A good share of this issue is devoted to corrections beginning with a letter from Bob Rossi correcting Laurens Otter’s reference to the WSA’s “Leninist past.” Internationalism corrects Adam Buick on the question of a transition period between capitalism and socialism. Mick Larkin updates DB readers on the fate of the six CNT members in Vitoria,
Spain, and also answers a DB article by Don Fitz which he found reprinted in a British anarchist journal. This reprinting is a gratifying first for the DB. Jeff Stein corrects Tom Wetzel regarding the WSA/IWW dispute, while Richard Laubach returns to the matter of labor time vouchers (LTVs). Interesting the authors of Non-Market Socialism, described in "Publications Received," write off advocates of LTVs from those groups which can properly be considered among the blessed. Laurens Otter speaks a word in defense of the Guilford branch of the SPGB. Mark Shipway defends the Wildcat publication Class War on the Home Front, reviewed in DB22 from allegations by Comrade Otter. Tom Wetzel also corrects Com. Otter in regard to the WSA. Finally Mike Gunderloy raises the question of how to get the attention of our class.

Again we invite your articles and letters for DB30. Please remember to single space and use a dark ribbon.

Frank Girard
for the DB Committee

PUBLICATIONS RECEIVED

NON-MARKET SOCIALISM IN THE NINETEENTH AND TWENTIETH CENTURIES;
Edited by Maximilien Rubel and John Crump; other contributors: Adam Buick, Stephen Coleman, Alain Pengan, Mark Shipway; 187 pp.; London, MacMillan Press, 1987; [The clothbound edition is available in the U.S. from St. Martin's Press for $39.95. We hope to have information on the paperback edition in DB30.]

Heralded in DB17 through a letter by Mark Shipway, the arrival of the book has resulted in a long and enthusiastic review which, alas, must wait for DB30 because of space considerations. It is easily the most important discussion yet published on programs and positions as well as the histories of the various groups which constitute our political sector. Two chapters by the editors survey the origins and development of non-market socialism in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries while the remaining five chapters, each by one of the other contributors, describe the major strands of non-market socialism: Anarcho-communism, Impossibilism (the SLP/SPGB strand), Council Communism, Bordigism, and Situationism.

ANGRY WORKERS' BULLETIN NO. 2, from 2140 Shattuck Ave. Box 2200, Berkeley, CA 94704. No price mentioned, 45 pages. AWB#1 appeared well over a year ago and was also reviewed in the DB. Number 2 is a definite improvement over the first issue with much less space devoted to intergroup feuds in the Bay Area. This includes an introductory essay on the current world situation and articles on the Watsonville Strike, Mexico, the anti-drug mania, Soviet yuppies, class struggles in the USSR, strikes in Spain and Yugoslavia, the Falklands War, John Olday, the French railway strike, and information on an "ultras" conference."

(Cont'd on p. 24)
Dear Friends,

I would like to comment on some of the remarks made in #28 regarding the debates between the WSA and others. Of particular concern to me is the letter from Laurens Otter. The WSA has no "Leninist past" and was never "vanguardist" in any sense of the term. People saying such things have an obligation to show when and where this "Leninist past" existed and should go into some detail on why they think that the WSA was "vanguardist." Many readers of the DB may also not be aware of the connections between the IWA and the WSA. Some WSA members will, no doubt, comment on this in the DB. It may interest DB readers to know that several founders of the WSA, and the founders of the groups which preceded the WSA, had a great deal of contact with the Syndicalist Workers Federation and the IWA throughout the 1970s. The comments about Dolgoff and the IWU in the Otter letter tell only a small part of a much larger story and no one reading it should make up their mind without hearing all sides out.

I am partly responsible for the confusion about "Leninism" and "vanguardism" in the WSA. I had hoped that with my leaving the WSA such charges would have been put on the shelf.

Back in the 1970s, before the WSA existed, there was only periodic discussion about anarchist-syndicalist forms of organization and this discussion was not carried on in a good or meaningful way. People were quick to write manifestos and we did more than our share of wishful thinking but none of the groups were informed by what workers or other oppressed people were doing. When the Libertarian Workers Group was formed we put the question of organization before everyone and we made a point of being activists in a wide variety of efforts. We probably looked like dilettantes to many people. In fact, we learned from each struggle. Many of us developed problems with the federative form because we came to see that a political organization was needed which was not a party and, also, not a "do your own thing" kind of group. We valued the possibility of a renewed IWU as an economic organization but we wanted something more open-ended and modern, something which could pull militants together behind a political program which was neither reformist nor "leftist" in any traditional sense.
Common sense told us that the I.W.W. would never be the organization it once was. At best, it might become one union amongst many or might broaden to become some kind of social movement with working class origins. Our experience in the I.W.W. and the I.W.W. 's history, taught us the value of thinking in terms of wide movements, unity across political and union lines and the need for working class direction and leadership. In fact, our vision of socialism came to be based on the possibility of proletarian movements—not parties and not unions—cooperating for the common good of all oppressed people. We were obviously influenced by feminism here. Our day-to-day organizing experiences reinforced that vision. Sadly, the I.W.W. has not been so open-minded in recent years.

"Movement" implies debates, vitality, organizing and a variety of influences. Around the time that we were questioning the federative form, organizing, trying to debate with other anarchists and rethinking our syndicalist past we encountered people out of the left who had done some good thinking about spontaneity and classwide organizing. Many of these people had behind them years of industrial experience. We were able to take from them some of their thinking on spontaneity but we never accepted the view that some kind of party, however democratic, was necessary.

By the time that the I.W.W. was formed many of us were better anarchists than the "official" anarchists: we could not label ourselves, we had found a history of non-hierarchical proletarian organizing in the U.S., outside of even the I.W.W. we had a good theoretical basis for spontaneity, we rejected parties and federations and we had experience in workplaces and in unions (including the I.W.W.). No other anarchist group, to my knowledge, did as well in such a short period of time. Does this sound like Leninism?

Our thinking did often lead us to a kind of "vanguardism" which deserves some discussion. We came to believe that oppressed people could play a special role in revolutionary activity. For instance, most of us saw the feminist movement as temporarily eclipsing the traditional labor movement in the 1970s. Prior to that, the Black movement played a pivotal role. Of course, we wanted everyone to cooperate and work together but at certain times we recognized, this or that group moved to center stage and drastically changed the terms of debate and the
The State in the Period of Transition: A Basic Problem for Marxism

In Discussion Bulletin 26, Adam Buick claims the International Communist Current's position on the state in the period of transition is the same as the Trotskyists'. This is a gross distortion and misrepresentation of the ICC's political position.

For the ICC, Trotskyism is a counter-revolutionary tendency, which exists on the other side of the class line which separates the camp of the working class from that of the capitalist class.

