

flux



*A magazine of
libertarian socialism*

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flux

A Magazine of Libertarian Socialism
Issue 5
October 1992

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ATTENTION!

Please note that Part 3 of our series on Psychology and Politics, 'Understanding the Irrational' has been postponed until Issue 6.

Editorial

"MAASTRICHT". The two-syllable word which is pronounced by the media according to how much their government wants it. At the moment it's all looking a shambles. Which is interesting in itself.

Less than two years ago '1992 and All That' was spoken of by the media, the business world, and the politicians as reality waiting to happen, an irresistible development we could only watch on tv.

But now the illusion of national and international harmonisation is turning to sand. At every level.

In the U.S. (that political and economic dictator of advanced capitalism), Los Angeles erupted into riots and looting far better than in the sixties, totally confounding the authorities.

Meanwhile in Eastern Europe, the economic miracles offered by Thatcher and Kohl have led to mass unemployment and political chaos. Moderate and extreme brands of nationalism have arisen as populist handholds for the many dispossessed, trying to hang onto meaning and certainty in a complex, treacherous environment.

In Western Europe, economic union is also becoming a farce. France holds a referendum on Maastricht for ulterior political reasons, which nearly ruins the entire show. Italian civil servants take to the streets, initiating riots not seen since the seventies. The social democratic fantasy, known as Sweden, slashes welfare spending.

And what of Britain? Well, the cacophony of gaffes and "economic indicators" would fill this magazine. But what we can see overall is the total inability of the state to determine development when it comes to the crunch. The government was forced out of the Exchange Rate Mechanism because the city decided it: the amount of money the Bank of England ploughed in to stop it was peanuts compared with what the speculators could buy and sell. On the night of Black Wednesday(sic.) the wine bars were awash with the flushed and gloating paunches of city slickers boasting about their fat commissions. They have learnt how to exploit the fragility of the seemingly fixed.

By the by, the news from China is that Marx speculated on the London Stock Exchange. So opening the Shanghai Stock Exchange is entirely compatible with revolutionary communism. Good news for designer socialists everywhere, wondering how to make a bit of money to enhance their Next wardrobes. Unfortunately for China, the ordinary Chinese peasant was not as genteel as expected: the riotous clamouring for a crumb of the cake caused a rapid closure and hasty retreat.

Descending from central government to local government, we turn to the collapse of Municipal Mutual Insurance, founded 1906. There is some gratification to learn of the economic incompetence of speculators themselves. But the real embarrassment lies with local authorities: Exeter City Council, for example, forced to take its bin lorries off the road, and to close swimming pools. One of the factors in the downfall of MMI is large payouts for the "pin down" scandal in Staffordshire. Make sure to tell your kids not to talk to smiling strangers wearing name badges!

Here in Nottinghamshire, the local papers are full of stories of imminent pit closures. The Union of Democratic Miners have gone, filofax in hand, to the government. The scabs gave really come home to roost - but have been declared homeless.

We don't have to talk about 'end of the millennium' calamity, to recognise that we're all in a bad state. The Catholic Church are going evangelical in order to soak up the growing army of casualties. But the 'everyone for themselves' crisis of capitalism is both a moment of threat and a moment of opportunity. It is an explosive situation, in which the facade of stability and measured strategy becomes laughable for more and more people. And it is a moment in which the value of collective struggle could arise more forcibly.

One thing is certain, though. Once a state, always in a state!

TRAVELLERS

flux asked our local Free Information Network (Nottfin) to write us an article on travellers. For whatever reason the article did not arrive - so, after nights of panic, we thought we would let you have our musings on the subject.

It has to be said that no member of the flux collective is a traveller thus our deliberations are not directly related to any of our own experiences. Of course not being something has not deterred us from commenting on anything before (and why should it?). We remain, as ever, sensitive to our position of outsiders looking in.

TRAVELLERS have been criticised by almost everyone. The media have latched onto dead sheep and hungry children; locals have complained of weekend raves and ecstasy for all and the left have taken the predictable stance of defining them as misguided and wasted in their politics.

How and why have they provoked such a big response? Dead animals are not something we are unused to (perhaps it is more comforting to have sheep killed indoors by humans than outdoors by dogs); deschooled children are fairly commonplace (maybe it is preferable to have one's child expelled from school than to decide you can do better yourself); and dancing in open fields is not the most anti-social of activities. What is all the fuss?

Cumulatively the actions of travellers are a thorn in the side of the state. They always have been. The Poor Law Acts and the Vagrancy Laws before them are keen to control and punish those wandering without visible means of support. The ground has already been prepared for state distrust and castigation. A 1536 Act dealt with the "sturdy beggar" (roaming from parish to parish) by the following means: "...whipped the first time, his right ear cropped the second time, and if he again offend, to be sent to the next gaol....and if convicted, shall suffer execution as a felon and an enemy of the commonwealth" (Parry et al cited in Corrigan and Corrigan, 1979, 5). The more sophisticated response of the

advanced capitalist state is to threaten withdrawal of social security benefits and to smash windscreens with truncheons. What gains Gypsies may have won from welfare capitalism (for example, the 1968 Caravan Sites Act obliged local authorities to provide adequate accommodation for Gypsies in, or coming, to their area) are also to fall prey to a government hell bent on pursuing policies of retrenchment. Undoubtedly the state is committed not only to controlling the masses of dreadlocked youth, but so too will it worsen the life of Gypsies - a group of people who have never fitted in. This summer possibly just hastened the process and caused an immediate irritation to be dealt with.

People who reject the stationary way of life are defying an imposed way of being and in this sense should be

commended. However one has to acknowledge that travellers are generally young, healthy and free from economic or familial ties. Travelling is not an option open to everyone. But this is not a strong criticism in itself - do travellers advocate that we should all pack up our troubles and move on? We doubt it. Some travellers might proffer their lifestyle as being preferable to, and perhaps more politically acceptable than, living in decrepid and decaying inner-cities. For those of us battling through dog shit on our way to some meeting the thought of sitting round a campfire might have some resonance. Mostly though this romanticism causes great dispute and concern within the left. There is a current which complains bitterly that travellers are not only opting out of the drudgery of daily life but that they are also neglecting their potential to change things. There can be many reasons for arriving at this viewpoint. Firstly, many people on the left simply find the travelling way of life not their cup of tea. Travellers look funny, have unusual beliefs and don't read Marx (some might). The ascetism of the left allows three pints a night and nothing more, perhaps a jumper from Next. Revolution is serious business. This personal preference rejection we believe has been well hidden and denied by the left. Secondly there is the real problem facing all revolutionaries of the growing emergence of disparate "social movements". This fits in with the confused notion that anything anyone does is political. These new definitions appear to make the possibility of collective struggle even more improbable. Certainly there is a shift away from workplace organisation and travellers fit in with this



From NOTTFIN, The Rainbow Centre, 180 Mansfield Road, Nottingham

abandonment. Thus we do hear travellers proclaiming that they are politically engaging and challenging. This is hard to swallow if you have been a shop steward for twenty years.

It is difficult to see the radical potential of throwing rune stones and dancing in circles and, in a sense, any critique of travellers includes an analysis of the politics of New Ageism. But travellers should have our support and interest - for two important reasons. Travellers are emblematic of an alternative way of living in communities. There are many reasons why people go on the road and the effects of mass youth unemployment, the removal

"For those of us battling through dog shit on our way to some meeting the thought of sitting round a campfire might have some resonance."

of benefit rights to 16 and 17 year olds and chronic housing shortages should not be minimised. If you haven't got a home then travelling is a better option to sleeping in some shop doorway. Whilst travellers are marginalised from mainstream society and legitimate political processes, we also have to bear in mind that radical left politics has not put the brakes on their travels (not that we're saying we should). Here we need to examine seriously the way we organise - both in our communities and at work.

The attacks from the state demand response. The Battle of the Beanfield was an outrageous and hideous example of state barbarism. Lessons have possibly been learnt and the forthcoming charge will necessarily be more subtle but prolonged. Not only has this potential in terms of travellers organising on the offensive but so too does it give us the opportunity to ally ourselves with the travellers. We should not ignore their struggles as they are most certainly part of our own.

