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BULLETIN MATTERS

Through the magic of Curtis Price's corrective laser surgery the DB has undergone its long-awaited face lift. Somehow Curtis found a font
that seems to have been modeled on the mimeographed masthead used by
the old SIU Discussion Bulletin.

The first article is Don Fitz’s no-holds-barred account of events at
the 1983 Green Gathering. The letter from Jack Straw should have been
in DB62 but was delayed because it was lost by a careless DB employee.
One of Ben Perry’s letters suffered the same fate. The employee has
since undergone re-education. The letter from the Internationalist
Communist Group and the article from Wildcat continue the debate on
democracy and revolution. We are grateful to Wildcat for providing it
in a form that facilitates its appropriation by the DB. The letter
from Jack Straw and Will Guest responds to IC0 and Wildcat.

(Cont’d on p.6)

ABOUT THE DISCUSSION BULLETIN

The Discussion Bulletin is affiliated with the Industrial Union Caucus in Education (IUCE). It serves as
the financially and politically independent forum of a relatively unknown sector of political thought that
places the great divide in the “left,” not between Anarchists and Marxists but between capitalism’s
statist winging of revolutionaries and social democrats and the real revolutionaries of our era: the
non-market, anti-statist, libertarian socialists. They are organized in small groups of syndicalists,
communist anarchists, libertarian municipalists, world socialists, socialist industrial unionists, council
communists, and left communists. The perspective of these groups with their rejection of capitalism’s
wage, market, and money system as well as capitalist politics and unionism constitutes the only real
alternative to capitalism in both its market and statist phases.

In the DB the often antagonistic groups that make up this sector can debate and discuss the issues that
divide them, gain some understanding of their history and future possibilities and begin a process, we
hope, of at least limited cooperation.

The pages of the DB are open to anyone in this political sector, the only limitation being that
submissions be typewritten, single-spaced, and copier ready. We do no editing here. As to content, we
assume that submissions will be relevant to the purpose of the DB and will avoid personal attacks.

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your subscription expires, we highlite it to remind you.

Sample Copies: A sample copy is sent on request. We mail copies not used to fill subscriptions to
people on our extended mailing list.
(Introductory Note — Don Fitz’s article on the 1993 Green Gathering last summer in Syracuse, New York, strongly criticizes the “management” of the Gathering, apparently with good cause. From the beginning the Greens have been divided between the action/reform oriented members and those with a metaphysical approach to environmental issues. The latter, with their devotion to consensus decision making and an implicit acceptance of the profit system have always been in the majority, to the frustration of those who see the possibilities of Greens for social change via the popular concern about the environment.

In fact, the Left Green Network was an organized response to this majority. As is always the case when such divisions exist, the majority can dominate and manipulate the organizational machinery. Don’s case is bolstered by the failure of the Greens’ Clearinghouse to communicate frankly with members about the events at the Gathering. The account of the Gathering published by the Clearinghouse was self-serving and downplayed the opposition and the statistical evidence of mismanagement. — fg)

Farewell to Grassroots Democracy?

Green Gathering, 1993

At the Green Council meeting of June 1993, The Greens/Green Party USA came out uncompromisingly against NAFTA (with or without “side agreements”). The Council set up a Stop NAFTA Action Group (SNAG) to pull Greens together. This issue is a natural for Greens. NAFTA strikes at every value Greens hold dear. Its “dispute resolution” process would undermine local, state and national law. The violent attack on the value of Grassroots Democracy has made defeating NAFTA a rallying cry for one Green local after another.

This is an excellent opportunity for Greens to help mobilize a mass movement. With a Congressional vote on the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) looming, the last half of 1993 is seeing a huge upswing in the number of people who understand how trade agreements can increase pesticides on our food, contaminate our environment, destroy family farms, put people out of work, and lock Mexico into a low-wage toxic economy.

Though NAFTA begs for opposition alliances, organization after organization has failed to take the lead. The AFL-CIO gave up on building a national struggle and is “leaving it to local unions” to take action. Some environmental groups have actually endorsed it while others want “strong” side agreements.

SNAG saw the Green Gathering in August 1993 as a perfect time to plan for building coalitions for a Fall mobilization against NAFTA. So, several weeks before the Gathering, SNAG asked Howie Hawkins (as a member of both the Coordinating Committee and the Gathering Site Committee) to make sure that NAFTA was on the agenda. Howie got it on from 3:00 to 5:00 pm the first day of the Congress. The hope of building anti-NAFTA work brought several people to the Gathering, including some from other groups.

Power Plays

But this was not to happen. The Green Congress did not plan an anti-NAFTA mobilization. More important, it was removed from the agenda without delegates having the right to vote on its exclusion.

Before the Gathering, there were inklings of a power struggle between the Greens’ Coordinating Committee (CC) and Mediation Council “majority” (MCM: see note for comment on “majority”). It began with the MCM’s offering to provide facilitation for the Gathering. Once the facilitation role was assured, the MCM said that it needed to plan the agenda. This was in contradiction to the Green Charter, which specifies planning the agenda as a CC function. Nevertheless, some MCM members met for several days before the Congress to orchestrate its direction.

The night before the Congress opened, it was beginning to look like the MCM would propose a totally different Gathering agenda. Apparently, “negotiation” between the MCM and CC broke down, with CC members not being told where joint meetings were being held. Whatever happened, the CC felt pushed out of the picture and the MCM took over agenda-setting.

Monday Mayhem

When the Congress began on Monday morning, its most noticeable aspect was the absence of the Coordi-
nating Committee. The Mediation Council Majority held tight control. It soon became apparent that we were not going to be presented with an option to determine our agenda. A continuous parade of MCM members and supporters told us that we were about to participate in a wonderful new experiment for Gathering procedure. But nothing was written out. No statement told us what would be omitted from the printed agenda if the MCM agenda were adopted. It was particularly disturbing that the MCM never asked the delegates, "Do you want these changes or not?"

Don asked when delegates would be credentialed so they could vote on what the agenda would be. The MCM didn't have a clue. We might be credentialed later on Monday; maybe on Tuesday. It was a two day Congress and we wouldn't even know who the delegates were until most of it was over?

The MCM gave an explanation of what the new Congress system would be that was confusing and left out critical details. They ignored the fact that we, the delegates, were supposed to structure the Congress. They also never announced that they had gotten rid of the two hours of planning for anti-Nafta actions.

Instead we endured dyads' sharing their feelings and six person circle groups. The circles discussed two issues: what locals were doing and what they thought about relationships between locals and the Clearinghouse. These two topics supposedly came from a questionnaire distributed to delegates. (How they knew who should receive a questionnaire remains a mystery since no one had been credentialed as a delegate at that time. To this day, Gateway Green delegates have not seen the questionnaire. How many other delegates didn't get one? How many non-delegates provided input?)

The thought behind the six person circles was that they would report themes back to the larger group and recurring themes would become topics that the Gathering would discuss. The MCM claimed that 'proposal-driven' Congresses were undemocratic because the few people who wrote proposals could dictate how the Congress spent its time.

The process on Monday represented a severe conflict of interest. People who had an extreme devotion to an idea about how the Gathering should be changed were the ones running it (without permitting a serious consideration of alternatives). If there were different views (and there were) why weren't we given a description of what each meant (by each side) and allowed to choose? The people who facilitated and changed the MCM during were so emotionally invested in having people accept their proposal that those of us who disagreed with it felt manipulated and bullied.

When we heard of the proposed process, Joseph Boland suggested approving some of the topics for the morning and reports for the afternoon. After lunch we would approve the agenda for the rest of the day. After working group reports we would renegotiate how to spend time.

Some did not participate in this discussion because it was pointless—how could we 'approve' anything if we didn't know who the delegates were? So, Monday afternoon just muddled along. There were Regional Caucus luncheon. Then we heard from the Planning Committee, Coordinating Committee, Clearinghouse and Budget & Finance Working Group.

Much of Monday night involved agonizing over debts. One of the more bizarre occurrences of the Congress was the proposal that evening for a '12 Person Committee.' According to the MCM, the Committee would review documents submitted to the Congress. No one could figure out what this meant. How would the Committee function? Who would its members be? Would the Congress be able to disagree with the Committee? Why did we need to exclude the overwhelming majority of those present from making recommendations on documents? Despite repeated prodding from the floor, the MCM facilitators were not able to answer any of these questions. Don was frustrated beyond endurance and violated his own taboo against talking out of turn. Jumping up, he yelled out, "If we don't know what it is and what it does, why don't we get rid of it?" That's more or less what happened—the '12 Person Committee' died an unmourned death.

Delegates finally get the vote

Tuesday morning began with "brainstorming" about concerns that had been raised in the six person circles. This led to the creation of committees to address the concerns. (Rather than beginning immediately to discuss the work at hand as had been done in previous Gatherings, committees did not begin their work until well into the second day of a two day event.) Committees met during mid-morning and several continued their work into the afternoon.