Trotskyism had its origins as a left oppositional tendency within the Communist International, which attempted to fight against the Stalinism, but on a very confused and opportunist basis. As a political tendency, Trotskyism passed into the bourgeois camp in the late 1930's by supporting anti-fascist mobilizations of the working class for participation in the inter-imperialist Second World War. Trotskyism today functions as a leftist appendage of the capitalist state apparatus, as a mechanism for coopting militant workers and intellectuals who begin to question and escape from the orbit of traditional left groups (social democrats and stalinists). Using a radical rhetoric, the Trotskyists steer these militants back into traditional, bourgeois activities, such as unionism, national liberation support movements, protest movements and electoral activity, which in no way challenge the capitalist stranglehold on the working class.

The hallmark of the Trotskyist movement is the "Transitional Program," which is nothing but an opportunist document, which advocates various unrealizable reformist goals. According to Trotskyism, in the struggle for these unattainable goals, the workers will come to understand the need for revolution. This fallacious argument neither accurately describes how the Transitional Program of Trotskyism is used in practice, nor how the working class comes to revolutionary consciousness. In fact, this program serves as a basis for not talking to workers about revolution, and hoodwinking them into worthless struggles. The ICC rejects this conception of "transitional program" and it has nothing to do with the necessity for a state in the transition period following the political overthrow of the capitalist state.

From his critique of the ICC it is clear that Buick neither understands the basic legacy of marxism on the question of the state in the transition period, nor the ICC's position. When the ICC says that a state will be necessary in the period of transition, it defends the same position developed by Marx and Engels in the debates against the anarchists in the First International, namely that the
state cannot be wished away overnight and that the continued existence of a state for a limited period of time following the revolution will be historically necessary. (Marx: "Between capitalist and communist society lies the period of the revolutionary transformation of the one into the other. There corresponds to this also a political transition period in which the state can be nothing but the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat.") The idea that the transition state will be a "semi-state", a state with its "worst features lopped off," are not "ICC jargon" as Buick claims but the words of Engels. (Engels: "(state is) at best an evil inherited by the proletariat after its victorious struggle for class supremacy, whose weight it is necessary to lop off at the earliest possible moment, until such time as a new generation reared in an equal state will be able to throw the entire lumber of the state on the scrap heap."

The idea that the state cannot be abolished overnight by withers away over time as the material conditions for communism develop in the transition period is not the creation of the ICC, but of Marx and Engels. (Engels: "The interference of the state power in social relations becomes superfluous in one sphere after another, and then ceases of itself. The government of persons is replaced by the administration of things and the direction of the process of production. The state is not 'abolished,' it withers away."

Libertarians and DeLeoniists, who advocate the "immediate establishment of a classless, moneyless, stateless world society," as Buick puts it, have to understand clearly that they are departing from the marxist position on this question. They must shoulder the considerable burden of demonstrating the fundamental theoretical errors of Marx and Engels. The ICC bases its position on the marxist legacy, theoretically elaborating the position on the state based on the experience of the proletariat since Marx's time. Thus, just as Marx saw that the experience of the Paris Commune disproved the position that the proletariat should take over the bourgeois state and instead demonstrated the necessity to destroy it, the ICC has concluded that based on the experience of the Russian Revolution Marx was mistaken in equating the dictatorship of the proletariat with the transitional state.

Obviously we cannot take the space here to present fully the ICC position, we will stress some main points: while the ICC holds that the existence of a state in the period of transition will be necessary because of the continued existence of non-proletarian strata and classes, we affirm that marxism is fundamentally anti-statist; the goal is to undertake a program of action in the transition period to progressively work for the
withering away of the state;  
  - Based on an analysis of the failure of the  
  Russian Revolution, the ICC rejects any conception of a  
  workers' state. Buick fails to mention out all the ICC's  
  fundamental contribution on the understanding of the  
  proletariat's relationship to the transitional state -- a  
  contribution which clearly demarcates us from the  
  Trotskyists, most of whom still regard Russia today as a  
  "degenerated workers' state." For us, one of the fundamental  
  errors of the Russian Revolution was to make an  
  identification between the dictatorship of the proletariat  
  and the transitional state.  
  - The historically discovered form of the  
  dictatorship of the proletariat is the workers councils.  
  (For the Trotskyists, it's the party.) Here we use the  
  concept of proletarian dictatorship developed by Marx, to  
  mean the political domination of society by the working  
  class, organized autonomously. This dictatorship must be  
  exercised by the workers over the transitional state. The  
  workers cannot develop an attitude of trust in or reliance  
  on the state, which by its very nature is conservative and  
  will tend to maintain the continuing divisions in  
  transitional society.  
  - The transitional state will be a semi-state, a  
  state with its worst features lopped off, (i.e. it will not  
  have a monopoly of force and arms, its functionaries will  
  have no social or economic privileges, its actions and  
  decisions will be reversible by the workers councils). Its  
  main function will be to integrate all non-exploiting strata  
  into social life, and administer daily functioning of social  
  life. The main task of the dictatorship of the proletariat  
  on the other hand is to overturn the continuation of this  
  daily functioning, to push steadily for the destruction of  
  the law of value, to eliminate the basis for the existence  
  of non-proletarian strata. As more and more strata are  
  integrated into the productive life of the proletariat, the  
  state apparatus will Wither away.  

Readers of Discussion Bulletin may not agree with our  
position, but they will have to grant that this is not the  
position defended by Trotskyism. By so grossly distorting  
the political positions of the ICC and trying to slander us  
with the charge of Trotskyism, Buick does a serious  
disservice to the political milieu and the climate of  
fraternal debate.  

We invite readers who are interested in a full exposition  
of the ICC's position of the state in the period of  
transition to send for our pamphlet on this question, or for  
back issues of our press which develop this question in  
deepth.  
- INTERNATIONALISM  
  Post Office Box 288  
  New York, NY 10018-0288
8

Spanish Info. Network,
Northern England.

17.3.88

Dear D.B.,

thanks for the
latest issue of the D.B.
which included a reprint of
my press release on the
trial of 6 CNT-U comrades
in Vitoria. As is to be
expected when things have
to be got out in a rush,
there were some minor
errors in this, but the
only significant one is
that at the first trial on
28.10.87 they actually all
got off with sentences of
just a month or two, except
one who got 4 years, but
this is almost certain to
be quashed on appeal.

The good news is that
everyone was found innocent
at the second, more serious
trial on 1.12.87. Simply
put, the prosecution trial
collapsed because they had
nothing apart from
'confessions' to go on,
and because of a massive
display of solidarity with
the accused.

It might be worth me
clarifying what the Spanish
Information Network is, as
the definition you gave is
a bit ambiguous.

S/I/N is an independent
source of information about
unions in Spain who use
anarchist/syndicalist forms
of organisation, including
the dockers' Co-ordinadora.

We don't provide much
information about the CNT-
AIT (Spanish section of
the IWA) because their more
dogmatic supporters in
Britain have prevented us
making enough contacts.