PHILIP & VAL CORRIGAN "SOCIAL WORK, WELFARE AND THE STATE" (1979)

The FLUX Collective

F A S C I S M

Anti-fascism has become the cause of the moment for the left, with most of us being enthusiastically sucked along. And why not? Fascism is a 'bad thing', wherever you stand on the left. Yet, there has been a noticeable absence of any real discussion of the precise nature and extent of this resurgent fascist threat. Discussion has by and large been confined to the listing of incidents involving fascist groups, the reiteration of the experience of the 20's and 30's and some sectarian point scoring over the precise history of the ANL.

So, why is Fascism on the agenda?

- * the rise of nationalism across Eastern Europe, with 'ethnic cleansing' in Yugoslavia and anti-Gypsy pogroms in Romania.
- * nationalist agitation in Western Europe, with Le Pen in France, the Republikaner Party in Germany, the Lombardy League and the MSI in Italy.
- * race emerging as a central theme of European integration; with collaboration over 'immigration' policies at a European level, the Asylum Bill in Britain and the former French premier Edith Cresson's threat to send refugees 'home' by plane.
- * ironically, the instability of the process of European integration bringing out deeply held nationalist sentiments at all levels, from the populist 'Up Yours Delors' to the scrap between the Bundesbank and the Bank of England over Britain's withdrawal from the ERM.
- * the higher, and very ugly, profile of fascist groups across Europe, especially in Germany. Rostock was merely the most 'newsworthy' of a number of similar attacks on refugee hostels.
- * the rise of racist violence here in Britain. 15 year old Rolan Adams was only one of a number of black people murdered by racist gangs.
- * definite parallels with the inter-war years. The economic recession, with the insecurity that it implies, is only the most obvious. Political disenchantment and abstention, the lack of faith that 'anyone can do anything' makes the 'simple truths' of extreme nationalism all the more attractive. In the 20's fascists were influenced by Spengler's writings on the collapse of European culture. Today, those professors who argue the 'end of history' endorse a general pessimism which similarly begs for 'men of action'.

In all this we see the disparate themes and fears which have crystallised together as fascism: nationalism, racism, anti-establishment populism, middle class fear, unemployment, resentment, feelings of exclusion, frustrated desire for community and belonging.

It all looks terribly bleak. And yet there are grounds to question whether British fascists pose any kind of general threat.

- * in Britain there has always been support for racist politics, especially in parts of East London. The BNP scoring over a thousand votes in the general election in two constituencies is not unprecedented. Likewise, there has always been a tradition of organised racist violence in this country, again largely concentrated in areas of East London.
- * in its heyday the National Front had a momentary peak of 17,500 members. By contrast the British Union of Fascists peaked at 50,000, and at the outbreak of WW2 had over 20,000 members. The BNP today is extremely small even by comparison to the NF in the 70's.
- * the NF was an alliance of populist racists, whose natural home was the

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Tory Party, with fascist currents. When Thatcher stole the racist highground support for the NF collapsed. Why be a nazi if you can be a racist and respectable? The main impetus to the growth of the NF was the immigration issue. With the almost total curtailment of immigration via tight (racist) legislation this issue is unlikely to have such pulling power for the far right - despite clear attempts being made on their part.

* it is impermissible to draw simple conclusions from other countries. Whilst global pressures cross over state boundaries, how they come to fruition in any context will vary. The histories of European capitalism are not identical. Le Pen stands in a tradition of authoritarian French politics going back through the 50's with Poujadist movement to Action Francaise in the 20's and beyond. The 'national' question has always been particularly sharp in Germany, since unification in the 1880's. Eastern European nationalism is a response to the end of the

'communist internationalism' brought in by Soviet tanks. To say that the situation here (and elsewhere) is 'different' is not to deny that nationalism, racism, economic crisis etc. etc. are not fundamental issues here. It is to say that they don't work in precisely the same way.

* the fascist movements of the 30's drew much of

the inspiration from anti-communism. They were mass movements, supported by big business, to combat mass movements. Today the threat to the system doesn't come from communism so much as from confusion! And why, given the globally enmeshed concerns of the bosses, would they support such virulently nationalistic movements?

So, where does this take us? The activity of the fascist groupings are a potent expression of all the various pressures described above. However, these pressures do not necessarily add up to the growth of a fascist **movement** as such. At least in Britain there are a number of good reasons why we should be very cautious about this conclusion.

A main failing of much of the current discussion of fascism, is the tendency to see fascism in terms of a distillation of the Italian and German experiences of the 30's.

This leads us to impose an undeserved coherence on what was and is an incoherent and unstable phenomena; perhaps more a mythology than an ideology. Fascism has been an 'all things to all' politics (anti-Working Class for the bosses; anti-establishment for the lower middle class; populist for the workers; reactionary for the establishment; revolutionary for the 'idealist'). It tries to overcome social divisions through authoritarian nationalism and racism.

More importantly, it leaves us mesmerised by the organisation, the 'ideology' and the historical prototypes, particularly nazism. Thus, in Britain 'anti-fascism' has a tendency to become fixated by the BNP, Blood and Honour and David Irving's 'hysterical revisionism'.

Fascism should rather be viewed less concretely; as a coming together of forces deeply part of capitalist society. A particular coming together, which on particular occasions has generated a movement capable of winning state power. However, if fascism is one way in which these forces come together it is not the only, and certainly not the most likely, way.

In Germany and Italy in the 30's fascism controlled state power. But in Britain



THE KEN WELLER INTERVIEW

Ken Weller was a founder member of the libertarian socialist group Solidarity. Throughout the 60's and 70's Solidarity was a major voice of the new left advocating a socialism of workers' self management and autonomy. It continues today, though in much reduced form. Ken Weller discusses libertarian socialism and contrasts it with the traditional socialism of Leninism and Social Democratic reformism. What unites these two he argues is their conception of the working class as potential clients rather than as a class capable of taking power on its own behalf. This ideology found expression in many places from Soviet State Capitalism to the bureaucratic local 'Socialist' governments. The net result is that the 'left' has become marginalised from the class it claims to represent.

We would fully endorse the spirit of what Ken has to say, even if there are points over which we would want disagree. However, as we don't really agree precisely what these points are, we'll leave that for next time....

FLUX: Solidarity always called itself 'libertarian socialist', but this probably doesn't mean a lot to most people. So, can you say what you mean by libertarian socialist?

KEN: We didn't think the term counted for anything in itself. We tended to use it to stress the anti-statist side of our politics. We believed that the working class should directly control society and rule their own lives, and that therefore they should directly control their own struggles. So we tended to use 'libertarian' socialist to distinguish ourselves from 'authoritarian' state socialism - in all its forms, from the Leninist left to the social-democratic right.

FLUX: A critique of what you called the traditional left was always central to Solidarity's politics.

KEN: We argued that the traditional left do share a number of fundamental attitudes. Although I'm not making an amalgam because there are many differences. But basically there was the question of achieving state power: Leninists said you seized state power and reformists said you did it by permeating the existing system.

And with this there was the central role of the political elite. With Leninism it was the vanguard party, where the only real discussions take place and where

decisions are taken on behalf of the working class. Often the working class didn't even know that the party existed! But its not only Leninism, it's there on the right too. There's a statist tradition where socialism has meant bureaucratic, managerial elites. One of the forgotten books by the Webbs* was a handbook for works managers!

FLUX: Of course, a Leninist would suggest a rather different picture...

KEN: Leninists have said many things. So has the Labour Party. And so have the Tories, but what *they* do is not the same as what they write in their manifestos. We have to find the real ideas behind the rhetoric. The whole thesis of Lenin, from 'What Is To Be Done' through all his serious writings on the structure of the party and the management of the Soviet economy is that what counted was the elite. For example, in the 'Tasks



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of the Soviet Government' you have the introduction of one-man management, the complete subordination of the worker to the Soviet manager, the introduction of piece rates and so on.

And it's there in Trotsky's Transitional Programme' too. This is based on the idea that you put forward demands which can't be achieved under capitalism. And that although ordinary people won't know this, they'll still fight for these demands. So, you'll achieve socialism without the people who carry out the struggle really knowing what's going on!

I'll give you an example of all this. Years ago in Fords we had a Shop Stewards committee controlled by the Communist Party, under a man called Sid Harroway. They called for a one-day strike in support of the nurses and called for a meeting of the body group at Dagenham. They said that South Wales and Halewood had both voted to take action and that we should support them. I was in favour of this. Later we found out that none of

the other places had even had meetings! The thing was to go to the most militant place first and tell them the others had voted to strike. After, you'd go to the other places and tell them about the vote and then get these places to support it. What's it all about? Lying and manipulation! And it flows from an ideology which says that it doesn't matter whether workers understand or not. If they do the right thing - it's enough!

