

A LITTLE MONSIEUR DUPONT READER

on activism,
democracy,

AND OTHER OBSTACLES TO REVOLUTION.

“THEY SAW THE EFFECT
BUT NOT THE CAUSE...”

There’s been a lot of talk lately in anarchist circles about “activism.” Some people have been saying quite loudly that they Do Not Like Activism. Others have responded with an indignation in which “activism” appears as if the negative reflection of the reification named “insurrectionism.” Meantime, “democracy,” direct, radical or otherwise, has been rearing its ugly head in the meetings, assemblies and discourse of the public education movement in California. Lost in all this is a clear understanding of what these words actually mean, what they represent and what relevance they bear towards radical possibilities.

It’s to this end that we’ve reprinted a few pieces by Monsieur Dupont (the pen name of two British anarcho-communist ex-mailmen). *What’s it all about, comrade?* outlines the general difference between the activist/voluntarist models of social revolution and historical materialist models—a much shorter version of some of the main points in MD’s 2003 book *Nihilist Communism*. This provides a basis for the much more thorough examination of activism in *Your smile is so mysteriously kind* (p. 13), and the eponymous essay on *Democracy* (p. 23).

We’re happy to say this is our first (re)publication of MD’s work and we hope you find them as insightful, challenging and enjoyable as we have.

Here’s to making theory a threat again.

—*an autonomous committee*

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what's it all about, com- rade?

“Revolutionary actions are directed against the system as a whole—for its overthrow. This pre-supposes a general disruption of society which escapes political control. Thus far, such 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. Revolution must involve a majority of the active population. Not ideology but necessity brings the masses into revolutionary motion. The resulting activities produce their own revolutionary ideology, namely an understanding of what has to be done to emerge victoriously out of the struggle against the system’s defenders.”

—Paul Mattick, from an interview with *Lotta Continua*, Oct. 1977

AS RADICALS AND REVOLUTIONARIES, what is it that we are really doing? Who are we really talking to? Who are we engaging with? What effect are we having? What effect should we be aiming to have? Why are there so few of us, and what is our purpose?

This article is a small exploration into the exploits of people like us. It is about what we are trying to do and what we actually do. Revolutionaries are more dangerous, more effective, and more intelligible when they are clear about what it is they are doing and where their effectiveness lies. It is hoped that those who read this will respond to it, creating a debate from which we can all learn something useful to our daily lives and thus also to our interventions in the class struggle.

There are two basic theoretical models of how a revolution (that can overthrow capitalism and replace it with a free human society) will transpire. These are broad descriptions of theoretical models; it is unnecessary at this stage to examine particular political groups who may adhere in differing degrees to either model. If we have had any involvement in political, class struggle or revolutionary activity then we will recognise what is being said here (although we may not like it, or agree with it).

MODEL I

I will refer to this model as The Consciousness-Raising Model. In something like its purest, or crudest, form the idea of this model is that radicals try to educate and inspire “the masses,” or the working class. These radicals hope to gain mass acceptance of their ideas so that eventually the majority of the population will be able to change the way we all live. Proponents of this model tend to have a conflicting view of those they hope to influence. On the one hand they may feel intellectually superior to “the masses,” and despair that the “ordinary folk” will never reach a high enough level of understanding (because of their almost willful stupidity!). On the other hand these radicals tend to have what might be called an almost religious faith in the “goodness” of people in general. They base their hope that everyone will one day change their minds about things because only the Devil himself could deny the truth of their propaganda forever.

The use of “religious” allusions here is deliberate. The main reason this model is so popular, perhaps, has to do with traditions of organised religion. I am thinking here in particular of Christianity and all its myriad sects. Christianity is a recruiting religion, other important religions (such as Islam) are also recruiting organisations, but it can perhaps be argued that Christianity has provided the basic tactics for other recruiting religions; certainly, so far, no other religion has been quite so successful (or quite so murderous). Organised recruiting religions base a lot of their activity on consciousness-raising; they aspire to show people, of all stations in life, “the light.” They aspire, as they see it, to bring the mass of the people to a higher moral level, a level at which a certain degree of peace and harmony between believers could be achieved. Having grown up under the shadow of a recruiting religion such as Christianity or Islam, as many of us who reside in these isles have, it might be all too easy for an atheistic proponent of the class struggle to take on board this mass recruiting idea, this Consciousness-Raising Model.

One clue to the “religious” nature of the Consciousness-Raising Model is the response that is engendered in some people when we radicals and revolutionaries are foolish enough to argue our case with “non-political” acquaintances in social situations. They think that you are like a Jehovah’s Witness, and they wish you’d shut up. What do you think when a Jehovah’s Witness type gets you into a corner and tries to shove “the truth” down your throat?

Another reason the Consciousness-Raising Model is still popular today amongst those radicals who want to change the way “the masses” think is because of its continued use by the authoritarian left across the globe. Radicals right across the spectrum have traditionally been heavily influenced by the tactics and success of organisations of the authoritarian left. We only have to look at the sycophancy of anarchists and libertarians all over the world for such anti-proletarian organisations as the IRA, the ANC, ETA, and the present fashionable enthusiasm for the authoritarian and pro-capitalist Zapatista movement in Mexico. A lot of anarchists can’t help suspending all their

critical faculties as soon as they see any grubby tyrant-in-waiting wield a gun in the name of national self-determination and bourgeois democracy. The reason organisations of the authoritarian left love the Consciousness-Raising Model is because of the ease to which it can be put at the service of building the Party and making compliant supporters. For the left, consciousness-raising really means educating people about the necessity of their particular Party taking power.

