

Editors' Note: *The last few years have been a discouraging period for those in the U.S. who want fundamental change in the direction of freedom and equality. Though struggle against the powers-that-be goes on, as always, struggles in the last few years have tended to be episodic and isolated. It's hard to find signs of a widespread willingness to fight the bosses and the government. This lack of movement among the mainstream of the population is, in all likelihood, the root cause of the general political drift to the right and, as well, the evolution towards social-democracy among so many leftists whose radicalism had been spawned by the movements of the late '60s and early '70s. One evidence of this latter trend was the evolution of the New American Movement (NAM) away from the revolutionary New Left politics of its origin, culminating in its merger last year with Michael Harrington's Democratic Socialist Organizing Committee (DSOC) — a tiny social-democratic sect that had emerged from the break-up of the old Socialist Party in 1972. That split-up had been itself a reflection of the Viet-*

the local dictatorship). Another outfit that came out of the break-up of the old SP was the group headed by ex-Milwaukee mayor Frank Zeidler which resurrected the name "Socialist Party" for itself. This group opposed the Vietnam war but more on the basis of liberal pacifist than class-struggle grounds. And finally, the third fragment from the old SP was Harrington's liberal group who had no consistently anti-militarist or anti-imperialist position (for example, they have supported U.S. military aid to Israel until just recently) but who simply followed the evolution of the liberal mainstream in its belated opposition to the Vietnam War. Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) is the organization which resulted from the absorption of NAM by Harrington's DSOC. Chris Nielsen, whose piece on "DSA and Libertarian

certainly this is the content of DSA's politics. Of course, it is true that some people who have proposed the use of social-democratic tactics have not proposed statist solutions. There was the now-defunct People's Bicentennial Commission (an off-shoot of NAM) which proposed the idea of "self-management" in a market framework, achieved through the electoral process. (An old idea, first advocated in the 1800s by LaSalle, the father of the German Social Democratic Party.) And then there are the tiny DeLeonist sects like the New Union Party and the Socialist Labor Party who propose to use the electoral process to abolish the state (eventually) and institute indus-

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nam War, since the Socialist Party of the 1960s had been firmly in the hands of the "State Department socialists" who thought the Communists were such a threat that it merited allying themselves with U.S. bosses, by supporting the U.S. government's imperialist foreign policy. This fit in with the practice of cooperation with the bosses which characterized the union chiefs who controlled the Socialist Party in those days. The split in the SP created three groups — the majority formed the Social Democrats USA, made up of such class-collaborationist union leaders as Lloyd McBride of the United Steelworkers and Albert Shanker of the American Federation of Teachers. They had no compunction about supporting U.S. imperialism in Indo-China (and anywhere else) right to the bitter end. In 1981, for example, Shanker's AFT ran a major spread in the "American Teacher" supporting U.S. policy in El Salvador as a struggle for "democracy" (even while members of the Salvadoran teachers union were being tortured or hunted down by forces of

Socialists" we are printing here, recommends the "democratic socialist" milieu — and specifically DSA — as an appropriate area for participation by anti-authoritarian socialists or anarchists. Though we disagree with Chris' conclusion, we think he raises a number of issues worth discussing. Social democratic ideas are on the rise, and the sort of position Chris argues for is one that needs to be answered by libertarian socialists.

What is "social-democracy"? Social-democracy is not unique in pursuing or supporting short-range changes to benefit working people — the revolutionary libertarian unions of the early decades of this century, such as the IWW in this country, used militant tactics for goals short of class emancipation. Social-democratic politics is typified by a reliance on electoral politics with the union bureaucracy providing the major base of support. Social-democratic tactics have traditionally led to a statist conception of what socialism is all about — socialist politics get defined in terms of what state policies the social democratic leaders will implement on our behalf once in office, and structure of socialism usually gets defined in terms of nationalization — and

trial self-management. Chris, on the other hand, is not recommending social-democratic politics for our participation because he wishes to defend the actual political content of social-democratic groups like DSA but only because he believes that such politics represent a necessary intermediate stage in the evolution of the consciousness of the American people towards a socialist future.

There are several responses we could make:

(1) We think the consciousness of the working class is a product of its own collective activity. The main problem is that people presently aren't aware of the potential power that workers have for changing society. The awareness that worker solidarity provides the power for creating a society based on direct democracy and self-managed production for collective benefit is only created through the experience of solidarity in action. The main thing that has to happen for a change in consciousness is people breaking through their passivity. This is why we rest our strategy on collective direct action. On the other hand, by furthering the reliance on politicians and union bureaucrats, social-democratic politics supports those institutions and practices that impede widespread direct action by working people.

(2) The outcome of a process of social change is determined by the actual character of the movement that is the motive force behind the change. A

mass social movement that creates a new set of social relations prefigures the new social configuration. A society based on mass direct democracy and self-determination can only be the outcome of a movement which has that character. On the other hand, a movement that defines its politics by what policies its leaders will implement once they have their hands on state power, or which is defined primarily by pursuit of state programs, will simply end up bolstering bureaucratic state control — it is completely utopian to think otherwise! Although it is possible for a small group to put forward the idea of using the state to dismantle the state or using the state to implement workers' self-management of production, mass political parties tend to adopt statist conceptions of their objectives — it is no accident that social-democratic parties have tended to define the movement towards socialism in terms of nationalization. The electoral process is defined in terms of disagreements over what state policy should be. Thus, social-democratic movements invariably come to define socialism, to one degree or

another, in terms of the state running things — social-democracy can only be a transition to more state control.

(3) Within the labor movement, electoral politics has always been used by the union bureaucracy as a safety valve — a way of avoiding militant action that might provoke an undesirable confrontation with the employing class. When workers raise issues that go beyond the narrow confines of what the established order accepts as part of its collective bargaining system — a shorter workweek, healthier working and living conditions, plant closings, racial and sexual discrimination, etc. — they are encouraged to think in terms of legislative changes. Social democratic politics, like the union bureaucracy it is based on, tends to reinforce passivity instead of working to overcome it. Because it tends to define politics by an orientation to getting certain leaders into power, it tends to encourage people to look to leaders to do things for them instead of encouraging collective self-reliance and contributing to the development of consciousness, actually doing nothing to develop revolutionary

or class-consciousness because it bases itself on the wrong kind of practical activity.

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Along with Chris' piece we are printing two replies, one by a member of Workers Emancipation and the other by a member of the Anarchist/Libertarian Socialist Association of Santa Barbara. Though we don't buy Chris' idea of a social-democratic "stage" in the evolution of society towards libertarian socialism, some of us did experience our own personal social-democratic "stage" in our political development. Dennis Hayes was formerly a staff writer on the Socialist Labor Party's "The People". Manuel Santos was a participant in the Portuguese social-democratic movement during the Portuguese revolution of 1974-75. We encourage others to join the discussion. □

DSA & Libertarian Socialism

The idea that libertarian socialists should involve themselves with the Democratic Left [i.e. social-democratic organizations and "single-issue" reform movements — eds.] — including organizations like the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) — couldn't even really be called "controversial" among libertarians. In my experience, the notion elicits argument at best and scornful insult at worst. Nevertheless, I present my own arguments in a spirit of comradely challenge. Since I came to consider myself a libertarian socialist or anarchist a few years ago, I've developed along two — many would say contradictory — lines. First, I've expanded by exposure to libertarian theory, and continue to be in broad agreement with it in the ultimate perspective, the long term requirements for the achievement of socialism or communism. In the intermediate perspective, however, in my effort to involve myself in political action, I've become severely critical of libertarians' unwillingness or inability to relate effectively to non-libertarian or non-revolutionary socialists and progressives — an unwillingness or inability that tends to leave them with nobody to relate to but other "uncompromising" libertarian revolutionaries.

My reading of the libertarian press for the most part shows me isolated individuals and transitory grouplets trudging along in a self-defeating rut of apocalyptic revolutionism, utopianism, and sectarianism. They show little or no sense of a concrete strategy for injecting their ideas into the movement for social change as it exists in this country and as it can be reasonably expected to develop in the foreseeable future. My experience of trying to work with libertarians politically has been discouraging and frustrating for the same reasons. Because of this, I joined Portland New American Movement in 1981, as it was in the process of merging with the Democratic Socialist Organizing Committee. Portland NAM had a strong history of local organizing, some existing projects I could agree with, and its stated politics were close enough to mine that I felt I could work within it (though I had my doubts about DSOC and the merger). It also had enough good people in it that I could feel like a member of an active organization and community, rather than like an alienated revolutionary hermit. It was — and I think continues to be, as Portland DSA — a reasonably coherent socialist group, linked with a nation-

wide organization, with roots in the real, existing social movement.

