

FREE

THE WHINGER

Irregular journal of hysterical madterialism

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Random thoughts for the day

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Don't mention the war. It appears that the U.S./U.K. imperialists have got themselves into a bit of a pickle in Iraq. Their lovely show war and ideological pantomime to "change the world" has turned sour. They are paying a growing heavy price in money and casualties, and well over 100,000 of their troops are permanently tied up in the area. They haven't even been able to get the oil production in Iraq running as productively and profitably as they had hoped. It's high noon for the neocons and any crazy plans they may have had to roll on and invade Iran/ Syria/ N. Korea and anywhere else will have been significantly delayed.

But is there anything to celebrate in this? It is still deeply grim. A dirty armed insurgency/ counter-insurgency war situation has been locked in and is being used to further destroy an already half wrecked country and bleed away segments of the population. They are still using it as a show of force and ideological demonstration of resolve to try and spread fear and intimidate the rest of the world. Unlike several other military conflicts going on in the world at the moment they deliberately flaunt the killing, abuse, and suffering in Iraq in our face in a global psychological warfare exercise.

Some of the armed insurgency is spontaneous desperate self-defence, people defending their homes and families and neighbours as any of us would if sufficiently provoked. But some of this is likely to be a well laid trap. To a certain extent it can suit the occupier to provoke lots of opposition, bring it out into the open, draw it into a "killing zone" and liquidate hundreds, thousands,... But the bulk of the *organised* armed resistance still comes mainly from rival ba'athist gangs sustained by a pile of cash looted from the national coffers just before the war, and conservative islamist parties, and it goes without saying that they are not social revolutionary.

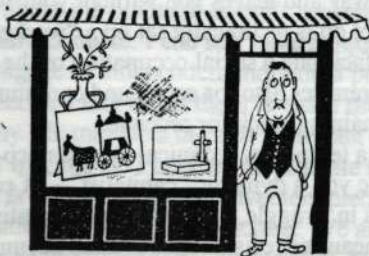
But it should also be observed that they are not even in bourgeois realpolitic terms *politically* "revolutionary". Their immediate realistic aim is not in fact to remove the occupation by force (they are not the north Vietnamese army and the viet cong), but rather to put on sufficient pressure to force the occupiers to cut a deal with them, incorporate them, and give them a stake in the puppet administration under a continuing occupation (wolfewitz admitted just before the war that *what* he really wanted was a thirty year colonial occupation). Thus, for instance, we see a uniformed ba'athist general being rehabilitated, and recruited by the occupation to take over policing in part of fallujah, etc. Part of this process will involve the gangs competing with each other to demonstrate to the colonial occupiers which of them are the hardest and most successfully oppressive in managing and holding down the workers and the population.

At the start of the occupation the prospects for class struggle and social movement actually improved compared to previously. Some sectors of workers have been quite successful in forcing big concessions out of the employers.

However the longer the dirty war situation is locked in the weaker the prospects for class struggle and genuine social revolt. Sentimental leftists in other parts of the world romantically sloganeering "support" for the "armed struggle" are just helping to set up the trap.

Outside the middle-east popular opposition to the war is massive and widespread, but it finds itself continually being drawn into the bourgeois ideological and political arena of spurious liberal debate. This arena suits the manoeuvres of the leftist and reformist parties, like the "Respect" racket in the U.K. Or on the other hand some of the opposition may be outside the bourgeois political arena but finds itself stuck and not able to go much beyond emotional, humanitarian, and symbolic responses. Nonetheless this is better than nothing. The election of the bourgeois social democratic government in Spain *has* lead to a change in the specific policy of the Spanish state. They are removing their troops unilaterally from Iraq and realigning themselves with a wily second division franco-german imperialism waiting patiently in the wings. It certainly aint "communism", but it still makes you think critically about the usual ultra-left sloganised positions and dogmas. Certainly we "proles" should fight first for our own cause before anything else, but the outcome of bourgeois faction fights is not always totally irrelevant. Nor is it the case that particular bourgeois executives in any particular situation can only follow one policy that a general "capitalism" forces them to follow.

Directly though, there isn't much in the way of an obvious point of material leverage for us to focus on in a class struggle way. In Europe at least, there isn't any immediately obvious war tax, or direct conscription for the war, or compulsory war work to focus direct refusal around in relation to the war in Iraq. Indirectly there is a more general growing crisis, probably an autumn storm this year, about to break out. What with rising fuel prices, the "jobless recovery", longer and intensified work pushing workers to the limit, the household debt mountain, government spending deficits, trade deficits, and the inflating of property prices, we are sitting on a load of wobbly bubbles. The bubbles can't go on getting bigger forever. We have our fingers in our ears waiting for a loud "pop!"



Who says commodity relations are everywhere and have taken over everything? Who says the entire life of societies in which modern conditions of production reign announces itself as an immense accumulation of commodities? One of the things I have learnt recently by helping out one day a week behind the counter in a leftwing bookshop is that we are not surrounded all the time by commodities. To the contrary, half the time we are surrounded by a big pile of junk that nobody wants to buy, and we have no chance of selling.

Just because something has a price tag on it, it doesn't mean it has a real price or successfully competes in the market as a commodity. Sometimes in some parts of the world fresh dandelion leaves get sold as a delicacy for salads. Now there are numerous dandelion leaves growing in my mum's front garden, but even if I put pretty little price tags on them it doesn't mean anyone is going to buy them.

