DISCUSSION
BULLETIN

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BULLETIN MATTERS

This is our fifth anniversary issue, and the DB seems to be panning out as it was intended to. For example, the letters and articles in this issue seem to make a good discussion mix--six responding to the ideas expressed in earlier issues of the DB, and three raising new topics of interest to libertarian socialists. To date I've had no negative feedback on the conclusion of the "Socialist Labor Party Revisited." It seems unlikely that all readers would regard it as highly as I or that it is totally without factual error.
There isn't much more in the way of Bulletin Matters. With a rather small backlog of material for the next issue, we eagerly await your articles and letters for DB26, which will be published around the first of November. Please remember:-- a dark ribbon, single space, and narrow margins (a seven-inch typed line is ideal).

Frank Girard
for the DB Committee

PUBLICATIONS RECEIVED

BULLETIN OF ANARCHIST RESEARCH (No. 11, August 1987), 3L per year (5L foreign) from T.V. Cahill, Department of Politics, University of Lancaster, LA1 4YF, England. Issues usually contain a listing of anti-authoritarian literature together with articles of interest to anarchist history buffs. What makes number 11 especially interesting is a fourteen page (reduced to one quarter size but still legible) list of collections of anarchist materials--books, pamphlets, periodicals, and manuscripts--held by libraries and archives in Great Britain and other countries. The list is weak on the U.S., but the project is ongoing and later issues will add to the list. Strangely enough two libraries with Kropotkin material are listed in the U.S.S.R.


AFFIDAVIT OF DANIEL P. SHEEHAN, Christic Institute, 1324 North Capitol St., NW, Washington, DC 20002, 55 pages, no date, Price $10. Our thanks to Rado Mijanovich for sending us a copy of this collection of evidence which makes a convincing case that the U.S. Government has connived with the Contra's in smuggling cocaine into the U.S. Although it all seems reasonable to me, Mike Gunderloy, reviewing it in FACTSHEET FIVE says that Sheehan, who was chief counsel in the Karen Silkwood Case and a host of other liberal court cases has walked out on a limb of unproven allegations in this one.

CORRESPONDENCE ON LABOR TIME VOUCHERS This is my title for a set of about 25 xeroxed pages of correspondence on the merits of labor time vouchers between Adam Buick and L.L. Men, whose book, TWO TEXTS FOR DEFINING THE COMMUNIST PROGRAMME, was listed in this column in DB23. The set includes several articles on LTVs, three of which have appeared in the DB as well as another letter by Adam Buick and a very long letter by L.L. Men methodically disposing of the anti-LTV arguments. Both debaters are eloquent and convincing, but--perhaps because of my conviction that LTVs are needed as a bookkeeping and individual accountability device in the early period of socialism--I found Comrade Men's argument the more persuasive. On the other hand, I haven't seen Comrade Buick's response. Presumably interested readers can obtain this correspondence by writing to P.O. Box 72341, Kowloon Central Post Office, Hong Kong. Do not write the name on the envelope or it may be returned. No price is given, but twenty-five xeroxed pages plus postage don't come for nothing.
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ANTI SEMITISME ET PROGROME DE BEYROUTH, by Fredy Perlman, 1987, 32 pages, no price; from L'Insecurite Sociale Publications, BP 243, 75564 Paris Cedex 12. This is the French translation of Perlman's 1982 pamphlet on the Israeli invasion of Lebanon, published this country by Black and Red and Fifth Estate.

AFFIDAVIT OF DANIEL P. SHEEHAN, Christic Institute, 1324 North Capitol St., NW, Washington, DC 20002, 35 pages, no date, Price $10. Our thanks to Rado Mijanovich for sending us a copy of this collection of evidence which makes a convincing case that the U.S. Government has connived with the Contra's in smuggling cocaine into the U.S. Although it all seems reasonable to me, Mike Gunderloy, reviewing it in FACTSHEET FIVE says that Sheehan, who was chief counsel in the Karen Silkwood Case and a host of other liberal court cases has walked out on a limb of unproven allegations in this one.

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Dear Discussion Bulletin Comrades:

We have prepared the following letter designed to raise certain issues for your consideration. We urge you to reflect on its contents, to comment on it. Feel free to publish the text in your magazine, alone with response, and please send us your comments.

Revolutionary regards,

INTERNATIONALISM

To the comrades of Discussion Bulletin:

The US section of the International Communist Current has followed your publication for several years now. On several occasions you have published exchanges of correspondence between us, and we have published a lengthy text by one of your comrades disputing our historical evaluation of the IWW. We view your publication as a positive expression of the process by which the working class secretes militants who begin to shake off both the dead weight of bourgeois ideology which hangs over the proletarian political milieu and the political sectarianism which has seriously infected that milieu. Your existence as a discussion group is not an isolated event, but part of an international process occurring within the proletariat, as similar discussion groups have emerged in a number of countries, including Italy, France, Belgium, Mexico. We think it is particularly healthy that your group is open to exploring divergent analyses and positions. And we think it is fitting that you have devoted considerable attention to analyzing the past history of the DeLeonist milieu, from which a number of your participants derive. We assume you are well aware of our critique of the DeLeonist tradition (see Internationalism 24).

There are two closely related problems which we believe must be raised for discussion. We raise these issues in a fraternal spirit, and the with the firm belief that these are serious questions which the comrades of BAC must grapple with, for your own sake as militants, and even more importantly for the sake of the workers movement as a whole. Briefly stated these problems concern:

1) the purpose, nature and goals of a discussion group;
2) the relationship of revolutionaries to the international class struggle.

PURPOSE AND GOALS OF DISCUSSION GROUPS

Historically, the international proletariat has provided itself two primary types of organization which are both indispensable to its self-liberation. The first is the revolutionary organization, grouping the most class conscious militants, who first come to understand the historic tasks of the working class, and organize around a set of proletarian political principles, which attempt to crystalize the
programmatic goals and understanding developed in the class as whole. The goal of the revolutionary organization is to intervene in the struggles of the working class to point out the general line of march to communism. The other is the unitary organization, grouping all workers, on a sociological basis, in order to maximize the strength of the class in its confrontation with the class enemy. It is within the unitary organs that the maturation of working class consciousness comes to fruition in the revolutionary period.

