

Red & Black Notes

A Magazine of Socialist Discussion

Winter 1998

You Don't Need A Weatherman

When reading the newspapers of the left it is hard to escape the conclusion that if there were no social democratic and trade union leaders, holding back the struggles of the working class, we would long ago have begun to construct a socialist society. This argument was most famously put by Leon Trotsky, who in 1938 argued in *The Transitional Program* that the "historical crisis of mankind is reduced to the crisis of revolutionary leadership."

For Trotsky and his followers the problem boiled down to replacing the bad leadership (the Social Democrats, Stalinists and trade unionists - them) with the good leadership (the World Party of Socialist Revolution, A.K.A. the Fourth International - us). This substitution was to be achieved through the magic of "transitional demands," a series of prescriptions designed to take the consciousness of the workers from immediate demands over to the struggle for socialist ones. Unfortunately for this prognosis the working class has largely remained inoculated against Trotskyism. Wrong demands perhaps?

The point is not to sneer at the Trotskyists because they are tiny. After all, given the number of people involved with the production of this slender newsletter, the same criticism could easily be leveled at us. Instead we will merely suggest that the problem does not simply boil down to changing

the consciousness of the working class through the propaganda of "revolutionary" minorities.

In November of last year a group of Canadian solidarity activists who called themselves the Liverpool Dockers Solidarity Network organized a cross-Canada tour with two members of the dockers' support group Women of the Waterfront. During the last two weeks of November Marie Eustace and Valerie Bibby spoke in Ontario, Quebec, Alberta and British Columbia. The tour raised upwards of \$42,000 for the striking Liverpool dockers. Perhaps more interesting though is how the Women of the Waterfront organization came to be organized.

During a speech given in Calgary, Alberta a WOW speaker described her husband's morning routine as he went to go down to the picket line. One morning she decided to join him. When she got there she discovered other wives and girlfriends on the line and they got to talking. In a very short time women who had never spoken in public found themselves as international ambassadors for the striking dockers. A no less dramatic transformation has occurred in the "consciousness" of the dockers themselves, both in the way they view their struggle and the way they view themselves.

Was there a party or organization to "teach" these workers class consciousness? The same organization present in Hungary in 1956 and Paris in 1968.

In this issue of **R&BN** we again look at some questions of organization, but also articles dealing with praxis. We welcome comments on this issue in the form of letters or articles, favourable or otherwise.

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Some Remarks on the Re-organization of the Revolutionary Left



The following article by Cajo Brendel deals with the left after the collapse of so-called actually existing socialism. We believe it poses important questions for those who consider themselves revolutionaries.

About 58 years ago the French writer Georges Sorel stated that "the historiographers and the actors in the historical drama are unable to see what is much later understood as the essence of what happened." (1) If this is true in general it is particularly true of the (revolutionary) left. Like those who in the middle ages marched with the "Bundschuh" (2) to bring the Kingdom of God on earth, although indeed they were the political opposition against feudal society, many revolutionary leftists of the 19th and 20th centuries have had false ideas about the real meaning of their own purpose and acts. Absolutely convinced that they were the champions of a proletarian revolution, the revolution for which they strived has achieved nothing more than the transformation of private capitalism into state capitalism.

Recently it has been stated that "with the collapse of the real socialism... the left has been fundamentally shocked." (3) Nobody will deny the reality of this shock. However, one has to add immediately that what has collapsed cannot be defined as real socialism. As far as the shock is concerned, it has at last forced the traditional left to give up its illusions.

However, the end of illusions has not yet brought a reorganization; at the most it can only be seen as one of its preconditions. This is so because the traditional left can also be characterized not only by its socio-political illusions but also by its forms of organization and its pretensions. Perhaps, for

special historical reasons, this left enters the public scene as a party or a political group which presents itself as the "vanguard of the working class" and in one way or another considers its task to be stimulating as what it defines as "class consciousness" of the workers. This task is considered urgent because the left regards the working class as "the agent of the revolution that it envisions."