This same dogmatism within
the Spanish section gave
rise to a split, producing
another CNT which is still
anarch-syndicalist but
more pragmatic, ie the
CNT-U, which we are
critically supportive of.

Mick Larkin.

The following article was
written in response to one
by Don Fitz's, which was re-
printed in the British
anarchist magazine 'Virus',
from an original published
in the D.B.

IS ROTATION
REALISTIC?

This article follows on
from the one by Don Fitz in
Virus no.11 which dealt
with the limited value of a
'real' to recall
delves. For those of you
who didn't see his article,
the main ideas in it were
that delegates almost never
get recalled (even when
members of an organisation
have the right to do so),
largely because this would
involve an unpleasant
confrontation with the
delegate concerned - something
which people prefer to avoid.

As a more practical
alternative to recall
Don suggested a system under
which a proportion of any
committee is automatically
rotated at regular
intervals, so that people
could effectively be
recalled by the less brutal
process of not being re-
elected.

I would say that we, as
anarchists, should make
rotation one of our most
important proposals, as it
is a simple and concrete
way of increasing the
amount of participation in
any organisation... and if
the main word people
associated with 'anarchist'
was 'participation' (rather
than 'destruction') then
things would really be
looking up.

However, to admit the need
for rotation is to admit the
delusion behind thinking that the end goal
of anarchism is the
complete absence of
authority. In fact it just
isn't possible for a group
of people to organise
themselves in such a way
that someone chosen to
carry out a function has no
more influence than the
person whose turn it is to
clean up the office. If it
was we wouldn't need to
rotate delegates in the
first place. As it is (if
only because of the work
involved in communicating
information between
individuals), anyone who is
asked to carry out a
decision will have a degree
of influence over how it's
done - even when they are
given the strictest
possible mandate.

So, we need to use all the
techniques at our disposal
(mandate of delegates,
rotation, the right of
ordinary members to attend
committee meetings as
observers, etc) to minimise
the amount of authority
that any person in a
position of responsibility
has - either as a result of
their evil desire to
control people, or just

because habit.

CULTURE

Rotation over involves
complex
contracts on March
and doesn't
involve
material
alienation
in any way.

It seems to me a
success in part
rest on the
way people
It seems,
who used to

It seems,
who used to

It seems,
because of laziness and habit.

CULTURE IS CRUCIAL...

Rotation has the advantage over 'mandation' of not involving a series of complex and abstract ideas, eg 'did s/he really contradict what we decided on March 7th, 1986, or has s/he simply responded to consequences which we didn't appreciate were involved in the original mandate?' This kind of abstract theorising is alien to working class culture, and therefore not a very good basis on which to build a workers' organisation. Personally I'm glad it isn't, because I'd hate to think that a successful revolution would mean I had to spend the rest of my life haggling over resolutions contained in endless volumes of committee minutes.

Resolutions, mandates, etc, obviously have their uses, but I think there's a lot more mileage in the ideas of 'rotation' and 'observation' if we're talking about a working class struggle. In some ways this is the real reason why I couldn't get involved in Green Party politics. At grassroots level their parliamentary delusions are fairly irrelevant and they have a lot of the right ideas, but the culture which they have developed for themselves is so sensible and abstract that it just turns me off. As class conscious anarchists we have much richer, more human, traditions to start from.

...BUT NOT ENOUGH.

Even when an egalitarian, democratic cultural does establish itself, the structures which would go with it, eg rotation of delegates, are often not properly developed. In most cases, although Don's point (that recall of delegates doesn't occur in practice) is true, it's equally true that his proposed solution - systematic rotation of delegates - hasn't been popular either.

Even the Co-ordinadora (C-O) which organises 85% of Spain's dockers and is easily the best example of anarchy in action that we can point to these days, is run by basically the same people year after year.

In some ways this hasn't reduced the dockers' effectiveness as a rank-and-file organisation because, for one thing, if there is a clique organising the C-O it's a pretty big clique (maybe 2% of the total membership). Mainly though they are saved by their culture. Everyone who is involved in organising the C-O is also a docker who works full time on the docks, so their basic outlook has been moulded by working with other dockers for years. In some ways they have already been given a mandate as to what the people who don't stand for election want - through the innumerable conversations and varied experiences, at work or in bars, which make up this shared culture.

In my opinion the C-O has mainly been successful because of these cultural strengths and, like most other mass organisations which have anarchist forms, can't tell us as much as we might expect about some of the more 'structural' possibilities (such as systematic rotation) which could be developed from basic anti-authoritarian ideas.

A PRACTICAL EXAMPLE.

The one real exception to this lop-sided development which I know of is the CNT-U's union branch at Michelin in Vitoria, the capital of the Basque Country.

In December 1986 they won 5 seats on their Works Committee, which do not come up for re-election until December 1990. A system of rotation was implemented under which the five seats were shared out between the original 32 people on the CNT-U's election slate, with two teams of 16 each covering 2 of the 4 years involved.

Of the first 16 (who are due to retire in December '88) 2 are 'regulars' (fijos) who keep their seats for the full 2 years. The other 14 share the remaining 3 seats amongst themselves with delegates being changed every 3 months. This same system will be repeated with the other team of 16 for the second 2 year period.
In 1990 a different group of people can be put up on the CNT-U's slate, and I'm sure Don's point will apply - that more ordinary people will be willing to stand then, because it will have been shown that they won't be letting themselves in for an open ended commitment. As a result there may even be more than 32 delegates next time.

The branch's slogan 'Everyone important, no-one indispensable.' seems to be a reality. For example, all those who were 'leading militants' at Michelin when the CNT reformed around the time of Franco's death have since left the company for one reason or another, but the branch continues to function effectively.

A possible advantage of 'the Michelin system' over the simpler form of rotation put forward by Don's article is that it contains clear 'firebreaks' every 2 years. One problem which could have arisen if they had adopted his system (for example, if 2 of the 5 delegates had been rotated every 6 months) is that it would have been difficult to separate out the contribution of each delegate from that of the people who came before or after them. This would make it harder for members of the organisation to decide whether to re-elect them at some later date.

The Michelin system goes some way towards resolving this because it has more stability built into it, though at the same time it tends to blur individuals into a team. It also has the disadvantage of a complete lack of continuity every 2 years, so it's a question of 'swings and roundabouts'. Further enquiries after December '88 will hopefully give us a better picture of how these competing priorities get worked out in practice.

The existence of 2 regulars seems, to me, undesirable as the 16 people in any period will presumably come to be known as "Jose and Carlos' team". Maybe this was a necessary compromise if only 4 of the 32 had much experience of union organisation and a different system will be developed for 1990-94.

A GROUP PERSONALITY?

On the other hand, the existence of regulars may also reflect what seems to be a standard phenomenon in mass organisations - the development of a certain individual (or in this case two) who give the group a 'personality'.

