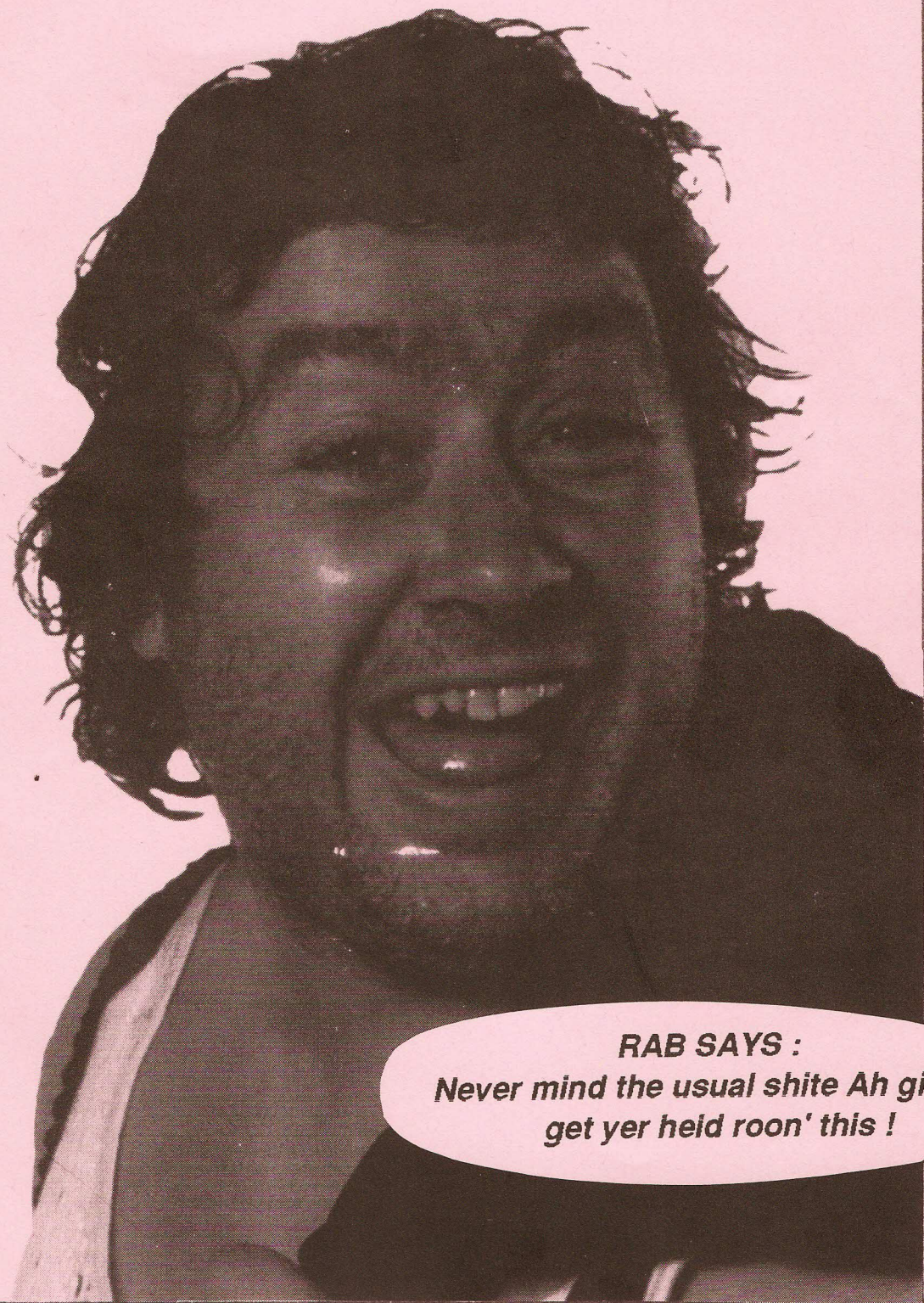


***How can the Working Class
transform the 'Economy' in
its own interests ?***



RAB SAYS :
***Never mind the usual shite Ah gie ye,
get yer held roon' this !***

The Content of Socialism / Communism - How can the Working Class transform the 'Economy' in its own interests ?

Preface

'There Is No Alternative !' - said the Iron Lady in 1981, and she kept on repeating it, like a litany, until we nearly all believed her.

But the 1980s were not a conspiracy, nor a plot against the working class by one woman [or even one political party]. We saw the same changes taking place INTERNATIONALLY - the old Social-Democratic consensus worked out after the Second World War of 'full employment', health care, education and so on is all being unravelled by newer more aggressive 'right wing' regimes. For our part we accept that it is impossible to go back to those days [despite what the 'modernised' Labour Party says].

But why did things have to change anyway ?