In fact it is, of course, the other way around: the proletarian revolution is the definitive result of the daily struggle of the workers. To the traditional left the starting point is not the class struggle but the revolution. Its principle is the Leninist thesis that "without a revolutionary theory, there doesn't exist a revolutionary practice" - that is to say, revolutionary practice as it is understood by the left.

Whether the traditional left will believe it or not, it is characterized by its mistaken belief that if one replaces false ideas by correct ones, the existing reality will collapse. Admittedly it is a wrong idea that can be explained by the fact that, although the left knows precisely that not an interpretation is important but a transformation, it regards this transformation not as an act of the working class but as the act of a vanguard. That is to say resulting from its own action.

However, as Marx knew: "It is not a matter of what this or that proletarian or even the proletariat as a whole present as its goal. It is a matter of what the proletariat is in actuality and what in accordance with this being, it will historically be compelled to do." (4) Completely contrary Marx the traditional left thinks that the working class has to learn that workers have to struggle to overcome capitalist society, and that the vanguard is teaching them! In this way, it separates itself as an intellectual stratum

superior to this class. And this has been so right from the beginning.

At first sight the pretension of the traditional left seems to have a certain basis in reality, it is only at first sight! As soon as this left is explaining its point of view and its position in relation with the so-called "idleness of the workers left to themselves" it becomes clear that the practice of the working class is far from being the practice that this left believes it should be, that is to say this practice is not as it should be according to it. Reality then doesn't accord with what the traditional left has in mind. In other words, this left has it upside down.

It is not true that without revolutionary theory there is no revolutionary practice. It is not true that certain opinions and ideas, that a certain quantity of consciousness are the absolute precondition to struggle. It is the other way round! Many times, it has been stated that the "theory becomes a material force as soon as it takes possession of the masses." However, a theory is never more than a recapitulation of the experiences of the past and of its consequences. Not because of a certain theory does one have new experiences of the struggle, but new experiences that arise from the struggle give birth to new theory. This is a continuous process. It is not a process in the heads of the workers. They don't draw theoretical but practical consequences. They don't struggle to realize any form of a theory, they struggle for their interests. Their practice isn't the result of a certain theory, instead their practice has consequences for theory. When the circumstances which lead to struggle don't exist, the voice of the left, which thinks theory is the precondition of the struggle, remains the voice of a preacher in the desert. The fact remains this reality now - and not since the latest few years - is clearer than ever before is the essence of the crisis.

What are the possibilities for the so-called "revolutionary left" to overcome this crisis? The discussion of its reorganization involves saying clearly to the workers that the transformation of private capitalism into state capitalism doesn't change their class position. However, this also is no

contribution to overcoming the crisis. It is all the same when "leftists" say that the liberation of the working class is by no means a political act, but a social one. And when they say that a change in productive relations - that is to say the abolition of wage labour - can't be realized by a party or vanguard. This demands autonomous struggle, so that workers have to create their own organizations completely different from the traditional ones. All this has nothing to do with overcoming the struggle.

The downfall of what is falsely called "real socialism" seems to be the cause of a deepening crisis, but certainly it is not so. Instead it has to do with the fact that the old traditional labour movement with those leaders saying that they are acting on behalf of the workers and taking decisions in their name, has become an anachronism. Our time is one in which one can see an ever widening gap between those who call themselves the leaders on one side and the workers on the other side, who are prevented by the leaders from acting for themselves and making their own destiny.

If the so-called "revolutionary left" believes that its reorganization means that it has to present other slogans and that with other slogans and principles and other perspectives - even with a different form of organization - yet still acting as a vanguard, still believing that it has to teach the workers something - they will be trying to sell new wine in old bottles. However in doing so, they are just acting according to the law that is dominating their own form of organization.

Reality dictates that revolutionaries learn from workers rather than teach them, not trying to realize their own ideas but concluding the meaning of what the workers are doing from what is going on before their eyes. If the left are doing this, it wouldn't be a vanguard any longer and this would interfere with the intentions of the reorganization.

