

HERE AND NOW

Inside:
Rushdie Protests
/ Situationist Glamour.

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CITIZEN OR SUBJECT



This issue was produced by the Scotland collective of the magazine.

The next issue will be arranged, edited & articles commissioned by the West Yorkshire collective. Letters, reports or features should be sent to their Leeds address.

All enquiries about Subscriptions, Exchanges, Back-Issues, copies for stalls, offers of distribution, payment/settling of sales etc., send to our new Glasgow address.

While the subject/citizen dimension explores an element of Statehood & nationalism, the appeal to readers to submit articles or letters has not evoked a response. However, we doggedly persist, whether it deals with third world, eastern europe or even 'celtic' issues. & request your views! We also commend the example of the West Yorks Discussion Group & encourage the creation of informal circles anywhere. Go ahead, do it yourself & we'll supply any contacts that may be interested. Printed by Clydeside Press.

CORRESPONDENCE

Recalling your article in H & N 3, on the new groups in the leftist marketplace, I have information on a new political grouping.

In the San Francisco/Bay area a variety of opportunistic front organisations using titles such as Green Future, Green Party & Bernal Greens have been exposed as fronts of the Humanist Party. In Iceland, and spreading into parts of Europe this same grouping is more commonly known as the Humanist Party, and has adopted an apparently decentralist/non-violent quasi-libertarian left guise.

This party is run from top down by a wealthy Argentinian guru called Mario Cobos, known in his international 'Movement' as Silo. The Party has been denounced by bodies as diverse as the American Humanist Association and Information Network on War & Fascism. The latter have revealed some concealed links with the Unification Church of the Rev. Moon ['Moonies'] in San Francisco, although this is far from substantiated. The Humanist Party originated in Argentina during the intense repression of the 'Junta' and has linked to an organisation representing Industrialists.

Their recruitment methods are as authoritarian as Parties on the extreme wings of Fascism or Marxism-Leninism. Interested individuals are invited to afternoon meet-

ings in which they are eventually allowed to collectively engage in, after a personal intense briefing session using psychological techniques. The target for recruitment in Europe is impressionable teenagers, who are unused to coherent political philosophies and want to become part of a cause to save humanity. The goal is to recruit members to 'The Movement', 10 recruits ensures an individual can climb in the hierarchy, and opportunistic means such as engaging in community, green, and support for Chinese students have all been regularly used. When their policies are revealed, they stand for nuclear fusion as an alternative energy source and anthropocentrism and large scale harvesting of forests.

Hopefully the appeal of such a group, with bases in London and elsewhere will be as minimal as their politics, but many youngsters will be 'burned out' by their absorption in such a bogus 'secular' sect.

Ed Grey, Oakland

Glasgow Anarchist Group reports action by 'Humanist Party' members at a pro-Chinese rally they had innocently attended with a literature stall. Members acted to exclude anarchist, trotskyite (RCP), and bordigist (CWO) literature promotion within the rally area. The few speakers, in between banal rock bands, gave stylised appeals based on the emotion of the student slaughter in Tiananmen Square, which included mock outrage and soft appeals. The minimal politics, a hotchpotch, is based on the premiss that youth appeal to youth and that 'Live Aid' lives on!

ALL THE FUN OF THE FAIR

The 4th North American Anarchist Gathering took place in San Francisco and attracted over 2,000 anarchists, punks, counter-culturists and a handful of libertarian marxists (welcome) and trotskyites (unwelcome).

Each day approximately 24 workshops took place, some of them with over 150 crammed into a schoolroom. The dominant impression, coming from Europe was that the serious and well presented publications (see 'Listings') were produced by an older (25-40) age group with an overriding concern with how technology shapes social relations. Many of the younger elements who attended the workshops were obsessed with form, how the meeting was conducted, and with the 'Process' of calling speakers, the number of women present, the tone of exchanges etc., even though few anarchists betrayed an intolerant, dogmatic attitude.

The gathering included hundreds of youth who merely hung about, beating drums and indulging in 'weird' activity. Press reportage was restricted to this aspect, the invasion of the Financial District by 100 Mudpeople and the fiasco of a Day of Action in Berkeley where the police prevented most 'actions' apart from the trashing of a Coca Cola Lorry. The scope for Anarcho-leftism, given the unpopularity of trotskyism and stalinism, is demonstrated by the dissolution of the Revolutionary Socialist League into the anarcho-scene and their role in creating a Continental Anarchist paper out of the ashes of 'The Torch'.

Jim McFarlane

HERE AND NOW

The current issue contains:



An Invitation to rip, burn or defenestrate 'Here and Now'

Here and Now was launched in Glasgow in 1984 to universal acclaim. Billed as a magazine of radical tyres it punctured the inflated claims of a moribund revolutionary movement.

"The unending tolerance of the anarchist group produces an uneasy excrescence of cretins, sinneralists, animal libertines, buddhist pornographers, Irish publicans, windy builders, knife-artists, child abusers, pussycats and ice cream salesmen..."

Here and Now wants to turn your head around. We wish to re-arrange the dwindling stock of words which accurately describe the awful state of things, in pleasing symmetrical patterns. We consciously avoid the esoteric outpouring of sterile academicism, forever caught between analysis and critique, detournement and deconstruction, post-modernism and postman's knock. We consciously avoid the sterile outpourings of academic eroticism as an end in itself. We despise big words. We're the fuckin' working class. This is England.

The so-called theorists of so-called change write their so-called analyses of every so-called struggle in the so-called world and think their so-called readers give a so-called shit about their so-called crap. Only Here and Now has the gen stuff. We take this as self-evident.

That the forces of opposition to the present system have manifestly bottled out doesn't surprise us. Nothing surprises us. We need a different kind of analysis from the plethora of contemporary theoretical novelties. Plus ca change. Readers of Here and Now need suspect nothing. We're not in it for the money and we haven't got a party. We have never met Colonel Gaddafi nor anyone associated with him. Some of us have been positively vetted.

The magazine is an artefact from a world that doesn't exist. It's a world where the Revolutionary Communist Group could never even have been imagined. Its a world where those who labour in the garden of ideas use only organic methods.

We abhor the ludicrous eschatology of the revolutionary left. We seek only to obliterate socialism, capitalism, fascism, racism, the internal combustion engine, liberalism, patriarchy and religion. We must be humble and warm and have lots of common sense. We will live in terraced houses with honest working folk and dig cobbles from the roadways. After the revolution we shall put the cobbles back, tenderly, one by one.

We welcome all contributions. We do not despise large cheques. Rich people may deliver up their wealth to us without fear of personal abuse or physical injury.

All monies to -
HERE & NOW,
c/o Transmission Gallery,
28 King St.,
Glasgow G1 5QP

HERE & NOW,
P.O. Box 109,
Leeds,
LS5 3AA

"The Tigers of Wrath"

After a brave foray into leafletting a Leeds March, John Barrett examines the Muslim mobilisation against the "Satanic Verses" and the liberal Rationality enshrined in Western notions of 'freedom'.

Probably against reason, two members of the West Yorkshire Discussion Group decided to leaflet the demonstration against *'The Satanic Verses'* which was held in Leeds last March. The leaflet was printed up at short notice by another member, and the Legalise Blasphemy Campaign founded for the purposes of the intervention. It was important to imply that we were standing against *all* religions which seek to circumscribe the freedom of others. Brevity was considered more important than detailed polemic.

the case against restricting *'The Satanic Verses'* to unbelievers like ourselves was put. There were a number of reactions. On the one hand there were some measured arguments delivered by some 30-40 year olds to the effect that the insult to Muslims contained in the book was so grave that banning it should take place 'just as *Spycatcher* was banned'. These people seemed quite happy to argue with us, although I think they doubted our motives. There were some older Muslims who simply said 'He has insulted our religion. You have insulted our religion', who were not open to argument. As the crowd grew some younger guys took up the argument in more strident

our intention was to present an example of reasoned opposition, not intimidation. We didn't persuade anyone, and I don't think we expected to, we were hoping to sow a seed of doubt in someone.

The "Rushdie Affair" throws out challenges to the radical movement which have been barely acknowledged. Billed as a struggle between radical scepticism and superstitious obscurantism, very real awkwardnesses have been stifled by such a simplification.

The first awkward reality is how the trend for a 'non-judgemental approach' towards other cultures (fostered by the very radical



The demonstration, overwhelmingly made up of Britons from the Indian sub-continent, marched from Chapeltown to Leeds Civic Hall. Slogans included: 'Freedom of Speech - Yes! Freedom of Insult - No!', 'Iran - You are not alone!', 'Come out Rushdie - You Mouse' and 'Down with Western Atheism'. Pictures of Khomeini were held and chants in what I assume was Punjabi, and shouts of 'Death to Rushdie' and 'Rushdie is the Devil'. The Yorkshire Evening Post estimated 2,000 people. Before we actually began leafletting it transpired that two people were beaten up by about 30 of the crowd for shouting 'Freedom of Speech' at the demo (if we'd known this, I don't think we would have begun).

and aggressive tones. A few of them were dressed in traditional robes. They asked us whether we thought Mein Kampf should be available for people to read. When we pointed out that it was available for people to read, they accused us of condoning the holocaust and screwed up some of our leaflets. There was both aggression and a willingness to argue, and stewards from the demonstration shepherded people away if the argument looked like becoming too heated. We didn't hang around, and after handing out a few leaflets to passers-by (some of whom affected to be frightened of receiving them) we left.

EURO-CENTRISM

Demonstrators quickly engaged us in conversations when leafletting began, with one of us doing the majority of the talking. Quite soon a sizeable crowd formed around us as

On reflection it was probably a good job there were only two of us, although this made us vulnerable. Numbers would not have made our argument any stronger, and

scepticism now challenged by the Islamic Establishment) has laid the basis for the conflict. The retreat from ideas, principles and ethics, and their replacement by a 'plurality of cultures' has been caused by a profound self-consciousness on behalf of radicals about the 'Euro-centric' and 'culturally specific' basis of their ideals of freedom, equality and solidarity. Indeed this self-consciousness has been reflected in the British State as a whole where the strategy towards cultures from abroad settling in Britain has been marked by a confusion as to whether assimilation and integration or cultural preservation should be the guiding principle. Broadly the Right and national government have favoured the first, the Left and local government, the second. It should not therefore be so surprising that the Muslim community should take the Left at its word and seek to enforce the dictates of Islamic law wherever there are Muslims.

REPORTS

In fact, written Muslim justifications for the banning of *'The Satanic Verses'* reflect the rhetoric of the assault upon 'Western Enlightenment'. Mohammed Arkoun, Professor of Islamic Thought at The Sorbonne writes in *'Index on Censorship'*:

'..... the reaction that begins by invoking the names of Voltaire and Rousseau then goes on to human rights, the freedom of the artist and the writer etc. refers to known themes and to conquests of the spirit which are indeed precious to all of us. Nonetheless, you can't expect all other cultures to follow the trajectory traced for the last two centuries by France and Europe. To hold just to this discourse alone would be to demand of other cultures that they enclose themselves in a specifically Western tradition of historical, intellectual and artistic development. This in turn would be a repetition of the colonial discourse, which 'legitimated' the domination of other people and cultures by exporting an indigenous civilisation elaborated in Europe.'

Here the same literary techniques as were exposed by Frank Dexter in the last issue of *HERE AND NOW* are used to make a complex relation a simple equation - Enlightenment = Colonialism. What began as an attempt to undermine the arrogant presumption of certain Western thinkers who extrapolated the particular of Europe onto the universal of the World, now finds itself being roped in to defend the persecutions of authoritarian priests. The fact that 'Enlightenment' and 'the West' are neither philosophical nor political unities is conveniently forgotten by the slippery Professor.

The crisis of confidence in the ideals of social hope does not only allow sophisticated logic-choppers like the professor to get his foot in the door, but far more seriously has generated a kind of cynical conservatism which has encouraged authoritarians from the streets of Leeds and Bradford to the mosques of Iran. The extent to which this conservatism has advanced can be seen in the approach of the British media to countries such as Iran (and which also, until recently, characterised much of the coverage of China).

In an article in the same *Index on Censorship* (5/89) Farzaneh Asari, an Iranian exile, outlined the conventional wisdom of the British media that Iran can only sustain either a Shah-type dictatorship or a Khomeini type theocracy. Such 'wisdom' condemns to nothing the aspirations of ordinary people in Iran for political freedom and social improvement which briefly came to the fore in the days of the Iranian Revolution before Khomeini took it over. The attitude is exposed by Asari in an article by Simon Jenkins in *The Sunday Times* (19/2):

'[The alternative to the Shah] was never a benign democracy. It was either a fierce military dictatorship or a primitive theocracy. Like most of the developing world, Iran was searching not for the best form of government but for the least bad. It got the worst..... No longer can we dismiss all 'strong leadership' governments as fascist and evil merely because they sometimes use authoritarian methods to maintain order and prosperity. Such a moral cosiness is simply out of date, a relic of Europe's 19th century liberal imperialists.'

