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SOLIDARITY

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About ourselves

Solidarity is presently published by a small group of libertarian socialists in London. Its primary aim is to encourage discussion and intelligent analysis of the world in which we live - from a libertarian socialist perspective.

We believe that this is an important aim for a number of reasons. First of all, we feel it is necessary to break decisively with the anti-modernism of the traditional anarchist milieu. It is no longer relevant to rely on the experience of the Spanish revolution as the paradigm of revolutionary practice; and it is pointless today to centre our theoretical discussions on the debates of the anarchist movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The world has changed since then.

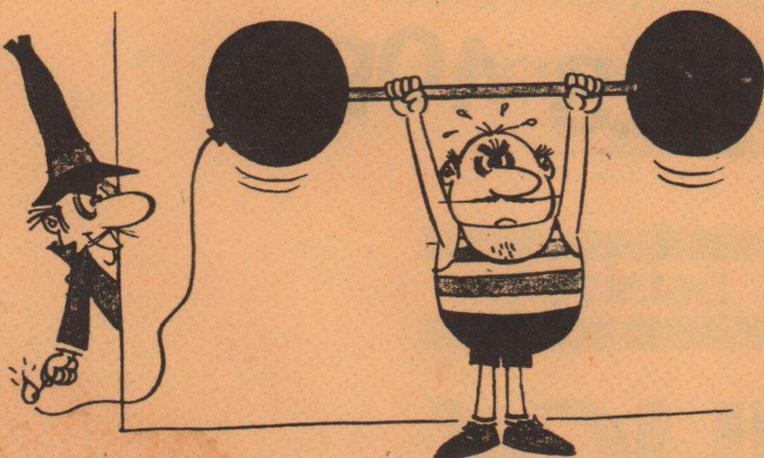
Second, we feel that it is necessary to counter the blind actionism found in many anarchists. To change the world it is necessary to interpret it: the 'refusal of thought' so prevalent in the anarchist milieu - which is closely related to its predilection for outdated models of revolution - has done untold harm to the cause of libertarian social revolution.

This does not mean that we are unaware of the dangers of isolation in the ivory towers of theoretical discussion; still less does it mean that we are uncritical of the role 'revolutionary intellectuals' have played in usurping self-managed struggles. Neither does it mean that we have any time for the rigid 'lineism' and sectarian rituals of denunciation typical of many other small groups on the revolutionary scene. Rather, we are committed to an open process of clarifying ideas as part of a more general development of practice. We do not consider this activity as having a particularly privileged place in the revolutionary project. We are one group of people among many engaged in the process of debate and we have neither the resources nor the arrogance to attempt to cover 'everything worth covering'.

Solidarity is published quarterly. We welcome contributions, which should preferably be typed doublespaced on A4 paper. (This makes subediting and word counting much easier). But don't be put off if you can't type.

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EDITORIAL

Notes on the Labour left

George is 36. He works for Hackney council as a welfare rights adviser. Before that he had a job with the Labour Research Department; and before that he was doing a doctoral degree (in urban sociology) at the LSE. He did his first degree at the University of Essex. It was there he met his wife, Sue, who is now a teacher. At the time, he was in the International Marxist Group and she was an anarchist. They used to argue about Kronstadt before making love, and were involved in a lot of demonstrations and sit-ins.

Things quietened down a bit when they moved to London in 1971: but George stayed with the IMG for another five years, still convinced that the British revolution was imminent. Sue continued to see herself as an anarchist, but mixed increasingly in women's movement circles. She enjoyed the consciousness raising. In 1976 George left the IMG over what he considered a deviationist turn from the class. He was unattached for a while, then joined the Labour Party when he and Sue moved out of their housing association place in Stoke Newington and into a flat in Islington which Sue had bought with some money from her grandmother.

Inside the Labour Party, George made swift progress. He soon found himself on the General Management Committee of the constituency party, and within two years he was Membership Secretary. He became a stalwart of the Campaign for Labour Party Democracy; as a delegate at conference he made many an impassioned plea for constitutional reform. After the election defeat of May 1979 his efforts redoubled. He was heavily involved in the manoeuvring behind the scenes at the 1981 constitutional conference at Wembley, spent long hours on the Benn deputy leadership campaign, and worked hard for a Labour victory in the 1981 GLC elections. (He had been approached about the possibility of standing for a GLC seat but he decided against it).

Meanwhile, Sue was beginning to feel isolated in her feminist group. She started going to Big Flame meetings but that didn't seem to make much difference. Next she got interested in the Communist Party, but they seemed slightly old-fashioned. And then, after the 'Beyond the Fragments' conference in Leeds, she swallowed her pride and joined George in the Labour Party. Somewhat to her surprise she took to it like a duck to water; the women she met through it were just her sort of person. There were

even a couple of teachers with whom she set up a 'Women in Education' discussion group.

And so to the present. Despite the poor showing of the Labour Party in the 1983 general election, George and Sue are happier than they have been for a long time. They have active social lives with their political friends; they know everybody worth knowing in the little world of GLC committees and North London 'radical socialist boroughs'. At home they spend their leisure hours reading Marxism Today and London Labour Briefing, or relaxing in front of Channel Four. They feel that they are doing their bit in the struggle for socialism - indeed, they feel they are leading the struggle for socialism. Of course, there is still a long way to go. After all; the vicious libels of the Evening Standard might easily result in Ken and the other comrades being defeated in 1985, to say nothing of the threats to abolish the GLC in the Tory manifesto. But until then everything is on course for the New Jerusalem.

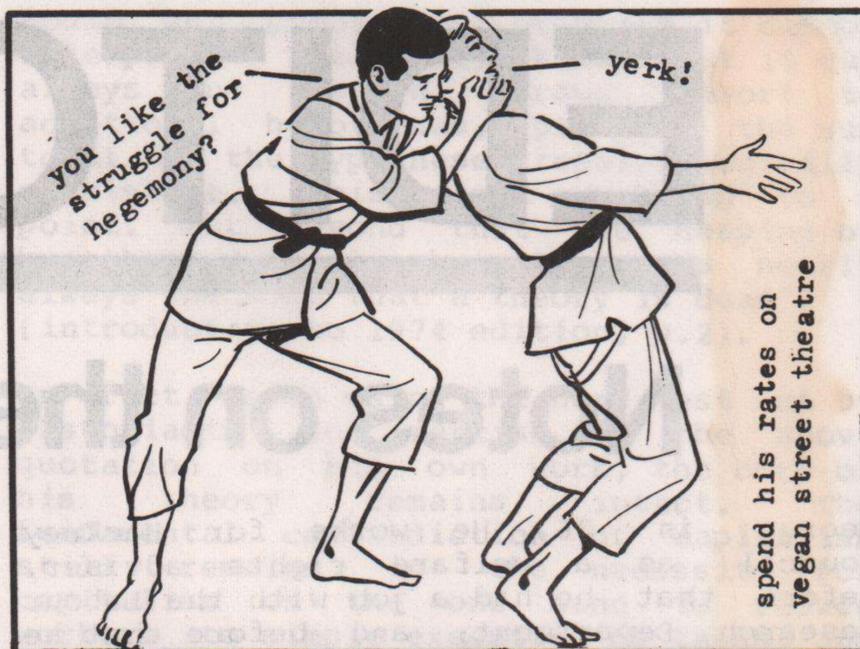
As you may have gathered, George and Sue are fictional characters. Any resemblance to real people and events in their story are not, however, entirely coincidental. George and Sue are typical members of the social group which now dominates the left political agenda in Britain. They are highly educated people, radicalised in their student days, whose main hobby for more than a decade has



been politics. They began their political careers on the far left outside the Labour Party, but with the passage of time more or less willingly joined its left wing. And they are reliant upon the welfare bureaucracies - within which they occupy high-status managerial, professional or semi-professional positions - for employment.

What are we to make of them? There are some who see the growing predominance of people like George and Sue within the Labour Party (and to a lesser extent the trade unions) as indicative of nothing more than the shift from blue-collar to white-collar employment in the British economy. That such a shift has occurred is certainly true; anyone who sees the modern working-class as composed mainly of horny-handed manual workers needs new spectacles. But it is not particularly relevant here. The Georges and Sues are formally white-collar workers, insofar as they sell their labour power for a wage and have no other significant source of income. They are, however, no ordinary white-collar workers. Unlike the average clerk or typist they are order-givers rather than order-takers. Their jobs often have professional or semi-professional career structures, in that entry is restricted to those deemed to hold relevant qualifications, and their job security is much greater than for most workers. Their culture, too, is not that of most workers. People like George and Sue are in certain crucial respects members of the middle classes.

And yet they are members of the Labour Party - traditionally the party of the working class. They are, moreover, in positions of power within the Labour Party: in many local LPs people like George and Sue hold all the key posts. What is more, they have reached such positions of power not as a result of working class deference in the face of apparent expertise - as the middle-class socialists of a previous era did - but by gaining majorities at the 'grass roots' of the Labour Party, often against the wishes of working class members, and often in an extremely manipulative way.



It is not how the people like George and Sue did all this that is really at issue. The membership of the Labour Party has been declining steadily for years: in Glasgow, for example, it is estimated that there are now only 50 or 60 paid up members in each constituency (outside one with a Labour club), most of whom are inactive. The reasons for this decline are varied. On one hand, since the late 1950s television broadcasts have replaced door-knocking canvassing as the main means of electoral campaigning; local LPs have increasingly lost touch with the people they once would have recruited as the need for a mass campaigning party has receded. This tendency has been particularly marked in 'safe' Labour areas. More importantly, working class commitment to Labour has steadily disintegrated since 1945. The traditional working class community which had always formed the social base for Labour's support has been dispersed, by consumerism, by rehousing (ironically, often initiated by Labour politicians), and the changing character of work. Finally, many once staunch Labour Party members have been irrevocably alienated by their experience of Labour in office. The stultifying bureaucracy of the welfare state, the corrupt machine politics of Labour town halls, the stark capitalist reality of having the state as an employer, wage control - all have encouraged the flight of the working class from the Labour Party.

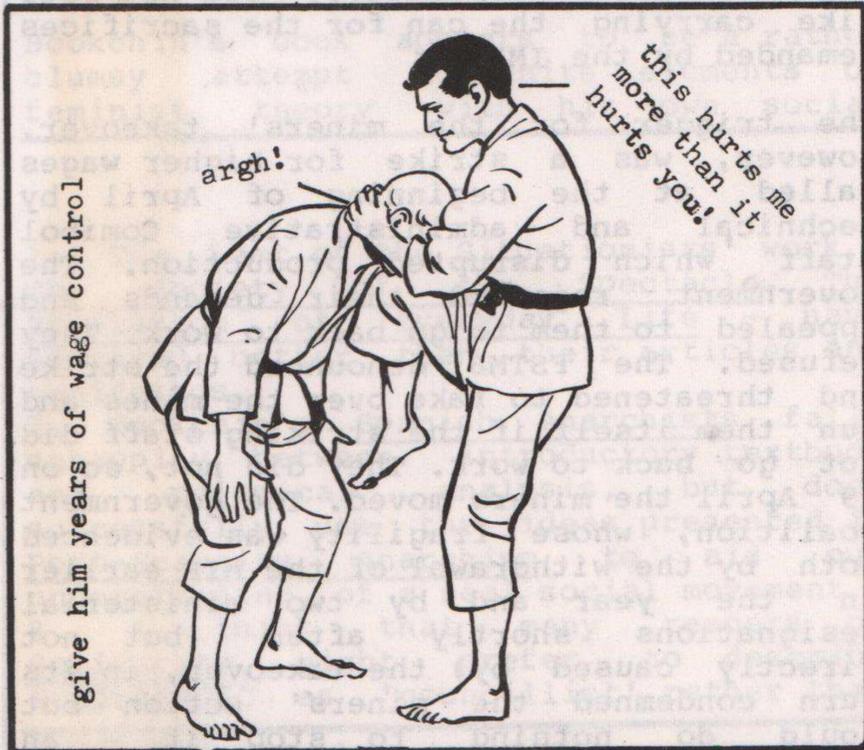
The results of this decline in Labour Party membership are obvious: it became very easy for a small number of people to take over a local LP, particularly if they were adept at political manipulation and were prepared to put a lot of work into committees. And that is precisely what the Georges and Sues have done - with the unintended and ironic effect of further alienating working class Labour Party members. Why, though, have they done it?