Cajo Brendel

1) The author defines himself as Marxist. Still? What is meant by this "still?" If, somewhere other theories or ideologies have collapsed, Marxism has

not. The author wants to stress that what he is understanding here by “the revolutionary left” is the traditional left, existing from the beginning of the labour movement and what has experienced a crisis today by the fact that new forms of class struggle arise not corresponding with the old traditions.

- 1 Georges Sorel, “Reflexions sur la violence.”
- 2 The “bundsuh” was painted on the banners of the revolting farmer. It was a shoe very different from the beautiful shoes of the knights. So, there couldn’t be any mistake about what sort of people were behind those banners.
- 3 The German magazine “Spezial” July-August 93, p. 24)
- 4 Marx/ Engles “The Holy Family.”

On Means & Ends

The following article contains two excerpts from material published by the British libertarian socialist organization **Solidarity**. The first is from *An Open letter to the International Socialists* [now **British Socialist Workers Party**].” written in 1968. While we have some reservations regarding the formulas dealing with self-management, we think it is important to recognize the link between means and ends in a revolutionary organization. As Rosa Luxemburg once noted “all roads do not lead to Rome; different roads lead to different places.” In the first issue of **Red & Black Notes** we included material from the **Solidarity** statement *As We Don’t See it*. The second excerpt in this article is also from that document, and expands on the concept of how a revolutionary organization might function. **Red & Black Notes** is not the product of an organization at the moment. Rather it is produced by a small number of individuals sharing similar perspectives.



As such we see ourselves as circulating information among revolutionaries and contributing to the class struggle where we have an opportunity to do so.

It is remarkable how few socialists seem to recognize the connection between the structure of their organization and the type of “socialist” society it might help to bring about.

If the revolutionary organization is seen as the means and socialist society as the end, one might expect people with an elementary understanding of dialectics to recognize the relation between the two. Means and ends are mutually dependent. They constantly influence each other. The means are, in fact, a partial implementation of the end, whereas the end becomes modified by the means adopted.

One could almost say “tell me your views concerning the structure and function of the revolutionary organization and I’ll tell you what the society you will help to create will be like.” Or conversely “give me your definition of socialism and I’ll tell you what your views on revolutionary organization are likely to be.”

We see socialism as a society based on self-management in every branch of social life. Its basis would be workers’ management of production exercised through Workers’ Councils. Accordingly we conceive of the revolutionary organization as one which incorporates self-management in its structure and abolishes within its own ranks the separation between the functions of decision-making and execution. The revolutionary organization should propagate these principles in every area of social life.

Because we reject Lenin’s concept that the working class can only develop a trade union (or reformist) consciousness IT FOLLOWS that reject the leninist prescription that socialist consciousness has to be bought to the people from the outside, or injected into the movement by political specialists: the professional revolutionaries. It further follows that we cannot behave as if we held such beliefs.

Mass consciousness, however, is never a

theoretical consciousness, derived individually through the study of books. In modern industrial society socialist consciousness springs from the real conditions of social life. These societies generate the conditions for an adequate consciousness. On the other hand, because they are class societies, they usually inhibit access to that consciousness. Here lies both the dilemma and the challenge confronting modern revolutionaries.

There *is* a role for conscious revolutionaries. *Firstly* through personal involvement, in one’s own life and where possible at one’s own place of work. (Here the main danger lies in “prolier than thou” attitudes, which lead people either to believe that there is little they can do if they are not industrial workers, or to pretend to be what they are not, in the false belief that the only relevant areas of struggle are in relation to industry). *Secondly*, by assisting others in struggle, by providing them with help or information they are denied. (Here the main danger lies in the offering of “interested help,” where recruitment of the militant to the “revolutionary” organization is as much an objective of the “help” as is his victory in the struggle in which he is involved) *Finally*, by pointing out and explaining the deep (but often hidden) relations between the socialist objective and what people are driven to do, through their experiences and needs. (This is what we mean when we say revolutionaries should help make “explicit” the “implicitly” socialist content of many modern struggles)

...As for ourselves, in view of our whole past there is only one road open to us. For almost forty years we have emphasized that class struggle is the immediate driving force of history, and in particular that the class struggle between bourgeoisie and proletariat is the great lever of the modern social revolution...When the International was formed we expressly formulated the battle cry: The emancipation of the working classes must be achieved by the working classes themselves.

