

WHAT WE STAND FOR

Liberty, Equality, Fraternity. These were the aims of the first great modern revolution. They have not anywhere in the world been realised. As slogans for capitalism, they have of course been long forgotten. But within the left where reformism and state socialism fight for superiority they are sadly lacking too. There is precious little liberty, equality or fraternity within the self proclaiming Marxist states (though attempts have been made to justify Soviet invasions of Eastern Bloc states on the grounds of fraternal support for socialism). The Marxist parties in Britain are not exactly hot houses of free debate, equality or brother/sisterhood (see the article on democratic centralism in this issue). So where do we stand?

class conflict

Capitalism is a deeply exploitative system in which social life is determined by the needs of profit not human fulfilment. The system maintains itself by a complex network of institutions - the coercive state (police, army etc.), the ideas manipulators (the mass media, schools etc.), the family and so on. So, despite a fundamental contradiction between capital and labour, the system is 'managed' more or less successfully in the interests of a small minority. The system has no provision for reforming itself away, indeed the most powerful capitalist institutions exist to maintain that system. Consequently, revolution not reform is the only means by which it can be abolished - the system must be subverted from within, weakened, and ultimately destroyed.

exploitation and resistance

It is the working class which constitutes a large majority of the population and which is most openly exploited by capitalism. Day to day resistance to the system is an accepted and ordinary fact of the worker's life. This may range from the mundane - time wasting and fictional illness to an all out national strike involving hundreds of thousands of workers. The unemployed, the homeless and other dispossessed elements (who may or may not be of working class origin) also provide a source of irritation to those in authority. The great contradiction between exploiter and exploited, though not politically an accepted reality (note the huge numbers of workers who voted for Thatcher), is a living source of instability. Ultimately, it may trigger a general revolt among the population at large.

propaganda and solidarity

The major problem confronting revolutionaries is not the building of **socialist** parties which will lead the revolution but convincing those who are in a position to bring about great social change of the need for socialism. Economic pressures such as inflation usually bring about economic demands. These in turn may well take on a political character, especially when a government, the courts and other state bodies involve themselves.

The need however is for confrontationist political strikes to be carried further into the realm of ideas and action. Socialists, therefore, who wish to see a genuine revolution directed by the oppressed themselves have the job of indicating the possibilities and practicabilities of a libertarian socialism. The role of revolutionaries is primarily one of education, propaganda and solidarity so that workers will take over the running of society for their own ends.

uprising

No-one can predict when and under what circumstances a revolution will occur (not even the Marxists with their particularly valueless 'dialectical materialism'). However, truly spontaneous popular revolutions often involve some or all of the following: general strikes, worker's councils in factories etc., soviets and armed insurrection. Should such a general uprising take place, it is usual for a 'dual power' situation to arise. Alongside more or less powerful remnants of the capitalist order exist the organisations of the people. To achieve liberation the revolutionaries must move dual power, dissolve powerful blocs of authoritarianism (both on the right and left) and bring into being a self managed society. The overcoming, by the workers, of a dual power situation is crucial, for there are dangers of capitalist restoration on the one hand and a Leninist coup on the other. Both, history has shown, effectively destroy genuine (i.e. anarchic) socialism. To achieve a society of free and equal citizens based on non state forms of social ownership and cemented by feelings of social solidarity is the aim. It will not be easy but neither is it impossible.

'VIRUS' exists to put the case for libertarian socialism. We would be glad to receive any help, perhaps an article, some cash or an undertaking to sell it. Correspondence to be sent to 'VIRUS' C/O Albany Bookshop, 36, Albany Street, London, N.W.1.



← AN 'OUTSIDE ELEMENT'
PUTTING THE BOOT IN
— OR GREAVE PICKET LINE
1984.

THE MINERS STRIKE some observations

It is not going too far to say that some of the coalfields are in a state of near insurrection. Vans overturned and set alight. Pitched battles between pickets and police. Buildings occupied. Police Stations surrounded and stoned. Lorries reduced to smouldering skeletons. Riots and much more. What can we make of all this?

