracy in action. In a democracy, the ruling class and their hired orchestras of lackeys brag that the difference between a democracy and a more open form of despotism is that under democracy there are rules that limit the degree to which our rulers can screw us. But when the rules don’t work, they show how meaningless they are by changing them.

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That has now changed for the time being. The phrase “class war” was widely used by the insurgents. This was a momentous reassertion of class as against the US bourgeoisie’s attempt to bury class awareness under the myth that the market and democracy are the end of history. However, it will take more than a few riots to overcome the massive defeat the working class in the USA has suffered since the sixties.

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The immediate cause of the April uprisings was the failure of a bourgeois court to find four policemen guilty of beating up Rodney King. Another example, the trial of a non-custodial sentence given to a shopkeeper who had shot dead an alleged shoplifter, Natasha Hartins. The case ‘White Night’ riot in San Francisco in 1978 was based on a demand for someone to get a longer prison sentence for shooting the mayor. However we must argue that there will no more be Justice in a communist society than there will be a fair day’s pay for a fair day’s work.

Revolutionaries utilize blatant examples of injustice to attack the state, to spread distrust of the police and hatred of the prison system, to add to the possibility of widespread working class conflict with its oppressors when the class struggle picks up, by helping to undermine attitudes which accept the rule of law. But in doing this, we can’t simply point to injustice, we have to undermine the idea of Justice as well. As a dramatic illustration, we must fight against Justice, consider the following demand from Women Against Violence Against Women in London: LIFE IMPRISONMENT NOW! (for someone who allegedly killed his wife). They urge supporters to write to the Home Secretary, “demanding that the government enforces its own law, and inform him of how disgusted you are that his police, who are being elected on a LAW AND ORDER platform is today setting murderers free, unpunished”.

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modern, that is to say bourgeois-capitalist, criminal law embodies the principle of recompense. This form is unconscious yet deeply linked with the conception of man in the abstract, and abstract human labour measureable in time. For it to be possible for the idea to emerge that one could make recompense for an offense with a piece of abstract freedom for every time that one might have committed all concrete forms of social wealth to be reduced to recompense for an offense with a piece of abstract freedom determined in advance, it was necessary for particular crime is evident in the frequent reports of Wecould add that exchange is another, even deeper measured in time... Industrial capitalism, the stipulated term are phenomena peculiar to one and the same historicalepoch", cited in Molossi D and Pavarini M, ThePrison and the Factory, MacMillan, 1981.

We could add that exchange is another, even deeper precondition, without which the idea of Justice could not exist. The idea of deprivation of freedom for a given time-slot as recompense, or payment, for a particular crime is evident in the frequent reports of victims arguing for longer sentences for criminals, and their outrage at their assailants getting "less than they deserve". To be able to make this calculation, you must have a particular crime that deserves a particular quantity of punishment. Calling for a particular sentence rather than any other, more or less extreme, implies labour time and exchange, which did not arise spontaneously. Justice is not a product of human interaction, it is the expression of class domination, in other words, the State. Undermining Justice is primarily a matter of undermining state authority.

SUPPORTING PRISONERS WHO, HOW AND WHY

Communists are very few and far between, and inevitably have limited access, when the criminal justice system is in open crisis, support for its intended victims is a key issue. This is for strategic, not humanitarian reasons. Demonstrations within prison, contact with prisoners, publicity around wrongful convictions etc., can achieve far more than other kinds of militant activity.

The 'Who' is more difficult than the 'Why'. Given practical limitations, we should argue for specific support for particular prisoners, as well as general support from the community against the system. The 'How' includes offering to put up relatives when they need to stay overnight for prison visits. Moral support includes writing letters to prisoners. This is not a token gesture - it is crucial to help overcome isolation. Poll tax prisoners were greatly encouraged by the hundreds of letters they received. The demonstrations outside prisons in support of the prisoners had the same effect. The screws took measures to try to prevent prisoners hearing the demonstrators shouting and singing. Isolation is crucial to make prison work.

Support for prisoners is such a central part of the class struggle that there is a tendency not to criticize prisoners at all. The non-angelic character of some prisoners has tended to be swept under the carpet. During the trial of the scapegoats for the Strangeways prison uprising of 1990, supporters rightly kept quiet about some of the crimes they may have committed. It is an uphill struggle explaining why we should support people who have committed anti-working class crimes who subsequently rebel against their imprisonment. But it can't be avoided. At one of the pickets outside Wandsworth prison, when the poll tax prisoners' campaign put forward the programmatic demand "Burn it down, burn it down, burn it to the fucking ground", a passer-by pointed out "there are child murderers in there". In the USA, this argument has even more weight. An easy answer to these public fears is to say that all the anti-social elements would be brought out if we ever got the chance. This is wrong for two reasons.

Firstly, it implicitly supports brutality against alleged sex-offenders. This is outrageous, considering that there must be hundreds of people in prison framed up by the police. Prisoners should know they are not better than anyone, yet they often turn their frustration against an underclass created by the prison system. We should make no excuses for this state-organized divison. Attacks on Rule 43 prisoners, who are segregated for protection, are against the class struggle (with obvious exceptions, e.g. imprisoned policemen). Secondly, even if we agree that the worst perpetrators of anti-working class violence would have to be eliminated in a post-civilized society, what about those who are reformed by their experience? Again, we oppose incarceration of any kind on principle. Their only alternatives are let them go free, or shoot them. This is ridiculously simplistic.

Albert Dryden is a clear example of a class war prisoner. A worker made redundant from the steelworks at Consett, NE England, when it was closed down by Thatcher, he kept himself busy by building a bungalow. The local council wanted to demolish it because of some legal technicality that Albert had overlooked. Adding insult to injury, they brought along camera crews to televize the confrontation. Albert felt that they were going to make him look a fool in front of millions. So he did the only thing he could - he barricaded his house against the forces of the state and media with a gun. He managed to kill the council planning officer in charge of the demolition attempt and wounded a policeman and a BBC reporter in the process of trying to blow away the council solicitor. Now he is doing a life sentence in Durham jail. Write to him expressing your support. A demonstration for him in Newcastle was banned, but he has many friends and supporters in Co. Durham.