Since the nature of that movement and its likely course of future development are central to my thesis, I'll sketch out my views on them. First of all, we have to be clear that the existing social movements don't include a meaningful socialist tendency of any kind, whether social-democratic, Leninist or libertarian. Socialists are active in such movements, of course, often in important ways, but they don't have much influence in the name of socialism. Socialist theory is not generally accepted or even welcomed in the movements that exist today. Socialist activists are, as long as they aren't perceived as doing propaganda work for socialism. This poses a big problem for all socialists, including us — how do we present our ideas if people aren't interested in them?

The movement as it exists is fragmented, made up of dozens of single-issue movements and organizations — labor, environmentalists, anti-militarists, feminists, racial minorities, civil libertarians, lesbians and gays, energy activists, tenants' rights advocates — who usually work in isolation from one

ALTERED STATES?

Chris raises several issues. Unfortunately, his argument is not as straightforward as his tone and attitude are constructive.

No one can predict with certainty the course social struggles will take. It's less difficult to suggest that we avoid what has been tried and found wanting. Chris advocates ideas and action that have already contributed to some of the most obscene barbarism of this century. He responds to the current hiatus in positive social movement in the U.S. with an argument of desperation and defeat. Fortunately, the alternatives to joining DSA are promising, though it could be argued that the gloomy alternatives Chris depicts are no less gloomy than the course Chris advocates.

Chris neglects discussing the concrete experience of "progressive," populist, or labor parties, much less evidence of DSA's politics, save a quote from a Santa Cruz mayor. This neglect is consistent

with Chris' argument, which rests mainly on his perception of the form that successful social struggles take.

Chris states that "ideological labels and formulas tend to become fetishes that we blind ourselves with..." As it is, the concepts that convey Chris' understanding of DSA as well as of social change remain buried in undefined phrases like "democratic socialism," "class consciousness," and for that matter, "libertarian socialist." As a result, semantic confusion stalks Chris' arguments.

Buzzwords

Few things in life are as predictably confusing as the lexicon of social change. Anyone who examines modern revolutionary literature must wade through a swamp of buzzwords that mean different things to different people. Take the word "socialism." Most ears and eyes, from

Gdansk to Detroit, identify "socialism" with dictatorships like the Communist Party states of the East, or European labor party reforms. Yet among many political groups in the U.S., "socialism" refers to some non-existent stateless society in which institutions are directly and democratically controlled by a majority of the people.

The semantic confusion reflects another dimension of the problem. Ideologically loaded words have become weapons in the mouths and pens of status quo keepers who monopolize and restrict connotation, deliberately confusing and inhibiting the free flow of ideas. If elites in the West identify "socialism" with "totalitarian" Eastern regimes, and if their counterparts in the East identify "democracy" with "oppressive" Western social orders, shouldn't those of us who use terms like "democratic socialism" divulge *our* meaning? Equally compelling cases could be made for "anarchism," "an-

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another or worse, at cross-purposes, seeing each other as rivals. They also tend to be fragmented along geographical lines, especially minority and poor people's grassroots organizations that don't have middle-class liberal backing channeled through national organizations like NOW, ACLU, and the Sierra Club.

The issues these groups address all point toward the heart of the multifarious crisis of our society — the crisis of capitalism, authority, racism, and patriarchy — but they fail, as single-issue movements, to make the necessary over-arching analysis that would

enable them to unite and resolve the crisis. The necessary analysis is that of libertarian and feminist socialism, you and I would agree. But that analysis is far from being accepted by even a significant minority in the movement.

As I say, the issues these groups are struggling with all point toward this analysis, but not with enough clarity for it to be obvious to most people. Bourgeois-democratic and American individualist mystifications trap most people into some variation of "just wanting to make the system work for us too." They ask for "equal opportunity" to enjoy the fruits of capitalism, not for an

abolition or even radical restructuring of capitalism.

There are two contradictions here (at least), and they're the key to the radicalization and unification of the movement. One contradiction is hidden in the system itself, a system that masquerades as a democracy and a free market but is really a hierarchical monopoly of wealth and power that has until recently been able to afford concessions to the working class. As the current crisis of capitalism deepens, the true nature of the system will become more apparent. The American Dream of freedom and wealth for all will dis-



archo-syndicalism," "libertarian socialism," etc.

"Class Consciousness"?

Chris insists that the DSA can contribute to "class consciousness." What is class consciousness? For those disaffected with or confused by leftist jargon, there is no such monolithic concept. Invoking it clarifies nothing. Among our milieu we might agree on a ballpark definition: a collective awareness of power by individuals who share common perceptions of — and interests in — changing their social environment. Essential to this perception is the subversiveness and power our fate as workers bestows on us — our class experience.

Class is a similar social experience people encounter, especially where they work. For most of us, the experience is perceived as oppressive tension — a tension somehow more focused, more unbearable at work than the hollow and impersonal relationships we individually experience in society at large that also are part of our class experience. The special tension imbues work with an explosive character. It derives from work's manipulative and irrational content and especially from the possibility of immediate, *collective* confrontation with the system and its social functionaries that the workplace uniquely offers.

Our class relationship is to small numbers of people who individually control workplaces and wealth producing resources, design and fashion strange and hostile technologies of domination, and collectively benefit from a state and ideologies that preserve this arrangement. This implies a paradox. The dominators control all who have not accumulated incomes on which to survive and therefore must work for a wage. But the dominators do not independently gener-

photo: Greg Kertel



ate their power; the dominated do, in the form of increasingly absurd services rendered in return for a wage. This paradox is the real marvel of modern societies, reproduced in quite the same

way in otherwise different societies all over the world. Class consciousness is an awareness of the paradox, and the essential inpotence of the dominators by

solve in the harsh light of austerity and repression imposed by monopoly capital in its frantic effort to save itself. Fragmentary movements to reform or democratize capitalism will founder on the fact that monopoly capitalism won't allow itself to be reformed or democratized, though it may manufacture the appearance of allowing it.

The other contradiction isn't as readily apparent, or won't be until the above dynamic shows itself to at least a significant minority of people. This is the fact, obvious to socialists, that "equal opportunity" to compete with others (men, whites, workers in another region or country) can do no more than reproduce social injustice in a more generalized form. Though racial minorities or women may make gains as an abstract group, it will only be a minority of individuals in those groups

who will "succeed," leaving the rest as disenfranchised and dispossessed as ever. And workers who compete regionally or internationally for the retention of job-creating capital will find themselves more and more at the mercy of capital.

This will lead to the development of class consciousness. On the other hand, it'll become increasingly clear that monopoly capital is the main barrier to the aspirations of single-issue popular movements. On the other hand, the failure of monopoly capital to integrate all members of a particular interest group will broaden single-issue movements' analysis to include the whole working class and working class interests. This will in turn lead to more radical analyses of the system and more radical demands on it.

Increasing class consciousness and

the beginnings of a socialist viewpoint will open the movement up to socialists to make programmatic proposals. The proposals that are initially accepted and struggled for by the movement will be, first, those that seem the most practicable and, second, those that are presented by trusted activists within the movement, rather than by revolutionary ideologues. They will basically be reformist proposals that could be implemented through the medium of state power (national, state and local), and a large part of the activity of an increasingly unified movement will be for the purpose of achieving and influencing state power.

State power is the preoccupation of both Leninists and traditional social democrats. Of the two tendencies, Leninists will tend to be discounted by

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virtue of their system's vulnerability.

Class is by no means monolithic. It does not exhaust the experience of social oppression. Class does not encompass, for example, the specific oppression of women, gays, blacks, etc. Thus, women execs, black businessmen, and gay landlords may experience limits to "upward mobility" (such as it can be). But class does provide a common ground and, most importantly, real power for liberating all people who work for a boss and who do not manage other workers. That power, though latent, can creatively liberate work from the domination of capital and the state, and can in some cases combine the elan of free expression and play with work. The point? Class power is uniquely adaptable to the fight against non-class-based social phenomena like sexism and racism.

Under what circumstances does class consciousness emerge? Chris is correct, I believe, in associating it with crises, but incorrect in implying that it emerges more or less mechanically, manifesting itself in stages that initially tend toward the political machinery of the "Democratic Left."

Social and psychological upheaval and trauma prompt people to question the rules and powers that govern their lives and that isolate them from similarly situ-

ated people. Questioning goes on in offices, schools, factories, bars, and among TV audiences everyday. But questions must lead to some direct collective activity, some independent form of rebellion, or the perception of — and will to assert — common interests — "solidarity," to define another buzzword — will prove elusive.