If you ask them, their answer will be simple: they have taken over the Labour Party because they believe passionately in the desirability of 'socialist policies'. And indeed there is no reason to doubt the sincerity of their commitment to what they see as socialism. But what the new middle class left see as socialism is not just a heady ideal. If we look at the content of their ideology



and practice we find it to be very much in tune with their economic self-interest.

This becomes particularly apparent in areas where the new middle class left have come to control local government. 'Socialist policies' in such areas have been characterised by the creation of a multitude of committees and grant-aided autonomous bodies which are supposed to monitor and control the police, work against racial and sexual discrimination, encourage the development of co-operatives, stimulate 'people's culture', attempt to decentralise the functions of



local government, and so forth. This is not the place to attempt a full-blown critique of such innovations; it suffices to say that the majority have failed even in their limited (and in many ways unsocialist) avowed aims, largely because they have not had the support of ordinary people. What they have succeeded in doing is providing highly paid employment for scores of middle class leftists. One does not have to be a cynic to suggest that the main beneficiaries of 'socialist policies' in local government have been those employed to manage their implementation, and that the middle class left's pursuit of 'socialist policies' is at root a pursuit of class interests that have little to do with the class interests of the majority of ordinary people.

As yet, however, only a small - though growing - number of the Georges and Sues are employed in the jobs created by left local government. Far more work in the more traditional welfare state, as social workers, teachers, college lecturers, administrators, and so on. Unsurprisingly, with their jobs under threat from central government cuts, they have campaigned vigorously against attempts to prune the welfare state.

Up to a point, of course, there is no conflict between their defence of welfare expenditure and the interests of the wider population. Cuts in the welfare budget mean cuts in services for ordinary people, as well as fewer jobs for social workers, teachers and administrators. Nevertheless, there is no necessary link



between preserving welfare expenditure and preserving services: much welfare expenditure acts only to sustain a parasitic bureaucracy. What is more, the 'services' provided by the welfare state are in many cases as much means of social control as they are beneficial to ordinary people. Yet we hear no substantive criticism of welfarism from the new middle class left. Rather, they give us the uncritical 'fight the cuts' slogans, and a vision of the future in which the welfare state takes control of every aspect of our everyday lives. Once again, it does not seem cynical to suggest that we are witnessing the pursuit of a class interest under the guise of 'socialism' which has nothing to do with the interest of the working class. The generation of 1968 has, it seems, grown up to be part of the problem rather than part of the solution.

PAUL ANDERSON

Letter

Dear Comrades,

Has Solidarity finally degenerated into straightforward guruism? The Castoriadis article which filled up the last issue of your mag was, let's face it, long-winded and boring, offered very little in the way of coherent analysis and even less in the way of conclusions. So why give so much space and consideration to it? I can only assume you must be suffering from an attack of the "Oh no, our great leader has betrayed us..." syndrome. Perhaps future editions will carry exhortations to "Put Castoriadis on the spot and make him fight" (!).

Yours siblyngly

Andy W.

Bolivian miners go for self management

Last April, as the government stood helplessly by, Bolivian workers took over the tin mines and offices of the state mining company, Comibol.

It was not the revolution - miners wanted to get the tin plants, responsible for 70% of the country's foreign exchange earnings, as well as their own livelihood, back to full production. Nor was it reaction - the move was merely another step towards implementing the policy of workers' self-management of the mines long held by the FSTMB miners' federation, under the influence of the dominant anarchosyndicalist current led by Juan Lechin. The government subsequently announced plans to institute a system of co-gestion - power-sharing whereby the miners would control five of the nine seats on the Comibol board.

Under the board's proposal, the remaining four seats would be held by representatives of the ministries of mining, labour (both portfolios at present in the hands of the Bolivian Communist Party), finance and planning. The mining minister would continue to act as company president, but would only exercise a vote in the event of a tied vote among the other board members. The Comibol mines and other installations would be run by administrative councils comprising three government representatives and three miners' delegates. Every aspect of Comibol's activities would therefore be subject to co-gestion, the government said.

As Solidarity went to press, however, the miners had decided to reject the government's offer. They said that the government's demand that the vice-president of the Comibol board be a specialised mining professional, which it would choose from a shortlist drawn up by themselves, meant that their majority on the board would only be apparent - the vice-president would in effect hold the casting vote and would thus be free to ally himself with whichever side he wanted. In other words he could hardly be called a miners' representative.

Meanwhile, at the instigation of the miners' leaders, workers at the central bank and state telecommunications company were discussing ways of introducing co-gestion into their own sectors.

The miners made their move only months after the ninth military government since 1964 had returned to the barracks, leaving the pieces of the country's shattered economy to be picked up by the winners of the ensuing elections, a leftwing coalition headed by the MNR-I (Revolutionary Nationalist Movement of the Left - socialist a la Mitterand, according to president Hernan Siles Zuazo), and including both the Moscow-orientated CP and at that time the MIR (Movement of the Revolutionary Left -

social democrat!)

The government decided it had no choice but to call in the International Monetary Fund. But the austerity programme it subsequently announced was rejected by both the FSTMB and the COB central trade union organisation, which having played a key role in rendering the military regime's rule inoperative, did not feel like carrying the can for the sacrifices demanded by the IMF.

The trigger for the miners' takeover, however, was a strike for higher wages called at the beginning of April by technical and administrative Comibol staff which disrupted production. The government rejected their demands and appealed to them to go back to work. They refused. The FSTMB denounced the strike and threatened to take over the mines and run them itself if the striking staff did not go back to work. They did not, so on 19 April the miners moved. The government coalition, whose fragility was evidenced both by the withdrawal of the MIR earlier in the year and by two ministerial resignations shortly after (but not directly caused by) the takeover, in its turn condemned the miners' action but could do nothing to stop it - an interesting contrast to the usual situation where the authorities, whatever their political hue, can call on the military power to enforce their will.

Genuine workers' self-management, or self-mystification in the service of the capitalist state? This episode is just beginning and hasty judgements are out of place. The miners themselves justify their action by saying that it was prompted by the need to 'defend and consolidate the nation's assets in the state-owned sector, as it is a type of advanced ownership which reflects the general interests of the people'.

N.T.

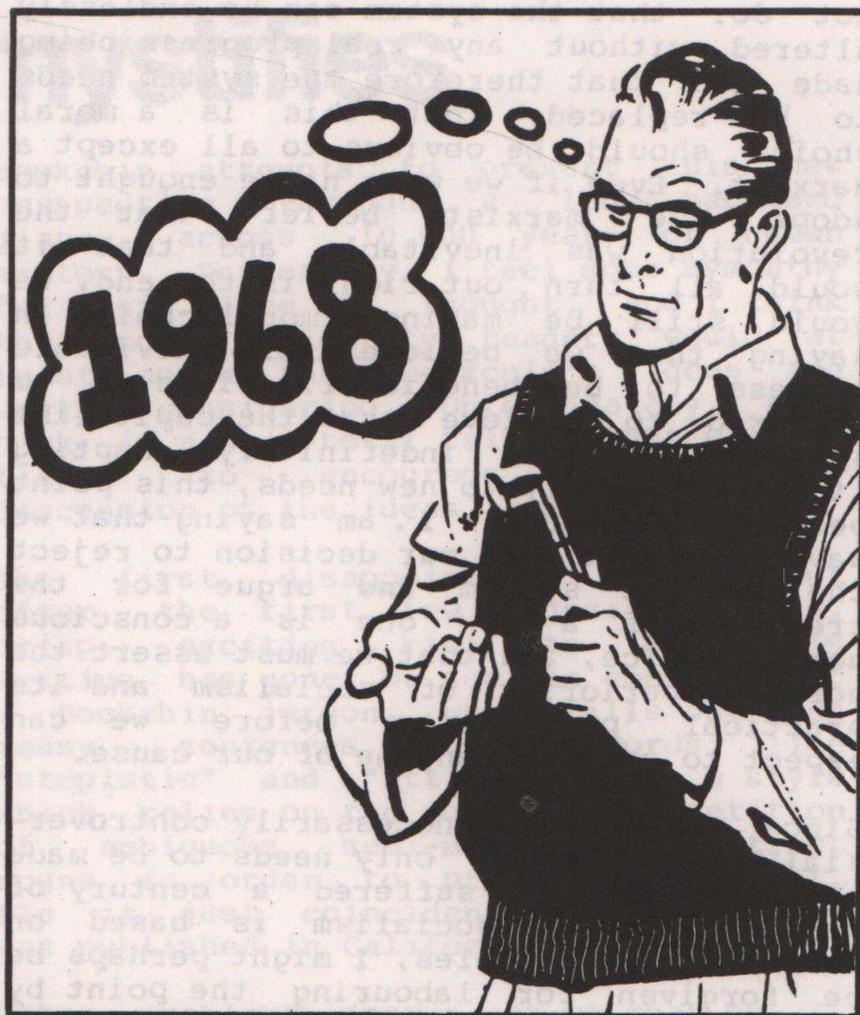


ON SOCIALISM

To anyone who studies the balance of social forces in contemporary Britain the idea of discussing the nature of a future socialist society must seem an appalling waste of time. We could be accused of either rank stupidity for failing to notice that the popular appeal of socialism is at a new low, or of drawing up blueprints on the arrogant assumption that history must turn out the way our theoretical prescriptions say it ought to. It is, however, possible to make out a case for discussing the nature of socialism without falling into either trap if we start by honestly admitting the poverty of thought, action and direction on the left, and the enormity of the distances which have to be travelled before humanity can achieve any kind of socialism worthy of the name.

First, we can point out that we cannot expect to convince people that things can be organised on saner lines than the current recessionary madness unless we can offer alternatives which will work. Second, it has to be recognised that socialism has become the intellectual property of a very wide range of people, so that it is no longer possible to define what we believe in simply by referring to ourselves as socialists. People are entitled to ask what kind of socialists we are, and are likely to be understandably suspicious of the future delights we have in store for them. After all, the reformist strain of socialism has provided us with the high-rise block, the social worker bureaucracy, and the wages policy, while revolutionary marxism has produced thought control, the gulags, and the Cambodian massacres. Socialism would appear to have been a failure, and if we are engaged in the enormous task of trying to rebuild it from the rubble of its own collapsed structure the first things we need are to be very clear about what we do and do not want to inflict on the future, and what we mean by socialism.