As Albert loads his gun, a cop runs away, leaving the council planning officer dead in a ditch.

Nick Mullen was illegally extradited from Zimbabwe. Framed up for supposedly allowing the IRA to use his flat, he is a straightforward political prisoner, hated by the police for his radical politics. Winston Silcott was one of the three acquitted for the Broadwater Farm cop-chop. He wasn't released because he was already doing life imprisonment for another "murther". There are many dodgy aspects to this case as well. Basically Winston was defending himself against assailants armed with knives. Kenny Carter was framed for murdering another prisoner, who in fact was an undercover police officer. The prison system. Martin Foran, framed up by the West Midlands pigs, has been recaptured and is being denied urgent medical treatment. Prisoners are frequently moved, even on the slightest information. And those who are particularly politically pugilistic are targeted. None of them could get a fair trial, and even if they could we would still take a clear line of unconditional support for all hostages taken by the state during the May Days.

A list of other American class war prisoners can be obtained from the Peoples Law Office at 343 S. Dearborn, Suite 1607, Chicago, IL 60604, or the Fall 1991 issue of Social Justice, obtainable from PO Box 40601, San Francisco, CA 94140. Information about imprisoned war resisters from the Gulf War can be found in The Anti-Warrior, 48 Shattuck Sq. Box 129, Berkeley, CA 94704.

We do not believe in supporting only those prisoners who pass a test of political correctness. We believe in supporting virtually all prisoners in their struggle against the system. It is not practical to concentrate on those who are particularly politically pugilistic. Irish Republicanism is a product, and to a lesser extent, a cause, of Anglo-Irish working class division. It is not opposed primarily by denunciation, nor even by analysis, but by undermining the divisions in the class which reinforce it. This does not mean abstractly arguing for unity between prisoners, and then doing nothing to support them from the class community. Supporting class communities in Northern Ireland means supporting demands for their imprisoned sons and daughters to be released, or at least be moved to prisons nearer their families, supporting campaigns against sexual harassment in Mugharry women's prison, etc. It is impractical and dangerous to attempt to divide Irish people in prison for political offences. Where exactly would you draw the line? Even the most celebrated innocent prisoners, the Birmingham 6, were sympathetic to republicanism. Others became more involved in the movement inside. Given the racist divisions in prison, this is hardly surprising. Our aim is to overcome these divisions. In Britain at present, this includes supporting all political prisoners, as the only thing he could do, especially those who are charged with their guilt or innocence. In other Western countries, analogous arguments apply, though not in a mechanical! We insist that conditions, involvement in prisoner support work is a priority for revolutionaries today.
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Firstly, it implicitly supports brutality against alleged sex-offenders by other prisoners. The prison system is not a product of human interaction, it is the expression of class domination, in other words, the State. Undermining Justice is primarily a matter of undermining state authority.

SUPPORTING PRISONERS — WHO, HOW AND WHY

Communists are very few and far between, and inevitably have to compromise. But we must keep our principles when the criminal justice system is in open crisis, support for its intended victims is a key issue. This is for strategic, not humanitarian reasons. Demonstrations outside prison gates, contact with prisoners, publicity around wrongful convictions etc., can achieve far more than other kinds of militant activity.

The 'Who' is more difficult than the 'Why'. Given practical limitations, we should argue for specific support for particular prisoners, as well as general support for prisoners in general, for prisoners against the prison system. The 'How' includes offering to put up relatives when they need to stay overnight for prison visits. Moral support includes writing letters to prisoners. This is not a token gesture - it is crucial to help overcome isolation. Poll tax prisoners were greatly encouraged by the hundreds of letters they received. The demonstrations outside prisons in support of the prisoners had the same effect. The screws took measures to try to prevent prisoners hearing the demonstrators shouting and singing. Isolation is crucial to make prison work.

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EARTH FIRST! WHICH PLANET ARE THEY ON?

In 1987 the Tagaeri [native inhabitants of Equador] attacked a group of oil exploration workers who were laying seismic lines which cut through the Tagaeri gardens. The oil companies enlisted the help of the Catholic Bishop in missionizing and "taming" the Tagaeri. The bishop and a nun flew into the area and killed. "Earth First! November 1991.

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Direct action to defend the planet against its destruction by industrial civilization is assuming more and more radical forms. The methods of the Direct action to defend the planet against its destruction which inevitably results from human activity are inescapable facts of modern life. We are worried, at the dawn of the 21st century, by the emergence of an irrational ideology which is opposed to scientific and industrial progress and impedes economic and social development."

"Bombs have been used in the world market. In 14th century England, they used to say "sheepeatmen In 20th century Brazil, I went to a much more inspiring meeting addressed by the veteran American social ecologist Murray Bookchin in May. Murray gave about 300 greens a lecture on class ecology. He explained how arguments that "we" are responsible for the destruction of the environment are dangerous because they make us identify with corporations. Against the view "that recognises the equality and inherent worth of every form of life" (Green Revolution, Spring '92), Murray welcomed the forthcoming elimination of the Smallpox virus.

support the Arizona 4!

4 Earth First! militants have been jailed in Arizona for up to 6 years for damaging an environmentally harmful ski resort. In spite of their deep ecological ideas, they have to be supported. Solidarity is the minimum starting-point for a discussion about the relationship between class struggle and ecology.

The following addresses are copied from the American Earth First! journal. Ilse Asplund and Marc Baker c/o 1385 Iris Springs Rd, Box 104, Prescott, AZ 86301, USA. Peg Mille, 2118-008, 3790 N 45th Ave, Dept 1785, Phoenix, AZ 85027, USA. Mark Davis, 23106-008, Federal Correctional Institute, RX 2 Box 9900, Safford, AZ 85546, USA.