The usual answer is 'because of the crisis of capitalism', and it is true that since the 1970s the world economy has seemed far more insecure than in the years preceding. The post war 'boom' has definitely come to an end. But our view is that it was the working class itself which was the active factor in the situation. We precipitated the crisis in the 1970s when we collectively refused to accept the conditions of continued exploitation. We used 'full employment' to constantly change jobs, in some factories labour turnover was 20% PER MONTH, shortage of labour, lack of 'skilled labour', poor

motivation, absenteeism and so on was a constant preoccupation for personnel departments. Alienation, sabotage, poor quality control and so on was widespread - and all this is without talking about the more 'obvious' signs of class conflict such as strikes and so on. In Italy, FIAT boss Agnelli talked of the 'ungovernable factory'.

Every change in capitalism and therefore our lives - the end of the 'mass worker', 'flexibility', short term contracts, increasing insecurity in all aspects of our lives, the increasing state control of our lives - all these things are only understandable as a RESPONSE by the system to our refusal to 'play the game' as it was understood ie. 'A Fair Day's Work for a Fair Day's Pay'.

So she was right, there was no alternative for them, except to attack us in order to continue the process of value production and extraction. And the attack is continuing

All the parties of Left and Right have no alternative - all of them accept the capitalist view of the world, which is why politics today is also in such a crisis. If the political parties are all more or less saying the same thing - why should we turn out to vote for them or take any part in the 'political process' ? It is when we see the widespread alienation from and indifference to 'politics' today, that we judge it timely to produce this essay.

For we have got an alternative - what follows is not the product of 'our heads alone' [of course if the ideas are not clear or badly expressed or contradictory, then that is our fault and

we fully expect to be criticised for it.] This essay is a reflection of a real practical struggle of millions of people, of a real movement we outlined above and a product of a study of our own history.

We also claim it to be 'scientific' - what we say can be 'proved' by reference to actual events. Which is perhaps more than can be said for those paid spokesmen and women for our rulers who have the temerity to call themselves 'economists'. For too long we have tamely accepted the so-called scientific pretensions of these people, with their one-sided view of the world. We need to develop our own critique and understand from our own point of view.

Everyone today who is 'oppositional' - from 'new age' travellers to anti-roads protesters, to those taking part in the miners strike and the anti-poll tax campaign or who opposes the new changes in 'Public Order' legislation, is expressing in a fragmentary way our need to create a picture of the world, different from and in opposition to the one we get fed every day. Since 'economics' is no more than the ideology of our rulers, we need to construct an 'economics' of our own.

What follows is our attempt



SECTION 1 Should We Be Writing A Blueprint ?

We'll actually we are not.

What we are trying to do is work out the general principles of how a new form of society might be organised. These principles must be simple enough for all to understand, elastic enough to preserve all the diversity of the human spirit and most important given the history of the past 80 years, not give rise to any exploiting elite.

We have borrowed ideas and conceptions elaborated by Marx and Engels. But they too would not claim to have 'invented' them. The working class of their day had already 'discovered' itself. Notions such as class, alienation, surplus value and exploitation were an everyday reality for people of their time. In addition they never claimed any originality for their view of a future society; what they did claim was to put the likelihood of a new and different society on a sounder, more scientific footing. Socialism or Communism was no longer the dream or fantasy of assorted Utopians constructing ideal societies out of their heads, but was finally identified with an existing class within society. A class moreover that was everywhere in struggle, and that was trying to develop some conception of itself and what this struggle represented. Marx and Engels merely saw themselves as part of an existing social movement. All they sought to do was to give it cohesion and direction - and by uncovering the laws as they saw it, of capitalist development, to help such a movement on its way to its ultimate objective. Most of their work was a

'critique' of existing society - that is capitalism. They knew that a new society would have to wait on the continued development of the working class and its own practical struggle. They attempted to be part of its own movement, part of its process of self education and self discovery, and because the movement of the working class is, as we hope to show, a dynamic process. That is why they revised some of their earlier conclusions as a direct result of our own history - we are thinking here of the lessons of the Paris Commune of 1871.

BY CONTRAST today nearly 80 years after the first international revolutionary wave, we have a working class that is confused, disorientated, hesitant, still burdened by the legacy of the failure of its first revolutionary attempt. As yet oppositional voices within society are feeble and isolated, not even sure why they are themselves oppositional and above all not sure of the way forward - so all the more reason to look back at our own history, as we have done, to look for pointers to the way forward.

It is when we attempt to do this that we encounter criticism. We are told we should not be writing blueprints - that it will be all right 'come the revolution', as though creating a totally new kind of economy was a completely automatic, unconscious process. In our view the 'Left' from the Labour Party to latter day Bolsheviks will not engage in an exploration of future communist society because their view of the future looks uncannily like the society we have already got. When these people study the Russian Revolution for instance, it is not to learn about its failures, but to know of its 'successes' - in order that they can repeat them.