MODEL 2

The opposite of the model described above might be termed the Economistic Determinist Model. This model is materialist in its essence rather than moralistic or “religious.” It has no interest in arguing about the “goodness” (or “sinfulness”) of people. It says that people are moulded by their circumstances and what they are forced into doing. It says that there is no point in trying to change the minds of “the masses” with propaganda of a literary or deed type. It says that sections of the populace (that is, sections of the working class) will only become able to change society when economic circumstances force a reaction. Basing their ideas on historical facts the proponents of the Economistic model argue that the consciousness of large parts of the working class will only change when society is confronted with political and economic crisis.

This kind of thinking emerges partly from an understanding of where major political (or rather, revolutionary) ideas have come from. For example, it was the workers of Paris in 1871 who came up with the Commune as a practical, revolutionary form of organisation; Karl Marx only documented and championed it after the event. And when politicians were calling for the establishment of Soviets in Russia in 1917, they were only able to do so because Russian workers had invented them in 1905. Outside of revolutionary situations the proponents of this model still see the value of dialogue and propaganda, however, but primarily as a way of building up the (always small) numbers of revolutionaries, and their abilities, so that when major

class confrontations occur they will be able to exert a positive influence on events.

This model starts losing its usefulness when a kind of naive determinism becomes the dominant analytical tool. Victims of this phenomenon might be a group like the International Communist Current in Britain, for example. This group takes determinism so far as to believe in “laws of history.” Thus, to them, the historical law that dominates our lives today is the one that states that Capitalism is in its Decadent phase and that the increasing number of economic and political crises will soon bring it to its knees. But their picture of the world doesn’t fit with reality. To adhere to the Economistic Determinist Model you don’t have to re-write history and current events to fit some fairy story synopsis that you want to be true.

HUMAN WILL

Advocates of consciousness-raising will be alarmed at the seeming disregard of “human will” that exists in the second model. They will argue that a “revolution” will not be able to occur without the conscious and enlightened actions of a majority (or large number) of the people. For this to happen, they may argue, years of education will have to be embedded in the heads of the working class. This reasoning is flawed, and we only have to look at history and the world around us to see why.

Firstly, if the masses haven’t picked up revolutionary politics by now, after 150 years of propaganda, and many historical examples, then when are they going to, maybe next year? Secondly, if we take a cursory look at previous revolutionary events (and I mean revolutionary, not nationalist coups) then we see that the majority of the participants are not “professional” revolutionaries. They are people who, over a very short period of time, and in the midst of political and economic disintegration, have realised the practical need for working class emancipation and got on with it. Their “education” has been

the result of witnessing real events, not years of reading propaganda (which they didn't read, of course).

Peoples' ideas can change very quickly depending on the circumstances they find themselves in; a revolution will be impossible without a large section of the working class going beyond events and creating their own future by their own will. It is, has been, and always will be, events that bring the working class to a revolutionary consciousness, not propaganda. But it is at this point that their will becomes the dominant factor, as they decide how to act on their new consciousness, in the circumstances that they find themselves. It is only in the hurley-burley of serious, collective working class action that change will happen; changes of consciousness and changes in our real lives.

What of the long-standing "revolutionary" in this situation? Well, it is at this point in the class conflict (when the possibility of destroying the economy becomes real and imminent) that it is essential for revolutionaries to make themselves heard. It is also at this point that a whole host of other pleas to the working class will be made by all shades of those who want to save capitalism. Having long studied the nature of the counter-revolution and its leading players, it will be the revolutionary who points all this out and will be involved in the suppression of any initiatives which threaten to harm the autonomous activity of the revolutionary workers. We can transpose this strategy to moments of intense class confrontation that occur without any sign of generalised insurrection around the corner. It is good for our class to be used to class struggle and industrial conflict and we should be intervening where we can to provide the same sort of foresight that we would hope to provide in a revolutionary situation.

In order to be effective in all this it is necessary that we have as many revolutionaries around as possible, but we must realise that these numbers will never form a mass movement. Events make revolutions, not the numbers of card-carrying politicians. An organised mass movement, by its nature, can never be revolutionary in this society. It just doesn't happen. To see why a revolutionary mass movement in

non-revolutionary times is impossible we can look at the early history of the “revolutionary” trades union movement, the rise of the “revolutionary” social democratic Parties in Europe, particularly in Germany, and the rise and fall of the anarcho-syndicalist CNT in Spain, among other examples. (The role of the CNT in Spanish history is often misrepresented in anarchist histories. The CNT was a reformist industrial union organisation, which, like other unions of the early part of the century across Europe, used “revolutionary” rhetoric. The Spanish revolutionary period of the 1920s and 1930s proved itself to be against the CNT. In 1936 the CNT tried to hold back a revolutionary impetus that, rather than being the product of CNT propaganda and organisation, was in fact the result of the living and working conditions of the Spanish proletariat and the disastrous way that the governments had been handling events for many years).

Mass movements can be created in society, but they are never revolutionary. Take, for example, the ecological movement; this movement has been building up for years now, and has plenty of support from sections of the capitalist class. It is not, however, a movement that demands the abolition of work or the abolition of classes. Although the activist fringes of it are recently beginning to grapple with the fundamental nature of what makes the world economy tick, there is no sign as yet that this “anti-capitalist” rhetoric will escape from the left-wing re-invention of anti-imperialism that it is at the moment. In fact, the reverse process looks more likely, as the old-fashioned lefty groups (e.g., Socialist Workers Party, in Britain) get on the bandwagon, and the leaderships of the new “anti-capitalist” groupings (e.g., Reclaim The Streets, in Britain) struggle for respectability and more control of “their” activities.

