

VIRUS

Militant Anarchism

Number nine 25p



NEW TECHNOLOGY; FRIEND OR FOE?

VIRUS THE ENEMY WITHIN

Contact adress c/o Angel alley, 84b, Whitechapel High Street, London E.1.7QX

open letter to the class war federation and direct action movement

At the moment in Britain, reformism and Leninism still dominate the working class movement. Action from libertarian groups and organisations has been on a fragmented and un-coordinated basis. There has been little sharing of experiences among libertarians in various campaigns and struggles. Even on something as basic as a demonstration, libertarians have marched separately and in different parts of the demonstration.

The Anarchist-Communist Federation realises that while there are differences of approach between the class struggle libertarian organisations in Britain, the possibility exists for cooperation on a practical level. Through cooperation, we could become more a more effective force, with the possibility of spreading our ideas more widely throughout society. Cooperation could be in terms of joint contingents on demonstrations, notifying each other of meetings, pickets, etc. and also the possibility of joint cooperation within campaigns or in particular industries.

If the A.C.F. receives positive responses from the CLASS WAR FEDERATION and the DIRECT ACTION MOVEMENT, then it would be prepared to arrange a venue for an initial coordination meeting, which could lead on to regular coordination meetings,

Yours in struggle,

ANARCHIST-COMMUNIST FEDERATION.

This issue of VIRUS is somewhat different from usual insofar as the important articles MYTHS OF GUERRILLA WARFARE and PROBLEMS OF ANARCHO-SYNDICALISM were not written by members of the A.C.F. As regards the last mentioned article, South London D.A.M have written a reply which will be published in the next issue of VIRUS.

MONEY MONEY MONEY MONEY MONEY MONEY MONEY MONEY MONEY MONEY MONEY MONEY MONEY MONEY MONEY

Some of you who subscribe to our paper LIBERATION might be wondering why it has been absent for so long. The simple answer is shortage of funds. Hopefully, LIBERATION will be out in the not too distant future and all subscribers will, in due course, get their copies.

If you would like to help, why not send us some (lots!!) money to enable us to bring out our publications more frequently. Cheques and postal orders should be made out to the ANARCHIST COMMUNIST FEDERATION.

Anarchist Communist Federation

Where We Stand

We believe that:

1. Capitalism and other social systems, in which wealth and power are the property of a ruling class/elite, must be destroyed.

2. Reformist and statist solutions will necessarily fail and therefore revolution is the only possible means of achieving anarchist-communism. How far such a revolution will be peaceful depends upon the degree to which the ruling class clings on to power through violence and state repression.

3. Genuine liberation can only come about through the self activity of the great mass of the population. We regard parliament, representative democracy and political vanguardism as being obstacles to a self-managed society. Institutions and organisations which attempt to mediate in the fight against domination cannot succeed. Trade unionism, as it is presently constituted, plays an important part in maintaining class exploitation, insofar as it regulates and justifies it through collective bargaining and bureaucratic structures. Nevertheless, it is important to work within the trade union movement, in order to build up a rank-and-file workers' movement which encourages workers' control of struggle and cuts across sectional boundaries.

4. Workers and other oppressed sections of society will, in times of revolutionary upheaval, create their own democ-

atic institutions, whether they be based on the workplace or the community. To this end we encourage the creation of organs of struggle based on the rank and file, independent of political parties.

5. Pure spontaneity is unlikely to be sufficient to overthrow entrenched class domination. Anarchists must indicate the libertarian alternative to class societies, participate as anarchists in struggle and organise on a federative basis to assist in the revolutionary process.

6. Capitalism is international and needs to be fought internationally. We therefore try to maintain contact with as many anarchist-communists as possible in overseas countries as the preliminary stage to the creation of an anarchist international.

7. We do not simply seek the abolition of class differences, for inequality and exploitation are also expressed in terms of race, age, sexuality and gender. Personal relationships are now often based on domination and submission. We seek not only an economic revolution but a social and cultural revolution as well, involving a thorough-going change in attitudes and organisation of everyday lives to free us in our social and personal interactions.

8. We reject sectarianism and work for a united revolutionary anarchist movement.

"LIBERTY WITHOUT SOCIALISM IS
EXPLOITATION,
SOCIALISM WITHOUT LIBERTY IS TYRANNY."

The Anarchist-Communist Federation has been formed with the aim of building a federation of class-struggle anarchists in Britain. The organisation is based upon individual members and groups. At the present moment there are groups in London, Newcastle, Stafford, Medway, Canterbury and Brighton. Individual members are to be found in many other towns. We publish two papers, VIRUS and our agitational paper,

LIBERATION. Subscriptions to VIRUS cost £1 a year, whilst LIBERATION subscriptions are £1.50 for six issues.

Contact care of 84b
Whitechapel High Street,
Angel Alley, London.
E1 7QX

Eltham
London
SE9 6EZ

10 October 1986

Dear Comrades

I really enjoyed reading the article 'Royals and Republicans'. However, I thought your short tour through the history of the monarchy and the opposition to it, ended somewhat suddenly with Tom Paine in the 18th century. A pity, as in the 19th century there was a very lively Republican agitation which has largely been forgotten or hidden from history.

