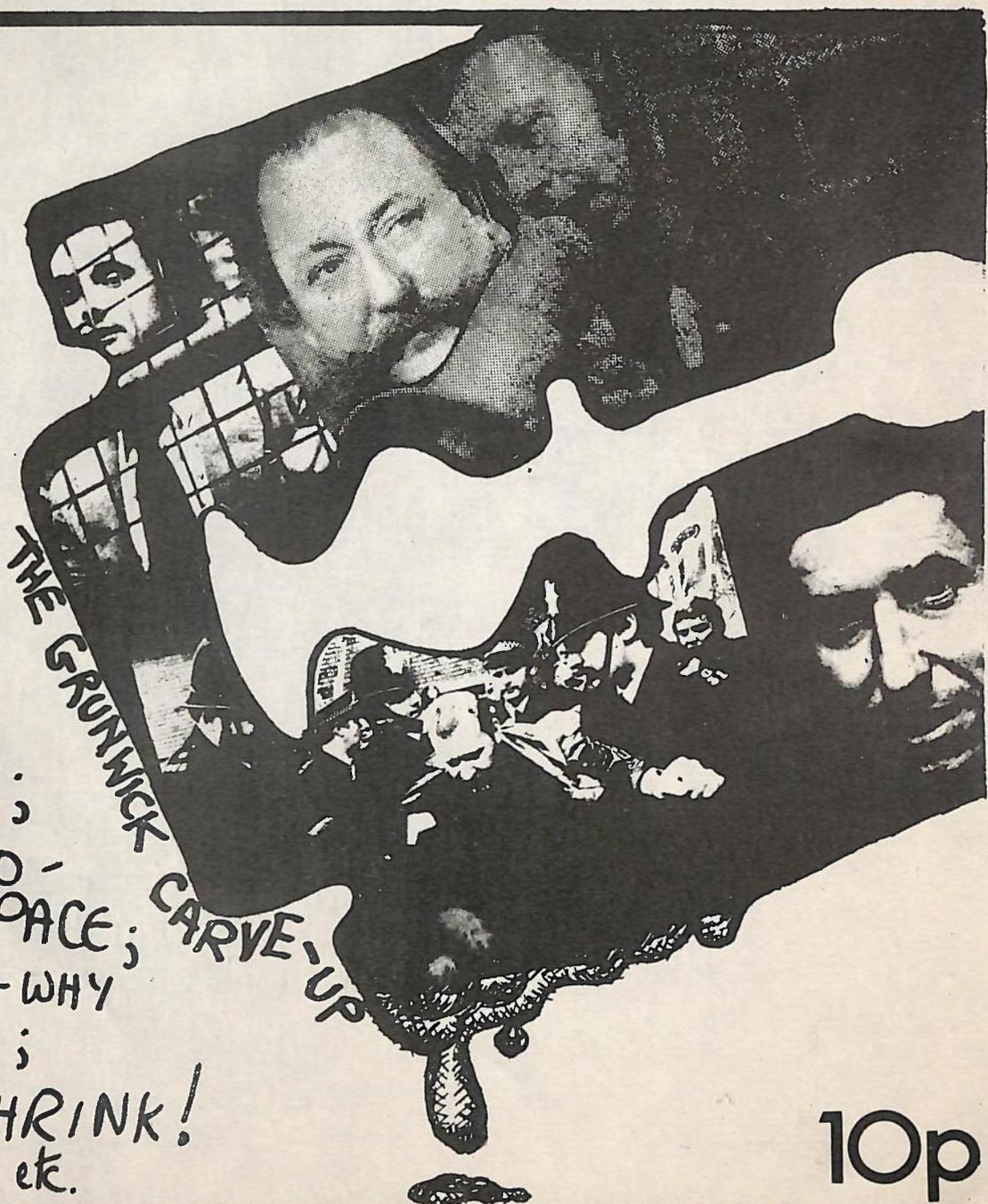


solidarity

for workers' power vol.8 no.7



THE GRUNWICK CARVE-UP

In this issue:
GRUNWICK;
LUCAS AERO-
SPACE;
THE C.N.T. - WHY
I LEFT;
LISTEN SHRINK!
etc.

10p

TWO STRUGGLES

Two recent industrial struggles stand in stark contrast. One is the Grunwick strike, with its allied solidarity actions. The other is the initiative of the Lucas Aerospace shop stewards.

GRUNWICK: A 19th CENTURY DISPUTE

At the centre of all the razamatazz is a strike of heavily exploited, initially non-unionised, largely immigrant workers who wanted a sacked colleague reinstated, an end to compulsory overtime, better ventilation, the option of a holiday during the summer months, less insulting and arbitrary attitudes on the part of foremen and managers, and an unspecified increase in their near-starvation wages. It has escalated into a battle over union recognition involving a mobilisation of the 'left' and of sections of the trade union movement.

Of course we support the strikers. They are seeking to control a little more of their working lives. Their courage and tenacity have been impressive. Dockers and Heathrow Airport workers have shown solidarity. For three weeks Cricklewood postmen refused to handle Grunwick mail. They were suspended by the Post Office, and only voted to return to normal working (and this by the narrowest of majorities: 51-48) under tremendous pressure from 'their' officials. These actions have shown employers throughout the country that working class solidarity - in the Britain of 1977 - is still, potentially, the nightmare they always feared.

Many will say things like this. But let's look below the surface. The 'support' the strikers have been getting provides us with a cross-section of the contradictions, manipulations, schizoid thinking and well-meant humbug that can be found today in the 'socialist' and trade union movement. The attitude of the employers is also revealing; it is equally riddled with cant and double-talk.

a) THE EMPLOYERS

The tenacity of the Grunwick management cannot be explained solely in terms of economic expediency. Other firms, both larger and smaller, have 'allowed the union in' without automatically collapsing. In fact, what an APEX (1) implantation might have gained (in terms of wages and conditions, over a long period) has probably already been conceded by the management - if only for propaganda purposes. What is at stake for Grunwick is the maintenance of a given pattern of authority relations within their plant. 'Who is boss here?' seems their main concern. In this their attitude is not

(1) Association of Professional, Executive, Clerical and Computer Staff.

unique. Certain managements would quite literally prefer to close factories down rather than continue operations with their authority reduced or constantly challenged. How big is the iceberg, of which this obsession with authority is the visible tip? How many employers, in their heart of hearts, identify with Grunwick?

The fact is that the employers are by no means unanimous. Some applaud privately but few do so in public. The behaviour of the Grunwick management is undoubtedly an embarrassment to those more far-sighted capitalists who see the unions not as a threat, but as essential allies in the maintenance of labour discipline. The Confederation of British Industries has carefully avoided giving public encouragement to Mr Ward. Tory spokesmen, keen to avoid appearing as 'union bashers' (which they see as an electoral liability) have concentrated their impotent anger on the 'illegality' of mass pickets, or on the solidarity action of the postmen.

What the Grunwick management have done, though, is to puncture a vast balloon of pretence. They have called the bluff of the liberals and the social democrats. They have shown that the noises of the left are so much piss and wind. They have shown that 'reports' and 'recommendations' in a capitalist democracy have 'weight' only insofar as everyone plays the game, internalises (or pretends to internalise) the rules of the system. They have monumentally demystified the situation. They have shown that, as far as employers are concerned, both state and unions only have velvet fists in their iron gloves.

b) THE UNIONS

The anti-working class division of labour, here, worked to perfection. Each did his share of the dirty work. We are not suggesting this was consciously orchestrated, or part of a great conspiracy. Just that the various roles dovetailed very nicely.

The 'right wing' urge reliance on the capitalist courts, on the 'moral' pressure that will be exerted - in the fullness of time - on the Grunwick management. Things drag on. Grunwick seek to have declared null and void an ACAS (Advisory Conciliation and Arbitration Service) report recommending that APEX be recognised. The Lord Chief Justice rules against Grunwick. The Court of Appeal then rescinds Lord Widgery's verdict. ACAS now trots off to the House of Lords. Meanwhile: 'Cool it, brothers and sisters'. The Scarman Court of Enquiry - whose judgments are not legally binding either - meanwhile seeks to 'ascertain the facts'. 'Freeze it, friends', till they too have reported.

The UPW (Union of Post Office Workers) does all it can to prevent solidarity action from spreading among postmen, spontaneously refusing to handle the Grunwick mail. The first blacking almost succeeds (in Grunwick's own admission). The union leaders plead with the Post Office to refrain from 'provocative' action, i.e. from sacking the men. 'In exchange' the UPW will circumscribe the action to the Cricklewood depot - all the better eventually to scuttle it. Grunwick resort to provocations. But is it likely

the local UPW officials knew nothing when the Post Office allowed the firm to collect 64 bags of mail in a private, unmarked van from the Cricklewood Post office, on the afternoon of Saturday, July 23? The police certainly knew. So shabby are the UPW manoeuvres that Norman Stagg (Deputy General Secretary) is denied access to branch meetings. This does not prevent him from using the big stick. On Friday, July 22 postal workers, summoned to Conway Hall, are threatened with withdrawal of hardship money, withdrawal of union protection should the employers sack them, and even suspension from the union.

The APEX leaders, 'struggling' for union recognition within the factory, are a similar shower. Roy Grantham and his cronies do all they can to smother the struggle from within. They fight consistently... to limit the size of the mass picket. They oppose the Strike Committee's call for a second mass demonstration on August 8. They too threaten withdrawal of strike pay should the Committee proceed with its plans. Like frightened mice they run back and forth between Whitehall and TUC headquarters. The government and the TUC are scared stiff of escalation. APEX will convey the message to 'their' striking members.

