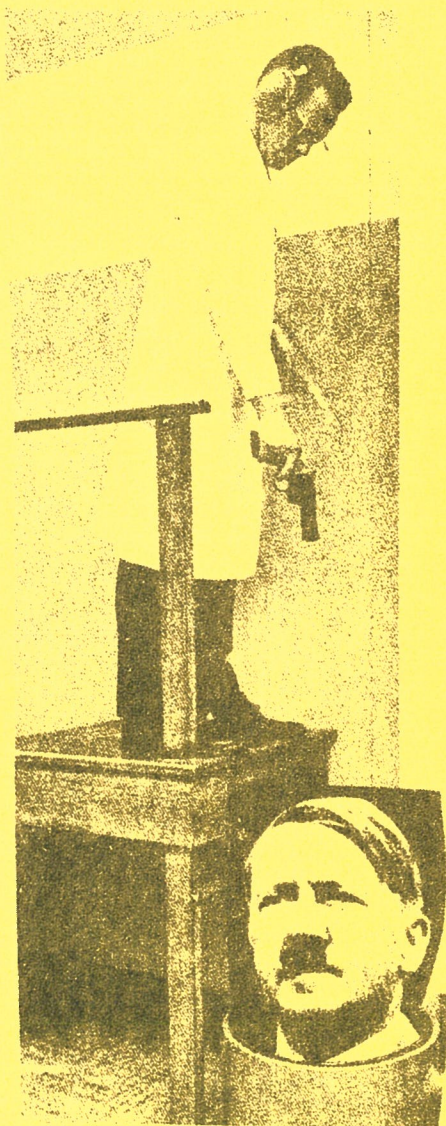


SELF—MANAGEMENT AND THE LIMITS OF RECUPEARATION



SOLIDARITY

DISCUSSION

BULLETIN

RECUPEARATION TO STIMULATE THE ECONOMY

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Self-Management Fetishism: The Internal Counter Revolution ?

Solidarity has been engaged in a discussion on the recuperation by capitalism of apparently revolutionary demands. This has lead us on to a discussion of whether self-management is of itself sufficient to bring about a revolutionary transformation of society. Within the group the discussion has not primarily taken the form of an investigation into self-management and the limits of recuperation, but has rather taken the form of a wider discussion on being and consciousness.

This discussion has been heated because one or two comrades have made an ideology out of self-management. This ideologising is permeating every discussion now occurring. A recent example was the discussion on crime and punishment at the last national meeting. The discussion on how a libertarian society would view deviancy (and an analysis of deviancy and how it is dealt with under the present circumstances) was switched into a discussion of whether any form of deviancy was an expression of self-management and therefore inherently revolutionary. Much energy was wasted and an incoherent discussion resulted because the wrong questions were asked for the wrong reasons.

Let us try to return to a simple premise and see if there is any possibility of reassessing the position. The simplest and most naive form of political statement is the slogan. Let us take a slogan and try to analyse the possible implications. In my view the components of a revolutionary perspective are interrelated, and therefore by analysing the slogan some light may be thrown onto the apparent fog that surrounds our concepts of being and consciousness, and the recuperability of self-management. Socialism! Self-management! Democracy! The grand triumvirate of the libertarian case reduced to a slogan. The first one to analyse is democracy.

Democracy.

Democratic ideas were one of the mainsprings of the French Revolution. The birth of bourgeois ideology can be seen as a blend of the French democratic movement with the liberal and utilitarian ideas of early capitalism. The most primitive economic formulation for the democratic movement was the crude statement that the greatest good for the greatest number would result from allowing the free play of the conflicting self-interests of individual capitalists, in a free and unfettered market. This concept has evolved into the familiar edifice of bourgeois democracy.

What are the main criticisms of bourgeois democracy?

- 1) Bourgeois democracy is confined to the political sphere. ie, there is no internal democracy for the basic social groups, especially in the economy. The end product of this arrangement are political parties; ie centralised oligarchies; dependent on a formal mass vote.
- 2) The power of the bourgeois class is out of all proportion to its size.
- 3) Those with a great deal of money at their disposal control the means of information, education and propaganda.

Stalinists, once in power, (and probably most trotskyists were they ever to achieve power) would say that it is not important if there is no

political democracy because they have achieved economic democracy which is a more perfect expression of democracy. Here we have illustrated the familiar stalinist-sophistry of negation rather than transcendence. Under this nonsense they disguise the fact that they have eliminated democracy of any sort. Now we come to the nitty gritty. The libertarian says that the specific form of socialist democracy is in the economic arrangement of self-management, that is, a social system that will transcend all the achievements of bourgeois political democracy, and combine them with the new anti-alienating concept of economic democracy.

Self-management for the libertarian is not a separate concept from democracy, but is its practical, realisable form. Moreover, it is a form that will provide a socialist content to the term democracy. Having arrived at this position, the mental fog sets in. If it is self-management that provides the socialist content to democracy, is there any point in asking what provides the socialist content of self-management?

Self-management.

I have tried to approach self-management, starting from another essential ingredient of socialism, ie democracy. Many of the arguments about self-management are confused precisely because the general framework of the case has been forgotten. When we speak of democracy, whether it be bourgeois democracy or "socialist" democracy we are speaking of a general state of society. If we wish to be specific in any discussion on democracy, we have to qualify our statement so that our exact intention becomes plain. Internal party democracy, democracy in the factory etc. If we just use the term democracy; (bourgeois or socialist) we are inevitably talking about the general form of society as a whole. Having started from the totality we arrive at a conclusion that says that for this totality to have a socialist content it must be based on self-management.