Once again the necessary conflation (liberal imperialism) is used to support a despairing argument. Anyone using such a phrase clearly doesn't know anything about liberalism or imperialism, neither of which have much to do with the internally generated (and internally suppressed) aspirations of people in the 'developing world' for the 'best form of government'. Asari comments:

'What is significant in Jenkins' attitude is the permanent condemnation of the vast majority of humanity to a set of sub-human standards, according to which they may swing or hang between the Ayatollah and the Shah. Gone is the universal declaration of human rights, not as an immediate practical proposition, which it has never been, but as an ideal - without which full-blooded apartheid on a world-scale is the only logical proposition: a proposition with which Khomeini could not agree more.'

FUNDAMENTAL SUFFERING

The real sufferers from Islamic fundamentalism have been neither Salman Rushdie, nor Europe, nor America, nor the Soviet Union; it has been the Iranian people in particular and the masses of Muslim countries in general. Since the end of July 1988 over a thousand people have been executed in Iran, labour camps are now being set up to 'rehabilitate' over a million drug addicts (Independent 20/6), whereas the wider Muslim world holds the 1988 record for political executions. If we include the carnage of the Iran/Iraq war which left 1.8 million dead, it is fair to conclude that suspension of judgement for the sake of cultural diversity contradicts the radical spirit in whose name this suspension is performed.

Unlike Christianity, Islam from its inception has been attached to a state (The Prophet Mohammed was the ruler of the city state of Medina) and this might explain the difficulty Islam is experiencing when it becomes separate from the State. Which is not to say that there are not Muslims who are attempting to speed the process towards toleration, such as the Nigerian, Wole Soyinka, who has called on the U.N. to declare the 1990's a 'Decade for Secular Options' and has condemned fundamentalism in the following terms:

'What response.... Can we offer when... horrifying events are sanctioned and promoted by a corporate existence which we call a state, when mass executions are routine, for no other cause than the courage of the victims which nerve them to resist state demands that they renounce their faith? A state where women are publicly lashed and even stoned to death for their refusal to submit to the jealously guarded dictatorship of male priesthood in matters of dressing or appearance? Where criminals, dissidents, adherents of dissenting faiths and economic saboteurs are lumped together under convenient titles as 'agents of Satan on earth', 'enemies of the Living Faith' and other versions of religious rhetoric which then become their own authority for their consequent imprisonment, torture and dehumanisation'. (Index on Censorship 5/89).

But even acknowledging the presence (and past existence especially in the 9th century)

of a questioning Islamist faith does not expel the fear of the triumph of a totalitarian version of the religion in this country. Other factors militate towards it.

One of those factors is the continuing decomposition of the idea of a 'Black' identity embracing Africans, Afro-Caribbeans and Asians from the Indian sub-continent. The polarity of black/white has not served Asians, and in particular Muslim Asians, well. An example of this can be seen in the Labour Party Black Sections movement insistence of a ratio of M.P.'s of 50:50 Asian and Afro-Caribbean despite the population ratio of 2.5 to 1..... The ferment against *'The Satanic Verses'* represents an assertion of Muslim identity separate from a 'Black' one (as well as being separate from the host 'White' one). The consolidation of the Imams power in Bradford has also been aided by the furor which seems to have silenced the Pakistani Left as feelings of entrenchment and isolation (some inspired by racial attacks, some inspired by bizarre notions of a Western conspiracy against Islam) serve to strengthen the traditional power structures. A side-effect of this affair should be the final burial of the notion that ethnic minorities are somehow a natural repository of radical and libertarian ideas. Nor has the parasitic relationship of the Labour Party with 'its' ethnic minorities escaped exposure as the absence of radical socialist voices from the Muslim communities (with the exception of literati like Tariq Ali, or Rushdie himself) reveals Labour's failure to impart even the most basic of socialist principles, such as freedom of expression, to its once-captive constituency.

The self-assertion of Islam in Britain appears against a background of Muslim invisibility, either in the category of black, or as a passive constituency of Labour voting small shopkeepers. But there is also another awkwardness which has aided the resurgence of this religion in its fundamentalist forms (and which is reflected less dramatically in other religions). This awkwardness emerges from the perceived spiritual wasteland of the 'West'.

Nobody looked very rich on the demonstration. Amidst the photos of Khomeini and the veiled-up women's section could be detected a defiance that went beyond the demand for the extension of the blasphemy laws. It was a ceremony a living faith directed against a cadaverous secularity which threatened to take even this away from them. Writing in the *Guardian* (27/2) Shabbir Akhtar said:

'Many writers often condescendingly imply that Muslims should become as tolerant as modern Christians. After all, the Christians faith has not been undermined. But the truth is, of course, too obviously the other way. The continual blasphemies against the Christian faith have totally undermined it. Any faith which compromises its internal temper of militant wrath is destined for the dustbin of history, for it can no longer preserve its faithful heritage in the face of the corrosive influences.'

Quoted in *'Labour & Trade Union Review'* (see note 1) -

SPIRITUAL WASTELAND

The true comparison for the Rushdie affair, and which has been expediently forgotten amidst the cant about Spycatcher, is the controversy over the film 'The Last Temptation of Christ'. There, despite the efforts of some priests and demonstrations outside cinemas the spirit of secularism completely defeated the Christian lobby. It is precisely this weakness which the Muslims do not want to repeat.

To Islam Christianity and secularism are indistinguishable. Picking up (again) from 'post modern' theorists on the exhaustion of the 'Western project' Islamists put their religion forward as part of the solution to the disenchanted Enlightenment:

'In fact I believe the teaching of the history of religions has particularly suffered from dogmatic secularism. The general culture of Europe remains impregnated by the philosophy of the Enlightenment, which has admittedly permitted real progress (notably in its affirmation of human rights), but within a cultural framework that today seems to me to be outmoded....The West's perception of human rights, grounded in positivist and historicist rationalism, only reinforces its misunderstanding with Islam, which has thought out the issue of human rights in the grander context of the Rights of God, by which I mean the space open to the Absolute of God, as defined in the metaphor of the olive tree'.

Mohammed Arkoun (I. of C. 5/89).

Such a statement represents both a caricature of the 'West' and if it had been more carefully targeted, a fair criticism of certain tendencies in the modern world (and that includes Islamic States). For the hegemony of technological forces and functional thinking has brought about, as G.K. Chesterton remarked, the kind of madness where one loses everything but one's reason. At this level Islam represents a real challenge to the bland, smug and complacent optimism of a rationalist-utilitarian establishment which considers that the world has somehow outgrown its capacity for radical evil. The notion that all the world needs is a further extension of technological expertise and market relations, which seems to be a common ideology of ruling classes East and West (with only the partial exception of Iran) clearly is beginning to grate on significant proportions of the world's population. And in as far as the 'irrational' idea of reverence for something is sneered at by all the secular ideologies, some understanding can be gained of the very public manifestations of faith which the British Muslims are exhibiting. And it is certainly that rejection of the limits of reason which has made Khomeini a surrogate (and now from beyond the grave) leader. In a lecture 'Veils of Darkness, Veils of Light' Khomeini writes:

'It has been said that "Knowledge is the thickest of all veils". For pursuit of knowledge causes man to be preoccupied with rational and general concepts and hinders him from embarking on the path. The more knowledge increases, the thicker the veil becomes, and the scholar may come to imagine that the knowledge he has achieved rationally represents everything. For man is arrogant as long as his skin contains him, and any branch of learning he has studied and mastered he regards as the sum total of perfection'.

EVERY RELIGION IS A BIASPHEMY TO OTHER RELIGIONS & ALL RELIGIONS ARE OFFENSIVE TO ATHEISTS -

AS UNBELIEVERS, WE ACCEPT YOUR RIGHT TO INSULT OUR UNBELIEF & TO SAY WHAT YOU WILL

-BUT WE DO NOT ACCEPT THE RIGHT OF ANY GOVERNMENT OR ANY RELIGION TO TELL US WHAT WE MAY OR MAY NOT READ

IF A BOOK OFFENDS YOU - THEN DO NOT READ IT. WHAT HAVE THE FAITHFUL TO FEAR FROM THE FREEDOM OF OTHERS ?



Khomeini also appeals to those who cannot accept modern capitalism's cult of the commodity:

'The criterion is attachment, the ties that bind man to things. These ties may make man an enemy of God when he sees them being severed at the end of his life, so that he then leaves the world in a state of enmity towards God. So, curtail your attachments: we will leave this world whether or not we are bound in affection to something'.

As long as the 'West' is associated with the culture of indulgence and immediacy, of the absence of the idea of the sacred, of the reduction of human experience to its functional necessities writ large, then Islam, and all the other authoritarian religions have an opening.

HORSES OF INSTRUCTION

However, perhaps the time has come to stop talking about the 'West' at all. The idea that all the phenomena of Europe, America and Australia can be wrapped up in one category seems absurd. For as long as rationalist-utilitarianism has held sway it has had its

indigenous opposition. It is as much a mistake to identify the 'West' as a consistent body of ideas as it is to identify the people of Iran with Islamic fundamentalism. For a start the proliferation of non-State religions indicate that the idea of sacred and the idea of authority can be separated.

The critique of the domesticating and pacifying nature of a rationalism that insists on reducing everything to the banality of the manipulable is as much internal, as external to the 'West'. As Ian Sampson identified in *HERE & NOW* 7/8 the refusal of radical reasoners to recognise the real need for the idea of a spiritual homecoming has let all kinds of messianic tendencies out of the box, sometimes with terrible results. William Blake warned some time ago that "The tigers of wrath are wiser than the horses of instruction", and the horses are continually being surprised by the skin-deep nature of reason amongst people despite 'education'. However, it is equally a mistake to succumb to the temptations of religion which have prepared for the faithful an understanding of the world no less limited and disenchanting than that of scientific management. Secularity and toleration are achievements which once a society strays from tend to lead to tyranny and witch-hunting. In the 'post-modern' world the pre-modern is a perpetual attraction, but to succumb is only to prolong the agony of the return of doubt and freedom. The attempt to re-establish a mythical human community in Kampuchea (see *HERE & NOW* NO.1) was a secular version same impulse. Any idea of the Universal for human beings will have to include the apparent opposites of enchantment and toleration, spiritually and materialism, awe in the sacred and scientific understanding of the real. And, perhaps already glimpses of a possible reconciliation can be seen in the developments of modern science - an investigation which perhaps this magazine could encourage. The twin dangers of dogmatism and relativism have been exposed by the Rushdie affair - we cannot swing between these two positions forever.

John Barrett

Notes.

1) Labour & Trade Union Review is the journal of The Ernest Bevin Society, which seems to have developed from the heretical British and Irish Communist Organisation. Some of the ideas of this article have come from this journal available from 114 Lordship Road, London, N16 0QP. For an anti-Rushdie, pro-visionary stance see *Rushdie's Insult* by John Mitchell, 11 Powis Gardens, London, W11.

SELF-DETERMINATION AND POWER ★★★★★★★★★★

A major gathering of writers, activists and anti-authoritarian individuals will be held in **Govan, Glasgow** between the 10th & 12th of January 1990.

One of the organisers, **Jim Kelman** says that the event has sub-headings, "a life task, a political task" and "tradition & existence". The philosopher and political activist **Noam Chomsky** has agreed to come and lead the opening forum. Other literary figures from home & overseas & radical/community activists have been invited.

If you would like to attend, or lead a discussion or simply want more details, write to the **Free University, c/o Transmission Gallery, 28 King St., Glasgow G1 5QP**. There will be social events in the evening. p.s. This has absolutely nothing to do with the European City of Culture shite !

Shroud a fake ~ Official !

New Times as the Euro-Communists update the 'British Road to Stalinism'. Alex Richards is amazed at the lack of substance behind the rhetoric.



Great claims have been made for the novelty of the 'New Times' relic now being clutched by the Communist Party of Great Britain. The self-described 'realistic Left' are continually genuflecting to 'post-Fordism', apparently a concept with a pleasing loose fit and none of that unpleasant tightness experienced when wearing the older Stalinist weave.

Post-Fordism gives the appearance of being a political concept which allows a grasp to be regained on the nature of modern societies. Most importantly for its acolytes, it seems to allow Leninism to be rejected without repudiation of past errors. Leninism is viewed as the natural form of socialist thought and action in the period of the mass worker, but one which is now outmoded as mass culture gives way to market-driven lifestyle fragmentation.