“The masses” will only become revolutionary (or there will only be a revolutionary mass movement in society) when society is crumbling under the pressure of industrial unrest, economic collapse and political instability. Look at any revolutionary period in history and this is what you will see. The time when the proletariat came closest to creating a world communist society was at the end of the First World War.

The ruling ideology is the ideology of the ruling class. The worst proponents of consciousness-raising prefer readers of The Guardian to readers of The Sun because they think Guardian readers are more “advanced,” and they cover everything they see with their sickly moralism and cultural tyranny. They think that people of a left-wing outlook are more potentially “revolutionary” than those with a right-wing outlook. This makes Tony Blair more potentially revolutionary than a working class van driver. Or it makes a working class voter for Labour more potentially revolutionary than a working class voter for the Tories. This sort of reasoning is for people who see themselves as morally superior to the rest of us and who have little understanding of the dynamics of class conflict and the way the economy works. Do strikers need to go through some sort of cultural conversion, whereby they pick up the rules of political correctness, before they are able to show themselves to be a real threat to the ruling class and state? Or do they just go on strike?

FINAL THOUGHTS

We can only communicate with those people who will listen to us and understand us. We can involve ourselves in struggles at our workplaces, for example, and make an impact. We can try to have a dialogue and working relationship with people in our living areas over issues that affect us there. And we can try to talk to those who sense that everything needs to be changed but haven't made the mental leap that makes them view the world in revolutionary class terms, these people will already be involved in “politics” in some way. But there is little point trying to make people on the street who pass us by and have no other contact with us, take a copy of our paper, read it, understand it and act on it. If revolutionary publications were popular reading material then the shelves of WH Smith's would have been packed with revolutionary journals for years now. Even in countries like France and Italy, where newsstands are obliged to sell ‘revolutionary’ papers, it is, of course, the case that the grumpy masses have not gone berserk with revolutionary fervour.

Everywhere it is the case that the ruling ideas (in the heads of people) are the ideas of the ruling class, until, that is, everything starts going physically wrong for the ruling class, and the credibility of the ruling class becomes suspect. This fracture in the armour of credibility will usually come when there is large scale industrial rebellion, when the workers begin to catch on to the fact of where their power lies, as in France 1968, when ten million workers went on strike and President De Gaulle felt the need to make certain that he had the backing of the army through a meeting with a General Masou. (French capitalism after WWII remained in a precarious state and in 1958 De Gaulle headed a peaceful coup and made himself President; the working class did little to oppose this because maybe things would improve, but they didn't and so the working class backlash of 1968 was set in motion. May 1968 showed that a major insurrection was possible in a "modern" state. But what is often overlooked is the fact that it happened because of the specific problems and fragility of the French economy, not because of the usually overstated wave of youthful radicalism and protest that seemed to be emerging towards the end of the 1960s. May 1968 was not a symptom of the "radical myth" that has been created around the events of the late 1960s and early 1970s, but it has been relentlessly used to consolidate that myth.)

A major task of an organisation like the Anarchist Federation, in its literary as well as practical capacities, and which it achieves in varying degrees at present, should be to combat the ideology of the left. Revolutionary ideas are not left wing, or social democratic, or Leninist ideas. Although the numbers of "professional" revolutionaries will necessarily always be small, we want them to be as clued-up as possible (e.g., as anti-left as possible, as anti-authoritarian, as anti-nationalist, as anti-capitalist, as anti-mystification as possible, etc.). Individual people do make a difference to things. What might have happened if Durruti had acted on his reservations about the CNT policy of fighting for the bourgeois Republic instead of fighting for the revolution in Spain in 1936? If "revolutionaries" are wrong, or stupid, or too timid, then they can become more of a threat to the working class than an aid.

We have to understand just why groups such as the AF always have small numbers of members. We have to realise that this fact is not a sign of “failure.” Indeed, if the “masses” flocked to the AF tomorrow, asking to join, then that would be a failure. The working class becomes revolutionary in action, and only in action. Revolutionaries will be there when this event occurs and act as an aid to the revolutionary impetus. At present, it seems that our main role is to try to keep a rigorous class analysis alive amongst the entire radical network and to thus to attract as many fellow travelers to revolutionary positions as possible. Although it is essential that we try to increase the numbers of conscious revolutionaries we cannot expect a mass revolutionary movement to arise until the economy finds itself in serious trouble and the bosses start losing control of us. The success of this revolutionary mass movement will depend in large measure on the work we continue to do now. This is why our work always has an urgency and why those who hold revolutionary positions need to work together.

If we waste our time then the only thing that will suffer will be our revolutionary critique. As ever, we need to seriously reflect on what we are really doing and what it is we are likely to achieve. We need to constantly evaluate what it is we consider revolutionary, or potentially revolutionary, and what we don't. We should not be afraid of saying what we think, and we should not be afraid of criticising present trends in global radical chic. We should not be afraid of realising that “the revolution” may not happen tomorrow, and that we are likely only to be able to keep a revolutionary critique of society alive by a constant dialogue, of words and interventions, with those who will listen. This means not only talking to those who have already made an effort to research what mechanisms may one day overthrow capitalism, but also acting in situations where there is a good chance of the escalation of genuine class struggle (rather than radical posturing).

your face is so mysteri- ously kind

What is objective?

