

VIRUS

THE ENEMY WITHIN

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

The trade union and labour movement is in a condition of almost perpetual turmoil and disarray. This springs mainly from the attack on workers' living standards and organisations by the ruling class, whether as employers, government speculators, or whatever. In some respects (perhaps superficial) we are going through a re-run of the 1920's and 1930's. Most unions are losing members, there is massive unemployment, lockouts are ever more frequently being resorted to and the smell of social and economic decay hangs heavy.

The response of organised labour too, has echoes of the inter-war years. Faced with a massive attack on the working class, what has been the response of the trade union leaders and the Labour Party - nothing but capitulation after ready capitulation (with the notable exception of the N.U.M.), a breaking of ranks for immediate advantage (most recently E.E.T.P.U.) and an urging of moderation in face of the onslaught:

Our rulers are waging class war, and quite successfully too. The T.U.C. quivers in its boots, trapped as they are by constitutional niceties and the threat to their sinecures, pensions, authority etc. The Labour Party hurtles to the right under the worthy heir to the Wilson/Foot/Callaghan mantle, Neil Kinnock, and as mentioned in the last issue of VIRUS, the Marxist left is falling apart.

Anarchism, whilst still quite insignificant, however continues to grow and consolidate. The Marxists are aware of our threat to their traditional constituency and the anarchist potential to outflank them on the left by offering genuine workers autonomy and self organisation, independent of political parties. Accordingly, the Marxist press has started to take note of us. The SOCIALIST WORKER devoted an article to the subject of anarchism a few months ago and the February edition of the LENINIST contained an article which was thousands of words long on the same issue. Incidentally, VIRUS was described in the LENINIST as "a more coherent 'Libertarian Communist' paper than most of the turgid anarchist rags". Thanks for the 'compliment'!!!

The ANARCHIST-COMMUNIST DISCUSSION GROUP is benefitting from the renewed interest and growth in anarchism. The SYNDICALIST FIGHT Group has merged with us and there are now groups or contacts in York, Medway, London, Salford, Lancaster, Crawley, Luton, Canterbury and Broadstairs. Hopefully, before the next issue of VIRUS comes out, we will have formed the ANARCHIST-COMMUNIST FEDERATION and produced the first issue of our agitational paper.

The A.C.D.G. has agreed upon a set of aims and principles and a constitutional structure (available free from A.C.D.G. C/O 84B, Whitechapel High Street, London. E.1. 7QX.) which combines a unitary organisation with full democracy and group autonomy. There are no leaders, central committees etc., all major decisions are to be decided by a system of mandatable delegates meetings from the groups, whilst the latter maintain complete autonomy in the localities. If you want to build a serious national anarchist presence in this country contact us now.

Subscriptions to VIRUS cost £1 per year from the above address.

A NOTE ON THE "LIBERTARIAN COMMUNIST PLATFORM"

We have mentioned the "Organisational Platform of the Libertarian Communists" in several articles. This may have led some people to regard us as "Platformists" so let's throw some light on the subject.

The Platform was written by Ukrainian and Russian Anarchists after their defeat in the Russian Revolution. Although there does seem to be a fascination with the Bolshevik victors and contains "centralist" tendencies within it, nevertheless it should be remembered that the authors struggled hard against Bolshevism and paid dearly for it.

Where the document is observed as useful is its argument for "class-struggle" anarchism for a specific libertarian communist organisation and against the confusion within anarchist ranks; especially the "synthesis" whereby liberal and individualist ideas are jumbled up with "working class" anarchism. The "synthesis" has played a disastrous role (even where this is not consciously the case) within anarchism via a collection of taboos, dogmas and sterile thought, divorced from the great historical movements of the working class.

We differ on the "Platform" on the question of absolute theoretical and tactical unity. An organisation must allow the convergence and synthesis of ideas through a dynamic dialogue between its members. A federation does not smother its members with doctrine - even if it is adopted democratically. We therefore obviously hold opinions about various aspects of the "Platform" that are deemed weaknesses etc., whilst also acknowledging certain aspects of it that seem to provide insights etc. That does not make us "Platformists".

The "Platform" is indeed one of many "points of reference" for us. Above all, we look to the working class in action - the movements that it has created and the various revolutions commenced.

A document written in 1926 has certain value where its contents were and may remain relevant to us but obviously we must also take account of everything that has happened since.

THAT'S RIGHT DAISY,
LET'S ALL JOIN THE
A.C.D.G !!

May Day all the Year Round



Every year May Day is celebrated all the year round. In Moscow, it is used as an occasion to demonstrate the military might of the state capitalists, as hundreds of tanks and goosestepping soldiers march past the sclerotic bureaucrats. In the West, the social democrats, Stalinists and Trotskyists all claim it as their own, but it is seldom celebrated as the day that was originally designated as a workers' holiday, the First of May, as a display of strength when labour was withdrawn from the workplaces. It has become just one more Bank Holiday, robbed of almost all of its original meaning.