Firstly, it is gratifying to see that the working class has not been infected with the disease which has been sweeping the middle class left, namely pacifism. The miners have been ready to set fire to police cars, throw stones at the police and exchange blow for blow.

Secondly, it is interesting to see the way that ordinary working people have created institutions from scratch in order to maintain themselves. Aided by outside solidarity in the form of financial and food donations, a mini welfare state based on cooperative self help has been created. The miners, their families and supporters in the coalfields have, after months of the strike, managed to retain an almost euphoric confidence and belief in victory.

This confidence is expressed daily by the pickets. An almost amazing level of combativity exists amongst them. Anyone who has spoken to the pickets will realise that their often violent attacks on the enemy are not merely expressions of despair. They are rather, a positive attempt to confront the Tories and the state head on. Of course the state has responded in a typically violent manner but at what cost in terms of money, manpower and police morale. Some cops may welcome a punch-up week in, week out. Others are plainly intimidated by the massed ranks of miners.

The police have been forced to drop the mask of impartiality. They are out for revenge. Saltley was a humiliating defeat that the police are determined would not be repeated. They have therefore used their considerable powers to bend the law. Blanket bans on picket movements ~~on picket movements~~, for instance are reminiscent of travel restrictions in Eastern Europe. Police intimidation within mining communities will have dissolved for a generation the traditional respect (albeit somewhat guarded) which they need to do their job. Dogs, baton charges etc. can only alienate the police further from the working class.

The law in all of its' aspects has been exposed for what it is - an instrument for class oppression. Magistrates issue blanket banning orders on groups of pickets in the dock at a time, bordering at times on house arrest. The blatantly anti union laws have been taken up by small time capitalists in order to take retribution against the N.U.M and the courts have dutifully fallen into line. Troops stand in the wings if all else fails and the Thatcher government will, it seems, bankrupt the economy in order to obtain a victory.

So the battle lines are drawn. On the one hand we have a government bent on the destruction of the N.U.M. Thatcher is out for a rout of 1926 proportions. On the other side we have a confident well organised and rebellious mining community. Yet the miners have become isolated from the trade union movement as a whole. This isolation encouraged by cowardly traitors such as Bill Sirs and the Nottingham miners could prove to be the N.U.M's Achilles heel. It must be overcome - solidarity must be extended. The miners must win. We all have a duty to see that a victory comes about.