The afternoon was finished with credentialing (delegates finally had the right to vote), reports from two and a half of the committees, and nominations for elections.

After dinner, the Gathering finished the discussion of publications, and voted on officers until 1:00 am the next morning. The previous evening had gone past 1:00 am. This was one of many indications of the incredibly disempowering effect of the MCM method of running the Congress. Since so much time was wasted, the most basic task of selecting officers could not be accomplished until it was so late that many could not follow what was happening. People who stood after 10 hours of meetings will inevitably resent a process which excludes them.

Sometime Tuesday night there was a suggestion that all the remaining decisions be turned over to the
Green Council. (This would have been the vast majority of what delegates were supposedly there to decide on.) Instead, Don proposed that the Gathering continue a couple of hours the next morning so that at least some decisions could be made.

NAFTA finally reached the floor Wednesday morning. The facilitator allowed a full six minutes and other Action Plans fared little better. Considerably more time was spent on a discussion of "Earth Spirituality." Many of us felt that the outcome was endorsement of an official religion, an act which further isolated Greens from people we should be reaching.

Why did we let them do it to us?

The MCM was not out to destroy Action Plans such as anti-NAFTA organizing—it just had its own agenda and did not want anything to get in its way. MCM members insisted that brainstorming must flow into group discussion as a part of the process. They kept assuring that we would discuss NAFTA (without telling us it would be six minutes). There was no way to oppose the manipulation because there was no way to vote. People who were not even members of the Greens/Green Party USA voiced their support for the "experiment" of the MCM's running the Gathering.

Many (most?) people did not understand the goal and philosophy behind the MCM proposal. This is because it was not explained before the Gathering. The only way to put a change of this magnitude into effect democratically is to propose it at one Congress as the procedure for the next Congress. Then, discussion would be necessary and a vote would need to be taken before selection of delegates.

As Peter Robinson pointed out, those who spent their time writing and discussing proposals expecting that they would be acted on were the people who were disempowered. Not only were delegates disempowered by not being allowed to vote on the Congress agenda—the entire Green membership was disempowered by not being allowed to instruct their delegates.

But the Mediation Council system would not have been okay had it been voted on prior to the Congress. The system asks Greens locals to give up their right to instruct their representatives. The reason that democratic Congresses are "proposal-drivers" is that this process gives members who cannot attend the right to support or oppose a particular idea. It is simply false to claim that democratic processes allow one or two people to dominate a Gathering by writing a lot of proposals. If locals do not like their proposals, delegates simply vote not to consider them and spend virtually no time at all on them. The MCM procedure would permanently take away rights from members and locals.

This is not to suggest that delegates should not have the right to challenge and change an agenda proposed by the Coordinating Committee or Site Com-

mittee. Any gathered body obviously has the right to determine its own agenda. The problem was that there was an intense conflict of interest with the MCM's running the Gathering. The same people who were proposing a change in Gathering process were themselves conducting the Gathering—they were putting into effect their own new set of rules without a fair discussion of whether we wanted those rules. People were manipulated into doing something which they had little understanding of. When people propose a change in the rules of the Gathering (or any other assembly), they have a couple of responsibilities: (1) provide a written description of their alternative so that people can see what they are proposing; and (2) explain honestly what their alternative will do (such as destroy a planned strategy session on NAFTA).

But didn't the Congress have the right to reverse the decision thrust on in Monday when it was finally credentialed? Not really. Over half of a two day Congress was had already gone by and there was nothing left to do but cram two days of work into a few hours.

Why was there no credentialing until we were most of the way through the Congress? Credentialing was one of several critical details which were not attended to because the CC did not participate in proposing the agenda. The MCM forgot that a Gathering must (1) credential delegates, (2) elect officers, (3) hold regional caucuses, and (4) plan next year's Gathering. None of these appeared in the MCM's alternative agenda and would not have happened if others had not insisted on them. This poor planning excluded delegates from participating in the discussion of publications out of the need to cut up paper for election ballots—a detail which should have been taken care of beforehand. Poor coordination forced others to miss discussion of action plans (i.e., NAFTA work).

It may appear that this lack of preparation was an unfortunate oversight unconnected to the role of the MCM. This was not the case. Dominination by the MCM was intimately connected to the outcome—people are elected to the Mediation Council because of "interpersonal skills" while "detail" people are elected to the CC. When the CC was not involved in its Charter-defined role, it was inevitable that there would be no planning for credentialing and elections.

Assumptions

What was perhaps the saddest aspect of the '93 Gathering was an apparent belief that whatever happened was unimportant because the Greens could never affect the world anyway. There was a pervasive belief that if "important" groups couldn't stop NAFTA, how could an insignificant body like the Greens have any effect? This reflects a profound "crisis of confidence" which permeates every aspect of Green work. Hun-
dreds of millions of people know that there is something terribly wrong with the world and are desperately looking for a group that has its act together. Many are more interested in a group's message than its size. This is especially true with NAFTA. Millions of people are disgusted with the inaction of their national organizations to take militant action against NAFTA. Timely united action by Green locals across the country could have inspired many of them to work with us.

However, it's a little scary to think of what could happen if Greens become a model despite the "crisis of confidence." Do we really want the Greens to provide a model for a political party removing grassroots democracy from its membership? If we eliminate the right of Green locals to mandate their Congress delegates, what does this say about what Greens are suggesting for the US Congress?

Some of the MTM may have been aware of what they were doing. But it seemed most were stumbling for a new way and got caught up in the euphoria of a promised empowerment through feeling dyads, circle discussions and spiritual awakening. Unfortunately, the result was disempowering rule by an elite.

Several concrete positive alternatives exist for reversing the disastrous course set at the 1993 Gathering:

1. Change the Green Charter to require a half day (four hours) of each Gathering to Direct Action Networking on specific topics determined by the Green Council, with this being the only portion of the agenda which is not determined by the gathering itself (so that other groups can be invited to participate);
2. Prevent the Mediation Council from interfering in and dominating the Gathering; and,
3. Affirm that delegates to the Green Gathering are responsible to the locals which selected them and that the gathering may not disregard the directives of locals by refusing to attend to Congress proposals.

Written by Don Fitz and Barbara Chicheris. Greens who agree with the recommendations include Peter Borden, Diana Bakst Frank, Aimée Glidden, Robert Glidden, and Sue Nelson.

Note on Mediation Council 'majority.' So many MC members had reservations about or openly disagreed with what was being planned that it is not at all clear that those who wanted to control the gathering had a numerical majority. The term 'majority' is used here to mean "dominating force," much like white males represent a "majority" influence in US society without being a numerical majority.

(Cont'd from p.2)

Next Lillia Frantin and Ben Perry answer earlier letters in an ongoing discussion of democracy or the lack thereof in the Socialist Labor Party (SLP). John Ahrens writes in regard to the differences between the Socialist Party (of Great Britain) (SPGB) and the SLP. An article by E.O. Edge and a letter from George Walford question the anti-reformism of the SPGB. Next A. Wobbly responds to John Zerzan's anti-utopianism.

An article on the recent Left Green Network Conference gives the latest news on the Left Greens and the Greens/Green Party USA. A document from Serbia provides interesting news about strike activity in Serbia. WSA included with the Serbian article information on worker activity in India provided by our Komunist Kranti comrades in Faridabad. We hope to run the article in the next issue, but readers can get the info from the address given. Next Curtis Price reviews some periodicals in our political sector that few of us have ever heard of. And we end as usual with some short reviews.

FINANCES

During the past two months, both receipts and expenditures were up, the latter because of post office box rent and an increase in postal costs. Although we lost our profit-making momentum, we are still operating in the black as we have for the past several months.

CONTRIBUTIONS: Sam Leight $22; Gerry Maher $18; Thaddeus Netz $7; Occupant $1; Margaret Ahrens $5; A Friend $7; Paul Sheldon $2; Monroe Frussack $7; John Zerzan $5. Total $88. Thank you, comrades.

(Cont'd on p.12)
Max Anger's response to the criticisms raised by Will Guest and myself in London Wildcat illustrates so well the points we were trying to make, it almost needs no further response. But it contains several remarks of a slanderous nature, and these must be contested for the sake of truth.

Max tries to turn my critique of the excuses offered for the Denny beating into a position on the trial of several people for the beating. This is nothing short of malicious slander. That trial was not yet in progress when my letter was written. In fact I believe the evidence showed one of the defendants was not even in the beating video. The question is still the pathetic excuses used to implicitly justify the beating, or at least make it seem less odious. Mr. Denny has shown far more understanding for his assailants than much of the anarchist-leftist press has shown for his suffering. Perhaps Max and his friends have similar beatings in mind for "uncooperative" proles during their actions, or once they take power.

My objection to Max Anger's 'song' has nothing to do with Bill Graham, who was never one of my favorite people, to say the least. His death was due, I believe, to his arrogant decision to fly during an intense rainstorm so he could get home fast. Nature bats last: this is one act that Max and his crowd can take no credit for. My objection is to the necrophilia, i.e. the use of death and violence for arousal. Max shows his class background when he can find humor in violence. In the New York working class neighborhood where I grew up, you didn't joke about violence - it was real. In Max's suburban-military-professional upbringing, violence was something you saw on t.v. It can even be funny.

