CONSCRIPTION

by Don Olson

The brutality of the Soviet Union and its invasion of Afghanistan are to be condemned. 

The top-down "revolution" is surprisingly supported by the Argentine "arch-enemies" (Trotskyists). The empire of the Soviet Union is a problem and only underscores that they need a bottom-up revolution there as much as we do here.

In the Soviet competition with the US, the insanity of the nuclear arms race is staggering. As Helen Caldicott says, "In two years the arms race will be out of control." Mr. Brejnev's minisatellite, killersatellite, and missiles launched by command of satellitessoldiers is it. It is surprising how few people yet know how close to nuclear holocaust we were last November 9th. For six minutes the military thought the Russians were attacking because of the accidental insertion of a war game tape into the fail-safe computer. On the seventh minute the president would have been notified and the Presidential 747 command plane was readied for take-off. This near destruction only merited a few inches of press in this country.

Besides the dangers of war in the Middle East, either around maintaining oil tanks in power or maintaining large forces of regular military, perhaps an even greater danger is the developing US alliance with China, whose rulers are firmly committed to the inevitability of nuclear war with the Soviet Union. Playing the China card will be a fast shuffle for peace in the world.

These of us committed against all the machinations of the various ruling cliques will have their work cut out. The draft fundamentally deals with the power of the state versus the individual and lead many people during the Vietnam opposition to underwar with the Soviet Union. Playing the China card will be a fast shuffle for peace in the world.

My second point is the history of conscription in the modern world. The American colonies did not need conscription because this country was half-free and had no need for an army. It was introduced by self-proclaimed democrats with a small g who hoped that by conscripting, by bringing everyone Into the army, the principles of liberty, equality and fraternity would be vindicated. The notion is that if you are all equally conscripted, then equality is assumed, you're all equally slaves of the State, in a sense. Which also leads to liberty, is one sense of the term, according to this argument. That is, you become subordinate to the body politic. You twist around the meaning of freedom. And of course it is supreme fraternity to be forced into the army because you are there with your brothers, presumably.

But let yourself be fooled by that point. But fraternity, or the idea of brotherhood, is servitude under this particular or peculiar notion of liberty. So the French revolutionists established the pattern that was then followed throughout almost every country on earth— with the exception of Great Britain and the United States. In the U.S. there is a long, or was a long tradition

CONSCRIPTION — HISTORY OF and ARGUMENT AGAINST

by Mulford Sibley

Mulford Sibley is a long-time opponent of conscription and war. The following is a talk given at a February 1974 teach-in.

I want to outline what seems to me to be the major issues in the problem of registration and draft which we now confront. I should like to divide what I have to say into 4 parts:

Registration is an enrolling of all the people who, according to the law, might be available for the draft. Every conscription system has some form of registration. The president today has the power to immediately order registration without going to Congress, but he doesn't have the money, it must be appropriated by the Congress.

Now sometimes you will hear that there is no necessary connection between registration and the draft. I hear this, for example, from candidates for president. But let yourself be fooled by that statement. Registration is not for the purpose of organizing a Sunday school picnic—registration is for the purpose of making it easier for a draft and a draft is conscripting young people for war. Don't let anyone pull the wool over your eyes on that point.

My second point is the history of conscription in the modern world. The American colonies did not need conscription because this country was half-free and had no need for an army. It was introduced by self-proclaimed democrats with a small g who hoped that by conscripting, by bringing everyone into the army, the principles of liberty, equality and fraternity would be vindicated. The notion is that if you are all equally conscripted, then equality is assumed, you're all equally slaves of the State, in a sense. Which also leads to liberty, is one sense of the term, according to this argument. That is, you become subordinate to the body politic.
CONSCRIPTION

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The brutality of the Soviet Union and its invasion of Afghanistan are to be condemned. Of its so-called "revolution" is surprisingly supported by those who would argue that revolution is always right. (Trotskyists.) The empire of the Soviet Union is a problem, and one underscores that they need a bottom-up revolution there as much as we do here.

In the Soviet competition with the US, the insinuity of the nuclear arms race is staggering. As Helen Caldicott puts it, "In two years the arms race will be out of control." Mr. Cruise missiles, killer satellites, and missiles launched by command of satellites becomes real. It is surprising how few people yet know how close we are to a nuclear holocaust. We were last November 9th. For six minutes the military thought the Russians were attacking because of the accidental insertion of a war game tape into the fail-safe computer. On the seventh minute the president would have been notified and the Presidential 747 command plane was readied for take-off. This near destruction only merited a few inches of press in this country.

Besides the dangers of war in the Middle East, either around maintaining oil shafts in power or maintaining large oil supplies, perhaps an even greater danger is the developing US alliance with China, whose rulers are firmly committed to the inevitability of nuclear war with the Soviet Union. Playing the China card will be a fast shuffle for peace in the world.

Those of us committed against all the machinations of the various ruling cliques in power may see their work cut out. The future demands more responsibilities with the power of the state versus the individual and lead many people during the Vietnamese opposition to an understanding of anarchism. Though many left sect groups are only against the capitalistic draft (and would quickly institute it after "their revolution"), I feel that anarchists can still work with them in coalitions. Much of the anti-draft activity so far has been on campuses and will need to be extended to the rest of society, especially to minority and working and non-working youth. In dealing with all this, it comes down in my mind to a question of survival, to take away the life and death power the rulers around the world have over us.

CONSCRIPTION

HISTORY OF

and ARGUMENT AGAINST

by Mulford Sibley

Mulford Sibley is a long-time opponent of conscription and war. The following is a talk given at a February 16th teach-in.

I want to outline what seems to me to be the major issues in the problem of registration and draft which we now confront. I should like to divide what I have to say into 4 parts. The first part of registration is an enrolling of all the people who, according to the law, might be available for the draft. Every conscription system has some form of registration. The president today has the power to immediately order registration without going to Congress, but he doesn't have the money, it must be appropriated by the Congress.

Now sometimes you will hear that there is no necessary connection between registration and the draft. I hear this, for example, from candidates for president. Don't let yourself be fooled by that statement. Registration is not for the purpose of organizing a Sunday school picnic—registration is for the purpose of making it easier for a draft and a draft is conscripting young people for war. Don't let anyone pull the wool over your eyes on that point.

My second point is the history of conscription in the modern world. The American colonies did not have conscription because conscription on a national basis was only introduced in the French Revolution. Technically, it was introduced by self-proclaimed democrats with a small d who hoped that by conscripting, by bringing everyone into the army, the principles of Liberty, Equality and Fraternity would be vindicated. The notion is that if you are all equally conscripted, then equality is assumed, you're all equally slaves of the State, in a sense. Which also leads to Liberty, is one sense of the term, according to this argument. That is, you become subordinate to the body politic. You twist around the meaning of freedom. And of course it is supreme fracternity to be forced into the army because you are there with your brothers, uncomically. French revolutionists didn't talk about sisters yet at that point. But fraternity, or the idea of brotherhood, is servitude under this particular or peculiar notion of liberty. So the French revolutionists established the pattern that was then followed throughout almost every country on earth—with the exception of Great Britain and the United States. In the U.S. there is a long, or was a long tradition...
against conscription. I'd like to emphasize this issue since sometimes today we forget or own history. The notion of national conscription had not been invented when the Declaration of Independence was issued and the Constitution of the United States was drawn up. When the Founding Fathers used the term army, they meant a volunteer army. They did not mean a conscript army. The very notion of a national conscript army and the Founding Fathers were against large standing armies—some of them were against any armies at all. And they certainly were against anything that would resemble national conscription. During the War of 1812, for example, when the public buildings were burned in Washington by the British, it was proposed that a national system of conscription be adopted. It was turned down by Congress in anger. Daniel Webster called the proposal for conscription a form of slavery. This was while the U.S. was being invaded. And so there is a long tradition against conscript armies in this country, particularly in peacetime but also even in wartime. In the Civil War, there were extremely anti-conscription riots, which extended over a period of time and which indicated the attitudes of vast numbers of Americans.