The TU 'left' plays a pathetic role. Much publicised - and much photographed - parades outside the Grunwick gates allow every tired official, whose radical image needs a revamp, to have a field day. After torrents of meaningless rhetoric about solidarity, the 'left' led a march away from the factory gates, on the one day (Monday, July 11) when a genuine mass mobilisation (20,000 people perhaps) could really have kept out the scabs ... or even taken the factory over.

c) THE GROUPS

Members of 'revolutionary' groups are there, on the picket line, for a variety of motives: out of genuine solidarity, because they want to fight the police, to sell their papers, to recruit, because they don't want to be seen not to be providing as many bodies as their rivals. The pervasive politics of their support runs something like this: 'the capitalist class are attacking the Labour Movement and its right to organise. The trade unions are in danger. Grunwick is a crucially important test case, which has to be won by the workers'. From here on forcing union recognition on Grunwick becomes the issue. The original demands of the strikers are swept under the carpet (it will be interesting to see how many of them are 'remembered' when the final 'historic compromise' is achieved). Outside the gates there is hardly any criticism of the unions as such, of how they divide workers. There is only criticism of this or that action of this or that trade union leader or Labour politician. This implies that the Len Murrays, the Audrey Wisers, etc., together with every full-time union official with a radical phrase in his head, are somehow on the same side as the strikers. To criticise is 'divisive'.

d) THE REAL ISSUES

Such a view can only help hide all the dirty work going on. We see things quite differently. Modern capitalism has learned to live very comfortably with trade unions - and vice versa. The struggle for socialism goes on within the unions, not through them. Autonomous action by groups of workers in unions is de-fused, squashed, denounced or pissed on from a great height by the full-time officials (and by some of the lay officials too). Socialism is about people acting for themselves, on a massive scale. It is most emphatically not about taking orders, or being bullied into actions that every class instinct tells one are wrong.

For us the positive content of the Grunwick struggle lies in the initiatives of the strikers to spread the strike. It is in the workers' resistance to Grantham, of APEX, when he ordered the end to mass picketing. (Incidentally, defending APEX as if one was defending socialism is hilarious. APEX was expelled from the TUC, at one point, because of its attitude to the Industrial Relations Bill. It also proscribed the SWP - called IS at the time.) It was great when the Cricklewood Post Office workers continued to black Grunwick mail, although instructed not to by their 'leader' Jackson. Even better was the way that these workers, once suspended, continued to work at sorting and delivering mail (until locked out) - with the exception of Grunwick's. There was socialism, too, in the genuine solidarity of the picket line.

Union bureaucracies use the threat of mass action as a bargaining lever. This will only work if the lever can be seen to stop mass action as well as start it. The potential power of the unions is real and massive: confrontations between government and unions can today result in a defeated government, as Mr Heath learned to his cost. It is obvious that Grunwick could be quickly closed down by concerted action. Trade union leaders are doing everything to stop this developing. This is not because they want to see the Grunwick strikers defeated, though this will probably be the result. Nor is it, to any great extent, out of fear of taking 'illegal' action or of prejudicing good relations with the Labour government - though the vote-losing image of militancy on the picket line is very much in the mind of the Labour politicians. Overwhelmingly it is a fear of losing control. The day-to-day business of blacking Grunwick work has already involved close contact between the Strike Committee and postal workers - cutting out the middle men. The more the blacking develops the more this parallel organisation grows ...and the more the bureaucrats are cut out. Behind the rhetoric of support by the full-time officials is the constant concern to assert control over 'their' members, a control which, once achieved, means the effective demobilisation of the rank and file.

It is doubtful whether the Grunwick dispute can be won by mere ritualised picketing. The 'concessions' gained on the picket line effectively deny the strikers any chance of stopping the coaches which daily bring in

the scabs. The most significant of the 'concessions' gained by Grantham, of APEX, was the arrangement whereby a small group of 'real pickets' (on foot) are entitled to speak to scabs (in buses), after being properly separated (by massive cordons of police) from all potential supporters. People quickly saw through this one. Talk of 'doing a Saltley' on Grunwick resulted in heavyweight battalions of Yorkshire miners under General Scargill arriving on July 11. Jack Dromey of the Strike Committee proclaimed: 'Here you have the highly paid, highly organised and disciplined working class'. The mass picket defeated the police. According to a normally reliable source, the bus was turned away four times. But Scargill then persuaded the battalions to march around Willesden. And the bus rolled in. 'Highly paid and highly organised' or not, the battalions were a damn sight too disciplined. What was needed was a little less 'discipline' and a little more of the offensive spirit.

We support the mass picket. But what is needed now, in addition, is a more subtle and imaginative approach. If such disputes are to be won, people must turn away, completely and finally, from the rotten juntas that have been 'controlling' - and throttling - their struggles. Workers must start taking the initiative into their own hands. A modern factory needs water, gas and electricity. It needs efficient drains and facilities for waste disposal. These are provided by working people. The National Association for Freedom have shown that they were ready for eventualities of this kind. Is our collective capacity less than theirs?



LUCAS AEROSPACE

One of us recently talked with a convenor of a Lucas Aerospace factory factory about the initiative that his Shop Stewards Combine had recently taken. Some of our readers may be familiar with the details but for those who are not here's what it's about.

The Stewards Combine have proposed a shift from Defence to 'socially useful' production. They want this linked with a breakdown of the managerial hierarchy in the factories. These wide-ranging demands originated in a struggle against redundancies which the firm had proposed. The stewards felt that protest action or rearguard defence - by occupation or systematic blacking for example - did not have a very good track record. It seemed to make sense, if only from a propaganda point of view, to suggest alternative projects for Lucas' unused capacity. But these proposals gathered a momentum of their own.

An approach was made to people in the Alternative Technology movement. This didn't turn out to be particularly useful. One naive group in Leeds set up a seminar for the stewards but didn't tell them that it had also invited the management, with whom the workers were in dispute at the time! More generally it wasn't a case of this kind of ineptitude. It was the do-it-yourself, alternative technologists having their minds boggled by the capacity and technological sophistication of the Lucas empire. It was like a child being given a toy too big to play with. With one or two exceptions the Combine had to work out its ideas by itself.

It concentrated on three projects: heat pumps, kidney machines, and a hybrid car. (This has a petrol engine, working at constant revs, which charges a battery which actually drives the car. This arrangement allows highly efficient fuel use, and creates much less pollution and noise.) There was much discussion and detailed technical feasibility studies were drawn up. These discussions were carried on within the combine in a democratic way. Parallel sets of proposals were well received. The proposed development and production teams were composed of democratic groupings of administrative, design, skilled and unskilled workers, instead of the present hierarchical heap. (The proposals were in fact drafted by one of the effective 'alternative technologists'.)

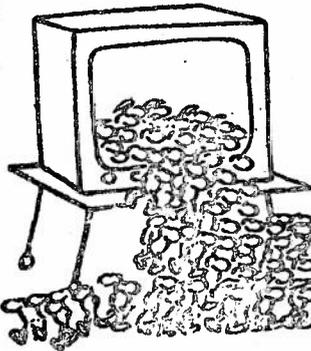
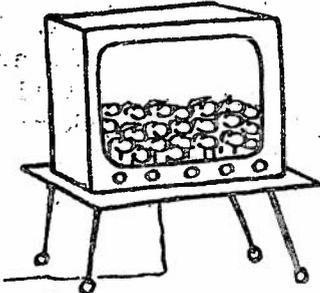
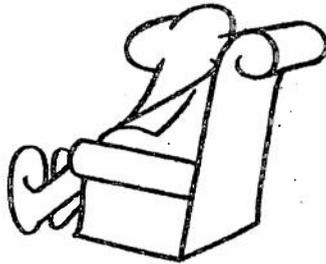
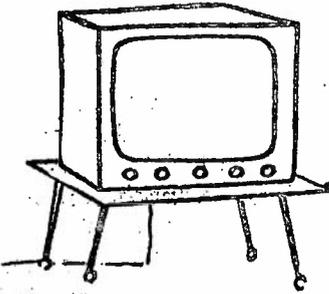
Within the Combine there were difficulties. Representatives of the design technicians (officially 'staff') saw things at times in a very 'wide perspective' and would invite the older, more traditional type of worker to condemn, for instance, the Agee/Hosenball expulsions. Some felt this to be 'external' to their immediate concern. The strains involved in this new kind of struggle nearly led to breakaways. The more traditionally minded at one point proposed to form an 'Hourly Paid Workers Shop Stewards Combine Committee'. (There may have been some discrete lobbying for this proposal by the Lucas management, but the breakaway was averted.)

As far as the Lucas management was concerned the proposals were out of this world. Their response has been confused. Faced with technical suggestions and organisational proposals which directly or indirectly would take

away a large lump of their power and authority, the management reacted with an instinctive refusal. Yet the ideas were good ones, well thought out by highly competent and also highly motivated technicians. In fact the management had decided to carry out a pilot project on the heat-pumps at Milton Keynes. Just a pilot project, mind you, no precedents to be claimed! But the stewards in the Combine were not prepared to act as an unpaid think-tank for Lucas.

'It is fundamentally a question of control' they say. They see their proposals for the new, socially-useful production as indivisible from the new social

structure of production. They see their set of demands as winnable this side of revolution, through traditional forms of rank and file activity. They also see great potential in appealing to management as fellow trade unionists! They point out with some justice that mergers, asset-stripping and shutdowns make managers redundant too, and to the fact that in recent years unions like the ASTMS have made advances in lower management in the new atmosphere of insecurity.



All this should make one think. One could react in at least three ways. Starry-eyed enthusiasm! Or 'they've not got a chance in hell'. Or 'yes, but it will only be self-managed alienation, with the profits still filling the bosses' pockets'. The fact remains that a new type of issue has arisen, in an area where revolutionaries have feared to tread. Revolutionaries

tend to see society as more polarised than the bulk of people. They tend to see certain kinds of demands as only realisable 'after the revolution'. This can work out as a variety of doctrinaire wet-blanket pessimism, since it means that proposals for 'genuine self-management' are made in terms of an indeterminate future, while the present is dealt with in terms of critiques of Wedgie Benn type co-ops, Swedish 'worker participation', etc. The effect can be depressing. Yet historically there have been several examples where the immediate and the utopian were combined in an agitational proposal, in a libertarian

way. Two examples: At the end of World War I coal miners in South Wales were seriously considering bankrupting coal owners by 'economic' strikes and taking over the mines at knock down prices and running them as co-operatives. In 1902 the French syndicalist CGT sent out a circular asking its constituent sections to send in detailed proposals as to how they would run their industries after the revolution. This was also intended to guide day by day activity 'in the right direction'. The fact that proposals in the above tradition are re-emerging from the base (the Combine is not officially recognised by either unions or management) should be taken as most encouraging and openly welcomed. In the last decades workers have tried to preserve jobs. The Lucas workers want this, for sure, but they also want to transform work and to put management out of a job.