The weather.

What is consciousness?

Rain on your face.

What is subjective?

“My hairstyle is a mess and my make-up is ruined.”

Objective is what happens. Consciousness is presence. Subjective is complaint.

Objectivity is appropriation. Consciousness is absorbency. Subjectivity is defeat.

Object is ground. Consciousness is mask. Subject is projectile.

* * *

YOU SAY: “there is much to be learned by hurling ourselves, again and again, against the bars of our cage. It is in our necessary failures as

much as in our partial, modest and always fragile successes that we learn how this society has crippled us, what it strips from us in terms of dignity and fulfilled desire. But we shouldn't pretend that we are liberated when we are not."

Once, monsters born to the village being not suitable for manual work sold their deformities, physical, and of the soul, to the circus. In this way they were both set free of the conventions of village idiocy and constrained to contemplate themselves only as other saw them, an entertainment; today, abortion has greater cost effectiveness than lifelong confinement.

Tell me, which spectacular creature has an instinct for self-harm?

Answer: the social activist.

The activist, whose phantom subject consciousness is defined by its vain wounds, collects injuries by throwing its body at a motionless objectivity; these are my chains, see how they chafe, this is my cage, how the shadows of its bars fall across me; Jesus and Rome. Anti-capitalism is a freak show, a wound parade. Must I cut me and rub earth in the gash to learn that dust is dry? In the hot days of Tehran and Beirut, demonstrators by-passed self-preservation instincts to prove the interpenetration of their subjectivity with the object by hitting themselves on the head until blood ran over their faces. Ketchup is as red but smeared over the head as a sign of fanatical commitment, ultimately inscrutable. Fire workers demonstrate subjective control of their consciousness and thus confound the invitation to conform with objectivity; it is true that their feet are not burnt but their heads are full of ashes.

I do not feel the need to hurl myself; I am hurled. I do not require lessons in necessary failure. My life is lived amidst the failing petals of disappointment. So they say, where there is no pain, in that very place, there is no gain. But I say, learning at the school of hard knocks makes you stupid, look at boxers. Starving all morning doesn't make you appreciate your dinner at twelve and the staged, white-knuckled

contest with objective conditions, riot shield, pepper spray, water cannon, does not illuminate subject/object relations; it merely transforms consciousness into a crash helmet. Let the demonstration of force be equal to its capacity to force home the demonstration. Foot dragging non-cooperation remains the best option, the doing of nothing that contributes nothing, the sullen stare that so infuriates our redeemers.

SUFFICIENCY. ADEQUACY.

Life is best in idleness and comfort; intelligence and sensitivity are characteristic of a subject position squeezed from sunshine and soft clothing like red juice from a pomegranate. Revolution is the actualisation of human beings as the object of their subjectivity, it is not religious martyrdom minus the religion. If the walls are not made of paper, don't punch them, if the bars are not made of chocolate, don't eat them. If you cannot win, refuse the fight.

You say, "...cops, priests, and parents—or anarchists and activists—come into existence through complicated social processes... the collective human dynamic by which social groups and professions (cops, priests or activists) emerge out of the division of labor... activism cannot be given up by the individual; it must be superseded in the collective process of overthrowing capitalism... the subject in the context of its complex, objective social mediations..." At all times the subject referred to as activist in our investigation is the historically specific, anti-capitalist activist, which we do not accept is a subject at all, but a phantom of political consciousness. Anti-capitalism in its own words: "From tribal resistance against Indonesia to the festive attack on the financial heart of London on June 18th, these are the voices, not of outsiders or journalists, but of those involved in the struggle themselves. In these times of concrete alienation these voices shine hope from movements that aim to defend nature, create revolution and re-wild humanity" (Do or Die journal).

Stillness, quiet. Noise, frenzy. Staring at a blank wall or senses overloaded? Activism supplies itself as a means of addressing the appearance of social deadlock. The activist can't take it any more, the terrible, terrible silence. It strains at the conventions of appropriate behaviour; let me dash out into the blizzard and howl, naked and true; if I fail no man may doubt the true grain of my soul. To the activist's running-mouth morality, we say: steady, boys; steady, wait, steady. But the hothead runs into the street; 'come out you murdering dogs' are its dying words. A full-stop of automatic fire. Good unit but overwrought. Authenticity, publicly witnessed authenticity, drives activism; it senses falseness and aims its critique more at mass conformity than capitalist exploitation; there is little moral doubt in activist heads that social change is predicated only on more people becoming just like them. In its passion for cultural alternatives we see the desire of activism to be not just a negation of present conditions but an incarnation of the future, like Jesus turning up before John The Baptist.

The activist makes its appearance in conditions of tableaux. There is desert, there is sky, of this we can be certain, but as to where one begins and the other ends... where there should be definition there is haze. If we are waiting, waiting and watching, for something to happen, for change, the haze is maddening; we cannot make out the horizon. We can see nothing, we pull at our collars, push back our caps, wipe sweat from our eyes; more time passes and still nothing; we have no timetable. We sense something is wrong, is something wrong? Or is this normal? To be expected? And then at last a sail, is it a sail or just a mirage, we've been wrong so many times, is it one of ours or theirs, it approaches in dust. Omar Sharif. Is the desert subjective or objective? In our head, or out? Must try and remember: objective is call and subjective is response. Objectiveness is reality and subjectiveness is perspective on reality. So you say.