This is why class consciousness cannot be intellectually injected from some external source. As Chris at one point seems to agree, socialist "preaching" — the majority of "propaganda work" by left parties — will not do. There simply is no substitute for concrete activity, the immediate experience of rebellion in which people discover a power independent of the state, workplace, and media hierarchies. Nor is this collective perception a mere shift in perspective; it is an emerging awareness of real possibilities to regain control over life through joint action among people who perhaps had very little direct contact with — or even interest in — each other. Class consciousness may be compared to a collective "eureka" phenomenon, a kind of secular revelation of alternative reality, of freedom through imaginative struggle and creative organization.

The important thing here is that class consciousness makes revolutionary

ideas seem practical. Today, the major barrier to radical collective action is that it appears to be impractical. Why? Because people do not believe they have the power to change their lives for the better. This is why, in my view, direct action in the workplace and in the streets is a necessary condition for the rediscovery of our collective power and thus for positive social change in the current period. The DSA bases itself on social forces that actively organize opposition to direct expressions of rebellion.

"Democratic Socialism"?

The springboard for Chris' appeal — and for DSA politics — is the belief that "revolutionary ideas and organization" are for the time being impractical. Chris' alternative: make the best out of the prevailing unfavorable balance of forces by uniting existing organizations behind a DSA-led political coalition. (According to one version, if labor leaders, politicians and other prominent coalition figures call themselves or their proposals "socialist" long enough, a "mass base for socialism" becomes possible!) It is worth noting that in rejecting the ideas and legacies of direct, self-managed rebellion in favor of party-dominated, state-imple-

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the vast majority of Americans because of their ideological association with foreign totalitarian governments hostile to the United States. Only in the most extreme class conflict — amounting to civil war — will authoritarian socialism be considered seriously by a significant number of Americans.

Social democrats, like the dominant tendency in DSA today, have the most likelihood of being listened to. Their programs are radical but not revolutionary (normal people are afraid of revolution, not infatuated with it), they'll be operating through recognized institutions like the Democratic Party, and they'll almost certainly be backed by the "corporate liberal" faction of capital. This will be both their strength and their weakness. The strength will come from their closeness to present power circles, the wise appeal of their "reasonable" programs and rhetoric, and from the comforting idea that the system can be changed "democratically," without upsetting anyone too badly. It'll just be seen as an "evolution of society" in the minds of most.

The weakness will come from the probable inability of a social democratic government to do any better than such governments have done in Europe over

the last fifty or more years, from the tendency of social democrats to become social bureaucrats with an interest in managing capitalist crisis with all the familiar panoply of mystification, austerity measures, and repression. In other words, traditional social democracy will fail, and once again people will be faced with the necessity of solving the crisis.

There won't be a simple progression from liberalism to social democracy to revolutionary socialism, either in the minds of most people or in society as a whole. There will be a period of oscillation between timid social democracy and decrepit conservatism, as there has been in Europe, probably with more radical swings than we see in Europe because the crisis will be deeper and more generalized. In this unstable context, with reformism failing and barring the kind of civil war that could lead to authoritarianism, it'll be possible for a resurgent grassroots movement to develop a new kind of politics. People who worked for social democratic reform only to see it fail will struggle for a far more direct, radical, and egalitarian form of both socialism and democracy.

This is the kind of situation libertarians would hope to be able to act on

constructively. The state we find the libertarian left in today, however, doesn't give us much hope for influence. And I believe that without a fundamental re-evaluation of libertarian politics, we won't be able to develop that influence. We can't be confident that the social change we want will happen through a natural, "dialectical" progression from reformism to revolution. There will be opportunities to be taken or lost, and some of them will be crucial. We'll be facing the twin dangers of civil war with authoritarian reaction and of inter-imperialist war with nuclear holocaust.

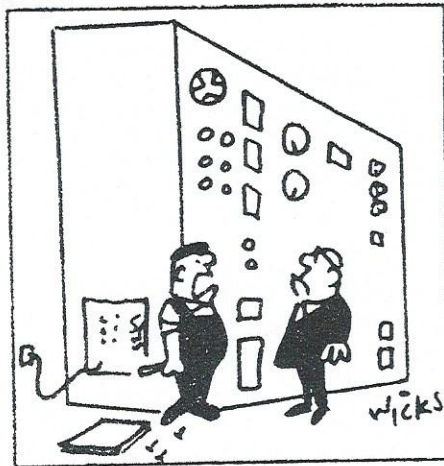
How can we best develop the ability to act in a crisis, to propose our ideas and programs effectively? How can we go from being an atomized milieu of squabbling sectarians to being a force to be reckoned with in society? I'm not talking about organizing for the seizure of power or any such idiocy; I'm talking about becoming a widespread, coherent network of influential activists — people whose opinions are respected by others in the general social movement.

Attempts to form such networks have failed miserably so far. I believe the main reason they've failed is libertarians' refusal to involve themselves in

mented ideas and action, DSA defines "democratic Socialism" as minority-controlled machine politics in the Democratic/Republican tradition. In effect, the DSA rejects the self-activity and class consciousness that could make imaginative "impractical" ideas plausible.

Just what DSA's politics are or are likely to be is not the matter of conjecture that Chris' conspicuous neglect of the topic tends to imply. DSA bases itself on organizations of unsuccessful (to put it delicately) struggle. DSA's leading lights and supporters include:

- International Association of Machinists president William Winpisinger, whose fickle support for labor includes refusing to mobilize the crucial support of machinist union members in the airline industry while the state matter-of-factly smashed the PATCO (air controllers) strike and union in 1981.
- UAW leader Douglas Fraser, who pleaded for — and received — state support for declaring Chrysler workers' jobs and living standards null and void and who personally ordered the breaking of a Detroit auto plant occupation on the heels of an earlier successful occupation in 1973.
- The DSOC apparatus, eloquently personified by the quixotic Michael



"It's on a hunger strike"

Harrington, whose "party within the Democratic Party" (the Democratic Agenda) supported the Carter and Kennedy nomination bids as the "left-wing of the possible."

- NAM, whose decentralized political character defies generalization, even after the sharp division over the DSOC merger creating DSA and in which NAM was the apparent junior partner.

At once a fledgling party and party caucus, the DSA stakes its chances on providing an impotent surrogate to the

direct action that can lead to a discovery of real power. Where governed minds begin to question government, DSA peddles confidence in "popular" government that remains out of direct, popular control. Where challenges to political and economic elites emerge, DSA proposes vesting its leaders with what amounts to undelegated power to choose, define and control the methods of struggle. Surfside socialist Rotkin's slogan "You get people organized so you can take power; and you take power for the purpose of getting people organized" suggests the essential limits and arrogance (but not the danger) of DSA's chosen political activity: vote-herding. Ironically, one of Socialist Party militant Eugene Debs' most famous statements was to the effect that if people can be "led" to socialism, they can be led anywhere. If Rotkin's view of top-down "organizing" for change isn't consistent with "authoritarian socialism," Chris, what is?

Barren Roots

Chris acknowledges that a DSA-led coalition has "potential as a counter-revolutionary force." Chris' apology is misleading. The potential is in fact a tendency that is documented in blood.

the reformism of the existing movement. The libertarian rejection of all statist politics and bureaucratic organization, and the revolutionary rejection of compromising reformism are based on "principle" — or ideology — and on "lessons" from past revolutionary failures. Compromised revolutionaries are continually criticized for having given up their anarchist purity to work with statists, and thus either being coopted or betrayed and crushed, as in the Ukraine in 1918-21 and Spain in 1936-37. And the failures of the uncompromising revolutionaries are generally blamed on the perfidy of the counter-revolutionary left-in-power, rarely on strategic mistakes by the revolutionaries themselves, as in Germany in 1919-20, Hungary in 1956, and France in 1968.

These criticisms and blamings are half true. The left-in-power has indeed proven its potential as a counter-revolutionary force. But I think these revolutionary failures are at least as traceable to, on the one hand, the failure of the revolutionaries to gauge the maturity of the situation both internationally and domestically. These twin failures, objective and subjective, have made all past revolutionary attempts turn out to be quixotic, futile demonstrations. Every uprising has been, to a greater or

lesser extent, isolated in a small area. In every case, effective power — economic, military and ideological — has been maintained by the rightist, leftist, or bourgeois democratic regime in power or coming into power.

