Marxist thought - that Marxism has in practice skirted over the very real differences operating within the working class. The presumption that people are born into fixed (material) environments with little opportunity for negotiation is a pertinent feature here. Classes are comprised of people and people do shape and affect the conditions into which we are born. Workers do not experience the world in the same way - whilst economics regulates my social condition so does my gender, the colour of my skin, my sexuality and so on. But recognising these differences does not automatically lead to a fragmented notion of class; it is a more wholesome, thorough approach and one which can easily make space for different and more complicated interactions with our environment. That is to say, we are human beings born into a society which regulates, categorises and controls according to a whole variety of factors - we cannot resist everything all of the time. There are valid reasons why we get involved in x and y instead of a and b.

‘Pessimism’

It is true to say that there are a whole spectrum of opportunities to resist open to working class people. The role of the workplace in collectivising and generating activism has seen developments both related to the fact that workplaces are hard to come by and to the growing fear and pessimism surrounding fighting the bosses. A lot of this is courtesy of Thatcher’s embittered attack on the working class and to critiques of trade union bureaucracy from those traditionally alienated from the left in general and trade unions in particular(5). Those of us without jobs who may have gone through higher education will have had more opportunity to experience community and non-conventional campaigning. Many working class people have had their first taster of activism during their time in the higher education system (myself included). Of course we now see the reverse of 60’s expansionist policies and such education is reverting to its rightful owners. Nevertheless it remains that more of us are familiar with organising outside of the workplace. In a similar vein, where we live and who we live beside matters. The “ghettoisation” of working class neighbourhoods has local councils and central housing policy to thank. But what it means is that poor and disenfranchised individuals are concentrated together thus allowing for conditions of collective fightback. For example, my local anti-poll tax group made a lot of noise about how the poll tax was affecting our communities and made direct comparisons to the more visibly prosperous and affluent neighbourhoods close by.

‘Libertarian in practice’

Class identity, formation and means of struggle changes over time and there is no question that traditional images of class struggle are too outdated to be useful. The nature of British society has changed. The factory worker skilled in her or his particular task has been transformed into the generalised pair of hands who can set her/his mind to anything. The bargaining power of those not in short supply is inevitably hampered by the thought of hopeful others ready to take our place. Technology has radically altered the workplace and resulted in widespread deskilling of workers. Theories focusing upon the potential of workers have had to adapt to the growth of the (so called) middle class professional on the one hand and the never-employed on the other. Whilst more people protest in ways and places far away from the traditional left, it is heartening to witness many of these movements stressing participation, localised agendas and people doing (and controlling) things for themselves. Libertarians have always contended that workplace struggle alone cannot lead us to a liberated socialist society. Yet it is important. What I would like to see is a re-negotiation of class theory and the recognition that our economic conditions are not the only thing to smack us in the face.

Notes

(1) The “true socialists”, vehemently criticised by Marx and Engels, stressed belief in common humanity and a faith in mankind (qc). The theoretical analysis of this “true socialists” lacked material grounding or a recognition of the conflict of classes and great emphasis was placed on the power of thought in changing society.

(2) The term “post material” interests refers to those interests which are not grounded in economics. Generally New Social Movements have been used as examples of a more widespread shift away from economic materialism.

(3) Stuart Hall and Martin Jacques (eds.) “New Times, the changing face of politics in the 1990’s” Lawrence and Wishart 1989.


(5) Although fighting the bosses has not lost resonance, the means of doing this - through trade unions- has suffered much criticism from the left. Similarly there has been much critique from women (both within and outside of the organised labour movement) of how traditionally trade unions have alienated us and used methods of organising which we find incompatible with our lifestyles. For one we have to be in a workplace - preferably full time - and secondly, we need to have time and energy to participate in informal meetings, etc. Whilst workplace inequality continues, active trade union resistance in the workplace will, in the majority, remain with men. And this is only a small part of a wider critique of contemporary trade unionism.

In this article, John French talks about an Anti-Fascist Movement in which the old problem of sectarianism disrupts cooperation and distorts debate. The answer lies, not in a “united movement”, but in a different attitude towards organising.

In the small towns around the Notts and Derbyshire border - Ilkeston, Heanor and Mansfield - unemployment is high and there are estates where almost every family is on income support. These are some of the towns the fascist BNP and Blood and Honour look to for recruitment. In the multi-racial inner cities nearby - Nottingham, Derby, Leicester - the many problems associated with modern urban life are never far from the surface. These are some of the ‘killing fields’ in the fascist strategy.

We are far from seeing a mass movement in this country. Nevertheless, the context of widespread political alienation provides fertile ground for far right ideas. In any case, the danger is not of a mass movement of the far right - which the NF of the 70's tried to create - but of a ‘strategy of tension’. Through ‘racial terrorism’ and general intimidation the far right could work outside-in, creating no-go areas of the small, largely white towns in the outlying areas and prompting conflicts out of the existing tensions of the inner-cities.

In this article I’m interested in the organised response of the anti-fascist/racist movement to the far right. In my view this is a movement which is prone to the same weaknesses that dog almost any other left campaign one could mention. The movement has, I think, been severely hampered by organisational conflicts between nationally based groups, which have made it difficult for activists to cooperate at the local level. What’s more, these conflicts have distorted the debates in the movement over the various ways forward. This idea of ways rather than simply way forward is important because the anti-fascist movement has to struggle over a number of different, albeit connected, fronts at the same time. It is worth listing these briefly:

* It needs to generate broad grass roots support and participation, understanding that whole communities are affected by the rise of the far-right.  
* It needs to physically confront and isolate the fascist hardcore of the BNP and Blood and Honour - giving a clear message that they’ll never enjoy open access to the streets.  
* It needs to help counter the racism which has become sharper across all levels of society and which provides a kind of protective shell in which the hardcore can grow. This includes campaigning against state racism which, through measures such as the Asylum Bill, adds weight to the far right’s belief in racial exclusivity.  
* It needs to recognise that black people and white people do not face the issues of racism and fascism from the same place. Accepting this in no way undermines the value of the notion ‘Black and White Unite and Fight’. The movement should support the demands of black people for autonomous organisation(s) and confident voices that will be listened to.  
* It should also have something to say about the sense of insecurity and alienation, particularly due to unemployment and the rapid change taking place around us, that causes some white people to make the leap into active racism, and makes passive sympathisers of many more.