You say, do you say, objectivity, because it is real, is also true and subjectivity being 'bourgeois, individualist' is fragmented and secondary? In contradiction we say, objectivity is also absorbed, it is not merely 'objective'. It is in us, it is the historical condition of our

perspective. And subjectivity is dictatorship, the capture of reality; the ruling class is a subject and its subjectivity defines our objectivity. The ruling class is a subject not because it has been produced by objective process but because it possesses objective processes, or that is, a bigger chunk of them than anybody else. And this is how it is that the subject became not merely product but also producer; it is the subject in the morning that names itself by taking up its axe, stepping out into the world. The subject is not only defeat, it is also resistance and making. Objectivity is obscured when the subject separates itself by aiming at another subject. Shall we say, that there is no objectivity, only the temporary tension, the aggregate of all subjective forces at work in one instance? That and ideology, objectivity is a weapon that the subject uses on the subjected. The dominant subject imposes hierarchically graded subjections on rival subjects. The dominant subject seemingly dissolves its own subject position and transforms it into objectivity. The only legitimate activity assigned to the subjected subject is to articulate a motive for choosing to do what it would be forced to do anyway.

Activists choose to be activists, They choose not to be what is assigned to them. Their struggle with reality is external to their subjectivity; they adopt a subject position not assigned them and in consequence cease to function as a subject component at all, becoming a projection. By choice activists become something other than what they are objectively. And this is a revolutionary act. It is a revolutionary decision which fails to coincide with revolutionary events.

It is the stillness in which they move that forces activists upon our attention. They are the seizure on the bus, the fainting guardsman on parade.

Activism is the military imposition of a would-be dominant subject position but without sufficient force of arms. Who asked them? Delegated by nobody, in accord with no process, emerging at no particular juncture they are, historically, putschists; by their intervention they hope to inspire force. But force does not follow intent, just cause, or

compelling argument, it follows force; power tends toward power and activists, good time gatecrashers to a wake, lack the necessary muscle; they chant, ring bells, wave coloured cloth but the world stays mute; we stare at them, then they fade away, like phantoms; join us, they whisper, but we carry on greyly. They act in the name of the earth or justice or the working class, whatever is mute, big and objective-seeming, but they do not register, they are not real.

Activism is not produced by the same processes that make the police or managers or plumbers or counter staff or machine minders—as these, precisely, are the invisible, the objective, the grains of sand, the function/defunctioning, the writhing backdrop across which subjects inscribe their routes, the stuff from which collectivities are formed and frustrated. Activism is not a function of political economy, it has little connection to the objective and therefore no claim to subjectivity (perhaps it is an existential function of reality). It describes a negative figure in consciousness, it is one part phantom subject and one part appropriated subjection; it has a need to feel oppression, to take on board suffering from elsewhere. It perceives what is wrong and simultaneously imposes itself, inappropriately, as a solution. At all times it affirms the necessity of what it does, deriving the justification for its actions from higher exigencies, objective laws.

The drive to affirm ‘action’ is an apparent anomaly for a negative social construct; we would otherwise expect ambivalence, uncertainty, the nagging doubt: if we are not part of the objective, then with what is our interest bound? In the positivity of activists, their not despairing, there is another element present, folded into the accentuated rebellion—activists search for solutions within existing conditions; they ask themselves, of all the ingredients present in this moment, which is the one that will abolish it? They rarely fail to identify themselves.

Activism refuses what it is first given, but its drive against passivity draws it at last to act both within the zone of the dominant subject and in a manner appropriate to that zone. It begins in attacking a manifest appearance, the golden arches, and ends up in attacking the

non-appearance of the masses. If structural oppressiveness supplies the entrance for the anti-capitalist character, generalised political indifference marks its exit.

Behind the vaunted alternatives to globalisation are the bourgeois values of social democracy, the concept of universal abstract equality of individuals; real democracy requires only that individuals become their abstract value; if only people participated and made their voices heard, incarnate the theoretical human being of rights and belief, fill out the legalistic skeleton of right bequeathed to every individual with the flesh and blood of engagement in civic forums, then, a-ha! then money could never withstand the advented blossoming of this new Athens. When the masses do not lift up their snouts from the all-consuming, filthy and destructive self-indulgences, then it is time to drink the bitter tea of decision: the question is formulated, whether to work with those who are listening (the state as charities/capital as alternative markets) or to go on and DO IT anyway, force it on those bastards who don't give a damn. Either way the charred and grisly chunk that floats to the surface of activism's cauldroning stew is, with or without wood ash, a final contempt for the working class.

At the structural level, that is the most cruel level, and in the guise of a rancid consciousness, activism is the dominant subject's judgment on itself, it is the negative judgment of imagined, objective authority.

That which at last must out itself as reformism (a recent anti-capitalist counter-conference in Porto Alegre, 'Une internationale rebelle mois democratique... Une internationale patiente, sons grand soir ni illusion lyrique. Une internationale sans dogme, sons hymne...' [*le Nouvel Observateur*]), an international so keen to get the job done that if it has to it is prepared to work with the least bad bits of the state (to get things done, to make achievement concrete); an international of pragmatism, of works, an international that the least bad bits of the state recognise as people it can do business with; the common ground is effectiveness, the radical scythe that cuts through the old Byzantine hierarchies, the fire that burns but renews. What the least bad

bits of state/capital recognise in anti-capitalism is the entrepreneurial impulse to begin again—the optimistic search for green shoots, the management of crisis, the positive factor in economic meltdown. In the social structure, anti-capitalism appears as the angel of destruction but it is a deity nonetheless dedicated in the Pantheon—a catalyst in the change of details. Activism is the begin again Finnegan. The mutual interest of state and anti-state is the factor of effectiveness, to getting things done on tighter lines. But effectiveness in the capitalist sphere is always a movement towards the maximisation of productive efficiency.