I also remind you that the U.S. partly became a haven for those who were escaping conscription in Europe—-in the first half of the 19th Century in particular. Many a German immigrant to the U.S. was in large part because of the threat of conscription in Europe. The immigrant was in this country a bastion of freedom from military slavery. My own grandfather left Germany after the failure of the Frankfort reforms of 1848 and conscription was being introduced. There were literally thousands of Europeans who saw the US as a bastion, a citadel against military slavery.

There was tremendous opposition to the enactment of a conscription law during WWII and it was resisted by a good many serious objections. For example, the war itself was opposed politically by a number of prominent leaders who, as a result, went to jail. Eugene Debs spent some time in Atlanta penitentiary and received his largest vote for the presidency, nearly a million votes, while imprisoned in 1920.

As a matter of fact, the first peacetime conscription in the U.S. does not come until 1960, and we did not know peacetime conscription until the last generation. We've forgotten our own history.

I think one can summarize my second point that opposition to conscription and registration for conscription is as American as apple pie and as a matter of fact, when you advocate peacetime conscription, particularly, you are advocating something that runs counter to the major tradition of the American people. Of course it still may be desirable to run counter to tradition when it is something terrible, but I think it is important to note this fact—particularly when we are told so often today that opposition to conscription is unpatriotic or unrealistic or too idealistic. You have American history on your side and I would argue, logic as well.

My third point deals with the arguments against conscription. There are some complicated arguments which I will try to go over and state briefly what they mean. In the first place it is unrealistic to say that conscription is something that is always bad. There is a number of laws, including the Selective Service Act, which states that everyone between the ages of 18 and 25 is subject to conscription. This unconstitutionality is based upon at least three factors. First of all, the Founding Fathers, when they gave Congress the right to raise and support armies, meant, according to some constitutional authorities, a volunteer army—this was the content of army in 1787 and the carefully distinguished the army from the militia. The militia are state bodies. You could be required to serve in the militia but only for local purposes—it wasn't for national purposes. So they had separate provisions for the army and the militia, and when they made provision for the militia serving in the national service, in the federal service, they carefully distinguished the purposes for which the militia can be used.

The militia can only be used for three
The used poses the militia be striking as vice, they careful the strike them mine a the national Revolution, break provision the local army has a conscript system, and breaking for local purposes, had a conscript army. It is easier to attack them, because they have a conscript army against conscription, I’d like to emphasize this since sometimes today we forget our own history. The notion of national conscription has not been invented when the Declaration of Independence was issued and the Constitution of the United States was drawn up. When the Founding Fathers used the term army, they meant a volunteer army. They did not mean a conscript army. The very notion of army being conscripted and the Founding Fathers were against large standing armies—some of them were against any armies at all. And they certainly were against anything that would resemble national conscription. During the War of 1812, for example, when the public buildings were burned in Washington by the British, it was proposed that a national system of conscription be adopted. It was turned down by Congress in anger. Daniel Webster called the proposal for conscription a form of slavery. This was while the U.S. was being invaded. And so there is a long tradition against conscription armies in this country, particularly in peacetime but also in wartime. In the Civil War there were extensive anti-conscription riots, which extended over a period of time and which indicated the attitudes of vast numbers of Americans. I also remind you that the U.S. partly became a haven for those who were escaping conscription in Europe—-the first half of the 19th Century in particular. Many a German immigrant to the U.S. was in large part because of the threat of conscription in Europe. The immigrants saw in this country a bastion of freedom from military slavery. My own grandfather left Germany after the failure of the Frankfurt reform of 1848 and conscription was being introduced. There were literally thousands of Europeans who saw the U.S. as a bastion, a citadel against military slavery.

There was tremendous opposition to the enactment of a conscription law during W.W. I and it was resisted by a good many constitutional objections. The war itself was opposed politically by a number of prominent leaders who, as a corollary, the non-patriot, Eugene V. Debs spent some time in Atlanta penitentiary and received his largest vote for the presidency, nearly a million votes, while imprisoned in 1920.

As a matter of fact, the first peacetime conscription in the U.S. does not come until 1960, we did not know peacetime conscription until the last generation. We’ve forgotten our own history. I think one can summarize my second point that opposition to conscription and registration for conscription is as American as apple pie and as a matter of fact, when you advocate peacetime conscription, particularly, you are advocating something that runs counter to the major tradition of the American people. Of course it still may be desirable to run counter to tradition when it is something terrible, but I think it is important to note this fact—particularly when we are told so often today that opposition to conscription is unpatriotic or unrealistic or too idealistic. You have American history on your side and, I would argue, logic as well.

My third point deals with the arguments against conscription. There are some central arguments which I will try to go over and state briefly what they mean. In the first place it is constitutional. I want to say something about the war which was against the constitutionality of conscription. This unconstitutionality is based upon at least three factors. First of all, the Founding Fathers when they gave Congress the right to raise and support armies, meant, according to some constitutional authorities, a volunteer army—this was the content of army in 1787 and they carefully distinguished against the militia. The militias are state bodies. You could be required to serve in the militia but only for local purposes—it wasn’t for national purposes. So they had separate provisions for the army and the militia and when they make provision for the militia serving in the national service, in the federal service, they carefully designate why the militia can be used. The militia can only be used for three
If the history of conscription demonstrates anything, it reveals a striking concurrence of drafting and militarism. From Napoleon to the present day, conscription has produced the cannon-fodder which has made possible the rising of virtually every major nation. Both world wars were fought by draftees. The militarists of today's world, including the Soviet Union, the United States, China, and the countries of the Middle East and Southeast Asia, rely upon conscription to fill their standing armies. Wherever we find an aggressive military policy, conscription is there to back it up.

One and only one reason prompts governments to draft their young men: to provide the manpower without which no scalable war can be waged. There is no record of any nation adopting conscription in order to "democratize" the army or provide a "civilian influence" within the armed forces. Conscription is always instituted solely to guarantee a ready and ample flow of soldiers. We know that the army, when the draft failed during 1947 and 1948, expected the volunteer system to fail. Instead, however, even without significant pay increases, so many men volunteered that the army remained almost at full strength. The result was that the army raised the Selective Service Act's draft score from 99 to 79, then later to 80. Quotes were set on the number of men a recruiting office would enlist. Civilians were hired from the Red Department-hospital attendants, guards, clerks, etc., and replaced with soldiers. After which the army made its case for reinstating the draft, and Congress enacted the Selective Service Act of 1948. Even then the army was embarrassed with so many volunteers that no draftees were needed. Army ingenuity provided the answer by raising the test requirement for volunteers another ten points to 99, and literally created the shortage of men that had existed all along was there.

Remarks from testimony given 4 October 1970 by James Bost of the American Friends Service Committee.

Our Humiliation —

The State’s Triumph

Registering for the draft becomes, much like voting, an act of being ruled and used, but unlike the act of ballotting, the repressive machinery of the state stands ready to spring against the first sign of uncooperativeness on the part of the individual who simply desires to be free of the political and military schemes of the government. Since most of us on the Fifth Estate staff previously submitted to registration, demands on one’s 18th birthday under the old Selective Service Act, we know personally that the humiliation of having to passively obey the command of the authority we despise is at the same time the political state’s triumph.