There are deep roots here. Seeing the working class as actual or potential clients. Saying the working class needs this elite. And all sorts of things flow from this attitude. If you have an elite it has to live and it needs privileges because, for example, it can't spend all its time in bread queues. And there you have the origins of the self-interested bureaucracy we saw in the Soviet Union.

And when you have people living off other people in this way they have to justify this. And 'socialism' becomes the self-advocacy of an elite!

This is a complex process and there are many lines in the matrix. There was the whole process of bureaucratization in local government, where more and more focus went on administration and less and less on people. And where did this leave the 'left'? Defending the status quo, and a system that didn't work. And why? Because that's what the 'left' became, hanging onto the control of this apparatus out of self-interest. And take the old GLC. There you saw this sort of process of clientelisation at work.

There was this ideology which said 'create a Rainbow Alliance of women, ethnic groups and gays' and so on. Now this wasn't an alliance of women, ethnic minorities and gays but one between people who claimed to represent them - and who expected to be paid to do it - along with the politicians. Now these weren't people who had an interest in overcoming the divisions of society. Rather, you had hierarchies rooted in division which justified their positions by creating myths: all whites are racist, all men are sexist!

Listen to the discussions on this 'left'. And to the denial of free debate. "We won't permit you to talk about this - it's an ethnic question": "Only we're allowed to talk about this - it's a gender question". As I said, there's a whole matrix here. But what you saw corrupt bureaucracies! I'll give you an example. One of the Labour councillors around here came out publicly in support of the killing of Salmon Rushdie. What was that about? Unprincipled deals with minority religious

leaders where a councillor or two or a grant or two are exchanged for delivering a Labour vote!

FLUX: So, the role of socialists is not to be an elite in the Leninist - or in the social-democratic - sense. Then what is it?

KEN: There is a role for all kinds of people and all kinds of discussions, providing they take place in the open. But the role of organisations is not to be a

government in exile - that's one thing it's not!

There are a number of very important roles for groups. Open discussion, putting forward ideas, spreading information, putting people in touch with each other, creating links, helping in the presentation of ideas. Socialism won't happen spontaneously, there are all kinds of structures and networks involved.

But libertarian socialism means that the people involved will decide. And this is a complex thing because if they decide they won't necessarily decide in detail exactly what you want. All you can say is that the direction will generally be a positive one. It doesn't mean there won't be political argument. And you have to fight for what you think is right as well. But you never substitute yourself. It's not about gaining control.

One of the struggles Solidarity was involved in was the King's Hill struggle of homeless families*. I think this illustrates what I mean.

King's Hill was a hostel in Kent. The system was that husbands weren't allowed to stay in the hostel and after three months the family were evicted and the

Meaningful action, for revolutionaries, is whatever increases the confidence, the autonomy, the initiative, the participation, the solidarity, the equalitarian tendencies and the self-activity of the masses and whatever assists in their demystification. Sterile and harmful action is whatever reinforces the passivity of the masses, their apathy, their cynicism, their differentiation through hierarchy, their alienation, their reliance on others to do things for them and the degree to which they can therefore be manipulated by others - even by those allegedly acting on their behalf.

From the Solidarity Pamphlet As We See It

SOLIDARITY



A Journal of Libertarian Socialism. Number 30/31. Spring 1992

children taken into care. It wasn't that there was an accommodation problem - the place was never full and, in fact, the hostel was made up of self-contained flats. It was like the old workhouses. It was systematically made unpleasant to force people out. Now one day the place exploded and the husbands refused to leave.

People from Solidarity were involved in the struggle right from the start, along with other unattached socialists. Now, people are products of their society - especially people in difficult circumstances - and there was this feeling that they couldn't do anything for themselves; that they had to manoeuvre other people into doing things for them and to shift responsibility. There was this tendency to say "You do it", but we said "No, we won't. You've got to do it for yourselves".

Now, they made lots of mistakes. People were fragmented. People were trying to inform on each other to save themselves if the struggle was lost. But as it continued you found people giving interviews on TV and to the press. They were managing the struggle themselves and in the process they became different people. Ultimately they won.

And this is what I mean by the role of an organisation. With the traditional left the organisation substitutes itself. Often people don't know what's going on. There are all kinds of caucuses and so on. In the end, if it's a victory no one's learnt anything positive, and if it's a defeat there's just a suspicion of being manipulated - and rightly so.

But there has been this attitude - and it's permeated great chunks of the left - that manipulation is OK. But if you manipulate you're making a very important political statement: that you have the authority and ordinary people don't.

FLUX: You came out of this 'traditional left'. Perhaps this is why the critique has been so central. Can you tell us something about this development?

KEN: Solidarity was formed in 1960, by people who came out of the SLL*. Before that some of us had been in the Communist Party but had left after Hungary 1956. Both the CP and even more so, the SLL were totalitarian

in their politics and organisation. There was never any real discussion allowed. So after we left, we started asking questions about the fundamental character of our politics.

We soon discovered that we weren't really Trotskyists, and later that we weren't Leninists. After much longer discussions we decided that we weren't really Marxists. We thought that whilst these things weren't all the same, nevertheless there were connections. In this we were influenced by the French paper 'Socialism or Barbarism'*.

FLUX: People might argue that your attitude towards Marxism was simply an expression of your experience of Leninism...

KEN: People do say that. Of course, there are many variations of Marxism and people are always rewriting Marx. All you can do is base yourself on what he said. I think he was a great man, who created a framework upon which much later discussion could take place. But despite his many valuable insights, on many central things he was wrong, the continual impoverishment of the working class for example. There are many examples. But a key thing in Marx is a vision of the working class as simply commodified labour power, and in this dehumanised conception of the working class you can see one of the roots of Leninist authoritarianism. There are other connections. If you read Marx and Engel's correspondence you'll see the justification for the way they acted in the First International. They describe how they lost control and so shipped it off to New York - basically to let it die. The classical justifications for many of the methods used in the Leninist movement are there.

But the point is Marx has to be treated as a human being and he hasn't been. He's been treated like a god, although people deny it. People have justified what they do simply by lifting quotes from Marx and so on! This isn't a rational way of looking at things.

FLUX: I think that one of the problems facing people trying to think through an alternative socialism is that

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the ground has been occupied by Leninism on the one hand, and the Labour Party on the other. Other traditions are not readily available...

KEN: That's right. When we came out of the SLL we were reading everything. We discovered a whole tradition of socialist critique of Leninism: Pannekoek and Gorter, Pankhurst, Kollontai's Workers Opposition within the Bolshevik Party, some of the Anarchists*. These were ideas that had effectively been suppressed.

But it wasn't just a question of socialist ideas, we found that the practical history of the working class movement had been distorted by the proponents of the dominant ideas.

Where do we start? Read stuff on the unemployed movement in Britain or the mutinies in World War 1. It's all been distorted in the most crass way!

Take Wal Hannington*. I could never work out why the unemployed movement reached its peak before the National Unemployed Workers Movement had really been formed. The NUWM was controlled by the CP, who were struggling for leadership of the unemployed movement nationally. And I'll give you an example which has completely been written out of history. One of the leaders of the unemployed movement in London between 1921 - 22 was a man called Gunnar Soderburg, a Scandinavian who'd been in the IWW*. In 1923 the CP sent a circular to their members telling them to pack a meeting of the London Unemployed Workers Groups and more or less telling them to get Soderburg out. The archives of the Kentish Town CP are available to us now. They alleged he was a police agent and so on. Hannington refers to this incident in his book without referring to Soderburg by name. Anyway it split the movement wide open with many of the active groups - for example, Poplar - breaking away. After that it went into decline. Hannington never mentions this.

The interesting thing is that when Hannington wrote his book he must have known that Soderburg was in the States, in Sing Sing, serving a 20 year jail sentence, for leading a major dock strike in New York!

Major episodes of the unemployed struggle were never described, and why? Because the CP - as it was in this case - had to be seen as the begetter of the movement!

Then there were the mutinies after World War 1, which involved hundreds of thousands and which effectively restricted Britain's ability to intervene in Ireland. Except for a few chapters they've gone undescribed. Why? Because they were autonomous movements of the working class. And although they involved all sorts of people from a socialist background, there was no party there to take the credit!