Readers may be interested in Live Wild or Die!, which is available from POB 411233, San Francisco, CA 94141. This is similar to Earth First! and contains loads of interesting information about doing things without getting caught. A more detailed class-based critique of "deep ecology, How Deep is Deep Ecology?" by George Bradford, can be obtained from Fifth Estate, 4632 Second Avenue, Detroit MI 48201, USA. Also available from them is Ecorefence (Ned Ludd Books 1987), an outrageously irresponsible manual of individual sabotage, which substitutes the formation of small elite groups of rigidly disciplined self-appointed professional saboteurs for the real working class tradition of mass meetings and collective.
GOOD OLD-FASHIONED TRADE UNIONISM

The year 1842 was a very significant one for the proletariat of the British Isles. On the positive side it was the occasion of a great struggle against world-wide wage-cutting and on the negative side it marked the formation of the first modern national trade union. This was the Miners' Association of Great Britain and Ireland, an organisation every bit as anti-struggle for their interests. This was an event of significance for the proletariat of the whole world. Unionisation was not the only important event in the one of the clearest examples of a general trend from the domestication of the proletariat of Britain but it is one of the clearest examples of a general trend from the uncontrollable mobs of the 18th Century to the passivity of the modern Labour Movement.

But first let's start as we mean to go on, with mass strikes and uprisings. In mid 1842 conditions for the working class were worse than usual. Emptiness and those "lucky" enough to be in work were even more desperate than usual. Unemployed and those "lucky" enough to be in work went on strike. The strike was smashed by the police and army and the workers were forced to accept a wage cut. A crowd of 500 set off to burn Powys' house. Later various rich scumbags had their homes pillaged and burnt. Coalowners and magistrates were singled out for special treatment. So were the clergy - as well as most of them preaching in support of coalowners some of them actually were coalowners. God may forgive, the proletariat doesn't!

Many of the early clashes occurred because of attempts by the authorities to crack down on poaching and the stealing of vegetables, which went on on an enormous scale. In Cheshire a special mounted force was formed to ensure that information about attacks on farms was quickly sent to the army.

When the strike movement ended in September, it was a partial victory for the workers, despite the vicious repression meted out by the state- hundreds of police and militia were killed and hundreds more injured. The situation was summed up well by Richard Pilling, a mill worker who was calling his fellow workers on strike when the bosses announced a wage cut. In court he said "if it had not been for the late struggle thousands would have starved to death".

It was clear that the workers had won this victory not through peacefully withdrawing their labour but through the traditional methods of rioting, freeing prisoners, plundering and burning the houses of the rich, theft, sabotage and undemocratically spreading strikes through going directly to other groups of workers. The numerous unions that were founded after this time were all more blatantly suppressing all of these activities in favour of legality, peaceful behaviour and, sometimes, the myth of the "General Strike" in which the workers would overwhelm all their grievances without a shot being fired.

The Miners' Association was not the only union formed in this time. The Potters' Union was formed in 1843, so was the Cotton Spinners' Association. In 1845 the local bodies of the printing trade were founding meetings of the Miners' Association.

In 1845 the bodies of the printing trade were founding meetings of the Miners' Association. The tailors and shoemakers were being enrolled into national societies as glass makers and steam engine makers. It was the most significant though, given its size (at one stage it may have had 100,000 members) and the important role played by miners in the strike/riot wave. The trade unions, including the Miners' Association, openly opposed all forms of struggle apart from the peaceful withdrawal of labour. At one of the founding meetings of the Miners' Association at Wacker we did not hesitate to use force to extend the struggle. They pulled plugs from factory boilers so in Lancashire and Yorkshire the strike became known as the Plug Plot Riots. At Shelton, North Staffs., Lord Grantley said it was an instrument of revolution. The work is and there is surplus of labour. This doesn't mean they can't fight at all: it means they have to use different methods. The struggles of 1842 were against economic laws taking place in the middle of a "recession" and succeeding where peaceful strike action would undoubtedly have failed. This isn't the only reason it is supposed to impose economic logic - the Miners' Association made regular appeals to employers to unite with the workers in demanding higher coal prices!

This period wasn't just critical for the development of modern unions but modern democratic politics as well. The National Association of United Trades for the Protection of Labour, formed in 1845, even seriously debated launching a Labour Party. Fortunately this particular attack on the proletariat had to wait another half century or so.

It was also an important time for the state reform of working conditions, that is, for planned preemptive concessions to the working class designed to buy social peace in the long term. This was the year of The Midlands Mining Commission Report and the founding of the first modern trade union, the National Association of Child and Young Persons - this was the first official exposure of the widespread employment of children (often sent down the mines at the age of four or five) and the appalling conditions under which they worked. There was renewed parliamentary agitation for the ten-hour day for women and juveniles in the cotton industry. This was led by Tom Pilling's type such as Lord Ashley (later Lord Shaftesbury) and finally became law in 1847. In 1848, when many bourgeois commentators thought that Britain was on the brink of revolution, the Secretary of State wrote to Lord Ashley saying "I shall declare without hesitation that the passing of the Ten-Hours Bill has kept these vast counties at peace during this eventful period". In 1846 Gladstone declared in the House of Commons that the law had been beneficial "both in mitigating human suffering and in attaching important classes of the community to Parliament and the Government".

At first it may appear that this "movement" had very little connection with what was actually happening within the working class but in fact there were numerous links between trade unionism and philanthropic reformers. The Miners' Association passed many resolutions praising Lord Shaftesbury's work and continually plied him with data. He once replied in the House, saying he was only an instrument, possessed little power unless the working classes stood at his back.

CHARTISM

Most of those involved in setting up and running the Chartist movement during this period, particularly the Miners' Association, would have described themselves as "Chartists". This meant they supported the "six
GOOD OLD-FASHIONED TRADE UNIONISM

The year 1842 was a very significant one for the proletariat of the British Isles. On the positive side it was the occasion of a great struggle against wage cutting and on the negative side it marked the formation of the first modern national trade union. This was the Miners' Association of Great Britain and Ireland, an organisation every bit as anti-working class as the trade unions today, which used almost identical methods to undermine the workers' struggle for their interests. This was an event of significance in the "domestication" of the proletariat of Britain but it is one of the clearest examples of a general trend from the uncontrollable mobs of the 18th Century to the passivity of the modern Labour Movement.

