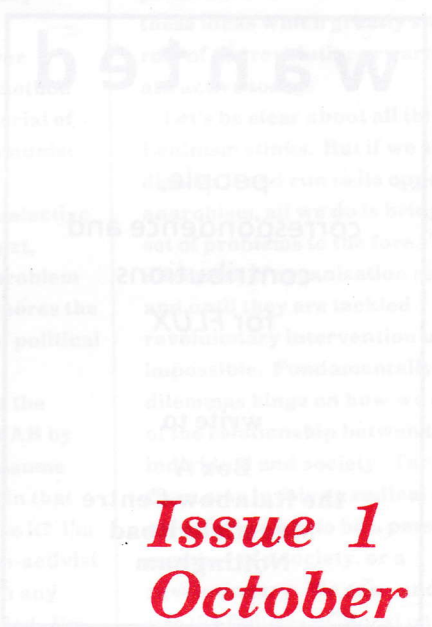


# FLUX

*A magazine  
of  
libertarian  
socialism*

*Issue 1  
October 1990  
50p*



It is intended for those who emotionally and intellectually recognise the need for a socialist transformation of society but who know that by clinging to the mythologies of the past, to the dogma, platitudes and slogans we can only spell irrelevance.

AMAN is a journal of ideas, a forum for the discussion of political and social issues, and a platform for the expression of views on the current situation. It is intended for those who are interested in the development of a socialist society, and who are committed to the struggle for its achievement.

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Are all these people a bit stupid?  
Or is it just that AMAN is not for them?

*This magazine was put together by a small group of  
Libertarian Socialists living in Nottingham.*

*It is an expression of disaffection with the revolutionary  
left.*

*It makes no claims to originality or to being in any way a  
definitive statement.*

*It is a magazine for discussion; amongst libertarian  
socialists and other sympathetic activists.*

*It is intended for those who emotionally and intellectually  
recognise the need for a socialist transformation of society  
but who know that by clinging to the mythologies of the  
past, to the dogma, platitudes and slogan we can only  
spell irrelevance.*

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people,  
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for *FLUX*

write to  
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Nottingham

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# Inside the Anti-Poll Tax Campaign.

*Tony, Claude and Iain, three members of the Forest Fields and Hyson Green Anti-Poll Tax Campaign in Nottingham, discuss their experience of the Anti-Poll Tax movement. They talked about the origins and development of their group and about the problems encountered when people from different political backgrounds work together. They looked at Militant's attempt to dominate the campaign and at some of the ways this problem was approached and dealt with. Finally they make some comments on the broader nature of Poll Tax resistance; on its two-fold character as an organised campaign and as a more diffuse movement. The discussion took place in late August 1989. Please note - the views expressed here are not those of the 'FFHGAPTC' some of whose members will express at least polite disagreement.*

## 1. In the beginning....

**Tony:** We should go back to an earlier attempt to start a small Poll tax group in August 1988. It consisted of the fall-out from Nottingham Anarchist group plus some ex-Wildcat members. It produced two posters and did some fly-posting but only lasted three months. Why did it fade away? There were two problems. Firstly, it might have been too early to start this sort of thing. Secondly right from the start there was a difference of approach. Some people wanted a definite revolutionary orientation which meant not working with people they regarded as reformist. I wanted a community based campaign and I couldn't see how this could be done whilst keeping to that line. We never got around to doing anything because we wouldn't have got agreement on anything that involved talking to people.

The present group was initially organised by word of mouth, and there were about twelve people at the first meeting including two people who might be seen as anarchists, a couple from the SWP and two people who had been involved in local women's and trade union stuff. The others I didn't recognise as having been involved politically before. And they dropped out very quickly.

**Claude:** Yes that often happens. I think that when people first get involved in campaigns they expect pretty rapid results. Because of the way the Poll Tax campaign has gone - really moving at a pace set for it - it's meant a long time to keep the momentum and the commitment going.

## 2. Inside the campaign....

**Tony:** This is very much a lefty area and so the major thing about the campaign here is that it hasn't been tied up by one or another political faction. It's been an uneasy coalition.

**Claude:** Yes, but there are negative and positive aspects to that. Positively it's been quite open but negatively there was a lot of inter-group squabbling which has detracted from the work with the 'non-politicos'. There's been an overt structure there with different groups involved in debate which tended to exclude people. In other areas of the city things are

straightforward because there tends to be one main political group involved so they're not constantly watching their backs or fighting battles, and they can get on with the groundwork.

**Iain:** I think this is a problem of trying to find ways of negotiating the different agendas that groups bring.

**Tony:** It's not simply that there are agendas to be negotiated, but that by and large they go unacknowledged - that's a more fundamental problem. For example, there was a big debate with the SWP, not long after the campaign got started, over community campaigning. The SWP's position was that community campaigning was a non-starter and they argued along that line in the meetings. But it was difficult to acknowledge that such a person was in the SWP, and that's why they were saying what they were at the meeting. You can't acknowledge this because you're accused of being sectarian if you do. Likewise somebody in S.O. might want a Labour councillor down to a meeting and the anarchists will say 'no'. They both have their own agendas as to why they want or don't want something. But it's difficult to get that out in the open.

**Iain:** It seems to me that although these agendas haven't been negotiated in any explicit way, in practice a common ground has been established. There's certainly a different atmosphere now to what there was a year or even six months ago. I think we've recognised that different perspectives aren't always incompatible, that there is room to move within the 'broader struggle'. An example might be our public meetings. We insisted on splitting them up into smaller groups so people could contribute more freely and feel more involved. But there was a fair amount of opposition from some people who preferred the traditional meeting format. Those people still aren't comfortable with the idea but don't oppose it and I think they can see the value of running meetings in this way.

**Tony:** That's quite optimistic. The SWP aren't particularly involved at the moment and that removes a specific problem because they're not

very good at working with people. But if they decide to come back, and they come and go depending upon what else is going on, those same problems will be there. But, yes, a fragile consensus has emerged. People have learnt to recognise the hidden agendas, and respond on that basis. People know who they're talking to and where they're coming from but still differences aren't open.

**Claude:** Also I think we skirt away from the dodgy bits. If people came along who didn't recognise the groundrules about what is and what isn't legitimate to discuss, the problem could develop again. And there is the continuing problem caused by not wanting to alienate people. New activists and people not politically allied get put off by the disputes and the jargon. So, we try to be friendly and avoid cliques - but in doing so the arguments get subsumed as well.

**Iain:** You talk about the SWP. What's interesting is that they blame the 'anarchists'. And it's true that often anarchists have not been constructive; storming out of meetings, talking and acting as if the only problem was the demon Militant. Let's go back again to the debate you were talking about Tony. The issue - whether people should be going out and canvassing - was totally sidetracked by 'anarchists'. The SWP were saying 'the class aren't ready' and were very negative about community campaigning. That issue wasn't

addressed because the 'anarchs' turned it all into a question of organisation.

**Claude:** I don't want to sound patronising but as far as the Militant goes, isn't it a question of inexperience in dealing with them? In any case, there are anarchists who have been involved positively in building the campaign.

**Tony:** You can't understand what the anarchists were doing without looking at what other people were doing. There's a context here. I was involved in that 'organisational solution' and looking back on it, yes, it was a bit naive. What I wanted to do was get a structure set up that would make people get out and do the canvassing that needed to be done. But what were the SWP doing? At meetings of a community campaign they were counterposing community campaigns to workplace action. We got into a long argument that undermined those who were committed to a community campaign. But it was really hard to take that on without getting into all the stuff you're not allowed to talk about - all the hidden agendas. Instead you got was a non-viable solution which skirted around the problem.

**Claude:** But I also think that if those discussions hadn't happened you could well have ended up with one group or another stitching things up in the normal hierarchical way. Knowing the area and the people in it we had to have those debates about structures.



### 3. The demon Militant....

**Iain:** Militant have consistently attempted to control the campaign, nationally and locally. There are two problems. Firstly, and regardless of how people in Militant feel about the Poll Tax, the issue is subordinate to their own organisational interest. And then there's the question of how they organise and what that means in practice for the campaign.

**Tony:** We have to recognise that the two things aren't separate. The kind of campaign you envisage and what you want to get out of it have an awful lot to do with the kind of organisational structures you favour. So you have to tackle both these issues.

And it's not simply a question of getting 'our people' elected, as if that way everything would be OK. It might be a bit better but the problems - the lack of communication, the lack of involvement in decision making and so on - would remain. So it's not just a case of saying these are the structures we've got and we have to work with them. We have to find ways of opening them up, involving people in the discussions and the decision making.

**Claude:** Once they'd set up those structures people played along with them. So the bureaucratic jungle these things tend to become was not just made by the Militant; but by a lot of different groups who have similar ideas about how things should be run. So there was no direct challenge to the way they made 20 minute speeches at Federation meetings or the Federation chair used his position in favour of the Militant. People seemed to go along with the way meetings were run.

What do you do about it? Well there's a dilemma because in trying to deal with the Militant you risk upsetting all the other groups. They'd see it as sidetracking the issues, or setting up shadow organisations or whatever. With the traditional left it's always been difficult to argue for devolvement, openness and informality because people don't understand the terms of the debate. They don't see the structure as a problem, but the fact that Militant control it and they'd like to.