Max asserts yet another lie when he discusses the class at U.C. Berkeley. I most definitely did not teach the course: it was initiated by a couple of students within a program of student-initiated courses called De-Cal. They decided on a reader (which included some pieces by Max), but left it up to guest lecturers or the participants to present the material. The class was open to non-students; Max attended a few times, and his colleague who I mentioned previously attended most of the time. Max further contends that Berkeley is "not a prole school like a state university" (such as the one he attends, majoring in Film Studies?), but a campus filled with "the world's most privileged bourgeois bastard college students" who are "highly motivated." Actually, these days most students at Berkeley require financial aid, and tend to be confused, bored, alienated and frustrated rather than highly-motivated about their training for future white collar wage positions as engineers, lab assistants, teachers and office staffers (not to mention the many social science and arts majors who are not being trained for anything). In my experience at several campuses, the most highly-motivated and conservative students often tend to come from prole backgrounds which they are trying to escape; such was my case in the '60s.
Max has long despised me for my political activity at Berkeley, as if campus
doesn't also serve as a workplace for thousands of clericals, non-faculty academic
support staff (such as myself) and even blue collar workers; it is one of the Bay
Area's largest factories. He has had this attitude ever since he had an unsuccessful
affair with one of the "privileged bourgeois bastards," a campus leftist. It's rather
sick that he uses the same phrase to denounce today's students as some of his
friends used to denounce Chris Filmer, a U.C. graduate and a communist activist,
who committed suicide about four years ago, to whom Max wrote a glowing tribute
in Anarchy magazine. His assertion that I and Will (who hasn't even been
associated with campus in years) are tailoring our politics to win brownie points
with bourgeois forces at Berkeley is again nothing short of slanderous.

It all comes down to the next-to-last paragraph, in which Max states the absurd
view that communist measures can "be imposed on the entire planet and against all
sections of the population that oppose the revolution" by a minority. Will Max and
his cohorts point guns (or bricks) at people's heads and order them to produce
collectively and cooperatively? Ominously, he advocates violence against not only
"counterrevolutionary working class formations" which includes even anarcho-
syndicalists, but also against "other proletarians," meaning unaffiliated individuals
who won't go along with what Max and his group deems is the communist program.
Market relations are to be replaced with gun barrel relations. Eventually, all of us
will acquire enthusiasm for the new way. Does this sound disgustingly familiar, or
does it? This is nothing short of a violence-wielding "revolutionary" state, which
pretends to be otherwise.

The point isn't whether ugly or unfair acts are done by revolutionaries, but
whether these acts are actively pursued by them. What I see in this latest rant,
which is filled with terms like "despotic," "physically destroyed" and "extinction" is
the clearest indication yet of blood lust, violence for its own sake, under the guise
of avoiding "moral bullshit." Coming from a guy who loses every physical fight he
drunkenly talks himself into, this is nothing short of macho bullshit and the taking
of refuge in fantasies of blood and gore instead of serious social agitation. One
more offering from the pseudo-poor, the pathetic and the poseurs.

Jack Straw
We've read, in the Discussion Bulletin, the response of Max Anger to the letters by Will Guest and Jack Straw. We agree to a very large extent with Max Anger's arguments against democracy. We would just like to put forward some more arguments that illustrate the need for our class to despotically crush democracy and to practically fight all democratic tendencies and illusions within the ranks of the proletariat.

Democracy developed itself with the dissolution of the primitive communist communities, with the development of exchange relations, of commodity production, of private property, of class society, and of the historical gestation of the individual, the development of the separation of man from himself and from the reproduction of his life. Its historical development has been nothing else but the development of the dictatorship of value over human needs. With the total domination of value valorizing itself, with the total domination of the fetish character of commodities, capitalist terror - democracy - has reached its apogee. Democracy is not a specific sphere nor a mere form of capitalist domination; it is the never changing essence that perpetuates Capital's society while atomising and unifying it on a fictitious but nevertheless material basis (a fictitious unification because corresponding to a situation of utmost atomisation). While subsuming all aspects of life, democracy is the practical negation of the existence of classes with irremediably antagonistic interests. It asserts the only community that is its own: the community of money, reproducing the individual, the free and competing citizen.

We know, and most proletarians have the direct experience of how the State uses the moral condemnation of violence in general (and the "anti-terrorist" campaigns are also part of this) in order to hide the intrinsic terrorist nature of its own society and to better assure the monopoly of violence that is its own. For this purpose, the argument about the need for majority approval by proletarians before taking up any subversive action is indeed very useful.

Max Anger rightfully mentions the low probability of having a majority of proletarians fighting for total social revolution, but above all we should question the very nature of such a "majority" notion. How to define it? On what basis to decide which kind of majority we would need, or actually have? When you are a majority in one sector, you still are a minority in all sectors, when you are a majority in one area, you still are a minority in the whole country, etc. It is stupid to base oneself on the unhistorical and classless criteria of NUMBERS and it should be obvious that if strength is primordial for the victory of our class, that this can never be synonymous with being numerous, quite to the contrary, trying to be numerous, in itself, just paralyzes the subversive actions by the more determined members of our class. In the same way, strength...
should not be understood as a mere expression of physical force since the latter remains limited to our muscular capacities and of course the historical clash between two antagonistic social projects cannot possibly be reduced to this.

The proletariat is not a static nor a statistical fact that could be listed or counted on an ideological, sociological or mathematical basis. It is a tension between revolution and counter-revolution, it is the process of constitution into a revolutionary class of proletarians who've spent their whole lives - for generations - being submitted to the reign of democracy, that is, to exploitation and slavery, dispossession and reification, atomisation. Only the interests that correspond to this process, that are inherent in such a revolutionary process, can validly determine which actions to undertake to strengthen our struggles. When the proletariat rises up in revolt, concentrating the revolutionary interests of humanity in itself, it is by nature anti-democratic. "It immediately finds in its own situation the content of and the motive for, its activity - crushing its enemies and taking such measures as the necessities of the struggle impose - and it is the consequences of its own actions which push it further." The identity of the proletarian situation everywhere, and the identity of its historical interests, are the material social realities that determine the full negation of democracy by communist revolution. Our movement is dictatorial because its characteristics are not defined by the opinions of a majority or a minority of people. Our movement is not defined by public opinion, nor by sociologists, economists or politicians. It is not defined either by revolutionary militants or groups, however essential these - and their activities - may be (in fact, the existence of revolutionary militants and groups is a basic characteristic of our movement). Our movement is determined by the history of our class' struggles all over the world, it is the movement of negation of the existing order.

It is these experiences of our class, internationally, that have shown, through bloody facts and sufferings, the errors and illusions for the new generations of revolutionaries to fight against. And we just cannot accept to continuously discuss always the same stupid illusions about non-violence, democracy, reformism, etc... that always correspond to the ideology and interests of the dominating class.

Max Anger's argument that what was wrong with the Bolshevik terror wasn't the use of terror in and of itself, but that the bolshevik terror was a counterrevolutionary terror, a statist and capitalist terror used against revolutionary proletarians, is 100% right. People who blame the Bolsheviks for having used terror as a method of government, most of the time just show how close they finally are to the same kind of social-democratic policies since they are incapable of seeing the relationship between the class contents of the terror used by the Bolsheviks (counterrevolutionary terror!) and the programmatic orientations they defended (capitalist development in Russia!).

If our class is driven to take up the use of violence
against this society and of red terror against all its
defendants, it is not because it is the positive expression of
violence, but rather, because it is the negative pole of class
society against which, in the last instance, all violence is
directed. We must further stress the fact that our movement
contains the abolition of the State as of all States and hitherto
of the class violence and terrorism that characterises them.

"It is the cannibalism of the counter-revolution itself that
will develop among the masses the conviction that there is only
one way to concentrate, shorten and simplify the death agonies of
the old society and the birth pangs of the new: revolutionary
terrorism." (Marx). Those who try to distill the pacifist poison
within our ranks while denouncing the violent proletarian
minority actions of terror against our class enemy, are
objectively on our enemy's side, on the side of those who
through their daily State terror and through their various
ideological forces obscure the class nature of the highest levels
of exploitation and destruction ever reached in history.

Contrary to the bourgeoisie, the class dictatorship of the
proletariat imposes itself openly, in full agreement with the
historical development of class society and of the communist
movement. This is why it does not need any ideology to obscure
the class reality of its dictatorship, and why it is antagonistic
to all ideologies, including "marxist" or "anarchist" ideologies!
The proletariat openly affirms its class' dictatorship as the
negation of all classes and as the process of its self-
suppression.

To be more explicit still on the particular point of
"marxist" or "anarchist" ideologies, and about their supposed
antagonism, we dismiss both of them. We equally reject all
"constructors" of parties and/or assemblies ... who - in full
harmony with social-democracy - always try to make reality stick
to their ideological constructions.