Revolutionary positions begin to take shape in activist groups within this context of reformation and the re-alignment of apparent enemies in terms of achievable detail. The revolutionary reflection on doing it takes the character of despair; it begins by listing failure, limitations and unnatural couplings.

The revolutionary critique of activism's rejoining the world, which begins within the terms activism has set, is manifested separately at precisely the point where a negative evaluation is imposed as a reflection on small group action. Despair finds that the self-defined subject, that is revolutionary desire, does not have sufficient force to strike at the world; and if it greatly increased its resources it could only swap seats with the present incumbents (and so the foraging for resources, endorsements and recruits by activist parties)—the more activist individuals there are, the more custard-like their consciousness, the more closely their organisations resemble those of the state.

The revolutionary reflection on activism is constituted as an awareness of the powerlessness of activism and its deluded march on power. The revolutionary position found after activism is not a fully-formed subject position but a mode of consciousness (pro-revolutionary); it maintains itself by doing nothing until it is finally abolished by or fused with the revolutionary subject proper. (Pro-revolutionary is the term given to a position which desires revolution but is conscious of its inability to make it.) It is likely that the revolutionary subject,

under pressure of event, will immediately grasp everything pro-revolutionary consciousness has struggled to articulate in two hundred years.

The revolutionary subject is, quite plainly, the revolutionary working class, but this is not a theological matter, there is no necessity for belief; it is so, simply because only the working class have direct access to the processing of power and, simultaneously, no structural interest in the continued existence of the process. Revolution begins exclusively in the self-interested actions of the working class, defining itself as a subject and defending itself against objectivity. What any future relation might be between pro-revolutionary consciousness and the formation of the revolutionary subject is unclear. The revolutionary subject is made from the working class which is the subjected subject position; how is the working class to become the revolutionary working class? Impossible to say.

THEY SAW THE EFFECT BUT NOT THE CAUSE.

You say, “the need for a theory, a theory that can think the ‘subjective’ and ‘objective’ simultaneously, seeing them in all their mutually-conditioning relatedness... We all know that one of the main characteristics of the traditional activist is a disdain for theory...”

The need you talk of is that of vinegar for salad. But revolutionary theory is not the dressing of practice, it is practice; it does not inform or motivate, it cannot be acted on, it does not explain, it does not provide justification or understanding. I tell my mysteries to those who are worthy of my mysteries.

As ideas do not determine reality, theory does not have to be servant of reality. Revolutionary theory engages or it is philosophy, but the form of engagement is not set in advance; revolutionary theory has no role to play but that of being itself.

We are not concerned with the convenience of the revolutionary organisation. Spring does not raise up the dead leaves of autumn and sew them to the trees. The project assigned to theoreticians of revolution by events is to theorise.

Elsewhere, theory is a trick, the window-dressing that gets the punters in. Today I saw a Socialist Workers' Party sticker in new 'protest' graphics and radical, groovy typeface. It did not say, 'trotskyists go to raves too.' It did say, 'our resistance must be as global as capitalism' (dozens of passers-by nodded off after only momentary glances). The left-wing fragments of the state are generally submitting themselves to a stylistic makeover; everybody's hip nowadays. Several left groups have shifted the emphasis of their rhetoric and it's no more 'come on workers, sign a petition to defend the NHS', now it's 'rebel', 'resist', 'fightback'—they are the sting without a bee, they are the pie without a filling; these dull trudgers with ping-pong eyes and feet like penguins, the slogan "this is consciousness" tattooed to their foreheads; these are the issue troops marching, marching, marching, all dressed in slice 'o' bread jackets soaking up the rain like gravy. Selling revolution on street corners to the Saturday shoppers is altogether futile, unless, that is, you are some kind of Reggie Perrin.

The hope of revolutionary theory is for its own potential usefulness, but that is not its function. What is said, as theory, is not significant—theoretical intervention rarely has a consequential content; for it, context is all. Where it speaks, who it speaks to, that's what matters. So long as it addresses the revolutionary milieu, revolutionary theory can say anything. So never hold back, do not appeal, do not sell, do not imagine that what you are saying is reasonable or convincing, don't overestimate the power of truth, which in most lives is no more than an irritant, treatable with lotion. He who has ears, let him hear! We shall connect only with those who are able to connect.

The object of revolutionary theory is not to address consciousness and thereby correct it; the eyes that browse along the supermarket shelf see just another can. Revolutionary theory is bound up in events;

what is its relation to the revolutionary position and what is that position's relation to the revolutionary subject?

Clownish absurdities at the right moment are more magical than understanding and the luxury of nonsense demonstrates mastery of conditions. Natural selection asks of birds an exhibition of their startling plumage; simple communication of information is not sufficient.