But first let's start as we mean to go on, with mass strikes and uprisings. In mid 1842 conditions for the working class were more desperate than usual. In some industrial towns half the population were unemployed and those "lucky" enough to be in work were often on short-time and subjected to frequent wage cuts of 10% or more. The first major outburst was in West Bromwich in May when miners went on strike. The strike was smashed by the police and army and the workers were forced to accept a 10% wage cut but the strike had only been over a fortnight when more than 10,000 iron and coal workers were joined in a strikewave.

In Cheshire a special mounted force was formed to ensure that information about attacks on farms was quickly sent to the army. A crowd of 500 set off to burn Powys' house. Later various rich scumbags had their homes pillaged and burnt. Coalowners and magistrates were singled out for special treatment. So were the clergy as well as most of the preaching in support of coalowners some of them actually were coalowners. God may forgive, the proletariat don't! Many of the early clashes occurred because of attempts by the authorities to crack down on poaching and the stealing of vegetables, which went on on an enormous scale. In Cheshire a special mounted force was formed to ensure that information about attacks on farms was quickly sent to the army.

When the strike movement ended in September, it was a partial victory for the workers, despite the vicious repression meted out by the state. In Lancashire numerous links between trade unionism and the cotton industry. This was led by Tory philanthropists such as Lord Ashley (later Lord Shaftesbury) and finally became law in 1847. In 1848, when many bourgeois commentators thought that Britain was on the brink of revolution, the Secretary of State wrote to Lord Ashley saying "I shall declare without hesitation that the passing of the Ten-Hours Bill has kept these vast counties at peace during this eventful period". In 1864 Gladstone declared in the House of Commons that the law had been beneficial "both in mitigating the suffering and in attracting important classes of the community to Parliament and the Government".

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LOOTING BREAD FROM A WORKHOUSE IN 1842

25% which they had intended. Some workers (such as the spinners of Blackburn) even went on general strike. The situation was summed up well by Richard Pilling, a mill supervisor on trial for calling his fellow workers out on strike when the bosses announced a wage cut. He said in his trial that it had not been for the late struggle, thousands would have starved to death. It was clear that the workers had won this victory not through peacefully withdrawing their labour but through the traditional methods of rioting, freeing prisoners, plundering and burning the houses of the rich, theft, sabotage and and undemocratically spreading strikes through going directly to other groups of workers. The miners and spinners met separately after this time about soaring commodities, but the Miners' Association had been defeated.

The Miners' Association was not the only union formed at this time. The Potters' Union was formed in 1843, so was the Cotton Spinners' Association. In 1845 the local bodies of the printing trade were unified as the National Typographical Association. The tailors and shoe makers were being enrolled into national societies as were glass makers and steam engine makers. It was the most significant though, given its size (at one stage it may have had 100,000 members) and the important role played by miners in the strike/riot wave.

The trade unions, including the Miners' Association, openly opposed all forms of struggle apart from the peaceful withdrawal of labour. At one of the founding meetings of the Miners' Association at Walsall there was a long session devoted to appointing delegates and urging them to conduct "unity, peace, law and order" its motto. This meant accepting the logic of capitalist economics since obviously workers were to blame for the law if anything by peaceful legal means. When there is a surplus of labour, they don't mean they can't fight at all: it means they have to use different methods. The struggles of 1842 were against economic laws taking place in the middle of a "recession" and succeeding where peaceful strike action would undoubtedly have failed. This was the case when the Miners' Association set up a separate economic logic - the Miners' Association made regular appeals to employers to unite with the workers in demanding higher coal prices!

This period wasn't just critical for the development of modern unions but modern democratic politics as well. The National Association of United Trades for the Protection of Labour, formed in 1845, even seriously debated launching a Labour Party. Fortunately this particular attack on the proletariat had to wait another half century or so.

CHARTISM

Most of those involved in setting up and running the Miners' Association, particularly the Miners' Association, would have described themselves as "Chartists". This meant they supported the "six
points of the People's Charter" on the reform of parliament. These were: adult male suffrage, no property qualification, annual parliaments, equal constituencies, salaries for MPs, and the secret ballot. This was first formulated for a specifically working class audience in 1836 by the London Workingmen's Association, a small society largely formed on the suggestion of the rich radical MP, Francis Place. Their program was hardly original - 58 years previously one Major Cartwright had introduced a Bill in the Commons containing the same six points.

As can be imagined, Chartism was a very broad church indeed, encompassing everyone from those who thought that adult males suffrage would somehow enable the country to be run a bit better to those, such as James Bronterre O'Brien, who honestly believed that the only way to save the property. Numerous progressive historians have written that it was a revolutionary demand - "in the context of the times", of course. We won't waste time trying to refute this absurd idea except to ask a rhetorical question: how come the famous Chartist leader Feargus O'Connor was actually elected to parliament in 1847 by the middle class electorate of Nottingham, and with a comfortable majority? It is often described as the "first working class organisation". It would be more accurate to describe it as a middle class movement dedicated to recuperation of property and work. The intention of Chartist was always to divert working class anger into demands for an extension of the franchise. In 1843, the cotton fields of much of Britain were engulfed in strikes and riots their response was... a massive petition to parliament, though they couldn't quite make up their minds whether to appeal to the Cabinet or directly to the Queen.

The Insurrectionary Tradition


The information in the following section is almost entirely taken from E. P. Thompson. This is because he seems to be the only lefty historian who's written anything decent about them. Many of the academics who regard the Luddites as such blatant "extremists" (hundredsof thousandsof people). The fact that it was localities like this which, on hearing rumoursthat troops would be present at the great meeting in Newcastle on Christmas Day, sent couriers to find out if they were to bring arms with them.