The state also recognizes this abnegation and responds accordingly: you are transformed from a human into a serial number on a print-out sheet; a number that will be activated into the service of a hated government and social system and ordered to kill in a further effort against the men who have been forced into similar servitude on the other side. All of your wishes are reduced to nothing while those of the state become unrefusable commands... Our daily unmitigated hatred of the political system and every single thing it represents is met with this plan to further rob young people of their freedom and create unwilling messengers of death of them—robots for the generals, politicians and the oil companies...

We wholeheartedly expect both mass and individual refusals of registration, as well as demonstrations at Post Offices when the time to register comes, other disruptions and the most flagrant violations of the procedures—all in a manner we cannot even possibly foresee in advance, but all of which we look forward to with great relish. One problem is that the popular resistance to the registration plan has brought the official left out like flies on shit, desperate for a “winning” issue, after a decade of defeats and isolation. This will force those uninterested in the recruitment drives of these parasites to rely upon their own inventiveness all the more if they desire not to have their forms of protest constrained by the imaginableness of the professional politician’s dissent.

It is very possible to be critical of anti-draft activity or apathy so only that much more in the parade of mindless militancy which refuses ever to grasp the totality and prefers to stagger forward, ahead of leaflets in hand, immediately upon the appearance of the latest excess of capitalism. And with so many liberal, leftist and feminist groups already in opposition to the draft (to say nothing of opportunistic politicians like Kennedy, Brown, and even Gerry "Oatmeal Man" Ford coming out against registration), it certainly does look like a movement destined from the start for reorganization and not real confrontation.

Still, the real fundamental abuse of human freedom which the draft is, and what a triumph its subversion would be, should not be lost on those of us who desire a more thoroughgoing critique of the state and the modern society. The draft has facets unique to most single issue struggles that link it directly to a larger understanding that slavery to the state, the sacrifice it demands and what the state protects in the totality of the modern epoch.

We can only hope that what has begun as an opposition to a single aspect of this ghastly society will soon come to consume its whole. But even if it doesn’t, the sight of mass resistance to the arrogant plans of the ghouls who run this show will certainly warm us through the remainder of this cold winter.

This excerpt is from the February 26th issue of the Fifth Estate newspaper which also had a very good article on the state of the world today and on the British anarchists found guilty on a gross frame-up. Subs are $4/year, 4403 Second Avenue, Detroit, MI 48207. We also have single copies of that issue for 75c.
OUR HUMILIATION —

THE STATE’S TRIUMPH

Registering for the draft becomes, much like voting, an act of belonging and used, but unlike the act of balloting, the repressive machinery of the state becomes ready to spring against the first sign of disaffection on the part of the individual who simply desires to be free of the political and military schemes of the government. Since most of us on the Fifth Estate staff previously submitted to registration demanded on one’s sixtieth birthday under the old Selective Service Act, we know personally that the humiliation of having to passively obey the command of the authority we despise is at the same time the political state’s triumph.

The state also recognizes this abnegation and responds accordingly: you are transformed from a human into a number on a print-out sheet; a number that will be activated into the service of a hated government and social system and ordered to kill people in sin and the Vietnam was a bad war, and so on, then you have to accept this argument against the draft registration with qualifications, but there are two positions one can make.

You can take the non-pacifist position and say that registration does not mean you’re against the draft because it is likely to lead to a bad war. You are likely to have a vast pool of manpower which the military can manipulate. One of the vigorous arguments against conscription is that it enhances military power which the Founding Fathers were very much opposed to. And this enhanced military power makes it easier to intervene in other countries, in Iran or Afghanistan or Vietnam, and so on. But still there is the possibility, under this argument, the notion that there may be somehow a good war around the corner for which it might be legitimate to conscript.

[Note: one could still argue that even if you did support a certain war, would a draft be necessary? If one’s goal was to fight and democratize society, could not people be convinced to participate, to vote with their feet? If not enough people show up, then no war.]

If the history of conscription demonstrates anything, it reveals a striking concordance of drafting and militarism. From Napoleon to the present day, conscription has produced the cannon-fodder which has made possible the shaping of virtually every major war. Both world wars were fought by draftsmen. The militarists of today's world, including the Soviet Union, the United States, China, and the countries of the Middle East and Southeast Asia, rely upon conscription to fill their standing armies. Whatever we find in an aggressive military policy, conscription is there to back it up.

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We know that the army, when the draft began during 1947 and 1948, expected the volunteer system to fail. Indeed, however, even without significant pay increases, so many men volunteered that the army remained almost at full strength. The result was that the army raised the General Classification Test score from 99 to 79, then later to 80. Quotes were set on the number of men a recruiting office would enlist. Civilians were lined from the IRS department—hospitals, attendance guards, clerks, etc., and replaced with soldiers. After which the army made its move for reactivating the draft, and Congress enacted the Selective Service Act of 1948. Even then the army was embarrassed with so many volunteers that no draftees were needed. Army ingenuity provided the answer by raising the test requirement for volunteers another ten points to 99, and foolishly created the shortage of men that it had insisted all along was there.

Remarks from testimony given 4 October 1970 by James Bialost of the American Friends Service Committee.
powerful argument you can develop of all of them. Keep these arguments in mind during the discussions groups which I am sure will push them much further.

My last point has to do with what do we do about it. First of all we ought to defeat registration and the draft so that we don’t have to make personal decisions about them. Defeat them politically, developing adequate techniques for defeating the appropriation in Congress for registration—using all the arguments I have tried to outline, and others as well.

If we are unsuccessful in preventing the resumption of registration and the draft,
powerful argument you can develop of all of them. Keep these arguments in mind during the discussion groups which I am sure will push them much further.

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If we are unsuccessful in preventing the resumption of registration and the draft, we will have very much involved in the powerline struggle of the farmers in Minnesota. The powerline stretches 800 miles from a nine-mouth coal-fired electric plant in North Dakota to the distribution systems of two so-called cooperatives, United Power Association and Cooperative Power Association. Since our last installment, the line has been completed and energized. However, JI covers have gotten tained and fallen down. The following is from their latest newsletter.

Hold That Line.

It is our sad but solemn duty to report that F. Martin, Theophile V. Lenkoff, and the rest of those toady parasites are getting about as frustrated as tape worms restricted to a mongoose diet. But that's not really very surprising considering all the problems they are having, and we won't even mention the internal squabbles they do or the heat they're catching from the FBI in Washington.

For starters, they could probably do a better job of spinning their Coal Creek generator by using hot air from their propaganda machine instead of the lignite coal they're trying to burn. That's because even though the lignite gets mixed with oil so it will at least catch on fire, it just doesn't burn hot enough. That lignite is 40% water and only 6500 Btu's/1b., and they can't seem to get enough heat out of it to do the job. So they have to mix it again, this time with substantial amounts of higher quality coal that is being shipped in by truck and rail from Gillette and Coloway, Wyoming. Ain't that something? Shifting in coal to a nine-mouth plant! That's like putting a center-pivot irrigator in a swamp! The companies don't like it, of course.

Then, every time they finally do manage to get up a head of steam out there, there are problems of a different sort to worry about. A couple of towers come to mind, 571 and 321 to be specific, and then there is that constant plague of the dreaded insulator's disease [thousands have been shot out]. As a utility big-wig recently stated, "That powerline is so unreliable that it may as
Fired!

by Russ Morken

The following piece is a short account of one man's bad experience working at a day-care center. The S of I collective had some serious questions about the experience related. Did the author attempt to organize around any of the problems mentioned, why did he feel worker support, why didn't he challenge the firing, was calling it sick a responsible way of expressing his unhappiness, or did it only make things tougher for the other workers? These are raised as political questions but they may only be narrative omissions. We print it because we want to encourage more accounts of work experiences and more attempts to ask anarchist questions and suggest anarchist responses to people's working lives.