Now self-management is by its nature a particularist form of organisation. It implies the dissolution of power down to a level where every ordinary worker, man and woman, will have a say in the decisions that affect their everyday life. So we have workers councils, community councils, schools councils etc. Starting from a general analysis of the body politic, we have, with a slight shift of mind, and without us usually noticing it, gone on to an analysis of a particular situation, and of the local limitations that the particular situation imposes. In other words, without us noticing it we have lost our overall perspective. It is this incoherent fog, confusing the general with the particular, that is in my view, bedevilling most of our discussion on self-management and the limits of recuperation.

This confusion of a particularist form of self-management with socialism is most apparent in the statements of one member of Solidarity. Let us take the argument one step further. If self-management is in itself a guarantee of socialism, then the actual forms of self-management are not that important. This is of course rubbish. You do not need a degree in marxist philosophy to realise that there must be some connection between the organisational forms of a society, their integration, and the final characteristics and functioning of that society.

Those who concentrate exclusively on the concept of self-management are, without themselves being aware of it, resurrecting the barbaric creed of 19th century economic liberalism. The consequence of self-management fetishism is a position that could be stated as follows; "The greatest good for the greatest number will be achieved by allowing the free play of forces produced by the self-interest, mutual or conflicting, of individual self-managed units." The only difference between this outlook and that of laissez-faire capitalism is that for "private capitalist" there is a substitution of "self-managed units." They have completely fragmented the totality of society, and by so doing have changed a socialist position into an anti-socialist one. This of course begs the question of what is the socialist perspective.

Socialism.

Those who adopt a self-management fetishist position, have unconsciously carried out, inside their own heads, an anti-socialist counter-revolution. That is the final and ultimate level of recuperation. This recuperation is not imposed on them by the resilient workings and adaptations of an external entity called "capitalist society", but has been produced by the very brains seeking to overthrow that system. If this is the anti-socialist dimension of self-management, we must ask, whether there is a socialist perspective?

First what is a socialist perspective? Socialists have for the last hundred years or so been claiming the desirability of something called the social revolution. The key to the socialist perspective is the social nature of man in society. Our aim is to transcend bourgeois society, while incorporating all its positive achievements, and to raise those achievements to undreamt of levels. Our aim is not, or should not be just the mere negation of bourgeois society. The fragmentation and disruption envisaged by the fetishists would not just be the negation of bourgeois society, it would be the negation of society: Alienated man, taking refuge in his isolated and alienated sanctums of self-managed hostility.

This is not however an essay against self-management. Whilst it is possible to have self-management without socialism, it is not possible to have socialism without self-management. The socialist perspective of self-management lies in the social behaviour that would be required to control the accumulated surplus of society, for the benefit of the totality of society. I believe that only a system based on self-management, with the totality of society providing an integrative mechanism can produce anything worth calling socialism. How can the totality of society arise from a substructure of self-managed units? This is I believe, the main problem for the libertarian socialist. The problem is not how best to manage our alienation.

Petr Cerny. London.

There were a number of points that I would have liked to raise during the discussion on the 'Limits of Recuperation'. Because I wanted to hear what others had to say I did not contribute as much as I would have liked. However, a weekend conference should not be the exclusive means of discussing Solidarity's ideas. Anyone with a typewriter can easily jot down his or her thoughts and circulate them amongst other members. The following 'thoughts' are not more than a contribution to the discussion initiated by MB's article 'The Malaise of the Left'. Rather than an attempt to 'refute' any particular analysis of the phenomenon of recuperation, they are an attempt to clarify my own confusions through open minded discussion.

1) Solidarity's analysis of modern capitalism can be said to rest upon two axioms:

- i that the present stage of capitalism is characterised by a social division between order-givers and order-takers.
- ii that a necessary struggle exists, within every institution, between order-givers and order-takers, the former trying to impose their authority and the latter striving to achieve their autonomy or self-management.

It is important to note that these axioms serve as a framework with which Solidarists make sense of reality. They are not derived solely from the data of our experience; they are the principles which determine how this data is organized, and reflect the condition of the contemporary class struggle. (This also provides a partial explanation of why people can act in a libertarian manner whilst adhering to a repressive ideology).

2) We must now distinguish between two sorts of demand that are made in the present stage of capitalism. (A) Demands for full employment, wage increases, nationalization, the dictatorship of the proletariat, equal pay etc. (B) Demands for self-management (SM) Demands falling into the category (A) differ from (B) in that the latter characterises the condition in which order-takers find themselves. They express the necessary condition of the working masses. Human survival depend on autonomy and initiative, yet existing social relations seek to suppress it. Should the demand for autonomy ever be entirely suppressed the whole system would cease to function.

Demands falling under the category (A) are not so necessarily linked to the historical conditions of capitalism. For this reason Solidarity has been critical of traditional leftist parties who have confined their objectives to category (A). MB has argued, correctly, that they are recuperable.

3) There is, however, a further distinction to be made between categories (A) and (B). Demands falling in category (A) conform to a distinction between means and ends, whereas the demand for self-management does not. For example, if the end sought is nationalisation, equal pay, etc., we can adopt one of a number of means. We can lobby MP's join a Leninist party, or pressure Trade Union officials, Solidarity has

always been critical of confining oneself to such ends, arguing that what matters most is the control one has over the actual struggle. That is to say, what matters most is the means not the end. It follows that demands which reveal the above means-ends distinction are secondary to the demand for self-management. The demand for self-management is not only an end; it is also a means of realizing other demands. As both means and ends self-management comes into conflict with many traditional ends, such as the demand for nationalisation which does not include self-management. The demand for self-management is a desire for an end which can be super-imposed upon any means of conducting a struggle against capitalism. No matter how praiseworthy the end Solidarity has always been prepared to ask whether the means fulfilled the criterion of self-management. (See 'As We See It', 7.). And very often this has been instrumental in Solidarity's rejection of the end; e.g. national independence struggles waged by a bureaucracy.