The Grievances of the Frame-knitting Industry

The Luddites

"The making of the English Working Class."

The formation of the frame-knitting industry was focused around three sectors: the destruction of shearing machines in Lancashire, the destruction of shearing frames in Yorkshire and the destruction of the fold-milling and the shearing-frame. The gig-mill and the shearing-frame. The gig-mill was as old as the handloom, whereas the shearing-frame was used for over two centuries. It was at least as old as the mid-18th Century. In the West Country bodies of rioters, 1,000 or 2,000 strong had attacked the hated mills. In 1839 Parliament repealed all the protective legislation relating to the woollen industry - covering apprenticeship, the gig-mill and the number of looms which could be owned by one master.

In small villages lying out from Newcastle the destruction of the fold-milling and the shearing-frame went on throughout the year. A month after the vicious pig massacre of a proscribed pig, a man in the South of England wrote to "Petroloao" (St. Peter's Fields near Manchester) in 1819: "Lancashire brute was the common and appropriate appellation. Until very lately it would have been dangerous to have assembled 500 of them on any occasion, and the least provocation would have caused a mob. But the rioting seems to have been organised in advance with handbills being distributed. One, from London in September 1800, said: "How long will ye quietly and meekly suffer in silence while your property is being plundered, your homes broken in the village of Arnold by rioters who didn't try to disguise themselves. They were cheered on by the crowd. For several weeks similar incidents were happening in Nottinghamshire. Despite the presence of troops and special constables, no arrests could be made.

In November of that year Luddism appeared in a more organised form. Frame-breaking had become the work of disciplined bands who moved rapidly from village to village at the dead of night. From Yorkshire they spread into the West Riding, and Derbyshire, and continued without cease until February 1812. On 10 November a hosier in Bulwell defended his mill with a strong party of Luddites. A Luddite was killed but, after taking away his body, his comrades returned, broke down the doors and smashed
points of the People's Charter" on the reform of parliament. These were: adult male suffrage, no property qualification, annual parliaments, equal constituencies, salutary three-year constituencies, secret ballots. This was first formulated for a specifically working class audience in 1836 by the London Workingmen's Association, a small society largely formed on the supposition of the rich radical MP, Francis Place. Their program was hardly original – 58 years previously one Major Cartwright had introduced a Bill in the Commons containing the same six points.

As can be imagined, Chartism was a very broad church indeed, encompassing everyone from those who thought of it as a way of achieving a better society, to those who thought of it as a way to overthrow the existing one. Numerous progressive historians have written that it was a "revolutionary demand" – in the context of the times, of course. We won't waste time trying to refute this absurd idea except to ask a rhetorical question: how come the famous Chartist leader Feargus O'Connor was actually elected to parliament in 1847 by the middle class electorate of Nottingham, and with a comfortable majority? It is often described as the "first working class organisation". It would be more accurate to describe it as a middle class movement dedicated to recovering its working class heritage. The intention behind Chartism was always to divert working class anger into demands for an extension of the franchise. In any case, the vast majority of much of Britain were engulfed in strikes and riots their response was... a massive petition to parliament, though they couldn't quite make up their minds whether to appeal to the Cabinet or directly to the Queen.

As might be expected of a movement with such conservative aims, its main activities consisted of organising petitions to parliament (with millions of signatures) and mass peaceful demos and rallies (hundreds of thousands of people). The fact that it was possible to assemble such large numbers peacefully shows how much the working class had been tamed by the 1830's. It had not gone unnoticed by the government. "London's outlaws" Francis Place later wrote a month after the vicious pig massacre of a pro-democracy demo at "Peterloo" (St. Peter's Fields near Manchester) in 1819: "Lancashire brute was the common and appropriate appellation. Until very lately it would have been dangerous to have assembled 500 of them on any particular occasion. Under the present state of the country, they would not have been plundered. Now 100,000 people may be collected together and no riot ensue, and why?... The people have an object, the pursuit of which gives them an exhortation to arms..."

THE INSURRECTIONARY TRADITION

"The Levelution is begun, So I'll go home and get my gun. And shoot the Duke of Wellington..."

- an 1820's street song from Belper, Derbyshire

Since the 18th Century there had been an almost unbroken tradition of organised violent resistance to capitalist power. The 19th Century was ushered in with a rash of riots across England against high food prices caused by Britain's war with the Continent. The rioting seems to have been organised in advance with handbills being distributed. One, from London in September 1800, said: "How long will ye quietly and meekly suffer yourselves to be possessed upon, and half-starved by a set of mercenary slaves and Government hirelings?... We are the sovereignty, arise then from your lethargy. Be at the Corn market on Monday..." Six days of rioting at the Corn Market followed. Another called upon: "Tradesmen, Artizans, Journeymen, Labourers &c..." to meet on Kennington Common. The meeting was preserved only by the use of troops.

For the first two decades of the century rural Ireland was swept by one revolt after another. Secret societies - Threshers, Caravans, Shanavests, Carders - formed armed bands of violence to defend tenant rights, to force down rent prices, resist tithe payment and drive out landlords. In 1806 the Threshers virtually controlled Connaught. According to E. Hobsbawm, they were led by Frost who had just been sacked from his post as a magistrate and was the chairman of a Chartist Convention which had just dissolved. They were attacked by Land and Social Club members and were killed. Violent rhetoric was also very common. The famous Chartist "extremist" Julian Harney once advised his audience to "avenge the death of one man who said in an unchristian phrase "the artimale and the ballot box!" This was, after all, an age in which the state had been particularly intense at the end of the 18th Century. In the West Country bodies of rioters, 1,000 or 2,000 strong had attacked the hated mills. In 1829 Parliament repealed all the protective legislation relating to the woollen industry - covering apprenticeship, the gig-mill and the number of looms which could be owned by one master.

