

SOLIDARITY PAMPHLET/51

10p

Henri Simon

THE  
NEW  
MOVEMENT



HENRI SIMON

## THE NEW MOVEMENT

1. The struggle against capitalist domination, which, in its various modern forms occurs in every country in the world, exhibits new tendencies, which are in complete contrast with what occurred before the beginning of the 20th century.
2. The common and essential feature of these tendencies, is the way in which those who struggle manage the totality of their affairs by themselves in all circumstances of their lives, in the field of action as well as thought.
3. The signs of what could be a radical transformation of social relationships are to be seen in the upheavals of capitalism itself in its crises and its attempts to adapt itself. These signs can erupt in isolated explosions rapidly destroyed by the dominant interests or they can be traced through their slow progress and more or less stemmed by reforms.
4. The effects of what has been stated above can be found more or less in all areas of human activity, in all countries, at the level of individuals as well as at the level of all the organisations in which they are involved. The struggle at the very place of the exploitation of man by capital - the industrial or commercial enterprise - remains essential; but the expression of the new tendency can be found in all areas of life and takes similar forms. Social conflicts are spreading to all sectors of social life showing that autonomy is not to be limited but will conquer in all things.
5. The abolition of alienated work and by implication, the abolition of all domination of man over man, will transform the entire range of social relationships. If this is true, it is just as true that the struggle in all areas of life transforms the whole of social relationships at the very moment that the struggle itself is taking place.
6. These tendencies towards autonomy and the original forms, be they open or diffuse, that they take, come up against all the structures of the capitalist world: the State, political parties, trade-unions, traditional left-wing groups, and against the entire system of ideas and values of exploitative society. The net result is a permanent conflict as much for the individual as for the social group to which he belongs. From these conflicts we can draw the conclusion that the various expressions of the New Movement are in opposition to all forms of elitism and vanguardism. They reflect a tendency to destroy all hierarchies and

establish new forms of relationships between individuals and organisations of struggle, and between these organisations themselves.

7. The new struggles and tendencies are linked to certain struggles and tendencies in the past. For example, we have seen the appearance of workers' councils or analogous institutions in all periods in which social conflicts have tended to threaten the very foundations of the system. Knowledge, studies and reflection on these events are a feature of our knowledge of the present. But we must beware of thinking that the collection of information about former struggles and the analysis of and theorising from this information will provide blueprints for future activity. What arises out of a struggle is adapted to the necessity of that struggle and for that reason cannot serve as the objective for other struggles or the criterion for judging what will come out of other struggles.

8. The elements of a new world tend to reveal themselves continually from the very functioning of the capitalist system. These elements are the product of the system's functioning and necessary to its functioning at the same time; for example the modern capitalist company needs individual and collective initiative at grass roots level to function. But the forms in which the New Movement is revealed can only be transitory, ephemeral and stamped by the society in which they have developed. Examples of such forms are the blocking of vast unities of production by spontaneous movements in one industrial sector, non-passive strikes, resistance to work itself, the women's movement, local community action, etc. It is important to emphasise the existence of these elements and to analyse their development and forms, but it is futile to glorify every example of autonomous activity as the imminent advent of the revolution. It is just as futile to criticize such examples systematically under the pretext that their isolation leads them in the end to contribute to reinforcing the system. The traditional left who either see in every strike the revolution or denounce every strike as reformist has been replaced by more subtle groups who propose tactical forms of struggle supposedly more radical.

9. Whether they have been glorified or denigrated, autonomous actions have only rarely been considered as the first symptoms of a New Movement whose organisation can only appear and develop out of struggle itself. In practice the attempts to analyse these autonomous actions try to explain their failure either by their lack of organisation, or by the non-existence of a revolutionary party, or by a lack of consciousness, ideological backwardness, etc. In fact all the above criticisms refer to old schemas of the traditional left who judge what happens according to criteria defined by a revolutionary elite. This elite supposes that when the time comes it will have to play a central role in the revolution using various means. In the workers' revolution, this elite would have to announce crises and map out the road to liberation, just as the bourgeoisie did in its own time. The revolution is thus conceived as a unique event in which the revolutionary finds himself in possession of a magical power enabling him to effect a total and brutal transformation

of all social relationships; from the moment a sufficiently violent force would be able to break an isolated link in the chain of world capitalist domination all would, according to this elite, topple over into a communist society.