One day last summer I went to talk to my boss about a wage increase for those of us who worked at a day-care center. After hassling over the increase, my boss mentioned matter of factly that she had decided that for the good of the center and myself, I should see a counselor or I would be fired.

I got madder than hell and started screaming at her. She had no reason to fire me, I had no reason to see a counselor and there was no way I was going to let her control decisions that affected my life. She came back with some psych book crap about how I must learn to deal with anger.

Over the next couple of days I talked to everyone I worked with and all agreed that I was getting screwed. I told everyone I needed their support if I was going to be able to keep my job. But when the situation came up at a staff meeting nobody said a thing and I was gone.

Everything happened so fast I didn't have much time to think about the situ-
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sexuality.

And finally when I couldn't handle the way the center was turning into a prison, I called in sick as often as I could, did what I wanted all day long and didn't pretend to feel guilty when my boss and board members 'caught' me waking around town fit as a fiddle.

I had a lot of complaints about the rigid methods used at the center, but none of them ever got addressed. Instead my boss discovered a problem inside my head.

Lastly, I never had any intention of appealing to any state board, etc. to get my job back. I felt the only way I would get my job back would be if those people I worked with gave me strong support. I didn't get it and it really bothered me that people I worked with for so long could be intimidated so easily, but their support was what it would have taken.

What happened to me was really a small scrap, but I think that if we're going to get rid of coercion and the state, we're going to have to stick together to gain our demands and protect ourselves from the authorities that be and stop appealing to the state.

April 26th.

The Language Of LeGuin

by Micaela Massimino

Full of passages to be read and savored is The Language of the Night: Essays on Fantasy and Science Fiction (ed., and with introductions by Susan Wood, Putnam, 1979). I have read more than once, and gladly. Between these pages, as in all her work, Le Guin emerges as a very real, richly varied and quietly dedicated human being. She believes the ethics and aesthetics of art are inseparable. I’m especially fond of the essays, “The Stalin in the Soul” and “Is Gender Necessary?” But the following passage says it all: “In art, the best is the standard.”

The Beginning Place (Harper & Row, 1980) is a modern fantasy novel about coming of age, journeys, lost countries within the soul, and other recurring themes in Le Guin’s work. Beautiful style, sometimes jarring dialog, but a satisfying ending.

Malatrena (Putnam, 1979) is a mainstream novel that borrows on fantasy. Set in the early 19th century in Oronia — that same land Le Guin explores in her short story collection, Orlinnian Tales — this book tells of Isale Sorde, a fiery and idealistic young man who “falls under the sway of an underground revolution — any movement sworn to destroy Austria’s domination of Oronia.” (So says the book jacket.) Since Sorde is a gentleman (as were most rebels at that time), I constantly had to battle my irritation at his worldview in order to allow the book to entertain me.

Interfaces (ed., by Le Guin and Virginia Kidd, Ace, 1980) is an anthology of speculative fiction. I haven’t read my copy yet.

Leese Webster (written by Le Guin and illustrated by James Brunaman, Atheneum, 1979) is an easy juvenile book about a spider who lives in a deserted palace and spins webs which not only catch flies but imitate paintings and carvings. When the palace is made into a museum, the spider’s webs put under glass, and the spider thrown out into the garden, she discovers her webs shine in the morning sun with the best jewels of all — “diamond water beads.” I liked it.

“SO” is a very entertaining satirical piece on a “war to end all wars,” this one waged against insanity. You can find it in either Cassandra Rising (ed., by Alice Lawrence) or The 1979 Annual World’s Best SF (ed., by Donald A. Wollheim.) The Pathways of Desire is a novella about a team of anthropologists, the world they catalog, and the dreamer in the dream. In New Dimensions 9 (ed., Robert Silverberg, Harper & Row, 1979), my nomination for best of the year in its category.

The Lathe of Heaven, Le Guin’s book about the dreamer whose dreams change the world, has been reprinted to tie in with the January PBS special of this work. Recommend reading, even if you saw the movie.

The Eye of the Heron, which is found in Millennial Women (ed. by Virginia Kidd, Delacorte, 1978), is an “overly political” novel, like The Dispossessed. Its world is again off-planet, “peopled by two communities of outcasts: One is nonviolent; the other is organized along very strict hierarchical lines.” (From the introduction.) Though an interesting thought experiment on exiles, somehow it lacked the power her writing usually holds.

And odds and ends:
If you’re interested in hearing what a Real Live Famous Author sounds like, here are two records on which Le Guin reads her own work: “Owlan’s Harp and Intracom” on the Caedmon label; and “The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas” — label unremembered.
And for those of you who are curious about writing workshops, The Altered Eye (ed., by Lee Harding, Berkeley, 1978) is a book that grew out of Le Guin’s residence at the First Australian Science Fiction Writers Workshop in August, 1975. Happy reading!

Micaela Massimino attended a writers workshop with Le Guin last summer in Cannon Beach, Oregon, and is presently working on a science fiction novel.

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REVIEWS

The Language Of LeGuin

by Micaela Massimino

In the past few years, author Ursula K. Le Guin has been quite prolific. Her work defies labels; she writes science fiction, fantasy, mainstream prose, poetry, critiques--a little of this or that and simultaneously. She does not write to formula, not in style nor in content. She simply gives voice to her inner dreams, unconscious lives, imaginary people who often seem more real than the person living next door. Because of this, to review her work from an "anarcha-feminist perspective"--assuming there is only one such perspective--seems ridiculous, if not impossible. She is a novelist, not a pamphleteer. To view her work with an eye tuned only to ideas, not to form or feeling or function, is to deny the reason why there is art and an audience for it. But Le Guin says it better:

"The pursuit of art, then, by artists or audiences, is the pursuit of liberty. If you accept that, you see at once why truly serious people reject and mistrust the arts, labeling them as "escapism." The captured soldier tunneling out of prison, the runaway slave, and Sozhenitsyn in exile are escapists. Aren't they?" (The Language of the Night)

But enough pontificating. Because Le Guin has produced so much lately, this review cannot be a review because of space limitations, and so instead will be an incomplete annotated bibliography of the rather formidable stack of novels and essays and anthologized works.

Full of passages to be read and savored is The Language of the Night: Essays on Fantasy and Science Fiction (ed. and with introductions by Susan Wood, Putnam, 1979). I have read more than once, and gladly. Between these pages, in all her work, Le Guin emerges as a very real, richly varied and quietly dedicated human being who believes the ethics and aesthetics of art are inseparable. I'm especially fond of the essays, "The Stalin in the Soul" and "Is Gender Necessary?" but the following passage says it all:

"In art, the best is the standard."

The Beginning Place (Harper & Row, 1980) is a modern fantasy novel about coming of age, journeys, lost countries within the soul, and other recurrent themes in Le Guin's work. Beautiful style, sometimes jarring dialog, but a satisfying ending.

Malaterra (Putnam, 1979) is a mainstream novel that borders on fantasy. Set in the early 19th century in Orsinia--that same land Le Guin explores in her short story collection, Orsinian Tales--this book tells of Iclie Sorde, a fiery and idealistic young man who "falls under the sway of an underground revolution--any movement sworn to destroy Austria's domination of Orsinia." (So says the book jacket.) Since Sorde is a gentleman (as were most rebels at that time), I constantly had to battle my irritation at his worldview in order to allow the book to entertain me.