This agitation involved such organisations as the Republican League and the Peoples' League against the Hereditary Principle in Legislature, and such leading Radicals of the time as Dilke and Bradlaugh. While Bradlaugh was a Liberal and opposed Anarchism, many Anarchists such as Joseph Lane cut their teeth in this agitation. Tom Cantwell and Carl

Quinn were imprisoned for 'seditious libel' against the royal family. In Bristol, at the time of the 1887 Jubilee, a mass meeting passed two Republican resolutions with enthusiasm. Even Kier Hardie, far from being an Anarchist, attacked the monarchy in his paper the Labour Reader.

Today, a small group of Republicans called Republic carries on this tradition by means of meetings, publications and organising alternative spectacles to the media hype surrounding Royal events. Most of us favour a Socialist Republic and some of us see that Republic as a stateless society based on workers' and neighbourhood councils. All of us see the monarchy as an integral part of a reactionary and repressive Establishment. If you're interested in helping in our work, contact us at 8 Boone Place, The Grove, Witham, Essex. CM8 2UE.

Yours in comradeship

TERRY LIDDLE
chair
Republic

Reviews



THE RUSSIAN TRAGEDY: Alexander Berkman. Phoenix Press £2.50.

The anarchist militant Alexander Berkman was deported from the States in 1920 for his anti-war activities, and arrived in Russia soon after. He had not lived through the previous three years of Bolshevik rule, and so was not prepared for what was to come. In fact he was favourably inclined to the Revolution and the Bolsheviks. When asked, to speak at a mass meeting he attended soon after he arrived, he said; "We came not to teach but to learn; to learn and to help".

But in the course of a year's stay in Russia, he realised that the Social Revolution had been done to death by the Bolsheviks. He saw this through everyday experience, from news he received of the persecution of the anarchist-influenced Makhno movement in the Ukraine, and finally in the Kronstadt uprising, when soldiers and sailors tried to bring about the "third Revolution for free soviets.

Berkman saw early on (he wrote in 1922) that the new regime was a mixture of free and State capitalism (at this time Lenin was instituting the New Economic Policy which encouraged free trade). He was one of the first to see the direction in which the Bolsheviks were moving - State Capitalism.

Berkman spoke out against all the uncritical supporters of the new regime. "Some unconsciously, but most of them consciously and intentionally, have been lying, persistently and cheerfully, in defiance of all facts, in the mistaken notion that they are 'helping the Revolution'".

That this attitude, especially amongst the intellectuals, should have continued for the next fifty years is deplorable. Berkman's book goes a little of the way to clearing the mind of the mists of Leninism, and as such should be welcomed.

THE SPANISH CIVIL WAR - ANARCHISM IN ACTION: Eddie Conlon. Workers' Solidarity Movement pamphlet. £1.35 (available from ACF + postage).

There has been a flurry of pamphlets recently with the 50th Anniversary of the Spanish Revolution. This should be regarded as one of the best, as it approaches the subject critically, asking why mistakes were made, whilst recognising the constructive achievements of the Revolution. The pamphlet describes the collectivisations that took place on the land and in the workplaces. At the same time it shows that the anarcho-syndicalist union, the CNT, with mass following, did not move beyond armed resistance to the fascists to the smashing of political power. "Spain provided important lessons for anarchists. It showed the inadequacy of syndicalism, the need for political anarchism and the need for an anarchist political organisation. We have to understand that the state and political power does not 'die', it has to be smashed".

1936: THE SPANISH REVOLUTION. The Ex. Record/Book. About £3 - £3.50.

'Reality and dreaming are different things. Dreaming is beautiful and sublime because dreams are nearly always the predecessors of what is to come. But the most sublime is to make life beautiful, to mould life beautifully'. Nosôtros, Spanish anarchist paper, 1937.

The workers and peasants of Spain tried to turn the beautiful dream of anarchism into reality. And what a better way of seeing how they tried, than through 150 photos taken by the CNT during the course of the revolution. Plus four songs about the revolution by the Dutch new wave band the Ex. Get someone this for their birthday or as a New Year present. (From Housmans Bookshop in London or through the distributors, Nine Mile and the Cartel, Lower Avenue, Leamington Spa, Warwicks).