That meaning was a revolutionary one, having little to do with the assorted labourites, Communists and Trotskyists. It was intimately connected with the struggle for the eight hour day and the execution of anarchist militants in Chicago.

In the 1880's, Chicago was a hot-bed of industrial struggle. Many immigrant workers many of them Czech and German had come to work in its mills and factories. There was a strong anarchist current among these workers, testified to by the German daily and two weeklies, the Czech weekly, and the English fortnightly published by anarchist militants, members of the First International.

In 1886 when the Eight-Hour Day Movement got under way, the International took an active part in the struggle in Chicago. 65,000 workers were locked out by the bosses. The police brutally attacked both strikers and demonstrators. As May approached, the centre of conflict became the McCormick Harvester works, where a lock-out had taken place. On the third of May the police opened fire on a factory-gate meeting there and killed several men. Next day a protest meeting took place in Haymarket Square. The police marched on the crowd to disperse it, when a bomb was thrown from a side alley. The police retaliated by shooting into the crowd, some workers shot back, and the aftermath was seven police, and about twenty workers dead.

A round-up of anarchists followed. Eight militants, many editors of anarchist papers were put on trial. In fact, very few had even been at the meeting, let alone had anything to do with the throwing of the bomb. (There is evidence that it may have been the work of a police agent). The anarchists were tried for their revolutionary beliefs not for any action that had taken place. Seven were sentenced to death. In the end four were hanged, one committed suicide before his execution, and two others had their sentences commuted to long prison terms.

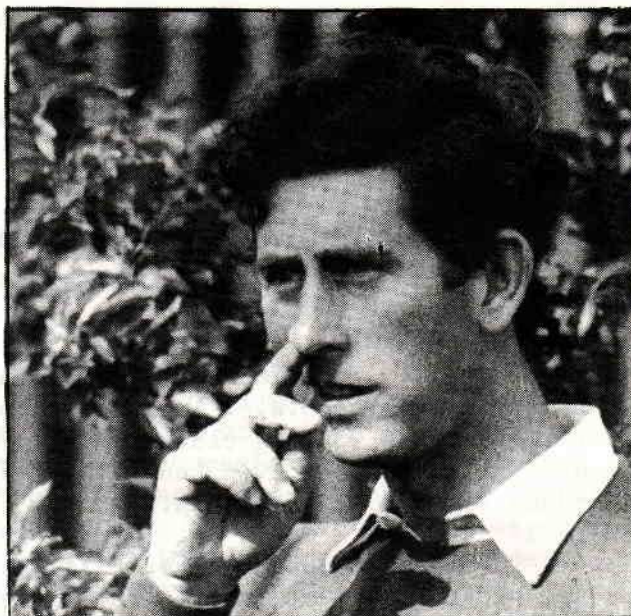
The trial had taken place in an atmosphere of hysteria and prejudice whipped up by the local and national press. When Governor Altgelt looked into the matter several years later, his investigation showed that the executed men had no complicity in any bomb plot. The two imprisoned anarchists were reprieved.

The First of May, designated as a day of action by the International for the eight hour day, now had a double significance. In these times of compromise when the labour movement is in the grip of the trade union bureaucrats, we should remember the courage and conviction of those revolutionary anarchists who died for their beliefs. We should try to re-introduce revolutionary libertarian ideas into the workers' movement just as they sought to do.

EXCLUSIVE!

In a far reaching scientific experiment, lasting over fifteen minutes, Prince Charles has conclusively determined that he does not have a brain. EXCLUSIVE PHOTO of the test →

A Palace spokesperson denied that this would likely be causing the Prince any real problems. After all, the official added, 'such a deficiency has never caused the Queen any difficulties'.





OLD MOTHER LENIN STIRS UP HER POISONOUS BREW.

THE SOLUTION

After the Uprising on June 17th
The Secretary of the Authors' Union
Had leaflets distributed in
Stalinalee
Which said that the people
Had forfeited the Government's
confidence
And could only win it back
By redoubled labour. Wouldn't it
Be simpler in that case if the
Government
Dissolved the people and
Elected another.

BERTOLT BRECHT.

LETTERS / DEBATE

ONCE AGAIN ON THE S.W.P.

Dear VIRUS,

Your journal's improving rapidly since the first issue, but your criticism of the S.W.P. is inadequate. It is quite common to criticise them for believing the working class can only achieve trade union consciousness. Unfortunately it is untrue. Even Lenin changed his mind on this one, after the workers councils of 1905 in Russia.

The point about the S.W.P. is that despite statements to the contrary, they are substitutionist. That is they intend to replace the direct control of society by the working class by their own control. This isn't a conscious aim, and it is no use telling them it's what they want, but it is implicit in parts of their ideology. Other parts form quite a good libertarian analysis, but they don't seem to recognise the contradictions.

a) They claim the working class cannot achieve scientific socialism on a mass scale, but need the leadership of a party to teach them, after the revolution.