What matters to us is to be clear about the reactionary
nature of all ideologies, including the "marxist" and/or
"anarchist" ideology, and to fight against them, while at the
same time, beyond the label taken up by such or such a group or
formal organisation, to look attentively at their practice and to
support it (to organise together! to centralise common
activities!) insofar as it corresponds to the needs of the
proletarian movement. The "socialist", "anarchist" or
"communist" labels never guarantee the class character of those
who endorse such labels! Each such label has served the aims
of counter-revolution and of counter-revolutionary forces.

reformist theoreticians, from all ideological families. Lasalle,
Bernstein, Kautsky, Proudhon, ... have operated under these
various labels. We know that it is in the name of anarchism that
such antagonistic practices as those of Makhno or di Giovanni on
the proletarian side and of Abad de Santillan or Kropotkine on
the reformist side, were developed. "Anarchism" was the label
used as well by the activists (Grave, Kropotkine, Malato, ...)
who supported the war with their "Manifesto of the sixteen" (in
February 1916, as by the comrades of the International Anarchist Group of London who issued a statement, in April of the same year, denouncing the patriotic stand of the Manifesto and opposing to it the struggle for proletarian internationalism against the war!

If today we ourselves claim to be "internationalist Communists", it is not in reference to some ideological family (whom supposedly we would belong to) but because these concepts express to the highest degree the totality of our movement and perspectives.

The Internationalist Communist Group.

Note: For further developments on these questions, and more particularly about the genesis of democracy, money as the community of Capital, and against workers' democracy, see "Communism against Democracy" in "Communism" n:4 - 1960. Can be obtained from: B.P. 54 EXL 31 Bruxelles Belgium.

(Cont'd from p.6)

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Fraternally submitted.

Frank Girard
for the DB
DEMOCRACY = DEMAGOGY + HYPOCRISY

Who are right, the idealists or the materialists? The question once stated in this way hesitation becomes impossible. Undoubtedly the idealists are wrong and the materialists right.

Bakunin, *God and the State*

3. Our Response

Although we don’t want to take time off from more important tasks to respond to the letters from citizens Straw and Guest we have found that if we don’t stomp on false allegations straight away, they spread like cockroaches. We are accused of defending political positions which we do not hold and which are not expressed in the articles which the DB reprinted. For example, we have never said that workers (or any other section of the proletariat) should be “deceived or manipulated”. Neither have we “praised” or “lauded” any of the Bolsheviks’ actions in 1917, still less described them as “revolutionary”. The claim that we “excused” the beating of Reginald Denny is a lie, which makes it clear which side Straw and Guest are on in the media war against the LA defendants. Although the LA 4 have benefitted from a militant campaign in LA, our comrades in San Francisco found it impossible to get a defence campaign going in the Bay Area, thanks partly to the smug middle-class libertarianism which still thrives there. People arrested during the May ’92 uprising are being quietly put away with no protests or anything - for example, Donald Coleman got 19 years and 8 months for torching a 7-11 store. Meanwhile, Damian Williams got 10 years for beating up Denny, while only two of the cops who nearly killed Rodney King received just 30 month sentences.

WG and JS both run in the binary mode of thought typical of those with a closed, totalitarian view of the world. For example, leftists in Britain say that if you don’t vote Labour, you are helping the Conservatives, or if you are not an anti-fascist, you are on the side of the fascists. In the case of WG and JS, the binary opposition is between supporting the Bolsheviks or condemning them for being undemocratic. When we say that we do not condemn Bolshevik manoeuvres for being undemocratic, WG and JS say we “praise” them. We shall try, once again, to express something quite different: the point of view of
According to WG: "Wildcat claim that the Bolsheviks were revolutionary in seizing the state". According to JS: "...the Bolsheviks are praised for being able to mobilise supporters in strategic points, thereby taking power...". This is quite simply false. The nearest we come to saying anything remotely like this is "The fact that the Military Revolutionary Committee did not wait for the Congress of Soviets to endorse the attack on the provisional government before acting is not a sin." Not quite the same thing, is it? So what is our view of the seizure of state power?

One of the major differences between communists and social democrats, including Leninists, is that our conception of revolution is social rather than merely political. For us there is no question of creating some kind of revolutionary government which then enacts communism by a series of decrees. The question of whether such a regime should be based on a single party or on the sovereignty of the workers' councils (or some other arrangement) is irrelevant. As we explain at great length in the articles, by seizing state power the Bolsheviks were taking over the management of capitalism, that they did it in the name of communism is neither here nor there.

WG distorts our position by quoting out of context. He cites the sentence "This minority can certainly take any action - for example, the overthrow of the state - which serves proletarian goals, without endorsement from the majority of the working class", without the one which immediately follows: "It cannot however impose communism - this can only be the product of mass activity - therefore it does not seek to create a new state power - a 'workers' state' - in place of the old administration." Contrary to what WG says, if an organized minority can take over the state, in the sense of the repressive apparatus of the bourgeoisie, it is certainly possible for it to overthrow it (particularly if most of the army has deserted or mutinied and the cops have run away, as in Russia 1917). The problem was not that the Bolsheviks "could not overthrow the state" because of objective conditions, as WG claims, it was that they never had any intention of doing so.

Communism is not a political program but a social movement. For example, private property in housing will not begin to be abolished because some "workers' government" says that it is no longer legal for landlords to live off rent but because proletarians are refusing to pay rent, resisting evictions, seizing the mansions of the rich, and in the process developing more communal living arrangements.

This brings us on to the use of force or, to state the question more precisely, The Dictatorship of the Proletariat (D.o.P.). This is the political position which WG and JS are really trying to undermine, using the tried and tested method of associating it with Bolshevism, with fanaticism and with notions of infallibility and other "psychological traits". WG says: "As Wildcat are fond of pointing out, the dominant ideas in capitalist society are bourgeois ideas. One of them is democracy, but another and far more fundamental (and dominant) one is the use of force..." [our emphasis]. Here WG appears to condemn all use of force (it's a "bourgeois idea"). There are only two types of people who condemn force per
se. These are:

1) Committed pacifists. Despite their ludicrous morality these people may sometimes make a useful contribution to the class struggle - for example by sheltering army deserters.

2) Hypocritical demagogues.

The comment (by WG) that we are for taking dictatorial measures “against the working class” is a typical piece of “no violence” demagogy. You cannot rule out using force against other working class people. Should working class people not use force to defend themselves against muggers, and other anti-social elements from within the working class? WG gives the impression in most of his letter that he thinks it is immoral to use force under any circumstances, but in his last sentence, he condemns us for advocating force as a PRINCIPAL means, which would mean his difference with us is that he thinks we give too much priority to the use of force. By being ambiguous in this way, he can occupy the high moral ground of pacifism without paying the entrance fee. All of us, except pacifists, are prepared to put the boot in from time to time. The difference between us and WG is that we honestly face up to the consequences of this fact.

Every society has to make use of force to some extent. What makes class societies different is that they are based on force since they involve a small minority of the population robbing and enslaving everyone else. Proletarian communities of struggle must make use of force too. It's true that you can't turn someone into a communist by pointing a gun at them. It's also true that you can stop them from doing reactionary things, such as crossing a picket line.

Like every other aspect of the struggle force needs to be coordinated to make it as effective as possible. It is not a question of force versus solidarity. Solidarity is the basis of our struggle to transform life but it is meaningless without the use of force. For example, we would always try to fraternise with government troops sent to suppress us and we should oppose any creation of a permanent military front with us on one side and the forces of reaction on the other. But fraternisation would be impossible if the soldiers could overwhelm us immediately without any resistance. The Makhnovists probably had the right idea when they said to Red Army soldiers “surrender to us and you won't come to any harm, it's only your officers we want to kill”. A more extreme example might be that of the mutineers on the huge Russian battleship Potemkin in 1905 who threatened to blow smaller naval vessels out of the water if they tried to stop the rebellion. Many of them joined in. A more down-to-earth example was the fact that in the British miners' strike of 1984-85, many of the pits were shut down only by the intimidation of scabs. We would like to take this opportunity to correct what we wrote in *Wildcat* #3, Jan/Feb 1985. Under the headline Support Class Violence, we said

*In general, violence in a strike is a defensive action. If the miners were receiving the support, and above all, the solidarity action they so desperately need, from other workers, then much of the violence witnessed over the past ten months need not have taken place.*

On the contrary: if the strike had spread, so would the violence. The above section implies that if the strike had become more offensive, the violence would have
been less necessary. But class violence does not tend to decrease as the revolution approaches; quite the opposite. It's important to understand the difference between force and bloodshed. Increasing the amount of force can reduce the degree of bloodshed, by making it clear to our opponents that it's not worth fighting. The above passage was written when *Wildcat* included “common ownership and democratic control of the world's resources” among its Basic Principles.