There have, on the other hand, often been gains made in these situations (and in reformist movements), either in the form of better living conditions for the working class or in heightening the tension between working class and ruling class. In Poland, for example, repeated mass uprisings by workers have forced concessions from the state on living conditions, and the state has only been able to make good on them by putting Poland in hock to Western banks to the detriment of the nation's — and the world's — financial stability. The government is walking an ever-shakier tightrope, and the workers have gotten better and better organized. Though not revolutionary, the Polish working class is definitely radical reformist, and every successive frustration of their desires can only make those desires stronger and more coherent.

Correspondingly, in the west, social democratic reforms have created the idea of entitlement to basic social services and a decent wage, and even the relatively passive American working

class is showing itself unwilling to give up these gains. Every new level of reform tightens the spring of potential capitalist crisis by one more notch, and should be welcomed and actively worked for by all socialists, including libertarians. The difference between American and British workers is substantial; Americans are hardly even reformist yet. They basically accept the capitalist equation, "good business climate = investment = jobs = livelihood for workers," and seem as likely to blame foreign workers as domestic capitalists, let alone capitalism itself. With more time and struggle and disappointment in old answers, they may look in more progressive directions for solutions.

Where will we be when they do? If the past is any indication, we'll mostly be working in small, isolated theoretical groups or in single-issue movements, with little prospect of influencing the direction of the movement as a whole. Single-issue movements are necessary, as the components of a larger, unified movement, and theoretical groups are necessary so we can develop our analysis, strategy and tactics. But they're not enough. These efforts won't contribute substantially, I believe, to libertarian influence in a

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The tendency stems not from "the immaturity of the situation," "the failure of objective conditions," and least of all from the failure of "revolutionaries to gauge the maturity of the situation. . ." It stems from the social institutions and legacies which DSA, like its predecessors and contemporaries in the Second International, rests upon.

It is more than an irony that the explicitly labor and socialist parties emerging around the turn of the century in the West traced their origins to labor uprisings and open social rebellion. These parties tended to develop a strikingly similar set of ideas and actions in response to the failure of general strikes and insurrections to thoroughly revolutionize society.

Unions and political organizations created amidst open struggles nevertheless maintained an organizational existence and considerable influence

when the struggles receded. In these conditions, revolutionary struggle was no longer on the agenda; the ideas and action of indirect struggle took hold, here as tactics, there as strategy, but ultimately as the organizational *raison d'être* for "social-democracy." The view commonly expressed came to be known as "evolutionary socialism," the tendency as "social democracy," after the name of such famous parties as the German Social Democracy of Marx and Engels. These parties advanced a program of parliamentary politics and union organization to manage and unite people for immediate, limited reform while awaiting a gradual transformation to socialism through the ballot, a transition *administered by the state*. The gradualist approach was and remains in direct opposition to the explosive, rapidly changing character of social rebellion and class consciousness, i.e. of real social history.

In theory, the mass social democratic parties, and the unions upon which they were based, spoke for the millions of people they nominally counted as members and supporters. In practice, the parties and unions made a virtue of collaboration, institutionalizing the passivity of grassroots support by elevating electoral activity and labor contract management to the level of first principles. These activities were, after all, the bread and butter of the union and party leadership.

The parties and unions also developed hierarchical structures of a contradictory character. On the one hand, their basis of support was the working people who constituted an overwhelming majority. On the other hand, unions and parties developed as independent structures whose original purpose became irrele-

"Too long have the workers of the world waited for some Moses to lead them out of bondage. He has not come; he never will come. I would not lead you out if I could; for if you could be led out, you could be led back again. I would have you make up your minds that there is nothing that you cannot do for yourselves."

— Eugene Debs (1905)

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unified mass movement for social change in this country.

I'm convinced that when the movement begins to look for an overarching theory to unify it and give it coherent purpose, it will look in the direction of Democratic Socialism. It's simply the most logical and easily-imagined alternative to the reactionary trend we're seeing in capital now. People will naturally tend to organize along lines that are somewhat familiar to them, according to programs that seem workable, given political power. The extension of democracy into the economic realm is one that large numbers of Americans can be expected to support at some time in the intermediate future, and coherent political organizations that offer this idea as a program can be expected to draw increasing support. These organizations will be the seedbeds of a unified social movement.

It'd be disappointing, of course, to see this development merely take the form of a social democratic party on European lines, though it seems inevitable that there will be a strong movement in this direction, especially as the more liberal faction of capital lines up behind it. The question for us is, what will be the most appropriate response

for libertarians to the emergence of social democracy in the United States?

My answer is that we should give it critical support. Not capitulate to it, not let ourselves be absorbed in it, and not vaguely accept it as an "evolutionary" step toward our ideals, but contribute to its growth for the explicit purpose of pushing it farther than a traditional social democratic movement would ever go — and certainly to help initiate a break with social democracy if and when it turns out to be a failure. To oppose social democracy *politically*, after it's achieved power in this country and failed to fulfill people's desires, will make perfect sense. To oppose it now, *ideologically*, is absurd — unless we're more concerned with ideology than with politics. If we're ever going to change from ideological hobbyists to political activists, we're going to have to learn the difference. (To make a semantic clarification, I'm not speaking of "politics" in the alienated, authoritarian sense, but in the widest possible sense: the determination of power relations in society.)

We should employ the same kind of strategy in organizations like DSA that DSA is using with respect to the Democratic Party and the unions, that is, the formation of a "party within a party," a

coherent tendency of libertarians within the Democratic Left. We should take on positions of responsibility in Democratic Left organizations; we should enter our theoretical articles in their discussion bulletins and participate in strategic debates; and we should work to develop specific spheres of activity so that we can concentrate our influence and become a recognized faction of the Democratic Left, identified with a coherent constellation of issues and strategic ideas.

By doing this we could gain experience as activists in national, regional, and local organizations; we could use the resources of those organizations to further our own growth as well as theirs; and we could increase our credibility as long-term members of the social movement, rather than appearing in sporadic "interventions" as ideological exhibitionists. We could also form alignments with the more radical and grassroots-oriented tendencies within Democratic Left organizations, to counter the inevitable drift toward bureaucratization and centrist politics. We would thus be performing a role similar to that of the *Jusos* (Young Socialists) wing of the German Social Democratic Party and the *auto-*

vant alongside the realities of maintaining an organizational existence amid such hostile forces as industry and the state. Ultimately, the unions, but even more so the parties, came to rely on the state and the perversities of lobbying and logrolling as the power base for enforcing the social democratic program, itself defined more and more exclusively by a distinct social layer of union officials and professional politicians. This, in a nutshell, remains the contradictory perspective of DSA, which today proclaims "We join with the liberal-labor wing of the Democratic Party, that unstable alliance of some of the worst and most of the best people in the land. We see this reaching out as the road toward the creation of a new first party of the American left."

gestionnaire [self-management] tendency of the French Socialist Party. These groupings have ties with more radical extra-party formations as well, like the German Greens, and so should we. They also have the ability to force debate within their parties, and they act influentially on some crucial party issues, like the Pershing missile question in Germany.

The other thing we'd be doing, of course, is lending our energy to the growth of these organizations in themselves. I think this is necessary for the purpose of developing a basis for more radical action in the future. In a conservative, confused society, we have to act with awareness of and respect for the limitations in people's minds. This doesn't mean accepting those limits as our own, but we do have to learn to relate to them in an effective way. We can't just preach at people, as revolutionaries are so famous, and so justly derided, for doing.

Unless our activity were purposeful, we would end up merely working to raise social democracy on our backs. And some of our energy would, whether we liked it not, be channeled into building up the same bureaucratic systems that we actually wish to dismantle. Part of my apology for this is that the development of such systems is inevitable as part of a social movement in the U.S., and that we have to accept that to some extent for now. I don't believe we'll ever see the development of a social movement tailor-made for us, and we should be able to tolerate some social democratic bureaucratization as well as we could tolerate a lot of other things — provisionally. The provision is that the organizations we join be open enough to dissent so that we can organize, criticize and agitate within them without fear of repression. If nothing else, our active presence in these organizations

The historical fruit of social democracy has been unstable, if material, reforms during periods of relative prosperity. But reform was won mainly by the threat — perceived or real — of direct action by workplace or minority movements, not by social democratic statecraft. The record of reform is outweighed by the bitter, tumultuous interludes of barbarity to which social democracy has contributed.

