

Collective Action

Notes



14 / 15

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French Unemployed Movement



Libertarian Socialism



Self-Activity of Wage Workers: Towards A Critique Of Representation And Delegation



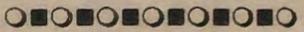
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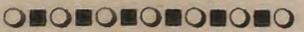
Liverpool Dockers Strike



Rome Bus Workers Strike



Karl Korsch: A Marxist Friend Of Anarchism



"HELL INSIDE, HELL OUTSIDE"

(Slogan of French Demonstrators Describing The Relationship Between Work and Unemployment)

The Jobless Movement in France



It is difficult to explain the situation of an unemployed person in France to non-French people - the various benefits which could be paid, or not paid, to somebody having formerly been a "wage earner". The official figures record three million "unemployed" people (those receiving unemployment benefits) but exclude people who have "lost" or not had the "right" to this benefit (those getting only the minimum allowance "R.M.I." Revenu Minimum d'Insertion, minimal income while waiting for a job). The latter are not recorded as "unemployed". To understand this situation we have to explain that in France, "unemployment benefits" are only allowed if you have previously worked, the level of the benefit is directly linked to former wages and the payment period linked to the length of the working period: the more you have worked, the longer you will be paid; the more you have earned,

the more you will get. Sooner or later if you have not found another job, you will be left with nothing and then you can ask for the RMI. Single young people can't get any benefit till they reach 25.

If we add to the "unemployed" category all other people like "RMIists" or young people obliged to live with their parents who are often forced to survive through moonlighting, more than 6 million of people (out of 26 million able to work) have to be classified in the new industrial category "precarious". i.e. people forced to look for any type of temporary job, however badly paid, for their daily survival. Their daily life is at the same time an immediate struggle for survival and worries about what tomorrow will bring. If the figures have meaning and if we take into account only what is "officially" paid as wages and/or ben-

efits (which means that some people can get far more or far less or even nothing at all), we can find that:

- Less than 25 % of the "precarious" population receives between 0 and 3.000 f per month (£300.00/\$500) - Less than 27 % receives between 3 and 4.000 F (£300.00-400.00/\$500-\$675) - Less than 33% between 4 and 6.000 F (£400.00 -600.00/\$675-\$1,000) - Less than 15% receiving more than 6.000 F (£600.00/\$1,000) We must add that the SMIC (Salaire Minimum Interprofessionnel de Croissance: minimum monthly wage) is between 5 and 6.000 F (£500.00-600.00/\$850-\$1,000) and that unemployment benefits decrease according to the previous time worked. It is possible for an unemployed person to quickly jump from one category to the next lower one and at the end finish with the RMI or nothing at all, unless they are lucky enough to find another job - a job generally paid far

Welcome to Collective Action Notes # 14/15.

Again, this issue of CAN is appearing much later than we originally anticipated. There are several reasons for this delay. Since our last issue, which appeared in November 1997 and is now sold-out, we have (fortunately) had an influx of nearly two hundred new subscribers as a result of favorable mentions in several other publications, which has led to considerable correspondence - correspondence in turn which has fallen on too few people to answer. Additionally - and in contrast to the previous year - the main person responsible for the lay-out and other day to day matters has been tied up in the demands of a regular, full-time job. We hope to have CAN appear on a more regular basis as a 12-16 page publication in the upcoming year.

We welcome submissions to CAN, especially coverage/commentary on actual struggles emphasizing worker's self activity. We ask that contributors write in accessible English and avoid the rarefied, self-reverential language and dogmatic jargon too prevalent within the 'ultra-left'. For a loose approximation of the political perspectives underlying CAN, see the ECHANGES Presentation in this issue. Also useful is Solidarity's "As We See It/As We Don't See It" pamphlet from the mid-seventies, available from AK Press; again, without pretending that either text is the type of set-in stone platform so prevalent among sects. Rather, we see both as beginning points for further questioning and open-ended inquiry into conditions of class struggle today and related questions, such as the role of "organization" in these struggles.

This issue of CAN contains three article on the recent jobless movement in France - one longer descriptive article and two shorter chronologies. We decided to use all three texts, despite a certain overlap in factual content between them, because we feel there were critical differences in the type of analysis presented and within the specific points emphasized. Readers interested in further material on the jobless struggles can also write to the Bureau of Public Secrets, POB 1044, Berkeley, CA 94701 and request a copy of their translation of leaflets from the unemployed movement (this material may also be up on the BPS Web site at: www.slip.net/~knabb). An omission that was discovered too late to correct before press time concerns the article on the Rome Bus wildcat. This strike took place in 1997 - a date which was not specified in the article. Due to the length of several of the articles submitted for this issue of CAN, much material has been pushed back until the next issue - which we're aiming to publish in early Spring 1999. □

Collective Action Notes now has a Web Page.

URL: <http://www.geocities.com/CapitolHill/Lobby/2379>

Among the documents on the site are texts from Anton Pannekoek, ECHANGES, Paul Mattick, Henri Simon plus the full 80 page text of Kamunist Kranti's "Ballad Against Work". Also links to many other relevant Web sites.



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The Jobless Movement in France

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below the previous one.

Untill recently, the unions and political parliamentary parties were not at all interested in the existing unemployed organizations. Most of the "big" unions (the CGT linked to the communist party, the CFDT and FO both linked to the socialist party) were even very hostile toward them, claiming to be the only legal "representatives" of the workers - employed or unemployed. (It would take too long to explain this legal distinction that effectively gives the unions a monopoly which they fiercely defend because it is an important part of their power). During the jobless movement, we could see a clear division between these unions:

- on one hand the CGT is trying to exploit local situations mainly through committees organized to fight redundancies and the closures of some factories, especially in the Marseilles district after the shut-down of the shipyards and the restructuring of the dock work. - on the other hand the CFDT and FO who hold to their initial positions and refused any contact with the unemployed organizations, even protesting when the government discusses directly with them.