'A Movement of Movements'

There are many tasks, and points of departure. I am thinking here of an idea of social movements in which there are many organisational and campaigning initiatives, many points of reference, rather than just one - a 'movement of movements', so to speak. Inevitably there are many potential conflicts here (for example, the question of where racism/fascism comes from in the first place, or do we press for further anti-discriminatory legislation, or do we kick fascist heads at every opportunity). These are real issues, requiring open discussion: not that they’ll ever be finally agreed.

But this is not to deny that there is also vast potential for co-operation over many concrete issues (Anti-Asylum Bill work, support for the Family Campaigns, monitoring and exposing the BNP et al, leafleting the estates where the BNP are active).

This would be a movement in which there would be many opportunities for involvement, people taking up those issues most immediate to them. It would mean activists making definite choices and not giving a blanket endorsement to any one organisation’s ultimately partial package. Of course, distinct orientations will remain. But alongside this there is room for collaboration around specific issues, in a context of sharing experience and debating ideas. This is not the anti-fascist movement we have today.

Nationally the anti-fascist movement is dominated by three organisations: the Anti-Racist Alliance (ARA), the Anti-Nazi League (ANL) and Anti-Fascist Action (AFA). These organisations are all markedly different in perspective and orientation. Nonetheless, they all share one thing in common. They all offer themselves as the exclusive voice of anti-fascism.

The ANL

The ANL is a classic front organisation. This doesn’t mean that ANL/SWP members aren’t committed anti-fascists, they clearly are. But it does mean that the
Movement

evolution of the ANL has been shaped to the interests of the SWP.

At the moment, the ANL is trying to establish itself as the ‘left alternative’ to the Labour Party. Desperate for bums on branch seats the SWP jealously guard the ANL’s recruitment potential. However, the ANL will only deliver the bums if, one, other ideas and groups can be kept at a distance and, two, anti-fascism can be bent to mean ‘whatever the ANL does’. Dangerously for the SWP collaboration would mean acknowledging that others have a contribution to make. This would compromise the party building ambitions. What else but this makes sense of the lack of any democratic structures within the ANL, and of the difficulties many of us have found trying to work with the ANL at a local level.

The ANL is the clearest example, and it is a sad comment that such attitudes and behaviour are still so engrained within a substantial part of the left.

AFA.

In contrast to the ANL, AFA are a front for no one organisation. Although certain groups do figure prominently, including Red Action and Workers’ Power. AFA prides itself on being ‘non-sectarian and democratic’. However, AFA also contributes to the unhealthy, fragmentary atmosphere surrounding the anti-fascist movement. Almost no effort is spared criticising the ANL, particularly over their wilful refusal to take the issue of physical confrontation seriously (be it self-defensive or offensive).

Much of this criticism is extremely well-founded. People are rightly wary about trusting ANL organised events - especially when these involve going into areas with known fascist activity: without security, effective stewarding, knowledge of the area or legal back-up. But the position of the ANL doesn’t solely come down to the issue of physical confrontation. Despite AFA’s caricature, there is more to it than that, including emphasising visible public rallies and work in other organisations.

"As I said at a congress in South Africa recently: there are two ways of fighting the same enemy. One is for you to come over to my side and help me beat him up. But in the process, you’ll tell me what to do and how to do it, and once again remove my authority over myself. The other is for you, who knows him so much better, to hold him, weaken him (from within, so to speak) so that I can beat the shit out of him. That way we achieve the same end without forgetting our different histories. We make the conditions to make a common history together in the future."

A. Sivanandan

But, again in contrast to the ANL, AFA seem to make a virtue out of confrontation. The criticism has been rightly made that AFA’s narrow focus can result in a macho, elitist, gang mentality - ‘Oh, we’re the lads: the lads are here!’ As one former AFA associate describes her experiences leafleting with AFA in Rochdale: “The women did the leafleting; the AFA men did the stewarding. They walked around the estate with no sensitivity for or awareness of the people who lived there.”

At one level, what is going on here is the usual sectarian drama with one group ‘investing’ heavily in what it sees as its opponents’ weaknesses. So, AFA see the ANL’s emphasis on mass mobilisation as a passive - and potentially dangerous strategy which does little more than create media lollipop-waving opportunities for the ANL. In their turn, the ANL see the call for physical confrontation as an elitist strategy - a kind of right-on thuggery - which does little to bring wider numbers of activists into the movement. And of course, there is truth on both sides.

Yet, big mobilisations and physical confrontations are not necessarily exclusive strategies. They could be complementary, each with its place in the tactical armoury. Unfortunately, open discussion on how they might complement each other is made difficult because the discussion is fractured by the organisational rivalry going on between AFA and the ANL. This problem is made worse by the fact that the very identities of these groups has become so closely bound up with one or the other approach.

Anti-Racism and ARA.

It’s not only from a concern with wider mobilisation that the strategy of physical confrontation can be criticised. It can also be criticised from an anti-racist perspective. Black activists are hardly likely to be attracted to this kind of ‘seek and destroy’ anti-fascist work when they would be the ones most clearly marked out and at risk: from the police and the BNP thugs.