4) From axioms I and II, and the above distinction between categories (A) and (B) it follows that the demand for self-management is (i) necessitated by the present stage of capitalism, (ii) cannot be recuperated by a society divided into order-givers and order-takers (since self-management logically excludes an elite of order-givers) and (iii) is logically distinct from any other demand, since it is an essential feature of the means of formulating sought-after end.

5) In MB's article it was suggested that self-management could be recuperated. The examples given were the "self-managed" UDA strike which sought sectarian ends, and the "self-managed" Kibbutzum which promotes nationalistic ends. His conclusion was that self-management without a "socialist content" was recuperable. This entails the necessity for a definition of the "socialist content" which carries with it the implications of a return to the means-ends (form-content) dichotomy, wherein the means-as-self-management is distinguished from the socialist goal - objectively or subjectively defined. What then is the yardstick for determining the "socialist content"? How is it to be defined? Note how it is always possible to ask whether the means of realizing this "socialist content" embodies the principle of self-management. Moreover, whatever we predicate of this "content" can be recuperated in a society composed of order-givers and order-takers, since an elite may always emerge to realize it on behalf of those it seeks to exercise authority over. Once we specify a "socialist content" over and above the means of realizing it we are obliged to search for ends similar to those in category (A), all of which can be recuperated. This leaves us with the search for a super-end which capitalism cannot recuperate. Much of conference time was spent searching for this end, with 'equality' and other indeterminate notions competing for first place.

6) Perhaps we should re-examine the relationship between the phenomenon of self-management and the repressive ends which its manifestations appear to serve. How self-managed were the examples in MB's article? In the first place we should note that repressive ends such as nationalism, racism, or religious bigotry, which workers often seek, have their origins in the interests of those who seek to prevent self-management on a large scale. Racism and nationalism are ideological weapons with which capitalism mystifies its working class in order to prevent the confident assertion of self-management. If this is so the recuperation of self-management, as a means of perpetuating a hierarchy of order-givers,

suggests a very paradoxical business indeed.

7) What exactly is the recuperation of self-management? Suppose we take MB seriously (which is to say dialectically) and imagine a society in which self-management is entirely recuperated - as nationalisation and the other demands of category(A). It would not be characterised in terms of a conflict between order-givers and order-takers, since the latter would not exist. From this it follows that (i) axioms I and II would not apply, and (ii) that Solidarity's analysis of society would be completely irrelevant. If a capitalist society survived a successful demand for self-management it would be capitalism without a bureaucracy, capitalism without capitalists, traditional or modern. (It might not be such a bad thing after all). (iii) It would be a society in which there would be no need for controlling elites to inject divisive mystifications into the class of order-takers, since there would be no order-givers. (iv) It would follow that many of the "self-managed" struggles for racist/nationalist and divisive ends would be unnecessary.

8) Self-management as both ends and means is a process for the destruction of a society divided into order-givers and order-takers. This process cannot be recuperated without the extinction of these categories. Insofar as this process reflects the condition of society it must find expression in various forms. That is to say bureaucracy must yield to the pressure of the working class, but it does so in a limited form. The Kibbutz is a good example. But what would happen if a Kibbutz refused to recognise the sovereignty of the central government and signed a treaty with the local Palistinians? It would be smashed. "Self-management" in a Kibbutz is only a means for a particular end. But if so is it really self-management?

9) When self-management is apparently recuperated for external ends it is always characterised by definite limits to its autonomy. The nature of these limitations is crucial here. In the conditions of modern capitalism they are clearly recognisable.

10) When faced - as we shall be - with an increase in the phenomena of self-management for capitalist ends (e.g. the UDA strike or Benn's participation schemes) the socialist critique should focus on its limits.

11) We can now answer the question concerning a "self-managed" struggle to prevent the employment of blacks. The fact that this struggle has ends other than the demand for self-management constitutes a limit to its autonomy. That these ends are racist reveal that it serves the interests of the status quo. In this way we discover the limits to self-management in this particular case. Self management, for external ends, is not recuperated it is limited. As with the Kibbutz self-management is limited to the interests of the status quo. But is it genuine self-management if it is limited? There are no degrees of self-management; either we have it or we do not.

12) We therefore arrive at a distinction between limited and unlimited forms of self-management. The former can only have the appearance of self-management, and is at best a 'hint' of possibilities yet to come. Unlimited self-management presupposes an entirely different society and is not recuperable.

13) The yardstick (see 5) for measuring the 'socialist content' of an activity is the limit which capitalism imposes on each appearance of self-management. When limits are imposed on self-management it is seen as a means to an end - the end being the preservation of a manipulative society. If a form of self-management has an end the removal of that end (e.g. racism or nationalism) determines what counts as meaningful action for revolutionaries. The 'socialist content' is measured by the extent to which it opposes any external end or limit to self-management.

14) Conclusion. Self-management as both means and ends is both necessary and sufficient for the socialist perspective. Its recuperation is possible only if certain ends are tied to the process of self-management, which implies that it is not really self-management at all. Self-management as an end in itself has no limits. Capitalism cannot grant this without self-destruction. It can only recuperate limited autonomy, but limited autonomy is not autonomous. Hegel once observed that "In the end relation in general, the realized end is also again merely a means, while conversely the means is also the realized end".