10. The New Movement opposes itself to what we call the Old Movement. This Old Movement refers to the plans and situations of the historic period, beginning around the opening of the nineteenth century and continuing until the outbreak of the 1914 war. Before the First World War we could consider that the values and ideas of this period had some validity. What could have seemed to be revolutionary at that moment, in the social democratic and bolshevik parties or in union organisations, was only a revolution in the form of capitalism (i.e. planned bureaucratic capitalism instead of liberal capitalism). This left the domination of capitalism and the exploitation of work completely intact.

11. Since the First World War, the Old Movement has increasingly become inadequate to the situation resulting from the renewal of capitalism, which emerged. From its first signs, the New Movement came up against not only the old forms of capitalist domination but also against the various forms of the Old Movement, even if at the same time these forms could still contain revolutionary illusions; for instance the conflict between the Bolsheviks and the factory committees in 1917, in Russia, and their epilogue at Kronstadt can be seen as a clash between the Old and the New Movement. The New Movement not only questions the existence of what we can encompass in the term vanguard (parties, groups etc) but also the very conception of the revolution. To the extent that the Old Movement is the present or potential holder of capitalist power, it has to engage in a struggle to the death with all manifestations of the New Movement, whether by violent destruction or total absorption.

12. One essential characteristic of the New Movement is at the present time the attitude of those who struggle and who no longer just demand things from people, groups and institutions which are outside them e.g. from their parents in the family, from their husband in marriage, from the teacher in school or university, from the boss in the factory, from the union in conflicts, from parties and groups in the organisation of actions or the provision of theories, etc. The form of struggle tends very often to be the very doing or taking of the thing demanded. The new tendency is towards people doing what they want by themselves and for themselves, towards taking and doing instead of asking and waiting.

13. The most visible demonstration of this tendency occurs in the new forms of class struggle, and the widening of class conflicts to clashes between the dominators and dominated in all structures of society. These confrontations illustrate the split between all those who claim to act for the workers whatever their motivation and the actions of the exploited themselves. The attempts at rejecting trade unions, the underground organisation of conflicts, the attempts to make horizontal links between those in struggle, the new attitudes of students, women, homosexuals and so on, the attitude of workers towards work, all these reflect the desire of those concerned to manage their struggle for themselves and by themselves.

14. One of the constant features of the Old Movement was that its practitioners

considered themselves as the workers' movement, and had made of the history of their organisations the history of the labour movement. But the New Movement develops its own history which is nothing more than the activity of the workers themselves, masked until now by those who wrote and made 'History' out of their own 'Revolutionary' activity.

15. The Old Movement will only acknowledge the different manifestations of the New Movement in order to subject them to its own political objectives. In general it condemns such manifestations without pardon under different labels such as "reformist", "lacking in consciousness", "hippy", etc. But the New Movement is so strong that it forces those who adhere to the Old Movement to perform a series of acrobatics in order to maintain themselves, as well as possible, in their self-appointed role or in the role which is assigned to them. For this reason changes or conflicts within parties or unions, and the present splits in different parties and groups, can often be explained by attempts to adapt fundamental positions to the new character of movements of struggle, bending these movements to serve their own interests.

16. There are some who tirelessly repeat the same old ideas or slogans as if the capitalist world had not changed profoundly during the last one hundred and fifty years. But others have tried to adapt.

One can thus witness two currents of opinion:

- a) There are those who place an absolute value on certain particular struggles. This gives rise to a whole flock of theories privileging the youth revolt, womens lib, student power, the drop-out movement, etc. Some consider the refusal to work and the physical destruction of the workplace to be the only sign heralding the destruction of capitalism; others want to restrict the notion of the working class only to the factory proletariat. Finally there are those who deny that a class struggle still exists, seeing only individual victims of universal alienation.
- b) On the other hand, there are those who reject all particularism and retain an attempt to give a total explanation. In doing so, they modernise language and theory, more or less integrating the evolution of capitalism and the class struggle, but at the same time rejecting the essential characteristics of the New Movement, namely autonomy, without exception, in all the fields of activity and struggle.