- i) This means they believe they have some inherently superior world view which entitles them to concrete leadership. It's somewhat similar to a meritocratic ideology, the experts must make the decisions. This is bureaucratic not socialist. Socialism is the collective control of society for the members of that society. No leadership can divine what the people want and therefore, as much direct democracy as possible is necessary. People must be as much in control of their environment as possible, or they may well become apathetic. The S.W.P. want a representative type of society with a few trimmings such as revocability and themselves in power.
 - ii) The advice the S.W.P. gives on specific issues, the action they tell people to take, is almost completely based on what the working class have done before, without directives from the party. Whilst revolutionary analysis is useful, it is a tool, not a superior world view, and there is no reason why you can't come to certain conclusions from experience that you would from studying political theory. It follows that there is no justification for becoming the leadership because you have a particular analysis.
- b) The struggle for socialism is reduced to a struggle between political leaderships.
- i) This is bourgeois analysis. The working class are an object of various parties' struggles, history becomes a record of this struggle, like bourgeois history of the rise and fall of kings and queens.
 - ii) This implies the autonomous actions of the working class are not to be encouraged. When union leaders of the Labour Party are criticised, the S.W.P. do not ask workers to do things for themselves, they tell workers they should do what they want them to do. The S.W.P. do not encourage workers to seek solidarity from others themselves and not rely on the unions etc. but to follow the S.W.P. line.
 - iii) Whilst reformist ideology and reformist leadership hinder the working class, this is not the only ideological obstacle the working class has to overcome. Apathy, consumerism, professionalism, sexism and racism form even more dangerous obstacles.
- c) The working class cannot go beyond a situation of dual power without the leadership of the party.
- i) There is no example to contradict this.
 - ii) There is no guarantee a party will do it for them.
 - iii) This means that the working class don't want to go beyond dual power. The party must get itself elected to positions of power and make the decision for the class, even if they don't want it.
 - iv) There is no reason why an organised revolutionary organisation couldn't argue consistently for this action and win a majority without assuming power.

These ideological positions have only one thing in common. The working class itself is incapable of achieving socialism. The party must not only lead, but foster a dependence on its views. Workers must be encouraged to follow the line obediently. Of course we all believe something, and want others to believe it, but irrespective of what revolutionaries say, this is no substitute for the experience of workers in struggle or creative acts. The revolutionary provides advice and analysis in order for the class to make decisions for itself, to determine its own future. The ideological leadership of the revolutionary is for aiding the working class, not a ticket for leadership. The class must base its decisions on its experience far greater than that of the revolutionary, who may often not be on the front line, in view of the advice the revolutionary gives. The problem is to get an audience, not a following.

Yours in Solidarity,
Phil Halsall.

(York)



“ I will have no other
Gods before me ?”

QUOTED FROM KAPITAL VOL. I.
P. 96. K. MARX.

anarcho- syndicalism ?

Dear VIRUS,

It was interesting to read VIRUS no.6 and your call for a national anarchist organisation. It seems that CLASS WAR (or at least some of CLASS WAR) have reached the same conclusion and are attempting to move in that direction.

I agree with all you write on the need to organise and how that organisation should be structured, i.e. a federalist structure, administrative posts (no full timers), instant recall delegates to coordinating committee etc. I am glad that anarchists seem to be more prepared to talk of and consider organisation and not regard it as a dirty word.

The Poly Anarchist Group started off as a mixture, anyone who called themselves Anarchists joined, so we ended up with Green Anarchist Pacifists, alternative life stylers, individualists, insurrectionists, class struggle Anarchists and Anarcho - Syndicalists. Basically we got nowhere, we couldn't agree on our priorities and now all that is left is a few of us from the Class Struggle/Anarcho-Syndicalist wing.

I myself am also a member of Manchester D.A.M. and all you describe in your piece on organisation and the need for Anarchists to end their isolation is what D.A.M. have been saying since its formation.

D.A.M. has stated that its end aim is libertarian-communism, I would say I am an Anarcho-Syndicalist but also an anarcho-Communist, I see no friction between them. D.A.M. is a federalist organisation with all the points mentioned in VIRUS. You say that the labour movement is a crucial area and this is the field D.A.M. works in, trying to build rank and file initiatives, and encouraging workers to take direct action and not to rely on the bureaucracies.

Anarchists have got to make their ideas relevant to the ordinary working class, to workers both employed and unemployed, in their workplace and in their community, linking struggles together and encouraging solidarity. A lot of work in doing this will seem boring to most Anarchists, but if we are to build a meaningful Anarchist movement we have to go beyond Bash the Rich marches, Stop Business as Usual etc. and be prepared to argue our case in the workplace and in the community and to put Anarchist ideas forward everywhere there is struggle.

I would be interested to hear your thoughts on Anarcho-Syndicalism, the need for Anarchists to organise nationally is correct but we are not only fighting the state but capitalism as well and while the power of the ruling elite is based nationally, capitalism is run on an international basis, therefore international links need to be built. This has always been recognised by Anarcho-Syndicalists and that is why the I.W.A. was formed to extend solidarity across the artificial barriers created by the ruling classes.