---- Marx & Engels “Circular Letter”

September 17-18, 1879



On Roma Immigration

The following article was sent to us by comrades of the Solidarita group in the Czech Republic. Solidarita describes itself as coming from a "class struggle anarchist and syndicalist tradition."

If readers are in a position to read Czech they can write to us for copies of the original leaflet or to Solidarita at PO Box 13, Cerna Hora, 679 21, Czech Republic. The leaflet below has been edited for grammar.

Solidarita Statement on Roma Immigration - November 1997

The Roma are being forced to leave the Czech Republic because they are suffering from terrible social and civil discrimination based on their ethnicity: They are not economic refugees; They do not try to abuse the hospitality of your country!

In the former Czechoslovakia the Roma led a life of either nomadic or settled artisans or peasants. Their different and independent culture and lifestyle meant that they seemed to be useless in the eyes of the ruling classes. The ruling classes were constantly persecuting the Roma and promoting xenophobia toward the Roma among ordinary people (the first Czechoslovakian Republic was not much better in this respect than the Austro-Hungarian Empire). The Nazis tried to exterminate those they called "Gypsy scum" and thousands of Roma were murdered in concentration camps. All with the assistance of the Czech authorities. The Communist regime did the most in trying to integrate the Roma community, but for its own reasons and with inhuman bureaucratic methods. Stalinism needed a cheap unskilled labour force that would replace the missing technologies and do work no Czech workers would be willing to do. Ghettos were built in industrial centres and the Roma were forced to live there, to work there, to go to school there. The aim of the education system was to reproduce a cheap unskilled labour force and

there was not any effort made to help Roma children overcome their difficulties in Czechoslovakian society. Most Roma children could not speak Czech very well and were not able to catch up with the "white" children in their classes and instead were sent to special schools. This decision ensured they could not attend any education higher than basic or vocational: Roma culture and history was to be destroyed and in this way they were to be completely assimilated.

The reconstruction of market Capitalism in our country has meant another disaster for Czech Roma. As unskilled labourers the Roma were the first to lose their jobs and new private employers were not interested in hiring them as long as there was a surplus of "white" workers ready to work for the wages of unskilled ones. The Roma were a despised "black" minority and it was easier to sacrifice them than to sack "white" workers. The education system does not offer the Roma anything new or better. On the contrary it is underfunded and even worse than it once was! The old discrimination continues and the Roma are trapped in a vicious circle of an unemployment rate of 70%, which leads to a decay in traditional community values leading to crime, drugs, prostitution and despair. The negative effects of discrimination only serve to increase the xenophobia of the white population: It means that Roma are often forbidden to go to pubs and other public places in many towns; They cannot get proper jobs or medical treatment; They are the targets of physical attacks by Nazi-gangs; They are bullied by the police and bureaucrats; they are afraid to send their children to schools and nurseries.

Recent disastrous summer floods which killed 48 people and left thousands without homes and property, brought a wave of xenophobia against the Roma. It was easier for the mass media to scapegoat a powerless minority for looting, the abuse of humanitarian aid, etc. etc., than to blame the real causes: the state unwilling and/or unable to adequately help the victims; bureaucrats abusing

their power and humanitarian aid; shopkeepers overpricing goods; a market system which doomed the old emergency system because it was too expensive. In this atmosphere of hatred a mass emigration started.

Politicians of all parties, left and right, have always used the Roma as scapegoats for crime, shortages of apartments and for cuts in social benefits. In this way they have created a xenophobic atmosphere that allowed for a rise in racism and in fascist organizations. Since 1990 members or supporters of those organizations have murdered about 20 Roma, anti-fascists and foreigners. Politicians and the state have turned a blind eye to these events.