Not all exchange relations are capitalist. Petty barter has existed on and off in various forms for thousands of years but "capitalism" has not existed for thousands of years. "Capital" at the very least, to be worthy of the name which is both noun *and* adjective, involves a dynamic self-reproducing and self-expanding extraction and accumulation of surplus "value". Ancient isolated petty barter on the edge of tribe or community didn't necessarily involve any of these factors. Nor of course did it involve any impoverished dispossessed freely competing alienated wage labour incorporated in an industrial capitalist commodity production process which has become an essential ingredient in sustaining large scale dynamic capital accumulation in the modern world.

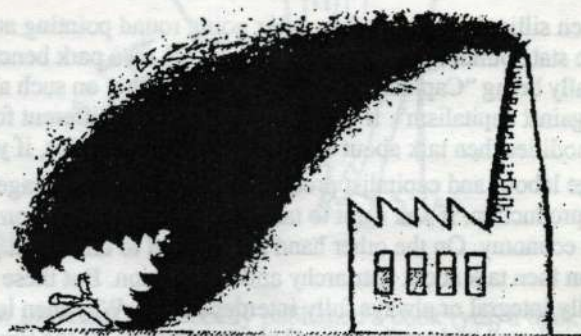
Petty barter does involve a certain small scale mutual estrangement and mutual paranoia; you don't fully trust me and I don't fully trust you. So we engage in petty exchange rather than open abundant free distribution which would be preferable. It is not at all clear that even today every moment of exchange that takes place has been totally and exclusively subsumed in the service of capital accumulation and nothing else. Even in the modern world not all exchange is inherently "capitalism". There is also some extra circulation, or to put it another way the wider circulation always involves some extra element beyond the needs of capital accumulation.

If you are a bunch of workers in a small factory in Argentina during the crisis and the boss runs away and leaves you without your wages what might you do? One thing you might do is technically set up a "workers co-operative" as a practical means to facilitate a social occupation of the premises to demand your wages, to use the premises also for social and community needs, as well as to sell off some of the remaining stock for revenue.

Does setting up a temporary technical "workers co-operative" in such circumstances make you a dynamic "capitalist" – of course it doesn't. As one tactic among others in struggle, a "workers co-operative" may sometimes be a useful temporary means of resistance to a wave of impoverishment. It becomes a problem when people make an obsession out of "co-ops" as a supposed radical end in themselves. But workers co-ops will only be feeding into a renewed

capitalist production if a wider capitalist production has actually successfully began to pick itself up and renew itself. Whatever visible organised forms might still be temporarily thrown up in industrial struggle these days, whether it is radical co-ops or collectives or union base committees or councils, they are never perfect or instantly "communism". But it isn't good enough to instantly dismiss them as purely "capitalist" either.

Contemporaneous parallel histories: We are living under pre-capital, capital and post-capital all at the same time.



Are humans "social beings"? Or are they something subtly different; individual beings that practise social behaviour most of the time? While a lot of our "individuality" might come from our social interaction, not all of it has to. There is already the physical sentient animal individual with unique awareness, unique pain, unique pleasure etc. But also, part of the social individual becomes autonomous from and extraneous to the social. It projects and asserts itself beyond the social.

One can always play the linguistic trick of insisting that everything in human life is social because we can talk about it in social discourse. But just because social discourse can talk about the unique it doesn't necessarily make the unique totally dependent on social discourse. I can still have unique awareness, sentience, feelings and so on, and engage in independent individual productive and creative activity, regardless of whether I talk about them or share them with others or not.

The social aspect of my life may be a big and important part of my life but it is not the total whole of my life, nor do I have to subordinate the whole of my life to it. The unique individual is not merely an inconvenient piece of fluff in an otherwise total social relation or total social machine. We are not just useless pieces of dust waiting for a vulgar marxism, for instance, to come along and sweep us under a collectivist sociological carpet.

It may be part of a supposed "capitalism's" own mythology to be heterodox not orthodox. But it is also the mythological orthodoxy of many of the heterodox collection of ultra-lefties, ultra-marxists, post-situs and friends to tend to see everything and anything all the time everywhere as uniformly just one thing; "Capitalism". But isn't this a bit of a mystical and moody way of viewing the world? Like some paranoid form of buddhism? Like some religious mania seeing everything and anything around you as uniformly "unclean" or "Beelzebub"? And does it add up in reality to try and centre everything exclusively on the *capital* process?

The even sillier bit comes when, after going round pointing at everything from the empire state building to a half eaten sandwich on a park bench and accusing it all as equally being "Capitalism" you then get together on such a basis and stage a protest "against capitalism". If you want to talk about different forms of exchange and commodities then talk about exchange and commodities, if you want to talk about wage labour and capitalist production then talk about wage labour and capitalist production, if you want to talk about bourgeois economy then talk about bourgeois economy. On the other hand if you want to talk about patriarchy and domination then talk about patriarchy and domination. But these forces are not always fully integral or always fully interdependent. Why then insist on using the word "Capitalism" to describe everything everywhere all the time? It's a vulgar bore. We don't believe in one omnipresent epochal total social relation, with one unified apocalyptic history, any more than we believe in god.