**WILL TO POWER**

By the D.o.P. we do not mean a specialised apparatus of repression (a workers' state). We mean the need for the proletariat to impose its needs despotically against its enemies. At the moment this is something which can generally only be seen in a very embryonic form - the beating of a scab (against the Right to Work!), the shouting down of a politician or union leader (against Freedom of Speech!), the smashing of a reporter's camera (against Freedom of the Press!), the smashing up of a patriotic or religious meeting (against Freedom of Assembly)... It's impossible to say in advance what organisational forms the D.o.P. will take in a revolutionary situation. We can say, however, that it will have a completely different form from that of the repressive apparatus of bourgeois society since the D.o.P. is a means by which a community of struggle (encompassing more and more areas of the globe) defends itself against dissolution whereas the bourgeois state exists to destroy community. It will certainly not possess a standing army or a judiciary, for example. Repressive measures will be carried out on the basis of expediency rather than justice, an expression of a society based on ex-

**UNINVITED GUEST**

The arguments of WG, JS and other left-wing libertarian critics of us authoritarian communists is not unadjacent to the libertarianism of the right. Their plaintive whining about our authoritarian psychological traits and the dire consequences thereof simply repeats what the bourgeoisie says about communists. What they are basically saying when they accuse us of vanguardism is “Who are these red troublemakers to tell you not to cross that picket line? What right do they have?” For the libertarians, some form of legitimate authority is being transgressed by someone using force. For the Right it's obvious who this authority is - it's The People represented by their democratically elected government. For the libertarian socialists it's something like The Workers Themselves. The Right deliberately avoid the issue of who actually acts when The People act. Similarly for the libertarian socialists when The Workers Themselves act. When they talk about a majority, they don't say of what. A majority in the whole world is unobtainable until the revolution is well underway, so to wait for this majority before starting would postpone it forever. A majority in one country is nationalistic, and a majority in any other arbitrarily defined area is meaningless, since anyone can draw the boundary wherever it suits them. Talk of the majority of the proles is, then, another piece of demagogy.
ANTI-LENINISM OR ANTI-CAPITALISM

The most vehement anti-Leninists usually share many of the conceptions of Leninism. In particular they share an obsession with the division between politically conscious people (such as themselves) and the masses. They see the central question as being how the former relate to the latter. Do they lead them organisationally? (Leninism); do they lead them on the plane of ideas? (Anarchism); do they refuse to lead them? (Counsilism). Whatever they do they mustn’t be too critical of “ordinary people” because that would put them off. They assume that everyone else is obsessed with this question as well: “Wildcat have evidently found their ideas and attitudes have little impact on the mass of workers around them...”. Who do they think we are, the SWP?

As we explained in our introduction to Gorter’s Open Letter, the view that proletarian revolution in Russia was impossible because the country was too backward is a profoundly nationalist one - the point is whether revolution was possible on a world scale. WG’s concern with Russia’s backwardness is closer to the dogmatic Marxism of the more conservative social-democrats than to Lenin. Most of Mensheviks and Bolsheviks believed, until April 1917, that Russia was unable to participate in a communist revolution because it was too backward: it needed to go through a bourgeois revolution and capitalist development first. Trotsky among the Mensheviks, and later Lenin, argued that it could “skip” a stage, and go straight to a socialist revolution. Unfortunately, what they meant by “socialism” was in fact capitalism. This was not an inevitable result of Slavic atavism. There were communist revolutions in 15th century Bohemia and Germany, far more backward regions than Russia in 1917. The “backwardness” argument expresses a belief in the liberating effects of capitalist progress. Russian agriculture was “backward”, in the sense that peasants still lived in communities which hadn’t been completely smashed by capitalist development and could still serve as a basis for communism. They were not to receive the full benefits of Progress until Stalin’s program of collectivisation in the 1930’s. Marx came to realise that these communities could play a positive role in the struggle for communism and that capitalist progress was not inevitable (see Late Marx and the Russian Road, T. Shanin, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1983).

Although WG says “the lessons to be learned from the Russian events of 1917-1921 have limited applicability to the current situation”, the whole basis of his politics is obsession with the bogey of Leninism. The hang-up of the libertarian left, anti-Leninism, belongs to the same category as anti-fascism: it identifies one particular form of the counter-revolution as the threat to the working class. Like anti-fascism it tries to rally people around the defence of democratic freedoms. Both anti-fascism and anti-Leninism are part of the official ideology of Western democracy.

DEMOCRACY OR COMMUNISM

As JS says, we are “against the content of democracy, not against a particular form such as representation or majority rule”. 
In the most general terms democracy can be described as the reign of rights and equality. The existence of rights implies a society of atomised individuals. Equality implies a society in which individuals can have equal worth, one in which their value can be compared, that is one based on the existence of abstract labour. In other words, democracy is the way of life of capitalism, not just a particular form of the state. When WG says communism is “the expansion of democracy into all spheres of life” it is not communism but capitalism which he is describing. When we say we are against democracy it’s not just from the point of view of dictatorship - although it’s true that the Human Rights of the bourgeoisie won’t be respected in the revolution. More importantly, it’s from the point of view of community. Classical democratic forms of organisation such as elected representatives and sovereign assemblies are an attempt to maintain social atomisation by creating a fictitious community. Democrats are obsessed with notions such as accountability and revocability which assume that no one can be trusted. Against all this we say that one trusted comrade is worth a hundred revocable delegates!

Finally, a few words about revenge and hatred. This is what both WG and JS accuse us of basing our politics on. Revenge is not something we generally favour since it’s based on exchange - “one bad turn deserves another”. But it has to be said that revenge is more human -less corrupted by commerce and the state - than fully developed justice. Hatred is another matter. John Major (Prime Minister of Britain) is not just a boring man in a grey suit. He is a monster drenched in the blood of the proletariat. When the bourgeoisie murder our class brothers and sisters, like the 100,000 children who died of disease following the bombing of Iraq, we don’t just throw up our hands and say “this sort of thing is bound to happen until the majority of workers see the need for communism”. Yes, we hate them.

Des Pot (no relation).

PS. No, Jack, we don’t think a song containing the words “comrades, let’s kiss” would be sung by the US Marines.

dem|a-gogue or dem|a-gag
(demuhgag) n. [Gr. demagogos, leader of the people < demos, the people (see DEMOCRACY) + agagos, leader < aegaein, to lead: see ACT] 1. orig., a leader of the common people 2. a person who tries to stir up the people by appeals to emotion, prejudice, etc. in order to win them over quickly and so gain power - vi. -gued or -gaged, -guing or -gaging to behave as a demagogue.
The response of the Internationalist Communist Group hardly deserves a reply. The little that isn’t simply macho posturing and the dishing out of (computer-generated?) wooden slogans is just plain wrong. Democracy did not evolve out of the destruction of the primitive communist community and the growth of the law of value 12 events widely separated in history, nor was it initially a form of class rule. It was a decision-making process within the ruling elite of Athens. The word means rule by the people, and can refer to the way decisions are reached within the proletarian. This has nothing to do with class rule via government by representation, which pretends to be democratic because decision-makers are chosen via elections.

As for Wildcat, these people now expose themselves as post-modern bolsheviks. They continue to attempt a confusion job by equating opposition to their politics with objection in principle to measures against the bourgeoisie. Again, what bothers us are the implications of their conceptual “dictatorship of the proletariat” to proletarians, especially those who may not agree with the (Wildcat-defined) communist program 100%. Max Anger was at least more honest (or was it mere blood lust?) when he advocated the use of terror against not only the bourgeoisie and the state forces, but against reluctant proleters, be they individuals, or members of just about any group that’s incorrect, including anarcho-syndicalists. Wildcat merely envisions smashing up religious meetings (so the idiots who attend them can come off as martyrs? Ridicule is much better) and beating up “scabs,” easily definable as those who may not think a Wildcat-advocated strike is a good idea, or “muggers”, as well as administering repressive measures “on the basis of expediency” (whose?). After all, if the only thing that matters is power (Max) and the will to power (Wildcat), anything goes. Foucault would be proud.

Wildcat equates elected representatives with sovereign assemblies. Both are described as attempts to maintain social atomization. This runs counter to what we (and many of you readers) know about the history of mass assemblies, councils, etc. The Wildcat crew prefer to put their money on a few trusted comrades, which makes one wonder what they envision vis-a-vis the functioning of a mass strike, an insurgency or a new society. All this is an a priori justification for undermining mass organs of class struggle whenever it suits them (whenever they are unable to take over and run them). Interesting that they now renounce “common ownership and democratic control of the world’s resources.” Is their new basic principle the “Wildcat ownership and control of the world’s resources”?

The analysis of the situation in Russia betrays a decision to replace their previous dogmatic marxism with dogmatic postmodern anti-“progress” ideology. We have long been critical of the unabashed enthusiasm shown by Marx and his epigones for technological advance and their overestimation of its liberatory potential. But equating conditions in 15th-century Central Europe, where most people were still self-sufficient, with Russia in 1917, where a large urban population depended on farmers, who themselves needed urban products, is as dumb as asserting a mechanistic theory of necessary stages of development.
Wildcat is merely trying to recruit in a new milieu, the radical environmental movement, and they think a new image will sell better. Left unchanged are their essentially leninist politics. And regarding that, there's little to be said that hasn't already been said too many times before.