The main unemployed organizations existed for years but never became any kind of mass organization even a low level one. They never tried to resort to radical actions beyond tiny street demonstrations. They were more the result of the activism of ultra left, anarchist or Marxist organizations that were often also involved in committees fighting for illegal immigrants or the homeless, etc... The most widely known unemployed organizations (which obtained this kind of "recognition" when called on for advice by the government during the movement) were:

"Partage", the first association of unemployed founded by an individual but remaining very small, the MNCP (National Movement of Unemployed and "Precarious"), the CDSL (Homeless Committee), l'APEIS (Association for employment and engagement of wage earners) linked to the Communist Party et AC (Act Against Unemployment) with a background of Trotskyists (Ligue Communiste), left Catholics and anarcho-syndicalists of the CNT. Outside the Marseilles district, the militants of these various groups were in a way the movement's vanguard and the main active people within it. Untill December 97, all



"The fact that the movement was widespread all over France had nothing to do with any specific organization but was due more to its own dynamics . . . But we have to underscore an important fact: the movement . . . remained from start to finish the action of a small minority

actions or attempts at actions launched by these "unemployed" organizations were rather patchy, symbolic and did not get any publicity, either because they remained isolated or localized and did not garner much support, or because their isolation did not generate any interest in political circles. More or less they obtained support from the fringe, alternative unions formed in the aftermath of the December 95 movement; often the same militants could be found within these unions and also within various specific organizations for the immigrants, the homeless, etc..

The pretext for the start of the movement was a reform of the unemployment benefit system. The benefits in which payment is linked to a period of work are paid out of special funds. The money is obtained from a tax levied on wages by both employers and employees and managed jointly by the employers' association and workers' unions; the local funds are called ASSEDIC but they are capped by a national organization UNEDIC which fixes the conditions of payment of the benefits. These organizations and especially the national one - UNEDIC - are bureaucracies in which the workers' unions fight more over political positions than economic ones. Recently the presidency of UNEDIC, for

a long time in the hands of the FO union, switched to the CFDT with the help of the employers' association. This inter-union competition may have played a role in the development of the movement, but it was not an essential role and can only explain some minor tendencies, opinions or support of the movement that followed.

Until last July, the UNEDIC had a special "social fund" which allowed the ASSEDIC to dispense "emergency benefits" to the most distressed unemployed; this benefit was generally paid at the end of the year. A new collective agreement for the management of the UNEDIC was signed between the employers' association and the majority of the workers' unions in July '97. Only one union refused to sign (the industrial relation law is such that if only one workers union out of five signs it, the agreement is valid). The agreement was scheduled to be implemented on October 1, 1997. The "emergency benefits" more or less dried up. For example, in a suburban district of Paris "Val de Marne", these emergency benefits were cut from 52 million in 96 to 15 million in 97 (from £5 million to 1.5 million/\$9 million to \$2.5 million); in 1996 in the Marseilles District (Bouches du Rhone 55.000 unemployed previously received

a special benefit of 1,500 F (£150.00/\$250).

Another aspect of this movement, both in the intentions of the militants and in the importance given to the movement by the media, has to be situated in the political background and in the uncomfortable position of the social democrat majority and their supporters in the government. They are trapped between their electoral promises of a quick solution to the "unemployment problem" and the imperatives of managing the capitalist system in France and in Europe (chiefly with the advent of the European Monetary Union with a common currency). Their present position is particularly uncomfortable because they can foresee not only the rise of discontent among voters reacting to the pressures of daily life but also the potential outburst of a social movement which, even if they could think such a movement could be controlled, channeled or localized, could still be very disruptive. These movements appear to be dangerous, not only for the current Socialist Party regime's political positions, but also for the stability of the capitalist system as a whole. Considering the levels of unemployment and the lack of real solutions (which politicians are unable to provide because the problem is a consequence of a world situation they have no possibility of influencing) the political leaders could find such radical movements difficult to stop. Similar situations have already erupted during the past ten years into wider, uncontrolled movements which were stopped only by the withdrawal of the measures which started the process. What these movements had in common was that they were sudden reactions to some very precise limited issues, issues not supposed to create such responses; movements expressing a widespread refusal of the system even if it was not openly claimed as such. It is certain that this fear (and the fear that some limited, disconnected movements could connect to a wider groundswell of discontent difficult to stop) was present in the attitude of all the political milieu. We are obliged to see in the background of the unemployed movement a kind of counter-reflex aimed at crushing in advance a potentially far more important movement

Apparently, the local unemployed organization of Marseilles (mentioned previously) on December 4th demanded a special benefit of 3,000 F (£300.00/\$510.00) to be paid to every unemployed person at the end of the year. To support their demand, they started sit-ins in 7 local ASSEDIC offices in the

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Marseilles district. At the same time, AC organized a sit-in former offices of a closed steel factory, property of the De Wendel company (the very tough president of the employers association CNPF is also the president of this big industrial holding). If these localized struggles had such a popularity from the start, contrary to the previous actions, it is because beyond the "militantism" or the political manipulations there existed a general awareness concerning the problems of unemployment and work - and linked to this a more general idea about redistribution of wealth. The counter-attack of manipulations, feigned sensitivity, and mediatisation were present in the rise of this movement and must be seen in dialectical relation to it.

From the beginning, the movement not only became stronger and more widespread and was very different from "traditional" movements. It was not "organized" with a kind of central planning, and did not give birth to regional or national coordinating organization. It appeared in a rather scattered way all over France, with different initiatives, with regrouping for local actions, sometimes immediate short-term guerrilla actions, sometimes more permanent sit-ins (until the inevitable police eviction). Some of these actions were tightly controlled by unemployed organization linked to unions or political parties, but on the other hand, other actions totally escaped this control, impelled by some "unorganized" militants acting more from inside independent local collectives than on behalf of a political or unemployed organization. For this reason, considered as a whole, the movement gave the impression of being something very confused, going in every direction without coordination and often making demands beyond the original demand of a special emergency benefit at the end of the year. These new claims were very practical but nevertheless had a more generalized meaning (for instance demanding there should be no more electricity cut-offs in people's homes because of non-payment of bills). The fact that the movement was wide-spread all over France had nothing to do with any specific organization, but was due more to its own dynamics embodied in local individuals. Even if the majority of activists in the movement were militants or ex-militants of various groups involved in separate struggles (immigrants, homeless, squats,...), the movement succeeded in gaining the active support of many



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"unorganized" unemployed people and some workers as well (sometimes through the involvement of the marginal unions - SUD, CNT,...). Most of the time, all these militants were active more as individuals motivated to struggle against a "social problem" than as foot-soldiers or deputies of "their" organization.