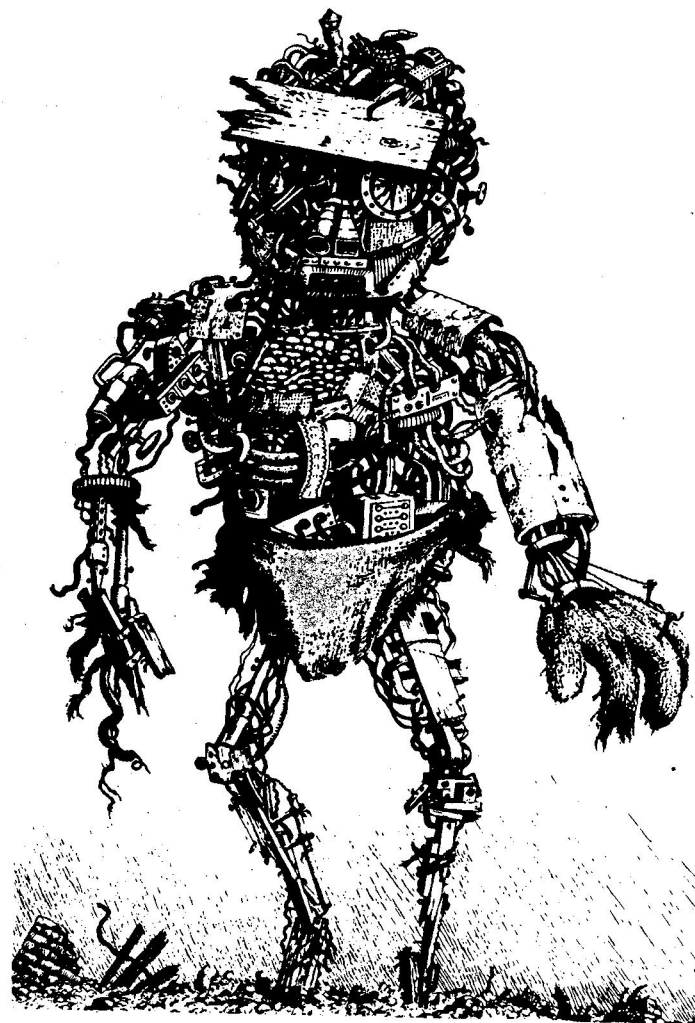
CATCH THE
NEXT
VIRUS...
SUBSCRIBE!

poverty that that means under capitalism. The emphasis should be not on the abolition of technology, but on how best technology can be used and implemented, as it is not technology itself that is evil, but the system under which it is currently implemented. Computers and technology can perform tasks quickly, efficiently, and can work a lot longer than humans can. Modern technology means that much information (eg hospital patients' records, lists of goods produced and goods requested) can be stored in the memory of one computer rather than on endless files and pieces of paper that can often be mislaid. In hospitals the speed of computers can save lives, and in industry computerised robot devices can save labour, in an anarchist society therefore, technology would be extremely useful; it is only in today's society that they very often are not. A prime example of this is the Wapping dispute; in a society organised by workers themselves, printers would be glad of technology that saved them labour.

All societies face difficulties in relating production to consumption and distribution. The market economies of capitalism and state capitalist Yugoslavia solve this problem through rationing by price, whilst in the USSR, prices are fixed, but goods are in short supply, resulting in food queues, for example. Technology provides a solution to this problem which communist-anarchists have in the past tended to ignore, or at best offer partial solutions, given the proposed abolition of money in anarchist society. Currently, institutions like banks and multinationals use computerised technology to carry out extremely complicated tasks of accounting, production, distribution, marketing etc. This technology can be adapted for the benefit of society as a whole, taking into account the nature and level of consumer demand and altering production to meet it - consumer sovereignty would for the first time be a genuine possibility.

Some anarchists criticise technology on the grounds that it makes people emotionally dead by encouraging an unnatural processed world. Surely though, it is the socialisation of people under capitalism (which encourages greed and selfishness) that causes people to be emotionally dead, rather than the actual technology used by capitalists. In an anarchist society where peoples' conditions of existence changed, there would be an awakening of emotion and community, and rather than people being controlled by machines, machines would be controlled by people. Technology in an anarchist society would take the drudgery out of many aspects of work, and would thus leave more time for people to interact with each other in leisure activities; therefore technology would encourage the development of emotion and community etc.

It is surprising how many anarchists see anarchism as reverting back to village style communities where the advances that have been made in technology, which have involved workers sacrifice, would be abandoned. If we can only imagine anarchism in very small rural village communities



which are self sufficient, then how much faith do we really have in anarchist organisation? Anarchism is not about the abolition of technology for a so-called natural way of life, it is about people taking back technology so that they may use it to benefit everyone, rather than a small minority.

The capitalists would like us to believe that if we stick to their twisted system, the so-called leisure society will arise which will bring enormous benefits to everyone; under their twisted system though, the leisure society would mean enormous wealth for the few, and poverty for the masses. Under anarchy however, the leisure society would mean equal wealth and leisure for all. It is not technology that is morally wrong, but only the system under which it is currently implemented.

Now, for the first time in history, we have the means, if democratically controlled, to free ourselves from work and enjoy high living standards. The key to achieving this is automation of industry, computerisation and the growth of information technology. At the moment, automation/new technology are perceived as a threat to the working class, they lead to de-skilling, mass unemployment and lessened control over the environment. In a condition of anarchy, however, they provide the solution, freeing the working class from onerous toil and creating the possibility of affluent idleness.

