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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Contents</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bulletin Matters</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Publications Received</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Letter from Norway, N.K.</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Review, <em>The Burning Question of Trades Unionism</em> (A Review)</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Letter, Alan Sanderson</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Review by John Crump, <em>Anti-Parliamentary Communism: the Movement for Workers' Councils in Britain, 1917-45</em></td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Letter, Jon Bekken</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Review, <em>Free Is Cheaper</em></td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Communique from India</em></td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Review by Alan Budd, <em>Free Is Cheaper</em></td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Letter, Mick Parkin</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*BULLETTIN MATTERS*

DB34 begins with a letter from Norway in which NK reviews the political and labor history of that country and comments on the present situation of non-market socialism there. We have published his letter in its entirety, but readers interested in a clearer copy or in further information can write to the new publishing venture by our Norwegian comrades, Motiva Forlag, whose address follows the letter. Further evidence of the internationality of non-market socialism appears in the *Communique* of a conference of Indian non-market socialists. Next is a review of the De Leonist Society's review of De Leon's *The Burning*.
Question of Trades Unionism. Written by Alan Sanderson, the national secretary of the Canadian SLP until the split in 1978, this short pamphlet is easily the most important theoretical work on De Leon to appear in the last decade. In a letter following the review Sanderson, who received a pre-publication copy of the review, takes issue with some of it ideas. John Crump, whose lucid and provocative discussion of Marxism appeared in DB33, here reviews a history of the Anti-Parliamentary Communist Federation (APCF) by Mark Shipway, one of the authors of Non-Market Socialism. This issue ends with two reviews, one by DB and one from a capitalist journal, of what I believe is a most important book on non-market economics.

Once more we call on readers to send in their articles and letters. Please remember: copy must be typed, single-spaced and have narrow--3/4 inch--margins.

Frank Girard
for the DB Committee

PUBLICATIONS RECEIVED

Missing from our list of pamphlet sources in DB33 was Books, C.P. 283, Lac Magentic, Quebec 3EB 2SF, Canada, which can furnish the following BM Blob publications in small amounts: Like a Summer with a Thousand Julys. 57pp. $3.00; The Bankruptcy of Syndicalism and Anarchism. 8pp. $0.40; International Bankers, Struggle in the Eighties. 6pp. $2.00; The Soviet and Political Trials in the U.K. during The Winter of Discontent. The Strikes and the Fall of the Labour Government (1979/72). by Henri Simon. 14pp. $0.40; Report on the Danish Mass Strike of March & April 1985. 6pp. $2.25; France Goes off the Rails. Nov. 1986-June 1987. 47pp. $1.75; Once Upon a Time There Was a Place Called Nothing Hill Gate.... $2.75. Buyers must send cash and a bit extra for postage.

Capitalism and Class Struggle in the USSR. Subversion Discussion Paper No. 1, 8pp., 50 pence (about $1.00) including postage from Subversion, Box W, c/o Raven Press, 75 Piccadilly, Manchester, M1 2BU, England. "This short pamphlet forms the introduction to a series we are publishing for a conference in the spring of 1989." The preface goes on to say that the main theme of the conference will be the importance of the market and the bureaucracy for capitalism and its enemies.

The Cobas, Italy 1986-88: A New Rank and File Movement. David Brown, 53pp., 1988, No price (try $3.00) from Echanges et Mouvement, BM Box 91, London WC1 N3XX, England. The Cobas were, as nearly as I can see, a spontaneous movement of workers confronted with the coopted union movement in Italy. They were the prime movers in a strike movement that lasted for two years. The pamphlet clearly deserves a longer review, which we hope to have in an upcoming issue.

Spanner. 3 The Mount, Lower Street, Haslemere, Surrey, GU27 2PD, England. Spanner is the name of a project of new twice- yearly publication, described as "A forum for discussing the creation of a new society free from domination by the market, and based on the common ownership and democratic control of the vital means of production of

Cont’d on p. 24
Dear comrades,

Norway is one of the lesser known parts of the world, and things going on here seldom reach international attention. Until now little has happened that should change this. As you will read further on, some important developments seem to be taking place. Therefore there might be no coincidence that this letter is written now.

Even among comrades who are in a favourable position to follow developments here we find a great lack of knowledge. Thus there is no wonder if comrades who don't even understand the local language are quite unfamiliar with our part of the world.

This presentation has a very restricted scope and its aim is to furnish you with some background and information.

Some words about the "revolutionary milieu" in Norway. In 1976 a quite large number of people were in the process of breaking with leftism (mainly anarchism) and gradually constituted themselves into a marxist milieu. Out of this process came some small groups adhering to revolutionary positions. Developing a certain activity both locally and internationally we ended up with one group of about 10 comrades, calling the group Kommunistisk Propagandakjøp (KPL) (Communist Propaganda Group).

In Scandinavia there were a series of conferences between 1976 and 1982, where different groups here in Scandinavia took part. At some of these conferences the ICC and the CWO took part. Towards the end of this period the ICC section in Sweden was formed.

The KPL and most of this Scandinavian milieu disintegrated. Today we are only two comrades left here in Norway who hold revolutionary positions and who wish to do something. We constitute no group or circle, but we meet regularly and have a certain common work. At the best of our means we try to keep up international political contacts. As far as we know the other former comrades of the KPL neither have a political activity nor want to have one.

Our address is:

Motiva Forlag
Postboks 9340 Vålerenga
N-0610 Oslo 6
Norway

Fraternal greetings

NK

The Black Death (1348-50) led to the practical extinction of the Norwegian state as an independent state. From then and until 1814 Norway was a part of the Danish kingdom. In this period before the industrial revolution the economical development was taking place mainly in the form of trading and exploitation of natural resources such as fish, timber, and metals. Together with this went a development of merchant shipping. The agriculture is weak because nature is barren. Only about 4 per cent of the territory of present Norway is arable. There are some larger agriculture areas, but also lots of small plots where a family could hardly make a living.

In 1814 Norway was transferred from the Danish to the Swedish kingdom, and in
this process the Norwegian bourgeoisie fought to establish an independent national state. This was partly successful as Norway from 1814 was a state in union with Sweden, having its own constitution and parliament. From the late 1840’s modern industry grew up; first in the form of textile and engineering industry. The invention of producing paper from timber and paper industry from the 1870’s. The next important step in the development of industrial capitalism came with the invention and industrial use of hydroelectric power. Norway is rich on waterfalls and from about the turn of the century these were developed, to a great extent by foreign capital. Factories grew up producing aluminium, fertilizers etc. All this industry has one thing in common; they are situated close to the source of power. Thus along most of southern Norway there are small towns with usually one big factory, and perhaps as little as a few thousand inhabitants.

In 1905 the bourgeoisie finally succeeded in achieving their independent state. It is a small state, having today only a little more than 4 million inhabitants spread out over some 380000 square kilometres of land. Very large scale manufacturing industry does not exist, for instance there is no auto industry; and there are no large concentrations of industry and workers. A large steelworks was only built in the 1940’s and this can be explained by the almost total lack of iron and coal resources.

Since the 1970’s oil production in the North Sea has grown to become an important industry. The oil production is small in relation to world production, but it has become important to the Norwegian economy. Another fairly new industry of importance is the rearing of fish - i.e. the industrial raising of fish; at the same time catching of fish is declining because there is not very much fish left in the seas.