SECTION 2 'Old' Movement is Part of the system

WE NEED TO leave the conceptions of the 'old movement' [and the 'Left'] and of the Second International way behind. We know that nationalisation and state control of the economy do nothing to alter our position within society - instead it actually reinforces it. Capitalism has used the programme of the old movement to restabilise itself and insulate itself from the challenge of the working class. This is what Keynes meant when he said in the 1930s, 'we are all socialists now'.

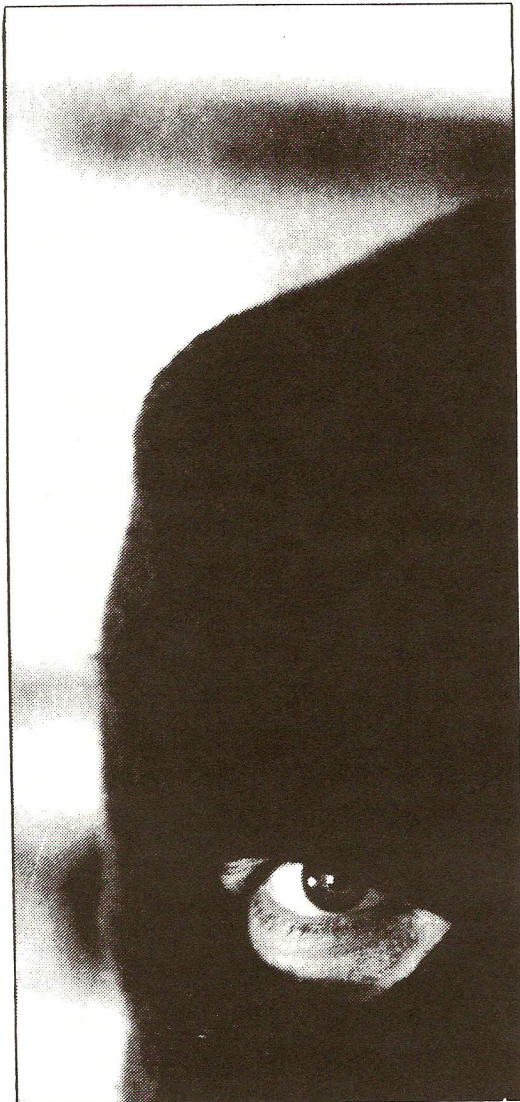
The purpose of this essay is not however to show how the 'old' movement of the Social Democratic parties and trade unions is now part of the status quo. This should be obvious to any one. If we are to be truly oppositional we have to be able to show what our alternative is and how it might be achieved.

In the past because of this old movement' communists and socialists have found themselves having to argue for a transition period lasting several generations, into a far off distant future. As a consequence of the views above, socialism became a programme of a political minority to which the mass of the population ceded power. The party or other political minority would then be obliged to 'educate' the masses into socialism or communism.

IN REPUDIATING this view, this hangover from the Second International, as we do, we merely point to the reality of capitalism as we experience it today. We base our ideas

and understanding on the experience of what it is to be working class today. In our view alienation, lack of power over ones own life and work, the reality of wage labour, is what gives rise to communism - not the programme of a political group irrespective of its social origins, and most definitely not the 'school of hunger and desperation' brought about by economic crisis, [though that is real enough].

In addition we argue that capitalism is sufficiently developed, indeed in many senses over developed, such as to make a transition to communism a relatively SHORT process.



The Blind Alley of Reformism

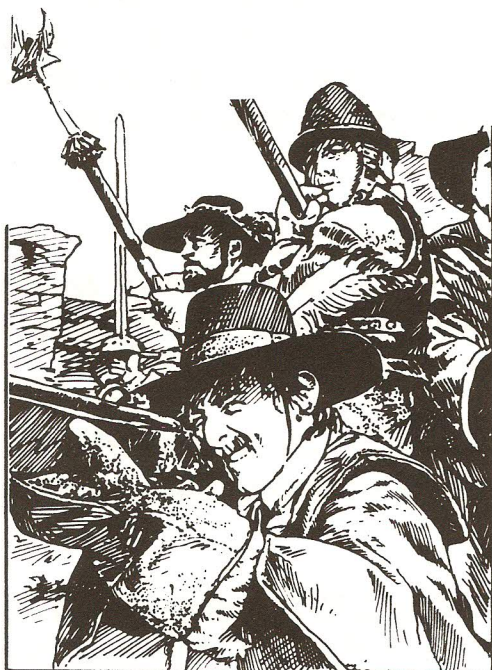
ONCE, at an earlier period of capitalism, the Labour Party in Britain, like Social Democratic parties everywhere, gave a voice to 'oppositional' forces - it said 'vote for us', build and support this party and we will give you 'full employment', 'cradle to grave security', a welfare state, health service, education, 'equal opportunity for all' and so on. The new communist parties of the period never challenged these notions. The majority of the population accepted them at face value, and indeed for many of the 'Left' this programme still constitutes the reality of 'opposition' politics today.