COMMENTS ON DAVE LAMB'S ARTICLE ON "SOME THOUGHTS ON THE LIMITS OF RECUPERATION."

"In the end relation in general, the realized end is also again merely a means, while conversely the means is also the realized end." (Hegel).

In this manner Dave Lamb concludes his paper. This particular quote only makes sense if it is looked at dialectically. At one particular stage a demand is a means. At a later stage it is achieved and becomes the end. Until that stage is reached it is always a means of striving towards a given end and is not yet the end, it is only the desired end.

In the process of living, human beings set themselves goals and in order to achieve these goals adopt certain methods. The usefulness of the methods is decided by whether they bring one closer or further to the desired goal.

The goal of libertarians is a society of autonomous human beings, an end to hierarchy and a meaningful life where people will decide their own fate. The methods used to obtain these are valid from a libertarian viewpoint only if in harmony with this goal, and here I am only interested in looking at things from a libertarian viewpoint. For this reason I do not support demands for nationalisation even if the struggle was self-managed, since these demands are in conflict with my goal.

Since my goal is the abolition of hierarchy I might under certain circumstances, support a struggle for equal pay even if it was initiated by the Bureacracy in much the same way as I support access to abortion and the abolition of capital punishment (although I suspect that if the latter question were raised in a free referendum, at the moment, the re-introduction of Capital Punishment would be a very real possibility).

One can pose self-management both as a means and as an end in much the same way as one can pose autonomy of the individual, the abolition of hierarchy and the self-confidence of the individual. By stressing self-management only, and elevating this aspect above other aspects of libertarian philosophy, one hides the fact that all these aspects taken together are part and parcel of what most of us regard as a socialist content.

It is therefore unfair to suggest that M.B. implies that self-management can be entirely recuperated. The tenor of the whole article is such that it makes it quite clear that self-management with a socialist content cannot be recuperated. When Dave says that when self-management is linked to reactionary ends we should focus on its limits he is, in fact, agreeing with M.B. who implies that self-management which remains within the confines of this system is recuperable. If self-management is linked to demands which have a socialist content it cannot be recuperated (i.e. the Kibbutzim signing a treaty with the local Palestinians).

I find Dave's statement "there are no degrees of self-management, either we have it or we do not" very confusing.

Does Dave mean either we have a self-managed society or we don't? Does he imply that the decisions we come to in Solidarity are not self-managed because we live under capitalism? If workers decide to run their

...cannon, is this not a degree of self-management in the factory? To me self-management does not cease to be self-managed just because it is limited.

The criterion, as far as I am concerned, is "self-management, for what purpose?" If we accept Dave's view that "either we have self-management or we don't" and moreover if we accept his opinion that "if there are limits to self-management then it is not self-management" the conclusion would seem to be that we cannot have self-management until we have the new Society. If this is so under what category does Dave put those aspects of autonomous decision making which are limited by this Society?

What seems to have become blurred in this discussion is the relationship between form and content. To illustrate this I relate the following which took place on my estate, during the rent struggle.

The Tenants' Committee called a meeting at which the Tory Chairman of the Housing Committee was invited. Amongst other things tenants complained of the length of time taken to do repairs and the botched manner in which they were carried out when finally done.

The Housing Chairman then proposed to the tenants that they take charge of repairs themselves, i.e. report them to the Direct Labour Force and inspect the work to see that it was carried out properly. They were promised that there would be no interference from the bureaucracy unless they asked them to interfere. The meeting unanimously rejected this proposition telling the Chairman that he had undertaken this responsibility when elected and that he was passing the buck. I think the tenants were correct since although the form of the proposition was self-management (and democratic on the surface) the content i.e. (the attempt to divert attention from the rent issue and to get the bureaucracy off the hook over the repairs) was the end the Chairman was after. Thus the content of the move was in contradiction with the form.

However, on other estates where there was a lack of repairs tenants entered into discussion amongst themselves, after having become thoroughly frustrated with appealing to the bureaucracy. They spoke about getting the repairs done and knocking it off the rent. In this case there were no contradictions between form and content.

Shortly after the war a scheme was initiated whereby a group of people paid an equal sum of money into a pool for the purpose of buying raw materials and payment of architects, but agreed to do the work collectively themselves, building each others houses. They self-managed the scheme and committed all their spare time to the project, sometimes for as long as two years. At the end they had built their own homes and acquired certain skills. Full stop! Despite the high level of self-management there was no socialist content. The goal was purely an expedient to get a home built cheaper than under a Contractor. Perhaps it would have been a good idea to put forward a "transitional" demand for even more self-management.

Self-management is accomplished which may or may not have a socialist content with privatised ends in view. Within this society it is possible to have limited self-management which has no socialist content. As a libertarian I only support those forms of self-management which have a socialist content as defined by the yardstick "As we don't see it",

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Section 7. I will continue to do this unless I am convinced that we are wrong, or that there is another aspect which we have not seen.

Arnold Feldman (London)

Dear Solidarity,

Your willingness to dissect and discard outmoded theories and practices has rightly made you friends and influenced people.

But aren't you now encouraging M.B. to shine the critical spotlight up your own collective arse, in your search for the holy grail of modernity and flexibility?

His questioning of the desirability of self-management itself - in "The Malaise on the Left" ('Solidarity', Vol. 7, No.12) - looks suspiciously like an attempt at controversy for controversy's sake.

So self-management is a "bottle" into which "many wines can be poured", is it? That's a Grade A mechanical metaphor of which Lenin would doubtless have been proud.