The engineering and shipbuilding industries have been declining for years, and what is left of the shipbuilding industry is almost exclusively producing for the oil industry. As the developments of new oil fields is not very rapid at the moment, this industry is suffering.

The Norwegian merchant fleet used to be one of the largest in the world. For years the number of ships registered in Norway has been falling, and the ships have been transferred to countries with low wages for sailors. To counter this development and to keep a fleet under Norwegian flag, a ship register was established which makes possible the employment of sailors from countries with low wages.

Some statistical illustrations taken from official statistics:
the population is approximately 4.2 million
"       665000 are workers
"     1.2 million are employees
"      800000 are farmers and fishermen
"      2.1 million are children, pensioners, under education

Something like 700000 are employed in the state and municipal sectors. The capital and largest city, Oslo, has 450000 inhabitants. Within 200 kilometres of Oslo lives something like 1.5 million.

Norway is a member of the NATO, and is one of the two NATO countries with a common border with Russia. In the north, few kilometres from the border to
Norway, Russia has one of its most important naval bases and a number of air bases. The Russian North Fleet, perhaps the most important Russian fleet, has its bases here on the Kola peninsula. The North Fleet has a large number of submarines carrying nuclear missiles, and also a large conventional fleet. This northern part of Russia is one of the few which is ice free throughout the winter and with a direct access to the oceans.

One of the main tasks of the Russian naval and air forces in this area is the attack on the Atlantic supply lines of NATO. In the event of war, the larger part of reinforcements and supplies from USA/Canada will have to be carried by sea across the Atlantic. It is supposed to be about 800 shiploads military and 1500 shiploads civilian supplies each month.

"Holst (the minister of defence) said that if NATO should loose a battle over the control of the Norwegian Sea, of which Norway is a very important strategic part, the possibilities of the alliance (i.e. NATO) to be victorious in a battle over the control of the Atlantic will be fundamentally reduced. If NATO should loose the control there, the possibilities of meeting and resisting an attack against the central front in Europe would be seriously reduced. The strategical importance of Norway is inextricably bound up with the supply lines across the Atlantic." (Aftenposten 11.10.88)

US military doctrine in this area is in the process of change. USA is developing a strategy of attacking the North Fleet at its bases or close to them; thus US naval forces will have to go high up in the Norwegian Sea. Earlier the line of defence for NATO was between Greenland, Iceland, United Kingdom; now this line has been pushed closer to Russia. The new strategy is more offensive, and is based on the use of several aircraft carrier groups.

Norway has an agreement with USA whereby a number of Norwegian air fields have been equipped and trained to be used by airplanes from US carriers. Recently it has been known that discussions have taken place between USA and Norway where USA proposes to establish storage of ammunition, fuel and spare parts for its aircraft carriers, and also workshops for repairing their aircraft carriers.

Official Norwegian policy is that in times of peace there shall be no foreign bases or troops permanently in Norway; and there shall be no nuclear warheads. However, the heavy equipment of one US-Marines regiment is stored in Mid-Norway and provisions have been made for sending Canadian, British and Dutch forces. All these forces train in Norway regularly each winter.

The military power of Norway is small. Due to its small number of inhabitants manpower is low, and due to its small economy expenditures on weapons are low.

The first working class organisation of importance was created in 1848, and before it was crushed by the state in 1851 it had some 20000 or more members. At that time there were only about 13000 industrial workers in the country; and many members of this organisation were farm labourers, fishermen, forest workers etc. After being crushed it left very few organisational remains, and only in the 1870's were the first trade unions formed. The trade unions formed a national federation (Landsorganisasjonen - abbreviated LO) in 1899, and already in 1867 they had taken part in establishing the social democratic party. All through its history the trade union federation has been dominated by
social democracy. There have been no other important federation of trade unions for workers; the syndicalists for instance had at its most approximately 3500 members in the early 1920's. Today there are some national federations, mostly for employees and other groups, which are so-called unpolitical and with approximately 450000 members altogether. The LO has today more than 750000 members.

In the years before and during the 1. World War a new and radical tendency grew within the social-democratic party and the trade unions. This tendency took part in the Zimmerwald movement. In 1918 this tendency took the power in the party and the party joined the 3. International in 1919. The whole party broke with the 2. International and joined the 3. International. Only in 1921 did a small "reformist" social-democratic party split off. The labour party was still very much a social democratic party, and in 1923 it broke with the 3. International. In 1928 the first social-democratic government was formed which lasted 3 weeks. In 1935 the party formed government again, and has been in government more or less since then. "Bourgeois" parties have formed government in the 60's, 70's, and 80's, but have not been able to establish themselves in government for longer periods.

The communist party was established in 1923 and declined rapidly. Only in the years immediately after the 2. World War did it have any strength in elections. It used to have some strength in the unions, but today it is weak also there. In 1961 a "third road" socialist party was formed by a split off from the social-democratic party. Together with elements from the communist- and socialdemocratic party it formed a left-socialist party in 1973 which today has some strength. A Maoist party grew up in the late 60's and still exists; though less Maoist and more general leftist. This party still have a daily paper. Trotskyism has never been strong in Norway, a very small group existed in the late 30's. Today two small groups of trotskyist tendencies exists, one sharing the positions of the British SWP and the other comprising supporters of the Mandel tendency and other elements. The extreme left has never been strong here, and many of the tendencies existing internationally does not have any known supporters here.

Trade unions and the laws and customs governing them are different from country to country. I shall therefore give some informations on general conditions and peculiarities of the Norwegian unions.

Usually the unions and employers have agreements running for two years, and usually these agreements have provisions for wage negotiations after one year. Almost all agreements expire in the same year, so that every two years there are negotiations of almost all agreements. In some agreements there are provisions for local negotiations of wages in addition to the national negotiations, in other agreements such local negotiations are outright banned. Traditionally the groups of workers who can negotiate local wage rises have been able to defend their wages better than those who can not have local negotiations. These local negotiations have gradually been restricted; some years ago it was common with two or more each year. Then only one such negotiation was allowed. Then came "suspensions" of this right to negotiations or restrictions on the wage rises allowed. Then this year there was a total ban on such negotiations and local wage rises of any kind.
By law and agreements all strikes are illegal except when there are no valid agreement. This means that a strike is legal only in the period when one agreement has expired and a new one has not yet been decided. Even in this period there exists a lot of rules which conducts the possibilities of strikes, rules for arbitration etc. In practice these means that only the national unions or the union federation can call a legal strike, and this can only be done in the process of bargaining a new agreement. As soon as an agreement is in effect, all strikes are illegal except for short political demonstration strikes which shall be of limited duration and shall not change the wages or working conditions of the workers striking (i.e. all matters ruled by agreements).

All trade union officials - also those at the workplaces - are obliged to try to prevent illegal strikes, and condemn illegal strikes if they should break out. Officials can be prosecuted, fined and/or lose their recognition if officials at the workplaces are elected by the union members, but their status as officials is confirmed by the employers. The employers and withdraw this recognition if the officials do not stand firmly against illegal strikes. Because of these rules trade unions never support illegal strikes, even if the unions in some cases give secret support. At the workplaces the union officials usually resign from their positions if there is an illegal strike that they support. Then it is common that a strike committee is set up, and usually the officials will be found in these committees. Apparently the strikes are not led by the unions, but by an independent strike committee elected by the workers.