This occurred to me on an anti-fascist demonstration organised to oppose a planned BNP march through the village of Flintham, near Newark. As we were assembling a young Afro-Caribbean man was heard trying to persuade other black people off the demonstration saying that this was how white people organised against the fascists. I think he had a good point.

In the event, the anti-racism of AFA and the ANL strikes me as largely rhetorical. A recent AFA leaflet carried the very ambiguous boast, "We are Anti-Fascist Action, an
organisation largely made up of white working class people committed to smashing fascism.” Surely this begs the question: where are the black activists?

In Britain there is a strong socialist tradition of anti-fascism. The experience of the left and the trade unions in Nazi Germany tells us why. But an equally committed tradition of anti-racism is lacking and many Black activists have commented on the hidden racism of the left. The SWP’s (by extension the ANL’s) refusal of black autonomy in an equation whereby ‘anti-racism = working class unity = building the party’ is an example of this. Anti-racism for the SWP is a recruitment strategy!

Anti-fascism without anti-racism is inadequate, potentially reinforcing the ‘patriotic’ nationalist (anti-nazil) sentiments that legitimate the far right in the first place. But taking up anti-racism clearly raises questions for the way we organise as a movement. The issues confronting black and white activists and the experiences on which they draw certainly overlap, but they are not identical. The idea of a single organisation embracing all facets of the anti-fascist/racist struggle is therefore highly questionable.

For their part, ARA strongly emphasise the broader issues of anti-racism. This reflects the fact that more black activists are involved in ARA (or maybe it’s the other way around...).

Black activists can rightly see in white anti-fascism a privilege denied to black people whose daily life is in effect a struggle against racism. Off the anti-fascist picket, demo or whatever I - as a white anti-fascist - simply merge with the crowd.

To emphasise anti-racism over narrower anti-fascism, and to give a voice to black experience, which the white left has traditionally found difficulty handling, ARA’s constitution demands that all local ARA groups have a 50% Black executive. (Although what happens to local groups if activists prefer not to have an executive as such?).

So far, so good. But if ARA credibility rests on its anti-racist breadth and its demands for Black leadership, behind the scenes things are less pristine than that.

Again, ARA gets into the whole ploy of claiming for themselves the authentic voice of anti-fascism/racism. Because of the notion of struggles for their own passage into power. Clearly then, there are issues of dispute amongst black activists concerning ways of organising and tactics etc., as well as over broader political perspectives and ARA does not represent the only black voice of anti-racism.

‘One United Movement’

So far, I’ve talked about an anti-fascist movement where national organisational rivalry gets in the way of collaboration between local activists and distorts the debate around the movement. Time and energy is spent wastefully watching out for the (inevitable) conflicts. This, rather than openly discussing differences and - whilst getting on
with the job at hand, as we see it - looking at the opportunities for collaboration.

But where do we go from here? Smaller left groups, and the anti-fascist group CAFE (the Campaign Against Fascism in Europe) have called for 'one united movement' (with a democratically elected leadership and approved programme of course). But the very idea of Marc Wadsworth (ARA), Paul Holborrow (ANL) and, say, Gerry Gable (Searchlight magazine, works closely with AFA) sitting around a table to discuss even a conference agenda makes this call absurd. Such a movement would be a minefield of sectarian intrigue, of manipulative dealing and string pulling. It would end in acrimonious collapse before it had even started.

I'd argue that this call - which, let's face it, has become something of a ritual - reflects the long history of a particular way of organising on the left. According to this concept, movements are expected to have neat programmes, singular structures and (democratically) hierarchical leaderships.

Ironically, it's the fact that this concept has such deep roots on the left that sectarian conflicts are allowed to undermine anti-fascist collaboration in the first place. It is because this concept is so widely accepted that the claims of ARA, the ANL and AFA, to represent the authentic voice of anti-fascism are given any credence. If there has to be one movement, then each organisation can legitimately claim to be it.

Libertarian socialists have always been highly critical of this approach to organisation. We have argued that what is seen as ideological coherence is often just a guise to hide the influence of the group or groups in control of the organisation.

Libertarian socialists have also valued the strength of local organising (and let's not forget that the problem of organised fascism, at least, is still a localised problem in this country). We have argued that the organisational and ideological divisions promoted at a national level often obscure the relationships and networks between activists at a local level. These relationships generally cut across the organisational divides. They should be a fruitful source of activity and debate. Instead they are fractured by the sectarian atmosphere around the movement, the lack of trust, the intolerance, the non-communication, and the hacks and operators who have narrower political aims in mind.

In my private summation of the problem, I admit, I would lay more responsibility in some directions than others. Nonetheless, responsibility is shared.

And so...

The implications of this view are far reaching. But there are four things I'd want to throw in, by way of conclusion.

Firstly, the answer is not to call on national bodies to put on a unity conference. Rather, it's a question of activists taking responsibility themselves at a local level. This would mean refusing to simply pigeonhole other activists and avoiding seeing 'our' group as the only group worth bothering with. It does mean actively searching contacts and discussion - and cooperation - with activists in other organisations.

The Anarchist dictum 'We need no leaders', meaning that we are responsible for our activity, is a healthy one. We can quibble the precise implications of this, but it ought to at the very least inform all our actions.

Secondly, whilst we can accept that differences over strategy can bring out some quite fundamental political issues, in the practical here and now we should accept that no one strategy is always appropriate. Anti-fascism is many faceted: here it might mean us building for a large - but peaceful - rally, there it might mean us physically breaking up a fascist meeting. Again, it might involve us joining an anti-deportation march. As individuals we can't do everything. We have to make decisions. But this doesn't mean that we can't tolerate (shades of liberalism? Ed.) differences, or that we have to behave as if the various perspectives on offer were always incompatible.