But we have to emphasize an important fact: even with these distinctive characteristics, the movement remained from beginning to end the action of a small minority. At the height of the movement, 30 ASSEDIC offices were occupied (out of 600 all over France) - but these 30 were spread all over France. All the same, the demonstrations, even if they took place in more than 26 towns did not gather more than 30 to 40,000 people. These are very small numbers considering the 3 million "officially" unemployed or the 6 million "precarious". A commentator wrote that the "numbers are less important than popularity". It was true, in a certain sense, as we can see in the results of a poll showing that 70% of the French population "supported" the movement. We could again here the slogan of 1995 that the active people were acting "instead of", i.e. the

apology for a minority vanguard movement. If this "popularity" effectively allowed some more radical actions than the traditional ones, often going beyond what is illegally allowed, on the other hand such limited and well "supported" actions fed an illusion (counterbalancing the fear of politicians of a larger, growing movement) that this "diffuse vanguard" could effectively pull together a wider movement. This point deserves more comment because the movements in recent years sometimes were far more extensive than the immediate issues that were initially the pretext in starting them. These movements grew independently of all militant action - but the growth of such movements could have spread the idea that a vanguard could - if correctly used - be the motor of a larger resistance.

The sit-ins were the result of the activity of often only a few dozens "militants", sometimes up to one hundred. Initially only the ASSEDIC offices were invaded, yet these occupations were directed against quite a lot of other targets too: posh hostels and restaurants, bosses' offices, headquarters of political parties (especially of the Socialist Party), EDF (state-run utility) offices, supermarkets, High Schools (among them the

famous Ecole Normale Supérieure) etc...When the government seemed to yield only crumbs to support the counter-attack and the "recognized" organizations, linked to the political parties or other marginal political connections that tried to calm down or stop the occupation movement, this movement split up in all directions, often in swift, suddenly decided actions involving for instance, taking free goods and services in supermarkets, restaurants, or transportation, or else the disruption of various ceremonies (concerts, grand openings,...)

Even if such actions were rather limited and essentially involved organized militants more than unemployed or "precarious" people themselves, some rank and file committees were starting to be built. For instance, a daily assembly met in a Paris University (Jussieu) to discuss various positions and to co-ordinate actions, but at its best, only 200 participants met there. The EDF office in the 18th district of Paris was occupied for more than one week before the occupiers were evicted by the police; some residents of this working class district joined the action committee's activity.

On the 15th of January, the government decided to put 1 billion F (£100/\$150million) into special "emergency funds" to grant a special benefit to the people in "social distress" and to launch promises like special committees to study the problem, the passage a law "against exclusion", granting official representation status to some of the unemployed organizations and offering early retirement at 55 for those unemployed who had paid retirement contributions for 40 years. From this moment, the "serious" unemployed organizations following the wishes of the government, withdrew their support for the movement. Even if the movement went ahead, pushed by its own dynamics in autonomous daily actions, these actions became more and more sporadic and the decline of the movement started at the beginning of February. If it was the intent of the "legal" part of the movement to build a counter-response, they - and the social democrat government - achieved their aim; but it is difficult to say if this was so because nowhere was there a fire to dampen. On the other hand, if some of the more radical militants active from the start hoped to open the Pandora's box of a large movement, they totally missed their target. It is true that the number of unemployed and "precarious" and the size of their problems as

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well as the previous more or less spontaneous and unforeseeable movement could have led these militants to think a larger movement would emerge. But they now have to jump to the conclusion that their militancy experienced a failure and if they reflect on this - to understand that this failure is the failure of the concept of a search for a 'revolutionary subject', the basis for the building either a revolutionary party or an "organized" class movement.

Anyway, such a movement, even as limited and manipulated as it was, was in certain respects a spontaneous one. If it could raise such fears or hopes, it is because it was connected to those previous movements having developed special characteristics for the past ten years. We can find such tendencies in distinct movements like the actions of illegal immigrants, of young people living in the suburbs, homeless people, and quite a lot of workers fighting individually or collectively, as in December '95. It is not by accident that the slogan then was "Altogether". The only fear of the rulers of this society have is that these movements, completely distinct but recurrent in their particularity, could connect in a formal way and then give birth to a far stronger mass movement. Of course it is impossible to tell when and how this could happen but it is at least potentially a real problem. If this happens, we will see the true nature of all kinds of political or specific organizations which applied brakes on the movement when it escaped their control or political framework. The form of rank and file autonomous organizations, which this time were on the fringe of the movement, could then take on real size and function. But they will have to fight against far more severe repression and fight against more clever attempts at recuperation and disintegration than we have seen in the last weeks of the jobless movement. □

Henri Simon Feb. 1998

Chronologies

□ At the end of last year, the unemployed section of the CGT trade union decided to take action in support of its demand for the end of year bonus of 3,000 francs (about f-300) that has been awarded to the unemployed every year since 1991. On 11 December, activists occupied 7 ASSEDICS - local offices handling unemployment insurance payments - in the area around Marseille. Further occupations followed as part of a week of emergency action around social security issues.

□ On 16 December activists occupied the Paris headquarters of a holding company owned by the President of the French employers' council. Next day, they occupied the pyramid at the Louvre and secured one of the galleries.

□ Lionel Jospin's socialist government was rattled. On 18 December, in an attempt to ward off trouble, it announced a 3% increase in social security benefit, amounting to 1.48 francs (15p) per claimant per day!

□ By Christmas Eve, some 15 ASSEDICS were under occupation. On Christmas Day, Martine Aubry, the minister for employment and social security, referred the demands of the unemployed and those in insecure jobs to a series of emergency committees under the authority of local prefectures.

□ By 2 January 1998, 14 ASSEDICS, were under occupation. There had been expulsions, but new occupations had kept up numbers. Trains were blockaded at the Gare de Lyon in Paris. Transport concessions for the unemployed were announced and Martine Aubry promised a series of measures, including the release of 500 million francs for retraining grants. However, this was just money that the state already owed to the UNED!

□ By now, members of the governing coalition were coming out in support of the unemployed. Throughout January, occupations of ASSEDICS, town halls, other government offices and even the Futurescope theme park continued. The TGV high speed train and a toll road were blocked.

□ January 7th was the first national

day of demonstrations, affecting more than 50 towns. 26 ASSEDICS were now under occupation. The movement settled into a pattern of occupations and expulsions throughout France.

□ On 8 January, representatives of the associations of the unemployed were received at the Prime Minister's office. The following evening, Prime Minister Lionel Jospin appeared on television to announce the release of a billion francs for local emergency assistance and to promise the reform of basic benefits. Two days later, he ordered the clearing of all the occupied ASSEDICS.

□ On 13 January almost 50,000 demonstrators throughout France took part in the second national day of action. A third day of action followed four days later. 20,000 marched in Paris, 10,000 in Toulouse and thousands more in Lyon, Lille, Nantes, Marseille, Bordeaux, Grenoble - thirty towns in all.

□ On 20 January, in the National Assembly, Lionel Jospin announced that he would not be increasing minimum benefit levels. At 6:30 the following morning, he was woken up at home by members of "Act Up", campaigning for the rights of victims of AIDS.