Interfaces (ed. by Le Guin and Virginia Kidd, Ace, 1980) is an anthology of speculative fiction. I haven't read my copy yet.

Leese Webster (written by Le Guin and illustrated by James Brunaman, Atheneum, 1979) is an easy juvenile book about a spider who lives in a deserted palace and spins webs which not only catch flies but imitate paintings and carvings. When the palace is made into a museum, the spider's webs put under glass, and the spider thrown out into the garden, she discovers her web shine in the morning sun with the best jewels of all--"diamond water beads." I liked it.

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And odds and ends:

In the Oct. 13, 1979 issue of The New Republic, Le Guin reviews Doris Lessing's Shikasta, her first novel in a science fiction series. If you're interested in hearing what a real live Famous Author sounds like, here are two records on which Le Guin reads her own work: "Owlan's Harp and Intracome" on the Caedmon label; and "The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas"--label unreleased.

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DeLeon's book is valuable as we look to the future of anarchist thought: he has some good insights into the weaknesses of anarchism and its shortcomings which must be resolved. Areas he feels anarchists must work on include: a better understanding of and response to, the power of bureaucracy; the cosmetics which capitalism applies to the work situation which makes work more enjoyable and self-sustaining, but still exploitive; seeing urbanization as a "good" idea, since he is critical of anarchist thought which has a tendency to idealize agrarian lifestyles. He argues that the decentralization of American farms and small towns has contributed to greater control of them when people are isolated from one another, they are easier to control; and the importance of understanding the dynamics of American prosperity (or the dream of it) in the failure of radical groups to secure major change in America.

Neala Schleuning will soon have a book out entitled America: Song We Sang Without Knowing, a study of Meridel Le Sueur's philosophy.

Aside from a persistent feeling that DeLeon never met a real live anarchist in his life, this is an important book for both anarchists and Americans to read. It is one of few books to explore anarchist ideas in their distinctly American formulation, and whether you agree or disagree with his interpretations, the book will certainly generate much thought and discussion.

In this overview of American anarchists and their ideas, DeLeon divides this material along a right-left wing spectrum: from Liberalism to Libertarianism (from individualist anarchists to communist anarchists (Left Libertarians, in his scheme) and on to statist radicalism (Marxists, Socialists--those anarchists committed to centralization of power). While his descriptions are useful for making gross generalizations about the various political ideologies, he consistently "misses the point" that Anarchism is radical not only in its "political" aspects (the focus of this book), but in its Philosophical, metaphysical and activist aspects, as well.

One such example can be seen in his analysis of Ralph Waldo Emerson. DeLeon is articulating the popular new-Left analysis of Emerson as a radical egotist. This analysis has its roots in Stephen Wither's interpretation of Emerson's philosophy as one of bankrupt sclerosis (Wither is a literary critic who was writing during the McCarthy Era). Since the 50's, Emerson has suffered from this hostile evaluation, and DeLeon has only served to perpetuate this image. This interpretation of Emerson is, I believe, inaccurate. Emerson's philosophy was one of a community of individuals. DeLeon doesn't understand the concept of community and collective spirit--both as it applies to Emerson and anarchism generally. As a result, his book reflects American anarchism in its individualistic forms and in its political forms as the culture has traditionally seen politics (as individual goals and rights, rather than collective action).

What is missing from his analysis is the richness of anarchist thought--the richness of anarchist thought--the depth of its message politically, socially, psychologically and aesthetically. He cannot see the anarchist dialectical sense of the individual--the individual who is only fully self-actualized as a member of a community.

Basically DeLeon sees anarchism as a form of reaction, a politics of protest. He is looking for a "revolution!--a revolution with distinctly political overtones growing out of frustration and rebellion--an "anti" revolution, one of reaction against. What he misses are those culture building aspects of anarchism--the commitment to being "for" a new society, a new reality, a new consciousness. Anarchism is committed to both directions.

American anarchists are, according to DeLeon, committed to individualism by and large. He does not discuss anarchists in groups, in community, in movements, in collectives. His overriding interpretation is the individualistic one. This is the book's most serious flaw, and the reader should be wary of the subtle connections DeLeon makes between anarchism and American individualism/materialism. He has, for example, included George Wallace and Ronald Reagan as examples of anarchists!!

He concludes the book with a devastating criticism of the contemporary phase of anarchism thought which reflects his individualist analysis: "Anarchist criticism...is an integral element of American culture that will remain as long as the United States is a liberal, middle-class society. The desire for freedom from government restraint, often to gratify one's own immediate desire with little operative concern for the long-term common good is--and that terrorism against non-Bolshevik left workers and peasants was an integral part of Lenin's plan to consolidate absolute power within the Russian Communist Party. The list of cynical infamies and intrigues perpetrated by the Cheka and later by the G.P.U. (Bolshevik secret police) is ruthlessly eliminating any other left-wing competition is long and horrifying. This list of betrayals bajasho's guerilla army being used by the Red Army to defeat Whites are, ironically, "too occupied with changing the world, and not enough with understanding it."

In general, this book gives the reader a good overview of the ideas of Anarchism as they are articulated by individuals. It does not give us a sense of anarchists beyond the political, however. Those groups whose ideas don't fit into his middle-class, individualism are only briefly mentioned, and summarily rejected because they do not have a large enough constituency to create a political movement which is centralized enough for him to pay attention to! As a result, he offers us no insights into the decentralized anarchist groups across the country. These organizations would be too diverse, too decentralized, too grass-roots for worthy attention in his analysis. In his efforts to be truly "American" he also denies the existence and impact of the millions of radical immigrants who came to this country with radical "European" ideas, ideas which were adapted to the American experience and provided a counterbalance to American individualism, and materialism.

DeLeon's book is valuable as we look to the future of anarchist thought: he has some good insights into the weaknesses of anarchism and its shortcomings which must be resolved. Areas he feels anarchists must work on include: a better understanding of and response to, the power of bureaucracies, the division between capitalism applied to the work situation which makes work more enjoyable and self-futilizing, but still exploitive; seeing urbanization as a "good" policy, for he is critical of anarchist thought which has a tendency to idealize agrarian lifestyles. He argues that the decentralization of American farms and small towns has contributed to greater control of them, when people are isolated from one another, they are easier to control; and the importance of understanding the dynamics of American prosperity (or the dream of it) in the failure of radical groups to secure major change in America.

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by Nhat Hong

Miller is an academic and has written an extensively researched biography of Kropotkin making use of unpublished correspondence, police records and Kropotkin's voluminous journalistic writings. This biography is generally careful and largely sympathetic, but does have a bit of the archivist's dusty odor about it. The directness and immediacy of Kropotkin's own autobiography is largely absent from Miller's book, which may only be the difference between the subjective and the historian's approach in each book. The autobiography would be better read first and Miller's to fill out certain details and interaction of personalities (mainly through correspondence) that Kropotkin omits.

Several things are annoying about Miller's approach, however. Miller's initial intent was to apply Eriksonian psychology to Kropotkin's political development. While Miller abandoned this as an unworkable project, certain elements of it remain and lead him, at times, to draw conclusions that may well have an element of truth in them, but not as far as he takes it. For example, in discussing the different political responses of Peter and his brother Alexander, Miller writes: "While Peter projected his personal deprivations into the arena of revolutionary politics and sought to resolve them in that context, Alexander internalized his conflicts and divorced them from the problems of Russian society." Here Miller reduces the complex process of a person's arrival to a political commitment to something too simple. It may well have been one reason Peter became a revolutionary anarchist, but one of many.