The first thing which must be said on this score is that any serious attempt to revitalise the left must begin with a radical reassessment of the meaning of the word 'revolutionary', and of our conception of how a revolution might take place. The most important piece of nonsense to dispose of is the popular notion of The Revolution as the universal cure-all. The revolution doesn't exist. A revolution is a highly significant moment in the development of history when social pressures, class conflicts, and the conscious choices which human beings make about how they wish to live run into a brick wall of established institutions, patterns of behaviour and ways of thought, and find that they can only find expression by breaking the power of the established social order. In this sense, a revolution is not a longed-for solution but a difficult starting point in which social forces and human decisions have



been unable either to absorb the pressures from below or defeat them. To call oneself a revolutionary is not to state that one would enjoy the violence this implies; it is simply to state that so far as one can see the established social order requires shifting into new channels of development if it is to operate in a non-pathological fashion. The system cannot make itself acceptable by reform, because by its very essence the social form which exists and under which we live can absorb gradual changes without altering its nature. It can abandon colonialism without removing colonial exploitation. It can permit free speech and the right to vote while continuing to control thought and manipulate the opinions of the majority of the public. It can respond to the demands of the women's movement and the movement for black equality without altering the exploitative methods of operation of the system against these and other groups. This is not to say that we should oppose reforms - on the contrary, a reform such as the granting of the right to free abortion on demand is well worth fighting for and winning; it is simply to assert that no conceivable package of reforms exists which would be granted and would lead to the gradual emergence of a socialist society. This statement is as true for the USSR as it is for the USA or Britain. Both Western and Eastern economic systems serve to absorb people's lives in struggles which have no meaning. The one system eggs us on to work in order to consume, without ever establishing the meaning of our work or the products we consume, while the other serves to break people's spirits and to teach them the value of obedience and conformity even at the cost of economic

efficiency (1). A revolutionary is not someone who assumes that a revolution will put all this right at once and usher in a new era of human co-operation and understanding; rather, a revolutionary is a person who believes that tinkering will not do: that the system can be endlessly altered without any real progress being made and that therefore the system needs to be replaced. That this is a moral choice should be obvious to all except a marxist. Even if we were naive enough to adopt the marxist belief that the revolution was inevitable and that it would all turn out right in the end, we would still be making a moral choice in saying that we believe this inevitable process to be beneficial. Since I am prepared to believe that the capitalist system can exist indefinitely, adapting itself gradually to new needs, this point becomes important. I am saying that we have to admit that our decision to reject the current system and argue for the creation of a new one is a conscious moral choice, and that we must assert the moral superiority of socialism and its practical possibility before we can expect to convince anyone of our cause.

Since this is an unnecessarily controversial point, which only needs to be made because we have suffered a century of pretence that socialism is based on scientific principles, I might perhaps be forgiven for labouring the point by illustrating the weakness of the opposite point of view. Marxists have based their theories on the assumption that progress is an absolute and is defined as the expansion of the productive forces. This allows socialists like Lenin to assert that once they are in control anything which they do in order to achieve economic progress is acceptable and necessary. Stalin, too, thought in the same way. 'We need to industrialise; this can only be done at the expense of the peasantry; anyone who argues is a petit bourgeois individualist who cannot see the beauty of my logic' - so runs the mind of a Lenin, a Stalin, a Mao. In the face of this, the new revolutionaries need to state things differently. There is no magic in a revolution which allows what was criticised before to become legitimate afterwards, none of Lenin's vicious attacks on Taylorism in the service of the bosses and fervent justification of it afterwards as scientifically necessary in the service of the workers or 'their' party. What is moral before the revolution is moral afterwards; what is not acceptable beforehand cannot be made acceptable afterwards by changing the name of the system to 'the dictatorship of the proletariat'. What is unacceptable about the systems which currently exist in the world is that they either serve to ensure that an undue share of the surplus which society produces goes to one class, or they ensure that one class has control over the decision-making apparatus which controls our lives, or most commonly both. To make matter worse, the system cannot be dodged by creating a commune or a workers' co-operative; the system is an unavoidable reality. Our objective should therefore be to create a society which is operated on the principles that people

should (after making due allowance for the handicapped) get the benefit of the surplus they help to create and that they should collectively control all important decisions over how this surplus is produced and distributed, while being left alone to run their own lives (2).

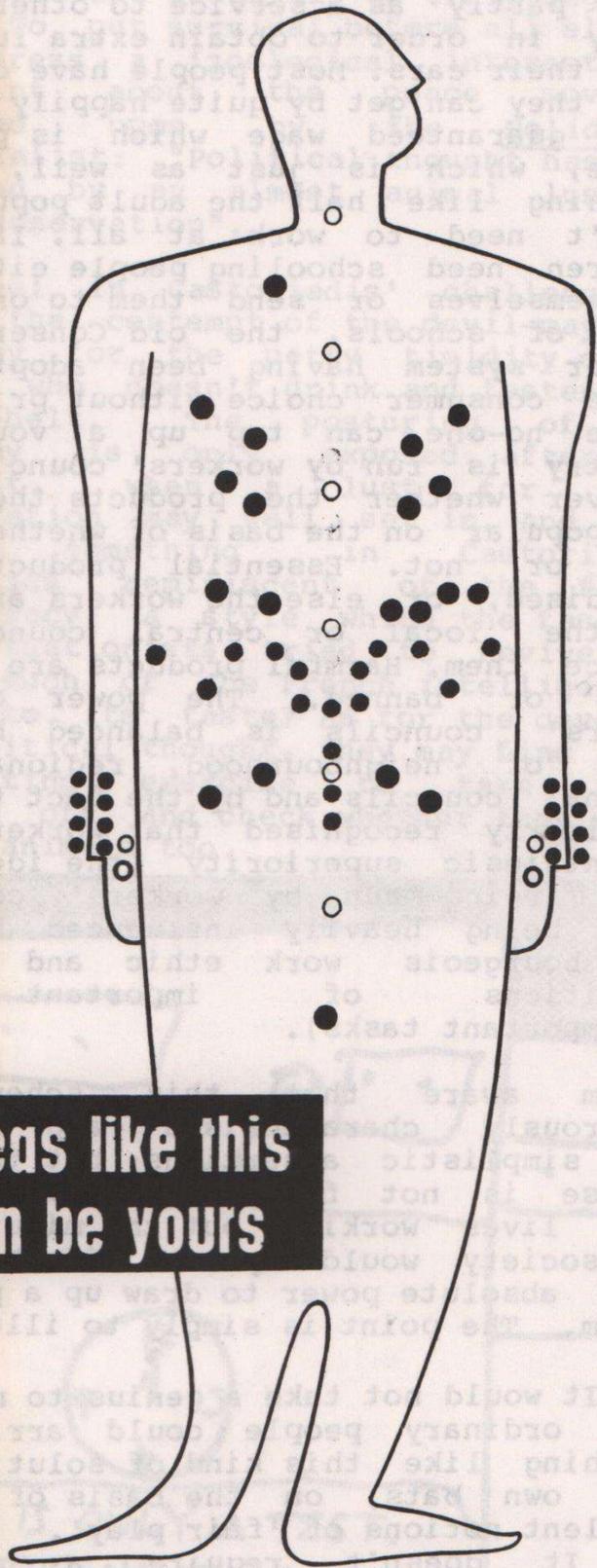
This would seem to imply that I'm getting very close to a traditional anarchist stance. But to criticise the communist movement for double standards in rejecting repression from a bourgeois government and welcoming it from a 'workers' government is not necessary to adopt anarchism. One has merely to be prepared to look accurately at the appalling track record of Communists, Trotskyists, Maoists and supporters of Angolan, Albanian, Cuban or Zimbabwean 'objectively progressive regimes' to see how easily erstwhile clearthinking critics of the powers that be can be turned into sycophantic apologists for exploitative regimes. One doesn't have to follow the worst of the anarchists into making a series of naive assertions about what life will be like 'after the revolution'. It is this naivety which most worries me about many of the statements made by libertarians who have written on the subject. Far too many of us fall into the trap of assuming that when we are writing about a post-revolutionary society we are being asked to describe the perfect unaltering form which society will achieve when all problems have been removed. I have written in the past (3) about the short-sighted purism of assuming that one can simply abolish money overnight, and move to a society which allows the consumer freedom to consume whatever he or she wants. I would go further. Revolution implies war. The marxists are therefore right to say that one needs armies and either prisons or firing squads if one has not been fortunate enough to pass peacefully into socialism. One also needs economic planning at both local, regional and central levels and a degree of expertise is needed here. One also needs rewards for unpleasant labour, taxes on the production of highly profitable items, enforceable laws and a

1. Of course these characteristic features of the two systems are not mutually exclusive.

2. Naturally I don't intend this to imply that socialism amounts to no more than the granting of the true fruits of their labour to the producers. To me socialism implies a society in which people have control over their own bodies and minds, and exercise the maximum possible freedom of choice concerning their lifestyles. It is therefore inconceivable to me that socialism could be anything other than socialist feminism.

3. In Solidarity National Magazine no.3. For any librarians, the National Magazine took over from the old London mag. and ran to five issues before being replaced by Solidarity for Social Revolution, which in its turn ran to 27 issues before giving way to this new series of Solidarity.

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mechanism whereby the decisions which are made by the entire society can be made to override those made by single enterprises or localities when the two are in dispute. None of these things are particularly desirable, nor are they 'socialist' measures. However, full socialism implies that we have had time to effect a change in the way people think and act - it assumes the eradication of short-sightedness and selfishness. There is no evidence I can think of which would lead us to believe that immediately following a revolution which has socialist aims that every group in society will agree with and fully understand these aims in such a way that they never act selfishly. Equally, and this is absolutely vital, there is no evidence to suggest that any leadership, any party, any selected group of the pure in heart or the all-wise will do any better at resolving such disputes which may arise than the democratic process will. Indeed, there is a great deal of evidence to show that any group which is allowed to set itself up as the arbiter of disputes and the correct leadership

will rapidly turn itself into an exploitative class which uses educational qualifications and adherence to the party line as a selection system for entry to the new aristocracy. Therefore, when I talk about the need for a central decision-making body, all I am implying is that democracy should be applied at every conceivable step in the organisation of society, that some decisions have to be made nationally, and that it is not inconceivable that in a dispute between largely autonomous factory councils and the national government that the national government might be right. For instance, imagine we have a system of workers' and neighbourhood councils at factory and neighbourhood level, and one factory hits on a product which is highly profitable but requires little labour and causes damage to the community's health. Is it not reasonable to argue that there should be a central body which could tax such a commune and could impose health and safety regulations upon it? What I am suggesting is quite heretical for anyone in the libertarian movement, but it amounts to no more than saying that group, sex, intellectual, and financial conflicts of interests will not disappear overnight in any revolution which I can conceive of in this century. What we are out to do is not to imagine what life might be like if we could instantaneously make people different at some time in the future; we are out to break the power of money to dominate our lives, to break the power of bureaucracy, to break down systematic sexual domination, and to hand the power to control their own lives to ordinary people. In other words, our aim is not to abolish every institution which has ever been used against us in some mad return to primitivism and barter; it is to alter those institutions to enable their beneficiaries to control them instead of being controlled by them, to alter them in such a way that no party can emerge to replace the bourgeoisie in its role of running the institutions to serve itself.

A number of points ought to be made here. First, to say that we are out to transform the nature of an institution is not to fall into the marxist doublethink we criticised above which assumes that what was wrong before the revolution can be made right by the beauty of Hegelian logic. In a great many cases it is not the existence of an institution we object to (e.g. London Transport, the National Health Service, a firm which makes toys for children or a manufacturer of household goods). What is objectionable is the fact that the institution is outside our control, and by 'our control' I do not mean the control of the party; I mean that even something as inherently acceptable as the NHS has been bureaucratised and is so operated that most people perceive it as something they have to fight if they are to get the service they require, and that there is a power structure which will have to be broken if this is to be changed. We have only to study the methods of working inside a toy factory, the willingness of the management to cut corners at the

expense of children's health, or the sexist stereotyping of the products produced, to see how easily an inherently pleasant and useful activity can be turned into an alienating waste of life. Second, there is no way to guarantee that in a successful revolution a new exploitative class wouldn't emerge to replace the old. There is no constitution which can be devised which can automatically prevent this (and the absence of a constitution is no guarantee either). The libertarian case rests on the assertion that history has taught us that the converse is true: that you can virtually guarantee that if you establish certain structures such as 'the workers' party', or the 'vanguard of the class', then you will get this undesired result (assuming that the workers' party doesn't in fact represent a class which has objectively set out to acquire power throughout the revolutionary process). Every revolution this century has followed this pattern. The libertarian argument maintains that we believe there is also historical evidence that ordinary people can run society and make the necessary decisions when both the structures and their own consciousness are not conspiring to prevent them from doing so.

