

# Nihilist Communism

## A critique of optimism

*(the religious dogma that states  
there will be an ultimate  
triumph of good over evil)*

**in the far left**



by Monsieur Dupont

# Nihilist Communism

Monsieur Dupont

Ardent Press  
2009

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## Preface

### **You know it is a book if it weighs a quarter pound.**

A book is dependent more on the quantity of its words than on quality of writing. Certainly, I have written better elsewhere but our book, this book, has a weight about it that goes beyond the writing – it has been assigned its own four ounces of reality, its half inch of spine width; *Nihilist Communism* is a true thing in the world of things, it has independent existence. Admittedly, the viability of this existence has been sustained amongst a very small readership, but nevertheless this book is real.

The phenomenon of books escaping from their authors is a curious matter and it is difficult to know how to respond to it; at one level we feel *responsible* for it, it is *ours*; at a different level entirely (the text is anti-copyright), it functions under its own power. I sense that my right to talk about it, alter it, frame it, is debatable. After all, there are live threads leading from the event of its initial publication which I might now cut with these comments here. It seems to me that there are more disconnections in the republishing of a book than there are continuities. At the least, there is the opportunity to modify and manipulate what went before.

### **If we cannot possess it entirely, we also cannot flee it.**

It is as well to acknowledge here that I would not mind if this book had no readership at all, as its republication causes me more anxiety than pride. I fully understand why Darwin sat on his theory for 20 years; I wish I too were in possession of a decisive caution, a secure certainty in what we have done. However, if I am nervous about our ideas appearing before a wider readership then this is compounded by an unthinking rashness that desires both to gamble, and also perhaps to lose. At the point of publication of the second edition I feel a sense of the inexorable that binds me to this book even as my first instinct is for flight from it.

My ambivalence is no doubt attributable to my revisiting the motivations behind our initial publication – namely a farewell to the milieu and a summation of the dead-ends we had encountered.



Perhaps I am no longer disturbed by those dead-ends, perhaps I am more disturbed by my inability to deal with them at that time. I think there was and is a residue of shame at my/our involvement in the tawdry theatrics of the milieu and this is expressed in the book. We were as much shaped by the milieu as anyone else: we took our cues, spoke the lines, made the gestures. Even as we broke from it, we were still too implicated.

Strangely, although this initial purpose of breaking away served adequately for my co-author, I found that many new opportunities were subsequently opened up for exploration by the publishing of *Nihilist Communism*. Once the break had been made I was more capable of understanding that the book's publication did not mark an end at all but, on the contrary, it created an entirely new theoretical framework through which I could explore social relations. In part, the sudden appearance of this new investigative threshold was related to my gaining access to the internet, where rapid circulation of connections within the milieu has meant an increased statistical likelihood of my encountering others who were capable of responding positively to me and I to them. In other words, an entirely new means of relating within the milieu became possible to those criticised within *Nihilist Communism*.

### **An archaeology of ourselves**

*Nihilist Communism* is the last book published in the Nineteenth Century, it was generated from within a political milieu which sustained itself through personal correspondence and meetings and we personally used and inhabited those conventions. However, I think this milieu of face to face interactions is now disappeared entirely. Our book was published on the cusp of the transformation within the milieu from the C19th to the C21st and if it had not appeared when it did in 2003, I think it would not have appeared at all in the form it took. In my opinion, if we had had access to a satisfying internet forum, I think we would have felt content that our ideas had been digitally ar-

chived on group sites and text libraries – the urge towards producing an objectively existing record in book form would have been much less pressing.

That *Nihilist Communism* squeezed through these apertures (of technological transformation; of direct personal disengagement; of shifts in modes of connection within the milieu; of the appearance and decline of popular anti-capitalism) now resonates upon rereading it, in both its form and its content. Over the space of six years the book has become an archaeological artefact, immediately evocative of a threshold between a past that is now banished and a present mode of organizing that is still very far from realising its virtual potential.

Internet organising, for good or ill, has almost entirely replaced significant real world interventions. That *Nihilist Communism* was intended as a retreat from participation, a relinquishment of the morality of involvement, and that this should coincide with a more general *retreat* into internet communities is, I think, archeologically important – I think our book records this relinquishment and objectively articulates the wider collective giving up on previous cast iron assumptions concerning recruitment, organisational autonomy and moralistic, effort-based commitment.

Our constant reference within the text to how hated we were, and how potentially hated we would be, indicates the hostile nature of milieu relations before internet based modes of organising took hold. Where previously, relations that were derived from a scene of face to face encounters were defined by the inter/intra group personal rivalries of dominating individuals, suddenly, with the advent of internet relations, nothing anybody said or thought made any difference one way or the other. The old London Scene, a system of personal rivalries, resentments and allegiances, which spread its issues throughout the u.k., has long since dissipated. Anger at, and rejection of, another's ideas is expressed more explosively now on internet forums but such intolerance also rapidly fizzles away. If the internet has had a negative impact on meaningful and important relations between

milieu-based individuals (and it has) then it has also undermined the traditional controlling behaviours of group gatekeepers.

I should note here, with regard to this general trend towards disengagement from elective, face-to-face group formations, that I now contain all of my designated political activities to computer based time. The consequences of this are quite remarkable. Just at the points where I have been unable to advance an inch in real space I have found openings for huge explorations of virtual depth. I am not sure of the significance of this disproportion but we should always keep in mind that our most telling and decisive victories tend to occur along well marked routes offering least resistance. Elsewhere in our lives, in those real struggles that are not political, it is always more a matter of hacking through an endless thicket, without either direction or orientation.

However, I don't have too much choice about where my politics may appear anyway. I find that nowadays I do not have the necessary reserves of energy to expend on those activities which have always produced as returns only an awareness of the depletion of those reserves. The unhappy personal relations with people I did not really want to know, and which made up the totality of my previous anarchist involvement are all now far in the past. I am happy to keep my engagement with others of the *politically minded* at stick length. Of course, I accept that my attitude to this may change in the future; that the dictatorship by circumstance to behaviour is a central message of *Nihilist Communism*.

### **Where one aims the missile of one's self**

It is important, in my opinion, for those who have an interest in the critique of capitalism, to concentrate energies where they produce most demonstrable effect, even if the objective worth of that effect is only a personal advantage (however that might be gauged). I feel no particular guilt about my deliberate non-involvement in Building the Movement. In fact, I think I perform my disengagement with a certain panache and style, but I also think it is worth recording my retreat here as I am certain that

after the onset of very brief struggles against its pull there is a widespread submission of individuals to the tendency of nonparticipation within the milieu.

It seems reasonable to suppose this failure of capacity to *achieve* things is largely technologically driven. In my experience, communications technology dissipates the ability to focus and complete projects. On the other hand, the same communications technology is capable of maintaining a pilot light level of interest amongst individuals where before they would have experienced a complete extinguishment of their politics. The latent potential of *mere* consumers of radical products is unmeasurable; the effect of their passively circulating critical memes as a type of background noise will forever go unresearched. I, for one, am not in the business of condemning people for their lack of involvement – I recognise there are many good arguments for complete disengagement.

### Writing techniques

A book may be written and assembled by any number of editorial strategies, but the immanent achievement of *book status* is dependent wholly on quantity of words. In our case, we achieved the requisite number through repetition of, and variation upon, a limited number of themes which appear as well, or as badly, put on the first page as on the last. *Nihilist Communism* does not advance a complex central argument supported by numerous proofs or derivative observations. On the contrary, its arguments do not advance at all but rather pulse constantly throughout the text's sentences. Our arguments, our insights, our themes, our breakthroughs, our flaws are all hammered at on every page of the book.

Again, this repetitious aspect is an archaeological feature consequent of the book's derivation from short texts developed in correspondence between ourselves and then sent, by post or email, to numerous other individuals and organisations. I remember no undue effort at editing. Whilst this technique does not typically produce a work that conforms to academic speci-

fications it does at least record the process of engagement and writing as it really occurred – it still has a real time immediacy. It records the combination of efforts and preoccupations of two individuals at a particular juncture.

If we had set out to write a pamphlet we would have edited the text down and produced a concentrated work which might have made more political impact than *Nihilist Communism* did.... But the everything-but-the-kitchen-sink maximalism of the work has many benefits, not least its political irreducibility. The immensity and richness of the archaeological artefacts uncovered in Burial Mound One at Sutton Hoo, were, over the course of a thousand years, compressed into a seam of material only an inch thick. We might have produced a similarly compressed, rich seam but instead we created a loose aggregate of arguments set beside other unintended material which situates us in our time. The book is much more significant for not appearing as a compressed theoretical pamphlet. Strangely, it remains truthful because it has been realised in book size, in three dimensions, truthful to us and to the now lost world we then inhabited.

### **Psychology.**

The text of *Nihilist Communism* and the idea behind Monsieur Dupont in general situated whatever contribution we were making to our milieu within our actual experience. We did not want to pretend that we lived a Revolutionary Lifestyle, we did not want to presume some objective significance in what we were doing beyond the objective significance of any other person. We absolutely refused to talk as if from the perspective of history, or as if we were mouthpieces relaying objective forces. We wanted to make it quite clear that we were not the carriers of proletarian consciousness; we could not predict what was going to happen in the history of capitalism – we did predict, not unreasonably, that capitalist relations would continue to be reproduced from basic productive circuits, and no matter the political framework, until such circuits were interrupted. We were unable to discern

any historical movement towards revolution, we felt neither optimism nor pessimism. Emphatically, we did not consider our lives, opinions, or actions were that much of a big deal. We were not prone to making statements such as, "we have the power to change things, we only need to realise it."

And therefore, by implication of the above, we did not consider any other small group of politicised individuals, or any leadership cadre salted into a particular industry, as being anything more significant than individuals expressing their opinions more or less in accordance with the pressure of economic forces. It was important to us then, and it continues to be a central facet of the critique of the left, to reveal the psychological/ambivalent motivations that underlay many of the untheorised assumptions and practices of the milieu. Objectively, there is no historic tradition, there is no appointed priesthood, no holy books handed down. We discovered that no communist group functions in advance of the curve, no communist group has anything particularly relevant to pass on to the proletariat. All is self-delusion and dysfunction, but masking what? What are the mechanisms, beyond Changing the World (which evidently is not changing) that are at work here?

The tendency within communist groups to produce such frameworks and fetishes directly contributes to the reproduction of received commodity relations within the milieu – where there should be lived relations, problematised between individuals based on acknowledgement of impotence before the sheer scale of the capitalist relation, there is too often imposed a set of relations between given and uncriticised things (groups, ideals, actions, journals etc).

The milieu is constituted of nothing more than individuals expressing their discontent with the present and their hopes for a different mode of social organisation in the future – whatever disrupts or obscures the objective baselessness of the opinions expressed within the milieu (whether by means of promoting organisational fetishism, militantism, moral denunciation, theoretical expertise etc), with the intent to produce an authoritative

voice, is always a lie.

Monsieur Dupont refused the trend of individuals within the milieu to speak in the first person plural in the pretence that behind their actual ones and twos they really spoke for thousands. We went in the opposite direction and pretended our two was really one. In part, our assumption of a shared identity referred to the collective figures then common within the avant-garde (in particular Luther Blisset), but it was also a recognition of the clown Monsieur Hulot. It was important to us, in order to think clearly, to rid ourselves from moral responsibility, from that terrible weight of significance that political activists carry on their shoulders – we did not want to continue to subject ourselves to the inhibitive pressures that have induced variously megalomania, conservatism, intolerances, despair, on those charged with a political mission.

The impersonal rigour of clowns (*and above all we were hard men given to an appreciation of craft*) is based in the rehearsal of a set of pre-established acts that are made to occur outside of the person performing them. The performer is not the clown, the clown is a character not a person. In assuming a shared identity we were suddenly freed from that urge towards conformity and *saying the right thing* that exists at the heart of all radical discourses as the vital matter of what is optimal, what is appropriate – we were able to put on a Performance in which our person, our standing, our dignity, was not at stake.

The clown is fundamentally an instrument of disinterested investigation of the world. In particular, clowning explores the tension of what might go wrong. Within the pro-revolutionary milieu everything had already gone wrong. This milieu, this community, is the one location in the universe where Murphy's Law is the only law and whilst everyone involved had noticed this, they tended to exteriorise the blame, becoming host to, and personifying, *a fundamental attribution error*.

### **From inside, looking out**

Within the carapace of Monsieur Dupont, our personal ex-

periences, small and irrelevant, became the base for our performances and the core of our awareness. However, we were careful to perform without the usual reflux of politics into our lives, we reversed the adage that the personal is political. Our performance became distinct from our everyday life and the advantages of this were clear. We found we did not have to be driven in order to trace the submerged codes of small group life, we did not have to immerse our persons, lose ourselves, in the mission. By assuming a shared, mysterious, identity, we were now able to say the first thing that came into our heads, we were able to speak lightly, and then see what happened.

Writing *Nihilist Communism* was a means of accessing another way of thinking, it helped us create a divergent means for producing theory. We broke from the conventions of commitment to the subjective form, where allegiance is used as a lever upon a ready constructed platform of principles, where it is incumbent upon the recruit to become host to what is already established, his purpose to become the vessel for it all.

We were investigating the same issues as everyone else: subjectivity; non-receptivity; organisational failure; the reproduction of commodity forms within the anti-commodity project etc. However, it was no longer important to us to achieve the right conclusions or affirm the established principles. We were content to work within a frame that worked for us – we did not demand agreement with our findings, but we did require a realistic and honest evaluation of both our project and other contemporary and historical interventions.

At every point we had to stop and ask ourselves, “What is the basis for proceeding? What justifies our going on?” Our investigations hit deadends at every turn, we were unable to theorise a positive, voluntarist, organisational, historicist way out from capital. Our opposition to the present state of things and our commitment to communism remained intact but in the process of our investigations we abandoned any remaining illusions about generating a social movement capable of deliberately changing the



world from within the capitalist productive relation. Our challenge to the milieu was to adopt a collective disillusionment, and then to move on from there.

The interventions of Monsieur Dupont, clown, diarist, essayist, correspondent, had the result of releasing what had become an unbearable tension in our lives. He settled matters, closed doors, and helped us to move on. I freely admit that much of what I personally wrote in *Nihilist Communism* I now find crass and I wish I could erase it. But, luckily, this was a shared project and thus my personal reservations are held back by my co-author's interest. The collective aspect of the book is significant, it fixes in place that which I might otherwise prefer to change; whilst collective identity contributes to the repetitions, it also constructs a set of permissions and boundaries which contrast sharply with those that we would have set working individually.

We wrote for each other, to not offend the other, and thus set out positions which as individuals we might not wholly agree with, or even would not have thought of. Collective writing produces a feedback loop of exaggeration in which the outside world, represented by the other, fails to correct but on the contrary encourages further exploration along the same path.

The texts included here were written in a rising spiral of excitement and as such we abandoned all claims to research. We relied instead on our intuitive reactions and our capacity to paste in patches and improvisations. All caution was abandoned in pursuit of something that we felt was radically different to anything written before. And we did feel that we had uncovered something, a form of critique, a perspective, a set of concepts that, although common in other areas of society, had never been coherently presented within the pro-revolutionary milieu before.

### **The measure of what we have contributed**

I am now so familiar with the core concepts that we first set out in the texts that make up *Nihilist Communism*, and which have since become the parameters of my research, that I no lon-

ger find these early texts particularly profound. But as I continue to encounter the same category errors within the milieu today, errors concerning agency and subjectivity, which we focused our critique on in the past, it would seem the ideas expressed within this book retain their radical edge.

The texts collected here now seem to be quite primitive, but there are other more dominant positions within the milieu that are more primitive still. I accept that it is possible, and some have said this to me, that *Nihilist Communism* does not say anything new, or profound or anything that everybody has not already been thinking. And yet, if others have been thinking the same, if our work contains nothing but commonplaces and the bleeding obvious, it remains a fact that nobody else prior to the publication of *Nihilist Communism* put such thoughts and feelings to paper. In the end the relevance of this material is for others to decide; interpretations will produce counter-interpretations and evaluations will cause re-evaluations – again, with this edition *Nihilist Communism* must do its own work, stand by itself. I am an inattentive parent, which is perhaps just as well because I am as aware as anyone that significance is prone to cycles of reversal and rereversal, critique is even more susceptible to bubbles of certainty than the banking system.

*Nihilist Communism* is not a book much quoted, there are not pages and pages of google references, but perhaps it has had some influence. Certainly, it was of its time and contributed to a shift in the terrain around 2003/4 when the critique of the fetish of activism really took off. We found our texts re-posted on several insurrectionist anarchist and communist sites, which inspired me to attempt engagement with the groups involved – with varying results. If I were to pinpoint our contribution to the milieu I would say it lay in our focusing on the nature of milieu character traits, group dynamics, the nature of revolutionary subjectivity, the relation between ideas and events, the relation between groups and the proletariat, and how external forces impact at different scales.

It is also worth recording, that as one ages, external triggers

to personal involvement are set at a higher and higher threshold; where as youths we were happy to submit to a pre-existing group hierarchy and undertake the mundane and unrewarding tasks of organising, now we are only interested in participation where the specific richness of our experience would really make a difference; in all other circumstances the meagreness of the rewards means it is not worth it for us. We are in a position now where the mountain really must move in our direction – I think this is true of much of the proletariat too. The fact that the productive relation is not ostensibly at stake within the class struggle is the major cause of non-involvement. As soon as the question of ownership moves to centre stage the situation will quickly change. Let he who has ears hear!

Our efforts at reclassification were improvisatory and conducted within the received terms of the milieu at the level of statements made therein. We related such statements to observable external and internal relations and judged them accordingly. We had no prior knowledge of the academic specialisations that address matters of classification, but I have since found confirmation of our intuitive method with other bodies of knowledge derived from, for example cybernetics, systems theory, evolutionary biology, and radical constructivist epistemology.

Specifically, the problem as we saw it was that the relation between economic forces and resultant events on the one side, and revolutionary groups on the other, was simply accepted as given by the groups themselves. In examining the statements of these groups concerning this relation made over a long history and setting them alongside our personal intuitive shift towards disbelief, we began to question the true basis of this presumed relation and to speculate on the hidden motives it was based upon.

Our purpose was to re-categorise subjective elements as well as release the moral tensions and theoretical obligations that dominated groups. We hoped to provoke a more realistic and lived relation between consciousness and capacity to enforce change. In this project, which we discovered and made up as

we went along, we were to some degree successful and found a degree of resonance with others. In particular, our distancing neologisms *pro-revolutionary* and *leaderless leninism* have had a wider circulation than we might have previously expected (see Appendix: Seminar 4).

Our contribution to the critique of anti-activism was not a mere endorsement of the wider Class Struggle rejection of summit protests. We saw the post-2003 return to membership organisations, platforms of principles, organisational positions, celebrations of proletarian culture, and so on as a further retreat from dealing with the real problems of the milieu, namely its excess of consciousness in relation to its deficit of effectiveness.

All this seems to situate Monsieur Dupont and the book *Nihilist Communism* simply within the conventions of a milieu that is defined by its political consciousness but this would be to give a false impression.

An important strand in our critique was the very existence of a separate sphere of so-called political questions. We were as much engaged with avant-garde activities as politics. As communists we saw what might be called aesthetics, i.e. the relation of human beings to the production of meaning and significance, to be of much greater importance than questions of political economy. The second half of *Nihilist Communism* therefore takes the form of a critique of cultural production and cultural identity – the influence here of the Situationists and Surrealists is clear.

I have stated above that I retain the framework set out by *Nihilist Communism* in my ongoing investigations. This is true to a large degree but one aspect that occurs to me which I have since abandoned was our attempt to represent the ruling class as an intelligence-based subject position. I think it is fair to say that I no longer use this method. I prefer to think in terms of the integrated totality of the capitalist relation functioning automatically and to which capitalists, states, institutions, organizations, all respond as if to a pre-established environment. Previously, it seemed important to stress the hostility of capital to life, now it seems more

important to emphasise the inextricable nature of the productive system. However, this does not indicate a major theoretical shift but is simply a matter of deploying a different investigative framework for exploring different objects of interest.

Finally, a short note on the mutual denunciations within the milieu that arose after 2003 concerning primitivism and leftism. We would certainly not define ourselves as workerist or progressivist. Our critique of capitalism, our understanding of commodity production, was based on an assumption that dead labour in the form of the commodity dominates present lived existence and that social relations are expressed directly in the productive technology of the time. If we are against capitalism then we are against the form capitalism takes in our lives, i.e. the specific structurings by dead labour of our lived existence.

Whilst we would never define ourselves as primitivists, or consider ourselves as having anything in common with the tedious ideology of primitivism, we always appreciate the most radical formulations of the critique of alienation, i.e. the critique of machines. It is also the case that on a personal level we feel an awe-struck appreciation for earlier forms/ techniques of relations with the natural world – thus it is plain that we do not subscribe to the ideal of social liberation via increased automation.

We do not wish for the world to *go back* but neither do we wish it to carry on *forward*. Our ambivalence on the question of technological development, and the relations bound up in machines, means we cannot support the self-management of production by the working class as a political aim and we fundamentally reject the implication that self-management is synonymous with communism. By implication this sets us beyond the pale of historicism; we remain convinced that communism has been possible during every period in history.

### On Crisis

*The struggle of the body for rest is not the revolution, it is merely the crisis of capital. A crisis because it brings the*

*massed, accumulated, fossilised acts of the past and the sedimenting/accumulating dead acts of the present, along with the possible conditions for the future, together in collision and in this standstill all value ceases to be enforced, leaving the world in a kind of zero hour/zero place where everything is contestable (when the traffic stopped last September during the Fuel Protests, a man on a bicycle passed me and said, 'I can hear the birds singing' - we have heard what economic collapse sounds like). When industry stops everything in society, otherwise absolutely determined by it, floats free from its gravity. In this particular crisis of capital all hell breaks loose; then comes the time for organisation, you can call that consciousness if you want. We don't care.*

We variously represented the crisis of capitalism in *Nihilist Communism* sometimes as being pushed by incompatible interests of the class struggle and sometimes as an internal failing of the mechanics of the capitalist system itself. At the time of writing the book, an unintended economic crisis did not seem very likely. However, in March 2009, unprecedented disruptions have objectively occurred within the productive system – recent images of Singapore harbour clogged with rusting container ships indicates a veritable blockage. And in particular, news of the downturn within Chinese manufacturing, the flux-like proletarianisation/de-proletarianisation of millions of people returning to peasant existence from the Shenzhen province seems to be of radical importance. It seems likely to me that the cycles of the conflict in Shenzhen will be decisive for how the crisis will turn out in the rest of the world.

Our argument regarding economic crisis was simple: as the breakdown of the set of relations built into capitalism progressed so this would set free different forces within human society – how these forces will shape society is entirely unpredictable but communist ideas have more of a chance in such circumstances than in stable times.

### **Anyone can write a book**

On editing the material here it was pointed out to me that certain texts seemed to be included in some versions but were absent in others. We were presented with the problem of editing. We had to ask ourselves a set of questions. Would a rewrite be a reasonable approach? Should the text be re-presented entirely as it was? Should parts of it be retained at all? If we re-wrote, should we adopt the style we used then, and write as if we were still living then? Or should we interpose current theoretical adjustments and concerns? As it is, we have done all of these things and done them more or less randomly. This edition of *Nihilist Communism* is a patchwork of archaeological artefact and re-writes, of found object and editorial intervention, of rigorous focus and offhanded laxity; there are sections of clarity set alongside others of obscurity (in places I have no idea what we were alluding to); there is good writing and there is bad. As a book of fragments, a book because it weighs five ounces, it retains the spirit of the Monsieur Dupont project.

See, we have written a book! I thank Leona for editing this, and Ardent Press for republication. I dedicate this edition's half inch of spine space, with respect and love, to the other Monsieur Dupont.

Frere Dupont  
March 2009

## PREAMBLE

### ***This is the definition of class hatred***

Death appears as the harsh victory of the law of our ancestors over the dimension of our becoming. It is a fact that, as productivity increases, each succeeding generation becomes smaller. The defeat of our fathers is revisited upon us the limits of our world. Yes, structure is human, it is the monumentalisation of congealed sweat, sweat squeezed from old exploitation and represented as nature, the world we inhabit, the objective ground. We do not, in our insect-like comings and goings, make the immediate world in which we live, we do not make a contribution, on the contrary we are set in motion by it; a generation will pass before what we have done, as an exploited class, will seep through as an effect of objectivity. (Our wealth is laid down in heaven.) The structure of the world was built by the dead, they were paid in wages, and when the wages were spent and they were in the ground, what they had made continued to exist, these cities, roads and factories are their calcified bones. They had nothing but their wages to show for what they had done, who they were and what they did has been cancelled out. But what they made has continued into our present, their burial and decay *is* our present. This is the definition of class hatred. We are no closer now to rest, to freedom, to communism than they were, their sacrifice has bought us nothing, what they did counted for nothing, we have inherited nothing, but they did produce value, they did make the world in which we now live, the world that now oppresses us is constructed from the wealth they made, wealth that was taken from



them as soon as they were paid a wage, taken and owned by someone else, owned and used to define the nature of class domination. We too must work, and the value we produce leaks away from us, from each only a trickle but in all a sea of it and that, for the next generation, will thicken into wealth for others to own and as a congealed structure it will be used to frame new enterprises in different directions. The violence of what they produced becomes the structure that dominates our existence. Our lives begin amidst the desecration of our ancestors, millions of people who went to their graves as failures, and forever denied experience of a full human existence, their *being* simply cancelled out. As our parents die, we can say truly that their lives were for nothing, that the black earth that is thrown down onto them blacks out our sky.

## ***Introduction to 2003 edition***

There has been an increasing tendency within the pro-revolutionary milieu towards theoretical error since the 1960s. It is our intention to hammer into the milieu some theoretical nails to halt and perhaps reverse this slide. To this end we have produced two essays. The first essay deals with the decline of revolutionary perspective into political activism. We hope to strongly delineate the limits we have observed in practical activity, revolutionary ambition, the make-up of the revolutionary subject and the role of the pro-revolutionary minority. The second essay deals with the manufacture of pseudo-subjectivities and how they have been contained within capitalism as elements of its own self-organisation and maintenance (spectacular forms, as the Situationists would say). It also considers the alleged role of consumerism and the consequences of prioritising anti-capitalist struggle in commercial and financial spheres.

Above all we want to restate the character of the real struggle against capital. Capitalism is not an idea and it cannot be opposed by ideas or by ideas-driven action. There is no debate to be had with it, it has no ideas of its own except to say that all ideas are its own. It has no ideas intrinsic to itself.

Capitalism is, at its most basic level, *a social relation of force*. Capitalist society is made up of conflicting forces and it is only at this level that it can be undone, either in the collapse of its own forces or by the revolutionary force of the proletariat (in the end we see this as two expressions of the same thing because we do not see the proletariat as having *any existence outside of capitalist force*). If capitalism is to collapse then it will do so at the level of the *relation of forces*, it is during this collapse that revolutionary ideas begin to take hold.

### *This is the fable of the thirsty crow*

Long ago, there lived a crow of determined character. One hot day the crow was flying over the empty plains of a certain country and felt the fire of thirst in its throat. It had flown this way many times before and knew of a river nearby where it could safely drink. But when the thirsty crow landed beside the river it found not even a trickle of water. It was high summer and all around the land was so hot and dry, the river had not flowed there for many weeks. The thirsty crow insisted to itself, "I must drink or I will die from the heat of the day." The thirsty crow desperately hopped about the river bank in search of water, but search as it might, it found not even a trickle. Just as it was about to give up it saw a stone jar with a wide neck set on a wall beneath an olive tree. At once the crow flew to the lowest branch of the tree so it could look down into the jar and happily found that there was water inside. Quickly, the bird hopped onto the wall and thrust its head into the jar but alas, the water was too shallow and the jar too deep for its reach. Luckily, the thirsty crow was an historian; it knew that if it knocked the jar over, the water would be absorbed into the dusty earth and lost forever. So the thirsty crow became the crafty crow and performed an old trick known since the beginning of the world by all the crafty, thirsty crows. In its beak it carried small pebbles from the ground to the jar. "By dropping the pebbles into the jar I will make the level of the water rise and when the water has risen enough I will be able to drink," said the thirsty crow. The thirsty crow dropped one, two, several stones into the water. Again it tried to drink from the jar but to its sur-

prise, the water was still beyond the reach of its beak. So, it brought more stones to the jar, many more stones. One by one the crow dropped them into the jar and then tried to drink the water. But the water did not increase. And the crow could not drink. The crow was at a loss. "Is it not well known that the stones always make the water rise?" asked the thirsty crow. In accordance with this law it had brought stones, but the water had not risen. The crow could make no sense of it. Crows may be crafty but they know only one trick involving hot days, jars of water, and stones. So the crow brought more stones. Many more stones. In fact, so many stones that soon the jar was overflowing with stones but not one drop of water rose up to meet that dry and eager beak. Now that the jar could not contain any more stones the angry and despairing thirsty crow looked ever further afield for stones to pile around it. The crow was determined not to give in. Soon its ambition for water was forgotten, it cared for nothing but the bringing of stones to the jar. In this way the wall beneath the olive tree grew taller.

### *Introducing Monsieur Dupont*

We are two communists who, for several years, have been engaging with the anarchist and communist milieu in Britain. Monsieur Dupont is the name we have decided to use for our joint theoretical activity.

This book is a composite of texts that attempt to outline our discontent with the concept of consciousness and in particular the way this concept is generally used by those who regard themselves as revolutionaries. It follows that these texts are also a critique of the roles that

those who consider themselves revolutionary experts and activists have given themselves.

Unsurprisingly our criticisms of the gestures made by pro-revolutionary activists (those who are, like us, *for* communist revolution) and the assumptions on which they have been based have caused us to become completely isolated in regard to that milieu. For undermining the practice and status of political activism we have been vilified for being *ridiculous* and *slandorous* and *insincere*. Indeed this name-calling has spread insidiously, and now no contemplation of our ideas is possible without the repetition of the exact wording of this judgement (on our moral lapse and our outsider status) before any consideration of our actual ideas is begun. It is enough to say that there have been sporadic attempts to have us expelled, demands that we shut up, and calls for others not to read our wicked ideas. These disparate communist tendencies (they rarely agree with each other) are at least united in their opposition to our critique of all of them!

Most of what appears below was developed in discussions with the Anarchist Federation (of the u.k.) and later posted to an international internet discussion list of communists; both groups adopted an attitude of hostility towards us; there may be the occasional reference to these groups in the texts. It is likely that that there are small contradictions in our text; this is because our ideas are not fixed but float about within a set frame. We have encountered people who have expressed their hatred of us by trawling our texts in the hope of exposing us. We do not think this is useful. We are happy to attempt to clarify anything that seems self-contradictory in correspondence, but equally, we hope that our correspondents will put some effort in them-

selves and think beyond whatever problems they find. We see ideas as a process and make no claims for the status of our writing other than it being a work in progress.

### ***We start, as we end, in simplicity***

The closest that the world has ever been to communism (it probably wasn't that close) was at the end of the First World War; there has never been a time before or since when the world was so open to the possible. But what are we to make of the inscrutable events of this near miss? How applicable are those facts now? And what of the context? What value should we place in our pro-revolutionary theory on the part played by objective conditions – that is, the conditions not created by revolutionaries? Or put another way, how much of what happens in revolutions is not designed or led by revolutionaries?

Many pro-revolutionaries argue that there can be no revolutionary attempt without the significant input of a revolutionary consciousness, but we are not so sure. In fact we are so unsure that we cannot grasp precisely what they mean by the terms *revolutionary consciousness* and *working class consciousness*. We are also unsure whether these pro-revolutionaries really have a grip on the concepts they perceive to be indispensable. We try to keep an open mind about the events that will make up the revolution but we fail to see a revolutionary role for any form of political consciousness, revolutionary or otherwise. Quite the contrary, when we consider past revolutionary attempts and pro-revolutionary organisation and their political interventions we see in the function of consciousness only an inhibiting influence.

In our opinion a great number of pro-revolutionar-

ies hold onto the Consciousness Model as part of the habit of being a pro-revolutionary. It is woven into their being: they must sell their paper, perform actions that are designed to inspire others, and defend the integrity of their group. However, we also think that most of them (and this also includes most of those who do not belong to an official group, and who don't produce a regular paper) do not have a properly formed conception of what working class consciousness really is, or a working knowledge of how it is to be transmitted to those who do not have it.

Some formulations of consciousness by pro-revolutionaries are extremely naive, one recently informed us that it was "being awake." We chose to consider and investigate this statement seriously even though it was intended as a piece of malicious flippancy. (To illustrate the tendency to move towards absurdity in the pro-revolutionary milieu, we were then condemned by one of his colleagues for formulating revolutionary consciousness as merely "being awake"). As a consequence of all this confusion we intend to formulate our critique of the communist objective of consciousness as slowly as we can, without, of course, abandoning the graphic and passionate qualities of our prose that so many people have told us they really enjoy....

We think revolutionary expertise, which bases itself in organisational certainty and theoretical rigidity, measures only pro-revolutionary fabrication – it has but one relation to actual social conditions, which is that it is wholly unable to escape its determinations. Predictions for the future that are hypothesised out of past happenings mistake the very nature of revolution, which we all agree is an event that is precisely not conditioned by the past and is

characterised as a complete transformation of human existence out of the economic mode. If we cannot recognise the future in the present then we cannot decide which pro-revolutionary activity or value of the present should be promoted or carried through to the future. It is our contention that most pro-revolutionary activity extends existing conditions and acts to prevent the future. We think many pro-revolutionaries rather enjoy the antagonism of capitalist society and the part they play by supporting a side.

We cannot say for certain what is to be done. What we do know is that the past appears, in one form or another, in the present, before our eyes, and from this appearance of dead forms we can identify what we think is counter-revolutionary. For example we see that consciousness is a concept that has been consistently deployed in past revolutionary attempts and because those attempts all failed the concept of consciousness and its role must be questioned. Our critique of consciousness begins with our understanding of the failure of revolutions: we see that consciousness, as an organising principle, has always been deployed by a certain section of the bourgeoisie which seeks to use working class muscle to gain political power for itself.

As an alternative to the Consciousness Model, which is, of course, also a recruiting model, we argue that once factories have been seized by workers and capitalist production halted then – through the resulting crack opened up in the structure of capitalist society – humanity may find it possible to assert itself for itself. We therefore see revolution in two stages: (1) the seizure of production by the working class pursuing its self-interest; (2) the collapse of existing forms of power brought on by the contradiction



of working class ownership. The collapse of established power will bring a new material base of human society into existence; drawing from this base the mass of humanity will have the opportunity to remake itself.

How the working class goes about the first stage of the revolution we can only guess at, but we can surmise that things will follow similar patterns (positive and negative) to events that have happened before, and those who have studied such things (pro-revolutionaries) will bring their ideas (for good or ill – but it *will* happen, as we can see in history) to the frontline of communist activity during such times.

It may appear to some readers that our consideration of the question of consciousness becomes a little obscure in places. A complete refutation of the concept is quite complex, but it should always be kept in mind that we are concerned with the second most basic activity of pro-revolutionaries: the communication of ideas and the explanation of actions taken. It may also seem that we are only concerned with old left formations and theories, and that anti-capitalism as it has recently appeared already outflanks us by its very modernity. It is true that this text does not attempt to engage anti-capitalism in its own language but our project was begun as an explicit critique of present day anti-capitalism, and has been continued as a critique with anti-capitalism's left-communist supporters. At all times in our critique, when we refer to the concept of *consciousness* we are in fact addressing the actions of pro-revolutionaries regarding consciousness: we could equally use the words *organisation* or *propaganda*, the deployment of which is a conjecture concerning the profound effect on directionless bodies by applying externally organised catalysts. What

we have in our sights are the underlying motivations and assumptions of pro-revolutionary activists.

### ***Basic statement***

The working class, as the revolutionary body, do not require consciousness but a peculiar alignment of events, and a series of causes and effects which produces a specific economic crisis that ends up with workers holding the levers of production.

The revolution is in two stages. The first is this naked, non-conscious holding of productive power by the working class. (That is to say, of course, it is conscious and some consequences are foreseen, there is a clearness of perception and a definite awareness of relative forces – but there is no alignment with the archetypal codes of political consciousness: “liberty, equality, fraternity”). We see that the working class arrive at this first level of revolution by force of circumstance. In defending their own interest in an increasingly unpredictable world, and with capitalists bailing out, they end up, almost by chance, in charge of the productive economy. We say that their brief period of ownership will occur by chance because it will not have been actively or consciously pursued – the proletariat will have consistently asserted its own interest and this steady course, when taken with general economic breakdown, will be enough to cause a proletarian dictatorship.

A new material base will begin to come into existence at this point, and all human activity will be determined by, and reflective of, these different conditions. The second stage of revolution is made by the vast mass of humanity realising what the essential proletariat have

achieved and then escaping through the hole created by events. The second phase is about becoming human and throwing off the economic model entirely. During this period the working class will cease to exist, as will all social categorisations, and humanity will organise both itself and its relationship to the material base by itself and for itself.

On the role of consciousness, of course, there is reflection and understanding of what is happening but it is not consciousness in the Marxist/Hegelian sense (which we characterise as the co-ordination of pre-set values among a great many people as a preliminary stage for engaging with the world). Therefore it is possible that a world-wide consciousness could come into existence because of revolution – because consciousness is not a precondition of revolutionary action but a consequence of revolution accomplished.

### ***On consciousness***

*Until they become conscious they will never rebel,  
and until after they have rebelled they cannot be-  
come conscious.*  
– 1984

Many pro-revolutionaries argue that revolution cannot happen without a revolutionary will propelling the revolutionary body forward. For them the revolutionary body must be conscious of its goal and of the connection between its actions and the goal, it must be aware of the consequences of what it is doing when it is engaging in revolutionary activity. For many pro-revolutionaries this means the revolutionary body must consciously embody both explicit revolutionary and post-revolutionary values.

The question of consciousness is therefore absolutely central to the revolutionary project and to pro-revolutionary practice. But certain problems become apparent when consideration is paid to the specific formulations of consciousness and the means of its arrival or manifestation in the revolutionary body. The first of these is the relative but objective separation of pro-revolutionaries from the revolutionary body – there seems little in common between the political values of the pro-revolutionaries and the economic struggles of the revolutionary body. This separation is most clearly stated in class terms: all too few pro-revolutionaries are proletarians. This immediate distance calls for solutions to the problem of how to reach out to the workers, what language to use, which short terms goals may be pursued without compromising the revolutionary project, which revolutionary values are appropriate for expression in this situation, and so on. Most crucially there is the problem of reproducing class relations within the revolutionary movement: middle class intellectuals as leaders and workers as, well, workers. From our experience of the current pro-revolutionary milieu, we have found no serious theoretical address of this problem. Most pro-revolutionaries have no clear-cut definitions of what revolutionary consciousness is, or how it is to be transmitted by pro-revolutionaries to the revolutionary body without the contamination of class domination. We have found that pro-revolutionaries are simply not prepared to discuss why it is that revolutionary consciousness has been steadily leaking out of the proletariat since 1945, and why after fifty years of pro-revolutionaries “speaking the workers language” this

drift has not been reversed. They have been busily dropping pebbles in the jar but the level of the water has not risen. Why has the pro-revolutionary movement had no success in conveying its message? Why has the working class not listened to its educators?

Consciousness is a political category. A world-wide or even national conscious proletarian identity would involve a high degree of *organisation*, which is another word for consciousness. There is no objectively existing, separate sphere of revolutionary consciousness and certainly none that is owned by a particular section of humanity; the working class especially do not own consciousness, they do not own anything (except their playstations). So, if revolutionary consciousness does not exist objectively, that is, as an immediate determination of the material base, then organisations must bring it into the world. Organisation carries consciousness into the world; as consciousness is not present naturally, it must be transmitted by an organising agency, but which organisation?

It is the pro-revolutionaries themselves who contribute consciousness to the revolution, but unless we understand pro-revolutionaries as being an objective expression of the negation of capitalist society then we are bound to see both their antagonism to all aspects of the existing order (and not just to some political issues), and their role of transmitting to the working class values that transcend existing conditions, as being more than a little subjective and therefore fallible. Most pro-revolutionary groups view themselves as being objectively constituted by the need of society to overthrow capital and therefore they see themselves as qualified to prescribe values and

strategies to the proletariat. We completely refute this assumption; all pro-revolutionary groups are subjective bodies, created by the subjective will of their participants, their perspective therefore never escapes their subjectivity. (If this were not so, then there would not be many small pro-revolutionary groups competing against each other, but only one organisation. Of course, most pro-consciousness organisations have a tendency to see themselves as the one true faith, and on this basis launch their critiques of each other.) Pro-revolutionary groups are not the historic party, they have not been thrown up by the economic base, they are not an inescapable result of capitalism's contradictions. In most cases pro-revolutionary groups are created in response to purely political events and have little connection to workers' struggles. Those who argue for the transmission of revolutionary consciousness to the working class by pro-revolutionaries see their role, effectively, as one of leadership. We observe with interest how those who argue for the "transmission of consciousness" model fail to escape from the confines of their milieu and do not reach the working class. They seem content to exhort each other to be more realistic, to speak in a language the workers will understand, etc while nothing ever happens. If these activists were any good then they would surely be locally recruiting five or more new adherents every week. The fact that the message is not getting through is, for us, the final critique of the concept of *messages*. To set in advance what ideological requirements are to be met by the proletariat, despite all experience of the failure of this method, is putting the cart before the horse and is a good example of impatience. This is as true for councilists as it is for vanguardists.

Because pro-revolutionaries have not learned how to wait, have not learned to engage at the level of their experience (they are always wanting to lead the way, wishing to push forward *their* hot-brained solutions), they are forever looking back and wondering why nobody is following them. Theories of consciousness and organisation are always attempts to impose past reflective forms onto living struggles – consciousness in these schemes becomes a stage, a precondition for the revolution. These pro-conscious/pro-revolutionaries think that no matter how intense a specific struggle might be, if it is not explicitly political then it is lacking in essence and therefore not wholly real. To the struggle they bring always the political dimension but never consider how the political dimension may, in reality, be lagging behind the economic struggle.

## ***A qualification***

*Echanges et Mouvement*, from their tentative Basic Principles:

*In capitalist society the true contradiction is not one of ideas – revolutionary, reformist, conservative reactionary, etc – but one of interests. No kind of will or desire can overthrow commodity production or abolish the wage system. This will only break down as a result of class struggle arising from the very position of the working class in the system of capitalist production. According to a widespread opinion “class consciousness” and “unity” are seen to be the main and necessary conditions for what is considered as ‘revolutionary behaviour’ or as ‘working class action’. This view overlooks or misinterprets how action and consciousness are influencing each other. Workers don’t act as a ‘revolutionary class’*

*because first of all they are or become 'conscious' of what they want. "Unity" is not a precondition for, but is created in, and as a result of, struggle. Workers are a "revolutionary class" because their position as a class inside the capitalist system makes it inevitable that the mere defence of their own interests brings them into direct opposition to the fundamentals of the existing order. Such struggles are fought continuously in the factories and elsewhere, and potentially they are revolutionary. The development of class struggle with all its changing forms is therefore far more important than the development of the so-called "revolutionary movement", regardless of the meaning given to this word. The break with any form of exploitation or political practice and thought (reformism, etc) is not a matter of theoretical discussion and conceptions but a matter of class struggle and workers' practice, a practice which is the result of their daily conditions of exploitation.*

The text continues elsewhere:

*The bulletin [Echanges] was started as a means of spreading and receiving information. Those participating in this project decided not to bother with the clarification of standpoints held in common (which usually accompanies the birth of a new group) but to accept the existing tacit agreement. The basic implicit agreement which underlay the content and form of the information published was still badly defined at the start, but as the project developed, it revealed a sufficiently unified approach among participants even if participants were very diverse as explained above.*

*This tacit agreement expressed itself in the analysis of various phenomena of the class struggle taking place every day and placed in the context of a more general understanding of*



*the world. These phenomena include what many other people think to be individual forms of protest which are in fact part of a collective movement (eg absenteeism, turnover, refusal of work, etc) This is necessarily linked to the critique of the existing theories of modern society.*

*To do this, we must have information about these conflicts and theories. If inside Echanges we sometimes draw different conclusions from a specific fact or from a set of facts, we still think that the information which describes these facts should have certain qualities. Here too, a few simple principles guide our way of selecting the information published in the bulletin...*

*The raison d'être of the bulletin is directly determined by the double inadequacy of the official means of information: lack of information on class conflicts, exaggeration of the importance of political and economic information (two ways of masking reality).*

*Hence the double task of looking for information concerning the experience of struggle of all sorts and of making a meaningful choice from the mass of political, diplomatic and economical news.*

*...*

*Class struggle exists and develops independently of these 'revolutionary groups' or 'movements'. The level and size of the so-called 'intervention of revolutionary groups in the struggles' never determine or fundamentally influence the level and size of working class struggle. We may be individually involved in such struggles either because we belong to the collectivity involved in a particular struggle or because we participate in one or another of the host of temporary organisms created during a particular struggle and for that*

*struggle alone. We consider that outside these struggles the exchange of information, discussions and the seeking of theoretical insights are an essential instrument of our own activity which eventually might serve others as well.*

Despite their brilliant, simple, and clear wariness of *consciousness*, a problem remains with the approach of *Echanges*. This is that they are too, as it were, polite, and seem hesitant about the possible concrete role of left and pro-revolutionary individuals and groups in moments of intense class struggle (and even revolution). In their introductory text and elsewhere *Echanges* appear coy about what they are doing themselves and what practical effect they might have. It is clear that their journals are only read by those who might understand them – that is, a thin scattering of radicals across various countries. Their journals are read by people who are like themselves, and not by the working class in general or even by the workers involved in the struggles that *Echanges* report and analyse. *Echanges* are absolutely right about how the working class might become revolutionary, but they seem to fail to acknowledge the role that their readership and themselves (those who might understand what they are talking about) could have in present and future class struggles.