**Tony:** It also brings up the question of 'sectarianism' again. And the way debates get structured in particular directions. Whenever someone in our group raised things to do with the way Militant controlled the Federation and wanted to challenge their stranglehold the traditional left said 'well, that's just sectarian'.

**Iain:** Maybe it was the way the issues were raised rather than the issues themselves.

**Tony:** Not solely no. You could be as polite and as eloquent as you liked but some people would still get upset. It was about the content of the ideas involved.

### ....and the response to it.

**Iain:** There have been changes though. We've all been forced to think about ways of getting around the Militant. Because it's not just a question of their being exclusive, but that it's inefficient. They haven't been doing their job properly - they haven't set up phone trees, their fundraising has been almost non-existent, basic campaign work in the workplaces, amongst women and amongst young people hasn't been done. All the independent groups have recognised the need for open meetings which get groups talking together directly. Some of these have been very successful. There has been more collaboration between different community groups, and different political currents, over the question of what we can do to get open structures set up and what we can do to give each other more practical support. We've put a joint slate up for some Federation positions, we've put motions forward on setting up open trade union and women's forums.

**Claude:** But there was a difference of perception over the open meetings. Many people were concerned that these meetings were not to be seen as a challenge to the Federation. But of course they were. They perhaps weren't an alternative to the Federation, but they were a challenge to the Federation executive's authority. The Nottingham Federation don't have a monopoly on the Poll tax and we shouldn't act as if they do. On the other hand we have to avoid getting into counter-cliques - and there's always a danger of that.



But we do have to be clear why we don't like the way groups like Militant operate. One of the problems with it is that it gives it a kind of gloss that lots and lots of people are involved with the Federation when in fact it only includes a minority of non-payers. For example, as many as 75% of local anti-poll tax groups are not affiliated to the All British Federation. Militant gain kudos from that. Open structures actually allow people to see what's going on, they can see how many people are actually involved in these campaigns.

The Militant, and so the Federation, have a way of working which excludes by design almost. It allows them to put a very specific political slant on things. And, as has been said, it's inefficient; it takes the life out of the campaign, it makes it difficult for people to know what's going on, to learn from each other and to co-ordinate their activity.

#### 4. Beyond the walls....

**Iain:** Some people have said that all this talk about Militant simply overestimates their influence, and that if they're in a position of domination then this simply tells us something about the campaign - that there isn't a great deal of activity. The arguments are just arguments between different activists. There might be some truth in this; although it ignores the fact that there's a long tradition of this kind of bureaucratic elitism on the left. But how should we see the Poll Tax campaign as a movement? Is it a case of widespread passive resistance with a small nucleus of activists?

**Claude:** I think that this is true of most campaigns like this. People get more involved

it affects them directly. For instance, they're going to be made redundant, or six feet of their garden is going to be chopped off next week to widen the road. The Poll Tax hasn't had that kind of immediacy. People have been getting away with it. The bailiffs haven't knocked on many people's doors yet.

**Tony:** I think it's been the same in Scotland, but I find that quite hopeful. We're in close contact with the Prestonfields group in Edinburgh, and the impression I get is that things are going very well. Even more people aren't paying this year than last year, and for very good reasons. You see the guy next door hasn't paid and he got away with it so you think 'well, why should I pay?'

Part of the problem is seeing activity just in terms of people at meetings or on demonstrations. But if people aren't involved in the organised campaign, but still aren't paying their Poll tax - that's a form of activity. It's a difficult one to make a coherent campaign out of, but to call it passive is to miss the point. I think we have to see things in a less schematic kind of way. We shouldn't see things simply in terms of "our" organisation. We have to understand the less obvious lines of influence and communication; how Poll Tax resistance becomes part of existing social networks - pub scenes and amongst neighbours. Counterposing community campaigns to the workplace, is another example. It's a completely false separation. People who work also live somewhere, in communities like this one.



# The Red and the Black.

*Two pieces by Ulli Diemer.*

The following two articles first appeared in the now de-funct libertarian-Marxist journal 'The Red Menace', published in Canada during the late 70's and early 80's. They were later printed as a pamphlet by the American group 'Root and Branch'. We are reprinting them here - to initiate debate - because as 'Root and Branch' wrote in their introduction: "In a clear and concise way they confront the main anarchist misconceptions about Marxism and demonstrate the relevance of those issues for libertarian-socialists today."

This magazine aims to contribute to the re-emergence of libertarian-socialism, and for this the anarchist-Marxist conflict provides us with a useful starting point. First of all, many of the issues over which anarchists and Marxists have clashed over the last hundred years are still on the agenda and are still central to the on-going clarification of libertarian socialism: for example, the role and organisation of revolutionaries, the relationship between socialism and the working class, the place of 'ideas' in history, the nature of post-revolutionary society and so on. And beyond this, many of those people who rejected the Marxism of the Leninist tradition as the alternative to reformism found homes within anarchism.

But if the anarchist-Marxist split provides a useful starting point we do not intend to get stuck in it.

Libertarian-socialism has often been taken as synonymous with anarchism, but as Diemer points out this isn't the case. Within Marxism there have been quite fundamental disputes over many of the same issues which have divided anarchists and Marxists. And in their tendency to condemn Marxism *per se* anarchists have often lost sight of these differences. Given this it would be impossible for libertarian socialists to take up a position simply within the terms of the anarchist-Marxist debate.

To do so would have us treat Marxism (and anarchism for that matter) as a one-dimensional caricature.

Again, we do not want to get stuck there because since Bakunin and Marx a lot more has been said and done. Feminism, for example, has enriched our understanding of what 'liberated society' should mean. Social movements like the Greens have things of great value to offer. And there are insights to be brought over from other, less immediately 'political', areas such as psychology. It is from this whole welter of stuff that a libertarian socialism now has to be made.

My main criticism of Diemer here is the fact that he discusses anarchism somewhat out of context. He criticises anarchists for misrepresenting Marx's views and for not attempting to find out what he actually meant. Yet this is not just an anarchist failing, but a problem common within revolutionary circles. Entrenchment and dogma are the stuff of revolutionary politics and anarchists give out what they receive.

Whilst anarchists might be guilty of misrepresenting Marx, their antagonism is to some extent justified. Anarchists haven't exactly fared well during the course of this conflict. Their critique of Marx as a *whole* is based on the experience of the Machnos, Kronstadts and the Barcelona May Days, when Marxist guns were turned on anarchists in a non-too comradely fashion. More recently the bureaucratic and manipulative behaviour of the Marxist Militant Tendency within the Poll Tax movement has fueled anarchist distaste for Marxism. To a large extent, then, the anarchist movement has grown in reaction to a Marxism which has meant something hierarchical, statist and often authoritarian.

Diemer would view this Marxism as a distortion of the 'real' Marx, and he says that Marxism-Leninism is a contradiction in terms. But Diemer is

ignoring some of the deep ambiguities within Marx: ambiguities which can and have led to quite different political practice. Diemer's own Marxism lies within the libertarian-Marxist tradition; but this has been very much a minority tradition and in no way agenda setting. If anarchists have confused Marxism with one of its possible interpretations this is understandable. But as a consequence they have been blinded to its wider potential; from which they, as revolutionary socialists, could benefit.

So, what is to be done? - as the man said. For a start we need to challenge the revolutionary left's 'we're right, you're wrong' intransigence. This is usually justified by the claim that 'we need to win the arguments' - which is little more than an over-rationalised recipe for sectarianism.

And the task for Diemer's libertarian-Marxism is not only to tackle anarchist misconceptions but also to take on Leninism as the Marxist 'common sense'. In this way a genuine dialogue might be established between the two traditions which will help us transform the existing framework and assist revolutionary socialism out of its present cul-de-sac.

As I mentioned earlier, we are reproducing these articles to initiate - we hope - some debate. So, we'd be happy to receive any replies you care to send.

John French.

# ANARCHISM VERSUS MARXISM:

## *a few notes on an old theme*

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Marxism, Anarchism, libertarian socialism - is it necessary to re-examine these old labels and the divisions they represent? Would it not be best to let sleeping polemics lie and simply concentrate on trying to work together?

The problem is that a socialist movement - or libertarian movement: what terms can we validly use? - that hopes to develop has to confront historical, strategic and theoretical questions. A socialist movement worthy of the name has to do more than get together for simple actions. It has to ask itself where it is trying to go, and how it proposes to get there: precisely the issues which sparked the fateful anarchist-Marxist split in the 1870's, and which kept the movements separated until today. Political questions which are ignored do not vanish, they only reappear with all that much more destructive impact at a later date. They must be dealt with frankly.

### **The Past**

But this does not mean that we are fated to barrenly re-fight old battles and re-live the splits and hostilities of the past. The world has changed a great deal since the 1870's, and the experience of the socialist movement during the past century has changed the problems we face immeasurably. Of no little importance is the revitalisation of a Marxist current which is militantly anti-Leninist, and the re-emergence of an anarchist-communist movement which accepts (although not necessarily consciously) a good deal of Marxist analysis. There is a good deal of common ground on which we can come together.