Whereas medieval relics had to be manufactured with the appearance of something ancient, the 'New Times' weave has to appear radically new. And examination of some of its threads shows that they are not as new as they are represented. For example, Stuart Hall's 'Brave New World' turns to Berman, Lyotard and Baudrillard to ring the changes, and in doing so, he shifts Baudrillard's critique of the pretensions of productivist Marxism, *The Mirror of Production*, to 1979, safely into the New Times era. Unfortunately, the book was published in 1973 in France and in 1975 in the USA. So if Leninism became obsolete through no fault of its own, when did this occur?

And when we find Centreport taken as a symbol for the new age, as occurs at the very beginning of Robin Murray's article 'Life After (Henry) Ford', we are entitled to ask whether this is the Sixties or the Eighties? For the notable feature of office blocks built in the late Sixties is their incompatibility with business requirements of the Eighties: they do not permit the false floors and ceilings needed for a wired office.

Overlaid on this apparent grounding in new conditions of production, distribution and consumption is a colour-supplement celebration of novelty for its own sake: smart cards, home banking, lifestyle analysis, it's all there, blending in with the now obligatory celebration of 'New Social Movements'.

'Robots and computers are familiar parts of

our workplaces, just as satellite television will become familiar in our living rooms.' Just as ... Perhaps this is a recognition that work and leisure are interlocking parts of the reproduction of capital? But no, the 'just as' is another celebration of modernity; later we find that the problem with satellite tv is that it will transform 'one of the most important acts of mass consumption, which is vital to the quality of information in a modern democracy'. The democracy of simulation of debate, the simulation of decision.

It might have been expected that Marxism Today's celebration of *Live Aid* as the beginning of the end for 'Thatcherism' would now be passed over in silence. But their ideologues have the strength of their convictions, for here it is again. Not a word about the merchandising of such events, about the career moves, about the politics of gesture, about spectator passivity. No, events from *Live Aid* to Red-Nose Day are manifestations of a 'progressive, humanitarian internationalism [which] combines many of the elements of successful opposition to Thatcherism. It has drawn millions into politics.' At which point Hans Christian Andersen could provide a textual critique: 'The Emperor's New Clothes'.

In among this pursuit of the new, some colours fade quicker than others. The clearest definition of the moment when the 'New Times' issue of *Marxism Today* was compiled comes when we find *Next* and its former boss, George Davies, depicted as the future—only three months before his sacking amidst rising losses incurred by his ventures.

Carbon-dating these threads, we find that they are not what they appear. The colours of the woven text are intended to disguise the shape under the shroud—the preserved body of Leninism. But as the chances of a politics based on Leninism ever again exerting significant influence recede, its adherents have to find some compensation in the real world. 'Progressive consumerism' will apparently fill this role, offering the chance to cut consciences to this season's fashions. In consumerism—'highly personalised, individualised, the area of life where people feel most expressed and free'—the ex-politicos will declare their preferences for Benetton over Burton.

Alex Richards

No Poll Tax rebellion

Will Poll Tax opposition in England avoid the stranglehold of Militant domination? **Jim McFarlane** draws lessons from the Scottish civil disobedience & cautions against optimistic & exaggerated interpretation.

The story so far.....

In *Here & Now 6*, the resistance in Scotland to the imposition of the Poll Tax was contrasted to the Anti-Census opposition in West Germany; the issue of a 'popular sovereignty' was developing, undermining Labour compliance with lawful protest; and effective opposition was polarising between a non-payment minority and those persuaded to, reluctantly or not, comply with its imposition.

Over a year since these comments it is evident, that despite a sustained assault by the Councils, established Institutions and media, that the Scottish Anti Poll Tax Federation and the Scottish National Party have persuaded hundreds of thousands of Scots to refuse payment of the Tax. A combination of disarray in Council collection and in the case of Strathclyde, deliberate silence on the scale of non-payment, means that it is difficult at this stage (July 1989) to identify how many citizens are prepared to refuse co-operation to the extent of having Benefit, Wage or Savings arrestments, and potentially Warrant Sales of luxury goods after their pointing under the Debtors (Scotland) Act of 1987.

It is likely that the scale of such resistance, not including those who delayed payment till the third instalment was due, will reach the 20% estimate mentioned in early Government statistics referring to the militant minority composed of non-registrants and non-payers. (1)

The architect of the Community Charge (Poll Tax), Michael Forsyth and the 'free market' Adam Smith Institute, have based their strategy 'on exploiting the discomfort of Labour Councils squeezed between a vocal minority refusing to pay and the 'silent majority' incensed at the level of the Charge' (*H & N 6*). The acid test of appealing unashamedly to the pure material self-interest will be the Regional Elections of May 1990. By this juncture the memory of Labour compliance will still be vivid, especially among those who have been pursued as debtors, the tactical subsidy of the 1989 subsidy to Strathclyde (worth £57 per head to each Glasgow citizen) will disappear, and Government levers on the Rate Support Grant will force Councils to either push up the level of the Poll Tax or accelerate the privatisation or dismantling of Council services.

The electoral message of the Euro Elections in June 1989 illustrate that the Tory master-plan has barely shored up its middle class support in formerly high rated housing and is still suffering seepage to the SNP and Labour. The targetted local authorities for the low poll tax bribery are Lothian Region and Edinburgh District which have 'Left'

images (unlike their unapologetic collaborationist counterparts in Strathclyde Region and Glasgow) and SNP strongholds in Tayside and Grampian.

The Labour Party, through the Trade Union bloc votes, surmounted the challenge to be committed to Non-Payment in September 1988 at the Govan conference. Since the debacle two months later when Jim Sillars of the SNP won the Govan Parliamentary By-Election, riding the anti-poll tax and pro-Home rule bandwagons, they have arrested the tide by presenting non-payment as gesture politics that weakens Council finances (2) and promoting the cause of a Scottish Assembly based on 'A Claim of Right' (see Alex Richards commentary on this). At the Glasgow Central By-Election the strategy worked; rising the crest of mid-term Government unpopularity, the credibility that they could gain a majority over the Tories weakened the SNP case that chasing votes in the south of England wouldn't result

when the evidence of saturation posterage gave an impetus for new groups to emerge.

The original opportunism of the Revolutionary Communist Party and miniscule Workers Party of Scotland prior to Registration in April 1988 was submerged by the policy of 'Militant' to make anti-poll tax opposition the cornerstone of its strategy to deselect right wing collaborationist Councillors and Members of Parliament in a groundswell of anger diverted into the Labour Party. The high powered mobilising appeal, especially geared to the young, was especially successful in housing schemes such as Pollok and areas of social deprivation in the east end of Glasgow. In these areas, 'Militant' operates on a totalitarian basis and the necessity to embrace pluralism in the form of participating in broad based local groups, and in the Federations has been a 'pill' that the Revolutionary Socialist League (i.e. 'Militant') has had to swallow to enhance the credibility



in the Poll Tax being abolished by voting Labour, aided ironically by 'Militant' canvassing which advocated voting Labour without endorsing its sabotage of anti-poll tax resistance and its expulsions of 'Militant' entrant Party members.

SATURATION

The 'Duke of York' tactics of Labour and Trade Union token opposition to the Poll Tax - leading the army up to the top of the hill only to lead it back down demoralised without a fight - has been outflanked in terms of community based resistance not by the SNP but by the Federations of Regionally and locally organised anti-poll tax groups. Although a comprehensive movement proved beyond the ambition of these groups, the early highpoint of anger generating local groups in Glasgow and Edinburgh (3) was re-stimulated in the non-payment period

of the Federations, which by and large, they dominate in terms of Executive power and Conference policy.

In Edinburgh and Aberdeen, and smaller towns such as Stirling and Montrose, the influence of 'Militant' has been less decisive and occasionally absent. In inner city Edinburgh, after the failure of early registration machinations, 'Militant' members have had to accept joint work in politically diverse groups. The Community Resistance network of libertarian socialists, together with miniscule sects such as the Revolutionary Democratic Federation & Scottish Socialist Party, have presented an alternative way of organising and regularly opposed 'stitched-up' token protests in connivance with 'Left' Councillors (4). The public profile of 'Community Resistance' also has stimulated in London, Leeds and other English cities

scores of groups operating on self-determining, pluralist and direct actionist principles.

In Glasgow, independent pluralist groups are less in evidence, partly due to less willingness on the part of Left groups (notably the Socialist Workers Party) to adopt a constructive approach, preferring a defeatist analysis based on Non-Collection through the Unions or nothing. The examples of non 'Militant' dominated groups range from 'Top down' groups like Gowan led by Communist Party of Britain (i.e. 'Morning Star') figures; groups such as Pollokshields which have had constant battles between participating in the Federation and endorsing the tokenist 'Committee of 100'; Woodlands, the most libertarian influenced group, and my experience in Ibrox/Cessnock of a group with assorted leftists operating collectively out of the necessity of bolstering a minority in an area tarnished with Loyalist associations.

In such an area, the example of anti-poll tax organising is almost unique in recent years (leaving aside the electoral circus of canvassing etc.), and the public profile of streetstalls, mass leafletting and Public meetings has bolstered the resolve of hundreds of individuals, who otherwise may have felt too atomised to have the confidence to withhold or refuse payment. This role for local anti-poll tax groups, rather than the fantasy of leading an 'Army' ['Militant'], has been to act as a 'tribune' of resistance countering the collaborationist views widespread in the media and to provide local substance of activity not directed by manipulative, demonic organisations (as the media has tried to represent 'Militant' and the Scottish Federation).

The mettle of the Federations has been demonstrated by the willingness in Aberdeen, Stirling, Edinburgh and Glasgow to actively resist pointings (marking of select goods leading up to a Warrant Sale to raise funds to offset Debts) concerning those who refused to register (5), and although this has involved much less people than the thousands mobilised for Rallies/Demonstrations, it could prove more crucial in halting such debt actions and in manifesting 'popular sovereignty' against the reluctant Local Authorities.

A TRIBUNE

Thousands of people have been drawn into resisting the poll tax, and have latched on to a political justification for 'can't pay' inability to meet the bill, or the moral crusade of the 'can pay: won't pay' dissenters yet it only represents a tiny fraction both of the 3/4 million refusing to pay, and the 3/4 million happily or reluctantly paying 'Thatcher's Poll Tax'. The idea of active opposition, far less instigating organisations of opposition, has proved obstinately unpopular. Although much of the passive opposition arises out of family commitments, the drudgery of work, or of suspicion of leftist rhetoric & motives (including that of the SNP), this failure to rise up in rebellion throws up wider considerations.

26,000 people (at least) have disappeared from the Electoral Register and the personal strategy to evade payment will be repeated in the English cities, especially London. The combination of casual or 'black economy' work, with squatting and sub let housing accentuates this tendency of 'low life'

survivalism (far advanced in U.S. cities). The instinct to avoid a public profile may conflict with appeals to engage in long term local agitation.

DON'T PAY



The appeal of collective community based opposition largely 'falls on deaf ears'. The accumulated influence of Labourism, the Welfare State ethos of the 'great provider', and the living patterns reinforced by housing and city planning, all mitigate against dissent becoming generalised and politicised. The generally uncritical perception of the media caricature of protest also immunises the great mass against being transformed through political activity. Added to this the social psychology of being the continual victim creates a situation where people are paradoxically surprised and even disappointed to be told that, as an act of civil disobedience, that the powers of the Authorities do not entail imprisonment, fining for non-payment, benefit arrestment beyond a paltry sum, wage arrestment that isn't linked to ability to pay, and the seizure of basic household items through Warrant Sales. Part of the confusion arises through mis-information relayed through the media and street-talk, but it also often reveals a reluctance to accept that resistance is a viable alternative even when the facts contradict the need for pessimism. What the Authorities realise is, that a culture based on anxiety, fatalism, pre-occupation with personal factors, social atomisation, a diet of trivia and spectacular events, is a culture predisposed to change which centralises power and institutes means of checking movement among the population of Orwellian design.

The tendency in anarchism, exemplified by 'Class War', to attack leftists and seek notoriety for their cause, may be contradicted by the need to organise on an open, pluralist basis as the London Federation of anti-poll tax groups is currently demonstrating. As the Letter published in 'Freedom' (June 1989) indicates, rushing the platform and assaulting speakers is hardly a responsible approach to win fellow activists to ideas which in the longer process will undermine respect for the position of Politicians and Parties.

The outcome of the anti-poll tax protest is as yet undetermined. The implications could accelerate centralisation of power, transfer of wealth and break up the service provision of Local Authorities, and reduce voting to primarily accountable expenditure to keep Poll Tax levels down. On the other hand, Labour could rebuild its electoral appeal through the imposition of unpopular regressive policies which the Poll Tax, water privatisation etc. represents. Alternatively, if Labour fails to advance significantly, the electoral appeal of the SNP (and less so Plaid Cymru in Wales) will regain its post-Govan momentum and 'independence in Europe' could lead to a seed-change which could prefigure the break-up of Britain (especially in a 'hung' Parliament).