If it's coherence we're looking for, then we should remember that this will be more the result of the movement's overall effect, and never the property of this or that group.

Thirdly, whilst I'm emphasising the building of local networks, with or without the backing of 'our' organisation, it obviously should not stop there. Liaison and networking at regional and national levels are vital. The aim should be to create a movement which as a whole emphasises practical co-operation and support.

Finally, some people will argue that all this adds up to an apolitical pragmatism, involving an appeal to co-operation without acknowledging the political differences between people. But I disagree. Promoting an ethos of cooperation where it is possible does not cut out the politics. In fact, we would be creating the conditions in which political and strategic differences could be acknowledged and ideas debated and exchanged openly - without the fear and suspicion of hidden agendas creeping up on us.
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CORRESPONDENCE

Dear Sisters and Brothers

Congratulations on an interesting magazine. I read 'Porn ... Yawn' with interest and was pleased to see the analysis from a socialist perspective of how the current anti-pornography obsession developed in the feminist movement. I was therefore disappointed to see Meg Allen exhibiting her personal prejudices against sado-masochism rather than saying that whatever one's personal feelings are about S/M every socialist and feminist should be standing shoulder to shoulder with the 'Spanner' men who were imprisoned by the state for mutual consenting SM sex with each other, the fetish clubs that are harassed by the police and the magazines raided by the Obscene Publications Squad.

Yours is a political magazine and these are urgent political issues, which deserve our support.

Love and Liberation

Nettle Pollard
Feminists Against Censorship
London.

TWO PLUGS

Green Flame, 'As We See It' (Aims and Principles)

As the authors put it, "Our aim is nothing less than the creation of a new 'social imaginary', involving a plurality of lifestyles, but rooted in the construction of socially, economically and ecologically self-sustaining communes." By its very nature this project is exploratory and there are no ready made alternatives we can lift from the history books to fill the gap. It is the sense of exploration that makes Green Flame an attractive project. We wish them luck.

Red Banner

Red Banner is a quarterly discussion journal produced by members of Bristol Marxist Forum. It covers a range of issues interesting to socialists, but with a focus on the workplace and issues around the Labour Movement. Its position is critical and open; questions are being asked and an ethos of non-sectarian debate pursued. Themes familiar to libertarian socialists slip in alongside more traditional left concerns and perspectives. Perhaps Red Banner is indicative of a new orientation potentially taking shape amongst disaffected Trotskyists. If so, it could prove fertile and engaging. Bristol Marxist Forum are planning an open conference in the summer. Contact them for details.

Subs. £4/year
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Judy Greenaway has been active in anarchist and women's groups for many years. In particular, she has been involved in Catcall, and the Anarchist Women's History Group (researching into anarchist communities).

In this interview with Meg Allen, she examines the relationship between anarchism and feminism. She also discusses the effects of professionalisation upon radical projects.

**Meg** - Do you see anything as distinctive about anarchism or libertarian socialism?

**Judy** - I think it is very much the emphasis on self activity, people acting out of their own experience and making connections with other people on the basis of shared experience. Rather than some concept of a group that has the theory and gives you the right line that you have to win other people over to. That's the basic idea. I think of it as something to aim towards, a permanent pressure in a particular direction. I think in a country that hasn't got a very powerful anarchist tradition that's our function. You don't expect to arrive at some kind of 'anarchist world' but you can push in a particular direction, keep a libertarian option open. People can do things for themselves, the things people think about their own lives are important and to be taken seriously and acted upon, they don't need someone else to tell them what to do.

**Meg** - That sounds like you think change comes from nowhere - do you think people act 'spontaneously' then?

**Judy** - Not 'spontaneously' in the sense that it wells out of nothing. Very often when people take part in things that transform their lives, even in little ways, there's been a lot of prior discussion and thinking and activity and propaganda. Things are constructed out of the world that we live in and again anarchists and libertarians have a role to play in creating a world within which certain kinds of things are more likely to develop than others. Anarchism isn't about non-organisation, that's a caricature that's used by people who don't agree with us. But it's definitely about participatory organisation and the rejection of hierarchical leadership, because leadership and organisation aren't necessarily the same thing! I'd describe myself as an Anarchist but it's certainly meant different things to me at different points in my life.

**Meg** - I suppose I describe myself as a libertarian because I'm always trying to avoid the polarised debates that go on. Anarchists characterise Marxism as some kind of structural deterministic monster and marxists tend to characterise anarchists as 'lifestyle', individualist weirdos. As far as I can see you've got to draw on both traditions, that's my 'libertarianism'. It comes from a background of socialist activity. But I know you've been much more involved in anarchist and feminist groups, do you see any compatible elements between anarchism and feminism?

**Judy** - I think the connections are very strong. One of the questions in my mind when I got involved with the anarchist women's history group was - why have women been marginalised in anarchism? But one of the surprising things is that in the past women have been involved, in a central role. Women's issues were being discussed, the debates around free love were prevalent...
from the 1880's onwards, there were strong feminist perspectives within anarchism which have been very much lost. Certainly lost by the few historians of anarchism and by socialist historians who are not interested in anarchist history anyway. It's a situation where men have marginalised women's history and socialists have marginalised anarchist history, particularly in this country. I always thought that anarchism had been a tiny marginal strand in UK politics but I know thing that it was, for at least forty years around the end of the century, quite influential. Again it's about who writes the history. Having said that, whilst many anarchist ways of working might be compatible with feminism, anarchists have used notions of 'individualism' to avoid taking on women's and gay liberation. They say yes of course we want all individuals to be liberated, we recognise the individual. But to take issues of race, of gender, of sexuality seriously it actually involves having to rethink what classical anarchism is about and what being a man, or white, is about and so on. That is where the real unwillingness has been in anarchist circles. 