Our argument however is different just as today's reality is different - the material basis for such a programme is gone forever, 'full employment', a welfare state, Keynesian 'demand management' that made this illusion possible have been swept away by the harsher economic climate of the 1980s. Instead we are told to accept the reality and 'logic' of the market. The old ways of state planning and nationalisation will no longer work their medicine. The mass of the population must be made to feel the rigours of economic 'laws' - no wonder there is discontent.

So, as part of an effort to create a genuine opposition, we have written this essay. It is an attempt explain 'economics' from the workers point of view. It is not an attempt to turn workers into economists - in fact just the opposite - we want to show how workers - and only the workers - can and indeed must abolish 'economics' altogether.

This 'old movement' - the Labour Party, trade unions, the Left of all shades and so on have always shared the same basic underlying assumptions, that is - once a 'workers' or a 'peoples' government 'came to power' and took control of industry, finance etc. then we would have 'socialism'. For good measure they added a bit about 'democracy', 'workers control' or whatever. Some like the Fabians and Christian socialists actually argued that capitalism was growing into a form of socialism with the growth of socialised property forms like joint stock companies, 'friendly' societies' and so on. So they hoped to avoid any nasty scenes of violence or other popular outbursts. Today the buzz word is 'community' and 'community values'.

The important point is that such notions have NO REAL MEANING in the modern world, they serve merely as a mask to hide the reality of class society and to prevent an alternative from developing.



SECTION 3 The Historical Experience

THE FIRST WORLD WAR had in reality already shattered forever these cosy notions - the largest pre war movement, the SPD in Germany, put itself at the head of a popular movement against the war and moved straight in to take over the Kaiser's State and immediately set about disciplining [by shooting them] the working class into a new state capitalist/socialist order. It should be noted that state intervention was an international tendency in all 'advanced' economies that found its theoretical justification in the work of John Maynard Keynes, who quite openly admitted that from the point of view of the existing order, it 'would be better to rob the working classes' of surplus value by means of slow inflation and so avoid a general social crisis such as they had just endured, than require the workers to submit to the laws of the 'free market' which might provoke a more generalised response. The critique of the 'Right' [von Mises, Popper, Hayek etc.] that this 'Prussian Socialism' as they called it, 'involved curtailing individual liberty and the growth of an all embracing state power that intervened 'too much' in economic and social life and 'distorted' the market, was dismissed as an old fashioned orthodoxy. The Right went into an eclipse from which it only re emerged in the 1970s when the fragility of the Keynesian solution became apparent.

Effects on the 'Old Movement'

HOWEVER FOR OUR purposes we must consider what the effects of these

ideas were in the 'workers movement' of the time. And now it is possible to see that the break in the old movement provoked by the Russian Revolution between Social Democracy and the 'Left' was not as great nor as deep as might be supposed.

As far as the Russian Revolution is concerned, a study of all the tendencies inside the working class [and that includes the Bolsheviks] will show that at no time were the workers ever able to rise above and challenge the well established notions of Social Democracy. Lenin himself boasted that they had the beginnings of STATE CAPITALISM in Russia and that every effort should be [and was] made to copy and develop and improve on all the latest 'scientific' management developments in capitalism and especially developments in the German economy [Taylorism and so on]. Now we can criticise Lenin and the Bolsheviks, but where was the alternative ?

The point is that the existing SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC idea of socialism, of state control of the economy 'in the interests of the working class / majority of the population' conformed to what appeared to be being done - for the majority of the working class, THIS WAS SOCIALISM. This has defined socialism and politics, Left and Right, ever since.

Socialism was seen as a form of better management of the existing economy not its transformation nor abolition. To their credit, the Anarchists had the merit of advancing the slogan 'ABOLISH THE WAGES SYSTEM' -

but a slogan was all it was, and in the chaos of disruption, forced requisitioning, barter and wholesale theft that was 'War Communism' in Civil War Russia, does anybody seriously claim that a new and higher form of economy was being created ?

WORSE THAN THIS however, is the complete silence on this issue since the revolutionary wave of 1917 - 23 subsided. Nobody, communist nor anarchist, has even been seriously interested in the question.

Capitalism re-stabilised itself on the back of a workers movement [social democracy, trade unions] which the newly bolshevised communist parties NEVER broke from. So far as we are aware, only in Germany and Italy did movements manage to exist independent of the Third International, and who had clearly broken at all levels with Social Democracy. And only in the 1930s did what remained of an isolated and demoralised German Left begin to try and construct a theoretical answer to the question that the Russian and German workers did not know how to answer in 1917 - 23. [A translation of a summary of their views exists which we hope to publish shortly]

Having dumped all the old assumptions we can now go back to our original question at the start of this essay.

And that is - How do workers begin to socialise the economy ?

COMMUNISM, SOCIALISM OR WHATEVER we call the new form of

society cannot be defined negatively. That is, it is not a form of society with all the negative features of capitalism - money, wage labour, sexual division of labour, hierarchical relations, commodity production, pollution, etc. etc. taken away.