With the British threat of visas for Czech citizens and delaying Czech membership in the EU and NATO the government has been forced to act. The government now admits there is discrimination and racism in our country, but they do not want to admit that the state follows these practices. They are promising to start to solve the problems facing the Roma community, but the Roma have not got the slightest reason to believe them. The "new solutions could possibly bring equality in access to education and jobs in the public sector and make it more difficult for the Police to bully the Roma while ignoring the fascist activities. Nevertheless it cannot secure a right decent housing for all. It cannot secure decent wages for all. It cannot ensure that the Roma minority will not be sacrificed again in the interests of the ruling capitalist class, nor that it will not be used again to divide working people and divert them from struggling against real enemies and real problems. It cannot secure real equality and freedom for all.

Emigration is not a solution, although it pushed the government to a positive reaction. An overwhelming majority of Czech Roma are so poor that they cannot afford to leave the country. Instead they are starting to fight back. They are not just protesting against fascist violence, but also demanding better education, jobs, decent housing and equality. The Libertarian Socialists of SOLIDARITA support their struggle. SOLIDARITA believes Czech workers and youth

have to throw away their prejudices and stand firmly side by side with poor Roma in their struggle against discrimination and unemployment. We both need jobs, decent wages and housing, free and accessible education, healthcare, public transport, a healthy environment. We are both deprived of all of that by the market system. It gives privileges and power to the rich, discriminates against the poor and abuses minorities. More and more social layers end at the social bottom. The Roma were the first because they were a "black" minority, easy to sacrifice. Pensioners, youth and workers follow them. SOLIDARITA believes we have to start organizing ourselves at our workplaces, communities, unemployment queues and schools, to fight the institutions and individuals, the whole system that causes our social deprivation and discriminations against us.

UNITY MAKES US STRONG

Cornelius Castoriadis 1922-1997

Red & Black Notes was saddened to hear of the death of Cornelius Castoriadis on December 26 1997 of complication arising from a heart operation earlier in the year. An appreciation of Castoriadis' life and work by David Ames Curtis can be found at <http://aleph.lib.ohio-state.edu/~bcase/castoriadis>

COLLECTIVE ACTION NOTES

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Some Worthwhile Projects

The **British Anarchist Communist Federation**, a class-struggle anarchist formation, has begun organizing with interested comrades in North America. The US address is **ACF c/o Raze The Walls -- Section Georgia**, 2351 College Station Road, Box 523, Athens, GA 30605. They have issued two issues of a North American newsletter, with more to come. Also, currently available from them is a pamphlet, *Beyond Resistance: A Revolutionary Manifest for the Millennium*. It's worth a peek, either on their web site (<http://burn.ucsd.edu/~acf/index.html>), or in the flesh from **ACF (americas)**, c/o 84b Whitechapel High Street, London, E1 7QX, England, UK. Cost is US\$5, C\$7, postage paid. Other fine lit is also available. <acf@burn.ucsd.edu>

Collectivities have just issued their second pamphlet this year entitled "Reflections on Marx's Critique of Political Economy." This 50 page document is an attempt to "dissolve the aura that surrounds Marx's concepts and categories ... [and] free them from the deadweight of tradition that has rendered them incapable of performing a critical function today." Available for free (but be nice and send something) from **Majdoor Library**, Autopin Jhuggi, N.I.T., Faridabad 121001, India; or on-line at <http://www.geocities.com/CapitolHill/Lobby/2379>

Antagonism Press have just reprinted "The Eclipse and Re-Emergence of the Communist Movement" by **Gilles Dauve (A.K.A. Jean Barrot)** and **Francois Martin**. Originally published in English in 1973 by **Black & Red**, Detroit, the new edition "includes a new introduction, along with substantial

additions and edits to the original text." This pamphlet is an extremely worthwhile read and can be obtained from available from **BM Makhno**, London WC1N 3XX, Britain for 3 pounds sterling. <mrnobody@geocities.com>

Praxis 1871 Publications have published a small pamphlet on the Liverpool Dockers' struggle consisting of two essays by **Bruce Allen** and **T.J. Baker** and an introduction by **Neil Fettes**. Available from **Bruce Allen** <praxis1871@aol.com> or from **Red & Black Notes**.

Red & Black Notes

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Subscriptions \$5 for 4 issues. Sample issue \$1.

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