### **Polemics**

It should be acknowledged that while the differences between Marxists and anarchists have been real, it has also been the case that too often in the past the real disputes between them have generated more heat than light. A problem in many polemics is that each side tends to take partial tendencies of the other side and extrapolates them to be the whole, and in that sense misrepresents. A serious analysis has to go beyond the simplicities of black and white (black and red?) argumentation. At the same time, it is true that posing questions sharply generally implies a polemical tone, and we should not shrink back from polemic if this means that important questions will be glossed over or ignored.

My own position is pro-Marxist, and it is in many respects quite critical of anarchism. It is therefore imperative to note two things. One: that there are many positive things about anarchism which I leave unacknowledged,

because I am attempting to criticise certain specific aspects of the total doctrine which I think greatly weaken it. I am not purporting to give a balanced evaluation of anarchism as a whole. Two: I am far more critical of the 'Marxism' of most 'Marxist-Leninists' than I am of anarchism. While I regard most anarchists as comrades in the libertarian movement, I consider the very expression "Marxism-Leninism" to be a contradiction in terms, and consider it to be an ideology that is diametrically opposed to the emancipation of the working class (1).

It is naturally impossible to cover the whole anarchist-Marxist debate adequately in an article. What I propose to do here is to concentrate on the most common and basic anarchist objections to Marxism, and examine them *briefly*. I hope that these notes will provoke a lively discussion that will make it possible to examine that questions raised, and others, in much greater detail.

### **"If This Is Marxism..."**

The impetus for seeking a debate on Marxism and anarchism comes primarily from reading a number of recently published pieces in anarchist publications, which all seem to display an astonishing misunderstanding and ignorance of Marx, of what he wrote and did. All of these - and most anarchist writings - expend a great deal of effort in attacking something called 'Marxism'. In every case, the 'Marxism' that is attacked has little or nothing to do with the theories of Marx. Reading these polemics against a 'Marxism' that exists mainly in the minds of those attacking it, one can only mutter the phrase Marx himself is said to have repeated so often in his later years, regarding the work of his 'followers': "If this is Marxism, then all I know is that I am not a Marxist"

If there is to be any dialogue between Marxists and anarchists, if the negative and the positive aspects of the anarchist and Marxist projects are to be critically analysed, then it is incumbent upon those who oppose Marxism, as well as those who support it or seek to revise or transcend it, to at least know what they are talking about. Nothing is solved by setting up and attacking a straw-man Marxism.

And it is important to understand and know Marx not only because there are 'libertarian Marxists' but because Marx is without doubt the central figure in the development of libertarianism and socialism. It is not possible to understand the development of any left-wing political movement or system of thought in the last century without knowing Marxism. It is not possible, in fact, to understand the development



of *any* ideology in this century, or indeed, to understand the *history* of the last hundred years, without knowing something about Marxism. The political history of the twentieth century is to a very great extent a history of attempts to realize, defeat, go beyond or amend, or to develop alternatives to Marxism.

Anarchism is certainly no exception. It originally defined itself in opposition to Marxism, and continues to do so today. Unfortunately, anarchists seem unaware - or unwilling to realise - that Marxism is not a monolith, that there are, and always have been, enormously different currents of thought calling themselves Marxist. Anarchist critiques invariably identify Marxism with Leninism, Leninism with Stalinism, Stalinism with Maoism, and all of them with Trotskyism as well. There is usually not a hint of guile in this remarkable bit of intellectual presdignitation - your average anarchist simply thinks it is universally accepted fact that all these political systems are identical.

This is not to say that it cannot be *argued* that they are all fundamentally the same, that their differences, however violent, are secondary to certain essential features they all have in common. But the point is that it *is* necessary to *argue* the case, to marshal some evidence, to understand before condemning. One can't simply begin with the conclusion.

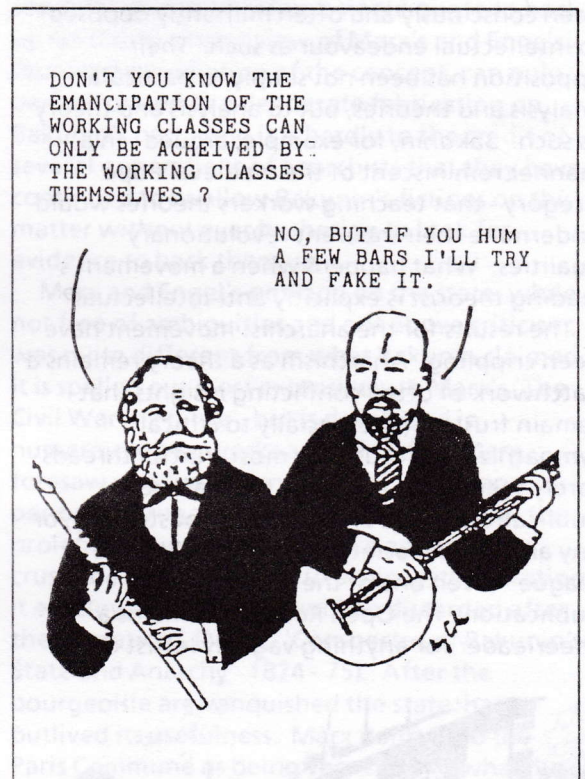
### The Other Marxism

But the fact is that Marxism is not a monolith. For example, Rosa Luxemburg - surely one of the central figures in any history of Marxism - was condemning Lenin's theories of the vanguard party, and of centralized, hierarchical discipline three-quarters of a century ago, in 1904. In 1918 - while many anarchists were rushing to join the Bolsheviks - she was criticizing the dictatorial methods of the Bolsheviks and warning of the miscarriage of the revolution. After her death there have been other thinkers and movements that condemn Bolshevism as an authoritarian degeneration of Marxism: Anton Pannekoek, Karl Korsch, the Council Communists, the Frankfurt School, right up to the New Left of the 60's and 70's. And even within the Leninist tradition there were thinkers whose contributions challenged the hold of the dominant interpretation and helped nourish a libertarian Marxism; Lukacs, Gramsci and Reich. A number of libertarian currents emerged from the Trotskyist movement in the 40's and 50's. Any libertarian movement that acknowledges only one thin anarchist strand as 'true' libertarian socialism, while cutting itself off - through dogma or ignorance - from all other contributing currents, only impoverishes itself. Yet anarchists writing on Marxism seem to deliberately shut their eyes and ears to anything except the dominant Leninist tradition, and so manage always to reconfirm their own prejudices about Marxism.

All this does not prove of course that the

libertarian interpretation of Marx is the correct one. But it should be possible to agree on a basic point: if there is doubt about what Marx stood for, then it is necessary to read Marx, not to take the word of either his enemies, or those who claim, justifiably or not, to be his followers. Only once this is accepted, is it possible to begin an anarchist/Marxist dialogue on a serious level.

My own attitude to Marx is not unequivocally favourable. There are serious questions to be raised about aspects of Marx's thought. Marxism, like everything else, must be subjected to criticism. This may lead to our transcending Marx, but not, I think, to our rejecting him. "Marxism is a point of departure for us, not our pre-determined destination". The essential point, however, is that the Marxian project must be at the heart of any libertarian politics. It may be possible, and thus necessary, to transcend Marx, but to do so it is first necessary to absorb him. Without Marx and some of the best of the 'Marxists', it's not possible to create a libertarian praxis and a libertarian world.



Finally, in judging Marx's work, it is necessary to keep in mind that his writings and actions span some 40 years as a revolutionary; that he often wrote letters and made notes that represent partial insights which he did not expand; that many of his works are polemics against particular doctrines and are one-sided because of that. It would be a mistake, therefore, to take each sentence and quotation as finished holy writ, or expect his work to be wholly consistent or that he thought the implications of all his theories through to the end. Marx's work is incomplete and uneven, but it is an enormously fruitful and brilliant contribution

that must be approached as he himself approached everything: critically

### Anti-Intellectualism

At this point it is necessary to confront one of anarchism's tragic flaws, one that has made it incapable of becoming a serious historical alternative: its strong tendency towards anti-intellectualism. With few exceptions (eg. Kropotkin, Rocker, Bookchin) anarchism has failed to produce proponents interested in developing a rigorous analysis of capitalism, the state, bureaucracy, or authoritarianism. Consequently its opposition to these phenomena has tended to remain instinctive and emotional: whatever analyses it has produced have been eclectic, largely borrowed from Marxism, Liberalism or elsewhere, and rarely of serious intellectual quality.

This is not an accidental failing - there has been no lack of *intelligent* anarchists. But anarchists, perhaps repelled by the coldbloodedness of 'official' Marxist intellectuals, perhaps sensing instinctively the germ of totalitarianism in any intellectual system that seeks to explain everything, have been consciously and often militantly opposed to intellectual endeavour as such. Their opposition has been not simply to particular analysis and theories, but to analysis and theory as such. Bakunin, for example, argued - in a manner reminiscent of the medieval Pope Gregory - that teaching workers theories would undermine their inherent revolutionary qualities. What happens when a movement's leading *theorist* is explicitly anti-intellectual?