ENGELS' ON AUTHORITY a critique

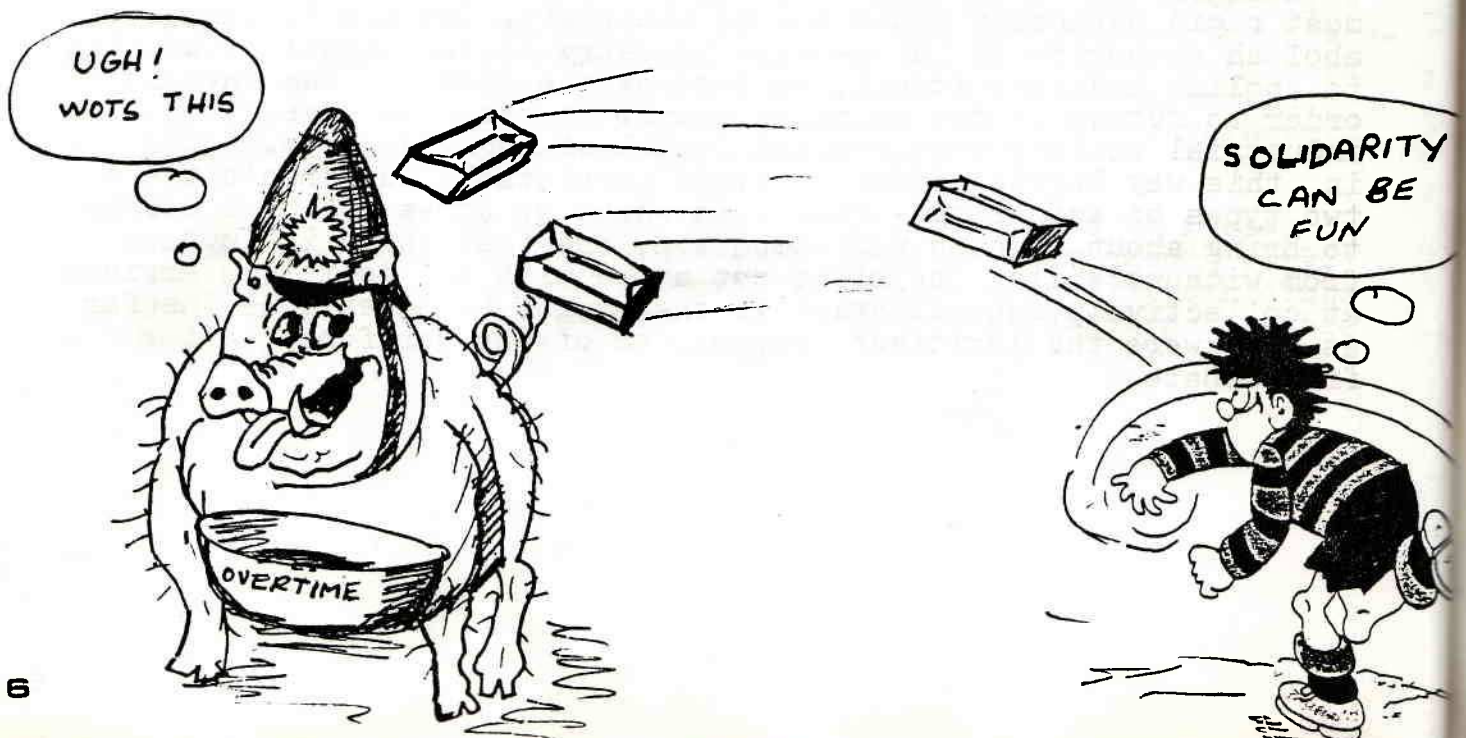
Engels' short article 'On Authority' has been used by authoritarian Marxists since Lenin to justify at one extreme 'dictatorship', and at the other 'iron' discipline. Together these two elements in Marxist thought have subverted a potentially liberatory doctrine and transformed it into an instrument for bureaucratic despotism. Engels' article is most usually dragged out to counter criticisms by the libertarian left, as if the arguments contained in it are sufficiently 'holy' to require little further explanation. It is time that Engels' article received a reply. So here goes.

Factory life for most people is, quite simply, crushing. There are two categories of people - those who wake to the day with a feeling of indescribable dread and loathing at the prospect of the working day ahead, and those who don't. Factory life in general for the worker consists of unending tedium combined with a mixture of bullying by petty 'generals' plus dirt, danger, and the giving up of an independent human existence. It manages to create a regimentation of individuals into preconceived patterns determined by the needs of production. All of this Engels accepts as being a necessary fact of modern life - so much for Marxism as liberation! Now Engels never spent 30 years or so of his life as an industrial worker, so his detachment is understandable. (In fact he managed to do quite well exploiting the efforts of the proletariat in his own Lancashire cotton mills.) The crux of Engels' argument regarding industry is this. "Everywhere combined action, the complication of processes dependent upon each other, displaces independent action by individuals. But whoever mentions combined action speaks of organisation; now is it possible to have organisation without authority?" In other words, the processes of production, the requirements of efficiency, speed, output, efficient use of machinery etc., require the subordination of the individual.

Engels could not envisage any possible situation where the most rigid authority would not be necessary. For him "wanting to abolish authority in large-scale industry is tantamount to wanting to abolish industry itself, to destroy the power of the loom in order to return to the spinning wheel." So there we have it: industrial society requires the denial of individuality. Argued in this way Engels' argument seems irrefutable. But aren't there two types of authority - that with which we agree and have helped to bring about through participation, and that which is imposed from without? Whilst one might not agree with all decisions arrived at collectively, subordination to them might be acceptable insofar as they were the legitimate expression of the workforce after free debate.