So support for self-management can lead to "confusion of form and content", can it? I've always felt that this "form and content" argument is just a fancy way of saying "things are very often not what they appear to be", a lesson that most people have learned by the age of five or so.

Or maybe "form and content" are really just those good old inseparables "means and ends"? But then, M.B. has divorced them too: "Self-management and workers' councils are means to liberation. They are not liberation itself".

If we must talk about form and content, they will have to be dialectically linked, loosely in some cases, more tightly in others. In the case of self-managed form and socialist content, I would say that the linkage is total and rigid.

M.B. will not be able to discard the self-management bath-water while retaining the socialist baby, because the little chap is frozen in there dialectically, so to speak.

Which is not to say, of course, that anything described as self-management will necessarily be the real thing. Those of us - surely almost everyone - who have learnt that things are very often not what they appear to be, will be asking the relevant questions: "who says so?", and "What's in it for them?"

M.B. says the demand for self-management could be "geared to the requirements of class society", provided that "those operating the self-management still accepted the values of the system", and provided the whole thing remained "strictly localised".

He then offers us as examples the manoeuvrings of Volvo and Saab in Sweden. How fiendishly subtle of the Swedish capitalist lackeys to prop up their decadent system by introducing self-management. How predictable naive of those Swedish worker chappies to fall hook-line-and-sinker for the evil job-enrichment ploy.

Let's return to reality. Group assembly in the European car industry is a management initiative designed to overcome the acute difficulties created by an increasingly choosy and self-active work-force. Unrest

among the so-called "guest worker" sections of that work-force has accelerated the search for job-enrichment "solutions" (in reality, palliatives).

Group assembly is supposed to reduce employee turnover, absenteeism, strikes, poor-quality work and outright sabotage. It will increase profits for a while; it may even increase output.

Volvo's chairman, Pehr Gyllenhammar, has even said that he sees no certainty of increased profits. So why make such an expensive changeover? According to Gyllenhammar: "Because there is no alternative ... If it doesn't come off, we go bankrupt anyway" ('Volvo millions to beat work boredom', western Mail (Cardiff), 1 August 1973).

All this information is freely available in the capitalist press. I'm sure most workers understand what's going on when management offers a group assembly scheme. The don't have any illusions about self-management. If they have illusions at all, they are much more likely to be of the "There always have to be bosses" variety.

Two examples: Renault car-worker, age 35: "It's no so bad as the old way. You have to think harder to start with, but you feel more like your own boss" (my emphasis; note he did not say: "you are more your own boss").

Another Renault worker: "I suppose the management will make more profit out of us - if you call that an improvement. It's better than the old way, though" (Both examples from 'Renault's new way of making cars', Financial Times, 31 July 1973).

These are men under no illusions, but equally they are men who find no difficulty in deciding which work system they find less unpleasant.

What does M.B. want revolutionaries to say to them? "Sorry chaps, but this group assembly business is recuperable, so you mustn't accept it"? A recipe for a raspberry.

Of course, this is part of the whole argument about reforms. Job enrichment initiatives are reforms won by modern methods (such as "voting with the feet"), as opposed to the more traditional forms of class struggle.

Those who would argue against the acceptance of such reforms lay themselves open to the suspicion that they think improved conditions can somehow obscure or abolish the need for revolution. This is a variant of the traditional Marxist argument which prescribes grinding deprivation as the necessary incentive for mass revolt.

To distinguish clearly between reforms and revolution is not necessarily to be against the struggle for and acceptance of reforms. Paradoxically, as Cardan says, the success of partial struggles demonstrates to workers the practical possibility of revolution.

I don't want to deal in such detail with M.B.'s other examples of "reactionary self-management" (and I must confess near-total ignorance of political practices within kibbutzim).

... it to assert that the supposed lesson that "self-management, divorced from socialist politics, is meaningless" is not borne out in the case of the UWC general strike.

The article in 'Solidarity' Vol. 7, No 11, drew the correct conclusions: Sectarian objectives, undemocratic and authoritarian beginnings, but a strong element of self-activity at the grass-roots. The experience there - of organising the necessities of life, and of struggling collectively - could not have been meaningless for the participants.

And in the case of the World War II mobilisation, M.B. does not even seem to believe his own argument ("..... people mobilised themselves (or allowed themselves to be mobilised)...").

I would suggest that there are at least seven indentifiable components in any real process of self-management:

1. Collective formulation of goals.
2. Collective consideration of possible means of implementing those goals.
3. Collective assessment of availability of those means.
4. Collective assessment of external constraints (yes, there will be external physical constraints, even upon a global socialist society).
5. Collective assignment of priorities to feasible goals.
6. Collective implementation of goals, in priority order.
7. Collective assessment of results of implementation, and feed-back of assessments to (1)

Check that list off against the cases of Volvo/Saab group assembly, and the UWC strike, and the attempt to label these phenomena as self-management ends up looking pretty sick.

The important question is: What is Solidarity's attitude to established common ownership groups, to the temporarily defunct sit-in/work-in movement and to Benn's ill-fated workers' co-ops?

Would it, for example, care to take the line IS took on the proposal to turn Briant Colour Printing into a slimmed-down community print-shop? "We don't believe in socialism in one country, let alone the Old Kent Road".

My own belief is that co-operatives in a capitalist setting cannot be socialist, but if democratically run they can nurture within themselves strong socialist elements. In other words, people involved in a democratically-run co-operative would gain a much greater understanding of what socialist society could and should be like.

Strong external constraints would prevent them from putting many of their insights into practice within their own organisation. Capitalist market forces would still largely control what they could produce to earn a living, what raw materials they could afford to buy, and how much their means of subsistence would cost. Other constraints, such as the law might also operate.