The precise form these organizations take are dependent upon the period in the development of capitalism. In the period of capitalist ascendancy, the revolutionary organization took the form of mass parties which sought to enroll broad layers of the proletariat, while in the decadent phase since WW I the revolutionary organization has taken the form of a minoritarian organization based on a set of stringent revolutionary principles. In the period of capitalist ascendancy the trade unions were the unitary organs, while in decadence, workers councils are the appropriate form of unitary organs -- which are the historically discovered form of the dictatorship of the proletariat.

Where do discussion groups fit in? Clearly discussion groups are an important part of the process by which the most class conscious elements in the working class regroup to form revolutionary organizations. In order to make the strongest possible contribution to the development of class consciousness, the militants involved in discussion groups have to be clear on their responsibilities to their class. First, they have to be clear that they exist as part of the working class struggle -- like all proletarian revolutionaries they have been secreted by their class as part of the collective existence and struggle of the class as a whole. As such, discussion groups do not arise within the working class simply to "discuss", otherwise they would be nothing but academic circles, pursuing interesting questions for their own sake, a phenomenon characteristic of petty bourgeois intellectuals, not working class revolutionaries. Revolutionary militants examine reality in order to change it. To help change the world, revolutionaries must be oriented to the formation of a revolutionary party, which can intervene effectively in the class struggle, to help accelerate the development of class consciousness. Because capitalism is a world system, and the proletariat is an international class waging a global struggle revolutionaries must have the perspective of building and international revolutionary party.

Because the proletariat needs an international revolutionary organization, discussion groups are historically transitory in nature, not permanent; discussion groups are way stations on the way to revolutionary organization, an organization based on programmatic principles, and an understanding of the class lines which separate the proletarian camp from the bourgeoisie, especially what separates the leftists (the maist, trotskyist, stalinist wing of state capitalist apparatus) from the revolutionary milieu. Discussion groups arise to clarify political issues and principles, so that this clarity can be used as the basis for further political development. In order to contribute to the regroupment of revolutionary forces, the goal of a discussion group must be the development of programmatic principles on a systematic basis. This involves examining the positions of other
groups which exist today, and have existed before, so that the framework can be developed for a principled regroupment. A serious discussion can't afford aimless discussions. It has to begin to tackle the serious issues confronting the workers movement, examining the positions defended by existing groups, and developing its own view. In all sincerity we believe that the time has come for DB to orient itself toward taking positions on class lines. For example, what position do you defend on trade unions? What is your evaluation of the positions defended by the various revolutionary groups in the milieu? Do you defend the DeLeonist perspective of socialist industrial unionism, or the position of the ICC and others that trade unions have been integrated into the state apparatus of capitalism as a means of controlling the working class? What is your position on nationalisation? Or on the lessons of the Russian Revolution? Or on state capitalism? Or on electoralism?

These basic principles provide the basis upon which revolutionaries can intervene in the class struggle. These are not questions that can be answered lightly. Positions on such fundamental questions must be based on informed discussion and reading.

This is not a simple or easy process, but it is the one that facilitates the greatest possible political clarification. In the course of exploring different political positions, discussion groups frequently undergo a decantation process, in which some comrades may leave. Perhaps some drop out because they do not share the commitment to systematic discussion adopted by the group. Or perhaps some depart because they find themselves in disagreement with the political principles being developed, or find themselves drawn to other groups in the milieu with whose principles they reach agreement. This decantation should not be a cause of demoralization, so long as it occurs within a process of political clarification. The proletariat needs unity, but a unity based on a firm foundation of agreement on fundamental principle.

One of the most crucial things to keep in mind today is that we do not have to reinvent the wheel. While it is true that the organic link of today's groups with the communist left of the 20's, 30's and 40's was severed in the depths of the triumphant counter-revolution, many of the key issues we grapple with today have been dealt with in the past, and the analyses we develop today must build on the foundations of the past. We must build on the positive contributions and learn from the mistakes of our predecessors.

DB has devoted considerable attention to the past history of DeLeonist and other socialist movements in the U.S., but very little attention has been directed towards the history of the workers movement internationally. This is a serious shortcoming which afflicts many revolutionaries in the U.S., who mistakenly view the American situation as an exception to the international situation. In many ways the most critical error committed by DeLeonism was to cut itself off from the left communist movement internationally from the time of the Russian Revolution. We urge the comrades of DB to explore the contributions of the Dutch, German, Italian left communists who fought against the degeneration of the third international, and tried to draw the lessons of the failure of the first revolutionary wave.
REVOLUTIONARIES AND THE CLASS STRUGGLE

A closely related point is the relationship between revolutionary militancy and the working class struggle. As we pointed above, revolutionary organizations exist to intervene in the class struggle, to point out the general line of march to the revolution. The analysis of the development of the class struggle and perspectives for the future are therefore at the center of militant life. It is this overriding concern to intervene most effectively in the class struggle, to contribute as much as possible to the development of revolutionary consciousness in the proletariat which must shape the discussion among the nature of the present epoch, the union question, state capitalim, the development of class struggle and the evolution of the economic crisis are the key questions.

Yet not one word has appeared in DB concerning some of the most momentous developments in the class struggle in decades. We refer in general to the new phase in class struggle which opened in May/June '86 in Belgium, where workers struggles, often erupting outside union control, extended from sector to sector, across all the false divisions put up by capitalism, as workers resisted government austerity programs. This explosive potential to spread struggles from sector to sector is a key characteristic of the present period, especially in Europe, as the onset of a new recession forces governments to abandon dispersed attacks against the working class and to resort to generalized, across the board attacks.