What is least likely, to be realistic, is that a momentum of community based opposition will persist significantly beyond the post-Debt recovery phase of Poll Tax opposition. The missing equation in all these considerations will be the extent and type of opposition that will be generated in England. If this is significant, possibly involving riots and/or the likelihood of willful non-payment after April 1990 (which can lead in England and Wales to imprisonment, with penalties for evasion too), then Scottish groups will persist as solidarity grouplets and the generalisation of a climate of opposition will be greatly enhanced. But this is a big IF!

Jim McFarlane, Glasgow.

Notes.

- (1) Including non-registrants, mainly people highly mobile or living in private rented or multiple occupied housing, but primarily non-payers. The authorities announced 98% Registration levels (having forcibly added names without their consent) and found in Lothian, for example, 20,000 applications for rebates from non-registered persons!
- (2) In fact 20% non-payment would reduce Council income by 4% and much of that would be recovered eventually through debt recovery. See also - *Organise No. 1* back-page article from: P.O. Box 125, Coventry, CV3 5QT.
- (3) Elsewhere in Scotland registration was completed by the sending of forms. In the two main cities Registration Officers were sent round the doors to establish 'responsible persons', thus generating greater hostility.
- (4) See various issues of Counter Information, especially no. 22, from: P/H C.I., 11 Forth St., Edinburgh, EH1.
- (5) In Glasgow, Janette McGinn, widow of a leading folk personality and 'Workers City' (Clydeside Press) contributor was mistakenly singled out.

Afterthought

In Northern Ireland, no Poll Tax is planned. Our rulers know it would be a non-starter & potentially draw parallel resistance both sides of the sectarian divide on an anti-Rich basis. It is the one place where a re-enactment of the 1381 uprising was possible!

We need solidarity: not Charter 88!

A new initiative for community based resistance? Two critics of 'Charter 88' offer an alternative version

In the wake of intensifying public debate over civil liberties, this statement aims to reorientate campaigning efforts towards the experience and struggles of those whose rights are being systematically violated by the British State. Since the 1970's entire categories of people have been labelled as 'criminal suspects' and persecuted as supposed threats to national security, public order, or even the individual rights of others.

In this way, the official rogues gallery has been expanded: young black people become labelled 'suspected muggers', Irish republicans become 'terrorist suspects', militant trade unionists become 'irresponsible wreckers', strikers become 'terrorists without bullets or bombs', and so on. Eventually the catch-all 'enemy within' encompasses those who resist oppression, whether it is the exploitation of labour or British rule over Ireland.

Those who struggle for social justice are cast as public enemies by the entire political system; the mass media, the legislature, the judiciary, the police and prison establishments. Extraordinary repressive measures have become the norm; special powers are used in the most ordinary situations. For all those actually prosecuted, many more are made fearful of taking political action. Exemplary sentences and punishments act as 'long sharp shocks' to deter others.

In this climate of creeping criminalisation, violations of civil liberties are officially acknowledged, while being justified as necessary for the common good. Severe penal statutes, apparently for use against a minority who commit violent crime, are said to 'protect' the law abiding majority. This protection, however, hangs like a sword over anyone who dares challenge the imperatives of capitalist rule.

Effective actions are necessary to confront this criminalisation process, and clear arguments are needed to refute the official justifications. Needed most of all is solidarity amongst, and with, all those who have no alternative but to organise demands for justice, and better strategies for limiting the State's repression. Individual rights can only be guaranteed by collective power organised as a defence against the State.

In the face of such difficult challenges, Charter '88 fails to contribute anything meaningful; it indulges in illusion mongering which is worse than useless. It has nothing to say about such special laws as the so-called Prevention of Terrorism Act, the so-called Public Order Act, the Police and Criminal Evidence Act, (or the para-legal 'shoot to kill' policies). It offers no challenge to the arguments used to justify such legal chicanery or the repression which such policies entail. Much less does it offer solidarity with the targets of these strategies. Indeed, Charter '88 could easily be signed by the people who drafted these laws, or those who use them to persecute the political opposition.

With its narrowly individualistic notion of civil liberties, Charter 88 ignores the State's targeting of groups for criminalisation. By its silence, the document dissociates itself from those forces which have done the most to defend civil liberties, both in the past and the present. It ignores the 1381 Peasants' Revolt, the Levellers, the Chartists, and the anti-fascists of the 1930's, as well as today's many committed grass-roots struggles. Turning its back on all these, Charter 88 bases its legitimacy on the State, to which it looks to guarantee our civil liberties. Indeed, the document's identification with the State coincides with the nationalist myths it promotes about the Glorious Revolution and World War II.

As a consequence of the 1688 Glorious Revolution, we are told, 'Britain was spared the rigours of dictatorship'. Yet we are conveniently not reminded that the new democracy applied only to a tiny minority who exploited the population at home and abroad, as well as persecuting Catholics. By presenting Charter '88 as somehow extending the 'positive side' of 1688, the document cannot avoid associations with British rule over Ireland. Opponents of that rule rightly saw last year's tercentenary celebrations as an affront to the labour movement and a calculated insult to the Irish community in Britain's cities.

To support this appeal write to the authors
c/o Leeds address.

Charter 88 likewise promotes historical myths in claiming that in May 1940, 'Britain defied the fascist domination of Europe', as if Britain's declaration of war was a 'democratic achievement'. In reality, through the 1930's the British State repressed anti-fascists, aided Franco in Spain, collaborated with fascist Germany and Italy while it was thought that Hitler would turn on Russia, and then entered the war only upon realising that the Axis powers threatened its own Empire. This was no 'anti-fascist' war except in left rhetoric: Britain interned anti-fascist Italians and Germans, with scant protest, as part of its national-chauvinist approach for ensuring continued capitalist rule in Europe after the war.

For Charter 88, the problem appears simple: apparently, we have for too long, been 'dependent upon the benevolence of our rulers', for our civil liberties. These liberties are now being curtailed by a process which is 'only in part deliberate' and can therefore be corrected by reason. Charter '88 proposes a new constitutional settlement. Finding the State deficient in its supposed duty as well-spring and custodian of liberty, the Charter proposes a Bill of Rights by which it is hoped to secure individual civil liberties.

In saying all this, the Charter ignores the outcome of previous calls for legal reform. The Royal Commission on Criminal Procedure, for example, was supposed to extend our liberties but actually resulted in further codifying repressive measures and encouraged the legal system to apply existing measures in more repressive ways. Why should we expect anything better from constitutional reform under the present balance of forces? Charter 88's arguments contribute nothing towards building the stronger, active solidarity which is needed to turn the tide against the state: demonstrations, occupations, strikes, uprisings, amongst other activities.

Charter '88 avoids discussion of such unpleasant realities by avoiding any taint of association with the social groups that have so far borne the greatest risks in struggles for civil liberties. Meanwhile the document arrogantly announces itself as our saviour; it would, 'make real the freedoms we once took for granted', and 'for the first time take them for ourselves'. This claim perfectly summarises the document's dual delusion: its disavowal of history, a history of violent struggles fought to wrest freedoms from the State, and its disavowal of present reality, where signatures on a petition will somehow dissuade the State from reinforcing capitalist rule.

In this society, while the state claims to protect civil rights, in practice it can truly guarantee only those of private property - the right to own, buy and sell. The current regime in particular has systematically invoked individual rights to attack the social rights of collective struggle. Charter 88 accommodates this political shift by proposing unity on the basis of individual rights alone, while leaving social rights for later consideration. It is no surprise, then, that Charter 88 diverts attention from the terrains where collective protest is being criminalised. The document represents the vain wish of the professional middle class to protect itself from similar attack, as individual citizens, while keeping their distance from those social groups already attacked.

Nevertheless new alliances are being forged amongst those who have borne the brunt of repression. Black people picket police stations to demand justice for those brutalised by State-licensed muggers; black and Irish people organise joint rallies against a commonly used show trials. This movement, is attempting to re-define democracy in terms of mass, collective action to take power away from the state. Protesting the economic oppression which underlies systematic legal injustice, the movement puts human needs before property rights and profit.

In these times, there is no middle ground. Those who want to defend civil liberties have to choose sides: either sustain illusions in the State, or help strengthen resistance to it by contributing time and resources to the many community struggles for social justice which are already underway. Most important, as special laws and legal strategies are deployed to criminalise political opposition, we need collective organisation rebellion to make them unenforceable. This is what it would mean for us to 'take back freedom for ourselves' - and surely not for the first time.

Martin Walker & Les Levidow.

FEATURES

Youth offers a target audience where hip techniques are formulated in Television. **Larry O'Hara** gives an in depth commentary on the manipulation & banal metalanguage of *'Night Network'*.

Those who use rights for sleep may not know it, but in the early hours the nation's youth (and their imitators) up until recently were regaled with the ultimate in 80's television - the video-music action programme *'Night Network'* (hereafter NN), whose stated aim was to bring tomorrow's television today. Its recent demise has not meant that it can simply be written off, for the form and style were taken up by other programmes still running - *'Reportage'*, *'Rapido'* and the soon-to-be chopped *'Club X'*. In keeping with the dispersed nature of the late show and its imitators, I offer below a few scattered observations on techniques pioneered by NN and now widespread -

Camera angles are deliberately bizarre, with the aim being to look at everything from difficult angles - the side, below, above. This is done to disorient, to provide an *apparent* perspective of difference, something accentuated by continual 'messages' flashing on and off the screen, paralleling the current trend of 'rap' and 'scratch' music, bringing the ghost of Schoenberg into the 1980's glare. Disorientation then is no accident, it is intended to numb the senses so you are ready for anything.

Topicality, being instantly (and sooner) 'up to date' is the flavour of the minute. Not that such programmes could be accused of having a sense of 'history' - other than that which could be snappily condensed into twenty second 'bytes'. So, the spectacle is constantly 'on the move', but like the Futurist movement it parodied actually *went* nowhere, except to ever more esoteric exotica to be 'consumed' like so much candy-floss.

Captions are ubiquitous, multiple speedy and *intentionally* distracting. Indeed, the chase to half-catch the message (in any case ephemeral) is the (simulated) process of learning.

Statistics are the 'heavy stuff' of such programmes. They are by definition spurious being a-contextual, never checked or indeed checkable, and the possibility of them being methodologically substantiated never arises - they are not on the screen long enough to be read more than once. Nevertheless, the impediments of 'knowledge' is flaunted before the viewers, thereby being exhibited as both available and irrelevant.

Presenters are often shallow in that *chie* was peculiar to the English, the 'professional amateur' having left the cricket-field, donned black leather and whizzed into NN's cavernous and chilly studios. To show the amateurs are really professionals underneath their (authentic Limehouse) chalk-white faces, they inject a synthetic 'urgency' into their game, by telling us incessantly 'What's coming up', and forever promising a 'return' to the street-cold reporter 'on the spot'. So, these promises confirmed both by anticipation and retrospect the 'importance' of earnest eminently forgettable 'snippets' of actual-life, 'Club X' have taken the cult of the amateur to new depths, having two Japanese frontwomen whose chief selling-point seems to be a (feigned) inability to communicate and a glorification of that fact. What was truly radical about NN was its attack on the disgraceful calamity that the young have short attention-spans - the programme assumes they have *none*, and need to be captivated by conjuring tricks.

links between them thus, in the absence of much of substance otherwise, become the core of the illusion. In this way we have the zenith of liberal humanism immortalised - the message is the medium, everything was as good (or bad) as everything else except when amenable to empirical tests 'on the air' as the verifiable (and thus ultimate) truth, leading to the sanctification of sensual riot and hedonistic consumption as a para-religious act. Evermore dazzling introductory logos have become the order of the night.

The viewer [us] is asked to partake in a public conspiracy. We are already at the outset, 'hip' insiders who understand what the score is without even being explicitly informed of the rules. As we 'know' what on earth would we need 'explanations' for? Little matters it that the 'knowledge' is video-babble - who cares (or can tell).

Meeting the public II. By asking inappropriate people odd questions to which no-one could possibly know the answer, and then subtly mimicking their response, we are put in our (exalted) place. If the subjects prove difficult, not only is it easy to cut them off (as

on this programme it would look entirely natural!), the quick imposition of a 'label' on a response usually suffices. Failing that, a starburst of sympathetic bleating is evoked from the existentially-disoriented cast of hundreds milling aimlessly in the background, only having slightly less clue than the presenters where the 'action' is going to be next.