Miller generally avoids such sweeping pronouncements and the strengths of the book balance it out. His discussion on the split among the anarchists over the question of W. W. I is interesting. Miller argues Kropotkin was something of a Francophile, viewing France as the birthplace of revolution and the historic vessel of the Latin, rebellious spirit. Hence, the defense of France as a nation must be carried out to prevent the triumph of German militarism, and Prussian militarism to keep the possibility of revolution alive. And most other anarchists strongly disagreed with Kropotkin on the war question and the sharp polemic is outlined by Miller.


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Cluenfuegos Press continues its invaluable service to the anarchist movement with the release of the first part of Maximoff's work on the terror used against left-wing opponents of Bolshevism absolutism. Maximoff's style is hard hitting and hammering, both in its repetitiveness and harshness. After an initial uneasiness with this approach (with its familiar ring of the cold war), the history of terror he traces makes the reader not only understand the causes of Maximoff's uncompromising mixing attitude towards Bolshevism power, but also agreement with it. Maximoff is uniquely suited to author this book. He was himself arrested six times by the Communist Cheka and was saved from probable execution (a fate shared by so many Russian anarchists) only by the intervention of foreign syndicalist delegates to the International Congress of Trade Unions convening in the Soviet Union at the time. After Maximoff's expulsion to Berlin, he participated in the relief and support work for political prisoners languishing in Bolshevism prisons, concentration camps and places of exile.

From this vantage point Maximoff remained able to follow the continuing use of terror (not too strong a term) used by the Communist Party against its left opposition. Using only Bolshevist and left opposition sources, he develops the thesis that terrorism against non-Bolshevik leftists workers and peasants was an integral part of Lenin's plan to consolidate absolute power within the Russian Communist Party. The list of cynical infamies and intrigues perpetrated by the Cheka and later by the G. F. U. (Bolshevist secret police) in ruthlessly eliminating any other left-wing opposition is long and horrifying. This list of betrayals (Iakshov's guerrilla army being used by the Red Army to defeat White advances, and then suppressed in blood), assassinations (of anarchists and Left Social Revolutionaries), reactionary suppressions (of Kronstadt, factory strikes and peasant uprisings), the torture of left political prisoners (leading to hunger strikes, self-immolations and suicides to protest it) leaves the reader with a very heavy heart. Cluenfuegos Press will publish the second part of Maximoff's work when they have the financial means to do so. Their address

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Ronald Fraser taped conversations with over 300 civil war survivors between June '73 and May '75. The 600 page book he crafted out of them is a most welcome and readable account that illuminates many of the issues present in the civil war. One might expect it would be an impossible task to maintain coherence and clarity in such a wide ranging history with so many contributors, but Fraser does a very good job of it, supplementing the text with 8 short essays on issues manifested in the civil war, including one on "Libertarian (CNT-FAL anarchists) and the Republic."

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The Guiltline at Work vol 5: The Leninist Counter Revolution, Gregory Petrovich Maximoff, Cienfuegos Press, U.K. 1979

by Nhat Hong

The Leninist counter revolution is a form of reaction, a politics of protest. He is looking for a "revolution" -- a revolution with distinctly political overtones growing out of frustration and rebellion -- an "anti" revolution, one of reaction against. What he misses are those culture building aspects of anarchism -- the commitment to being "for" a new society, a new reality, a new consciousness. Anarchism is committed to both directions.

American anarchists are, according to the author, a part of the movement, and yet have been forced to go through a series of disillusionments, false starts, and defeats. The book is divided into two parts: the first half covers the history of the movement up until the death of Lenin, while the second part deals with the present state of the movement.

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The advent of agriculture and the domestication of crops and livestock transformed human societies. As communities became more sedentary and reliant on agricultural production, social hierarchies and political structures emerged to manage the division of labor and control resources. The book's narrative centers on the exploration of these transformations and the consequences for social organization.

The book is divided into several sections, each focusing on different aspects of the transition to agriculture:

1. The rise of sedentary societies
2. The development of political power
3. The role of agriculture in social stratification
4. The impact of agriculture on cultural and religious practices
5. The effects of agriculture on the environment

Throughout the book, the author draws on archaeological, historical, and anthropological evidence to provide a comprehensive overview of the agricultural revolution. The material is presented in a clear and engaging style, making it accessible to readers with a variety of backgrounds.

The book's insights are crucial for understanding the origins of modern societies and the legacies of agricultural development. By examining the historical record, the author challenges widely held assumptions about the causes of social change and offers new perspectives on the role of agriculture in shaping human history.
The book doesn't short change the anarchist initiatives in the civil war. The text and many of the persons interviewed give their views on and experiences of the anarchist collectives in the city and the country, the anarchist militias, and the enmity between the communist party and the anarcho-syndicalists. Aspects of the civil war consciously neglected by 'democratic' and bolshevist historians alike are not excluded from this book. For example, the sending of Spain's gold reserves to the Soviet Union, the communists' smashing the Aragon collectives in the rearward under General Lister, the existence of the Cheka and assassinations of Camilo Ber-neri and Barbieri, the conscious make-up of the communist party of petty bourgeois elements fearful of revolution, all find their place in this oral history.

But in addition to the attention taken with libertarian initiatives, the book includes personal accounts of the civil war from the entire spectrum right to left. It is in this variety of description which makes for an exciting and revealing history of the Spanish civil war. It is a good and comprehensive introduction to this period of Spanish history, but you might want to try and get it out of the library, because the book costs a whopping $16.

Society Against the State: The Leader As Servant and the Humane Uses of Power Among the Indians of the Americas, Pierre Clastres, Urizen Books, New York, 1977

A handful of savages--scattered about the jungles of South America may have much to teach us about the nature of political power--so argues the French anthropologist, Pierre Clastres, in this brilliant book. Clastres explores the relationship between power and culture in Society Against the State, and, as the title implies, he argues that the relationship is one of antagonism. Primitive peoples intuitively recognize power as a human possibility--and set out to systematically circumscribe and negate power. Hence, power as coercion does not appear among American Indian tribes--except of course in the state societies of Mexico-Amer-ica and Peru. Rather, the power of the chief (the major 'authority' figure of American Indian societies) is sharply delineated. The chief is called upon to reconcile conflicts by means of his arat-orial skills; he cannot, however, utter commands or demand to be obeyed. The chief is allowed to be polygynous (a rare privilege in primitive society), but at the same time must be generous with his material possessions and so has no chance to accumulate any great quantity of eco-nomic goods. Indeed, members of Ameri-can Indian tribes are not even under an obligation to listen to the chief's words; Clastres cites one instance in which Indians altogether ignored their chief's harangues--they preferred to rest in their hammocks or go about their daily chores rather than to listen.

Clastres, who was tragically killed in an auto accident a couple of years ago, is particularly concerned with the Guayaki Indians--a hunting and gathering tribe of the Paraguayan jungles, among whom Clastres did fieldwork. The Guayaki is a horticultural society, which was once represented by a dense population along the coast of Brazil and Paraguay. From his knowledge of these two groups and from his general acquaintance with American Indian ethnography, Clastres speculates on the nature of power in primitive societies.