There's a subliminal line that everything needs to be tight and structured and under the control of the people who understand and so on. And so, there's a richness of history that has been completely suppressed!

What about the working class, has it disappeared as some say? And what should socialists be doing?

KEN: Something very important has happened. People have retreated, they feel isolated. They don't think they can influence the society around them. The industrial working class has got smaller and been modified. There are problems. The working class don't work in vast factories producing steel anymore, but in smaller factories, in service industries, in shops and so on. Factories employing thousands were easy, but there are alternatives.

But I don't think its that the working class has changed so much as the socialist movement has gone elsewhere. The working class has become completely alienated from the socialist movement. It's not only a question of the 'downturn in class struggle' - the classic argument. There is truth in this but it's not a recent phenomena. The seeds were already there in an ideology which didn't see the working class as the revolutionary class but as clients.

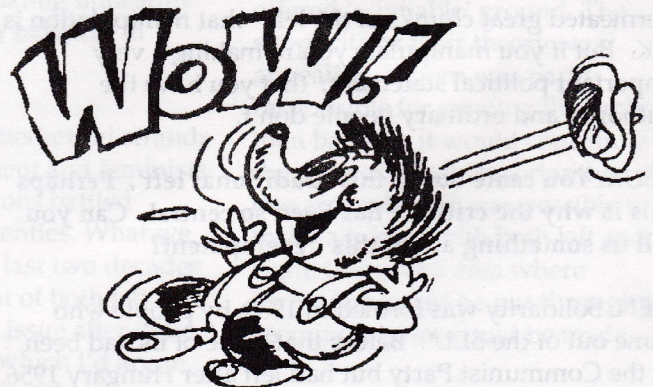
First of all socialists have got to reestablish contact with working people, taking their interests as determined by them as being important. There are many different tasks. Rearticulating the vision of socialism, documenting and criticising what went wrong. It's not a monolith, different groups of people can do different things.

You've also got to create an environment of free discussion going beyond political groups, and trying to create an environment - however small to begin with - which reflects the vision of the society you want.

NOTES

THE SOCIALIST LABOUR LEAGUE WAS THE FORERUNNER OF THE WORKERS' REVOLUTIONARY PARTY. THE 'KING HILL STRUGGLE' OCCURRED IN 1966 - IT WAS A KEY EVENT IN THE FORMATION OF THE SQUATTERS MOVEMENT. PANNEKOEK, GORTER AND SYLVIA PANKHURST WERE PART OF THE LEFT OPPOSITION TO LENIN. PANNEKOEK AND GORTER WERE CLOSELY ASSOCIATED WITH THE 'COUNCIL COMMUNIST' MOVEMENT. PANNEKOEK'S 'WORKERS' COUNCILS' IS PUBLISHED AS 4 PAMPHLETS BY ECHANGE ET MOUVEMENT, AND GORTER'S 'OPEN LETTER TO COMRADE LENIN' HAS BEEN REPRINTED BY WILDCAT. ALEXANDRA KOLLONTAI'S CRITIQUE OF THE BOLSHEVIK PARTY, 'THE WORKERS' OPPOSITION', WAS PUBLISHED BY SOLIDARITY. WAL HANNINGTON'S BOOK 'UNEMPLOYED STRUGGLES 1919 - 1936' IS PUBLISHED BY ROUTLEDGE KEGAN & PAUL. SOLIDARITY PRINTED THEIR OWN PAMPHLET ON 'MUTINEES: 1917 - 1920' BY DAVID LAMB.

John French



From the Solidarity Pamphlet, *As We Don't See It*

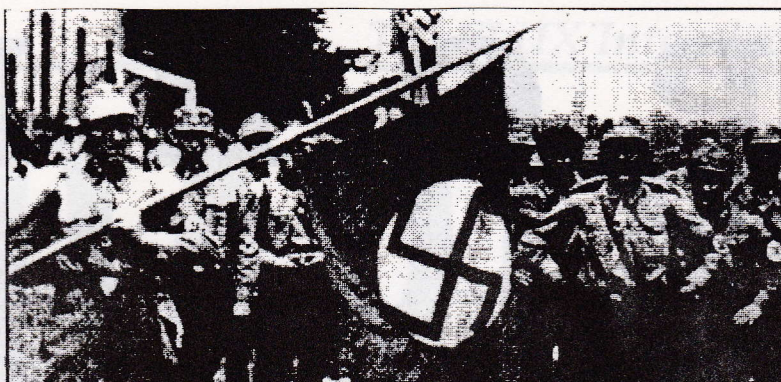
FLUX: Finally, I want to consider the situation now.

Mosley's Blackshirts were never a major political force. Why was this? Because in Britain the situation was different! Yet, in Britain there was anti-semitism, nationalism, despair, a defeated workers' movement and an economic crisis; and Oswald Mosley. Britain's 'national socialism' took the form of a national government of 'renegade' Labourites and Tories instead!

The last decade has seen a dramatic reactionary slide. State sponsored racism, homophobia, controls on movement and opinion, criminalisation of class struggle all attest to this. Around the state a plethora of organisations and ideas have taken advantage of and added to a climate of reaction: the so-called Freedom Association and Pro-Life Campaign, the Economic League, the Adam Smith Institute, evangelical Christianity and...the BNP.

Hypnotised by the overtly fascist, we become less aware of those 'fascist moments' which have become part of the web and weave of everyday ('democratic' capitalist) life. Missing all this fascism becomes seen as the unacceptable bogey on the fringes, and anti-fascism becomes simply a defence of liberal democracy.

Anti-fascism has to be part of an anti-capitalist struggle: not crassly, in the way that anything not completely opposed to wage labour is written off as 'counter



Is this really what we should be afraid of?

revolutionary'; or mechanically, in the way that fascism is seen as 'what the bosses do in crisis', but critically.

Perhaps there is a psychological dimension to all the anti-fascist zeal. Against fascism our self-understanding as socialists is reaffirmed; we are internationalists, the thin red line between barbarity and civilisation! Fighting fascism is easy because the lines are clear. It demands no awkward questions, such as why are we desperate for reaffirmation. There is also a tendency for anti-fascist confrontations to become 'gang confrontations' - squaddism.

None of this, however, is to suggest that there isn't a need for anti-fascist activity. It is a place in which people involved in different issues can meet (i.e. anti-racists, socialists, gay rights activists, etc.) Fascists do pose a particular threat as racists who murder black people, attack gays, beat up lefties. And as people who inject a potent but dangerous (even if incoherent), ideology into events. But anti-fascism alone is not enough.

Andy McLure

possible participation by their ordinary members...(ADN) is an international project which aims to produce some practical analysis of active democracy...(ADN) will aim to produce a series of self-contained pamphlets...(and) a bulletin which subscribers can use to conduct an ongoing debate..."

From the Introduction.

Spain has a rich tradition of democratic, participatory workers movements. However, 'mass assemblies' with mandated delegates have often been seen as a "magic formula which guarantees complete participation". This obscures problems such as "demogogy", "subtle forms of exploitation" and the fact that recallable delegates rarely are recalled. Through articles taken from the Spanish dockers' paper 'La Esteba' and elsewhere this pamphlet asks for a more honest and searching analysis of the problems and dilemmas of workers' democracy and collective representation.

FLUX

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P O R N . . .

IN A COUNTRY where women's benefits, jobs and very livelihoods are under attack it can appear baffling that only Sado-Masochism and pornography can bring forth an outraged response from what's left of the 'women's movement'. I think most feminists would agree that it seems almost impossible to say something new about either; the great pornography debate is usually framed in simplistic terms, either anti or pro censorship.

What I'd really like to do is take a look at the whole debate, as someone who was involved with the movement and who's always found it hard to understand or relate to many of the ideas that seemed common currency. I'd like to look at why there has been such a singleminded concentration on pornography and sexual violence in the women's movement and at where that concentration on sexual violence has taken us.

In the '60's and '70's feminism meant exploration and expression. Women began to assert their right to the same freedom as men and to explore their sexuality - to fantasize. Women rejected notions of themselves as non-sexual or passive and argued that it was not 'nature' which made them more gentle but on the contrary their upbringing. Unfortunately for many women this self-expression often appeared simply to play (literally) into the hands of men. Women were now sexually available, yet still not taken seriously by a male dominated left, for many women 'free love' was just a con in an unequal sexual marketplace. Women reacted

against both the sexism of the left and the 'heterosexual' sexual expression of the times.