Speaking of demagoguery, Wildcat demonstrates its meaning quite well by accusing us of siding against the LA defendants, even sabotaging their defense campaign. What Jack criticized was Wildcat's flimsy excuses for the beating of Denny. None of the LA 4 claimed the assault was in any way excusable, merely that they did not participate in it, a claim we feel the state failed to disprove.

Jack Straw
Will Guest

To the Readers of the DB,

In response to Ken Kelly's defense of the SLP's long history of the "dictatorship by the Georges", I'd like to note that Ken seems to miss the crucial point of the criticism. No one doubts the efforts that "George" gives, but this isn't about George as such. Rather than allow the destruction of a legitimate working-class De Leonist movement whose aim is to build a democratic Socialist future, it seems vital at this point to recognize that "George" ought to learn to control his possibly overzealous impulses to take on more than, possibly, he can handle. Rather than rationalizing George's tendency to throw out members he perceives as "standing in his way", maybe George ought to realize neither he nor I, nor a thousand other Georges will single-handedly "make the revolution", only a class-conscious and committed majority will. And George ought to be reminded by his fellow members, comrades and friends that principals of democratic justice, humane respect for each other, and a real understanding of the historic forces of change must be the means to foster the way for real Socialism. He needs to be reminded that the best-intentioned "George" - no matter the cause or amount of self-sacrifice-can turn out to be no better than the most exploitive Capitalist who blames the workers for not working harder for less 'pay'.

We cannot know how "Future History" will judge any of us. But from past history we do know that the real revolution will not be made by allowing the "Georges" to run amok. It must be made patiently and carefully, by us all—men, women and children—recognizing exploitation and authoritarianism in any form as evil and the love of human life—with all its weaknesses and fallibilities—as the basis for social governance, organization and decision-making. Intimidation, secrecy, or even institutionalized lack of common courtesy and respect is not the foundation upon which an authentic class-consciousness can be built. We should not be so ready to give up the cause of building a truly democratic Socialist society because of any George. We've got too much to lose, and so much to gain.

Sincerely,
Lillia Frantin

Lillia Frantin
Esteemed Editor:

A brief response to Ken Kelly's comment about my piece in DB 61: Since he implies that I have "dreamed up...lies and distortions" about the SLP, I think that he owes me and DB readers a little proof of his charge rather than blithely remarking that it takes time to come up with refutations. Let me simplify his task by suggesting that he answer a few questions:

1. How can anyone make the sweeping assertion that the "only people who have been expelled" were proved to be enemies of the party and working class? Wouldn't it be necessary to examine every case or to prove the party's infallibility?

2. Specifically, how did Ed Jahn (who was never in the SLP) and Ed Wizek interfere with the work of the "Georges"? Has he read Wizek's perspective on his expulsion? Would he care to?

3. How could I or anybody be so absurd as to refer to SLP members as hierarchies since a hierarchy obviously implies a large subset of persons subservient to the hierarchies?

4. Does he deny that Arnold Petersen was a hierarch? If so how does he explain the official SLP position, "...the party was saddled with a tyrannical bureaucracy headed by the former National Secretary Arnold Petersen and the clique that surrounded him?" (1962 national convention proceedings, p. 161)

4. How does he account for the charge by the current leadership that the NEC of Petersen's time (the "Georges" of their day) repeatedly failed to take initiative on matters and acted as a rubber stamp?

If Kelly is "trying to emancipate the working class from economic slavery," he has my best wishes whether or not I think his chosen instrument is the best or even a feasible one. However, I suspect that his slander of others with the same goals results from a certain amount of insecurity.

Ben Perry
22 December 1993

To the editor:

I have a correction or addition to my article on the SLP constitution in DB 61.

The recent death of Nathan Pressman reminded me of the circumstances of his expulsion in 1983 when he ran for Mayor of Ellenville, NY on a platform advocating municipal ownership of a utility. The NEC objected to a section flyer promoting this and endorsed a conventional one written by the national office. The section declined to withdraw their flyer despite a letter from the national secretary, and Pressman gave interviews supporting municipal ownership. One would have expected from historical experience that the NEC would have acted against the entire section or have directed it to discipline Pressman. Instead, he
alone was summarily expelled on the basis of a constitutional section reading: "All NEC rulings shall be binding until Convention review. Refusal to abide by such rulings will be grounds for immediate expulsion." From an incomplete overview, it would appear to me that the only ruling came from the national secretary unless one considers the NEC rejection of the section flyer to constitute a ruling.

In any case, as the man in the orthopedic shoes remarked, I stand corrected: There is a legal basis for the NEC to directly expel a section member. However, I tend to think that my assertion that the national office often operates by ingenious interpretation of the constitution is again demonstrated here.

Ben Perry
14 October 1993

Hi folks:

Adam Buick in D.B #62 claims that Alan Sanderson misrepresents the Socialist Party of Great Britain's case. But then Adam also misrepresents the S.P.G.B.'s case when he states: "Socialism can only be established by the working class organized both politically and economically outside parliament." He then points out the need for the political organization and couples it with economic organization making socialism appear dualistic, what it is not.

Socialist organization includes solving the problems of production and distribution democratically, so it's not just an outside job.

My understanding is that the S.P.G.B. and the Socialist Labor Party do NOT have the same political and economic urges, so they cannot hold the same position, regardless of where they put priorities.

If any one is looking for a winner in this argument, for starters it would be wise to remember that the S.L.P. has for many years proclaimed, "that religion is a private matter and the vote is as weak as a woman's tears".

Sincerely,

John F. Ahrens
Dear Comrades,

I’ve enclosed a part reply to Robin Cox’s contribution to D.B. 62. I also mention Dave Perrin’s answer to Robin in D. B. 63.

I say part answer, as Robin’s contribution took advantage of mine in D.B. 60 to put the “Spanner” position, and I haven’t, or at least only partially, crossed swords with that. In fact I do to an extent sympathise with aspects of it.

I have been signing myself “The Sectarian Bird” as a gesture of opposition to Steve Coleman’s remarks on “sectarianism”, which have riled me. It is unfortunate that this antagonism has arisen, but I too have my own views.

Fraternally,

64 Laverton Road,
Lytham St. Annes,
LANCS FY8 1EN.

E. C. Edge

The Problem of Reformism

My contribution to D.B. 60 seems at first sight to have elicited the responses under the above heading from Robin Cox in D.B. 62 and Dave Perrin in D.B. 63. In fact Robin’s contribution took advantage of mine to put the “Spanner” case, and Dave’s was an answer to Robin’s. Robin did however make a few specific refutations of some of my points, and these I shall now answer briefly.

1. On the question of socialists wanting crises, etc., to get worse, I had my own answer in place, but Dave has done the job for me.

2. Concerning to what extent reformism in the SP is reflected in the columns of the Socialist Standard, I also invite readers to peruse that publication, but would ask them additionally to compare current issues with those published in the 1950’s and 60’s, and earlier ones still, and see if they can detect changes in approach. In my opinion its SP conferences, not the Socialist Standard, which reveal the extent reformism has crept into the party. The SP is only too well aware that to endorse a reform programme would cause them to lose all credibility as a revolutionary organisation. Therefore they are unlikely to do this for some time at least. What they are doing is refraining from endorsing an actual reform programme, while having become more sympathetic to reformism and reformist bodies than at any time since World War 2, perhaps more so than they have ever been in the past.

3. If you accept Robin’s or Dave’s definition of reformism, then it is indeed curious to class trade union activity as reformist. However, my definition of reformism is activity which even if completely successful in its object will leave capitalism unchanged. I could agree to soften this stance if I could be convinced that participation in union activity leads to increased class and socialist consciousness. However the decline in union membership appears to contradict this, and I have recently come to the reluctant conclusion that there will be no real revival of unionism until the socialist movement takes off. Thus I have reversed my previous position. It required practical evidence of reformism and unionism in action to establish this, and this isn’t meant to be a reflection on the opinions of socialists of earlier generations.

The level of socialist consciousness remains close to zero in 1994, and it is ridiculous to expect anything other than reformism from the working class
until this situation improves. It might be objected that higher levels of consciousness have obtained locally in the past, and hence that genuine attempts have been made to transcend capitalism, but I deny this. I hold that this impression is an illusion, based on the incorrect ideas of socialism prevalent at those times. The great thing about the 1980's and 90's is that "actually existing socialism" and other ideas of that ilk are slowly dying out in the wake of hard practical evidence. Reformism continues, but there is less pretense that it is anything else.