It is the transition from stateless society to state society with its apparatus of coercive and centralized authority that marks the fundamental break in human history for Clastres. This rupture is fundamentally a political event--and economic factors are secondary to it. Thus, political domination precedes economic exploitation. It has been said that primitive societies are the original 'affluent societies'--and Clastres agrees with this assessment. Primitive tribes were often quite capable of producing an economic surplus--but either did not do so or consumed it or even destroyed the surplus during lavish feasts and festivals. The exploitive extraction of a surplus from the majority of the population by an elite is the consequence of the usurpation of political power by the elite--and not vice versa. Clastres is more interested in examining how primitive societies avoid state power than the actual process of state formation. He suggests that primitive peoples have a keen perception of the nature of power and its dangers for human cultural and social life; they are therefore scrupulously watchful of chiefly power and segregate it from the everyday activities of social life. Modern coercive power, Clastres intimates, probably did not originate with chiefly 'authority' at all--but more likely made its first appearance in cults led by shamans or charismatic religious figures.

Clastres' observations on the role of language in primitive and state societies are especially intriguing. Following Rosseau, Clastres notes the increasing impoverishment of language and symbolic life with the rise of authoritarian power. Language as poetry stands opposed to language uttered as a command. Particularly with the advent of capitalism and and the mass media, language is 'institu-mentalized' in order to convey 'information'--and this instrumentalization of language preempts the qualitative, poetic dimension of language, its 'magical' aspects. In one of the most hauntingly beautiful passages in the book, Clastres writes of the strange, solitary songs of the Guayaki hunters. In the night, each hunter sits off from the group and sings to himself of his hunting prowess; his song often becomes incomprehensible as the conventions of grammar and meaning are abandoned--but in singing he afirm's his solitude and his sense of indi-viduality. (The book suffers, however, from Clastres' neglect of the role of language among women in primitive soci-ety.) Such singing--and poetry generally is a transgression against the commun-icative function of language, since words become an end in themselves rather than a means to express oneself to others. This poetic quality of language in primi-tive society becomes subjected to signifi-cant erosion with the coming of state society and the written word.

Clastres' book is suggestive rather than conclusive--but it contains a wealth of insight and speculation on the relation-ship of power to social and cultural life. Itwell deserves to be read.

Dennis Bryson is a student of anthropology, formerly at the New School for Social Re-search in N.Y.C. and now lives in Mpls.
Dear Soil of Liberty,

I would like to commend the SOL comrades for making Sam Dolgoff's "A Critique of Marxism" available to the public. It is good that you have seen fit to bring these matters out in the open and I hope that it will provoke some good discussions. As far as I go, I think Sam's critique is one of the best contemporary assessments of Marx's thought from an anarchist perspective. At the same time I think that it suffers from incompleteness.

Certainly Marx's economic determinism, which led to his "dialectical falsification of history" and confusion about the nature of the state, should be discrediting enough. Unfortunately Sam failed to deal with the question of Marx's apparent sporadic lapses into libertarian positions. It is on the basis of writings like "The Civil War in France" (on the Paris Commune), that a myth has been constructed of a libertarian Marx. It is from this myth that Marx's theory has been rendered acceptable in some libertarian circles.

The problem with the various theories of the "libertarian Marx" is their failure to put Marx's writings within their historical context. It is ironic that many thinkers who are comfortable accepting ideas on their face value (saying that we must consider the conditions that give rise to the ideas), fail to follow their own advice when dealing with the sacred texts of Marx. They do not stop to consider that Marx was not only an intellectual, but also a political activist. His writings were intended to influence the direction of the various movements in which he participated. It must be remembered that much of Marx's works were written while he and his supporters were locked in a bitter struggle with Proudhon, Bakunin, and the anarchists, over the questions facing the international workers' movement. As in any struggle for political influence, there is always the temptation to speak favorably of popular ideas one does not agree with, if this will further one's goals.

This was the case with most of Marx's so-called "anti-statism". The "Civil War in France" is a good example. The Paris Commune was a popular rebellion which took place after the collapse of Napoleon III's regime in the Franco-Prussian War in 1871. By a complex series of events the city of Paris, besieged by the Prussian army, ended up in the hands of the workers and urban poor of Paris. The event had a profound impact on the socialist movement at the time and would require me to go into too much detail for a letter. Nevertheless, it should be mentioned that the development of the Commune included not only centralizing tendencies, but decentralizing (libertarian) tendencies as well. Unfortunately the Commune was soon crushed by remnants of the French Army, which prevented the social revolution from going any further.

Marx, using his position with the General Council, got the International Working Men's Association to finance the publication of an "Address" on the Commune. Marx was quick to claim the Commune as a vindication of all his political theories even though the Commune developed in many ways which were contrary to his previous writings. As Oskar Anweller points out in his book The Soviets (p. 17), "Even a superficial comparison of the actual history of the Paris Commune with Marx's description shows that his picture of the Commune coincides only in part with reality. By stressing certain traits of the Commune and bypassing or reinterpreting others to support his thesis, Marx created an idealized 'Marxist Commune' that at first fit his conception of history and revolution. Marx was accused even in his lifetime of having 'usurped' the Commune. Bakunin, most vocally, pointed out that Marx was forced by the powerful impression of revolutionary events to adapt the Commune's program to his own, contrary to his previous views, in order to maintain his position in the Socialist International."

Nor is the Paris Commune the only example of Marx's intellectual opportunism. Another text often cited in the "libertarian Marx" debate is a letter written by Marx to the Russian revolutionary Vera Zasulich dated March 8, 1881. In this letter and a few similar writings of the period, Marx apparently repudiated his position that non-industrialized countries like Russia would have to pass through a capitalist transition before reaching socialism. Marx went on to state that he shared the view of most Russian revolutionaries that the still existing rural commune, the "obshchina," might prove the "starting point of communist development." It should be noted, however, that up until the 1880's, the dominant current of revolutionary thought in Russia was populism. Populism, which placed strong emphasis on peasant rebellion, was the opposite of Marxism with its characterization of peasants as reactionaries and stress on the industrial workers. As could be expected, the analysis of anarchist thinkers which allowed for a revolutionary peasantry, seemed more relevant. As Avraam Yarmolinsky notes in Road to Revolution (p. 324), "In handing down his sanguine opinion on the role of the rural commune, (Marx) may have been guided by the desire not to injure the morale of the Russian activists, who, he knew, had pinned their faith to the mushkie's (peasants) collective habits." (Nor could he have failed to appreciate that by restating this position, the rest of his theories might prove more acceptable in Russia -- which they soon did.)

One must also take into account Marx's political activities around these times: his kangaroo court purge of Bakunin from the International, his plot to dissolve the International rather than see it come under the influence of the anti-parliamentarian workers' movements, and his continued distribution of the "Communist Manifesto." In particular his practical proposals for the "most advanced countries" should be noted. For instance the "Manifesto" calls for "Centralization of credit in the hands of the state, by means of a national bank with state capital and an exclusive monopoly... Centralization of the means of communication and transport in the hands of the state... Extension of factories and industries owned by the state... Establishment of industrial armies, especially for agriculture." These are the words of a libertarian?

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For the Social Revolution,

Jeff Stein
Dear Soil of Liberty,

I would like to commend the SOL comrades for making Sam Dolgoff's "A Critique of Marxism" available to the public. It is good that you have seen fit to bring these matters out in the open and I hope that it will provoke some good discussions. As far as it goes, I think Sam's critique is one of the best contemporary assessments of Marx's thought from an anarchist perspective. At the same time I think that it suffers from incompleteness.

Certainly Marx's economic determinism, which led to his "dialectical falsification of history" and confusion about the nature of the state, should be discrediting enough. Unfortunately Sam failed to deal with the question of Marx's apparent sporadic lapses into libertarian positions. It is on the basis of writings like "The Civil War in France" (on the Paris Commune), that a myth has been constructed of a libertarian Marx. It is from this myth that Marx's theory has been rendered acceptable in some libertarian circles.