The results for the anarchist movement have been crippling. Anarchism as a theory remains a patchwork of often conflicting insights that remain frustrating especially to critical sympathizers because the most fruitful threads rarely seem to be pursued. Most anarchist publications avoid any discussion of strategy, or any analysis of society as it is today like the plague. (Even one of the best anarchist publications *The Open Road* (3), remains a cheerleader for anything vaguely leftist or

libertarian. People organising unions and people organising against unions receive equally uncritical coverage; pie throwing and bomb throwing are seen as equally valid activities, and no attempt is made to discuss the relative strategic merits of one or the other in a given context). Most anarchist publishing houses seem interested in nothing except a) refighting the Spanish Civil War, b) refighting Kronstadt and c) trashing Marxist-Leninists yet one more time. Even these preoccupations, which have become so routine as to make anarchism simply *boring*, are not pursued in such a way as to develop new insights relating to the history of capitalism, the revolutionary process, or Bolshevism, for example.

### Liturgies

Rather, the same arguments are simply liturgically repeated. Rarely is there any serious political debate within the anarchist movement, while polemics against the bugbear of "Marxism" (as essential to anarchism as Satan is to the church) are generally crippled by a principled refusal to find out anything about what is being attacked. Arguments are mostly carried on in terms of the vaguest generalities; quotations are never used because the words of the supposed enemy have never been read.

As a consequence of its anti-intellectualism anarchism has never been able to develop its potential. A movement that disdains theory and uncritically worships action, anarchism remains a shaky edifice consisting essentially of various chunks of Marxist analysis (4) underpinning a few inflexible tactical concepts. It is held together mainly by libertarian impulses - the best kind of impulses to be sure - and by a fear of organisation that is so great that it is virtually impossible for anarchists to ever organise effectively on a long-term basis. This is truly a tragedy, for the libertarian movement cannot afford to have its members refusing to use their intellects in the battle to create a new world. As long as anarchism continues to promote anti-intellectualism, it is going nowhere.



*Socialist Worker* washes whiter!

# BAKUNIN VERSUS MARX:

## the continuing debate

I propose in this article to examine some of the most common anarchist objections to "Marxism". The issues I shall single out were raised for the first time by Bakunin at the time when anarchism was emerging as a self-conscious movement defining itself in opposition to all other currents on the left. Therefore I will concentrate primarily on Bakunin in the following discussion, and on some of his differences with Marx. While I realise that Bakunin is not the only interpreter of anarchism, I think this is a valid approach for a number of reasons: a) it is impossible to cover everyone and everything in a short essay, b) the Bakunin/Marx split was the formative event in the history of anarchism, c) Bakunin is still the most widely read, quoted and admired anarchist in the anarchist movement itself and d) many of the key anarchist objections, which continue to be used today, originate with Bakunin. To the extent that it is possible to call these objections into question, it is possible to call into question current anarchist pre-conceptions about Marxism and inaugurate a genuine debate.

**How do anarchists see the Marxist/anarchist split? What are their claims?**

The following beliefs seem to be generally accepted by anarchists:

1. Marxists believe in the creation of a 'people's state' or a 'worker's state'; anarchists believe in the abolition of the state.

2. Anarchists look to a society in which real decision making involves everyone who lives in it; Marxism instead would lead to a society in which a few disciplinarians were pulling the strings in a so-called 'proletarian' dictatorship.

3. Marx was an 'economic determinist' - Bakunin emphasised the psychological (subjective) factors in revolution. Marxism is very much of the intellectuals who try to fit everything into their 'theory' of 'dialectical materialism' - of doubtful use at best and which mainly serves to make it possible for Marxist leaders to establish control over the movement.

4. Anarchists believe that revolutionary movements should be open, egalitarian and completely democratic; Marxists on the other hand advocate firmly hierarchical leadership, as exemplified by the vanguard party and 'democratic' centralism.

5. The original split in the First International between Bakunin, Marx and their respective factions came over the issue of authoritarianism; Marx had Bakunin expelled from the International on trumped-up charges because Bakunin opposed Marx's dictatorial, centralized regime over the International.

6. Marxism is 'authoritarian'; anarchism is 'libertarian'.

What of these objections.?

### 1. The peoples' State

Perhaps it is not surprising that it is widely believed that Marx originated this concept, given the number of 'Peoples' Republics', 'Workers' States', etc. in the world today that call themselves 'Marxist'. Yet such a concept is nowhere to be found in Marx's writings. Marx, on the contrary, *specifically rejected it*. (See for example the Critique of the Gotha Programme).

It is indicative of Bakunin's methods that he repeatedly accused Marx of advocating a 'Peoples' State' (see for example Dolgoff ed. 'Bakunin on Anarchy', Vintage 1972.), an accusation that in view of his failure to cite any evidence to support it (check the sources and see if Bakunin ever offers a single quote to back up his claim), and in view of Marx's and Engels' repeated repudiation of the concept, can only be interpreted as a deliberate fabrication on Bakunin's part. And it is hardly to the credit of several generations of anarchists that they have continued to swallow Bakunin's fictions on this matter without ever bothering to look for evidence to back them up.

Marx and Engel's position on the state, while not free of ambiguities and not above criticism, was quite different from what Bakunin claimed. It is spelled out most extensively in Marx's 'The Civil War in France', but is developed in numerous other works as well. What Marx foresaw was that during the revolutionary period of struggle against the bourgeoisie, the proletariat would use the state apparatus to crush the bourgeoisie: "to achieve its liberation it employs means which will be discarded after the liberation" (Marx. 'Conspectus of Bakunin's State and Anarchy' 1874 - 75). After the bourgeoisie are vanquished the state has outlived its usefulness. Marx pointed to the Paris Commune as being very close to what he had in mind. Bakunin too was enthusiastic about the commune, yet he continued to accuse Marx of secretly holding very different views. This Bakuninist nonsense has been endorsed by other anarchists as well. For example, the anarchist Arthur Mueller Lehning writes that "It is an irony of history that at the very moment when the battle between the authoritarians and the anti-authoritarians in the International reached its apogee, Marx should in effect endorse the programme of the anti-authoritarian tendency.....The Commune of Paris had nothing in common with the state socialism of Marx and was more in accord with

the ideas of Proudhon and the federalist theories of Bakunin. 'Civil War in France' is in full contradiction with all Marx's writings on the state." (Quoted in 'Bakunin on Anarchy' ed. Sam Dolgoff p. 260). This is a remarkable piece of doublethink. Marx's major work on the state is said to be "in full contradiction" with "all" his writings on the state. What writings is Leiring referring to then? We don't know because he doesn't say. As always, in anarchist polemics we have to take him on faith. Certainly he can't be referring to 'The Poverty of Philosophy' (1847), or to 'The Communist Manifesto' (1848), or 'The Critique of the Gotha Programme' (1875), or to the private letters Marx was writing at the same time as the publication of the 'Civil War in France' in 1871. All these consistently maintain that the state is incompatible with socialism. Together they comprise most, if not "all" of Marx's writings on the state. But Leiring (and Bakunin, and Dolgoff, and Avrich, and...) know better. Somewhere, in some mythical world known only to the anarchists are to be found Marx's *real* views on the state, the "People's State of Marx" ('Bakunin on Anarchy', p. 318), which is "completely identical" with "the aristocratic-monarchic state of Bismark" ('Bakunin on Anarchy' p. 319).

How does one refute an 'argument' which, without a single shred of evidence, except racial predisposition ("as a German and a Jew, he (Marx) is from head to toe an authoritarian" - Bakunin in 1872) or a single quotation, attributes ideas and concepts to Marx that Marx had repeatedly *attacked*? There are two alternatives: either one swallows everything Bakunin, Dolgoff and co. say, on faith, because they are anarchists, or one takes the path of intellectual integrity, and tries to discover Marx and Engels' views on the state by reading Marx and Engels. If one takes the latter course, one might start by reading Engels' March 1875 letter to Bebel, in which he says "...it is pure nonsense to talk of a free people's state: so long as the proletariat still *uses* the state, it does not use it in the interests of freedom but in order to hold down its adversaries, and as soon as it becomes possible to speak of freedom the state as such ceases to exist. We would therefore propose to replace *state* everywhere by *Gemeinwesen*, a good old German word which can very well convey the meaning of the French word '*commune*'."

It is still possible, of course, to argue that the use of the state by the proletariat in the brief transitional period is dangerous, and could lead to the establishment of a permanent state. (It must be admitted, however, that Bakunin himself envisioned a form of post-revolutionary state, complete with elections, delegates, a parliament, an executive committee, and an army. ('Bakunin on Anarchy' p. 153). Anarchists are curiously quiet about this, however).

Nevertheless it remains a fact that in balance, the concern that Bakunin expressed about the

possible degeneration of the revolution was a valid one, and that Marx for his part failed to give sufficient weight to the dangers posed by this threat to a future revolution. This criticism, however, must itself be qualified in a number of ways. It is a far cry from the claims of Bakunin and the anarchists that Marxism was a theory that *aimed* at the subjection of society to the state.