Of course there are things on the debit side. So far this development has very largely concerned the stewards. They seem to be solidly backed as individuals on the shop floor, but it is not at all clear how much their proposals are supported or understood there. Anyway, self-management is about everybody acting, not some leading and some following. The transformation of these shop floor relationships is only elliptically thought of. Although confidence is a good thing, misplaced confidence, based on hopes of and assumptions about 'the left' in the Labour Party and the unions, can only be harmful to self-management. The battle can be re-defined in theory but only resolved in practice. And by their action the Lucas stewards have shown that it is not a question of whether workers can manage production, but of how they will fight to get there. We are entering a time when workers will increasingly seek not only to control wages and conditions but also what is made and how it is made. Such initiatives will repay scrupulous examination.

PORTUGAL: THE IMPOSSIBLE REVOLUTION?

by Phil Mailer (£2.25 + postage)

Sales are going reasonably well. There have been reviews in TIME OUT (April 15-21, 1977), LEEDS OTHER PAPER (April 16, 1977), NEW SOCIETY (April 21, 1977), PEPYS (April 28, 1977), THE SUNDAY TIMES (May 1, 1977) FREEDOM (May 28, 1977) and UNDERCURRENTS (no.22, June-July 1977).

Reviews available on request. The trad left have ignored the book, probably because it doesn't call for the creation of yet one more vanguard party. We ask all our readers and supporters to make sure their local district, community or university library has a hardback copy (£5.00 + postage).

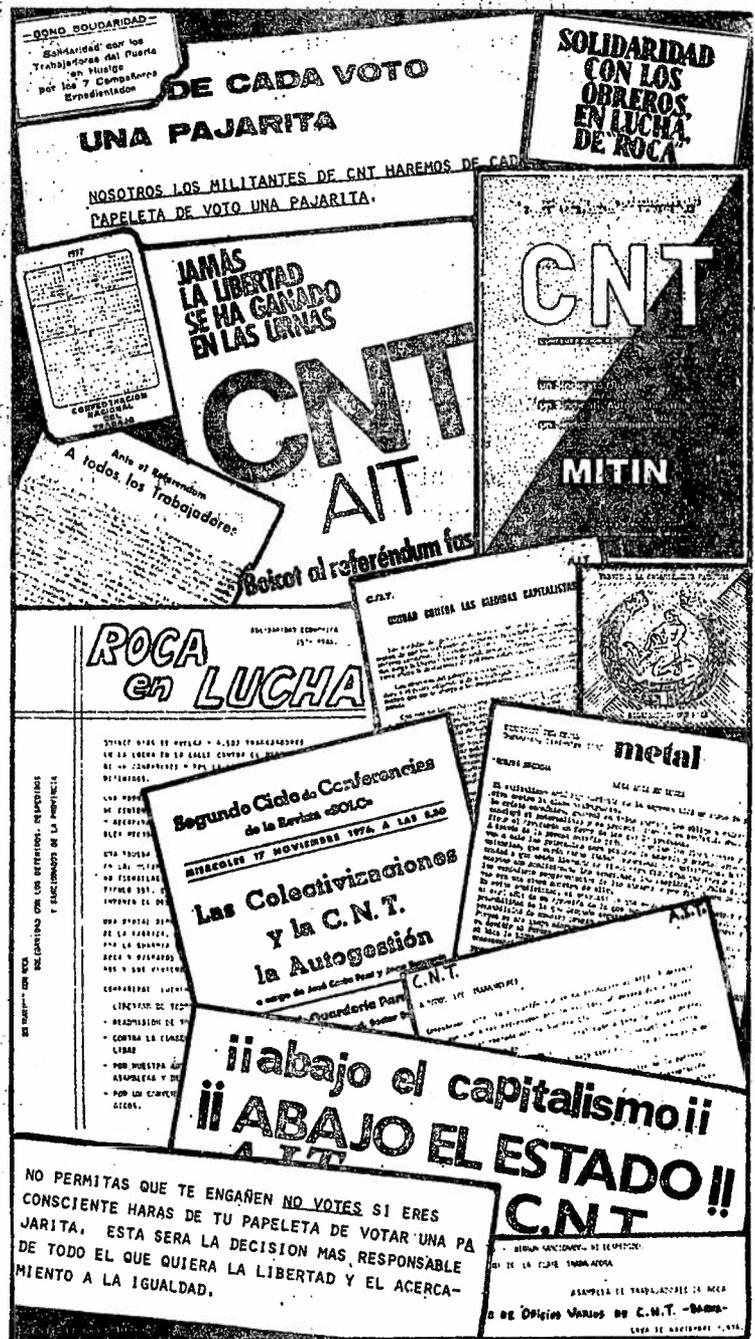
BEYOND TRADE UNIONISM

A CHALLENGE TO THE CNT

We welcome the re-emergence, after years of repression, of the revolutionary libertarian movement in Spain. We see in it the seeds of the future. It is much wider than the CNT, although we can't discuss it without reference to that organisation. If the errors of the past are to be avoided the new movement will have to learn, however painfully, from previous mistakes.

Politically aware revolutionary libertarianism must be prepared, today, to struggle on a very wide front. It must be prepared to challenge all those who, consciously or unconsciously, seek to limit the organisational and ideological autonomy of the working class.

We publish the following text (which originally appeared in the February 1977 issue of the Italian journal 'A Rivista Anarchica') as a part of a continuous effort to grapple with an old disease: revolutionary nostalgia. The CNT was important in Spanish labour history. Those who claim to speak for it are well aware of the power of myths and legends. As far as the British movement is concerned the legends are still with us. One example was the bitterness with which a debate over Sam Dolgoff's review of Semprun Maura's 'Révolution et Contre-Révolution en Catalogne' was conducted (see Freedom, vol. 36, nos. 46-52; vol. 37, nos. 2 and 4). Another was the uncritical applause which met the CNT's first mass rally, in a bullring (see, for example, Zero no. 1).



This text fits in with other pieces of information that have come our way. We are told that there are many genuine revolutionaries outside the CNT who are dubious about its present form. There seems to be internal criticism of the centralist tendencies of the regional committees. Recent industrial struggles in Spain have evolved an Assembly structure of workplace democracy which has largely by-passed the Workers' Commissions. The CNT's response to these Assemblies remains ambiguous. (Basically, the question is whether the workers are more important than the union, or vice versa!) Many CNT militants still seem to hold a very traditional attitude concerning the relation of 'their' organisation to the working class as a whole. (Even the author of the article doesn't escape entirely from voicing such a viewpoint.) For those who are against all patriotisms - even 'revolutionary' 'organisational' patriotism - the problem remains immense.

Readers with long memories may recall an article (still available) which we published over ten years ago (Solidarity vol.IV, no.4). In it we reported the agreement concluded in 1965 between the fascist 'labour syndicates' and a section of the CNT, in Spain. The fruits of opportunist, 'non-political' libertarianism (or militancy) were already clearly apparent then, for those with eyes to see. They are a great deal more obvious today.

We know that what we say will prove unpopular with sections of the revolutionary movement. But so long as people spring to the defence of bodies they know little about, so long are they thinking with parts of their anatomy other than their brains. And so long does it remain important that the questions raised in this article be put clearly, fearlessly and repeatedly.

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QUESTION: I'd like you to talk about the situation in Barcelona today, in 1977.

ANSWER: I can't really talk in absolute terms because I've only recently been released from prison, and what's more, a short time ago I left the CNT because it has become an institution, but I do still carry on with my anarchist activities. I can however give you my opinions, which will no doubt be subjective, but they probably come fairly near to a realistic assessment of the situation. To speak of anarchism in Barcelona means in fact to speak of the CNT. This causes a great deal of confusion because the majority tendency in the CNT is not in fact anarchist and so its policies and the stances it takes are used by the left-wing press to criticise, not so much the CNT, as much as anarchism itself. I think that the CNT has been reconstituted with too much haste. The original CNT was formed after 40 years of preparation, of propaganda and militancy. Such a process almost certainly guaranteed a well-developed sense of militancy, with deep-rooted anarchist conceptions. Obviously in this manner it was possible to build a mass

movement with libertarian-anarchist tendencies.

Today the reconstitution of the same organisation has been brought about without having taken into account the fact that a generation gap exists which means that for 40 years there has been a break in continuity, and so an intermediary generation does not exist which could have transmitted its experiences in the anarcho-syndicalist movement to the young. The result has been that for many people the reconstitution of the CNT has meant the re-adoption of the same organisational form, of the same statutes, the creation of committees, and then sitting back and waiting for the people to arrive and thus inflate the organisation. Moreover the reconstitution of the CNT has been brought about with such haste that it has now been formed as the result of an agreement between groups already in existence: there was the old CNT, which existed only in committee form, made up of old militants completely disconnected from social reality, student anarchists groups, neo-marxists from the MCL (the "Libertarian Communist Movement"), and autonomous groups.

All these groups agreed to the reconstitution of the CNT, but each of them did so with the intention of imposing its line on the organisation which led to a series of sterile struggles for the occupation of the various posts on the regional committees. This state of affairs was only overcome by deals between the various tendencies in order to save the organisation. There is a "cult of the organisation" in Spain which traditionally has been strong and this phenomenon is now repeating itself. But "saving the organisation" today entails the saving of a bureaucratic structure and the formation of regional committees which are not really representative of the militants in the factories who have been having a certain effect on the work-place. I'll quote you a recent example.

The building workers' union, which has about 200 members, recently had to elect its delegate for the regional committee. However, at the meeting in which the election was to take place only about 20 members were present. The other workers were not present because they had not even been told that the meeting was to take place. Despite all this the union delegate still held the votes of all the members at the regional plenary meeting, including the votes of all those who had been unaware of the electoral meeting.

The same thing happened in the media workers' union. This led this group of workers to rebel, demand an end to this way of doing things, and that instead of a plenary session a general assembly of all the workers should be held at which the regional committee could be elected by popular acclaim. This general assembly was never held, but the bureaucrats took note of the danger that these demands represented and so proposed the election of a regional committee in which everybody would be fairly represented, and this is the aforementioned committee in which all the tendencies are represented: the faction which identifies with the FAI and is tied to the "official" CNT in exile, the faction which identifies with the Parisian paper "Frente Libertario", the autonomist faction, the marxists (ex-MCL), the ex-members of the State unions, and the revolutionary syndicalists.