Because their modesty forbids them to give this scattering of radicals (themselves included) any real importance in the development of events, they fail to see, or explain, just what it is they are doing or think they are doing. Of course, they are right to understand that they have no (or extremely little) effect on class struggle in the present time, but their modesty seems to have led them to deny the role they have now and might have in future.

What we have to understand is that the effect that we might have on left radicals (that is, the only people who are able to listen to us) is very important because, whether we like it or not, many of these individuals will come to the fore in times of revolutionary upheaval. This will be due to their prolonged interest in changing the world, their knowledge of what might happen in certain situations and their general silver-tonguedness. Thus it is most important and a matter of constant urgency that we engage this disparate group in dialogue in order to get as many of them as possible to ditch their leftist/liberalist/statist/managerial, etc, convictions and take on communist positions. This process of development must be done by engaging people both on paper, in journals, and at discussion meetings, and also in areas of practical struggles. (It goes without saying that we can also engage, as a separate activity from so-called political work, with our fellow workers in struggles at our workplaces, in the knowledge that we may also be listened to in these situations where, rather than trying to install *consciousness*, we will provide, or suggest, concrete tactics and strategies.)

*Echanges* say that their “activity... eventually might serve others as well”, but they do not explore what this means in any real depth. One reason why *Echanges* do not seem to explore this aspect of their activity might be because the truth of what they must do, by their own logic, is to actually go against most of the so-called revolutionary communist and anarchist milieu. The difference between *Echanges* and the rest of the communist milieu is over the concept of consciousness, which *Echanges* reject almost completely. To take the logic of their position as an explicit argu-

ment into the arena of the communist milieu creates the risk of being totally rejected by that milieu. To examine the concept of consciousness in any depth leads to the equating of that concept with leadership and organisation of the working class by presumed revolutionary experts. To go down this theoretical road leads to the realisation that in an important aspect there is little real difference between the projects of anarchism and most of communism and their supposedly deadly enemy, Leninism. If one is going to make this conclusion then one is going to lose most of one's friends in the political milieu. *Echanges* seem to have tried to avoid this, and, indeed, because of this they have continued to have some limited respect from the communist milieu down the years. (*Monsieur Dupont* have no wish to be so circumspect.)

### ***Working class consciousness?***

1) MD advocate the possibility of revolution via the intervention of a relatively small section of the proletariat simply because we see that only a relatively small section (a vast minority) of the proletariat have potential power over the process of capitalist production.

The acts of most people do not effect the world but function at a level of wholly contained effects of the world's turning. In contrast the proletariat's anti-act, the act of non-production or of ceasing work, instantly has effect (like in a dream) on capitalism as a whole (in the past few months, lorry drivers, postmen, tube workers, and now railway guards have stopped sectors of the British economy). Most workers are now employed in sectors that are peripheral to the economy's well-being; if they take industrial action it causes inconvenience only to the im-

mediate employer and perhaps a few companies up and down the supply chain. In contrast the essential proletariat is that group of workers who can halt vast areas of the economy by stopping their work.

These workers are employed in the economy's core industries, industries that can only operate with a relatively high level of labour input into their processes, which gives to those workers an already existing control over process; core workers' latent power can be demonstrated immediately in industrial action which spreads its knock-on effect to all businesses in the locality and beyond, producing spiralling repercussions in society. Core-workers include factory workers, dustmen, power workers, distribution workers (post, rail, road haulage, ferries, dockers, etc); in all of these examples the cessation of work causes immediate and widespread problems for the economy, and this is why it is precisely in these industries that wildcat action is most frequent. Quite simply, industrial action in these industries has a history of success.

Our certainty concerning the revolutionary potential of the essential proletariat is not at all founded upon a presumption of the superiority of life lived as a proletarian, or that working class existence is an end itself that should be pursued by pro-revolutionaries. We do not see the modes of working class organisation as an indicator of a possible, post-revolutionary future, nor as an inherently preferable, that is, more morally pure, existence in the present, as compared with middle class life. We say this because these are the pretended presumptions of many inverted snobs in the Class Struggle movement – they tick off proletarian characteristics like naturalists identifying a separate spe-

cies. We do not pointedly prefer football to opera; we do not think it is better, more pure, more human to be poor than to be rich. We do not think it is inevitable that human kindness is more likely to be encountered in working class individuals than in middle class individuals. We do not think working class people are better than anybody else because they have been defined as belonging to one or other social category. We are not interested in working class culture. We do not accept that you can be working class if you are not employed as a worker no matter what your family history (this is not intended as an insult or slight on people's sense of themselves and where they come from, but we are bored with university lecturers who use "life was hard back then" as a means of asserting their authority). Quite simply, we see the working class as being an economic function organised as part of capitalism and not as being an ethnic identity. If you are no longer employed as an industrial worker then you are not an industrial worker. The same goes for industrial workers when they are on holiday, off sick, in the pub, or indeed any time when they are not present on the actual production line; that is, any time they are not working or having an effect on their work (in official or unofficial industrial action, when they are preventing production).

We are not interested in theoretically expanding the working class to include all militant formations from blacks, gays, women, disabled, to peasants. We are not interested in the working class becoming more human (that is, more political) by means of a raising up through consciousness. We do not celebrate the working class: working class life is rubbish, it is not a condition to be aspired to, and the past thirty

years of pro-revolutionary fetishisation of the proletariat as a thing in itself (the legend has it that the leftist group Militant used to force its activists to wear flat caps and donkey jackets on their paper sells so as to fit in) has mistaken and confused the actual power of the working class and reduced the proletariat to the status of just another oppressed minority. Finally we do not endorse the delinquency of the underclass or interpret it as rebelliousness, we see permanent delinquency as the psychological absorption of dehumanisation, no more than a v-sign offered by one who is standing in quicksand. Underclass delinquency fulfils the function ascribed to it by the state: it causes life, particularly that lived on the housing schemes, to be even more constrained than it is already by employment

The working class is nothing but the collective position of those who are brought closest to the machinery of the capitalist system; a human function in the capitalist machine; the working class are the revolutionary body because of, and only because of, their position in the capitalist economy – they are the one social body that can close the system down.

From our experience we see the proletariat as being made up of many individuals, all different, and with just one thing shared by all of them – they have the same economic position, they all have the same functional status (labour) and all have the same economic value (wages). If general circumstances force you to work in an essential industry (and by essential we mean those industries that will make the continuation of capitalist society impossible by their absence) then you are a proletarian. This social status is not something to be fetishised, it's just a fact.

The working class is merely a function of the capitalist economy. We are interested in the proletariat only to the measure that the proletariat literally has in its hands the levers of capitalism's power. Only those who can be effective will be effective.

As for the left, everywhere we see unresurrectable and useless acts, which no matter the intention connect only with institutions that were formed ages ago: revolution has become, for too many, the smashing of mirrors. At the moment this is called anti-capitalism. There are no revolutionary means of connecting to society, there are no means of escaping absolute containment by institutional determinations, except in the locus of production; factory production is where society's power originates and it is the only place where it can be directly engaged for certain. Outside the factories all is spectacle, all is mirrors. Every non-productive social form is more or less unreal and engaging with them in political terms is always a move into falsity.

How is an anti-capitalist protester going to change the world? By what means exactly? We have given our formula. Yes it is simplistic, it is materialistic – mechanistic even. Even so, everything in the world is made, and power derives from the control of this making. If the making is stopped then the source of this power is interrupted, that is our formula. So now let us hear the plans of the anti-capitalists, what for them is the source of capitalist power, how is ownership maintained? How are the anti-capitalists to engage the power they have theorised, and how to overthrow it? If it is a good recipe then we shall use it. If, however, it begins, "first take several million assorted people over the world and get them all



angry about the conditions of their life, and induce them to catch a plane to some foreign city to march down the main thoroughfare, perhaps breaking a few windows,” then we say this is not a good recipe but the continuation of miragic democracy by means other than the vote.

The world will not be changed by millions of people voting for change, or demonstrating for change, because capitalist power is not constituted with reference to human feelings: political desires and demonstrations, which are the social forms consciousness takes, cannot touch capitalist domination but are merely determined by it. We have no place for consciousness in our scheme, we see no need for a generalised formulated desire for revolution. Revolution belongs to the mute body and its resistance to, and its *giving out* to, the imposition of work. What is needed in the revolutionary struggle is precedence given to the needs of the body (consumer culture is a contemporary echo of this). The slogans are not inspiring or romantic: more rest, more pay, less work, no deals on productivity. However, once this demand-regime is set in motion it cannot be side-tracked except by counterfeit political demands, or formulations of radical consciousness made by those who seek to lead it. Once the body tends toward rest, it cannot rid itself of that inclination unless it is roused again to work for some political vision. In short the struggle of industrial workers against capital will be conducted entirely in selfish terms, which in the end describes itself as the struggle against work in the interest of highly paid sleep. In the present nothing has significance but the desire to extend half-hour lunch breaks into hour lunch breaks. If all pro-revolutionaries

grasp this they will stop worrying about the precondition of consciousness. It is within the political-economic figure of the imposition of work and its negation (which is comfort), that pro-revolutionaries could make a contribution to their workplace struggles. The struggle is against the maximisation of productivity and for the maximisation of rest. If workers could win their struggle in these terms then they will have broken up the basic mechanism of the capitalist system.

The struggle of the body for rest is not the revolution, it is merely the crisis of capital. A crisis because it brings the massed, accumulated, fossilised acts of the past and the sedimenting/accumulating dead acts of the present, along with the possible conditions for the future, together in collision and in this standstill all value ceases to be enforced, leaving the world in a kind of zero hour/zero place where everything is contestable. (When the traffic stopped last September during the Fuel Protests, a man on a bicycle passed me and said, "I can hear the birds singing." We have heard what economic collapse sounds like.) When industry stops everything in society, otherwise absolutely determined by it, floats free from its gravity. In this particular crisis of capital all hell breaks loose; then comes the time for organisation. You can call that consciousness if you want, we don't care.

2) The question of consciousness is central because of the ease by which it is defined and thus counterfeited. The proximity of consciousness to ideology is undeniable, a change in conditions renders a truth false. Because that is what we are talking about isn't it? Truth and Falsity,

consciousness and ideology?

Our position is simple: all consciousness is in fact, by a roundabout route, ideology. Consciousness is the appearance in thought of the forms and content of objective conditions. We know that objective conditions are capitalist and are anti-human. Therefore it would be naive to place any faith in the transformative properties of consciousness if consciousness fails so easily under the command of, and exploitation by, the owners of material conditions.

Everything that appears (even the struggle against capital) is mediated through infinite filters; nothing political has a direct relation to the base. The truths and values that pro-revolutionaries assert are equally subject to the distorting pressures of the economy as are religions, entertainments, and reformist politics. (Does not the Party or group have to be preserved as a thing in itself, kept going by small clerical acts and cash raised? The acts that uphold the group are not in themselves revolutionary and have no connection to the revolution; they are dead acts, they are labour. The group is maintained as the church is maintained: by accumulation.) All pretensions to consciousness are determined by the same forces as ideology; they cannot escape their determinate conditions, and so cannot be identified except as ideology (more or less true, more or less false). These are not grounds for building a reliable foundation for revolutionary practice. In practice, the revolutionary subject (the working class) cannot recognise consciousness, or it cannot distinguish it from ideology. Why, it may ask itself, is the truth of this agitator before me more true than the truth of that last one which was proved by my experience to be a lie (and proved objectively in the ideological co-option of

every revolutionary body that has so far existed).

We are interested in the critique of the concept of consciousness because many messiahs and spoonbenders are currently standing up and demanding participation in the struggle against capital on their terms (for example, the English website for the 2001 Barcelona anti-capitalist protests claimed the possibility of a pre-revolutionary situation; this has proved to be, and was always anyway, completely false). Our self-appointed task is to go around pricking these millenarian bubbles if only to save gullible individuals the costs of air travel and involvement with opportunistic and exploitative groups (Globalise Resistance, for example, rented a train and ran an excursion down to Genoa. Thus the reinvention of the package holiday, or is it the International Brigades? But this group or any other similar has no presence where we live or work; it does not touch real life. Recruitment of those with disposable incomes goes on, as does the process of accumulation in the name of revolution).

No amount of anti-capitalist protest can lead to a pre-revolutionary situation (by what mechanism would it force itself into a position of revolutionary subject?) but the protests are called for in terms of raising consciousness or, as some say, political radicalisation. But if the call to arms is false (based on the incorrect idea that this is some pre-revolutionary preliminary, and a stage in building consciousness) then surely the consciousness raising aspect is, in fact, a lie and is therefore a bomb-the-village-to-save-the-village ideology. Something we cannot accept. Even for buffoons like us in MD, intelligence is always negative, critical, so it is politically vital that our

first reaction to pro-revolutionary manifestations is one of cynicism. Praise and affirmation of the pro-revolutionary milieu is the greatest sin of the pro-revolutionary; it is not our job to affirm anything.

One defensive definition of revolutionary consciousness we have recently encountered is “a definition or a tendency to action on the part of the working class” (meaning: consciousness arises within the workers in their daily struggles). We agree with the sentiments of this definition but we do not call it *consciousness* – for us consciousness also includes a concept of overcoming present conditions, of having a map of where everything is going to end up. It therefore describes a position of objective authority which we do not think is possible without a lapse into ideology. We do not think the proletariat can possess consciousness until capitalism is finished, otherwise this consciousness becomes reified and establishes specific rules of behaviour where certain interests are surreptitiously maintained in present conditions. The stability of these present conditions then becomes the end of those who claim to desire their overthrow.

Consciousness, or overcoming the present situation with a strategy or an intent to reorganise society as communism, must come at some second stage of revolution – after the conflagration, and from *new material conditions*. We said we agreed totally with the definition above but that we do not call it *consciousness*. We prefer the term *interest*. In our scheme the working class act out of solidarity in opposition to capital because they must defend their interest. It is possible that the working class will never escape trade union consciousness (ie being selfish and with-

out transformative vision), that is, they will never stop seeking to defend their interest, never get past wanting more pieces of pie. This is fine by us because it is possible that the working class could drive capitalism into collapse and effect their own erasure and never get beyond a bodily, single-minded pursuit of their own selfish interest. So long as the proletariat's demands stay within economic terms – that is, so long as they remain impervious to political temptation – then so long do they stay on course for naked conflict with the bourgeoisie in the factories. Political demands obscure the clarity of self-interest, political compromise in times of crisis can easily be reached – it doesn't cost the owners anything. Which owner lost out when workers got the vote?

It is possible that the dictatorship of the proletariat itself would be organised (and then left behind as unsatisfactory and self-contradictory) as a more developed form of interest. This will develop, perhaps, along a line of the social institution of efficiency and use value, basically establishing a supplier-interest by getting needed products to the populace. (But then, of course, technology is not neutral and much of what it produces is not useful and will be necessarily abandoned – so the dictatorship will temporarily be over a materially much more basic standard of living.)

In short we see no need to marry the proletariat to consciousness and therefore see no need to theoretically expand the proletariat to include everyone (that is everyone paid a wage, regardless of social status), which is the traditional means by which pro-revolutionaries can inject consciousness: industrial workers can use their revolutionary muscle and teachers and social workers can bring the ideas (as if!).

For us the revolutionary function of the proletariat is very mechanical, and only a relatively small number of people will be significant in the mechanism. On the other hand we think it is important that other groups also act selfishly (the disabled for example, or local communities) and so drain energy from the authorities: these other social and political struggles are marginal and cannot finish the job (they cannot seize the means of production) but they are *never-ending* in that they are concerned with the articulation of needs which cannot be satisfied. However, we think the damage caused to capital by the anti-capitalists is outweighed by their falsification of their own role, that is their false representations of, and hopes for, consciousness and the political sphere in general and their neglect of production.

Incidentally, it may seem that our formulations of how a revolution could take place are rather dystopian, a-human; certainly it gives us little pleasure to slowly erase our previously held leftist tendencies. But at least our concepts are clear and lay down precise criteria. This cannot be said of most pro-revolutionaries, who get extremely vague when discussing how such-and-such of their gestures will engage with, let alone overthrow, present conditions. We would, perhaps, place more trust in pro-revolutionaries and thus in a human-based, participatory revolution, if it were not for the lamentable history of ideas-led revolutions. Pro-revolutionary practice is synonymous with rivalry, personal ambition, corruption, stupidity, and failure. If the supporters of these groups a) did not continue to predict imminent revolution because of what they are doing, and b) did not adopt a slavishly affirmative attitude towards their groups, and c) if they

could maintain a sceptical and critical perspective... then their meaning might amount to more than feeble attempts to alleviate their personal alienation by universalising their rebellions and resentments. It is our lot to be bequeathed a legacy of bad acts, which forecloses the possibility of all acts. It is our personal experience that Revolutionaries, as often as not, behave very badly in ethical terms (the surrendering of the Mayday 2001 crowd to the police in London being the latest example of losses and defeats incurred through ridiculous stunts), as if their heightened political consciousness gives them the right to neglect ordinary decency. This degeneracy is characteristic as much of anarchists as Trotskyites – or anybody, in fact, who thinks they have consciousness and cannot bring themselves to reflect critically upon it. So there it is, revolution cannot be left to Conscious human actions and our only hope lies in the structural conflict of social forces created by capitalism/the economy – again, the blind mole tunnelling in the dark.

*Note, aside, interjection:* We do not pretend articulacy in any specialised language. Our position is developed through our personal experience. We, as MD, are not interested in explaining capitalism as a totality of processes and forces, which we feel is beyond our capabilities. We are content to describe capitalism as we experience it directly. This is probably the source of our difference to other pro-revolutionary groups. For example, the theoretical conception of the working class in pro-conscious and political terms by many pro-revolutionaries is unacceptable to us, and we fail to see the purpose in these fantastical conjectures if the pro-revolutionaries are in good faith.



How can anyone say the working class should act politically? Surely this goes to the heart of the problem of consciousness and the function of the working class. It is not for the working class to support or oppose nations, fascism, democracy, or any other political form; how could this opposition organise itself? How could the Kosovan proletariat oppose Serbia, or the Serbian proletariat oppose Slobbo, or indeed the proletariat of the West oppose NATO? To live in a European slum is surely better than dying in a concentration camp but how could the proletariat intervene and make a choice in such an alternative? The working class is not a politically constituted body; it cannot make final judgements on political questions by making a bloc intervention. Political strategies are more likely to divide the working class than unify it, which unification is the purpose of democracy. Politics always functions to obscure self-knowledge of self-interest.

### *Further thoughts and explanations*

We do not say that consciousness is impossible although we suspect it is (otherwise why has it been forgotten? How did it pass into non-existence so that we must talk about it being resurrected before a revolution can take place?). We simply cannot see consciousness competing with ideology under present conditions. Therefore, we suspect that all pretences at consciousness in the past show themselves to be ideology. That is, we suspect that all ideas-led revolutions in the past were not a realisation of working class consciousness in society but seizures of state power by the bourgeoisie, who used Revolutionary Consciousness as an ideology. The ruse of higher impera-

tives masked the illegality of their appropriations. None of this necessarily forecloses the possibility of an authentic consciousness; it is possible that the great spirit of enlightenment will descend into the clayish heads of the masses and they will at last see the truth. But we should all be very sceptical when it is claimed that this is actually occurring. It seems to us that every half-definition of consciousness given to us during the months we have been formulating our critique contains precisely what we define as a leadership impulse. We have been disappointed to discover such disagreeable codes flashing through the texts of our comrades.

We think everyone we have so far encountered and who supports the Consciousness Model means exactly what we accuse them of: there is always present in their theoretical models the fundamentals of force and of hierarchy, even when they abase themselves before the proletariat, muttering, "we must learn from the struggle itself." The pedagogic relation of revolutionary to worker is downwardly directed. Even – or especially – among those who appreciate the centrality of the workers to the revolution, it is a given that the workers' struggles must be politicised.

And then among the anarchists there is outright contempt for the working class, "the willing slaves" who comply with their bosses and do not rebel, for these passive and useless automatons the pro-revolutionary group substitutes itself and its direct action. The struggle becomes that of active groups against the state and so, even in the heart of libertarianism, the concept of a vanguard and substituted elite takes hold. Because they have not addressed the issue of what consciousness is, anti-capital-

ist groups model themselves on and crudely reproduce previous authoritarian forms based upon a conceptualisation of passive masses and active elites.

One of our critics wrote: "We must insist on 'opening up specific struggles', on calling for their extension, generalisation, on fighting corporatism which wants to enclose workers in their little corner with their specific demands...". These sentiments form the dreary end of almost every single leaflet that emerges from the communist camp. The game is given away: the role for expanding struggles falls on those who have the vision, the owners of consciousness. But the deliberate expansions and connections of struggle always follow the lines set by those doing the expanding and connecting. The lines deployed by these revolutionaries are not purely objective but are developed subjectively and therefore carry their own cultural/political baggage (you still meet anarchists who go on about the struggles of the Irish and Palestinian peoples despite anarchism's explicit refutation of national liberation struggles); in other words it is easy to vaguely call for the expansion of struggles but that expansion has to have a specific content and it is this political content which we reject – if this were not a problem then there would not be thousands of tiny revolutionary groups in the world, there would only be one all inclusive revolutionary party. The fact that we all disagree with each other even though we are all more or less saying the same thing is the final disproof for consciousness, in the same way all the various religious sects in the world are the final disproof for the universal message of The Word of God.

## Summary and counter-interpretation

Our main critique of pro-revolutionary groups is simple and is the form of a question: what do pro-revolutionaries do (and what is the use of consciousness) when there is no revolution? The answer, “make revolution,” recreates the separation of The Movement from The People. The cycle of representation, leadership, the reinstitution of particular cultures as universal objectives begins again. Whilst the answer, “build the movement up so it can force conditions of revolution” merely initiates a cycle of accumulation.

From one perspective it could be argued that we, of MD, are among the most conscious, or the most pro-consciousness in the pro-revolutionary milieu: we are against the reification of consciousness, against its every political manifestation, against its ownership and definition, against its subjective organisation by small groups that have no relation to the revolutionary body but are related to, determined by, and cannot escape from the economic base (as is the case for all social entities).

We are pro-consciousness if you understand our arguments as being carried by the Hegelian stream: from simplicity towards higher simplicity by route of the complexities of alienation; just as in Marx, history rises from simple communism, and ends in communism proper. We are certainly pro-human, and wish to see the return of humanity to its essence as a simple, that is non-alienated, existence. Like Bataille said, as water moving through water.

## *Dictatorship of the proletariat*

We would re-emphasise that we do not see the working class takeover of the factories as a revolution as such but simply as the downfall of capital. We see the revolution (and communist consciousness) arising after this period of crisis when a *new material base of reality is coming into existence*. We see revolution as being in two stages (as, we believe, did Marx). It is in the second stage, the becoming human stage, that the vast mass of human beings participate. This participation will be through consciously-developed organisations in response to critical conditions. The occupations of the factories are only a means and not an end, therefore we are not ultra-councilist (as those who would marginalise us would have it). We do not propose workers' councils at all – we do not presume to call for any specific political institution, we leave that to the participants at the time. We say only that, for capitalist process to be suspended, the ownership of production must directly pass to the workers, without any mediation by political institutions or bodies.

Incidentally, by *factory workers* we mean those employed under factory conditions and this includes distribution staff, etc. We mean those workers who have the power to stop the economy (this excludes shop-workers, teachers, politicised groups, the unemployed, ethnicities, and other marginal categories).

## *Groups*

Our experience, and the experience of proletarians, is that there is always more going on in revolutionary groups

than their stated aims and principles and it is this which has so thoroughly cheesed everyone off with revolutionary consciousness (the reproduction of leadership structures and authoritarian tendencies). The non-appearance of consciousness in the working class is its critique of consciousness.

The absolute refusal of pro-revolutionary groups to recognise the failure of all pro-revolutionary groups in communicating their message can only be explained if the communication of messages is secondary to a leadership impulse. We see Lenin everywhere, yes like Banquo's ghost, and a line of kings rising up. We cannot bury him deep enough. No matter how we pile the dirt on his head he reappears in every tuppenny-hapenny anarchist group and communist sect. We are obsessed, that is the job we have awarded ourselves.

Given the terrible history of the revolutionary movement and its betrayals of the working class surely it is imperative that every pro-revolutionary group reaches the level of integrity whereby it is able to recognise and denounce its organising tendencies and look for other ways of acting. We do not say what pro-revolutionary groups should do, we only say what they should not do; we also say what we do. We are open to critique for this, and welcome it.

### *Is Lenin on sale again?*

When the way is lost the traveller looks up to the heavens, worlds without number.

When the nightstorm wrecks the ship, the water-spouting survivor embraces dawn's wavelapping shore.

When the gods fail and the harvest is lost, the good

soul stares into the totem's eyes.

We are searching for signs.

We are waiting for the mute and closed face of the objective to speak to us.

We desire the affirmation of external forces, let the authority of history affirm the rightness of our actions, for are our acts not historical?

But the only sound is the winter wind singing in the wire; we are alone and rudderless.

But what is really going on when pro-revolutionaries begin their back-to-basics campaigns? Our engagements with other pro-revolutionaries on the issue of consciousness are always re-routed in a "going back to see what Lenin (and Kautsky) said". The search for legitimising authorities happens when there is nothing else to say, when the most important thing is to silence those people whose proposals are taking the issue terrifyingly beyond the confines of the sacred tradition. The star is Lenin, the shore is Lenin, the fetish is Lenin.

We are slightly disorientated by the need for Lenin. We do not share it, we cannot empathise. In this deity, this heavenly body, this mariners' dreamed-for horizon, we see only a gaudy statue, a hole in the sky, a treacherous reef. It seems, in moments of crisis and doubt, that many communists turn for home, to where they feel most comfortable. They fall back on the fortifications of previous positions. Mother Mary comes to me, speaking words of wisdom, let it be. The comfort, the authority, the harbour's arms. When communist theory degenerates it does so always along the same lines, like in timelapse films of fruit rotting in a bowl. The ecstatic, rebellious moment is

one thing but how long can it be sustained against the onslaught of ceaseless experience?

Is not all *movement* the progress of decay?

Retreat is the removal of oneself (under pressure of hostile circumstance) to a place of relative safety. In ideological terms it is more than this: retreat is falling back onto the political frames that really shape the so-called revolutionaries' ambition – retreat is the stripping away of ideological gloss and becoming what you really are. Thus the common practices of right and left totalitarianisms in the 1930s, 1960s radicals becoming stockbrokers, youthful rebels turning out like their conservative fathers. We hear the radical talk of anti-capitalists but we see in their actions the creation of alternative markets. We have seen many pro-revolutionary groups and individuals retreat into personal nastiness in response to our critique and thus expose their true characters. During critical events, or over time, we see who people really are – the radical guise is dropped because of a perceived urgency or simple exhaustion at maintaining the pretence. The false proletarian accent adopted by Brighton activists is abandoned when they give up and get on with their career.

In the fuel protests of 2000 the left and the greens forgot about what they had understood as the police state and eagerly called for a clampdown on fascist/polluting lorry drivers who were “undemocratically holding us all to ransom”. And during war there are an embarrassing many who lose their cynical attitude and find a reason to become patriotic. Which is the worse spectacle, leftwingers berating the working class for their lack of enthusiasm for leftwing politics or leftwingers berating the working



class for their lack of enthusiasm for war? The most repulsive attribute of the left is that first they have to blah blah about how radical they are and then they have to blah blah blah about their conversion to the right. They never shut up. It is possible to perceive a common driving force in apparent political adversaries: behind the rhetoric of the political left and right is the orchestrating interest of the owning class. So, when we talk about consciousness and, in response, others look for quotes in the collected works of Lenin, we see them as being in retreat – both refusing to engage with our ideas and refusing to engage with the failure to achieve the purpose of their groups. We see in the retreat to Lenin a revelation of many authoritarian characteristics in small group life, the dominant motive of which is a search for a means to shut us up. This is one source of our anti-consciousness position: consciousness, and the owners of consciousness, cannot be trusted because, quite rightly, under pressure beliefs will be dropped in favour of underlying class interest. Middle class radicals will always revert to class affiliation, no matter the political content of their values. The reality of the world is that of defending the class-interests created by capitalism. The only way to get beyond *interest* is the collapse of its determining frame.

Every 15 year old pro-revolutionary is disgusted by the figure of Lenin; only later do they learn realpolitik and (swallowing their bile) assert in the face of their own political defeats and disappointments, “at least he was right.” He was right because he won and it is this achieved power, this victory, that excites admiration. The seizure of state power seems real enough, real in the sense that it appears to escape

the determination of events by conditions. By force of arms he did what he meant to do, and that is the definition, is it not, of revolution? Or is it really? Wasn't this just a case of inter-bourgeois strife, just spectacle played around the shifting techniques of exploitation?

And so it is that every year some downhearted group, lost in the desert, must turn to Lenin's writings for inspiration, so that they can cut through the mess that surrounds them, so that they can start again from the source. But there is no determinate connection between Lenin's dullard writing and his Machiavellian genius for political action. There is no example of Leninism that is not simple Garibaldism, or Robespierreism, no example that does not finish up in nationalism, does not end with lesser Lenins like Gerry Adams or Nelson Mandela, Carlos, the RAF and E. Germany and Syria. Anybody for the heroic PLO against the fascist Jewish state?

In the Russian Revolution we see two movements: one the spontaneous abandonment of war and the nation, the dropping of weapons, and the seizing of land and factories; the other the re-territorialisation of the existent Russian revolutionary movement onto the model of 1789 (via an ideology that fetishises state power as a neutral, objective technique). Lenin belongs in world history books because he was deployed by Germany as a weapon in the Great War, without that aid he would be another Herzen. So what can he say to us now?

For Monsieur Dupont, Lenin is as far away in time as Robespierre, whereas we find Marx modern. This is because Marx failed. That is, he remains human. He did not merge himself with an existent political power, did not

link into the carousel of ruling class forms. Hegel observed that falsity is a moment in truth – the ideas of Marx did not coincide with reality and therefore were in error and so fix themselves to truth because they negated actual conditions. In the same way, we are not so harsh on pro-Leninists like Luxemburg, Gramsci, and Lukacs, who failed in the manner of Marx and not that of Lenin. They were quite wrong in their attempt to fuse their theories with Bolshevik practice, and so, regardless of their intent, and even in their affirmations of falsity, we can uncover some viable negation, something useful. The actions of Lenin on the other hand were very appropriate for the moment – being affirmational, they belong to falsity.

What is the motive for the return to Lenin? It is a noted historical phenomenon that religions are revitalised, become fundamentalist, immediately preceding their abandonment – there is always one last great bonfire, cathedral built, sacrifice of innocents, before indifference, groups and ideas decay always along the same lines because they always encounter the same boundaries to their effectiveness. The typical pro-revolutionary response to this frustration is to bring in an element from the outside which is intended to trump the impasse of present conditions but serves only to suppress the function of the group. A better response would be a clear eyed evaluation of failure and the limits of group effectiveness; at that point you will find the end of the expediency of consciousness. We see the return to Lenin in people's responses to us as, on the one hand, an affirmation of the need for a Revolutionary Movement independent of the working class with the Bolsheviks as the model. (Because

they were the so-called winners, they are the chosen example for our refuters. There are some people who have tried to shut us up, or expel us from debate, who perhaps are our own little contemporary Lenins. Bless them.)

And on the other hand it seems to revitalise previously-subdued Trotskyist (Leninist) roots. More vaguely, but influencing every move on the internet discussion forum of communists (where we have had much of this debate), there is a Leninist urge to get to a stage of defined position; the idea of the final word and supra-historical principle are the great temptation. If we have not numbers then at least we can have truth?

MD think not. Truth is always in numbers. Curse the working class. All they do is drop their guns, go home, and start ploughing the landlord's land again, damn them. It's so easy for them, and here we are, revolutionary heroes, brooding on our non-connection. The defeat of the revolutionary working class, their enclosure and extermination, is the truth of the Russian Revolution, and not Lenin at all: why didn't they leave any writings that we could go back to when we are presented with our own defeat?

We see the retreat by pro-revolutionaries to previous theoretical fortifications as a complete loss of nerve, and an ugly conservatism. When all pro-revolutionary theory of the Twentieth Century was about *leaving* Lenin, this absurd return to Kremlinism is anti-historical. The truth of our situation is precisely the impossibility of the return to Lenin. The ambitions of a few in seeking this reinvention of marxist-leninism, or even the pursuit of their own taking leave of Lenin, is an attempt to escape addressing actual historical conditions: it is a mad-eyed flight, a nerv-

ous taking hold of neglected idols. There are no atheists in foxholes indeed. The point is this – every year, dozens of pro-revolutionary groups expire, they go from theorising themselves as revolutionary vanguard, bringer of truth, to simple non-existence in months. And get this. The world neither registered their presence nor placed a stone over their demise. Nobody took any notice, let alone cared.

We are not Lenin, the vari-determined Lenin. (Lenin who was only *Lenin* because of a) a long-lived Russian pro-revolutionary milieu that gave him his meaning and status, and b) the intervention of the German state.) Fortunately we, the pro-revolutionary milieu, are more than Lenin, or less than Lenin. We can never repeat his entrepreneurial audacity, that market has been cornered and exhausted. It is possible that we are nothing but the dying echo of that Bolshevik, that we are figments of his cross-sectioned mind; we are becoming an exaggerated periphery, further and further removed from reality, sent on long-ago-issued orders now irrelevant to the situation, and as his significance fades and he becomes just another Black Prince, we find ourselves mere archaeological curiosities. The pro-revolutionary milieu is becoming irrelevant and we think that this is a good thing. Our ineffectiveness means we escape the damnation incurred by all those who impose themselves and do not understand that they have been imposed upon by conditions they have not considered. We, this political milieu, are destined to become all those groups of the past that laid down and died because in their vainglorious aspirations to be an historic party they became irrelevant.

Some talk of “when such a (revolutionary) move-

ment gets off the ground” and in this very affirmation demonstrate their reluctance to engage with *why* this movement has not got off the ground since 1939; they want to go back to a time when such movements were possible because political revolutions are the only revolutions that they can conceive.

We shall put this simply: there is no revolutionary movement. There was a revolutionary movement but it collapsed because it turned out not to be a revolutionary movement at all but an ideological mystification of social and economic relations and processes (ie, a political interpretation of capitalist social mechanisms that saw itself as the mystified solution to the mystified problem). It is possible that there will be, in the near future, a revolutionary movement of the kind some hope for but it will not really be revolutionary – even though, or especially because, it says it is.

We view revolutionary and anti-capitalist movements not as mistaken forms of otherwise correct positions but as capitalist movements in themselves; revolutionary movements effect only the reorganisation of capitalism and as such, at the end of their acts, words, and breath, are pro-capitalist. To be a Leninist is to be as much a capitalist as a Keynesian, Trotsky was as capitalist as Ford; to be an Anti-capitalist is to be as much a capitalist as any other liberal reformer. There are different forms and interpretations but the theoretical maintenance of the working class as workers (whether for state owners or green collectives) and the emphasis on the re-organisation of production (whether in terms of nationalisation or with reference to the environment) means they are always within the capitalist frame of definition.

Do these Revolutionary Experts with their vague appeals to *consciousness* think that nobody else has tried to build exactly what they desire to build? They want to go back to Lenin but there have been thousands of revolutionary groups, parties, and individuals in the eight decades since 1917, all of which failed. Do they think their personal ardour is enough to bring billions into line? These billions have not come for Lenin (or any other socialism) for fifty years and nor will they. There is nothing any of us can do to bring them to consciousness. Some of us, beginning with MD, do not even wish for the Movement, that means to an end which always becomes the end. We wish for the opposite, for the movement not to come into existence.

Let's accept it: the pro-revolutionary groups that exist and that will come into existence will never escape the smallness of their numbers; there will never be a mass revolutionary movement. Now it is for us to understand precisely our smallness by contemplating the smallness of all the other small groups that thought of themselves as a Party. Those who awarded themselves the right to talk turkey with the objective (just as we do), those who called for the masses to join them, or for the masses to join some organisation not yet in existence but to be forged out of our consciousness and their numbers.

Let us contemplate that call for revolution in the terms that have been set, and the deafness of the ears for which it was intended. If the conditions of present reality allowed for a revolutionary movement it would come into existence because a base of mass social militancy would produce a receptivity for political messages. Even so, a

self-proclaimed mass revolutionary movement would still be counter-revolutionary, but we are content that present conditions have slammed the door on the possibility of such an eventuality. There is not now and there will not be in the future a revolutionary movement that is really revolutionary, and to look for it, plan for it, or organise it is futile and wilfully ignores all past pro-revolutionary forms and their fate.

The communist milieu will never be more than a few dozen and each of us in our agitating will never contact more than a few hundred. The structure of capitalism determines that only a few dozen people will have revolutionary consciousness under these conditions. The distribution of, and possibility for, communist consciousness is something never adequately explored by the left-communist milieu, which assumes a priori that all may acquire consciousness as the Catholics believe we might all be saved, or in the same way as the American Dream says we can all be millionaires. If this were not so, in our everyday lives without even trying, we would meet at least five people every week who we could recruit into our organisations (or informal groupings); every week our organisations would be growing. That is the necessary ground (in a world of billions of people) for revolutionary consciousness to form. It is because this ground does not exist, because each of us are not spontaneously encountering hundreds of would-be revolutionaries every year, that the problem is not one of getting a message across. Information has removed the meaning from all messages and this is why we must consider concepts of crisis, collapse, and economic struggle within the sphere



of production. Concepts, in other words, that do not rely upon political forms and their distribution.

### *Identity politics*

We do not know what anyone means when they describe the proletariat as a social category. If they are implying that members of the working class as a social body have something between themselves other than their experience of work then we utterly reject this. MD have a penchant for champagne and Tarkovsky movies whereas our neighbours prefer White Lightning and WWF wrestling, our economic position, however, is identical. We refute all identity politics as ideology and we absolutely refuse to view the proletariat as a political/sociological constituency equivalent to ethnicity, gender, or sexual preference. The proletariat has no existence independent of capitalism.

There is no space in the world that is not ultimately dominated by capitalism – the proletariat is always collectively determined by capitalist pressures. When/if the proletariat abolishes capitalism it will be driven into that position by capitalist imperatives. There is nothing outside the dominion of capital, perhaps occasional fleeting moments, but not culture nor social form, how could there be? To assert, as Autonomists do, that there are other processes by which value is generated independent of capital is to mystify the nature of exploitation. Activists go looking for signs, they create narratives whereby discreet events are connected together in a totalised movement towards revolution, they tend towards an uncritical acceptance of liberationist politics which they see as part of that movement. Such fateful soothesayings lead negation back into contained forms of engagement.

What there is in the world that is not determined by capitalism is the entirely mute but donkey-stubborn a-historical resistance of human flesh; it is the body and its desire not to be productive that resists capitalism. Ok, this is a completely negative formulation, but we have seen how pro-consciousness values always end by flipping into their opposite. The body remains unchanged, enslaved but fundamentally unhelpful. Bodyresistance is a drag on maximisation; in its unmediated form it cannot become articulate other than in times of crisis. When production stops then the body speaks and production stops when the body speaks; all other representations of the working class in political form serve only to keep productivity going – one way or another improving messages arrive always from above. The proletariat is a mute and ugly body that has been electric-prodded into existence; it has no worth other than its integration into the productive machinery from which capital is generated. It is this integration of the human body (and its tendency towards rest) with the productive form (and its tendency towards maximisation) that gives the proletariat its revolutionary thrill. The body's impulse is to shrink from the machine and the machine's impulse is to shrink from the body, no other intimacy was ever so frigid. Only the proletariat has the capacity to engage so up-close with the productive process and feel no love for it. All other social movements and categories end by floundering in the drying mudflats under the burning rays of a merciless sun.

In its resistance to work, the proletariat will not be motivated by political values but by its selfish interest to assert its species being; its bodily desire to be human floods across the barriers of its separation. There is nothing nice or noble or heroic about the working class – it is essential

to the productive process which constitutes the structure of our reality and therefore essential to revolution and the abolition of reality based upon production.

### ***Militants and otherness***

As mere anecdotal evidence, and briefly touching on the matter of pro-revolutionary consciousness which we understand to be a proposed solution to the problem of engagement and organisation, we should like it to go on the record that we have met with several workplace militants and for the most part they have no political consciousness. Many of these militants are very anti-political; we would say they were post-political. But how did they become militants if they did not receive political instruction? Their condition is one of absolute refusal of the legitimacy of the manager, an absolute intransigence over specific workplace issues and a kind of terrifying site-specificity – producing in them an absolute refusal to look at the wider picture (like Ahab on the back of the white whale they are consumed with a madness for not escaping). We do not endorse such militants; we see them as being stuck in a loop of restricted gestures which their identity seems to depend upon. What would they do if they had not their struggle? It is a fact of our experience that most workplace militants are quite mad and/or not especially nice people to know; it is important not to get wrapped up in their personal feuds but still we would argue that these mad-eyed prophets are in advance of those who are politically motivated, in advance and waiting in the desert, gone mad with waiting, gnawing at

locusts, sitting on poles. Some of them, and of a certain age, cite *Pink Floyd*, and not Marx, as the biggest influence on their lives. They required only a narrative of otherness, something that was not contained in the usual cause and effects of everyday life to legitimise their dispute. Will the misty master break me, will the key unlock my mind? For such people, the A to B thinking of most pro-revolutionary activists is too basic and not even appropriate to the situation. To them it means nothing to "speak in a language the workers understand" because nobody has ever spoken such a language.

### ***Political priorities and consciousness***

The absurdity of pro-revolutionary consciousness is its content (its beautiful form, a cloud softly crackling as it passes behind the eyes, and behold: enlightenment!). If it were a commodity of high use value then those who possessed it would have a capacity for establishing political priorities and getting to the heart of the matter – and yet they faff about, getting nowhere. All those who pursue consciousness are completely at odds with one another over its content and the means of its transmission; those who have no power and continue to pursue political consciousness fail to understand that political consciousness is something deployed, by those who have power, as a mask of their power.

If the workers were to have consciousness, then what would its content be in non-revolutionary situations? What precisely is the most radical position for workers to take on Northern Ireland, to support the UFF, or the

Real IRA, or the Peace Process, or not to get involved at all? What is the most radical position for workers to take on the recent riots in the north of England, to support the ethnic identity of the Pakistan nationalists, to understand the riots as working class resistance to fascism and not, say, the entrenchment of the leadership of particular forms of primitive accumulation (drug gangs, the expulsion of Hindus, protection rackets, etc, accumulation of national capitals in Pakistan), to support the integration of both so-called communities in a harmony of different identities, to support the white working class who have no political representation, or not to get involved at all? What is the most radical position the working class could take on asylum seekers and how would this be demonstrated? What is the most radical position the working class could take on policing, the Prevention of Terrorism Act, CCTV, and how should that be demonstrated? How would the working class express these politics if it decided on them? If these questions could be parachuted into the workplace by activists as ideological issues then at best it could wind everybody up into camps of conservatives and radicals, with the radicals being no more revolutionary than the conservatives, but it is more likely that most people would continue to be uninterested.

It is a simple fact that the working class have no power over these issues and therefore to hold opinions on them would be a form of self-tantalising torture. It is impossible to know what is the most radical opinion to be held, because every opinion may be undermined by further facts. Just as feminism, black power, and gay rights have been de-radicalised by a capitalism that has not only

tolerated them but fostered them as niche markets.

As private individuals we have our ethical opinions and values but in our public guise as Monsieur Dupont we have learnt that it is a waste of energy to hold ecological, anti-fascist, or anti-nuclear opinions. We have no power over these things and even if we could mobilise enough support for them we think the apparent radicality of such causes is very suspect and possibly less radical than the current situation of instability of pressures and forces – possibly less radical but we don't really know, so it is better for us to stick to what we do know until someone comes along with a model of urgent consciousness that really works.

It seems as nice as pie to advocate the transmission of revolutionary ideas to workers in struggle so that they have a wider perspective on the world and are therefore more prepared to engage with society at a higher level, but when you get to the nuts and bolts of it – the actual details of how it should be done – then there are immediate problems. The most glaring of which is that in this transmission of ideas and goals, the pro-revolutionary party also imports into the very heart of the revolutionary project a reproduction of the capitalist social relation: workers organised by revolutionary experts. We see this missionary work, this hierarchical relation, replicated in everything from the support for rebellion in Chiapas to the handing out of leaflets by activists visiting picket lines. We see it in the vague pronouncements that usually appear at the end of such leaflets; where calls are made to the working class, or it is stated that some kind of leap of intellectual faith and working class solidarity (consciousness) is needed be-

fore capitalism can be threatened: "When will you workers wake up?" We see it also in the cosy social and political world that the revolutionary experts and activists have built for themselves, where they can create their own importance through their political activism.