(4) I am unsure how Robin interpreted my remarks about active trade unionists believing that the capitalist system is "made of plasticene". What I had in mind is ideas like thinking that a Labour government could come to power and virtually abolish unemployment overnight. In the debate on unemployment at the 1993 TUC, speaker after speaker came to rostrum and effectively said just that. I insist that such individuals do to all intents and purposes think that capitalism is made of plasticene. My remarks are not intended to be read across to any situation in which socialists are a significant minority.

(5) Robin questioned the consistency of my views. I have deliberately added to his puzzlement by my remarks under (3). If there were enough socialists to be a real influence in society, this problem in my opinion would die out. In the present circumstances, however, I'm not even sure what would be true consistency. We cannot totally abandon the struggle for "something new".

Here I agree with Robin, and also with the true SPGB of Asbourne Court, that trade union activity is the optimum way to get it. Union activity has of course other points from the socialist angle, not least that it minimises the chances of the unintended cooperation with capitalist interests so common in political reformist activity.

I do not intend to go deeply into the debate between Robin and Dave on the "Spanner" position. It is difficult to assess what percentage of non-market socialists will be required for a significant effect to be observed. If I say 15% and still rising, this cannot be much more than a guess on my part. I also feel that it is reaching that level from the near zero of today that is the hardest part. I don't envisage too many problems with passing through the 51% barrier. In a 51-49 split very few of the 49% would want to call the troops out and even fewer would still see socialism as sheer potty utopia. It is the prevalence of this latter idea, assiduously encouraged by the media and those claiming a "practical common sense viewpoint", which has been such a barrier to the socialist project attaining credibility.

The presence of a significant and still rising socialist minority would force the ruling class into concessions. These reforms would come about without the need for workers to agitate at length for this or that particular reform, and hence would not dissipate the desire for revolution. Democracy would be strengthened also, although at an earlier stage the ruling class may make an attempt to limit it. The desire for "abstentionism", as Robin calls it, can also be expected to increase. The problem with this, and any concessions the ruling class may be forced to make, is just what scope there will be within capitalism for such things. However there is no comparable experience to date on which to base a judgement, and we are relying purely on theory. The nearest has been situations in early capitalism in which the ruling class might have thought that a revolution was imminent. These were inevitably transitory, and cannot now recur.
My last point concerns the two part assessment of the recent upheavals in Eastern Europe, with a split into an anti-authoritarian and trade union struggle of the working class as a class on the one hand, supported by the Clapham based SP, and a political reform programme, not supported by the SP, on the other. I assume Dave includes the changes to a more market oriented economy in the latter, but it is not clear whether he and/or the SP supported the change to a multi-party system. If he didn’t, then he seems to be at loggerheads with Robin on this issue.

I maintain that there was only one package on offer, a transformation of the eastern states into something like the western model. This involved a multi-party state and some trade union rights but also the “market reforms”. Just as in Russia in 1917, because socialists were in a tiny majority, a transformation to socialism was not on, so in Poland in 1981, no better result than a western type regime was possible. The workers could thus do little other than group in with the capitalists when the chips were down. Personally I cannot fathom what the SP thought the Solidarity movement would lead to, except that they seem very bitter about what actually did come about. Much of their bitterness has been directed at the true SPGB, who made the correct diagnosis of the Polish situation from day one.

I end with a plea for an open debate between the SP and the SPGB on this and the other issues which divide us.

E. C. Edge 14/1/94
(The Sectarian Bird)

ARE THE PRINCIPLES BEING REFORMED?

In DB62 Robin Cox expresses support for democratisation: ‘The fact that those supporting political democratisation in Eastern Europe happened to be very largely pro-capitalist is no reason why socialists should not do likewise’. One can hardly disagree with this, if only because the libertarian socialist movement depends on a high level of democracy for the freedoms that enable it to operate, but the letter raises the question whether members of the SP(GB) are entitled to take this stand. They belong to a party which declares itself, in every one of its publications, ‘determined to wage war against all other political parties’.

Each issue of the Socialist Standard confirms this, telling us that the Declaration of Principles (‘war’ appearing in Principle No.8) is ‘the basis of our organisation’. It dates from their foundation in 1904, and is so important a historical document that the original language has been retained.

One member of the party recently published a letter in Ideological Commentary (No.62) which said ‘the 1904 principles are no longer holy writ, although still valid in essence’. The editorial reply pointed out that this, without quite saying so, suggests that the party has dropped its commitment to the Principles as printed in favour of some unspecified ‘essence’. If so the new approach may well justify support for democratisation, but no confirmation of the suggestion has yet been received. Perhaps Robin Cox can help. It is after all important, for people trying to take this party seriously, to know whether it still holds to its Principles as printed in each of its publications. If it does, how does he reconcile ‘the hostility clause’ with his approval of democratisation?

George Walford, Ideological Commentary.
Fellow workers.

John Zerzan writes in DB63 that we don't need to think of ways to run the world because only a world that doesn't need running will offer us any, "qualitative difference from today's hyper-alienated one." How we get to the a world, qualitatively different from the one we live in now is left open to exploration, as John would not want to run into the Adorno-type objection of imposing his ideological views on a future where options may provide more radical departures than those now envisioned.

One presumes then, and John implies as much, that a system of social ownership of the productive apparatus, under the democratic control of an association of producers would be an illusory emancipation from the rule of capital, even if production was carried on solely for the uses and needs of the producer/consumers. This would be because, "emancipation consists of no rule" and "rule by councils is not emancipatory."

Excuse me John, if I shun your ideological boundaries of "anarchy" and engage my critical faculties, my imagination and my everyday organizational efforts, in trying to get a class-wide union together. Pardon my ignorance at thinking that the abolition of wage labor would not enable me to help create a world qualitatively different from today's "hyper-alienated" one. Forgive me for wanting to use science and technology, the product of my fellow workers' social labor, to eliminate as much of the drudge work as possible and by extension, believing that free time has something to do with the struggle for freedom.

Short of knowing the secret of how to achieve autarkic individualism, I suppose, I will have to continue down that tobogan road to destruction, hoping that my consciousness, combined with my democratic-libertarian principles keep me out of the bureaucratic soup which class collaborationist democratic unionists have historically, consistently piled in to.

Perhaps someday, after the social division of labor, which an advanced industrial society demands, has become superfluous and the associated producers have discovered the secret of autarkic individualism, a true anarchy will prevail.

For the works!
A. Wobblly
1095 Market St. Suite 204
San Francisco, Ca 94103
THE ST LOUIS LEFT GREEN NETWORK CONFERENCE

Over the past two years the Green movement in the U.S. has declined substantially. At the same time the Left Green Network (LGN), a separate organization designed to provide an anti-capitalism perspective and antidote to the "new ageism" that was influencing the Green movement, was at the point of evaporating completely. Recent events, however, suggest that the LGN may revive.

In a letter dated January 11, 1984, Left Green Network Clearinghouse Coordinator Gene Rodriguez invited all Left Greens and "interested others" to a conference in St. Louis on February 19 and 20. The letter also notified us that memberships had expired and were renewable. For most of us this was the first news in some time that the spark of life still existed in the LGN. Attendance at the conference varied from twelve to sixteen with members present from California, New Mexico, Colorado, Kansas, Missouri, Michigan, and New York.

The sessions began Saturday morning with a general discussion of the internationalization of capital. The point was made that NAFTA gives only a minor impetus to the international movement of capital but a major impetus to environmental degradation. The discussion went on to personal responsibility to society of workers and the economic forces that require them to carry out environmentally harmful orders of their masters, and workers' concern about their jobs when environmentalists demand the end of destructive production--as in old growth forests for example. The point was made that capitalism is the first social system capable of analyzing the personalities of its slaves.

In a discussion of "Politics in the US and the Failure of the Left" contention between opponents and proponents of political action ended in a sort of agreement that electoral activity is a strategy that might be useful at times on the local level.

A discussion of the Greens/Green Party USA (G/GP) began with a debate between those who believe one aspect of the role of the LGN should be to influence the G/GP internally through its organizational machinery and those who believe that the LGN role should be limited to that of injecting the ideas of anti-capitalism among the Greens.

The discussion moved on to the present condition of the G/GP. For whatever reason the G/GP has experienced a steep decline in membership--down to an estimated 1300-1900 from 4000 to 5000 only two years ago. [One must keep in mind, though, that Green locals have many members who do not pay dues to the national organization, the Clearinghouse in Kansas City, and thus aren’t in this count]. The number of active locals has also declined. Some state organizations of the Green Party have seceded from the Clearinghouse and the Green Party element in the Greens devotes itself almost entirely to getting its members elected to office. A complicating factor is a Clearinghouse debt that began at the Minneapolis Gathering and has ballooned to an estimated $25,000. Subsequent national gatherings haven’t addressed the problem nor have the national representative bodies.

Under the agenda heading "What do we want the LGN to be"? a debate developed between those who wanted the LGN to become a caucus within
the G/GP and those who wanted it to remain a separate entity.
We agreed to remain a separate organization, but members who wanted to
could also organize a caucus in the G/GP.