17. Such attempts are not always insignificant, for they often help to elucidate the sense of new manifestations of autonomy and underline the ambiguities and limits of autonomy within capitalist society. But the importance of such theories, ideas or group activities as those referred to above is often exaggerated beyond measure through passionate debates, limited to the revolutionary vanguardist ghetto. Besides, these debates themselves and the ideas which come out of them are recuperated, like all which develops in capitalist society, by the ruling class itself, whatever the originators of such debates might think. The vanguardists themselves end up as the melting pot wherein an ideology is elaborated which is appropriated in the end by the established structures of the Old Movement.

18. In conflicts the intervention of this modernised vanguard leads to the above situation. The vanguardists claim that they bring a great deal to the struggle in all areas. But what actually happens is entirely different from what they think. Sometimes, those that they would like to make the instruments of their political aims turn the situation against them, and transform the 'goodwill' of such vanguards into the instruments of their own struggle. Sometimes, on the other hand, and more often, such intervention only succeeds in holding back the autonomous development

of the struggle. Here also, the political parties and trade unions which they claim to surpass, use this intervention to channel and suppress the very autonomy to which the interveners seemed to contribute originally.

19. At the level of action and theory, vanguardist groups, whatever the disagreements amongst them, even if they are at daggers drawn, all have one essential feature in common: they refuse to those who struggle the possibility of managing by themselves and for themselves the entire situation in which they are involved. (Such situations imply action, organisation, aims, tactics, reflection and perspectives). If pushed, the groups recognise that those who are in a conflict can decide their own action and organisation; but they deny them the 'consciousness' of their struggle, and, a fortiori, the theory and perspectives of the struggle. Doing this, they give priority to certain forms of thought concerning action itself. In this way, these specialists in political theorising become again the superiors of those for whom action and thought are inseparable. Such inseparability is natural to each individual in the process of struggle against social domination at the very heart of the social collectivity in which he is involved. In numerous groups, the autonomy of action is acceptable only if it leads to a pattern of events which is defined in advance by experts as 'socialist' or 'revolutionary'.

20. The New Movement is not what some, be they relatively numerous, organised, structured or coherent, can think of or build to liberate others. The New Movement is what each and all create by themselves in their struggle, for their struggle, in their own interests. The surpassing of particularisms, the unification of demands and their transcendence in more general and fundamental problems, the perspectives of the struggle, all of these can only be, at any given moment, the product of the struggle itself. Trade unions speak often of unity, the traditional left of popular fronts, of committees, etc; but for example, in every strike where autonomy of action expresses itself none speaks any longer of such things, for the struggle is the expression of all the workers in action.

21. The appearance of the autonomous movement has led to the evolution of the concept of the party. In former times, the Party, as a 'leadership' saw itself as the revolutionary vanguard, identifying itself with the proletariat. It saw itself as a 'conscious fraction' of the proletariat, who had to play a determining role in the raising of 'class consciousness', the high level of which would be the essential sign of the formation of the proletariat as a class. The modern heirs of the Party are well aware of the difficulty of maintaining such a position; so they entrust the party or the group with the very precise mission of making good what they consider to be any deficiencies in working class activity. This gives rise to groups specialised in intervention, liaison, exemplary action, theoretical explanation, etc. But even these 'groups' can no longer exercise the hierarchical function of specialists in the general movement of struggle. The New Movement, that of workers and others in struggle, considers all these elements, the old groups like the new, to be of exactly equal importance as their own actions. They take what they can borrow from those who come to them and reject what does not suit them. Theory and practice appear now to be no more than one and the same element in the revolutionary process -neither can precede or dominate the other. No one political group has thus an essential role to play.

22. The revolution is a process. What we have been able to indicate are the first manifestations of this process in all the fields of social activity. Noone can say how long this process will take, its rhythm and the forms in which it will progress. Its manifestations will inevitably be violent for no dominant class will allow itself to be dispossessed without resisting with the utmost of its force. But this battle will not be a pitched one ending in the collapse of capitalism and the setting up of 'revolutionary structures'. A whole series of events, of which we can predict neither the place, the domain, or the form, could affect all social structures in all parts of the world, surprising everyone no doubt as much by their suddenness as by their character. Noone event will constitute the brutal and general rupture expected. Noone could claim today that the Russian Revolution, the Spanish Revolution, the insurrections in the Eastern bloc (Hungary, Poland, etc) or May '68 in France were the Revolution. Nevertheless, each of these events has deeply influenced the evolution of capitalism and the revolutionary process. If one looks at the world today, one can see that the revolution, in the Jacobin sense, is becoming progressively outdated, but that the revolutionary process itself is becoming more and more powerful.