### *On economic determinism and autonomism*

One comrade writes to us, in opposition to our mechanistic concepts, which he characterises as "economic determinism that denies the complexities of social processes etc," and attempts to supersede by advocating "the development of the class struggle and the autonomous organisation of the class in it, a condition for the consciousness of the possibility [for revolution]". Harry Cleaver writes in *Reading Capital Politically*, "With the working class understood as being within capital yet capable of autonomous power to disrupt the accumulation process and thus break out of capital, crisis can no longer be thought of as a blind 'breakdown' generated by the mysteriously invisible laws of competition".

There is a lot of dust blown up in these statements and nothing is very clear, but what is common to them is the use of the term "autonomous," which we find very interesting. We would like to expand the discussion of consciousness to include both these ideas on the "complexity of social processes" and the use of the concept of autonomy.

Many of the arguments we have come up against from communists are stated in Cleaver's book (which we

recommend very highly but with which we disagree in almost every detail beginning with the title and its Phd thesis style), however there is no reference in the otherwise complete index for the concept of autonomy. So, how can the working class be both inside and autonomous of capitalism (if by "autonomous of" we mean *not determined by*)? Cleaver appears to argue that the proletariat becomes autonomous when it becomes politicised, which we immediately and emphatically disagree with because we think politics is always a manoeuvre away from the [question of the] ownership of production. But then he goes even further and says that reality is not simply imposed by the ruling class but is a matter of response and counter-response within the class struggle. This seems fair enough on one level until we remember that we still live in capitalism, and that all of the reforms won in the political struggles of the working class have helped capitalism run more effectively.

The idea of a world that is not simply imposed from above is quite appealing at first but then we have to address the idea of escape from that dialectic. The model Cleaver argues for is one in which working class struggle wins its victories on the terrain of the ruling class. In other words it is a dialectic in which the antithesis operates as a function of the way things are: every resistance feeds into domination and allows it to penetrate further and more effectively. Every victory of this apparent autonomy is manifested in the world of capitalist determination. Perhaps Cleaver is, in effect, making a case for the autonomy of political values and principles that float free of economics. He wants to salvage the political ideals of the 1960s; it is the same kind of



argument used by those who advocate “real democracy,” like Castoriadis or Bookchin. The questions begin with: is autonomy an ideological mirage generated by capital in the heads of its rebels; how does this politicised set of practices, called autonomy, escape economic determination? How should the working class be organised when they are already organised by capital?

Capitalism itself has given the revolutionary role to the working class, so what need is there for another tier of middle management politicians?

The autonomist mode of struggle seems to argue for acts that will register only in the world the way it is. How is it possible to judge them as advances for the revolutionary tendency when they also become weapons of the ruling class against us (equal opportunities policies, for example, which have facilitated the idea of worker participation in management, touchy-feely personnel strategies, and anti-racist and anti-sexist capitalism). How is it possible to escape the conditions set by the unofficial dialogue that this sort of struggle becomes?

Much of the argument from communists against us has come from this autonomist direction. We think it would be helpful if some of these claims were made more explicit. For example one communist has argued to us that white workers must come to respect black workers before there can be a revolution. This is the sort of position Cleaver takes in his book, where he argues white workers’ racism oppresses black workers and impedes the communist movement. We think this mistakes the symptom for the cause. If all the symptoms are put right, that is, if all the nastiness in capitalism is removed, would

that in any way affect capitalism itself? It is a question that takes us right back to the origin of this discussion on consciousness. If it is truly believed that before revolution can occur certain political-institutional reforms have to be set in place then there is no purpose in being a pro-revolutionary. Better to work to get the reforms done first. We should not hold onto illusions about the nature of capitalist power; capitalism is fundamentally not racist, sexist, or prejudiced in any form. Anti-racism is now a specific project of all capitalist political institutions. Autonomists would argue that this is because militant self-organisation has forced this reform onto the capitalists; in fact such militancy has merely opened up possibilities for the breaking free of capitalism from traditional social forms. Prejudice and bigotry impedes the smooth running of production. It, like national borders, must be altered to serve capital more efficiently (the reduction of people to ethnic identities, which has been the project of identity militants, is a new form of racism which works much more effectively within the distributive, state-funded, sphere).

It is not the role of pro-revolutionaries to take up a political position on prejudice. It is not for us to improve life conditions within the capitalist form and obscure with side issues the tyranny of the commodity which goes unchallenged in the competition of identity markets (for funding). However, as individuals of course it is our ethical responsibility to oppose bigotry whenever we encounter it. We must not confuse our personal ethics with Revolutionary Movements.

Another communist has said that, "the socialist revolution has to be a conscious act which could be de-

scribed as the people involved as having ‘socialist consciousness’”. We certainly agree that the working class are conscious, that is, awake for 16 out of 24 hours a day. We agree that the people involved in the revolution are likely not to be asleep. But to be conscious and to have socialist consciousness is not the same thing. To be conscious means to have your senses fully engaged with your brain and your mind filled with any old nonsense. Socialist consciousness implies the implementation of a shared set of principles. We think there are practical problems with this implementation, because we look at the history of revolution and we see a history of failure. If consciousness were enough then the revolution would have happened a century ago when many millions were socialists. At the moment, it could be argued, only a tiny minority has this consciousness. If the revolution must be initiated by the participation of the working class, then the absence of their socialist consciousness is cause for comment.

We, on the contrary (based on our tiny experiences and our readings of the histories of these failed revolutions), think it likely that the revolution will spread like insects caught in the wind. We think that many people involved will not know what they are doing beyond the practical task at hand, which will be an impulse to take power, to take control of their immediate working environment. It is likely that there will be many causes and ideas running through people’s heads at this moment: reformist political, religious fervour, trade unionist, this revolutionary party, that revolutionary tendency, revengist against the boss or society, whatever. As the working class takes power there will be any number of ideas

appearing in their heads and these will be echoes of the capitalist form. Many of these ideas will be seriously discussed and will seem to have the utmost urgency. But as soon as occupation of the factories is fully secured then a new material base will begin to configure and at that point new ideas, the ideas appropriate to collective ownership and collective dictatorship over events, will begin to form. What matters is the event itself, the seizure of production, and not the idea that motivates it, because the act itself, if it is on sufficient scale, will collapse capital. From that moment other forces take hold.

### *The revolutionary subject*

We recognise the industrial proletariat as the revolutionary subject not because we are romantically attached to its way of life, we do not think in terms of salt of the earth, or even that, in some dark way, the workers know how society really works. We are not interested in setting our gladiator against the pet subjectivities of other theorists; we have simply reached our conclusions because we can see no other. For us, everything political is contained; politics as a practice is itself a technique for relating the social back to the economic without antagonism.

The questions we have asked have been hard for us: "How are women, organised as women, going to stop capital?" "How are blacks, organised as blacks, going to stop capital?" "How are women or Blacks organised as workers going to stop capital?" Many theorists have tried to expand the definition of the working class to include political elements within it. Thus the struggle of women

by themselves for their position in the workplace is viewed positively because they are struggling consciously, that is, politically, for a defined political end. We, contrarily, see in this politicisation of struggle precisely the route by which it will be utilised to improve productivity, because political consciousness is precisely the factor that tricks workers into forgetting where their real power lies. Women do not harm capitalism by establishing themselves as equals to men in the workplace, blacks do not harm capitalism because they establish themselves as equals to whites. Equal opportunity legislation is a source of great pride in capital's civilisation of itself. The ongoing victory of women and of blacks in this area is proclaimed by capital as its own victory, its own self-civilising progress towards a free, happy, equal society. Political demands may be satisfied under capitalist terms and used as a ground for further exploitation. This is the function of politics, and radical politics in particular.

The truth of the workers' struggle against capital is not political, it is the truth of capitalism itself: the capitalist economy depends upon the exploitation of workers to reproduce itself and its conditions. Therefore the workers alone, because of their centrality to the productive process, have the capacity to stop production. Only they can reach past the roaring engines and press the off switch. It may seem that they would never desire to do this, and it is true they may never want to stop capitalism; they may never even conceptualise what capitalism is. But desire and consciousness do not come into it; the workers are forced into struggle by the very conditions in which they work; it is in their *interest* to go against capital because

although capital is dependent on them, it is also hostile to them. That is, it is driven to cut their wages in real terms (either by redundancies, relocations, or increased productivity deals). To survive, workers have to improve or simply maintain their interest within production, so they are forced into conflict with capital, which has the opposite intention. This blind pursuit of *interest*, if followed to its limit, is enough to bring capital to a crisis.

### *A recap of our perspective*

1. We do not think there is any role for Class Consciousness, that is, the leadership of the working class by politically motivated groups in the revolution.

2. We think pro-revolutionaries do have a role but it is not generally the role they award to themselves (for example, waving flags, masking their faces, travelling to international cities, exhibiting the most extreme gestures in the parade of gestures that are political demonstrations). We see one of our tasks as to inhibit those who would lead the revolution, *especially those who are closest to us and claim not to want to lead*. Other tasks we have set ourselves are the creation of tools, tactics, and perspectives for use by others in various critical events, for which we claim no intellectual property rights.

3. Our concept of the revolution involves the working class engaging in a struggle that goes no further than maintaining its own interest. We advocate the struggle of self-interest because it cannot fail. We think if it is followed through to its end it will in itself bring capital down because this struggle is situated within production

and the ownership of production is the basis of capitalist existence; if this direct struggle is not side-tracked by political mediations, in five minutes it will discover everything Monsieur Dupont has attempted to articulate over months and years, and many times over in many places of the world. The proletariat is organised by capital, in every place. Its situation is always, everywhere, the same; in direct struggle it will always uncover the same truths, therefore any further organisation would be superfluous and potentially exploitative.

4. Our mechanical schemes are not nineteenth century as some have argued; they are much older than that. We think the revolution will be in two stages, the first will involve the destruction of the capitalist system by the working class as it seizes production (which it might do without even formulating a desire to do so). Many factories will be occupied because many other factories are occupied. Change will be spread by the force of change, mechanistically, virally, infectiously. Consciousness, decision making, intentionality will flow out of, and adapt to, the new structuration as it takes shape. This responding to structure will form the second stage of revolution, feeding into the process the participation of all humanity in its endless struggle to become human.

### *No way out*

It was not our intention to promote alternatives to the consciousness-raising model but we have met with such (wilful) incomprehension and misinterpretation that we should conclude, for the sake of good form, by stating our continued support for pro-revolutionary positions

and actions. It is absurd that we should have to make this declaration. We would not be participating as we do if we were against revolution. Vaguely, our intention is to talk to those who are able to listen to us. We hope to influence only those who are already pro-revolutionary. It is our hope that if we can connect with anyone then our influence will help to curtail the mystifications that activists and experts promote. The specifics of any particular action are dependent on ability to act and the situation itself – this can be addressed in correspondence between interested groups and individuals. We have no set formula as such and we are prepared, much to the annoyance of activists, to condone the strategy of doing nothing and disengagement.

Monsieur Dupont  
September 2001



## Appendices

### *The optimism of revolutionaries*

Long ago I felt the utter weariness that religion induced in me. So I abandoned all respect for it. Later in my life I came to the conclusion that ghosts did not exist, that there was no such thing as magic or miracles, and that aliens have never visited planet earth. It took a great weight off my shoulders to come to these conclusions. I was reminded of when I had given up allowing for the possibility that a god existed. It is common sense that permits one to come to such decisions. It was once said that "the only true histories are those that have been written by men who have been sincere enough to speak truly about themselves". Shakespeare said, "This above all: to thine own self be true, and it must follow, as night the day, thou canst not then be false to any man". If we can look out from our own eyes and judge the world with our own feelings then we will get closer to the truth about things than in any other way. The point of religion, the belief in ghosts or the supernatural, the belief in aliens, all ideology in fact, is to distract people from thinking about, and *from*, themselves and to make them feel humble and powerless. Instead of basing our world-view on our own experience we are coerced into looking out onto the world through a filter of *hope* and *fear*.

When I was young, after I had passed through a period of reading that started with tales about King Arthur and ended with the Conan the Barbarian books, I began reading *serious* and *great* literature. I did not read everything by

any means, but I read enough. As a young man I read less; I was in the search for how to actually live my life, which for me meant doing as little work as possible. However, if I had to work I preferred manual labour to anything else. I was a student for a while, to put off inevitabilities. Here I met many Marxist lecturers. In fact, in those days every academic seemed to be a Marxist of some sort. One of them, a man whose thinning black hair and full, unkempt beard suited his passion for the French Revolution, once said to me that he had given up reading fiction a long time ago. I remember him saying this but do not remember exactly why he said it. Probably it was because I had asked him if he had read some novel or other. Being of an impressionable age and, indeed, nature, I resolved to abandon my silly novel reading. What use was fiction when there were so many factual books around that could tell you more about real life and the forces that shape the world? But I was unsuccessful. I could rarely read factual books; they hung like a dead weight on my hands. (There are a few exceptions to this rule, I remember, for example, reading with great gusto an academic book I had borrowed from Sydney Library, while lazing by a pool in Fiji, on the Ruhr and its role in the German Revolution.) One of the problems with factual books is that the reader cannot tell if they are telling the truth. For this reason it is no good reading one version of events – you have to read all of them and only then can you attempt to form your own opinion on matters, or give up in despair. This is too tiresome a task for the likes of me, so I tried to find the right interpretations of events by only reading writers I thought were close to my way of thinking. So I read a few obscure political works: anarchist,

ultra-left, council communist, Marxist, Situationist, etc. I did not read everything by any means, but I read enough. As I said, I read much less in general than when I was a teenager, but still I was drawn to *great* novels, and I continued to read them, slowly.

The political works I read, the people I was involved with, and the texts I produced myself, although often having some worthy characteristics, were imbued with an optimism and a faith that bore no relation to the real world that I saw around me. I had become a kind of political animal. However, since I never actually lived for any length of time in any political *social scene* I was always able to critique it from outside. Macho gestures; lack of serious thought; lack of self-reflection; insularity; condescending and do-good impulses better suited to the rigorously alienated world of social work – these were elements I became aware of in the Revolutionary social scene. It seemed to me to be a grave error to see your personal lifestyle, your personal politics, as evidence of genuine revolt. It is also tragically egotistical and, in the end, comic. After a short while all bohémias become restrictive, moralistic, and deadly boring. We cannot escape this society while the fundamental aspects of its continuation are still functioning, we cannot come up with any real alternatives, beyond half-told dreams, until the economy comes crashing to a halt. It is the way the economy of the world works – not to say that it always works perfectly of course – that makes it possible for the ruling class to exercise its power. And the ruling ideas of society are the ideas of the ruling class. And in this democratic and mass world the ruling class provides us with many differing and even competing ideas.

By providing us with these false opposites (globalisation/anti-globalisation, imperialism/anti-imperialism, vegan café/McDonalds, etc) the ruling classes can ensure that debates are kept on their terrain, that those with a sense of self-righteousness are kept busy playing the tiresome political games of good versus evil. These political movements, naturally, never threaten to destroy the economy (how could they?), they only offer empty threats to refine it or save it. History shows us that it is not *movements* that lead to genuinely revolutionary events, it is only complete economic failure and mis-management. If this occurs, and it was close to happening at the time of World War One, then it may be that the workers in those industries that are essential for the economy to keep running will be forced to take them over. It is at this point that the material basis of society will have altered, and it is now that humanity has *the chance* to assert itself, and prevent the re-imposition of economics. Where movements are the dominant force in events one will only see a hasty replacement of effective government, a *coup d'état*; one will *not* see the collapse of all sections of the ruling class as all these sections lose control, however temporarily, of the economy. There is a difference between the toppling of political parties in, for example, Serbia in 2001, and the turmoil in society in Europe at the end of WW1. There is a difference, for example, between the toppling of political parties in recent years in the Philippines and the limited events in France in 1968.

Apart from my distance from the revolutionary lifestyle I also had an enlightening experience in a postal workers group. This was not really a rank-and-file group, it was mostly a group of political postal workers who

wanted to gain some influence over other postal workers and increase tensions at work. (Attempting to expose *all* anti-worker tendencies at one's workplace is the nihilist communist's daily fare – "Cheer up, folks, in a hundred years we'll all be dead and forgotten!") It wasn't long after I joined it that the group began to fall apart. My experiences in this group and at work in the delivery office convinced me of certain things. I became aware of how those who are for communist revolution should act and behave in workplaces. I also became aware that most of my political associates did not work, and would not ever work, in any essential industry. This, I felt, helped sustain the current and general misunderstanding of where the power of the working class lies. On the other hand, simply working in essential industries does not in any way guarantee clarity of observation for so-called revolutionaries. Anyway, I can see now that it was this experience that helped me move away from more liberal, leftist, anarchist convictions and take on more communist positions. It was from this point that much of my political writing became aimed at the *whole* of the political milieu that I associated with. Over the years my critique of this milieu has deepened, and indeed my critique of my own actions and texts has also become sharper. For example, I used to do a small magazine called *Proletarian Gob*. While there is much in this magazine that is still useful there is also much that relies on a kind of religious faith. A while ago I thought about re-issuing the whole set, but now I realise that it could only be re-issued with heavy annotation. Better, in fact, that the whole minor work is left in the oblivion (my loft) in which it now lies.

The optimism of so-called revolutionaries now pro-

duces an utter weariness in me. And I have abandoned all respect for the various self-appointed midwives of communism; all those who talk about what sort of *movement* is needed to destroy capital – they who insist on putting their ideological and restricting cart before the horse of material events. It has been like a weight lifted from my shoulders. Recently my critique of Revolutionary Experts and activists has sharpened to the point that I am now no longer much welcome in revolutionary circles. People don't like to have their bubbles threatened by little pricks like me. I am now in the group Monsieur Dupont. The two of us in this group are generally despised. The common fault we see across the whole of the communist and anarchist milieu is one of a faith in the concept of consciousness, particularly Working Class Consciousness and the general belief that consciousness in The Masses can be *raised* by revolutionaries.

We have come to the conclusion that the useful proletariat only consist of those workers who work in the essential sectors of the economy. Those who produce and/or distribute things without which the economy would crumble. And these proletarians are only useful when they are actually at the point of production, that is, actually *at work*, whether it be working normally or preventing work through strikes and similar. We have also come to the conclusion that people will only be able to decide on new ways of living when the old ways have been broken *materially*. The concept of Consciousness is mistaken. There is no way that millions of people across the world will eventually arrive at a communist perspective and *then* overthrow the economy. It is common sense that permits one to come to such conclusions. It was once

said that “the only true histories are those that have been written by men who have been sincere enough to speak truly about themselves.” If we can look out from our own eyes and judge the world with our own feelings then we will get closer to the truth about things than in any other way. One major factor in Revolutionary Politics is this optimism that workers will wake up. But the only way workers will be considered to have woken up is when they have become *organised* by revolutionary experts, this leadership of experts will then end up killing workers the same way Lenin did. Steve Biko of South Africa was a proponent of consciousness-raising and the ANC was successful in organising workers through this process. They started killing workers routinely even before they got into power. These revolutionaries – who tell us that one day people will change their minds because they will realise the sinfulness of present society – are trying to make us see the world through a filter of *hope*. They have put common sense aside, they are offering us that same old pie in the sky that the clerics used to sell.

There is no hope (but this does not mean I need not be enthusiastic in my life, or a participant in events. My negativity, which is at last written through me like rock, does not make me unhappy). A famous Revolutionary once said, “Nihilists, one more effort if you want to be revolutionaries!” This was a slogan of the generally remarkable Situationists. But this is also the optimism of the Christian missionaries, “Be positive about the future of the world; if we work hard enough then the rest of the people will see the truth of what we say and the world will be saved,” not forgetting the stage whisper, the secret goal: “And then we

will get a place in government!" Someone once said, "Nobody speaks the truth when there is something they must have." This maxim seems to apply to the majority of the revolutionary milieu across the world, who want to preserve their sense of self-importance above all else.

We would reverse the slogan and say, "Revolutionaries, one more effort to become nihilists!" And we would say that from your critique of *everything*, from your *non-belief*, it may be possible for you to connect with your own humanity. My criticisms of revolutionism have always been based in my attempts to establish a personal perspective and experience. This has not been an easy task, and it is ongoing - it is easy to fall back on holy mantras. It is easier to promote dogma, to let dogma rise to the surface, than it is to engage with the world through one's own experience.

These days I have almost completely abandoned reading factual books because I have discovered that there is more truth in one page of good fiction than there is in a shelf of academic or political works.

I am for communism now more than ever. I am against religious faith, intolerance, hidden agendas, and machismo now more than ever.

Monsieur Dupont  
18<sup>th</sup> December 2001



*This was part of a letter to someone. The recipient was informed that this part of the letter was an official reply rather than a personal one. This way the writing effort could be used again, and in the event that the person did not endeavour to continue the correspondence (as occurred) then the writing was not completely lost.*

## ***Language and consciousness***

Let's talk about language. I will quote your question concerning my use of language in full:

*... can I ask you what sort of audience you had in mind when you wrote the piece [an article on the English Civil War]? Was it produced in any kind of academic situation? I just feel that your language seemed to be just that little bit denser than it needed to be in places. Of course, you were making some quite intricate points, but I do feel that you could make those points, at some places, in plainer English and thus be read by more people, or at least be more likely to convince those you do reach.*

This is the question I am asked most often; whether it is by Reclaim The Streets activists, the Anarchist Federation, anarcho-communist interlocutors from America and even relatives scoring points against my character by asking for simplification, or more charitably, clarification. The same question but different motives. I understand that you are genuinely perplexed by my methods and my motives and the question you have asked is quite appropriate; I am not offended by it and I shall honestly (but no doubt obscurely) answer you by and by. The same question is raised but with hostile intent by the so-called revolutionary movement, for them it is a matter of scratching me out of the picture, creating a situation where they do

not have to respond to what I am saying, dismissing the form so they do not have to address the content. They don't want to be bothered with it, but sometimes "too difficult" means only that it *is* too difficult – I do not understand some people's difficulty with difficulty, I've never been intimidated by it. What I don't understand I skip, otherwise I am always on the look out for ideas or phrases I can refashion or steal outright, and if a text defies all efforts at comprehension, as in Beckett, I just set myself the task of reading every word from beginning to end; that way at least I can claim to have got through it alive.

The Revolutionary Movement is a racket dominated by groups of aggressive robber barons who want to protect *their* booty; they do not, on the whole, create/produce/generate theory or ideas but stick religiously to a code of morality which they consider suitable for all occasions, and because this code is simple, they claim it is intelligible to the working class (if this is so why then have the numbers of these revolutionary groups not increased over the years?). It is more true to say that difficult theory is of less use to workers than simple morality even if theory is more closely related to their values. Moral codes are easily enforceable, they do not need to be interpreted by any budding revolutionary rabbi, and therefore they function to defend the structural integrity of the group, preventing it from changing, preserving the internal, non-explicit power apparatus. Pro-revolutionary organisations want easy ideas for public consumption in the same way factories seek to cut costs, simplify processes, and speed up production. The objective of the factory is not to produce objects but to make money by producing objects; what then is the objec-

tive of pro-revolutionary groups? When we ask, "what is the opposite of difficulty in pro-revolutionary texts?" (texts which, in the final analysis, attempt to realise in the most radical form what is not present to everyday experience, what is not capitalism, what is not totality), the answer too often comes back as: laziness, morality, incompetence, that which lacks internal rigour – in other words, an ugly, bullying stupidity. Not all pro-revolutionary texts need be as complicated as what I write. In fact none of them do, I do not advocate a style. As well as difficulty there is clarity, there is rigour, there is discipline, there is passion, there is intensity, there is imagination, there is commitment – pro-revolutionary writing should aim for these.

I am not a particularly educated individual; I have not practised writing in an academic environment. I have not passed through enough tubes and all my abilities I have come to late and only half-prepared; this has some influence on how I write. What I am capable of, the forms, the connections between concepts, do not come from official education but from surrealism which is the only expressive form to put readymade creative techniques into the hands of otherwise unschooled individuals. It is also true that the hare I am chasing is elusive, quick and well-camouflaged; in other words my quarry is difficult and my mind is easily distracted by shiny things, sweat drips in my eyes, my hand is not steady, I'm not as young as I was, the terrain is uneven, oh and I am tired, so, so tired but I keep on (with my pockets empty).

If you desire contemplation of the category *difficulty* I suggest reading Winstanley, a pro-revolutionary who all admire but none read. In reading Winstanley I discovered

that difficulty of expression is evidence of a struggle against socially imposed silence; difficulty, when it is not a cloak of expertise thrown by the scholar over his professional interest, indicates the inappropriateness not only of what is being said but of who is saying it; if a worker says "the earth is a common treasury for all," it has more profundity and difficulty (it is more open to doubt and interpretation) than if a middle class drop-out scrawls it on a banner hung across the streets in the City of London; the latter being merely an act of appropriation. For the worker even a simple truth is difficult to fix with the right words because truth and words are not workers' business.

I did not include your query as a way of criticising you, as a weapon to beat you with. It merely put neatly what so many others have been saying; because it was so succinctly put it becomes very useful to me. Certainly I would prefer to engage in discussion on the content of what I am saying instead of having to go right back to the beginning and justify my privilege to write what and how I like. But any point is an equally good place to start an exposition of what we have to say, and in addressing writing style we will consider in passing all other matters of vital importance. To begin immediately, you make two assumptions that I would like to investigate, "...you could make those points.... in plainer English and thus be read by more people, or at least be more likely to convince those you do reach." I think you think that I want to convince people of my opinions, and from this I think that you think that I, along with most socialists, prioritise *the manipulation of consciousness as a means of realising social transformation*. (If people's values are not altered how can the project of a

new society begin with sincerity? And if we are not seeking mere totalitarianism then had we better not try to convince as many people as possible of our ideas and had we better not move social consciousness towards our goal as deeply and significantly as we are able?) For me to say that I am not particularly interested in persuading people of my opinions and neither do I place a premium on the role of consciousness in history perhaps appears perverse to you but that is indeed what I do say. It is not your fault if you are at this point bewildered by my aims and motives, after all it is the convention for most pro-revolutionary groups in history to seek a realisation of the ideas *they* possess. It must seem like I am hopping from one boulder to the next and proclaiming each to be the kingdom of truth and all the rest to be mere products of your imagination.

In reply I do not particularly want to make an exhaustive study of consciousness, or consider the means by which revolutionary theory becomes translated into social life so I will content myself by rehearsing a few rhetorical jibes and unsupported assertions and leave it at that.

The historical background to my remarks is this – socialism and socialist theory has been, in the most part, decaying for about a hundred years. The betrayals that were Bolshevism and social democracy had fatal effect. It became impossible to think or act within the terms initially envisaged by the working class movement without subordinating that thought to an allegiance to some interim political party, state, or cause. Those who advocated shipping political consciousness into the hearts and minds of people were in reality only using the alleged stubbornness of consciousness in sticking to old ways

of thinking as a shield for postponing social revolution and protecting the existing powers of those organisations (which found that they rather enjoyed recognition from, negotiation with, and containment by the state). Freud tells us that all defined structure seeks stasis and so it is with pro-revolutionary organisations – most of which rapidly discover the principle pleasures to be had from society when playing the pantomime villain, but which off-stage collaborate in the maintenance of balanced, apparently oppositional, but otherwise *motionless* deployments of force (the cold war of capital and labour). Who are the transmitters in the consciousness model, who are they really? And who are the receivers. Who is the hauler with his cargo of beliefs and who plays the depot hanging on desperately with forklift and docket pad? Is revolution no more than the shifting of containerised units of theory from our warehouse to local corner shops? Are we to use the internet; shall we call the workers on their mobile phones? Will the white moths of the proletariat be sucked out of the darkness and into the burn of our candle?

Conversion is the ugliest technique. Elmer Gantry is not a figure to be emulated. Consciousness, for those who advocate its raising, for those who sell it in their papers, is just a euphemism for the scalps of new recruits hanging on their belts, it is the demo placard numbers game; consciousness for them is allegiance to the party, to the function of the party within society and thus to reality as it is presently organised. Once you've got it, you've got it in full; you don't play with it, you don't change it. The party has been good enough to supply you with the truth so don't pay it back by asking damnfool questions. In short, for its raisers and

recruiters, consciousness is not consciousness at all if by that term we mean the principle evidence of human alienation from the world, that which resists organisation.

Here is a question: If an individual converts his faith from Protestantism to Catholicism is that individual altered? Via what means does this alteration have effect on society? I think the individual considers the conversion to be important but his character has probably changed very little and I think his essential beliefs and values are probably not decisive in the way he lives his life. I think there are other, pre-conscious, factors with more pull on his being and I think that his values and beliefs are of infinitely small importance to the world. (Seventy million people as I write are participating in the greatest demonstration of alienated consciousness the world has ever seen, Kumbha Mela; the consciousness of seventy million Hindus does not alter the geographical truth of the origins of the flowing Ganges let alone the historical truth of capital's flows towards cheap labour and unrestricted exploitation. And nor does the Revolutionary Movement have to take up the white man's burden to prove to this seventy million that they are in error, to convert these believers into non-believers. Their beliefs and their values are *irrelevant* to the revolution. My conclusion from this is that there seems no necessity to persuade random individuals of the rightness of my values when it can only gain for me an increase of earthly power.)

What comes before consciousness? Material events.

Individual testimony as to the meteor-like impact of matter on people's lives is to be observed in how certain discreet objects crater their being, *agitising* them. It is all absurdity (the other name of facts) that mobile phones – now

owned by sixty per cent of the population – have had in five years a more profound impact on consciousness (by *agitating* the preconscious) than has a hundred and fifty years of socialist propaganda. Those who presume that the role of the pro-revolutionary is to be convincing to The People disregard the phenomena of mobile phones (and the commodity as an abstract generality) and how they have replaced cigarettes as principle fetish objects of anxiety (everybody has found a reason for owning one). Head tumour threats replace lung tumour warnings; the train's not moving they give you something to do with your hands, secure you in emergency. How are The People to be convinced when so many thousands of receptor consciousnesses are scrambled by tamazipan and prozac, when adolescence is prolonged past forty by computerised amusements and dashboard gadgets, when thoughts are filled with resentment of time-consuming children and irritating spouses (let me be alone, I want no-one here in my womb to provoke me, leave me the plug-in appliances and I'll be ok)?

There's no one left alive to convince of The Revolutionary Project; the city is deserted like a beach washed out by the storms.

Consciousness died seventy years ago. It has been replaced by electronic media.

No one is listening now. We leave messages on voice mail but our addressees never get back to us. No one can hear us above tempest sounding alienation.

No one reads what we write, and if they do then tomorrow they'll read someone else's webpage (we can make the message as simple as you like, write it in single syllable words a foot high on the walls of the amphitheatre



or scribble it on origami paper and fold it seven times, slip it in the menu at a truckers' caff, "capitalism is rubbish, communism is good, you alone have the power of transformation." Our Prospero spell binds nothing to our will).

On the couch, the neurotic prattles on, matching hats to heads in the psychoanalytic rigmarole, "a-ha I am Oedipus, a-ha here is the castrating father, a-ha the phallus." It soon became evident to Freud's gang that the recognition of formulas was part of the problem and in the same way but at the risk of appearing ridiculous we have discovered that consciousness, that is knowledge, does not equal power. Every worker-unit understands its own exploitation but how significant is understanding when all proposed alternatives are as unconvincingly schematised as the ghosts of Christmas's past, present, and future? What sane person would jeopardise their wage packet and mortgage for creased blueprints of socialism's fairground rides when capitalism supplies dvd players, Thai restaurants, and central heating? By what means, precisely, would an analysis of alienation and a promise of eventual redemption through revolutionary transformation change anything should a worker choose to commit itself to that routine? I know I am held in a vice, I can feel it closing, it hurts, but how do I help myself by thinking about it? Isn't it better to be distracted by beer and art? How many worker-believers with fully articulated consciousness would it take before reality jumps its tracks? (On the internet individuals band together to buy in bulk and get those prices down, is this solidarity?) The structure of the pro-revolutionary party is such that no amount of recruits is enough, there is always some circumstance that will convince it that playing the

resistance game and thereby retaining its organisational integrity is preferable to risking all in a revolutionary gambit. All defined structures seek stasis. So tell me one more time of how Israel crushes Palestine, or why Nike dumps on Malaysian workers, sing me the song of the Zapatistas and maybe at last I'll get patriotic for our common cause, but it's more likely you'll be asking me for contributions to finance The Struggle. (One Trotskyite group in the early 90s used to stop shoppers in the street to ask them if they had a bank account before trying to get them to subscribe to their glossy mag by direct debit. If you replied no to their first question they immediately lost interest.)

Is consciousness Our Side in This World? Joschka Fischer has passed across the spectrum of political consciousness from pro-RAF crash helmeted street fighter to K/For-ist German Foreign Minister, but through those thirty years he never ceased to be a bourgeois. Back then he was in the vanguard of the revolution and now he leads a nation state – now Fischer has come to accept his class status (that is, achieved transference), consciousness had pushed him into falsity, into rebellion against his essence but now he does not feel guilty; he has come home. He was young – it was all those years ago – now he only regrets being held to account for what he did back then. What difference is there between the anti-capitalist spectacular events and a Benetton advertising campaign? Both compete in the pit of quick ideas and branded distinction. Knowledge, information, communication, consciousness, are held by, and do not hold, the world; those middle class individuals who revolt against capital for political reasons always seem to fall back to earth indistinguishable from what they oppose (groovy

protest, a product of groovy capitalism); for them revolution loses its appeal. They find that when their energy is spent they have been in error, their revolt was no more than their energy. Their subsequent understanding – that revolution is impossible because it did not happen under their stewardship – is really only an insight into their typically bourgeois ambitions (that and the realisation of the structural impossibility of revolution as a mere continuing of the intensification of protest politics). *Earth First!* grasped this point by declaring that the London First of May demonstrations in 2000 were not protests at all but were expressions of capability, like IRA promo videos and shots over coffins. But there was no self-examination as to what kind of collectivity was present on that day and how it related to the wider public: What was it expressive of? No doubt the organisers would prefer it if we focused on the political consciousness of the crowd rather than, say, its class identity, ie, an informal leadership showing us the way to revolution. If these were not protesters, if they were not representative of a wide section of the populace then who were they and by what right and under what terms did they make the presumption that we should go and join them? Seventy million Hindus, ten thousand anti-capitalists, historical dust.

Proletarian Consciousness too is always earthbound. It is constituted under a star of diversion. We look elsewhere, we hold on to the things we can; what motive is there for contemplating what's over the rainbow when history indicates that here might be Oz and there might be Kansas?

All political consciousness is bourgeois.

Workers cannot believe, as belief is a betrayal of experience; who can believe and get up before dawn?

Have I fired off enough bombast to take away your will to live? Have I won because I'm the last one talking? Stacked enough pancakes to make a... stack. But what is this, what is it really? Don't I do the consciousness thing as much as anyone else, but dishonestly and with suspect motive? I don't know. But it doesn't concern me if hypothetical readers cannot understand what I'm saying. In literature the writer must dictate and the reader must follow. The writer must determine the rules of reading otherwise a democracy takes hold – like that of Hollywood's preview performances and the demand of producers for happy endings. Writers create readers and not the opposite. I did not demand that Hegel, Kafka, Carroll, ought to exist. There is no market of readers *out there* that demands particular products before they have been written. I do not see my task as a theorist of revolution to either convince or explain to people who wouldn't read what I had to say even if I did explain or convince. My aim is to write as well as I am able within certain formal bounds. I have no time to explain and only just enough to describe what I find out. Description must precede explanation. I explore and discover, I experiment; if this finds any readers then I am pleased: I may not have completely misjudged my object (my object being the nature of human beings and the possibility for social revolution). If any part of what I have written is of use to somebody else who shares the same object then that gives me a sense of achievement, I have escaped solipsism. I think I have to write out a lot of slag to find a good bit of coal but I also think there *are* adequate sentences and concepts hidden within my work. If finding them demands effort of the reader, then I think it might

be worth their while – what else have they got to do? It takes a lot of grind to set up a true sentence and I think it is reasonable that the difficult workings-out remain in the finished text to demonstrate to the reader how a truth was uncovered. (Burroughs used pages of cut-up sentences to get one great line. Perhaps the effort of reading the indifferent is rewarding because brilliance shines out so much more intensely.) This is not to say that I endorse every media studies professor who's read a bit of Debord and thinks they have a duty to inflict on us their black roll-necked research. (What did come after post-modernism? Are we still in the time of Deleuze and Guattari?)

Who are these people who write to me and say the proletariat will never understand me? Am I paid a salary by the clarity council? Do I have to produce graphs of my effectiveness? In what way am I responsible, to whom am I subordinate? If my work is rubbish, if all these pages are to go unread, well then in what way have I harmed their Revolution? In truth, what our comrades fear is that my writing calls into question their organisations (or their individual projects), which is another matter entirely. I do not say that it is my aim to bring down Trotskyism (for example) as I am not competing with it; I think it is irrelevant to the revolution. Whilst I know there are many decent but mistaken individuals who pride themselves on their party membership I consider that the best job pro-revolutionary organisations do is to contain all the idiots in one place, permitting to everybody else the luxury of avoiding them. Revolutionary activists denounce me, but in their denouncements they condemn themselves. When they talk of clarity what they mean is that nothing should obstruct

the flight-path of new acolytes and nothing should obscure their own trademarked embodiment of the revolutionary subject, that is, their *authority*. Look, to hand I have a child's umbrella, a collection of postage stamps and a ravioli machine – from these meagre resources I make what you see before you. Certainly it is done to the best of my abilities and in that sense is *authentic*, but if what I do finds no readers and gains no positive response then so what? I think, of course, that that would be a pity because I am as right as any individual can be and my writing is as real as writing can be, but I *would* say that.

If consciousness – that is, *voting* for alternatives – does not bring on social change then what makes things happen? Change is instituted by immediate massed human reflex to unexpected but unavoidable events. In some cases the reflex is one of abandonment, that is, to be swept out by the tide, and this is called crisis. On other occasions the reflex is to seize hold of the event and use its power to alter conditions, this is called revolution.

MD,  
10<sup>th</sup> January 2001

## ***Recent Interventions:***

### **MAY DAYS, PALESTINE, AND THE MATERIAL BASE**

*a week long farce of radical yoga, face painting, dressing up as clowns, gender awareness spaces and other middle class bullshit... The anarchist movement has been hijacked by middle class radicalism to such an extent that we ought to ditch it and – when we struggle to reorganise our class – deny all contact with it and drive it out of working class areas when it appears. It's usually the avant-garde of gentrification anyway.* — a contributor to *Freedom*

Elsewhere in the same paper another contributor expresses his anti-imperialist politics and support for a Palestinian State, noting heroically that, “suicide bombings seem ‘irrational’ from the comfort of the armchair” (presumably Palestinians are too revolutionary to sit in armchairs). Our comments below were sent to *Freedom*, as we explained to them, not as a letter, but as a political intervention.

### **Jour de Fete avec Monsieur Dupont**

Our membership application for The Hyde Park to Trafalgar Square Heroic Martyrs’ Brigade has been rejected because we didn’t pass the male bonding exam – we couldn’t name Arsenal’s back four and then failed to down a pint in one. What humiliation, now we can never be real revolutionaries.

So, it looks like we must make a choice between two options, on the one side it’s the clowns and on the other,

leftism.

The fault line runs in other directions too, particularly between the minority of all shades of fanatical doers on one side – their little cliques, their pet obsessions, their ultimata over irrelevant issues and their spectacular interventions – then on the other side the quiet majority of *Freedom* readers who, sheepishly, “are not really involved”.

We could be wrong but this seems not an ideal state of affairs. The question is often asked: which came first, the egg of non-involvement or the cluck of getting stuck in? But it is likely that the two mutually condition each other – a small band of desperadoes with the stage to themselves whilst the cameras are a-clicking (these are the very stars of recent media sensation) and then the rest, rather timidly thinking, “I couldn’t do that, I’ve got too much to lose and for what exactly, some cause I had no part in formulating?”

We shall say it again, we are very sceptical about so-called anti-capitalism, because it mistakes the nature of capitalism and the methods by which it might be overthrown, and this is readily apparent to anyone who attempts to make sense of its claims about green this, car-that, freedom to smoke something, freedom to wear my hair like I want, down with our exploitation of workers in foreign countries, stop the debt, don’t build the dam, etc. In short it has nothing to say about the conditions we live under here and now, the work we must do, crime and criminals, displaced everyday unhappiness and the mechanism by which things might change, etc.

However, the opposition to anti-capitalism (an anti-capitalism that may as well be called leftism as it has little



to do with free communism) is profoundly unappealing to anyone who has even the basics of human emotion. The sort of so-called anarchism espoused by the above quoted contributors to *Freedom* appears to be motivated by a desire to preserve a bullying superiority that they have awarded themselves and that is predicated on a class-specific authenticity. They attempt to trump everyone else by talking in judgments and assume that because they claim to speak for the working class everyone else will be amazed and subdued because everyone else reading *Freedom* is by definition middle class. In fact, not every working class pro-revolutionary expresses themselves in macho propositions, and not all of us need to be talked to in a “language we can understand,” which surely ranks as one of the most elitist and alienated of revolutionary presumptions.

The working class is not a cultural entity, nor is it a community. Maybe it was once when everyone from the same street worked in the same mill but nowadays it just isn't like that, and the passing of the days of self-policing ought not to be lamented. The working class is not what the class warriors and all the hard bastard posturers (up to their necks in the one-upmanship of small pond politics) represent it to be. Just as the swaggering gangs of youths who dominate our housing estates are not politically significant – their delinquency being managed and contained as a form of policing of the other residents – so it is that the quoted statements concerning what does and does not constitute class politics is a form of ideological policing. It seems working class individuals could never do soft things like yoga or face painting because every single one of them drinks beer and watches football. The working class are

always young men who steal cars, call women bitches (no gender awareness classes for them, eh?) and deal drugs.

It is plain that someone has got to step in and quieten the macho undertow that is so prevalent in the Class Conscious Critique of alternative politics, so here's our go.

The working class is not a political, social, cultural, or ethnic category; it is, quite simply, an economic function. Away from the factory those who are employed by capitalism find many different forms of entertainment and cultural expression, none of which has any kind of relevance to their economic status (for example on our [council] road there are more ostentatious Jag drivers than on a typical, sensible middle class cul de sac). It is this fabulous array of cultural activities that obstructs the likes of the class warriors and their left-issue politics from ever reaching the proletariat. Proletarians simply do not speak the same language as the revolutionary left, and no amount of dressing rhetoric up all rough 'n' tough will entice them into a Revolutionary world view. They've got religion, netball, gardening, art classes, and the internet, why should they convert?

What is important about the working class is not their sports clothing, nor the music they listen to but precisely their working existence. We, for one, do not think revolution can or will be made by street fighting youths who riot because the police have raided their stolen property racket. On the contrary we think it will be made by men and women who have mortgages, own cars, go on holiday, watch telly, never think about politics: literally those people who would rather do anything than further the revolution, and above all who fiercely preserve their

personal best self-interest under present conditions (and this includes buying their council house).

We find ordinary struggle in everyday life much more interesting and significant than any amount of extreme political action because our analysis has found that those who fight for themselves to preserve what they've got and for what they want are more likely to induce a crisis in capital than any named political action by others (that at most might cause a transfer of power but otherwise merely lets a little pressure out of the system). But how are these ordinary people to stage a revolution if they don't even have political consciousness?

Politicised solidarity as the left rhapsodise over it – panning for its glimmering presence like gold in the soul – is a sentimental lie and an ideology. However, class interest does exist as a second nature and it is an active force in society. Individuals see the world from their own perspective and fight for the improvement of their own lives, and that is quite appropriate. However, individuals are mass produced by society and organised into classes, their individual desires and interest are reproduced simultaneously many times over. In moments of heightened struggle people belonging to the working class understand they won't get anything themselves unless everyone else gets it too. The collective, single-minded pursuit of ongoing improved conditions and pay is precisely the cost that capitalism cannot afford, which is why it has globalised its search for lower wages. Labour costs are what bring companies down and a militant working class that fights to increase its share and therefore increases that cost of production is the only human agency that has the necessary

power to halt production and therefore capitalism (that is so long as it pursues its own self-interest and does not become politicised by the left or the unions).

The most revolutionary slogan for the pursuit of self-interest is: more pay, fewer hours, and no productivity agreements. From this it should be understood that we see the first stage of revolution – which we call economic crisis and which results in the working class taking over industry as an unconscious or unforeseen event – as an accident, an unplanned outcome of the economic system working out its contradictions. For busy people like *Freedom's* contributors the revolution will be made by Revolutionary Acts and the motivation for the Acts will be anger expressed at present conditions. We do not agree. We see revolution beginning in a structural deficiency of the ruling order, possibly brought on (or at least exacerbated) by the blind greed of the working class pursuing their own self-improvement. We do not see this as either admirable or deplorable, it is not for us to judge other people's priorities. One thing is certain, revolutionary ideas do not appear on a mass level until revolutionary events are already well under way.