□ There were more huge demonstrations on January 27. At the Eurostar Terminal in Waterloo Station, London activists leafleted commuters in solidarity. Meanwhile, the occupations continued across France: ASSEDICS and other benefits offices, electricity company offices, FNAC record stores (think Virgin Megastore), town halls, supermarkets, the Paris Commodities Exchange, political party buildings, the School of Political Science in Paris, Angers Film Festival...

□ On 11 February, about 150 demonstrators staged a symbolic protest outside a Cash Converters store in Paris, to denounce the proliferation of businesses that exploit the distress and misfortune of the most deprived, making a profit by buying up their goods at pathetically low prices. Violent police intervention ended in the arrest of four demonstrators.

□ Since February, the movement seems to have lost momentum. Occupations and other actions have continued, but the introduction of

two government bills - one to combat social exclusion, the other reducing the working week to 35 hours with no loss of pay - have stolen some of its thunder. And the media have moved on to other issues (the Papon trial and the success of the Front National in the regional elections).

□ The movement continues, however. As of the beginning of April, the following future actions had been announced by the unemployed associations and various trade unions:

□ April 21-22: National days of action by the unemployed associations.

□ April 30-May 1: Overnight vigil outside the Paris stock exchange - against the Multinational Accord on Investment.

□ May 1: United march in Paris, organized by the trade unions. Despite the fact that they will be relegated to the rear, the unemployed associations will be participating. The themes of the demonstration will include unemployment and "the excesses of the market economy, which leaves no place for human beings and where job insecurity has become the norm".

□ May 4: Actions to mark the evening preceding the opening of the parliamentary discussion of the bill to combat social exclusion.

□ May 8: Meeting between the French unemployed associations and their German counterparts, at the Bridge of Europe on the frontier.

□ May 12: Mass meeting in Paris to support the 35 Hours bill. It is hoped that 25,000 activists will attend.

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The Jobless Movement in France

2. Len Bracken

Birth of the Jobless Movement in France

1. This particular wave of occupations and protests began in 1997 with events such as the occupation of an unemployment center in Marseille on December 11.

2. The movement quickly spread; as many as thirty government unemployment offices were occupied across France.

3. Demands for a Christmas bonus and an increase in "social minimum" welfare programs were summarily rejected by the government.

4. Although Prime Minister Lionel Jospin made a slight concession to the poorest of the poor, he didn't hesitate to use riot police to have the jobless evicted.

5. In his New Year's Eve message to the nation, President Jacques Chirac lamented: "Everyday new limits are being broken, beyond which society begins to fall apart."

6. The response of youth gangs to the New Year's speech was a rampage in Strasbourg - the molecules of civil war expressed in car fires, broken bus shelters, vandalized municipal buildings.

7. Not wanting to appear soft, the state dished out stiff sentences to people who had no other criminal record.

8. The delinquents were not afraid; hardly a week went by in January and the first two weeks in February without some new actions across France. An editor for *Le Figaro* spoke to *The World* radio program of a revolution the likes of which hadn't been seen since '68.

9. Reports suggest that a climate of fear exists in the country because of this marked increase (eighty percent in ten years) in juvenile delinquency - vandalism, shop-lifting, drug-dealing, throwing stones at cops.

10. The government proposed three plans to stop juvenile crime in three months, then sent consultants to experts in Washington and New York.

11. To get a feel for the atmosphere, it's worth recalling that attacks on bus and metro drivers prompted public transport strikes in eighteen towns in November of 1997.

12. According to a recent government report, student violence of the sort seen in the Debord-Cornand film *Guy Debord - His Time and Art* affects half of all secondary schools. Teachers who fear for their lives have, in recent years, taken to the streets in protest.

13. For weeks, this vocal minority of jobless people sustained powerful tactics such as "wake up" calls at the homes of ministers banging pots and pans, and the mob-storming of town halls, post office centers and other public places under the banner: "The unemployed are on strike."

14. Hence there is a connection in the minds of many between joblessness and urban violence (even if it isn't a perfect one-to-one correspondence). Those who have been jobless for more than a year, and others in the margins - the excluded class - have become the dangerous class.

14. How so? Take the response of a jobless group to Prime Minister Jospin's televised speech on January 21 about quelling what he referred to as the undisciplined majority - the group went into the luxurious Park Hotel in Mulhouse and complained about lack of

work and food and were served steak and champagne, as has happened across the country.

15. These occupations became so common in January that police stood guard at the doors of fancy restaurants and hotels in Paris.

16. Jospin has hedged on the issue of high unemployment and rising poverty, insisting on "a society of work, not a society of assistance."

17. Jospin is pushing his reduction in work hours through, a reformist measure that I support because it could inspire people to go much further in the same direction. To be sure, management has been given greater "flexibility" in the process, such as being able to force workers to submit to onerously odd hours, and other concessions that limit the value of the reduction in hours on workers' lives. Jospin's proposed raise in the ASS (*Allocation spécifique de solidarité*) may actually go into effect in 1998.

18. The French public is thoroughly cynical in regard to its political class and what it might do for "the excluded ones." Jospin came out for the Euro in June of 1997, regardless of the harsh conditions France will be forced to meet. This contradicts statements in his book *L'Inventaire du possible* (1995).

19. Jospin still talks about social solidarity with the jobless while simultaneously adapting to the dictates of global capital as though the public doesn't see through his transparent hypocrisy.

20. In this light, certain facts remain: more than ten percent of France's population depends on government assistance and virtually everyone knows someone who is jobless.

21. Marches by tens of thousands

are undeniable expressions of solidarity with the jobless who are so desperate that they can't even sell their services at beggars' auctions in occupied city halls.

22. The Communists and Greens are powerless and haven't even really tried, as far as I know, to stop the wildcat operations of the amorphous "jobless movement."

23. Reports suggest that the movement may have retreated toward the end of February, but only time will tell if this is true.