23. The idea of the revolution as a single event continues to haunt not only the old Marxist or Anarchist theories of the destruction or conquest of the state by a direct confrontation. It also haunts all the more or less modernised substitutes of these theories. The Old Movement displays endless treasures of ingenuity and makes unmeasurable efforts in its attempts to reconstruct the adequate organisation, either with the help of old formulas (various Leninist or neo-anarchist ones), or with new formulas ('drop-out' groups, various committees, communes, etc.) or by promoting a new form of elitism in the name of theoretical or practical 'exigency'.

24. At the same time, organisations assuming particular tasks develop according to the struggle or to circumstances. These organisations then break up and reform themselves elsewhere. Very often they exhibit an ambiguous character since they are often animated by members of groups which have not lost all their vanguardism and tend to substitute themselves for those who struggle. But more and more the existence of such organisations is linked closely to a particular conflict and they have to express the interests of those who struggle, and remain under the control of those who struggle. All attempts either to keep such organisation alive after a conflict or to give them another direction, or to join them to a political organisation end in failure and very often lead to the death of the original organisations.

25. More and more, individuals fighting for their own interests tend to undertake themselves all the tasks which arise during the course of the struggle (such as co-ordination of information, liaison, etc.). To the extent that they do not feel strong enough to undertake such tasks themselves they resort to organisations which offer their services to them, such as union branches, leftists and various other groups. The interventions and liaisons of traditional organisations develop and are a break on autonomy, at one and the same time. They develop the autonomy to the extent that they multiply openings and contacts,

of all kinds and give confidence to those who use them in their struggle against the established legal structures. But they are a break on autonomy to the extent that they lead the struggle back into structures or ideological currents (such as unions, parties, etc) and to the extent that they block, by means of an ideology referring to the past, an action, and the imagination accompanying that action, whose sense is in the direction of the future.

26. It thus seems that a double confrontation exists. The rank-and-file is up against, on the one hand capitalism and its structures, and on the other hand, those who apparently are in conflict with the established order, but who dream of building new structures which would impose upon those who work the concepts of a 'revolutionary elite'. And so, an enormous network of horizontal links is being built up which takes different routes, is extremely mobile, has many forms, ephemeral as well as permanent, is powerful through the accumulation of good will, and which renews the material means available to it with an undreamed of energy. An enormous melting-pot of ideas and theories is created, which lays bare without concession the weaknesses and strengths of everyone: a whole process of self-education and self-organisation by and in the struggle seems to have begun, and we cannot foresee the form and final end of this process.

27. There are those who believe they have discovered in this new bubbling over of forces and ideas the birth of a new movement of revolutionaries, of a new party. With the help of the new situation, they try to rejuvenate the old theories of organisation and parties, or theories concerning the direct action of minorities.

28. The New Movement is however the very negation of such old theories. Some evidence for this can be found in the absolute failure, in practical terms, of all attempts to monopolise in a single organisation all the strands of the rejuvenated Old Movement and in the failure to englobe in a single ideology the innumerable forms of action and thought thrown up, in the struggle by those involved. The temptation to try and group this disparate and irrecoverable 'vanguard' in street demonstrations, comes itself from the thinking of all those who consider that they are included within it. Such demonstrations show at one and the same time the strengths and the weaknesses of the 'revolutionary elite'. They are strong because, in terms of traditional parties, they appear to be numerous and can play a not altogether negligible role in certain conflicts. They are weak because of their very elitism, and because of the belief in their own strength, which allows all sorts of manipulations by such leftist groups and the illusion that they can substitute themselves for the self-activity of the exploited. Behind all these theories and actions we find again the idea that one can make the revolution for others.