Imperialism in Central Africa

After the bombing of Libya, many small Left sects in Britain rushed to the aid of Gaddafi, for opportunistic and perhaps financial motives. We of course were totally opposed to the bombing of Libya, but that does not mean that we think Gaddafi is the great revolutionary of the Third World. Far from it. In 1971, at the request of the Sudanese Government, he sent forces there to crush a Leftist uprising. He has promoted splits in the Palestinian resistance for his own ends. And in Chad, he has designs on incorporating that country into a Gaddafi-ruled Greater Sahara. The following statement by two Chadian Libertarian Communist Revolutionaries exiled in France throws some light on the matter, just as it does on French designs there.

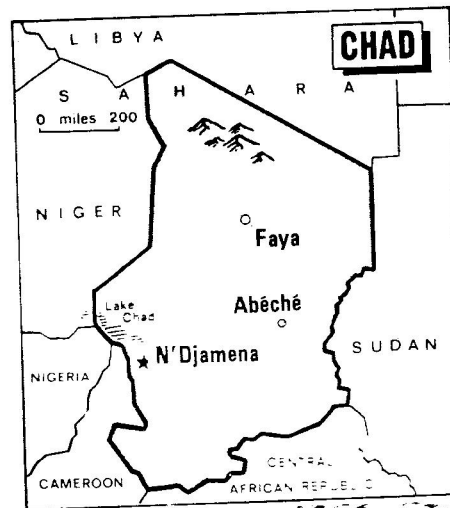
"It is certainly true that Gaddafi nourishes a dream of building a Great Islamic Sahara stretching from Somalia to Senegal. In Chad, his immediate ambition is to install a Head of State who will be completely devoted to him".

The expansionist visions of Gaddafi do not entirely explain the many military interventions of the French in Chad. The first French expedition dates from 1968 when Gaddafi was just an officer of King Idris, under the control of the Americans.

Since the 'independence' of Chad, the French army has intervened massively on four occasions. Each intervention is a carbon copy of the preceding ones, and always involves support for a dictator, and that applies whether the French government is left or right.

Some bourgeois journalists are frank about French intentions in Chad. As one said; "We must intervene one more time in Chad and we must intervene militarily to protect French interests in that continent". It is proclaimed high and low that the paratroopers are in Chad to protect the Chadian nation. It is doubtful if this nation exists except in the atlas.

Towards the end of the 19th century the powers of western Europe divided up Africa. A portion of territory allocated to France was called Chad and encompassed a mosaic of different peoples. Even today, more than 27 years after the creation of the National State, these people are no better integrated. The Nation State is like a foreign body in the organism, above all for the dispossessed, those who experience daily exploitation and repression. Even the petit-bourgeoisie who derive their privileges from the existence of this state do not feel part of a nation. Everyone feels above all a member of an ethnic group. Political organisations and their influence on the workings of the state are the measure of this ethnic microcosm of the



Chadian petit-bourgeoisie.

Today more than a dozen political organisations, more or less identical, fight for power. They represent their tribe or ethnic group, and do not recruit beyond these boundaries. The most blatant example of this is FROLINAT. Born during the 60's in the north and centre of the country, this organisation split into a myriad micro-organisation representing tribal and ethnic groups. To speak of defending the Chadian nation is to mystify people, because this nation does not exist. Even imperialism itself laughs at such an idea, and struggles to retard any such development. Behind the word 'nation' imperialism defends a Centralised Nation State, which it considers as its private hunting ground. It seeks to maintain the set-up it has created.

The Charter of the Organisation of African Unity is brought up to justify the frontiers inherited from colonisation. The defence of the Chadian government at N'Djamena is a necessity for French imperialism. The disappearance of a centralising state in Chad would put in question all the neo-colonial institutions in Africa. The maintenance and reinforcement of such a Centralising State is an indispensable condition for the defence of imperialist economic interests in Chad and Africa.

French exports to Chad rose in 1980, in the thick of civil war, to 48.3 million francs being mostly vehicles and equipment. Today, 90% of French purchases in Chad is made up of cotton, an agriculture imposed on the Chadian peasants since colonial times.

Since 1979, economic chaos resulting from civil war has caused much disturbance for French businesses in Chad. To return to order the system of pillage and exploitation, imperialism has need of a strong government. The permanent worry of the

representatives of the European and American capitalists is to maintain this system.

The argument that France is intervening in Chad to chase the Libyans out is an alibi. France has economic relations with both Chad and Libya, and in fact France and other imperialist powers see Libya as more interesting than Chad in these relations. Today 80% of Mirage jets in the possession of the Libyans have been furnished by France. In the USA, the industrial and commercial lobbies for the maintenance of economic relations with Libya, still remain strong. Imperialism exploits and pillages in Libya and Chad just as it does in every other African country.

Tony Cliffs State Capitalism in Russia

The following article was intended to be published in the internal bulletin of the AFC as a response to the views put forward by a member of the Workers Solidarity Movement of Ireland. We think that it may be of more general interest and so are publishing it here.