Many people say that the CNT should be an occasion for debate between the various tendencies and I agree with them to a certain extent, but I'm also convinced that there are limits; it's not acceptable to have to argue with marxists within the same union, nor with people who advocate moderate

proposals such as many of those in the media workers' union, the majority of whose members have come from the State controlled union.

Personally, when I saw what was happening in the CNT I voiced my disagreement. So they asked me if I would take on the post of secretary of the "Oficios Varios" union (a union for workers not covered by the other sectors), but I refused, just as I refused to take on all the other posts that I was offered because of my ethical conception of anarchism, although I still sympathise with the motives of those comrades who occupy posts in the CNT bureaucracy. I was informed later on that my name had been put forward for a regional secretariat and also learned that several individuals had started a campaign against me in an attempt to counter any possible influence that I might have had on the younger and more rebellious sections of the CNT. The attacks on me, of a personal nature, were either taken up or tolerated by the various factions fighting for power inside the CNT. Obviously people like me who are opposed to bureaucratisation are seen as enemies to be fought by any possible means and to be removed from the organisation. Having seen how things were developing I decided to take the initiative before the regional plenary meeting since I thought that my intervention could have a positive influence on the anti-bureaucratic tendency in the CNT. I wrote a letter stating the reasons for my resignation and I read it out during a meeting. Those present applauded me but none of them felt able to speak out directly and positively, and in fact I had the feeling that those closest to me had also isolated me so as to avoid being attacked themselves. In other words they chose to sacrifice their anarchist individuality in favour of the organisation.

TRADE UNIONISM? SYNDICALISM? SELF-ORGANISATION?

In a forthcoming issue we will be discussing the inadequacies and ambiguities of the concept of syndicalism (as distinct from trade unionism) as exemplified by the traditions of the Wobblies, of the Shop Stewards' Movement before and after World War I, of the IWMA, and of such drives to 'industrial unionism' as that which created the CIO.

For those interested in our own views on industrial organisation, we recommend the following: Motors and Modern Capitalism (Solidarity vol. III, no. 12); *Participation: a trap (IV, 6); For a Socialist Industrial Strategy (IV, 10); *Trade Unions: the Royal Commission Reports - the story of a nightmare (IV, 11); The ambiguities of Workers' Control (VI, 6); *Unity for ever... with the Institute of Workers Control (VI, 7); *The Miners' Strike (VII, 1); *Caught in the Act (VII, 2); *The Unions Keep Us Weak (VIII, 5); *Unionism and the Labour Front (VIII, 5) and our pamphlets What Next for Engineers? (no. 3); The Standard Triumph Strike (5); The BLSP Dispute (8); Truth About Vauxhall (12); Busmen What Next? (16); Mount Isa (22); What Happened at Fords (26); *GMWU: Scab Union (32); Strategy for Industrial Struggle (37); *Trade Unionism or Socialism (47); *Bureaucrats and Women Cleaners (52). Items marked with an asterisk are still available : 10p + postage.

QUESTION: *What is your opinion of the general position of the CNT?*

ANSWER: It seems to me that both on a theoretical and ideological level the CNT simply wishes to become a repetition of what it once was. And I believe that this is catastrophic because present-day Spanish society is certainly not the same as that of 1936. In fact the first plenary held in Spain since 1936, instead of starting a theoretical discussion on the actual problems in Spanish society, started by asking for the ratification of the decisions taken by the congresses of 1911, 1919, 1920 and 1936, all of them congresses at which none of the youngsters present could possibly have taken part in, and even if the general principles of those decisions were still relevant, they are of no use for the development of anarcho-syndicalist activity in the advanced capitalist society of 1977. The CNT as it now presents itself is not capable of providing an alternative to the new social order.

QUESTION: *Has the FAI been reconstituted?*

ANSWER: There has been an attempt to re-create the FAI in Catalonia inspired by the FAI in exile; in fact this attempt has so far had few and debatable results, of a formal nature only and with no substance. Despite all this, I believe it to be extremely important to rebuild a specifically anarchist movement composed of groups, and federations which could "produce" new ways of looking at things. Indeed the existence of such a movement could contribute a content to the CNT which it does not have today.

Today, for instance, the CNT in Barcelona has a little over 2000 militants but there are over 4000 libertarians who operate outside the CNT and many of these people do not belong to the CNT because they see themselves as anarchists only. There seems to exist a refusal to join organisations on the part of the vast majority of the population, and this not only affects the CNT but also affects the other organisations such as the UGT, which after a year of work only has about 20,000 members in the whole of Spain, which is a very small number. The Comisiones Obreras (Workers' Commissions) issued a million membership cards but it seems that they had to eat most of them because nobody seemed to want them, so they set about forging many of the membership cards and also sent many of the others abroad, but even then they didn't succeed in getting rid of them; the USO has no more than a handful of militants.

This refusal exists, therefore, not only on the part of those people who are not politicised but also on the part of those who are eager for action and for rebellion but have no wish to join parties or unions because they are not interested in work of a reformist nature. It is just in this area that we should intervene as anarchists in order to study the problems of Spanish society from an anarchist point of view and to try and offer the perspectives for anarchist struggles in all aspects of life. For example, there exist in Spain local associations in which the most restless and rebellious people gather together. There are about 30 of these associations in Barcelona which produce over 30 magazines a month between them; in these associations many debates take place discussing the problems of education, work, women's liberation, the adulteration of food, town planning, pollution, the provision of open spaces, etc., in other words, the totality of problems which affect the life of the individual. You see, I believe that anarchists have an important

role to play in these associations; indeed, in the places where anarchists are present, such as the Sans area of Barcelona (where they are in the majority) they have succeeded, through tackling issues from an anarchist or libertarian approach, in becoming a focus for the people of the area.

QUESTION: You have criticised the reconstitution of the CNT, but as regards the FAI you haven't said so far in what way an organisation, which I would regard as indispensable in order to have an effect on the Spanish labour movement, should be reconstituted or created. Moreover, it seems to me that the main concern of those people who reconstituted the CNT was to face up adequately to the "competition" provided by the other political organisations (Communist Party, Comisiones Obreras, UGT) which in this politically transitional period were already putting themselves forward as the true representatives of the labour movement in Spain. This meant that there was a need to re-establish this organisational structure before it was too late and so before the authoritarian political forces monopolised the labour movement.

ANSWER: The argument you have just put forward is the same as that of many old comrades and this preoccupation of theirs is easily understandable. But let's examine this further. At a time when there is the freedom to organise and belong to unions, it is proposed that the CNT be offered as an alternative to the other political forces but I wonder whether this isn't just playing the same game, just so as not to be a step behind the others. A centralised union organisation? What for? To be like the Socialists or the Communists? To gain control over the labour movement? I think that the CNT could easily achieve all this, but for us anarchists it would be extremely disadvantageous for it to do so.

I've already said at the beginning of this interview that whenever anarchism is mentioned in Spain one's thoughts immediately turn to the CNT. This has led to a chronic confusion in the Spanish libertarian movement, and it is taking place just at the same time that syndicalism has been seen, even on an international level, to have embarked on an irreversible process of integration with the system of exploitation. The Spanish anarcho-syndicalists think that by rebuilding the CNT they are following a different process but this faith of theirs comes more from sentimental attachment than from a realistic appraisal of the situation. They forget that Spain has started its process of political and economic integration with Europe which is progressing at an accelerating rate. Thus both the political panorama and the unions are being levelled up to a European level.

If the CNT refuses to follow the rules of the game to their ultimate conclusions (in other words, if it does not become a "civilized" central union organisation) it will soon be reduced to the status of a simple "groupuscule", which will prevent the anarchists from having any influence on a mass scale (because of their lack of importance through being too few in numbers) or even on a specific level (because of the fear of superceding the basic presuppositions of anarcho-syndicalism). The reformist tendencies, which are in the majority in the CNT, have indicated on many occasions their intention to establish a differentiation between anarchism and syndicalism, a point which unfortunately the anarchist tendencies have not yet picked up.

The alternatives which the Spanish anarchist movement could offer should in actual fact be arrived at through a general analysis of Spanish society, but I fear that so far nobody has bothered to make a serious study of the socio-economic changes which have taken place since the end of the Civil War. Only a few sectors of the CNT have so far tried to organise some work in this direction, but moreover, since an autonomous anarchist movement independent of the CNT does not exist, it has not been possible to learn how Spanish anarchists see the present situation and what are, if any exist, their projects for revolutionary transformation. Generally what has taken place has been the mechanical repetition of the alternatives adopted by the CNT in its pre-Civil War congresses.

Personally, I'm firmly convinced that the Spanish anarchists must establish their ideological and organisational autonomy from the CNT. Since leaving the CNT I've been unable to take part in activities which are organically related and I believe that many anarchists find themselves in the same situation. I believe that we must create a coordinating body for all anarchists to refer to so as to begin the urgently-needed deep study of the possibility of intervening "negatively" in the actual evolutionary process of Spanish society. Neither the central union organisations nor the political parties enjoy the benefit of massive popular support owing to an instinctive fear of manipulation by the various bureaucracies. We should remember that the social struggles of the last few years have basically been uncontrolled struggles and it is precisely in this area that Spanish anarchism should initiate its researches and interventions, instead of engaging in the reconstruction of a central union organisation of a traditional type.

We must think less about the past if we want to have a greater effect on the present. Still less should we limit our activities to those that only concern work; anarchism should stand for the total liberation of the individual, but although this liberation depends ultimately on the liberation of the workers as the exploited class, we must avoid descending to the level of simplistic marxist abstractions. There are an infinite number of issues which are considered to be secondary by the marxists, but which little by little are becoming increasingly important for the emancipation of the individual.

I'd say that the tasks of anarchism in Spain are as follows: 1) affirm its ideological and organisational autonomy from the CNT; 2) begin work on wide-ranging theoretical debate and clarification; 3) intervene, as a co-ordinated force, in all the areas which provide the movement the opportunity to tackle the totality of the problems of society and of the individual, trying all the while to use means which are consistent with the ends; 4) strengthening international contact and solidarity with anarchists engaged in struggles in other countries, with an exchange of experiences and reciprocal help.

As regards Spain, in my opinion, one of the most urgent tasks is (along with those of struggle and organisation) the denunciation of the pact which exists between the opposition and the government in order to achieve "democratic" normality; to make people seriously aware through sound arguments of the fraud of parliamentarianism, whilst at the same time giving greater emphasis to the initiatives based on direct action which had already begun in the final period of the francoist regime, all of which entails opposition to the institutionalisation of the organisms of mass revolutionary struggle.