The oil industry is as mentioned above rather important to the Norwegian economy. Oil revenues have been able to offset many effects of the crisis, buying Norwegian capital out of most of the effects which the crisis has had internationally. Now this has changed. Oil revenues have declined rapidly with falling oil prices, and the deep crisis of Norwegian economy can no longer be hidden. Now the crisis is hitting Norwegian capitalism, with full force and developing rapidly. "Investments in Norwegian industry rose by approximately 50 billion kroner in the period 1984-87. But this expansion of investments made poor profits. Figures from the Norwegian Bank Association demonstrate that profits from fixed capital ... fell with 1.3 billion kroner in the same period, in spite of the higher investments. This results in a negative profit for these last 50 billion of approximately 2.5%." (Aftenposten 07.09.88)

Overaccumulation has led to large capitals not productively employed being thrown into the fields of speculation. The stock market and the real estate market as well as the building trades saw a boom which ended abruptly in October 1987 with the stock market crash. Much of this speculation was funded on credit. After the sudden collapse in '87, fortunes of speculation capital were destroyed, and unlike in most other countries the stock market has not recovered. Almost all banks are making big losses for the second consecutive year.

Levels of productive investments fell by approximately 20 per cent from 1987 to 1988 and are likely to fall by another 11 per cent from 1988 to 1989, and at the same time existing plants are closed or threatened with closure. Investments in new oil production fields are low, and this has of course its effects on the industry producing oil production platforms and equipment. The
building trades have less work. The newspaper industry is in difficulties; due to large reductions in the earnings from advertisements, the whole newspaper business is in difficulties. At least two papers have already closed down, and even the "richest" newspaper company will have to reduce manning and cut costs. The print industry is in trouble, many companies have closed down this year and many printing workers are unemployed. To give one example of the overaccumulation in the printing industry: The capacity for scanning for the print industry in Norway is supposed to be big enough to fill the demand for scanning of all Western Europe. It is said to be a larger number of scanners in Norway than in Great Britain.

Banking is in difficulties. After two years of heavy losses and expecting losses also next year, the banks have begun to reduce the number of employees. The largest Norwegian bank - Den norske Creditbank - have begun to fire 1050 employees which is one quarter of the staff. Also other banks are firing employees - up to one third of the staff for some of the smaller banks. Several thousand bank employees might lose their job in the near future.

Unemployment is currently more than 54000 and in addition to this more than 20000 are working under special programmes funded by the state. Approximately half of the workers in the textile industry are unemployed, perhaps as many as 30000 building and construction workers will loose their jobs. Figures have been published showing that 89000 workplaces will disappear next year, and that unemployment will reach 100000 this winter.

The last couple of years have seen several struggles by workers against the closing of factories or reductions of the number employed. Because these factories are very often the only important one in the town, the resistance to closure is fought not only by the workers, but by the whole population of the town. In this way the workers resistance has been immediately transformed into a popular resistance, supported by almost everyone in the town. The workers have not been able to develop an independent class response to the attacks. The method of these struggles are very often the sending of delegations to the capital to petition government, parliament and the company owners; with the aim of either to rescue their factory or to demand the development of new industry. Often the companies make the continuation of one plant dependent on the closure of another plant in another part of the country, thus setting the workers of different plants against each other. To give just one example: a major food production company was going to close down one plant. This led to a big resistance by the workers, unions and politicians of that district. The company yielded, but just as the company had decided not to close this plant it immediately announced the closure of another plant in another part of the country. This in turn has produced heavy resistance by the workers of this plant and the district, leading the local trade unions to call a half-day "general strike" by 2200 workers.

Open workers struggles and strikes (except political demonstration strikes) have been few in recent years, and wildcat strikes have been very few. At the end of 1987 there was an illegal strike by kindergarten teachers in Oslo, followed by a countrywide teachers strike at the beginning of this year. Approximately 7000 teachers were on strike at the most. The teachers strike was peculiar in the sense that it was the first wildcat strike I can remember which was not utterly condemned by all of the "establishment". The strike and the situation of the teachers was "understood" or "supported" by forces which usually are
the strongest enemies of illegal strikes, e.g. the press, the leaders of the "bourgeois" parties etc. When workers go on wildcat strikes they usually meet the total condemnation of these same forces. Both these strikes were dominated by the unions even if they were not officially supported by the unions.

Many of the local struggles taking place are not over the questions of wages or layoffs, but against changes of ownership, mergers, and other changes of the company, or against attacks and harassments of union officials. Thus for about half a week in the middle of October the workers and staff in the company that is flying workers to the oil platforms staged a sitdown strike. They struck against harassments of union officials and the proposed merger of this company with another company. The workers feared that this merger would only be for the benefit of the other company (a real estate company) and thus draining resources from their own company. 450 workers in five different towns took part in this strike.

Wages have been declining for several years. This year wage rises were restricted to 1 krone per hour, and a law was passed banning all further rises. This law was protested against by more than 300000 going on a two hour demonstration strike on March 11th. This strike was called by the trade union federations outside LO but also supported by some of the locals of LO. Last year there was no general wage rises and only certain groups of workers with local negotiations managed to get any wage rises. To illustrate the development of wages: figures have been published showing that as many as 250000 families have suffered a yearly reduction of wages of one monthly wage or more.

Many workers have large debts on housing, rates of interest are high, and the rules for tax exemptions for paid interests have been changed to the worse. The level of taxation is one of the highest in the world, both for direct- and indirect taxes. The thinking of the workers will easily be diverted towards for instance questions of taxation and the level of rates of interest.

In addition to the wages, the living standard is constituted by the so called social wage - benefits and services rendered by the state and local authorities. The state is trying hard to reduce this public consumption. Much of these attacks are made through the local administrations. A whole series of attacks are presented as a specific "crisis" of the local authorities and their economies. These attacks are spread out and will be different from one local community to another.

Recently the proposed budgets for next year in the different communities have been published. They have one thing in common: cuts, reductions of services, and higher fees. Throughout the country perhaps as many as 14000 jobs in the state and local administrations will disappear next year. In Oslo for instance large cuts have been proposed, and also reductions of jobs. Also, the government of Oslo has proposed to sell municipal enterprises to private companies. So far this budget has provoked the unions, and they organised a three hour demonstration strike on November the 2nd by some 30000 municipal workers, and a demonstration on the same day with 10000 participants. Other demonstrations have been announced this autumn.

In Halden, a town with approximately 26000 inhabitants, there was a "general strike" on November the 3rd with 10000 on strike and taking part in a demonstration.
The unions had organised this action to protest against the proposed closing down of the local hospital. Even though Halden is only 120 kilometres from Oslo, the newspapers here wrote nothing about this strike. The only exception was the social-democratic daily which carried a small notice.

In Sauda, a small town on the west coast of Norway, 3000 of the 5500 inhabitants took part in a demonstration to protest against the closing of the local hospital on November the 14th.

The real wages have been attacked slowly and in different ways. This might explain why rather big reductions have not produced widespread open responses from the workers. The low levels of unemployment up till recently might also be part of an explanation, many workers think that at least they still have a job even if it is not paid as well as before. The workers have little experience of class struggle. The unions and the left still have a large influence. Perhaps the influence of the union leadership is not as strong as it used to be, but the local trade union officials still have a strong influence. Within the unions and the left there are some initiatives to try and radicalise the unions. An opposition is growing and have organised two national opposition conferences.