Meeting the public [II]. The summit of the 'vox pop' that was NN must be the 'phone vote'. In the supreme skit of bourgeois democracy at its most inane, yes/no responses were asked for on issues of trivial import, on the basis of ludicrously inadequate information, with the results having virtually no practical effect. So, after a one-minute snatch of a Judas Priest song, votes were asked for on the question of whether or not it had a *subliminal* Satanic message.

Now, not only is this something that would by definition not be ascertainable this way, if it *did* contain such an undercurrent then their viewers will have thus been exposed - or didn't it matter anyway - what the Hell. If the vote went the 'wrong way' e.g. to allow members of the public to strip on screen - then the result was ignored.

Subsequent 'refinements' on the phone-vote are little better, asking questions of such vagueness as to be meaningless - which is their real meaning.

Reality is fragmented enough as it is, but NN had a neat inversion that added yet more twists to the shattered helix. For unless the real is bizarre, it isn't 'normal'. The depth of this inversion was shown by the extensive and totally sympathetic coverage given by these gullible gourmets to the 'Transcendental Meditation' (TM) craze. Unanswered airtime was given to these androids both in a Runcom colony and in the studio 'live', where we were treated to the spectacle of a successful (three foot!) world-record attempt at 'flying' (i.e. jumping in the air with legs crossed). In TM, the professed belief is that by applying will-power plus sufficient practise in the end the believer will *really* fly unaided.

Nobody was willing (or allowed) to make the obvious point that there is no connection between squat-jumps and unassisted flight. Peddling such harmless twaddle might not greatly matter were it not for the arbitrary dismissal in seconds on the same programme of other cults, by a mixture of usual door-step techniques and ridiculous on-air 'simulations' of the cult 'programming' process. What is questionable was not the criticism but the capricious selectivity of it, on the strength we must presume that it was only TM that could offer the 'participation' opportunity.

In the *Psychiatrist's chair*, assorted luminaries of the new Dark Age bared their innermost soul to the panting millions, and revealed themselves as the empty clones we had always suspected they were. This 'proved' anyone can be a star, why they still eat breakfast cereal and use the lavatory like ordinary mortals - what a relief! So, the dream is accessible, and the viewers can aspire to become true celebrities - 'famous for being famous'. The assumption of *ersatz* intimacy provided by Emma Freud's 'pillow-talk' has spread beyond these shores - 'safe sex' indeed.....

Simulation was for NN the peak of sense-experience, the best that could be hoped for. The programme was periodically awash with rushes of Gestalt-energy that would put that old faker, Jean Baudrillard, to shame while confirming his essential theses. So we had on-screen 'tests' of psychic vision, and the pinnacle of schmaltz - gay people allegedly 'coming out' on screen to their close ones for the first time. Even were it the first moment all were appraised of each others sexuality, it was so false and artificial the participants dissolved in an orgy of self-congratulatory giggles - hardly an effective representation of a 'real-life' reaction - but then its only a *simulation* isn't it?

Truth, being relative in NN's view, was not anything like a guide to action - rather it was an excuse for yet another game. So we had a 'True/False' section where we were sold 'plausible' stories e.g. about the 'bizarre' (in NN speak-normal therefore) which all fitted perfectly well with the rest of NN's frantic fare, and asked to judge which label applies - yet again another means of poking subliminal fun at the viewers, mocking them for their own credibility in consuming NN. There were some attempts at political moralising - for instance the successful criticism of shops near London's Carnaby Street for selling Nazi memorabilia. However, the basic format was so ingrained that the most concrete outcome was likely to be new customers for the shops so advertised and indeed lately glamourised. The fascist appropriation of the Celtic Cross as a symbol was accepted at face-value, and so the Cross joined other elements of the symbols of the damned, the essential extras for the street-wise consumer.

Jumbled images becomes the central social space, the *site* of credibility, the locus of style. So the 'hip' reporter alternately acts as brave 'street person' and knowledgeable (as of five minutes previously) 'rapporteur'.

Youth is the apparent target audience for such programmes, but it is not that simple. The real focus is on well-heeled 'youth', illustrated both by the plethora of 'consumption opportunities' pointed to and the adverts in breaks some of which so seamlessly merge with programmes you only realise they are such when the prices of clothes come up on the screen. I say 'youth' advisedly, for a substantial part of the audience, that with financial clout is

intended to be the post-teens seeking to, and this is it, *simulate* youth, recapture it. The way to do this is to engage in expensively 'authentic' fashion-wars, keeping a beat ahead. These conflicts are producer-led rather than organised from below I would contend. The basic problem for such shows is that the very people who make up their target audience, by virtue of being such, are exactly the punters out at the wine-bar or having moved on to the night-clubs, and garage parties, while they're on. Once the advertisers tumble to this, the days of such innovative programmes are numbered. Some might wonder whether NN was given much of a chance, being parachuted into an acknowledged 'dead zone' for TV programmes, 1 - 4a.m. on Saturday. However, if some of the subtleties of technique are combined with a more brash macho procedure, as in the James Whale Radio Show, where jokey insults and obscenity are the staple ingredients, then ratings can come.

Stylistically such programmes have a hidden code, by constant inversion seeking to replicate the fragmentation of meaning we all experience. Daily life is increasingly confusing, with symbols referring to symbols referring to simulacra..... Is this to be accepted or challenged, that is the question facing us in the satellite-TV dawn. The NN perspective was to accommodate to and exaggerate the lurch to meaninglessness - without it must be said the nastiness of the 'Sunday Sport'. Indeed, any programme which revived 'Batman' must have something going for it, though with this and other retreats NN was careful never to tell you at any time throughout the night they would be on, thus keeping an addicted captive audience till near the end. The insidious but none the less real charm of NN was such that a critique like mine is something they could well have 'packaged' and used to confirm their 'open-mindedness'.

So what? you might say, what is the upshot of such criticism. Well, it would be too easy to simply write it off, but the techniques have spread. There is no doubt it did to an extent fulfil its objective of entertaining - but likewise so did feeding the Christians to the Lions, public executions and today's form of public torture, game-shows. My basic point has been that much of the programme was too shallow, this plastered over by *speed* and *simulation*. Perhaps such pernicious products should be suppressed? However, it is not possible to ever totally suppress the search by the young for excitement, the real question is how to respond and help this in a socially responsible way. Surely none today would argue TV is 'irrelevant' to the working class, so it has to be to come to terms with it.

Some integral features of such programmes - especially the emphases on high-grade consumption and deliberate shallowness, are intolerable. These should be separated out from other elements - the desire to shock and disorientate has a noble history, exemplified for example in medieval mystery plays, gargoyles, and even the proto-Surrealist work of Bosch. One of the main problems today is not so much the variety of symbols as their corrosion by capital, utilising intrusive media like TV and video. It would be a mistake to *reduce* everything to conspiracies by such global forces - the now-defunct 'Chatline' services provide perfect illustrations of the profusion of babble that will characterise the 1990's. Everyone talks, no-one listens, there are supposed to be 'monitors' whose only real function appears to be parading their egos and (like the mythical 'night-watchman state') spasmodically intervening to summarily disconnect the inhabitants of this latter-day Bedlam. The parlous state of Italian satellite-TV, complete with on-screen stripshows, portends what might be ahead for the U.K. Clearly, this does not mean that the current BBC/ITV/C4 monopoly is acceptable either, but if the far left does not intervene in these debates then it will continue to be sadly marginal. Other shows like 'Rapido' and 'Club X' have not only imitated but also 'developed' techniques pioneered by NN. For instance in the latter the pretence of meaningful communication is even further undermined by deliberate muffling of the presenters' microphones. The teenage-oriented 'Chart Show' makes a virtue out of difficulty, constantly producing on-screen visual 'crackle' *simulating* the jarring resulting from operation of a video recorder. The fate of NN itself wasn't of great importance, nor even is the question of whether a suitably 'segmented' affluent audience could be attracted to a similar programme. Of more salience however, is the perhaps irreparable fragmentation of the symbolic universe such programmes foreshadow.

As will have been obvious, the 'problematic' by means of which I have approached NN irremediably marks me out as fully deserving the hippy warning to 'never trust anyone over thirty'. Nevertheless in conclusion I would suggest Night Network and its clones prove another warning is in order 'and never trust anyone over twenty simulating being under eighteen'.

REVIEWS

Rebellion Remodelled:

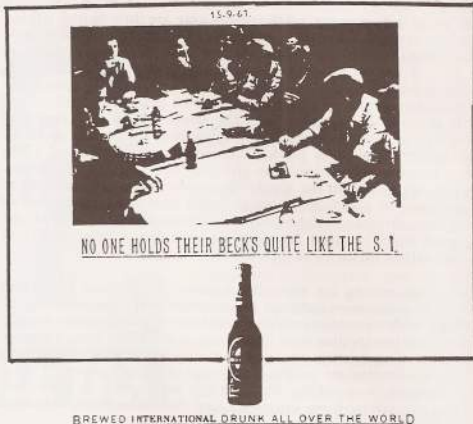
Pete Suchin offers an insight into situationist capers at the ICA & the cultivation of an Image.

Review of the exhibition 'On the Passage of a Few Persons Through a Rather Brief Period of Time: about the Situationist International 1957 - 1972', The Institute of Contemporary Art, London, June 21 - August 13, 1989, and of the conference 'Never mind the Bollocks, here's the Situationists', Saturday, June 24 - Sunday, June 25 (ICA London). The exhibition was at the Pompidou Centre, Paris from February 22 to April 9 (1989) and will be at the ICA, Boston from October 21 (1989) to January 7 (1990).

A reviewer of the Parisian version of this exhibition remarked that 'Few exhibitions have been so vital or ambiguous in recent years. Vital because the Situationist International is still rather unknown to the public, and also because the incendiary bombs launched by the SI between '57 and '62 have profoundly sustained subsequent generations'. (1) And indeed, from a didactic point of view the ICA Show does serve a 'Useful' purpose. There's a lot of stuff at which one can ponder and/or gawp. Indisputably, 'classic' situationist bric-a-brac protrudes from the walls or rests beneath glass, accompanied by a selection of items the production of which was influenced directly or indirectly by the erstwhile scandalous activities of the SI - that's the curator's claim anyway. And though there is a kind of continuity between the two parts of the show the more recent material seems somewhat tenuously attached to the main body of work on exhibition. Those personalities and groups which are known to have had some considerable influence on the SI - the Surrealists, the College of Pataphysics, Isidore Isou and the Lettristes, the International Movement for an Imaginist Bauhaus are largely ignored (2). Thus one is given a good selection of material from the SI itself but in such a way that the contextualisation is poorly carried out.

The situationist section of the exhibition is arranged into several categories or themes - detournement, device & psychogeography, Unitary Urbanism - and includes a number of psychogeographical maps (Debord, Rumney), Asger Jorn's detoured paintings, Constant's 'New Babylon' models, Pinot-Gallizio's reconstructed 'Cavern of Anti-Matter' (first presented in 1959) (3), and a large number of posters, publications and treated comic strips (notably Bertrand and Joannes' *Return of the Durutti Column*). The post-situationist or 'Fallout' part of the display includes work by the French conceptual artist Daniel Buren, Art & Language (a trio of maps, one of which is their *Map to Not Indicate* of 1967), Mario Merz, Marcel Broodthaers, as well as work by Sex Pistols' graphic designer Jamie Reid and various other punk-related items. Here too can be found quite a number of publications - copies of *Vague*, *Smile*, the parodic, anonymously produced *Smirk* leaflet, and an early printing of *The End of Music*.

The arrival at the ICA of a show comprised of situationist ephemera was by no means an unpredictable event. Previous examples of what might be called 'ICA culture' have generally been of the type to which the word 'radical' can be easily, if inappropriately affixed. Mock radicalism as consumer choice has long appeared to be what the ICA (like Beaubourg in Paris) is all about. The situationists had a theory of art and, or rather, of its dissolution and to find their texts and objects placed in a gallery/museum context is surely a strong contradiction, and this despite the excuses proffered in the essay which opens the book - dutifully sandpaper bound - that serves as a kind of catalogue to the show (4). Therein, one of the curators, Mark Francis, tells us that much of the material included in the exhibition was already in storage in the archives of the Silkeborg Museum in Denmark awaiting, as it were, a centre-stage presentation, a place in mainstream culture. He calls his piece 'It's all over'. This is *History* and *History* is that which resides in museums - the dead things. Yet by the twist of another paradox one can see the situation of this installation in an at least partly positive light, since one can hope that the displaying of this material might help a sceptical viewer to view things, including the exhibition itself, a little differently to that anticipated by the admirers of neat curatorial accomplishments (of which of course this show is a prime example). To take the situationists seriously is to realise that their critique of 'everyday life' is by no means 'out of date'. It is not a fashion item. Nor is it any kind of desolate regression to look back at work some thirty years old, as long as one's view is not merely an exercise in nostalgia. A present-day reading of this work should be one in which the intentions and objects generated by the situationists become something more than merely a memory.