The irony is that those issues have been tackled in groups which I would say operate within an anarchist framework but don't use the label or even realise that there is a tradition to which they might attach themselves. So there's this big disparity, because women's groups, gay groups may use those methods but don't recognise them as anarchist - so I think it's important to name them, to make the connections with a wider theoretical perspective.

Meg - I think that's what I mean by compatibility, between broadly libertarian and anarchist methods and the women's movement. A lot of women's groups use, or used, what might be called 'anarchist' methods. They don't have unnecessary structures and positions are rotated. It's about skill sharing, consensus decision making and the validation of women's experiences. All these sorts of things go on yet no one says "we'll do this in an anarchist or libertarian way shall we?" But that's the way they operate. Their ways of working are compatibly with libertarian theory. What I'd argue is that although the many left groups have taken the ideas of women's liberation on board in theory, they've lost the libertarian, the 'empowering' element along the way. They've taken those ideas on board but in their own way, without realising that it's about a whole different way of working and conceptualising politics.
kind of political simplification which does not resemble the complexity of the original feelings, and of course people change. What you often see as a result is people leaping from one very extreme position to another very extreme position. At the end of the day you have to recognise that politics is about change, whether about sexuality or gender or class.

Meg - That's where I'd bring in marxism, what marxism should be about, the dialectic. It gives me a conception of politics as movement, that everything moves on and every historical moment is unique in a sense. For me feminism alone doesn't give that sense of movement of economic and social change. My 'libertarianism' is where I bring the two together, it means I don't have to dump a socialist analysis which has been so useful to me but I can 'feminise' it - change the whole way of conceptualising it. It means that you acknowledge that your politics will change according to the change around you - it's a different approach to that of the traditional left.

Judy - I suppose that's why the version of anarchism that I'm attracted to is the notion of 'permanent revolution' - that you're never going to arrive at some utopia. Any new situation that you're in, although it might be a world that's a huge improvement on what went before, it's going to generate its own problems, its own power relations and they will need to be critiques and dealt with. You're not aiming for stasis, society is not static and static political answers are inevitably left behind. Yet that's a hard concept to hold onto because there is a desire for a safe, fixed place with shared feelings and no more struggle, that's why the left groups are continually trying to give easy answers. The problem is that they do that because it's much easier to act out of that optimism. All we see now is pessimism and it's hard to imagine things getting better in the foreseeable future. It's hard to sustain activity in the face of that. That's why left perspectives offer something in the near future.

In the face of those easy solutions you have to offer a broader vision of what life is about. They may have easy solutions, but the 'revolutionary self-sacrifice' they often demand, the denial of individual need can be incredibly negative. If you accept that our lives are of value then politics can also be about creating something for yourself as well. It can be a view of politics which is incredibly positive and self sustaining. The early anarchist movement was not just about political activity and engagement but also it was about a whole lifestyle, about a created culture.

Meg - I remember my involvement with a left group was very much about self sacrifice. It was about how many papers you could sell or meetings you could attend. No-one talked about how much you could realistically do or how you felt as a woman in the group, which was often marginalised. My political security isn't based on a tightly knit group or 'dedication now'. It's more about a whole approach to life, that 'push' again. It's about looking at how I do things and not giving myself too hard a time if I don't do it 'right'. It's also about working with people to create a 'space' for other possibilities in terms of ways of living and thinking. I don't think such 'lifestyle' politics have to be separate from a socialist vision. Women Against Pit Closures can campaign for their livelihoods and for their position as women in the movement, and they've used pretty varied methods! But I come from the left, in the women's movement how do you think that 'anarchist element' makes a difference?

Judy - Let me give you an example, for a while I was on the collective of 'A Woman's Place' which was the London women's centre at that point. We were squatting in an abandoned hospital in the centre of London, very seedy it was! This was the heyday of the GLC and in the end the collective decided to apply for money, for funding, to get better premises and this involved setting up a whole range of structures. To get money we had to bring in paid workers and change the way we organised - things I really disagreed with. I decided I didn't want to be involved any more because I thought it was going the wrong way. For a few years afterwards I thought I was wrong, I was being too purist, because they did have nice premises and I thought, yes, why can't women have a good place to organise from, why can't women get paid opportunities as workers. But when you look now at all those organisations that were funded by the GLC they've nearly all folded. The ones that survived are the ones that stayed with voluntary workers and so on. I know all the arguments about unpaid work, but for a political group to keep going it has to be on the basis of...
people's commitment and I think that commitment gets changed and power relations are changed by having paid workers. There are so many pressures from outside people who determine funding. The GLC did do some great things for London and I regret its going but I also think a lot of groups were killed off by it.

**Meg** - In Manchester there was the same problem, the eighties saw a left council who provided a level of service which doesn't exist anywhere else in the country. But now those services are all being cut there's a terrible sense of disillusionment, having to start from scratch because everything came under the banner of the council.

**Judy** - But then I wouldn't want to take a purist line that says you should never take money from the state, I think that's a mistake too. I think you can have both things, some kind of dual structure with organisations which are independent of the state. I think it's important not to create a career structure around what you're doing, I think that's what we're seeing around AIDS activism now. Of course we need to demand money from the government, but at the same time there must be an awareness of what the price of that is. Whatever position you have in any situation will determine how you fight and what you're fighting for. And if there are paid workers they will fight to keep their jobs, quite reasonably. But you've got to recognise that in political organisations that might be very different from having the interest of the cause as the major focus.