REVIEW

The Burning Question of Trades Unionism (A Review), The De Leonist Society [Alan Sanderson], 1988, 18 pp., $0.50 from the DeLeonist Society of the U.S., P.O. Box 22055, San Francisco, CA 94122 or the De Leonist Society of Canada, P.O. Box 944 Station P, Toronto, Ontario M4Y 2N9, Canada.

Alan Sanderson’s “Review” of the 1904 speech in which De Leon projected an American version of syndicalism is the first serious work in DeLeonist theory in several years. Written mainly as a polemic against what he sees as the revisionism of the Socialist Labor Party (SLP), Sanderson attacks the SLP first for its revisionist advocacy of a transition period between capitalism and socialism, advanced in the After the Revolution Who Rules? (1977) and secondly for its decision in 1976 to allow its members to join capitalist unions and intervene as socialists in them.

The transition period aspect of the revisionism Sanderson abominates was a temporary aberration, the product of the National Office, i.e. the then Weekly People staff and National Secretary along with an NEC member, all of whom fancied themselves theoreticians who would take on the Marxist-Leninist Guardian in the columns of the Weekly People. The whole thing lasted about four years and had no real membership support. There was always vocal opposition, even on the National Executive Committee (NEC) which the National Office was able to overcome by virtue of the control it has always wielded. However, by 1980 there was enough NEC opposition to stop a final move, an effort to abrogate De Leon’s statement that the party of revolution must dissolve immediately after the revolution. By this time the prime movers of revisionism were leaving the party; and this aspect of revisionism became a dead letter; in fact it was actually repudiated by the National Secretary in 1981.
Intervention in the union movement was proposed by the N.O. at the 1976 convention and adopted by a substantial majority in a referendum. Although it had a lot of support, few members were in a position to implement it. Today it is a dead letter. The single organized effort, an attempt in 1976 to set up a revolutionary caucus in the education unions, lasted only a year or so before it was disowned by the party, largely because the National Office could not trust any activity it couldn't control directly.

Sanderson explains his choice of The Burning Question of Trade Unionism as the basis for this pamphlet on the grounds that it contains lessons that can serve as warnings against revisionism. The fact that, as he puts it, "...it is also now dated in certain respects," serves, he asserts, to help expose "fraudulent De Leonism." In fact, the pamphlet can be read as supporting both aspects of revisionism that Sanderson is decrying. It calls for what can only be regarded as a period of transition after the revolution "until...the nation shall have had time to reconstruct itself upon a labor, that is, socialist basis."

However, the author correctly points out that the evolution of De Leon's thinking caused him to reversed himself on this matter within months later in Socialist Reconstruction of Society, a speech delivered in 1905, a few days after the founding convention of the IWW. Here De Leon sees the revolutionary industrial unions, engaged in organizing production, as the only necessary form of social organization. The political state would be abolished and the revolutionary political party disbanded.

Less successful is Sanderson's attempt to reconcile his group's opposition to such activity with De Leon's advice to workers to agitate for socialism in their capitalistic unions. His argument boils down to that of every disserter: that times have changed and De Leonists must change their tactics to match. The SLP's prohibition against members joining or—if they had to join to keep their jobs—holding any union office was instituted in 1940, long after De Leon's death in 1914. The SLP's 1976 return to the tactics De Leon advocates in The Burning Question then becomes revisionism by this logic.

The most surprising feature of this pamphlet is what appears to be a revision by Sanderson and the De Leonist Society themselves of the major DeLeonist principle that workers should organize socialist industrial unions (SIUs) now. De Leon argued that by organizing such unions now, workers could resist the encroachments of capitalism, learn about socialism, and build the framework of the new society. SLP literature throughout the Petersen era urged workers to organize politically in the SLP and economically in socialist industrial unions.

This pamphlet, which apparently speaks for the De Leonist Society, announces a new position, one that is in keeping with what it regards as the likelihood that workers will not organize SIUs "until the eve of a revolution—that is, not until the working class is prepared to repudiate capitalism." Again the author pleads changed conditions and—in this reader's estimation—properly argues that the present
condition of capitalism renders futile any hope of improving workers' conditions through struggle.

While I can support most of the De Leonist Society's new positions, I feel that it should realize that the accusation of revisionism can be made against any group that seeks to modify the program De Leon set forth. This well-written, well-reasoned pamphlet is strongly recommended to all readers, not just DeLeonists, in part because it illustrates the difficulty we all have in updating a program associated with a revered thinker.

Dear Mr. Girard:

Thank you for your letter post-dated January 7 enclosing copy of your critique of our pamphlet, The Burning Question of Trades Unionism, A Review, and inviting us to respond. We note that you intend to publish your critique at the beginning of March in the Discussion Bulletin (copy of its prospectus herewith acknowledged) and will include our response if received by mid-February. Also acknowledged is receipt of your two dollars for copies of the above pamphlet. Under separate cover we are sending you four copies at fifty cents each.

As to your critique—we are pleased to reply and will proceed to take up salient points upon which we find disagreement, in the order in which they appear.

1. You state that De Leon's 1904 speech was a speech "in which De Leon projected an American version of syndicalism...." (Our emphasis.) Did he? Not according to De Leon. In his Daily People editorial, "Syndicalism" (See Industrial Unionism, Selected Editorials), De Leon states his opinion that "Syndicalism," properly understood, does not mean "unionism"; moreover that condemnation of it is "imperative" because "any other policy...would have no effect other than the harmful one of furnishing grist to the crack-brained mill of Anarchy." Another point: We do not regard De Leon's projection of Socialist Industrial Unionism as a "version" of anything; we regard it as a completely original concept!

2. You state: "Less successful is Sanderson's attempt to reconcile his group's opposition to such activity [the SLP's "decision in 1976 to allow its members to join capitalist unions and intervene as socialists in them" (your first paragraph)] with De Leon's advice to workers to agitate for socialism in their capitalist unions." (Our emphasis.)

First: Where does The De Leonist Society take the position that Socialists should not join capitalist unions? We recognize that Socialists and their families must eat and that membership in these unions is frequently the price of a job. Moreover, while questioning the opportunities for socialist agitation within capitalist unions, we have never opposed it. What we do oppose is office-holding! in them. We asked ourselves how Socialists could presume to speak for Socialism or remain credible after lending support to or identifying with Socialism's foes--in this case the "labor lieutenants of capital" and their janissaries!

Second: Where does De Leon advise workers "to agitate for socialism
DISCUSSION BULLETIN
P.O. Box 1564, Grand Rapids, MI 49501

REPORT #34
February 23, 1968

Members of the DB Committee

Dear Comrades:

Whether the improved financial condition of the DB is the beginning of a trend or whether it is simply an abnormal but gratifying fluctuation in the financial picture can be answered only by the likes of Marty Feldman, Alan Greenspan, or one of capitalism’s other soothsayers. We will hope for the best. Through your generosity, we managed to climb into the black. But with only four or five subscriptions expiring with this issue, we will again have to depend on contributions to pay for the next issue. After six years in this job, I’m beginning to feel ready to play the part of a televangelist.