(*) I think the number 2 was hit upon as a minimum which would avoid the idea of a leader and provide an element of 'checks and balances', but at the same time keep the core group as small as possible so more people could be rotated.

For example, in the County Durham Miners' Support Groups (an assembly of about 100 ordinary workers which met every week for over 18 months), the strengths and weaknesses of the group (eg. warm and open-minded, but not very good at giving criticism) mapped perfectly on to the personality of its leading light. I've known other organisations which have had similar links between them and a key figure with a different kind of personality, so I don't think what happened in the Support Group can be explained by suggesting that most of its members shared these basic attitudes before they got together.

Although this is not the place to go into the complex emotional factors which effect how a group works (see 'The Future in the Present', published by L.O.S., for more detailed ideas), it does seem that a group's cohesion is improved if some individual can be found to provide it with a personality it can take on as its own.

If this is what we, as the products of our particular society, are going to be like for the foreseeable future, then a core group which is only in office for a fixed period may be a good compromise between the mathematical ideal (in terms of rotation) and the demands of 'human nature' in its present form.

Alternatively, someone could come to represent the group's personality without being given any executive responsibility (as happens in some tribal societies)
though even this figure would surely acquire certain forms of power within the group through their role as figurehead.

The need for someone to provide a group personality could also go some way towards explaining why (even in groups which see themselves as being opposed to authority) there is such a strong resistance to the actual implementation of regular rotation.

**LONG TERM EFFICIENCY.**

Another major reason why people lack enthusiasm for rotation of delegates is probably the fear of inefficiency. In fact a system of rotation is more efficient than being ruled by a clique, but perhaps this only becomes apparent in the long term - always supposing that it's the overall level of human happiness, rather than just the number of shoes produced, which is the measure of efficiency.

Obviously, for the boss classes what matters is just the number of shoes produced, but workers have also resisted the idea of rotation because of the time and energy needed to maintain it, and because a system of fixed delegates is more stable in the short term.

However, in the long term, a system of fixed representatives will be a disaster. History is littered with unions which started out full of grassroots activism and have now become corporate monoliths because an activist class within the organisation fossilised into permanent leaders.

Perhaps the only way to fight this kind of short term complacency is by pointing out some of these historical examples to people who are reassured by the fact that, even if there is a limited group of people running the organisation, it doesn't really matter because "we've all known them for years and they're OK."

To sum up: Recall of delegates has never really been a very useful idea, though we might as well hang on to it for the rare occasions when it may get used. Systematic rotation is a far better way to promote genuine democracy, so it's very important that we try to understand why so few radical organisations have ever put it into practice.

Mick Larkin.

**POSTSCRIPT:**

Although we do need to have clear 'firebreaks' between different groups of delegates (so that specific individuals can still be held responsible for their actions) this would not be difficult to maintain while gradually adopting a system of rotation.

Let's assume that instead of a proportion of any committee (which is what Don suggests) there was a re-election of the whole committee every year or two. It would then be a simple matter of not allowing more than, say, 80% of that committee to be re-elected.

In effect, all of the ex committee members would be able to stand for re-election, but if more than 80% of them actually were elected only the first 80 'past the post' would be eligible to take up their positions.

They could then simply take up their position along with the 20% of new delegates who got the most votes, or a new election could be held on the understanding that only these first 80% were allowed to stand from the new delegates on the old committee.

This needn't get too complicated as most of the time the original vote would probably re-elect less than 80% anyway, with the mechanism described above only coming into play if it didn't. Also, the great beauty of Don's system (the ability to gradually adopt rotation could apply to this system as well, with the number being reduced when possible from 80% to 75%, etc., down to some figure such as 50%
course of history. Such activity occurs spontaneously and groups are
pushed and pulled into and out of leadership. They are, in the
most basic sense, vanguards. Political organizations might
follow along and help out and gather together people of similar
thinking but the emphasis must be on the debate between the
"average" people in the movements and on the movements themselves.
Again, does this sound like vanguardism?
Given all of this, why has the WSA not gone forward? Are any of
the criticisms of its past or present justified?
Readers should take into account that we were all quite young in
the 1970s and that we grew up without the guidance of any oldtimers
or groups. We "became political" at the end of the 1960s and so
brought to anarchism a hard combination of youth culture, cynicism,
working class orientation, machismo and leftism. We were alternately
activists and isolated kids playing at revolution.
The WSA, and even its preceding groups, were small and given to
splitting over obscure matters. Not all of us were so confident
about leaving the Anarchist-Communist Federation as we may have
appeared to be at the time. We seriously misjudged the militancy of
the mid-1970s as permanent. We reacted to other groups rather than
assume responsibility. We waffled on the questions posed by feminism,
technology, councilism, Spain and determinism. We allowed the ethnic
consciousness of New York to distort our thinking at many key points.
We took ourselves too seriously.
The WSA failed to become a crossing point for movements and experience.
At a certain point its theoretical work was sacrificed for debates
with the IWW and dead end projects which imitated the left. In the
end, the WSA developed its own variety of leftism.
Around the WSA the fascination with being anti-party became a fascin-
ation with being anti-intellectual. "Anti-party" people now look as
sectarian and dogmatic as does any member of the Spartacist League.
In its own way, the anarchist movement has joined the left by being
anti-left. Readers should not make the mistake of judging the WSA and
their detractors without judging the larger left and the hangovers of
the past which influence them all. Take into account that our intentions
were good and that our work taught us a great deal. Remember that we
DISCUSSION BULLETIN
P.O. Box 1564, Grand Rapids, MI 49501

REPORT #29

April 29, 1988

Members of the DB Committee

Dear Comrades:

Somehow we made it through DB 29 without having to resort to deficit spending. Our financial condition, I suppose, will never become stable; that's just not the way things are with publications like this. Still, I'd like to avoid going into the red for the next issue, DB30. With that in mind, about half of the subs expire, and we should have no financial pain with DB31 and the next two or three issues. So-o-o, if your sub carries an R50, please consider renewing now to get us over the hump.

CONTRIBUTIONS

From March 2, 1988, to April 29, 1988, we received the following contributions: Ken Smith $15.30; Ben Perry 53; Michael Zelenski $12.55; Sam Leight 52; Tiziano Galante $4.49; Bob Rossi 43; Jeff Stein 92; Monroe Prusseck 810; N. Morgan 91.18; Florida reader 85; Valentine McEntee 910; Harry Wade 820; Mike Sutker 93; George LaForest 5. Total $123.40. Thank you, comrades.

FINANCES

Balanced March 2, 1988 $15.29

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Fraternally submitted,

Frank Girard
for the DB Committee
did fairly well with our limited resources and our half-open minds. Ask yourselves what kind of organization is needed now and look carefully around you to find the source of such an effort.