The WSM of Ireland is by no means alone in suggesting that Tony Cliff's book *STATE CAPITALISM IN RUSSIA* is an authoritative analysis of the Russian economy. Its definitely worth reading, but what it doesn't tackle is as important as what it does, and says a lot about Cliff's politics. Apart from the obvious rubbish about Russia becoming state capitalist after Lenin's death, there is no real analysis of the bureaucratic class, or the black market.

That Russia operates like a very large company trading on the international market, protecting its interests by direct control over the armed forces, is subject to the vagaries of the international market, and international arms competition, is not disputable. As such Russia is state capitalist, the bureaucracy is the class which rules this system.

What, however, is the ideology of this class? Cliff couldn't begin to analyse this, since he himself possesses an ideology that is thoroughly bureaucratic. This ideology is not simply 'Marxism'. There are many 'marxisms', like there are many 'anarchisms'. In addition, if we want to isolate the core of bureaucratic ideology, the ideology of the Russian ruling class must be compared with the ideologies found in other bureaucracies. The root is quite simply expertism/professionalism/meritocracy. The idea that there are individuals with a superior world view, whether it is town planning, 'scientific management' of socialism. This expert knowledge entitles the owners to monopolise decision making. Input from those on the receiving end can be tolerated, and even helps the running of the system, in the same way as democracy prevents the excesses of the leaders of Western countries. Expertism, however, remains the legitimising ideology for the material privileges of the bureaucracy. In Cliff's case, he is an expert in Marxism which he believes legitimises his leadership of the SWP, and the role of the SWP as an embryo for a

And that is not all, to efficiently defend imperialist interests, the French state needs to protect its strategic positions. Chad is positioned in the heart of Africa, and is vital for control of Northern and Southern Africa. That is why the French state regards with a jaundiced eye anything which upsets the status-quo in Chad. The expansionist visions of Gaddafi are considered by the French leaders as subversive. Gaddafi will not free the Chadian peoples from their poverty and oppression by the French Army. Only the peoples of Chad, organised independently, in a self-managed way, federalised region by region can decide their future without delegation of power to any leader!

future bureaucracy. To the SWP they are the owners of a special revolutionary consciousness, and the flip side of this is that the working class can't say anything significant about their own exploitation (in a remarkably similar way, the psychiatrist can't believe patients have anything significant to say about their illness). If the working class do say anything significant, this is co-opted and presented as an SWP idea.

It is equally unsurprising that Cliff can't bring himself to seriously analyse the black market in Russia. The black market is no minor occurrence, it is endemic throughout all levels of the Russian system, it is an integral part of the system. Un-elected autocratic managers at all levels have their own spheres of influence, their own property, to deal with. Hence they act in their own personal interest. The centralised Russian economy is merely the ultimate in state interference in private accumulation in the form of increasing the sphere of influence of personal consumption for the class that results from this. The Russian bureaucrat must bribe to work efficiently to gain more power. A factory manager who needs more materials quickly is at the mercy of the supplier, hence a bribe is in order. Cliff couldn't recognise such a system operating, without conceding that it was an integral part of Lenin's Russia. For Lenin to attempt to purge the bureaucracy of 'opportunists' was a naive political act. Lenin was instrumental in creating the bureaucracy, and therefore its corruption. Cliff can hardly go around criticising Lenin can he?

Lenin created the bureaucracy by assuming dictatorial, undemocratic powers. A leadership cannot plan an economy without an army of bureaucrats to find out what's going on outside their own offices.

Only a really democratic society can plan. This won't happen with the creation of a master plan, but through the co-operative acts and decisions of the whole population.

Problems of Anarcho syndicalism

The problem of organisation and leadership (and what happened to the CNT in 1936).

It has long been a part of anarchist theory that means cannot be separated by ends. By 'means' here, it is meant what type of organisation, what sort of tactics; to argue that the new, free society will have blood on its hands and will therefore be somehow psychologically doomed because people will undoubtedly get killed trying to stop the revolution is just silly, hypocritical, bourgeois moralism. Many anarchist analyses of historical events or movements have shown that 'degenerations' in movements or organisations are not really degenerations at all, but faults that have become fully evident and that can be traced back to the structure of the organisation in question, or the ideology that has shaped it. For example, whereas certain Trotskyists would argue that the USSR was a 'degenerate workers' state', we would argue that the initial ideology and organisation of the Bolshevik Party made that 'degeneration' inevitable. Before the end of the last century, anarchists were correctly predicting what would happen to a revolution if the Marxists were allowed to direct, or hijack, it; they were predicting Stalinism long before Stalin was even in the Party.