CONTRIBUTIONS

From December 24 through February 24 we received the following contributions: Dick Weideman $2; Anonymous $25; Tom Holzinger $22; Lauren Otter $15.81; Ben Doganiero $10; N. Morgan $1.75; Kard Nijensovich $91; Ken Smith $14.15; John Craven $7; Tiziano Salante $13.52; Margaret Bogovich $11; Frank Smith $10. Total $223.27 Thank you, comrades.

FINANCES

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Fraternally submitted,
Frank Girard
for the DB Committee
in their capitalist unions"? Quoting from his *Burning Question* address as follows:

"Accordingly, it must be every Socialist's endeavor to organize his trade. If there is an organization of his trade in existence that is not in the hand of a labor lieutenant of capital, he should join it and wheel it into line with the Socialist Trade and Labor Alliance." (Our emphasis.)

3. You state: "His argument boils down to that of every dissenter: that times have changed and De Leonists must change their tactics to match." Not so! The times have changed, the tactics have not. They remain as De Leon defined them in his *Daily People* editorial entitled *Industrialism* (See *Industrial Unionism, Selected Editorials*). Quoting as follows:

"Industrialism is a trefoil that constitutes ONE leaf; it is a term that embraces three domains, closely interdependent, and all three requisite to the whole. The three domains are Form, Tactics and Goal. The Goal is the substitution of the industrial for the political government; another term for the Socialist Republic; the Tactics are the unification of the useful labor of the land on the political as well as on the economic field; the Form concerns the structure of the organization."

In short, De Leonists have kept in step with changing times not by changing tactics but by updating principles for setting them on foot.

4. As to "the major De Leonist principle that workers should organize socialist industrial unions (SIUs) now." SOCIALIST industrial unions? Would that the working class were class-conscious, therefore could now do so! It should be recalled that what you call a "major De Leonist principle" was repudiated by De Leon and the bona fide SLP following the I.W.W. fiasco—that before the I.W.W. experience the watchword was ORGANIZE, THEN EDUCATE but that after this experience it became EDUCATE FIRST, ORGANIZE AFTERWARD! This very matter is extensively dealt with in a sequel to *The Burning Question* review—a review of De Leon's 1905 address, *Socialist Reconstruction of Society*, now being readied for publication.

And of course the question WHEN begs another crucial question, to wit: Should workers attempt to launch a Socialist Industrial Union on a local rather than on a national scale? The De Leonist Society has adopted the latter position for reasons also thoroughly explained in its *Socialist Reconstruction* review.

5. In your concluding paragraph you say that The De Leonist Society "should realize that the accusation of revisionism can be made against any group that seeks to modify the program De Leon set forth." Taking examples, the implication is that both the SLP and The De Leonist Society have modified the De Leonist program, hence that both can rightly be accused of revisionism. The implication cannot stand. While their principles of conduct differ in a number of notable respects, neither the SLP nor The De Leonist Society has modified the Socialist Industrial Union program as set forth by De Leon in the above-cited passages from his editorial, *Industrialism*—"Industrialism is a trefoil that constitutes ONE leaf...." What, then, is "revisionism" (i.e., not revision
but revisionism!)? The term has acquired a special meaning in political science and this is the sense in which Socialists use it. According to Webster, "revisionism" here means "a movement in revolutionary Marxian socialism favoring an evolutionary rather than a revolutionary spirit."

Connecting the foregoing with your observation (third-to-last paragraph) that "SLP literature throughout the Petersen era urged workers to organize politically in the SLP and economically in socialist industrial unions." Certainly! And the revisionist SLP does likewise. But whereas the bona fide SLP consistently emphasized education and organization FOR THE SOCIALIST GOAL, and held the possible winning of "something now" by such organization as purely incidental to a direct march toward that goal, the revisionist SLP not merely dismisses the hard won lesson, EDUCATE FIRST, ORGANIZE AFTERWARD! but by lending support to workers' day-to-day struggles, denies the urgency of the goal!

Where does The De Leonist Society stand? Taking stock of worsening conditions we concluded that not only could the working class (as a class) henceforth not hope to mount successful resistance to capitalist encroachment (much less wrest further gains from the capitalist class!), but that the closer approach of the terrible dangers threatening civilization has made organization FOR SOCIALISM by far the most urgent task confronting today's workers.

Convinced that our position is sound, we have no difficulty in either defending it or exposing the fallacy of the revisionist. We would hope, in conclusion, that the following excerpts from the article Organizing for Socialism (January, 1989 issue of The De Leonist Society Bulletin) will help clinch the matter:

"The October 8, 1988 issue of The People, organ of the Socialist Labor Party, displays yet again the inebriated, fatally flawed reasoning that swamped the bona fide revolutionary SLP a decade ago. At issue is the question of organizing for Socialism...

"If true [as The People claims] that 'the economic laws of capitalism' fuel unemployment and declining living standards (not to mention 'the future depressions looming ahead')--that is, if indeed 'workers have no future under capitalism'--by what reasoning does The People conclude they could beat both capitalist laws and the capitalist class so as to 'increase' wages and 'improve' conditions?

"On the other hand, if Socialists are indeed 'in a race against time...before the decay of capitalism brings about irreparable global destruction and/or totalitarianism,' why this talk of a 'long-term' struggle 'to abolish the wages system itself'? Why not a short-term struggle? Why not immediate repudiation of the wages system? Why not immediate organization for Socialism?

"It is a case of EITHER--OR! ONE THING OR THE OTHER! Workers who organize for 'a fair day's wage' do not organize for Socialism--Socialism is farthest from their minds. The two aims do not blend; they are incompatible.

"Organization for amelioration made sense when Capitalism was young. It is nonsense when Capitalism is collapsing and taking society down with it. The one thing that makes sense now is revolutionary organi-
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"Organization for amelioration made sense when Capitalism was young. It is nonsense when Capitalism is collapsing and taking society down with it. The one thing that makes sense now is revolutionary organi-
zation—organization for Socialism! De Leonists do not blur the issue; they tell it like it is."

*

Yours truly,

Alan Sanderson

REVIEW

Anti-Parliamentary Communism: the Movement for Workers' Councils in Britain, 1917-25 by Mark Shipway (Macmillan, 1988, 239pp., £29.50)

What sort of books should communists write? Firstly, they should locate their writings within the intellectual territory of communism. That is, they should address the type of questions which are vital for the achievement of communism and, through their writings, engage intellectually, politically and even emotionally with other communists. Secondly, and just as important, they should write in a style which is accessible to any thoughtful member of the wage-earning class, irrespective of the level of education which he or she has received or of previous exposure to communist ideas. In other words, a communist book is one which any wage earner who happens to open it can immediately recognise is speaking to him or her, both in terms of the issues which are being discussed and the straightforward language which the writer employs.

A third feature of communist literature, at least within liberal capitalist states, is that communist authors should attempt to use whatever resources capitalism puts at their disposal for the benefit of communism. Capitalist publishers regard books as commodities, as sources of profit, but the communist writer grasps any opportunity to use such a commodity as a vehicle for expressing the communist alternative to commodity relationships. Similarly, if the communist author can live off capitalist funds (for example, in the form of a student's grant) while writing a communist book, that becomes another means to turn the resources of the capitalist class against the capitalist system.