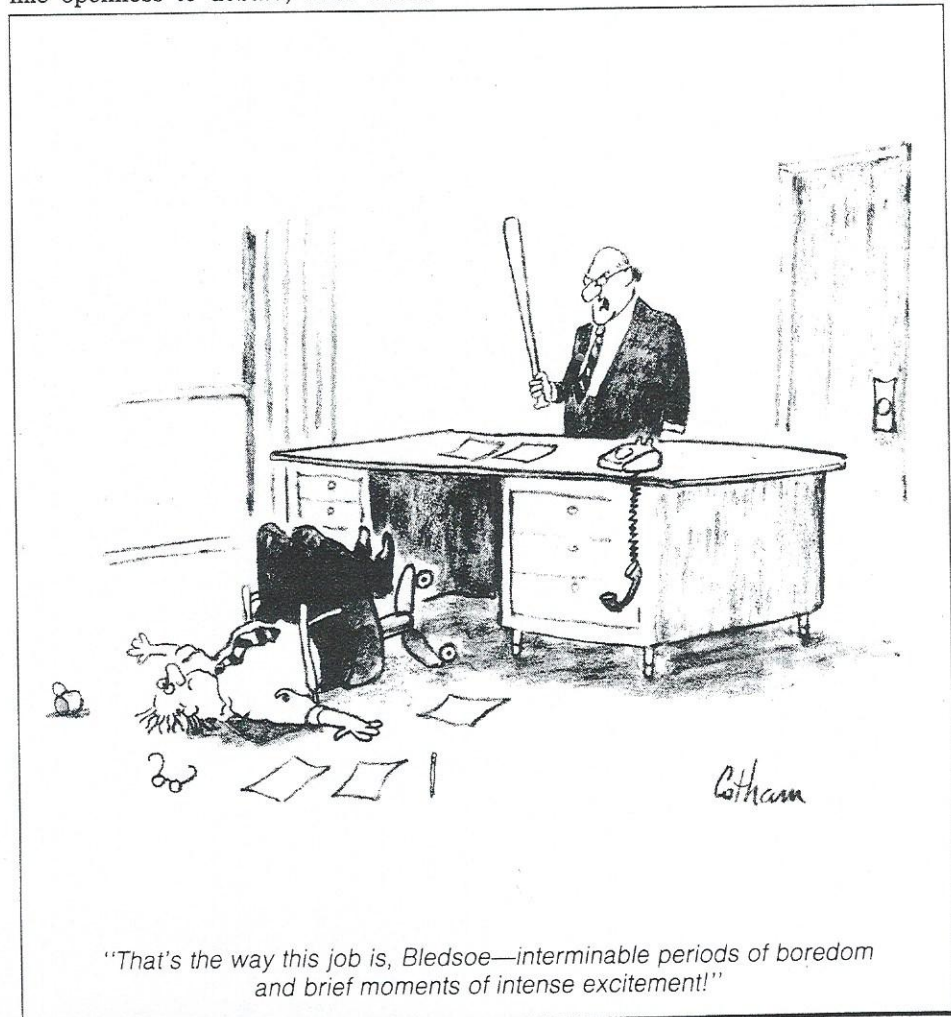
The growth of social democracy has tended to come at the expense of the fighting organizations of workers — the last and only real defense against totalitarianism — and the popularization of the state as a "neutral" and essentially benign institution. As a result, social democratic unions and parties have historically created a political and social atmosphere for war and holocaustal rule:

- The social democratic parties and unions actively mobilized workers for the international terror of World Wars I and II, and countless other conflicts, while enforcing war-time production and state-regulated labor schemes at home.
- The German Social Democracy, in successive acts of suicidal folly, refused appeals to mobilize arguably the most fully organized (and clearly well-armed) working class in the world in the 1930s while Hitler consolidated the Third Reich.
- In Chile, the social democratic marxist Allende ordered the disarming of the workers at the urging of the generals before the coup that for

would put their claims of multi-tendency democracy to the test for all to see.

The other part of my apology is that I don't think we'd find ourselves alone in these organizations, and I think we'd be able to do a lot more than yap at the heels of bureaucrats. My experience in DSA has been one of finding considerable sympathy for libertarian ideals like openness to debate, local auton-

omy, and base-oriented rather than hierarchical organizing. Most of my comrades — scholar and DSA theorist Stanley Aronowitz, for example — would agree on self-management as a crucial part of socialism. The main difference is their idea of a transition to socialism being a matter of change in degree, rather than in kind — of a gradual, cumulative evolution of social-



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Hayes

ten years has drowned Chilean protest in a sea of blood and "disappearances."

- In Poland, the social democratic tendency dominant in Solidarnosc actively worked with the Church and the State to disarm and isolate the social rebellion, paving the way for the December repression.

Such is the legacy of social democracy and the working basis of DSA politics.

If there is one thing we can learn from the living history of modern social movements, it is that their outcome reflects the organization and character of the movement. Chris makes an artificial separation between the movement of DSA-style reform from the ultimate goals he seeks. Far from sharing common ground with the "long term requirements for the achievement of socialism or communism . . .," the DSA cheerfully, if unwittingly, champions a recipe for defeat and demoralization. It may be true, Chris, that one could benefit from going through a "social democratic stage," i.e. renouncing social democracy once and for all. But this presumes that workers and revolutionaries can survive such historic repression that social democracy has set the stage for. The legacy of social democracy is attributable ultimately to a conception that substitutes the party for the movement, and the electoral maneuvering of machine politics for the self-activity of popular direct organization.

Chris' ad hoc attempt to justify DSA politics by asserting "Society is the state, we are ourselves the state, whether we like it or not," is difficult to accept as more than a misleading metaphor. It is an admission that autonomous struggles, and therefore any hope for the future, are impossible; that such autonomous phenomena as Solidarnosc, which emerged in "truly totalitarian" Poland, never existed. This confused section of Chris' appeal is, in a word, incredible.

Alternatives?

What are the alternatives to DSA? Chris' criticism of the "unwillingness or inability that tends to leave [libertarians] with nobody to relate to but other uncompromising libertarian revolutionaries" is well taken, although exaggerated if taken as a characterization of our milieu. We are not as isolated as you think.

Many of us are taking advantage of the current lapse in generalized rebellion to publicly exchange our ideas and digest our experiences in such publications as *Processed World*, *No Middle Ground*,

Strike!, and *ideas & action*. Others are active in "single-issue" groups opposing nuclear weapons and power or putting up an alternative information network on Latin American and Caribbean struggles. Still others are active in workplace organizations. Those of us who can arrange to do so are coming together this July (see box on page 9).

Still, Chris' criticism of inactivity remains valid; we cannot harbor illusions about the limited scope and impact of our activities. In fact, a regrettably increasing amount of our time is spent devising

strategies to keep body and soul together and still have enough left over to keep modest, if promising, political projects alive.

No unifying strategic perspective or concrete set of ideas and actions organizationally links our milieu. Such things are crucial. But they cannot be manufactured from fossilized ideas, particularly of those on the left who pretend to design the architecture of tomorrow's revolution from the ghosts of past defeats.

It can be said that our ideas of direct action and self-managed struggle have

an immediate application and simplicity that, as these things go, are far more "logical and easily-imagined" than the confused and misleading designs of socialist statecraft advanced by the DSA. But it will take the shockwave of rebellion and the human movement it throws up to imbue dormant imaginations with the creative perspective of rebellion — the perspective that constitutes a genuine opportunity for social change in the direction of human liberation. Then, too, will the current passive *malaise* among our milieu be put in proper perspective.

— Dennis Hayes

Nielsen . . .

ism rather than a fundamental break with capitalist production relations.

My own present perspective is that a fundamental break with capitalism is ultimately necessary, but impossible without the social movement going through a developmental period that includes reformism. I agree with DSA that in order to move society toward socialism, we have to move toward society as it is. That doesn't mean compromising on what we believe in or want for society; it means compromising on what we think we can get, for now. It means finding out what ordinary (non-activist, non-socialist) people want, and proposing socialist programs that fulfill their needs.

Mike Rotkin, DSA member and mayor of Santa Cruz, ran for office in a conservative town as an open socialist-feminist. He hasn't back-pedaled on his politics; in fact he presents his success as an indication that moving toward the center politically might not be what's needed — as opposed to moving toward people. He ran a campaign based on grassroots neighborhood organizing for municipal social services, and recognizes the continuing — indeed escalating — necessity for ongoing organization *after* taking power, to end people's passivity in relation to government. At a "Community Congress" in Portland in October, Rotkin said:

The real key is trying to find ways that we can catalyze people to get organized themselves, so that they don't hear about what it means to have power collectively but that they experience it in some direct way.