Steve,

Manchester Poly Anarchists/
Manchester D.A.M.

A VIRUS COMRADE REPLIES

We welcome the D.A.M. comrades remarks. As regards CLASS WAR, it seems that they have recently helped set up a CLASS WAR FEDERATION involving a number of groups around the country.

It is certainly this writer's experience, and from twenty years involvement in the anarchist movement, and from conversations with French comrades, that what happened in the Manchester Poly Anarchist Group was a repeat performance of something that has been happening for many years. As he says, Green Anarcho-Pacifists, alternative lifestylers etc. existing in the same groups as class struggle anarchists results in nothing getting done. This was the problem in the ANARCHIST FEDERATION OF BRITAIN in the 1960's. Many people became interested in class struggle anarchism, but they found that they were totally paralysed by being in the A.F.B., a real Holy Roman Empire of anything that called itself anarchist. This led to an exodus of many militants to the Trotskyist organisations (I.S. and I.M.G.) and the setting up of both the ORGANISATION OF REVOLUTIONARY ANARCHISTS and the ANARCHIST-SYNDICALIST ALLIANCE in reaction to the A.F.B.'s total ineffectiveness.

We recognise that the aim of Anarcho-Syndicalism is Libertarian Communism and that many D.A.M. militants see themselves as both Anarcho-Communists and Anarcho-Syndicalists. We also agree that much work in spreading our ideas throughout society will seem boring, however, that both BASH THE RICH MARCHES and STOP BUSINESS AS USUAL did get fairly large numbers of young people involved in action and in contact with anarchist ideas. (After all D.A.M. members took part in the STOP THE CITY actions). We recognise their limitations, as I think do many who initiated the actions.

However on Anarcho-Syndicalism, we must make our position clear. Anarcho-Syndicalism (and revolutionary syndicalism) have, in the past, inspired and created many mass movements throughout the world. Their insistence on direct action, complete independence from domination by political parties, on self-managed struggles, and finally their involvement in collectivisation and self-management in, for example, Spain (1936), the Italian factory councils (1919) are an inspiration to all class struggle anarchists. Anarcho-Syndicalism concentrates on the work-place, to the detriment of activity in the community and on a whole range of social movements. The revolutionary union is not enough for the control and take-over of society. General assemblies of workers must delegate factory committees and workers' councils to run the workplaces. In the communities, similar assemblies must create councils to run the towns and villages, in conjunction with the workers' councils, to organise the health service transport system, and social welfare (looking after the old and infirm). Similarly, in the schools and colleges, mass assemblies of students must, with teachers' committees oversee the day to day running of education. Anarcho-Syndicalism in its pre-occupation with the workplace, ignores the struggles of the unemployed, of women and men outside of the workplace, of issues affecting conventional issues of sexual morality, and the environment. It is of course a priority to build an active anarchist presence in the workplace, but we should not ignore struggles on other fronts against capitalism and the state.

Some Anarcho-Syndicalists (not all, by any means) see the creation of a mass Anarcho-Syndicalist union as enough in itself. They have been apathetic, and some times hostile to the creation of a specific anarchist organisation, carrying out activity inside and outside the workplace (some elements in the Spanish C.N.T. the German F.A.U. and the Argentinian F.O.R.A.).

We are very aware of the need to have links internationally with other libertarian organisations, and are in correspondence with groups in Ireland, France, Italy and Switzerland. To put forward the I.W.A. (THE INTERNATIONAL WORKERS ASSOCIATION) as the anarchist international is inadequate. For a start this not an international of anarchist organisations, but one of syndicalist unions and of groupings hoping to set up syndicalist unions. Another point is that not all of the syndicalist unions are in the I.W.A. The Swedish S.A.C has left, the American I.W.W. has never been a

member. The I.W.A. represents a fraction of the international libertarian movement. We see the need for the eventual creation of a libertarian communist international.

We hope the D.A.M. comrade takes this reply in the spirit in which it was written, that is, in a comradely and non-sectarian manner. If we happen to be in different libertarian organisations, we can still look for areas of common agreement and activity. In the future, we hope that we can cooperate with both the DIRECT ACTION MOVEMENT and the CLASS WAR FEDERATION. We are completely pissed-off with sectarianism where it is not necessary. We feel that many comrades feel the same way, and are looking for ways out of the ghetto we are in.