However, before we all start enrolling as PhD students to write communist tomes at capitalism's expense, a few words of caution are needed. Obviously, not everyone is cut out to be an author, and writing is only one form of activity for communists to engage in, none of which is intrinsically superior or inferior to any other. In addition, no communist should underestimate the difficulties of ploughing a communist furrow within the stony soil of academia. Not only do the universities offer an artificial and enervating setting from which to observe the workings of capitalism, but they also provide an intellectual environment where communism is habitually distorted as yet another project for reforming capitalism and where communists find themselves under an unrelenting pressure to divert their attention to the latest fads provided by a panoply of currently fashionable ideologues. Within such an environment, it takes enormous commitment and strength of mind to stick to one's communist guns and not be diverted.

Against this background, it is hardly surprising that precious
little emerges from academic sources that has any bearing on communism. All the more reason, then, that on the rare occasions when a worthwhile book does appear, communists should recognize the achievement of its author. Mark Shipway's Anti-Parliamentary Communism is based on a PhD thesis which he wrote as a postgraduate student at the University of Manchester, while living on a grant provided by the capitalist state. Since the money for such grants derives from the surplus value which capital wrings out of its wage slaves, in writing a communist book Shipway has effectively siphoned some tiny fraction of capital's profits out of the capitalists' pockets and turned it to the advantage of the wage-earning class. Not only that, but he has written a book which, in an exemplary fashion, meets the other criteria which, we suggested above, communist writing should display. In examining the ideas and the activity of the anti-parliamentary communists in Britain during the period 1917-45, he has chosen a theme which cannot fail to interest those of us who are already committed communists. Yet, at the same time, his book can also serve as an excellent introduction to what communism genuinely means for any wage earner who has previously been hooked on capitalism's ideological bait. Clearly written in straightforward but elegant English, without a trace of academic jargon, here is a book which any wage earner who approaches it with an open mind can read, understand and be inspired by.

The book is an account of two currents of all but forgotten revolutionaries. On the one hand, there is the Workers' Socialist Federation of 1918-24 and, on the other, the Anti-Parliamentary Communist Federation of 1921-41, as well as its various precursors and offshoots. Shipway tackles the account of these two currents by splitting his book into three parts. Part One, which is arguably the most important section of the entire book, is on 'Basic Principles'. Here Shipway is concerned to show not merely how the WSF and ACPF emerged historically, but rather to demonstrate theoretically how they arrived at coherent communist positions by answering the key questions confronting the wage-earning class in the aftermath of the First World War (not to mention today, of course). Obviously, 'anti-parliamentarism' and 'communism' are at the head of the list of Shipway's 'Basic Principles' and he provides clear descriptions of the anti-parliamentarians' grasp of these vital concepts. For example, on communism he writes that this was envisaged as a 'classless, stateless human community based on common ownership of the means of production (which) would also involve production for use, democratic control and free access' (pp. 25-6).

Other 'Basic Principles' were hammered out as the anti-parliamentarians analysed the Russian Revolution, the Labour Party and the Trade Union form of organisation. As far as Russia was concerned, the anti-parliamentarians perceived that the regime 'was not communist, but state capitalist, and that when the communist revolution did arrive the ruling class in Russia would have to be swept aside with all the rest of the world's capitalists' (p. 56). With regard to the Labour Party, the WSP's Workers' Dreadnought warned that 'the Labour Party cannot emancipate them (the workers), because it is merely reformist and will not sweep away the capitalist system when it gets into power' (pp. 69-70), while as Shipway explains:

The basis of the anti-parliamentary critique of trade unionism was
that trade unions organised workers within the capitalist system, as did the Plesse of Labour bargaining with the capitalists over the sale of the commodity labour power. (p. 79)

Part Two deals with the bleak years from 1925 to 1935 during which the wage-earning class experienced numerous setbacks and the anti-parliamentarians suffered defections and splits. Notwithstanding the difficulties posed by this period, however, the anti-parliamentarians refused to compromise with the forces of capitalism and maintained their commitment to communism. Shipway pays them the deservedly handsome comment that:

To their credit...they did not become disillusioned and drop out of the struggle. To the best of their abilities they carried out the essential tasks of keeping the idea of communism alive, and nurturing the basic principles born from previous periods of struggle. (p. 126)

Finally, in Part Three, Shipway shows how the anti-parliamentarians relied on their principles and experience to denounce the lies of the capitalists and their lackeys when another generation of wage earners was marched into the slaughterhouse in the Second World War. While the Labour Party, Communist Party and trade unions, as well as the avowed supporters of capitalism, urged workers to murder one another, the APCF appealed:

Workers! The Capitalist system - production for Profit instead of for use - is the cause of War!...ALL the Capitalists are aggressors from the workers' point of view. They rob you until you are industrial 'scrap', and will sacrifice you 'to the last man' to defend their imperial interest! (p. 169)

Some readers of this review may form the impression that the story that Shipway has to tell in Anti-Parliamentary Communism is an essentially depressing one. After all, here is an account of an entire generation of revolutionaries who, despite their best efforts, were unable to defeat capitalism. The mass of wage earners remained indifferent to the anti-parliamentarians' 'Basic Principles', preferring to slaughter one another in war rather than join in a common effort to destroy the capitalist system. Paradoxically, however, the cumulative impact of Shipway's account is an inspiring one. Among the anti-parliamentary communists, the most famous individual was Sylvia Pankhurst. With an eye to their profits, Macmillan have seen to it that Pankhurst's photograph appears on the dust-cover. Yet the Pankhurst who appears in these pages is not the famous suffragette or anti-fascist, but the unfashionable communist Pankhurst of the period 1918-24. Even during this period, however, it is the less well-known Guy Aldred rather than Pankhurst who is the more consistent and clear-sighted articulator of communist ideas. In later years, isolation and disappointment took their toll of Aldred, so that towards the end of his life he became, to put it charitably, not a little eccentric. Yet, again, the good sense of communist ideas ensured that there would be ordinary working men and women, in the ranks of the APCF and elsewhere, to articulate them coherently and impressively. The overall moral of Shipway's account is that anti-parliamentary communism is not an episode in the history of the wage-earning class that belongs to the period
1917-45. Rather, since anti-parliamentary communism is a reaction to capitalist irrationality and inhumanity, for as long as capitalism lasts it is bound to occur and re-occur as a protest within the wage-earning class and as a vision of a better world.

Mark Shipway has written a book which any communist could be proud to have written. All communists are in his debt and, although it was far from being Shipway's purpose in writing *Anti-Parliamentary Communism*, he has carved out a niche for himself in the history of the movement for working class emancipation.

One final word: any wage earner who is put off by the book's exorbitant price should reflect on the fact that free access is a principle of communism.

John Crump

Fellow Workers,

It is impossible for productive discussion/debate with someone who constantly shifts his ground, and who consistently displays the reckless disregard for facts that pervades Wetzel's writing. His latest, wherein he strips Marx's base/superstructure model of its core ideas in order to render it compatible with "libertarian social realism" is a case in point. Rather than join Wetzel in pointless debate, I will confine myself to refuting the lies and distortions in his concluding paragraph.

*Libertarian Labor Review* has consistently opposed the renewados, a minority splinter group which seeks to steal the CNT's name and funds (going so far as to issue newspapers under the same title and flag), and which recently bombed CNT-AIT offices in Sabadell (an incident which passed without comment by WSA, but which we reported in LLR #3). Nor are we in an alliance with Guy Cheverton or the syndicalist network of which he is a part, as is clear to anyone who has read the exchanges between Cheverton, the Direct Action Movement (DAM--British anarcho-syndicalists) and ourselves in LLR's letters columns (#3 & #4). We have repeatedly criticized the Hull group--both in LLR and in their *Syndicalist Bulletin*--for the disputed issue, for improperly disposing of DAM assets, and for their support of the renewados.