## 2. Dictatorship of the Proletariat.

A closely related question is that of the dictatorship of the proletariat, one of the most abused and misunderstood terms of all of Marxism. The question of the transition from capitalism to socialism, and Marx's view of it, is an extremely complicated one that cannot be covered in a few paragraphs. But the point here is simply to dispose of the grossest misunderstandings of the term, fostered by its appropriation by the Bolsheviks, and by the related fact that dictatorship has come to have a quite different meaning today than it had in Marx's time. As Dolgoff puts it, there was then a "loose sense in which the term 'dictatorship' was used by nineteenth century socialists - to mean simply the preponderant influence of a class, as in Marx's 'dictatorship of the proletariat'" ('Bakunin on Anarchy' p. 12). To be more precise, the dictatorship of the proletariat means the rule by the proletariat as a class, and the suppression of the bourgeoisie as a class. It is perfectly compatible with, and indeed presupposes, the most thorough going democracy *within* the working class. The best brief exposition of the Marxian concept, and how it differs from the Leninist concept of dictatorship, comes from Rosa Luxemburg's 1918 polemic against the Bolsheviks:

"We have always distinguished the social kernel from the political form of *bourgeois* democracy; we have always revealed the hard kernel of social inequality and lack of freedom hidden under the sweet shell of formal equality and freedom - not in order to reject the latter but to spur the working class into not being satisfied with the shell, but rather, by conquering political power, to create a socialist democracy to replace bourgeois democracy - not to eliminate democracy altogether.

"But socialist democracy is not something which begins in the promised land after the foundations of socialist economy are created; it does not come as some sort of Christmas present for the worthy people, who, in the interim, have loyally supported a handful of socialist dictators. Socialist democracy begins simultaneously with the beginnings of the destruction of class rule and the construction of socialism. It begins at the very moment of the seizure of power by the revolutionary party. It is the same thing as the dictatorship of the proletariat.

"Yes, dictatorship! But this dictatorship consists in the *manner of applying democracy*, not in its *elimination*, in energetic, resolute

attacks upon the well-entrenched rights and economic relationships of bourgeois society, without which a socialist transformation cannot be accomplished. But this dictatorship must be the work of a *class* and not of a little leading minority in the name of the class - that is, it must proceed step by step out of the active participation of the masses...." (Rosa Luxemburg. 'The Russian Revolution').

### 3. "Economic Determinism"

The question of Marx's materialism and his emphasis on the relations of production, is an extremely difficult one which cannot be dealt with in such a short article. At this point it is possible only to say that it raises difficult problems which have to be seriously analyzed. However, while a re-examination of Marx's theory and the admitted contradictions in it are on the agenda, it must be said that the typical anarchist portrayals of it and objections to it are ill-informed misconceptions that contribute nothing to the discussion. For example, Marx was not an 'economic determinist'; he rejected such determinism and what he called 'crude materialism' out of hand. He did not attempt to reduce all phenomena to economic ones; and it is necessary only to read any of his political works to be convinced of this. As Engels said, "According to the materialist conception of history, the *ultimately* determined element in history is the production and reproduction of material life. More than this neither Marx nor I has ever asserted. Hence if somebody twists this into saying that the economic element is the *only* determining one he transforms the proposition into a meaningless, abstract, senseless phrase." (Letter to Joseph Block, September 21 - 22, 1890).

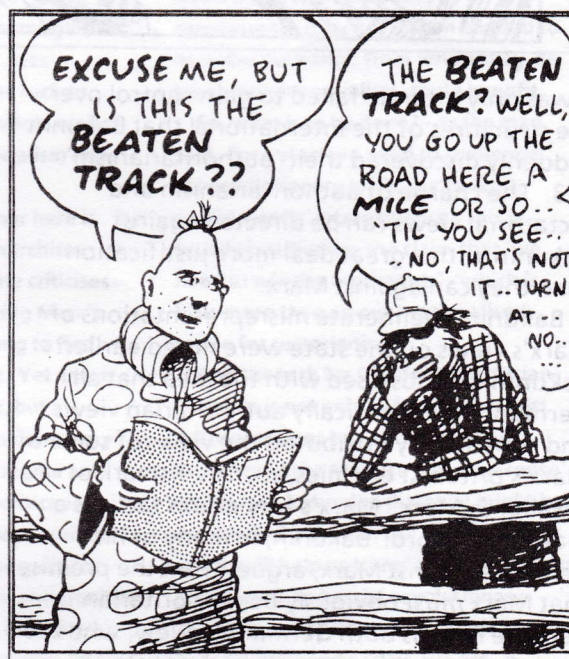
Anarchists like Paul Avrich, however, have their own view of 'what Marx really meant'. See how Avrich crudely contrasts Marx's and Bakunin's views: "(Bakunin) rejected the view that social change depends on the gradual unfolding of 'objective' historical conditions. He believed, on the contrary, that men shape their own destinies..."

It is unfortunate that Avrich has never read Marx's third thesis on Feuerbach: "The materialist doctrine (of Feuerbach) that men are products of their circumstances and upbringing, and that, therefore, changed men are the products of other circumstances and changed upbringing, forgets that it is men that change circumstances and that the educator himself needs educating." Or 'The Holy Family': "*History does nothing*, it 'does not possess immense riches', it 'does not fight battles'. It is *men*, real, living men, who do all this, who possess things and fight battles. It is not 'history' which uses men as a means of achieving - as if it were an individual person - its own ends. History is *nothing* but the activity of men in pursuit of their ends".

### 4, 5, 6. The nature of the revolutionary organisation; authoritarianism and libertarianism.

Again it is impossible to do justice to either Marx's or Bakunin's views in a short article such as this. It is necessary to understand, first of all, that the ideas of both, as expressed in their writings, are in certain respects contradictory; neither Marx, nor certainly Bakunin, was entirely consistent throughout his life. Secondly, the practice of both men was sometimes at variance with what they advocated. Neither was able to live up to the standards set down. Both displayed considerable streaks of arrogance and authoritarianism in their own personalities.

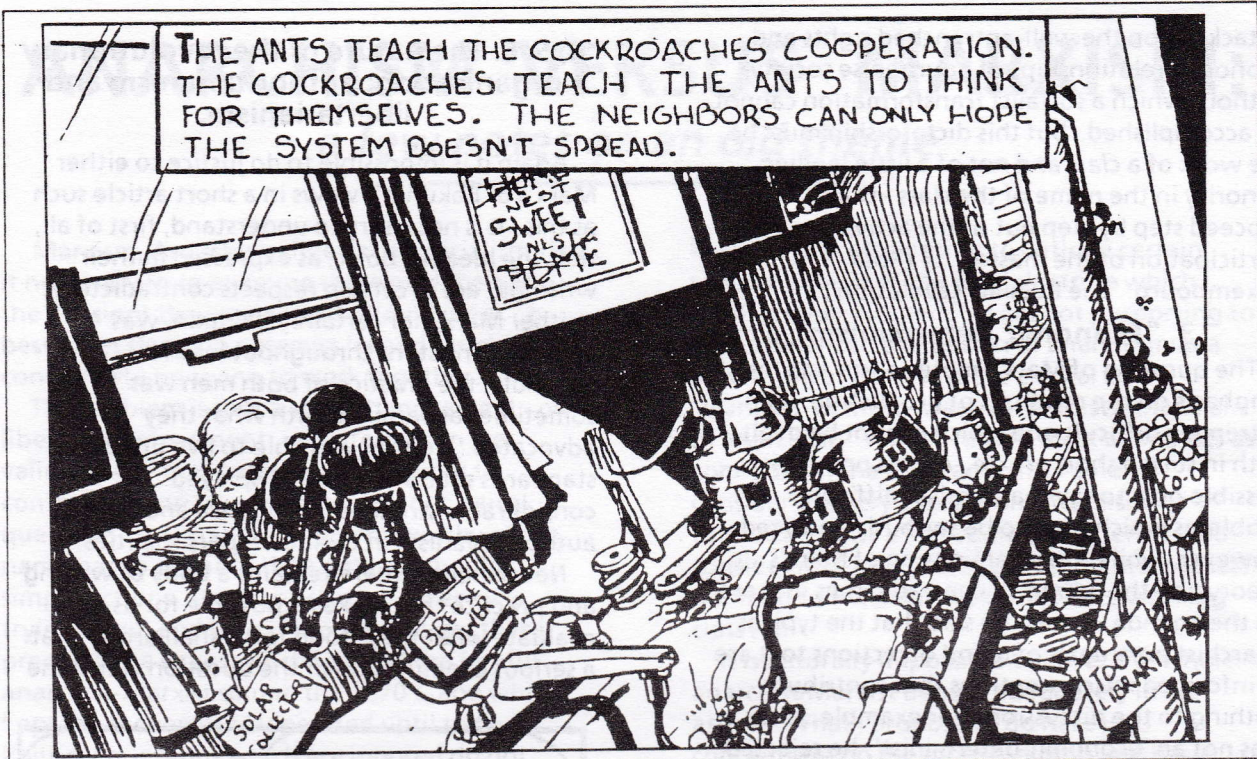
Nevertheless, there remains a body of writing and practice that makes it possible for us to evaluate what they stood for. I shall argue that a serious examination of the question yields the



following points:

1. Bakunin deliberately distorted and falsified Marx's views on the issues under dispute.
2. The accusation that led to Bakunin's expulsion from the International, that of heading a secret society which aimed to infiltrate and take over the International, was true. (Since this seems to be accepted by most historians, this point will not be pursued. See for example Woodcock's 'Anarchism' p. 168, or Aileen Kelly's article in the New York Review of Books, January 22nd, 1976). The only point worth noting here is that the 'authoritarian' federal structures of the International that Bakunin protested so vehemently against in 1871 and 1872 were introduced to the International shortly before, not on the initiative of the General Council of which Marx was a member, but on the motion of *Bakunin's* supporters, with Bakunin's active participation and support.