Despite all this, I believe that excellent conditions exist in Spain for the development of an anarchist society as long as the movement avoids the error of digging its own grave, which is likely if it dedicates itself exclusively to the strengthening of a union organisation which in order to prosper will have to make deals with the authorities and exclude the anarchist influences from the organisation.

David Urbano, ex-CNT militant

Confederación
BOLETIN DE LA FEDERACION REGIONAL DE LA CNT
1936-1937

REPRISION A LOS TRABAJADORES EN LOS TALLERES

ACCION DIRECTA

ANDALUCIA LIBERTARIO
CNT-AIT

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CNT

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ACABEMOS DE UNA VEZ CON EL SINDICATO FASCISTA

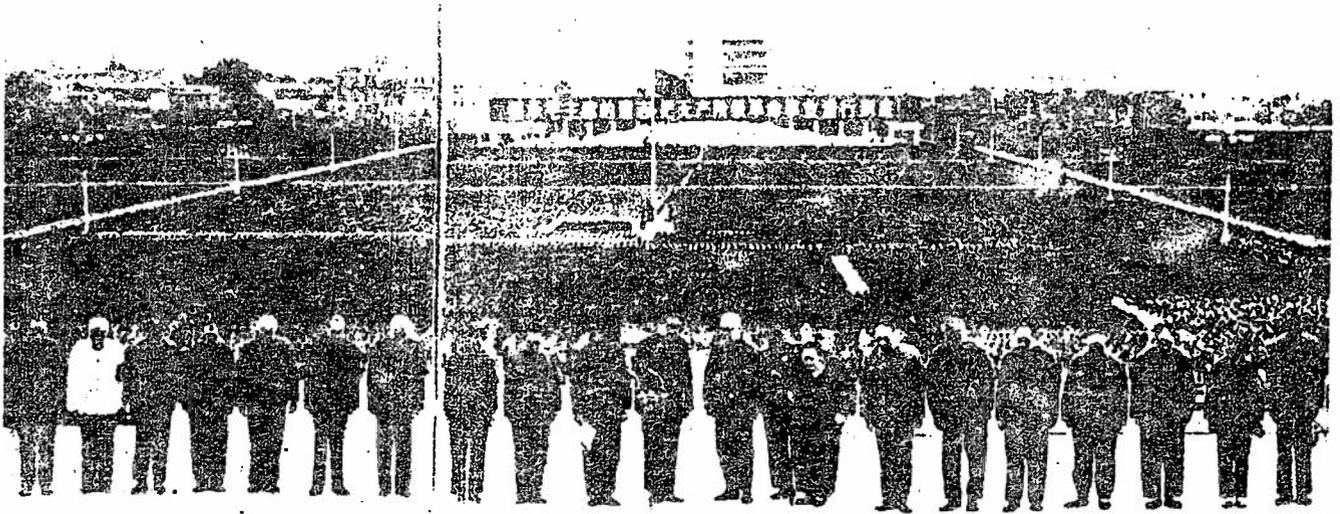
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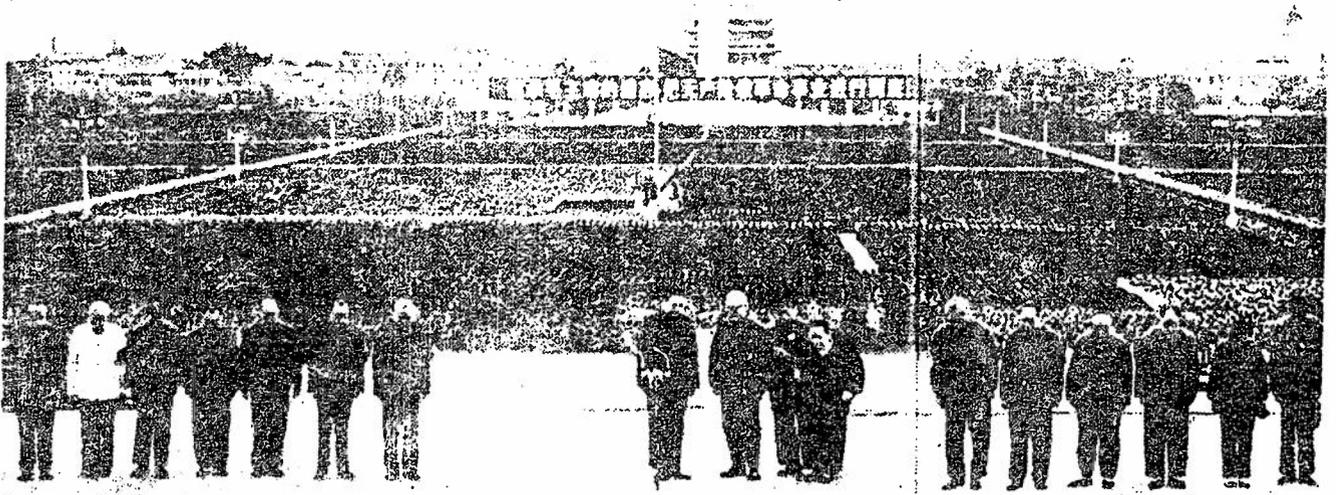
CNT

UNPERSONS OF THE WORLD, UNITE!

The tampering with factual evidence and the 'cooking' of historical records were both hallmarks of the monstrous Stalin era. This era has clearly not come to a close - as the following pictures illustrate. How much other 'information' coming out of China can we believe?



Before the purge . . . *Peking Review*, 24 September 1976



After the purge . . . *China Pictorial*, Number 11, November 1976

letters

In Vol. 8, no. 5 (p.25) P.F. made a staggering error of 'fact' which I would like quickly to 'correct'. She/he claimed that 'In the October Revolution itself, the organisation of the armed uprising was the task of the Petrograd Soviet, from which the various armed bodies depended; the actual uprising was not started by the Party, but was a reaction, in which Lenin had no role, to the decision of the Provisional Government to close down two Bolshevik papers...'

This is not my reading of the situation. The date for the October Revolution was fixed at a Central Committee meeting of the Bolshevik Party (which Lenin attended) on October 10. (See Trotsky, History of the Russian Revolution, p.1007.) The uprising, therefore, was planned 15 days in advance. It was organised not by the Petrograd Soviet but by the Military Revolutionary Committee of the Petrograd Soviet, an organisation which was stacked out with Bolsheviks. The revolution might have begun a few hours early because of the Provisional Government's decision to close two Bolshevik papers, but why did the Provisional Government take that decision? The answer is that they were vainly trying to stop the coup which they knew the Bolsheviks were about to stage. The October Revolution was therefore not a spontaneous revolution but a planned take-over of power by the Bolsheviks.

A. B.

* * * * *

After reading your 'Wildcat at Dodge Truck'* I thought I might contribute a few more nails for the coffin of the Revolutionary Union. Last summer I had the 'fortune' to see Steve S. and his merry manipulators in action. At a forum about their strike, they managed to link up with some workers from an optical factory on strike for union recognition. Although I am not sure whether the optical workers digested any Mao Tse-Tung Thought they agreed to hold a joint forum in Ann Arbor in the fall ('Workers' Struggles and the Crisis of Imperialism'- or words to that effect). The forum was sponsored by the Revolutionary Student Brigade, the R.U.'s unofficial satellite for children.

Predictably enough, the Spartacist League arrived at the forum, presumably to raise some 'transitional demands' during the discussion period. Also predictably, the R.S.B. excluded them, since 'the people don't want to hear that kind of thing'. A few of us in the audience (i.e. 'the people') walked out in protest.

In March, the R.U. colony in Albuquerque, N.M., held a forum on 'Soviet Social-Imperialism', for which they imported a speaker from California. Needless to say, the factual content of his talk was quite low. So I felt compelled to set the record straight on a few points (e.g.

* Solidarity Motor Bulletin No.4

'socialism' under Stalin, Chinese foreign policy). The immediate response was 'This is the typical kind of Trotskyite slander with which we are all familiar'. I might have taken up the gauntlet, but the debate soon shifted to a dispute with a smaller stalinoid group who took offense at the R.U.'s suggestion that Comrade Stalin had made any mistakes. The R.U. hastened to deny this charge of lèse majesté, notwithstanding the few criticisms they had made in passing.

This laughable exchange went on for about half an hour, replete with quotations from the master and solemn avowals of the need for further study of Marxism-Leninism. Perhaps this is the American equivalent of arguments over 'deep entrism' vs. 'shallow entrism' into the Labour Party.

L. C., Albuquerque, New Mexico.

* * * *

The position at Cowley didn't change much last year. The ultra left and the right wing are still fighting each other rather than the management. The right wing are winning easily because the ultras lack any tactics at all. They have no support among the people they claim to be leading towards the socialist revolution.

What is even more distressing is that the Company, through the medium of collaboration (sorry, participation) have succeeded in buying many of the senior stewards in Leyland, including most members of the C.P. The man at the top, Derek Robinson (C.P.), is in favour of a fringe benefit offer that includes penalty clauses for unconstitutional action. He has been nicknamed the communist copper of the shopfloor.

Apart from that, things aren't too bad

G. H., Cowley.

* * * *

I have just read your Motor Bulletin No.5. You ask for feedback. First of all, I welcome it. There have been some dreadful statements in 'left' publications regarding the opening of the Ford plant at Valencia. Some say that Ford moved there because Spanish workers don't strike, as strikes are illegal! I have had great difficulty in trying to convince members of my own union committee of the falsity of this picture of our fellow workers in Spain.

Your report can help counter such ideas. From a personal/practical point of view I would appreciate more facts and less analysis in future reports. Ford workers are not dumb - we can draw our own conclusions from facts.

I also question the value of the (not very veiled) attack on the C.P. I am not a C.P. supporter here. Nor do I support the C.P.'s policies in Spain. But such an attack is divisive. The C.P. has a lot of militants in Ford's. What we need to do is build solidarity with our fellow workers in Spain. The C.P. people at least seem to understand the need for international solidarity. So I would only be able to use your report 'selectively' at the union meeting, i.e. the bits with the facts and the report from the SEAT worker (good, that). To try and distribute the whole bulletin might alienate C.P. members who are leading (O.K., for their own ends, but still...) in solidarity struggles.