Best Wishes,
Bob Rossi

Dear Discussion Bulletin,

I'd like to thank Frank Girard for giving anarcho-syndicalists a chance to air our differences with the Workers Solidarity Alliance, even though he has restricted us from talking about specific misdeeds of members of that group. Many of WSA's recent recruits have been misled into believing that WSA was formed to promote anarcho-syndicalism. We are grateful to have a chance to explain anarcho-syndicalist ideas and clear up the confusion.

Unfortunately Frank has also fostered the argument that we are arguing on behalf of the IWW. The network which has been formed around Libertarian Labor Review is anarcho-syndicalist, and independent of the IWW. Some of us belong to the IWW but not all of us. We support the IWW to the extent that it lives up to its own traditions of revolutionary unionism, as we feel all anarcho-syndicalists should, but reserve the right to criticize it when the IWW diverges from its principles. We do not object to the WSA because it "criticizes" the IWW, but because the WSA seeks to substitute the IWW's revolutionary unionism with an opportunist approach to the labor movement (ironically similar to the CNT "renewados" split in Spain). The 1986 Convention of the IWW condemned the WSA for its disruptive sectarianism, and we agree with that assessment.

Our main ideological differences are over the issue of revolutionary unionism vs. trade union reform, and anarchism vs. anarchist-Marxist synthesis. It is our feeling that our positions on these questions are closer to the original positions of the IWA (the revolutionary syndicalist international) than are those of the WSA. Martin Comack has (not to mention the IWA's) references (to workers' councils). WSA's emphasis is on trade union reform, not on building councils or revolutionary unions. All attempts at building revolutionary labor organizations are postponed indefinitely, lest they offend other trade union reformers. Yet to give WSA's more ideological recruits the impression that reformist efforts will someday, somehow lead to something revolutionary, WSA often borrows rhetoric from the council communists. Revolutionary labor organizations, they say, can only be organized in the midst of the revolution itself. This lets WSA off the hook, allowing them to continue their trade union work while assuring their more radical recruits that "come the revolution" WSA will shift into more revolutionary activity.
If we are going to ever have revolutionary labor organizations, anarcho-syndicalists believe that the foundations must be laid now, not postponed way off to the future. Engaging in reformist organizing while waiting for "objective conditions" to change is basically a marxist strategy. We do not ignore external influences nor the dismal times we live in, but anarcho-syndicalists have always pointed out the possibility and necessity for workers to make social change consciously, not as mere dialectical materialist pawns. We reject the notion that "revolutionaries" bogged down in the morass of pro-capitalist business unionism, will either recognize the revolution when it begins or be able to alter their reformist course if they do. We do not oppose the formation of councils, factory committees, solidarity networks, or any other attempt at building self-managed revolutionary labor organization. But we think that rebel workers need to go beyond abstract theory and start making these a reality. Talk is cheap.

It is ridiculous for Tom Wetzel to claim that trying to form revolutionary unions is to force a preconceived notion on the working class. We have certainly not put guns to anyone's head. How does any organization get built without individuals deciding ahead of time what they want to do? The AFL was a preconceived idea in 1886. The CIO was a preconceived idea in 1935. (Wetzel doesn't seem to have any problems belonging to those groups.) Even the CNT was preconceived in 1911. The WSA's lukewarm suggestion that it is now okay for workers to form "self-managed libertarian unions" is also a preconceived notion, since these hardly exist in the U.S. Wetzel's whole line of argument is just one more rationalization for not organizing labor along revolutionary lines.

On one level, however, I sympathize with Wetzel and the WSA. It must be difficult to be all things to all people and still do what you want to do: to print articles in your journal calling for a "synthesis of anarchism and marxism" and then have to disavow it later, to make official reports to the IWA and then say later that these were just the views of one of your affiliates, to make the most outrageous and groundless accusations against the IWW or others and later say these were just comradey criticisms. It would make me nervous to be in a group that forced me to justify every political twist and turn by pretending that each new twist was what we meant all along, that every inconsistency and contradiction was really a sign of pluralism and undogmatic thinking. To be in such a group requires a lot of nerve and a strong stomach.
Dear DB:

In DB #27 Jeff Stein takes me to task for various things, and so I would like to respond. To begin with I would point out that Jeff is wrong to take my remarks about free sharing and consumption vouchers in previous DBs as indicative of anything about USA's positions. The views about these matters in my letters were tentative ideas that express only my own opinion.

Stein's way of characterizing my position makes it sound as though advocacy of a market society ("mixed market syndicalism") is my intention. However, I stated quite plainly that what I was trying to do was to solve certain problems in libertarian communism, as traditionally conceived, without reconstituting a market society. Thus, if it could be shown that my proposals would lead us back to a market society, I would consider that to be conclusive reasons for me to abandon those ideas and go back to the drawing board. What Stein needs to do is to provide some proof that a "consumption vouchers" system would lead back to a market society.

Moreover, Stein needs to go back and read what I said because he attributes to me things I never said. For example: "individual workplaces would compete for consumer income and workers would be rewarded according to their productivity (or according to how well their plant competes)." On the contrary, I explicitly said that the issue of how workers get their "consumption vouchers" was a question not going to discuss. I left it open that "consumption vouchers" might simply be automatically distributed in equal numbers to all people, regardless of any measures of work performance.

I think it is possible to use information about what people "spend" their "consumption vouchers" to obtain as a guide for the overall distribution of resources and labor within a unified production system, in order to have people working in ways that will best satisfy people's desires and thus avoid wasted efforts. But this does not require that we say that each plant is "on its own", like a capitalist business. If each plant WERE made into a private enterprise, in this sense, then I think that it would not be long before capitalism reappeared. For, some plants would go broke and there would be nothing to stop members of existing plants from hiring them as wage-labor, with lower wages and/or less rights than people already working in those plants. A class system could, thus, evolve out of such a "market syndicalist" setup.

Stein chastizes me for allegedly advocating "market syndicalism" but then starts talking as if the economic relations developed during the Spanish revolution were the embodiment of his ideals. Now, this is a contradiction, for the Spanish collectives certainly did not abolish either the market or money.

It's true that the anarcho-syndicalist unions that were in the strongest position (entertainment, railways, marine transport, furniture making, public utilities, etc) "syndicalized" their
industries in certain regions, mainly Catalonia, where they were strongest. Though this eliminated competition between small firms in the same industry, they were not able to go so far as to re-make society without market relations.

For example, the woodworkers union, which closed down all the mom-and-pop cabinet making shops and concentrated production in two new factories, adopted as their goal that of "making durable furniture for the working class at reasonable prices." This program reflects the transitional nature of the social situation, caught between the capitalist society they were trying to overcome and the classless, communist society they wanted to build. For, obviously, the relationship between the woodworkers and the rest of the workforce was mediated by market relations. Though use-value was their aim ("durable furniture for the working class") production was still regulated by the market economy ("reasonable prices"). The wood industry union, moreover, paid its members a wage so that they could then go out and purchase the product of the other industries.