The grievances of the framework-knitters of the Midlands (especially the large towns and urban areas) were a bit more complicated. They mostly worked in small industrial villages in workshops containing three or four looms. These were rented from local employers. In the 18th Century they had suffered a severe worsening of general conditions as the development of uncontrolled prices and shoddy goods had undermined their earnings and craft status. The cotton weavers of Lancashire were also used to an artisan status which was directly threatened by the factory system.

The movement began in Nottingham in March 1811. A large demonstration of framework-knitters was frustrated in the attempt to march on London. The Luddites were largely composed of former weavers who had been particularly intense at the end of the 18th Century. In 1812 their numbers were particularly intense at the end of the 18th Century. In the West Country bodies of rioters, 1,000 or 2,000 strong had attacked the hated mills. In 1829 Parliament repealed all the protective legislation relating to the woollen industry - covering apprenticeship, the gig-mill and the number of looms which could be owned by one master.
frames. Three days later a large force of Luddites armed with muskets, pistols, axes and hammers destroyed 70 frames at a large workshop in Sutton-in-Ashfield.

Only those frames were attacked which were associated with reduced wages or the production of lower quality goods. This "reformist" spirit of the Nottingham Luddites is expressed well by the popular ballad of the time, General Ludd's Triumph:

The guilty may fear but no vengeance he aims
At the honest man's life or Estate;
His wrath is entirely confined to wide frames
And to those that old prices abate.

These Engines of mischief were sentenced to die
By unanimous vote of the Trade
And Ludd who can all that frames defy
Was the Grand executioner made.

The Luddites were masked and had a well developed system of signals, sentinels and couriers. Whoever led the raiding party on the particular night would be referred to as General Ludd. They also had "inspectors" who were around investigating pay and conditions and collected money for the workers made unemployed by the frames being broken.

At the beginning of February 1812 this phase of Midlands Luddism quickly died away. There were three main reasons for this. Not least of these was the fact that the use of terror by the workers had been successful; surplus wages and conditions had improved. Secondly, there were now several thousand troops in the area. Thirdly, there was a Bill before Parliament to make frame-breaking punishable by death. This didn't stop the movement but did cause considerable panic in the workers' ranks. It also created a space for parliamentarism and trade unionism. A quasi-legal association, the "United Committee of Framework-Knitters" was formed to petition parliament for a Bill to protect pay and conditions. The Committee tried to suppress machine-breaking but the pressures were running high in Nottingham, where seven Luddites were sentenced to transportation. In April a hosiery was shot and wounded outside his house. He was accused in a letter from the›››"...the Weavers in Glasgow and many parts of Scotland will join us the Papists in Ireland are rising to a Man, so that they are likely to find the soldiers something else to do than Idle in Huddersfield and then woe to the places now guarded by them..."

Many of the smaller manufacturers just gave in, destroying or storing their own shearing-frames. After six or seven weeks only a few substantial mills were still holding out. In particular there were two owners who were notorious for their determination to defy the Luddites, they both kept armed company guards and troops on the premises day and night.

According to tradition, the Luddites drew lots to decide which mill to attack. The choice fell on Rawfold's. Luddites attacked it. They failed. Many were wounded, two of them mortally and they had to be left behind. The first blood had been shed and it did not go unavenged. Later the same month the other notorious owner, William Horsfall from Otwell, was shot dead.

In Lancashire the movement was more one of open mass riots. On 20 March the warehouse of one of the first manufacturers to use the power-loom was attacked at Stockport. In early April there were numerous fires aiming to force down the prices of potatoes and bread. On 20 April in Middleton a power-loom mill was attacked by several thousand. The machinery was damaged and three pickets were killed and many wounded. The next morning the crowd assembled in even greater strength. They were joined by a body of men armed with muskets and pistols with "Captain" General Ludd and a red flag at their head. Finding the mill still impregnable the crowd burned the mill-owner's house instead. Four days later a large mill was successfully burnt down in Westhoughton.

April-May 1812 was a real high point in the Luddite War. Providing food riots in Bristol, Carlisle, Leeds, Sheffield and Barnsley. In the coal mines in Coalbrookdale there had been a massacre. On May 11 the Prime Minister, Perceval, was assinated in the House of Commons. Joy amongst the proles was unrestrained. In London large crowds gathered outside the Commons and cheered the assassin as he was led away. In Nottingham order could only be restored by military force and the repeal of the Riot Act. It was widely assumed that Perceval's death must be the result of some revolutionary conspiracy. There was widespread disaster at first but it soon turned out to be the work of a solitary hero.

One of the factors which brought this movement to an end was the pressure of criminal prosecutions. More spies, more arrests and an increasing number of executions. But probably more important was a major concession. This was the repeal of the called Orders in Council June 1812. This was the policy of blockading France as part of Britain's war effort. Its repeal led to an immediate improvement in trade, greatly relieving the famine conditions existing in many parts of the country.

But the ending of the bosses' recession didn't completely kill the movement. Luddism in Yorkshire and Lancashire largely gave way to preparations for an insurrection. During the summer of 1812 there were numerous raids for arms. Lead for making bullets was being taken, in the form of punnie-water-spouts and guttering. The conspiracy extended well outside the Luddite areas but, unfortunately, never got as far as an actual uprising.

Over the next two or three decades the tactics of Luddism did much to inspire other movements of class warfare.

In the early 1820's in Mommouthshire, Wales there existed a secret organisation known as the "Scottish Castle" based on the collieries. They claimed that Ned Ludd was their leader. Like the Luddites they had a well developed system of threatening letters, night meetings and military-style signals. They specialised in blowing up furnaces and terrorising scabs. Their leader was said to be Lolly, obviously Lol - the Lord of Misrule.

In 1830 the discontent of agricultural labourers exploded through the southern and eastern counties of England in marches from village to village, breaking threshing machines and demanding higher wages. Night time arson and machine-breaking were very widespread. "Captain Swing" was the signature most often attached to the threatening letters sent to local manufacturers. W. G. Wardle, the Chesterfield man who was sentenced to death in 1830, summed up by Francis Place "The laws against combinations... induced [working people] to break and disregard the laws. They made them suspect the intentions of every man who tendered his services".