*Why should we, soft intellectuals that we are, argue that the working class – not a one-plus-one collectivity of committed activists – is the most revolutionary form?*

For a couple of reasons. Capitalism generates both revolutionary ideas and the working class but capital is not made of ideas. It is a social relation based on forced exploitation. It follows that because it is a force itself, only force will bring it down – but which force? Most revolutionaries argue for a conscious agency, that is a grouping

of people who have been persuaded of certain values and have joined together to impose them. This seems very unlikely to Monsieur Dupont because no two people can really agree on ideas. This holds true in particular for the revolutionary movement, which has had two hundred years to get its ideas across but is now further away from achieving them than ever. It is also unlikely because propaganda is inherently elitist: the small group (spirit) attempting to lead the mass (the body) and forever seeking to correct, lead, and censor. By its nature, consciousness is divergent; it cannot be held by ideology and all ideological representations of its terms of principles are demonstrated (by lived life) to be false.

It is our experience that the working class are in advance of the revolutionary movement in terms of understanding at a practical level how capitalism works – no matter what their party political opinions might be. However it is not the opinions of the working class that are of interest but their integration into the productive machine; only they have the necessary access to that machinery to stop it, and let us be quite clear here, capital accumulation can only be stopped when its machines are stopped by those who ordinarily operate them. Of course, if the working class is the only revolutionary agency capable of inducing a crisis within capital (and it is possible that they may never do this, that there will never be revolution, we must include possible failure into our model) and they will be moved to do this not by revolutionary rhetoric but in pursuit of their selfish interest, then there must be more to revolution than that.

What we have so far sketched in is the dictatorship of a small section of the proletariat over vital industry

(taking over a cake shop won't bring the system down), but the crisis of ownership is not a revolution and this is where (what we call) pro-revolutionaries raise to consciousness a contradiction and thereby provoke a second crisis. Working class ownership of production is simply impossible; it is a contradiction in terms (the working class become its self-exploiter). An awareness of this contradiction then, reaches another crisis. The choice is plain: to progress with the communist, pro-human revolution, or to allow the bourgeoisie back into power, probably in the guise of a revolutionary political party.

The working class has two functions: the first, and the reason why it was formed, is to labour for the capitalist class and produce the world as an expression of the capitalist's interest; the second function is the proletariat's revolutionary potential, which belongs to it purely because of its integration into the productive economy. In terms of revolutionary function the working class cause is to abolish itself and therefore all classes because of the self-contradiction inherent in its collective ownership of production. This second crisis will be brought on by the pro-human communist revolution, which will be a creative intervention on how society will be made without capital.

The moment for the introduction of revolutionary ideas occurs during the proletarian dictatorship. It is then that people will begin to look collectively for alternatives as a way of getting out and this is the moment when pro-revolutionary ideas will have most effect. People look for alternatives at other times as well of course during the crises of their own lives but will accept whatever it is that gets them through, whether it's radical yoga, pro-revo-

lutionary politics, beer, or xenophobia and misanthropy. Whether these solutions are felt to be effective or not on a personal scale, none of them will have any bearing on capitalist social relations, because these experiments are determined by and contained within those relations.

We made the point above concerning the working class's self-abolition because many leftists tend to idolise the proletariat as an end in itself, as if there is something worthwhile or desirable in being working class. This is ridiculous; there is nothing to take pride in. There is no such thing as working class culture, and there is nothing worth preserving from life in the backstreets and tower blocks. Post-revolutionary society should be the very opposite of proletarianisation. To be against gentrification as the quoted writer claims, that is, being in favour of slums, makes no sense – it is natural to want to get away from where you live for somewhere better, and only revolutionary martyrs want to preserve degradation, presumably as a prompt for recycling their outrage. The working class is the means, it is not the end.

### **On Palestinian nationalism and the political lessons learnt from it**

It is appropriate at this moment for us to pick up certain leftist so-called alternatives and values (as in the current pro-Palestine guise) that are taken up by anti-imperialist politics. Again the either/or of these arguments is quite false and we think indicates in this particular a more general theoretical malaise, as anarchists continue to get sucked into leftism via the presumed successes of recent anti-capitalist demonstrations.

We derive from the pro-Palestinian arguments several propositions that we intend to demonstrate as being at odds with free communist theory. In the recent *Freedom* article it is claimed that Palestinian "self-determination is a legitimate, democratic demand." Straight-off, the word legitimate is rhetorically loaded, and democratic is also a problematic concept. Our free communist definition of democracy is, "the institution of all political opinions that do not effect the ownership of the production of reality, ie all those opinions that are structurally incapable of changing the conditions that have determined them."

Self-determination is an anti-imperialist aspiration that depends upon the idea of one state being the proletariat of another state. This is an assumption grounded in fetishising victimisation and that studiously ignores local tyranny (or explains it as a natural response to external tyranny). Free-communists consider all forms of nationalism and representative politics set up in terms of religion, ethnic identity, peoples, or oppressed/proletarian nations, to be false and designed to obscure the capital accumulation being carried out by nascent bourgeois factions in the liberation movement. The ideology of liberation is used to promote their economic self-interest and to repress internal class struggle. Put simply, the leaders of Hamas do not carry out suicide bombings, and we can see from the examples of the IRA and ANC how mafia-style operations are hidden behind revolutionary pretence until the appropriate moment for a butterfly-like emergence to full, respectable, bourgeois status and fully-fledged participation in established institutions. In all such political transfers of power, from imperialist to people's liberation party, the position of the proletariat



within the productive relation, remains unchanged.

The Israeli working class is as proletarian as the Palestinian working class, therefore it is obvious that there is no side for pro-revolutionary communists to take in this battle. If we were to encapsulate our position into a slogan it would read (for the Palestinians): the struggle against Israel begins with the struggle against Palestine; (and for the Israelis): the struggle against Palestine begins with the struggle against Israel. Even this formulation is flawed and we are skeptical about sloganeering, but we make it to build bridges with the conventions of this milieu.

We must first oppose the bosses we work for, the state we live within. However, we are not very effective at this so there is no point in exporting our useless solidarity to other countries. To us it is irrational to be against our state and for a foreign one (and suicide bombings, are not irrational as the *Freedom* writer would have it, they are indiscriminately murderous and criminal, and we make this pronouncement from our armchairs toasting crumpets by the fire). The *Freedom* writer does not give an account of how Hamas view adulterous women, or homosexuals, but these are secondary issues no doubt when compared to building the Free Palestinian State.

The *Freedom* writer then goes on to quote the imbecile Sartre about how we are human beings at the expense of those in the third world. This is another classic anti-imperialist line; it has nothing to do with politics and everything to do with moral manipulation. In fact, none of us is responsible for what is happening in Israel, any more than we are responsible for what happens in our own country. The very fact that we are pro-revolutionary

is proof that we have no power. Sartre was a pro-Stalin CP fellow traveler who consistently condemned the imperialism of France whilst ignoring that of Russia in Hungary, etc. Sartre's and the rest of the left's support for the murderous FLN is useful to us because it shows them up for what they really were. It can also be said of the left in Britain at present: anti-BNP-internationalist at home but patriotic for other people abroad. In left-speak, the collective noun for foreigners is peoples but what would they say if someone started talking about the rights of the British people? We note that in the report on the Belper Green Fair that the so-called community choir sang Spanish, Mexican, and South African songs (what, no Eskimo ditties?). No wonder the working class in Britain want nothing to do with anti-imperialist so-called revolutionaries.

It may appear from this that we don't think much of macho class struggle *Menaces* and it is true that we love them as much as they like Walter Softies like us but the question we would ask them in a spirit of comradely solidarity is: why is it that nobody listens to you, why have you made no progress, why are you not recruiting amongst the working class, why has revolutionary consciousness not been transmitted, why are anarchists and the like such failures?

The fact is that all anarchist types, no matter what their variation, form a relatively numerically small and culturally restricted group of bohemians. It is important for us to face up to the fact that even the most working class anarchist is different from his fellow workers. We must understand that we are different and we see things differently from everyone else. We will never be more

than a minority and should scale our ambitions and tailor our actions to fit that reality. More precisely, what we should maintain as our objective is the revolution, not The Movement.

It follows that if fighting for your own self interest is the basis of revolutionary activity and that the working class is already organised by capital into the appropriate formations for fighting for themselves then that leaves a very limited role for social Revolutionaries and certainly eclipses the role quoted above by the glum contributors to *Freedom* (namely, the role of organiser and bringer of ideas) which is shown by circumstance to be superfluous and verges on a leaderless Leninism.

So, what do pro-revolutionaries do in the present if they are useless at expressing solidarity and organising the proletariat? We think the first impulse should always be to do nothing, to watch the turning of the world and keep our powder dry. For those who wish to be activists we recommend that they take jobs under industrial conditions, not to lead the struggle (because the struggle will find them out soon enough), but to participate as ordinary workers in the only possible means of properly engaging capital, and see how things really stand. (For most present day revolutionaries it is inconceivable that the most important place in the world could be a factory in a provincial town, but it is from out of these factories that the world is built.)

We also advocate the negative role, that of opposing false revolutionaries (those who would seek leadership and those who mystify the struggle by adding secondary political issues to it). We would advocate the maintenance and

production of pro-revolutionary consciousness, not to Go To The People as this can only fail (The People will never read revolutionary literature), but it is important to preserve and renew ideas for ourselves now and for that moment when they will have significance for a wider audience.

We would advocate being yourself, being honest, living your own life as best you can, that is, to move in the opposite direction of those public school boys who currently dominate the (allegedly) anarchist movement who dumb themselves down and leave their comfortable life to live in Brighton squats. It is important to be the revolutionary in your own town, and within the relations that you are born into. It is important to get on with living and not be tempted to live the life of the revolutionary hero, the martyr for the cause. It is a fundamental mistake that we have all made, this imagining that we could personally make a difference beyond the level of personal existence – this is the ultimate self-delusion. We would advise everyone to be ready for a long wait, to have no great expectations, to be ready for failure, and to keep going for decades. Most of all, and in contradiction to both the optimism of the anti-capitalists and the moral injunctions of the class warriors who oppose them, we would recommend doing nothing (much) and for inspiration for this we take Tolstoy's account of the military defeat of Napoleon in 1812.

None of this sounds particularly revolutionary and it is true that it isn't. It is our opinion that revolution will be finally achieved by many millions of people making small gestures towards a communistic society. It is our opinion that revolution is not synonymous with the ex-

treme acts of a few thousand hardcore militants. We understand that what we have said will make the potential Che Guevaras reading this hate us. We admit to a slight buffoonishness. We are also dumb clowns, we're fire-eaters, jugglers extraordinaire, tumblers, bare back riders, and contortionists. We're too intellectual, we're wreckers, nihilists, and whatever other bouquets of praise you can think of but that's ok because we do not claim to be revolutionaries. We are merely pro-revolutionary and take part in events to no greater degree than our individuality allows. Not for us a participation in such revolutionary acts as slitting teenage girls' throats for failure to observe the veil, not for us the bombing of workers' buses and ice cream parlours, not for us the machine gunning of teenagers; we are neither heroes nor martyrs and we have been thinking for a while now that the values of the anti-imperialist revolutionary movement leave a nasty taste.

Finally, we would just like to say that we think the pro-revolutionary movement is full of people who would smear shit in your face. And that much of what is said is hypocrisy and much of what goes on is a racket. We understand that those who dominate the scene are emotionally incontinent and put others off from speaking up because of the fear of personal attack. So, knowing from past experience what to expect from our so-called comrades and how people will not come to our defence for fear of breaking ranks (even though in private conversation there are those who do express agreement), it is important to give some explanation of ourselves. Monsieur Dupont is made up of two people who use this identity in our political and creative activities. Our perspective can

be summed up very briefly: nothing is outside the question of ownership. In practice we try to conduct ourselves with honesty and rationality, we have no racket to hide and try to keep our political opinions completely separated from our family lives. We would never recommend anyone do anything that we were not prepared to do – we accept that some people may think more extreme measures are appropriate at certain times but we do not accept the moral pressure they bring to bear when insisting that others do likewise.

We do not wish to make contact with anyone and we certainly have no recruiting intentions. We will send texts to people who contact us at our address and we would like to encourage others in the task of theoretical development of the ideas we have articulated; this is a task that we now feel almost too weary to continue with. We gained our insights into the revolutionary struggle by theoretical reflection on our past experiences as workers, specifically as postmen, and at all times we prioritise experience over political beliefs. We have operated as communists within the anarchist milieu for more than several years. We are not academics or students and have no contact with any educational or bourgeois institution. We do not presume to speak for the working class or for revolution. We make no great exhortations. We speak for ourselves in favour of the free communist revolution.

We see a lot of mutual recrimination within the left, each grouplet reacting to the other as if the very devil had made itself flesh, but then we also hear plenty of unquestioning praise for foreign causes like that of the Zapatistas – we see both of these reactions as mere moralising.

We've attracted our fair share of vilification and misrepresentation but we think things are at the stage now where it is time to see who's who both abroad and at home: it is important to know who is talking and for whom and why and for those making claims to be ready to discuss them and not simply resort to denunciation.

That's all we have to say so, if the class warriors at *Freedom* are quite ready, they may drive us out now.

Doing nothing,  
Monsieur Dupont  
June 2002

## THE TICKLISH MATTER

*In a fairly typical attempt at revitalising a non-essential project, the anarchist paper Freedom requests suggestions to improve its content and, by implication, its circulation. One respondent, S.N., makes a number of points that we, in turn, transform into an opportunity for yet more ranting.*

Readers are spoon-fed viewpoints rather than given facts and insights they can really sink their teeth into and which can catalyse individual theory and organic forming of opinion. What's needed is investigative journalism, new slants, new perspectives, stories which genuinely cultivate a new understanding – not by convincing the reader of the value or veracity of anarchist politics and organisation through doctrine, but through shedding light on history and struggle as they're happening. Information

has always been ammunition for action and self-created theory. It's never neutral, but that's exactly the point – it's genuinely anarchist, in my opinion, to show rather than tell, to stimulate and inspire through arming the reader with as much information and insight and historical context as possible on struggle, capital, ecocide and eco-defence, and new topographies of class, in order to grow new libertarian thought organically. – S.N.

Long live facts, news, and information. Death to opinion, theory, and conjecture. Hooray for S.N. for adding a pinch of Alice in Wonderland to his/her otherwise run of the mill gradgrindism: it seems that the new opinion we must subscribe to is to be against opinions, because, as S.N. says, it is our opinions that get the goat of the masses of potential readers who would otherwise be more than pleased to walk our way. Wouldn't it be nice, thinks S.N., if only we'd just shut up for five minutes and let the people ingest their daily requirement of lovely facts?

Or, is S.N.'s thesis merely another opinion that shields, by denunciation, an ideological commitment to that newfangled anti-capitalist movement; a species of politics that cannot bear critique of its particularist, culturally-based content and its underlying reformist agenda?

But what exactly is the news that is happening now that the old school is missing and that S.N. thinks so important? What is the theory that assumes news is a more effective form of writing than, for example, our old-time evangelical witnessing? After all, if you read Winstanley



you don't get many facts.

To begin, we will list the unsubstantiated assertions in S.N.'s argument, the nuts and bolts of his/her opinion, to "show rather than tell" how his/her argument is really quite similar in form to that which s/he berates (albeit with a slightly different political agenda): "Catalyse individual theory"; "new perspectives"; "stories which genuinely cultivate a new understanding"; "information has always been ammunition for action and self-created theory"; "struggle, capital, ecocide, and ecodefence, and new topographies of class, in order to grow new libertarian thought organically"; "a constantly evolving, active approach to organising community and personal life", etc. All these statements mean something but what exactly? All these concepts have theories attached, theories that S.N. neither articulates nor illustrates with stories from his/her own experience, so what are we to make of them when set beside the values s/he criticises: "boy's-own, old school establishment", "Minority, entrenched I-have-the-one-true-faith anarchists", "sectarian lines of defence", "dogma, tradition, and narrow critiques layered upon past critiques layered upon redefined critiques", "all in a style of writing that's largely dogmatic and assumes prior knowledge... "Right now, it's lifeless"?

S.N. says people like us are already dead and we probably stink. The point of our listing his/her values and anti-values is that we think those of the new school are remarkably similar to those of the old school, if not in specific jargon, then in the urge to denounce and rubbish rivals and in the desire to move in, take over, and impose their interpretation. All that s/he accuses the old school of can be equally applied both to him/her and his/her

friends who have no desire to read *Freedom*, ie to communicate with anyone who is not identical to themselves. No milieu is more dogmatic than the Lusting for Life, young new school of anti-capitalists who've recently inflicted themselves upon the world, reinventing action and sweeping away those dusty old anarchists who never do anything but blah blah. It may surprise you crazy kids, but the previous generation of anarchists took exactly the same path as you; made the same judgments; and attempted the same revitalising projects. The issue here is not the divergence between the old and the new but the continuity expressed by each new generation in the pattern that begins with the Discovery of New Ways and ends by slipping back into old habits. The transformation of the role of pro-rev is not the result of subjective decision making but depends instead on external circumstances. Unchanging economic conditions reproduce more or less solidified character types, moulds, and roles within the pro-rev milieu that each new generation of activists conform to.

We have encountered opinions like those of S.N. every couple of years or so since we began our futile involvement in the pro-rev milieu and we've noticed that they've become more frequent recently since the milieu has detheorised itself, dumbled down, refused to have dealings with anyone that is not itself, convinced itself it is not a milieu at all but is really a movement, and desires that all writings about itself should be celebratory (see the dire London "No War But The Class War" leaflet issued just after the events in New York of September 11th 2001), ie should be based upon its own newsworthy events and also on selected atrocities of its chosen enemies.

Is it over for us, those who are not new? Shall we get our coats? Have we been made redundant?

Not quite yet, ah, if I can just reach that button on my remote... S.N., welcome to the hall of mirrors.

Here is the ten o'clock critique of factism, stuntism, specificism, and immediatism.

*Q. What is the worst thing about a fact?*

A. The function of facts in any discourse is to disguise the generality of social relations; it is presumed by activists that if you pull on a thread of facts then, like Ariadne, you will arrive at the general relation of capitalism. They're wrong. If you endlessly list the crimes of corporations, if you march against the monarchy, if you organise anti-summit summits, if you support national liberation struggles, if you monkey wrench ecocide, then you find yourself in 1789 as an anti-imperialist sentimentalist – such is the radical politics of the moment. You do not arrive at a social revolutionary perspective and you still have little conception of what capitalism really is. Capitalism cannot be exposed by facts about incidents that occur within its boundaries because capitalism is the general condition of all facts and also of the theory of facts. What you could say is that one fact which is always missed out in any consideration of facts is the fact of social relations – in other words, the ownership and selection of facts is always obscured by their artfully presented self-evidence. This is why factism is so much practised in Anglo-American university social science departments. Social institutions refuse, by all means, to reflect upon their own integration into, and determination by, the capitalist base, preferring instead to

examine autonomous Facts and Issues .

And this is also why Radical politics and their emphasis on the facts of their events and the facts of capitalist extremism is currently espoused in especially weightless milieus based in London, Cambridge, Oxford, and Brighton. The radicals in these locations can act in the freedom they have bought with their parents' absence. Pro-revolutionary factism desires to operate in a bubble of pure issues that are situated in anonymous international cities away from families and without the complication of complicit middle class personal origins; factists, who are really issueists, want to get away from the problematic facts of their own personal history, which is why they are always talking about rainforests and South East Asian workers and why they say nothing about the estates and factories in their own towns.

A2. Aren't facts always the extreme case but isn't life always the banal experience? Facts are fun, facts are in dispute, facts are exciting. But life is dull, living is rubbish, nothing ever happens to me that will get on the news. We are drawn to the disaster of a bus-bombing because we cannot see, and the fact of the bombing does not illuminate, the facts of the shadows of our own lives which are very much: got up, went to work, came home, went to bed. The lie of facts is that they say something is happening when really nothing ever changes.

*Q. What is the worst thing about news?*

A. It is a communications ideology. It assumes that information is significant.

Go tell it to the Chaikovskists. It is all very well going to the people with a feast of facts about Turkish dams,

and arms manufacturers, and political corruption but what if the peasants run you out of town?

People do not respond to news, they do not act on ideas or facts, what they do do in relation to information is respond according to the force that is applied through the information in their lives. Someone sends me a red bill, I must act. It is not the bill that makes me pay but the force behind it. People are not rational in the sense that they weigh up arguments and make decisions on the best ideas; they are rational in the way animals are rational – they act in their own best interest as they perceive it in the present moment and with the limited powers of their abilities. They respond to the orchestration of news, they cry when this royal dies, they cheer when that team wins, but it is not the news that moves them it is the force behind the news.

You could say they respond to the amount of capital that has been invested in a message. Imbeciles and anarchists say knowledge is power, but Freud thinks (and we agree), that knowing you are repressed doesn't stop you being repressed. MD's fabulous knowledge of pro-revolutionary history and ideas has not set us free; quite the contrary, it has drawn us into an investigation of why we're still miserable gits; why our beliefs have no significance in the world; why intentional actions always fail; why so many revolutionaries are arses, etc.

Don't the working class already know all the facts they need to know about capitalism? Do they really need the pro-rev equivalent of a spotty student telling them about, sorry, showing them the plight of distant natives, or the revolutionary potential of veganism? The working class know they are being exploited but they are also get-

ting something in return; as things stand their wages are more real than ideas of social change. It's no good telling them things could be otherwise because there's no proof that they could be, and the cost of the struggle against capital must be borne by the workers who have no option but to exist where they are.

People do not rise up against capital because they lack sufficient facts. They refuse to act, or act as they presently must act, because that is the best bet as they see it under current conditions. Power is not knowledge, power is power, or put another way, power is force and force is power. Information is only significant if you have the power to act on it, otherwise it is just noise. You tell us America did a bad thing, you say some company uses child labour, too bad and so what? We're just people, we can't change anything, we can't do anything more than anyone else, it is simply beyond us. The specifics of news always draws a response to the symptoms of capitalism, not the capitalist relation itself, as a cause. The implication is always that we must respond to the issue, and the direct cause of the issue, rather than examine the relation which the issue emerges from.

The working class bury their heads; that's good, they might see the root of things. It is not the knowledge a news item brings that is significant but the force it carries behind it. For example, the news content in the single word, strike, is only a pinpoint but it carries behind it the weight of a thousand decisions and attracts to it the force of many others. The news of local breakdowns of the social relation as expressed in industrial action is important to the degree that it can be acted on and engaged with.

Living and acting within the strike, and not the news of the strike, is the important event here; if we are unable to contribute to a particular industrial action, then news of it is irrelevant to us. And it is no good calling for a strike as a matter of political preference, as many left organisations do, people aren't prepared to risk themselves on something that isn't objectively conditioned... they do not volunteer industrial action out of the blue – there must always be an objective context, something really at stake. Only the news of the breakdown of our subjectivity is really news, and we are certain that we will be aware of such a breakdown, if it were to occur, long before the news of it has reached.

The precondition of revolution is not more information but real events to which the world must respond, and only shifts in economic forces create real events. It is precisely force that we as a milieu do not have, and never will. The working class has force but it acts in response to the capitalist organisation of the world and not to the holy exhortations of unwashed prophets. We are saying here that capitalism and the working class (which is one of capital's ambiguous forces) dictate when and if the revolution will come.

*Q. What is the biggest obstacle to receptivity?*

A. It is assumed by many in the pro-revolutionary milieu that all they have to do is grow and grow and grow and that people will be attracted to their movement, one by one. However, after two centuries of socialist agitation this assumption has been proved incorrect, on several counts. Left organisations underestimate their own formal determination by capitalist social relations and have been

consistently surprised not only by the innate and trademark conservatism of the revolutionary movement but also by their own capacity for tyranny, entrepreneurialism, and exploitation. The structure of much of the radical press for example facilitates a majority passivity amongst the readership, which comforts itself with a product that is unusual, radical, and alternative, but remains essentially a commodity. Because of the pressing needs for continuity, for some sense of permanence, the radical press can only ask "how can we reform ourselves?" It cannot ask "are we wrong even to exist?" This counts double with unreflective publications such as *Schnews*, which are distributed within a highly specified cultural milieu that is itself dominated as a niche market by radical products such as vegan food, underground music, cannabis, etc.

Equally, groups such as SolFed and the Anarchist Federation are predicated on the accumulation of capital for the maintenance of their organisations, publications, etc. This in turn is based upon the accumulation of recruits. Then we see in the underlying structure of S.N.'s solutions, to the ever-present rota of pro-revolutionary activity, some basic economic-religious concepts. The driving assumption is that if you show the truth to people they will believe but the question of the ownership of these ideas and facts bound up within them are not reflected upon. S.N., in calling for self-created theory, echoes the scene in *The Life of Brian* where the main character is echoed by the crowd of his followers, "yes we must think for ourselves." In reality ideas, facts, and much decision-making within radical circles is driven by charismatics, whose informal leadership position goes unchallenged.



The authoritarian nature of information-based propaganda lies in its vague aspiration to universality of message; its angry appeal over the heads of foot-draggers to an ideal readership that does not yet exist; and by denouncing the efforts of those already involved. There is a limit to the number of people who can absorb a message that goes against the way things are. Certainly, a paper like *Freedom* (as an example of the radical press in general) can considerably expand its readership but in doing so it may have to adopt even more capitalistic methods and change into something else entirely. We are sure there are many more people out there who would buy it. However we do not consider this necessarily a good thing – a proliferation of readers or recruits does not translate into radical events, quite the contrary in many examples.

Our aim, for what it's worth, is not to build the movement, nor to sell the paper, it is rather to publicly pursue the truth of our condition and examine the likelihood of its overthrow. We absolutely oppose all forms of movement-patriotism and all organisations that function within the spectacular array of movements. For example we see no point in being against the monarchy, a current unpopular populist-anarchist campaign, any more than being in favour of football – both are cultural/political forms generated out of the capitalist base of social relations.

What is the milieu to do if it does not seek its own self-expansion? Work it out for yourself but we think that in a world of billions, the matter of a newspaper's circulation, whether in magnitudes of hundreds or of thousands, is irrelevant.

The problem raised by S.N. is not one of clarity of

message. You can reduce it down to a-is-for-apple and the message still won't get through. The problem as S.N. sets it up is not with pro-revolutionaries expressing their opinions, because none of our opinions have any wider effect, but that these opinions are often ugly, authoritarian, elitist, and plain wrong. The idea that a simple message is more consumable than a complicated message misses the point on three scores; firstly, May 68 shows us that an absolutely dormant proletariat can be radicalised over a few days (and not by the established anarchist groups, nor by facts, nor by ideas as such, but by events and the ideas generated within the events). Pro-revolutionary ideas are consumable at the moment of revolutionary potential in society: events come first, ideas come second. The second fallacy of the highly theoretical but unreflected-upon concept that we-must-speak-to-people-in-a-language-they-understand is that the manner in which pro-revolutionary ideas work and the way they are formulated is not at all commonsensical or straightforward, in fact none of us really knows how to proceed, which if we think about it leaves our pious certainties very exposed. The third point is a stupid and a dumb one. Pro-revolutionary theory is complicated – especially when it comes to considering the counter-revolutionary implications of avowedly revolutionary groups and strands – each of them has their own dark heart whether they are nationalist, anti-capitalist, Leninist, or whatever, and to expose this beating heart upon the altar of critique is not an easy thing especially when the true believers refuse to see it.

We are not in a marketplace of ideas, we are not selling our wares in competition with other ideas, we are

not prepared to democratically accept another five years of the people's will because a majority disagrees with us. Our aim is the abolition of capitalism and its replacement with a fully human free-communism that at the moment exists only as an idea, but must one day become a force and then perhaps not in accordance with the idea of it.

The struggle is not between ideas and the competing interpretations of a vortex of facts but is over the nature of ownership and the eventual abolition of the imposition of private interest. None of us can produce a formula by which our childish fantasies of reversal and the overcoming of reversal may, like a fairy tale, come true. But what we are ever so 'umbly certain of, and what we propose all pro-revolutionaries should learn, is that it is not revolutionaries that make social revolutions. Revolutionaries maintain the pro-revolutionary milieu by means of gossip, controversy, rivalry, and critique. This is both a good thing as it preserves and perfects certain important ideas and is a bad thing because the milieu acts as a spectacular force that tends to politicise and therefore denature direct class struggle. There is a limited number of people able to achieve pro-revolutionary consciousness. The question then becomes, if we drop the idea of talking to everyone, what are we going to do afterwards?

As an alternative to either factistical journalism or academic games of marbles we propose the creation of theories that are taken from personal experience and pursued with an open and honest attitude. For example this piece is written from the perspective of a dependent of a wage guaranteed by the minimum income scheme; we have sunshine caught in our curtains and we're looking

out of a window onto various neighbours who live on a typical provincial council estate. Too many facts? Well of course we leave out banal personal experiences, our previous pro-revolutionary activities, our personal relations, and so on. Even so, our experience of our locale is enough to prove to us that people here are interested neither in facts nor in opinions, and how could they be when there is so much information buzzing in their head?

The average proletarian absorbs six hundred times more pieces of information per day than the average peasant did during a whole year in The Middle Ages (made up statistic), so how is that person going to distinguish between the significance of one message above another? The fact is, they have other things on their minds: joy, worry, hope, dread, work, TV, love, neighbours, those strange Monsieur Duponts looking out of a window at them. There're junkie squatters down the road, a spate of trashed stolen cars, the local pedophile. Then there are the drugs that distort consciousness and decision making, information capabilities (cannabis, heroin, proscription antidepressants, sleeping tablets). Then there is Islam, Pop Idol, Christmas. Then there is football, then there are holidays. Isn't that enough facts for anyone, isn't personal experience of capitalism factitious enough? What do we need to know about the facts in Mexico or of some anarchist avant-garde stunt? So many chemicals and issues in people's heads and so tiny a space for thoughts of revolution, a revolution that will probably not happen. And what kind of person would think of that instead of holidays? Holidays are something that really happen, that is if you can secure the loan.

We look out at people on our street, we talk to mums and shop assistants, postmen, neighbours, passengers on the bus, we pass people in the shopping arcade and all of them, just like the friends of S.N., do not read *Freedom* and no matter how the radical press in general is reorganised they will never read it. But their revolutionary potential, or lack of it, is unchanged. How can this be?

Again, we think, people will address the question of revolution when the revolution means the binmen have not turned up, there's food and petrol rationing, there's roadblocks on the motorways, the railway workers are on strike, they haven't had their post for a month, and the stock exchange is in freefall (whatever that means). People think about solutions to problems that are in their faces right now. If you don't have to think about the character of a workers' council then why do it? Well, pro-revolutionaries have to think about it because such questions are unavoidable once you are possessed by them. It is also the role of those who have prior awareness of these issues to intervene when potentially revolutionary events are about to get re-routed back to capitalist forms. It is during the revolutionary period that pro-revolutionaries can make a decisive intervention, and push forwards revolutionary opinions. Like those seeds in the desert or the eclipse horizon, our moment is very short.

Finally, the easy question of the function of *Freedom*, and oh how many years it had to wait to want to change. We suggest that it seeks circulation decline by demanding from every one of its subscribers a critique of one aspect of its content. By refusing to appeal to the general public in terms of sales it will, perversely, have much greater

indirect impact in the public sphere. We formulate it thus, the new *Freedom* should become an ideas-stallion that services the broodmares of its readers' minds, and in the passage of time each of them will squeeze forth a tiny Pegasus from the top of their heads.

One fact we have learnt that was taught us by our children, and it has some metaphorical resonance here: if you pitch your tent someone else will find its warm, soft, darkness just the right place to fart in, so we're sorry S.N. for the stink but we'd like to thank you all the same, for giving us the chance to go through our now routine nihilistic free-associations based (on this occasion) upon your argument. You say information is ammunition (nice), we say we've fired your rocket into outer space and in leaving you all, we'd just like to add, in a Brel style,  
*au suivant*,  
Monsieur Dupont  
June 2002

## REPLY TO "THE REAL MOVEMENT"

*The following article by Monsieur Dupont is a reply to "The Real Movement" in Red and Black Notes #14. A response to this piece appeared in Red and Black Notes #17.*

It is difficult to reply to your article because it doesn't really get anywhere. At one point in the article you say "Yet, all of this begs the question of what exactly is the real movement?" But you fail to arrive at any sort of real conclusion, even though you have already stated what Marx and Engels thought and already described their thoughts as "clear."

For the record, we don't think Marx and Engels

were very clear on the issue of how a revolution that might overthrow capitalism could develop. Look at this example – also from *The German Ideology*, where the term “real movement” is used – “Both for the production on a mass scale of this communist consciousness, and for the success of the cause itself, the alteration of men on a mass scale is necessary, an alteration which can only take place in a practical movement, a revolution; this revolution is necessary, therefore, not only because the ruling class cannot be overthrown in any other way, but also because the class overthrowing it can only in a revolution succeed in ridding itself of all the muck of ages and become fitted to found society anew.” What does Marx mean here by “movement,” by “practical movement,” by “the cause,” by “revolution”? Is “the movement” the actual physical revolution (seizing the means of production), or is “the revolution” a continuing accumulation of acts of revolt (a “real movement”) wherein mass communist consciousness is formed? Or is he talking about something else entirely? Don’t try to answer these questions. The point of asking them is not to encourage further interpretations of the Works of Marx, but to indicate where the limits of his theory, logic and explanation lie. We do not need to “go back to Marx” to examine the concept of “the real movement”, we can look at ourselves and the world around us to see if this marries up to what present day ideologues of The Real Movement are trying to tell us. In so doing we will be examining the way communists generally see themselves.

One problem with your article is that you haven’t looked at what the word “movement” really means. Surely such an examination is the first criteria for your article?

When we look at various activities that are related to the working class and its inherent opposition to the economic system – do we see a movement? Do we see a real movement that is heading in the direction of the overthrow of capital? Marx also described upheavals of the working class as “convulsions”; were these convulsions part of a real, continuous movement, or unconnected spasms (connected, of course, by the fact that they were brought on by the same conditions)? The article ends with this vague and meaningless statement (one that also implies that the whole debate is a waste of time anyway): “We end by concluding [sic] that the resistance to capital must be the prerogative of those who struggle against it”. It seems that the main angle of the writer of the article is to continue a refutation of Leninist and Trotskyist notions of Party vanguardism. Unfortunately, the writer does not seem to sense the possible vanguardism, despite our previous correspondence, that lies inside the concept of The Real Movement itself. Below are some partial thoughts on the subject.

You say that capitalism has produced its own gravedigger in the form of the proletariat. But you don’t say why this is. Why is the proletariat any more the gravedigger of capitalism than the slaves were the gravediggers of Ancient Greek society? What is the difference between the world today and the world before capitalism?

You make some linking of the proletariat with class struggle (ie, its role as the revolutionary subject) in your web page intro printed in the last issue, where you say to look for class struggle in “strike figures, wildcats, sabotage.” But then you abandon the direct link of the proletariat with economic production by continuing with, “and



above all resistance to capitalism in all its forms.” Here we have left the realm of the working class and entered the world of political movements, single issues, and most importantly, the heart of capitalist economics: resistance to capitalism comes mainly from capitalists themselves and ideologues of capitalism. Every corner shop resists the onslaught of capitalism, every big firm resists the onslaught of rival capitalist firms. The ideological basis of capitalism is democracy, which is another word for competition. Globalization and anti-globalization is the latest public arena in which capitalism is testing itself, checking horizons and re-formulating strategies.

But what is the proletariat anyway? Academics, sociologists, and communists and anarchists usually only help to confuse matters.

We, at Monsieur Dupont, aim for a simplicity that is strategic and tactical in analysis, since definitions of the proletariat/working class that are ideological or cultural have never had any use but to mystify (protect) capitalism. We would say that the relevant part of the working class, for an analysis of how a revolution might come about, is that section working in industries without which the economy would stop functioning (Marx called the proletariat those workers who work in big industry). They are relevant not because they have some sort of working class Cultural Identity (all cultural identifications help mystify the true nature of society) but simply because when they are at work they have in their hands the levers of production, the mechanisms whereby capitalism can continue to function. How it comes to pass that these workers stop production is entirely out of the hands of those who would call them-

selves “revolutionaries.” (We prefer the term pro-revolutionary, since the description “revolutionary” bestows on the holder of the title an expertise all out of proportion with reality. Since there has never been a revolution that has got rid of capitalism how can anyone be an expert on it?) As Paul Mattick has said, “Thus far, [...] revolutionary actions have occurred only in connection with social catastrophe, such as were released by lost wars and the associated economic dislocations. This does not mean that such situations are an absolute pre-condition for revolution, but it indicates the extent of social disintegration that precedes revolutionary upheavals. There will be no movement created that will destroy capitalism. Capitalism will only flounder under the incompetence of its directors and managers, when a situation might emerge in which workers are forced into certain acts, and, in particular, when those workers who work in the essential industries are forced to stop production, thereby halting the capitalist process; thereby creating the possibility for a new material basis of living to assert itself.”

We would agree with Marx that capitalism creates the grounds for its own removal not because of any (mystical) “necessity” or “movement of the class towards... self-actualisation” as you would have it (we acknowledge that Marx also talks about communist revolution in terms of “necessity”), but simply because capitalism is a global condition. In antiquity it was possible for people to live in different ways across the globe, but to only a certain extent due to the limited technologies of the time. These days advanced technology allows for the possibility of everyone to live comfortably, but the economic system prevents this. In antiquity any successful revolt of people from oppression would eventually

be brought down by the imperatives of survival. These days there is no possibility of any revolt to escape capitalism, of any people. There is nowhere to go, and nowhere to stay. Any direct opposition to capitalism (seizing its productive apparatus) is always forced to expand into a global phenomenon. If revolt fails to do what it must then it is quickly brought right back into the capitalist arena (we see this truth in every strike, and in every revolutionary event in recent history). This is what the proletarians of Russia in 1917 (and beyond) knew instinctively, what they knew in Germany in 1919, what they knew in Spain in 1936, etc. It is also what the Revolutionary leaders knew of course. All of this explains why, at some point early on during all these events, the workers started giving up, going home, and allowing their leaders to try to get into power under capitalist/anti-working class terms.

### *Back to The Real Movement*

Capitalism is an economic system that relies on certain industries (which rise and fall in individual importance over time) to keep it functioning. Now, these industries – which make, dig, extract, build, distribute – all, at their base, rely on the work of supervised workers. In times of economic crisis these workers might feel forced to take over their workplaces as a collectivity (thus disrupting the reality and continuation of capitalism, creating a new material base). And, in their making of connections to other workers and other parts of the working class (which tactics their revolt forces on them), they may establish a new way of living. But this new way of living cannot be established, or planned, before the old way of living (capital accumulation) is stopped. The ruling ideas of society are the ideas of the

ruling class. To put it another way, there is no possibility of a new way of thinking arising before the material basis for it has been established. Who, amongst the readers of this magazine, really thinks that a movement is needed before capitalism will be halted? Yes, we thought as much, all of you. Does history count for nothing? Everywhere in the pro-revolutionary milieu we see aspirant midwives for communism, self-proclaimed experts who insist on putting their ideological cart before the horse of material events. The problem we see with the concept of The Real Movement is that it is another ideological trick by which pro-revolutionaries can trumpet their sense of self-importance and their ownership of understanding, the leadership role which they refuse to give up. The British group *Aufheben* use the concept in the most explicit, and authoritarian, way. They say, "The real movement must always be open, self-critical, prepared to identify limits to its present practice and to overcome them" (*Aufheben* 9, 2000). Here *Aufheben* have gone beyond merely looking for connections between events and given the concept a personality and suit of clothes, that is, they have themselves actually become The Real Movement. The gods have put themselves in heaven. Marx was vague about this concept that he coined; he himself cast about uncertainly for "signs of resistance" like many others do now, and we will never know whether he understood the kind of use that the term might be put to.

1. In Dauvé and Martin's *Eclipse and Re-Emergence...* it says, "Communism is not an ideal to be realized it already exists, not as a society, but as an effort, a task to prepare for. It is a movement which tries to abolish the conditions of life determined by wage labour, and it will abolish them by

revolution". Here communism, or The Real Movement, is clearly described as "an effort, a task to prepare for". This, plus the use of the term "movement" would imply that it is the continuous accumulation of certain acts that will bring us to the revolution. Of course, once such a (flawed – see below) prognosis has been accepted, then it is up to the experts to identify which acts are to be considered worthy. It would seem that we have replaced the notion of The Party of the Working Class as the holder of truth and understanding with the notion that the politicized element (the communists) of The Real Movement now hold understanding. Thus the "historic mission" of "revolutionaries" is not damaged at all. Revolutionaries are still the experts, despite their history of failure and betrayal. We are stuck at about 1860, we are still in the period of anti-tsarist populism. Communists have not escaped Lenin. (Not a disciple of Marx but an anti-tsarist populist, and finally an agent of the German State – if Germany hadn't used him Lenin would not be mentioned or remembered by communists.) When they are pushed, communists always go back to what Lenin said (as *Red and Black Notes* did), because he so-called won. ("Lenin [is] perhaps more than any other person, responsible for the course of twentieth century history", *Red and Black Notes*. By the way, what happened to the materialist conception of history?) The owners of understanding (the modern, friendly face of the old-style Party) can display some interesting characteristics, characteristics that are no different from those of the old Leninist Parties. Take this threat from *Aufheben*: "Our interest in the struggle in Mexico is how it expresses the universal movement towards the supersession of the capitalist mode of production. One

needs to avoid acting as judge of every manifestation of this universal movement, dismissing those manifestations which don't measure up, while at the same time avoiding uncritical prostration before such expression" (*Aufheben* 9, 2000). This is from an article that championed the movement of the Zapatistas and criticized the views of people they termed "ultra- leftists" on the matter. At first glance what they say above might seem reasonable, until one realizes that to ask people not to "judge every manifestation of this universal movement" is, in fact, their bullying defense of their own judgment of events in Mexico. Where is the intelligence here? Where is the self- reflection?

The concept of the real movement and communists' self-employed status as the holders-on to consciousness, the performers of understanding of the movement, is grounded in an ideology of inter-subjectivity. (*Aufheben* again; "Our task is to understand, and to be consciously part of something which already truly exists – the real movement that seeks to abolish the existing conditions.") Communism for the understanders is made of acts. But we understand from the works of charity that inter-subjective acts (no matter how profoundly good intentioned and no matter how many thousands or even millions might be involved) address only surface phenomena of society and not the structural causes. Acts, even at their best, can only ever achieve a status of a political intransigence, always trapped by conditions. There is no means by which a symptom may turn on and attack its cause, puppets cannot cut their strings. *Fi Fie Fo Fum*, an Englishman cannot be anti-English – as many are, of course – without expressing one of the possible forms of Englishness. Communism cannot be itself in an

ideological form (that is, as a current, or movement of political values and acts acting in present conditions) without being wholly determined by conditions, which in an almost unanimous majority are capitalist. How infinitesimal, how like the mustard seed, is the negative moment.

Communism, breaking out right now, is a variant of capitalism. It is precisely because communism is absent, is in a future, that we search for it. Search for it but do not work for it – there is no proof that acts or works (that teaspoon paddling against the current) makes our desire more possible. In the dingy bars where we hold our meetings, communism is always not here. To say, as we do, *do nothing*, is only an admittance of the difference between structure and perception. The cup of the world is not shaped by many people talking to each other, rather the world is a cup that holds many people talking to each other. Structure precedes acts. This is not to say *do nothing*. Some lives are better lived than others, some have the life force stronger than others. Don Quixote's adventures reveal a flawed but good human being but he never approached political and social power; his vision of a better world made up of noble acts never passed beyond fancy – reality is always a drag. It is important to be a good human, to work good works, to perform noble acts. After all, what else is there to do? But works and acts address the merely and immediately human, this cannot bring about the revolution. Good acts in the capitalist world is pissing in the wind (the cherry saplings on the estate where we live have all been snapped). A generality of good acts depends upon an entirely different configuration of social power. Communism comes after revolution.