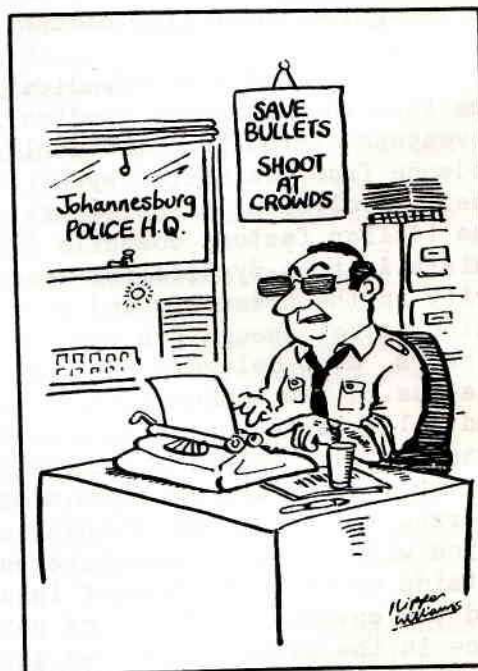
BRITISH SOUTH AFRICA

Everyone knows that South Africa was the creation of racist Dutch and British settlers. What is perhaps less well known is the extent to which Britain still supports the Apartheid state. In a recent statement, Tory Minister Mrs Chalker had this to say. "Britain is an integral part of the South African economy. To that extent we are actually a part of South Africa and its system. The British stake there in direct investment is now about £5,000 million, or about 40 per cent of the total foreign investment in South Africa. Indirect investment, via portfolio holdings and the like, adds another £6,000 million.

In 1984, Britain exported £1,200 million of visibles and £1,300 million of services to South Africa. In 1983, the earnings repatriated from South Africa to Britain added up to £527 million. This constituted no less than 13 per cent of all Britain's overseas earnings....."

The purpose of Chalker's statement was to underline the continued need for Britain's involvement, it creates jobs here etc. Similar arguments are advanced for our support of the military dictatorship in Chile. They were put forward in the 1930's regarding Nazi Germany, in the 70's in respect to the Greek dictatorship and so on and so on. Given the Tory Governments less than desperate measures to tackle unemployment in other ways, we may wonder just a little if those fat profits from South Africa aren't the real reason for blood on British hands.

Given the maldistribution of power in this country there is little that ordinary people can do, greatly alter the situation. Publicising trade boycotts, sabotaging Barclays Bank, participating in demonstrations, and generally showing solidarity with the insurgent people of South Africa is about as much as we can do. And do those we must. The black working class of South Africa is in a state of general insurgency, they deserve all the support we can give them.



In a recent poll in NATIONAL STUDENT published by the National Union of Students, number one 'favourite politician' was 'none' - 'they're all no good', etc. As the paper commented: "the Anarcho-Cynicalist tendency made damn sure that 'They're all B-s' carried off carried off favourite politician accolade."

british anarchism surveyed

What is Wrong with the Movement?

The general environment for revolutionary anarchists is, at present, undeniably very hostile. The ideas that we put forward are regarded as at best irrelevant and at worst the rantings of the left's lunatic fringe. And as far as the revolutionary socialist movement is concerned the influence of anarchists is negligible: revolutionary socialism, in Britain at least, is effectively dominated by the Marxist tradition.

In large part this unhealthy position is the fault of the anarchist movement itself. After all, opportunities for growth have been consistently missed, in particular the period from 1968 to 1974 with its mass demonstrations and a working class confident enough to bring down a Tory government.

But far from extending its influence British anarchism has clung to existence by its fingernails. This is not to dismiss the invaluable contribution of various organisations since the Second World War in keeping the revolutionary flame burning. However, we do have to recognise that these organisations, as well as others over the past forty years, have failed to break down the ghettoisation of anarchism on the margins of socialism in Britain.

Why is this? There is no doubt that revolutionary anarchists have firmly maintained an orientation on the working class as the chief agent of social change. Yet in the same period since 1945 many authoritarian groupings, some of which have trumpeted student radicalism, black nationalism and colonial liberation as a substitute for proletarian revolution, have grown considerably. In 1950 there can not have been more than one hundred and fifty Trotskyists in Britain. In 1985 there are at least ten thousand, albeit fragmented into a large number of small groupings.

A brief examination of the British anarchist tradition points to two key factors that have distorted the development of the movement.

Firstly, there has been a widespread adoption of the "anarchist" label by essentially bourgeois political movements. This process can be traced back to the emergence of CND as a mass movement from 1958 onwards. Before that date the bleak political terrain of the 50's Britain, barren soil for socialist ideas, had enforced the isolation of anarchists from any real audience. CND, however, drew a huge number of activists, new into the political arena. Albert Meltzer has described this development and the response of the anarchist movement:

"The anarchist movement already existing did not exactly encourage the new trend. With memories of many peace and reform movements, the "older generation" either grandly ignored this one (I did so myself) or pointed out logically but derisively that merely to call for the banning of the bomb was hardly enough. How could they expect that governments would 'ban' the bomb? - or respond to appeals to do so? - or be expected to keep such a ban? And what hypocrisy to associate the Labour Party and Liberal MP's! All this was very true, but it was an echo of the conclusions arrived at independently by a large number of the CND rank and file. Indeed, so impatient with the leadership were many of the latter that they lined up behind the anarchist banner so that they would not cooperate with what was - so far as the nuclear dividing line was concerned - the loyal opposition... with the 'New Left' and the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament of the fifties, many in the peace movement looked to anarchism rather to the established parties, though it was not clear what some of thought of as 'anarchist' and they may have confused it with a more militant liberalism." (1)

The words "may have" are a serious understatement. It is certain that relatively large numbers of CND activists were radicalised by their experience of the anti-war movement but failed to link their new demands for social justice and equality with the traditions of the labour movement. That this could happen in the late 50's and early 60's is not particularly surprising. It was a period of relative prosperity during which the working class was, on the whole, conservative and sectional in outlook. But the anarchist movement compounded the problems caused by the absence of a class perspective through their sectarian attitude to the anti-nuclear movement.