Let me try to make what I'm talking about a little more clear by briefly describing a possible working system which could be introduced immediately and which it is plausible to believe people of their own accord might decide to create. Let's start by assuming that there have been no changes in the level of economic development, no new technological changes, and no improvement in the standard of education. A few minimum changes have been made, however. All the basic items such as staple foodstuffs, housing, heat, transport, and medical care are provided free of charge by the councils, while luxury items are not. Housing is not allocated by a remote bureaucracy which uses it to discipline us into our roles (4). The decisions on housing are made by a body not unlike a jury which has as its disposal any council houses which fall vacant, together with houses expropriated from those rich people who possess more houses than they need. Hospitals are run by councils elected by staff at all levels inside the hospitals together with people from the local community, but there is still a thoroughly advertised complaints system to prevent these councils losing touch with public needs. The transport network is being extended but some of the cost of providing the service has been removed by breaking away from the comically primitive idea of charging and so wasting several thousand people's lives in the mindless task of collecting fares. Naturally, the income of British Rail has dropped to zero, but what the hell; if taxes can pay for education they can surely pay for transport. Citizens are permitted to use private transport if they wish to, but are taxed heavily on this unnecessary luxury unless they are disabled or live in a rural area. Few people can afford such luxuries or want them, since public transport is so

extensive, but there are a number of people who enjoy driving and who decide to work at unpleasant but irremovable tasks partly as a service to others, and partly in order to obtain extra luxuries like their cars. Most people have decided that they can get by quite happily on the basic guaranteed wage which is paid to anyone, which is just as well, since something like half the adult population doesn't need to work at all. If their children need schooling people either do it themselves or send them to one of a range of schools, the old Conservative voucher system having been adopted to ensure consumer choice without privilege (since no-one can top up a voucher). Industry is run by workers' councils who discover whether the products they make are popular on the basis of whether they sell or not. Essential products are subsidised, or else the workers are paid by the local or central council to produce them. Harmful products are either taxed or banned. The power of the workers' councils is balanced by the power of neighbourhood, regional and national councils and by the fact that it is clearly recognised that workers have no intrinsic superiority (the idea of a state being run by workers' councils alone being heavily influenced by both the bourgeois work ethic and sexist definitions of important and non-important tasks).

I am aware that this scheme is ludicrously characterised and riddled with simplistic assertions; but the main purpose is not for some idiots to waste their lives working out the minutiae of how society would operate if they were given absolute power to draw up a perfect system. The point is simply to illustrate that

- (a) It would not take a genius to make it work; ordinary people could arrive at something like this kind of solution off their own bats, on the basis of widely prevalent notions of 'fair play'.
- (b) It doesn't require a massive bureaucracy to make socialism work if you are prepared to give people the maximum range of free choice.
- (c) We may expect people to make extensive use of existing social institutions (particularly at first) but to use them in a very different way.

Many anarchists seem to base their position on the assumption that they can think up a better scheme for running the world than anyone else and therefore ought to be given the job (5), or else they assume that everyone will somehow come around to their way of thinking. I would argue that what anarchists and libertarian socialists should be doing is placing their faith in the kind of institutions which human beings have chosen in the past at the high points of

4. A feature of the Soviet system.

5. Equally many reformist socialists seem to base their position on the assumption that they can draw up the largest number of schemes for employing white-collar workers in the service of the state.

their struggles. All the evidence (the Paris Commune, the Russian Revolutions of 1905 and 1917, Spain in 1936, Hungary in 1956, France in 1968, Portugal and Poland) seem to indicate that given the chance to run their own lives ordinary people do move spontaneously towards workers' and neighbourhood communes and councils. They do not spontaneously abolish money, but they do try to redistribute it on the principle of 'fairness'. They do not try to tell neighbours what they should spend their money on, but they do want to ensure that everyone is fed, clothed and warm. Finally, they are quite prepared to discipline people whose selfishness threatens to destroy what they are trying to build, but they are highly suspicious of those who set up 'workers' parties' which preach the need for ever tighter discipline. Many internal struggles such as strikes or community protest groups show similar tendencies. Ordinary people tend to be very active in the creation of protest groups and in the initial organisation of strikes, and then drop out and become suspicious as their actions are placed under progressively tighter control by the committee, the regional officials, or the latest

trotskyist grouping. Equally, many internal struggles show none of the progressive tendencies of e.g. the Lucas Aerospace workers, and those involved in the struggle are quite content to see themselves as normally loyal workers and union members who have been forced to take action against their wills. The task of those who choose to use the name of revolutionary is to do their best to participate in, encourage, publicise and support all struggles which seem to them to be moving towards giving people maximum possible confidence in themselves and their abilities to run their lives. An important part of this process may lie in attempting to show that ordinary people can, given the chance, run society much more efficiently and much more in their own interests than any of the currently existing governments can manage anywhere on the planet. Given the extent of the poverty in the Third World and the current mess which has been created by the Western economic system, it is a shocking indictment of the socialist movement that this statement is not self-evident to all.

ANDY BROWN

FACING WAR?

Introduction

In the last issue of Solidarity we published, under the title 'Facing War', an extract from the book 'Devant La Guerre' by Cornelius Castoriadis, in which Castoriadis argues that Soviet society has changed fundamentally in the last decade and should now be understood as a "stratocracy" within which a military-industrial complex dominates a separate civilian socio-economic sector. He goes on to argue that responsibility for the current arms race lies first and foremost with the Soviet Union.

As we expected, 'Facing War' has provoked a lively response from our readers; below we present some of the contributions we have received. Some of our more critical correspondents have, however, missed the point of our publishing Castoriadis' article. First of all, we were not endorsing everything Castoriadis says. It is true that analyses similar to those he puts forward have been articulated in our group discussions; but so have criticisms of Castoriadis' position. We published 'Facing War' because we believed - and still believe - that discussion of its arguments was a worthwhile process.

Second, we did not publish out of any veneration for Castoriadis as our 'guru'. Of course we have in the past published many of Castoriadis' texts; and we have no desire to deny the influence of his writings - or more generally the tradition of Socialisme ou Barbarie and its successors - on our orientation to the world. But we have never claimed that Castoriadis is infallible or beyond criticism. Nor do we consider that those who have at some time in their lives expressed stimulating and useful ideas will always continue to do so.

We had hoped that it would not be necessary to spell this out. The fact that it is indicates that there are many on the so-called revolutionary left whose desire for a solid public 'line' to give to the people has made them blind to the nature of politics as a process of debate. They cannot appreciate that the airing of differences - both in itself and as a contribution to the deepening of understanding - is essential to the revolutionary project, something to be positively encouraged rather than avoided.



Facing reality

The Castoriadis' article 'Facing War' is provocative; but that is all that can be said for it. Indeed, I have spent some time considering whether a response would make me the butt of a situationist joke. However, I shall address myself to a few points Andy Brown did not cover in his article.

Castoriadis attempts to establish a case for recognising two Soviet economies - military and civilian. The argument is based, empirically, upon the quantitative distribution of resources (including labour), and upon 'qualitative' differences between the technically superior military sector and all others. Clearly this begs comparison with capitalist economies and, in the face of such a comparison, it fails; where is large scale initial use and development of technology to be found in the capitalist nations if not in the military sector? Wasn't the Lucas Aerospace workers' plan, in part, a response, however inadequate, to the devotion of resources to military technology (1)? Reagan's 'Star Wars' plan and current US space projects are nothing if not a reaffirmation of the leading role of the military in technological development and expenditure in a hemisphere just as easily characterised by the poverty of millions in whose lives modern technology appears only as a means of exploitation and repression. This is not to deny that there is a faster and greater interchange between military and civilian sectors within capitalism than within the Soviet Union, but this has more to do with the multiplicity of pies into which multinational corporations have their proverbial fingers (in comparison with the rigidity of centralised state planning in the Soviet Union) than with Castoriadis' quasi-conspiratorial vision of the Soviet economy. His attempt to blow relative differences in structural rigidity into qualitative distinctions, with reference to militarism, is repeated in his bizarre comment about supposing "that, in France, the first 30 per cent of students who finish at the top of the entry examination or final tests of the 'prestige schools' were drafted and enrolled into a caste with all kinds of privileges, with a standard of living several times higher than they would have elsewhere". Where does he suppose these people go? To be sure, some join the liberal professions; but how many are creamed off into the multinationals, finance, government, civil service - that is, into precisely those (well-paid) institutions which create and service France's military machine. The institutional forms of organisation are neither here nor there. Furthermore, the Soviet Union may well buy itself industrial peace within the military areas of production, but I have yet to notice a plague of crippling strikes within NATO's arms factories, let alone mutiny within the ranks of its

researchers and administrators. This stability is bought, too.

Castoriadis underates the success, stability and complexity of Soviet socialisation in his reference to the Soviet Union as a 'cynical society' with an ideology perceived by those it exploits to be crumbling. Certainly Soviet socialising agencies have had to resort to ideological contradictions in order to seal the gap between the career expectations of its youth and the material aspirations of the population as a whole, but what is far more worthy of note is the degree to which the plugging operations work (as here). Not only are the overwhelming majority of Soviet citizens sufficiently indoctrinated by a plurality of agencies into accepting the state's dictates, but they participate in their own exploitation far more than workers in any capitalist nation (with the possible exception of Japan)⁽²⁾ It is pertinent to point to the lack of response in the USSR to the events of Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Poland et al. (information about Afghanistan is patchy but indicates only a limited ethnic and regional response at best). I am quite sure that this reflects the ability of the superstructure of the Soviet state to react far more flexibly and sensitively, in the face of variations at the base, than Castoriadis is willing to acknowledge. Let's talk about a 'cynical society' when the cynicism begins to materialise.

My third point is an obvious one. The "...inability of capitalism to transform and truly assimilate immense regions of the Third World..." is contradicted by the shift of the middle-east even more firmly into the embrace of capitalism (epitomised by Infitah and Camp David, the resumption of imperialist drives into the Iranian economy immediately after the Thermidor, the ambivalence of Iraq and Syria, the alliance with Saudi Arabia, and now the securing of Lebanon). It flies in the face of the expansion of the IMF, irrespective of the current stranglehold over Zimbabwe, Turkey, etc. Castoriadis ignores the fact that the Soviet Union is struggling to maintain its 'influence' over Mozambique, Angola, Ethiopia, Afghanistan, Poland, Kampuchea, and Nicaragua. The fact that capitalist imperialism is more capable of using finance as a weapon than is the Soviet Union merely means that the former need not use overt military strength as frequently.

(1). In 1980 54% of total research and development by the British government was spent on 'defence' projects. The figure obviously excludes all that spent by the private sector.

(2) See The Soviet Industrial Worker by Lane and O'Dell, pub. Martin Robertson, 1978.

Castoriadis is unable to see that his refusal to categorise the 'modern army' of the Soviet superpower with anything but its own identity produces nothing but the trivial tautology that a superpower must have a modern army in order to be such. With anything but a modern army no superpower has ever existed. This goes for the USA as much as the Soviet Union. Another point of contact with the cold-warriors is a shared and racist view of Russian history. This is produced by characterising Ivan the Terrible, Peter the Great and Stalin in the purely ideological guise of Great Russian Chauvinists and ignoring their roles and relationships with the economic base. Perhaps this lack of method is all we can expect from the fading guru who predicted an end to capitalist crises. Certainly it is all we can expect from someone who, while proclaiming the qualitative basis for his propositions, produces dubious quantitative comparisons which he then applies, selectively and a-historically, to only one of the twin poles of oppression - namely, the USSR. This is not, of course, to say that I reject the axiom that quantity is, at some point, transformed into quality; merely that to pose the suggestion of structural developments of a qualitative nature in the USSR while ignoring a comparable basal situation in the capitalist nations is not justified because it saves a prejudice.



That, "in coming years, the world situation cannot be thought about without taking into account, first and foremost, the prospect of war", is perhaps the most crass comment in the whole essay. When has imperialist/superpower rivalry offered anything but the "prospect of war"? That, surely, is one of the main spurs which urges revolutionaries toward the destruction of all powers, East or West, 'super' or not.

Toby.