February 2002

**TO GET OVER THE WALL,  
WE FIRST HAVE TO GET TO THE WALL**

Reading your article about five years of *Red and Black Notes* has made us think about the paucity of interesting literature these days in Britain. In the Nineties, when I was doing *Proletarian Gob*, there were lots of little zines about (of varying theoretical quality), but now there is hardly any stuff of any interest. This is partly due to the closure of lots of alternative bookshops across Britain (for financial and exhaustion reasons rather than any plot by the State!). More importantly, economic determinations have been allowed free reign within the milieu without any theoretical reflection on them; very basic industrial forms of production have been absorbed and replicated by the radical milieu at the very moment of their denunciation of such forms. By “the very moment”, we mean that the moment anarchism decides to try to rally people for the cause of anti-globalization and anti-monopoly, its own structure becomes a reflection of the ideologies it says it is fighting! Anarchism is an ideology that now clearly promotes the concept of set roles for producers (of anarchism) and consumers (of anarchism). It has become a rigid monopoly, despite all its hippy vagueness. Writers for anarchism are very few and they write for a readership that makes no response, that does not engage; the prescribed duty of the reader is to subscribe and donate cash. This does not compare favourably with the more chaotic and less closed-down scene of about ten years ago where many people would be producing their own magazines and these would only be read by people who were also pro-



ducing such magazines. The content was often poor but at least the structure was not anti-human. Now we see monopolizing tendencies such as AK Press/Distribution and papers that place publication dates and glossy (but boring) format over content. (For example, our letters to *Freedom* could not be published for reasons of form; the very idea of changing the form to accommodate our contributions was unthinkable.) We're not attacking these people personally since they are working hard; they are putting the hours in, but they are not reflecting on what they are doing. They are running their wheels in a rut because it is the image and structure of what they call anarchism or communism that they are busy maintaining. This is at the expense of helping create the space for a free development of pro-revolutionary ideas and theory that is based on their own and others' actual immediate experience. The market in Britain is now sown up by an old guard: people like the old timers in the Anarchist Federation, Class War, anarcho-syndicalists, *Freedom*, *Aufheben*, *Undercurrent*, the people who run things like the No War But The Class War grouping, and who organize the anarchist May Day fiascos. The scene is run by people who have now been around a long time, and because these people have a relatively restrictive set of reference points, their psychological make up and political blindspots are mechanically reproduced and amplified over and over again. Because of this we continually run up against the same prejudices and errors. There is, of course, a steady transfusion of new blood, but it is just that, a traffic of consumers who are unable to contribute anything because of the restrictive structure of the anarchy factory. We can see this phe-

nomenon most clearly in organizations such as the British Anarchist Federation, but it exists throughout the milieu. On top of this the internet and email have detrimentally influenced the ability to engage with others. There is very little development of ideas in discussion; other than us there are few individuals or groups that actively engage using correspondence and there is much too much religious maintenance of preserved and sacred positions. We do not have our own web-site, we do not have our own magazine, what would be the point? We do not want to be dragged down by proprietorship; for us it is important to appear in other people's web-sites and magazines and we always do so by taking an article from the magazine as our starting point. Obviously there are exceptions to this (tentative) rule/observation about the old guard, but the truth of the significant part of the matter seems to be that theory is dead, that it is stuck in the past, and that the anarchist/communist scene is a kind of exclusive racket run by and for the benefit of people who have lost touch with reality a long time ago. The form taken by pro-revolutionary groups actively dissuades any theory that might result in the alteration of the form of the group. Theory is dead because organizing is the imposition of dead forms. Yes, the past shows us that the inevitably short dynamic periods of pro-revolutionary innovation always begin and end in failure, but at least, for a while, they seem to have some connection with reality. The present configuration of anarchist/communist politics is like a dead body, which no one in their right mind will want to go near. So your calls for more discussion of ideas is a welcome one, even if it will probably lead nowhere. It is, to us, self-evident that

every genuine contribution to revolutionary forms made by the pro-revolutionary milieu is accompanied by, or wholly embodied in, an attack on existing pro-revolutionary institutions.

Below are a couple of questions I want to raise that were provoked by your article, "The Legacy of CLR James". On page 9, in the last paragraph, you say that one of the key strengths of the Johnsonites was their focus on the working class and "that the working class was key to a revolution". This is interesting, but you don't explain what they meant by the working class being key. It is right, as you do, to criticize the notion that so-called revolutionaries must bring ideas to the people (which, for example, from our understanding, is the aim of the main participants on the Internationalists' Discussion List, mentioned elsewhere in the magazine). But this use of the working class as a holy touchstone, as the key, only serves to put us in a mystical land where we know the working class is important but we never quite know why. (For why we at Monsieur Dupont think the working class in particular industries is important look again at our "Reply to 'The Real Movement'".)

On the following page you do a good description of Lenin but before that, at the end of the first paragraph, there is more obliqueness. You say, "Marx noted that you make a revolution and that's how you change people. If you wait for it to happen the other way, you'll be waiting a long time". This is the heart of Marx's vagueness on this issue. What you have implied ("make a revolution"), and indeed how Lenin could have interpreted what Marx said, is that Lenin was right. He did make (well, hi-jacked) a revolution in order to then work on the minds of the people.

The problem, I find, with the rest of the piece is an inability to discard the ideological temptations of leadership and organization. What you perhaps might be reading into the Castoriadis and Brendel quote is that they are talking about revolutionary organizations, that they are talking about a revolutionary movement, but they are not talking about such things (even if they thought, at the time, that they were). We all know from history that there has not been one organization that has ever been, or ever could be, actually revolutionary. Castoriadis and Brendel, here, do not make this claim for workers' organizations, but they could have tried harder, and gone on to conclude that in all events of a revolutionary nature the workers will be in opposition to, and/or at the mercy of, existing organizations that are nominally for their interests. They are right to tell other pro-revolutionaries to desist from setting up anything that aims to herd workers towards the promised land, but they do not develop, at this point anyway, any elaboration of the tensions that will arise in periods of economic calamity.

You say, "I don't want to suggest that the working class does not need organization. In fact, organization and the ability to stop production are the key strengths of the working class". These are such loaded and impenetrable sentences. For us pro-revolutionaries it should be (but usually isn't) clear that the important, essential, or key, part of the working class is that which can halt production. Without production being halted nothing happens, there can be no revolution, there can be no communism. But what do you mean when you preface this statement with the assertion that organization is also a key strength, is needed? You are not (we hope!) simply bowing to Castoriadis' and

Brendel's authority (they said it so it must be right). What sort of organization are you talking about? Are you talking about workers organized in unions? Are you talking about political parties? Are you talking about workers organized in Revolutionary Armies? Are you talking about the temporary organizations that emerge during strikes or insurrectional events? Are you talking about various and fleeting means of self-defence? When you say that you "don't want to suggest that the working class does not need organization," you are not defining what you mean by organization, even when you talk about organic leaderships.

But we must go further than this and look at just what we are implying when we talk about the working class having strengths at all. When we start to talk about the (amorphous) working class having general worthy characteristics then we are walking into very dubious terrain. The working class are not good, honest, or salt of the earth. People who think the working class has innate cultural, social, or political ethical characteristics (and this includes many anarchists and communists) must surely not want them to lose these characteristics by ceasing to be the exploited class. Anyone who says they love the working class is either an idiot, a tyrant, or a tyrant in waiting. If the working class – if we are to talk about it as a unit – has strength, only has the strength of a lumbering blind beast. This is what our bosses are aware of and this is why they control us in particular ways (carrots and sticks). They are aware that if they lose control then this beast may sweep them all away in its blind attempts at self-defense. (Only in the commotion of casting the bosses aside will the beast be able to open its eyes and begin to decide how to live.)

It is not a strength of the working class that it is able to halt production, it is merely a fact. If we talk about working class strengths then we may be encouraged to try to appeal to their good side, we may say to the amorphous working class (through our unread leaflets) that they are the ones that hold the strength (or whatever), to stop the capitalist economy, so they must wise up and get to it. But, oh misery, they don't listen to us, and we are left with only one course of action – to try to get the numbers of people who subscribe to anarchism or communism to rise; the essential workers won't listen but maybe others will? Maybe, if we try hard, we will be able to kickstart a movement that will reach some critical number and then we can have a revolution, for it is often said by tired old pro-revolutionary hacks that it is only a movement (imbued, of course, with worthy characteristics) that can destroy capital. This seems to be the sad and a-historical plan of every group and individual in this political milieu from formal, recruiting, anarchist organizations to the core of informal networks such as *Echanges et Mouvement*. Here, incidentally, we are back at the question of putting carts before horses, which we explained in our "Reply..."

So let's drop our fixation with working class organization, which for many is merely another term for Movement. The revolutionary organization (that is, strategies and tactics for their defence) that workers will be involved in will only appear after production has been halted; it cannot happen before. Before this point only other forms of worker (or people) organization can appear or exist: things like unions, clubs, or informal or formal political parties.

There is a theoretical brick wall that the anarchist and

communist milieu refuse to confront, this refusal makes them intellectually weak and causes them to be the tools of authority. This brick wall is the fact that events will shape people's consciousness; events will make people act; consciousness is determined by the material structure of our lives; mass changes in consciousness come after changes in the material base of society. If communism ever appears it can only do so after the collapse of capitalism. Communism is not a movement, or a question of organization; it is only a vague description of a possible way of life for humankind. Communism comes after revolution, and revolution will not be made by any of us. Our inevitable and necessary failure as pro-revolutionaries is written on this wall, just as is our failure, and our parents' failure, to live fully as human beings. Against the missionary and dishonest optimism of pro-revolutionaries we posit a basic nihilism.

## SOME NOTES CONCERNING FUTURE PROLETARIAN INSURGENCY

Part One:

*The Dynamics of Protest Seen in the  
Recent Petrol Blockades in Britain*

Below are some brief notes regarding the recent petrol blockades in Britain (September and November 2000). What hooks our attention in these events is not the so-called consciousness of the protesters, nor whether the protesters could be labelled reactionary or petty bourgeois/middle class, but the dynamic of the struggle, the truisms it laid bare, the potential for utilising some of the

tactics employed, and lessons that might be learned in the future struggles of wage labour.

September 2000, an outbreak of effective popular spontaneity occurs, ie a non-formal organisation takes the State unaware, the police back off, approaches are made to identify leaders so as to enter into a condition of negotiation and thus out of crisis.

The size of public support takes everyone by surprise. The left condemn the fuel protesters as fascists because the protesters reveal no apparent ideological consciousness, and are often petit bourgeois/middle class (sometimes even being employers themselves).

Many people comment on the pleasurable quietness of the world, people start talking to each other – the privations generate a sense of pleasurable solidarity. Social dislocation is not as unpleasant as the media try to make us believe.

Objectively, the blockades bite very quickly into the reserves of the Just in Time economy. The State seems paralysed, unable to strike out in all directions at once, its counter-insurgency measures appear to simply rely on information gathering. But as there is no intelligence (ie, there is no overt, formal leadership as yet: everyone is involved), it sits and does nothing.

Protesters call off the blockades, formalise a pressure group, set timescales and make demands.

A propaganda offensive is begun by the State particularly through progressive and green journalists.

Leaders are identified and very quickly are divided into moderates and extremists, debates are set up between them, on Channel Four News etc, in order to estab-



lish rivalries.

The formalisation of the protesters' organisation places it within the State's discourse. What matters now is not the statement of feral power on the roads but of having opened up a direct route of negotiation with the State (a Trojan horse in reverse, the State allowed such an opportunity precisely because it could neutralise that kind of organisation).

When it was publicly perceived that this was not a peasants revolt but just a bunch of petty capitalists trying to get a little bit extra then public support very quickly dwindled. What they had liked was the "aggro," the sight of workers confidently taking on the state. When that proved to be not really the case, they lost interest. The Public has no interest in issues (consciousness) only in power and counter-power.

Of course the enticement of negotiation was a lie. The state will exact a revenge on the individuals involved. Melville writes in *Billy Budd* of a system of power whereby the ship's master-at-arms has means at his disposal for punishing individuals who may not have broken any rules but who have become subversive of the ship's spirit. It is described as "being down on you". *Billy Budd* finds that he encounters all sorts of inexplicable bad things happening to him, petty but annoying all the same. And all the while the master-at-arms, who orchestrates Budd's perplexity, smiles at him.

The build up to the proposed actions planned for November are portrayed in the media as indecisive, weak and confused. The protesters, in a classic tactical error, but under immense pressure and no doubt destabilisation

strategies, decide in favour of adopting a policy of gaining State recognition (and respectability) and forget the blockading lessons of their earlier efforts. One leader publicly declares that if any unruly drivers picket a fuel depot he will personally go to them and demand they stop. There has developed within the drivers' leadership an aversion to the tactic of the blockades, a vertigo at the prospect of so much instant power, a terror of what they have done.

In general terms we should see this stage not so much as a crisis of consciousness but a forgetting of the nature of power in the rush to be heard and to be accepted by the State. The impulse to act within the law, to appear respectable and within the pale is very strong – most protest groups see the adoption of a rational, media-acceptable face as the only way of getting things done. But the public were not interested in the issue; what they admired was the actualisation of power created by the blockaders. Power attracts support – from this we can infer that a large section of the populace will become pro-revolutionary almost immediately in any similar crisis initiated by a proper working class intervention, and they will do so not because of the issue at hand but because they sense their direct access to power.

*Police anti-convoy tactics*

Splitting up convoys, individual harassment, setting routes, and no-go zones (firstly they just want to negotiate, to open up channels; they then use these channels as a means for dictating terms to the protesters). Changing of plans, abandoning agreements without notice. Provocation and intimidation, including videotaping (in one incident a driver demanded that a TV camera crew ob-

serve the blatant police surveillance he was suffering – the camera didn’t move). Given that the September blockades had conveyed a sense of power, solidarity, and strength, the harmonised work of the police and media was now to generate images and actions of weakness and division. We saw hysterical, frustrated drivers; the derisively-named convoy of a few lorries; protesters represented (as are all non-establishment political entities) as a minority divided from the normal and neutral population as a whole.

The informational forces of the State had, by November, plenty of time to gear up. The State shepherded the convoy down to London like it was droving sheep for market day. The despair of the drivers in the convoy became apparent as they realised they’d been had. “Now it’s gloves off,” snarled one of them to the TV news, impotently. The lorry drivers suddenly became another squealing TV protest group like the Greenham Women. The shrillness of tone in itself indicates powerlessness and interrupts any potential solidarity or support.

It seems therefore that making demands on the back of popular revolt is automatically a disaster because revolt cannot be called back, also it cannot be called for in advance, there is an alchemy to it, a mystery, it just happens, it cannot be made into a political entity. The Situationists had it right: the only call to revolt is to say to it, “Call that a revolt, that’s nothing! Take courage you pussyfooters, one more step.” Revolt is a blind bull feeling for a way out of the field and into a different arena. What it lacks is not consciousness but tools that are applicable to the job.

It seems the move to symbolic action (as opposed to real action) is a disaster and everyone who had previ-

ously pricked up their ears lost interest.

Local negotiation with the police is a disaster as they will use any agreement as a lever.

Announcing in advance what you are going to do is a disaster because the State will stop you. There should always be alternatives and contingencies including absolute silence and doing nothing.

*What we have learnt*

When revolts of this nature occur we tend to begin to speculate about ways that we (as radicals) might have related to such an event, or how we might relate to a similar one in the future, especially if the revolt in question had a proletarian character. We can see how the methods used in this revolt might be taken up by proletarian insurgents; therefore it is useful to think about how we might react to such future possibilities.

Most state activity in the management of populations is focused on identifying individuals and relating them through organisational structures. All membership organisations, therefore, are built with flaws present from the outset, which the State is able to exploit usually to the detriment of the whole Movement. (Look at the film, *The Battle of Algiers*.)

In general terms spontaneity is one anti-informational technique, another is the absence of significant individuals. In particular (as radicals who desire the overthrow of capitalism), we can also draw the lesson that The Revolution is not the (revolutionary) organisations' preserve. Still another anti-informational stance is group openness, explicitness, and coherence (not to the State but to comrades: no fronts; no issues; no hidden agendas). Nothing can be

found out that is not hidden. Structurally, genuinely radical political groups will never be more than pro-revolutionary, so if they are neutralised then it will make no decisive difference because the action is going on elsewhere (this is only a rationalisation of what is already true). The role of organised groups is very specific – they are not a vanguard but can have a decisive role. They are never revolutionary, they are pro-revolutionary and as such can bring things as a kind of service provider to workers who are engaged in direct struggle. Therefore, in a similar situation to the fuel blockades, the pro-revolutionary group will agitate to clarify what is going on, to maintain the situation, to further the sense of power and progress by interventions on small so-called second fronts (in their localities or at work, for example), to provide communication and information. When nothing is happening these organisations should do nothing more than maintain networks at a minimal level.

The most important lesson of the blockades, and their subsequent translation into symbolic protest, is to do nothing unless you have the power to do it successfully (give the State no chance to practice its techniques) and then do nothing that feels like a retreat or a crossing over into a terrain described by the State. (In other words, don't let them set the terms. It would have been better if the fuel protesters had done nothing after September, that way the threat would have remained.)

What is certain is that most of the radical movement will instantly pass over onto the terrain of the State in the event of any crisis. But this may be just a short term thing (most of the left supported both the action of the State against the blockaders and the bombing of Serbia). When

they have regained their nerve they may return to their radical democratic (and thus, still anti-proletarian) positions. It is quite plain that these radicals are a miserable shower.

Red Robbie,  
*Proletarian Gob*,  
Nov. 2000.

### **ONLY WE CAN PREVENT MYTHOLOGY**

*Four conceptual definitions intended for use by anarchists,  
circumstances permitting*

#### **managing the situation:**

A current controversy rippling across the soft-cop sphere is the mysterious phenomenon of depression, which is supposed by the World Health Organisation to become the major health issue in the West some time soon. The line goes, one in five this, suicide rates that, maybe it's genetic, maybe it's environmental, what is the effect of anti-depressants, is there a talking cure (and how much would it cost), etc.

One participant of the frenzy, a pro-pills psychologist – sticking tightly to the parameters of accepted specialization – claimed that not only was the incidence of depression on the increase but that it was also now seen to be a chronic (ie incurable) condition. The metaphor and model of uncontrollable spread and futurelessness is now highly visible in almost all academic discourse. It seems capital wishes to theorise the worst case scenario of no way out.

Universities are in the grip of a prof's fad for making

pronouncements on the inescapable in all manner of issues. The continuous brainstorming on academia's intranet, in every field, is throwing up the same formula over and over again: "this so and so detail of present existence (crime, hayfever, rainfall, starvation) which is the object of our study, is on the increase (and that's bad) and there is no answer to it (and that's good). Let's keep researching." How exquisitely the higher functions of restricted thought mirror the base urge of mature capital accumulation.

The scene is this: the period of innovation and experiment is long since dead and all that is left is the dotting of the i's, extra shading-in of the white areas and some filling in of the few unused pockets: phones that take pictures, cars that don't pollute, equal opportunities, 24 hour drinking.

The gee whizz forward march of progress has not just hit a dead end, even if that's how it seems (what with post millennial ennui and the exhaustion of all available forms). We've been up against the wall for at least fifty years but it's only now that the university is beginning to register it (of course the end of art emerged a hundred years ago and that there are no good tunes anymore is a commonplace). Expansionism is long since finished and what's left is throwing metal at useless desert terrain, in the name of what? Wars fought for war itself, for the ripples of crisis it creates? This is what it seems like, of course, and indeed how it has come to be promoted, and there is truth in it, like the truth of art, and underneath this art there are the perfectly sane, rational, and simple facts of economic life, specifically oil (but don't, dear reader, think you'll change anything by "revealing the truth" to twenty readers of your little news-sheet, es-

pecially after other, highly respectable, magazines have made a reasonable business as the Serious Press, from uncovering such truths for years to many more people).

But everything is in crisis, everything has gone wrong and every specific is found to be both an epidemic and a chronic situation; terrorists, autism, and pop idols are everywhere. And every crisis, be it infant delinquency, homelessness, or deforestation, has its own admin team in attendance; there are agencies, charities, government depts, NGOs, all gathered round, engaged judiciously in pruning back the worst excesses but preserving their interest and their income at competitive levels.

Paradoxically – given the causes of war, corporate corruption, and oil slicks – crisis and the management of crisis is the only given spectacular explanation for why we need our governments and their xmas tree array of specialised experts. Who else would we turn to? Managing crisis (you might say manufacturing crisis) and the prediction for more and worse on the way is the current strategy for governance. It appears that there are no solutions (and aren't natural disasters brilliant?) and this solutionlessness is further exaggerated as new and completely unforeseen catastrophes erupt. At the level of strategy, there's no time for the future – we are all employed in plugging the dyke, the threat of inundation is always imminent. This means social managers are off the hook and don't have to make any promises about getting things right. Governments are the unfortunate victims of invisible forces, they have no choice but to define their practice in terms of response to perpetually extraordinary conditions. There is only containment of the problems,



they say, because a total breakdown in governmental management would have consequences that were much, much worse. Governments don't have blueprints, burning visions, or even plans for the future, but threaten their populations instead with a present wracked with increasing instability. The social life of the present is always about to slip away, and as a result there is a price to pay in preserving it, a price we all must bear. We may have to accept less because to ask for more (as the firefighters have done) is to propose complete economic breakdown, the ship is sinking and it's all hands to the pumps. The entire political-economic system is no longer legitimised by its governments in claims for a demonstrated mastery of the situation, that question never comes into focus; what we receive is a demonstrated and deliberate show of the failure of government, and the weary excuse that the failure could have been greater.

The governmental system itself is never presented as the problem because it promised no success in the first place, there are no means for measuring its right to continue its operations. It expresses a legitimate organising principle because there is no other conceivable, and it is preferable to terrorism or financial recession, high inflation and the riotings of anti-capitalism. This is the best we can hope for, given the circumstances.

The language of social control operates within a frame for the management of an unending series of chronic situations; the social agreement is falling apart and a feral, underneath capitalism is breaking out below, these are unprecedented times. Manufactured threats inoculate against real instabilities. Or, alternatively, the governance

of the social relation has reached a point of auto-erotic suffocation and must respond to the absence of any real threat to its dominance; capital pursuing its own piecemeal breakdown in order to, Sarajevo style, tender contracts for the rebuild before any bombs have fallen. Robbie Williams has become, to the critics' chagrin, the melancholy balladeer of this impasse of wealth without opposition; "I'm a star but I'll fade," he whines and accurately portrays the present moment. Nothing's going anywhere.

The ruling class is in desperate need of a real crisis, something to move things on, something to precipitate a re-calibration right now in the hope of preventing it some time later when the attrition of boredom has left them too weak to keep a grip on it. When the Situationists predicted that boredom would be the motivation for revolution, little did they think that this tedium would be felt most keenly by the ruling class, which even now is nihilistically slashing at its wrists desperate, like Robbie, to feel real. All this stagnation is doing for them; they want something threatening, something real, a sport more than sport, a vortex of the amphitheatre, a hole to pour their wealth into. A revolutionary attempt or some similar trauma will freshen things, and supply another fifty years of ivory tower research.

**defeat:**

It is 16/11/02. The forty per cent claim has been deflated to sixteen and the firefighters are heading for some kind of industrial relations calamity. It is dreadful to watch honest people being squeezed by the likes of Mandelson and the Iron Chancellor, dreadful but inevitable. They cannot

win their strike against the government, all conditions are against them, the structure of the social relation is against them. And if, by some miracle, they did win, they still would lose; something else, more valuable to the employers than wage costs, would be dragged back from them. No specific struggle against capital can be won; all isolated engagements end in defeat.

Will the firefighters draw the appropriate conclusions from their humiliation? Loss of hope, cynicism, pessimism – these are the open-eyed modes of consciousness appropriate to present conditions. There are no solutions, no good prospects, no chance of improving your lot. Things are going down; we're all going down together. Everything is decay and defeat, the world is grey. Big, good men are laid low by weasly small men. Treachery wins out time and time again: true-hearted intention is twisted to further the purpose of despair. These are the blackest days.

And so, if we cannot win, if defeat by the powers of darkness are certain, what then of our rejection of the bad days? Nothing is changed; an illusion is crushed – that is all. Resistance is not a bet made, Pascal style, in the hope of making a fortune in the future – it is an unavoidable burden, a fate, a curse upon our miserable band. Shall we then hear no more uplifting songs from the activist camp, no more group patriotism, no more positivity, no more “together we can do it.” Let us find in the defeat of the firefighters the absolute truth of capitalised existence: people lose out to money, we lose out to money. With no prospect of victory we still go on because the resistant position is not dependent on either political victory or lifestyle choice, it is an unavoidable chore. Without illusions we must proceed,

our consciousness hardened.

**anti-imperialism:**

This assumes imperialism, which in itself is a mystification of the relations of production. Anti-imperialism situates itself within the perceived necessity of maintaining the integrity of national borders (and implies the validation of the national elite's political interest), against all evidence of the internationality of capital and the homelessness of the proletariat.

"Our people suffer from poverty," he told me, as we sat in his office in the capital, Belmopan. "We need development in our country. And much as we want to preserve our environment for this and future generations, we have to develop." When I pointed out that there is a moratorium in Newfoundland on the size of a dam that his government is allowing Fortis to build in Belize, he grew testy. "Canada continues to build dams" he said. "The European countries continue to build dams. But little Belize is not allowed to build dams? Is that what you are telling me?"

*The Guardian Weekend 9/11/02*

Anti-imperialism is a compensatory politics made by the left after its retreat from class struggle; it is staged in the hope that the left can break free of local complication and therefore afford itself the luxury of positively endorsing a simple cause without being too involved. There is a pleasure in being on the outside, of having no influence and therefore no responsibility. One may own one's radical opinion about the stark contrasts of faraway places sure in the knowledge that it will never be engaged.

The economic structural antagonism of proletariat to capital is difficult to identify and champion so it is replaced in left ideology by the pure antagonism of foreign anti-imperialists who are quick to arms in the struggle against our ruling class. Those who would reject British or American nationalism by pointing out the complexity of society, saying "there is not one interest here but many" (and then showing how patriotism is but a means to repress contradictions to the dominant cultural form), are quite content to affirm the cross-class nationalisms of distant lands and thus by implication affirm the role of those elites (aka Mandela, Arafat, Marcos, Che, Ho-Chi Min, etc) and thereby negate the interest of the proletariat in those nations.

Whilst it would be entirely inappropriate for these liberal apologists to advocate social violence against the ruling class in Great Britain it is apparently understandable in places like Palestine – in fact the further away the bomb the more understandable the atrocity. This inevitably develops into a partial analysis of the news in which we call your victories "massacres" and describe our massacres as "natural expressions of justified anger."

In *Schnews* (issue 377) the terrorists who exploded the nightclub in Bali (11/10/02) were only attacking a "hated symbol of western imperialism" whilst the real criminals were apparently those on holiday, "drunken, obnoxious, youngish Australians... (who) flaunt their money and feel like royalty for two weeks" – political code, no doubt, for uncultured Aussie workers. In the same way Palestinian statists routinely attack work and school buses because the working class is the least well defended of all Israelis and travels in large groups.

The very move away from industrial militancy as a strategy in these countries (in favour of bourgeois means of conspiracy, terror and *coup d'état*), indicates the arrival on the scene of a nascent bourgeois elite ready to take power and eliminate all rivals. The military techniques of Hamas show them to be middle class first and Palestinian second.

Support in the west for distant, simplified struggles (like the Zapatista phenomenon) indicates a fatal alienation of committed intellectuals from the proletariat at home. This has an inevitable and disastrous effect on their intellectualizing, eg "there is a downturn in the struggle" (as if that were possible), or more simply, "nothing ever happens here". It also indicates a football fanlike requirement to support a side in every issue of the day, thus displaying an apparent mastery of all world events.

We, on the contrary, think pro-revolutionaries should have nothing to say on most issues that appear in the news – as they refer to inter-capitalist rivalry, the outcome of which cannot change the basic form of property (thus class domination).

Intellectual and romantic identification with virile foreigners began with the snobbish Byron, continued with HG Wells and DH Lawrence's admiration for Mussolini and now is a staple of leftist ideology. In all cases admiration for the exotic is attended by a distaste for the degeneracy of the local proletariat.

It seems there is one thing more stupid than patriotism and that's patriotism for someone else's country.

### **left wing:**

The left wing and ultra-realist film maker Ken Loach

observes how times have changed between the making of *Kes* and his most recent film *Sweet Sixteen*. In the old days there was some chance of redemption, he says, because of the dignity of traditional labour. Kids in the Seventies grew up in the context of stable communities so even if they went off the rails for a while they could be brought back in line by work and everyday banality.

With the undermining of such communities by various actions of capital (anti-union legislation, de-skilling, globalization / relocation of industries, set-piece defeats of the working class as in the miners' strike, etc.) the kids have nothing to do but either educate themselves into professional careers or get involved in the drugs mafia. Dad's depressed and on the dole, mum's drinking hard and everyone's a junky. No way out once you've got into it and the result is consumerism, addiction, knives, guns, robbery, further destabilisation, and despair. In consequence the working class have lost their power and are further oppressed by an uncaring elite.

We do not disagree with Loach's account, although his schematic reductionism from an inevitably privileged position, his tendency towards placing quick morality above critique and his limited portrayal of the working class as Brechtian peasants all within a mass entertainment (ie capitalist) medium makes his work probably less accurate in its portrayal of class conflict than Harry Potter.

So whilst we agree that things are getting worse, what he proposes as a solution illustrates very well the core of left wing ideology. He says there are a lot of under-employed electricians and mechanics out there and what's needed is a reinvestment in traditional industries; this will

resurrect old communities and everything will be well again because labour of this type brings dignity.

Whilst we accept that it is likely that working in a cotton mill is more dignified than robbing old people to feed a hundred pound a day heroin addiction, it is even so a very limited socialist goal to have as your ambition for the poor only that they should find something useful to do with their hands. To contrast (in the Technicolour Joseph style) the fat years then with the thin years now is an acceptable political tactic but to proclaim, as your solution to the thin times, a return to industrial slavery is about as limited and ugly a concept of freedom and equality as it is possible to conceive.

What the left forgets is that the same rules are in play now as then; things have got worse but have not changed. The time of wonder and freedom cannot be found in examples of the past – the days full of stars have not yet arrived. They have no name, they will be utterly unlike today and unlike all previous days. The names given by the left for what they want – a living wage, dignity of labour, national ownership – are precisely the limits of their agenda.

To go back to the days when such things were possible will always ultimately bring us to where we are now because whether things get better or worse, nothing essential within the social relation has changed. Liberalism slips into fascism or state socialism and back again according to economic pressures, and whilst the rhetoric alters, the same people hold power. All forms of government are bound in their actions by the same economic priority of accumulating capital.

Thus Left Wing means being stuck ideologically in



a loop between past and present; it seeks to defend what has already been lost using moralistic arguments based in nostalgia ("look how bad things have got"). Nostalgia for early forms of employment is based in the fear of alienating a perceived reactionary public to whom the left must always appeal in the language of clumsy populism. The left is convinced, rightly, that the public is incapable of conceiving anything beyond existing terms. Whilst we agree with Loach that most people are thick, we do not agree that appealing to their stupidity is an appropriate strategy for bringing on the beautiful revolution.

Monsieur Dupont

December 2002

## **ANARCHISTS MUST SAY WHAT ONLY ANARCHISTS CAN SAY**

*Monsieur Dupont's New Year Message*

### **Part One**

I stopped briefly on the pedestrian bridge over the A14 near Milton's Tesco and watched as cars, vans, and lorries appeared and vanished like shooting stars beneath my feet. For once not content with the devil getting all the best lines I made a duce-like proclamation from my impromptu balcony, "every vehicle on this road," I announced, "contains at least one for-itself individual and yet from my perspective all this is just noisy, slightly vertiginous traffic with somewhat sinister connotations."

I might have made a subjective case here for the ap-

parent divergence of traffic and personhood based upon previous theoretical reflections on a theme of alienation, but it would have been made against all objective evidence. Instead, I wondered at the contrary tendency, that of the steady integration of individuality and production. Someone once said to me, "I sat in my car in a London traffic jam and I looked, around me, at the other cars all stuck just like me and I thought, all of this, so much of it, how could there ever be a revolution? It is because all this modern life is so absurdly integrated that you can't get rid of it, there's no external reality to appeal to, no substantiated alternative."

Of course, I thought to myself, this comment is a misunderstanding of things, a case of not being able to see the wood for the trees. It highlights the childish despair of those who seem to want to change the world by changing appearances, who give up because of the impossibility of the (absurd) task they have set themselves. First they propose to change everything at the level of choice, then they despair of ever changing anything because so few chose options that are set against existing conditions. And throughout this trajectory, beginning with the proposed instant solution and ending with instant resignation, they sense but cannot intuit that there is no clear blue sea between the commodity and the human being. The agency they require is absent from the scene they have conjured.

There is no wild essence, like the red squirrel under threat but still holding on, that we could use to repopulate the wilderness. There is nothing real to go back to. And there is nothing now surviving of what existed before the motorway. Of life, human living life, all that there is to work with, are the restricted choices made by the in-

numerable individuals hurtling along the highways of the world, choices that are all of the same type, all directed to the same end, "which is it, where is it, my exit?"

Cycling away from the fact of the motorway, my mind recoiled and sought some ideational solace from the perpetual launchpad of all those banal journeys. I thought on as I freewheeled down the hill, passed by white vans, park and ride buses, and brewery trucks. What exactly, I asked myself, is the relation between the road (its complex of habits, purposes, rules, laws, vehicles, surface, destinations, etc) and the individual beings that hurtle along it?

Is there not, I thought, an illustrative correlation here concerning human existence lived within the frame of capitalism's soft totalitarianism?

The motorway is an example and metaphor of the maximised commodification of individuality, and of the secondary integration of its figure within a stabilising albumen of social admin.

First the law, then the policing of the law.

First the policing of the law, then the law.

The parable is also the paradigm. We discover the limits of the frame, and are condemned to rediscover it. Like Swiss Toni, we find ourselves imagining that driving your car on a motorway is a bit like making love to a beautiful woman. Isn't it also a bit like shopping, a bit like a maternity ward, a bit like filling in forms, a bit like broadband, a bit like education? The motorway is a sophisticated conveyor belt, a factory process that produces both destination and the high velocity turnover of packaged units, all done up in their cars like unique and expensive chocolates. A bit like eating, a bit like having an operation, a

bit like emotions and stupid political solutions? A bit like dying, a bit like clicking on your mouse, a bit like the fall of civilisations, a bit like reading novels? Appearing here, ending there, distance and the time to cover that distance. Hold-ups, contra-flows, accident blackspots, tail-backs.

It seems you can and you cannot travel the same motorway twice.

All the movement and the events borne of movement: disease, ideas, accidents, disasters, military manoeuvres, and money (always money). Getting to work, to the out-of-town, off on our hols, the products rolling off the line, the waste transported to the dump. All of that, and the motorway itself untouched, ever present like a black angel's roar, and electronic money washing over us, past us, through us. Everything, every thing, is integrated into this grand movement made up from small to-ings and fro-ings. The motorway is the site of movement, just as the factory is the site of production. From a single of its products you may deduce the capitalist economy, from one car you will understand distribution.

The motorway does not move but gives form to every possible movement from the smooth flow to the grinding snarl-up.

Moving and non-movement, the motorway conditions all possible phenomena – even that which reflects critically upon it (anti-globalisers hop on aeroplanes to attend far away conferences against aeroplanes, but to travel by mule would be mere conceit). Yes you may alter your car, reform it, change it for another, try alternative fuels. You can transform your driving habits, you can pledge yourself to the cause of safety; at the level of your

ownership you are free to do anything, but.... nothing of what you choose has any significance to anyone but yourself, all choices are conditioned.

And ethical choices, even if they are shared with a number of others, remain at the level of ethics; there is no true (that is, independent of the general movement of things) organisation in it. Revulsion against the motorway-way of doing things is not a politics, it is not derived from anything substantial but rather it remains dependent on that which it deplores. It remains merely one of the exits diagrammatically represented on the large green signs approaching at 70 miles an hour. It is an exit, like Newmarket, Bury, Peterborough, or Kettering that is either acted upon or not acted upon; it calls forth a response or it doesn't; some others take the same slip road, most keep going. The anti-motorway is one of the exits that are not exits, it belongs rather to the forest of clearly signed pseudo-priorities that are generated quantitatively by the generalised circulation of traffic.

The rules for the road are set by the road and not its users; there is imposition not consensus.

The conditioned response, the effect, the result, cannot reach 'round and alter the forces determining its presence or its character. The road drives your car, it's in your unconscious. You can turn off, but you cannot turn it off. You hear it on the other side of the hill, rubber spinning water. Nobody can stop it because nobody chose it; it is a fact, the world we live in.

In the same way a television programme critical of the psycho-sociological effects of watching television ultimately ends only in affirming the amazing versatility

of the medium – such a programme cannot turn the box off and release its spectators to do something less boring instead. Television and the motorway (unlike the Roman Emperors) tolerate, even encourage, dissent.

Outside the metaphor, anarchists can refuse details and go on demonstrations, they can change their lives, they can try to will the future into existence; they can go vegan, they can develop viable alternatives, proclaim themselves against burger bars and coffee shops; they can develop green, organic, co-operative ventures. They can attempt to control every detail of their personal lives and make their existence as alternative as is possible but the system itself remains out of reach; the social relation is untouched. When they are saving the environment by recycling their rubbish someone else is extracting surplus value from their unpaid labour. When they are printing leaflets and shouting slogans for their cause forces at a higher level of organisation are converting such energies into political advantage.

Within the metaphor, anarchists can disrupt local traffic with their critical masses; they can park their cars on the hard shoulder and go and find themselves in the adjacent field of sugar beet; nobody notices the sparks that fly off into the dark periphery. They can drive their tractors slowly, they can hold parties on the tarmac, they can dig up chunks of what they hate. They can cause other drivers to feel very, very annoyed by their pranks and provocations. But all this might be termed second order voluntarism. I am determined by the road therefore I rebel against the road. It is not profoundly structural, it is not expressive of a critical juncture in reality. It's just another exit, and always stuck at

the level of Starbucks Bad, Fairtrade Good; it never touches the heart of it. The most coordinated second order structure for political reflection upon economic forces is democracy, but at all times in its history democracy has shown itself to be controlled by, not in control of, the economy.

## **Part Two**

The system of the motorway, the social relation of the motorway, is left untouched by any attack on its specifics – untouched or is it reinvigorated? Does it bloom like the desert in places where fire and rain have visited? Anarchism against circulation is an ethics; it doesn't hurt the motorway even though it wants to. It doesn't hurt the motorway because it is just one response among many to present conditions, and it takes its place alongside all other theories and actions as an ideology – it exists as one strand in the strand of strands of commodified consciousness.

On the motorway, everything that can happen will happen, including dissent against the motorway. But we see now that achieving the heightened condition of dissent does not bestow upon the rebel a capacity to change anything, or even to escape the conditioning of the possible exits open to her/him. Saying “no” does not transport us to a place where we might make decisions separately from the world in which we live. I have met anarchists who live like ironside puritans and others of a deliberately decadent inclination, but whether you forbid or celebrate you do not touch capitalism itself. At every point it holds you in its palm – sometimes allowing a little more movement, sometimes gripping harder. Capitalism has facilitated democracy, fascism, state socialism, theocracy, militarism, human rights, religious

revivals; it processes and transforms all social organisation into its social organisation. Every political aspiration is compatible with its productive relation. You propose the counter culture? Capital will commodify it, instigate it, reproduce it, and sell it. There is no outside of the loop.

The motorway cannot be undone either by ideas or practice. It cannot be undone. You think a million people like you could do the business? Well, where are they? If you haven't got them after two hundred years of agitation what makes you think they will turn up now or at some time in the future? And do you really think it possible that a million people can believe the same thing at the same time? How would you check they were really thinking what you thought and not hoping to get something else out of it: a Phd thesis, a promotion, a ministerial promotion, a groovy party, radical credibility, a new girlfriend? And if they did truly believe as you believe, if they downloaded your consciousness – by what mechanism would that change the world? Proposed democratic change works like magic, it has a misdirected relation to the movement of capital: if we all think the same thing then everything will come good. In reality, we know that agreement is both false and also not decisive on the mechanisms of power, which act automatically, independently of decision-making.

Why should large numbers of people be convinced by what one person claims more than the promises of any other? The internet is full of get rich quick schemes, anarchism is just one of them.

The easy anarchist answer is that it is not thoughts that change the world but acts. The fundamental flaw in political action is this: the more militant (and therefore



true) the action is, the fewer people want to participate in it. The more unreal and fluffy, the more inclined they will be to turn up. Anarchists, being mostly young men, still have not learnt that only young men like to fight back on the streets, everyone else will find excuses not to be there. In directing campaigns, the choice for activists is stark; it is between numbers or ideological purity.

But even to say that rubs some up the wrong way; all discussion subverts the glory of acts. Apparently talking and thinking gets you nowhere because “there is no point in theory without action”, as if the likes of Class War or RTS have ever got anywhere. How could Monsieur Dupont demonstrate its activities on the streets? How is anarchism demonstrated on the streets? It seems after all, that all deliberate interventions made by the pro-revolutionary minority are acts but what is really important is whether the proposed interventions either achieve, or are capable of achieving, what is claimed for them.

We shall quickly pass over the crude philosophical underpinnings of the direct-action-is-the-only-language-they-understand arguments. These are tactical arguments made merely to deflect attention from the mini empires and established anarchist cults (dominated by backdoor authoritarians) that have not increased their membership or influence despite existing for many years. What is worse, since they have recruited hundreds of adherents in that time only to lose them very rapidly (when it becomes clear that these so called groups and federations are really only psychological projections of one or two individuals), this not only puts people off the groups in question but paints us all as brooding loonies obsessed with our own expertise.

Pro-activist anarchists are transfixed by the tableaux of street action but they cannot be bothered to ask themselves whether what is happening is achieving anything more than the spectacle itself. What they want is the reproduction of confrontation – the recorded display of resistance becomes the end in itself, it is a fetish, it has a cyclical temporality. Check out any issue of *Counter Information* to confirm this; its *raison d'être* lies in an assumption of the accumulatory significance of tiny uncheckable snippets of info. Have the editors of this and other similar newsheets ever considered what the shelf-life is of their information? In what way do the struggles of the past still count? Are they part of a movement to change, each a brick placed on a revolutionary wall that is slowly being built across the world by those who are fighting their bosses? Or is each act's significance merely local in both place and time? A Zapatista says, "Any struggle that wins anywhere in the world is like a breath of oxygen to us." We do not believe him.

But that is not our point. What is important with regard to political action (and a question that should be addressed by all interested parties) is the decrease in complexity of political acts as the numbers involved increase. Whilst it is easy to programme a million people into accepting football and pop music as compensations for living impoverished lives, a certain quantity of displaced violence is necessary beforehand. Programmed, or imposed, behaviour is easily reproducible because of the accumulated alienations located in personal and social relationships that we are all born into.

This accumulation of relationship and behaviour

types is why there is essentially no difference in attitudes from one end of the country to the other. People respond to objective reality on a secondary level, that is, they act as people who do not own the context of their experiences but even so have no option but to experience life in the shadow of the volcano. In these situations their so-called free actions conform very readily to half a dozen psychological types. But things are very different if you ask (as pro-revolutionaries do) people to take control of their lives, or at least to protest against their conditions. If coercion is used in the name of revolutionary values, as in Northern Ireland (and if you have sufficient firepower), you may impose on people a will to act politically, which they will do in the same passive way as others visit DIY stores; it becomes their culture.

However, if you aim to remove all leadership structures and instigate mechanisms by which people begin to think and act for themselves then it becomes almost impossible to motivate more than a few thousand individuals from a wide geographical area; and even within the most optimised conditions the specifics of the action will be undertaken by a relatively small number of young men with the majority content to look on.

As the numbers of protesters increase, as with an anti-war march for example, so the action taken and the reason for the actions become more and more simplified. To cut a long story short, it seems to us that the fewer people there are participating in political actions the more the acts conform to a defined set of ideas, but the less real the action is felt to be – because the numbers involved are so small. Contrariwise, the larger the numbers of people

involved, the more restricted are the possible actions and the less defined the ideas. With the participation of a million people acting against capital, the actions open to them appear to us to be primarily negative, namely the withdrawal of labour. The only other option is that of the mass demonstration (which when boiled down to its essence is a gathering together in one place of many people for a set period of time beneath a one- or two-word slogan). To ask anything more of such demonstrations is unrealistic; everyone will find an excuse not to act and to limit their personal participation because the pressures of reality carry too great a penalty.

The exception to this general rule of opposition occurs when people are compelled to respond to an objective economic crisis, as in Argentina at present. In this case they have no choice but to act. Even so, whilst the demonstrations, collectivisations, and occupations of this emergency communism are interesting, they are not an end in themselves; we must remember the lessons of the self-managed counter-revolution. The workers in Argentina are only keeping the seat warm as everyone awaits the bosses' return.

It is not for anarchists to celebrate when The People take over; anarchists ought not to be so amazed at examples of natural ingenuity and resilience. That is, after all, what they base their principles on. Unfortunately, anarchists' proper political task is less appealing and more controversial; it is to poke their fingers into the wounds of revolution, to doubt and to look for ways in which the Zapatistas, FLN, ANC or any other bunch of leftwing heroes will sell out, because they always do sell out. The questions we must ask during civil emergency and economic

breakdown (which are the occasions where various social and pro-revolutionary movements appear) is, how exactly does capital re-establish itself again and again despite the apparent revolutionary intent of the general populace?

If the motorway is ever to fall into disuse then it will do so because of some internal dysfunction – specifically, when the costs become too high to maintain it. Cars will come to a halt, the individuals inside will get out, and they will walk away not looking back. They will forget instantly the purpose of this architecture which within two years of such a cataclysm will fall into the field of archaeology.

Anarchists have no role to play in the initial downfall of capitalism, they have no means by which they could escalate costs to the level where Value extraction is put in danger and a crisis is brought on. It is possible that the working class, because its labour is an integral cost of production, could cause a systemic collapse by refusing to improve productivity, and by fighting to increase their wages. It is possible that they could bring on a revolution even though their only aim is their own self-interest. We think it is now fairly clear that the proletariat will never overthrow the system by choice because that is a secondary political ambition produced as a mirage by the system itself. If the working class aimed for revolution it would not achieve it, since political ambition is a readymade form, held within capital's array of determined responses; as soon as it recomposes itself in political form, the mechanisms of representation by which it achieved such a feat would cause it to drift from its economic function, and thus revolutionary potential. The working class is purely an economic category, it cannot act politically; it certainly

has political impact but by accident, not design.