Anarcho-syndicalism correctly asserts that workers must organise themselves in their economic units and in these structures must practice the organisational forms of the anarchist society, this is only possible if the organisations are anti-parliamentary. The anarcho-syndicalist CNT in Spain, in its congress of 1918, stated that: "professional politicians can never represent workers organisations, and the latter should make sure that they never affiliate themselves to any political club". Slogans of the CNT reflecting its apolitical/anti-parliamentary stance included: "there are no good and bad politicians, only bad ones and worse", and, "provisional governments turn into permanent ones inevitably". However, on November 4, 1936, the CNT entered four ministers to the government, which was led by the non-revolutionary socialist Largo Caballero. José Peirats, the official historian of the CNT, has written:

"The top cadres of the movement acknowledged the crushing weight of a situation which they had been incapable of foreseeing seriously. They never outgrew their apprenticeship in which, paradoxically, they had to act the unwelcome part of acting as a brake on the inexperienced revolutionary impulses of their own comrades. They had to take on an ungrateful task, for which they were neither prepared nor felt a vocation".

"Solidaridad Obrera", the paper of the CNT in Catalonia, wrote at the time:

The entry of the CNT to the government Madrid is one of the most important facts of the political history of our country. Always, on principle and by conviction, the CNT has been anti-state and the enemy of every form of government. But circumstances, almost always superior to human will, although determined by it, have transformed the nature of the government and the Spanish State. The government at the present time, as a regular instrument of the State organs, is no longer an oppressive force against the working class". (In the light of the May events in Barcelona in 1937, amongst others, this statement reads like a bad joke).

However, Federica Montseny, one of those CNT ministers, said. "All the most prominent men of the syndical and anarchist groups were present (at the decision to join the government) ... We have joined the government, but the streets have escaped us...).

And "Los Amigos de Durruti": "The truth is that the rank and file was not consulted, only a few of the best known elements of the CNT and FAI were present at the meetings".

In fact, the entry of the four anarchists to the Republican government was a local stage in the policy of the CNT, relating to the revolution and the fight against Franco, which began on July 21, 1936, the day after the people had defeated the military rebellion in Barcelona and proclaimed the revolution.

Hours after the defeat of the military rebellion, Luis Companys, as head of the Generalitat (regional government) of Catalonia, arranged a meeting with prominent members of the CNT-FAI. He told them that since it was they who now had the power, he would step down as President of Catalonia if they so wished. However, he also suggested that the struggle against fascism nationally might be aided by his presence as President of a government composed of all the leading parties in Catalonia. He knew that his generalitat would have little authority without the CNT.

On July 21, a Regional Plenum of the CNT "decided not to speak about Libertarian Communism as long as part of Spain was in the hands of the fascist". (Paz). With objections from only one delegation, a policy of collaboration was agreed upon.

Garcia Oliver explained that the fascist threat was the most important consideration and that anti-fascist unity had to be maintained. Gaston Leval gives his other, deeper reasons: "He expressed them in conversations with comrades. 'What would I have done with the power? I was in no way prepared for what was implied, the situation was such that I could not but fail'. And it was quite true. Garcia Oliver, like all the more or less demagogic orators of the FAI, was quite ignorant of the steps that had to be taken to direct the life, industry and provisioning of a city like Barcelona. The same could be said of Federica Montseny. This did not stop them from becoming ministers

of the Republic. It was easier than organising a collective".

In reality it was to be the Central Committee of Militias which wielded the real power in Barcelona, not the Generalitat. Although it did not have the authority of the State, which the Generalitat did have, it was still a political body composed of eight different political groupings. The CNT-FAI, however, was clearly dominant.

The revolutionary CNT and FAI were now embarking on a course which, because of the revolution was going on around them, meant that for the sake of collaboration they would have to try to slow down the spread of the revolution, any steps toward the new society, beyond the ones already achieved, had to wait until the fascists had been defeated.

This policy of postponing the revolution affected the military strategy of the CNT (probably disastrously) and forced the CNT into untenable positions.

The contradictory (though perhaps tragically common in revolutionary periods) situation of revolutionaries attempting to hold back the revolution while still trying to maintain, or envisage, a course to the revolution, led to a strange formula being adopted by prominent CNTers (Santillan especially). This was that the revolutionaries must legally build up defences, using the power of the armed workers controlled by the Central Committee of Militias, so that the old regime would not be able to restore itself, either now or after the defeat of fascism. This would entail creating an 'armed vigilance unit' controlled by the unions.

* Legally creating the conditions whereby the revolution could not be seriously attacked, and could in fact extend itself, would mean complete integration into, of perhaps take-over of, the State - not the abolition of the State. The new economy, already managed by the workers, would gain strength against the Central Committee of Militias, which was provisional and regional, and the CNT would perhaps become the dominant force in the State since it would control the economy. As Durruti argued, this would lead to a "sort of State socialist economy", it would not mean revolution since it is impossible for a revolution to have "a legal basis".

Here we can see the 'degeneration' of the union at ultra-fast speed. Collaboration - with other political parties and the state in order to ensure the survival of the organisation and its growth of power in the present society - has led to the acceptance of bourgeois legality and the organisation trying to use the workers for its own political ends: ultimately the taking over of the running of the state, and thus of exploitation, "in the interests of the workers". This is every ambitious trade union bureaucrats dream.

The entry of the CNT to the Madrid government was not a very big surprise, nor was it an 'historic error' but a symptom of



Garcia Oliver; "in no way prepared..."

the weakness of the CNT as an anarchist organisation. (1).