As has been developed in our National Situation statement, this new phase of class struggle has had its echo in the U.S. though on a smaller scale, as seen in the cross sector solidarity in the Detroit municipal workers strike last summer and in the Kaiser-Permanente strike last fall. This new phase of class struggle continued its development in France this winter when French rail workers struck, outside of and against the control of unions, and made great strides in the developing autonomous self-organization. Revolutionaries have the responsibility to draw the lessons of these struggles, and help spread them to other workers.

CONCLUSION

We hope you will receive this letter in the fraternal spirit which motivated it and give serious consideration to the problems we have tried to raise. We look upon DB as positive reflection of the process by which our class is struggling to come to consciousness. We urge you to grapple with the reasons for your existence, to establish goals for discussions, to prioritize those discussions on the most pressing issues for the workers struggle, and to orient yourselves towards the development of a set of class lines and principles. In conjunction with these programmatic discussions, we urge you to focus also on an examination of the nature of the international class struggle, with the perspective of taking up an active intervention. We look forward to your response to this letter and to our continued reading of your publication.

REVOLUTIONARY REGARDS,
INTERNATIONALISM
U.S. SECTION OF THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNIST CURRENT
POB 288, NEW YORK, NY 10018-0288
In the July '87 issue of DB, one DeLeonist writer questioned the value of the Discussion Bulletin ("a publication which seems to collect a bunch of so-called radical thinkers who try to outsmart each other and DeLeon")

That view may be in the eye of the beholder. Yet as a DeLeonist, I try not to shrink from the real world which is full of "radical thinkers who try to outsmart each other...". That's the way it is and we need to learn how to conduct our educational work in this kind of environment.

The DB provides a "safe" place for us to learn. By "safe", it allows minimal confusion to workers (outside DB range) while allowing maximum expansion, projection and development of SIU concepts and the people who express them.

For example, the semantic debate between Dekovich and Gerard (time frame for political/industrial union act) would be a real turn-off for workers generally. Outside of DB, is there any other publication where such disagreement by DeLeonists would be welcome or desired for their readers? Fortunately, with DB, DeLeonists can now air their differences while in pre-DB days, un-healthy animosities festered in silence.

For 30 odd years I observed the damage done to the SLP by the "put-off's" (wait 4 years till the next convention—from or other time—observe the correct form/procedure.) till I finally realized the SLP structure never really permitted its members to openly examine, question, and discuss their differences and NOW DeLeonist experiences with each other. The resultant frustration was unhealthy for individuals and the Party so resignations and expulsions were periodic—"solutions".

Forty years ago a publication like the DB would be classed as a "lampoon" by the SLP and its members were disciplined if they read it and expelled if they wrote in it. I don't know if these rules have changed much with regards to "writing". Last year I noted few DeLeonist responses to counter broadside attacks on LABOR VOUCHERS. Why?

Today, the DB is freely (nominal cost) available to the entire DeLeonist/SIU's labor movement. All can have healthy discussions on questions as they arise in the real world. What is wrong with that?

Why is F. Gerard admonished with—"drop your fascination with the DB and start to distribute one DeLeonist leaflet a day...." That doesn't seem a proper statement to Gerard who probably exceeded his lifetime quota of "one a day" leaflets in thirty odd years of party activity as did many stalwart party people.
Daily leafleting wasn’t the ENTIRE answer then, nor is it now.

The DB is a unique opportunity for expression which has been absent in our DeLeonist past. Now we can openly examine how workers respond to our leaflets—Do they understand the SIU concept as it is presented in our literature? Is there a need to up-date the SIU concept? (from smokestack to service oriented industries) Why are workers NOT responding to our Program?

As far as I am concerned, what is lacking in the DB is that the full and open debate which should be able to exist among DeLeonists is not taking place. Maybe that’s why the DB space seems pre-empted by expression of other thinkers.

These other “radical thinkers” are also of the working class and they have a legitimate right to question our premises and challenge our conclusions. We may also benefit from the process by perfecting our arguments and examining positions.

Of course, there may be some DeLeonists who believe DeLeonism was carved in stone circa 1914. With DeLeon able to change from Reform to Revolution in less than 15 years, I cannot conceive an informed DeLeonist in 1980’s, entering modern class struggle with the political/economic weapons and understanding of 1914.

Just as capitalism has revolutionized the means of production, our DeLeonist approaches toward revolution need to be aligned with the new realities of production because the SIU program is based upon organizing workers at that point.

Political action today makes 1914 look like a different ethnic political period as does the intervention of the government into the economy and the vast technological progress which has created the illusion of well being among many workers. How do we approach this? How break-through to workers’ minds? These are the kinds of questions DeLeonists should be discussing and grappling for solutions so our work will have more impact in the present.

Unless we can openly express ourselves on these ongoing questions, the movement stagnates as in the past. Even the best of ideas need updating, especially in the social sciences. As in THE SLP REVISED, we need to raise the most vital question of why the DeLeonist movement did not achieve the
influence it deserved despite "one a day plus" leafleting by the membership for many decades.

Fraternally
Edward Wizek

A CRITIQUE OF THE THEORY OF DECADENT CAPITALISM

In the past we were defenders of a more or less heretical view of the theory of decadence. Then, gradually, we detached ourselves from it. This was not a result of a critique of Rosa Luxembourg's theories, but because we found that as we delved deeper in our critique of the world, her theories became less relevant to us. Not yet having had occasion to clarify our position on this issue, we will try to do so here.