The RECOVERATORS

It would be a mistake to think that the development of trade unionism and parliamentary politics was just a middle class conspiracy. If petty bourgeois and even bourgeois elements had an influence out of all proportion to their numbers it was because, for the most part, the proles saw nothing wrong with this. A. F. C. Thompson says in The Making of the English Working Class:

"Only the gentleman - Burdett, Cochrane, Hunt, Feargus O'Connor knew the forms and language of high politics, could cut a brave figure on the hustings, or belabour the Ministers in their own secret mass meetings were called out and there were only occasionally infiltrated by the state. This is why so few Luddites were ever caught despite the fact that they were often being saturated with troops and the extensive use of spies from outside the areas. The harsh sentence imposed by the judiciary were a sign of the determination of the authorities."

Contrast this with a statement made by the executive of the Miners' Association in 1844 to the employers. It began: "We have no secrets; all is done openly and to any of our meetings all are invited. Manufacturers! Traders! and Shopkeepers! You are deeply interested in our welfare".

The legalisation of certain forms of organisation such as the repeal of the Combination Acts in 1824 is not something which enabled the working class to organise itself better - the Luddites were pretty well organised and everything is legal if you don't get caught! What it did do was enable the recuperators, particularly middle class ones from outside "impenetrable" working class communities, to become better organised. The attitudes which the working class had had towards rich reformers was summed up by Francis Place "The laws against combinations... induced [working people] to break and disregard the laws. They made them suspect the intentions of every man who tendered his services".

The recuperators

An important feature of all these movements was the commitment to secrecy. The clandestine hit squads of the time were protected by a mass culture of non-cooperation. Whole working class communities refused to collaborate with the authorities. Often
frames. Three days later a large force of Luddites armed with muskets, pistols, axes and hammers destroyed 70 frames at a large workshop in Sutton-in-Ashfield.

Only those frames were attacked which were associated with reduced wages or the production of lower quality goods. This "reformist" spirit of the Nottingham Luddites is expressed well by the popular ballad of the time, General Ludd's Triumph:

"...the Weavers in Glasgow and many parts of Scotland will join us the Papists in Ireland are rising. Scotland will join us the Pople will be supressed. In London large crowds gathered outside the Commons and cheered the assassin as he was led away. In Nottingham order could only be restored by military force and the reading of the Riot Act. It was widely assumed that Perceval's death must be the result of some revolutionary conspiracy. There was widespread disappointment when it turned out to be the work of a solitary hero."

One of the factors which brought the movement to an end was the repression by the authorities. More spies, more arrests and an increasing number of executions. But probably more important was a major concession. This was the repeal of the so-called Orders in Council June 1812. This was the policy of blockading France as part of Britain's war effort. Its repeal led to an immediate improvement in trade, greatly relieving the famine conditions existing in many parts of the country.

But the ending of the bosses' recession didn't completely kill the movement. Luddism in Yorkshire and Lancashire largely gave way to preparations for an insurrection. During the summer of 1812 there were numerous raids for arms. Lead for making bullets was now being taken, in the form of puncheon-water and gutters. The conspiracy extended well outside the Luddite areas but, unfortunately, never got as far as an actual uprising.

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In Lancashire the movement was more one of open mass riots. On 20 March the warehouse of one of the first manufacturers to use the power-loom was attacked at Stockport. In early April there were numerous riots aiming to force down the prices of potatoes and bread. On 20 April in Middleton a power-loom mill was attacked by several thousand. Like the Luddites its defenders fired muskets, three attackers were killed and many wounded. The next morning the crowd assembled in even greater strength. They were joined by a body of men armed with muskets and pistols from the town of Colne. At a meeting where Ned Ludd was present, they declared that they had a well developed system of threatening letters, night meetings and military-style signals. They specialised in blowing up furnaces and terrorising scabs. Their leader was said to be Lolly, obviously Lol - the Lord of Misrule.

At their head. Finding the mill still impregnable the crowd burned the mill-owner's house instead. Four days later a large mill was successfully burnt down in Westhoughton.

April-May 1812 was a real high point in the class war. Outside the Luddites there were other conspiracies. Property riots in Bristol, Carlisle, Leeds, Sheffield and Barnsley. In Cornwall the miners struck and marched into the market towns demanding reductions in food prices. At Sheffield a meeting was called to protest against the new taxes imposed by the government. On May 11 the Prime Minister, Perceval, was assassinated in the House of Commons. Joy amongst the proles was unreasoned. In London large crowds gathered outside the Commons and cheered the assassin as he was led away. In Nottingham order could only be restored by military force and the reading of the Riot Act. It was widely assumed that Perceval's death must be the result of some revolutionary conspiracy. There was widespread disappointment when it turned out to be the work of a solitary hero.

An important feature of all these movements was the commitment to secrecy. The clandestine hit squads of the day were permitted upon a mass culture of non-cooperation. Whole working class communities refused to collaborate with the authorities. Often
The reform movement might use the rhetoric of equality, but many of the old responses of deference were still there even among the huzzaing crowds'.

But the role of middle class types should not be underestimated. Most of the top leaders of the Miners’ Association had never worked in the coal industry despite the continual cry from the members for the appointment of sacked miners as officials. The Association’s treasurer, for example, was a pub landlord from Newcastle. A particularly important role in the union was played by W. P. Roberts, a solicitor from Bath, who was the union’s legal officer.

In so far as Roberts and his friends had a political program for the union it can be summed up as the right to work and the role of the unions being to defend the workers, thereby the bosses allow the workers to struggle by peaceful, democratic means in return for guarantees that they won’t go any further than that, that they won’t threaten the bosses property rights or control over the production process. The right to strike implies democratic means in return for guarantees that they did not receive a penny in strike pay and union officials had been sent to try to get them back. Not surprisingly, thousands left the union over the next few months. In many cases the men had succeeded in winning large pay rises through their unofficial action!