Facing death

Castoriadis (Cardan), the long-standing guru of the Solidarity group, has succumbed to militarist hysteria and joined the jackals' chorus which is preparing us to 'face war' - to quote the title of his diatribe (Solidarity no.2). The refrain is familiar. The USSR is an uncontrollable military machine, inherently expansionist, poised to take over the world. Peace, it follows, is attainable only through surrender, an option rejected as despicable. So on to universal death! What is shocking is to hear this tune from someone who we have regarded in the past as a socialist. Nothing conceivable could have been a more shameful betrayal of everything he has ever stood for.

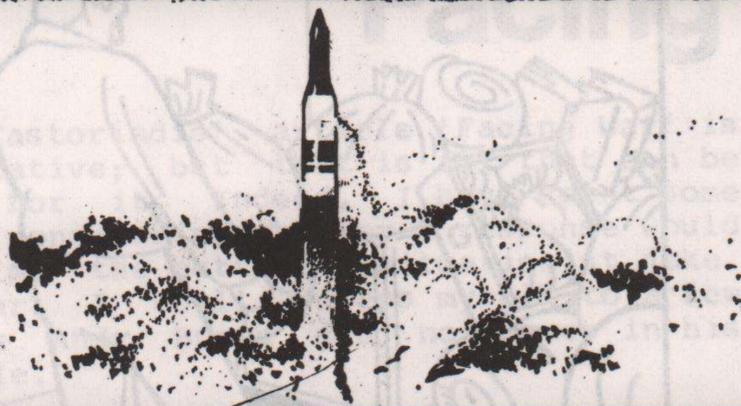
In his 'analysis' of the Soviet system, Castoriadis combines arrogant self-assurance ("one can be categorically certain" about this, that is "perfectly well-known") with wide-ranging ignorance of Soviet affairs. I too used to 'theorise' in the same sublime way. When you start to study things seriously, you realise how little you know and are no longer so certain.

No one with any real knowledge of the USSR could give the least credence to Castoriadis' fantasies about the military taking control over State policy. The Party leadership, now as in the past, have ample means for keeping power concentrated in their own hands - the KGB

not least among them. A variety of interests, of course, exercise influence at the second echelon of power, but the military constitute only one such interest, balanced by others, such as the foreign policy advisers, who tend to adopt a more cautious approach.

A more soundly based analysis of Soviet politics is that given by the emigre Alexander Yanov, who was a journalist on Pravda while in the USSR, in Detente after Brezhnev: the domestic roots of Soviet Foreign Policy. Yanov argues that an important section of the Soviet elite now has a vested interest in detente - all those, in particular, who gain through detente the coveted opportunity to travel abroad. Against them stand the conservative section of the elite, including the military, who strive for a "neo-Byzantine empire", isolated from a hostile outside world. Western policy towards the USSR is a key determinant in deciding which section wins out.

In Castoriadis' picture of the Soviet system, there are two virtually independent economies - the inefficient civilian economy and the efficient military economy, run on completely different lines. Nobody would deny that military industry is run by special methods and gets the best supplies. But it is absurd to claim that the top priority given it can insulate it all that effectively from the deficiencies of



the Soviet planning system as a whole. Even managers of military factories make speeches complaining of supply difficulties. For how on earth could military industry be, in Castoriadis' words, "almost completely self-contained" except for inputs of raw materials? Military and civilian industry, in the USSR as in the West, must equally rely on a range of industrial branches, from metallurgy and chemicals to computers and instrument-building, for equipment and materials. Not all of these can be given top priority, by definition.

The extent to which the most qualified personnel are channelled into military industry can also be exaggerated. Thus, the professional disadvantages on military secrecy and anonymity, not to mention the abandonment of any hope of going abroad, often outweigh for scientists the material privileges of military work.

Let us take another argument of Castoriadis - the supposed displacement of the "dead" Party ideology by Russian chauvinism. Russian chauvinism is an influential reactionary ideology in the USSR, and is prominent in the armed forces. But again, a number of other ideological currents achieve self-expression in the USSR - technocratic and even humanist currents as well as the far-from-dead Party orthodoxy. The prospects of Russian chauvinism as a socially integrative ideology are fortunately limited by the fact that over half the Soviet population are not Russians.

As an example of the internationalist trend in Soviet official thought, we can cite a recent Pravda article by the prominent economist Bogomolov to the effect that, in preparing its own economic reform, the USSR must learn from the experience of other socialist countries, such as East Germany and Hungary, whose peoples have a higher level of culture and discipline.

In short, the USSR is not a military automaton but a highly complex and differentiated modern society, the real diversity of which is camouflaged by the compulsory facade of unanimity. It is true that no leader can survive who goes too far in opposing military interests, as both Malenkov and Krushchev discovered, but many military demands have been successfully resisted by political leaders (demands to invade

Rumania and Yugoslavia, to intervene directly in the Middle East, to make a pre-emptive strike against Chinese nuclear capacity, etc.). Arms control agreements have been imposed on a reluctant military, and can again be imposed.

A recent victory of the detente-minded tendency in the USSR concerns Soviet doctrine on nuclear war. Soviet military men have long proclaimed, in opposition to academic and journalistic commentators, that it is possible to survive and win a nuclear war. In recent years the Party leaders, including both Brezhnev and Andropov, have demonstrated awareness of the real nature of the nuclear peril and are pushing through a re-evaluation of military doctrine. Talk of victory in nuclear war has disappeared from the military press.

Peaceful coexistence and co-operation between East and West are quite possible. In the foreseeable future they are the only alternative to human extinction. The Soviet philosopher Fyodor Burlatskii describes world peace as the "absolute value" immeasurably higher than all other political aims or "relative values". Relative values are the concern of different political tendencies, social groups, economic systems; absolute values belong to humanity as a whole. To secure survival we must do what we can to push the West towards a policy of compromise and disarmament. To the extent that we succeed, we shall automatically strengthen the position of those who advocate disarmament in the Soviet elite.

This process does not depend on any fundamental change in the social systems on either side. That is just as well, for there is no prospect of any such change in the near future. No independent peace movement, for example, will be allowed to develop in the USSR. This proves nothing about the Soviet attitude to peace; it merely confirms the long-established Soviet attitude to independent movements.

Until now it has been a mystery to me on what grounds anyone could dispute the absolute primacy of the goal of securing human survival. If, for the sake of argument, we suppose that we really do face a choice between eventual Soviet world domination and nuclear war, then surely everyone would opt for Soviet domination? Not Castoriadis. For him the relative joys of Western capitalism are worth the risk of death. For only when we

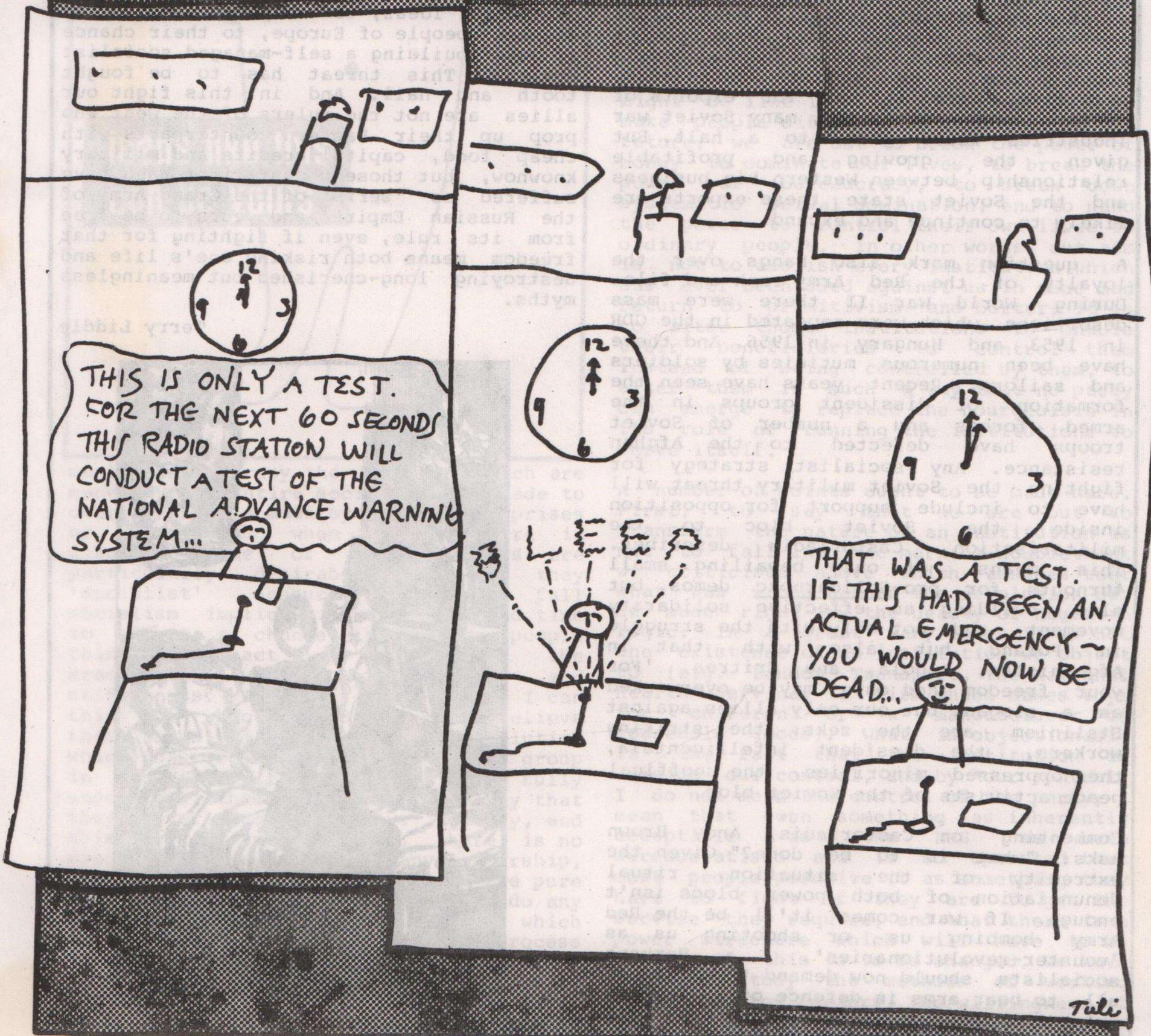
understand that we are always living in the face of death and already count ourselves as dead, can we truly begin to live. To put survival before all else is to express a 'zoological interest', a complaint about the peace movement expanded upon by the Solidarity editorialist: "Political thought has been replaced by an almost animal lust for self-preservation".

We feel in Castoriadis' challenge to death the contempt of the devil-may-care tearaway for the petty timidity of the driver who doesn't drink and fastens his safety-belt. The posturing of the tearaway is only exposed after the accident, when a lust for self-preservation may well set in. And isn't there something in Castoriadis' aesthetics reminiscent of the feudal aristocracy, a style which the fascists and situationists tried to revive and which much of the French intelligentsia finds to its taste? As for the devotees of political thought, they may find it an interesting exercise to take their clothes off and check whether they might not be animals too.

Yes, we are animals. As animals, we have zoological interests, and those interests must come first. If they don't, we are insane animals, cut off from reality.

But curiously enough, the insane animal called Castoriadis has missed what is specifically human about the lust for survival of the peace movement. It is not, as he thinks, individual death which we fear, but death of the species, death of the planet - something too all-encompassing for non-human animals to conceive of (or to accomplish!). What has helped many people in the past to face individual death has been the feeling that life as such would go on. They were reborn in their children and their children's children. What Castoriadis urges us to face is incomparably more terrible than any personal death. He has a right to risk his own life. Perhaps he will go and get himself killed fighting the Soviet Army in Afghanistan? But he has no right to gamble with the world. The world is held by us animals in trust for future generations.