The journals Freedom and Anarchy provided the new liberal adherents of anarchism with their chief mouthpieces. From 1961 Anarchy in particular, as the theoretical magazine of the movement's liberal wing, reflected their self imposed exile from the labour movement. Even as the post war economic boom was ending amidst student uprisings and mass strikes the influence of liberalism prevented the British anarchist movement from relating to the new situation in a concerted fashion. In fact the bulk of the movement was already sunk into the swamp of reformism, pacifism and so-called "pragmatism". Murray Bookchin wrote to Anarchy in June 1968 to comment on an earlier article:

"After reading Anarchy 85 .I would have gladly discarded the word 'anarchist' if I did not remember that men like Bakunin, Malatesta, Ravachol, Makhno Durruti once called themselves anarchists Do the views expressed by most of the participants in the radio interview fairly reflect those of the British movement? Is it true that propaganda of the deed by English anarchists is almost invariably non violent that the police force is merely 'rather like crutches . . . at the present day it's necessary ? Is it true that 'anarchism' is becoming almost 'modish' in Britain today- a cute, harmless little doll cradled in the comfortable arms of the United Kingdom?"

(2)



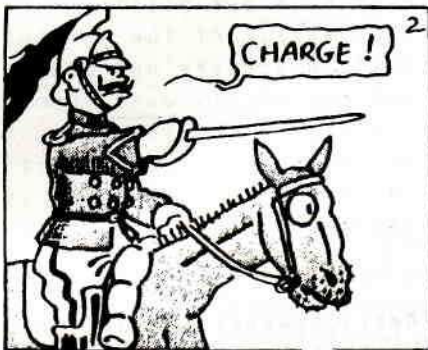
But the ideas of Bookchin - and others - were insufficient to stem the advance of liberal irrelevance. The biggest problem caused by the predominance of such ideas was theoretical confusion within the movement. Even many class struggle anarchists were diverted into forms of activity that originated outside the revolutionary anarchist tradition.

This was not unique. Writing of the French anarchist movement, which he described as "out of sympathy with Proudhon and Bakunin", and of its influence in Spain, Gaston Leval described the state of that part of the French movement which remained outside the syndicalist unions at the end of the nineteenth century:

"The custom of small groups, which Kropotkin deplored, had established itself only too well. It is true that there was much talk about making the revolution but this was seen as the apotheosis of the general social upheaval, romanticised to the point where Jean Grave and Charles Malato had to polemicise with their own comrades for whom all organisation was necessarily authoritarian and a threatened the rights of the individual. Then, as the revolution was long in coming, matters of secondary importance were taken up. Individualism appeared with its Stirnerite demands more or less ably interpreted by the self; the revolt became purely negative when it did not change course in quest of various marginal hobby-horses such as vegetarianism, naturism, aestheticism, Nietzschean exaltation, etc. These novelties became confused with those of a form of anarchist communism which rejected union activity and the broad organic anticipation of the future by Spanish anarchists." (3)

A similar process has affected the British. The revolutionary idea of the great anarchist theorists have been well and truly buried by the weight of bourgeois liberalism. An abstract concept of freedom has replaced Bakunin's insistence that "the serious realisation of liberty, justice and peace will be possible so long as the vast majority of the population remain dispossessed....". (4) Now, apparently, we can obtain liberty within capitalist society through personal liberation - as if such were possible without social revolution.

The tragedy is that this reactionary nonsense influences genuine class struggle anarchists as well as the editors of freedom. Anti-intellectualism hampers the movement by preventing the development of any coherent analysis, the rejection of effective tactics on the basis that "the Trots do it" leaves revolutionary organisations unable to relate to the real working class involved in real struggles.



So revolutionary anarchists will have to break once and for all with liberalism if the movement is to gain any political ground at all. But as has already been mentioned, there is a second factor enforcing anarchism's current fringe status.