When the event is the event of falling apart it is the theory that may be broken into pieces that is most useful. Theory to be kept in pockets or scratched onto surfaces—theory is what prevents you being broken down, it's what stops you playing for the other side; in crisis, theories are instruments for changing terms; in crisis, theories are portable tools that connect to larger forces, levers to weights; a ladder, an aspirin, a jackhammer, and becomes a shelter for the birds of the sky.

democ- racy

“Every time an anarchist says, ‘I believe in democracy,’ there is a little fairy somewhere that falls down dead.”

—JM Barrie (*Peter Pan*, 1928)

THE GUILT-RIDDEN, double-checking tenets of democracy bother all fragments of radical opinion like a haze of late summer midges, but the anarchist milieu seems especially prone to tolerating, even embracing, this maddening visitation.

The cyclical return within the milieu to the tenets of democracy is conducted by those who in other elements of their own analysis understand that it has nothing to do with either Greek ideals or power to the people and that in reality it consists of little more than a parade of cattle-prodded common senselessness, more LA Arnie than Athenian Socrates. These revolutionaries state explicitly in their most lucid moments the determinate relationship between capital and its political administration but it seems that even this is not enough and the temptation to refer back to the democratic form as an ideal is irresistible.

1. Democracy is a specialised form of political domination deployed as a universal objective value, it is set in place as a political end or ideal for society by an elite whose real power over society is not political at all but is grounded in an all-pervasive economic exploitation.

At the level of detail in direction, policy and law, the state's democratic practice is presented as somehow objective and final because of the overly involved process that has led up to it, in reality however the grounding of such a process, from its original conception to its execution, is contained within the bounds set by economically imposed scarcity. And the constriction of distribution is set by the party of capital as it pursues its own interest.

Let us take for our example the founding of the National Health Service; it has become the example par excellence, albeit a lonely and aged beacon of the glories of social democracy. If we take the NHS as our example, and we tick the boxes of its effectiveness in genuinely improving proletarian health and also the ongoing usurpation of the idea of public services by the commodity, if we accept all that but still retain our critical attitude then the questions we set are these: a) if the NHS was a concession of the dominant class, a maximum quantity it was prepared to give up, then what was it intended to prevent; b) what is the functionality of healthy workers for the bourgeoisie; c) what other policing, stratifying, organisational functions does it perform in the bourgeoisie's domination of society? If we critically situate the function of the NHS within the wider strategic intentions of the ruling class then we see that our gains have never really belonged to us. And what goes for the NHS is equally applicable to education, employment rights, social wages, political inclusion and to all of the benefits of democracy.

Democracy is concerned with a degree of reflexive administration of the social body but the social body is not self-defining, it is determined by the commodity form. This means the administrative institution only has power enough to intervene in what already exists. Democracy and its product therefore serve the party of capital on

many levels but always as a disguise to its exploitative social mechanism.

The only voices, the only ideas, that have ever appeared within democracy's register—and this despite the representational claims of these voices—the only voices ever raised within the democratic schema are bottomline bourgeois. Thus a function of democracy is to restrict the appearance of what can be said and to portray this restriction as all that can be said. One of the secondary consequences of this restriction has been the enclosure and subsequent devaluation of many political reference points. For example tyranny, dictatorship, and totalitarianism lose practical application to lived reality when established democracy facilitates the deaths of twenty thousand people a day from starvation, causes the just-like-that deaths of ten thousand civilians in a war against Iraq, inflicts a death every minute because of its trade in small arms, and above and beyond all these and other mere details, imposes the systematic binding of billions of human beings to capitalist production. The democratic ideal does not state that life must be reduced to labour function nor does it say that most people will exist without any hope of owning the product of their labour. Democracy itself is a euphemism for capitalism, as in "Britain is a democracy," and from this original mystification follow others. Democracy grants itself the right to take hold of and dictate the meaning of concepts like freedom which becomes freedom of speech, or freedom of the ballot box, and equality which becomes equality of opportunity, or equality before the law. In these cases, and many more, a universalist aspiration is honed down to the point that it mutely serves the narrow interest of the dominant class and accelerates the hold on society of that class's tightly defined form of ownership, a form that is always carefully withheld from the democratic horizon. In other words, what is most fundamental to the scene, who owns it, who dictates its character, is always absent from all legitimised engagement with and conventional reflection on the scene.

2. The most radical democrats seek to establish what they call real or direct democracy, which they say will bring all socially occurring

phenomena within the scope of the proposed popular assembly. In one bound they forget, in that endless oscillation that is chronic to the left, the objective influence of big money on the solutions they propose even after their own efforts to point out the specifics of such instances as examples of the problem of the present. The left enthusiastically investigates the mutual benefits enjoyed between the political party in power and its corruption by capital; observe its glee as it exposes the Republican Party's allocation of re-build contracts in Iraq (what else did it expect?), but then carries its conclusions no further; it learns no lessons and seems pathologically incapable of connecting the specific to the general. It neither speculates on the likely manipulation by capital of the assemblies it favours, nor does it consider for one moment the current influence capital has on its own pro-democracy line, which, lets face it, has a very convenient path-of-least-resistance quality to it. That cringeworthy Michael Moore-style blab, those American flags on peace demonstrations, "we are the true guardians of democracy," "we are the real patriots"—as if such mystifications weren't also fragments of the real, true problem.

Radical and direct democrats seem ever-doomed to forget that the form society takes is not finally determined by public opinion, but by the ownership of property. The surface of opinions and of subjective values, even if regimented into a mass movement, are no opposition at all to the force of property ownership. Such movements press the button marked "have your say," but it is connected to nothing, they are "making themselves heard" down the phone but the line is cut, they are "standing up for what's right" but their feet are in quicksand. The petitions and lobbyings and protests and pressurings are so many open doors to empty rooms.