The decadence of capitalism is a theme which revolutionaries in the past used in seeking to find an explanation for changes occurring in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as well as a search for appropriate responses to these changes. They believed that if a revolution did not come soon, bourgeois society would head directly toward barbarism. "War or revolution," "socialism or barbarism" were the historical alternatives put forward by all who adopted these theses, whether the theses were central or peripheral to their position. These theses were based essentially on Rosa Luxembourg's theoretical work, whose principal virtue probably was to analyze capitalism, not as a rigid structure, but as a dynamic movement engaged in fighting an exterminating battle everywhere and constantly against the natural economy, in whatever form it finds it, whether the form be slavery, feudalism, primitive communism or a patriarchal peasant economy." "The time is past when the small and middle farmers lived almost without cash money and could thresh the wheat according to their need for money. At present the farmer always has to have access to money, a great deal of money in order to pay his taxes. Soon he will have to sell all his products so as to buy back from the industrialists what he needs in the form of commodities." (Accumulation of Capital) Some important corollaries follow from this theory: on the
extension of market relations and the mediating role of money in a growing number of human activities; on the increasing intervention of the state in the management of capitalist affairs; on the importance of the war economy and the sector of arms production... The limits of this theory were reached already in the period in which it was formulated and in the very framework of this formulation: social-democracy. In this sense, one can say that the theory contributed to the partial break with social democracy (the European ultra-left tendencies) while at the same time it contributed to the formulation of ideologies which justified social-democratic policies--both in the name of the decadence of capital!

According to a conception widely held by adherents of the decadence theory, imperialism is relatively recent: it consists of the colonization of the entire world and is the "final stage of capitalism." We get closer to the truth by turning this conception on its head and saying that imperialism was the first stage of capitalism, that the world was subsequently colonized by the nation-states and the social relations that accompany this colonization. In defining imperialism as the last stage of capitalism, one infers a break within this colonizing movement, one which is both temporal and spatial. A theory which sees an "imperialist phase" in the development of capital and which proposes "new tasks" justified by the opening of this "new period" serves mainly to vindicate "former" practices. Thus after 1914, certain more or less radical social democratic groups claimed to start again from scratch without making a critique of their own activity within this capitalist organization. The myth of the "final stage" gave them a theoretical basis for putting forward a new system of "tasks of the proletariat" following the sacrosanct year of 1914! In this way, the neo-social-democrats could continue to associate themselves with the "glorious past" of the Second International by claiming that the pre-1914 reformism was merely a transitory phase in order to reach the final goal: communism. In actual fact, "communism" conceived of as ideology (cf. the Third International) was only a tool which helped strengthen capitalist relations throughout the course of the 20th century.

Ideologies of decadence are based on a superficial view of the contradictory tendencies in capitalist development. Behind the description of the death-throes of capital, the halt of progress, the putrefaction of society... lies an apology for the development and the socialization of the capitalist mode of production. These ideologies do not make a critique
of progress (the development of capitalist relations) but rather they criticize what they consider to thwart progress. In the end, this view of capitalism is a moralistic one. If one should consider the goal of nascent capitalism to be the nourishment of people, this position can lead to an apology for progress and for the development of productive forces in the 19th century. And since the vicious, decadent capitalism of the 20th century no longer feeds all its subjects and even kills some of them along the way, it becomes important to "make the revolution" in order to reallocate and make some adjustments so as once again to enjoy the benefits of progress and industrialization. Obviously none of this has anything to do with capitalist reality, or with a perspective of a communist humanity. Capitalism does not produce goods, only various commodities which can be converted into money: objects for consumption, weapons, display, appearances . . . These "goods" for consumption destroy us, brutally or little by little. Their continued production can be assured only through a competitive system which is constantly growing, growing in extent as well as in intensity. Its geographic expansion was responsible for the development of ever more widespread markets, for the great expeditions of the Renaissance, for colonization. . . . This expansion had already taken place by 1914, but only geographically, in area, and it provided the basis for Rosa Luxembourg's catastrophic view, an interpretation which underestimated subsequent possibilities for development. In intensity, the growth of this competitive system led to the progressive disappearance of activities which did not pass through the mediation of money (gift, exchange, domestic production, . . .) and led to advertising and mass production, to the democratic totalitarianism which grew out of World War II.

The theories of decadence led not only to an incapacity to analyze modern capitalism, but to a fascination for the system itself. Modern capitalism could be simultaneously seen as the antechamber of "communism" and the condition for its appearance; negatively because the halt of capitalist development or the difficulties it encountered would bring about the catastrophic collapse of capital; and positively because technological-scientific progress and the socialization of the means of production introduced by capital would permit planning on a world scale and bring an end to poverty! As a matter of fact it is hardly surprising that the appearance of such conceptions appeared just as neo-social-democratic theory adopted a global perspective and when capitalist social relations were rapidly spreading and intensifying. . . . The
failure of any of the reformist workers' movements to transform itself into a revolutionary movement certainly made more credible ideas according to which communism would be an "objective" (not to say, mechanical) necessity and capitalism's destiny would be a rapid decline and collapse. This perspective also provided the small ultra-leftist organizations with a reason for their existence, and later, after 1968, provided a basis for some mechanistic analyses according to which another world war was the only short-term alternative for capitalism in crisis (as if the world were not actually at war!) or, further, that the workers' struggles in Poland were part of "the dynamic process which leads to revolution."

After all these years, it is easy to ridicule Nostradamus and his prophecies of decadence. But rather than indulging oneself in this complacent response, it would make more sense to try to formulate the actual problem: Where and when have capitalist relations suffered a decline in the 20th century? Every serious examination will show that they have only continued to expand and grow stronger. Admittedly, capitalism undergoes economic crises, but their inevitable result is capitalism's domination over a new aspect of human existence. Not one of these crises represents the fatal and ineluctable catastrophe which can destroy the capitalist mode of domination. Capitalism is without doubt a catastrophic system, but for humanity—not for itself. The vision of "revolutionary catastrophe" draws different conclusions from premises it shares with social-democratic reformism. For the former, the crisis will provide the salutary shock which will awaken the proletariat and lead to the destruction of capitalism; ... the latter openly seeks to manage it. Thus both "revolutionary" and "reformist" social-democrats palliate the difficulty for new social relations to emerge between human beings. Ultimately, they do not have much cause to reproach this world, unless it be for their sense of shame for their cowardly acceptance of every condition that was imposed on them. These are veritable men of the economy, and they will have to search in and through the economy for reasons to be scandalized by this world.