Engels seems unable to differentiate between a recognition of the needs of production which is under democratic control and authority imposed from without through a hierarchy of managers. And, of course, in a truly democratic society people would be able to make choices - it just might be preferable to produce goods on a small scale (with reduced output and efficiency) than to be dictated to by machines and the industrial process. To some extent we can now have the best of both worlds. Automation, if introduced to relieve the monotony of labour, could leave free to control the machines rather than being controlled by them. So even if in the field of industry Engels was correct (and we doubt it) his arguments have been superceded. The advances in automation are so great that in a non exploiting society work need not be a) the major conscious life activity and b) a tyrrany under which the industrial worker must deny their humanity for the sake of some machine.

Engels arguments on political authority are similar to those advanced for industry. Basically his position is that the anti-authoritarians, in demanding the immediate abolition of the coercive state and political authority, do not understand the political requirements of revolution. Surely a revolution, he argues, "is the most authoritarian thing there is; it is the means by which one part of the population imposes its will on the other part by means of rifles, bayonets, and cannon....." Just so, it is the method which is required to end the rule of a tiny minority and replace it with a system in which political domination and exploitation have been abolished. The authority of the armed majority of the population, acting in its own interests against a tiny ruling group, is liberating for the majority. After all, the revolution is not carried out for the immediate emancipation of the bourgeoisie but in order to liberate those who are oppressed. Libertarians have never extended a helping hand to those who support the existing system of exploitation. The issue at stake is not the authority of a popular, self organising revolution, but that of ruling cliques, juntas, parties etc. which speak on behalf of the revolution. The former is truly liberating for the oppressed, the latter merely replaces one group of bourgeois elitists with another.



I lead the central committee
which leads the party which
leads the proletariat which
leads the peasantry. Good 'in it'?



DEMOCRATIC CENTRALISM

A PARTY FOR BUREAUCRATS

A persistent weakness of Marxism which has had disastrous consequences has been its failure to comprehend the subjective and organisational forces which can undermine a revolutionary state apparatus and government. For Stalinists the problem is of relatively minor significance. Despite shortages and shoddy goods, the Soviet style system is basically sound and political oppositionists can always be labelled "Trotsky-Fascist" or less sinisterly, 'anti-party'. Trotskyists and their offspring, whilst accepting that the U.S.S.R is a monstrous perversion of virtually every principle of socialism, nevertheless argue away the problem by a convenient string of excuses -- the backwardness of the young Soviet state, capitalist encirclement, civil war etc. They conveniently ignore the dictatorial arrogance of Trotsky and the bureaucratic manoeuvring of Lenin. It is the purpose of this article to indicate some of the factors which lead to political degeneration within 'Marxist' organisations.

Some of the anti-democratic, authoritarian and bureaucratic tendencies within Marxism are amply expressed in the organisations of the revolutionary movement today. As anarchists have argued for decades, 'revolutionary parties' tend to reproduce certain tendencies inherent in themselves upon seizing state power. Authoritarian, hierarchical parties based upon discipline and intolerance will bring about (despite a genuine desire to the contrary) authoritarian and intolerant societies. Political parties may well be the creation of human beings but these organisations in turn affect the consciousness and therefore the actions of these human beings. Organisations often 'take on a life of their own' -- people become trapped within them, acting out predetermined roles. Formal organisations of the working class (as demonstrated perhaps a little too intensely by Michels) are extremely prone to oligarchic structures and acting in ways which are actually contrary to their avowed aims.

Leninist parties, which by definition must be democratic - centralist, almost inevitably and imperceptibly move away from 'democracy' towards centralism. It does not require very penetrating analysis to observe that, for example, the Socialist Workers Party (neo-Trotskyist) and the Communist Party (neo-Stalinist), negate any genuine intra-party democracy. The forms of democracy as represented in constitutions and formal party structures are devoid of real content. Simply stated, democratic-centralism requires that the lower party bodies (cells, branches etc.) should be subordinate to the 'higher' bodies (e.g. the central committee).