The labyrinth of participation turns out to be a fetish of alienated consciousness, "getting involved" is specially designed to convince the unwary that their concern is special, that this time they're really making headway against all precedence of the circumlocution office, and that really, really change is very close now, ah but they aren't and it isn't. And if, as the radicals have diagnosed, this democracy is one

sign of a fundamental economic alienation then it would be a strange medicine indeed that recommended its treatment by means of a blanket application of its symptom.

It seems that democracy occurs as a sublimated politics when the alteration of property ownership is forbidden. It is promoted as a form of political compensation for the cost to society of the original prohibition. It states that everything else, everything that doesn't refer to ownership, is up for discussion, and yet we now see that even this limited remit must be continually revised "" property is vulnerable, it needs change constantly, it requires constant care and protection. So, if it is now established that democracy at its heart is a trick to distract attention from economic domination of one class by another then it is unlikely that any popular assembly in any imaginable circumstance could defend itself against non-explicit manipulation from hidden forces, factions, splinters and so on (the contrary: the more open and honest the assembly is towards the citizenry the more responsive it is to hidden influence). I also do not see how any given democratic institution could prevent at least one degree of alienation opening up between itself and the social body, and in that unspoken space who knows what lurks?

Democracy cannot dismember capitalism.

If you are tempted to throw up your hands and demand what is to become of us, I'd reply only that the radical overthrow of ownership must come before the setting up of any political institutions – first make power explicit, then human beings can organise themselves accordingly.

3. The anarchists have recently fallen into a trap of attempting to formalise the constellation of discussion, disagreement, consent, legitimisation, delegation, and so on under the rubric of democracy; the reason for this is several fold. For one it is the unthought-out application of a systematically impoverished vocabulary – what other words are there for people instituting themselves, as the end for their activ-

ity? For another, the milieu wants to reassure a wider anti-capitalist protest movement, which is supposedly mystified or intimidated by it.

MD has written long and self-importantly on the self-deception of the anti-capitalist protesters so it is enough here to say that I do not think this essentially reformist movement is so very worthy of the milieu's tender considerations. Anti-capitalism is an endless shading of opinions one into the other, but basically it is a protest of the bourgeoisie against itself, a movement of and for social reform, which nevertheless wishes to preserve its own economically-derived class privilege of speaking to, and being heard by, government.

The anti-capitalists legitimise themselves by castigating unrealistic pro-revolutionaries and claim that they speak for the urgently poor. The accusation of irrelevance and unreality hurts and the anarchist milieu hides its face in shame, concluding that it has no licence to instruct the poor in the illusions of self-determination, anti-imperialism, and democratic political reform which, it is decided, must be the baggage of their liberation. In response to reformist bullying the milieu tacitly falls into line, in its aims and principles it adds other politically weighted oppressions to its class analysis, and swallows whole the leftist agenda. In this the milieu is wrong. It not only can but must extend its critique far beyond the easy target of America and "big business." In its analysis it must include the recuperative part played by those false and essentially conservative solutions to America that are proposed by the left, all of which are easily contained by the commodity system. The stated aspirations of the anti-capitalist movement are not identical to the interest of the world's poor; what we are told the poor want is what has been formulated for them as an alternative to the present and whilst the worst off's rejection of present conditions is sharp and instinctive their commitment to the alternative blueprint is more shaky. Nevertheless their democratic representatives do not cease in their pushing forward of these aspirations to fair trade and democracy, and that says it all.

It is no miraculous feat of prophecy to predict that many if not all of those involved in the current protest movement will end up as future entrepreneurs and politicians of the establishment. Such is the history of political protest. The French, American, and Russian revolutions, and even the protests of the Sixties all disguised self-interested, economically based, ambitions behind a Birnham wood of slogans for universal emancipation.

4. Many energetic and independent souls have entered democratic politics saying they were going to bring the practice of democracy into line with its alleged ideals. All have ended instead by adapting themselves to what existed before them. The English rebel MP Diane Abbott, famous only for castigating her New Labour colleagues for sending their children to private schools, ends by sending her kid to a private school. I don't criticise her, it's inevitable, the political class are separate, her kid would certainly be a target, and the nature of privilege is that you can choose to escape what the rest of us have no choice in.

Those who attempt to reform privilege from within end up as its beneficiaries. So it is no surprise when, for whatever reason, democratic ambitions are proclaimed within the anarchist milieu and these we-don't-mean-it-in-the-same-way-they-do self-described anarchists conclude their ignominious career by proposing anarchist intervention in the electoral process (as the former editor of Green Anarchist did in Freedom 9/08/03). When anarchists declare themselves democrats for respectability's sake, so they can get on better at university research departments, so they can tap into a shared and honourable left tradition, so they can participate in the global forum, when they crown their decomposition by saying, "we're democrats too, we're true democrats, participatory democrats", they ought not be surprised at how enthusiastic democracy is to return the compliment, and of course to extract its price. Those who sign their names soon find themselves falling silent on a spray of other matters to which democracy and the force behind it are secretly hostile, and of that invisible bouquet class is the big, bold, blousey one.

LIBCOM.ORG/TAGS/MONSIEUR-DUPONT

likelostchildren.blogspot.com

*Every time an
anarchist says,
“I BELIEVE IN
DEMOCRACY,”
there is a
little fairy
somewhere
that falls
down DEAD.*