And I think that means a lot of organizing has to go on not around the kinds of goals that some of us might like to see people organizing around, but around the kinds of goals and concerns that people themselves experience.

Having micro-state power in Santa Cruz has allowed Rotkin and his pro-

gressive associates on the city council to raise issues, initiate programs, and stimulate self-organization among the people of the city in a way that indicates the democratic essential nature of socialism. He's been able to demonstrate a socialist practice that's definitely not the usual centralized, bureaucratic, authoritarian mold. His perspective on state power is that "You get people organized so you can take power; and you take power for the purpose of getting people organized."

The traditional libertarian critique of state power is certainly important, but I believe it needs to be revised and put in perspective, not fetishized as it often is by libertarians. The state is not, as many anarchists would seem to have it, a monolithic, foreign entity, a discrete block of political power that can be "smashed." The state is the organizational scheme of capitalist society (as Castoriadis described it), a system of interlocking hierarchical structures that seeks to integrate all sectors of society into a controllable, totalitarian whole to facilitate capital accumulation. It doesn't exist somewhere "above" society; it pervades society. It's not a static institution; it changes and expands, and in fully developed capitalism it's extended itself farther into the fabric of society than the early anarchists could ever have foreseen. In developed capitalist society, the state has come close to actually replacing society, if by society we mean individuals and groups and their interrelations. Individuals and groups are being assimilated into the state, and their interrelations are being redefined and redirected by the state, in the interest of capital. We have entered the era of totalitarian capitalism.

This means, I believe, that we have to revise the libertarian project. Whereas in earlier times the state could be conceived as an alien entity that could be resisted and ultimately destroyed by determined collective action on the part of an autonomous soci-

ety, today the possibility of developing an autonomous society is severely limited. Society is itself the state; we are ourselves the state, whether we like it or not.

Evidence for this proposal is everywhere. Whereas in the days of classical revolutionary socialism (say, until the end of the Spanish Civil War) there were workers' organizations that could maintain (sometimes armed) autonomy against capital and the state, this is not so today. All unions everywhere are integrated into capital and the state, either on the truly totalitarian model of the Soviet Union or the corporatist model — soon to be totalitarian — of Western Europe and the United States. Community organizations and social mutual aid networks are few, small and weak, and most of their efforts are channeled almost automatically into the state, because that's where the resources are to address community needs. As Mike Rotkin said in an address to the DSA's Western Regional Conference in August, only a small minority of Americans are active members (as opposed to passive members) of *any* organizations at all. As a society, we are losing the capacity for self-organization, because of the encroachment of totalitarian capitalism on every aspect of our lives.

Under these conditions, I believe that the libertarian project has to include working for the development of the most basic movement for social autonomy and change, and I believe that the principal work being done in that direction is now being done in the Democratic Left. This will necessarily involve some form of state politics, because of the extension of the state into most aspects of our lives. If the distinction between state and society has indeed broken down, then struggle within society implies and necessitates struggle within the state. Though as libertarians we have to struggle to break out of this limitation, we have to

To the ballot box!

(temporarily, of course)

by Manuel Santos

Debate on the question "Reform or Revolution?" is at least as old as the socialist movement itself. Chris Nielsen sees reforming the system, not as an end in itself, but as a necessary step on the way to achieving Libertarian Socialism. Chris poses the idea that the system's failure to live up to the increasing expectations created by the reform process will — through dialectical acrobatics, perhaps — lead to increased class consciousness and revolution.

Chris' naivete is sometimes alarming. He writes that the strength of Democratic Socialists "will come from their closeness to present power circles, the wide appeal of their reasonable programs and rhetoric, and from the comforting idea [of being] seen as an evolution of society in the minds of most." But how does the ruling class view such reforms? In the latter's eyes, this process of reform is one of either buying time by granting some temporary concessions,

or co-opting the people from the pursuit of more threatening actions. For example, capital has been recently applying the idea of "quality circles" and "worker participation" in industrialized countries. Why? To make it appear that unionism is unnecessary, to raise productivity, to get workers to participate in their own exploitation. Such tactics seek to give an appearance of self-management without the substance — the idea is to forestall the development of a demand for genuine self-management — a concept advocated, in one form or another, by such workers organizations as the Spanish CNT or the French CFDT.

Chris writes about the possibility of forming a broad unity of the left. But this assumes that social-democratic politics, such as advocated by the DSA, has more in common with genuine socialism than with capitalism. Looking at the past performance of social-democracy, I don't think this is true.

Social-democracy sells the worker to

the state. The character of social-democratic politics is exemplified by the betrayal of the European working class at the beginning of World War I. The possibility of worker solidarity across national boundaries was undermined by social-democratic appeals to nationalism — as each national working class lined up behind its own government. As Herman Gorter wrote in 1915 in his *Imperialism, World War and Social Democracy*, "A class which for twenty years has been taught to trust the bourgeoisie can no longer combat it." It seems to me that social-democratic rule would be as likely to result in nationalist consciousness as in class consciousness — witness the Argentine left's pro-war nationalism during the Malvinas incident. Or, more close to home, Michael Harrington's espousal of protectionism. Workers might be rallied for a war — and attacking the working class of other countries — under the rationale of "defending our hard-won reforms." A war — especially if it takes place abroad — could be made to

Nielsen . . .

accept it for now as the limitation that exists in the minds of virtually everyone in this country and in the actual organization of society.

I fear that unless the various single-issue movements and political tendencies can be drawn together under the umbrella of a more or less unified socialist theory, the state and capital will find it possible to perpetuate the fragmentation of the movement by coopting some segments of it and playing them off against the others. I see Democratic Socialism as the theory most able to counter the present reactionary trend, and to establish a base for further, more radical movement. If the very basic notion of Democratic Socialism isn't established, I don't see how a more radical vision could ever arise.

The broad movement for Democratic Socialism, as long as it's truly multi-tendenced and doesn't itself become totalitarian, is open and malleable enough for us as libertarians to work within it. The best way, in fact, to prevent the totalitarianization of Democratic Socialism is for libertarians to join with near-libertarians within the movement to agitate for a more open and base-oriented politics than tradi-

tional social democracy.

I've chosen DSA mainly because of its local strength and because, as with NAM, I felt I could provisionally or nearly agree with most of its perspectives. I am less in agreement with the politics of DSA, but I still see DSA as the organization with the greatest potential for building a Democratic Socialist movement in the foreseeable future. If DSA becomes more conservative and closed rather than more radical and open, I'll lose interest in it, and if a better organization emerges, I'll join it.

I'm sure there'll be enough ferment in the Democratic Left as a whole, and the social movement as a whole, to counter the bureaucratic trend of social democracy. Along with the Democrat-boosters and union hacks in DSA, there are community organizers and others with a more base-oriented approach. If DSA became too closely identified with traditional social democracy when the larger movement demonstrated a desire to go farther, I'm sure it would split or otherwise engender the rise of a more radical formation. People in the U.S. are tired of bureaucracy, and a political organization that just offers more will merit the same contempt as

others that have come before it and will deserve to be superceded. In any case, I see the social movement as too broad to be actually dominated by DSA, or by any other organization.

I do hope, and am willing to work, for the development of an effective libertarian organization. Such an organization could contribute a great deal to the development of a truly and radically democratic socialist movement. But as I've laid out here, I consider as crucial to the success of such a project the ability of the organization to work closely with the various tendencies of the Democratic Left. Ideological labels and formulas tend to become fetishes that we blind ourselves with, using them for alienated self-justification rather than collective self-realization. The libertarian project is still vital, but it'll be dormant until it finds a way to connect with the real, existing movement of society.

— Chris Nielsen

Note: Chris invites responses to this piece. His address is 5215 N.E. 30th, Portland OR 97211.

seem more desirable to workers than fundamental social change.

Nationalism is one of the dangers of social-democracy.

And what if a deepening social crisis does take place? The social-democratic bureaucrats and intellectuals will always cringe in horror at the possibility of "opening the floodgates of anarchy" — i.e., direct action that threatens the established institutions. Their call will be for more law and order. After all, under what other social climate could their reform orientation flourish? In the meantime the working class has been disarmed, with no autonomously organized movement. A working class caught like this might rebel but would not have developed the means for creating and running a new, equalitarian society.

History is not a science. One cannot simply sit down and develop a theory of history that can predict the process that will bring about a revolution, particularly of the kind desired by anti-authoritarians. In so far as history shows anything, it indicates that a revolution is a creative, spontaneous act that can occur under many different circumstances. Revolutionary situations have occurred in backward, repressive regimes such as the Czar's Russia, more recently in bureaucratic collectivist Poland, and in the liberal capitalist France of May 1968.