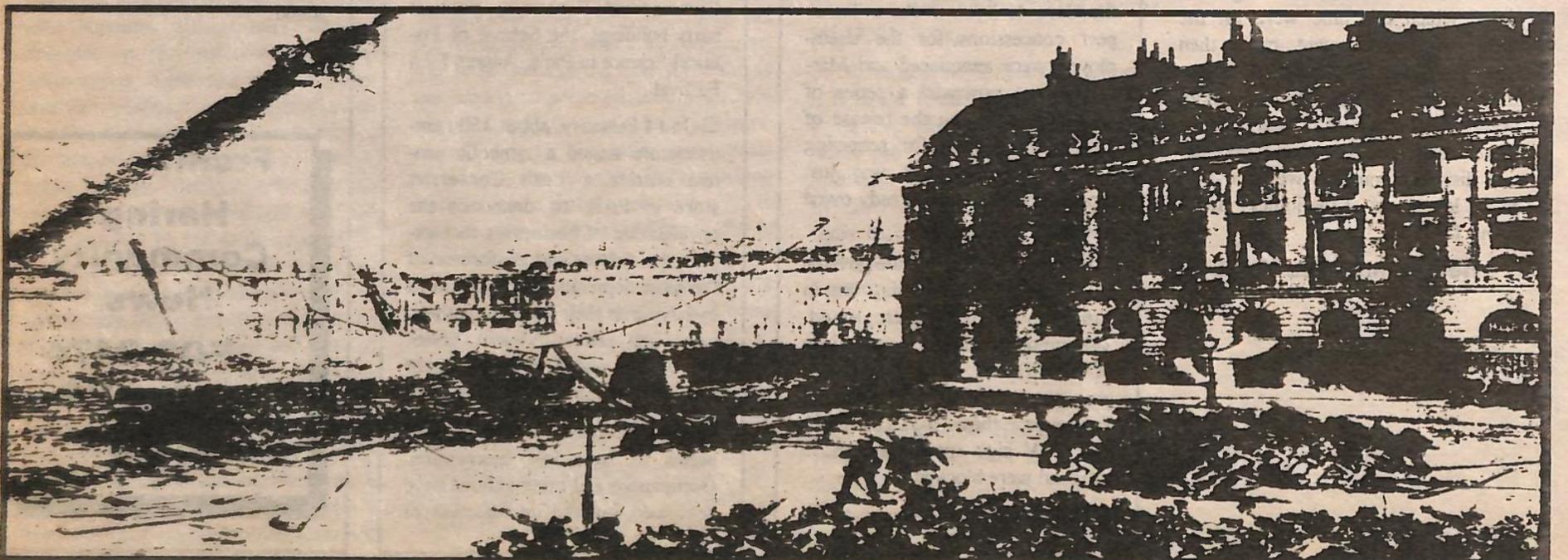
24. Many of the jobless are still tragically ashamed of their situation; others recognize that being unemployed gives them the time to "find the sensitive points in society and attack."

25. Our thoughts are with those who have had the time to question the absurdities of all jobs, regardless how worthy or ridiculous they may be, and formulate their thoughts in these beautiful words:

Isn't it time to ask ourselves about the meaning of what we produce, to pose the essential questions: what to produce? for whom? why? how? at what ecological and social cost?

Or again:

No one today can deny the misery of everyday life and everything it implies. And it is because this misery is generalized that its contestation is generalized, and must, in the future, be even more generalized. The question of unemployment in its present formulation can only pose the question of work and, consequently, questions about the employment of life itself. In this way, the jobless struggle concerns EVERYONE. □



Rome Bus Strike - From P. 7

workers' coordination network and debate. What's more, although politicized workers could for a while contribute to the maturation and development of the movement, they can not substitute for the level of action and theory of the other workers, neither introducing class consciousness nor using a succession of exemplary acts "to wake up the masses," nor creating the real radical, revolutionary, organization of the struggle.

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1) They are 'willed' organizations (committees) came out during the late 1980s and the early '1990s. They developed, on one hand during spontaneous workers movements as autonomous committees and on the other, they were created by the left branches of the unions. Some of the COBAS leaders were left-union militants. They are experiencing the impossibility of voluntary organizations developing themselves, even if their daily practice of struggle illustrates the very ideas they put forward. They have become more and more "political" since the social movement declined. About 80,000 have joined the COBAS. There are different organizations:

CUB (confederazione unitaria di base) includes three currents: the new-Stalinist current (most of their members work in the public services), the 'neutralist' current, ex-CISL (most of their members are steelworkers), the syndicalist and libertarian current which is very active (most of their members are teachers).

SLAI (Sindacato Lavoratori Autoorganizzati Interconfederali)-COBAS, a 'workerist' and Leninist union organization, most of whose members work in the high-sized industries.

COMU is an important union of the railway-workers politically closest to the 'new' communist party which is a branch of the old PCI.

ARCA is a confederation of different union federations. Their members work in different categories and have different political background whose the most important currents are closed to the 'new' communist party and to the Trotskyism, while the less important current is closed to anarcho-syndicalism.

Some very political ones as CNC (coordinamento nazionale cobas)-COBAS closed to Autonomia which is a 'workerist,' 'willed' political current of the '70s with a Leninist background.

USI is a small anarchist and anarcho-syndicalist union organization, about 100 members, that joined the AIT(IWA).

There's a debate-review that tries to promote the discussion between different struggles experiences. It is issued by libertarian-syndicalist-communist council comrades named Di Base.

2) The entire membership of active workers joined to the CGIL, including the more important categories. i.e. metal-steel workers, public service workers, teachers and others adds up to 2,334,000 members; less than the CGIL's retired worker membership of 2,842,000.



Liverpool Docker's Strike

The fact that the Liverpool dockers agreed to accept a pay off from the Mersey Docks and Harbour Corporation (MDHC) which ended a two years and four months dispute deserves some explanations because quite a lot of discussions were and are often going very far from the actual class struggle.

To understand what was wrong in these comments we have to consider: 1) What was the real situation of this group of dockers usually called the "Liverpool dockers"? 2) What was the real support they have got: a) from other dockers in the UK and in the world? b) from other workers in the UK and in the world? 3) What was the position of the dockers 'union' - the T&G (Transport and General Workers Union), i.e. what was the function of a recognised big union in the UK, of a union in a capitalist society?

1) What was the real situation of this group of dockers working in the port of Liverpool, unusually called the "Liverpool dockers"? Even if they worked in the same port - Liverpool - and belonged to the same union - T & G - they were juridically and legally divided: - 300 of them - old dockers - worked for a company - the MDHC (which also owned and managed other ports in the UK, each port having been privatised and belonging to one specific company). The situation and working conditions were still linked to what remains from the NDLS (National Dock Labour Scheme) dismantled in 1989 after a lost national strike. - 80 of them - new dockers - worked for another company - Torside - totally distinct juridically from the MDHC - more than 500 other port workers (

dockers, tug seamen, lorry drivers, maintenance workers,...) also worked in the Liverpool docks - some for the MDHC, some for other companies, most of them members of the T&G union.