Interrogations, March 1987
DISCUSSION BULLETIN
P.O. Box 1564, Grand Rapids, MI 49501

REPORT #25

August 29, 1987

Members of the DB Committee

Dear Comrades,

There isn't really much news to report. As usual at this time of the year, we are in good financial condition, for a lot of subs have been renewed thus swelling our treasury. Also as usual at this time of the year, we have a majority who don't view renewing their DB subs with the same sense of urgency I do. If you haven't renewed, you have another, more urgent sounding renewal blank in your DB along with a red circle on your address label. Please renew as soon as you can. The DB needs your support.

CONTRIBUTIONS

From July 4 through August 29, we received the following contributions: Edward Wizek $30; William Friesser $2; E.H. Royer $2; Jack Ceder $4; Frank Girard $22; Ron Miller $3; Monroe Prussack $12; Steve Hoyle $20; Mike Gunderloy $3; James Minal $20; Subscriber $17; Anonymous $12; Paul Burkett $7. Total $154. Thank you, comrades.

FINANCES

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Fraternally submitted,

Frank Girard
for the DB Committee
Comrade Bulleteers:

It's been quite a while since I've written and I confess to having been busy frying other fish. I do want to gently chide Marin Dekovich, though, for his statement that anarchists teach the workers to overthrow the government by physical force. The anarchist is a slippery creature (I say this as a long-time anarchist supporter of the DB) and hard to pin down. Some anarchists indeed advocate the violent overthrow of the government (Horrors!). Others of us, however, prefer to talk of education and slow organic processes of government disenfranchisement through alternatives being offered. I just hate to see the dreaded anarchist turning into the same sort of bogeyman in the pages of DB as he is in the more mainstream press. Why, I haven't thrown a bomb for weeks.

Also, I'm fairly sure that distributing 300 DeLeonist leaflets a year would be considerably more waste of energy than coordinating DB. Radicals of all stripes have been distributing leaflets by the car-load for centuries, and most of them end up on the ground or get used as asswipes. DB may not attract a huge audience, but I think it is considerably more likely to make converts among that small audience than a single leaflet handed out by some bug-eyed revolutionary.

Mick Larkin might be interested to know that the word "minarchist" is already in general use in the Libertarian Party, where it is used as a smear word by the anarchists.

Even if I don't have much to say I'll be lurking in the woodwork and listening. I enjoy DB immensely.

Mike Cunderloy

Dear DB readers,

I'm totally in favor of what you call, the "free access" distribution system without any accountability. Bucky Fuller years ago proved with his "World Game" that there is an abundance of natural resources. With all our unemployment we are shown that we have an abundance of labor. With our continous overproduction it is easy to see that there is really no need for scarcities.

With this ability to produce abundance there is no reason to worry about people taking too much. Who steals sand when he lives in a desert??? When everything is free, things do not serve as status symbols. We will no longer have a need to "create" demand. No "resale" possibilities will further discourage hording. So, to take more than one needs, merely becomes a burden, so this takes care of itself.

I have read much of the Socialist literature and it all seems to teach a need for the workers to elect delegates to represent them at higher levels. I have a hard time with this. I do not desire to have anyone represent me. This just opens the door to our present-day corruption. Representatives create a hierarchy, i.e., an easier way for a few or one person to Rule.

I will exercise my vote by "giving" my work to a place of production or service that I agree with. I will withhold my energy if I do not
agree with my group or its methods.

I further cast my vote by which products and services I take. This is called the "Law of Supply and Demand".

Workers would soon discover who they could get the best advice from to do their job well. Each worker would be like a coordinator, taking responsibility for the production and helping each other when asked.

I really don't see a need for bosses when we are each our own boss but are not anyone else's boss.

This would be a cooperative effort instead of a competitive one.

I don't understand why we put so much energy into the Party jargon. Most people are conditioned against these words. I think we should look for acceptable words from our own time. We would not then have those old mind-sets working against us.

Instead of using so much of our time arguing and talking about the old writings, I think we should focus more on the here and now and each other. There are some really good people putting out some really good stuff today. Let's do more brainstorming with our peers and develop synergy that the old ones never dreamed of.

Sincerely, 
Ernest Mann (Little Free Press)

Comrades

I've been subscribing to the DB for several years now and have found it to be a very worthwhile source of history of the movement and a good forum for the discussion of libertarian socialist ideas. I've never to date submitted anything for publication but would like to submit a short comment in the interest of promoting an honest and straightforward discussion.

I'm a member of the WSA and so I'm interested in Cdr Laubach's ideas and the comments of others may have by way of response. So, I was interested in Jon Bekken's critique of Laubach's discussion of the problem of distribution in a communist society. The purpose of this letter is not defend or support either of their positions.

I'm taking some exception to the last paragraph of his letter that was published in #24 of the DB. He probably wasn't trying to mystify us all, but he did speak of "our ideas" and "our comrades" in the sense that those were "anarchist-syndicalist" type ideas and comrades of the WSA were not.

All I can say in the defense of the WSA's anarchist-syndicalism is that our aims and methods are those shared by the other member organizations of the International Workers Asso, which is generally considered to be the anarchist-syndicalist international. If we differ in certain "concrete measures" employed in the past it's because we're still developing an anarchist-syndicalism for our time and in North America. This is a process that will always continue until the revolution. We're receptive to all ideas towards the end of achieving the free society.
I think that we'd all better socialists for examining Jan Beekman's anarchosyndicalism. After all these years I think that F.W. Beekman should offer his programme for revolution and do so in the pages of the DB where we could all enjoy them.

Box 56
Sioux Rapids, Iowa 50585
---Jake Edwards

The crises in today's society are so deep that they even extend to the publicly questioned plausibility of Oagun's Star Wars schemes. We think this is illustrative of the point that science is being increasingly harnessed to production for war and destruction. Any move that promotes questioning of this direction is definitely needed, just as ongoing debate is needed about the nature of science itself.