Inequality between collectivized or "syndicalized" enterprises was a serious problem. To begin with, the unions that were in a weaker position (e.g., the department store union, the textile union) were not able to "syndicalize" (i.e., unify under union management) the various workplaces that had been seized at the outset of the revolution. So, the public utilities union or the railways union might be able to pay its members a higher wage than (say) the department store or textile collectives. (The situation in the textile industry was particularly significant as it was the largest industry in Spain at the time, apart from agriculture.)

A number of CNTers were highly critical of the problems created by workers running plants as enterprises in a market economy. For instance, Josep Costa, who was secretary of the CNT textile union in Badalona, had this to say about the collectivization of the textile industry in nearby Barcelona:

"We didn't see the Barcelona textile collectives as models for our experience. Individual collectivized mills acted there from the beginning as though they were completely autonomous units, marketing their own products as they could and paying little heed to the general situation. It caused a horrific problem. It was a sort of popular capitalism."

Even Horacio Prieto, prominent in the moderate (pro-Popular Front) wing of the CNT, had this to say:

"The collectivism we are living in Spain is not anarchist collectivism; it is the creation of a new capitalism....Rich collectives refuse to recognize any responsibilities, duties or solidarity towards poor collectives."

Moreover, Stein talks as if the "family wage" were somehow a progressive step. In fact it was thoroughly patriarchal. The "family wage" was not a new development but had been a tendency since the 19th century in industrial capitalist societies, to ensure that capital would have a new generation of workers. Raising children was a social
requirement and cost of the system. To avoid having to pay for this themselves (by providing childcare, say), capital exploited the patriarchal tradition of having women be the primary child raisers. The tendency was to pay men a wage sufficient to have a wife at home to take care of the man and their children. The "family wage" thus was an expression of the subordination of women. Anyway, it is hardly consistent for Stein to say that the Spanish anarchists during the Civil War were trying to do away with the market and, in the next breath, talk about the marketing of labor (that's what "wage" means).

The original goal of the Spanish anarcho-syndicalist movement, constantly repeated in the years leading up to the Civil War, was "libertarian communism," a "socialization" of the economy. This would mean that everyone would have a right to share in the society's total product and what is produced would not be geared to what sells but to what is useful to people, as decided by workers themselves through a democratic process.

The needs and collective desires of the populace would be articulated through a process of collective decision-making that would begin with assemblies of the workers in all the workplaces. These assemblies would discuss and decide on proposals about the society's priorities for production, and they would elect delegates to take these proposals to regional and national worker Congresses, which would develop plans and priorities that would govern the entire economy.

In order to do away with the market economy, it is essential that the economy be unified in this way. If there is not a congress of the whole workforce from all industries, then how will the workers in the garment plants know how many shirts to make (say)? How will it be decided whether resources should be shifted from (say) building houses to building hospitals? How will workers be shifted from industries that have a surplus (from the point of view of society's current priorities) to those most in need of increased production? If the economy is not unified in something like the way the Spanish anarcho-syndicalists proposed, the only alternative would be the market as the means for "telling" workers in the various industries what they should produce.

Stein objects to my insistence on this unification, and, instead, talks about "voluntary" relations between the various units of the economy. I believe that Stein's position, if carried out in practice, would necessarily lead to a market system. For, if the various workplaces and groups of workers are not bound to carry out instructions from a democratic, collective rendering of the society's desires, then we're left with a system where the activities of each workplace are limited only by what they can get by selling their product, i.e. a market society.

For example, if the community decides that it wants the subways and buses to run all night, it is not "voluntary" for the transport workers to carry this out. Under libertarian communism it is mandatory.
Why did the Spanish anarcho-syndicalists end up with a "market syndicalist" set up instead of libertarian communism? Stein doesn't tell us. The explanation I offered was in terms of the Spanish union movement's inability or unwillingness to overthrow the capitalist state. As the upshot of a series of union assemblies (local and regional conferences) on July 26th-21st in Catalonia, the anarcho-syndicalist movement essentially decided to put off overthrowing the government until Franco was beaten.

Whatever the reasons or explanation for that decision, I believe it explains why Spain got market syndicalism instead of an integral socialization of the economy during the Civil War. A libertarian communist organization of society requires unification of the WHOLE economy (not just unification within single industries), and to achieve this would mean overthrowing the state whose authority would be eliminated if the whole society were run by means of the assemblies and congresses envisioned in the original CNT program.

But the rank and file in the various local unions had seized their places of work at the outset of the Civil War. So the Spanish anarcho-syndicalists were thus confronted with a dilemma: What to do with the worker-managed workplaces if they couldn't unify the economy as originally planned? The inevitable result was market self-management.

Stein is mistaken when he tries to insinuate that I was referring to a "workers state" when I talked of a "single democratic organism." "Single" here means UNIFIED, in the manner explained above. It does not mean that there would not be self-governing components of society at the level of the local community, workplace, etc. The sort of unified organization of society that was advocated by the CNT before the Civil War, and which I have also advocated in these pages, would not be a state for the following reasons:

1. The congresses of worker delegates would not consist of professional politicians but workers from the shopfloor, representing the views of the workforce in their industry and/or region.

2. Coordinating bodies existing between sessions of the worker congresses would not be top-down executives but would be limited to merely carrying out the decisions of the congresses. They would also be subject to mandatory rotation from office after a brief term.

3. There would be no top-down hierarchy from the coordinating or administrative bodies to the various industries. Each industry would be self-managed, not on the basis of production for the market, but as a kind of sub-contract from the whole society.
Dear Frank

Since the debate between the Guildford SEGB & Adams is not unknown in anarchist circles may I intervene. Both fail to be specific. Guildford started off by talking of a large number, short of a majority, and one envisaged that their plan was intended when the SEGB had got about 42% of the vote. They then spoiled things by adding proposals as to what the SEGB should be doing now - when they would be doing very well if they got 0.042% of the national vote. Adams answers Guildford again with no apparent conception that circumstances might be important.

Let us be a little more specific. It is possible that not merely 42% of the population would be socialist (whether the capitalist state would have banned the SEGB before it reached that stage is a question to be answered on another occasion.) It is possible that these socialists might be somewhat more militant in industrial & other struggles than their party's reputation might suggest; and so major struggles throughout industry would be being waged.

Now if we say that the print capitalists would number somewhere around 5% at most; that the petit-bourgeoisie & salariat who consciously support the capitalists might amount to a further 10%; that police and similar agents of capital, the bribed supporters, & deluded (such as fascists) would probably bring the score up to 20-25%; & that therefore a majority of the non-socialist majority are undecided rather than anti-socialist

In such circumstances I would suggest a strategy such as Guildford's would help polarize things, would contribute to the political conversion of the 25-30% undecided, and though it would certainly not avoid a decisive break (indeed it would provoke it); and it would be a somewhat more appropriate way of proceeding than the SEGB's normal electoral-fetishism. But it would need to be in such circumstances.