At the same time you can fall into the trap of criticising women just because they're doing a particular job, much more so than you would a man. I get pretty fed up with ultra left critiques that slag off anyone who holds any position at all. I don't think for most people there is any option to exist outside the state.

**Meg** - I know you've done research around early anarchist communities, were they attempts to exist outside the state?

**Judy** - For example I've done research around 'Whiteway' which was a 'colony' set up in 1890 in the Cotswolds by a group of Tolstoyan anarchists, including a number of women. They wanted to create a new kind of society, which was not completely outside the emerging capitalist state society because they kept contact with the towns. They bought this incredibly stony land and then burnt the title deeds, this land still has no title deeds which creates enormous problems for the present owners! The group that founded it believed in free love, it was very much about having new kinds of relationships between men and women. I think there were some gay people involved but this is not explicit, it's very rare that being lesbian or gay was seen as a political stance before the 1960's. The politics of sexuality at that point was about transforming male/female relationships. There were meant to be equal relations between men and women, which mostly meant that women did some of the things which men would do and men did rather less of the things that women would do! But also the women did communal laundry, communal cooking. In the end they got fed up with it and decided that it was easier to be washing one man's shirts, and relations were more individualised after a while and it reverted to a couple set up. It still exists today, with a few remnants of that early politics, something less than a political community and something more than a village.

**Meg** - Do you think we've moved on since then?

**Judy** - In some ways the issues were very similar! If you look at the arguments in these early communities they were about who does the housework. Women felt very resentful, particularly when they had children and they were very much less able to be involved in politics. Even if men believed in being involved with children it wasn't usually at the same level. In some ways it's exciting and some ways depressing. It seems as if no one has learnt anything but at the same time people were struggling around these issues and yet finding it possible to do things with their lives which were really unimaginably a break with what had gone before. It's something we were able to build on, something that's not been recognised by the women's and left movements. We don't have a strong sense of history. Some of the debates now are things that were debated only twenty years ago and we don't even remember those, never mind the debates that happened a hundred years ago. I find this very aggravating. But at the same time it's really easy to get into a role where you're just telling people what to do as the 'older' person who's done it before and knows where we went wrong. It's not a role I want to play.

**Meg** - It's a line you have to walk, your whole politics is about people learning for themselves. You don't know how to do something until you've done it, you can't learn how to run society until you've organised and learnt how to run it. But at the same time we don't want to start from scratch all the time and there have been changes, huge changes.

**Judy** - Yes I think we've got to recognise that and remember that the most destructive thing is to think that there's a 'right answer', to believe that if only you think hard enough you'll come to some solution. Whatever course of action you take it's going to turn out to be mistaken in some ways and have disadvantages you didn't see. There's no right way, everything is a gamble in a sense, but you may as well try and learn from what has gone before. It's really easy to forget what we've gained in this climate. If we think about what the women's movement has achieved in issues like rape, it's thought about in a completely different way from how it was when I was growing up. It's taken as a serious issue in a way that it wasn't. Lesbian and gay issues, abortion rights - anything we have that's worth anything has been fought for in the past, that's something to hold onto.

Meg Allen
Inside the L.A. Riots
Price £9.95 pbk.

On April 29th, 1992, four Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) patrol officers were acquitted by a white jury of criminal behaviour in the videotaped beating of black motorist Rodney King. That same night South Central L.A. exploded into the most severe urban riots in the US this century. Cities around the country followed suit.

The result in Los Angeles? 58 dead civilians; 2,383 reported injuries; $800 million of property damage, with the loss of 40,000 jobs; 12,000 arrests, 7,000 of which were for looting and the majority of the remainder for violations of a heavily enforced curfew order.

In fact most of the deaths and arrests occurred after the rioting had subsided, as a direct result of a massive police and army sweep through the poor neighbourhoods. This was a panic response from a system taken by surprise. Ironically, these mass arrests did exactly the same thing as after the Watts riots (an area in South Central LA) in 1965 - they brought the courts near breakdown, and the whole judicial system into further disarray.

Inside the L.A. Riots attempts to deal with all these issues and more. Compiled within six weeks of the end of the riots, the book aims to be the alternative view to the prevailing conservatism of the mainstream media. The book is divided into four: pre-riot commentary; first-hand reporting of the riot; analysis of its implications; and prescriptions for the future. Many of the individual pieces are very impressive. For example, in 'LA's State of Siege, City of Angels', Marc Cooper looks at the total divorce of the LAPD from the communities it polices. 'Civil Liberties in Crisis', details the widespread infringements of constitutional rights during and after the riots, showing quite clearly that the state will employ any methods to suppress dissonance when it has to. Carol Tice notes how the 'Helicopter Journalism' depicted the riots as a re-run of the Gulf War, trying to prevent identification of the viewer with the rioters. And Michael Ventura, in 'Democracy', attacks the belief in social renewal through the Democratic Party, arguing that both political parties serve capitalism, not people. And there are other good, or at least provocative, pieces.

But there are many problems with the overall tone of this book. Particularly in the reporting of the riots themselves, there is an odd detachment. But this is because the writers are detached. There are no pieces from looters, or from demonstrators attempting to torch the Parker Center or City Hall. This maintains the distinction between "us" and "them", and those without economic power are denied a voice even in the alternative press (apart from soundbites). The editors cannot claim that none of "us" would want to write about how we looted for tampons and cockroach spray - people readily talked to the cameras and reporters during the looting, and anyway articles have been published by participants, for example in a recent issue of Wildcat.