Instead communist minorities must be able to show how such a society might work. We must be able to lay bare and elaborate its 'economic' laws of motion. We must be able to show its theoretical principles and in the absence of a practical movement that is in the process of working out concrete answers to this question, then at the very least we must raise the question and keep it at the forefront of the workers own agenda.

We saw that the workers movement of the early period was not able to successfully bring a socialisation of the existing economy even though the existing socialist movement did successfully manage to 'nationalise' areas of it. Now society is never static and so the consequence of this failure [of which the communist movement of the time was a part] was that capitalism continued, but only by responding to this failed challenge of the working class and incorporating the 'old' movement into its management. The workers movement is ALWAYS a factor in the capitalist response and part of our ongoing discussion should be the part played by that old workers movement in the management of the system today and conversely, what the form and content of a new workers movement is likely to be, given what we all accept has been the DEFEAT of a previous economic and sectional movement, that of the 'mass worker',

which we took part in, in the 1970s and 1980s, and the continuing
CAPITALIST REORGANISATION OF THE LABOUR PROCESS

SECTION 4 Abandon the Old Conceptions

If we want, however, to play a part in shaping and moulding this new movement then it is vital that we go beyond the conceptions and philosophy of this earlier period. It is moreover essential to get beyond the simple minded opposition of 'Leninism' versus 'libertarianism'. We have enough practical experience now to say that socialism / communism is not merely the MANAGEMENT of EXISTING society by the workers - if it is only this, THEN IN REALITY NOTHING HAS CHANGED.

The working class must not only seize the existing world; they must also terminate forever the historical cycle of capital and END THE PROCESS OF VALUE PRODUCTION AND EXCHANGE. Both Leninism and libertarianism insist on opposing forms of organisation of society - party versus councils, forms of management of society, but both equally neglect the content. For them the working class continues to be just that - a class separated from the productive process and the products of its labour. This content of a communist society is what this essay is all about.

Instead the workers movement of the post First World War period had a reformist practice, even if dressed up in revolutionary phrases. This was the content of the mass struggle in practice

- a practice which we have already failed to adequately challenge capitalism.

The Russian Revolution died because it had to develop capitalism in Russia - irrespective of the intentions of its leaders - management of the existing productive apparatus, and the accumulation of further capital were its prime tasks. Critics, appalled by this development, have developed other conclusions - that workers, as opposed to Party management, was necessary. Since that time a more or less coherent outlook has been created with different forms of management at the core - workers councils versus party state, [note that all descendants of the Bolsheviks - Stalinists, Trotskyists of all hues, are united by this Party state conception].

BOTH THESE VIEWS ARE OF NO USE TODAY - IF NOT ACTUALLY REACTIONARY. THEY MUST BE ABANDONED.

Capitalism as a System of Production and Reproduction of Value

Capitalism is not a system of management. It is not a change of bosses that we need - Labour for Tory, Left wing for Right wing, communist for capitalist. It is not important who manages capital : indeed we have plenty of experience of workers managing capital, which has not had the effect of ending exploitation or any of the other evils of the capitalist system. Capitalism is a system of given production [and distribution] relations of which management is merely a part. A revolutionary analysis

therefore must aim at ending these relations and moreover not as some far off ultimate goal but as immediate, practical politics.

We first have to understand how this system works, and this is not especially difficult. Once we get behind the fetishised forms as they appear and are described by the ideological mouthpieces of our rulers - the economists. As workers we know that we 'exchange' our ability to work for wages. With these wages we are able to buy the products of other workers labour in order to live and reproduce other workers. Explained this way, it becomes obvious that capitalists, bosses, those who merely own and control the assets that we have created, are 'surplus to requirements'. In practice we already run and maintain the productive apparatus that makes any kind of social life possible. Capitalists merely appropriate or rob us of the value of what we produce, since we are obliged to spend our wages on purchasing the product of other workers.

The problem therefore divides into two. Firstly what institutions do we as workers need to create to express our ability to meet our needs ? And secondly what sort of relationship should these institutions have to one another, that is what are the 'economics' of the new society ?

Create New Social Relations

TO ANSWER THE second question first, we must first of all understand how these relations are expressed at the moment in capitalist society, and this is in the peculiar form of the

exchange on a market of 'values'. Now crudely [very crudely] the value [or price] of commodities is mostly directly related to the labour time used to produce them. Labour time therefore determines the entire social organisation of production and distribution. Capitalism as a social system has taken this principle which is valid for all societies throughout history, to an extreme level by creating a class of people who only have their [life] time to sell and who are entirely dependent on this hidden relationship which is expressed in the form of wages. We now live in a society where all labour is now COMPLETELY SOCIALISED in spite of understandable attempts by some groups in society to escape or evade the consequences of this fact.