29. We have already emphasized that the new forms of struggle which bear witness to the existence of the New Movement are transitory forms, moulded by the very circumstances of a struggle at a given moment, and that in the attempts to disarm those who struggle and to overcome the crises which opened up such struggles, capitalism tries to use and profit from what the practice of struggle has thrown up, for its own ends. We find this happening inevitably in the most 'dynamic' sections of the structures of domination, those structures which regiment the exploited: 'progressive' companies, unions, parties, etc. Self-management set up by a decree of State power (whatever State) is only one



attempt among others to adapt the structures of capitalist domination. But like all such adaptations they only manage to create new forms of struggle, and to develop new struggles for emancipation. All those who confuse true autonomy of struggle with its recuperation (never complete) want to deny the dialectic of the process of struggle. They want to impose their 'theoretical science' upon the working class under the pretext of warning them to avoid falling into the trap of self-management, etc. In reality, those who struggle know better than most of the ideologists of the new groups how to distinguish, in their practice, between autonomy dictated by their own interests and attempts to integrate them dictated by the interests of capital.

30. What happens in conflicts does sharp justice to all claims of leftist groups: one of the characteristics of the New Movement, the movement of the exploited themselves, is to lessen the claims of 'minorities' or 'revolutionary elites' to be this New Movement and to reduce them to the role that those who struggle assign to them. The existence and the role of a revolutionary group is thus radically transformed. The claim of such a group to universality is reduced to an element of an experience amongst others. All theorisation is but a part of a whole, and understood as such. Moreover, the transformation of attitudes towards the traditional values of capitalism and the institutions bound up with them is at least as important as the struggle itself, and is linked closely to its evolution. This transformation is an important part of the revolutionary process.

31. A critique based on the facts concerns all aspects of theory, including all concepts of organisation. The involvement we undertake ourselves is above all motivated by our personal experience of social relationships in a capitalist world. This experience, the reflection of its consequences and the conclusions we draw from this are never more than a particularised aspect of life, in a world which is so vast and contains such unknown depths of inter-relationship and which is in constant transformation; no one can claim to possess a truth other than his own, which he places at the same level as all other truths.

32. Even when people get together with others to think things out or have some joint activity, each individual acts in the first place only for himself. The reflection and action of a group have no more value than those of any other similar group. Whatever 'tasks' a group may set itself, whatever the level of generalisation of its intervention, or thought may be, there is no way in which it can conclude from its own existence that it has a superior position to any other similar group, or to the organisation of the movement of struggle itself, as it appears in the New Movement.

33. Groups and organisations have always existed in various forms, making various claims. Their multiplication to-day is a positive factor and shows precisely that each group develops according to the particular circumstances of those who form it. This entire text has had the aim of defining what might be the general orientation for the work of such a group, which could be made more precise relative to the New Movement as it has been outlined above. The very conception of the New Movement, as we have approached it in this text, will become transformed as the evolution of the revolutionary process continues. The New Movement is not an immutable absolute but a practice in constant change of which we cannot foresee the future.

# socialism: DEFENSIVE REFLEX OR CONSCIOUS CREATION?

Henri Simon's 'Nouveau Mouvement' was first published in 1974. This is a translation checked and agreed by the author. It is an interesting and provocative text, and we strongly urge all our readers and supporters to get it, to distribute it, to study it, to argue about it.

With many of its propositions we would find little to disagree. Long before 1974 both I.C.O. (Informations, Correspondance Ouvrières, the group with which H.S. was associated) and Solidarity were explicitly stating that the very functioning of modern capitalism was forcing people - and would force them on an increasing scale - to break with the established order on a very wide front: a 'new movement' was developing around us, visible for anyone with eyes to see. This new movement was not only challenging the institutions of existing society (nation states, parties, unions) but also its values, its priorities, its modes of thought. Starting with a challenge to authority at the point of production (in which area it partly echoed the age-old struggle of working people against exploitation, but also introduced new elements of critique), the new movement carried its challenge (either explicitly or implicitly) to every assumption of the dominant ideology, creating thereby a deep-going crisis in the authority relations on which class society was based.

Autonomy was certainly one of the cardinal features of this new movement. People were beginning to break with the habit of asking others to do things for them (the government, the TUC, the leadership of the Labour Party). They were starting to do things for themselves, often discovering themselves in the process. Revolutionary politics were falling into contempt. People who still talked in terms of 'making the left MPs fight' only covered themselves with ridicule. The process is continuing, although old attitudes die hard.