A generalized crisis of class society and of the state pose the possibility of fundamental social changes, of hitherto undreamed-of possibilities. Such a critical juncture may take place under many different types of system — fascist, bureaucratic collectivist, social-democratic, etc. Why suppose that social-democracy is necessarily "the next stage" before a revolutionary change? If we wind the clock back to the Czarist Russia of 1917, we could see that Chris would be suggesting that we support "actively" the Kerensky government because the Russian people must first experience social-democracy to realize that it won't do and then move towards a revolutionary change, such as a revolutionary federation of Soviets. But was this the thing to do under those circumstances? I don't think so.

The Issue of Democracy

Chris writes about the grassroots democracy existing within DSA. Here's a question: Assuming he's right about this, how permanent a feature of DSA is this? Chris himself gives us some evidence that a more powerful DSA means a less democratic DSA when he indicates that DSA is a less satisfactory organization than NAM was. We can only expect that DSA will become

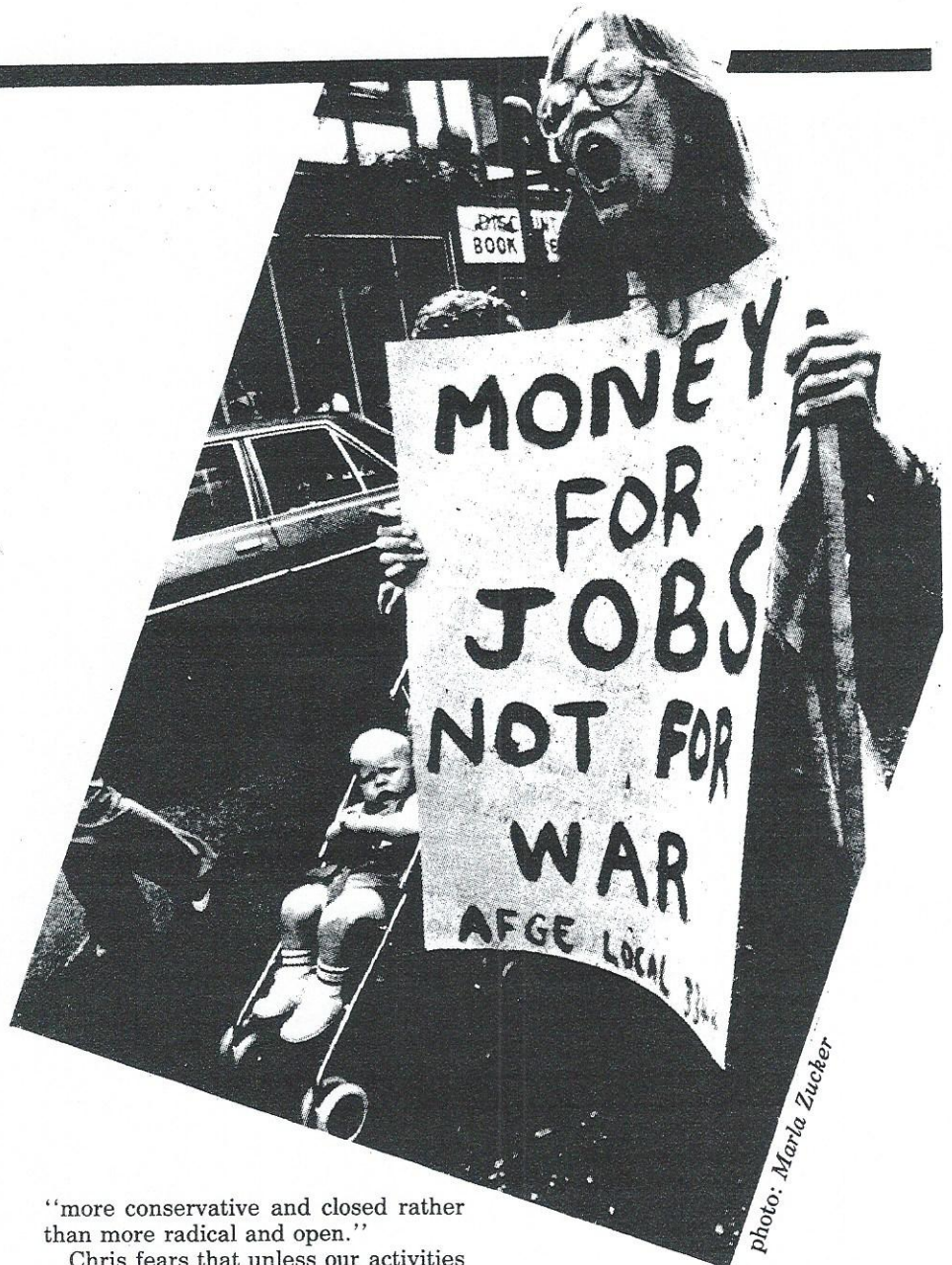


photo: Maria Zucker

"more conservative and closed rather than more radical and open."

Chris fears that unless our activities are directed to libertarian purposes "We would end up merely working to raise social-democracy on our backs. And some of our energy would, whether we like it or not, be channeled into building up some bureaucratic systems we actually wish to dismantle." You bet! I suspect that the reason for DSA's involvement in grassroots movements, and its own internal democracy, is that it is a very small organization and is anxious for all the help it can get in order to grow. Maybe they don't want to appear authoritarian because they would risk tiring off militants like Chris. I suspect that the involvement of DSA — and the Campaign for Economic Democracy also — in grassroots movements is just a trampoline to get into power. I'm not suggesting a conspiracy theory in which DSA activists are just cynical power mongers — though that might develop. I am saying that the actual role of an organization — especially if it is large or influential — goes beyond

the subjective wishes of any one militant and often even of the majority of the members. I believe that structures shape people more than people shape structures.

During the revolution in Portugal in 1974-75 I belonged to the social-democratic party. My rationale was that anarchists were a small crowd with less than adequate organizational skills, but social-democrats were democratic, realistic and occasionally would talk about self-management. It soon became apparent that their radicalism was a front which they maintained during those two years when the popular mood was one of deep reform. Even the Socialist Party was Marxist at that time. Later on, when things cooled off, the social-democrats became middle-of-the-road and the Socialist Party became social-democratic.

The social-democrats will be out there hunting for votes whether we

[turn to page 42]

To the ballot box.....

help them or not. Are we to use our energies, as anarchists, for this? How does the common person view parties today? The majority of people certainly view parties — and the government as well — with scorn or distrust. To the extent that workers vote, we observe that they vote, not so much for the party of their class as for any party — even a conservative one — that looks like it can provide security and employment. Oscillation between a conservative and a pro-labor party seems to be the pattern in industrialized nations.

Chris' assertion that social-democratic rule would expose the inherent contradictions of the system and possibly trigger a movement for deeper changes doesn't correspond with observations of what really goes on. Often, the inadequacies of social-democratic governments induce people to vote for the conservatives the next time around. Workers, of course, want to hold on to whatever comforts they've gained under capitalism. If they bother to vote at all, they'll vote for any party that looks like it can protect their present level of well-being. This leads me to the conclusion that the workers will struggle for radical alternatives, not when they experience social-democracy, but when they see that capitalism is not capable

of providing anymore, i.e. when it becomes completely bankrupt in their eyes.

Class Compromise

There is another thing that makes me very uncomfortable with the idea of joining DSA or the like. To join them means to enter the world of endless class-collaboration — only by class compromise can the social-democratic machine serve both of its masters, Capital and Labor. For example, we have the Socialist government in France that tries to balance the national budget by exporting weapons and tries to quence French capitalism's thirst for energy by developing nuclear power. Is Chris asking us to "actively" support an American Mitterrand?

We have witnessed the failings of social-democracy many times over. Social-democracy hasn't worked and can't work — in part because it maintains governmentalism, and in part because it does not work to abolish the profit motive and competition as the basis of the economy. Social-democrats not only pursue a policy of accomodation to capitalist society, a number of social-democrats also advocate some form of "market socialism." To see the prob-

lems with this, it is enough to look at Yugoslavia where the market and statism are combined. Their market socialism, which also includes so-called "workers councils" in the factories as a means of popular participation, has not prevented inflation, foreign debt, unemployment — including 700,000 workers with no choice but to work abroad, flagrant inequalities in living standards between regions, etc.