Stefan



Facing Russia

Congratulations on publishing Castoriadis Facing War - a welcome change from the usual pro-Soviet apologies and woolly-minded peacenik vapourings which fill most 'socialist' publications. Red or dead is really no choice at all! If Stalinism ever captured Britain, most, if not all, Solidarity would, at best, suffer the living death of the Gulags which would doubtless be staffed by the cadres of the New Communist Party or the Spartacists. A glance at the Stalinist takeover of Bulgaria, Vietnam, Cuba, Ethiopia, etc., shows that it is not the bourgeoisie but democratic and libertarian socialists who are the terror's first victims.

While they do not invalidate its central thesis, there are some errors of fact in the article. Despite scares put out by the American military, the MiG 25 is a poor item of weaponry, aptly described as a 'flying coffin'; it still uses valves instead of transistors! More Soviet military hardware such as the Red Army's tanks are, by Western standards, primitive. Were it not for exports of Western high technology, many Soviet war industries would grind to a halt. But given the growing and profitable relationship between Western big business and the Soviet state these exports are likely to continue and expand.

A question mark also hangs over the loyalty of the Red Army rank and file. During World War II there were mass desertions which were repeated in the GDR in 1953 and Hungary in 1956. And there have been numerous mutinies by soldiers and sailors. Recent years have seen the formation of dissident groups in the armed forces and a number of Soviet troops have defected to the Afghan resistance. Any socialist strategy for fighting the Soviet military threat will have to include support for opposition inside the Soviet bloc to the militarisation Castoriadis describes. This means not only bewailing small turnouts for pro-Solidarnosc demos, but also building an effective solidarity movement; and not only with the struggle in Poland but also with that in Afghanistan, Angola, and Eritrea. 'For your freedom and ours' may be overworked as a slogan, but our only allies against Stalinism are the zeks, the striking workers, the dissident intelligentsia, the oppressed minorities, the unofficial peace activists of the Soviet bloc.

Commenting on Castoriadis, Andy Brown asks: "what is to be done?" Given the extremity of the situation, ritual denunciation of both power blocs isn't enough. If war comes it'll be the Red Army bombing us or shooting us as 'counter-revolutionaries'. Perhaps socialists should now demand the right of all to bear arms in defence of their own, not the ruling class's, liberty, and

devise an alternative non-nuclear defence strategy based on this. It is easy for the European ultra-left, cushioned by the bourgeois democracy it professes to despise, to devise sophisticated critiques of Stalinism, but it is another matter actually to physically confront it as the resistance groups in Eritrea, Afghanistan, Angola, etc., have done. One day this problem may well face us.

If this is 'morbid Russophobia' so be it. I think it is necessary as an antidote for the Bolshemia which has poisoned the minds of all too many with the nonsense of 'workers' states' and 'actually existing socialism', and made socialism appear the antithesis of freedom. It is because I am a socialist, humanist and internationalist that I think it is time to face harsh reality - the reality of the threat posed by Stalinism, the negation, the very death of these ideas, to the peace and liberty of the people of Europe, to their chance of ever building a self-managed socialist society. This threat has to be fought tooth and nail. And in this fight our allies are not the rulers of the West who prop up their Eastern counterparts with cheap food, capital credits and military knowhow, but those who at first hand have suffered as 'serfs of the Grand Army of the Russian Empire' and yearn to be free from its rule, even if fighting for that freedom means both risking one's life and destroying long-cherished but meaningless myths.

Terry Liddle



REVIEWS

Bookchin mystifies

The Ecology of Freedom, by Murray Bookchin (£6.95)

In his preface to The Slow-Burning Fuse John Quail listed three main sources of modern libertarian-socialist/anarchist theory: Castoriadis, the Situationists, and Murray Bookchin. I doubt if anyone would have seriously disagreed with his choice at that time. Since then we have seen Castoriadis fall into a blind anti-Sovietism and in an atmosphere of '80s gloom the Situationists' texts have come to sound more like esoteric apocalyptic gospels than innovative revolutionary theory (1). So what's happened to Murray Bookchin?

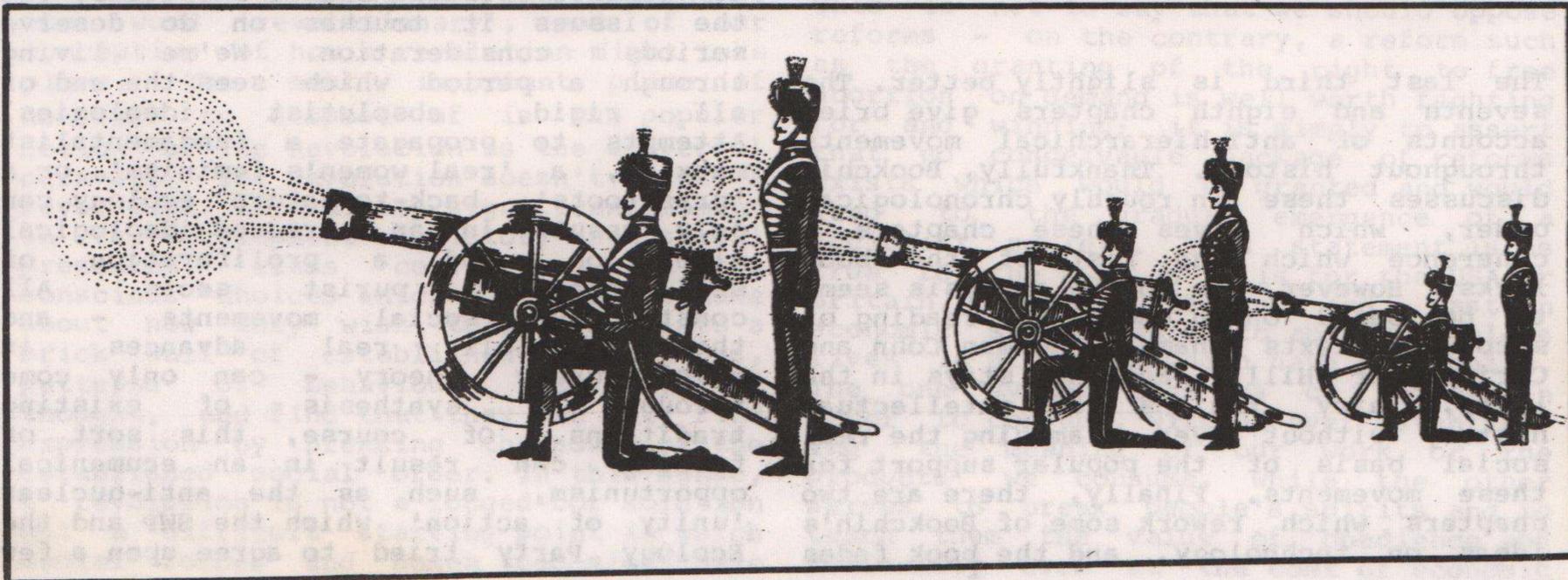
I suppose that most of us first encountered Bookchin through the collection of essays entitled Post-Scarcity Anarchism, and then perhaps met him again in Towards an Ecological Society (2). Both books showed Bookchin at his best: the master of the short, hard-hitting essay that could devastate a pompous orthodoxy or outline an original idea with clarity and imagination. The enthusiastic optimism of Post-Scarcity Anarchism may sound a little hollow today, but the book survives as a worthy summary of the best libertarian thinking of the '60s. Towards an Ecological Society was somewhat narrower in its scope, but it seemed to show that Bookchin was capable of resisting the inevitable disillusion of the 1970s without falling back into a blind faith in some orthodoxy or an empty despair.

Bookchin's latest book is his most ambitious: a philosophical 'magnum opus' (in the words of its back cover). The Ecology of Freedom is intended to mark a decisive break from the marxist class-based, economic analysis of society, and to suggest a new revolutionary perspective based on an ecological sensibility that uses social, cultural and psychological analyses of society.

Bookchin attempts to present this new perspective through a long backward glance across 10,000 years of human history. Personally, I feel some sympathy for this line of thought, and I think that most Solidarity readers would at least agree that Bookchin's ideas are worth considering. Unfortunately, this book is a near-total failure that will do little to encourage any serious discussion of the ideas it presents.

The first disappointment screams out after the first few pages: the old, crisp, exciting ring to Bookchin's writing has gone. We see the emergence of a Bookchin jargon, which fills out long messy sentences with words like "utopistic" and "attitudinal"; a style which relies on the monotonous repetition of ambiguous semi-meaningful abstract nouns in order to present an argument. (Is it just coincidence that this book was published in California?)

Other problems emerge as we read on. If Bookchin's real subject is the presentation of a new ecological sensibility, then why have three hundred pages of lightweight, quasi-historical analysis been dumped into the book? Or, if the real purpose of the book is to discuss the historic emergence of social hierarchies, why are there scattered references to the ecological movement throughout? It's often difficult to be sure what Bookchin's subject is. His chapter headings - "Epistemologies of Rule", "The Emergence of Hierarchy", "The Legacy of Domination" - are almost interchangeable; their content is a bewildering scrapbook of anecdote and observation. Bookchin faces 10,000 years of human history like a bored consumer facing a four-channel television set: he jumps from subject to subject, looking for something interesting. This reaches a quite ludicrous extreme on page 126 and 127, when Bookchin switches from Channel 1 - the biblical story of Joseph - to





Channel 2 - Enlightenment and Hegelian analyses of the State -, then to Channel 3 - the social structure of the Crow Indians - finishing on Channel 4 - a brief analysis of the centralised states of Eastern Europe. Any of these topics could provide material for a libertarian analysis of hierarchy, and could also serve as useful sounding boards to test Bookchin's argument. But none of them are seriously discussed; Bookchin selects them, considers them, takes out a point, and brushes them away, in the space of a paragraph. His arguments are actually weakened rather than strengthened by the range of material he presents.

Some explanation for this alienating technique is given in the introduction. Bookchin seeks to present "...a few general ideas that grow according to the erratic and occasionally wayward logic of the organic rather than the strictly analytic..." (p.13). To this end he uses a "process-orientated dialectical approach". Put bluntly, he has made a quite basic methodological error, just that error which Marx identified in The Poverty of Philosophy: it consists of rearranging history in accordance with the writer's political ideas. Thus Bookchin can jump from primitive matri-central society ('good') to Athenian democracy ('mostly bad') to Bedouin society ('bad') because these jumps follow his own ideas. This is a cheap, lazy way of writing history, which avoids any real confrontation between the writer's ideas and human experience, and stands in direct contradiction to the values which Bookchin expresses in the book. Lastly, when one considers that Kropotkin (in Mutual Aid) and Lewis Mumford (in The City in History) have already covered much of the material presented in The Ecology of Freedom, there seems little justification for the book having been written.

The last third is slightly better. The seventh and eighth chapters give brief accounts of anti-hierarchical movements throughout history. Thankfully, Bookchin discusses these in roughly chronological order, which gives these chapters a coherence which the rest of the book lacks. However, his entire analysis seems to be based on an uncritical reading of secondary texts (namely, Norman Cohn and Christopher Hill), and he stays in the lofty, airy regions of intellectual history without ever examining the real social basis of the popular support for these movements. Finally, there are two chapters which rework some of Bookchin's ideas on technology, and the book fades

away with an 'epilogue' on the problems of human freedom.

An incidental fault is Bookchin's failure to come to terms with modern feminist theory. He expresses fairly clearly attitudes towards socialism (rejection) and ecology (critical appreciation), but apparently fails to recognise that feminists - like socialists, like ecologists - can be recuperated into bureaucratic hierarchies. Instead, he stretches his (minimal) historical theory in a desperate attempt to make it fit an orthodox feminist critique of patriarchy. However, in the last analysis, he breaks with this orthodoxy by arguing that the first oppressive social group were the Old and not the Men (chapter 3). A far more serious point is his persistent tendency to identify women with mothers, and femininity with motherhood (pp.53 and 77), although at times he does seem to consider a second role for women: Goddess. One would like to see him spell out that both the woman who chooses not to have children, and the man who chooses to raise a family, are acceptable to his notions of 'freedom'.