If you go round seeing "Capitalism" everywhere all the time, then it is already posited in the all too pervasive creeping vulgar Marxist notions of "Capitalism" that "dictatorship of the class-party of the Proletariat" is the necessary inevitable outcome of such a supposed "Capitalism". It's not that a new Lenin is just about to come to power and seize the state this very October, but seeing everything as "Capitalism" all too conveniently lends itself in practise to a lurking neo-bolshevik politics.

The battle for ideas is not unimportant. To the contrary it is very important. There isn't just a need for us to take a specific libertarian communist stand against the material practise of state socialism and neo-bolshevism and bureaucratic collectivist parties, but also to make and remake a critique of its theoretical underpinnings going right back to Hegel. Someone like Mattick for example was quite right to provoke the issue by talking in terms of "Anti-bolshevik Communism".

Today neo-stalinist attitudes can still be found all over the place, not just in the lefty parties, but in softy form even amongst some ultra-leftists, autonomist marxists, class struggle anarchists, and so on. Even more than a decade on from the collapse of the Soviet Union, cold war attitudes still hang over and cast a big shadow. In this respect there is no immediate genuine "superseding" of the question of bolshevism versus anti-bolshevism, even if one wanted to adopt the intellectual posture of having "superseded" it. A lot more real history and social struggle is going to have to take place for such a superseding to be genuine.



LATE NEWS

A Stamford law professor has recently published a book (yes, a book!). Called "free Culture", by Lawrence Lessig, it is about "free" things, particularly in relation to culture and "new technology".

Prof... er... Mr. Lessig argues that culture is less "free" than ever. Partly this is supposed to be because the U.S. congress keeps extending the length of copyright, reducing the material people can use or adapt without paying. Second, he says that far from making culture more accessible, the internet is tightening large media companies' control because the technology allows them to track which sites we visit and what we do when we get there. Mr Lessig also attacks the music industry for being mean and hunting down and prosecuting teenagers who download and share songs without paying.

But the music industry's behaviour is surely a sign of desperation. There are too many people downloading free music to stop it. In a New York Times interview in 2002 David Fucking Bowie said: "The absolute transformation of everything that we ever thought about music will take place within 10 years... I'm fully confident that copyright will no longer exist..." We're hoping that in 10 years time David Bowie won't exist.

Meanwhile, back in the present, the extension of the length of copyright doesn't necessarily reduce in absolute terms the amount of material people can use or adapt, there's still masses of old free stuff still out there. And it depends on whether you want to spend all your time consuming commercial stuff anyway. If you sit at home and make your own music it costs you nothing (apart from the goodwill of your next door neighbours).

The internet is challenging one industry after another: music, software, telecommunications and news. Linux and the open source software movement,

which relies heavily on volunteer programmers, has not made huge progress against Microsoft on PCs, but nonetheless it has made some (China, the Israeli government and the city of Munich have made linux their operating system of choice, which ends up establishing Linux's imperialist credentials and undermines any radical cred.). Telecommunications monopolies are being challenged by the growth of very cheap, web-based Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) telephone calls. What does this mean down the line? Does it mean new waves of mass unemployment?, a meltdown into deflation/overproduction?, we get to end up spending our whole lives on the phone to our mums?

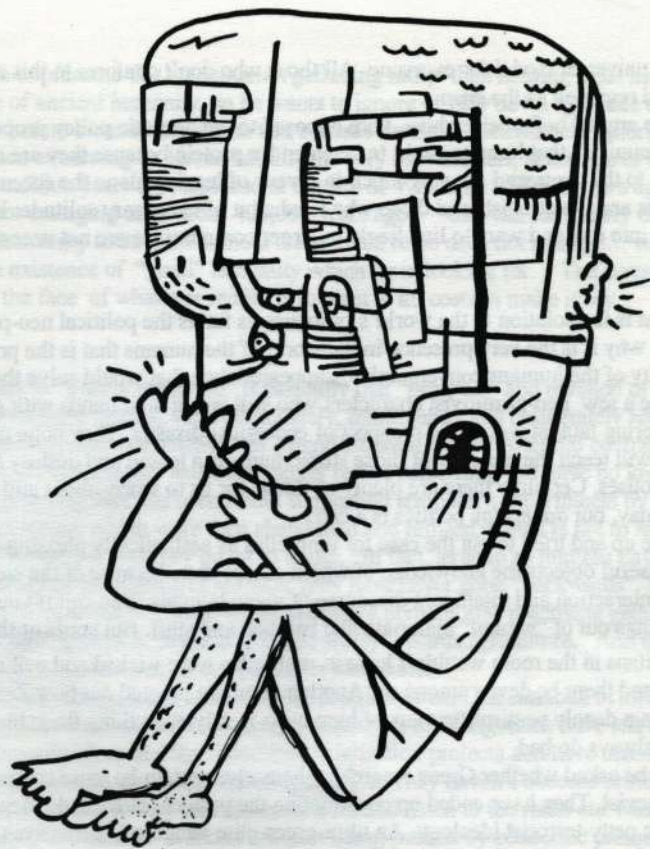
You want virtual free energy?: The Scottish executive launched a pioneering trial of silent, roof mounted wind turbines bringing closer the prospect of viable cheap domestic wind power for homes. Five turbines have been installed at primary schools in Fife, using technology that "Renewable Devices", its Edinburgh based creator, claims is a breakthrough in "mass-producible" renewable energy. The turbines are capable of generating 4,500 kilowatt hours annually and could provide "up to a third" of the average household's electricity demands, windy weather permitting. Photo-electric cells and solar panels are not only getting more efficient, they have started getting a lot cheaper.