In this respect, we are left puzzled over what is called "the idea in science." What is this? Does science have an idea that is unique unto itself? If it means the search after "truth" didn't science as a branch of knowledge long ago adopt a restricted notion that left human activity, thought and experience out of its subject of inquiry? It can't mean a "freedom idea" because it is said that history and its process cannot be confused with science and its process. If it means science as the practice of observing and experimenting to find objective "facts" in the world outside of human activities, then this is only scientific method at its worst.

We are surprised at references that bring in the word feminism, implying that the meaning of the feminist dimension would actually transform science into something it is not now.

Some call for an "emancipatory epistemology," to which they think they're making a contribution. In fact, Sandra Harding's book, The Science Question in feminism, ends by saying, "I doubt that in our wildest dreams we ever imagined we would have to reinvent both science and theorizing itself in order to make sense of women's social experience." Therein lies the difficulty of the problem - her vantage point (and that of those who think like her), as well as their point of return - is epistemology (i.e., their school of thought). Rather than seeing the revolutionary movements of the masses as the upholders of these false academic disciplines, they look upon each one, science especially, as if it were itself a universal.

The best part of Harding's book is her discussion of the origins of modern science and how they were rooted in the transformation of economic, political, and social relations. She says that modern science was inseparable from broad movements for social change until the defeat of the Puritan Revolution in 1660. The official scientific societies that were formed, in order to be allowed to exist, compromised, i.e., it was then that they stated their "value-neutral" objective that has been the myth of science since. What she and others of the same mentality fail to see is that that precisely is the false consciousness of all bourgeois intellectuals. Their ideology claims objectivity.
to be "value-free" just because they recognize, correctly we might add, complete identity between their capitalist view and that of the intellectual.

The false consciousness ignores the fundamental division of society into two classes and is blind to the difference between the workers' attitude and the intellectuals' view. This can especially be seen on the question of automation, when movement, labor bureaucrat, scientist and engineer all hail it as progress, while the worker experiences its dehumanizing effects. The intellectuals are blind to the positive creativity in workers' opposition.

The dialectic process is a 'dangerous' one because it causes the unity of two forces in such violent contradiction that they must eventually break apart. While it is impossible to unite worker and capitalist, the unity of worker and intellectual is not impossible, provided that the future that is within the workers' bones - that is to say, the new society established in the old - breaks out as a social revolution that unites mental and manual, science and labor within the individual. The intellectual must therefore gain a new set of ears, not to aim at the generalization, but to hear the concrete.

"We keep wishing that more people would 'hear the concrete' and see the dialectic (logic) of the relationship between scientific discovery and mass upheaval, but they don't, except to state in the abstract that science changes when social conditions change in history. Some give the impression that they relate the modern woman's liberation movement to the civil rights movement and anti-war movements, but they don't. Mass movements are absent in their understanding; instead of total social revolution, what they are rooted in is competition between theories.

We keep thinking of how everything seems so compartmentalized. Isn't the logic of socialist liberation at one with life and labor already? Isn't the task of the theorist to make it plain and clear? Isn't it the truth uniting both physical materialism and the philosophy of idealism? That to us is the key. The fact that the very word "science" has left so revolutionary an imprint on the mind of humanity has meant that whenever a totality of concepts/facts is reached, people just give credit to the word "science". Isn't it true that this is exactly the illusion that is being questioned because we are living in a nuclear world?

Crista and Tom Johncock
Discussion Bulletin
PO Box 40400
San Francisco, CA 94140
July 23, 1987

Dear DB:

Bekken's letter (DB 24) on my remarks about "consumption credits" shows several confusions:

(1) He says my arguments "show not the slightest familiarity with ...the concrete measures that our [anarcho-syndicalist] comrades have implemented in the past."

The implication of Jon's words is that there is some time and place in the past when anarcho-syndicalists have "implemented" free sharing, without market relations or rationing systems. Well, where did this ever happen, Jon? The closest example, perhaps, were the rural communities in Spain in the '30s that tried to implement their own small-scale brand of "libertarian communism." While it is true that they abolished use of the government's money in their small towns, they usually substituted some form of script or a rationing book. (This means some of the functions of money were still in place; see below.)

If we look at the industrial collectives in Spain in the '30s, we will find that they continued to operate as independent enterprises in a market economy. They did so, not because that was their original goal; it was considered a temporary "stop-gap" at the time. Their program was libertarian communism but its construction would have required that the society's production and consumption be integrated into a single democratic organism. They were unable to achieve that because of the inability or unwillingness of the CNT to overthrow the Spanish government. (See the discussion in *Ideas & Action* #7.)

I do not mention this to justify a market economy, but to point out that a person who looks at "the concrete measures" that anarcho-syndicalists "have implemented in the past" might get the false impression that anarcho-syndicalism advocates a market economy. However, I believe that this "market collectivism" of Spain in the '30s is not a positive model to be emulated, but a mistake to be avoided.

(2) The "consumption credit" system that I briefly described in the last DB was motivated by a desire to solve certain problems of traditional libertarian communism while avoiding a market economy. Jon denies that any problems exist in the traditional free sharing scheme, but snide remarks do not constitute a proof of this.

The system that I sketched was not a "market" system for several reasons:

(a) There was no necessary requirement of having worked in order to secure consumption credits. I purposely left that an open
question. I pointed out that there was no assumption that one's consumption credits were supposed to measure one's labor contribution.

(b) Consumption credits cannot be used to acquire means of production. They can be used only to acquire consumer goods and services. If the means of production can be said to be "owned" by anyone under libertarian communism, they are "owned" by the society as a whole. This is reflected in the fact that the major guiding decisions for the economy are made through conventions representing the whole workforce.

(c) Consumption credits are non-transferrable. In other words, if you have a certain number of consumption credits, those are for your consumption, they are not a generalized medium of exchange.

(d) There is no requirement that production facilities must balance their inputs with the consumer credits used to acquire their products. In other words, I am not assuming that there are separate enterprises that have "revenue" and "expenses". The consumption credits are not "revenue" that can then be spent by production organizations for inputs.