Ditto the attacks on unions per se. I am aware of the nature of the TGWU, to which I belong! But I fail to see how we can organise effectively outwith a union framework. My position is that we must fight for workers' control of the union, as well as of the factories!

I think you must decide whether you are producing bulletins to inform the general public, or to be of use within the motor industry. Naturally I think the second emphasis more useful.

If and when you produce a bulletin on the latest strike wave in Barcelona I hope you will include a section on how the wives and children of the strikers organised. Unlike the infamous 'Cowley wives' the Barcelona wives occupied the cathedral in support of the strike. And, as there was no strike pay or social security, they asked the people of Barcelona to feed and provide for them, which they did, in abundance!

We have a lot of ground work to do to build international working class solidarity. To be fair to British Ford workers, they remember only too well that no Ford worker abroad supported them during the 10-week strike in 1971. We have been insular ever since. I hope your Bulletins will help overcome this.

J. Smith,

* * * *

...Good to see you're working in with other libertarian socialist/anarchist groups; though while you state the issue so much more precisely than other groups your separate existence is vital. There's growing understanding of the relevance of your critique here in New Zealand. Andrew D. (Wellington) sold out of your pamphlets very quickly. In the future a movement specifically developing your type of approach will undoubtedly develop here, but at present the libertarian left is so small that to get anything done I don't think we can afford the luxury of division.

Richard B., Christchurch, N.Z.

LISTEN, PSYCHIATRIST

Revolutionaries are often faced with 'scientific', psychological objections to revolution. These are aimed as much at the revolutionary as at what he or she is saying. The 'argument' usually goes like this: 'your ideas about a new society are a cloak for hidden motives. They are a projection of unmentioned desires. They are a vehicle for your lust for power'. Or: 'your vision is an infantile day-dream: an escape mechanism which allows to live in two worlds at once. It is all just imaginary compensation'.

One could retaliate: 'and what of the motives - conscious or unconscious - leading to the conformism of psychiatrists'. But playing shuttle-cock with the problem won't make it go away. The question of self-knowledge is a real one: why are we revolutionaries? Everyone needs insight here, for a revolution embedded in unconscious urges could only re-enact, yet again, the incoherence of preceding history. It would remain dominated by obscure forces which would ultimately impose upon it their own finality and their own logic.

Why men and women are revolutionaries is by definition a highly subjective matter. Here is just one personal statement.(1) The author hopes it won't be pointless if it helps a single reader 'see more clearly into another human being - even if only into his (Cardan's) illusions and errors', and thereby more deeply into himself or herself.

...I wish, and I feel the need to live in a society other than the one around me. Like most people I can live in this one and adapt myself to it - I am, anyway, existing in it. However critically I look at myself, neither my capacity for adaptation nor my responses to reality seem to me below the sociological average. I don't ask for immortality, ubiquity or omniscience. I don't ask that society 'give me happiness'. I know that happiness isn't something that could be dished out at the local Social Security office, or by the local Workers Council. If such a thing exists,

(1) P. Cardan, in 'Racines subjectives du projet révolutionnaire', Socialisme ou Barbarie No.38 (October-December 1964).

I alone can create it to my own measure, as has happened to me before and may happen to me again. But in everyday life, as it impinges upon me and upon others, I find myself up against a mass of things I can't accept. I say these things are not inevitable, and that they depend upon the way society is organised.

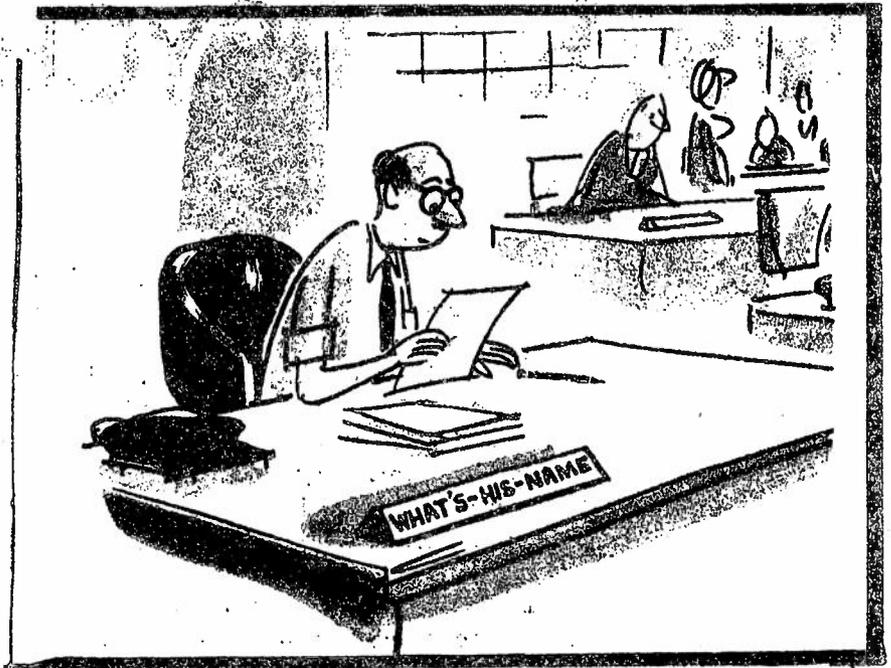
Firstly, I want and I ask that my work have some meaning. I want to approve of its purpose and of how it is done. I want genuinely to involve myself in it, to make use of my faculties, to be a

more complete person, to develop myself. I hold that this would be possible, for me and for all others, if society were organised differently. It would already be a big change in that direction if I were allowed to decide (along with everyone else) what I have to do and (together with those I work with) how to do it.

I (and all of us) want to know what is going on in society, to control the extent and the quality of the information we are given. I want to take part, directly, in all the social decisions which will affect my existence, or which help shape the world in which I live. I don't accept that my fate should be decided, day after day, by people whose plans are hostile (or simply unknown) to me, and for whom I and everyone else are but figures in a plan or pawns on a chessboard. I reject the fact that, at the limit, my life and my death should be in the hands of people of whom I know that they can't see either me or others.

I know that bringing about a new kind of social organisation and making it live won't be easy. There will be difficult tasks at every turn. But I would prefer to get to grips with real problems than with the cynicism, double-talk or manipulations of our leaders. Should we fail in our endeavour, I would prefer failure in a meaningful attempt to a state of affairs which remains permanently on the wrong side of either failure or non-failure, that is simply derisory.

I want to meet others as an equal, and yet as someone absolutely different, not as a numbered object, not as a frog perched on another rung (whether higher or lower is of little matter) in the hierarchy of income and power. I want to see others, and for them to see me, as another human being; that our relationship be not a battleground of aggressions, that



our rivalry remain within the limits of the game, that our conflicts (inasmuch as they can't be resolved or surmounted) be about real problems and real stakes, that they carry as little unconscious material as possible, that they be burdened as little as possible with things that are unreal. I wish that others may be free, for my freedom begins where that of others begins.(2) Alone, at best, I can only be 'virtuous in misfortune'. I don't count on people becoming angels, nor do I expect their souls to be as pure as mountain lakes - which incidentally have always bored me stiff. But I know how much our present set-up aggravates people's problems of existence - and of existence with others - and how vastly it increases the obstacles to our freedom.

I know for certain that my wish can't be realised today. Even were the revolution to take place tomorrow, my wish would not be fully achieved within my lifetime. I know that one day men and women will live for whom even the memory of problems which today cause us great anguish will no longer exist. That is my destiny. I have to accept it, and I do. But that does not reduce me either to despair or to a state of catatonic rumination. Wanting what I do, I can only act so as to bring it about. And I am already partly fulfilling myself in the choice that I make of the main interests in my life, in the work and time I put into trying to change things - a work full of significance for me (even if I meet in it - and have to accept - partial failure, delays, détours, tasks that have no meaning in themselves). I enjoy my participation in a collective of revolutionaries which tries to overcome the reified and alienated relationships of present-day society. If I had been born into a communist society, would happiness have come more easily my way? I don't know - and I can't do anything about it anyway. But I will not, under that pretext, spend all my time glued to a TV set or reading thrillers.

Does my attitude reflect a refusal of the reality principle? But what is the content of that principle? Must one work? Must work neces-

sarily be deprived of meaning, embody exploitation, always contradict its claimed objectives? Is the reality principle valid, in that form, for someone living on unearned income? For the inhabitants of Samoa? Up to what point does the reality principle reflect nature and where does it begin to reflect society? Up to what point does it manifest society as such, and from where on a given form of society? Is the critical point serfdom? The galleys? The concentration camps? From where would a philosophy acquire the



"I DREAMT I MET JOE HILL LAST NIGHT.."

(2) French school children have been taught for generations that 'individual freedom ends where the freedom of others begins'. (Solidarity footnote)

right to tell me: 'Here, at this precise level of existing institutions, I will show you the frontier between phenomenon and essence, between temporary historical forms and the eternal kernel of social systems'? I accept the reality principle because I accept work (as long, that is, as it is real - which each day becomes less evident) and the need for work to be socially organised. But I reject the invocation of a pseudo-psychoanalysis or of a pseudo-metaphysics which smuggle into the precise discussion of historical possibilities gratuitous affirmations about 'impossibilities' concerning which it knows precisely nothing.

Would such a wish be infantile? But the infantile situation is surely that in which everything in life is given to you, in which the Law is handed down to you. In the infantile situation you have life for no obvious reason and the Law is given on its own, with nothing more. No discussion is possible. What I want is the very opposite. It is to make my own life, to give life if possible, in any case to give for my life. I don't want the Law just handed down to me. I want, at one and the same time, to create it and to give it to myself. It is not the revolutionary who is permanently in the infantile situation. It is the conformist, or the non-political person. It is those who accept the Law without discussing it, without wishing to take part in its creation. Those who live in society with no thoughts about how it functions, with no political will, have only replaced their personal father with an anonymous social one.

What is infantile is the state of affairs where one receives without giving. It is the state where one does, or is, just in order to receive. What I want, to start with, is a fair exchange. Later, I want to go beyond exchange. The infantile situation is the dual relationship, the illusion of a fusion. It is today's society which is constantly infantilising everyone, by its fusion of the imaginary with unreal entities: leaders, cosmonauts, pop stars, national interest. I want society to cease at last to be a family (which is false, furthermore, to the point of being grotesque) and for it to acquire its proper dimension, namely a network of relationships between autonomous adults.