Richard Laubach

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Stein's position on unification of the economy is, like his whole approach, inconsistent. For Stein realizes that the unification of individual industrial industry is necessary to eliminate inequalities of production, and that this could not be a state & that there must be ideological conflict to keep the state in its essential function of an exploiting class. It would be, in the hands of the organizations, put together by the coordinating administrative bodies could use armed power to reconcile conflicts, like his whole approach, inconsistent. For Stein realizes that the unification of individual industrial industry is necessary to eliminate inequalities of production, and that this could not be a state & that there must be ideological conflict to keep the state in its essential function of an exploiting class.
Dear Comrades,

I hope the Discussion Bulletin's contributors and readers will forgive me for filling up so much valuable space on a topic I'm sure many of you will regard as a bit esoteric, but my reasons for doing so should soon become obvious. I am writing as someone who has had a hand in researching, writing and publishing Class War on the Home Front, the Wildcat pamphlet on the Anti-Parliamentary Communist Federation reviewed in DB 27, and because Laurens Otter's shocking attack (in DB 28) on Wildcat's political honesty and the historical integrity of our pamphlet simply cannot be allowed to pass unanswered.

In his letter Laurens Otter put forward six criticisms of the pamphlet. The fourth one of these I accept - i.e. his correction of our description of the attitude hypothetical SPGB Parliamentary 'delegates' would adopt in the absence of a Socialist Parliamentary majority. However, the rest of his criticisms, as I hope to show, can only be described as utter gibberish. In fact, for Laurens Otter to claim that the Wildcat pamphlet shows "remarkable carelessness" or "doubtful honesty" is the grossest effrontery, since these are insults which could be applied with far more aptness to his own letter.

The numbered paragraphs that follow correspond to the order of the rest of his original points.

[1] This criticism alleges that Wildcat has turned one George Plume, so-called "editor of Solidarity", into a 'non-person', on account of our supposed "embarrassment at his subsequent political evolution", rather in the manner that Stalinist rewriters of history obliterate their former allies-turned-opponents. The plain fact is, however, that while George Plume was an occasional contributor of articles to the APCF's paper Solidarity, he was never the editor, so Wildcat could hardly have "dethroned" him from a position he did not occupy. Still less would we have done so for the sinister reasons ascribed to us by Laurens Otter.

[2] The second criticism states that the pamphlet over-simplifies the APCF's history, neglecting (a) its founder-members' political activities before coming together in the APCF, and thus the way their views were formed independently of the "Continental Left Communists" with whom they later came into contact, and (b) the APCF's relations with the London Freedom group in the 1930s.

Neither of these criticisms are valid.

With regard to point (a), in a pamphlet mainly devoted to the Second World War years it was not felt appropriate to go into minute detail about events which had taken place 20 or more years previously. However, the pamphlet's account of the formation of the APCF, while certainly condensed (as might be expected from an introduction prominently titled 'Brief History of the APCF'), is nonetheless accurate. Furthermore, it is clearly explained (on p.8) that the APCF saw their views "as a continuation of the pre-1914-18 war anti-parliamentary tradition" in Britain, that even after coming into contact with the European left communists the APCF continued to draw most of its anti-parliamentary arguments from the pre-war movement", and that "the dual influence of European council communism and British anti-parliamentarism largely accounts for the distinctive character of the group" (emphasis in original). So what is Laurens Otter complaining about?

As for point (b), contrary to Laurens Otter's statements the APCF did not "merge" with the London Freedom group, nor was Solidarity printed by the latter as a joint publication of these two organisations. I have before me one of the earliest issues of Solidarity, dated August 1938. Its masthead reads as follows:

SOLIDARITY
ADVOCATE OF WORKERS' REVOLUTIONARY UNITY
Incorporating "Advance" (which merged with "Freedom" to form "The Fighting Call"), and "The Workers' Free Press"
The first issue of Advance was published by the APCF in May 1936. In October 1936 the APCF and the London Freedom group suspended publication of their respective journals in order to publish "In Confederacy" (as they put it) The Fighting Call, a bulletin, printed by the APCF in Glasgow, publicising the cause of the CNT-FAI in the Spanish Civil War. But while the two groups' publications could be said to have "merged", there was no unification between the two organisations, each of which maintained its own independent identity. This is explained in an editorial in the fifth and last issue of The Fighting Call (dated 1st May 1937), which acknowledged that the paper's function had been largely superseded by the emergence of Spain and the World, and that "After this issue, therefore, the "Fighting Call" will be discontinued and the London comrades and the APCF will be free to resume the publication of their respective journals...". This is exactly what the APCF proceeded to do, bringing out further issues of Advance, followed by the Workers' Free Press (September 1937-May/June 1938), and then Solidarity. At the foot of the back page of the early issues of Solidarity it is clearly stated that the paper is "Published by the APCF, printed by Voluntary Labour at 31 Rosehall Street, Glasgow". So, the London Freedom group clearly had no part in either printing or publishing Solidarity.

Incidentally, while making these false statements Laurens Otter also says that during the Second World War the APCF changed its name to the "Revolutionary Workers' League" (RWL). This is also untrue. The title assumed by the APCF after October 1941 was the Workers' Revolutionary League (WRL). This confusion is due to the BML and the WRL is not as trivial as it may appear, since the WRL was at that time already the name of a quite separate organisation i.e. that of the Socialists in the USA.

5 Here Laurens Otter accuses Wildcat of "trying to rebuild a barrier" between the anarchist and Marxist components of the APCF. But what motive would Wildcat have for wanting to do this? After all, Wildcat's first ever published statement of principles declared that "The political tradition to which Wildcat belongs... attempts to combine the best elements of anarchism and Marxism" - a conscious echo of the opening paragraph of the APCF's own 'Principles & Tactics', which are reprinted in full on pages 12-18 of the Class War on the Home Front pamphlet. Wildcat later dropped this formulation on the grounds that it was too vague and imprecise. We have never uncritically accepted nor blindly rejected the whole of either anarchism or Marxism. The real issue is not anarchism versus Marxism, but capitalisms versus communism - a dividing line which historically cuts straight through both the 'anarchist' and 'Marxist' camps alike.

Laurens Otter also says that Wildcat "trot out the hoary old Leninist myth that because anarchists want to destroy the state, that this means that they merely ignore it and so are in fact less anti-statist than those who merely wish to capture it for their own ends." I am completely baffled as to where he gets this from. I have carefully re-read the pamphlet, and can find nothing in it which states anything of the sort.