As part of its presentation of situationism the ICA is putting on a series of screenings of related films, as well as setting up talks and even a two-day conference, 'Never mind the Bollocks, here's the Situationists'. The first day of this gathering brought together a variety of personages from the SI, the media and what I will call, in a generalisation, the arts. In the first session the audience - which was not very large - were offered, to my mind, the musings of Ralph Rumney and Mark Francis, chaired by Matthew Collings. Things became a little more interesting with the contributions of Stewart Home, Chris Rawle and Terry Atkinson. Yet, this session was more a set of discrete statements than a coherent discussion on the proposed theme of recuperation and resistance in commodity culture. Notable contributions were Home's utterances on the topic of why situationism was on the agenda at all - he gave a group of points which revolved around the idea of situationism as the latest site of academic and cultural commodification - and Atkinson's clarifications of the (often collapsed) distinctions between radical social practice and (so-called) radical art. But aside from one or two interesting moments and points the session was disappointing. A few bits of 'audience participation' livened things up only slightly.

After the showing of a short videotape by Rumney (telling the tale of situationist bad behaviour at the SI congress held at the ICA in 1960 in an again tedious manner) and a break which allowed certain members of the audience to leave quietly, Michael Baldwin and Mel Ramsden (Art & Language) took to the platform to discuss detournement. Elizabeth Sussman from the ICA Boston acted as chair, and Giorgio Gallizio, the only-present 'representative' of Pinot-Gallizio, completed the team. An audio-tape account, by Pinot-Gallizio's daughter, of the making of her now deceased father's 'Cavern of Anti-Matter' began the proceedings. This was followed by an extended account of detournement/the situationist project as a kind of dreamwork - Baldwin did most of the talking, his remarks interspersed with comments, sometimes confused, from the audience. Drifting away from and then back to the concept of detournement this section of the conference was another instance of bad planning in that there was little coherence to the 'debate'. Baldwin did at least make clear that he considered situationist thematics to be the product of a kind of fantasy reading of capitalist culture, a reading which had resulted in the promotion of a device - detournement - which held very little potential as a radical political tool, even if, as an art-making technique, it did a lot of work. Aligned with this interpretation was the clearly-stated claim that the very idea that such a thing as an art-led politics was a plausible modern operandi was itself a kind of fiction or fantasy. (These remarks echoed similar considerations expounded by Atkinson during the first sitting). It was apparent that both members of A & L shared the view that their inclusion in the 'influenced by situationism' section of the exhibition was the result of a curatorial move, an 'academic' attempt to cobble together the semblance

of a critical (art based) tradition. There was some chatty disagreement between A & L and Matthew Collings around the topic of a short film made by and shown on the BBC's *The Late Show* when the display was still at Beaubourg. Collings, who had interviewed A & L about the exhibition defended (from his seat in the main body of the theatre) the BBC's editing and presentation, whilst A & L contested the way their remarks had been redistributed and rendered into typical BBC libel. Ramsden's comment during the interview, to the effect that if one had a genuine interest in situationism one shouldn't bother going to see the show had, we were told, been cut. Getting back to detournement for a moment, I should add that A & L seemed to view the world as already, in the 1950's, so much a collage or distorted/detournement entity as to render the situationist practice of (further) dislocating meanings merely superfluous, a merely aesthetic re-presentation of events. As for the present order of things we were offered a short, sharp remark by Mel Ramsden: 'detournement today is shopping'.....(5)

When Sussman asked for Gallizio's comments on the discussion he immediately admitted that he didn't understand what had been said that afternoon.

The present reviewer did not return for the Sunday session. (6)

Peter Suchin.

NOTES

- (1) Nicolas Bourriard, 'Situationist International Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris', *Flash Art*, No. 146, May/June 1989, pp. 122 - 123. See also: Christian Schlatte, 'What Is Lettrisme?', *Flash Art*, No. 145, March/April 1989, pp. 92 - 95 and Giorgio Maragliano, 'The Invisible Insurrection', *Flash Art*, No. 147, Summer 1989, pp. 87 - 90. The latter article offers a present-day contextualisation of detournement with specific reference to the practices of 'postmodern' art.
- (2) This point is made by Stewart Home in his 'The Situationist International and its Historification', *Art Monthly*, No. 127, June 1989, pp. 3 - 4.
- (3) Pinot-Gallizio's roll-affixed 'Industrial Painting' is also included in the exhibition. The terms cited at the beginning of this paragraph refer to the following ideas or concepts: The realigning or distortion of the meanings of an aesthetic or cultural object [detournement]; a method or technique of 'drifting' through various ambiances [dérive]; the analysis of specific effects of the environment upon the behaviour of individuals [psycho-geography]; the theory of combining various arts and technical skills in order to produce an integral ambient space in line with psycho-geographical (etc) experiments in behaviour [unitary urbanism].
- (4) The 'catalogue' - which hardly serves, after all the justifications proffered in defence of documentation - to document the exhibition 'properly' is in fact an anthology of situationist and other writings, photographs and diagrams. The sand-paper cover (donated by English Abrasives and Chemical Limited), please note refers to the cover of Debord and Jorn's *Mémoires* (1958), a copy of which is to be seen in the exhibition. It is interesting that the first two essays in the catalogue, by curators Francis and Wollen are copyrighted, whilst the situationists, as is well known, refused to copyright their work. One wonders if this is intended as a kind of joke, particularly as Wollen appends the place and date of the production of his essay as 'Los Angeles, Capital of the spectacle 1989'. The full title and publication details of this work are as follows: *An endless adventure....an endless passion....an endless banquet A Situationist Scrapbook*, edited by Iwona Blazwick in consultation with Mark Francis, Peter Wollen and Malcolm Imrie, ICA/Verso, 1989.
- (5) See Art & Language, 'Ralph the Situationist', *Artscribe International*, No. 66, November/December 1987, pp. 59 - 62. An edited version of this text appears in the catalogue cited in the previous note (pp. 93 - 94).
- (6) It should be recorded that when a demonstrator, (Michel Prigent) handing out leaflets attacking the institutionalisation of the SI, ran out of same whilst positioned at the main entrance of the ICA representatives of the gallery photocopied some more for him. This was during the first day of the conference. The Sunday conference presentation concentrated upon situationism and punk/pop.

To make shame more shameful

A small press edition challenges marketization on the campus. Mike Peters marks its paper.

Matthew Salusbury **THATCHERISM GOES TO COLLEGE: the Conservative Assault on Higher Education** [Canary Press, BCM Canary - London WC1N 3XX, 1989, £4.95].

Every student should read this book. It will teach college and university lecturers more than they might want to know about what the present regime plans to do with the academic sector.

It's a pity that in present conditions there is small chance the information contained in these pages will reach them; the marketization of knowledge means that small-press productions like these cannot compete with the current 'Thatcherism' book mountain, even though it is undoubtedly better value for money than many of them. Its most important contribution is its detailed account of how the Left was beaten at its own game on campus in the mid 1980s. The book shows how it was that the Right exploited rentacrowd tactics with greater sophistication than their opponents, & how the 'free speech' set-up (provocations by controversial visiting speakers) and the antics of the **Federation of Conservative Students** softened up the colleges for their economic restructuring, 'enterprise in the curriculum', student loans & the rest of it. It is a sorry tale, a miniature 'strategy of tension' worthy of *The History Man*, enough to make the greying ex-radicals of the student sixties (many now hoisted by their own tenured petards) hang their heads in shame.

The book itself is written with no such cynicism; it is a brisk and informative outline in 115 pages packed with names & dates which serves to remind readers of what actually happened when. Its findings can be used well even by those who would contest its arguments.

I personally thought the exposure of the links between the **FCS & the Heritage Foundation** the most useful thing the book provides, but the account of events at Bristol University in 1986 (centred around the figure of John Vincent), in which the author was personally involved, will be of the most immediate interest.

If there is still anyone who imagines that conservative policy on education is simply about cost-effectiveness or that the Thatcherite hegemony was won on the playing fields of democracy, this book will disabuse them. Control of educational institutions has always been crucial to the political strategy of both Right & Left (Higher Education is arguably where the British New Right was first spawned, with the 'Black Papers' of 20 years ago), and the rise of Thatcherism has required intimidation and dirty tricks every bit as much as the winning of hearts and minds.

One reservation I would make about the argument of this book is that the familiar Leftist rhetoric about a 'Tory attack' on Higher Education may now be diverting attention from the complicity of managerial socialists in the brave new academic world. 'Socialists' if late have not been slow in lending their support to the disciplinary commercialism, standardization and cheapening of educational work (under such time-worn radical catchphrases as flexibility, decentralization and the breaking down of traditional structures and boundaries etc). And they have not found it difficult to give a progressive, 'feminist' and 'anti-racist' gloss to the **systematization** of British colleges. Insofar as this book still resorts to shibboleths like 'elitism' and 'hierarchy', it perhaps underestimates the ways in which yesterday's 'radicalism' can be made to serve the logic of total commodification.

Mike Peters.

Some Recent Developments
Among Those With

Nothing to Lose but their Jobs

Offering examples of combative, autonomous workers groups, **Phil Mailer** reviews pamphlets that chart their progress in a world unfriendly to permanent organs of resistance.



** France - Winter 86-87. An attempt at Autonomous Organization, Exchange et Movement 1988.

** The Cobas, Italy 86-88. A New Rank and File Movement, by David Brown, Exchange et Movement 1988.

** Sorting Out the Recent Post Strike by a Postal Worker. Dec. 1988.

** La Estiba, Voz de las Puertas, Barcelona Dockers, [various issues].

In November 1986 a 31 year old train-driver at the Gare du Nord Depot in Paris decided he was fed up with his job and passed round a typewritten petition which proposed to "have it out once and for all" with the Company, i.e. to go on strike forever until the Company agreed to better working conditions. By December 19th some 16,000 train drivers (99% of them) were out on strike and the whole of France paralysed.

When the Union of Communication Workers in Britain called a 24-hour strike in the Postal Services last December they must have thought they would have been in and out from the bargaining table in no time. Instead thousands of workers refused to obey the union and stayed out on strike, and it took a lot of manoeuvring to get them back to work.

In Spain, for ten years now, a 10,000 strong organization of dock-workers called the Coordinadora has refused to join any of the competing trade unions. These dockers call their organization "Unitary, of the Class, Autonomous, Independent and Democratic". They are presently on a collision course with the governing Socialist Party.

In Italy successive waves of strikes over the past three years - involving bus drivers in Turin, pilots and other airport workers at Milan Airport, and hundreds of thousands of service workers including teachers from all over the country - have been led by organizations called COBAS (Comitati di Base) which have by-passed and even in some cases fought against the unions.

The decline of the unions in the 1980's - something evident since the oil crisis of 1973 - really underlines the decline in capital's need for organized labour in the first place as part of its need to transform traditional jobs through automation and the new technologies. While more and more trade unions have agreed to this capital transformation, dropping their last traditional vestiges of opposition, unions are seen as the mere brokers of labour power they are, and not even as very good ones at that. In France just 10% of workers are unionised. In the U.S., capital's heartland, eight years of Reaganomics has attempted to gain unimpeded access to all markets even the labour market. If capital had its way, its most coherent and preferred form of organization would be the temporary agencies, with workers hired and fired on demand and it is these rather than the vestiges of a senile union movement that are the true enemies of an autonomous resistance in the workplace. What has happened in this situation is that workers, in order to defend their jobs from the global appetite of capital, have been forced to go beyond the trade unions and set up their own organizations. This has been a tendency in all strikes in the U.K. since the miners' strike - a point made by Henri Simon in his book on that topic "To the Bitter

End" - a book still only available in French.

It is events like these that are described in the above pamphlets and newspapers. In most instances the unions have retaliated with a vengeance usually reserved for bosses and have systematically set out to destroy them through slander, fear or the use of the law.

These pamphlets have different vantage points and different degrees of analysis, the first two being more distant from what they describe while the latter two are deeply involved. But none of these pamphlets fit the classic leftist descriptions as social-democratic, Leninist, or anarcho-syndicalist. Instead they are representative of a new and growing current which takes seriously the motto of the First International, "the liberation of the workers is the task of the workers themselves" and sees the only transformation of society as being driven by hitherto powerless workers negating the categories of "capital" and "labour" altogether.

A French Winter.....