Tins of spaghetti in tomato sauce are still only 9pence a can in Lidl. (mind you, the wages aren't much higher).

Of course there is a constant battle between the emergence of new forms of free and virtually free goods and common wealth on the one hand and the campaigns by monopoly capital and the state to impose new enclosures and force people to pay more for things. If you could get all your household energy needs from your roof the authorities would invent new oppressive planning regulations to ban it, or they would try and raise revenue by taxing it, or require that you install some useless expensive "safety" device you can only buy from certain approved monopoly suppliers, etc. In some parts of the world they are trying to make it illegal to collect rainwater from your roof, although these attempts appear unsuccessful so far, most likely to provoke a popular uprising like in Bolivia...

If they are still in a sulk because we are getting too independently well off, they can attack us indirectly by sticking up rents and general taxes/charges, or jack up interest rates to impose a recession, and we haven't even dealt with the subject of how employers might launch new direct attacks on workers wages. We can always be pessimist defeatist demoralisers, like many a moody puritan politico, and insist on seeing a grey cloud to every silver lining. We can just see most of this as the basis for new restructuring, new recuperation, new domination. But it is not always the case that the forces of enclosure are always winning the battle.

Anyway, rather than waste time with Stamford law professors, I would recommend instead checking out some of the cool innovative experiments with libertarian technology some folks we know have been engaging in recently at www.c-realevents.demon.co.uk



Review of "John Zerzan And The Primitive Confusion" by
En Attendant, translated and re-published by Chronos Publications
2004 (BM Chronos, London, WC1N 3XX), £2.50.

By Paul

This Chronos pamphlet is a reprint of a French text which was translated in September 2000 to coincide with a talk in London by the political neo-primitivist John Zerzan. The talk was hosted by U.K. Green Anarchist and Zerzan's subject was the Green Anarchist movement in America. The text dealt critically with two of John Zerzan's books, "Future Primitive" and "Elements of Refusal", and criticised them for being an *ideological* re-writing of the history of humanity.

I made the mistake myself of going to the talk in London, and I was disappointed to find Zerzan, and more particularly his U.K. Green Anarchist hosts, talking some tiresome tosh against ALL technology, against ALL towns and cities, against any agriculture except the most basic smallest scale subsistence horticulture, against electricity, against language, rationality, logic, against any large or sophisticated human interaction. The only valid thing for them being very small neo-primitive subsistence groups and isolated individuals as a

compulsory universal model for everyone. All those who don't conform to this are to be despised and regarded as the enemy.

As I have argued before elsewhere, I am opposed to the despotic policy proposal of some "communists" that hermits ought to be eaten for protein because they are outside community, to the contrary I am very much in favour of leaving alone the eccentric individualists and isolationists and those who need a bit of temporary solitude. But those who are not into this and want to live freely in larger communities are not necessarily the enemy.

Now what is the solution to the world's problems as far as the political neo-primitivist is concerned? - why it is the very presence in the world of the humans that is the problem. And if the majority of the humans conveniently disappeared then that would solve the problems. There's quite a few neo-primitivist characters who will wring their hands with glee in a doom mongering fatalist way at the prospect of ecological disaster. They hope major catastrophe will teach the majority of those stupid humans a lesson and destroy all their towns and houses. Certainly there are plenty of things for us to worry about and act upon in the world today, but *doomsday* politics is a con.

We spoke up and tried to put the case for umbrellas as aesthetically pleasing and practically useful objects the knowledge of which comes to us because of the complex productive interaction and intelligent discourse of many humans. You can if you choose make the things out of "natural" materials like bamboo and stuff. But some of the green anarcho-puritans in the room wouldn't have it; umbrellas were wicked and evil and part of civilization and there be devils among us. Another comrade pointed out how Zerzan's talk was based on a deeply pessimistic view of humanity; nearly everything these humans do they nearly always do bad.

It should be asked whether Green Anarchist themselves might be more correctly titled Green Bolshevik. They have ended up constructing the perfect ready-made megalomaniac misanthropic petty-terrorist ideology. An ultra-green elite vanguard, themselves of course, can sneer at the rest of "civilised" humanity, and everything and everybody living in the modern world becomes a legitimate target. Mind you an ideology like this can become tempting for a few minutes if you ever find yourself squashed up on a crowded commuter train full of accountants and systems analysts stuck outside a station one morning.

Anyway back to the pamphlet; "John Zerzan And The Primitive Confusion". Here En Attendant argue that Zerzan is engaging in an ideological re-writing of the history of humanity, he makes use of different research works by prehistorians, anthropologists and philosophers with the sole aim of establishing a pre-conceived idea of what humanity is all about, has been and will become. The trouble is pre-history is a field of very shifting knowledge and based on extremely fragmented traces, animal and human bones and carved stones. The ideas we have of prehistoric periods cannot be precise, the picture keeps changing and new complicated questions get thrown up.