As Malatesta has pointed out, and Alfredo M Bonanno expanded, traditionally a union that aims to defend and increase the immediate, partial gains of the workers (which is an objective of anarcho-syndicalism) tends to collaboration with the state. Basically, the leaders, or the bureaucracy, become fearful of 'losing all they have fought for' (ie, their positions) by jeopardizing their relations with the state.

Bonanno: "Given that the job of the unions is that of claiming better conditions, to claim them it is necessary first to save the life and efficiency of the counterpart (employer/economy/state)". And again: "On the morrow of the revolution ... there can be neither party nor trade union, just as there can be no capitalism. The structure of the future will consist of only economic and not political federations of grass roots organisations, otherwise the work will have to be begun all over again".

The argument here is that even revolutionary and anarcho-syndicalism will, sooner or later, find itself inevitably bound up in a trade union logic, defending the organisation before anything else, and doing this by getting involved in all sorts of political chicanery.

Malatesta: "In fact, being a movement which proposes to defend the present interests of the workers, it must necessarily adapt itself to the living conditions of the present".

The problem is that an organisation is built that acts in the workers' interests, the organisation must therefore act in the best interests of all its members; in fact in the best interests of the organisation. In a revolutionary event it means that the revolutionary proletariat will be subject to stops and checks from positions of seeming authority, and finally repression. Witness the CNT's collaboration with the Communist Party during 1937 when the CP started to stamp out anarchist initiatives.

Footnote.

(1). A Giles-Peters, in 'A New World...', in an article in support of the CNT writes: "The CNT has its own political traditions even if these are more ambiguous than many people would like to believe". p91. "The celebrated 'anti-politicism' of the CNT was not only compatible with the 'historic error' of entering the Caballero cabinet in 1936 but also with collaboration with all the military and political conspiracies against the Primo de Rivera dictatorship in the 1920's and the rather more dubiously useful political alliances of the CNT in exile in the 1940's". p96.

Problem of the General Strike

A central tactic that emerged with the concept of anarcho-syndicalism was that of the revolutionary general strike. At the beginning of this century many anarchists had given up hope of a mass revolutionary insurrection, partly because organising it seemed too difficult and partly because it was thought that the armed forces of the state were now so efficient and so technically advanced that an armed uprising would stand little chance of success. A complete, mass withdrawal of labour was considered to be the ideal way to make the bourgeoisie relinquish power; the bourgeoisie would be, in effect, 'starved out'.

Some realised the error in this position as it stood on its own (it would certainly be the strike that would break before the bourgeoisie, because the people would also starve) and argued that the strikers must also start expropriating the means of production and using them for the benefit of the people. This was called the 'expropriating general strike', later the idea of insurrection was also incorporated into the concept, this made it the 'expropriating and insurrectionary general strike'!

But the general strike would have finished once the expropriating had started and due to the certainty that mass expropriation will provoke an armed response from the bourgeoisie the people would have already made provisions for their defence (locating and distributing arms, for example) - the revolution, therefore, would be identifiable not as an expropriating general strike, but as a mass insurrection.

In 1907 Errico Malatesta was complaining that the use of the term 'general strike' was misleading: "Some of the enthusiasts of the general strike go so far as to admit that the general strike involves expropriation. But then the soldiers come. Are we to let ourselves be shot down? Of course not. We should stand up to them, and that would mean Revolution. So why not say Revolution at once, instead of General Strike?". There is perhaps a kind of unconscious deceit in using the term general strike instead of revolution, as if the words 'general strike' will not frighten the workers off, whereas the word 'revolution' will.

Apart from the confusion over what the general strike is supposed to be there is another problem which relates to armed resistance or struggle during the revolutionary event. The general strike is considered to be a tactic which will minimise armed intervention by the state. Alexander Berkman, in 'The ABC of Anarchism'. 1929, argued that the masses would not stand a chance in a fight with a modern army, and that to propose such a thing was foolish. Apart from the fact that he wrote this before several guerrilla movements of the 20th century had defeated modern state armies - and after the Ukrainian peasants had driven out the Whites during the Russian revolution - his argument lacks a certain logic. The only reason the bourgeoisie might give up the power without a serious fight would be if there was absolutely no chance of winning or they had nothing to fight with, ie, the whole of the armed forces went over to the people or foreign states refused to intervene. These things would be highly unlikely, to say the least.

In 1930 Pierre Besnard, the French syndicalist, wrote on the general strike that "On the duration of the stoppage will depend the future of the revolutionary movement". And Berkman wrote: "You can shoot people to death but you can't shoot them back to work". However, people can be starved back to work. If the general strike is to be a revolution then the people will have resumed all the essential services well before any workers, or their children, have started to go hungry. And this revolution is going to have to be able to defend itself, as well as trying to extend itself, in the face of the state's armed forces. This is an insurrection not a mass withdrawal of labour.