The "strike" started with Torside workers: five dockers of this company refused to work overtime. They were immediately sacked. 15 other dockers of the same company stopped work immediately; they were also fired without delay. 60 remaining Torside were due to unload a cargo the day after: they refused to work as long as their work mates would stay fired. They were all fired and then started altogether to picket the entrances of the port. Out of 300 MDHC dockers, 60 crossed the picket line, 240 not and, in solidarity with Torside dockers, voted to strike. During the following night the 240 were fired by the MDHC. When T&G union ordered them to resume work - what they did - they were refused to enter in the port (because they were fired) as the 60 of them having crossed the picket the day before could work "normally" along with the 500 other port workers who did not move at all to support the fired dockers.

We have to consider what was then the situation in the port in regard to the present industrial laws in the UK, a situation which will be essential to understand how this conflict will develop: - a wildcat strike is illegal and could be legally opposed by the employer in firing the striking workers - a solidarity strike (wildcat or officially supported by a union) is illegal and could be legally opposed in firing the striking workers and with court decisions with heavy fines

for the union (even their belongings sequestrated). If a court impose the end of the strike or forbid any other action, the trespassers could be sentenced to prison. - not crossing a picket is considered as an illegal solidarity strike and a consequent vote without respecting the legal complicated procedure, for instance in an assembly by show of hands, is also considered as an illegal wildcat strike. So the Torside and the MDHC were legally perfectly right to sack successively the 5 dockers, then the 15 and then the 240. If we consider this legal situation, the "Liverpool dockers strike" was neither a strike, nor a lock out but a succession of legal collective firing by company acting in total legality: it was the struggle of some 400 dockers for their reinstatement outside the place of work. I know some will say it is playing with words. But this situation meant that without the support of the other dock workers, of all the other workers in Liverpool and elsewhere they have no means to influence the process of work in the Liverpool port and then to pressure on their employers.

2) What was the real support the fired dockers have got? a) from the other dockers in the UK and in the world? The answer is: practically no actual support. b) from the other workers in the UK or elsewhere? The answer is: practically no actual support. These answers as brutal as they are have to be explained. What is support, real support, real solidarity? True support, true solidarity does not mean finance contributing, demonstrating, sending solidarity messages, spreading detailed information and calls on Internet, token very limited strikes, all these things as important as they could be are only a tiny part of solidarity but not at all a true solidarity. We can call all that "virtual solidarity" not effective solidarity. True solidarity is what the Torside dockers did for 5 then 15 of them, what most of the MDHC dockers did for the Torside

dockers. True solidarity is stopping work - in any manner, in any number, and for any time in such a way that the pressure on the capitalist or the threat of a larger pressure will be so that the capitalists will have to yield. It is what the Liverpool dockers were looking for but nothing of that happened and they could only go ahead with their struggle getting these "secondary" inefficient supports, hoping desperately that something will endly move on the path of a true support.

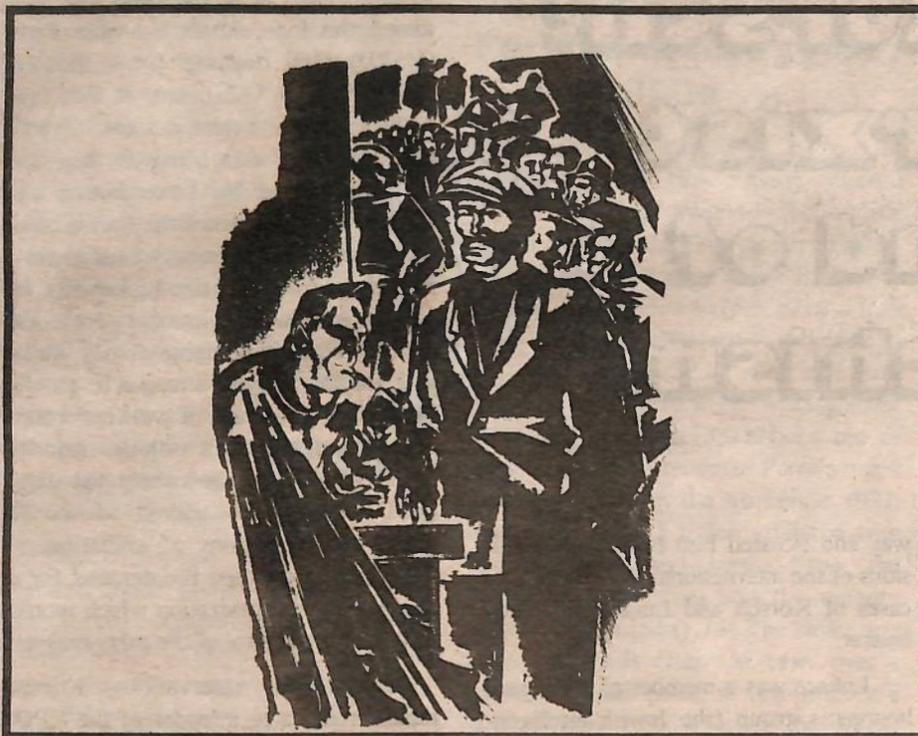
True solidarity is a matter of balance of struggle. We can say that, from the moment the sacking of most of the Torside and MDHC Liverpool dockers did not bring a spontaneous spreading solid strike, the Liverpool dockers were doomed to loose their fight as courageous and stubborn they were and notwithstanding the widely spread "secondary" support they could have got all over the world.

Is it a dream? Not at all, such struggles happened in the past- in the UK - years ago and even at a smaller scale recently during a postal strike. But we have to recognise that nothing of that happened for the Liverpool dockers and they had, at the end to agree with what they have proudly rejected more than two years ago. We can read a lot of dythyrambic comments in the aftermath of this struggle, some of them accusing the unions and their leaders of not having done what they should have done.

Class struggle is the struggle of workers at first at their place of work, a struggle which threaten for a time the possibility to exploit their work and to extract surplus value. If this possibility of pressure against the employers is missing, a struggle could be the struggle of a class and of quite a lot of people identifying themselves with the fight against the capitalist system but who had no special mean to pressure at the heart of exploitation. So this struggle can be a substitute for the struggle of workers against their employer at their place of work but in no way it is a threat against exploitation of work. Which does not mean that such a substitute can have by its size or duration a certain political impact, but this is another question with more questions for instance of the role of a vanguard of militants in true class struggle.