It is significant, we think, that most anti-capitalists have no theory of capitalism or its overthrow; their ideas are based on third worldism, productivism (small workshops, worker self-management, localism, etc) and direct democracy, and as such (again in our opinion) the ideas they espouse are really pro-capitalist – albeit capitalism with a human face. They are for a capitalism that might be severely inhibited by autonomous ethical values; they are for motorways of quality not quantity. They do not see how all elements within play, including themselves, are determined and contained by capitalist reality and how they reproduce mere ideological reflections (exit signs) on the same basic productive circuit. Such initiatives, whether they are called ethical capitalism or “socialism in one country,” can survive for a while by producing expensive products for a specialised market of enthusiasts (Cuba is the most sustained example) but then they disappear or simply revert to an uncomplicated adherence to the rules of the all-encompassing generality. Isn’t this what happened to the communes of the Sixties and Seventies? The base capitalist reality always reasserts itself at the level of phenomena because its rules continue to dominate what is derived, at the level of social experiment, from its general relations. Rebellion and romanticism manifested at the level of opinions and actions do not impact on the hidden machinery that gave rise to such romantic rebelliousness in the first place; eventually, rebellion must give way to what determines it. Rebellion has always been unsustainable.

There are no individual, entrepreneurial, solutions.

### Part Three

Anarchists as an ethical body can continue their consumer/lifestyle protest for as long as they have the strength (I, for one, will continue my quixotic struggle to the death or some other finality) and that's fine. It is important to them, at the level of self worth, to attempt to live the good life, to resist, and say no to arbitrary authority, but they will never have the necessary force to overthrow capitalism. Revolutionary agency is not the anarchists' historic function. This belongs to a non-political proletariat. Which leaves the anarchists' true political mission unsaid.

Their two-part mission is dependent on the accidents of economic events. Firstly, in the present, anarchists must intervene in political debate with the intent of destroying false hopes for reform by showing how proposed solutions alter details but retain the character and imprint of the general social relation. The role of the anarchists is firstly that of the popper of balloons; they must be agents of anti-ideology. They must say what only they can say, they must refuse the script written for them by leftists and liberals – they must refuse celebrations of causes, even their own causes. There is nothing to be gained by repeating easy leftwing slogans. Truth, and not recruitment, should be the decisive factor. For example, the only reason to participate in demonstrations against the proposed Iraq war is to subvert the political maneuvers of the anti-war coalition's popular-front ideology (which would use anti-government sentiment to draw power and wealth to itself). Specifically, in this case anarchists must disrupt the proposed anti-imperialism of both Islam and leftism, and level the accusation against both that they are in fact pro-capitalist. In

the place of their national liberationism and state capitalist wealth redistribution projects, the anarchists must insert an unequivocal message that rejects all states, religions, and nationalisms as capitalist institutions. Despair and nihilism are more appropriate responses to the prospect of war than calling for an end to US/Israeli imperialism.

In 1983 Kinnock, the leader of the Labour Party, was robustly heckled at a CND march by anarchists as a means of demonstrating that there was no common ground between anti-capitalists and bandwagoners. However at the recent anti-war demo in London there was no equivalent action against the pro-Palestinian statist and religious maniacs spouting their primitive accumulationist ideologies. Why not?

The recent tolerance of the ugly for political purposes, this “we mustn’t rock the new left boat” policy means the anarchists have already been sidelined by their leftwing adversaries. If in doubt, critique is always more appropriate than affirmation – nothing good has ever been harmed by intelligent doubt whilst current anarchist affirmations of political struggles (such as those of Hamas) have clouded the clarity of the own cause. For example, that the message “war is always a struggle between competing capitalist elites – all organisations on both sides are pro-capitalist” has not been hammered home (as it was not hammered home during the Vietnam War and is/was stifled beneath the absurd sub-nationalist/anti-imperialist propaganda of the left) means anarchists end up chanting for “victory to the Viet Cong” or “victory to the Palestinians”. That is, they are obliged to chant against their own principles. One thing is more stupid



than patriotism for your country and that's patriotism for someone else's country.

There is no earthly reason for parroting "down with the USA and Israel" or "They say cutback we say fight back" when you have already developed a position that is against all states and all governments, and when your theory has established that all national phenomena are organised by the movement of capital. Not only is it dishonest to repeat such trivialities, it is bad faith not to properly engage and dispute the propagation of it by others. Anarchists cannot afford to tolerate other ideologies on protest marches. If it is not (as it cannot be) their role to overthrow capital then it is certainly up to them to dispel the myths of their fellow protesters. At some fundamental level the hundreds of thousands of sheep-like followers not really sure why they are there all yearn to be free of their ridiculous beliefs; let them at least be relieved of their leaders – that which is human in them cannot be satisfied with trotskyist politics.

If, as an anarchist, you have declared that you are against capital then it means you are already against war, it is the "against capital" bit that is important, not your feelings for this arbitrary incident of the moment; you are therefore not obliged to talk about being against the war now, so as to talk about revolution later, at some more opportune moment. The united front at such moments is precisely the issue, but it ought not be preserved, on the contrary; now is not the moment where we must "bury our differences" for the sake of so-called unity. During every public manifestation the only argument to be made is the determination of war by capital; anti-imperialist

stories of oppressor and oppressed nations are irrelevant.

Anarchists must say what only anarchists can say, it is important to remain true to theoretical positions and not get caught up in apparent resurgences of popular dissent. Even if there were only ten anarchists left uncompromised, as long as they kept to their principles they would have a greater impact in critical moments than any phalanx of flag-waving activists and their watered-down populist anti-capitalism.

Anarchists must undermine faith in all proposed solutions to war, repression, cheap labour, etc and not promote their own. They must demonstrate how rubbish all left wing solutions really are and how there are no solutions that do not end in compromise with the general-ity. There is no relief, there is no peace, there is no reform; as long as the system remains there is only intensification of productivity by whatever means, and that includes both war and so-called people's governments.

To be against capital in all its forms is sufficient, there is no need to tack a utopia at the end as some kind of golden handshake; all such solutions smack of religious falsity. To say "we want a better world free of this or that" plays into their hands, it's so easy for politicians to say, "we agree, we're all working together" when really there is no commonality of interest. The class system from its very origins robs some to pay others. To say "we are against capitalism in all its forms" is enough. The specifics of what comes next are not ours to propose.

The anarchist role is negative, the aim is the destruction of all exploitative and repressive false hopes. However, the history of popular fronts from the 30s to

the Anti-Nazi League to Globalise Resistance, shows the “we all march together” strategy to be a neutralising force that dissipates resistance to capital and plays down class struggle in favour of a reformist political agenda (eg anti-fascism now, revolution later). The exposure by critique of all ideologies is important because in any revolutionary situation it will be the Trots and the religious nutters who will be trying to take over and it simply makes no sense to be uniting in the present with those organisations that under different circumstances will be out to eliminate you – in organisational terms there is no imperialist like an anti-imperialist.

The second function of the anarchists is highly speculative, and depends upon the collapse of the capitalist system; under these circumstances groups like the anarchists will have more of a say as people generally attempt to re-establish social relations on different lines. There will come a moment during this period of reorganisation when things will either return to the capitalist mode or will go somewhere else entirely (the end of the motorway); it is at this moment that saying and doing the right thing will have profound effect.

My thoughts had taken me a long way from the motorway bridge at Milton so I was pleased to get back home with the last of winter’s light still lingering in the sky. After locking my bike away in the shed I paused before opening the backdoor and listened to the domestic sounds of my family inside: warm, happy, and safe. Once more the image of the motorway returned to my mind. I thought of its strange black dominance of the ground beneath our feet and I muttered to myself, “there is no hope, is that why

I'm so optimistic?" I felt strangely exhilarated like a saint-knight of an errant fraternity; I may never succeed but at least I have remained true. I opened the door; "get the kettle on love, I've been philosophising fierce."

Monsieur Dupont  
January 2003

### **MORE ON ANTI-IMPERIALISM**

It seems that the ideological construct known as imperialism has not yet been adequately dismantled and continues its detrimental effect on anarchist consciousness. The construct of imperialism as understood by the left did not fall out of the sky, equally its existence as an actual economic/political/military force is not an undisputed fact.

The left wing explanation of imperialism was devised after the Russian Revolution (to underpin the Bolsheviks' dubious claim to be operating within the proposed historical framework supposedly set out by Marx). The problem addressed was simple and twofold: Russia was not an industrial nation and the Bolsheviks were not an economic class but a political faction. The Leninists explained their apparent deviation from the tenets of Historical Materialism through an analysis of what they called Western Imperialism but which anarchists now know to be the geographical dispersal of capital's general conditions (or globalisation).

The Bolsheviks argued that Russia and other feudal countries were, when considered in relation to Western Imperialism, the national equivalent of the proletariat.

This spurious analysis over the last eighty years has become the legitimating myth of many subsequent national liberation struggles. The myth is politically expedient because it supplies an easy, immediately recognisable us-and-them scenario whilst at the same time mystifying the class aspect of such struggles.

Terms such as the people are deployed by the leaders of national liberation to obscure their own class position (always bourgeois) and their domination over the local peasants and workers they claim to represent. Thus the struggle against the alien oppressor is characterised in terms of cross-class solidarity, and one can readily see the urgent appeal of such strategies – they shut critics up by demanding, “if you were menaced by the real threat of a foreign jackboot, would it be appropriate to dispute the right of your leaders to lead?” The now familiar disguise of a sectional push for power runs, “First we must win the war, then it will be time for the revolution.”

It’s as if the anti-imperialists would have us believe that foreign capitalists are somehow more offensive than indigenous capitalists, or that local/native exploiters and tyrants are less exploitative and tyrannical. Against anti-imperialist arguments No War But The Class War doesn’t even get close to a class analysis of war, culture, and power, precisely because it has no critique of anti-imperialism. The exigency of realpolitik has always been used to justify not just the emergency measures taken by the struggle’s leadership but the position of the leadership itself. So, to the question, “Is now the right time to be criticising the Palestinian bourgeoisie?” the answer must be (if the answerer is an anarchist), “Yes”. The moment of political cri-

sis is precisely the moment to question all emergency authority because it is in crisis that tyranny establishes itself.

Anarchists explicitly reject bourgeois terror (or Nationalist armed struggle if you like) whether it is embarked upon by the leadership of some romanticised representation of a people, or whether it is officially state sanctioned. This is because all such struggles have a hidden agenda that operates against the working class. There is no such thing as a shared interest where the productive relation is concerned, and there is no political struggle where the productive relation is not concerned. Anarchist consciousness states that we live in a period of history that it describes as capitalism (a generalised social relation and source of political power based on economically base exploitation) and that capitalism is inherently hostile to human beings because it revalues everything, including people, into monetary value. It therefore follows that all macro social/political/cultural phenomena including nations, tribes, cultures, and peoples are both structural expressions of capitalist domination and a phenomenal mystification of it. Anarchists therefore consider that all struggles between nations are really struggles between capitalist factions competing for the right to own the means of production, including the right to own the labour power of The People (Israel wants a cheap labour force, Arafat et al want a cheap labour force).

There is, under capitalist domination, no such thing as a self-determining nation – neither imperialist states nor so-called liberated states are free of the capitalist order that exists above and within all established political forms. All capitalist states from America to Palestine are driven

by economic imperatives that they cannot control. Anarchists consider it impossible for a nation to act autonomously of economic stimulus. This is in contradistinction to the way that, at a micro level, all of us as individuals preserve some part of our existence that is not commodified. And it is from this experience of small freedoms that anarchists infer the fundamental struggle of present existence as being between the interest of capital and the interest of humanity as so many billion individuals – every other issue, language, nation, religion is secondary.

Therefore, when someone talks of the struggle of a People against imperialist aggression anarchists ought to ask themselves a set of simple questions. 1. Does the term the people include a set of instituted political and religious conventions (because that is not people as anarchists understand it)? 2. Does the term the people include all minorities and sections of the local populace, or are these being subdued and exterminated? 3. What is the role, background, and business interest of the representatives of the people? 4. In what context is this tragic and moving account of the people in struggle made to appear? Who is telling the story and what is their political angle?

## WE'RE ALL CLAIRE SHORT NOW

24/3/03. It must be Chinese year of the headless chicken, that or our boys in the frontline media have done a thwacking good job of hitting dissent for six. Equally, and alas inevitably, the old lefty bleaters who dominate the leadership of the anti-war movement have made a flipping pig's ear of their part in the fiasco. Never mind

that death, criminality, blood, oil, lies, and rebuild-corruption is boiling away nicely in the stewpot – suddenly it seems war really is ok. War is ok and the peace movement has blown it, just as Monsieur Dupont said it would. A veritable torrent of popular disapproval has, five days in, miraculously transformed itself into the regimented whine of getting behind the coalition forces.

The specifics? Well for a start, why, when thousands of autonomous anti-state actions are erupting everywhere, do the protest leadership call for a setpiece rally? Could it be that their most ardent desire is to be applauded by adoring crowds for preaching excruciatingly dippy platitudes? And later perhaps, on a tide of political enlightenment inspired by their leadership, they cherish a hope to be voted in to those very institutions that right now are harmonised in an all out psy-war on our humanity (but only so they can turn these rotten bureaucracies round and make them work for the people, huzzah!) Durr.

Whatever else, this at least is true enough: the biggest wartime demonstration in British history has, in effect, become a gesture of abdication from that field of subterranean power that the peace movement had minutes earlier divined and tapped into. You doubt it? Then think on this, if the peace people had been employed by the state to sabotage popular anti-war sentiment, could they have staged a more successful campaign of disillusionment?

When people are dying in their flipflops because of capital's rush to ensure the security of its long term energy supply, only the very politicised could believe that really they have achieved some sort of people's victory and that they wield massive influence over international events.



They must believe because even now they retain a sentimental attachment to the democratic rip off. Their hope is always that the enthusiastic forces they have co-ordinated can be converted into a political presence within existing society. Everybody else, feeling very intimidated, senses a real and brutal sheering off of the populace from the state apparatus and (quickly ducking their heads down) say, "me, nah, I always supported the war." The failure of the peace movement to theoretically connect the banality of ordinary, everyday life with war, capital, the media, and the nature of power proves again how that old race-the-wind hare of the english social revolution remains far in advance of its naive and overly optimistic political leadership. We find ourselves once more back in the unheady days of July '68.

What is essential of current events is the peace movement's total failure to have any impact at all. The failure to impose a democratic will finally (yet another finally) disproves the value of the civil society project. There is no common ground between the people and the state, there is no common interest at all – and if these socialists and greens continue to address their political discourse to existing institutions (in the expectation that something can be done) then their actions will continue to be valued by those institutions solely as a tool for delivering over potentially-resistant positions. Their optimism concerning the neutrality of the state is a religious hand-me-down that continues to drag radical thought away from reality. Why can't activists admit that the existing power structures don't listen and couldn't care less. People are controlled by and do not control their world.

Politically uncommitted individuals were initially drawn towards the anti-war position because they sensed

its power; they thought that it might function as a vehicle to express something of their own lives. They were wrong. As usual the leadership failed to put the appropriate theoretical tools in their hands but instead fed them bad slogans and ideological nonstarters about the Palestinian state, blood for oil, and American imperialism. Once again they shied away from pointing the finger at the system of capitalism and at the social institutions that manage the world. They cannot bring themselves to say, for example, "Because we are powerless so the capitalists can use war," all we got was that old positive thinking, "together we are powerful; we can change things." Wrong again. No matter the millions marching, war and capital go on and on, unchanged.

The peace movement's argument is simply not radical enough and the unfortunate consequences of this for all of us is that under present totalitarian conditions such positions are blended into a coalition, the elements of which (because they agree on something – for example democracy, or the UN, or humanitarian aid) are forced by mere proximity to agree on everything (so the Prime Minister is free to quote anti-sanctions arguments to support war). In other words, reformers and moderates, by perpetuating the illusion of the use of capitalist institutions for possible human ends, in practice only legitimise the actual activities of such institutions.

Ordinary people have correctly walked away from the antiwar movement because there was, and is, no hope. They, unlike the leadership, saw the terrifying actuality of our situation. We cannot stop the war, we cannot influence government decisions, we cannot get the necessary facts to make proper decisions, we cannot control capital-

ism, and we cannot hope for protection in law. There is no effective free speech, there is no democracy, there is no escape from the dictates of commodity production. The peace movement blathers about Bush and Blair, or America, or the UN and sovereignty, it rattles on about individuals and nations but until it acknowledges that this is a war of money waged against all humanity, and that that war is inherent to a system into which every established institution (including the law, the media, the financial institutions, and the government) is integrated, and that ordinary people have no chance of turning it around, then it continues to function within the system merely as a spectacular, irregular, but ultimately legitimising fragment.

For us the peace movement's very real failure has been extremely useful, it has exposed things as they really are. It would be a pity if this rare insight and the opportunity it affords of achieving genuinely radical positions in response should be immediately recognised by the depoliticised but lost on the ever-hopeful trudgers of the lost cause.

There is no way forward from, and no way out of, existing conditions. Nobody is going to step in and save us. The most appropriate, and ultimately, most negative response to the world situation is one of despondency, it is therefore logical that this is the mood-position, because it is most at odds with what is asked of us, that pro-revolutionaries should promote.

Monsieur Dupont  
March 2003

## SOMETHING ON POLITICAL ACTIVISM

*"I'll tell you what to do," he pursued, since Prince Andrei still did not reply. "I'll tell you what to do, and what I do. Dans le doute, mon char," he paused, "abstiens-toi."*

*He spoke the words with slow emphasis. "When in doubt, my dear fellow, do nothing."*

### 1

We think revolutionaries fail to recognise the revolutionary subject and mistake their own political activism for proletarian action. We think this is a leadership residue uncritically absorbed from leftist organisation.

### 2

Opposed to the figure of the political activist, we champion the figure of the workplace militant. The political activist chooses the terrain of struggle, chooses to give itself up to the struggle for others, very noble; it is also free, when its energy declines, to deselect the struggle and recline into private life. And if revolution were a relay race then the relinquishing of the baton would be an honourable convention. But, as the race itself is better not run, activism shows itself to be a parallel apparatus of social change, superfluous.

The militant, by contrast, is enmeshed in its workplace; it will never escape therefore it acts from self-interest. It struggles every minute to protect itself from attack, its every moment is a Houdini squirm from imposition. The workplace militant, without too much thought, under-

stands that capital is resisted more effectively by not doing what is required, literally in doing nothing, than by activist initiative. The workplace militant does no work at work.

The lead-by-example activist sets up actions that, regardless of explicit radical content and extremity of form, nonetheless retain phosphorescent genes that emit a glow of bourgeois moral behaviour. Doing something, for the bourgeois actant is always doing something on behalf of present social organisation; it is work, hard work, exploitable, surplus-producing slavery that is gladly undertaken. Political refusal of details, issues, principles, causes, is almost without exception an affirmation of the generality.

### 3

We are not so slow as to invest our hope in the militant personality, we are not that desperate to believe. Contrariwise we turn our face towards passivity, we observe grains of sand becoming a weight, an expanse of non-commitment and slipping cliffs. We turn our face to what is not happening. The flaw in heroic militancy is precisely the condition of its appearance, the seemingly routine absence of militancy in the masses. Where the militant stands as the name of resistance there you will find the turning away of others, that and nascent rivalries for the post of workers' representative.

Revolutionary action belongs to those capable of realising it, precisely those workers who best survive in present conditions without losing their humanity, preserving their dignity in the heat of exploitation, adapting to but not submitting to external forces. Without the duneish shift of ordinary people into the logic of social transformation there can be no change – but they are not to be

appealed to, they are not to be pummelled, they heed no promises; they carry on turning up, doing their hours, going home, absenting themselves from the social stage.

By contrast the militant who flies off the handle now, true to the pull of its crumbling self, will be unpredictable in the moment of other people's crisis – the final motive is not so much political as personal. Individual extremism, radical posturing, does not signal subjective authenticity but the singing blade presence of objective tyranny cutting to the quick. The militant unit is the first to give out under pressure, it cannot bear either the truth of its predicament or the loneliness that this consciousness brings. Resistance belongs to the body not the mind. We recognise the figures of coping and practicality but those who embody them are pigheaded, our recognition is no more appealing to them than any other tatty bauble to be found at the back of the drawer marked revolutionary consciousness.

#### 4

*In the event*

*the story is, foretold,*

*foremade in the code of its happening.*

We reject the notion that the proletariat may become politicised or recruited through the promotion of political issues; its self-interest is the only political issue. We reject the notion of political consciousness, the positive value invested in the action on the many by the few. If we are saying that political consciousness is the grip of some vice then we mean it is a form of capture, it is intended, and part of a power struggle not an accident of nature. We do not wish to free our minds or let go, we do not seek peace, calm, or balance. We are interested only in the list-

ing of weapons present in the field, how many teeth, and whether they're barbed. Consciousness is a weapon; it is effective only when deployed against politicised groups and individuals – those who have taken a side. It is activated by recruitment, it is a coagulation agent that thickens values into a crusty shell; inside, the recruited unit produces for the organisation to which it has been bound.

History has not moved on, conditions have not altered. Basic social forms are not mutating. Behind the frenzy and the noise all is still, all is quiet. We get the same events coming up over and over. None of the components of the social field have been used up. Even if some of them are buried for long periods, they must return, inevitably squeezed back to the surface under pressure of revolving circumstance. Unchanging conditions supply unchanged output.

In the refusal of consciousness we discover that meanings and therefore social directions are not pumped arterially from this urgent heart to that airless brain but are plucked from the breaking crust of events by any body in the field. Revolutionary activity is sometimes an archeology of what has been deliberately forgotten but we should not forget the objective movement of revolutionary fragments, events will throw up the necessary artifacts from the belly of the earth. Every event holds its idea, the idea appropriate to itself. And events are scattered in society like pumice over Pompeii.

We do not despair because the plough has uncovered little of late besides old roots and worms, food for the crows not revolutionaries; does this impoverishment mark the end of history? Maybe, but tomorrow in the

same field, who knows? The plough will pass again.

5

All political formulations of motive are false if they neglect the essence of capitalism and so the ground of social existence – the exploitation of labour. We are not moved to agitate for the recognition of issues because all issues end either in revolutionary class analysis or in containment within state forms. The liberation movements forged within the specialisations of sexual, racial, ethnic, or cultural identities do not concern us as they aim for recognition by the state. We have no interest in campaigns on nuclear bombs, or colonial exploitation. We do not believe in the preservation of working class traditions. We are in no position to act in defence of the values we cherish nor to attack those we revile. All strategic formulation in the political field function within conditions already set; the victory of equal rights countenances exploitation, the triumphant end of deforestation would legitimate international alliances, the end of conscription autonomised the military – every campaign won actualises capital's universality as neutral backdrop.

Capitalism without the exploitation of humanity as labour is not possible, but anti-sexist, antiracist, anti-colonial capitalism is now an explicit project. Green capitalism is feasible. Bossless, self-managed capitalism is feasible. Capitalism without war is feasible. Capitalism without starvation is possible. If social activists consider these causes worthwhile, then by all means they should activise for the implementation of these causes. If these same activists claim to be revolutionaries, then there is a contradiction at the heart of their project between the im-



pulse to reform the character of exploitation and its complete overthrow. Perhaps they forget the means by which details appear within a general context of social relations.

For us, the improvement of capitalism has little significance except perhaps in personal life. Reform issues encompass what the ruling class is willing to negotiate, which is precisely that which does not threaten its position. Why else would such old political causes be always so enthusiastically resuscitated?

The bestowing of a human face on capitalism has historical precedents – universal suffrage a century ago was readily given when it demonstrated, as the necessary myth, a capacity to deliver the maximisation of social integration and therefore to improve productive efficiency. Now we find ourselves in a similar position, too many social revolutionaries are busy affirming the details of possibilist reforms whilst forgetting their own negative position to the whole. All causes won are won only in the present, they must decay into defeat, they are soon reversed or modified or become meaningless, a mockery. Must we defend every piecemeal reform? And for how long? Must we struggle for new ones? We are suspicious of all concessions when they are painted in the colours of progress.

## 6

We insist that the working class may uncover their power only through resistance to capitalism as they directly experience it at work. Only those already enmeshed in the production process have the necessary proximity, energy, and self interest to stop it. We do not renounce revolutionary activity (why would we draw a circle around ourselves?). But we are uncertain of the status of

our actions. We do not say revolutionaries are irrelevant, we do not claim the working class can do it by themselves, as if we were not part of the working class. But we do see that too much explicitly revolutionary activity is arbitrarily constituted and hastily directed at the political sphere, as if revolution were in mere competition with other ideologies. We have enjoyed the anti-capitalist protest circus as a manifestation of some discontent but we can also see that whilst it connects objectively to examples of the problem (capitalist corporations), it does not demonstrate any significant engagement with the solution (the inevitable revolutionary subject).

7

As we imagine ourselves to be born unto an ice age we should not be surprised to encounter the contents of the world as frozen.

Everything we (as revolutionaries) contribute to the struggle against present conditions ends as an offering left upon the altar of our conditions.

Doing nothing is not an exception; it is only that it is less productive.

We learn from the law of no exceptions – the law of the orbiting of everything – that revolution comes from other planets.

Those pebbles taken from the beach are not so pretty now. Without the waves to wet them.

Monsieur Dupont

A day in a month... years ago

## Appendix

### Seminar 4:

### On the Prefix Pro- and Pessimism (Revised version)

*Their theoretical clarity can be an important catalyst in the development of the understanding, throughout the working class and even beyond, of what's at stake. But to play its role, the pro-revolutionary milieu must transcend its fragmentation by coming together to defend basic pro-revolutionary positions with a clear and loud voice.*

Internationalist Perspective,  
APPEAL TO THE PRO-REVOLUTIONARY MILIEU  
(March 2009)

The use by the left communist group Internationalist Perspective of the term “pro-revolutionary milieu” in its literature is intriguing – the source for this usage is certainly Monsieur Dupont even though this goes unacknowledged. It would be interesting to know Internationalist Perspective’s motivations for inserting the prefix pro- at this juncture, it would also be worthwhile to examine the term’s wider use within the milieu... Does pro-revolutionary have the same qualitative function as, for example, pro-choice, i.e. simply meaning *in favour of*?

It should be noted straight-off that naming ourselves pro-revolution marked for us a shift in emphasis from calling ourselves anti-capitalist at the level of awareness – occurring as it did at the time when the term anti-capitalism had wide currency. Our use of pro-revolution was intended to revise awareness of social relations – in that we took it for granted that we were always already, at the level of proletarian self-interest, and thus by structure, anti-capitalist. The point for us was to discover what else we were, what else was decisive and at what level.

The use of the prefix pro- with reference to the conscious-

ness and activity of communists, distinguishing them as being separate from the consciousness of the proletariat, was the source of a profound pessimism for Monsieur Dupont with regard to the self-evaluation of optimistic revolutionary ideologies. It was also specifically theorised to mark precisely the split between consciousness and capacity. However, I have always felt the term to be rather unstable and that this instability should be explored further. Below, I will recount a reservation and confusion I had at the time we developed the theory, followed by what I take to be a similar blurring that has arisen since.

1. At the time, and we must remember the time (i.e. a post-1999 situation of rising protest activity where the image of revolution was present to some extent within popular culture), MD failed to fully theorise (within the term) the difference between those who saw revolution occurring from within a wider and wider popular protest-based multitude (whither now that fabled beast?) and those few, like ourselves, who viewed revolution as being only possible if driven from within the productive relation and undertaken by an essentialised proletariat (understood as already organised and in place, as an anti-capitalist effect of capital).

Of course, elsewhere we clearly set out our opposition to anti-capitalism as it then appeared and the term pro-revolutionary played a part in that critique. However, both positions (the activist type and the communist type) could be termed pro-revolutionary, i.e. both the activists and anti-activists were ostensibly, on their own terms, *in favour of* revolution. Therefore, our term was not performing its task of distinguishing between profoundly different modes of consciousness (i.e. the various optimistic and pro-raising-consciousness-based types and our pessimistic, structural-based type). What meaning was there in describing the milieu in the entirety of its acts and reflections as pro-revolutionary?

Putting this another way, the problem could be described thus: with one approach, we described ourselves as pro-revo-

lutionary as a result of our acute awareness of the limitation of our influence; but with another approach, we also described everyone else in the milieu as being merely pro-revolutionary wherever they considered themselves to be revolutionaries (i.e. they had no more objective effect than we did but they were saddled with delusions about what they might achieve). With the same term we equated both our awareness of our collective situation with their lack of awareness of it.

Pro-revolutionary may be used as a diagnostic term of revolutionary pretensions as well as a self-description. Is it that pro-revolutionaries are those who overestimate their own capacities? Is it that pro-revolutionary is the name given to those who erroneously think that they are actually revolutionaries? Should a further qualifier be deployed here? For example, a pro-revolutionary-in-bad-faith would be recognised by his retention of a notion of revolutionary agency and this could be contrasted with an authentic-pro-revolutionary for whom the question of agency has been settled in the negative. These are certainly lines of enquiry that could be followed but I am sure that the theory behind the term is not working if it has become useful to those who do not use it to distance themselves from mythic forms of subjectivity.

Whatever its current usage, pro-revolution refers to a lack of capacity for action correlated to an acute awareness (of the proletariat's function within the preliminaries and preconditions necessary for communist existence) better than it does to an arbitrary, pre-established affirmative reaction to, or vote of confidence in, an event that has not yet occurred (and this reaction produced within a pseudo-subject which has difficulty in defining itself in any other terms than its being passively in favour of this messianic event.)

The term should function as part of the critique of those who call themselves revolutionaries from the hypothesised perspective of all those who are not revolutionaries. The internal critique of subjective forms within elective groupings must pass through a representation of an other's point of view...

in particular, this critique must focus on the assumption that pro-revolutionaries have something special and important to say that separates them from everyone else. It appears to the self-designated revolutionary that he is imbued with a double existence; he is somehow folded over on himself, being both an ordinary worker but also separated, blessed, on account of his radical insight – he already has something, or so he imagines, more to contribute than the simple withdrawal of his labour. He thinks he has something revolutionary to say even before the revolution has begun.

It is this remnant of bourgeois individualism that combines so readily with a religious sentimentalism that Monsieur Dupont identified and rejected, even as it was a part of us – even as we simultaneously viewed ourselves in this special light. I watched an example of this doubling-up of existence recently on TV as 6 year old Chinese children put on rouge and lipstick in readiness to ceremonially join the Young Pioneers – as one tied his neckerchief, he said, “it is red in memory of our martyrs.”

The issue relates to the difficulty of self-evaluation in relation to the nonimpact of our projects upon the external world. At what scale, at what juncture, in which category is this blessedness meant to have relevance to anyone but ourselves? This is not a matter of moral denunciation. It is not the case that the pro-revolutionary's arrogance is wrong but rather it is more a question of at what scale it is appropriate. Revolutionaries are really only pro-revolutionaries because, despite all their actions, their expertise, and all their ideas, they are not more significant than any other individual human being. Or, more problematically, if they are doubled in their being, then this doubling causes them to be of less worth than others, as their overstuffed significance too often interrupts, with a negative outcome, other people's singular existence.

2. Since the publication of *Nihilist Communism*, the use of the term pro-revolutionary has seemingly increased (or I have noticed it more) but it has been used from positions

within class struggle consciousness which, it seems to me, differ strongly from our pessimistic standpoint. Again, the term does not seem to be doing its theoretical work of distinguishing between a Dupontist-Mossist pessimism and what I shall call, positivist (activist) versions of class consciousness.

Particularly, this lack of distinguishment seems to be located around what revolution is and what its relation to communism might be. MD perceived revolutionary events as an expression of capitalist relations in crisis, we did/do not see revolutionary forms (such as workers' councils - see our text: "The Impotence of Councilism") as particularly communist. That is, we do not see communism as a matter of redirecting the economy, or of administrative decision making within the context of production. I think our view (that revolution would be located within a crisis in capitalist relations and must in itself be revolted against) is quite distinct from other formulations, which have an identifiable subjective movement passing through different sets of social relations and progressively binding objective events to its will.

Monsieur Dupont saw revolution as a moment of opportunity occurring at a distinct juncture in which the destruction of the role of the working class as the working class facilitated the possibility for a new form of human existence (and no more than that, we never got beyond speculating about a possibility). By contrast pro-revolutionary positivism sees revolution as contributory in itself, a great liberating of accumulated capacities (this version often includes the moment of the accession of the working class to power as being synonymous with communism). In this context, it is plain that pro-revolution has contradictory meanings - for us revolution was/is a mere and necessary event, for others it realises a subjective form in a moment of supercession...

The communist role within revolutionary events, far from supporting the construction of a proletarian state, will be to attack the formation of workers' self-management as soon as this is established. It will be an attack pursued in the

name of the destruction of the capitalist productive relation as it is retained in workerist formations. This variously-triggered approach to the role of the working class in itself indicates the complexity of the relations in question here, and indicates why the use of distancing devices such as the term pro-revolutionary are necessary.

FD

March 2009



## GLOSSARY

**Base:** The system of production of reality. The capitalist base draws its energy from the ownership of capital that has been produced by past acts; this capital feeds into the base. It has to be said that the base is more than the sum of its parts and has developed inside itself general rules and values that can not be altered by any individual or alliance of forces. Nevertheless the base is owned piecemeal by what can be called a ruling class in whose benefit it operates.

**Becoming human:** Human beings have not yet existed. The pro-revolutionary project is to see the establishment of individuals in the post-revolutionary society as fully existing human beings. It is the difference between being individual and being individuated. This transformation involves the removal of scarcity, exploitation and oppression and necessarily begins as the project of established communism. It is not possible to be human in the present under capitalist conditions – each of us carry too many wounds that cannot be healed because they are inflicted accidentally in the living of our lives. Even a hermit cannot be free, since capital accompanies him in his desire for a personal solution to his unhappiness. However it is possible to be more human, almost human, in our everyday life, if that is what we choose. Such an ethic has no revolutionary credentials, no objective significance, and it contradicts our own rule of speech but in a milieu dominated by a martyrising impulse (Camus said “Too many people have decided to do without generosity in order to practice

charity.”), we think it is important to be as almost human in our own lives as is possible and in this way pursue whatever happiness is available. We also hope by saying this that we save new pro-revolutionaries from the exploitation, pressure, and misery routinely inflicted by the milieu upon its adherents because of its religious character.

**Communism:** Communism begins as a process and a goal with the seizure and collective ownerships of society's productive means during the collapse of capitalism. This period is known as the dictatorship of the proletariat and has problematic connotations but is only troubling if some representative body has intervened to stand for the proletariat in the state. The dictatorship means just the continuation of the means for living during the revolutionary crisis under the direct control of those who work in the industries concerned; it is a social survival mechanism. This period is followed by the crisis of ownership itself: How can the working class own the means of production? This second crisis is either resolved by the return of the bourgeoisie or by the abolition of all classes and a conscious move towards communism. The route to communism involves the abolition of ownership outright and therefore the ending of the dictatorship and its replacement with a more integrated system or process by which people's experiences are responded to and stimulated by the social organisation from which they draw their individual identity. The purpose of communism is the fulfilling of each individual's existence and their becoming human. Communism is unique in history because there is no hierarchy and no depth to society, life is lived on a single plane upon which everything is available to all

individuals, thus the levers of power and therefore of existence itself are immediately apparent and always close-by. For the first time individuals will be free to make their society without the pressure of a-human forces such as politics or economics which routinely perceive individuals and masses as functional units within their systemic becoming.

**Consciousness:** Consciousness is the appearance in thought of the appearance of a fraction of the objective representing itself as the explanation of the objective with an intention to deceive the recipient of the image.

**Culture:** The working class do not have a culture. There is no asian culture, there is no black culture, there is no people's culture. All culture is bourgeois culture and its products are fashioned for specialised markets. Into its very refinement is folded its barbarity. How much suffering-of-others can purchase one unit of freedom for a patron to feel rich enough to pass it on to the artist so that he may create? All artworks are bought with blood and sweat. The special freedom of the artist is an ugly thing when considered in context of the slavery of others, and yet it is a freedom – the freedom of the dirty face pressed up against the window of opulence. There is beauty and fascination in it. The very best capitalist society may produce is mired and dragged down by its basic structure. No matter that our first instinct for our favourite pieces is to defend them, preserve them, involve ourselves in them. We have had our say about DaDa and pop music but we must, in the end, admit to their ultimate worthlessness and declare that we are prepared not to raise a finger in

their defence or their salvage.

**Do:** What is to be done? The task of pro-revolutionaries is to locate and address the revolution and thereby aid it. The Do is two sided, the negative half is to criticise all political pretensions to radicality. This can be done kindly with those who have simply got it wrong and more harshly with those who are out to deliberately mislead and manipulate in their drive for supremacy. The positive side of the Do is to create and speak that which only pro-revolutionaries can create or speak; that is, do only that which nobody else can do. Primarily this involves locating and describing the revolutionary potential in events. This may involve the participants in the events, or certain tactics discovered in social conflict. It is never our task to speak out on, or participate in, reformist initiatives; we do not have the numbers to force such reforms through and we do not have the time or energy to waste on tinkering with banning nuclear weapons or with prison reform. That is, we must at all times understand that the secondary appearances of issues within capitalist society are always only symptoms of the basic capitalist structure, which is what should always remain within our focus. To draw the connection between war or prisons and capital is however a worthwhile project. If as an individual you choose to participate in a reformist movement then do so as an individual and because you think it will directly improve your life and do not pretend it has anything to do with revolution. The proper pro-revolutionary position in regard to such movements is to demonstrate how they will fail and why they will fail and how they help capitalism renew itself. Misplaced solidarity with left politicians who do not share

your vision but are needy only for their self-institutionalisation within the existing establishment is the worst example of pro-revolutionaries losing their heads. (We, for example, were condemned for not condemning the attacks of 11/09/01, as if our comments have any relevance to anyone else.) Solidarity should be reserved for family, friends, and workmates in times of stress; it should never be expressed for mere political expediency. (In fact, solidarity in these cases is actually only a self-serving tolerance for others who in reality you can't stand. It is a representation of solidarity, and is always recuperated by those who have organised the movement. We have seen this in trades unionism, the anti-nuclear movement, anti-fascism, etc, all of which have provided the base for the organiser's political ambitions and are abandoned when they have served their hidden purpose.) Pro-revolutionaries should only ever engage with wider political movements by means of critique and example. We can either keep our integrity in the open or we can trap it and let it die behind our closed lips.

**Do Nothing:** We came up with Doing Nothing during the activism debate at the beginning of our MD venture. It was and remains a provocation. We think it is important to say whatever it is possible to say within the pro-revolutionary milieu both to bring new terms of reference in and to illuminate the existing and usually unquestioned conventions. Do Nothing is an immediate reflection of Do Something and its moral apparatus, which is how we characterised the activist scene. Do Something is an agitated reflex to stimuli, a theorisation of turning yourself into a bridge. There is a perceived urgency and a presup-

position that the doer is doing something important but Do Something also suggests Do Anything, a desperate injunction to press every button to save the world. We disliked the connotations of Do Something, and were aware that all the other stuff wasn't getting talked about in the rush to make protest appear on the streets. Do Nothing means thinking about the reproduction of authoritarian and capitalist forms within this political milieu; it also ties in with our notion of revolutionary subjectivity and what is appropriate for the pro-revolutionary role.

**Events and effects:** All that may happen, under restriction of conditions, will happen. All that happens is an unfolding or embodiment of what is possible given the circumstances of our existence. It is not possible to produce, or create, anything the production of which is not possible. There is no outside the box. There are discreet objects and gestures and individuals and series' of developments within these figures, but no evolving ladder may reach outside the base, which is the condition of its existence.

It may be objected to this that whilst anything is theoretically possible under capitalism what we actually get is a distinct tendency towards death and destruction, and therefore acts of love retain a redemptive, even revolutionary, character. We do not belittle the struggle to be more human and we agree that whilst there is very often the appearance of a generality of night there has never been a generality of goodness and therefore the aim to establish such a system of good acts by intervening with good acts is very attractive. Nevertheless we refute all political stances based on the supposition that the world is made from acts.

Capitalism is politically neutral and contains both fascism and anti-fascism within its bounds, it contains both socialism and corporatism; both workers' co-operatives (and their production for need) and rampant consumerism; both Israel and Palestine; both the USA and Al Qaeda.

We agree that darkness does seem to dominate to the exclusion of much else, and we can say there is always movement of the balls across the baize, of the seaweed in the tides, but the movement is always towards the worse. The current preference for suicide bombs among irregular military is surely a sign of specific cultural bankruptcy and imminent societal collapse. Nothing could come after the social promotion of martyrs, the culture of death, could it? After such a decadent society has collapsed the individuals previously bound to it will be free to pursue their own happiness, won't they? Unfortunately not, after the culture of death and no surrender, comes a period of re-evaluation; the martyrs are still venerated but their value is reassigned as has been that of the IRA hunger strikers of the early 80s. The line now is that they were relevant in their time but times have changed. When a force has gathered to itself sufficient capital then it is prepared to live in the world the way it is. The movement of the world is always to darkness and the exploitation of darkness.

Is this not then sufficient argument for a deliberate escape from such manoeuvres and for the intervention of beauty and love? We do not think so, because good intentions in the form of the avant-garde, the counter culture, charity, political reform, pressure groups, alternative society, anti-capitalism, all of which may be more or less desirable, are addressed to the effects produced by the base and

not the base itself. And the movement towards night that we witness is not the base showing itself but only some of its effects. A resistance to bad things by good things is, unfortunately, only the resistance of an effect to an effect, the mirror image can show ugliness but it has no power to force a change, the base itself cannot be resisted by its effects. No matter what the flights of fancy conjured up about how things could be, by those who rub against the grain of things, they always keep one foot on the ground (all else is error, join my group, read my paper, think my thoughts).

Amongst all those who hate the bad things that come before our eyes there have been produced no viable escapes or alternatives to capitalism. There are only conflicting opinions on how capital is to be managed. Some of these opinions even go so far as to utterly refuse capitalism altogether, but these proclamations are made in bad faith. Everyone has a Plan Two along the lines of the NEP. If change is to come then it will be from within the system, from one of its component parts and not from the many effects of the base. The proletariat is structurally essential to capitalism but because it is the human element it is its most unreliable part. It is probable that revolution will begin from the weakness of human beings and not in their fine sentiments or urge to overcome.

**Experience:** Experience is the opposite to belief. Together MD have forty years of experience of the anarchist milieu, this has given us an insight into the kind of people who frequent it. First, let us not pretend that everyone can become an anarchist, it will never be more than a minority movement and throughout its history it has usually been



much less. In itself, the lack of numbers does not discredit anarchism, but the impossibility of its infinite expansion should inform its activities. We have broken anarchists down into three main groups. (1) There are a few good guys (but their position over the years means that they tend towards mental instability). (2) There are a lot of pedants who form fluctuating circles of admirers about themselves. They live for their own *centrality* to the Movement's history and to denounce their rivals. (3) However, the anarchist milieu and its communist sideshoot is made up mostly of transients, that is, people who come into it like meteorites, saying they're gonna do this and they're gonna do that but then they burn up, get disillusioned and either turn into simple consumers of the radical press or leave the scene entirely, recalling it with amusement as a phase of their adolescence. That anarchists do not recognise themselves as merely passing through is their most damning flaw and their verdict on their own worth. We have never seen this transience addressed in the anarchist press. There is instead a perpetual striving to realise the projected ideal of *being an anarchist*. This desire to live as an ungrounded image is impossible to achieve and all attempts at doing so must result in disaffection and self-contempt – nobody can *be* an anarchist in the sense that the ideology of anarchism proposes. To substitute for this they construct a bubble of *living it*, a project that is utterly impossible and doomed to result in disaffection and self-contempt. Anarchists, above all else, and beyond their politics, suffer fatally from a crisis of integrity, a crisis of experience: They deny experience, pretend to be someone else, try to make a big impact, get upset when their impos-

ture becomes transparent, and end up achieving nothing – not even the dignity of a thorough-going personality.

Experience and the primacy of experience as a base for value involve the acceptance of our own weakness and our individual irrelevance to the workings of the world. Where you are important is in your own life, where you are unimportant is in the sphere of economic struggle. The revolutionary struggle occurs at the level of social structure and not individual will. If, from the certainty of this diminution, which is a defeat to your ambition, you are still able to hold on to a pro-revolutionary perspective, then you have made an advance – if you can accept your personal irrelevance to the causing of revolution whilst holding on to the thought that revolution is a good thing then you will become more present in your own life and not displace your existence to the spectacular realm of the political merry-go-round. To base your life on reflections upon your experience is to engage with what it is to be an individual human being, and to escape the ideology that is reproduced within the pro-revolutionary project.

From experience to honesty, from honesty to awareness, from there you may act effectively, but only within your small capacity.

**Freedom:** It is said that the world we live in is man-made and this is true to the point that human beings have existed. But they have not existed very far and have been prevented from coming into being by the systems that have generated them. So it is that although human beings have built palaces and sewers and computers and vacuum cleaners they have done so under conditions of extreme

pressure, which has facilitated the existence of the object they have worked on whilst inhibiting their own being. The systems that give rise to human beings, society, are, for the majority, beyond control. Bondage is this: People are made by society and society is made by the accumulated dead acts of the past which are owned by the powerful. Freedom is this: the designing of society by the people who live in it. Freedom demands the immediate appearance of the means of producing society before the inhabitants of the society so that they may modify the conditions in which they live. Freedom is the power to change the way you live, to be the cause and not the effect.