We in Solidarity certainly felt part and parcel of what was going on. In our involvement in the Direct Action wing of the anti-bomb movement and in the struggles of the homeless we were doing things with people, not for people. The new movement was not something external to us. On the contrary it was at the very center of our political existence and of our political preoccupations. This feeling of involvement influenced the content of our paper, the themes we thought worthy of

fuller discussion in our pamphlets, the issues on which we would argue heatedly both with others and among ourselves. We even sought to explore its historical roots, in earlier explosions of self-activity.

As a logical consequence of all this we fully endorse what seems to us to be the main thesis of Henri Simon's text, namely that no one has the right to aspire to becoming a leader merely because he thinks he has a better understanding of events than other people.

But it is on this issue of political judgments and criticisms that our perplexities also begin. On the one hand (section 30) Henri Simon stresses that 'the transformation of attitudes towards the traditional values of capitalism and the institutions bound up with them is at least as important as the struggle itself and is linked closely to its evolution', and describes this transformation of attitudes as 'an important part of the revolutionary process'. With both of these assessments we would agree.

On the other hand H.S. seems hard (section 9) on those who dare criticise the new movement because of its 'lack of consciousness' or 'ideological backwardness'. Although we have never used these words, if we are honest with ourselves we must include ourselves, at times, in this category. The dominant ideology has very deep roots indeed (it wouldn't be the dominant ideology if it hadn't). It seems obvious to us that if the new movement possessed the attribute of socialist consciousness in high measure, the process of social change would be more advanced than it is. We have repeatedly stressed that the crisis of modern society was a crisis of consciousness, not a crisis of leadership, and see no reason to modify this assessment.

Simon also seems suspicious (section 19) of those who 'give priority to certain forms of thought concerning action itself'.

Two interpretations of these statements are possible.

The first is that H.S. is here merely attacking the practice of traditional organisations which, because of their belief in their exclusive possession of truth, feel entitled to castrate or at least manipulate all struggles which express different aspirations or use different methods from theirs. With this critique of the traditional left we would fully agree.

But H.S. might alternatively be suggesting (and this is the second possible interpretation of sections 9 and 19) that the mere possession of a coherent system of ideas, of a frame of reference from which to make critical comments, of itself constitutes some form of elitism.

If we accepted this second interpretation the concept of elitism would be completely trivialised. To think before acting is not elitism. It is what distinguishes man from most other species, and enables him to dream of - and eventually to create - another kind of world. Nor is

it elitist to judge, to weigh things up, to evaluate, to compare and, if necessary, to find certain forms of autonomy unacceptable. (When millions of ordinary people voted for National Socialist candidates in 1933, or supported the two imperialist wars, should revolutionaries have refrained from comment, on the ground that such comment implied 'denying' people their autonomy?) To us the term 'elitist' has a very specific meaning. It implies the belief that without a revolutionary elite ordinary people are incapable of meaningful action, either in destroying existing society or in building a new one. This belief is patently absurd and deeply reactionary. We have repeatedly stressed that it is this vision which makes of politics a technique of manipulation. This leninist belief is moreover controverted by a whole historical experience, in which the masses in action have repeatedly revealed themselves more revolutionary than the most revolutionary of existing revolutionary groups.

But the final criticism of the conception that there is something essentially elitist in ideas would come from the fact that it would make H.S.'s pamphlet self-contradictory. Let us assume, in fact, that this is what H.S. means. Then his text would assume the form of a coherent attack on 'coherence', full of interesting ideas, despite the assumption that the mere formulation of ideas is, somehow, 'vanguardist'.\* Although it would condemn those who analyse events (in attempts to achieve an overall view) it would do so in a deeply analytical manner. In its implicit emphasis on coherence and analysis, and whether H.S. likes it or not, his text is in the best tradition of what ICO used to produce. One of the functions of a group like ICO was, after all, 'to discuss general problems such as state capitalism, hierarchy, bureaucratic management, war, racism, socialism, the abolition of the state and of wage labour'. The group advocated 'the establishment of committees, actively associating the greatest number of workers'. It defended 'non-hierarchical demands and not those of particular categories of workers'. It stood for 'anything that enlarged the struggle' and against 'anything that tended to isolate it'.