The text accuses Zerzan of wanting to paint an idyllic picture of the origins of humanity and therefore only seeking elements that will permit him to paint this picture. "For Zerzan, scientific discoveries are just a way to develop his ideology... clearly he will take no account of what hinders him, he will reserve the right of using the argument of scientific authority when it will be convenient for him, and to reject it when it will cease to be convenient to him. Here is the essential of Zerzan's "method", which can be found in all his texts." The authors make a comparison of Zerzan's method, "scientific activity put at the service of an ideology", with that of a character like Lysenko.

Zerzan wants to presume that a vegetarian gathering rather than hunting must have been the natural state of ancient humanity, so he wants to ignore or play down evidence of hunting activity before Neanderthals. The text accuses Zerzan of deliberately ignoring, for instance, evidence of hunting by *Homo habilis*, the very first humans, at the site of Olduvai in Tanzania 1.8 million years ago, and also at the site of Vallonnet 950,000 years ago (Neanderthals not emerging until about 400,000 years ago). "One can see clearly that even by dating back humanity to its most ancient representative he does not manage... to demonstrate the existence of "good" humanity which he is looking for... The surest way of being wrong in the face of whatever reality is to want at all costs to make it say something."

Zerzan's thesis in "Future Primitive" is basically that "progress" and division of labour, domestication, symbolic culture, were consciously, intelligently and deliberately *refused* until fairly recently in human existence. En Attendant point out the potential contradiction in this; how can you consciously and intelligently refuse something you have no knowledge of? And no specific evidence has been found suggesting temporary experiments by ancient humans with agriculture which were then abandoned and refused, which is not to say it may never have happened. But they go on to argue; "In fact, as soon as humans have practised agriculture or the rearing of animals, they have never gone "backwards". We have cases at the beginning of the Neolithic era of sedentary humans also practising gathering and hunting but these groups afterwards evolved solely towards agriculture." And they claim; "Settled culture, once it is formed, is never abandoned."

Now I am not sure this last generalised claim is strictly true. One can look at an example in modern Mongolia: since the fall of Stalinism thousands of Mongolians have left the planned urban housing blocs and the failed industrialisation projects and have taken up a new modern semi-nomadic travelling/ herding lifestyle. They haven't become primitive again or rejected technology, they still drive vehicles and listen to the radio etc. Meanwhile worldwide, millions of "settled" workers are now being pushed by economic pressures to uproot themselves and become modern transient economic refugees. Of course, this is not neo-primitivism.

As to the question of *agriculture*, just why did it develop in the first place? The passage to the Neolithic era still remains quite a mystery. There are only *theories*. The theory that the development of agriculture was provoked by climate change is dismissed by En Attendant. They suggest there were at least 15 significant climate changes in the relevant period, but agriculture didn't develop in each case. Nonetheless is this dismissal acceptable? Climate change may well have been a catalyst in the birth of agriculture, particularly if it coincided with cross pollination of certain plants creating new varieties particularly suited to agriculture that hadn't existed before. So maybe it *does* take at least 15 climatic changes over 3 million years to help successfully kick off this agriculture thing.

What they do say about the development of agriculture is: "Human societies seem to aspire more to their own conservation, to the upholding of their own structures than to the domination of the surrounding environment.... What took place during the Neolithic era, is that the conservation of the social structures *went through* the domination of the natural environment, a domination that in turn brought about the creation of new structures"

The text scoffs at Zerzan's notion of a "face-to-face society", his desire to "live in the present", his affinity for the spontaneity of the hippies, his like of psychedelic drugs, his individualism etc. They also sneer at Zerzan for being, as they put it, an "American

feminist". Here in my opinion the text actually starts taking an ugly turn. The authors slag Zerzan for being "moralistic" for seeing "evil" in stocking (no stupid, not "stockings", but stocking, storing and hoarding etc.), in agriculture, in complex organisation etc. But are they not being "moralistic" and puritan themselves in scoffing at psychedelic drugs (according to them psychedelic drugs are all a C.I.A. plot), at youth movements, at the practical preference some may have for organising in smaller groups, at "individualism"?

The authors show their own miserable big-bourgeois collectivist prejudices in their sneering at "individualism". They sneer at "wounded individualism" and the isolated "vegetable". But it is not just peasants and small farmers in the third world who have a real material need to defend their remaining individual space and petit informal reserves against the relentless encroachment and enclosure against them. Individualised and atomised workers under dispersed fordism in the developed world also have perfectly good reason to defend their individual space and what little reserves, whether social or individual, they have left against further encroachment by both corporate capital and state capital. It is part of the process of defending both the individual and the social wage, and what amounts in part to an informal strike fund, while under capital.

This "individualism" of the individual peasant or the individualised worker, defending what remains of their petit reserves, can only be regarded as "reactionary" to the extent that you are mad, bad and stupidly *Marxist* enough to think that enclosure by big capital and state capital is in any way "progressive". For instance, only a very sentimental variety of ultra-leftist would think it in workers' interests to demand *lower* individual wages and *less* housing in order to bring themselves closer to "communism". And here paradoxically, in their sneering at modern "individualism", En Attendant end up slipping into their own backward looking trajectory.