3) What was the position of the dockers' union T&G (TGWU), i.e. what was the function of a recognised big union in the UK, of a union in a capitalist society? It is evident that when firing the dockers the MDHC took a revenge of a long fight and use the situation (perhaps it provoked it) to restructure the work in the port: 150 "new" dockers (scabs) making presently the work of 400, it was a great jump in productivity and in profits

The MDHC certainly thought - and it was right - not only that no risk of a true solidarity would change radically



"The decline of the unions is not the consequence of some distortion of their role or/and of some distasteful leader (they were exactly the same when the unions were prosperous or more powerful: their decline is only due to the fact that in the hard capitalist competition (in attempts to raise the falling rate of profit), the capitalists all over the world have nothing else to offer than pain and tears; so the unions have nothing to sell to the workers (except holidays or insurance) because the employers have nothing to propose in the bargain."

the balance of struggle. One has to think that the Liverpool area is economically a very depressed one (the offer of 150 scab dockers job to break the struggle brought 1.000 candidates). MDHC also knew that not only the T&G union would have its hands paralysed by the industrial laws, but also that it had certainly no intent to give a true support to this struggle, certainly not displeased at all by this firing of disturbing people disobeying the law and doing something revealing the real character and function of such an union. MDHC also knew of course that the government (then conservative party) would do nothing to help the dockers and that the Labour taking the succession in May 97 will follow the same path.

There was recently an exchange of letters in the "liberal" paper -the Guardian about the role of the T&G union and especially about its leader Bill Morris. What the authors of two letters John Pilger and Mark Steel developed was about the question of a kind of "betrayal of T&G and of Morris" having been at the end the cause of the climb down of the Liverpool dockers". John Pilger could write: "Their struggle was lost because the TGWU virtually guaranteed its failure" and Mark Steel discuss the role of "the modern union leader". Both of them and all people attacking the TGWU and other unions, or their leaders, or the Labour, etc., for having let this struggle isolated without true support to the Liverpool dockers struggle,

actually discover the moon. They refuse to see what is the function of the union in a capitalist society. In a certain way, Bill Morris was right when he wrote that the supporters of the Liverpool dockers: with their message of false hope... did more than anyone to prolonge the agony". He was right but not on the way he thought to be: most of the dockers' supporters, and certainly part of the dockers themselves thought it would be possible to oblige the TGWU to be actively on the dockers' side and to give another size to their struggle, the size it lacked because of the lack of a true support from the other dockers or workers in the UK. Bill Morris knew perfectly he would do nothing important for the Liverpool dockers, but as a union leader he had to behave as if he had the possibility to do so; it is part of its job and function to keep this illusion and so "the message of false hope" has to be shared on one hand by himself and the unions, on the other hand by people having illusions on the role of the unions.

We have to be clear about this function of the unions: they do not exist to support workers struggles and not at all to impulse radical way of struggle (and even less to think of a "revolutionary" way). Their function is to be intermediary between labour and capital as a regulator, eventually to bargain about working conditions, eventually to discipline the workers going "too far" in their struggles against exploitation of work. They are part of the capitalist

system and will stay there in this function as long as the capitalist system will exist. Their leaders has become leaders not because they are the best tacticians or theoretician in the workers movement but because they have the required qualities to perform this double face function; so is Bill Morris and in the Liverpool dockers strike he has not betrayed anybody, he has only well realised what the system was waiting from him.

The decline of the unions is not the consequence of some distortion of their role or/and of some distasteful leader (they were exactly the same when the unions were prosperous or more powerful: their decline is only due to the fact that in the hard capitalist competition (in attempts to raise the falling rate of profit), the capitalists all over the world have nothing else to offer than pain and tears; so the unions have nothing to sell to the workers (except holidays or insurance) because the employers have nothing to propose in the bargain.

On the other hand, as organisations able to perform its function - a hierarchical bureaucracy well established and connected to political and economic milieu (an important part of their power) they have to protect themselves from all dangers. Class struggle is one of these dangers especially wildcat strikes (even if occasionally they can use "legal" control strikes to support their power as regulators in the production process). Their present position in the system is only maintained if they can in all circumstances bring the proof they have the ability to control the workers. Bill Morris - as a leader of the main UK union- is perfectly right not to have taken the risk to ruin the TGWU in supporting the illegal solidarity action for an illegal strike: a union has to stay in the legal frame. It is sheer illusion to think he (and the union could have acted differently; if previously he would have had such a thought he would never have become the leader of the TGWU. As we have said above, he did not betray anybody: involuntarily he betrayed only those who - full of illusions - thought that a union and its leaders could act differently, could be "obliged" by a rank and file pressure to act differently, that a union could be "reformed" or transformed to play another role in class struggle. A lot of people in the leftist groups or elsewhere think so, some full of good will, some others in order to "conquer" the bureaucracy of the union as a political lever: the harsh reality imposed on the Liverpool dockers struggle show the narrow limits of their action. If only this could bring their faithful supporters to think about their illusions and their consequences. □

Henri Simon 2/98

Karl Korsch: A Marxist Friend of Anarchism

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Karl Korsch (1886-1961), who is today being rediscovered by the "new left", was one of the major theoreticians of left communism. Of the three major theoreticians of 1920's Marxism - Gramsci, Lukacs and Korsch - Korsch is at once the one of most interest to anarchists and also, I believe, the superior Marxist.

Marxists of the 1920s have an interest for anarchists of a quite different order from those of any other period. The reason is that for a brief period after the First World War Marxism was a revolutionary doctrine in a way that it had not been since Marx nor has been again (leaving aside its use as an ideology of basically peasant nationalist revolutions.) in that brief period the Russian Revolution served as a rallying point for left-wing intellectuals of all shades of red and black, and these joined with anarchist workers and socialist workers of a syndicalist stamp to form the basis of the new parties of the Third International. Except in Spain, anarchist and syndicalist organizations everywhere lost ground to these new parties which rapidly evolved into bureaucratic state socialist organizations interested in the control of the working-class movement. During this evolution those anarchists, syndicalists and left socialists who held true to the initial promise of the Russian Revolution were isolated, weeded out and kept by the party's superior organization from the access to the working class that alone could sustain a revolutionary movement. Karl Korsch was one of the casualties of this process.

Although Gramsci had been a supporter of workers' councils, and in prison tended to associate with syndicalists, he did not become a left opponent of the Comintern. The reasons would seem to be that, firstly, the Italian problem was not revolution but defense against fascism; secondly, Gramsci was opposed to the abstract leftism of Bordiga who was connected with the German ultra-left; and thirdly, Gramsci's imprisonment kept him out of harm's

way and isolated him from the convulsions of the international movement. The cases of Korsch and Lukacs are much clearer.