The upside of this relationship is that it has [at enormous social cost] created an immense productive capacity in the economy. So much so in fact that it is now perfectly possible to modify / destroy that wage labour relationship altogether. [This is what we mean when we say communism is objectively possible now even if it is not felt as a necessity yet by the mass of the population.]

The only way time can become 'free' is by making the products of that time free as well. The products of our work can all be compared with one another in terms of the time taken or spent producing them. So now we can, if we choose, suppress prices, markets and so on and make distribution of all products 'free' in exchange for the 'time' of the producers **ONLY THE 'FREE AND EQUAL' PRODUCERS THEMSELVES CAN ORGANISE**

THIS. This can become the organising principle of our new society. Time for the citizen of a new society need no longer be divided as it is now into 'free time' where he / she is free to do as he / she likes [always provided that they have the wherewithal] and compulsory time at the service of a boss or some impersonal capitalist institution [state or private].

A Society Based on Labour Time

ALL TIME CAN become 'free time' which is now both idle time and time for any higher [including socially productive] activity. In other words it is now possible for the working class to ABOLISH ITSELF as a class and at the same time production itself can be freed from the fetters that capitalist society has put upon it. Already we are way beyond 'forms' of management [which in any case is as we have already said increasingly superfluous.]

We must now turn to elaborating what necessary 'laws of motion' such a new society might have. [We will come back to our first question about what institutional forms the workers need to create later.] We must show what is still determined by necessity and is therefore a permanent feature of what we here have called communist society, and what is merely historically determined, and can therefore be done away with.

We have already theoretically proved the possibility of the working class creating a new form of society - a society in which 'free time' can become the right of all and not simply that of privileged minority. And we have set

ourselves the longer term task of demonstrating the 'economic' dynamics of such a society. Before however we can do that we have to be able to show practically how we can achieve the transition from one society to the other. Very largely and initially at least this is a political problem which is very amenable to this kind of analysis.

Creation of New Forms - New Political Tasks

IT IS A MATTER OF history that the working class has already created the form of its rule over society in this transition period. We refer of course to workers councils or soviets [the Russian word for council]. These are institutions or organs of workers collective power based on units of production and distribution, using binding and mandated delegates. They have combined all aspects of power - legislative, executive and judicial - in the one body and conduct their affairs using binding and mandated delegates.

Given the many changes within the working class since these institutions first saw the light of day, we cannot yet say how these organs might be modified or altered in conformity with these changes. [To some extent we touched on this in our discussion of 'post-Fordism' and the rise of 'social' movements, and it will be necessary for us to return to this aspect at some stage.]

Now we know that the independent existence of such institutions was short, and it is not our purpose here to go into the reasons for this. The main purpose of such institutions is to act as

a mechanism whereby the will of the working class can be generalised, centralised and unified into an assault on the capitalist system as a whole. This is why we say it is initially a political problem - a question decided first and foremost by a clash of forces within society and crucially for the working class a test of its consciousness, its will to create a communist society.

Role of Communist or Political Minorities

IN THIS REGARD we cannot let the role of Communist minorities, parties or other kind of organisation pass without mention. Political minorities of workers or other social groups will always arise as people try to confront and understand the society around them. In this sense arguments for or against 'the party' are nonsensical - prior to the experience of Leninism, nobody would have questioned the notion of people coming together to express a common point of view. In the situation we describe above, it is height of criminal irresponsibility not to have some scheme, design or strategy to put before the workers and their mass organisations. In writing this we are putting down a marker for the future, we are part of the process whereby the working class discovers in its own practice a way forward for itself.

The Process of Socialisation

The immediate task of whatever administration the workers set up in an area where they manage to defeat state power include the following :-

Abolition within these areas of wage

labour, all forms of trading, hiring and firing, all forms of money including the repudiation/cancellation of all debts public and private, the market economy, commodity production etc., etc. -

Only the 'soviet' power - that is the masses organising themselves - can guarantee these as features of communist society. It is the practical effect of these decisions which roots the soviet power firmly in the minds of the mass of the population, that is gives these measures MATERIAL FORCE.

As far as is possible all production should simply be for use and distribution should be based on the needs of the population as expressed in the institutions that the working class has created - this is what the slogan 'all power to the workers councils' means.

It is a new form of state power based on a new form of state. [For the moment we cannot do without a state - but it should always be remembered, a state is a necessary part of any society that is still divided into classes. We are as yet, talking of a society where although perhaps a majority are represented in these new institutions, a significant minority - former capitalists, bureaucrats, and the like still exist. Integration of these people into society cannot be a forced affair, it rests purely on the success and superiority of the new relations of production and on the new society which the councils are establishing]

Note straightaway, that this is already the lower stage of socialism /

communism [the two are the same].

Although some transitional forms may survive, such as some form of rationing of goods which the communist economy may temporarily not be able to supply in full, production and distribution is emphatically for need - profit, money and so on are consciously suppressed.