When some drivers decided to republish the aforementioned leaflet that had been handed around the Gare du Nord they called a strike for December 18th, calling on all trade unions to support the strike, warning that "the drivers will know what to do with trade union organizations that did not offer their support" and ended by asking, "If you agree with us, photocopy this leaflet and pass it round". Soon all engineers had seen the leaflet. By the 19th only one of the 94 depots

in France was working.

Strike committees were elected in open meetings in all the depots - subject to instant recall. Some union members were elected, but most were certainly not union officials. A national Liaison Committee was set up by the drivers of Paris-North and Sotteville. The CGT (the Communist Party controlled union) then entered the arena by condemning the Liaison Committee accusing it of "bypassing the usefulness of the representative trade union organization and of breaking workers' unity". They called for reinforcing the strike through trade union representation - translation: take it over. A clear demarcation line between the rank and file workers and the unions emerged. Fearing the rank and file, the railway management took the side of the unions and called on them to negotiate, ignoring the existence of the Liaison Committees. As one worker (quoted in *Le Monde*) said "We can't negotiate. The management and the unions don't want us". Another worker forecast that "if the union takes over the strike, we will return to work". The Liaison Committees were not strong enough to resist this alliance of management, police, government and the unions. By January 4th ten smaller depots voted on a return to work and the CGT, knowing the strike was collapsing, launched a call for all-out support, essentially launching a parallel strike which they could lose. By January 12th, 55 of the 94 depots had returned to work and the strike was broken.

In the pamphlet by Exchange et Movement (who have produced some 58 issues over the last few years) these relationships are detailed and the weaknesses of the autonomous movement and the connivings of the CGT trade union documented. While the pamphlet is difficult to read because of both its style and presentation it is well worth the effort since it has a wealth of detail about the strike and the Liaison Committees.

The Italian COBAS.....

The same outfit produced another text which tells the reader that they abandoned "the original intention to produce a short documentary on the series of unofficial movements and strikes in Italy over the period 86-88" to (instead) "look behind the tendencies that allow the capitalist class to present Italy as a boom economy as well as the rhetoric of the unofficial movements". It is a pity however that no attempt to place these phenomenon into a historical setting was made as it would have made easier reading. Instead for half of the pamphlet we get an analysis "of how the capitalist class could deal with the internationalisation of markets" and while such analysis has some interest - given the 1992 Common Market date - the pamphlet really only gets interesting when it gets into the nitty-gritty of the movements themselves.

Quoting from interviews and descriptions in various national and local newspapers the author shows how the train drivers COBAS was not a spontaneous movement resulting from the deterioration of the drivers' economic situation. Instead it was "developed" by small nuclei who had been involved in earlier struggles and had, on the whole, a series of relations with different unions". A series of wildcats carried out on the local level forced drivers to network, something which the CGIL union had not been doing. In fact membership of the CGIL had gone from 76% of the workforce in 1968 to 20% in

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1988. It was this liaison committee which began to call 24-hour national strikes. In mass meetings some rank and file workers wanted to continue the strike for two days (and two weeks even) and a split developed between radicals and moderates. An attempt to set up a national COBAS - with teachers and civil servants - further divided the drivers. The split formalised when a new drivers' union called for pay increases twice that which the COBAS had originally been asking for. What appears to have followed was a lot of positioning by the unions who had been upset by this development and had wanted the COBAS rescinded. Talks between the COBAS and the unions broke down when a draft alliance was rejected by the rank and file, best explained by one delegate from Rome who said that "The liaison committee cannot be dissolved as it represents an organizational form of union representation for drivers and has the aim of supporting self-defence and proposing democracy in the union movement". This was to be achieved by open mass meetings and recall of delegates.

Various COBAS were set up at roughly the same time in various places and different sectors. There was the Turin public transport COBAS. Turin, with a million inhabitants, the home of FIAT has no commuter trains and no subways but instead is governed by traffic snarls; and the Communist Party led Council didn't take lightly to this break in good relations. The COBAS there was eventually smashed. A teachers' COBAS called a nationwide demonstration in Rome drawing 400,000. Again the tactic used by the government was refusing to negotiate with the COBAS while dealing directly with the unions - with all the political jockeying, the balancing of seats in the government at stake. The ground crew at Rome airport also had a COBAS, the ins and outs of its struggle being described in the pamphlet. Efforts to unite these COBAS was not successful. Clearly the various governing coalitions - involving Socialists, Christian Democrats with the tacit support of the Communists - was reflected in the traditional union movement and just as clearly created a move away from those unions, another effort of the proletariat to consolidate itself as autonomous from both capital and the brokers of labour power.

While this pamphlet is steeped in a vulgar economic determinism, it does provide myriad details on the functioning of these organizations. Characteristically, this Exchange et Movement text doesn't even attempt to draw historical lessons, although bolder readers will certainly draw their own.

THE COMING DOCKS WAR: LA COORDINADORA.....

La Estiba is the official newspaper of the DEPB, the Barcelona dockers organization. The dockers refused to integrate into the fledgling unions being set up by the Communist Party (CC.OO) or the Socialist Party (UGT) after the death of Franco. In 1976 they started a struggle to re-hire some fired workers and a co-ordinating committee was elected for the duration of the struggle. The structure remained and became the Coordinadora. In a text read to Third International Congress of Stevedores of Europe they analysed how workers' organizations always had a tendency to bureaucratise and wrote that their organization would be "Unitary, of the Class, Autonomous,

postal workers that a series of wildcats followed. Seeing how unpopular it was the union then condemned it. Everytime there was a wildcat the union entered into secret negotiations with management. "They called a 24-hour strike which they thought would start and finish our struggles, but many workers just didn't bother to turn up the next day and thus began a national stoppage. The union responded with rumours to the effect that the strike was playing into the hands of the Post Office who wanted it to help Thatcher's reprivatisation of the postal services" and, the pamphlet continues "tried to sabotage the strike from within". Again there was the usual divisory tactics and attempts at manipulation by certain leftists. A front organization, calling itself the Communication Union Broad Left was dominated by Trotskyist Militant Tendency and the Socialist Workers' Party and was really no more than a wedge of the union itself. The author despises this kind of manipulation even as he criticises the positions which these manipulators had. After getting a form letter "Dear Mr 1. You again absented yourself from duty on..... in the course of industrial action although you had previously been warned about the consequences of work without authorised interruption and without normal instructions..... 4. You will not, of course, be entitled to any pay in respect of any part of the period of your unauthorised absence from duty or your suspension from work..... 5. A copy of this notice is associated for your retention" - he declares himself sick to death of bosses as well as "organisations set up to sabotage and derail the struggles of the postal workers".

After management called for a return to work the union declared the strike official and proceeded to call on local branches to stress local issues while avoiding the large ones, packing meetings with their members for this purpose. And once they gained control of the strike the union leaders immediately called it off. The author concludes: "The postal strike was very significant in the sense that we proved to the ruling classes that we are not defeated or passive. The strike was a step forward compared to the miners, printers, etc. Our strike initially went beyond the union control which is a sign of maturation of class consciousness. This is not enough. We have to go beyond the Post Office and link up with other workers in struggle. We are facing the same enemies that all workers of the world are confronted with. We are back to work but not heavily defeated. We did not have much experience when we entered the struggle. We will be back much stronger and much more determined".

X-MAS POSTAL STRIKE IN THE U.K.

"Sorting Out The National Postal Strike" is a unique piece of writing. It isn't often that rank and file participants in labour struggles sit down and write about them right after the fact and certainly not in the U.K. where there is very little tradition of writing pamphlets or leaflets - unlike say France where there is always an embarrassment of leaflets.

The Union of Communication Workers (UCW), while not yet a Tory trade union, had not recently lifted a finger in the defence of its members. They'd defended the introduction of sorting machines and drafted a bonus scheme called Improved Working Methods which sacrificed many jobs. This resulted in so many divisions within the

LA ESTIBA

VOZ DE LOS PUERTOS

BOLETIN DE LA
COORDINADORA
ESTATAL DE
LOS
ESTIBADORES
PORTUARIOS

Independent and Democratic and Self Organised". And for 10 years, with various ups and downs, this has been the basis by which 90% of the 10,000 dockers of all the ports of Spain have organized themselves. They have produced invaluable documents some of which have been reproduced in their newspaper. **La Estiba** is usually an 8 page large format - focusing on the docks obviously, but with coverage of other labour struggles and attempts to democratise certain companies - like the SEAT car factory where one section of the old anarcho-syndicalist CNT recently won representatives over the Communist Party and Socialist Party unions - as well as many international articles, including the situation in Danish and British ports, Algeria, Poland and France. The article on the British ports for example was one of the most clear-headed and concise analysis of British capitalism at work in the ports that I have seen, even compared to the British papers.

The problems the Spanish dockers face are formidable. Given the technological modernisations which the Socialist Government wants to introduce (containerisation, roll-on/roll-offs, etc.) the government would like to reduce the number of workers; first they tried to negotiate separately with the two main unions - who have almost no representation in the docks. Finally they agreed to negotiate with the Coordinadora, and the Madrid agreement of February 88 was made. But, the wording was so loose that each side came away with different interpretations. In any case dockers in Bilbao and in Tenerife (Canary Islands) refused to ratify it, went out on strike, and won. The agreement had called for the

compulsory retirement of the oldest dockers who would not be replaced and a 'five year' employment plan whereby each Company would adjust its labour force to local activity levels with redundant workers being paid up to 18 months non-worked days by the State.

The agreement is something like the Guaranteed Annual Income which stevedores here negotiated in the 60s and was the price paid in order to move the ports away from the strong labour organisations in New York. Essentially this would be a divide & rule tactic and would aid the privatisation of the ports, the goal of the Socialist Party.

Large assemblies took place in all the ports; and while a majority of dockers have approved this agreement, there are really two interpretations of the complex terms contained within it and much is at stake - from the side of capital a freer hand in organizing labour, less work-time, and flexibility; from the workers side a guaranteed income, control over work-loads and control of the unemployment fund.

An article in **La Estiba** no.33 by a Barcelona dock, Paco Aroca, criticises the **Coordinadora** for having made the agreement too fast and without having consulted the assemblies enough. In fact after 10 years of isolation a long-lasting organisation like that can easily degenerate into bureaucracy and lose the original elan. The conflict continues on the docks and in the openness of the pages of **La Estiba** and the situation at present is one of brewing conflict.

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As in the case of the **Coordinadora** there is a problem as to how long such organisations can last under present conditions. The Italian **Cobas** and the French drivers didn't last long although such forms do keep re-appearing. There is also a problem of false liaisons, ones set up by the unions themselves or by leftists. Trotskyists are notorious for this kind of infiltration and have been responsible for turning these tentative autonomous moves back into old forms of opposition. And the State has sometimes used these coordinations to put pressure on the unions; modernise, or we will talk to the others. The coordinations or liaisons have sometimes been more than ready to lend themselves to this kind of manipulation which pretends both sides have finally the same interests.

Self-organisation is not a question of democratic fetishes; its anti-capital and anti-hierarchical content is what is important. People must be conscious of what they are doing for this content to win. If it turns out that coordinations or liaisons merely promote passivity, if members merely vote on their leaders' already formulated demands, then these coordinations will not be by and for themselves and will degenerate quickly as yet another more modernised form of brokerage in which wage earners participate more fully in their own demise.

The proletariat, as negation, does not reform itself around the workplace but rather on the social terrain as a whole. Therefore these struggles will have to generalise beyond the workplace into the streets, parks, day-care centres, schools, hospitals etc.

Exchange et Movement is available from **BM Box 91, London WC1N 3XX, U.K.** while the Postal Strike pamphlet is available from **c/o TURC, Markhouse Road School Complex, Markhouse Road, London, E17.** The address of **La Estiba**'s is **OEPB, Calle del Mar, 97, 08003 Barcelona, Spain.**

P.M. [New York] □□□□



ENCYCLOPEDIA OF NUISANCES No.8, 'Abyss', English Edition, April 1989. From Compendium, 234 Camden High St., London N1 [£1.50].

"...the demand for life itself has now become a revolutionary programme...those social forces which would once have been described as conservative are no longer concerned even with the conservation of the biological basis of the survival of the species".

This is a well argued critique of nuclear power as the quintessence of the nihilism of the technocratic elites. Nuclear power is simply the most extreme manifestation of the principle of the elimination of humanity from the realm of creation, in the name of economic rationality; both in that it needs minimal human labour, the factor which so endears it to its fans on the Right, and in its basic disregard for the continuation of human life itself. The logic of techno-economic rationality simply eliminates human beings from its calculations.

This is no mere theoretical exercise. It's packed with unpleasant detail concerning the workings of the nuclear industry, much taken direct from industry sources, none of it likely to help you sleep at night.

Jack Murphy.