One may agree or disagree with these views. One cannot pretend however that they are not political judgments, made from a certain viewpoint. The same applies to H.S.'s text on the New Movement. Whether the author likes it or not his text is a political statement. It will become a political rallying point, a stimulus to political differentiation (those who agree with it and those who don't), possibly even, for a while, the ideological garb of the very movement he is so accurately describing. There is nothing wrong in this. Ideas have always played an important role in human history and to suggest otherwise is to reduce human beings to less than their full stature.

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\* This would perhaps then best be epitomised in H.S.'s use of expressions like 'it is important to emphasise', ... 'it is futile to criticise'... Important? Important to whom? To an abstract historical process? Or to real individuals, in a real movement, whom he is seeking to convince? But, if he is seeking to convince people...

In spite of the contradictions inherent in this second interpretation of sections 9 and 19 we wonder whether it isn't in fact quite close to H.S.'s views. We say this because this particular interpretation would seem to follow quite logically from H.S.'s uncritical exaltation of autonomy as such. Here again his text is unclear. The absence of any critique of the aims of autonomous struggles may be taken to imply that autonomy per se is the one and only criterion for revolutionary politics. It is true that the examples given of New Movement activities (section 8) all have a socialist content. But there are other problems. What is part of the New Movement, and what is not? How are we to judge whether a struggle reflects, or not, (section 6) 'a tendency to destroy all hierarchies'?

Autonomy, although extremely important, is not enough. There can be autonomous reactionary dissent as well as autonomous revolutionary dissent. Solidarity has never given a blanket endorsement to people 'doing what they wanted, by themselves and for themselves'. Rightly or wrongly (and we think rightly) we sought to apply certain yardsticks to our political judgments of what people were doing. We saw a connection between means and ends. We had a certain vision of the kind of society we wanted (a non-alienated, non-hierarchical society, in which wage labour has been abolished) and that vision deeply influenced the criteria we applied to what we saw happening around us. Without illusions as to the effect it would have we gave what support we could (in terms of propaganda for their ideas and creations) to the self-managed upsurges of Hungary 1956 and of Paris 1968. We did this because we saw in them the harbingers of meaningful revolution, in the bureaucratic capitalist societies of East and West alike. But in 1975 we condemned the reactionary assumptions underlying the self-activity of the Ulster Workers' Council. And we repeatedly warned against the limitations (and stressed the recuperability) of localised forms of self-management within capitalism.

We have never felt it was enough for an activity to be autonomous for it to warrant our uncritical endorsement. We are not 'autonomy fetishists'. We are opposed to racialist strikes, however autonomous. When part-time hospital consultants seek to wreck the National Health Service in order to enhance their privileges, or when 'doing one's own thing' consists of signing up for Angola, we feel entitled, collectively, to make political comments. The same applies in many other areas. Terrorist activities, for instance, however strongly directed against established society they may be, in our opinion, deeply counter-productive. These are political judgments, which are the legitimate concern of a political organisation.

This isn't nit-picking. At stake in discussions of this kind are some very fundamental questions. Is socialism 'man's positive self-consciousness'? If the phrase means anything at all, it surely means that people have achieved some understanding of their environment and of themselves - and know what they want. Is socialism something which will

have to be consciously fought for and collectively created? Or is there some God in the revolutionary Pantheon who, in His wisdom, has allocated a revolutionary content and a socialist destination to all 'struggles' and 'conflicts' within existing society?

Will mankind evolve into socialism through coherent, creative action or through a series of defensive reflexes directed against the oppression of existing society? Are Lenin's preconditions for revolution, namely that the rulers no longer have the confidence to rule and the ruled are no longer prepared to put up with the old system, really sufficient? (We are obviously not implying that there is anything leninist in the views expressed in the New Movement.) Or should one add a third precondition, namely that those who no longer accept the existing society should have at least some notion in their minds concerning what they would like to replace it by? In our opinion the 'classical' preconditions may produce the collapse of the old society. They will not - and have not - ensured that it will be replaced by a non-hierarchical, non-authoritarian classless society. In fact, left to themselves, the classical 'preconditions' will almost inevitably guarantee that one form of class society is merely followed by another. But if one accepts this proposition, certain things follow. Judgments will be called for. Choices will have to be made. Revolutionaries are not mere surf-riders on the tides of history.

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