What most clearly separates this transitional stage from later stages, is simply the need to see this lower stage as part of a process in which more and more features of communism are introduced, as the revolution is extended to cover more geographical areas of the globe, and as production and distribution for use can be extended to all areas of social life.



SECTION 5 The Dictatorship of the Proletariat

The other important aspect of this transitional stage, other than the immediate creation of the basis of a communist 'economy', is the recognition of this necessity for the working class to have a form of state. This has been referred to as the 'dictatorship of the proletariat' - and this is as good a description as any.

Now our idea of this dictatorship can be found in the central role we ascribe to the councils we described above. In our discussions on the role of the trade unions and other institutions that the workers have created in their struggle with capital, we have neglected to look at the kind of organisation which the working class needs and is obliged to create in this struggle. Time and again we have seen how workers in struggle have been forced to create institutions which combine both a mass accountability and have a capacity for centralised and unified action. Here we have the institutions of a new society in embryo. This is why the working class is the revolutionary class. All functions executive, legislative and judicial are combined in the one body.

In this sense we have gone beyond and surpassed 'bourgeois' forms of 'democracy' where an atomised mass surrenders its power to 'representatives' who because they are subject to party machines and other influences of a 'commodity form' of economy, are therefore removed from the control of this atomised mass of constituents.

Nobody except professional politicians

and manipulators takes this form of democracy seriously.

Today; although the mass of the population is cynical of such ideas as 'democracy'; mostly because of the weight of the counter revolutionary history of the Russian Revolution, a revolution that so obviously 'failed', they find it difficult to go beyond this cynicism and develop a new conception along the lines we suggest. Much of this confusion was illustrated when that symbol of the old world, the Berlin Wall came down in 1989. Only in the middle of class struggle when workers emerge as a collective, independent force is it possible for such conceptions to take root and become a material force in their own right.

A New Society

If we insist as we do on all power being transferred to these institutions, then whilst it is true we still have a state power, an authority which may upset those of an Anarchist persuasion - it is nevertheless the power of the immense majority. Those who are excluded can at any time take their place in such institutions provided they accept the reality of soviet or council power and the new relations being established. It is a new form of power based on new property relations and it is a state in transition to a non state. In so far as the councils succeed in establishing their rule over a significant part of the world economy, and in so far as the threat of capitalist restoration recedes, then so does the power of the state 'wither away' - then we can move on to the 'mere administration of things'.

SECTION 6 'Economics' of Communist Society

Our next task must be to show how this new economy the soviets / councils are creating might work and therefore how we may move from the lower to the higher stages of communism.

This is the final section of this dialogue where we set out to explore the dynamics of a communist society or at least a society in transition to communism.

We have seen that the creation of a new society is a largely a political act. Political because it relies heavily on the mass consciousness of the working class and on their creation of institutions appropriate to their rule over society. We also saw that on no account should such institutions wait until such time as they have control over an entire economy. [Nor should they wait until there is a 'majority' of votes for such a course of action - the working class has no need for such 'democratic' scruples]. Instead we argued that these institutions should begin immediately to SUPPRESS capitalist categories such as money, wage labour, all debts, rent, interest, etc. and begin production for need, with distribution based also on need as expressed through these institutions.

Whilst initially at least this can be done on the basis of the existing productive apparatus and existing technology, which is why we say communism is objectively possible now, soon the workers administration will be obliged to make conscious choices, to begin planning a new society. At this point what present day economists call

'opportunity costs' will arise.

How do 'costs' manifest themselves in a society without money, a market and so on ?

We'll try to answer that in a moment.

Meanwhile back to the 'political' movement.

One of the first decisions a workers administration must take in the area of the 'economy' which it controls is to conduct some kind of census. This is not just to find out what the population needs [and to ratify those 'spontaneous' measures of socialisation which have already occurred such as land and housing seizures], but also to find out what resources it has at its disposal and what needs it cannot satisfy from its 'own' resources. From this exercise can be calculated [in hours of socially necessary labour] what is needed to maintain the population at its existing level of consumption [or better]. The other main decision for the workers movement is on the length of the average working day/week. Here we would argue that it be CUT BY AT LEAST 50% to take effect immediately. In addition to workers released from 'socially unproductive' tasks, for instance much of local authority administration, or most 'shop work', plus the reabsorbtion of the unemployed, our main argument for this step is to increase the amount of 'free time' at the workers disposal which will allow them to take part in the extension of the revolution, especially in those 'social' areas as yet untouched by the new economy - such as education, health, 'domestic' life,

consumption, leisure and so on. With the fundamental change assured in production relations we can only begin to speculate what changes might come about in these areas. However these are for the new citizens to work out for themselves. [In addition although society as a whole may need to calculate its requirements in hours of socially necessary labour, we do not advocate workers being 'paid' in vouchers or labour time certificates. All consumption is 'free'.]