(e) I did not say that the whole economy should be regulated by consumption credits but only consumer goods and services. That is, areas where there are differences of taste and opinion that need to be measured. The idea of consumption credits is a kind of proportional vote on what to produce.

In areas like clothes and food and magazines and music there are inevitable differences of taste and opinions that must be accounted for. If everything had to be approved by a general assembly, as Bekken says, then I think it is very possible that various minorities in the community are likely to be overlooked. For example, if the workers convention must approve all production requests, would any jazz records be produced? Would there be any Asiatic specialties in the grocery distribution centers?

On the other hand, I do think there are areas where these differences of taste and opinion are not operative. A good example are the various public utilities, or the public transit system. Water is water, electricity is electricity. Thus, I believe that free sharing would work in these areas. That's why I also advocate a large "free sector", which might include such industries as water, gas, electricity, telephone, transit, health care, housing and others.

The only cogent argument I've heard against free sharing for public utilities is that this might lead to waste. However, if that were to happen, the local workers convention in that community could decide to set a maximum limit and impose a penalty (in consumption credits) if someone uses more than that limit. But there would be no point to using consumption credits for normal consumption.
The boundary between the free sector and the consumption credit sector could not be set in a hard-and-fast way because this is something that would have to be determined in practice and could be experimented with. It is possible that over time more and more areas might be added to the free sector, and society would then more completely approach the traditional concept of libertarian communism. But to what extent a libertarian communist society would tend to evolve in that direction is not something that could be predicted in advance, I believe.

(3) If Jon thinks that "scarcity and a labor shortage" will not exist in libertarian communism, then he has not thought through the consequences of such a system. The logic of libertarian communism precludes a "reserve army of unemployed."

Under capitalism the addition of more workers in a facility is a cost and no single employer is responsible for the maintenance of people other than those he employs; therefore the logic of the system leads to replacement of people by capital and accumulation of a pool of unemployed.

But under libertarian communism, putting as many as possible to work would be advantageous to those already working since it would enable a shortening of the time they have to work to produce the social product. Thus, a functioning system of libertarian communism would tend to already have full employment. This means production of a particular good X could only be expanded in one of three ways:

a) an innovation that improves labor productivity
b) producing less of Y so that former Y-producers now can go to work producing X
c) lengthen the workweek.

The laws of nature tell us that a person cannot be in two totally separate places during the same finite stretch of time. Hence, if a person is working in a VCR factory at a given time, that same person cannot also be working across town in a camera factory at that time. Given a certain level of social productivity, and a given average workweek, increases in the production of certain goods will necessarily entail a decrease in the production of other things. Again, I'm assuming that there is not a pool of unemployed who can be brought in to increase production.

Even if we do not assume that the production of material goods is increasing, the situation will be the same. Free time versus increased production of material goods is itself a trade-off that the community would need to decide upon, presumably through the workers assemblies and conventions. The community might decide in favor of less material goods and more free time...but that would not help Jon out because there would still be full employment...the workweek would simply be shorter.

In order to avoid systematic and massive misallocations of time and resources, it is essential to have a system of libertarian
communism that can automatically register not merely that people want X, Y, Z... etc. produced but also their relative preferences. Jon thinks it is obvious that it is more important to produce shoes than cameras. But how is this information to be automatically rendered effective in the workings of the economy? It might not be "obvious" to people working in a camera factory that they should disrupt their lives by moving to some other line of work.

Under capitalism the workforce is moved from one line of work to another in a rather brutal process; people are laid off in areas that are declining and left to fend for themselves. They lose their livelihood and are thus forced to seek out whatever other work they can find. Employers are forced to lay people off if sales are declining; it's a question of that or bankruptcy. In libertarian communism there must also be a means of moving workers from a line of work less in importance to the populace to lines of work now more in demand. But how is this to be accomplished?

Jon says decisions about what to produce are to be made by general assemblies. To some extent this is correct, and I agree with him. I think the periodic conventions of the workforce would make very basic decisions, such as deciding on the balance between work and free time (which determines overall production capacity), general levels of service in the free sector, and setting general guidelines for the economy as a whole, such as "Increase allocation of workers in health care by 5%" or "Build 7% fewer houses in the coming year."

But obviously we're only talking about slower, long-term changes in production here, and the overall conditions and division of labor. But there are just too many daily decisions about production that would have to be made in order to have all trade-offs decided through assemblies. Comparing cameras and shoes is easy enough, but there are literally millions of comparisons that would have to be made -- it's just not practicable to do this through general assemblies. And, as I pointed out, making all decisions about production in general conventions would bias production of consumer goods in favor of the most popular types of production and away from the special needs and tastes of various minorities.

(4) Jon says "There is no reason why, under conditions of free distribution, you cannot keep track of social needs and desires through a combination of keeping track of what is taken off the shelves and asking people in periodic general assemblies what goods and services they'd like to see produced."

But this misses the point because it doesn't answer the problem. The issue is not just what things people want produced, but rankings of importance among these items. When Jon says shoes are obviously more important than cameras, he is implicitly recognizing the sort of information I am talking about. But just from the fact that items are disappearing from the shelves it is not possible to know how people would rank these items in importance. In the logic of a free sharing
system all items are equally important, and that is exactly the problem. We cannot convocate a convention of the community's workforce to decide every relative ranking among all possible goods and services -- that is not an effective solution for the problem.

(5) Since Jon says consumption credits are "money", it is perhaps worth considering what "money" is. Money is a medium of exchange in a commodity economy. In other words, you must have a society in which the various production organizations have private ownership -- exclusive control of use -- of its product. This private ownership of the product is necessary in order to attach a price to something, that is, in order to force others to provide something of value to the producing organization in order to get the product. The accumulation of market value thus becomes an end in itself, and the dominant end, in such an economy. Typically such societies also have private ownership of the means of production (though that is not essential: look at Yugoslavia). Money is "capital" to the extent that it comes to be used to hire wage-labor to produce commodities for sale in order to make more capital.