The external constraints upon such an organisation, in a predominantly capitalist setting, would be so massive that I would be unwilling to describe such an organisation as self-managed.

But every insight frustrated, discussed and understood collectively, would only fuel the need to change society as a whole. The search for ways of getting round the constraints of capitalism, though in most cases doomed to failure, would generate a much better understanding of how the system works, which would have a profound demystifying effect.

But most demystifying of all would be the group's view of itself - taking collective responsibility for its own survival, without reference or appeal to any higher authority, in an environment clearly perceived as hostile.

M.B's message, on the other hand, seems to be: "You worker chappies cannot be trusted with self-management just now, because you have not yet thrown off all the trappings of bourgeois ideology".

The underlying assumption in this is that self-management can and will come later, after socialism has straightened out people's consciences. This is a variant of the "withering away of the state" argument.

All that is needed to take the idea out of the realm of paternalistic utopianism into the realm of nasty reality is a Vanguard Party, offering to usher in the new regime of pre-democratic socialism.

M.B's attitude is perhaps an ~~unwelcome by-product~~ of Solidarity's main contribution to socialist thought, the idea that the crisis of capitalism is mainly one of social relations rather than one of material production.

If, from this starting point, one were to take the fundamentalist and anti-dialectical position that capitalism can recuperate all material demands, and can offer not one crumb of improvement in institutional and social arrangements, one might feel very threatened if evidence to the contrary started to appear at both ends of the argument. The present "crisis" situation does seem to be offering just such evidence.

My belief is that socialist consciousness and self-management can only develop together, in an interactive fashion.

The answer to the question: "Can workers self-manage their own exploitation?" is "Yes". But a second question cannot then be avoided "Once they have begun to do this, will they keep it up?"

My answer would be: "Not for very long, provided the so-called self-management is genuine". In a truly self-managed situation, assessment of deleterious effects would quickly lead to corrective measures being taken.

In the "enclave" situation, such as a workers' co-op, external economic constraints would ensure that workers presided over their own exploitation, but they would simultaneously be presiding over their own self-activity and demystification - a distinct improvement over the conventional mode of capitalist operation, and a sign of that mode's growing weakness.

Anyone who gives an unqualified "Yes" to the second question is plumbing the depths of condescension and contempt. People are perfectly capable

of recognising what is good for them when they experience it - the problem they have yet to solve is how to take control of it.

D.B. (BIRMINGHAM)

WHAT'S A MALAISE?

The article, 'The Malaise On The Left' (Solidarity. Vol. 7 - 12) is ambiguous. It plays around with words in order to tell us, "Recuperation, of course, is nothing new". (P.3.).

My dictionary definition of the word malaise is, 'Discomfort or uneasiness without apparent specific cause'. Nothing could be more ambiguous than that.

The 'left' can mean almost anything to anybody. A Lenninist, Anarchist, Conservative or Libertarian, etc. would all have different definitions. 'Left' is not a precise label which can be easily understood. We are not told whether Solidarity is included under this heading, or precisely where the growth of unofficial/wildcat actions in industry and elsewhere is to be considered.

Six pages are devoted to describing capitalism's ability to recuperate. Much of this is well known and understood. After all, capitalism is still here. It must have recovered from all attempts to overthrow it. Isn't there another side to the story?

What about the results of successive acts of recuperation? What is the nature of the animal which has recovered? Is capitalism less vulnerable to attack now than it was previously? Can it go on recuperating indefinitely?

If capitalism can recover from all attacks and even make, ".... icons of its iconoclasts", there would be no revolutionary perspective whatever. There must be limits to recuperation.

If you forecast recovery for an ageing body, one day you will be wrong. If you forecast death every day, one day you will be right. But every day presents us with problems which have to be considered and acted upon.

Under a sub-heading, 'The limits of recuperation', we are invited to discuss and are offered some opinions. Quote. (P.3.)

"In 'The irrational in politics' we wrote that exploiting society would not be able to tolerate the mass development of critical, demystified, self-reliant, sexually, emancipated, autonomous, non-alienated persons, conscious of what they want and prepared to struggle for it. We still hold this idea to be basically correct."

Do such people exist? If so, can we hear more about them and what they want? Are they an elite who will show the rest of us the way forward?

The article continues, (P.9)

"..... Let us take it for granted (a) that meaningful activity needs to be collective; (b) that social transformation needs emancipated individuals, and (c) that the institutional framework of any new society will probably be based, in part at least, on those forms which the struggle itself has repeatedly thrown up at its moments of deepest insight and creativity

..... Are certain yardsticks necessary to define such an activity? I personally think the answer is 'yes' - with the proviso that the definition must be seen as an on-going process....."

How does this compare with the following quote (p.5.)?

"To paraphrase Marx, it is not what men think they are doing that matters. What matters is the objective result of their beliefs and actions."

Can this mean that people with different yardsticks will try to measure things, but this is not what matters?

The article ends (P.10.)

"Finally we must not underestimate the forces we are up against, including the recuperative powers of established society. An on-going reassessment of the degree to which one's former goals have been recuperated is the most effective antidote to the malaise on the left, and the only possible prescription for remaining a revolutionary."

Here is a yardstick which is very definite. I think it falls far short of the dimensions of the material to which it is applied.

I am not a Marxist or any other 'ist, but will quote Marx because I think this particular passage is relevant to the matters we are invited to discuss.

COMMUNIST MANIFESTO (International Publishers. 1932. P.P.2)

"The bourgeoisie cannot exist without continually revolutionizing the instruments of production, and thereby the relations of production and all social relation.