Within left groups women argued that only in women-only space would they be able to understand their oppression and gain strength to fight for their rights within a mixed movement. Such a push created so many tensions within male dominated left groups that the result could only be dissension and eventually split as women left to join the ranks of an ever growing women-only movement. It was a movement that asserted the 'personal', the relevance of personal



The rallying call of the '60's and '70's

relations in perpetuating unhealthy and unequal power balances in society.

There were many theoretical strands in this new movement and feminists of various persuasions battled throughout the seventies. What we have seen over the last two decades however, is a defeat of both left and feminist groups on issue after issue, a history of defeat which I'd argue contributed to the fact that one

theoretical standpoint gained a stranglehold on the women's movement - Radical feminism.

In America we saw the loss of state funded abortion rights and with the election of Reagan the Equal Rights Amendment was defeated. For both left and feminist movements, with a growing recession and the increasing dominance of the right wing, it seemed that no battle was 'winnable'. It was in this context that the American writers Andrea Dworkin and Adrienne Rich began to gain the 'moral' high ground. As radical feminists they saw the oppression of women as fundamental in understanding an unequal society, but what was more important for Dworkin and Rich was the way in which male power was perpetuated. For them the defining feature of patriarchy was

violence, women were controlled by 'male violence', ultimately by rape. According to this analysis pornography was, in a sense, the 'training manual', depicting women as submissive, as passive victims, teaching men how to rape. Dworkin and Rich tapped into a rich vein of women's experience, into our experience of abuse in this society. This was in part their appeal but more than this they

offered 'winnable' ground. The simplicity of their theory was appealing, if porn was partly responsible for creating the problem, then banning it would contribute to the answer. Most importantly it was one area where it was possible to make alliances with both left and right, it was one area where legislation could be put through and seemingly gains could be made.

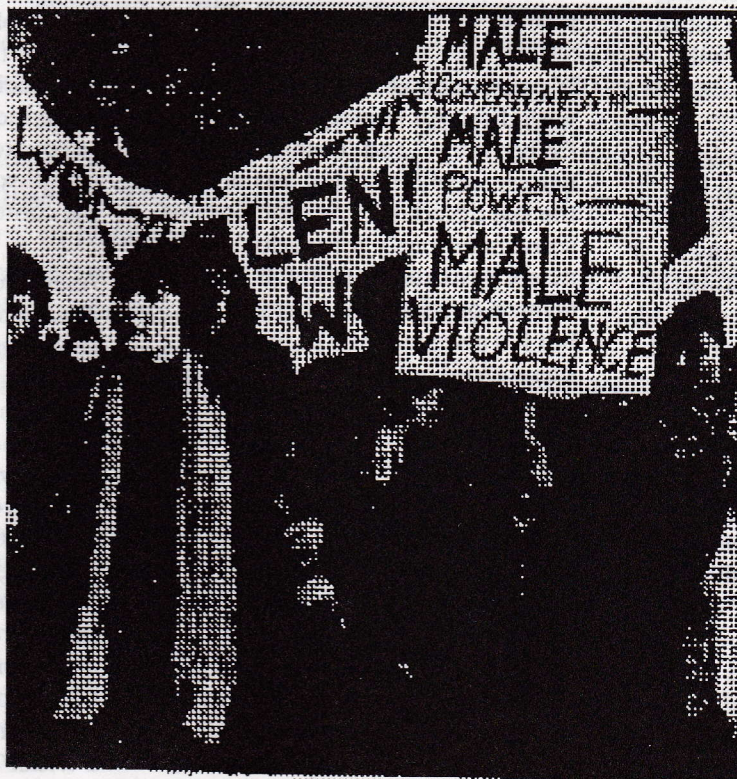
Unfortunately it was this very

Y A W N

simplicity that was problematic. Radical feminism concentrated on 'horrors', on women as abused 'victims' in this society. Of course as feminists they were aware of the negative portrayal of women as victims and coined the term 'survivors' to combat this. Yet the very theoretical model being employed had no room for the concept of the combative women. For Dworkin and Rich society is arranged according to a hierarchy dependant on the possession of power. Women are always powerless in relation to men therefore in relation to men women were ALWAYS VICTIMS. There could be no more complex relationship than this. Women who argued that they enjoyed pornography or made a good living from the sex industry were not engaged with, but in the finest tradition of the left, dismissed as at worst collaborators and at best suffering from a form of 'false consciousness'.

Equally the solutions to the problem were confused and often contradictory. Since in relation to men women were powerless, the only way they could reclaim any power was to work separately from men, to work with and devote themselves to women in all areas of their lives. Radical feminism teetered on the brink of a biological determinism. Women could change, if they withdrew support from men. If men were to change they would only do it when forced to by the 'absence' of women. So we weren't determined by our glands, yet the literature cites example after example of the contradictory 'natures' of men and women. There were continual references to 'male violence' and yet

no understanding to the historical or material conditions which produced such violence or how it might vary or be fought differently according to circumstance. Many of us in the movement were left bewildered as to the possibilities for change and the way forward.



Radical feminism focussed on male violence

We are all part of this system, our very opposition grows from within and contains the notions with which we were fed as children. Such a feminism is no exception, and it contained within it a view of women as 'pure', as powerless and as sexually neutral or passive. Simplistic battle lines were drawn up and there were again the good and bad women, those who dissociated themselves from anything which smacked of the sexually 'masculine' and those who did not. The problem with tackling this aspect of radical feminism was its very unstated nature. Women were spoken of as

'strong', 'powerful' etc etc, but these were only women doing exactly what radical feminism defined as 'correct'. A woman being strong as a trade unionist in a misogynistic movement, fighting in armed insurgency or struggling for some autonomy and independence whilst REMAINING in the sex industry - these women were not strong. Politics became 'pure', ignoring the complexity and contradictions of women's lives. Women - both strong and 'weak', at times simultaneously powerless and powerful.

This was a political approach which was to have profound effects on the political direction of the movement and on the self-image and involvement of individual women within the movement.

The last decade, of H.I.V. and of thatcherism has seen a retrenchment and little or no advancement or exploration of sexuality for women. Radical feminism did nothing to challenge this state of affairs and by its

very concentration on sexual violence and pornography, forestalled any honest discussion about sex and fantasy.

What of the women in the movement who had 'right off' fantasies (myself included). There was a feeling of denial that any woman could think or desire anything other than walking through the fields hand in hand with a lover. Whilst Cosmopolitan and She wrote sex obsessed articles about female orgasmic potential and the porn market thrived the women's movement found it hard to even mention the clitoris much less explore the possibilities of wild

Feminism and Pornography

'non-goal orientated', sweaty sex. We are abused in this society, we fantasise abuse, we revel in power relations and control, but there was a strong feeling that to admit to any 'complicity' with those aspects of ourselves was not on the agenda.

The women's movement concentrated on sex as violence, speaking an experience of women tortured with flashbacks and suffering the after effects of violence that women and children suffer. But women do not just have violent sexual experiences with men and women do not always have 'pure' egalitarian sexual relations with each other.

So where did this approach leave us? As a woman involved at the time, in what was admittedly a very diverse and fractured movement, it just seemed to mean the stifling of debate, and more than that seemed to impose another moral standard on us.

I remember sitting in a workshop on sexuality in the early eighties listening to a woman who had 'always' been a lesbian. She said that because she was a lesbian she had never had any 'unpleasant' or masochistic fantasies. I remember an uncomfortable shift around the room from both lesbian and heterosexual women. Women who did not have such clear consciences, or were not easily able to lie, were marginalised. We were not allowed to discuss our fantasies, denial was the only option left open if women were to separate themselves from any 'complicity' with male violence.

As the women's movement dwindles and the theoretical and social stranglehold of radical feminism loosens, we see a response to that denial. We see new magazines where we hear the voices of women who have long felt excluded from the movement, expressing the forbidden.

What we see is the emergence of 'porn' aimed at women. In the Lesbian community there's 'On Our

Backs' in the USA, 'Quim' in Britain and both 'Serious Pleasure' and 'More Serious Pleasure'. We now see a 'traditionally' framed pornographic magazine aimed at heterosexual women, "For Women". In the face of denial the pendulum swings the other way and on the lesbian scene sado-masochism is fashionable, the 'offensive' is revelled in and 'reclaimed'. Article after article in suspiciously glossy magazines with minute circulations tell us that to call yourself a 'pervert' or a 'shit shoveller' is ok. It's time for sado-masochists to be out and proud.