Nor did we "inspire Cheverton to introduce a motion... in favor of WSA's expulsion from the IWA." We, along with several other North American anarcho-syndicalists, did send an open letter to the IWA/AIT and its sections deploring the decision to admit WSA (then the Libertarian Workers Group) and calling for an international investigation into this sordid sect. PW Cheverton then wrote IWW headquarters asking for further information, which was provided. Hull DAM was understandably distressed to receive irrefutable evidence that the WSA includes embezzlers in its ranks, is overtly hostile to the IWW (with which the IWA/AIT maintains fraternal relations) and to revolutionary unionism (and has repeatedly slandered the IWW and its officers), and opposes the basic
principles upon which the IWA/AIT is founded. They therefore
introduced a resolution, on their own initiative, to the DAM’s
national congress to put DAM on record as supporting an
investigation into these charges by the IWA/AIT. (Wetzel is
probably correct, however, in assuming that such an investigation
would inevitably result in WSA’s expulsion.) This action was
hardly sudden or secretive, as all the issues Hull DAM addressed
had been the subject of prolonged correspondence between the IWW
and the IWG and most had been raised either in the open letter or
in the pages of the Industrial Worker. Upon learning of Hull DAM’s
action, by the way, WSA’s national secretary wrote the DAM (on June
5, 1986) demanding "disciplinary action" against Hull.

Abundant documentation of all of this is readily available. The
WSA relies on the ignorance of its victims, and the reluctance of
our comrades to take on the unpleasant task of exposing and
confronting them, to survive. No rebel worker familiar with the
evidence could consider the WSA anarcho-syndicalist or condone its
actions.

Jon Bekken, Box 2024 Station A
Champaign, IL 61820

REVIEW

Free Is Cheaper by Ken Smith, 240 pp., Clothbound, L12.95 from John
Ball Press, Sheepoote, Folly Lane, May Hill, Gloucester GL17 8NP,
England

Ken Smith has written the ultimate economics book for non-market
socialists. Unlike Marx’s Capital, which concentrates on the big
picture of how capitalism works—and doesn’t work—Smith’s book spells
out the effects of four centuries of market capitalism on the slaves,
the masters, and the Earth. Above all, his book deals with the kinds
of facts that any reader can understand and from which he can draw
conclusions. Examples are in the advance notification flyer that
accompanied the copy received here:

"It takes longer today for a carpenter or bricklayer to earn the
price of a pound of meat or a housebrick than it did five centuries
ago. Where has the money gone? The rich are still rich but not as
rich as they were, so they haven’t got it. The poor are not so much
better off as to account for the loss. The answer, says Ken Smith in
‘Free Is Cheaper’ lies in our economic system”

"This system, the Market Economy as our author calls it, from small
 beginnings at the end of the Middle Ages, has come to dominate life in
every corner of the world. But it has brought with it increasingly
unacceptable costs. The crime industry, war preparation, bureaucracy,
the sales effort—these and other non-productive activities absorb the
efforts of nine tenths of the population and are growing faster than
productivity itself. Meanwhile the disadvantaged—women, children, the
old, racial minorities, and the unemployed suffer unnecessarily."

"The only answer, he says, is production for need and not for sale—
Cont’d on p.21
The Communiqué below was sent to us by a Discussion Bulletin reader in Faridabad, India, who is connected with the periodical Kamunist Kranti. Readers interested in more information should write to Bhupender Singh, 879 Jawahar Colony, Faridabad - 121001, India.

COMMUNIQUE

A few people from different parts of India met on 10-11 September 88 at Faridabad for the second time with the aim of taking steps towards the formation of a revolutionary group in India—a revolutionary group that would contribute positively to the constitution of a world communist party and the communist revolution.

The discussion was centered around the fundamental problems that the revolutionary movement is facing and the steps to overcome them.

The following broad understanding has been reached: -- Capitalism is an historical and social relation. Surplus value extraction/wage-labour-based commodity production is the essence of capitalism.

-- Capitalism is a world system. A world communist system alone is the alternative to it. The harnessing of productive forces for human welfare can be done at the global level alone.

-- The destruction of capitalism is possible only through a revolutionary process.

-- The formation of a world communist party (organization) is the primary requirement for revolutionary work.

-- The organization not to be pyramidal/hierarchical

-- Presently the focus of activity will the working class, especially industrial workers.

-- No formation of a standing army.

-- The parliamentary process cannot be of any use to the revolutionary movement today

-- Movements for national liberation/reorganisation of provinces distract the laboring masses, workers.

-- Changing the form of capital is a mystification. To destroy capital lock, stock, and barrel is the aim of revolution.

Coordinated efforts for the formation of a revolutionary group have been agreed to.
Cont'd from p.19

Everything Free [a huge sector of the economy from street lighting to health care is already supplied on the basis of need.]. Crime against property is thereby eliminated, similarly bureaucracy, advertising, gambling, insurance—the whole money system will go down the plug hole and take with it the environmental horrors that confront us."

Smith has the same talent that John Zerzan demonstrated in The Revolt Against Work (reviewed in DB33). He finds little-known facts from dozens of sources and weaves them into a highly convincing book. Part II of Free Is Cheaper, consists of such facts about some of the principal "industries," a word that in Smith's hands takes on a new meaning. Chapter titles include "The Food Industry," "The Clothing Industry," "The Food for the Mind Industry," "The Unemployment Industry," etc. Smith shows us in these chapters just what has happened in these industries in the past and what is happening now: the decline in the quality of life of working people, both as workers and consumers.

Some of the puzzles that seem to mystify capitalist economists—an explanation for declining productivity, for example—Ken Smith answers by pointing to the huge increase in non-productive workers over the past decades. While productive workers, those employed in direct production have declined, the number in non-productive areas of the economy like banking, insurance, advertising, government, law enforcement, etc., have by Smith's count increased. Of course Smith's figures are for Great Britain, but one has only to multiply them by four to reach comparable figures for the U.S.

An especially interesting chapter is "The Unemployment Industry." Here Smith explains why increased use of technology presently increases permanent unemployment, whereas applications of new technology in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries caused only temporary dislocations. He locates the difference in market demand. There were burgeoning third world and domestic markets eager for goods then. Today our society routinely produces enormous surpluses of all goods. Uneconomic practices only serve to give an individual employer the edge so that he can sell his commodities a bit cheaper and grab the market. The problem of surpluses remains unresolved and thus unemployment.

In Part III Smith concludes by examining solutions to the problems created by the market. He shows the phantasies of rightwing free marketeers like Milton Friedman and the left, social democratic reformism as the utopian schemes they are. He then proceeds to unveil the non-market socialist solution, cutting off accusations about utopianism by pointing out the vast amount of voluntary, unwaged labor that makes it possible for the market system to function at all: the labor of mothers, wives, and husbands around the home, the thousands of voluntary organizations that stand outside the market economy and make it endurable to some degree, the blood donors, etc. One might quibble about the exact mechanism by which our class will rid itself of the market system and its political state, but it would be hard to find a book with more convincing arguments for the change.
I can't end this without a comment on Smith's style. The title 'Free Is Cheaper' struck me as a bit flippancy for a book on a serious topic. But the title serves well for this book. Written in everyday language and enlivened by wit, it can be understood by any reader. Here is a sample: Smith is writing about the boom and bust nature of the system:

"In times of boom, e.g. the 1950s and 1960s, we are told we have reached Shangri La and we will never grow old but stay young and beautiful forever."