..... Constant revolutions in production, uninterrupted disturbance of all social conditions, everlasting uncertainty and agitation distinguish the bourgeois epoch from all earlier ones. All fixed, fast-frozen relations, with their train of ancient and venerable prejudices and opinions, are swept away, all new formed ones become antiquated before they can ossify. All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned, and man is at last compelled to face with sober senses his real conditions of life and his relations with his kind."

This does not mean that capitalism has no recuperative powers. It does mean that there is a continuous struggle of opposing forces which transforms relationships requiring new approaches to new conditions. 'Solidarity' (vol. 7-12) also has an editorial which appears to say there is a malaise on the right. Quote (P.2., concluding sentences).

"If the authority of the trade unions is challenged and superseded by direct action on the shop floor, the floodgates could open.

There will then be no card left for the Establishment to play, short of naked coercion. And that would be a very risky card indeed for them to play."

This seems to take little account of capitalism's ability to recuperate.

The particular interpretation of capitalism's ability to recuperate, as described in the 'malaise on the left', is inaccurate because it confuses the so-called revolutionary demands of so-called revolutionaries (all self-appointed) with the real struggles, past and present.

Do workers and peasants who take part in revolutionary activity really formulate the demands without the intervention of some organisations which is seeking to lead them? On the rare occasions when decision making has been directed by the participants, from below, they were subjected to the most violent attacks from their opponents and from the would-be leaders they have rejected. Autonomous activity, in which ordinary people decide both form and content of the particular struggle, is always a threat to authoritarians even when the particular issue does not appear to have a direct connection with the overthrow of the system itself.

When I am told "The lessons are clear, self-management, divorced from socialist politics, is meaningless." (P.7), I am entitled to ask some questions.

Who decides what constitutes 'socialist politics'? Are there not different views as to what is labelled socialism?

Having arrived at your particular view, how do you set about making it known to those who are struggling, if you are not directly involved? If you join an organisation in order to make your brand of socialism known, how do you avoid being an elite? If this cannot be avoided, should it be stated explicitly, or do we remain silent because we do not wish to be an elite? Are people incapable of fighting effectively, without a specific view of the nature of a future socialist society?

Capitalism certainly has immense powers of recovery, but it cannot avoid generating conflicts. It cannot avoid exploiting and alienating the vast majority who produce and consume its commodities. So long as we produce and consume on its terms, it will go on and recover. But it can be weakened. It is an illusion to think that recuperation leaves the system in the same position. It is an illusion to think that every struggle will weaken the system.

The limits of recuperation will be decided by people who cannot avoid fighting against their alienation. They will only do so effectively if they decide for themselves both the short and long term aims, according to their needs, as and when they feel inclined.

Of course, each of us are involved in this process and we can exercise a limited choice to participate in a particular way. But we have no right to believe that our contribution is indispensable either as individuals or as organisations.

Solidarity has published a lot of material, in which its view of modern capitalist society, is seen to be quite limited in its ability to recuperate. It is said that -

"If the fundamental contradiction of capitalism is not to be found in the 'anarchy of the market' or in its 'inability to develop the productive forces' where is it to be found? It is in production, in the labour process itself. It is in the alienation of the workers. It lies in the necessity for capitalism on the one hand to reduce workers to simple executors of tasks, and on the other hand, in its impossibility to continue functioning if it succeeds in so doing. Capitalism needs to achieve mutually incompatible objectives: the participation and the exclusion of the worker in production - as of all citizens in relations to politics.

This is the real contradiction of contemporary society and the ultimate source of its crises. It cannot be alleviated by reforms, by increasing the standard of living or by eliminating private property on the market. It can only be eliminated by establishing collective management of production and society by the collective producers: the working class. The real contradiction within capitalism is experienced daily by the working class in the course of production. This is the only possible foundation of a socialist consciousness. It is what gives the class struggle under capitalism its universal and permanent character, whatever the level of production.

Such conceptions provide a framework for understanding the history and development of capitalist society, which is nothing else than the history and development of the class struggle. Such a dynamic is historic and not 'objective' for it constantly modifies the conditions of its own development. It modifies the adversaries themselves. It gives rise to collective experience and collective creation. The class struggle has more and more determined the evolution of technology, production, economy and politics.

It has imposed on capitalism the profound modifications of its structure which we see today."

(Modern Capitalism and Revolution.
P. Cardan.
Solidarity Book. 2nd edition.
P's 14-15).

I do not have to accept everything written in this book, but I think the above quote is a good summary of the way capitalism develops. The emphasis being on the effects of class struggle.

This book has a lot of relevant statements concerning capitalism's ability to recuperate. It also says a lot about the limits of such recuperation. It emphasises time and again that self-management is

not acceptable, if capitalism is to survive. Neither is it acceptable to the traditional organisations, trade unions, political parties, or the vast majority of so-called revolutionary organisations.

The writer of 'The Malaise on the Left' is entitled to question the form and content of some very limited efforts on the part of some workers and others, to self-manage their own struggles. I disagree with some of his descriptions and views concerning the nature of capitalism's ability to recuperate and his conception of self-managed struggles.

If he is saying that he will only support and encourage those struggles which have his version of socialist objectivity, there will be very little for him to do but criticize. If at this stage, the growing tendency of workers to struggle in some new ways is not yet perfect in all respects, I suggest we might do our best to help the process to mature by becoming more involved in the struggle itself. By all means present your point of view, but don't lay down conditions in advance of the actual struggle as to its form and content. It will be impossible to avoid becoming what you say you don't want to be - a vanguard - if you do that. If this cannot be avoided it should be stated loud and clear.