Despite occasional passages where Bookchin does present new ideas, or presents old ideas in a new and constructive way, this book is a failure. After wading through its 384 pages, one thinks nostalgically back to the good old days of dialectical materialism, when classes were classes, when thesis, antithesis and synthesis rolled forward majestically and reasonably comprehensibly, and even if there was some obligatory necessary jargon one could at least believe that there was something worthwhile being said behind it all.

* * * *

The Ecology of Freedom can fairly be described as mystifying. In dumping 300 pages of quasi-historical analysis on us, it has clarified nothing and only serves to obscure existing social struggles. Yet the issues it touches on do deserve serious consideration. We're living through a period which sees the end of all rigid, absolutist ideologies. Attempts to propagate a fundamentalist marxism, a 'real women's feminism', or a 'grassroots', back-to-nature ecology can only result in an increased ideological alienation and a proliferation of self-isolating purist sects. All constructive social movements - and therefore all real advances in revolutionary theory - can only come through a synthesis of existing traditions. Of course, this sort of feeling can result in an ecumenical opportunism, such as the anti-nuclear 'unity of action' which the SWP and the Ecology Party tried to agree upon a few

years ago. But there have already been some more positive results. The Beyond the Fragments bubble did raise interesting questions about feminism and socialism before it burst. The whole of the Polish SOLIDARNOSC seems to be based on a unholy mixture of popular catholicism and a spontaneous anarcho-syndicalism (3). The Green movement in Germany fuses incredibly varied traditions: ecology, feminism, self-management, parliamentary reform, and old-fashioned liberal humanism. This fusion has created a serious, mass-based social opposition which still shows little sign of recuperation (4).

Bookchin's book appears to be a rather clumsy attempt to unite elements of feminist theory with his own social

ecology, but although this book can be alughed off as a sort of ideological hoax, perhaps it would be better to pay attention to the questions it raises. Despite Solidarity's rejection of marxism, why are most of its articles still written within the old structural framework of marxist analysis, using essentially marxist idioms and vocabulary? Are we still seeking some 'focus', some 'real base' of social struggles, or do we follow Bookchin in accepting society as an organic whole? What happened to our understanding of the irrational in politics? Until the new Solidarity can provide solid answers to these questions, answers that can be backed through participation in real social movements, we can't be sure who is mystifying and who is revolutionary.

1. The best of the Situationists' work - The Society of the Spectacle, The Revolution of Everyday Life - have survived better than their articles and manifestos.

2. Bookchin's Spanish Anarchists falls unhappily between introductory textbook and polemical analysis, but does successfully use the ideas presented in Post-Scarcity Anarchism to aid our understanding of a real social movement.

3. I think that many readers of Solidarity might prefer to describe SOLIDARNOSC as 'councillist' rather than

anarcho-syndicalist. Lack of space prevents me from pursuing this point.

4. I don't wish to give the impression that the Greens are the Answer. The whole German Green movement is heavily dependent on the existence of a large minority class, almost an anti-class, of disaffected youth, barred from state employment by repressive employment legislation (the Berufsverbot). The existence of this social group has given the 'alternative movement' a far greater depth than anything similar in Britain. While admiring the Greens, I doubt if a similar movement could be created here.

John Cobbett



Rowbotham clarifies

Dreams and Dilemmas by Sheila Rowbotham (Virago, £4.95, 374 pages)

I hope that the publication of this book marks the birth of a new spirit. Beyond the Fragments produced few concrete results, but it did successfully express a wide-spread disillusion with the various Leninist vanguard organisations created in the 1960s and 70s. Dreams and Dilemmas voices the disappointments that many feel about the development of feminism over the past decade, but it also expresses a continuing hope for the future of feminism. If it succeeds in provoking an honest debate between

feminists and socialists, it will help in the construction of a new form of politics which goes beyond both.

Dreams and Dilemmas is a selection of about 35 essays plus book reviews and poems written by Sheila Rowbotham since 1969. About two-thirds of the essays discuss the growth of the feminist movement in the last fourteen years; the remainder are either studies in nineteenth and early twentieth century history, or biographies of individual women. Each essay comes with a new introduction that often raises questions about the conclusions given in the main

every day of the week you need a carpet sweeper



text. Although written with great clarity, this is a complex book that works on many levels at once.

It would be easy to give a quick summary of the book as 'Rowbotham Hits Out against Separatism and Leninism'. The truth is that the arguments presented here are far more profound. These essays do not come in pre-packaged form, with a firm meaty assertion at the beginning of each paragraph and a solid course of empirical references to follow. A gentle, tentative spirit of exploration and questioning predominates. Rowbotham writes with sincerity and emotional commitment, but she does not exhaust the reader with melodramatic rhetoric, nor does she invent absolute certainties to cover weak points in her arguments. She describes the development of socialist feminism since 1969, telling us of the great advances that have been made, but also discussing openly the missed opportunities and the steps backward.

The first essay - "Women's Liberation and the New Politics" - is filled with a time-changing optimism. It is a mark of the decline of radical thought that this essay still sounds new and exciting after fourteen years. The essay examines changes in the roles of women during the 1960s, and explains how a feminist programme could be created within these conditions. It suggests that such a programme would bring about a renaissance of socialism, and would be an essential part of any new revolutionary movement. This, if you like, is the dream. Even in 1969, before the growth of a mass feminist movement, Rowbotham was aware of the dilemmas. She warned of the arrogance of socialist patriarchs and the self-destructiveness of myopic feminism (pp.15-19). The second essay - "The Beginnings of Women's Liberation in Britain" (written in 1972) - identifies another major dilemma: the constant

tension between the cosy but often introverted sisterhood of the small consciousness-raising group and the impersonal, sometimes unfriendly tone that frequently appeared in the agitational organisations needed to take feminism onto the streets. The essays which follow chart aspects of both the dreams and dilemmas in the struggles for adequate childcare, abortion and equal pay. Eventually, clear and well-argued positions are stated against both Leninist and separatist forms of organisation. But Rowbotham argues that the real dilemma that constricts us is neither: we are held back by the "bitterness, antagonism and paranoia" (p.61) that thrives among the cliques and sects of feminism and socialism.

Rowbotham never takes an attitude of dogmatic rejection to the theories or the actions of feminists or socialists. Instead she offers some constructive criticism. Her essay on the use of the word 'patriarchy' by some feminists is a good illustration of her style of argument. While she appreciates that this word seems to offer an illuminating clarity, she feels that in practice it hinders discussion, for its rigidity "...produces a kind of base-super-structure model to contend with the more blinkered versions of Marxism, or it rushes us off on the misty quest for the original moment of male supremacy" (p.209). Rowbotham argues against all iron-clad dogmas that squeeze people, society and history into biblical battles of Right and Wrong. No new dogmas are hammered out here; many of the essays are unusually open-ended, leaving the reader to think further.

However, at times this absence of dogmatism can lead to a certain vagueness. The early essays contain a number of New Leftist references; the later essays mention the Labour Party left, libertarian marxism and anarchist feminism. Rowbotham does not state clear attitudes to these differing traditions, and so sometimes gives the impression of advancing a kind of 'libertarian populism' that wants little more than unity at any price. This fault in no way detracts from the value of the book's arguments, but it does raise serious questions about the long-term objectives of Rowbotham's socialist feminism.

The only major flaw in the book is that sometimes it seems to reflect the very problems it identifies. Rowbotham notes a tendency towards introversion in small feminist groups, and yet she has produced a book dominated by an intense, introverted discussion of the internal problems of feminist and socialist organisations. In the last fourteen years there has been far more talk about women's liberation than there has been real liberation of women. Surely this resistance to the women's movement cannot be explained solely by the organisational problems of feminism and socialism. More analysis of how the State and social institutions have succeeded in containing feminism, and of how men and women outside feminist and socialist organisations have reacted to feminism

would have been useful.

There is no conclusion to the book. Its final message is definitely not that if only feminism were free of separatism and socialism free of Leninism then the world would be a better place. The problems we face are not limited to any particular political tendency. New ethics, based on honesty and mutual respect, are needed. New attitudes to our own theories and programmes are a necessary part of this new spirit. "The act of analysis requires more than concepts of sex and class, more than a theory of the subject, it demands that in the very process of thinking we transform the relation between thinker and thought about, theory and experience" (p.208). Instead of an ending, there's a new beginning. In a short letter to the feminist movement, called "Against the Grain", Rowbotham states "We have lost our innocence as a political movement" (p.351). There can be no return to a semi-mythical ideal feminism of the early 1970s. Instead, she hopes that through an honest appraisal of successes and failures a new wave of feminism can be started.

The message of Dreams and Dilemmas to

largely male groups like Solidarity is more complex. Rowbotham warns that there is no longer one single united feminist movement, and that some feminists are trying to drive feminism into a blind alley. Should we now turn our energy to criticising the myopic perspectives of separatist feminists? The fundamental argument of the book is that there is another, more positive course of action that we should be taking. While we must recognise the splits within feminism, our greatest efforts should go towards participating constructively in political activity with socialist and anarchist feminists. Throughout Rowbotham emphasises the value of this interaction. It's clear that socialist feminists like her come from a different political tradition to ours; it's equally clear that we are growing up in the same world, thinking along similar lines, often experiencing the same dilemmas and even sharing the same dreams. "For this is the dream - that all human beings can be more than present circumstances allow. And the dream is not to be appropriated and confined" (p.359).

JOHN COBBETT

Castoriadis' economics revisited

Modern Capitalism and Revolution by Cornelius Castoriadis (Paul Cardan) was drafted in 1959, published by Solidarity in 1965 and issued in a second edition in 1974, bearing a new introduction by the author in which he declined to make any significant alterations to his original conclusions.

In that introduction, Castoriadis listed six assertions from the original text as having been central to the analysis presented, and which he considered remained totally vindicated by events up to 1974. These were:

1. That the standard of living of the working class would rise and continue to rise.
2. That permanent unemployment did not any more, and would not in the future, have the numerical significance it had previously had in the history of capitalism.
3. That the capitalist state had become able to control the level of overall economic activity and to prevent major crises of over-production.
4. That the absence of political activity by the masses (privatisation) would form the central problem confronting the action of revolutionaries during the coming period.
5. That new attitudes on the part of youth expressed a total rejection of the system by the young and that this signified that established society was becoming unable to breed a new generation which would reproduce the existing state of affairs.
6. That the revolutionary movement could no longer treat as relevant the narrow 'economic' and 'political' issues and

ought to be concerned first of all with the questions men and women face in their real everyday life (i.e. there existed a crisis of the whole social fabric).

Of these assertions numbers 1,2, and 3 appear to have been proven wrong. There is most definitely an economic crisis of global proportions, the consequences of which include the driving down of working class living standards both in the heartlands of capitalism and in the 'Third World', and a similar pattern of rising unemployment which in global terms probably greatly exceeds the experience of previous world crises. The ruling classes do not appear to be in control, and the signs are of a turn to the classical solution: world war.

What remains astonishing, however, is the extent to which assertion 4 continues to hold true. While marxists point to the economic crisis and chant 'I told you so', they can take little comfort from the continuing refusal of the working class to show serious evidence of the classical predicted response. For the present period the fundamental problem is the absence of generalised working class political activity. On the obverse side, it is also evident that there is a marked lack of enthusiasm for ruling class propaganda - the Falklands spirit failed to catch fire despite a barrage of continuing media coverage, and the sight of Reagan lighting candles for the Poles evinces only disgust. The tragedy of all this, from which no one can derive any comfort, is that it evidences the extent to which bureaucratic capitalism has demoralised and desensitised the mass of

the people into a state of apathetic negativity.

There are exceptions, which relate to assertions 5 and 6 above. It is still true (5) that the young have presented a permanent problem of socialisation to their parent societies in ways not previously experienced, and that youth unemployment has done nothing to help. But it is equally true that this has not assumed anything like revolutionary dimensions, either in size or in consciousness. For the most part it remains alienated, isolated, sporadic, easily recuperated and contained into environments where it can be exploited and policed. The problem has been put into the ghetto where it assumes the character of an eyesore - and no more.