The individual spaces and petit reserves of the modern atomised individualised worker are there to be subtly subverted and detoured into something socially radical, ultimately to be turned against capital and state. They should not be despised or *scapegoated* as the cause of all the social ills. In this respect it is the collectivist marxists and the collectivist sociologists who are the ones who are really guilty of fetishising and exalting the abstract "individual" in order to scapegoat it. When vulgar ultra-left collectivists adopt a puritan stance of being anti "individualism", all they are really doing is ganging up with collective capital, with social democratic politicians, and with the clergy. Their solution to the problem of individual alienation is merely to suppress it under a collective alienation, a collectivist *property*, or some bureaucratic collectivist gang. The question of workers' individual pride and individual dignity is not just a question of conservatism. At the same time the social solidarity and mutual aid of the exploited and oppressed in struggle is not necessarily the same as *collectivism*. Meanwhile doesn't the Stalinist union bureaucrat always attack the autonomous wildcat strikers for their "individualism" and parody them as "petty-bourgeois"?

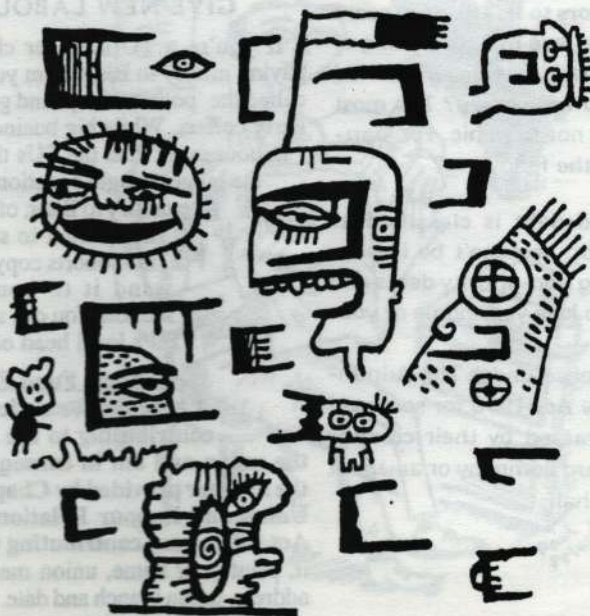
In the future under "communism" if there is not a degree of tolerance for some individual space and some individual autonomy then the real sentient physical individual humans will be suffocated and crushed. And the supposed "communism" will have succeeded in suffocating and crushing itself in the process. So we are both pro radical individualist and pro-communist at the same time!! –and we revolt against the prejudice that this must be a contradiction. As for any form of collectivism that might have a *radical* side, like a wildcat strike committee that actually had some clout, we fear a lot of it of it died out in the early eighties. Only a weak rump remains.

En Attendant finish off, as one would expect, with a rant about "revolution": "When, for example, the revolution is done (which no doubt will be soon, of course) we will occupy ourselves intelligently re-afforesting the millions of hectares devastated by industrial agriculture, this will not be done by the action of "small isolated groups". And if, as an individual, I have the good fortune to participate in this collective action, I will be quite indifferent to inscribing my name on each tree I will have planted, and that besides, without doubt, I will not see reaching maturity. I will not feel less an individual for that."

Now maybe I'm being too paranoid in my reading of the above passage, but it does hint a little to me of some sort of state socialist collectivist labouring army, or mass compulsory work team; yuk! The painful truth is that a lot of the damage to the environment is semi-permanent and we are just going to have to live with a lot of it for some time into any post-industrial, post-capitalist situation (and the "revolution" might not at all be soon). Like old derelict mills dotted around the landscape, the big chunks missing from the ozone layer and rainforest will serve as grim follies and monuments reminding us of a different grim past.

En attendant also don't seem to appreciate how material conditions and physical scale, the quantity of resources and density of population for instance, may have some influence on the various social forms that might occur in a given situation. Maybe it is just possible to imagine a city of a million people being "managed" in a non-exploitative and non-hierarchical way, without capital and domination. But if the population grows beyond a critical point and gets too crowded won't it become increasingly difficult to "manage" it in this way? Even if such a city is run on egalitarian lines the physical pressure of overcrowding could still end up being harmful to both the humans and the environment, won't such pressures tend to harm and deform the egalitarianism? Even a hard left communist like Bordiga could see it would be useful to communism to reduce the massive population imbalance between urban areas and rural areas.

Paul, May 2004



CUT THE CARD

YOU DON'T NEED to work for the Financial Times to realise that credit card debt is getting well out of hand. Ten years ago hardly anyone had one. Now there are 91 million credit and debit cards in the UK. Two fifths of our shopping is now put on the plastic. The net result is a large portion of the population with massive credit card debt. Given the extortionate interest rates charged this is seriously bad news for us and the source of gleeful hand rubbing for the high street bankers who are pocketing it.

Credit cards have been introduced not to make our lives easier, but to extract money from us. Credit card debt acts like a mini mortgage – got to keep our noses to the grindstone so as not to miss any payments. We lived without them for years, and can start doing so again. To help you on your way to liberating yourself from plastic purgatory **get your credit card and take a pair of scissors to it.** This may seem hard at first, but believe me, the feeling of relief when it's done is immense. Worried about the debt you've accrued? The most important thing is not to panic. For starters, did you know the following?

- Credit Card debt is classified as "non-priority" debt. You can't be imprisoned for not paying non-priority debts and you are unlikely to lose your home or your essential goods.

- It is an offence under The Administration of Justice Act 1970 for someone in debt to be harassed by their creditor such as a credit card company or an agent acting on their behalf.

- Debts of under £5000 can only be heard at the small claims court. So even if you do get taken to court you can't be stung with solicitors costs if you lose.