Self-management means what it says. You cannot exclude the inevitable wrong decisions which will occur as it develops. It will only be possible to correct mistakes if the principle of self-management itself is not violated. If there is an unprecedented explosion of self-managed activity which can be sustained without surrendering the effective decision making, from below, capitalism will be unable to integrate that.

The idea that there is a 'Malaise on the Left', because it has failed to understand capitalism's powers of recuperation, is not the way I see things. The traditional left and others have made demands which were not really revolutionary in the first place. Therefore it should be no surprise if capitalism has been able to meet them and even benefit from so doing.

The chronic sickness on the left reflects the chronic sickness of the capitalist system itself. This is the result of a growing tendency to struggle in new ways. When considering how to get closer to this movement, I think the following quote is relevant. It doesn't matter who said it, or whether it is a perfect translation from the original - what it says is what matters:

"..... If socialism is the full flowering of the autonomous activity of the masses and if the aims of this activity and its forms can only flow from workers' own experience produced by exploitation and oppression, there can be no question of either inculcating them with a 'socialist consciousness' produced by a theory or of substituting ourselves for them for the leadership of the revolution or the construction of socialism.....

..... The second was the contradiction implied in the very idea

of organisation and revolutionary activity: the contradiction is how, when we know or think we know that the proletariat should arrive at a conception of the revolution and of socialism, which it can only draw from itself, not to sit back and do nothing because of this

This requires careful consideration. It can no longer be pushed to one side because of the difficulties implied in facing the problems.

One more quote - very revealing (P.3).

"If certain sacred cows (or certain previous formulations, now found to be inadequate) have to be sacrificed, we would rather do the job ourselves."

I'm for sacrificing all 'sacred cows' if I have them. I'm for looking at all previous formulations, which will always be inadequate. But I don't favour doing the job myself

If 'ourselves' means Solidarity I suggest it would be difficult to do the job without going out into the world where it is all happening. The 'left' may ignore the criticism implied in the article, 'The Malaise on the Left' and go on defining their positions themselves. We should not seek to redefine our positions by ourselves. The implications are enormous.

POSTSCRIPT

This discussion did not come out of the air. It had its origin in the events as they happened.

Looking back, I refer to the struggles at U.C.S., Fisher-Bendix and Plessye's. These three events among other forms of occupations, interested me as expressions of a 'new movement'. They were all very different as was the 'Lip occupation'. They interested me because I was looking for new forms of struggle. I tried to understand what was happening and I think I learned a lot from these events.

Then there was the postal strike, the dockers and container workers, the railwaymen and the miners among many others. The question of whether these struggles had a 'socialist content' did not really arise. I was aware of the limitations of these struggles and often referred to them. This was nothing new. All forms of struggle in the past have had their limitation. I looked for anything new just as I looked for changes in production relations, social and political relations brought about by the class struggle itself.

It seemed to me, that Solidarity was trying to define its position without relating to these events, but somehow outside the events. Articles appeared in the magazine about 'Being and Consciousness', 'The Origins of Soviet Bureaucracy' etc., These articles were reflections of discussions which had been going on for some time within the group.

Some people were trying to say that 'ideas' were paramount in the dynamism

of social change. Nobody had said that ideas were unimportant. I think this issue was well put by Marx ... "It is not what we think we are doing that matters. What matters is the objective results of our actions and thought."

This understanding is now part of the discussion.

What brought matters to a head and put the real questions before us, was the Ulster Workers Council Strike. Here was an important strike which brought down a government and revealed some very important forms of self-managed activity. (See Solidarity Vol 7-11).

I thought this was a good article, until I got to the last paragraph. There you will see that the writer, (who was expressing the majority's view as stated within the group), is not content with describing the events and commenting on them. He says we should not support struggles unless they have a 'socialist content'.

I asked what this meant and who decided what the 'socialist content' was. The answers revealed what was behind the earlier discussions. The group saw itself as fulfilling a role and applying its yardsticks, because it was concerned with the direction struggles should take. They think they can and should intervene with their ideas in order to help to direct the struggle.

Do people who struggle sit down and ask themselves if their struggle has a 'socialist content'? Or do they struggle because they have to, in order to resist exploitation and alienation?

Was the question to be answered by reference to Solidarity's ideas about direction and objective, or was it a question of how people struggle which really mattered?

I prefer to be critical about methods of struggle, rather than try to define my idea of what socialist content means and using that as a yardstick. I am arguing, that self-management, autonomy, new forms of struggle, the new movement, which is that of people struggling for themselves, is what matters and not any particular view of what is socialist or not.

If struggle is to be managed by those directly involved, I can't see how anybody can tell them what the objectives of that struggle should be. Struggle is concretely about the fulfillment of immediate demands and the outcome of such struggles, determine the conditions for the struggles which will follow.

I am also concerned with direction, but this is not the same as thinking I can achieve something called an 'objective' total view of how society will be changed then try to judge which actions fit into this objective, i.e. my particular idea of the workers wants and how they will or should manage a new society.

What they do is decided by themselves, will certainly mean there will be mistakes. What matters is that they don't give anyone the right to correct those mistakes for them. Not even Solidarity or anyone else who

may have the best intentions. "The road to hell is paved with good intentions".

I have only given a general indication concerning the events which are causing me to look differently at those events themselves, because they challenge my assumptions and my assumptions are not more important than the facts.

I hope I have said enough to enable us to try to widen the discussion to include any one who is interested and wishes to learn from all the many struggles going on and particularly those directly involved.

J.J. (LONDON)