The analysis of Inside the L.A. Riots often provided a refreshing recognition that the uprisings were far more to do with class than race: this certainly distinguishes them from the rest of the US media machine. But the liberal establishment is so obsessed with race as an issue, that even its radical margins appear unable to hold onto a class analysis consistently. The most important example of this, I think, is the book's treatment of the firebombing of Korean businesses. Over 1800 Korean stores and liquor shops were destroyed during the rioting, one of the reasons cited being the murder of 15-year-old black girl Latasha Harlins by a Korean shopkeeper (who received community service as punishment). Writers such as Manning Marable and Nora Choi see this targeting as politically immature at best, possibly even racist. But this misses the whole point. The lesson many South Central residents learnt from the Latasha Harlins case, was that property is far more valuable than life (Mike Davis, ' Burning All Illusions in L.A.'). Also, Korean businesses do not represent a community resource: most Koreans lived outside the area, and were seen as syphoning out the little money that existed in the area (Peter Kwong, 'The First Multicultural Riots'). In other words, there is a justifiable perspective which sees the Koreans as class enemies.

The reality is admittedly more complex than this. Koreans are first and second generation immigrants who have survived by opening shops in those areas that had long been abandoned by the corporations. Their ambitions have been focused on giving their children a good education, in the belief that this would give them all the opportunities they needed to succeed in American culture. But the way in which Korean storekeepers were unprotected from looters, testifies to their function at the bottom-end of capitalist exploitation. Undoubtedly, there are ambiguities around the conflicts between Asian-Americans, on the one hand, and African-Americans and Latinos, on the other. But these can only be explored constructively if the basic analysis recognises class.

In general, these journalists were not able to comprehend the subtleties of class identities as manifested in the L.A. riots. This is partly because the writers were usually not recounting their own experiences or activism, but were instead commenting, however "sympathetically", on the situation. Similarly, most writers clinging onto the belief that the solution is to vote Democrat. True, some writers attack the myth that the Democrats supported welfare spending and urban investment. But it is significant that the last article in the anthology is an excerpted speech from Jesse Jackson. As President of the National Rainbow Alliance, Jackson has a fairly simple solution: vote Democrat, and then lobby for/promote a broad coalition of the disenfranchised, whose power lies in the ballot box. This epitomises the left-liberal view of a democratic society - the illusory notion that the mechanisms of participation in the wealth of capitalist production can be widely shared without really changing (let alone ditching) capitalism itself.

The way in which this book is 'alternative' only serves to show how vacuous the US mainstream actually is. What is really telling is how so very few of these writers can bring themselves to celebrate anything that happened. This shows complete detachment from the widespread cathartic pleasure the rioters seemed to experience, but which all reporters, mainstream and alternative, dumbfoundedly recognised ("Do You Fear the Coming Darkness", Tom Carson). The rioting was uniformly described as nihilistic
self-destruction of their community. But whose community is it when you are effectively under siege, with no services, resources, or opportunities?

At the same time, the articles are too despairing about the possibility of change. In fact the insurrection created the context for an ongoing debate about the relationship between race and class, and showed that members of different oppressed groups could act decisively together. It also showed that the federal, state and corporate rulers do not control a self-perfecting bureaucracy which cannot be successfully challenged. On the contrary, the system reacted with shock, then panic, then overt brutality. This is extremely damaging to the self-image of democratic capitalism. Economic and political powers are not abstract machines. They are complex institutions which have been created and are run by people. The riot vividly demonstrated this fact. In everyday life, individuals, groups and communities are continually resisting these systems, putting them to the test, revealing the contradictions. This is one of the crucial ways in which people are empowered to act politically.

Of course a riot, like anything else in capitalist society, is a contradictory event. But as an action it has a lot more to commend it than Inside the L.A. Riots recognises.

Simon Scott

ANSLIM
“Beyond Sexuality”
Phoenix Press
1992 109pp
Price £4.50

I have read this book twice in a hopeless effort to be less irate about its contents. The introduction promises us "...a libertarian viewpoint on issues of gender politics, extending socialist critiques of sexual oppression by focusing on the destructiveness and conflict caused by state and capitalist hierarchies of power”(5). An appalling start but one which fails to match what is actually on offer.

We are told at the beginning that the book is written by two men and three women. However, it is very evident that the vast majority of the book is actually written by one man. We are also informed that the authors have various backgrounds in lesbian, gay and bisexual politics. Despite the main author asserting that he is bisexual, the subject matter is irritatingly heterosexual. A central (and recurring) theme of the book is the examination of women and men’s relationships. The author tells us very early on that he wants to have an intimate relationship with a woman (9) and then continues to construct an elaborate thesis of why women won’t have sex with (nice) men like him. Basically we are conditioned to desire macho, athletic boys at school then we proceed to marry sexy men who we can fuck but not hold a decent conversation with. And we are quite happy with this because we don’t want our men boring us with their troubles, “when it comes to the practicalities of living with someone day in day out, women may prefer ‘unreconstructed machos’ to ‘sensitive nice guys’ for the reason that the former are not sensitive to their own pain and oppression, and so spare their partners from hearing about their problems, whilst at the same time they can be relied upon to go out to work uncomplainingly, day after day”(43).

The author describes how he is repeatedly used by women who want to rant on about their blokes but who then return to them for the sake of economic security. He explains how he categorise certain men as friends and others as lovers, the author fitting the former category. Sex and friendship are clearly separate. Conversely men view sex as indicative of friendship, love and acceptance. Women are less likely to be (heterosexual) virgins then their male contemporaries (105) thus men are “sexually deprived”. As there are more men under the age of 40 we have a “buyer’s market”(84).