It's a swing that's reflected socially with discos in Manchester called "Whip it up!" and 'flesh' whose very names reject the sexual asceticism of the last decades. How much of this scene is seriously into sado-masochism and how much is fashion or rebellion is hard to tell, but it's a scene that like the rave scene arose out of a particular set of circumstances. In the context of a political vacuum, the 'failure' of the left, of Clause 28, of the women's movement. In the context of recession with no sign of let up, seemingly little hope of resistance and the denial of any 'unpleasant' female sexuality this rebellious hedonism does not seem so strange a reaction.

What has been the response of the more 'traditional' and radical feminist element to these new movements? Well true to style, in Manchester the response has been to 'ban' any sign of sado-masochism. There are discos with dress codes, no sado-masochistic dress or behaviour (?). Women argue that they need space which is 'safe' from this threat, fair enough. But like any 'safe' space surely the political point of it is to enable its users to go out and fight. Women-only space enabled us to define our oppression, to find the energy to work with other women or in mixed movements on many issues. At times it seems that just creating a 'safe' space seems to have become an end in itself.

So where does all this leave us? I do not 'like' or use pornography, but an analysis of it must be based on more than its violent or denigratory aspects. We must understand the market which produces it, why men and increasingly women use it. It may or may not encourage rape but before we proceed to censorship we must ask how that censorship will be carried out by a capitalist state, censorship has never worked to the benefit of left or gay groups before.

At the same time I believe that sado-masochism is a reflection of our power obsessed society, I do not believe that it is the way to create new social forms or relationships. But a radical feminist analysis is not adequate to understand the complexity of either as they exist in the context of capitalism.

As libertarians we focus on the ways in which people define their own struggles and create new ways of resisting. Each time that resistance emerges it has aspects which are both reactionary and progressive - so too with the recent 'rebellion', when we reclaim words like 'dyke' and 'queer' we subvert and challenge. Yet at the same time we do not need to accept that pornography or exploration of pain and submission is good. We need to see the potential in this challenge and at the same time place it within a wider economic and historical analysis. There is political 'space' as people lose faith in the traditional movements to express their energy or anger and those who sit in 'safe' spaces will be left behind.

Meg Allen

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REVIEWS

Iron John,
by Robert Bly;
Element, £6.99

IRON JOHN,
subtitled 'A
Book about
Men', has been

an enormous success in the U.S.A., and is beginning to catch on in the U.K. too. To the extent that is indicative of a dominant trend within the American and British anti-sexist men's movements, its arguments need to be looked at closely.

It is, however, difficult to summarise. This is because Bly recites, a piece at a time, a Brothers Grimm fairy tale ('Iron John'). He then uses this story to interpret the reasons for what he sees as "the anguish of 'soft' men" (3).

Much of what Bly says is beautifully written, and the book contains many powerful insights into the way men are emotionally dysfunctional within our society. But what concerns me here is Bly's explanation for this sorry state of affairs, which may be summarised as follows:

(1) Since the Industrial Revolution there has been a dramatic social shift in parenting: the father leaves the home to work in the city for long hours, so the children are raised solely by the mother. For boys this is disastrous because, Bly claims, it is the role of men to initiate boys into malehood. He compares this woeful situation with pre-capitalist societies, and also new "primitive societies", to show the prevalence of male initiation away from the powerful maternal bond.

(2) The Women's Movement has socialised men out of their

traditional macho behaviour. But this has been so successful that now men are **too** weak and accommodating to the demands of women. They have become passive "life receivers", not "life givers" who can act on their own desires.

(3) The solution, for all these screwed up men, is to get together so they can unblock their emotions and participate fully in childcare. Men must reclaim their repressed psychic archetypes (The Lover, The King, The Wild Man, The Warrior, The Trickster, the Mythologist, and The Grief Man). They do this by attending 'Wild Man Gatherings' in which they participate in such ritualised activities as drumming, yelling, talking about their fathers. They can then return home as healthier men, proud to be male.

There are lots of problems with Bly's analysis, which are both symbolic of the slant of the American and British "men's movements", and expressive of the great popularity of Bly and others.

Some of these problems should be seen in the context of what Susan Faludi describes as the present cycle of 'backlash' against the small but significant gains of women. Briefly, three claims of this backlash are relevant to Bly's book: that the demands of women are largely achieved; that women are now suffering emotional and physical distress from having **too**

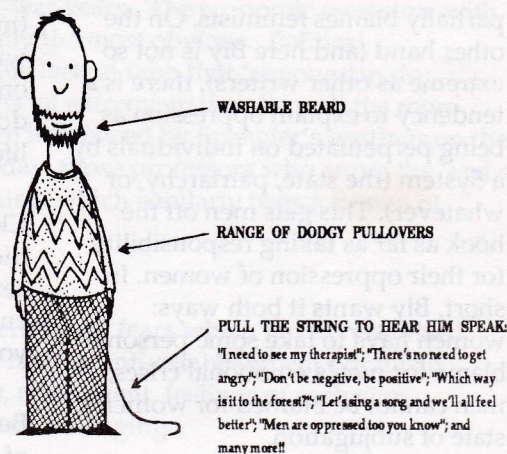
much equality; and that we should reclaim a lost feminine ideal (women as beautiful servicers of men, and nurturers of their children). Additionally, and crucially here: "'A crisis of masculinity' has erupted in every period of backlash in the last century, a faithful quiet companion to the loudly voiced call for a 'return to femininity'" (Faludi, 84).

Bly repeats every one of these

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ideological tenets, though he is not usually so explicit as right-wing tendencies in the men's movement. His argument that men have been pacified by the women's movement enormously overstates the influence of feminism on most men, however relevant it might be to those men who attend Bly's weekend retreats. Bly also thinks that women are



Iron John - front cover

"losing out" by having passive men around them, who soak up women's energy rather than generating their own.

Finally, Bly promotes his own mythic split between feminine and masculine when he examines "primitive" cultures. For it is clear that to Bly part of the healthiness of these societies is that men and women are not confused by the roles they perform: women as nurturers and child-rearers, men as hunters and initiators. To be frank, Bly's use of these societies is a blatant romanticising of them which seems to buy into the revived interest in tribal paganism and mysticism.

Like much men's movement writings, there is a great deal of dishonesty in Bly's formulations. On the one hand, he expresses alliance with the aims of feminism, yet his version of the 'crisis of masculinity' partially blames feminists. On the other hand (and here Bly is not so extreme as other writers), there is a tendency to explain oppression as being perpetuated on individuals by a System (the state, patriarchy, or whatever). This gets men off the hook as far as taking responsibility for their oppression of women. In short, Bly wants it both ways: women have to take some personal blame for men's emotional crises; men cannot be blamed for women's state of subjugation.

This sort of position often becomes crystallised into "All men are oppressed; there are no winners": which is not surprising when Bly barely mentions women in his book, except negatively with respect to the damage done to men. But what is missed here, is that the "costs" of being a man in Western capitalist societies are directly related to the "benefits". For example, men benefit from greater economic and political

power. But since capitalism can work only if the players are competitive, aggressive, individualised, and so on, the cost of this is difficulty in emotional bonding, trust, and expression. The men's movement seems to think that the "anguish" of men can be cured without changing anything else. But this is false on two fronts. For not only must men recognise that they have to give up their power over women in order to lead a fuller emotional life; they also cannot hope for this without also getting rid of capitalism, racism, the oppression of children, and the myriad of interconnected oppressions and inequalities which constitute our society.

All the above does, I think, go some way in explaining the popularity of Bly: his disciples do not have to deal with guilt in the way the anti-sexist men's movement of the '70's insisted; they do not have to take responsibility for women's oppression; the deep hurt which they undoubtedly feel as men is finally recognised and validated (men are listened to, commiserated with, told it's not their fault, and so on); and the solution to end this hurt does not require major upheavals of lifestyle, or collective struggle.

Clearly the earlier politics of guilt did not work. At best, to be an anti-sexist man in the seventies, was to endlessly admit what a nasty person you were, and to confess your sins!

But the new "Wild Man" flip-side, of a simple affirmation of masculine values (with added emotional depth), seems destined to align itself with the anti-feminist, anti-collectivist backlash.