- Debt collectors are not the same as bailiffs. Debt collectors cannot take any action against you, apart from asking you to pay any money owed.

- Regardless of what they say, **YOU DON'T HAVE TO LET BAILIFFS IN.** They are not allowed to force their way into your home unless you have let them in on a previous visit, hence the importance of never, ever letting them in.

We don't claim to be legal experts. We certainly don't claim to offer "impartial" advice either – we despise bailiffs, bankers and other creditors as much as anyone and support fair means or foul to get the better of them! Some decent, free, practical advice is available from The National debtline on 0808 808 4000. Their website is www.nationaldebtline.co.uk.

Alternatively, you could visit the Citizens Advice Bureau.

GIVE NEW LABOUR NOWT

If you're a TU member chances are you're paying money to Blair from your union dues. It's called the 'political levy' and goes right to Labour Party coffers. While big business now gives New Labour more than the TUs the latter still make the biggest single donations. About 60 unions

give money to Blair, often millions. If you don't want to subsidise Blair and his cohorts copy the following and send it to your work's wages section. You can send a copy to your TU's local head office.

Political Fund Exemption Notice.

I hereby give notice that I object to contributing to the Political Fund of the union and am in consequence exempt, in the manner provided by Chapter 6 of the Trade Union and Labour Relations (consolidation) Act 1992, from contributing to that fund. Sign it, print your name, union membership number, address, union branch and date. Tony's money will then be in your pocket.

Some things we've been reading recently...

The **Insane Dialectical Posse** have just put out a reprint of "Revolutionary Optimist, An Interview with Martin Glaberman". Martin Glaberman was a member of the proto-autonomist Marxist tendency founded by C.L.R. James along with Raya Dunayevskaya in America in the 1940s. Glaberman worked as an autoworker for twenty years where he was a shop steward, committeeman and local union editor. There are plenty of specific points in Glabermans views we could argue with but we admire his basic spirit. Get a copy from; Insane Dialectical Posse, P.O. Box 31372, Los Angeles, CA 90031-0372, U.S.A. idp_editions@yahoo.com

Check out all the mountains of political text at the **Antagonism** website; www.geocities.com/antagonism1

Communicating Vessels. A good political zine from America that successfully mixes communist theory with poetry, fiction and surrealist graphics. \$3 or equivalent to; Communicating Vessels, P.O. Box 1124, Madison, WI 53701-1124, U.S.A.

Freedom. Bog standard U.K. anarchist fortnightly. Freedom Press and Bookshop, in Angel Alley, 84b Whitechapel High St, London, E1 7QX, U.K.

Hobnail Review. A good guide to small press and alternative publishing. P.O. Box 44122, London SW6 7XJ. U.K.

Wilful Disobedience. Naughty insurrectionary anarchist stuff. Oops! I don't have their box number immediately to hand, but try via www.geocities.com/kk_abacus

Troploin newsletter, radical communist theory from France about the way the world is going, obtainable from; Aredhis, B.P. 20306, 60203 Compiègne Cedex, France.





Lots of awkward Questions

Today, are all struggles for communistic social relations exclusively the struggle of just one class, the famous grandiose "Proletariat" as "class for itself"? Or in reality, do pro-communistic struggles by necessity involve diverse radical social movements and awkward material struggles, which are likely in practise to contain elements from more than one "class"? Or is it the movement itself which defines the class? In which case what are we to make of the conflicts in social and economic interests to be found in practise within the various movements and struggles? Can all questions of social difference and conflict be reduced exclusively to a question of "class"? Is there a "real movement" one can really put ones finger on, or is it just a romantic myth? And does the marxist mythology of the universal revolutionary "Proletariat", and total "Communism" after the "Revolution", bear any relation to the real need for practical solidarity and practical struggle in the present, however imperfect these may be?

Is there any good reason why what remains of small farmers, peasants, self employed artisans, unemployed and so on, shouldn't be included in the various struggles for communistic social relations alongside wage labourers in revolt? Despite growing encroachment and enclosure and dispossession it is not yet the case that all these people are fully proletarianised and fully absorbed into wage labour. Nonetheless, is it not the case that many of them are still capable of seeing the need for, and having a desire for, communistic relations? And struggles don't

just stand by and wait for the supposedly convenient moment when dispossession of virtually everyone is complete, they break out anyway while the process is still going on.

Would it not also be useful for social revolts to aim to bring in and include some of the small farmers, who could provide good food for the social revolt to eat? You certainly won't get good healthy food from the ecodeaster of big industrial agribusiness, whether controlled by the capitalists or even by collective workers' self-management?

Today is it not the case that when social revolt breaks out it is not so much any more about forming and building class but more about destroying class? What it forms is less likely to be a clunky tanky "class-party" but instead a radical insurgent diverse mass of humanity. The bog standard ultra-left Marxist formulation that the "Proletariat" comes together as a "class for itself" to "overthrow" Capital, impose the "Dictatorship of the Proletariat", and in the process succeeds in abolishes itself as a class, is a bag of very awkward and not at all satisfactorily explained contradictions. In reality there is a problem of class formation, and in reality there is never a perfectly fully formed Proletariat for itself.