In his report as Clearinghouse Coordinator Gene Rodriguez reported
that the invitation to this conference had been mailed to all persons
who had been paid members within the past two years. As a result of
the mailing the LGN has a growing paid up membership of forty and a
balance in the treasury of $407.

The belief that neither the G/GP nor the LGN have been functioning
well because their organizational structures are not related to
activity led to a proposal that the LGN adopt an activity-related
structure. We agreed to elect as the LGN Co-ordinating Committee
those members who will co-ordinate an action network on a particular
issue. These coordinators would be required to report quarterly—as
LGN members to the LGN Clearinghouse and to the G/GP Clearinghouse
through their Green locals or involved Greens. The reports are to be
published by the LGN in a bulletin.

We agreed that the present size of the LGN makes a publication like
Left Green Notes impossible. Because of the importance of
communication among the membership, the Clearinghouse Coordinator
would be responsible for publishing a quarterly network bulletin for
dues paying members. The contents would consist of a clearinghouse
report, reports of the coordinators, and a one-page maximum by each
member. Those with longer items could describe it in a sentence or
two and offer it on request. The first issue is to come out by the
end of April and will be sent to paid up and recent members.

A proposal to replace the LGN Principle “Labor Liberation” with a new
one titled “Self-Management of Work” resulted in a discussion on
whether workers should make the decisions about what to produce as
well as how production should be carried on.

We agreed to submit important proposals to a referendum, the ballot
for which would go to the membership along with a summary of the
minutes of the conference.

A discussion of the problems confronting the Greens/Green Party USA
focused on the unwieldy structure of the national organization and a
selection process that loads the Green Council and Coordinating
Committee with inactive and incompetent people. Acting as an informal
gathering of G/GP members, we worked out a proposal based on the 1993
“Structure Simplification” proposal of the Syracuse Greens, which the
1993 gathering did not have time to discuss or act on. We agreed to
take this to our G/GP locals for endorsement in order to get it acted
on at the Boise gathering next August.

For readers who are interested in joining the Left Green Network, the
dues are now $10 per year. Make out checks to the Left Green Network
and mail to the LGN, c/o Gene Rodriguez, P.O. Box 913, Lyons, CO
80540.

Frank Girard
20/10/93 start a strike in radio station "Radio Pančevo". Workers from the radio station are constantly oppressed by city government. Till the 6/1/94 they don't stop with strike. They have a great help of independent radio stations, newspapers and TV stations. Radio stations, TV stations and newspapers ruled by government and state don't mention a strike.

29/11/93 in a hospital "Sv. Petar" in city Kraljevo start a strike of 1200 employed. Till the 7/12/93 they don't stop with the strikes but I can get more informations coz state media also don't talk about that strike. Strike is against bad conditions and low wages. Also, strike is against few people who get rich on poverty of the people.

6/12/93 6000 of workers from factories "Zrak", "Ikarus GAC", "Teleoptik" and "Teleoptik Zrinski" blockade traffic for two hours in Belgrade (capital city). Next day they were strengthened by 4000 workers from "Chuda", "Gornjaše", "Insa", "Impa" and "Automatika". Together they blocked traffic for few hours.

24/12/93 start a strike 300 workers in "Zastava nemenski proizvodi". That's an army factory.

24, 25/12/93 there was unsuccessful strike of 15000 of railworkers. They have a bad union under state control.

27/12/93 there was in Kraljevo strike of 7000 workers from "Vaskohlim".

29/12/93 start a biggest strike. Strike of 60000 workers in mines (coal mines) and in power plants. Serbia two ...s don't have enough of electricity. After 31/12/93 strike continued only miners from coal mine "Kalubara". State try something to stop this strike. In 5/1/94 they arrest leaders of strike. Nobody knows what will happen.

CONTACT: Milan Djuric, M. Velikog 12/10, 11300 Smederevo, Serbia-Yugoslavia

Workers Solidarity Alliance
U.S. Section of the International Workers Association
East European Working Group
339 Lafayette St., Rm 202, New York, NY 10012 (212) 979-8353
"WHICH WAY FORWARD FOR THE WORKING CLASS?" By Simeon Scott and Terry Dawson (Workers Council Publications) 28 pages. Available from Simeon Scott c/o Union President, Queens Hall, Morley St., Bradford BD7-1BW.

A useful pamphlet which summarizes many traditional council communist ideas in light of today's changing conditions, with a special emphasis on Great Britain. Chapters include: "The Working Class in Britain Today", "The Trade Unions", "Labor Party and Parliamentarianism", "The Leninist Party", "Is Anarchism the Answer?", and "The Need For Workers' Councils.". Probably $3 U.S. would cover costs.

"LONDON NOTES". Available from: AK Distribution, 22 Lutton Place, EDINBURGH, EH8 - 9PE, SCOTLAND. 62 pages.

"Autonomist" journal very similar in scope to "Midnight Notes." Articles on: LA Riots, Squatting and Social Housing, and reports on Conferences in Venice and Paris. A major article titled "Migratory Flows, Mass Worker, and The Socialized Worker" discusses the role of immigrant workers and migrations in the present period of capitalist restructuring.

"LANERN WASTE". Available from LANTERN WASTE, POB 346, PETERSHAM, NSW 2049, AUSTRALIA. 28 pages.


EDITIONS PROGRAMME, 3, rue Basse Combalo, 69007 LYON, FRANCE has several publications in English available from the International Communist Party, a group with origins in the Bordigist tradition. Write for a list.

"RADICAL CHAINS." Available from BM RADICAL CHAINS, LONDON WC1N - 3XX. 52 pages. Overseas subscriptions: 10 British pounds for 4 issues.

Now in its fourth issue, "RADICAL CHAINS" is a well produced, glossy format journal with a strong academic and theoretical slant. Issue # 3 included articles on "Consciousness and Political Economy", "The Hidden Political Economy of the Left", and Joseph Diezgen. Current issue contains an interesting debate ("Autonomist" and "Trotskyist" Views) between Harry Cleaver and Hillel Ticktin. "RADICAL CHAINS" describes itself as "a journal which aims to contribute to the retrieval of the
revolutionary core of Marxist theory, the critique of political economy. Our starting point must be the need to understand the prevention of communism in all its forms, e.g. social democracy, Stalinism, fascism, or national liberationism. Whatever their differences, these forms constitute real changes with bourgeois political economy by which the self-formation of the working class is hindered. Serious theoretical work is necessary if all inherited ideologies are to be discarded and the communist perspective rediscovered as practical need.

SHORT REVIEWS


For decades I've talked to Christian critics of the effects of a class divides society and read their publications including the Catholic Worker occasionally. Their innocence and naive belief that their personal sacrifice, charity and exemplary behavior will solve social problems still puzzles me. The sixty or more "voices" of this oral history, each telling his/her experiences in the movement don't really shed any light on the puzzle or the motives of the devotees. The Mother Theresa syndrome clearly has its origin in the desire to emulate Jesus, whose solution to social problems didn't run to revolutionary theory, if we can trust St. Paul and the writings that the church has given its believers. At the same time it is hard to condemn decent people who can see no alternative to an individual commitment to do their personal best to alleviate the suffering in this world.

At least some of the voices speak of the internal politics of the Catholic Worker movement, defiance of the official church, and memories of Dorothy Day, which may interest some readers.

THE MEANING OF SOCIALISM by Cornelius Castoriadis, 1984, 26 pp. plus wraps. $1.00 from Philadelphia Solidarity, 422 W Upas St., Philadelphia, PA 19113.

Forty years ago as the real nature of Soviet Communism and the role being played by Communist parties internationally was becoming obvious even to some Marxist intellectuals, the reaction in the form of oppositional revolutionary splinter groups began to make their appearance. London Solidarity, strongly influenced by the works of Castoriadis was one such group.

The pamphlet begins with Castoriadis's rejection of Marxism or "traditional" socialism, which he identifies with the Soviet Union. He also rejects the idea of a class struggle based on the wages system. In his view the source of worker consciousness is capitalist control over production. Revolutionary, then, should speak to workers about the oppression on the shop floor and the revolutionary alternative. To him the salient feature of socialism is worker management; he calls for workers' councils and much of the pamphlet defines and describes worker management. Surprisingly Castoriadis (or London Solidarity) in a footnote asserts that socialism is "the" step to communism and expects it to be complete with a form of the state and with political coercion.
COLLECTIVE ACTION NOTES, number 1, January, 1994. Quarterly, six pages; free, from P.O. Box 22862, Baltimore, MD 21203.

This new periodical describes as its goal "...to circulate information concerning tendencies within present day capitalist development and the struggles, both large and small, that inevitably erupt against it. Our special focus is on struggles and social conditions in the United States, partially to counter the belief that 'nothing happens here' i.e. that class struggle is dead." To that end, besides articles on "Soup Kitchens: A U.S. Growth Industry" and a welfare recipients rebellion, this issue contains a forty-item chronology (October 15 to December 31, 1993) of incidents of capitalist oppression and working class reaction.

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1984 SOCIALIST SCHOLARS CONFERENCE

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