The problem with the various theories of the "libertarian Marx" is their failure to put Marx's writings within their historical context. It is ironic that marxist thinkers who commonly warn of accepting ideas on their face value (saying that we must consider the conditions that give rise to the ideas), fail to follow their own advice when dealing with the sacred texts of Marx. They do not stop to consider that Marx was not only an intellectual, but also a political activist. His writings were intended to influence the direction of the various movements in which he participated. It must be remembered that much of Marx's works were written while he and his supporters were locked in a bitter struggle with Proudhon, Bakunin, and the anarchists, over the questions facing the international workers' movement. As in any struggle for political influence, there is always the temptation to speak favorably of popular ideas one does not agree with, if this will further one's goals.

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For the Social Revolution,

Jeff Stein
Dear Friends,

After reading the polemical exchange between Mickey Lauria and Sam Dolgoff concerning Dolgoff's "A Critique of Marxism" (Soil of Liberty, March, 1979), we decided, for better or for worse, to throw in a third opinion.

We believe that both sides in this disagreement fall into identical, mirror-image traps. Mickey Lauria defends Marxism by identifying it with a libertarian and dialectical interpretation of Marxism, while Sam Dolgoff attacks the (more widespread) authoritarian and dogmatic current of Marxism. Neither one is really speaking to the other. As a result, they're both right—and both dead wrong. Marx was contradictory (or at least, very ambiguous) in his writings. The historical susceptibility of Marxism to two differing and contradictory interpretations (the libertarian and the authoritarian) is enough in itself to prove this.

It is thus impossible to draw an anarchist critique of Marxism in a simplistic way and have it apply to both interpretations. A convincing critique (or defence) of Marxism as a whole must of necessity be very complex and subtle. What it would also be a waste of time. Let us explain why.

Mickey and Sam have both failed in their attempts to criticize and defend Marxism, in general. Mr. Lauria also fails to admit that many of Sam's points are quite accurate regarding the vast majority of those claiming to be Marxists in this world. He claims instead that Sam's criticism is aimed at popular misconceptions of Marxism. In turn, Sam fails to acknowledge the existence of the small, but important, critical and libertarian current of Marxism. Mickey's failure is the result of a sympathetic reading of Marxist theory, coupled with a neglect of most historical Marxist practice. (And Sam is essentially correct in his assertion that "Mickey tries mightily to whitewash Marxism...") Mickey's mistake is his/her uncritical openness.

Sam's failure seems more serious to us, if only because it represents a much more widespread attitude in the present North American anarchist movement. It is the reflection of a stubborn anti-Marxism which might be understandable in terms of the historical betrayals dealt to anarchists by counter-revolutionary Marxists—but it is inexorable in its dogmatic and ideological nature. (According to our usage here, "ideology" is refuted theory—theory which dominates its subject, rather than serving her/his authentic social desires—in this case it is an anarcho-capitalism which is rigidly and narrowly defined.) The important point is that not all Marxists are evil, and conversely, that all anarchists are pure by virtue of the names of the ideologies which they respectively hold. Lines of division must be drawn between the authoritarian and libertarian tendencies, not between anarchists and Marxists as such.

When we (as anarchists) are confronted with self-defined Marxists who are anti-state, anti-party, anti-ideological, etc., the appropriate response is not to condemn them for being "Marxists." We need to recognize that anarcho-capitalism as a living force is not an ideology. It is a historical tendency, a natural response to the suppression of freedom and to the alienation of thought, desire and activity. As such, it cannot be rigidly identified with any one, eternally perfect set of ideas, or even any one perfect "correct" label. The real point should be that we recognize and actively support any social currents which, in the struggle for libertarian communism, practice real autonomy, spontaneity, and self-regulation. Sam's ideological critique of Marxism is possibly most disturbing in that it is too reminiscent of dogmatic Marxist critiques of anarchist incoherence which criticize the most obvious contradictions and failures of anarchism, and then throw out the valuable aspects along with them.

It also greatly bothers us that Sam Dolgoff commands so much uncritical respect from such a large segment of the libertarian movement. The dark one has undoubtedly contributed much to the spreading of an awareness of the anarchist alternative, but he has accomplished this in a way that invites (incites?) criticism. He is socially/culturally conservative and tends to define anarchism in a narrowly political-economic way. His ideological and moralistic anarchism tends to encourage a split in the anarchist movement in his rejection of the "lunatic fringe" (i.e., critical, anti-ideological anarchists). Worst of all (though certainly not his fault), he seems to be a father-figure for many young anarchists who are afraid to think and act on their own, without the sanction of an older generation of the anarchist movement for support.

This is not meant to be a "personal" attack on Sam, though undoubtedly it will be mis-taken as such by those unable to see our point. We feel that this critique must be made if we are to be able to really understand the dynamics of our movement. We need to face the fact that the conception of anarchism as a political ideology is increasingly out of date, and that a critical and dialectical conception of anarchism based upon the critique of political-economy and the critique of everyday life will be the seed of our future success.

subversively yours,

LEV CHERNYI, JAI S.MoRo, LEff, ERIC BLACK, DEAN ALLISON

The pamphlet referred to in these letters, "A Critique of Marxism" by Sam Dolgoff, is available from Soil of Liberty for $5.

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Then we have to confront the problem personally. What do you do then? How do you express your opposition to registration, the draft and ultimately to war? There are a number of ways and let me comment briefly on them.

You can go into the army. You can register and then in the army say and resist. There are some groups who have traditionally taken this position.

Or you can claim conscientious objection, that is, if you law draft law means provision for conscientious objection. There is opposition to legal provision for the conscientious objectors on the part of some congressmen. This would involve registration but registration as a c.o., in which case you could perhaps do alternative civilian service. You would be registered as a conscientious objector rather than as a soldier.

Or you can in the third place refuse to register in the first place, to indicate your opposition not only to war but also to the very idea of conscription, the first step of which is registration. Now traditionally this has involved a criminal penalty of five years in prison (maximum) and/or $10,000 fine. And those of you contemplating non-registration, keep in mind these penalties. In the past, very few people have received this maximum penalty. The penalties are usually in the 12 to 18 months in prison, with time off for good behavior, for refusing to register. I'm hoping, of course, that you will not be confronted by this but we ought to face these alternatives honestly now, before the crisis arises. I assure you that I and many others who are older and who have gone through this process, maybe twice already in our lives, will be with you, both in the flesh and in the spirit. Thank you.
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Free to those incarcerated in prisons and mental hospitals. Due to rising costs, for the first time we must urgently ask for subscriptions from those of you not having done so.
SOIL OF LIBERTY staff and helpers are Nhat Hong, Don Olson, Fluffy Gelod, Victor Urbanowicia, Mickey Lauria, Pat Christensen, and Daniel Shaw.
We apologise for the dropped m of our type-writer.
We invite submissions of articles and graphics.
Printed by Haymarket Press.

NO BLOOD FOR OIL

We of the Anarchist Communist Federation are vehemently and unalterably opposed to draft registration and conscription in whatever country it may occur. THE DRAFT IS SLAVERY AND CANNOT BE TOLERATED. Once again young workers and students will be forced to risk their lives to maintain the profits of the powerful few. We condemn an economic system which forces youth into the military because no other jobs are available. We will aid and abet anyone engaging in anti-draft struggles or G.I. resistance within the military.

Resolution passed at Jan 1980 conference
Three issues of their newspaper North American Anarchist have been issued. Subscriptions are $5/year (6 issues) POB 2, Station Q, Toronto, Ontario, Canada M4B 2BO

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