In 1943, Lady Katherine Chorley's 'Armies and the Art of Revolution' was published, part of it deals with the efficiency of the general strike as a revolutionary tactic and though Chorley wasn't an anarchist or revolutionary she makes some interesting comments:

"During a revolution, the more smoothly the machinery runs for the neutral population the better..."

"A general strike, then, must succeed in its objective within the first few days.. If this does not happen, it will probably collapse under the weight of the dislocation it has itself brought about before that dislocation actually brings down the whole social structure. There is an alternative: that it should transform itself into armed revolt. Granted the opposition of the armed forces of the government, such a revolt can only be successful if the conditions created by the strike prevent the troops from exerting their full strength ... Taking it by and large, the general strike is not a good revolutionary weapon. Its main revolutionary value is as an expression of working-class solidarity. It can sometimes be used to create artificially a revolutionary situation, but unless such a situation can be used as the taking-off point for an already planned insurrection, whose chances have been

calculated, it is a useless expenditure of enormous energy. As an actual instrument of policy it is more wasteful of energy than a straight insurrection, and its failure is more likely to set back a working class movement than the failure of an insurrection".

There will be a suspension of work during a revolutionary event, this will be the time of initial armed defence/insurrection, celebration, and the re-organisation of services, production and distribution for the benefit of everyone. It was the armed workers who defeated the military rebellion in Barcelona in 1936, not the general strike.

Problem of the relationship of workplace to community in anarcho-syndicalism.

The most common criticism of anarcho-syndicalism is that it neglects roles in the community by being solely pre-occupied with the workplace and industrial struggles.

This criticism can be looked at in two ways. Firstly, it is actually true that anarcho-syndicalism neglects wider issues and, if it is true, then does it have to remain so? Secondly, does it matter?

Both these questions presuppose that anarcho-syndicalism is truly revolutionary. So, criticising anarcho-syndicalism for its apparent neglect of other issues becomes pointless, unless you are an anarcho-syndicalist, because if you are right at the moment it doesn't mean the criticism has to be valid forever and also, if the criticism is correct, does it matter?

If anarcho-syndicalism is truly revolutionary does it matter if it is restricted to organising around industrial struggles? Will it be one organisation, decided upon, and built up in non-revolutionary times that will prefigure the organisational forms of society after the revolution, whether syndical or not?

In 'A New World in our Hearts', Albert Meltzer writes that anarcho-syndicalism should be viewed as a movement within the anarchist movement. He argues, for example, that the CNT, as a union organisation, is not designed to operate outside the workplace and that other anarchist organisations should be created to work in the wider community.

This would seem plausible, and desirable: people creating their own forms of organisation specifically designed to operate with a certain situation, ie, in the workplace, on the housing estate, etc. These organisations would then of course be helped by the fact that people would be involved in at least two or three of the different organisations.

But what if anarcho-syndicalism is not, or cannot remain, an anarchist organisation? What if all unions, from neutral to anarcho-syndicalist, end up with a similar relationship to the state, and to their membership? Bearing in mind that

anarcho-syndicalism must always try to expand, or strengthen itself with regard to the state, is it reasonable to assume that anarcho-syndicalism will eventually be in competition with all other forms of organisation, even anarchist ones? (To act like a trade union in protecting workers' 'rights' anarcho-syndicalism must become a counter-power, struggling against the bourgeoisie under the rules the bourgeoisie have set down).

The ultimate aim of the trade union is the management of the state, their argument is that the union will be able to look after the interests of the workers far better, and run capitalism (exploitation) more smoothly than at present.

Malatesta: "The union can emerge with a socialist, revolutionary or anarchist programme, and indeed it is with such programmes that many workers' organisations were originally launched. But they remain faithful to the programme so long as they are weak and impotent, that is so long as they are propaganda groups, initiated and sustained by a few enthusiastic and convinced individuals rather than organisms capable of effective action; but then as they manage to attract the masses to their ranks, and to acquire the strength to demand and impose improvements, the original programme becomes an empty slogan which no one bothers about, tactics are readjusted to contingent needs and the enthusiasts of the first hour either adapt themselves or just make way for the 'practical' men, who pay attention to the present without worrying about the future". (1925).

Anarcho-syndicalist unions must always try to become a power in society, in industrial and political relations, because for an organisation that aims to protect workers' interests, and improve on them, it must have an influence of its own, that influence must be based on its ability to control the rank and file membership.

Anarchism has always taught, especially in the theory of direct action, that workers must collectively look after their own interests.

Sources:

A M Bonanno, "Critique of Syndicalist Methods", Bratach Dubh Anarchist Pamphlets No 2, 1979.

G Leval, "Collectives in the Spanish Revolution", Freedom Press, 1975.

A Meltzer (ed.), "A New World in our Hearts", Cienfuegos Press, 1978.

A Paz, "Durruti - The People Armed", Black Rose Books, 1977.

V Richards (ed.), "Malatesta - Life and Ideas", Freedom Press, 1977.

The above article raises some serious questions about the nature of anarcho-syndicalism. A member of the Direct Action Movement has been invited to reply.



Too much of this...



leads to a little of this...



and this!