At a stroke therefore we can accomplish two things : -

1] Reintegration of previously marginalised or 'unproductive' layers of the population into productive activity and the political process, via 'work' based institutions.

2] Participation, because they are freed from 'productive activity', of the mass of the population in the decision making process in these institutions which enables them to extend the revolution.

Extend the Revolution or Die

THESE TWO POINTS are vital, for they guarantee the mass basis of the new society, and thereby lessen the likelihood of success for attempted counter revolution.

Those outside of this process - bosses, bureaucrats and so on - have no social role, no point round which they can focus. They may have political representation or 'rights' only in so far as they accept the new social reality. For the mass of the population, their

continued participation in the revolution and its extension, their management of the new economy, is the only guarantee that the old world will not return.

Now we can return to the question of the 'laws of motion' of a communist 'economy'. The actual running of the economy is not the task of technical specialists - unlike in Russia in 1917 we have no need for former capitalists and technical experts to 'run' the productive apparatus for us. This is something the working class has actually been doing since it came into existence, Our rulers have trained us, educated us and socialised into running their system, it is the capitalists and their managers who are surplus to requirements, as even now they are finding out.

Decisions on 'investments' or finding out how much a certain production process 'costs' are now transparent and capable of being calculated and decided on by anyone.

All costs are expressed in socially necessary labour hours - the total requirements for society both in terms of consumption and investment can be calculated and alternatives decided on by simple voting in the councils. 'Enterprises' can be expanded or shut down in response to needs as directly expressed.

As these needs are expressed in the councils, the means to meet them, the technological choices that are made can be made to reflect the new society. We have seen in our discussions that technology and its application to the productive process and social life is not neutral, but determined by the class

struggle and the capitalist need to control the working class. Only with the mass of the population finally in charge can real choices be made about technology. [Ecologists and other 'green' politicians take note].

Almost certainly therefore after this 'breathing space' to take stock, we will find not 'socialist construction' or any other drivel of this type, but more probably a SHUTTING DOWN OF WHOLE AREAS of the old economy which are not socially productive in any sense.

SECTION 7 Conclusions

So now let us sum up

It should be clear that there is no 'economics' of a communist society - although we have talked of a communist 'economy', this is simply to distinguish it from a capitalist one. There are no 'objective' laws of economics to which the future citizens of a communist society must submit. 'Economic' decisions are not taken 'behind the backs' of the producers themselves. This is what we mean by decisions becoming 'transparent' - nothing is decided in advance. There is no role for 'economic' specialists of any sort. We can finally talk of the abolition of the 'dismal science'.

But . . . there's always a but. Communist society just like any other society in history cannot abolish necessity - that is that minimum level of productive activity necessary to reproduce society. To that extent some form of 'work' is still a requirement for the majority of the population. In so far as capital itself has abolished boring

and repetitive production tasks with the introduction of machinery [only to reintroduce this form of 'work' in the so called 'service' sector] 'work' can now become meaningful and purposeful activity, an intrinsic part of life rather than an obligation upon it.

Also, communist society cannot do without calculation - that is the four laws of arithmetic. There will always be the need for society to calculate beforehand how much labour time, means of production, means of subsistence it can invest in a project which may not yield any of these for some time, nor produce any useful effect on other areas of the economy.

In capitalist society this is achieved, if it is achieved at all, blindly, with much waste, with all the participants subject to the laws of the market. [For a modern example look at the financing of the Channel Tunnel]

In communist society by contrast such projects are conscious decisions of society, to which only natural disasters can have an adverse effect. Communist society can do this because the producers themselves decide how much of their and society's labour time they are putting in - and this decision can become the basis for thousands of others throughout society.

So that's it then ?

Well actually no.

We are very conscious that in our attempt to cover 'all the bases', it may seem that we have missed or not adequately dealt with an issue or

maybe made a loose formulation here or there. So be it. For instance we have hardly touched on the more 'social' aspects of new society, but that was not the task we set ourselves. It is more important that the general thrust of our argument is taken up, than the details be correct in every particular. Real movements have ways of sorting out these theoretical deficiencies one way or the other.

In any case we could probably have written much more, but the bones of an answer to the question we posed at the beginning should now be in place.

We asked the question which the Russian and German workers couldn't answer in 1917 - 23 and which has not had a chance to be realistically posed by a mass movement since.

- How do the working class socialise the economy ?

Only when a mass movement begins to seek practical answers to this question will any real change be achieved. It should be obvious from the foregoing that no ready made plan exists in some politicians pocket or in the programme of any political party, and that no Government however 'radical' can even begin to substitute itself for the mass activity of the working class..

'The Emancipation of the Working Class is the Task of the Working Class itself.'

If you find yourself agreeing / disagreeing with the foregoing, don't keep it to yourself. **GET IN TOUCH.** Above all don't think you are the only one thinking along the lines we have indicated. The more we can encourage debate on these issues, the quicker the ideas can be turned into reality.

DG October 1994



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