FESTIVAL OF PLAGIARISM

Transmission Facility, 28 King St., G1.

A poor videocopy of "Call it Sleep" by Isaac Cronin & an associate, didn't disguise an essential weakness in a film essentially translating the language of Debordist situationism into a documentary form. It also seemed to over dwell on the importance of Bolshevism & the Cadre mentality so that, in the era of Gorbachov 'Glasnost' in the Soviet bloc, it almost sounded like a reworking of the hysterical Right.

Far better was another video by the late Larry Law & 2 women 'presenters' from the Thames Valley mid 80s anarcho-situationist scene. The basic explanation of the history & logic of capitalism was clear & easy to digest and some humorous visual clips were well matched with accessible commentary. From time to time, as with a clip from the "Avengeers", Law's choice meant an over-extended clip. Available through a Video collective in London, this copy was made available by Stewart Home as part of his contribution to the Festival. See "Smile Issue 11" for more of the background. A roughcut of the Stop the City demonstration a few years back finished us for video consumption. Some of the footage did at least dispel some of my preconceptions about the event & present the conflict of cultures (City/Anti-City) in

a dynamic interview & action format

Jim McFarlane.

The Festival of Plagiarism [£1.95 from Smile BM Senior, London WC1N 3XX] is a pamphlet detailing the background organisation & debates around the London Festival of Plagiarism in February 1988. Supplemented with articles on the same event published in issues 58.6 of **Variant Magazine** (now again from 76 Carlisle St., Glasgow G.22). This provides the necessary documentation considering & reconsidering the efficacy of such interventions. Also available from the same address are the **Art Strike Handbook** and **Number 11 of Smile Magazine** (30p + post) which features more critique of Spectro-situationism, Skinhead stories & radicality in 60s & later arts projects.

Notes on Class Struggle in the U.S.S.R.: Subversion No.4. Very interesting history of workers strikes, criminal behaviour and resistance in the Labour camps in C20th Russian Empire. Avoids Kronstadt fixation and advances a somewhat limited critique of the civil society as embraced by Soviet oppositionists. c/o Raven Press, 75 Piccadilly, Manchester M1 2BU.

Listings & Short Reviews

Because of the closure of the Glasgow Bookshop address we had used through to No. 6, the Post Office refusing to forward mail from a 'Pigeon-hole', and the possible failure of some exchanges to notice the 'temporary suspension' of the Glasgow address, there has been a drying up of incoming mail, although receipt of an American magazine was plentiful in San Francisco.

In "Europe Against the Current", a combination of publication stands, video, exhibitions and discussion will have similarly stimulated new contacts in mid-September, held in Amsterdam.

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SUBVERSION DISCUSSION PAPERS - No. 1 Capitalism and class struggle in USSR, 25p plus post from Box W, c/o Raven Press, 75 Piccadilly, Manchester M1 2BU.

THE RED MENACE - A3 folded free news-sheet with left communist articles. 3 issues so far have included World War 3, Satanic Verses, Teaching, Venezuela and other riot areas analysed. Donation to BM Wild, London, WC1N 3XX.

NO RESERVATIONS - Housing, Space and class struggle. From Box 14, 136 Kingsland High Street, London E8.

BULLETIN OF ANARCHIST RESEARCH - No. 16 with reviews of Assault on Culture & Deep Ecology. From TV Cahill, Politics Dept., University of Lancaster, LA1 4YF £4.13 sub.

BLACK CHIP (new series) - from Richard Alexander, Cwm Gwen Hall, Pencader, Dyfed SA39 9HA.

WORKERS INFO. RAG - No. 5 from PM, C/o Zamisat Press, GPO Box 1255, Gracie Stn., New York, NY 10028, with donation.

BLACK EYE - No. 6, \$1.50 magazine, eclectic from 324 East 9th St., New York, NY 10009 USA.

BLACK WHEEL OF ANGER - By Peter Plate & other poems/tales of revolt/city life. Contact 537 Jones Street. 8456, San Francisco, CA 94102, USA.

COLLIDE-O-SCOPE - Libertarian marxist magazine. Donation from 2140 Shattuck Ave., Box 2200, Berkeley, CA 94704, USA.

AGAINST SLEEP & NIGHTMARE - Post-situationist cum left communist 1 person effort. Includes the Spectacle's Critique of the Spectacle. \$8 sub. from PO Box 3305, Oakland CA, 94609.

DEMOLISH SERIOUSNESS!

We call on all theorists to pour coke on their word processors and cease to think between January 3rd 1991 and September 31st 1994. Thought is a virus let loose on the world by a self-perpetuating elite in order to market the paraphernalia of the thinker - books, papers, pens, art films, word processors, whisky..... Intellectuals are the pet gerbils of the bourgeoisie, fed and watered by them to demonstrate their essential cuddlesomeness. Thought creates the illusion that through activities that are actually waste this civilisation is in touch with a 'higher logic' which gives meaning to its activities. To call one person a 'thinker' is to deny another the equal gift of cogitation; thus the myth of originality becomes an ideological justification for the free market, mass culture and cancer.

We call on all cogitatorial workers to recognise the materialist account of the origins of thinking and admit their parasitic antecedents in the traditions of monasticism. As bodies surplus to production mediaeval, cogitatorial workers were immured in the monasteries and employed

Le Brise Glace no.2-3, Spring 1989 (25FF from BP 214, 75623 Paris Cedex 12) is largely devoted to two long articles. The first is a critique of "democratism", discussing firstly the position of law-based 'rights' between capital and totalitarianism, from the French Revolution to Castoriadis and Lefort, & later criticising radical calls for 'direct democracy' as supporting managerialism over action, citing examples from recent workers' struggles in France and Britain. The second article is the initial part of an analysis of the emergence of Zionism in relation to the industrialisation of Europe: a simultaneous destruction and reinforcement of separate Jewish community which weakened the classical workers' movement.

COUNTER INFORMATION nos. 22, 23 & JUMBO SIZE 24 (after slight break for Fund-raising) - Includes 'Inside Info' prisoners news. Donations/Stamps to P/h C.Info., 11 Forth St., Edinburgh.

SOLIDARITY - No. 20/Spring 1989 with article by Paul Anderson on CND decline. No 19 on Gorbachov's Reforms £6 sub. from 123 Latham Rd., London, E6.

INTERROGATIONS (POUR LA COMMUN-AUTE HUMAINE). - December 1988 issue. French & English editions. Includes Critique of 'The Proletariat'. USA influenced anarchism from I.S. BP:243, 75564 Paris Cedex 12. [10F plus post].

GREEN PERSPECTIVES - No. 13, 'Ideological Conflict in the German Greens' vs Reale Yuppie voter appeal. \$10 sub. [10 issues] from PO Box 111 Burlington VT 05402 USA.

FIFTH ESTATE - Spring 1989 heralds the RETURN of the Son of Deep Ecology, by George Bradford (subtitled The Ethics of Permanent Crisis & the Permanent Crisis in Ethics). Summer 1989 is more eclectic with coverage of China, India, West German Autonomes, General Custer, The Bastille and Detroit's Incinerator Protests. \$7 sub. from Box 02548 Detroit MI 48202 USA.

ANARCHY: A Journal of Desire Armed - Issues 17, 19, 20-21. Like 5th Estate receives an amazing amount of correspondence and generates debate, especially in the realm of ideas about Technology, Sexuality, Ecology and Spirituality. 17 & 18 feature a debate on Luddism. \$12 sub. worth checking out! From C.A.L., P.O.B. 1446, Columbia, MO 65205-1446 USA.

An Endless adventure...an endless passion...an endless banquet. A situationist Scrap-book (published by Verso/ICA) is what it says: a collection of scraps published in association with the recent exhibition on the Situationists (sponsored by Beck's Bier). An ineptly-edited version of Peter Wollen's historical article from the **New Left Review** no.174 is the best thing in the book, which otherwise avoids critical assessment, preferring contemplation of expulsion lists (a modern form of the prewar intelligentsia's admiring glances towards Mussolini, Stalin & Hitler ?).

EDINBURGH REVIEW no. 82 - from 22 George Square, Edinburgh. £12 sub. Including selective look at Leeds Libertarians in 1970's by Max Farrar.

GLASGOW LIMBO (including a poem HERE & NOW) - from Withers, 16 Belmont Cres., Glasgow, G12 8EU.

GATEAVISTA (THE STREET PAPER) - an alternative magazine in Norwegian. From Hjelmsgt 3, N-0355 Oslo 3. ★ Offers to translate similar alternative/anarchist magazines in other Scandinavian languages, German, Dutch etc. would be appreciated on a voluntary basis.

DISSENT IN THE UKRAINE: A collection of Ukrainian nationalist samisdat publications with photo-reports on recent mass movements. From Ukrainian Press Agency, 78b Kensington Park Rd., London W11.

PPS BULLETIN 'SOCIALIST MESSENGER' News about the radical wing of the Polish opposition. Reveals connections with Left Labourism. From The Basement, 92 Ladbroke Grove, London W11.

ACROSS FRONTEIRS - Summer 1989 Vol 5 No.2 on Soviet Union, Poland and other East European societies. In depth coverage of struggles around Perestroika, Repression and Nationalism. Sub \$20 I.M.O.s and dollars only, from PO Box 2382, Berkeley, California 94702 USA.

ON GOGOL BOULEVARD - Vol. 2 Nos. 3/4 has briefly surfaced from the columns of Torch before future inclusion in a Continental anarcho-leftist publication. Very detailed and dynamic account of Polish Anarchism, by Bob McGlynn. \$1 plus post from 151 First Ave., 62, New York, NY 10003, USA. News from Soviet Bloc columns in Torch, PO Box 1288, New York, NY 10116. \$1.

in the production of the ideology that producing ideology was on a higher plane than producing food which in turn provided the theoretical underpinning for the notion that producing nothing was higher still. Only by breaking free of the bounds of their social function and ceasing thought altogether can cogitatorial workers hope to contribute to the movement for humanimal liberation.

Thought - who needs it? We proclaim the Thought Moratorium - a total assault on rationality. Millions of people have had a wank without ever knowing what a syllogism is. How can we think when some people don't even have a hat?

The Thought Moratorium will be launched at The Festival of Stupidity at Galleries far and wide (24th - 26th Dec. 1990-). Events already planned include short personal statements of bewilderment by several passers-by. The Festival will be immediately followed by a retrospective exhibition at the I.C.A. entitled "Thought: was it?"

DESTROY THE TRADITIONS OF THE DEAD GENERATIONS!

Karen Eliot.

Further Reading: ?

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Openers & Correspondence

Reports:-

The Tigers of Wrath
The Shroud a Fake - Official!
No Poll Tax Rebellion

John Barrett
Alex Richards
Jim McFarlane

Features:-

We need solidarity not Charter 88
Assemble and Dissemble
An Insomniac's Dream

Martin Walker
Alex Richards
Larry O'Hara

Reviews:-

Rebellion Remodelled
To make Shame more Shameful
Nothing to Lose but their Jobs
Listings. Demolish Seriousness

Pete Suchin
Mike Peters
Phil Mailer
Jack Murphy

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- Institutions £5.00 incl p & p
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28 King St.,
Glasgow G1 5QP

HERE & NOW,
P.O. Box 109,
Leeds,
LS5 3AA

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All enquiries to Glasgow address except:

London outlets - A. Distribution, 84b Whitechapel High St. E1
New York outlets - A. Distribution, Room 202, 339 Lafayette
St. NY, NY 10012.
Other outlets worldwide in U.S., Canada, Netherlands, Australia
etc. supplied direct.
U.S. Individual Mailorder - Flatland, P.O. Box 2420 Fort Bragg,
CA, 95437

Summary of Contents of Previous Issues of Here and Now

No. 1 (Spring 1985)
Management of Schooling;
Nature of Modern Society;
Sites of Contestation;
Kampuchean Communism;
Lifestylism.

No. 2 (Summer 1985)
Fifth Generation Computing;
Remaking of the Community;
The Subversive Past;
Critiques of Germaine Greer
and Paul Cardan.

No. 3 (Spring 1986)
New Lines in the Leftist Marketplace;
Perceptions of the Riots;
Animal Liberation;
Poland 1980-6;
The Nomenklatura in the USSR;
Critique of Lasch.

No. 4 (Winter 1986/7)
The Invasion of Exchange;
Murray Bookchin: Libertarian
Municipalism;
West German Greens;
Jean Baudrillard and Politics.

No. 5 (Summer 1987)
Vaclav Havel's ideas;
Money and Credit;
The Third Assault;
New Social Movements;
Art and Fashion.

No. 6 (1988)
Cleveland;
Third Assault Debate;
New Liberalism;
Eclipse and Re-emergence of the
Economic Movement;
Pubs.

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