THE ANTS TEACH THE COCKROACHES COOPERATION. THE COCKROACHES TEACH THE ANTS TO THINK FOR THEMSELVES. THE NEIGHBORS CAN ONLY HOPE THE SYSTEM DOESN'T SPREAD.



It was only after he failed to gain control over the structures of the International that Bakunin suddenly discovered their 'authoritarianism'.

3. The charge of authoritarianism and dictatorial views can be directed against Bakunin with a great deal more justification than they can against Marx.

Bakunin's deliberate misrepresentations of Marx's views on the state were noted earlier. Bakunin was obsessed with the idea that all Germans held identically authoritarian views, and consistently attributed the views of some of Marx's bitterest enemies, such as Bismark or Lasalle, to Marx. Marx's fury at this tactic is a matter of record. Bakunin, in many of his polemics against Marx, argues from the premise that Marx *must* obviously be authoritarian because he was both German and Jew, who are by *definition* authoritarians and statist. (Because of selective editing this is not evident in Dolgoff's anthology). Bakunin went even further, claiming that Marx was part of an international conspiracy with Bismark and Rothschild. Such accusations are not worthy of reply, but surely they make it clear that it is necessary to treat the 'facts' and arguments of the man making them with the greatest of caution.

A similar disregard for the most elementary rules of evidence, not to mention decency, permeated most of Bakunin's polemics against Marx. He charged again and again, that Marx advocated a universal dictatorship, that he believed in a socialism "decreed from the top down". He ignored Marx's lifelong insistence that "the emancipation of the working classes can only be the work of the working classes themselves", and Marx's intransigent opposition to the state. Nor did he attempt to support his accusations with the facts or quotations.

In reading Bakunin's caricature of Marx's views - the only 'version' of Marxism most anarchists have ever bothered to familiarise themselves with! - readers will search in vain for one single quotation amidst the hysterical confusion of wild, unsubstantiated charges. There are simply none.

Almost as bad are those anarchists who lambast Marx for his 'advocacy' of 'democratic centralism' and the 'vanguard party'. Is it really necessary to point out that these concepts came into being long after Marx's death; that Marx never belonged to an organisation practising either; that he consistently opposed the tiny conspiratorial sects of his day; that he made it a condition of his joining the Communist League that they scrap their closed, undemocratic organisational forms; that he always, and angrily, refused attempts by socialists of his day to single him out for special honours or titles in the movement?

And has it been forgotten completely that one of Marx's chief themes in his criticism of Bakunin was the latter's eternal fascination with conspiratorial, manipulative, sectarian politics?

For there is, unfortunately for those who believe in anarchist fairy tales, a substantial body of evidence for the contention that Bakunin held precisely those 'authoritarian' views which he brazenly attributed to Marx. Those who seek evidence of a penchant for dictatorial, Machiavellian politics will find a good deal of material in the writings not of Marx, but of Bakunin. (This is not to say that Bakunin consistently held such views; within Bakunin's work the contradictions amount to a basic polarity).

Bakunin's advocacy of a post-revolutionary state, which contained most of the forms of the

pre-revolutionary state, such as Parliament, army, elections etc. was noted earlier and can be found in 'Bakunin on Anarchy' (p. 153).

Similarly, despite his much vaunted opposition to any form of independent political action by the working class, one can find him advocating, in his letters not simply political action, but working class support and action on behalf of *bourgeois* political parties. (See 'Bakunin on Anarchy' p. 219). And elsewhere, one finds him advocating nothing less than that anarchists run for Parliament. ('Bakunin on Anarchy' p. 218).

Nor are these merely the products of his naive, youthful days. No, these pronouncements, and many others like them, were issued *privately* at precisely the time that Bakunin is *publicly* proclaiming his opposition to Marxism because it advocates political action by the working class, and a transitional dictatorship of the proletariat in the immediate post-revolutionary period.

It is also worth contrasting Bakunin's proclamation of the principle, for the future anarchist society, of "from each according to his ability, to each according to his *work*" with Marx's much more radical principle, "from each according to his ability to each according to his *needs*".

Or consider Bakunin's rules for the International Alliance, not a passing whim, but the organisation to which he gave his primary allegiance whilst participating in the First International. Here is a sample written in 1869: "it is necessary that in the midst of popular anarchy, which will make up the very life of and all the energy of the revolution, *the unity of revolutionary thought and action should be embodied in a certain organ. That organ must be the secret and world-wide association of the international brothers...*"

"...the only thing a well-organised secret society can do is first to assist the birth of revolution by spreading among the masses ideas that accord with instincts of the masses, and to organise, not the army of the revolution - that army will be composed of the people, but a *revolutionary general staff* composed of devoted, energetic and intelligent individuals who are above all sincere - not vain or ambitious - friends of the people, capable of serving as intermediaries between the revolutionary ideas and the popular instincts."

"The number of these individuals should not, therefore, be too large. For the International organisation throughout Europe one hundred serious and firmly united revolutionaries would be sufficient. Two or three hundred revolutionaries would be enough for the organisation of the largest country."

As the 'authoritarian' Marx said of this libertarian idea: "To say that a hundred international brothers must 'serve as intermediaries between the revolutionary idea and popular instincts' is to create an unbridgeable gulf between the Alliance's

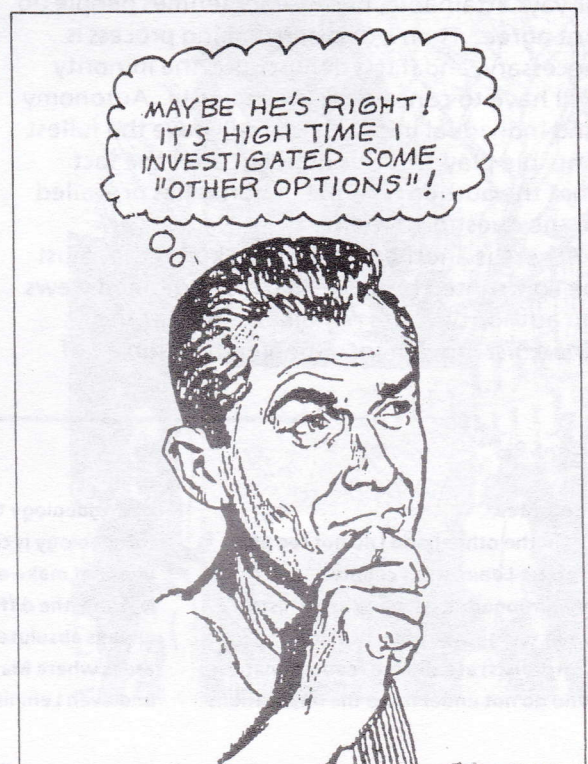
revolutionary idea and the proletarian masses; it means proclaiming that these hundred guardsmen cannot be recruited anywhere but from among the privileged classes."

When one sees the views of Marx and Bakunin side by side, it is difficult to remember that it is Marx, not Bakunin, who is supposed to be the father of 'Marxism-Leninism' and Bakunin, not Marx, who is supposed to be the father of anarchism.

Bakunin's authoritarian tendencies were at their most extreme at precisely the time he was splitting the International. This was the time of his association with Nechaev. Most anarchist sources treat this as a passing aberration on Bakunin's part, and indeed he did repudiate Nechaev when he realised the true nature of his activities.

But the fact remains that Bakunin did enter into partnership with Nachaev, and under his influence wrote a number of tracts that displayed a despotic, Machiavellian approach to revolution that far surpassed anything he ever accused Marx of. The authorship of some of the pieces in question is under dispute, but the relevant point is surely that Bakunin allowed his name to be put to even those pamphlets he did not write, and that he actively worked to have them distributed knowing they bore his name.

In these pamphlets, Necheav and Bakunin advocate a new social order, to be erected "*by concentrating all the means of social existence in the hands of Our Committee, and the proclamation of compulsory physical work for everyone,*" compulsory residence in communal dormitories, rules for hours of work, feeding of children, and other minutiae. As the 'authoritarian' Marx put it: "What a beautiful model of barrack-room communism! Here you have it all: communal eating, communal



sleeping, assessors and offices regulating education, production, consumption, in a word, all social activity, and to crown it all *Our Committee*, anonymous and unknown to anybody, as the supreme dictator. This indeed is the purest anti-authoritarianism...'