It is equally true (6) that questions have been asked by a wide range of people on a wide range of issues cutting into the most intimate corners of everyday life. It is also evident, however, that this has posed absolutely no threat to the status quo, no fundamental challenge to any institution or part of the capitalist social fabric, beyond what could be absorbed through reform and a moderate cultural shift. What did filter through has taken a back seat to personal economic survival.

Beyond these examples - unless one pins widely optimistic hopes on a movement isolated in Poland and swamped by nationalist and religious ideology; or on isolated resistance by steel workers in France, Belgium and England bent on stealing each other's jobs; or as some do on the re-emergence of a mass peace movement in Western Europe - there is not much sign of life. On balance, what is left of Castoriadis' six assertions?

"When a theory is disproved by the facts, or has to face facts which it did not and

could not predict - or which it cannot interpret - it is well known that it can always be rescued, through resort to additional hypotheses, provided the sum total of the hypotheses remains logically consistent. This might work up to a point. But beyond that the heaping of hypotheses upon hypotheses is nearly always the sign that a theory is dead". (introduction to 1974 edition, p.2).

In fact, even using the hard test set by Castoriadis for marxism in the above quotation on his own work, the core of his theory remains intact. The fundamental contradiction of capitalism still remains in the necessity for capitalism on the one hand to reduce workers to simple executors of tasks, and on the other, in the impossibility for it 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 relation to politics. This is the real contradiction of contemporary society and the ultimate source of its crises. The present world economic crisis, in its origins, its development and its consequences, is a continuation of that struggle. Far from being a refutation of Castoriadis' theories it is their complete vindication, since in his theories economic crisis does not fuel class struggle but rather it is class struggle which fuels the economic crisis. We are not witnessing a mystical conjuncture in an uncomputable combination of falling rates of profit, over-production, under-consumption, long-waves, short-waves and medium-waves, etc.; we are witnessing the failure of the ruling class to attain its prime social objectives. The only mystery is what happens next.

M.B.

Letter

Dear Solidarity,

Thank you for sending me the first two issues of the new series of Solidarity. I'm happy to renew my subscription and enclose a cheque for £5 for the next few issues.

I do however find it not a little ironic that a group which talks in its editorial about the veneration of gurus takes up an entire issue of its journal with a text from its own venerated guru! Never mind, I'm sure Solidarity has enough organic intellectuals left after the split to fill more issues of the journal. I personally feel that Castoriadis' writing, while still of interest, should no longer be given this emphasis in the journal, but encouragement should be given to new writers.

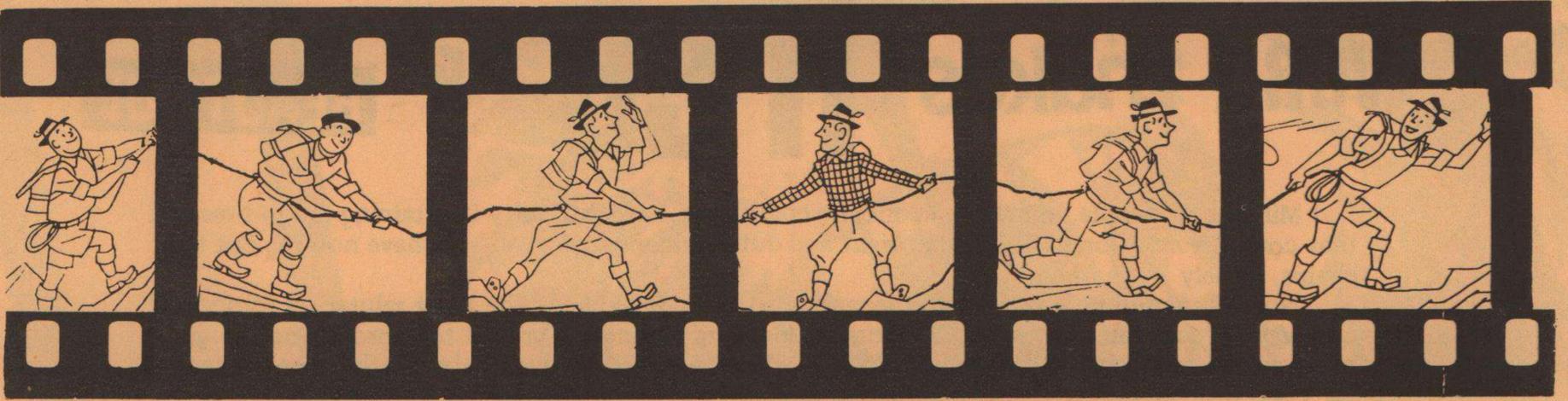
Following on from this point, I also think that Solidarity needs to more

closely define its field of interest, approach, etc., without getting entrapped in the dogmatic swamps of ideology, 'single correct answerism', etc. Anyway I'd be interested to see how the group develops and would like to come along to a meeting or two to see how best I can participate (if I get on with the other people!)

All for now,

R.A.





DUSTIN & SEX

'Tootsie' is ostensibly a sex-role comedy with a feminist message. Michael (played by Dustin Hoffman) is a 'difficult' out-of-work actor who, in order to raise money to back a play written by his flatmate, disguises himself as a woman and auditions for a role as a nursing administrator in a hospital soap. He gets the job and finds himself increasingly trapped in his drag role because 'she' increases the ratings. This is done by rewriting the lines to allow the character to become more independent, which attracts a large female audience tired of the usual dumb-blonde nurses and helpless accident victims. Offscreen, as well, Michael, or Dorothy Michaels as he calls himself, increasingly stands up for women in general and the female members of the cast in particular by rejecting the gropes of the lecherous old male lead and the demeaning 'dears' and 'toots' of the director. As Dorothy puts it, "Dan is called Dan and John is called John. Well, I have a name too. It's Dorothy. Not sweetheart; not Toots; Dorothy!".

Now this is fine as far as it goes. The trouble is that most of the other female characters in the film are portrayed as either as tough as men - like the producer - or else nervous wrecks - like Michael's girlfriend. The only upfront, right-on, together female character - i.e. Dorothy - is played by a man. There is no other positive female image, and thus the apparent feminist message is undercut at its very heart, notwithstanding that Dorothy does effect improvements where 'she' works and encourages the other actresses to reject their oppression. Nor can it be said that the film is adventurous in its attitude towards the wider question of gender. It is quite clear throughout that Michael is hetero and going to stay that way - unlike Al Pacino's police officer in 'Cruising', for example. Michael's roommate's only contribution is to tell us how disgusting he finds Michael's interest in women's clothes. The man who asks 'Dorothy' to marry him subsequently tells Michael that the only reason he is still alive is because he never kissed him; and the girl who Michael falls in love with is repelled when, as Dorothy, he tries to kiss her. Only encouragement for Anita Bryant here!

feminism is liberal, not radical. The American film industry has realised that there is a great big market of women who have absorbed Betty Friedan. 'Nine to Five' was aimed at it, and so is this. The macho man may be taken down a peg, but just the one. Moderate feminism is good for business: it SELLS.

There is one respect in which 'Tootsie', which is generally a nice and usually amusing film, is in fact thoroughly exploitative, and this occurs in the course of the relationship between the Hoffman character and that of Jessica Lange as Julie, an actress who is also the mistress of the director. She confides in Dorothy and becomes a close friend, eventually inviting her to stay the weekend at her father's home in the country. The scriptwriter sends the couple to sleep in the same bed and the girl, at her most open and trusting, talks about her relationship with her mother. At this point 'Dorothy' strokes her hair and she says "That's nice; my mother used to do that". There is a strong lesbian overtone to this scene, fuelled by the obvious desire of Michael for Julie. It takes little imagination to think of the shock to Julie's feelings had she responded to those overtures only to discover that what she thought was a woman was actually a man. I would think that any lesbian watching this scene would be distressed; it left me with a nasty taste in my mouth, not least because it was entirely unnecessary to the plot, which would have been just as well served if the characters had been in separate beds in the same room.

The 'message' of the film is at the end. Hoffman, by now irrevocably reverted to Michael, tells Julie that he has recognised the female within him. "All I have to do now", he tells her, "is to do it without the dress". Despite his considerable lack of straight dealing hitherto, Julie, needless to say, walks off arm in arm with him. The film is written by a man, for (straight) men, and despite its witty dialogue it has little to say to anyone else. As a comedy about transvestism it isn't as funny, crisp or innocent as 'Some Like It Hot'; but it does boast a good performance by Dustin Hoffman, and a fine one by Jessica Lange.

So at best we can say that 'Tootsie''s

S.K. French

WORK makes **free** & **BEAUTIFUL**

Millions of people, in present economic conditions, have difficulty in attaining the self-respect that comes from a long spell of that right and duty fundamental to all who have nothing but their chains, namely Wage Labour.

Whole generations now lack the incentive to wake up, one of the most salutary traditions of our way of survival. They miss the Monday Morning feelings so crucial to reproducing the good humour and regularity of the Honest Worker, who sweats productively, obediently, ever tightening his belt. Instead they fall into confusion, anguish, and deviance. Abstention from work seduces them into crime. Long term laziness only encourages disorder and sedition. Moreover, millions of scroungers now have to contend with the overwhelming guilt of receiving an income without being able to contribute to the community. Sociologists and psychologists agree, Work is the perfect optimal remedy for drug abuse, hooliganism, pederasty, bestiality

In the sixties boom everyone (even women, blacks, and vegans) was encouraged to donate their surplus effort to the cause of Economic Growth. Some incorrigibles however, so far abandoned this wholesome ethic that they degenerated into refusing the enriching discipline of work by striking, go-slows, absenteeism, and sabotage. Indifferent to the joys of travail, they made unrealistic wage demands. This threat to Civilization forced employers to remodel work. Through Austerity measures such as redundancy, speed-ups, incomes policy, inflation and other necessary remedies they have restored the Dignity of Labour.

For workers the current mass unemployment opens unexpected prospects for toiling harder, more exuberantly, teaching them to repress excessive expectations. They should grasp the chance of labouring not only for personal fulfilment or family obligation but for the Company, Investment, and Nation.

The Demand for the Right to Work fits excellently into the context of World Recession and will hopefully stimulate competition between those in jobs and those without. Workers should recognise the sanctity of this demand and cease all activity which threatens the rules of employment. This will maximise Job Satisfaction. Work must be valued once again – it's not enough just to do it for the money. And why be content with only 8 hours a day ?

It is fitting to congratulate the entire Labour Movement for its efforts in organising on our behalf. The last Labour Government especially showed how union/government cooperation can make work bracing enough to be worth doing. The TUC must be encouraged to continue marching, regimenting, and representing the victims of blind market forces. How else are they to learn to go on their knees to beg ?

The Left are also to be commended for refraining from complicating matters with excessively critical theory or over-imaginative activities. They help stabilize a dangerous situation by their diverting show of opposition. They popularize the litany that identifies class with work. Socialists all over the world are committed to elaborating the rewards of restraint. Through job-sharing, co-ops, and other ingenuities they aspire to reform the system so that none are excluded. For a lucky few they offer interesting jobs, participation, training, high morale. Accountable police will be given new powers to assist those genuinely seeking work.

A NEW HOPE

For all those temporarily denied a career but not oblivious to the gratifications of Exchange, We propose Local Authority grants for the following occupations :

1. Eradicating graffiti from walls, municipal buildings, churches, and toilets.
2. Voluntary work as soldiers or policemen in seaside resorts.
3. Mime classes to teach individuals to mimic work while at home.
4. Extension of Time and Motion principles to all sexual acts.
5. Moral re-education for absentee workers.
6. Haircut and alternative comedy competitions.
7. Poverty sharing, voting practice, and cycling lessons.
8. Aversion therapy for illegal or autonomous activity.

Remember : Sacrifice is not enough – we must immolate ourselves !

WE DEMAND : MORE WORK – LESS MONEY

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