**Ideas and the limit of ideas in numbers:** One weekend in April 2002, thousands upon thousands of people queued up in London for six hours at a time to walk past the coffin of the Queen Mother. This no doubt was a dismal spectacle for many of those reading this. If one has faith in ideas and the power of ideas to move the world then its negation was surely to be found in this tableau. It cannot be escaped that the numbers queueing there far surpassed the numbers mustered so far by the anti-capitalist movement for its demonstrations.

But we are not so downhearted. We place no particular value in the expression of ideas in crowds: anti-capitalist crowds include a large proportion of counter-revolutionary imbeciles amongst their number and many of the Queen Mother's mourners were there to be caught up in the occasion and have no testable political allegiance to the Windsors (both anti-capitalists and monarchist mourners are outnumbered by *Harry Potter* fans).

Ideas are not chess pieces to be moved about in blocks of thousands of people; they work unpredictably, like magic, and no crowd has ever been homogeneous. So, could the queuers at the Palace of Westminster in some future crisis become pro-revolutionaries? Why not? The other side of this coin is the certainty that many pro-revolutionaries already function effectively as cops. Revolution is not the imposition of an idea, it is a rational response to economic collapse, just as the decisions made by today's capitalists are not grounded in ideas or values but are responses to the possibilities coming up within the system. Millions will be moved towards the idea of revolution when they are already moving towards revolution socially and economically.

**Imperialism:** In late March 2002 a group of two hundred peace activists infiltrated Palestine and vowed to stand before the besieged Chairman Arafat to protect him from the Israeli army. We think it is foolish to defend or uphold the rights of one nation or people over that of another simply because they are having a bad time. Poverty and being oppressed does not make a people good, or more worthy of our political allegiance than their oppressors. It does not even make them a people, which is an entirely ideological term used to lever representatives into power. We can be certain that all such constituted peoples given access to sufficient capital and weaponry would become equally as barbaric as their oppressors. This is the prime characteristic of nations, so-called peoples, liberation struggles, and anti-imperialist apologists. For example, the strategy of suicide bombings used by the Palestinians is not an expression of

desperation as is claimed but is a means of securing political supremacy for the organisations that send them, with the intention that all subsequent capital investment will be drawn towards that organisation, whose power, although ugly, is undeniable. The theory of imperialism, and thus the anti-imperialist politics derived from it, is a reiteration of an untheorised sympathy for the underdog. Wherever anti-imperialist politics is prevalent there critical evaluation is absent; the faults of the oppressor are endlessly exaggerated whilst the faults of the oppressed are always excusable. But it is through critical analysis that we understand that although one people or state is stronger than a rival, they are qualitatively identical. That is to say, the difference expressed within the imperialist relation is reducible to the command of resources available. And once we refuse the given terms of the blood feud between warring 'peoples', atrocity and counter-atrocity, we quickly perceive that if the oppressed became strong and the oppressors became weak then the terms of the struggle would continue as before despite this reversal – an 'oppressed people' has no other exit from its subjugation but to become an oppressor nation. It is well to remember at this point that America remains the dominant anti-imperialist force in the world. What passes for imperialism in leftist politics is really only the normal run of things in the capitalist system. All elements in play in the imperialist relation – the oppressor, the oppressed, and the leftist sympathiser – are contained within the basic capitalist form. No matter how the relation of the elements is altered the basic form remains unchanged.

**Interest:** on 23/3/02 in Rome there was a demonstration of two million workers. What was interesting about this demonstration aside from the numbers was what it was about. The Italian government had passed a law that made it easier for companies to sack workers. The trade union movement prepared to mobilise its millions in opposition to the government. Three days before the demonstration the academic responsible for the drafting of the law was killed by the Red Brigades. In response the unions repackaged their demonstration as 'anti-terrorism.' The infiltration of the Red Brigades is well known, it is therefore possible that the murder may have been organised from within the state to discredit by association the forthcoming demonstration. The unions, who may have anticipated this, changed the demonstration so they could not be dismissed as friends of terrorists. It may be that unions organised the assassination so they could neatly avoid being too militant. At the time of writing we have not seen any comment from pro-revolutionaries or the far-left on all this but we assume they will condemn the unions for their timidity and for once again imposing an irrelevant and conservative bias above workers' struggle. But in this they will have missed the point. What is interesting is not the betrayal of the workers by the unions and the fudging of their message but the containment of all operational units within the confines of the spectacle and how nothing that appeared, not the numbers, not the gunmen, and certainly not the state functionaries, came from outside of the established political spectrum. The demonstration was never about the workers struggle but the competition between elements within the ruling class. From the beginning the demonstration was a political

representation of workers demands by organisations within the state who use the workers as their lever. The Red Brigades and terrorism generally is also a spectacular power managed by the state to add a further depth to events. Since 1917 the capitalist state and its pseudo-opponents have played out a phony conflict in which everything that appears has been contained within terms set by the capitalist management of politics. Since the institutionalisation of anti-capitalism in 1917 as a variant of capitalism there has been no politics that has escaped being determined by one or other faction or institution of the ruling class.

The only solution we can see as a means of escaping this is the proposal of severe limitation on pro-revolutionary activity and the pursuit of non-political self-interest by the working class. Self-interest means acting only for the self (taking action or doing nothing if no action is required) – to protect and improve the standing of workers in their own industry and not get sucked into making political gestures that refer to positions and ambitions and policies far from their own lives. We think that if a strategy of rigid self-interest, a strategy for higher wages and fewer hours, etc, is rigorously pursued by the workers within all industry that this will be enough to generate a crisis in capitalism which in turn, we hope, will produce conditions for revolutionary intervention.

**Movement and movements:** There is an idea that the world and history is somehow linked to an idea and the idea is progress. We hear a lot in the media nowadays about the rapid pace of change in society. There have been a number of technical innovations and these have allowed for some

spectacular events but in reality the actual structure of society has not altered for about a hundred and fifty years. We are stuck in orbit. Most theoreticians on the left disagree with this. For reasons of novelty and academic ambition they are always coming up with new concepts about how capitalism has transformed and how society has passed into another age; there is always another philosophical sensation. But life at the bottom, where capital is not afraid to bare its teeth and show itself for what it really is, goes on unchanged. (Occasionally you might hear, "oh it was very post-modern yesterday but they forecast rain today.") There is an idea in the pro-revolutionary milieu that as well as the reality of experienced capitalism there is a reality in idea form that is expressed in anti-capitalist action (mostly unconsciously) as a movement for communism, and is made up of various political movements that exist in the present and have existed in the past. Many pro-revolutionaries think that all of these add up to a generality that is taking shape in the shadows and will carry on growing until it is so powerful it will be able to overthrow capitalism and establish itself as communism. There is an immediate problem, of course, with this; most of the movements participating in the movement towards communism do not know they are participating. It is not an explicit project of theirs but has been interpreted by pro-revolutionaries who insist that communism is implied within the organisation and its relation to capital as it is within capitalism itself (these movements being the objective expression of that). We think this is too complicated, too theological, and too dishonest to be an accurate description of reality. Communism exists nowhere in the world at present and nor will it



until after the collapse of capitalism and the reorganisation of the material base of existence. All existing political movements, despite their radical pretensions, are determined by the capitalist material base and are therefore more or less contained within present conditions. We see no solution to capitalism either through the becoming of some idea of communism out of capitalism or from any political movement. We see the end of capitalism only in its self-destruction. We see that this destruction may be caused by the working class who have been created by capital and are an absolutely essential component of capital. If this component malfunctions it could cause a crisis that destroys the whole system. In that event it is possible that a new material base may be organised by the working class that it creates out of a theoretical ideal of communism combined with the establishment of the primacy of human needs as the sole reason for the base. Ideas and movements can only make a difference to the nature of reality when they have escaped their determining conditions. Only when capitalism is destroyed will communism appear as a possible way out.

**Nihilism:** literally a belief in nothing. In basic terms it means being dispassionate about the pro-revolutionary movement and not getting sucked into other people's pipe-dreams. What is in question here is not the material world itself nor indeed sensuous existence; it is not at all about indifference. We use nihilism as a description for a proper attitude or stance taken up in relation to the world. What we reject as inappropriate to the present moment is belief, which is a mental attitudes that places an affinity for images above life experience. Nihilism re-allocates

the importance of belief, and the function of ideas in the world generally. For the individual nothing is more important to it than the question of its existence, which must be decided at every moment by combining circumstances with consideration, but at the same time it is important to note that this urgency is lived entirely at the level of experience and cannot impact on the system that has given rise to it. In place of belief we assert the primacy of the senses arranged about a critical attitude. Therefore, while we are strategic communists with reference to the future and its commencement in the breakdown of capitalism, we are for the present, tactical nihilists. This gives us the freedom not to be misled by all the solutions to social conflict that are currently generated by the capitalist base. Nihilism is an armour that protects us from credulity and the complicity of the bad faith pro-revolutionary movement.

**Owners of consciousness.** Isn't it outrageous that MD use highly politically conscious concepts to undermine the status of consciousness in the pro-revolutionary milieu? All those reading this text and us writing it have pro-revolutionary consciousness, or at least some form of political consciousness. How it should come to be that this is so we cannot say; we think it has something to do with the social structure of enthusiasm and the economic distribution of enthusiasms geographically. For example, in one town there is one pro-revolutionary, about thirty bird watchers, four old car enthusiasts, sixty vegetarians, a hundred football fans, etc. It does not follow that because we are conscious that everyone can become conscious. Quite the opposite in fact. The other people in

the town have other interests, therefore MD begin from the assumption that propaganda does not work and that people do not become revolutionaries because they are persuaded by the plausibility of certain beliefs or statements but because circumstance forces them into certain acts, which when reflected upon produce values that are entirely at odds with present society. We assume that our texts and the texts of all the pro-revolutionary milieu are read by only a small number of already conscious individuals – thus our concept of “the owners of consciousness.” The slightly derogatory stress in the concept is our comment on the unreflective use of consciousness by pro-revolutionaries in their lazy theories. Just because propaganda is useless at changing people’s minds (or more subtly, even if people’s minds were changed then that would not change the world) that does not mean we should all give up writing and engaging. (Although we believe certain groups and individuals have caused such damage to the pro-revolutionary milieu that they should give up.) We just think it means we should change our practice accordingly. We think consciousness is important because it allows us to operate in advance of any objective revolutionary activity but only within a very limited field and never as the revolutionary subject or as its mouth-piece. We are a pro-revolutionary minority that wants to contribute something to revolution, a something that is probably negligible except in the negative sense – that we have the supernatural ability to spot would-be leaders and re-institutionalisers. Or do we?

**Politics:** what is worst about the current anti-capitalist

movement is its understanding of capitalism. Its struggle is conducted primarily as an extended form of democracy. It assumes that it has a collection of ideas that it must get across and set against the ideas that govern society at present. It is a fatal error and a major reason why it so easily leeches into conventional politics. Capitalism is not a set of ideas or a politics, and cannot be engaged in debate about values and visions for the future. That kind of thing is what it has invented politics for. Politics is determined by capitalism; it is an effect and as such it cannot reach back and directly confront its parent. So it is that you see Committed Socialists in parliaments all over Europe; they are there because they think socialism is an idea that must compete with capitalism and when it has convinced enough people then the day will come when socialism will be established. Capitalism is not an idea; it is a set of practices and conventions but most of all it is reality which generates illusions to hide the true nature of its power. It can be engaged only where those illusions are less apparent, that is in the factories where it makes itself. The model for the struggle against capitalism may be found in the internal competition for power within the ruling elite. What matters at the highest level is not the truth or supremacy of ideas but position, manoeuvring, taking effective action, forming alliances, betrayal, and above all ambition for more power. From this we can learn how capital is organised against the workers and we can formulate tactics accordingly. Capitalists find nothing easier than to give in on political demands so long as the demands don't interfere with productivity. What they don't want is to increase their costs.

**Pro-revolutionary:** This is the term we give to those who are in favour of the revolutionary transformation of society but who have no means to effect that revolution. We apply the term to all those who call themselves revolutionaries whether they think that only the working class will effect the revolution (which is MD's position) or whether they think pro-revolutionaries themselves have an important role to play. We therefore divide pro-revolutionaries into two camps: *authentic pro-revolutionaries*, those who accept the limitation of their role; and *bad faith revolutionaries* who persist in the delusion that they really are revolutionaries. In our definition of the revolutionary we briefly outlined the production of the revolutionary perspective and the self-reflection initiated from that perspective, which concludes with the resolution to act. Our definition of the pro-revolutionary pushes the critical/negative function of the revolutionary one or two steps further. By evaluating the actual contribution of revolutionaries to potentially revolutionary situations we see that in most cases those with critical consciousness who seek to push the situation into revolution by their actions have the opposite effect. Those who are most conscious (that is, desirous) of revolution, are those who *from the start* impede and restrict the revolution by means of their leadership and influence. And it follows on from this that the most revolutionary elements in a potentially revolutionary situation are precisely a) those who have no political commitment, no group or party whose interest must be preserved in all situations, but who are both committed to the present events of their experience and the vistas of possibility opening up before them, and, of course, b) those who have

the physical power to make themselves effective in events by halting the machinery of accumulation.

From looking at the failure of previous revolutions and remembering the corruption of revolutionaries and their part in the downfall of revolutions as they looked to preserve their party or group, we have developed the concept of pro-revolutionary. This perspective and position assumes that most revolutionary action is not effective and is no more than gesture. We also conclude that most revolutionaries are never in the right place at the right time. Therefore we argue that the proper position for revolutionaries to take up is that of the authentic pro-revolutionary. The basis of this position is that even though we are cursed with revolutionary desire we have no means of making it concrete. In other words, the pro-revolutionary is a revolutionary who cannot and more importantly, must not, make revolution.

In our opinion revolutionaries should let go of the responsibility for making revolution. If they did this they would see more clearly what is possible and where they stand in society; they would no longer have to pretend that what they did was important. It would also allow us to escape from having to have an opinion on every media sensation from animal rights to immigration. In a more positive sense an authentic pro-revolutionary stance permits a tactical understanding of what our effect could be in every instance of struggle that we happen to find ourselves a part of. In our time we have come across many groups who use "we" when they write to garner for themselves some rhetorical authority when speaking for the Revolutionary Movement or the proletariat. These groups usually turn out to be one person. It is this kind of basic self-aggrandis-

ing dishonesty that makes bad faith pro-revolutionaries such low and dirty dogs to work with. How can you deal with a guy who calls himself “we”? It is our suggestion that all such writings use “I” and thereby re-align the writer’s subjectivity to an axis of honesty. This is one step towards becoming authentically pro-revolutionary.

**Revolutionary:** There are those who see that revolution is a necessity for the redemption of humanity. They see that revolution is desirable because their perspective on society (which has been developed through an interaction of social forces with their personal history and the development of their consciousness) has produced in them a negative or critical attitude to much of what they experience in present society. They are prevented from being dragged down into utter despair at the hands of this negativity because they see some signs in the present that suggest to them that this reality is merely temporal and that things could very much be otherwise. They see that under different conditions the majority of people could live better lives. The question of the relation between revolutionaries and society becomes urgent. In 19th Century Russia the constant refrain amongst the intelligentsia was “what is to be done?” The crisis of this contemplation is usually resolved in self-activity – that is, revolutionaries believe they can make an intervention and turn the world to their design.

Revolutionaries conclude that it is their task to make revolution, which necessitates the deployment of revolutionary acts in society. These acts vary in quality and quantity but range from seizure of state power, to factory agitation, to raising consciousness. In all cases the revolutionary

assumes that revolution is to be made by revolutionaries and by implication the prerequisite of making revolution is people becoming revolutionaries, that is: *people must change to make social change*. We disagree with all of this because it is limited by too basic of a theoretical condition; we disagree because we see the possibility to push much farther the boundaries of this position and the forces that go into making the revolutionary perspective in the first place. We do not think that the revolution will happen when enough people have become revolutionaries. Revolutionaries do not make revolutions, revolutions make revolutionaries. Revolutionaries can only make groups, networks, parties, unions, etc; the adherence to which and functioning of, within society, is *the opposite* of revolutionary intervention.

**The spectacle:** This is the self-organised appearance of capitalism within society.

**State Capitalism:** It is a convention of the ultra-left to describe post-1917 Russia and its like as state capitalist. However, since the collapse of this particular experiment the term has come up for re-interpretation and what we mean by it is closer to what Debord described as the *integrated spectacle*. For us, state capitalism means the integration of the state with the productive sphere and the interchangeable roles that have recently been taken up: the strategies behind recent wars, the industrial supply of education, prisons, health, etc. We have no interest in theorising this inter-penetrative relationship, but we are happy to see every capitalist instance included under one term. We do not want to get sucked into defending public transport and



opposing private healthcare, or any variant of the public/private debate. That is not what pro-revolutionaries do. We see that the so-called introduction of the market is no such thing and we understand that public ownership is as capitalist as any other form of ownership. We also understand that there is a tightening up of the generality, increased planning and organisation. More and more of production is being linked up, which is precisely what Stalin attempted (albeit under different circumstances).

## Cruelty *or* the inclusion of the distributive sphere

### *Feint*

State capitalism doesn't do splendour like the old monarchs did, even though it has the means to do it better. Power has found that it cannot safely parade its power without giving natural enemies a target to aim at, so it secures itself by staging shows where factions of the ruling class compete to expose their rivals' weaknesses – the least wicked, corrupt, inept, foolish, is the winner. Nevertheless a city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden, it must show some light through its curtains. And whilst critical attention may be directed away sufficiently for that to become the normal run of things (pet journalists and heated debates about renewable energy, all that politics circus), there are occasions when a searching look will be turned back upon itself. Something of the something going on shines through. Enough of a something to crack the city walls.

Capitalism as a totality only appears out of the corner of the mouth, over the shoulder, a whisper in a crowded room. If you look capitalism straight in the face you will see nothing but an issue, a spectacle, a side-show, an ideology; what you get is politics. What is made for the eye is not there. Where you look, power isn't. What you debate does not touch the matter.

What we live in, what we live through, is not a society organised on the basis of principles, nor on beliefs or opinions. Capitalism, like all forms of social dominion, boils

down to position, interest, ownership, and those sustained by force. You can't debate with capitalism, nor dispute with it, nor take it through the courts. All engagement at the level of political agenda, social aspiration, and cultural value, no matter what the content, *no matter what the content*, takes place within the world as it is, the world organised by capital. At the level of values, ideas, and beliefs, there is nothing outside of capitalism.

Capitalism is defined in its perfection of domination by a characteristic of disguising itself, making its workings invisible but showing something else. We look at the screen not the projector. What happens, what interests us, what is put on for us, is fatally unimportant.

Capitalism is a general rule or law for social relations that determines and is made up of many small and boring gestures – the banality of which we could not look at even if we thought it vital to, but which nonetheless are organised around the centralising configuration of power, the immense gravity of ownership.

The truth of our moment is like staying awake in the garden of Gethsemane: sleep and politics are more desirable, more inevitable. And even in the pure will of revolt (or especially there), the gaze that would hunt out the ugly truth to slay it in righteous anger, chooses, in the end, to settle for surface disturbances. And all the time, like the bureaucrats of Dennis Potter, the figureheads sing, *Look not at us but at the events unfolding, we are only the administrators of what is inevitable*. The world is made to appear as a machine running itself and its owners as nothing but its minders.

In crisis *power* looms over its enemies. In crisis everyone is an enemy. Crisis is the one time power can show

itself imposing itself, without fear of usurpation. But even here, there is a current trend to manufacture crisis as a representation. We are passing into a time when crises exist only at the level of the screen. You could say capitalism is now concerned primarily with the orchestration of crisis and its theatrical overcoming. The UN has recently linked the “most powerful supercomputers in the world” to generate predictions of global weather collapse, sea inundations, life amongst twisters, and melting polar icecaps; set eighty years in the future, this virtual crisis forms the ground conditions for capital investment in technologies of anti-crisis. Communications technologies are being superseded by anti-crisis industries as capital’s preferred futurological modality. In crisis, power manifests itself up close, not as it is itself, not naked, but in the manner of the Wizard of Oz, a roaring face. Noise is the proper medium of contemporary power; it occupies all wavelengths and prevents other sounds. You can feel it pinning you against the wall, but it is careful never to form any discernible words.

Crisis and noise. All crises of the economy are manifested at last in terms of crowds and the control of crowds. A couple of years back, protesting students were forced out of their occupation of a Canadian university by the authorities’ deployment of a *Backstreet Boys* album which was played at them repeatedly and without break for days on end (why not a *Backstreet Boys* single, or one, unending, note? Perhaps this marks the qualitative difference between democratic and totalitarian torture methods?). The inferno of Waco was preceded by psy-war techniques in the form of Wall Of Jericho style directional noise artillery, the groundwork for which was laid during the US blast, bang, blare, siege of Noriega.

We recall stun grenades in the Iranian embassy. New wave, anti-crisis, crowd control strategies advocate the necessity of targeting social dissonance with immediate and maximum use of unbloody force – this accepting the given that a videotape of what happens will surface eventually (stun technologies, microwave pulse weapons – everything is permitted so long as it doesn't make blood and bone appear, a technological version of, "don't touch his face").

Noise is also circumstantial. The thud of depleted-uranium tipped entertainment pierces privacy. Objective background hubbub, motor traffic. Whirr. Throb. No peace from purchased communications. Bleep. Noises forming alliances; informal blocks of techniques and applications of sound acting as deterrent to drift; bodies channelled, persuaded, funnelled into designated areas. Behind the soundstage roadies of the commodity organise popular distraction. A woman has to be restrained by court order from playing Whitney Houston's *I Will Always Love You* all day and all night, the neighbours become crazed precisely because there is no agenda other than the routinisation of this figure of unbearable proximity: walls, ears, noise technique. The generators in the dark of the funfair. An orchestrated Babel of diverting news issues. Chime. Everybody addresses the appearance of crisis, all anybody is concerned about is its alleviation. Throw a cloth over it. CRASH. "Over there, animal epidemic! Sigh, nothing can be done." Plastic tape across the roads. Bing bong broadcast.

## *Thrust*

But this is the world. We observe the attacks made upon our bodies, and describe the shadows that attend

disruptive phenomena but there is no critique as such to be made, no protest could be adequate to the continued diminution of personal life in the face of the perpetual throbbing of commodity spread. Power will do what it will, there is little (if we are consistent in our analysis) that we can do to oppose it. Nothing, that is, unless we are prepared to accept the legitimacy of medium-term political objectives and dedicate ourselves to treating symptoms, and it is sure that we are not prepared to accept that. Power will do what it will, and it *will* extend itself to the maximum of its capacity. The pursuit of power is its own realisation, the end of capitalism is the domination of the world by capitalism. This does not surprise us, it is what we expect, and we understand that every expansion of its dominion will be attended by some form of political protest as interest niches and cliques of experts get jostled about and rearranged.

*No social order ever perishes before all the productive forces for which there is room in it have developed; and new, higher relations of production never appear before the material conditions of their existence have matured in the womb of the old society itself. Therefore mankind sets itself only such tasks as it can solve; since, looking at the matter more closely, it will always be found that the task itself arises only when material conditions for its solution already exist or, at least, are in the process of formation.*

- Preface to *A Critique of Political Economy*

That is what we expect. The above is a profoundly pessimistic text. Parts of Marx's writing have come to read like a prophecy for capitalism stretching out forever;

in truth, the room for the development of capitalism's productive forces is infinite, the gestation and birth goes on forever and simultaneously. Even the total collapse of the biosphere (something that in certain discourses appears to be bigger than capitalism's capacity to handle it) is contained and forms a uterine wall to which new capitalising initiatives might attach themselves.

Our concepts have enabled us to grasp that the content of much of the protest directed against capitalist encroachment is concerned with interest group re-establishment within updated configurations of power. Even anti-capitalism is contained within a lopsided dialectic where conflict is played out within conditions set by an already given synthesis. Some play the politics game, even when they say they reject it. When politics is routinised on co-ordinates set by the economy, when it is made to appear by forces that do not appear within it, then politics becomes a secondary issue that can never touch the thing itself. Reality, state power, capitalist infrastructure, is not transparently coherent. There are flaws made up of competing factions – but, leapfrog each other as they may, none of these interest groups can get beyond the general terms for social relations set by capital. New packs of cards but always the same rules of play.

None of that is difficult, it is to be expected. We are also perfectly capable of theorising the continued breaking off of revolutionary groups into alliances with reformist initiatives. We all have our personal lines in the sand, we are all passionate beings, we are all likely to be goaded into futile action every once in a while by some perceived urgency. With every bit of this we are at ease, it

is within the bounds of our comprehension and requires only a steadying influence. But that is not all.

What has surprised us, and what we always run into as a concomitant to capitalism's appearance in society as distractive (and ultimately nullifying) noise is the falling silent of pro-revolutionaries when faced with particularly vibrant and rebellious manifestations of reformism. In a reversal of the negotiative conventions of diplomacy, pro-revolutionary theory loses its critique precisely at the point when the state becomes most conciliatory, thereby losing everything in the rush to secure real gains. It is most prone to capitulation when the state is most willing to negotiate. Pro-revolutionaries are *most* gullible when the state is *most* plausible. They fumble their critique at the moment it ought to be pushed to its fullest limit. It is not coincidence that these periodic re-territorialisations of apparently revolutionary positions by the state, this calling in of dogs allowed to roam wild (under the pretence of exigent political reform) occur in moments most likely to go objectively into a revolutionary situation. Personalist, or identity, politics is one such roaming dog. It strutted like a sheep killer but really it was on a long lead.

## *Parry*

We will participate in the revolution no more than any other individual worker. For anyone in the first stages of social revolution, we see no role that is more than participating as an individual in the seizure of the means of production. However, because we are cursed with consciousness of our conditions, we have allocated to ourselves another job – the description of our experiences.



We will not explain the world. We refuse to acquire an empire of political expertise, the partiality of which lies precisely in inverted relation to the claims of such explanations to totality. The ultra-left is still dominated by theoretical explanation, which forms the sandy base for predictions of victory and the end of capital. We can see no purpose in detailed critical explanation's of capitalism's processes: critique of power becomes veneration of power, for example, the works of Marx of became a ground for the creation of an instituted exotic rival to ordinary exploitation.

To get away from explanation we opt for description. We describe our experiences of capitalism because our findings may be tactically applicable (our experiences also serve as justification for our existence) but we do not seek to explain capital in total, either philosophically or economically, which would be beyond our capability and, we believe, an unachievable/unjustifiable project for anyone. (Quite simply, we do not think grasping capitalism in consciousness is necessary to overthrow it.) The job we have given ourselves is the investigation of sideofthemouth capitalist forms as they appear variously disguised as radical alternatives to capital. Houdini made it his life's work to expose spiritualists and mediums using his knowledge of conjuring; he pursued magic by critique. In the same way, we understand that in American football there is a role for an individual whose only purpose is to physically impede members of the opposing team. Like Houdini, we intend to use our critical abilities to expose the tabletoppers and spoonbenders of the revolutionary milieu, those who (in our opinion) would lead the revolution by complicated route back to the basic capitalist

social relation. Our purpose is not mere denunciation (call us Saint Just if you like) but the activation of a corrective agent designed to operate against dangerously false positions (those that are not merely ideologically wrong but are out and out counter-revolutionary) and to more realistically describe what is strategically appropriate and possible for small pro-revolutionary groups to achieve. For example, many such groups have taken it upon themselves to engage in reformist community campaigns. We see nothing wrong in this but no amount of such improvements will lead to a revolutionary situation or even revolutionary consciousness; in this case we would see our job as to demonstrate that the aggregation of reforms gained through popular pressure will not necessarily, or even at all, lead to revolution, quite the opposite in fact. Our first case history concerns what we call personalist politics which is otherwise generally known as identity politics.

In the circles that chant "Out Out Out" there are no longer any radical points to be won for declaring that the personal is political. In part this is because the campaigns for personal rights are no longer conducted in political terms (tribunals have replaced collective bargaining). It is also because as a motto, as a refrain, *the personal is political* operates generally within grassroots social campaign groups as the entirety of their manifesto and has therefore become invisible. To question "equal opportunities," for example, is simple bigotry to leftist social managers who have campaigned for it for the last twenty years (since the light went out of their eyes). Within the radical/progressive tendency the rationale and aspiration of personalist politics is either implicitly acknowledged as formative or, at

the very least not considered to be an appropriate issue for critique. *The personal is political* became a motif of social antagonism after '68. New, unused subjective modalities were set up in opposition to what had become traditional forms of represented individuality. Driven by popular culture and the freeing up of post war restraint on personal expression (*butterfly upon a wheel*) campaigning subjectivities asserted themselves within institutional settings, demanding recognition and rights beyond those assigned them by the traditional establishment and the official workers movement. (An Asian Community Leader stated after the north of England riots of June 2001 that, "we are not asking for more than the whites but we are certainly not going to settle for less.") Rebellions were conducted with explicit reference to individual experience of everyday life and its deprivations as archetypical prejudice. Personalism became a critique of existing conditions; some even thought it could be politicised and used as a basis for attacking capital itself.

So it was left to the last two scorpions under one wet stone to organise the sharing out of the political forms of personalism. One took to itself the inscribed circle of the *inescapable condition*. And the other dressed in the cap and bells of *f*.

### ***The inescapable condition***

Civil rights campaigns were conducted from an understanding that whoever you were as a human being living in this society you had the constitutional right to be recognised legally as an equal to all other citizens. But positions in advance of legalistic equality were already tumbling over each other to get to the front of these marches;

the critique of the concept of rights has been apparently transcended in any number of rebellious partial subject positions and legitimised via left ideology. Its various forms have ranged from liberationist, anti-imperialism and racial/sexual separatist struggles to anti-capitalism as it now appears. In all cases it boils down to a consciousness: *we ARE different and we can't be included in YOUR state*. Both tyranny and the resistance to it are, from the post-civil rights perspective, natural conditions – the black struggles against white oppression, women against patriarchy. The consciousness that perceives itself as existing through an inescapable condition set by a residual, unsocial (and probably genetic/biological) category has gone largely unchallenged by the left even though such categories run counter to typical progressivist concepts of universalism. The liberation projects of homosexuals, women, and blacks have had a profound influence on all socialist groupings and it is rare not to read in a group's *aims and principles* the assertion that as well as being for *socialism* the group is also against sexism and racism (and any other form of oppression and exploitation). Why is it that equal opportunity sentiments have been welded onto revolutionary aims as conditions when they are theoretically anterior to a revolutionary position?

Certainly, there is the Nietzschean *will to recruit* within special interest campaigns and thereby to have a presence in the debates of these campaigns but there is also a vulnerability, an untheorised anxiety over possible perceived omissions concerning the special cases of sexuality, race, and gender, which might leave people open to accusations of prejudice. But by what means would an

avowedly revolutionary group (and here we shall leave out all the left statist as not worthy of consideration) be *against* prejudice? The great ecumenical vision of the Seventies was for some kind of alliance of all liberation tendencies in the absence of a proletarian revolutionary subject but, in reality, these competing and often mutually hostile formations could only be united (that is contained) within the democratic, constitutional state that produced the conditions for their formation. State recognition and funding, the apparatus of internal promotion within the extended state apparatus, and the systematic retardation of the claims of rivals are the only notable political operational modes of the liberation movements. (There is no liberation movement as such, only mutually exclusive organisations claiming to be the true voice of that movement, The Nation of Islam *is* the voice of black men/people/America.) The militancy of individuals within the liberation movements made it possible for a small number of leaders to get paid to be gay, female, black. Liberation politics did not, in reality, transcend either the civil rights movement or any pre-defined social category's relations with the state; liberation politics marked the appropriation of a number of democratic fragments by a leadership who used the momentum built up by these fragments (and their failure) as a rationale for their leadership. Leaderships that they secured by means of advocating more extreme tactics (extremism in tactics did not express a revolutionary intent but a measure of their individual ambition). The racial meltdown in Britain's northern cities during June 2001 has exposed the leadership structure, and organisational manipulation of racial identities in

place. The apparent crisis has led to these community organisations accusing each other in terms of opportunism, personal ambition, intolerance, self-segregation, etc (eg Channel 4 Television News 12/7/01). When the lie of state-promoted ethnic identity breaks down, the truth of individualist capital accumulation is revealed.

Liberation politics was not recuperated by the state in the end but was initiated by it at the beginning. Its origins lay in the administration's addressing of social problem issues according to sociological categories. The subsequent appropriation of research funding by community leaders was later formalised as Community Relations and an ad hoc local, informal (that is, unaccountable) state apparatus was formed. This apparatus joined itself to the official state by means of establishing recognisable locales that could be funded and could reciprocate by supplying both social data (by which future funding could be judged) and accounts to say how money had been spent. Deciding on issues of prejudice (which means no more than deciding the allocation of funds to social management) has since remained under the control of the state's legal and community apparatus, which provides a stage for elite community representatives arguing their constituency's case from their structurally guaranteed positions. In the meantime the popular *political* manifestations that established the need for such recognised positions have fallen away (to return as mere a-political riots that have to be interpreted by leaders). The social sciences have made a further contribution to the issue of the *inescapable condition* by theorising the working class as just one more constituency that *needs to be heard*, a cultural entity discon-

nected from the mainstream. The *inescapable condition* is a statist ideology. That is, it depends upon legal recognition to attract investment and thus continue its existence. But why did nobody see through it?

The passing of time is the medium through which proclaimed progressive bodies ripen to show off all, and not just some, of their uses. If you wait long enough you observe all liberal-left/progressive groupings and individuals will find an excuse to support some state initiative. This is because their politics exist at the level of ideas, and on the level of ideas, at some point, there is bound to be an alignment between the protest milieu and the state. The collapse of the anti-capitalist movement after September 11, 2001, is proof of this. Somehow the Taliban really were more evil than American imperialism and the True Democrats of the anarchist milieu felt more sympathetic to the false democracy of the US than the beyond-the-pale theocrats. Apparently it was too difficult to see both the established state and the bandit religion as mutually supportive functions within a capitalist frame, each doing its job and furthering methods and extending techniques of exploitation and accumulation.

The single interest group, which must keep its object in sight even if all else has changed or been abandoned, ends by defending basic essential categories. Categories not much different to those it once opposed; after years fighting against segregation it is later found that *black* people are different from *white* people, have different needs, perspectives, cultures, and that these must be defended from *alien* influence. "As we all know, women make the world go round, looking after its entire population; but

two thirds of this work is unwaged and undervalued. This lack of economic and social recognition is a fundamental sexist injustice, devaluing women and everything women do, which keeps most of us poor," (from the leaflet, *mobilise now for the 2<sup>nd</sup> global women's strike 2001*). So, *women* are different from *men* and have different characteristics that should be recognised (and included in the wage economy), and the first of these differences is that women are caring, nurturing, encouraging to children and to everyone, and men cannot be these things as men are oppressors. Over time the destruction of classifications (which was the original impulse of single issue groups) becomes the re-institution of classifications but with a new set of waged interpreters, experts and managers, recruited from the Movement itself. What was once reviled has now become the goal. In this shielding of their always-to-be-preserved flame, these groups fail to observe how capital itself breaks down barriers and stereotypes. They fail to notice objective shifts in the character of labour and thus the infinite social mutations forced on people by the meticulously applied pressures of exploitation. There are now thousands of men staying at home looking after their children because employers prefer female workers (for too many tedious reasons but most obviously because they are cheaper). In thirty years, capitalist objectivity has turned upside down the critique of feminist essentialism and shown it to be a restrictive and reactionary ideology not willing to engage with the religious idiocy of indigenous cultures where so many women are indeed to be found looking after others. The genuine feminisation of human existence which we may have hoped for from a woman's



critique of productive relations has been frittered away and is now lost because of feminism's failure to expand its analysis to include all capitalised roles within in its critique. It is a tragic irony that the relentless empire of coca-cola capitalism, which must lay waste to native *culture* in its movement of self-expansion, has been, in effect, more progressive than the shifting categories of identity politics precisely because it *destroys* traditional roles. Feminism, in response, has sought only to preserve itself as an interest lobby, a mere signifier of contradictory moral values which now argues for tradition and now for progression but always within capital's continued expansion.

By the early Seventies, most pro-revolutionary formations were fairly tired. They'd developed in response to '56 and matured during the mid Sixties. By the time of the late Sixties they were getting a bit careworn, reduced to looking for signs. It is a convention in pro-revolutionary writing of that time to predict the immanence of revolution. At this distance and not being on personal terms with these theorists, it is impossible to say whether they were being optimistic, tactically astute, or just desperate. Whatever the motivation, it is plain they lost their puff around '72, when all hell was breaking loose: guerillaism, industrial militancy, liberation politics. It is open to interpretation whether the extreme forms taken at this time were also signs of desperation and a sense of something being lost, the way a child, having concentrated in drawing minutiae with tongue peeping out the corner of the mouth will, when tired, scrawl over its efforts in exasperated and exaggerated gestures.

We can see that pro-revolutionary groups got sucked

uncritically into the maelstrom of apparent conflicts and at the moment of intensification we can also see that theory, and therefore all engagement, degraded into mere affirmation of militancy (look at the hideous endorsement of the IRA by many anarchists). We are no scholars of revolutionary theory; what we have read has come to us by chance and so we make no pretence of exhaustive research – but from all the literature that we have read relating to this period, we have yet to come across a pro-revolutionary critique of the form that engagement took in the hot days of the early Seventies. After so many years in half-empty, smoky rooms, it was no doubt a great pleasure for pro-revolutionaries to step into the sun. If they were the lived theory of the conditions of the world, as they had proclaimed, then it was about time the world supplied them with some objective proof. In short, they had a need to be vindicated, a need to prove the worth of their sacrifices and their faith. Negri viewed the new alleged subject positions, the new causes taken up and out onto the street in the Seventies, as a sign of further social polarisation, the old struggle taking new forms and engaging capital on different fronts. The argument went: if those participating in the wave of actions, demonstrations, and movements were not workers as such, the positions defined naturally aligned themselves to the workers' position because of an unconscious awareness (via their personal alienation) of the antagonistic nature of society. It seemed to Negri and his mates that the new social movements would supply to the workers' movement a fresh perspective and different tactics; they would widen and deepen the meaning of what it is to be a human being. Their protests would illu-

minate precisely where the repressions of capitalist society chafed most. The composition of the working class would become more diverse, more radical, more politicised, more filled in/complete and more antagonistic to the status quo. The perspectives/experiences of the myriad different movements would break off and become embedded in each other. The many struggles, after initial skirmishes, would discover the inter-connectivity of struggle itself; the many struggles would combine to become the one struggle and in victory many yeses would be chorused in affirmation of the inconceivable numbers of different modes of human being. And this is how present day anti-capitalists see it too – alliances of causes becoming one great cause; many local uprisings providing the conditions for the existence of each other and throwing out sparks; new revolts extending towards the horizon, filling up the map, and every new revolt at first limiting itself to local concerns and then, thwarted, looking to extend the struggle. The Situationists could write of how the spectacle was producing “new resistances everywhere,” of “youth rebellion,” “millions of individual people, each day seeking an authentic life, linking up with the historical movement of the proletariat in struggle against the whole *system of alienations*.” Society appeared to be breaking apart and recomposing itself along explicitly antagonistic lines. Camatte went much further and declared the transfer of revolutionary subjectivity from the working class to a newly-becoming *humanity* that would define itself finally against capitalism. And of the array of intellectual sympathisers in French universities eager to affirm what appeared transparent, Castoriadis welcomed new forms of autonomous

subjectivity, Deleuze and Guattari saw new forms and potentialities (becomings), and perhaps only Foucault was a bit pessimistic, seeing some affirmative pattern at work but submerged in the liberationist ideologies. There was a general confusion in theoretical and intellectual *contributions* to the revolution over the distinction between the political consciousness of militant minorities and their social-economic determinations; the preference for focusing on political manifestations is understandable but the arena of political consciousness produces only ambiguous facts. Yes, ten thousand demonstrated one day in a city of five hundred thousand but were each of the ten thousand delegated by fifty others? Or did events present to this ten thousand a critical role to play in that moment and if they did then why didn't they do more? If the social movements were an expression of something bigger, why and how were they separated from this bigger force?

By the Seventies the wilful theoretical emphasis on the effects of small group action, which was itself following the logic of progressive radical expressivity, indicates a desire for some form of patriotism in the pro-revolutionaries of the time, particularly as this contemplation of action obscured the continued non-involvement of the masses. Pro-revolutionaries no longer participated in objective events; they made events and claimed for them the condition of objectivity. The rebel's gesture reflects upon itself and claims it is an expression of underlying reality, this is the radical's variation of *voices in the head*. It could be imagined that the prediction of imminent change and the praising of radical political groups might have been abandoned after the disappointments of the Seventies

but anti-capitalist manifestations and the logic of those manifestations are producing the same connections and, crucially, the same non-connections.

It is not that the social movements, the liberation agendas, the personalist politics of the Seventies were defeated (the forward movement of history does not negate what did not become real, it merely ignores it), it is not that these groups failed, that they did not have enough resources or adherents, or that the time was not right. All these factors ought to be considered but are not sufficient reason for critique; the social movements draw critique to themselves, from us, because they were wrong. They fell into every trap and cliché imaginable and the worst mistake they made was in imagining that the times they were living through were revolutionary because of what *they* were doing. It is at this point that we re-engage with some of Foucault's pessimistic concepts. We do so only because there is little else from this period that is usable and it is through his concepts that we encounter the second mode of personalism, *expressivity*.

*A theory of exploitation and identity politics*

It is not hardship to consider in the space of a few paragraphs a concept outlined by the most intelligent individual of the Twentieth Century. Most popular political movements of the late Twentieth Century operated strategically on an ideological assumption of liberation as their end. However Foucault, in contradiction, argued that society was not based on structures of repression but on techniques of exploitation – he put his finger on economy when so many Marxists were concerned with political side-shows. Where Marxist dialectical theory described radical failure antago-

nistically, and relied metaphorically on battlefield terms: seizure, capture, recuperation, incorporation, containment – Foucault created the concept of maximisation.

Firstly it is important to grasp the form Marxist critique takes so as to understand why that critique became uncritical when confronted by popular politics. The tendency of Marxist theory, as it moves by means of critique, is to disprove everything that it itself is not. It assumes an identity between its techniques and the objective movement of history; it has a consciousness of what is real (the real movement of positions and forces within society, which necessarily includes itself) and what is unreal: the vaporous mists that appear important in the present and obscure people's understanding of how society really functions. The theoretical apparatus of the real (Marxism) identifies all that is unreal; the real is riveted to the productive form (albeit as Holmes clasped Moriarty to his breast above the torrential abyss) whilst the unreal drifts about, subject to the hidden determinations of the productive form. The unreal is described and undressed by Marxist theory in degrees of falsity: mists that drift across the actual conditions of life and the interests invested therein, illusion, projection, identification, religion, *ideology*.

We do not reject Marxist critique, but we think it does not go far enough. It does not survey effectively enough its own theoretical grounds, it does not question concepts such as *the real movement* of antagonism in social forms. And so it is forced (for example) to look for evidence of opposition to capital identify fragments of this real movement that will one day overcome dominant conditions. A Marxist analysis of ideology, for example, will identify how a small frag-

ment of human experience (goodness, wickedness, will to power, Oedipus) is recognised by enthusiasts of a social project, who will take it to be the explanation of the entirety of human life and thus a legitimisation of their project. (Ideological explanations of Man usually boil down to formulations such as, "man is a sexual being," "man is fallen," "man is a thinking being," etc.) Uncritical, theological, explanations of human nature and society are simply engaged by revolutionaries. They are, like the majority of toadstools, neither flavoursome nor noxious, they do neither harm nor good but are merely irrelevant. Most ideologies, whether of football or religion, cannot be used either to defend or attack property as a social relation. Of course it can be (truly) said that all forms that do not directly express communism to some degree obscure it and thus supply succour to existing society. But there is little political significance in such observations as we, as individuals, must live now, and we all require the opiates of love, art, entertainment, success.

The situation alters (this is where so many pro-revolutionaries fail to apply their critiques when caught up in social eruptions) when an ideology sets itself up as an opposition to existing conditions and thereby attracts to itself the investment of individuals' disaffection. All the time this radical ideology is negating details, *corruption, America, corporations, patriarchy, racism*, it has no critique of the conditions of society and thus, through this mistake, ends affirming by omission *what is really wrong with the world*. What is forgotten by the groups of partial causes is that the world *is* prepared to negotiate on partial terms. In this way, pro-democracy movements, trade unions, educational and health initiatives, which at first take a critical per-

spective on the organisation of society, end in becoming functions of it. And this is where Marxist terms such as *containment* and *recuperation* come in. When circumstance insists that Marxists must contemplate the collapse of apparently revolutionary social movements, Marxists come up with a variation on the theoretical model of corruption; they say the movements in question were *once* revolutionary but certain factors became dominant over their initial determinants and altered their original nature. This is how the real movement recognised and affirmed by theory becomes decayed, ideological, and thus not real.