State and Society

In order to bolster his decision to be involved in statist politics Chris discusses the relation between State and society. Anarchist analysis has always maintained that the two are separate and that the existence of the first is not only unnecessary but is an impediment to the free development of the second. Anarchists have also defined the State as that hierarchical institution holding a monopoly on violence over a certain geographical area, which allows a minority of the population — an exploiting class — to rule over the rest of society.

No matter what political game is being played in society, ultimately the game will only go as far as the State will allow. In a so-called "democracy" power doesn't rest with the elected party but with the upper class, the military, secret services, etc. During the decisive moments, the State will always try to intervene. It is not really accountable to society — force is only accountable to more force.

In lieu of these considerations, anarchists have generally agreed on the idea that economic, social and individual liberation are contingent on the destruction of the state apparatus, and that the freedom enjoyed by society varies inversely to the power exercised by the state, and, furthermore, that self-management can only be achieved through self-activity and, thus, labor and social movement organizations have to be autonomous of the State, as well as developing a sense of self-confidence and independence among the people involved.

But now Chris is asking us to alter these fundamental tenets in a fundamental way. In his attempt to "revise the libertarian project" I'm afraid he's running the risk of giving it up altogether. He believes in the necessity of a social-democratic regime because not only is this stage supposedly necessary for the achievement of class consciousness but also because struggling inside the state is unavoidable since it "pervades" society and in "developed capitalist society, [it] has come close to actually replacing society..."

I would agree that many states seek total control of society and that it is in

Kowalewski. . . .

Jan Rulewski's proposal did not involve an immediate mobilization of the masses.

It was not clear how power could be seized from the bureaucracy without a direct confrontation, without a qualitative leap in the counterpower of civil society represented by *Solidarity*. A passive strike, even on a general scale, would not allow the problem to be solved. Jan Rulewski's tactic was based on illusions which had, for several months, been rejected by the masses and a growing number of union leaders. Nor was it without significance that parliamentary democracy appeared to Jan Rulewski as the form by which the working people should come to power. The more radical currents, while not dismissing parliamentary democracy, favored its combination with genuine council democracy.

The tactic proposed by Lodz, Krakow and Warsaw Regions had an obvious advantage over that put forward by Bydgoszcz. Still, it displayed a weakness which can be found in all the tactics advanced during the Polish revolution in 1980 and 1981. In its struggle to solve the question of power, even the

most revolutionary current within *Solidarity* had nothing to propose on "the struggle to win over the army." Such was the feeling of power emanating from the mass movement that the most aware members fell victim to the illusion that this strength would be enough to neutralize the army, and that the problem of confrontation was not yet posed. *Solidarity* and the whole of the mass movement would pay for this illusion in the hours that followed.

The National Commission did not come down in favor of any of the proposed tactics. It was content to call for a referendum on the system and the form of rule — which was not in contradiction with any of the tactics put forward. The debate remained open on the way in which the problem of power should be resolved. However, a defensive attitude prevailed in face of the risk of attack by the state against *Solidarity* and society, although it was evident that whoever took the initiative and struck first would have the advantage in the event of a confrontation.

— Zbigniew Kowalewski
February 1982

the interests of the State to spread the myth of its having taken over so many social functions that the State and society are practically one. But it seems to me that this is far from true.

For one thing, there is still the distinction between, on the one hand, those advanced capitalist countries where many personal freedoms developed since the 19th century still exist and, on the other hand, regimes that are more dictatorial. Dictatorial regimes are those where the state has achieved substantial control of society. In the Soviet Union the individual is totally dependent on the state for employment, for permission to move to another city, etc. In Cuba there are the Committees for the Defense of the Revolution which are the local neighborhood eyes and ears of the omnipresent state. But even in these societies the state has not completely replaced society — passive and active dissent exists in various ways, and there is the potential for autonomous social movements, such as Solidarnosc has demonstrated.

In such societies the state prevents many direct relationships between people by interposing itself, and this is what the development of the state does in the less totalitarian situation of developed capitalist countries also. But libertarian change is exactly concerned with restoring these direct connections between individuals and groups in society. Social democracy fails to accomplish this because its goal is "efficient" paternalistic government accomplish this because its goal is absolute social welfare under state tutelage; its goal is "efficient" paternalistic government with promises of security, freedom from unemployment, etc. Whereas State Communism has at times meant the violent imposition of Big Brother, Democratic Socialism is supposed to be a "peaceful" evolution towards what is in face essentially the same goal.

Chris believes that in the past it may have been possible for revolutionaries to work outside the sphere of the state but today the state is so powerful that we have no choice but to be activists within the framework of the State. But would Chris be willing to tell all those rebels who suffered at the hands of the state in the past — in 1871, 1905, 1936, etc. — that it was so much easier in that era to organize outside the sphere of the state? In fact, it has always been hard to organize outside the channels of political activity established by the State.

Chris' attitude is a defeatist one. But I don't think civil society has lost out yet. What we want to do is work to develop a movement that attempts to break with capitalism and the state, not

towards a movement that strengthens them now while maintaining a pretense of defeating them later on.

Anarchists and the Reformist Left

This January I attended a lecture by DSA member Stanley Aronowitz at a University of California campus. His talk was interesting but the positions he put across were ones that I, as a Libertarian Socialist, felt very uncomfortable with. His entire message was a social-democratic one: support for the French Socialists, electing "progressives" through the Democratic Party, his belief in the need to be "soft" on vital companies that might go on a capital strike if threatened with socialization, his satisfaction with the behavior of large national companies in Sweden and France (such as the nationalized auto-maker Renault). I was left with the clear sense that this is not what I believe in. Whether Stanley says he's not "way over on the left" because he means it or just doesn't want to scare Americans, I got the sense that he was, in some ways, deceiving his audience.

To me, libertarian socialism has to be different than social-democracy and all the authoritarian sects or it will be nothing. I think revolutionaries have to be honest with working people, with students. Would workers cringe in horror at the mention of libertarian socialist tactics and goals? I don't think so. For one thing, government has been traditionally seen as an enemy by the American individual. One ideology that is now trying to tap this sentiment is right-wing "libertarianism." I think there is definite potential for a concept of socialism that takes it away from its statist proponents and opposes governmentalism. But only the working class' own activity against the bosses and the government will allow the development of this potential.

We cannot join a social-democratic organization because we differ fundamentally from social-democracy in both tactics and goals. Of course, it is true that many socialists claim that their ultimate goal is a classless, stateless society. The real differences between libertarians and other socialist tendencies, however, lies in what they propose for the present. Anarchists believe that it is utopian to expect any statist method to lead to a society of generalized self-management. Chris at times seems to believe this but then undermines this understanding by adopting social-democratic tactics. But he rationalizes this by calling these tactics "temporary," a "necessary stage," etc.

Small gains and reforms are valuable and make living in the short run more

enjoyable. But there are various ways of achieving "realistic" demands — demands for short-range changes. Some tactics prolong the passivity of the working class while others, such as workers strikes, develop self-confidence and expose the cruelty of the system (for example, when striking workers confront cops).

With the social-democrats in power, we could expect them to pursue a policy aimed at capitalist recovery, which is, of course, likely to mean appeals to workers for moderation, for concessions, and, most importantly, workers will be asked to limit their self-activity and let their legally elected and supposedly "accountable" legislators make social changes as they see fit. Such is the reactionary essence of social-democracy.

Today's world is in a state of crisis, a condition that calls for drastic changes before it's too late. As a species we cannot afford even a half century of reformist evolution. As we've witnessed in Europe, this process didn't prevent — and actually contributed to — two world wars. More faith in government can only bring us more wars. We know that the solution can only be society rising from below and abolishing all states. This is a message we have to spread: no faith in governments, power directly in the hands of the people. We have to be bold, yet responsible.

Chris believes that we are isolating ourselves by keeping to a steady course of radical criticism of the existing structures. He says we have to involve ourselves in reformist organizations, such as DSA, so that we don't isolate ourselves, so that we can be activists. But I think we have to be clear on what sort of isolation we're talking about. Is it being isolated from parties, politicians and bureaucrats, or is it being isolated from the people? I don't think isolation from the first implies isolation from the second.

I believe that the anarchist movement can work out an activist strategy for itself without falling prey to the reformist, legalist traps of the state. The state would like to channel all opposition in ways it finds non-threatening. Social-democracy falls into this trap, anarchy rejects it. To us, getting people to go to the ballot box isn't the only form of activism.

By being in DSA, Chris is giving up working out a realistic anarchist strategy, and, instead, follows a social-democratic one, effectively becoming a social-democrat. Social-democracy is a Faustian pact in which the working class loses its soul in exchange for a welfare check and a free tooth check up. □