Is it not actually the case that what we are seeing now is the mass of atomised individual exploited proletarians already engaging half way in the process of abolishing themselves as a class by conspicuously refusing to come together on a mono-class basis and impose the "Dictatorship of the Proletariat" in the first place!? The workers have been unable to live up to the expectation the big employers once had of them to act as a fine coherent strong corporatist body of fordist workers. Now, in addition, the workers are inclined to resist both capitalist work, and their apocalyptic supposed "historic mission", as laid down for them by marxism. And in reality wouldn't the "Dictatorship of the Proletariat" just turn out to be the ultimate *collective capital*? Increasingly the individual proletarians refuse to unite on the basis of a conservative workerist identification with, and fetishising of, their own fundamental impoverishment and misery under wage labour exploitation, a condition they despise so much that half the time many of them refuse to consciously even think about it any more.

Instead, if they openly revolt, they are just as likely to a) Express their suppressed needs and desires through proud individual rebellion, or radical hedonism, or individual semi-antagonistic lifestyle alternatives, or b) Join together with other individual proletarians and a smaller number of disillusioned members of other classes in radical diverse social movements and social revolts.

The majority of workers are not individually paid up members of the official trade unions, nor are they members of any formal unofficial unions. For a variety of material and historical reasons the majority of workers are unlikely ever to become members of formal unions. The majority of individual trade union members are not actively involved in the organisation. It is increasingly visible to

many workers that the trade unions are unable to win any significantly large gains for the majority of their own members, never mind the workers as a whole, only some temporary gains for certain "key" sectors. Some traditional industrial militancy does continue, like the recent wave of wildcat walkouts in the Post Office in the U.K. for example. But it is heavily sectoralised and contained and doesn't have as much leverage as it used to. Some of the industries in which it occurs, like the Post Office, just aren't as important today as they were ten or twenty years ago.

The decentralisation of much of production, together with new systems of "dispersed fordism" and "globalisation", have undermined the collective bargaining power of many workers. In the seventies if the miners in the U.K. went on strike they could bring down the government. Today if all the miners remaining in the U.K. went on strike how many people would even notice? Industrial militancy and fist waving alone don't necessarily make you strong, you also need some essential leverage. Some groups, like transport workers, might still possess a degree of this. But the need to break out of exclusive industrialism and workerism is obvious.

There are millions more workers who don't struggle openly. They remain silent, collapse in on themselves, become depressed or neurotic, or they turn to religion or drugs or alcohol, they burn out and become nervous wrecks, go mad or become ill to the point they are no longer able to work efficiently or work at all. In the U.K., one of the industrialised developed centres and certainly not a "third world" country, on any given work day there is an average of 6 million workers and people of working age who are officially too sick to work, that's if you total up the long-term sick and unable to work with the short term sick and those phoning in sick. In 1980 in the U.K. there was 0.5 million of working age on long-term sickness benefit or incapacity benefit. Today the figure is well over 2 million. Against capitalist work and production, for many workers who do not have the strength to struggle openly, the weapon of default is growing ILLNESS. I am myself an unemployed temp worker getting older and tired and ill.

In the sixties and seventies and early eighties, the production line would often be stopped by a strong coherent body of workers forming a strike committee, or shopfloor assembly, or flying picket, or workers council. Today all over the world the production line is just as likely to be stopped by half the workers burning out and falling to pieces on the job, slowing down or even collapsing from exhaustion, while the other half desperately find ways of skiving off, running away and individually escaping. A dignified organised conscious worker activism or worker militancy, whether in the union or not, is no longer a realistic option for the majority because they are too tired or too burnt out or too drugged up or too ILL.

Their sickness becomes a major problem, both for them and for capitalist production. Even in social insurrectionary situations such as have recently occurred in Bolivia or Argentina, the formation of "workers councils", or

autonomous "union committees" and "strike committees", or "peoples assemblies" is only half the story of the real crisis in the bulk of production. Yesterday production would be periodically interrupted by moments of class formation. Today millions of workers worldwide have been so burnt out and worked to the limits of exhaustion that production is increasingly being stopped indefinitely by physical *class-collapse*.

The "Proletariat" as a class are irreparably fragmented, atomised, shattered. But the twist in the tale is that the "capitalists" are losing too. Despite all the humbug talk of "recovery", the social landscape is becoming less successfully dynamically "capitalist", but becoming more lumpen-bourgeois BARBARIST instead. The social clashes, which in the first place were never strictly totally centred on one big supposed opposition of "Proletariat versus Capital", increasingly break down into a drawn out series of fractured conflicts between a dispersed diverse déclassé mass of billions of humans on the one hand, and a fractious collection of lumpen-bourgeois barbarist elites on the other. Neither a unitary action nor a unified consciousness is instantly possible.

Maybe the silver lining to this gloomy cloud is that we are not going to get one big "Dictatorship of the class-party" with its inherent neo-stalinist dangers, magically leading us to one big total centralist-integralist "Communism". Is it not instead the case that the potential in the real historic movements in the real world right now is for diverse dispersed free and open social revolts leading to many diverse dispersed free and open "communisms"?

Paul Feb 2004



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WHAT DO WE WANT?

In our struggles against the exploitation of our labour, and in our resistance to capital, domination and the state, we stand for **equal inclusive solidarity and mutual aid.**

Our libertarian communist desire is for **global abundant free access to land, water and productive resources**, with production for the mutually complementary needs and desires of communities and individuals.