Radicalism fails where it becomes a function of a force bigger than it can conceive and it becomes a function of a larger force because of its theoretical limitations. Radicalism fails because it narrows the margins of the issues it wants to address. It wants to talk about health, or war, or equal pay, but these issues do not stand independently of each other or of the world that contains them. As activists seek to promote the interest of their cause they are at the same time participating in and, by implication, validating processes and forces that they have not consciously addressed. They become part of the great debate, or one interest that must be balanced with the interests of all others – part of the democratic process that must be set before the attention of the electorate. The Marxist concepts of *incorporation* and *recuperation* mean very simply that the significance of the values you espouse are outweighed by the values contained – unconsciously but structurally – in your limited objectives. You say, “defend the health service” but as the health service is a function of the state and was produced by a number of conditioning historical forces and events, you are by



implication arguing for the continued existence of the state arrested at a particular point in its history. Recuperation and incorporation are terms that describe the capture of a narrowly specific field of radicality by the capitalist state, not for the purpose of silencing criticism, but so as to deploy the continued existence of that criticism as a demonstration of the state's universality and the impossibility of any real political position outside its bounds. The same fortified position may be taken and used by both sides several times in a conflict. Recuperation means that everything that exists affirms what has given existence to everything; every theoretical formulation, every gesture of defiance, every conceivable resistance, every phrase spoken, and scrap of thought arcs back to the centre; every phenomenal no is a noumenal yes; all the trees bend in the same direction; the wind blows always against your face and giant beach balls patrol the surf. The concept of recuperation is also a prophecy, revolt is an expression of youth whilst the corruption of *giving in* belongs to age and experience.

Foucault's formulation of *maximisation* is more subtle than the theological turn in Marxist thought that uncovers, that is driven to uncover, the universal but empty routine by which all flesh decays and no purity may be maintained. *Maximisation* is more subtle and more true because it has more content. It is not enough to denounce in a religious manner; our need, as pro-revolutionaries, is always for more accurate instruments, more effective weapons.

*It seems in fact that what was involved was not asceticism, in any case not a renunciation of pleasure or a disqualification of the flesh, but on*

*the contrary an intensification of the body, a problematization of health and its operational terms: it was a question of techniques for maximising life.*

– History of Sexuality

What has been instituted since the beginning of capitalist exploitation is a tightening of the screw, a winding in of the rope – the perpetual drive to cut the cost of production. Capitalist exploitation of circumstance, and of flesh, expands suddenly at first and then gradually. First there is globalisation, imperialism, the ravening hoard, the advancing plague. When every surface is occupied then comes the widening and deepening of the capitalist form. What Marxists have described in political-military similes as recuperation, this averting of their gaze and still being turned into stone, is really the continued intensification of economic processes of exploitation (as Foucault says, of maximisation). This is a matter not of the capture of subject positions but of advancing productive techniques. After achieving for capital mere geographical ubiquity now boss-science must shove aside the old mole to strip mine and hollow out existence at the level of the infinitesimal; it transforms autonomous life-processes into factories. Mice, trees, viruses are now to be used to grow injection-moulded commodities. And it is precisely at this moment that pro-revolutionary and Marxist critique formulated both the subjectivity of “many struggles,” and conceptualised the flanking manoeuvres by which state-capital would capture these positions, leaving to the pro-revolutionaries irrelevant positions in the political sphere where they must defend tunnelled-out and undermined territories by means of *resistance*. From

the Seventies to the present, pro-revolutionaries have done little more than occupy defensive and reactionary positions, resisting the encroachment of forces that they had already theorised must win; the theory of recuperation has always been recuperated. It achieved a condition of peace, "Ok lads, struggle at first in hope but go limp when you feel the grip tightening." Recuperation – the theory of defeat, the theory of *upsurges* and *downturns* in struggle – inevitability facilitated the withdrawal of thousands of militants from the struggle in apparent good faith.

But they were wrong. What was going on, the apparent radical rise and legalised decline of personalist politics, was nothing to do with a wide ranging political and military engagement of social movements with capital. From the start these radicalities had a commodified aspect; there was no rise and decline at all, no loss of revolutionary potential, no falling away of impetus or direction even if there was a spectacular trajectory of sorts. Personalist politics never articulated the manoeuvre of recuperation, which in itself was an ideology of resignation and an embrace of political/academic mystification. This process was never a case of subjectivities and their capture, but of the furtherance of a specific mode of production. From the beginning personalist liberation strategies aimed for the establishment of bureaucratic and cultish elites which, when fully ripe, could be swallowed whole by general administrative structures of the state and the economy, that and the development of differentiated markets: the black dollar, separatist economies, the pink pound, the gay village, the women's vote, black/gay/women's studies... All of these recuperated and es-

entially conservative and exploitative enterprises were present in the aspirations of the liberation movements at their beginning in the way that a capitalist exploitation was not. Of course at an individual level, the reforms devised and pushed through may have made life easier for some people, a passionate debate about rights with a university chancellor is preferable to being chased by a bigoted mob. But that is not our point.

It is no doubt preferable to exist in a freer climate than an oppressive one, to exist under a democratic state than a fascist one, but this is saying nothing of value. To live in a condition of lessened exploitation is not the end of revolutionary aspiration and it is demonstrably not the means either. We have understood since the anti-fascist political mystifications of the Thirties that the basic social relation within all states (including its pseudo-opposition) is the same and the political condition within each state mutually conditions the others. It is not a matter of supporting this democratic nation against that fascistic one but of viewing all nations together as an array of possible political methods of domination under a given set of economic conditions. This nation's democracy cannot be exported so as to replace that nation's totalitarianism; this nation's democracy is as much a strategy as the other's fascism, a strategy decided upon and implemented by the same class in the same moment, just as a particular company might count razor wire and sticking plasters amongst its products. In history all individual states *become* more or less authoritarian and more or less open as events dictate; they tend to swap masks between themselves. The liberal state utilises the spectre of totalitarianism to defend its

own iniquities: there is the ongoing threat of dangerous and unwished-for transformation, of losing what we have got, and of the rescinding of reforms by pressure of Objective Circumstance™, of the democratic state becoming totalitarian, of the reforms recently won being reversed. (Thus under the constant threat of the so-called *police state* pro-revolutionaries are forced to defend what now exists as civil liberties rather than fighting for something else entirely.) This element of falsity in pro-revolutionary thought is a product of the fatal confusion of political expediencies with economic actuality, a confusion brought on by the gradual erasure of the experience of work (and therefore the mislaying of the true character of exploitation) and its subsequent replacement by academic research.

Subjective liberation projects were, from their inception, examples of productive maximisation; at the heart of the liberationist project, machines of manufacture were set in motion and markets established to consume the commodities flowing out. Out of anecdotal grievances, short hand concepts of oppression, and the response to real prejudice, opportunities were exploited for the furtherance of the capitalist social relation. Through a transference of the Revolutionary Project to the apparatus of political appearance, the causes of personally experienced misery could be mis-attributed to simple mechanisms of caricatured oppositions of interest: the situation of women could be attributed to men, blacks to whites, gays to straights. And all the time, profit was to be made through the enforcement of prejudice. In the case of Apartheid profit was to be made through its reduction and overthrow of prejudice (all instances of

political rejection of prejudice refers back to apartheid as an essence made concrete). Anti-racist, anti-sexist, anti-prejudice capitalism is an explicit project of the United Nations. It is apparent therefore that prejudice is not the true problem and its overcoming is no kind of solution to the exploitation of humanity. This literal overcoming of prejudice is a fantasy anyway, it disappears like a vanishing point on a *trompe l'oeil* horizon. Prejudice is effect not cause, it is present in all of our partial experience and in the very structure of language. The liberation effected by oppressed subjectivities that we have experienced since the Sixties can in no way be considered to constitute social progress, unless, that is, we acknowledge progress to be something malign. Progress implies development within set conditions and the set conditions of our society are those that constitute capitalism. Progress, in present society, is a concept applicable only to the increasing effectiveness of exploitative procedures.

Has it all been in vain? Was the struggle of the Seventies worthless? If we consider our world and ask ourselves whether our lives have *improved* in general then the answer must be that, in general, they have not. The end of the liberation struggles was the achievement of a status of normality, that and a commodity definition for what had been previously undefined economically. To live a normal life, for those previously excluded, like any other poor dummy, is some kind of something, we suppose. Life for some has got better, that which chafed has been filed down. But there is no balance book, no means by which partial advancements may offset other defeats, no way even of knowing what precisely is a defeat and what is, precisely, a victory.

The question is quite different and sets itself up as: has personalist politics contributed to the social revolution? The answer is plainly that it has not, other than in a negative sense, that is, it has shown us how easy it is to go wrong, but should we exhaust all available roads before finally turning for our destination? It may be the case, and we are sure it is, that some people had some great experiences during the high days of the personalist struggles. It may be that a lot of people feel that they have achieved something remarkable, that they have been lifted up from one moment by some wave of elemental social force and set down again in a completely other moment; from the Forties to the Eighties is as far from Kansas to Oz, from monochrome to colour; they led a life vibrant and tight-packed with experience. We are sure that this is true, it is as true as the disillusionment of other individuals and as true as the structural modification of this force that began as popular protest and ended as Equal Opportunities Law – all of this is true, but it is not the point.

*Something is happening here but you don't know what it is, do you Monsieur Dupont?*

So far we have considered *the inescapable condition*. Now we turn our attention to cost effective individuality. We call it *expressivity*.

Bowling green. Sewing machine.

You know, some of the pieces get to you. They are broken off from somewhere else, against the odds they survive atmospheric burn-up, and pit your head like meteorites. You weigh them up, you can't make them out exactly but find yourself muttering them like pre-prayer material. Or you make like you aren't even interested – you

toss them into a corner, and then you pick them up again without even noticing. You can't get rid of this thing humming in your brain. You have an attachment you didn't know about so you need to dispose of it, you work it out to its end, achieve so-called closure by following a special procedure, like that of *the poverty of philosophy*. Or maybe just find something else palm-sized as a replacement.

*Bowling green. Sewing machine*, is the couplet snarled by the *defiant ones* at bay; it is tossed like a flickflacking acrobat at the cop who has cornered them. He doesn't get it, and it just begins to show on his face. The film ends. *Bowling green, sewing machine* as a phrase isn't pretty or profound but it is hammered enough times through the film for it to stay put. Is this some kind of victory?

Nonsense verse becomes fantastical because of the arbitrary connections effected by mechanical rhymes as they pile up in succession like tumblers on a vaulting horse; it is the kind of procedure used by Surrealists and occasional blues singers, Willie "61" Blackwell is the only one we can name, Beefheart is the arty version. *Sewing machine* is also suggestive of Lautréamont; it is a modern object, and to make poetry about modern objects is to live slap bang in the modern world (it is said that the sides of this world are smooth, the pace of this life is fast, machines turn and people lose their arms. You expect a favour? You won't get a favour. You get off the bus and nobody applauds. Swim in the stream bud. No nostalgia just immersal, and always the cutting to it; shoot straight and if you can't shoot straight shoot fast, no time for long speeches, *just do it*, checklist tick). *Bowling green, sewing machine*, it's an expression of how things stand; in saying



it the defiant one says, "I can see exactly what is going on here." And the implication is that the cop doesn't see it at all. There is some power in incantations if they reach into something that is not ordinarily visible, that is not visible to those who live out ordinary functions. The ordinary steps back when confronted by the extraordinary, feeling like something furious is dragging it off the map.

Expressivity began after the War. It had its avant-garde: Beat poetry, Be-Bop, Pop Art, Abstract Expressionism, Existentialism. It had its media: recorded music, film, sound amplification (and if this is not a medium but a technique, its significance remains). It had its modalities: Trad Jazz, The Folk Revival, Aldermaston, fanclubs, cigarette cards, rock and roll, protests. You were certain that, no matter what the chosen object of your enthusiasm, you could find others who shared your appreciation. Capitalist society at the level of individual experience means simply this: whilst you no doubt experience yourself as a separate entity you find you are never alone; the book you want from the library has been taken out, there was no occasion when you had the swimming pool or the cinema to yourself, the road is full of traffic, there is a queue at the checkout. You go to the late night garage to buy a pot noodle, it is three o'clock in the morning but there are five others already there; they look exactly like you and are buying the same thing. You think you experience everyone else as the crowd, as something separate from you but forever surrounding you, obstructing you, blocking your view and shoving from behind. It is difficult to think "I am an atom." The decisions you make are repeated a thousand times in other, remote, lives as the sun is shared

in each grain of a broken windscreen, spilled out in the gutter. Receiver not transmitter: if you become separated from the crowd, *there's a club if you'd like to go*, you can meet people just like you, there are clothes to be worn, equipment to be accrued; it is just like Bruce Lee, just where you are thwarted there you shall flower. One of the characteristics of expressivity, as a social quality as well as a brand of politics, is the sensed dispersal of ordinary social commonality as it is determined objectively by economic forces. Other, more immediate, more personal motors are presumed to be the cause of behavioural reality (psychology). When ordinary reality is dispersed in consciousness it is replaced by a subsequent, compensatory, centripetal drive revolving on a hub of arbitrary but strict cultures. Strangers come together.

Expressivity has its social and economic determinates. What was previously permitted like a bit of wasteground in the City – as irrelevant and vulgar entertainment of the masses, *working class culture* if you insist (if that is not a self-contradiction) – was abolished after 1950 and replaced with mass popular culture developed according to the commodity form. Which means only that in every city of the world you will find a McDonalds and in every city you will find an anti-capitalist protester – the object shaped by the commodity form is that which recurs. The elective communities that arrange themselves about the object of their enthusiasm alter for themselves the reality of their condition in two ways: firstly, they do not appreciate their chosen object as it exists objectively (that is, their enthusiasm contains no trace of its derivation – one does not gush for an object as a commodity but carefully screen that element out, even

though it is the commodity element that makes the object possible); secondly, fragmented, enthusiast communities arranged about mystified objects are organised according to commodity distribution – what is unacknowledged is that which finally determines. What is present to be appreciated in cultural objects and what determines their character (that is, their distribution) is precisely the mechanism by which exploitation distracts away any appreciation of the forms made possible only by its organisation.

The unconscious, self-organising, character of cultural enthusiasm that proceeds by means of focus on the routines of inclusivity/exclusivity and neglects the great exclusion is like ignoring the rotation of the planets about the sun whilst theorising about the capture of satellites around the Earth. Cultural objects persist because of the audience they have pulled into their sphere of influence. The audience contemplates itself as specially qualified; they see what the rest of society does not see. From the vantage point of the chosen object, or through the screen of consciousness it supplies, the world is always made up of the mostly indifferent or openly incredulous on the outside and *the special few* on the inside. Fans of Manchester United retain their sense of specialness, despite their overabundance, because all other football fans either hate them or are resigned to their existence like dandruff – this can also be said of the fans of Michael Jackson. Otherwise enthusiasts are content with their fewness and with the exquisite finesse by which they may discriminate between almost identical products: antique porcelain, singing groups, crews of Star Trek, Pokemon cards. The cult of Ringo is the epitome of formulaic enthusiasm: Too many love John and Paul but I am different

I think Ringo is best, he's cutest. At the airport today there were thousands of us chanting "We love Ringo".

*The way in which men produce their means of subsistence depends first of all on the nature of the actual means of subsistence they find in existence and have to produce. This mode of production must not be considered simply as being the production of the physical existence of individuals. Rather it is a definite form of activity of these individuals, a definite form of expressing their life, a definite mode of life on their part. As individuals express their life so they are.*

- The German Ideology

*Next section but keep the concept Expressivity*

There is no difference between the organisation of the object Hear'say (a pop group) and that around the object Tate Modern (an art gallery). But this enthusiasm is not the alleged phenomena of consumerism (the UFO malaise of modern life), enthusiasm is not materialism, commercialisation of Christmas, or any other vain spiritual grievance (under the surface over which spirituality hovers, there you shall find money writhing, buried alive). Consumerism doesn't exist; this alleged avarice is a trick. There is nothing objective in the organisation of enthusiasm but the enactment of work codes – we never possess our objects, Microsoft still owns the software in our computers. Our enthusiasm for the objects of our enthusiasm is work-energy, or a form of pre-work, speculative work, unpaid for finishing, distribution, storage. Call it slavery as it is not worth a wage.

If work is the adding of something of ourselves to an object under conditions of force, then our so-called con-

sumerism is, in reality, a version of labour; it is the work of free-time. Our job is to fill out the world, to carry the trigger objects of our enthusiasms to all areas, to produce new objects or the desires for new objects which may already have a commodity character or later require its commodification. (The internet is our first example, but every object has its formal and informal enthusiasms, its literatures and its controversies – affects are to be attached, or disengaged or re-engaged. In terms of productivity, there is no difference between the programme Buffy The Vampire Slayer and my watching it.) Our work in the free-time allotted to us is the production of the objects our desires will be stimulated by. Driving your car is work, shopping is work, heading out of town is work, working-out is work, sorting your rubbish into different bins is work, flushing the handle is work, getting drunk is work, home computing is work, watching television is work; other people own these machines and we are employed to mind them.

(We are working for the film industry when we go, *and* when we don't go, to watch a film. If we do go, the film will be remade under a new title; if we don't then the characteristics of the film will be noted and not used again.) Our gameplaying is training like fox cub rough-and-tumble on a grassy bank. We do not do nothing, our jabbing at the console, our survey of the screen. We are always in preparation for work proper by work irregular.

(The absorption of productive forms via distraction and habit. It is not just school that prepares one for work, bizarre quarter – happy quarter – tragic quarter – historical quarter – useful quarter – sinister quarter. “What the funfair achieves with its dodgem cars and other similar

amusements is nothing but a taste of the drill to which the unskilled labourer is subjected in the factory.... their behaviour is a reaction to shocks.") Our free-time never broke free of the company shop; we walk around with machines attached to us. The machines are activated in social space, clothes, cars, phones, haircuts, prepacked lunches eaten on foot, damn the old lady and her walking stick in front of me, all are transmitting or creating approximations, reproductions, echoes. The crowd is a production line and each individual speeds up its pace and shaves down its gestures to submit to the force of circumstance.

The point here is not that we should not have feelings for special objects, or that the figure of technology inter-penetrating human existence goes against an ideal natural order – the communist society will also be made by machines set in motion in a human world. Machines (that is objects and states of being) are always present, but in conditions of capital maximisation the technologies operating in social space are not in anyway random or autonomous. Your smile is a machine, I saw it on an advert; my bus ticket is a machine of anxiety, which pocket did I put it in? The thoughts that fire like pinballs down the street ricocheting between our heads, they too are machines, or parts of machines. The problem for pro-revolutionaries is that the machines of expressivity, the sphere of culture, is independent of actual production as such, and although we are always working when we use commodified expression, we are working at a level that does not produce the conditions of reality. The machines of expressivity are not the machines of production, they do not produce reality. On the contrary they create more or less true evasions from

the nature of reality; this is why the control of such expression is of only a secondary matter. It is why a book, or a song, cannot change the world. Those pro-revolutionaries who site their actions within culture cannot affect the ownership of reality. Here are the shops; these machines, the people, their talk, the clothes, the cars, the food, the architecture, the sounds, appearances, are all working as capital; they are all inclined in one direction. They are the inevitable penny in the charity collection bin that swirls down a funnel and into someone else's pocket – they are all commodities all of the time.

*Next section but keep thinking* Expressivity

The conditions for mass culture were organised during the war, total mobilisation produced in individuals a state of receptivity to readymade cultural forms. When we talk, just like in *The Singing Detective*, we talk in the forms of popular song; we dream, as the Pet Shop Boys observed, of the queen; everybody in the army knew someone who was as funny as Bob Hope; tourism is based on GI's encountering foreigners (Guy Mitchell's *She Wears Red Feathers*) Frank Sinatra on a warship, Fred Astaire cutting a dash through Parisian existentialism.

Expressivity, the speaking, thinking and feeling of ready-made forms is determined by the maximisation of the commodity form; all social objects come with a copyright. We cannot *express* anything that is not already in circulation as expression or potential expression, what we add is what the media say advertisers call, *word of mouth*, personal commitment, buying into; the internet is the systematisation of word of mouth. And this is why the concepts of culture and working class consciousness are now moribund. In terms of

expression everything is bound, nothing is outside.

At various points popular culture runs up against resistance to it its amphitheatrisation of forms, it is here that it pulls on its radical trousers and rages at incursions of freedom of speech or the restrictive practices of some previously obscure elitism. This happens less now, most barriers are down and popular culture has achieved some kind of militaristic uniformity, violinists dress sexy, we all like different songs but essentially it is the same music. Nevertheless, an 'Indian Reservation' is designated within capital's integrated geography for the function of rebellious *expression*.

Capitalism demonstrates its economic mastery of the ideological concept of 'totalitarianism' by encouraging dissent against its existing forms, rebellion is the discovery and integration, as niche markets, of new forms. In capital's actualisation of culture, arranged as if on an op-art canvass, there are no square pegs, even the squarest are more or less rounded – being fitted into (with a squeeze) the sea of holes and in that juncture making something of a product for someone to gouge at. Bogus subjectivities, call it Puff Daddy, struggle to establish an outsider position by rehearsing scenes of conflict and transgression, mingling them with approximations of regret and thereby holding onto maximum airtime; hiphop recreates fate, "dat's jus' the way it is," and it's all Achilles and Hector condemned to a primal scene of rudimentary struggle but really there is no stripping away of the veils; this is not life, this not how it is. What rap has to say is just lad's tales, soldiartalk; the base is not uncovered in pseudo-accounts of pump-action nature. Society's truth, employment, is no more to



be found In The Ghetto than it is in the suburbs.

Capitalism is obscured as much by rebellion as it is in affirmation. The antagonism created out of class interest (that is, the real terms of our social existence) is to be found not more clearly in punk rock than it is at Disneyland. Even rebellious cultural forms work within existing terms; there is no way of assuring that some message might survive commercialisation – not that the revolution is dependent on messages or that we haven't got it already; Roger Daltry can sing "meet the new boss same as the old boss", but our repetition of that formula only confirms the impossibility of autonomous consciousness, the very fact that we have heard of Roger Daltry proves we cannot develop revolutionary consciousness. There is no unfenced ground from which it can be generated.

Expressivity – the urge to be traveller not tourist – pioneers the trail, and Dylan mocks, "now, you see this one-eyed midget shouting the word 'now,' and you say, 'for what reason?' And he says 'how,' and you say, 'what does this mean?' and he screams back, 'you're a cow, give me some milk or else go home'." There is no more to the avant-garde than this. *We've got a secret, you don't know what it is, we turn our backs on you, and you want to see what cute kitty is getting the tickle, and if you pay out enough money then you will find out.* "I liked them before they got famous" is the straggler's refrain because what did he ever possess really? When a new games console comes out, enthusiasts queue up from midnight, to be of that elite, to be *one of the first in the country* to own that particular model; that's really saying something something. Our excitement is integral to the production of the object, and our

excitement is no more than completing the labyrinth of ownership, programming the video, reading the owner's manual, getting to the end of a computer game. But the measure of time between excitement and indifference is declining. Dylan's shine, his cultishness lasted about five years, the rate of wasting has speeded up since then. In a world of unvaried consistency, the understanding of any detail was sufficient for the understanding of all things, once the smallest detail was properly understood, then everything was understood. Pop music has followed a typical commodity trajectory, an initial specialised product of indefinable but inescapable quality breaks out from its confines and is distributed globally (the peculiar blend of Tennessee hillbilly music with the Blues); a golden age, the perfection of the form and an age of ubiquity, the pop song that genuinely articulated something of lived life. In pop music's case, the *something of lived lived life* was an address to lately-abolished popular culture; pop music derived some energy from that association (the *Sgt Pepper* sleeve, nostalgic fairground music, cheeky story songs about obscure so-called real people, Lovely Rita, Arnold Lane, Lola – quickly parodied as Polythene Pam and Telegram Sam).

As the world became saturated, pop had no reference but itself, because there was nothing external to it and no memory of a time when there was. Working class culture ended when pop music forgot to sing about it, and sung about itself instead. Pop had fused with the means of its distribution. It became fully integrated with the media industry. Twenty four hour broadcasting delivered twenty four hour pop – at first shovelling it into the airwaves as

if into the furnace of a steam engine and then merely programming it, buying it by the yard like old books to be nailed to theme pub shelves. Pop is now designed exclusively for broadcast whilst the last pop record that referred to anything outside of popworld, *Ghost Town*, has become a mere demonstration of what authenticity might look like. Contracts between pop producers and pop broadcasters are to be honoured, targets to be reached, the needs of the one are fulfilled by the other – the lascivious pelvis thrust of pop stars is now a gesture of utter conformity, a cultural adherence. Enthusiasm for pop still exists, and of course that enthusiasm has always been manipulated, but now it must be maintained at a constant frequency, galvanised, provoked, squeezed; machinery is tired.

When quality replaces quantity (that is, when tunes are overshadowed by promotional distractions, when inundation becomes saturation) then we'd expect some sort of revolt. If it were simple, then a song sung from the heart would mean something somewhere, it would mean something over and above the interests of the *breadheads*, but what is signed away in public view by the band is clawed back under the table by the accountants. Sadly it seems that the truth of pop has nothing to do with either lyrical good intentions or stylistic heresies; its truth is economic and structural, and was realised in the destruction of autonomous popular culture (pigeon fancying, spam for Sunday tea, model making, wearing hats, and dressing like your parents), replacing it with mass culture organised according to the commodity form. Even so, the value of pop music has declined, and it would seem appropriate if, when confronted with the

fare of this naked lunch, consumers spat it out and rose up like lions out of slumber and demanded better pop. If the explicit call to pop revolution were *co-opted* by other forces, drugs, failure of vision, cynical record companies, then why not, when confronted with the utter banality of pop's current content, rise up against it? But the fans are not consumers; they have made no decisions, they merely follow – as a vaguely defined workforce – the dictates of economic forces that barely appear in the register of their understanding. The decline in product quality has been accompanied with a similar slippage in the subjective consciousness of the object, which means pop-product can now be *finished* by under-tens (fashionably called *tweenagers*) whilst their parents, just taller children, re-condition old material via subjective nostalgia. (We saw a display recently in a bookshop consisting of books of photographs entitled *Paris in the Sixties*, *New York in the Sixties*, *London in the Sixties*. That digital technology is primarily about the storage and retrieval of information is a dull but accurate peg, but next year greater magnification will accelerate the book, *The Latin Quarter in the Sixties* and the following year and zooming in still closer, *Le Cafe de Sartre in the Sixties*. Mass cultural production is a satellite photograph, it aims to focus on a lit cigarette from a thousand miles up. Information technology is a mining operation, a juicing machine; it is deployed to squeeze out the last drop. Recycling is the systemisation of the mud-lark and because our moment is comprised of events that recur perpetually, the going over what is already finished is all that is left to entrepreneurs. Wham bam technology is about the retrieval and exploitation of the past;

it has nothing to do with either progress or the future. Under present conditions there is no future. When we see a gaggle of African children gathered about a news reporter and wearing logo-emblazoned t-shirts we do not think *imperialism*, but *anachronism*. This be-calming and stain-spreading out of capitalism, called globalisation, is a bringing into line, a synchronisation of all present factors. It is happening, as all floods happen, because there is nothing else for it to do; there is no way forward. The curse is one of repetition not uncontrolled advance – no social order ever perishes before all the productive forces for which there is room in it have developed). Pop music has declined in value like all reproduced commodities do over time but it does not follow that when it was intense it was an expression of a revolutionary force. There is a natural hierarchy between mouth and ear but in the capitalist economy, the organisation is in place to make sure that when there is speaking then there will be listening, and you can't get more ecological than that.

Capital's maximising of the role of subjective enthusiasm in the production process of pop, and in all similarly maximised products, has actualised a formulaic structuralisation of enthusiasm. Enthusiasm is becoming, in the everyday functioning of the multipack individual, a serial array of disconnected, incandescent jolts of pleasure, and rapid fallings away – the highs to be had from portable super-technologies are of lesser duration than from the inhaling of crack and this is because gadgets are not products for consumption at all but products waiting for additional labour to finish them. They come to us on a conveyor belt, we do not have long before the next

one and like in *Modern Times*, the belt is speeding up. Our grandfather was a handyman, he fixed things because everything, from toys to cars, in the Forties and Fifties was fixable with a spanner, now there is only Superglue; nothing can be mended any more only returned via statutory rights; rag and bone men, the last of the paid finishers, disappeared in the Seventies but many everyday economies in Africa are based upon the reuse of tin cans. (More systematically, but going unrecognised, the first purchasers of any new fangled invention (Windows 95, etc) are its low cost testers and finishers, it is up to them to discover the glitches and flaws, to make the complaints.)

Pro-revolutionaries might find this a dull and unimportant lesson but Anti-capitalism has predicated itself on the assumption of radical expressivity, the pivotal moment of any Reclaim The Streets event is the arrival of a *smuggled in* soundsystem. Oscar Wilde never made a claim for the revolutionary potential of poetry; he understood that revolution belonged to the working class. Anti-capitalists have forgotten this; for them cultural manifestations in the streets are manifestations of resistance to capitalism. But radical expressivity is only a final layer of varnish on a product that has had a long trip down a conveyor belt. Why should this last process of many be valued so highly? To advocate an anti-capitalist culture in the belief that it can be spread and will eventually overthrow capital is a confusion of cultural content for productive form; anti-capitalism is a fragment of pop culture and functions as such; it cannot escape its confines, even down to the repetitious and exclusive nature of its events. *Next section but keep thinking* Expressivity

The only time a weasel makes a sound is when it's dying. All its life in silence and suddenly it's got a lot to say for itself, too much, and then it's cut short. Expressivity is the whine of defeat, it is the sound of pressure, of the pips squeaking.

In the end we return to the last avant-gardes, those who would make themselves real. Through them we will finally define the last and most radical figure of expressionist personal politics. The avant-garde set-up that found politics (and by 1960 there was no other avant-garde) is this: *there is an impossible situation, no exit, a sense of stillness and perhaps a total non-appearance of social dissonance so we place ourselves in the space, we will make ourselves and our gesture the object at issue, we will do something and we shall be registered.*

Aesthetic considerations have become a fundamental of revolutionary politics since 1950 and have found no adequate critique since, in the last three years in London there has been a concerted attempt to revive *les ballet des rues* in *Carnival Against Capitalism*, *Guerrilla Gardening* and *Mayday Monopoly*. These interventions have been staged as attempts at establishing a popular cultural form that is simultaneously a revolutionary critique of capitalism. The shift of so-called revolutionary action into a cultural mode is resultant of four factors, the most important being 1) The Myth of 1968; then 2) the formal dominance of pop culture in society (coupled with an idea that it has somehow been betrayed and made to speak against its true nature); 3) the passing of the ownership of revolutionary theory to a specific class of bohemians (who have been fostered at several interchanges of the economy, particu-

larly at the peripheries of academia, the media, the welfare state, mental hospitals, the art world), and finally 4) the reversed idea within revolutionary milieux that personal and social extremism always constitutes a threat to society and therefore should be recognised, encouraged, and even enacted. (This last is a reversed idea because it has been swallowed whole, it being the basic normal/abnormal mystification distributed by the media which portrays the world as being normally at balance but beset occasionally by the symptoms of contingent and isolated problems: the media says cannabis is bad, but is this cause enough for the revolutionaries to say it is good?)

The character of revolutionary organisation has largely transformed since 1950 (in response to Leninism). The ideal of the bureaucratic party leading the masses has been eroded by the millions who had a tendency to vote with their feet for anything stupid the hierarchy told them to vote for; membership of political parties became something like supporting a football team, you did it for no reason and without thought. *Socialisme ou Barbarie* was the first example of the new model: relatively small, ideologically pure groups finding their values realised in objective events and then looking to intervene by means of the transmission of consciousness to the masses (who were prepared, and ready to receive it, by events). The trick was to articulate ordinary experience of production line life as revolutionary concepts, perspectives and tactics, the trick was not to be separate, but to be within the proletariat and to *appreciate* it by interpreting what seemed to be the unsophisticated pursuit of self-interest as strategic positioning within an objective class struggle. If mass



organisations must always produce a settling tendency towards bureaucracy and political reaction, then the small revolutionary group resembled in group structure – and in the ideology of practical effectiveness – the artistic avant-garde, specifically the Surrealist and Dadaist groups. Small numbers of people, precisely because of their purity, could at certain moments achieve spectacular results – if they judged their interventions correctly.

### *How many of you are there?*

*A few more than the original guerrilla nucleus in the Sierra Madre, but with fewer weapons. A few less than the delegates in London in 1864 who founded the International Workingmen's Association, but with a more coherent program. As unyielding as the Greeks at Thermopylae ("Passerby, go tell them at Lacedaemon..."), but with a brighter future.*

- Situationist International questionnaire

Revolutionary groups, in the absence of the realisation of the unity of theory and practice, sought to establish the reality of truth in two places at once: in their own heads and in the objectively constituted but autonomous working class engagement with the economy. But the contemplative role of the revolutionary cell soon became restrictive, so to compensate for this (or at least to address this discomfort) the groups sought out means, events, modes, ideologies, whereby they could justify their appearance on the stage as actors. It is important that the

move towards action and its justification was begun in response to initial passivity – that is, direct political engagement was begun from a predication of subjective, ideological factors. For the revolutionary groups becoming fidgety it soon became morally insupportable that they should *sit by* whilst momentous events were unfolding, that they should *sit around theorising*, when they ought to be *out there showing solidarity and getting our ideas across*. But what can ten or twelve declassé individuals *do*? Make situations of course. It is at the juncture where the individual or small group seeks to make itself significant to the world that leftist ideology becomes less concerned with inconceivable masses and more focused on conceptions of the self. From *SoB*'s initial transformation of the formula for social division from owner/worker to ordergiver/ordertaker, a sudden rush of new theories of polarity went in and out of leftbank fashion: authentic/inauthentic, tuned in/straight, spectator/actant. Existentialism, Marcuse, and the mythic heroes of popular culture (Dean, Presley, Brando, and later Guevara) also contributed to the legitimisation of pursuing the forms of ideological oppositions. In the end it became (and it is this mockery that present-day advertisers use as a jemmy) the opposition of boring normality against the coolly different – revolutionaries were the cool sect.

The mainstream media now grounds its operations in the production of maximised untypicality. On any single evening it is possible to find – on TV – celebratory reference to cannabis, sexual fetishism, independent pop music, spiced and groovy foods, stylised homes and gardens. It is assumed that normality is now individualised; there is a background of millions of people going off backpacking

to faraway places. People are young, they are funky, they want more than their parents had, more in the sense of *different*. Very amusing and slightly embarrassing but nonetheless not at all revolutionary. And so the pro-revolutionary, operating with the Sixties legacy of *IT*, *Oz*, *The SI*, and within the cultural/ideological sphere, must push it further: pirate radio, webcasts, clubnights (there are more leaflets given out at Reclaim The Streets events for raves than for political positions). The *real thing* – that is, the subjective conditioning and autonomous production of non-conformity – must be even more cutting edge, more knowing, and more stylistically radical than the latest Ball and Theakston product. Unfortunately, Style, the production of stylisation, is dependent on who has the best video editing technology; so the BBC, the not-so-stuffy-any-more BBC (the BBC of *The Love Parade Great Britain*) can now produce images, sequences, cultural products that outstrip the radicality of form of any pro-revolutionary and his photocopier. Thus the efforts of RTS to parody *The London Evening Standard* and *Monopoly* seem rather tame and formally conservative.

*Imagination is taking power* used to be a slogan of the libertarian left as it role-played a series of surface oppositions that portrayed the establishment as inhibitive and itself as carnival harlequin. Now imagination *is* in power; it has been recruited through a maximisation of the role of the culture industry through lottery funding, 24-hour broadcast media, the internet, and the manufacture of celebrity as a product but nothing could be duller than our bungee-jump society created out of the unholy union of capital and radical imagination. The preference for extreme, *to the max* entertainment has something Roman about it but it remains

spectacular, that is beyond critique or engagement.

The answer of revolutionaries to the perceived threat of cultural recuperation is to push it still further, finding aesthetic beauty in the ugly and discordant Real of everyday life. Delinquency is celebrated as a form of total resistance (rather than as the state-supervised macho social incontinence that it really is). In Kings Lynn, Britain, Spring 2001, a pizza delivery driver was surrounded by a gang that demanded the contents of his van and then beat him up. Some pro-revolutionaries would probably celebrate the youths for attacking a representative of domination and the Americanised food industry. Some would say, of course, that the gang should have drawn the line at physically attacking the driver, but, even so, such events are often routinely portrayed by pro-revolutionaries as signs of *movement*, of *escalation*, of an emergent generalised radical consciousness. The gang may even be celebrated for enacting the revolutionary necessity of the redistribution of food. (We have seen how attacking McDonalds or parked cars has been advocated as *direct action*, but, in fact, these acts are cultural and based upon certain aesthetics of preference.) The pursuit of radicality or social and political extremism within a society grounded in extreme maximisation of exploitation is an impossible and unsustainable strategy. All cultural extremism feeds into the amphitheatre; extreme gestures become, literally, a kind of trailblazing of cultural forms. The cultural elitism inherent to anti-capitalist forms, which claim to pose more *real* forms (music, language, literature etc), to the mystifications of the establishment, disprove themselves by their own existence. Capitalism is easily capable of supplying dissonant forms, the proof for which is to be found in the exist-

ence of radical groups, all of which are contained within the political-cultural field and are neutralised along the lines of politics and culture. Better to not engage at all, do nothing, make no comment.

Cultural preference, especially the pursuit of the authentic, is not an appropriate form of communist struggle. The only important cultural forms for communists are those that may be reused to articulate and illuminate experience of negation and engagement within the economy. Walter Benjamin, for example, observed that the machinery of the fairground accelerates, through shocks and jolts to the senses, the process by which workers are habituated to the horrors of mechanised work; at no point did he argue for the organisation of radical or alternative fairground forms to oppose de-sensitisation, indeed all such theatres of cruelty, and confrontational circuses, despite their radical ideology, only thrust the capitalist form further into people's heads. Benjamin's conclusion was simply that as this unavoidable disciplining could not be effectively opposed on its own terms, it was therefore to be hoped that the always decreasing distance between workers and industrial machinery would somehow facilitate the workers' expropriation of the machines.

## ***Stop thinking expressivity, start thinking transcendence***

*It also goes without saying that we unconditionally support all forms of liberated mores, everything that the bourgeoisie or bureaucratic scum call de-*

*bauchery. It is obviously out of the question that we should pave the way for the revolution of everyday life with asceticism.* – SI questionnaire

*The non-fragmented life*

If ideas of subjective resistance to capital have eventually become *infantilised* under pressure of terrible and continued defeat (to authority's sternly ordered Shall, a petulant Shan't – easily enclosed and even useful to the funding bids of social management agencies), then the organisation of alternatives to capital calamitously misplaces all conceptions of generality. It is one thing to set your group up as a negatively defined element within the field of social forces (and even this has potential for error and self-misunderstanding), but to seek to organise something that embodies a going-beyond-capitalism, a making of the future in the present, a guide to how things might be, is fated to end as just one of the multitudinous forms of social being that are compatible with the capitalist base.

Since the early Nineteenth Century there have been attempts at village communities of decided ideology: communes and the like. They have all failed, either because they betrayed their expressed values for the price of expediency or, more importantly, because they failed to break out of their restricted situation and became resigned to a peripheral status as an *alternative*. A terrible *alternative* idea of stasis was introduced: that the radical minority could gain for itself what it wanted but only for a short period and over a small area. The small unit, which sustained itself in opposition to the generality, and whose end became only the continued realisation of itself in its locational

particularity, also realised elements within its bounds that were entirely determined by the generality, but which had gone unrecognised – beginning with the very idea of separateness, of the niche and specialisation. Communes and elective communities establish themselves as a refined type of capitalist living even as they pose as an opposition and alternative to more conventional capitalist livings. The end for the commune, like that of the ideological party, is the pursuit of itself. Its drive, like the drive of the millenarian sect, is the unhappy sense of never quite completing the circle; the endless reforms and modifications; the self-promotion and recruiting; the struggle for society-tight seals and temporal enclosure like re-enactment experiments of the past staged regularly at stately homes, “Television sire? Prithy, what is that? And pray why doth thou go about in such strange garb?” Individual assertions of transcendence do not escape mass-conformist individualism but complete its criteria by overly complicated means. The *conformity by rebellion* pattern is not confined to the lifestylist anarchist milieu; there is an uncritical expectation amongst pro-revolutionary communists that they might live the unfragmented life, that in the posing of themselves as an opposition to capital they incarnate its overcoming. Of our contemporaries, these two examples demonstrate the tendency. *The Bad Days Will End* say, “Communism is not a ‘program’ nor a goal of the distant future; it is the living historical movement of resistance and revolution by workers and the oppressed ourselves against capitalism and exploitation in all its forms.” Aufheben go further, “*The real movement must always be open, self-critical, prepared to identify limits to its present practice and to overcome them.*” Here it is understood

that communism 'is not an ideal to which reality must accommodate itself'. Our task is to understand, and to be consciously part of something which already truly exists – *the real movement that seeks to abolish the existing conditions.*"

Is there a real, unconscious, subterranean movement towards communism? And is the task of revolutionaries to understand this movement by bringing it into the open, and thus redeeming themselves with a godly importance? Is there a real movement against capitalism, a movement of social events that incorporates communism into itself as much at the beginning as at the end? Is there a unity of ends and means, where that which opposes capitalism also somehow incarnates a moving on from present conditions? Or isn't this an idealisation of opposition, looking for something positive in what could only be anti? Perhaps a desire to identify counter-examples to the way things are, to have alternatives and escape routes *right now*. It seems there is a confusion in the communist milieu over the differing value of political aspiration, and conflict that is inherent to the economic structure. Only those who name themselves Aufheben could discern in historical ruptures a continued movement of progress towards communism, each moment adding its brick to the anti-capitalist citadel.

Capitalism, if it is to collapse, will enter its final crisis being driven to its extinction by the proletariat, but in this destruction we should not look for too many positive forms or signs of future freedom; the end of capitalism as a base for social possibility is a precondition of communism but the death of capital will not be pretty. Nor will communism be constituted in the actual process of capitalism's destruction; one is not born in the other's death even if



that death is a prerequisite. We should not hope to hand over all responsibility for the institution of communism to the workers (who as a social category will be destroyed along with capital in the collapse), we should not hope for it in singular future events, *nor* should we get 'round the a-political nature of crisis by theoretically expanding the concept of the working class to include everyone (so as to allow for some kind of participatory people's revolution against capital). There will come a point in the struggle of the proletariat against capital where all sane people will wish for a return to capitalism as it was and whatever lies in the future will look very doubtful (such will be the conditions of our world's unpleasantness).

Are all piecemeal struggles entwined together in their roots, roots which taken together sustain a great tree of Revolution? Perhaps, but only in a negative sense, in that capital reproduces its conditions and the struggles against those conditions all over the world. There is no necessary communist element in specific proletarian struggles, even if there is a contingent one. The proletariat are the structural factor within generalised production that has a potential chance of overthrowing production, so every instance of industrial conflict points faintly to the possibility – if this instance should coincide with and then deliberately connect to many other similar conflicts then such an event could become a pre-revolutionary situation, that is, a crisis of capital. The role of the pro-revolutionary communist, so some say, is to understand the supposed inter-connections of proletarian struggle and thereby bring them to the surface and make them explicit. This understanding, they argue, is possible because the pro-revolutionary communist lives

the unfragmented life; the communist embodies a central task of "the living historical movement" and thus has the necessary categories of understanding in place to make the strategic manoeuvre of understanding-as-intervention. We do not think this real movement exists, except in a negative form, and we do not see any reason for not thinking that communism really is something that appears at the end of capitalism and is dependent on a social base of workers' control of production...We see communism as something that exists after the revolution. The revolution is an event – something that happens concretely at a certain moment in time – it is not a tendency or movement, not at all inevitable-and-containing-its-truth, now and in the past, wrapped up inside its events like a parcel left on a shelf of the unconscious to be interpreted and realised as revolution.

The revolution as an event is dependent on many factors: the first of these in importance is the control of production by the working class. This control does not exist in the present except as an ideological sense of reified labour, that is, as a capitalist reflection upon the role of labour and the threat of the proletariat. All formulations of communism that refer to the present day are reflections that have passed through many ideological filters of present, general, social conditions and are therefore reflections only of those general social conditions; they must always re-establish what determines them from the base. Communism really is a utopia, a utopia dependent on the transformation of the organisation of basic human activity. Communism is a utopia set in the future, after capitalism, but we are not moving towards it; we are revolving in cycles of events set by the conditions of those few possible events. Today we

are still living at about 1860. For a new event to establish itself, there must be new conditions, or at least the failure and end of present conditions, a new ground. There is no movement towards this new event because, strangely, the event of revolution is the only undetermined event. It must ground itself, it must break away from current determinations and this is impossible to understand or theorise – other than to say that the more instability and conflict there is within the current system of causes and effects, the more likely is the chance for a completely different mode of human *being* to break through and establish itself. We are at the end of our understanding, we are not therefore optimistic; we see that objective events are beyond our capacity to influence them (and that of any group or individual).





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It is not for anarchists to celebrate when The People take over; anarchists ought not to be so amazed at examples of natural ingenuity and resilience. That is after all what they base all their principles on. Unfortunately their proper political task is less appealing and more controversial; it is to poke their fingers into the wounds of revolution, to doubt and to look for ways in which the Zapatistas, FLN, ANC or any other bunch of leftwing heroes will sell out, because they always do.

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