Further we are told that single men die sooner (82), drink more alcohol and are more likely to kill themselves than their married counterparts. More boys are abused as children and men experience more violence than women. The author accedes that women are more likely to be raped than men but he continues to explain that those men who are raped “...have often been raped multiple times”(100). He also notes that “...a man may not even conceive of saying ‘no’ to a woman”(100). Citing the (alleged) lack of U.S. research on circumcision he states that this is “...indicative of the fact that men’s health is not a social priority, provided they can be relied upon to keep turning up for work”(91).

Men going out to work to satisfy women’s wants is a continuous focus, “women are the largest consumers of all personal products, and directly encourage men to participate in capitalist structures...”(104). Another complaint is that we passively allow men to initiate all (heterosexual) contact (85) and that we encourage men to fight over us (79). A more distasteful comment is that if we refuse the authority’s (sexual) interest in us then we have power over him. An awkward and unsavoury reference is made to adults and children, “...the apparent polarisation of power of the adult over the younger person may offset by the power that the younger

has in voluntarily maintaining the relationship...”(82). Here the concept of power has been utterly skewed; how can a child who resists the sexual interest of her father have power over him because she says no? Similarly if a woman refuses the advances of a man she is not exercising power over him, she is simply stating that she does not share his desires. Power is socially constructed and needs to be set in context. Simply saying no to other people’s desires is not an exercise of power; the author may feel powerless, frustrated and unhappy but I can confidently state that he is not being oppressed. He merely isn’t getting what he wants - a good (heterosexual) fuck.

This is not to say that the whole book is a collection of reactionary splurge. There are some very good and thought provoking discussions of gender and power. Thus there are critiques of the "men’s movement", an exploration of political bisexuality and an interesting interview with an anarchist-feminist. Similarly pornography and transsexuality are discussed from a libertarian framework, although the latter is almost exclusively debated from the angle of what lesbians and feminists have said. Unsurprising that we are again led back to women. I must admit that the author has an uncanny knack of saying something quite reasonable then proceeding to expire lines of unreasonable nonsense. I was particularly pissed off by his misrepresentation of women at the 9th Bisexual Conference (65). Couched within a discussion on pornography he cites how women at the above conference “...objected to the term 'bisexual' because it had sex in it”. Of course we’re all sexual prudes. Well, I was there and I can assure the author (and any potential readers) that both women and men expressed dis-satisfaction with the term - for many reasons. It would be fair to say that the issue over the word sex related to the common assumption that if you are bisexual then you are hopping in and out of bed with anyone and everyone. This is not an assumption that many (bisexual) people are happy with. This example just adds to the chronic hidden agendas of this book.

What I would like to know is what is Phoenix Press doing printing such a book. Fair enough (possibly) if the title suitably relates to the contents and does not masquerade as a libertarian critique of sexuality. Then only those interested in one man’s wrestles with women and sexuality can obtain a copy. Potentially very interesting if you’re into psychoanalytical theories of projection. I am not.

This book argues that an alternative "men’s movement" ought to be established which is based upon the issues raised within. I think I’d rather have men howling in woods thank you.

Carolyne Willow
Dave Douglass, 'Reflected Perspectives';
Cajo Brendal, 'Making the Unions Pay' Echanges et Mouvement, 90p
Wildcat, 'Outside and Against the Unions', 45p

These pamphlets represent the latest round in the anarcho/communist Trade Union debate. The Dutch Council Communist Cajo Brendal and Wildcat take their scalpel and crowbar respectively to demolish the myths of leftist trade unionism. Dave Douglass, of the NUM and Class War, gives his reply.

For Brendal and Wildcat trade unions are categorically not defence organisations of the working class. Rather, their role is to act as 'go-between's', between the bosses and the working class, who negotiate the rate of exploitation and aim to 'normalise' need to exercise power over working class relations. But the one thing trade unions can't do is negotiate away class relations. But the one thing trade unions are categorically not defence organisations of the working class. Rather, their role is to act as 'go-between's', between the bosses and the working class, who negotiate the rate of exploitation and aim to 'normalise' need to exercise power over working class relations. But the one thing trade unions can't do is negotiate away class relations. But the one thing trade unions are categorically not defence organisations of the working class. Rather, their role is to act as 'go-between's', between the bosses and the working class, who negotiate the rate of exploitation and aim to 'normalise' need to exercise power over working class relations. But the one thing trade unions can't do is negotiate away class relations. But the one thing trade unions are categorically not defence organisations of the working class. Rather, their role is to act as 'go-between's', between the bosses and the working class, who negotiate the rate of exploitation and aim to 'normalise' need to exercise power over working class relations. But the one thing trade unions can't do is negotiate away class relations. But the one thing trade unions are categorically not defence organisations of the working class. Rather, their role is to act as 'go-between's', between the bosses and the working class, who negotiate the rate of exploitation and aim to 'normalise' need to exercise power over working class relations. But the one thing trade unions can't do is negotiate away class relations. But the one thing trade unions are categorically not defence organisations of the working class. Rather, their role is to act as 'go-between's', between the bosses and the working class, who negotiate the rate of exploitation and aim to 'normalise' need to exercise power over working class relations. But the one thing trade unions can't do is negotiate away class relations. But the one thing trade unions are categorically not defence organisations of the working class. Rather, their role is to act as 'go-between's', between the bosses and the working class, who negotiate the rate of exploitation and aim to 'normalise' need to exercise power over working class relations. But the one thing trade unions can't do is negotiate away class relations. But the one thing trade unions are categorically not defence organisations of the working class. Rather, their role is to act as 'go-between's', between the bosses and the working class, who negotiate the rate of exploitation and aim to 'normalise' need to exercise power over working class relations. But the one thing trade unions can't do is negotiate away class relations.