When one looks at Bakunin's views on authority and revolution in detail, it is hard to disagree with Marx and Engels' claim that Bakunin and his followers simply used the word 'authoritarian' to mean something they didn't like. The word 'authoritarian' was then, and remains today for many libertarians, a way of avoiding serious political questions. For the fact is that not all authority is bad; that in certain situations it is both necessary and unavoidable. As Engels said: "A revolution is certainly the most authoritarian thing there is; it is the act whereby one part of the population enforces its will upon the other part by means of rifles, bayonets and cannon - authoritarian means if such there be at all". And some form of authority ie. decision making structure, is necessary in any form of interaction, co-operation or organisation that is social rather than individual. In a socialist society, it will still be necessary to make decisions about things; these decisions will necessarily reflect the will ie. the authority, of the majority. This is not a violation of collectivity, but an absolutely indispensable component of it. To say, as many anarchists do, that they reject all forms of authority, even that which is willingly accepted or which is the result of democratic decision making, is simply to advocate either minority rule or a return to the purest form of free-market capitalism, as is advocated by the 'libertarian' right. No amount of talk about consensus or local autonomy or individual initiative will alter this fact. Consensus is not always attainable, because sometimes people do not agree. Then a decision making process is necessary, and if it is democratic, the minority will have to concede to the majority. Autonomy and individual initiative can still have the fullest possible play, but this does not alter the fact that the authority of the majority has prevailed in the question at hand.

There is another aspect of Bakunin that must be confronted because, like his ill-defined views on authority, *it has remained a part of the anarchist movement*. Running through *all* of

Bakunin's thought and subsequent anarchist thought and practice is a dark thread; an infatuation with violence; with destruction for the sake of destruction; action for the sake of action; distrust of logic, intellect and knowledge; a love for conspiratorial and tightly controlled organisation. For the most part, these things remained subsidiary to his - and his successors' - genuinely libertarian and humanistic instincts.

During the period of Bakunin's association with Nechaev, who was attracted solely by Bakunin's dark side, this aspect took over. Then, confronted with the realisation of this dark thread in practice, in the person of Nechaev, Bakunin shrank back in genuine horror. However, as Aileen Kelly has noted, "...even then he managed to integrate Nechaev's villainy into his own fantasies, writing to his astonished friends that Nechaev's methods were those of a 'pure' and 'saintly' nature who, faced with the apathy of the masses and intellectuals in Russia, saw no other way but coercion to mold the latter into a force determined enough to move the masses to revolution. Such reasoning, Bakunin concluded, 'contains, alas! much truth'".

Kelly continues: "This grotesque assessment of Nechaev is very revealing. At a time when the gap between man's empirical and ideal natures seemed enormous, Bakunin, albeit, reluctantly, concluded that if men do not wish to liberate themselves, it might be necessary for those with their highest interests at heart to liberate them against their will."

To Bakunin's credit, he continually struggled against the implications of this aspect of his thought. Always fascinated by all the 'revolutionary' shortcuts, he nevertheless remained loyal as well to his libertarian instincts, and it is this aspect of his remarkably polarised vision that he left as his lasting heritage. The anarchist movement that came after him has also been plagued by the same polarity, by the tension between the real libertarianism on the one side, and the sometimes irresistible attraction of anti-intellectualism, terrorism and conspiracy on the other. The anarchist movement needs to come to grips with Bakunin's ambiguous heritage. And to do so, it also needs to come to terms with Marx.

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#### Footnotes.

1. On the other hand I do not see all Marxist-Leninists as counter-revolutionaries, as many anarchists seem to do. Many (particularly Trotskysts) are sincere revolutionaries who do not understand the implications

of the ideology they adhere to. Even if the ideology is counter-revolutionary it does not make every Marxist-Leninist so. Nor are the differences on the left always absolute, there are always grey areas where Marxism and Anarchism, and even Leninism and Anarchism

converge. Life doesn't always lend itself to analysis by the 'them' 'us' categories, if for no other reason than that all of us have internalised at least some of the repressive baggage of the dominant society. All of us have something 'counter-revolutionary' in us (Diemer).



# In Review...

## **"Surviving the Blues - Growing up in Thatchers Decade". Edited by Joan Scanlon. Virago Press. £5.95.**

As we've hit the 1990's it was inevitable that there'd be a review of the past decade - of ten uninterrupted years of 'Thatcherism'. 'Surviving the Blues' is a worthwhile attempt, made up of individual contributions from women who've grown up 'under Thatcher' (an unfortunate phrase).

It's a broad sweep of a book that covers women's experience in different areas and gives a real feel of the times, without the hopelessness that seemed to accompany them. There was a lot of fight in women in the eighties, as Emma Wallis' piece on Women Against Pit Closures and Clare Ramsaran's piece on Stop The Clause tell.

Agnes Quashie gives insight into the black community's attempts to redress the balance with playschemes for black children and she reviews the SUS law. It's worth buying just for the article by Norah Al-Ani. As a cleaner in a women's centre (surely a contradiction in terms!) her experience reveals many of the problems that accompanied the politics of the movement.

The book raises many important questions about the nature of the women's movement and its fragmentation in the eighties. It questions the assumption that women have a common oppression overriding all others; an assumption which was largely accepted in the movement. The 'all new' Spare Rib Collective even argue in their piece that the movement was 'hi-jacked' by a minority of women "defining it narrowly, in terms of their own interests and privilege". Presumably these were white and middle-class.

This is important about 'Surviving the Blues', the recognition that class and race cannot be subsumed to the greater cause of the battle against Patriarchy. Throughout the book is a plea that the movement, such as it is, widens and diversifies its perspectives. The solution is seen as letting women define their own issues and needs, whether black, white or working-class, and then acting on

these self-defined needs.

Sounds great to all of us who were arguing ourselves blue in the face about class and race in the eighties. In those days Patriarchy was paramount, and any attempt to talk about other issues raised storms of protest. There's definitely been something of a shift when the Spare Rib Collective can argue: "For us, everything is linked.....for a majority of women worldwide, other oppressions - of race, class, capitalism and imperialism are intricately connected with their subordination as women and their liberation."

It's positive and heartening stuff, and yet they continue the 'old ideology' in a new form. The Spare Rib Collective argue that the women's movement has had no "definitive theoretical viewpoint", but I'd argue that the movement of WIRES, of the women's centres and of Greenham did have a viewpoint - one defined for us by Rich and Dworkin. It's a viewpoint which the Collective still use and which talks of "the power imbalance between men and women, among races and classes". And this is where I depart.

Being working class in origin (and I don't want a medal) if Marx had left his analysis of capitalism as simply a list of injustices followed by the statement that there was a power imbalance, I don't think my understanding of my class position would have progressed very much. The problem with this kind of analysis, especially in relation to class, is that responsibility for injustice is placed on the shoulders of 'wicked people', and changing attitudes by 'putting women first', or replacing the individuals in positions of power is hardly an adequate solution.

It's an analysis which ignores how these injustices occur in the first place. It attempts no understanding of how structures such as capitalism have developed and manifest themselves in different forms at different times. It gives us no insight into how structures interrelate or how to change them.

Action is all very well, but in acting we must understand the context in which we act, and the material

conditions which influence and inform our actions.

To give radical feminists their due they did put women's issues on the agenda, and did do much of the practical work. But for years socialist feminists have been trying to place issues of class, race and sex in relation to each other and feminists should recognise that there is some basis already for an understanding of this interrelation.

I've spent years arguing with feminists about Capitalism, and with socialists about Patriarchy, and race hardly ever gets a mention. But what is good about this book is that it offers the chance for a dialogue.

Meg Jepson

## **"Necessary Illusions: Thought Control In Democratic Societies". by Noam Chomsky. Pluto Press. £9.95.**

'Necessary Illusions' is 136 pages long, but comes in a four hundred page volume. The other three hundred pages are appendices.

Taking American foreign policy as its prime example, it shows how public debates portray the media as being subversive and prone to dangerous "excesses of democracy", when in fact they carry little more than the poisonous undiluted voice of the state.

This is not a new idea. In fact, it's an element of the Situationist theory of the Spectacle: heated debates within a narrow framework are encouraged, since they divert attention away from challenges to the framework itself.

But Chomsky's book is useful because it details the myriad ways that this actually happens, without recourse to arcane conspiracy theories or assumptions about the inherent nastiness of journalists and editors.

He details the interlinked forces of commercial viability, market share and concentration of ownership; he also outlines their transformation for media workers into career structures and immediate, daily priorities. The

convergence of state and class interests as a worker moves up the career ladder is a further factor.

Chomsky's book is packed with examples of outright lies, gentle distortions and simple changes of emphasis designed to manufacture consent - or at least its appearance. Together with the myth of the sometimes-subversive media, these are the necessary illusions of the book's title.

The book's particular relevance at the moment is in its focus on the actions of the US and its 'client states'. Chomsky contrasts media portrayals of Nicaragua with Chile and El Salvador, of Israel with the Gaza Strip and the Lebanon. In doing so, he provides a guide to the efforts of Bush and Co. as they manipulate public opinion in the Western capitalist world to the point where they think an armed assault on Iraq will be acceptable.

'Necessary Illusions' is rigorously documented and tightly written. My only cautionary comment would be that if you try to read all the appendices too, you're likely to suffer an overblow of evidence compared to ideas. A book to shoplift rather than buy, but definitely worth a read.