Simon Scott

NOTES

1. BY "MEN'S MOVEMENTS" I REFER TO A LOOSELY CO-ORDINATED AND POLITICALLY INCOHERANT AMALGAM OF ANTI-SEXIST MEN'S INITIATIVES. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE CURRENT UPSURGE IN INTEREST IN "MEN'S ISSUES" IS THE ARRIVAL OF FIGURES WISHING TO CLAIM LEADERSHIP OF AN ENVISAGED ORGANISED MOVEMENT.
2. FALUDI, S. BACKLASH, 1991

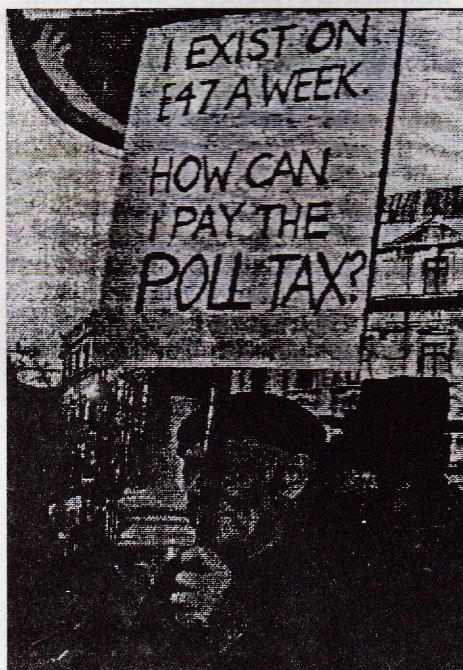
POLL TAX REBELLION provides a readable and credible account of poll tax revolts in Scotland and England from 1987 onwards.

Danny Burns, Secretary of the Avon Anti-Poll Tax Federation and National Executive member of the All Britain Federation, describes how hundreds of thousands of people refuted Tory sweet talk about the tax. The Tories spoke of fairness, accountability and efficiency whilst for the 17 million of us who refused to pay, the poll tax was better characterised as unjust, regressive and a blatant attack on working class people. Burns highlights the many ways in which ordinary people came together to reject the tax and details the pitiful meanderings of Labour politicians. From the beginning people who had often feared acting against 'the law' saw the eventual necessity of resistance in the form of non-payment. Conversely the Labour Party and Trade Union Congress urged legitimate protest. What was clearly emerging was, "a confrontation between the poorest people of Britain and those who claimed to represent them" (24). Not only were non-payers slandered by the Party imposing the tax so too were we vilified by those very same people who declared our interests as one.

Opening in Scotland, Burns concisely details the varied efforts of objectors; including attempts by the largely middle-class 'Citizens Against the Poll Tax' (driven, he states, more "by political motivation than economic necessity" [27]). By Autumn 1987 he sees a clear distinction emerging between two broad coalitions: the Community Resistance Against the Poll Tax, and Militant Tendency. The former Burns crudely labels as libertarian socialists whilst the latter is obvious. Militant's tactics are discussed and their obsessive desire

Danny Burns,
Poll Tax Rebellion, AK Press and Attack international, 1992. 202pp. Price £4.95.

to control castigated. Organisational methods are compared and the obvious benefits of sharing information, involving as many people as possible and having direct relevance to local communities emphasised. The traditional style of Militant in terms of domineering agendas and hijacking neighbourhoods is shown as seriously deficient. This was a campaign which involved everyone, and, as such, Militant's manoeuvrings were out of place. Burns' repetitive criticisms of Militant do, however, in the end become rather tiresome. Particularly so because the oppositional divide is presented so often as impenetrable. For readers not



A Hated Tax

involved in the Anti-Poll Tax movement there is the danger of them gaining the impression that there was only two groups or positionings within the movement: Militant or not-Militant. Thus one's existence is contextualised in relation to Militant. The reality was far more complex. Certainly my experience in my neighbourhood Anti-Poll Tax Union (A.P.T.U.) involved me working with, and alongside, an assorted bunch of people - from various (and no) political backgrounds. The point is that Burns' writings present his recollections.

This leads me to ask a curious question: why has Burns written this book single-handedly? Given the very social nature of the campaign I am left wondering why he didn't feel it preferable to present a collection of accounts and experiences - written by (more of) the very people who were there. Burns does quote a multitude of people, aiming to capture the feel of ordinary folk. However, a lot of the people quoted are well known activists which again is irritating given the missed opportunity.

Nevertheless this is a welcomed book and one which succeeds in chronicling the many events between the initial setting up of community APTU's to the final sinking of the (Tory) flagship. Particularly good is the chapter detailing the circumstances of Trafalgar Square and its aftermath.

Burns ends with a rather optimistic view of the potential of resisting communities. Like many others (myself included) he hopes that we will now be more inclined (and experienced) to chase off bailiffs and debt collectors more generally. He gives a couple of examples of places where this has happened: "Such organisations are likely to be important vehicles for radical change in the future, becoming part of the new politics of the Left" (202). Regrettably this now appears a failed hope rather than a realistic eventually. Burns' (probably because of manuscript deadlines) conclusion thus appears to be somewhat out of date and leaves the reader wanting more. *Why did people disband; what has happened to those people politically active for the first time; did common perceptions surrounding debt, the law and the courts change for ever; are people paying up?* These are only some of the many stones left unturned.

This book is an appreciated first. It is accessible, interesting and gives a good account of Burns' experiences with the Anti-Poll Tax movement. It should be one of many.

Carolyne Willow

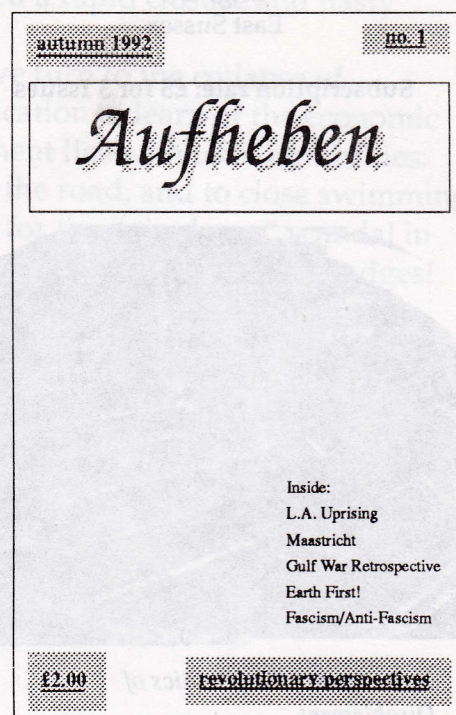
Aufheben,
No.1, Autumn
1992. 44pp.
Price £2.00

AUFHEBEN, is a new magazine from Brighton. The title, as they explain, derives from Hegel, and means both 'to abolish' and 'to supersede'. They go on:

"The proletariat's revolutionary negation of capitalism, communism, is an instance of this positive-negative movement of supersession, as is its theoretical realisation in Marx's method of critique."

This may sound like heavy-going - and indeed the mag isn't exactly light reading. The high cover price is a further signal that their expected readership are committed activists steeped in revolutionary theory.

But though demanding, it is worth the effort, and more often than not has direct relevance to practical political issues. Articles include: an account of the LA riots; an ambitious analysis of the economic power-mongering behind Maastricht; an interesting piece on the tactical errors made by class struggle activists opposing the Gulf War; an internal critique of Earth First!; and a timely review of Jean Barrot's 'Fascism/Antifascism'.



Inside:
L.A. Uprising
Maastricht
Gulf War Retrospective
Earth First!
Fascism/Anti-Fascism

Reviews

The writers make it hard to pin them down to a political label, but I would call them libertarian marxists. There appears to be a class emphasis when they focus on political struggle (for example, they were members of 'No War But The Class War' during the Gulf War). And when they get more abstract, there is a definite economist slant (see the Editorial, and "EMUs in the Class War"). At the same time they subscribe to standard libertarian critiques of social democracy and Trotskyism.

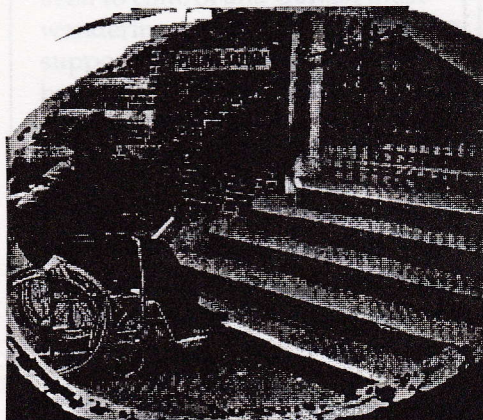
Away from the content, I found the articles a bit long-winded. Additionally they could have done with a more interesting layout and better graphics. (Of course, such criticism coming from *flux* is like a drowning rat teaching a whale about buoyancy.)