5 The fifth criticism is founded (extremely shakily) on this opening assertion: "Wildcat states that council communists have always accepted the need for a transitional state, & elsewhere that the APCF always did." It is in fact, what the pamphlet actually says is this: "All council communists, including the APCF, accepted the need for some kind of transitional workers' state immediately after the revolution, although in a very different sense from that understood by the Bolsheviks" (p.7). We made this remark in the context of a discussion of the differences between various revolutionary ideologies in the aftermath of the failure of the Russian revolution i.e. the early 1920s. Laurens Otter, however, wrenches this comment out of its historical context, changes its grammatical tense, and then proceeds to read it as a sweeping description of all council communists who have ever
existed for the last sixty or seventy years! Thus, since he has failed to grasp the specificity of our comment, his vague recollections of arguments among French communist groups in the 1950s and 1960s are completely irrelevant to what Wildcat actually wrote.

In his sixth and final criticism Laurens Otter raises the issue of British anarchists' attitudes towards the CNT-FAI during the Spanish Civil War. He claims that Guy Aldred - a once-prominent member of the ACPF who resigned in 1933 and formed the United Socialist Movement (USM) the following year - "had constantly through the civil war" reproduced the arguments of the dissident CNT-FAI group, the Friends of Durruti. However, the formation of the Friends of Durruti group was only announced in March 1937, so how could Aldred have reproduced their arguments "constantly through" a civil war which began eight months earlier in July 1936? Laurens Otter will not find any publication issued by Guy Aldred, nor by the ACPF for that matter, which is not full of uncritical adulation towards the CNT-FAI until February 1937 at the very earliest.

Laurens Otter also complains that "The suggestion that the Bilan group was in some way unique in its criticisms of the CNT-FAI is just nonsensical." Yet the pamphlet makes no such claim of "uniqueness". What it states is this: "Very few other groups /apart from the USM/ took up a similar stance at this time /i.e. revolutionary opposition to a capitalist war/, notable exceptions being the International Council Correspondence group in the United States and the Bilan group in France." (p.30). In no way does this necessarily exclude the other groups Laurens Otter mentions (though his description of Hugo Oehler as a "perfectly orthodox Leninist" is unusual to say the least).

I would like to finish by raising the issue of sources. Laurens Otter's letter employs a series of devices which convey an impression of a deep and intimate knowledge of the subjects it deals with: the chummy first-name references to some individuals, the casual unexplained references to others, the personal reminiscences and hearsay ("I can remember...", "I cannot now recall..." - as if he might be able to, given a little time!), and so on. Yet nowhere is he able to cite a single primary source to substantiate any of the statements he makes. The Class War on the Home Front pamphlet, by contrast, was in large part the outcome of many years of painstaking research, during which I endeavoured to track down as much of the original source material as has survived. Funnilly enough, while I was engaged in this research I came into contact with Laurens Otter, and I asked him then if he had any information which might be of use. In his reply, a letter dated 22 July 1983, he stated (and I quote his exact words): "Unfortunately I know remarkably little about the ACPF." His letter in DB 28 shows that this is still the case.

Once again I apologise to the DB's readers and contributors for writing at such length, but sometimes it does take a hammer to crack a nut.

Yours for socialism,

Mark Shipway

c/o Box W, Raven Press, 75 Piccadilly, Manchester, M1 2BQ, England, U.K.

P.S. Copies of the Class War on the Home Front pamphlet are still available from the above address for £1.50 or US$ equivalent (= $2.70 US -- fg)
Dear DB:

Just a brief note to respond to some rather outrageous remarks in Laurens Otter's letter in DB #26. Otter's accusations that we in WSA have a "Leninist past", that we have been advocates of a political party, that we've been (and maybe still are) "a vanguardist organization" are all obvious LIES (unless maybe Otter is confusing us with someone else).

We are an anarcho-syndicalist organization, we've been a part of the anarchist movement for quite a few years, and we have ALWAYS been staunchly anti-Leninist and anti-vanguardist. Though we advocate a political organization, we have NEVER advocated a "party" because we understand the term "political party" to refer to an organization that exists to put a particular leadership in control of a State. Since we are against States, and since we are against top-down control of organizations or society by leaders, we are against "parties", in this sense.

Because he states his accusations in the form of questions, Otter says he is not making "accusations." I would be using the same method if I were to ask "Is Laurens Otter still beating his wife?" and then say "This is only a question, I'm not making any accusations". This is obviously a dishonest method.

Nor does Otter bother to provide any evidence for his accusations. For obvious reasons: There isn't any.

Tom Wetzel
Workers Solidarity Alliance-IWA PO Box 40400
San Francisco, CA 94140

Comrade Bulleteers:

Just wanted to drop in briefly and respond to Rik Winslow's letter in DB28. In suggesting that coordinating DB probably does more good than handing out pamphlets on the street, I didn't want to imply we should stop handing out pamphlets. My point is that the broad spectrum of opposition groups and tendencies needs internal discussion as well as external publicity, and while we've got lots of the latter, there are precious few places for the former. So if DB were to die, it would leave a bigger hole in our chance to change the world than the exit of one propagandist would.

But Rik's letter does raise an important point for me: just how can we spread out messages -- be they anarchist or syndicalist or socialist -- more effectively, so as to get a sympathetic hearing from more people? One must admit that telephone-pole posting, streetcorner newspaper sales, and a pile of journals internal to the movement haven't done very much in this regard. Shop-floor organizing is perhaps the usual idea, but I haven't been on a shop-floor myself for years, and I'll bet a lot of DB readers have never been on one (though I sense that there are more real workers here than in a lot of movement publications). I think I do a pretty good job of spreading various revolutionary and evolutionary ideas within the particular intellectual milieu that I'm a part of, but when it comes to leaping the chasm from there to the working class -- well, I'm fresh out of ideas. And if everyone else is too, we've got a real problem.

Your occasional friendly anarchist,
Mike Gunderloy, 6 Arizona Ave., Rensselaer, NY 12144-4502
(Cont’d from p. 2)

ON CENTRAL AMERICA, A Mutual Aid Alternatives publication by the Free Association. 11 pages, no price, from Mutual Aid Alternatives, Social Justice Center, 33 Central Avenue, Albany, NY 12206. This attractive pamphlet consists of several articles which analyze the Sandinistas and the general situation in Central America from a non-market socialist viewpoint.


Questioning Technology represents the thinking of a branch of anarchism which at times seems entirely at odds with that of most non-market socialists. Zerzan and contributors to this book see the most important source of social problems in technology rather than the continued existence of capitalism. The editors have organized selections from thirty or more authors under three main headings, one dealing with the history of technology and the others with the effects of computers on human relationships and on control of information. These in turn are subdivided by questions which the selections address. Number 2, for instance asks, “Was there a point in history when technology came to dominate the individual? How could this have happened? Two of the four essays addressing this question are “In Search of the Primitive” by Stanley Diamond and “The Death of Nature” by Carolyn Merchant. Number 7 asks “What does one learn from interaction with a computer? How does it affect relationships with people?” This book also deserves a full-length review, and we hope to have one in DB30.

fg