Is this a lust for power on my part? But what I want is to abolish power in the current sense of the word: I want power for all. Power in its present sense means thinking of and treating other people as things. Everything I want runs contrary to this. Those for whom others are things are themselves things. I don't want to be a thing, either for my own sake or for that of others. I don't want others to be things: I wouldn't know what to do with them. If I can exist for others, and be recognised by them, I don't want it to be because I have something external to me: power. Nor do I want to exist only in their imagination. The recognition of others is valid for me only inasmuch as I myself recognise them. Would I run the risk of forgetting all this, should events ever bring me close to the exercise of power? It seems to me most improbable. If it came about, it would be a battle lost, not the end of the war. Am I going to regulate my whole life upon the assumption that I may one day regress into childhood?

Am I pursuing an illusion, that of wanting to eliminate the tragic side of human existence? It seems to me, on the contrary, that I am seeking to eliminate the melodrama from life, the false tragedy - the one where unnecessary catastrophes occur, where all would have been different if only the actors had known this, or done that. It is a macabre farce that people should be dying of hunger in India, while in America and Europe governments penalise farmers who produce 'too much'. It is a Grand Guignol show, in which both corpses and suffering are real. But this is not tragedy: there is nothing inescapable about it. And if one day humanity perishes under H-bombs, I will refuse to call it tragedy; I will call it a monstrous fuck-up. I want the suppression of the Punch and Judy show. I want to stop people being turned into nonentities by other nonentities who 'govern' them. When a neurotic treads for the umpteenth time the same path of failure, recreating for himself and for those around him the same type of misfortune, to help him get out of it is to eliminate the grotesque farce, not the tragedy, from his life. It should help him discern at last the real problems of his life (and any tragic element they may contain) which the neurosis may partly have expressed, but more massively served to mask.

POSTSCRIPT

We are publishing this statement, in this particular issue, as a 'first-person-singular' antidote to the 'Why you should be a socialist' type of propaganda (John Strachey, Gollancz, 1938; Paul Foot, SWP, 1977) now flooding the movement. Bob Potter (3) and P.G. (4) have written excellent critiques of the leninism permeating Foot's political perspectives and shown up his very limited vision of 'socialism'. We here seek to take up an additional criticism.

The marxist left too often sees socialism as the disincarnated fulfilment of the 'logic' or of the 'dialectic' of history. For them, socialism is too often 'the answer to the contradictions of capitalism' or 'the removal of the capitalist brake on the development of the productive forces'. The revolution, for them, is not what this or that proletarian, or even the whole of the proletariat, at any moment, considers as its aim'. The question, for marxists, 'is what the proletariat is, and what -consequently on that being - it will be compelled to do' (5)- under the expert guidance, no doubt, of the vanguard party. Our text seeks, on the contrary, to root the vision of a new society not in mechanistic abstractions (or in middle class guilt, or in 'Third World voyeurism'), but in the everyday life of ordinary men and women - here and now.

(3) In ZERO No.1, c/o Rising Free, 182 Upper Street, London N.1.

(4) In Solidarity-National Working Group No.3, c/o 34 Cowley Rd., Oxford.

(5) The last two quotes are from The Holy Family by K. Marx and F. Engels (FLPH, Moscow 1956, p.53).

REVIEW

BUSINESS CIVILISATION IN DECLINE by Robert L. Heilbroner. Marion Boyars, 1976. 124pp. £3.95. Also in paperback.

At a time of general preoccupation with analysing the latest crisis (or non-crisis) this review is an attempt to stand aside from the debate and look (with the author) into the future. I am not an economist, and thus am not concerned to provide an account of the book's inadequacies as a work of economics. I shall attempt to present Heilbroner's main argument and indicate some of its implications. I hope others will be stimulated to read the book (though not to pay its exorbitant price) and provide the sort of analysis that I cannot.

The book comprises an amplification of essays initially published between 1965 and 1974. Heilbroner cites his mentors as Marx (1) and Schumpeter (2) 'without following either slavishly'. The major thesis is that '... the political apparatus within capitalism is steadily growing, enhancing its power, and usurping functions formerly delegated to the economic sphere - not to undo, but to preserve that sphere. In the end I think this same political expansion will be a major factor in the extinction of the business civilisation.' (3)

Using the American experience RLH looks at 'The Immediate Future', 'The Middle Distance' and 'The Long Run'. He starts by indicating three overlapping periods in the history of government intervention. From the earliest days as a colony to a heyday in the early/middle decades of the 19th century, government intruded into the economy as a direct stimulus to economic expansion itself: roads, canals, railroads and public-sector schools, etc. Needless to say, this function of government has not come to an end. From about 1865, accelerating through the New Deal and peaking now, intervention appears in the proliferation of regulatory agencies. Such agencies have the prime function of regulating markets - often at the behest of the business community. Lastly, as from the New Deal period (1932 onwards), there has been the active use of central government's powers to bring the economy to an acceptable level of employment, growth and welfare.

(1) Heilbroner, *Business Civilisation in Decline*, p.10. (Marx) 'singles out prospective self-wrought changes in the milieu within which capitalist processes must work.'

(2) *Op. cit.*, p.10. (Schumpeter) 'stresses challenges that undermine the culture rather than the system of business - challenges that weaken the spirit and values of bourgeois society.'

(3) *Op. cit.*, p.17.

It seems to me relatively unimportant that RLH cites only the history of the USA here. The sort of developments he discusses have occurred in all advanced capitalist countries, to a greater or lesser extent, in one form or another. The proliferation of regulatory agencies such as the Securities and Exchange Commission may be a mainly American phenomenon but some form of regulation occurs in most advanced economies, regardless of the differing forms it takes. Often it is proposed by the business community. Influential members of the City of London, and those who articulate their views, are well aware, for example, that regulation is required to stop the repeated occurrence of IOS and Slater Walker scandals; thus they encouraged the formation of a Government Inquiry into their own affairs (even though they might not have chosen Harold Wilson to chair it). Most governments have adopted Keynesian policies. Most governments encourage investment in productive enterprise - either by doing it themselves (e.g. the Italian IRI and ENI; perhaps the British NEB), or by providing a favourable framework of incentives for business, or both.

Heilbroner proceeds to identify difficulties, present in varying degrees in all capitalist economies, that are likely to accelerate this trend of increased state intervention:

- a) the continued propensity to develop generalised disorders (e.g. inflation, depressions);
- b) the tendency to develop serious localised disorders (e.g. the near-breakdown of mass transportation in the USA in the early '70s, resulting in 'Amtrak'; the near collapse of the financial structure in the USA and Western Europe in the same period; urban insolvency);
- c) dangers imposed by a constricting environment (overrunning the resource base before technological remedies can be found, ecology).

None of these problems, nor the consequent increase in government intervention are seen as necessitating any alteration in 'the inertial core of social privilege'.

The extrapolation into the 'Middle Distance' is presented fully cognisant that previous attempts (the Marxian and the Liberal 'end of ideology') have failed. Both, RLH avers, held the primacy of the economic machinery of capitalism in setting the tone and temper of its political and social life. This is no longer valid. Since 1945 we have witnessed '...the rise of the political superstructure to a position of much greater equality with, and now indeed to a prospective position of superiority over, the economic mechanism'.(4) The prognosis for the period 25-30 years hence attempts to identify potential strains and challenges to business civilisation.

Firstly, perhaps surprisingly, the problem of affluence. Heilbroner doesn't foresee any general lowering of all incomes, nor the elimination of the social security net, but does believe that inflation (a major constituent of which is the enhanced power of labour) will be a continuing 'problem'. He also foresees problems in the ability of society to get its 'dirty jobs' done - unsolved by automation, partly because of resource difficulties, partly because of the loss of purchasing power it might entail.

(4) Op. cit., p.49.

What he could have mentioned, but doesn't, is that these tasks are frequently undertaken by Third World immigrants. (In fact nowhere does he discuss, in more than three lines, the possibility of racial conflict in the future.)

Secondly, the common technology of all capitalisms affects social structures, leading to a hierarchical organisation of work (hardly new - S.A.C.) and to a coordinating bureaucracy. RLH sees the conflict of the future as being between not Capital and Labour but Capital and the elite of the bureaucratic technostructure.

Thirdly, the need to establish effective social control over technologies holding the capacity for enormous social mischief, i.e. social censorship over the advance of science.

Finally, RLH notes (as his 'firmest generalisation') that '... its problems are at least as much rooted in the nature of industrial society as ... in capitalism proper'.(5) He proceeds to identify these problems in 'Socialism', and analyses the merits and demerits of East and West as regards their abilities to meet them:

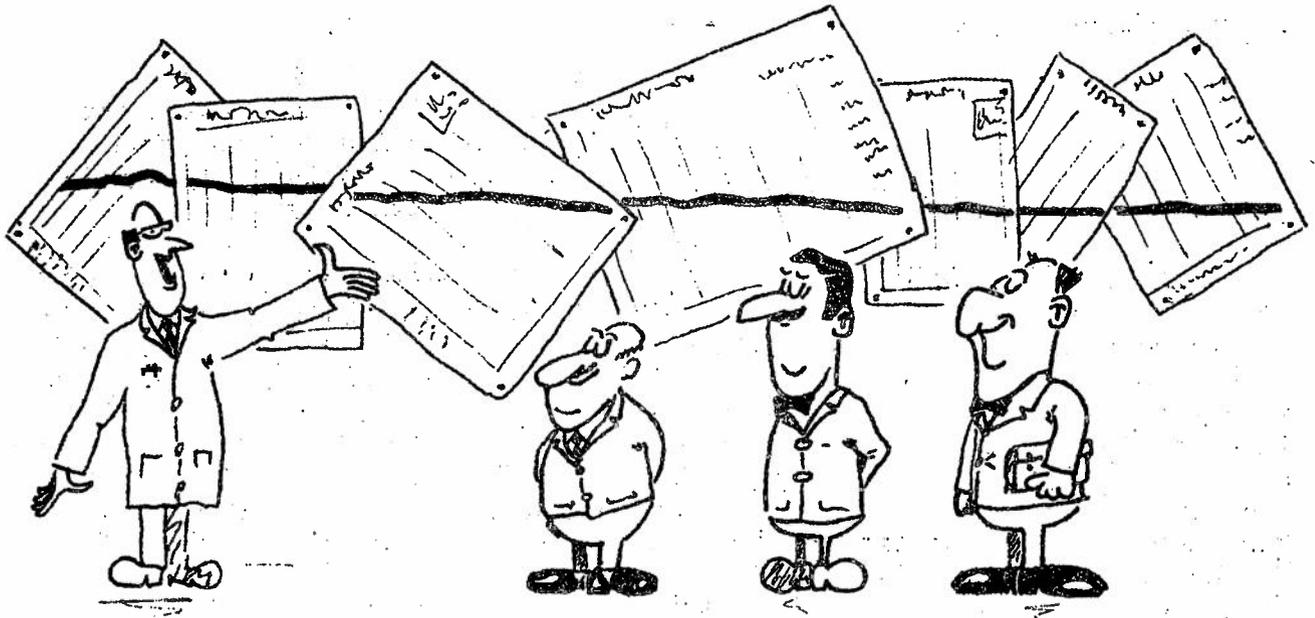
'This is not to say that capitalist and socialist nations will not have their general differences in coping with common problems. The capitalist group brings with it the obsolete privileges of inherited wealth, of acquisitiveness as a dubious source of social morale, of a clash between a "business" outlook of decreasing relevance and a technical-planning outlook of uncertain strength. On the other hand, these nations generally enjoy parliamentary forms of government that, if they withstand the transition through planning, may provide useful channels for social adaptation. On the socialist side we find the advantage of economic systems stripped of the mystique of "private ownership" and the presumed legitimacy and superiority of the workings of the market. On the negative side is the cumbersomeness of their present planning machinery, their failure to develop incentives superior to capitalism, and above all, their still restrictive political attitudes.

'In the middle run, then, it seems plausible that the economic institutions of socialism may prove superior to those of planned capitalism, whereas the political institutions of capitalism may present advantages over those of socialism (as matters now stand). The hope, of course, is that we can combine the two...' (6)

In 'The Long Run', both systems face the blunting, and ultimate halting, of the drive for growth through resource limitations and pollution exacerbated through intensified exploitation by poorer nations trying to catch up, the antagonism between rich and poor nations, and nuclear proliferation - perhaps mitigated by technology and the development of synthetics.

(5) Op. cit., p.58.

(6) Op. cit., pp.58-59.



AT LAST WE HAVE FOUND ONE WAY OF STABILIZING THE ECONOMY !

But capitalism has problems that are specific to itself - and they are all related to the blunting of the drive for growth. Firstly, the constriction of the expansive drive: the progressive elimination of the profits that are the means and ends of the accumulation of private property. For Heilbroner this implies the end of property rights as we know them, since it will have become '...impossible to satisfy the claims of the working majority by granting it ever larger absolute amounts of real income ... that do not come out of the pockets of the rich but out of larger total output'.(7)

Secondly, the expansion of the planning apparatus. Thirdly, the erosion of the 'spirit' of capitalism, i.e. changes in the value structure - a waning belief in the ability of a business civilisation to provide social morale. The 'hollowness at the centre' has two aspects: the tendency to substitute impersonal pecuniary values for personal non-pecuniary ones, e.g. in advertising and sport; and a disregard for the value of work:

'A business civilisation regards work as a means to an end, not as an end to itself. The end is profit, income, consumption, economic growth or whatever; but the act of labour itself is regarded as nothing more than an unfortunate necessity to which we must submit to obtain this end ... the business civilisation carries the disregard of work far beyond what is required by the objective necessities of survival even at a fairly high level of material enjoyment'.(8)

(7) Op. cit., p.109.

(8) Op. cit., p.114.

A commonplace? Perhaps. But Heilbroner concludes that:

'...at the very time that the mechanism of the business system must prepare to undergo an unprecedented trial, the participants in the system cannot be expected to rally to its defence with enthusiasm ... economic patriotism is on the decline, especially for believers in the orthodox capitalist faith'.(9)

Within his overview of the next century Heilbroner has also glanced at related problems: whether industrialism is the society of the future and whether the rise of the multinational corporation heralds a new phase of capitalism. His answer to the first question is qualified. If post-industrial is defined as post-capitalist, then we shall witness 'a system in which the traditional problems of capitalism will give way to a new set of problems related to the altered organisational structure of a post-industrial world'(10) - one with an enhanced trend towards hierarchy, bureaucracy and concentrated economic power, a 'tertiary' sector increasing at the expense of the 'primary', and vulnerable to the threat of labour stoppage. Above all, it will feature '...the exertion of active control in place of passive submission (corresponding) directly with the elevation of the political will over the blind interplay of economic forces. ...post-industrial society thus becomes that period of economic history in which men (!) make their boldest attempt to escape from the thralldom of social forces over which they hitherto exercised no control'.(11) This begs a large question and will be returned to later. RLH also concludes that the multinational corporation does not herald a new phase of capitalism. While not denying their influence, their malpractices abroad are not new. They are not multinational but rather national companies operating abroad. And in accordance with his general view, Heilbroner sees them as likely to succumb to planification and the exertion of the political will mentioned above. This could be accomplished in any number of ways.

So what is the future of capitalism? Naturally the answers will differ according to the country concerned, but in the near future

'...the emerging economic structure will ... be characterised by large, bureaucratic corporations, organised into a viable whole by a planning agency that attempts to reconcile the drive for business profits with the evident need to curtail activity in some areas and to encourage it in others ... the planning agency will also seek to avoid disasters, either at the macro or micro level, that threaten the business system as a whole'.(12)

This is almost straight Schumpeter - indeed, I regard the debt to Schumpeter as rather larger than that to Marx, although Schumpeter acknow-

(9) Op. cit., p.115.

(10) Op. cit., p.71.

(11) Op. cit., p.78.

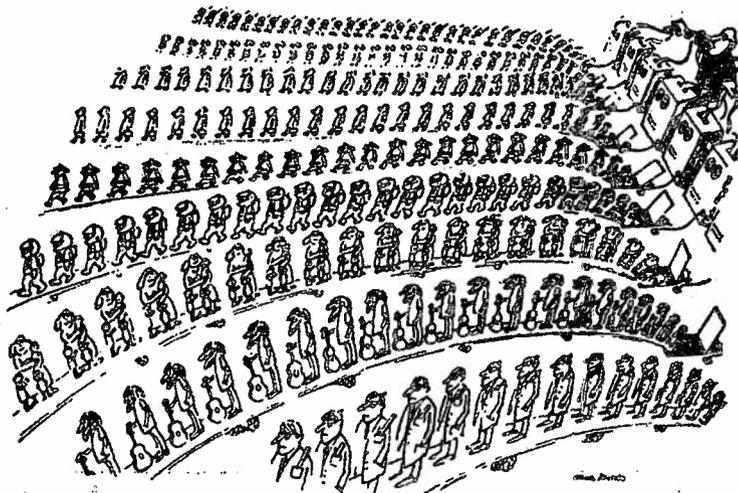
(12) Op. cit., pp.35-36.

ledged a debt there too. For the latter '...Capitalism, whilst economically stable, and even gaining in stability, creates, by rationalising the human mind, a mentality and a style of life incompatible with its own fundamental conditions, motives and social institutions, and will be changed, although not by economic necessity and probably even at some sacrifice of economic welfare, into an order of things which it will be merely a matter of taste and terminology to call socialism or not'. (13)

Perhaps it is odd to use a conservative social theorist to make the following point? While the 'Futureworld' envisaged by Schumpeter and Heilbroner may also be that envisaged by Social-Democrats, Stalinists and Trotskyists, it is not that envisaged by Solidarity and groups like it. Heilbroner admittedly mentions hierarchy, bureaucracy, and capitalism's disregard for the value of work, but seems not to conceive of the possibility of a radical transformation in productive relationships (or their equivalent in other areas of society). Schumpeter and Heilbroner may be conservatives; Social-Democrats, Stalinists and Trots, 'radicals'. But ultimately they are all ideologues of the same sort of society: state capitalism, which for their varying reasons they all identify with socialism. And they'd all love to get their sweaty little hands on Heilbroner's 'planning agency'.

The significance of this book seems to me to be its recognition that state capitalism will (unless working people decide otherwise - S.A.C.) come about sooner or later through bourgeois politics - it will be the creation of conservatism. In the British context, it means that it is quite irrelevant whether Labour (with or without 'illusions') or Conservative is in power. If the latter, the options chosen will, in all probability, be different from those chosen by the former (however 'radical' or 'left') if only because the Labour Party has an obsession with nationalisation. Conservatives, while genuinely believing that the future lies with backward-looking economists such as Milton Friedman (almost an inevitable phenomenon at a time like this) will usually - but not always - opt for less blatant forms of social control. But the long-term result will be little different.

If the Conservative Party 'wins' the next General Election, it is quite possible that they will be without an overall majority in Parliament - hence dependent on the support of other parties. Who knows? Who really cares? An increasing number of the major decisions are taken by the bureaucracy, upon which the parliamentary process has little effect.



(13) J.A. Schumpeter, Essays, pp.71-72

We may expect to see the Official Representatives of Labour continuing some form of 'social contract' under a new name, but with doubtless more 'left' rhetoric. The incorporation of the TUC as a de facto arm of the state will proceed further, as it has done for fifty years. Electing more 'Lefts' onto it may alter the balance of rhetoric but it will make it not one whit more representative of the interests of working people, nor will it bring us any closer to socialism.

Heilbroner has implicitly posited a form of 'convergence theory' by acknowledging that many of the problems capitalism will face in the future will be shared by 'industrial socialism', i.e. the bureaucratic state capitalisms of the East. Heilbroner transcends 'capitalist breakdown' by showing that capitalism can, and will, survive its future problems by altering its form. And of course there will be forms beyond state capitalism (not necessarily socialism). State capitalism may well be the period in which political will is asserted over the blind forces of economic life. However, our own period provides enough examples of the 'benefits' of such assertion at the 'systemic' level: the 'what's good for capitalism/"socialism"/The Party/The City, etc., ad nauseam, is good for the individual' argument. Benefits defined in terms of individual control over productive (and other) relationships, and confidence in one's own abilities, have a negative value. And the only factor that can change it all would be the decision of working people not to share a Brave New World that, in its essential features, will be Oh, so Old!

S.A.C.