Money, thus, has many functions in a capitalist economy. Most of these functions would not exist in the version of libertarian communism that I have sketched. Most important of all, it is not a commodity economy: neither the means of production nor the product is "owned" by the production organization but by the whole society. The society provides consumption credits to its own members in order to determine what balance of different goods to produce. Insofar as this information is used to move production work from one area of the consumer goods sector to another, it is performing one of the functions of money under the present system. But from the fact that consumption credits would perform one of the functions currently performed by money, it does not follow that they are money.

Notice, for example, that one difference between consumption credits and money is that consumption credits don't regulate the allocation of labor time in general but only within the consumer goods sector. Moreover, this "regulation" is not mediated by competition and market coercion. The workers' organizations would be able to make a more effective set of decisions -- thus leading to less waste and fewer shortages -- because they would have more accurate information about relative preferences among the populace.

However, if consumption credits are going to be effective as a means of efficient allocation of production resources and work time, the relative amounts of credits required for the various consumer goods should mirror their relative social costs. And here we have another divergence from a commodity economy: In a commodity economy, money prices do not measure social costs but only market costs to the production enterprise.

Total labor time is perhaps the most important factor in determining the social cost but it is not the only factor. The impact upon the planet's ecology and depletion of natural resources also must be factored in.
Let's take an analogy. Management under capitalism performs a variety of functions. In addition to the discipline that reflects class oppression, they also do work of coordination. Such work of coordination also must exist in any other industrial economy. But from the fact that coordination is necessary under libertarian communism, it doesn't follow that bosses are necessary. On the contrary, this work of coordination would be arranged by workers themselves, including decisions in assemblies, departmental committees, election of delegates to industry coordinating bodies, and so on.

Likewise, from the fact that one of the functions of money survives in consumption credits, it does not follow that they are "money." To show that they are money, it would be necessary to show that they would inevitably function in the same way as money. And this Bekken doesn't do.

Furthermore, Bekken's preferred scheme of free sharing is not going to eliminate all the functions of money either. Why? Because it would be necessary to establish a system of rationing under that system, as Isaac Puente acknowledged. The ration book implemented by the anarcho-syndicalist collectives of rural Aragon is an example of this idea put into practice. And, as Bertrand Russell cogently argued in "Roads to Freedom," rationing performs one of the functions of money, that is, the function of limiting demand to the available supply.

Rationing is a relevant comparison because the consumption credits system is functionally a type of rationing system.

One last comment: I would agree with Jon Bekken and Adam Buick that an unqualified free sharing system (as opposed to the modified free sharing system I've defended up to now) would be preferable... if it could be shown to be feasible. But this requires that a plausible solution be provided to the main problems of the free sharing system, such as the "freeloader" problem and the problem of information about relative preferences among consumer goods and services. Neither Jon nor Adam have provided the necessary solutions.

-- R. Laubach
REPLY TO H. ARBEITER

Dear Comrades;

There have been many occasions I have thought the DB is proving futile. Everyone who writes for it seems absolutely convinced of the correctness of their own views. The worst thing though is that with the exception of comrade F. Girard and a few other comrades the participants do not really read or understand the point of view of the other writers. Such was the case with comrade Hungrig Arbeiter in DB 24.

But before debating H. Arbeiter, I would like to endorse what comrade Girard said about H. Arbeiter quoting Daniel De Leon out of context as regards the leadership role of the socialist party.

In issue 23, I clearly said there was no need for a revolutionary socialist party to inscribe immediate demands. The use of immediate demands in a socialist platform was my objection to H. Arbeiter's earlier article. Apparently, H. Arbeiter had missed this point.

I did not, as H. Arbeiter seems to think, overlook the legitimate temporal demands of our class. Arbeiter missed my point that when the revolution arrives it will encompass all of the legitimate grievances the workers have against capitalism. In deed, I support those demands that lead to direct conflict with the ruling class. I think, however, that socialists need to be careful in supporting worker's grievances because what some workers may see as legitimate grievances only divide the workers.

Where I differ from H. Arbeiter is that I do not wish to enshrine such demands. H. Arbeiter may reply that he does not propose enshrining such demands such as adequate housing and an end to war but that is precisely what I see as happening if socialists propose immediate demands.

Numerous "socialist" and "communist" parties have enshrined reformist demands in their platforms for many years and they are no closer to their proclaimed goal of socialism. In point of fact, these parties have become blatant opportunists who have no intention of destroying wage slavery. This was what I meant by the SWP trying to "lead the workers by the nose."

The point I was trying to make and H. Arbeiter did not care to observe was that once one is set on the course of revolution one does not ask for reforms of the existing system. When our forefathers had decided to forgo all relations with England they did not list any immediate demands. They did not say something like "Hey, King George, we colonists have been bled dry by your damn import taxes, the quartering of your army in our homes... etc. We ask that you find another means of quartering your army and lessen the tax burden on us poor colonists."
The American colonists did not come to the point of breaking with England until after many attempts at reconciliation. They were "feeling their way towards a revolution without realizing that a revolution would be the ultimate outcome of their endeavors. But once the reluctant revolutionaries concluded there could be no reapprochement with England they did not repeat their grievances as demands for King George to satisfy. They stated their intention was nothing short of independence. Just think if the Declaration of Independence had enumerated the demands of the colonists. We would not have had a "Declaration of Independence" but a "declaration of demands" which is not a revolutionary goal.

A genuine socialist party does not exclude participating in the everyday struggles of the workers. The intent of our participation is to support the working class and present our socialist ideas. Participating in issues oriented movements does not mean that we need to enshrine such demands as though these were the tablets that the supreme deity handed to Moses in the Bible.

As I believe H. Arbeiter is sincere in wishing to liberate our class from wage slavery, I welcome H. Arbeiter to endorse my view there is only one goal, socialism, and drop his insistence on adding a list of immediate demands to our own "declaration of independence" from capitalism.

Thunder