S. Callas

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### "Manifesto for New Times". CPGB. Lawrence and Wishart. £2.95.

On page 45 of the 'Manifesto' it reads: "The progressive politics would reunite us with the humanitarian traditions of the early socialists who were concerned with the politics of consumption, art, culture, poetry, nature, childhood and sexuality, as well as production. Socialism would be recovered as a bottom-up, dynamic, humanising force". This is ironic, since the Stalinist CPGB did so much to undermine this bottom-up socialism in the first place.

Anti-Stalinist socialists have tended to see Stalinism as an aberration which grew out of the particular experience of post-1917 Russia. Yet as the authors point out: "The Communist Party shares the past and present of the British left - its victories and defeats, strengths and weaknesses." Stalinism, in other

words, also expressed something of the wider left. The British Labour Party, and especially the Fabian tradition, shared in its bureaucratic managerialism. Trotskyists - the anti-bureaucratic Bolsheviks - were amongst the most vocal defenders of the 'degenerate workers state', seeing in nationalisation the essence if not the actuality of workers' power. And the Trots have also shared many of Stalinism's characteristic features: the prioritised party, the economism, the almost theistic dogma. The collapse of Stalinism, east and west, is an occasion for socialists to rejoice; it also calls on them to take a long look at themselves.

The 'Manifesto' is one reassessment, and is a distillation of many of the debates that have appeared in Marxism Today over the past few years.

These debates initiated a great deal of controversy on the left; with the ideas of Marxism Today being portrayed by many on the revolutionary left as merely academic rationalisations for the labour movement's 'shift to the right'.

Not surprisingly this controversy focused on the issue of class. 'New Times', it has been argued, is part of an intellectual fad which is 'waving farewell to the working class'.

Essentially 'New Times' argues that the old class identities are being eroded by technological change and consequent economic restructuring; and that these are being replaced by an array of newer identities based on gender, sexuality, race, age and off the peg consumer lifestyle. It goes on to suggest that the 'old' socialist class strategy is out of date and needs to be replaced by a new strategy based on a 'progressive alliance' of different collectivities and identities, of which class is but one.

There is some food for thought here. The left have rarely given sufficient credence to questions of sex, gender and race; and social movements that don't fit neatly into the traditional class categories are marginalised still. Thus 'New Times' might help us reapproach class politics in a more open way; explicitly recognising that the working class is not an undifferentiated mass and that a class analysis is ultimately incomplete.

But 'New Times' goes far beyond this; and when in the interests of plurality we're called on to build a

socialist project that actually embraces market individualism (rather than concerning itself with some kind of empowered individuality), then it goes too far. What possible long-term social interests could be generated that unites the green consumers, marathon runners, opera goers, wine drinkers and Nike wearers that Marxism Today courts?

The problem is that 'New Times' deals with class in purely subjective and 'cultural' terms. They have rejected the understanding of class in terms of the deeper structures and relationships within the system. Of course it is true, the working class changes - as technology, work, investment patterns change. Capitalism is nothing if not dynamic. Yet it matters little whether you wear a blue collar or press the buttons of a VDU, as a wage worker you'll be subject to an array of pressures - deskilling, increased intensity of work, unemployment - irreducibly part of an exploitative system based on the profit motive. And the same kind of unifying experience reveals itself across the range of social situations which make up working class life. In welfare, health, housing, education, transport and so on. It is certainly not undifferentiated: yet experientially and structurally class remains central to capitalist reality. Whatever the complications, class still has to be at the core of any project of socialist change.

Naturally a manifesto will include too many issues to be developed in a review. A key issue is the technological determinism that seems to underlie 'New Times'. Most of Lenin they have abandoned, but significantly not this. Is it a retrospective apologia for their Stalinist past - saying "Technologically we had no choice"? Such an approach towards technology is inconsistent with socialism. It imputes a non-existent social neutrality to technology. But technology is not socially neutral and neither does it 'cause' social change in the way 'New Times' theorises. Technology is produced within society and carries all the marks of class struggle. And technological norms are as much ideological expressions of class interest as descriptions of the actual labour process.

The Bolsheviks provide one

example of what happens when such a view of technology is expressed in policy, the workers' councils were deliberately undermined in favour of Taylorism and one-man management, and 'New Times' provides another. Both are only consistent with a view of 'socialism' which accepts the terms and terrain of capitalism.

Another thing is the language. By page 46 I was bored reading 'modernisation', 'progressive', 'progressive modernisation', 'progressive settlement'. In any case gutted of any militant socialist content, this language becomes amorphous and vague. Which says a lot about the manifesto really. I don't want 'modernisation' (whatever that means) but socialism.

John Roberts

## "Marxism and its Failures." A.C.F. 50p

I must begin by saying that some of my most trusted comrades are members of the ACF, so this is not just a slag-off. But I had the same problems with this pamphlet that I have with most anarchist critiques of Marxism. What are they?

Firstly, and most importantly, the pamphlet never acknowledges that Marxism does not simply equal Leninism, does not simply equal Stalinism, Maoism or Trotskyism:

"Lenin, Trotsky, Stalin...all contributed in their own way to the creation of the Soviet Union, that totalitarian state which discredited the revolutionary left for so long. But they do not deserve all the blame, for they were only trying to put into practice the programme originally drawn up by Marx and Engels in the Manifesto of the Communist Party in 1848."

(From the preface to "Marxism and its Failures")

This is an exaggeration. Marx himself wrote very little about the practical application of his theories of class struggle. What he did write was often ambiguous, sometimes incoherent and even contradictory - barely capable of being described as a programme.

Lenin, Trotsky, Stalin and Mao are all 'Marxists' who tried to fill this gap. More recently, groups as diverse as the Red Army Faction, the CPGB and

the Vietcong have all described themselves as 'Marxist'. The confusion this causes is deepened because many 'Marxist' groups insist that theirs is the only true Marxism - or at the very least, that theirs is the biggest or the best.

But there is also a libertarian strand in Marx, exemplified by some theorists of the Frankfurt School, writers such as Daniel Guerin and groups like the Situationists. By failing to acknowledge that there have been different kinds of Marxist, the pamphlet censors and devalues these contributions. Libertarian Marxists don't get a mention, whilst council communists like Wildcat just scrape into bracketed semi-relevance by the skin of their claws.

This failure to distinguish the '57 varieties of Marxism' allows the ACF to lump together all the atrocities ever committed by state capitalists, from Kronstadt 1921 to Tiananman Square 1989, and describe them all as 'Marxist' in exactly the same way as the capitalist press label them all 'communist'. And this provides half of the proof for their main argument, which seems to be that 'All Marxists Are Bastards' - AMAB.

Their other major proof that AMAB is, of course, quotes - and there are some beauties. I especially liked the one attributed to Bukharin:

"Proletarian compulsion in all its forms, beginning with summary execution and ending with compulsory labour is, however paradoxical it may sound, a method of reworking the human material of the capitalist epoch into communist humanity" (p. 15).

But quotes are inherently selective and can be taken out of context, which brings us to the core problem of the pamphlet: it largely ignores the socially embedded context of political ideologies.

Let us ignore for a moment the problems of proving that AMAB by studying their texts - let us assume that this is simply true. Why in that case don't more people realise it? I'm not just talking about the non-activist population who wouldn't join any organisation, the ACF included. I'm also talking about the many (and their existence can't be wished away) committed revolutionaries who join the SWP, (for example), and stay there.

Are all these people a bit stupid? Or is it just that - AMAB - they were

already bastards beforehand, which is why they joined? I think not.

Yet it is certainly true that organisations like the SWP often behave in ways which are manipulative, dishonest and ultimately contemptuous of the very people they claim to be acting for. If SWP members are not simply stupid bastards, then it must be the ideologies that shape these organisations which are bad. So why don't the committed revolutionaries in the SWP realise this?

The obvious answer is that Leninism seems to offer something. Lenin was only able to achieve the status he did because his ideas related to the real world that he was part of. If his ideas had never been relevant, we would never have heard of them. And although the world he inhabited is vastly different to ours there are continuities.

In particular, the tasks of organising to create social and political change still throw up the same dilemmas: between organisation and accessibility, between planning and spontaneity, between intellectual knowledge and gut-level motivation.

Lenin offered solutions to all these dilemmas. His strategies for change favoured rigid, top-down organisation, planning and intellectual leadership. As solutions to the practical dilemmas of organising, these ideas which greatly simplify the role of the revolutionary are still attractive today.

Let's be clear about all this. Leninism stinks. But if we simply dismiss it and run to its opposite pole, anarchism, all we do is bring a new set of problems to the fore. The basic dilemmas of organisation remain, and until they are tackled revolutionary intervention may be impossible. Fundamentally, these dilemmas hinge on how we conceive of the relationship between the individual and society. Tackling them may involve a radical re-think of just what it is to be a person, a member of a society, or a revolutionary. We can - and should - use the failures of Marxism, and of Leninism, Trotskyism etc in this task. We should also use their experiences. The ACF's pamphlet is a neat critique, but it is only half the picture.

S. Callas