But the union didn’t have things all its own way. As well as the unofficial strikes (many of which it had to officialise) there were numerous occasions where the men used their power to fully observe the spirit of Rule 12. During a strike in Yorkshire in 1844 scabs had been brought in from Derbyshire in large numbers. At the Soap House pit near Sheffield they were housed in a barracks in the pityard. A large crowd scaled the walls, broke open the doors, smashed every window and gave the scabs a good kicking. During the same strike, at Deep pit in the same area, strikers blew up the engine boiler. These sort of incidents, though, had already become few and far between by 1842 standards. The Miners’ Association largely disappeared after the anti-Chartist repression and recession of 1848; but the damage had been done.

In Britain today, anti-fascist fronts divert those who wish to fight racism towards the almost irrelevant tactic of chasing small groups of skinheads. There is no evidence that racist attacks on black people are primarily carried out by Nazis: ordinary British patriotism is the problem. Anti-fascists do not challenge patriotism, in fact they support it. They demonstrate every year against fascists marching around doing Nazi salutes. There are even worse foreign ideas. On Remembrance Sunday 1991, a speaker from Anti-Fascist Action argued against burning the Union Jack, and instead set fire to an imperial German flag.

The basic proletarian position on fascism and anti-fascism can be stated simply. Fascist governments are anti-working class, and have murdered millions of working class people in the interests of capitalist accumulation. When not in government, fascists have often played an important role for the state in spreading racism, dividing and weakening the proletariat. Judged by these criteria, all other capitalist political tendencies are no different. Democratic governments have killed just as many people as fascist ones, and through nationalism, reinforce racist divisions. The left have used anti-fascism to persuade people to support democratic parties. During the Second World War, this was useful to the Allies. The main purpose of anti-fascism was to justify the war, and crush the working class. This was the central aim of the war effort, as shown by Britain’s attitude towards resistance to Hitler inside Germany that Foreign Office argued “the Gestapo and the SS have done us an appreciable service in removing a selection of those who would undoubtedly have posed as ‘good’ Germans and defeated a Nazi Germany” (Guardian, 23 July 92). When Milan’s workers rose against the fascist government in 1943, Britain and the US bombed them.

In 1844 there were strikes in almost every district of Britain. The Miners’ Association was the first union in Britain to use the law courts in a systematic way to defend its members. Roberts became known as the “workingman’s Attorney General”. He used to travel from Bath to London to defend his clients there, or to take their cases. He once branded himself a “dead one” and so on. In a way which today we find very familiar, the Miners’ Association was the first union to demonstrate every year against fascists marching around doing Nazi salutes. There are even worse foreign ideas. On Remembrance Sunday 1991, a speaker from Anti-Fascist Action argued against burning the Union Jack, and instead set fire to an imperial German flag.

In Labour-controlled Camden, when the council started to gently discuss the idea of putting Indian families in separate estates from whites. Targetting fascists is a deliberate strategy by icepick-heads to shield Labour politicians in local government, though the anarchists involved in anti-fascism lack the analytical ability to see that they are being used for this purpose.

The anti-fascist movement’s analysis of the fascist resurgence in Germany today is basically that Germans have an inbuilt urge to wear jackboots and march around doing Nazi salutes. So many people as fascist ones, and through internationalist perspective.

The commitment of the union to the rule of law was nothing short of practical. They always told miners to be peaceful, even when they were being evicted from their homes. This happened on a massive scale during the strike in Northumberland and Durham in 1844. The Northumbrian miners’ union leader Thomas Burt (later to become a Liberal MP) describes how families “stood with tears in their eyes and saw villainous wretches throwing to the door articles to which the memory of past years had given sanctity; but they had been taught by their leaders that if the peace was broken, they might bid farewell to their cherished union; and such was the power, eloquence, and advocacy of their leaders that the peace was not broken, but they submitted to the union’s discipline” (Rule 12 of the union’s constitution (agreed in May 1843) stated “That this Association will not support or defend any member who shall in any way violate the laws of the country”.

As well as assisting Queen Victoria’s judiciary the union also attempted to suppress strikes, even legal ones, in a way which today we find very familiar. During 1844 there were strikes in almost every coalfield in Britain but the union doggedly maintained its position of opposing all “partial” strikes. Only a “general” strike of the whole industry was supposed to be good enough.

The union conference in Manchester in January 1844 was held in the midst of a strike wave in the South Lancashire coal-field. There had been 20 strikes and 100’s of men had been out for 5 months. Since the last conference had condemned partial strikes they had not received a penny in strike pay and union officials had been sent to try to get them back. Not surprisingly, thousands left the union over the next few months. In many cases the men had succeeded in winning large pay rises through their unofficial action!

But the union didn’t have things all its own way. As well as the unofficial strikes (many of which it had to officialise) there were numerous occasions where the veterans of 1842 failed to fully observe the spirit of Rule 12. During a strike in Yorkshire in 1844 scabs had been brought in from Derbyshire in large numbers. At the Soap House pit near Sheffield they were housed in a barracks in the pityard. A large crowd scaled the walls, broke open the doors, smashed every window and gave the scabs a good kicking. During the same strike, at Deep pit in the same area, strikers blew up the engine boiler. These sort of incidents, though, had already become few and far between by 1842 standards. The Miners’ Association largely disappeared after the anti-Chartist repression and recession of 1848; but the damage had been done.

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In Britain today, anti-fascist fronts divert those who wish to fight racism towards the almost irrelevant tactic of chasing small groups of skinheads. There is no evidence that racist attacks on black people are primarily carried out by Nazis: ordinary British patriotism is the problem. Anti-fascists do not challenge patriotism, in fact they support it. They demonstrate every year against fascists marching with the other capitalist parties, who fully supported the World Wars, to remember the dead. They object to fascists painting the patriotic ceremony with their nasty foreign ideas. On Remembrance Sunday 1991, a speaker from Anti-Fascist Action argued against burning the Union Jack, and instead set fire to an imperial German flag.

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