But it's probably unfair to categorise the magazine on one issue. Overall, it's a welcome addition to the growing array of radical quarterlies. Decide for yourself!

Simon Scott

Aufheben
c/o Unemployed Centre
Prior House, Tilbury Place
Brighton
East Sussex

Subscription rate: £5 for 3 Issues



Front cover - *The Politics of Disablement*

Michael Oliver "The Politics of Disablement" Critical Texts in Social Work and the Welfare State 1990. 133pp. Price £9.99.

IN THIS BOOK Oliver successfully locates disablement within its historical and political context. From a position of marginalisation, as a disabled sociologist, Oliver succinctly covers the ground which his abled-bodied colleagues have ignored. It is refreshing to read a book concerning disability which is theoretically astute whilst at the same time distinctly comprehending of the problems faced by disabled people.

From the beginning Oliver is clear in situating disability within capitalism and demonstrates how disabled people are affected by both (his distinction, not mine) the economic mode of production and ideology. A critique of the rise of capitalism shows how the developing state intervened to identify, label and segregate disabled people, particularly referring to the Poor Law workhouses and asylums. These two systems operated to control and forge distinctions. At a glance one was able to untangle the deserving from the undeserving, the feckless from the workshy. Oliver rightly points out that most disabled people have never been incarcerated in institutions and notes the active role which families have played in caring for their disabled relatives. He also describes the effect which the developing state has had upon families' perceptions of their disabled kin: notably that capitalist ideology has generated the notion of disability as being shameful and worthy of stigma. Obviously this belief has not only permeated the minds and behaviours of the relatives of disabled people; Oliver gives plenty of examples of contemporary welfarist interventions which rely too upon the disability = personal inadequacy equation. Inevitably this involves a staunch critique of the medical and other professions, "...it is

professionals who are dependent upon disabled people. They are dependent upon them for their jobs, their salaries, their subsidised transport, their quality of life and so on" (91). The effect is to turn the tables somewhat.

Having charted the parallel development of the capitalist state and the institutional problematisation of disability Oliver is, however, cautious of inferring that capitalism is to blame for the oppression which disabled people face. Of course to imply this would be to give an easy, and predictable, solution: socialism. Oliver's reasoning for not promoting this analysis any stronger is that there is insufficient evidence to suggest that disabled people were free from discrimination pre capitalism. Nevertheless one does get the feeling that, despite the empirical shortage, he subscribes to the anticipated (classical) Marxist analysis.

Not only does Oliver politicise the definitions and assumptions we hold about disablement, he also discusses the ways in which disabled people are politically organising for themselves. Here the problem of representation is addressed, disabled people having been notoriously misrepresented by well-meaning individuals, charities, professional bodies or even disability organisations themselves. The distinction needs to be made between groups operating on behalf of and groups made up of disabled people. This latter group Oliver sees as developing into a kind of new social movement. He draws parallels with other social movements, stressing alienation from mainstream society; the search for self-actualisation through participation and a critical and marginalised relationship with legitimate forms of political participation. Because they are located within a "post-materialist" framework Oliver contends that these movements will not change the status quo, "...It is their counter-hegemonic potential, not their actual achievements, that are

significant in late capitalism." Finally he urges action to improve the here-and-now experience of being disabled whilst not underestimating the necessity of more far-sighted objectives.

This is a well written and coherent book, albeit slightly short. Oliver sets out to make his writing accessible to both academics and to disabled people (assuming that you cannot be both?), hopefully he has succeeded.

Carolyne Willow

**The Fight
Against Racism:
Alex Callinicos.
A Socialist
Worker
Pamphlet. 50p**

THE ARGUMENT in this pamphlet is simple. According to Callinicos racism is a product of capitalism, originating as an ideological defence of slavery and

empire. It survives today, dividing the working class to preserve the power of the bosses. Eradicating racism, therefore, means getting rid of capitalism. The only way to get rid of capitalism is through working class revolution, in which workers unity is achieved through the revolutionary party. The SWP is in the business of building that party.

This is all sadly predictable stuff, and were sexism substituted for the racism of the title the same formula would apply. Now, whilst formulas might make for good slogans (and there is a place for both - and the SWP excels at both) they certainly don't clarify anything.

This is not to say that Callinicos is wrong to emphasise the connections between racism and capitalism, racism functions for the bosses in precisely the way he describes. And it is useful to reassert this against the tendency to see racism as 'a bad thing', a problem of behaviour and attitude somehow divorced from other power relationships and pressures in social life.

However, Callinicos is not arguing that racism has to be seen in the context of capitalist society. Rather, he's suggesting that an analysis of class and class conflict is enough, in itself, both to describe racism and to offer an adequate strategy for dealing with it.

A prime example of his formulaic approach is seen in the way deals with strategies that have been put forward by

anti-racists. For Callinicos, and the SWP, there are three possible strategies: black nationalism, parliamentary reformism and revolutionary socialism. Black nationalism fails because it cannot unite the working class. Parliamentary reformism because it is an attempt to reform the unreformable and eventually comes to pander to the racism inherent in the system (witness the Labour and Conservative Parties' bi-partisan approach to Immigration legislation). This leaves us only revolutionary socialism, which here - surprise, surprise - takes us back into the arms of the SWP. It is a perfect, circular argument.

Of course, this all begs a big, big question. Are these strategies being defined either honestly or correctly? I wouldn't quibble too much here with the critique of reformism. But the question of black nationalism does raise some rather thorny issues, that Callinicos effectively defines away.

Central to all this is Callinicos' reduction of everything to a western economic experience, and his inability to recognise that the experiences, and traditions of resistance, of white and black workers are not completely identical.

The slow evolution of the western working class, within a cultural context shared - if often fought over - with the ruling class contrasts with the more sudden experiences of slavery and colonisation. Black people brought a history and a cultural identity with them into capitalism, and this is important.

The status of the black worker under capitalism has never been simply one of exploited worker. There has always been a dimension of race. For black workers capitalism is 'racist capitalism'. When the dockers and the Smithfield meat porters marched in support of Enoch Powell, back in the 70's, they revealed graphically something of the double bind black workers find themselves in. Superficially, Callinicos wouldn't deny this double bind, but he certainly fails to draw out its full implications - especially in terms of the organisation of resistance and the self-understanding of people involved in resistance.

An assertion of cultural identity and a desire for autonomy is a challenge to the economic and cultural oppression of black people. This has led to nationalist separatism, which is divisive and weakens the prospects for overall social change. However, separatism isn't simply 'wrong politics' but an affirmation of the experience of black people in capitalism and also an expression of the alienation of black

people from the 'white' left. This has to raise some important questions.

There is an issue of responsibility here. But when Callinicos effectively blames the eventual failure of the Black Panthers on their not making links with the white working class, without aiming some equally critical comment at the left - including the 'revolutionary' left - he is defeatingly one sided. There is another side to the story. The story of how black experience (and for that matter, women's experience) is marginalised by the revolutionary left's impoverished view of what class struggle and revolution are all about. Indeed, he is reaffirming one reason why many black people will adhere to nationalist politics, and not make links with white socialists.

Socialism demands unity. But unity can only be achieved if we acknowledge differences. In this there are the attendant risks of separatism, But separatism has to be understood in conjunction with the kind of contrived unity pursued by groups like the SWP. Things have a way of working in harness. I think Marx called it 'dialectics'.

Ironically, Callinicos argues that socialists should support the right of black people to organise autonomously, and he attacks the Labour Party for refusing to recognise the Black Sections. But, given his analysis what on earth is there for black people to organise for? This is as empty and patronising as his assertion that it is "vital to involve black people" in the fight against racism. As if they're not already involved: in daily, immediate ways.

What this pamphlet basically sets out to do is vindicate the self-image of the SWP. As the 'vanguard' of the class the only consistent way to fight racism is through its ranks. Its assumption ('we need a party') and its conclusion ('build the party') are predictably one and the same. What we need are conclusions which are not predictable, but which are challenging and provocative. The wholesale crisis of the left - whichever bit of the left you occupy - demands it.

John French



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