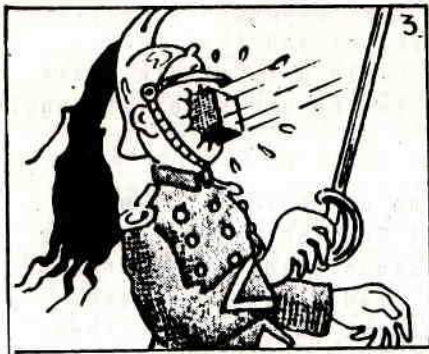
When the pioneer British anarchists gained control of the Socialist League in the 1880's they were part of a native revolutionary tradition. On the merit side, that tradition was always strongly anti-parliamentarian. On the debit side were the propagandist attitudes of British revolutionaries. The approach was summed up by William Morris in 1890 as the "making of socialists, ie. convincing people that Socialism is good for them and is possible". (5)

This is a far cry from Bakunin's understanding that propaganda was, in itself, insufficient and that the working class could only attain class consciousness in the course of struggle

The "making of socialists" meant in effect that British revolutionaries consistently stood aside from "partial" struggles for trade union ends and for limited social improvements. These were regarded as mere "palliatives" that could only divert the working class from the straight road to socialist revolution. The fact that this strategy left them completely isolated from the mass of the working class did not seem to disturb them in the least.

An example of propagandism in action was the activity of the Socialist Labour Party, a largely Scottish based organisation that split away from the Social Democratic Federation in 1903. The SLP's position was heavily influenced by the ideas of Daniel de Leon, one of the founders of the Industrial Workers of the World in the U.S.A. They argued for the creation of industrial unions linked with a political party that would generalise the politics of local struggles. Their concept of "setting up" industrial unions, however, consisted of counterposing the idea of their Industrial Workers of Great Britain to the existing trade unions. There was no understanding of how to relate the building of industrial unions to the actual experience of workers. Consequently, although the SLP became relatively influential - SLP members played a leading role in the battles on "Red Clydeside" just after the First World War - the projected IWGB never saw the light of day.

The same attitude is still fairly common in the British socialist movement. The Socialist Party of Great Britain continues "to make socialists" while rejecting "partial" struggles: as an organisation they still have as few members and as little influence as they did at their foundation in 1904. For the Revolutionary Communist Party the central question confronting the working class is that of leadership. So they work to prepare their members, in isolation from the dirty work of day-to-day fights to win "palliatives", of course, for the



moment of revolution when the class, apparently, will spontaneously turn to the RCP's carefully nurtured revolutionary leaders.

Obviously the propagandist approach is wrong. Not only is it highly elitist ("...we're educated and it's our task to enlighten the workers..."), historical experience has shown that it invariably fails. But having criticised the state socialists of the SLP, SPGB and RCP for their folly, what do we do when we look at the modern anarchist movement?

We see endless policy documents that can never be put into practice, newspapers that do not relate to working class struggles, an abstract concept of "revolution" with little or no attempt made to develop a concrete analysis that might guide the movement towards the real thing.

In other words, British anarchism is, on the whole, every bit as propagandist as the margins of authoritarian socialism.

THE NEXT STEP

So with the British movement in such a sorry state the future does not, at first sight, look too bright for revolutionary anarchism. Yet it is possible, with the correct strategy, for us to put the movement back on course, although many so-called anarchists would undoubtedly fight against this.

A major task must be to cut through the theoretical confusion that surrounds us. This is not a question of starting from scratch, of trying to learn purely from our own experiences of revolutionary struggle.

On the contrary, for over a century revolutionary anarchists have been studying the lessons of history, of the mass struggles and revolutions in which they have participated, of the living school of class war that is provided by the daily battles in which working class people are forced to engage.

There is an immediate need for serious revolutionaries to reconnect with this rich vein of political experience. Proudhon, Bakunin, Kropotkin, Malatesta, Archinov, Leval... just a few of the writers in a long line of anarchist contributors to socialist thought. Reconnecting with this tradition does not, of course, mean blindly accepting every word written by anarchist theoreticians. Apart from anything else, we would end up with an extremely contradictory set of principles—even anarchist thinkers have never necessarily agreed with one another. But anarchism is, above all, a scientific approach to socialism. That is, all our theories must start from material fact, from the lessons of real experience. So, for instance, we base our political practice on the potential of the working class to transform society not because, in our heads, we merely want them to do so, but because that social class has proven time and time again that it is the only section of society that is capable of doing so.

Theory, however, is not enough by itself. We have to be able to translate that theory into revolutionary practice, a practice developed by applying, and so testing, our theories in the real world of social struggle. That cannot possibly be achieved by an organisation that takes a propagandist position: sitting outside of and commenting upon the concerns of the people we are trying to reach. So far none of the established anarchist groupings in this country have made any serious move to break with that propagandist approach.

The obvious objection that will be made by many active anarchists is that they do involve themselves in many areas of struggle. This is often quite true: in fact anarchists are frequently the most committed, most active fighters in a wide range of campaigns and workplace struggles. But the problem is that the anarchist response is invariably fragmentary, a matter of individ-

ual action rather than of well organised collective intervention. This is contrary to the methods developed and encouraged throughout the genuine anarchist tradition. To paraphrase the words of Alexander Berkman, anarchism means organisation and more organisation.

WHAT SORT OF ORGANISATION?

One question is left begging- what sort of organisation? By the time that Berkman was writing in the late 1920's anarcho-syndicalists had succeeded in building mass movements that actually had the collective power to threaten capitalism and the state. In Spain, Germany, Italy, Argentina etc. large well established anarcho-syndicalist unions had acted as rallying points for the most militant sections of the working class.