"At the paranoid stage, in times of slump, e.g. the 1970s and 1980s, those who have not jumped out of sky scrapers or taken an overdose warn us that Armageddon is on the way, that the sun will never shine again, and it's all our fault, because like Oliver Twist, we asked for more."

Although the book was written for British readers, the parallels with the U.S. economic condition and the frequent references to the U.S. make it a useful tool for any U.S. revolutionist. American readers can order the book from England now or write to the Discussion Bulletin; we hope to have information on an American distributor soon.

[Very rarely does a book advocating non-market socialism get a hearing among establishment economists. Ken Smith's 'Free Is Cheaper' received the following review in Ham & High, the newsletter of a British financial firm. The author, Professor Alan Budd, 'is one of Britain's top economists, often on the box, has advised Mrs. Thatcher, and is currently economic adviser to Barclays Bank, U.K.' --and an accomplished dancer around facts.]

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The happiest overhead — a rooftop

FREE IS CHEAPER
by Ken Smith.
John Ball Press, £12.95

"FIVE hundred years ago an English building worker could earn the price of a steak or lamb chop, a housebrick or rooftop in as little, or even less, time at work than he can today."

Faced with an assertion like that, an economist will either argue that the facts must be false, or alternatively, if the facts are correct, there must be a simple explanation for them. (That is why you can never win an argument with an economist.)

It is quoted by Ken Smith in his provocative book as an example of how crazy our modern economic system is. I suspect that the fact is wrong.

If we disregard some of the extraordinary pay allegedly being earned in some parts of London during the current boom, we can suggest an hourly rate of 56 per hour. If lamb chops cost about 75p, it takes 76 minutes to earn enough to buy a lamb chop. In a full day the worker can earn enough to buy 56 lamb chops.

Were they really that well off 500 years ago? I doubt it. We know that we eat far less meat than we used to (Nelson's sailors had about a pound of meat a day), but that is rather a different matter.

However, it is Ken Smith's arguments that are interesting rather than his facts. His book presents a sustained attack on what he calls the Market Economy. The following extract typifies his views (and his style):

"Yet increasing numbers of people are indicating this market-based system itself as the root of most of our troubles: the enormous waste of the system, where nine out of ten employed are not producing any wealth at all but are simply dead-wood, economically speaking; the enormous callousness of the system, where people are condemned to lives of drudgery with the alternative of enforced idleness; the enormous divisiveness of the system, where people's natural sociability and generosity are perverted by squabbling and competition over artificially created scarcity, the enormous destructiveness of the system with its periodic wars over markets and 'spheres of influence', to the destruction of the environment caused by short cuts in the struggle for profits."

Some of that sounds true enough, but is it really the fault of the market economy, and is there a better system? To return to our building worker, one thing that is certainly true is that cannot use
conventional economic yardsticks to measure "happiness" (and no-one should suggest that we can). As conventionally measured, our incomes are about eight times as high as those of people who lived a century ago; but we are not eight times better off (and we are certainly not eight times as happy). Much of what is described as "consumption", for example, is in fact sheer misery, which is endured in order to earn a living. (These rush-hour journeys on the Northern Line, for example.)

We do spend a great deal of our time and energy suffering the costs and clearing up mess caused by our economic activity. It is Ken Smith's view that these "corners of the Market System" have in fact absorbed most of the growth of productivity since the Middle Ages, so that we are no better off than people were then.

How can this be blamed on the Market Economy? Smith's arguments run as follows: only a very small part of our economy produces things we actually need. The rest is rubbish of one sort or another (banking, advertising, etc.).

These activities command a price in the Market Economy and therefore people buy and sell them; but they do not really contribute to wealth (or to our welfare) at all. If anything, they subtract from our welfare because they use up resources that would be better employed elsewhere.

Ken Smith says: "Wealth consists of food, clothing, shelter, and food for the mind — distraction, call it what you will". A sensible economy would concentrate on production of this wealth. If we cut out the misery associated with market production (and its attendant political and military burdens), we can all lead a more sensible and happy life.

What is the solution? We change from production for sale to production for need. Since we can produce the things we actually need with so little effort, they can be given away (and incidentally here will be no crime). It is a utopia of small communities, based on the land.

"The answer to major problems before us lies not in the impossible dreams, the utopian schemes, of those who tinker with the market economy in the hope that, after five centuries of failure, it could be made to work. the real answer lies all around us in the attitude of self-help, in the spontaneous groups of mutual-aid, in the inescapable urges of sociability that have always characterised the human race".

How might the market economist reply? He might say that the virtue of the market is that, if we believe that people are the best judges of their own welfare, then it is an effective way of organising economic life. And there is nothing to stop the appearance of the kind of society Ken Smith proposes, if that is what people want. (Even if, by conventional standards, we would all be much poorer.) Finally, what about those household bricks and rooftiles? Well, there is a simple explanation, though it takes a little too much space to provide it.

Alan Budd

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Dear D.B.,

can you put the note below in the next D.B.?

By the way, I didn't get D.B. no.31.

Sineus no.12 is included with this letter.

All the best,

Mick Parkin.

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Regarding Tom Wetzel's 'P.S.' in D.B. no.32, I'd like to point out that I was in no way involved with Guy Cheverton's attempts to get the W.S.A. expelled from the I.W.A., nor with his publication of an issue of Direct Action which did not represent the ideas of the D.A.M.

Mick Parkin (Previously Mick Larkin)
Cont'ú from p. 2

the world." A recent letter from the Spanner production team noted that the first issue is projected for March 31, 1989. No information on the price.

Interrogations Pour la Communaute Humaine. April/September, 1988, 6pp., No Price (try $1.00) from Interrogations, c/o I.S., B.P. 283, P-75584 Paris Cedex 12, France. This is an English language edition of a French periodical, some issues of which have been described in this department in earlier DBs. In a letter to English language readers it questions the conventional socialist view of classes and class struggle and raises the idea of a new basis for revolutionary action. The other essay, "Some Modernist Remarks," also attacks what it calls "the myth of the proletariat."

Sinews. No. 12 and Special Issue--Spain and Sweden, January 1989, 24pp. total; 5 pence per page (around $2.00 for 24) from Spanish Info. Network, 6a, The Drive, Roundhay, Leeds, England LS8 1LF. These two issues have branched out from Spain to include news about radical or revolutionary unionism in Sweden and the Netherlands. No. 12, concentrating on Spanish news, updates events in the Coordinadora, the dockers' union, about which Don Fitz wrote in an earlier issue of the DB. According to Sinews the government has been at least partly successful in its efforts to weaken the dockers' union. Two articles totaling 16 pages give us an update on SAC (the Swedish Workers' Central Organization), which was organized originally along syndicalist lines, although it seems to have deviated from that orientation since. It still, however, is a relatively democratic union without a large paid bureaucracy. Sinews refers to it as a rank-and-file union. A two-page article describes the OVB, a Dutch union, also described as rank-and-file but not syndicalist, although Dutch members of AIW, the international syndicalist organization, are influential in it.