These organisations, even in their heyday, made serious mistakes. They were all, without exception, smashed by the ruling class. But even in defeat, anarcho-syndicalism constituted a vital experience for the anarchist movement, an experience that revolutionary anarchists at the time unfortunately did not learn from. Rather than analysing the growth and defeat of the anarcho-syndicalist challenge and assimilating the lessons, many militants continued (and still continue) to champion or reject the syndicalist approach on the basis of personal prejudice or of abstract "theory" unsullied by the consideration of political practicality.

As the revolutionary anarchist tradition re-emerges the struggles of the past will need to be examined in detail and the lessons properly incorporated into our theory and practice. There is not space in this short article, which is really no more than an outline of a political position, to present a thorough analysis of them. Besides, they deserve more prominence than a few paragraphs in a discussion of British anarchism today.

There is space, though, to state briefly those aspects of the anarcho-syndicalist experience that have a direct bearing on the way in which anarchists can best organise for the social revolution.

Aside from the magnificent example that anarcho-syndicalist unions set of labour and community organisation, their principle contribution was their insight into the relationship between anarchist organisations and the working class as a whole.

One of the major flaws of the Leninist theory of the revolutionary party is not that it is built exclusively of activists from the most advanced sections of the working class, but that by regarding itself as the workers' sole vanguard it separates itself out from the rest of the class. There is an inbuilt tendency for members of such an organisation to see themselves as an elite, to develop the embryo of bureaucracy. Even Trotsky drew attention to the process in his pre Bolshevik days:

"Lenin's methods lead to this: the Party organisation at first substitutes itself for the party as a whole; then the Central Committee substitutes itself for the organisation; and finally a single 'dictator' substitutes himself for the Central Committee". (6).



While oversimplified, this account points to the inevitable and increasing divorce of the Leninist vanguard party from its class base.

Obviously, any revolutionary organisation, even an anarchist organisation, is subject to similar pressures. The mass revolutionary unions illustrated how to avoid bureaucratic degeneration by drawing less advanced workers into the same industry based and community based organisations as anarchist militants. This meant, in effect, that those workers were not left to come under the influence of left sounding reformists, but were won over to the political and organisational leadership of the anarchist movement.

But "classical" anarcho-syndicalism and revolutionary syndicalism have also left a negative legacy. Their "apoliticism" opened their ranks to statisticians of all shades, both reformist and revolutionary. Their faith in the General Strike as the great social panacea, their belief that if they constructed the "new world in the shell of the old" the state and capitalism would simply fall away, exposed them to savage reaction from a state machine that had been given time and space to recover from the initial shock of social revolution.

So from the tragedy of defeat, particularly that of Spain, we learn the absolute necessity of a distinct libertarian communist orientation and of revolutionary insurrection. Statist politics must be excluded from any anarchist organisation; the bourgeois state must be physically overthrown.

What is needed, then, is a specific revolutionary anarchist grouping that operates as an organised force within the working class. But such an organisation by itself would be insufficient to carry through a social revolution. Discussing the relationship between the Central Sections (distinct revolutionary groupings) and the Trade Union Sections within the First International, Bakunin insisted that the former alone would be "merely so many workers academies", (7). The real power of the International derived from the ability to mobilise large numbers of workers on the basis of material demands rather than ideology.

The articles contained in VIRUS do not necessarily represent the views of the GROUP as a whole but should be seen as contributions, by one or more members, to free discussion. We actively encourage free debate within this magazine and welcome contributions.

VIRUS supporters have formed the ANARCHIST-COMMUNIST DISCUSSION GROUP which aims to create a national association of class struggle anarchists based upon the principles of anarchist-communism. Our medium term goal is to bring into existence an ANARCHIST-COMMUNIST FEDERATION, and, if the GROUP maintains its present rate of growth, to bring out a monthly newspaper, provisionally entitled LIBERATION. If you would like to see an end to the isolation, bickering and sectarianism which afflicts much of the anarchist movement, why not get in touch. C/O 84B, Whitechapel High St. London. E. 1. 7QX.

British anarchists should not be playing with the idea that the death of capitalism or the state is inevitable, neither should we devote our time to preparing blueprints for the new social order.

Our task is to build a movement that really can "turn the world upside down"; a movement founded on anarchist politics and wielding the power of mass rank and file union action and other forms of democracy that may emerge.

NOTES

- (1) Albert Meltzer, "The Anarchists in London 1935-55", p36.
- (2) Murray Bookchin, letter to "Anarchy" magazine, June 1968.
- (3) Gaston Leval, "Collectives of the Spanish Revolution", p36.
- (4) G.P. Maximoff, "The Political Philosophy of Bakunin", p269.
- (5) A.L. Morton (ed), "Political Writings of William Morris", p225.
- (6) Leon Trotsky, "Our Political Tasks", 1904.
- (7) G.P. Maximoff, op.cit., p303.