Lukacs was a member of a marginal bourgeois group (the Jewish intelligentsia) in a semi-feudal country (Hungary). Prior to 1917 his interests were primarily literary although he had been influenced by Szabo - an intellectual who took his syndicalism from Sorel. Not surprisingly his initial position as a revolutionary was utopian and abstractly ultra-left; his later evolution to a "right-wing", almost social-democratic, position (Blum Theses 1929) was quite reasonable given that Hungary only ceased to be feudal in 1945. On the other hand his accommodation to Stalinism, however partial and "insincere" it is alleged to have been, is hard to forgive.

Korsch's knowledge of the workers' movement was, at the end of the war, of an altogether different order from Lukacs'. Educated at several universities in economics, law, sociology and philosophy, he became a doctor of jurisprudence in 1911 and went to England where he joined the Fabian society and studied the syndicalist and Guild socialist movements. He was already opposed to the Marxist orthodoxy which defined socialism as the negation of capitalism by nationalization, saw the coming of socialism as inevitable and conceived Marxism as a pure "science" separate from the practice of the workers' movement. His opposition to this orthodoxy turned Korsch's attention to the Fabian's concern with the preparation of individuals for socialism through education and to the syndicalists' stress on the conscious activity of the workers as the basis both of the revolution and the management of a socialist economy. From his very earliest articles he stressed the role of consciousness in the struggle for socialism and the importance of working class self-activity. After the war he developed his ideas further by working out schemes for socialization coupled with workers' control.

At the beginning of the 1914-18 war Korsch was conscripted in the German army and went to the front, but he was against the war and, although wounded twice, never carried a gun himself. He welcomed the formation of the anti-war

socialist movement and after the war joined the Independent Socialist Party (USPD). Still opposed to "orthodox" and "revisionist" Marxism, at that time he believed that a third current, "Practical socialism", was being formed and was represented by Luxembourg and Lenin. For this tendency the transition to socialism was a "conscious human act". Korsch became sufficiently Leninist by 1924 to see the 'revolutionary act as the act of, a mass revolutionary party but he still saw the party as a means to an end of a direct democracy of workers' councils. Although he went with the majority of the USPD into the communist party (KPD) he argued against Moscow's twenty-one conditions of affiliation; in particular he opposed the demand for a parallel illegal organization which would be out of the control of the party masses.

Despite his reservations, Korsch rapidly rose to be a leader of the KPO. He became editor of the party journal and a deputy in the Reichstag. This he owed to his theoretical pre-eminence for, although he had always rejected social-democratic "Marxism", he had been led in his legal studies to see society and the economy as the basis of legal systems and, during the brief liberation of Marxism from orthodoxy his previous philosophical, sociological and economic studies served him well. However, this situation soon changed; after 1923 he was obviously on the left-wing of the KPD; in 1924 his 1923 book *Marxism and Philosophy* was denounced at the executive meeting of the communist international and he was removed from his editorial position in 1925; in 1926 he was excluded from the KPD.

According to Mattick, Korsch always had a critical attitude to the emerging Russian state but in the early period of the Russian revolution, when all the forces of reaction were arrayed against it, he believed that a revolutionary had to support it. Furthermore, although the Russian revolution had to be a capitalist one, i.e. its mission was to develop capital and a proletariat in underdeveloped Russia, it still had a revolutionary significance if the break in -the world system could be extended westward into Germany. Once Russia had reached its accommodation with Germany and other capitalist powers and had turned the Communist International into a foreign instrument of its national purposes, a revolutionary had to break with Russia. Thus in 1926 he joined the "Resolute Left" - an ultra-left group opposed to the new Russian bureaucracy and its German ally, the KPD. Even earlier he had been in contact with Sapanov of the "Democratic Centralism" group within the Russian party who believed that the Russian proletariat should break with the Bolsheviks. (Korsch's views on these questions can be found in the article in French by Mattick. Very similar views are to be found in *Society of the Spectacle* by Guy Debord in the section "The Proletariat as subject and as representation".)

Unfortunately Korsch's political articles on Bolshevism are not yet available in English (1). On the other hand we have most of his articles on Marxist theory and these make plain why the split had to occur. In his 1923 work *Marxism and Philosophy* Korsch claimed to be attempting to "restore" the correct Marxian position on this question in the same way, and for the same revolutionary purposes, as Lenin had restored the Marxist position on the state in *State and Revolution* (a pamphlet denounced as "anarchist" by the other Bolsheviks). In fact what he did was to show how Marxism had become an ideology of the workers' movement: for Korsch Marxism, whether in its pre-1848 "philosophical" form or its post-1848 "scientific" form, was neither a science nor a philosophy, it was either the theoretical consciousness of a proletarian revolutionary practice or it was a "Marxist" ideology unrelated to practice or, concealing a counter-revolutionary practice. All this was placed in the context of violent attack on the orthodox Marxism of Kautsky, and hence, said Korsch, was against the second International and for the third International. In saying these things, Korsch trampled on all that Marxist orthodoxy, German or Russian, social-democratic or Bolshevik, held dear.

In 1930 when Korsch returned to the question to write an anti-critique he was clear on what had happened. Unbeknown to him, he had been "guilty" of deviation from the emerging Marxist-Leninist orthodoxy based on Kautsky and Plekhanov. Thus for the Russians there was a materialist Marxist philosophy (given in Lenin's *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*) and also a Marxist science which, following Kautsky, had to be brought to the proletariat from outside by bourgeois intellectuals (as expounded in Lenin's *What is to be Done?*). Thus what Korsch had thought to be a new, third, current in Marxism was just a new ideological variant of the old Marxist orthodoxy. The special features of bolshevism were merely a reflection of the special tasks which the ideology was to perform in undeveloped Russia. This discovery of the ideological nature of communist theory and the collapse and the collapse of all revolutionary Marxist workers' movements in the face of counter-revolution, implied a re-evaluation of Marxism.

For Korsch Marxist theory was the general expression of the existing revolutionary movement. In counter-revolutionary periods Marxism could be developed further in its scientific content but once Marxism was developed as a pure science separate from its connection with the proletarian movement it tended to become an ideology. Thus the link between theory and practice was not anything to do with the application of a science but meant simply that theory was the articulated consciousness of a practical revolutionary movement. To re-establish the link required the existence of

cal revolutionary movement. To re-establish the link required the existence of a proletarian revolutionary movement and the purging of Marxism of all its ideological and bourgeois elements. The only movement which answered to the description in the Europe of the 1930's was the Spanish anarchist movement and so Korsch, while continuing his work on Marxist theory, also studied Bakunin and the anarchist movement.

In his 1923 work Korsch had stressed that early marxism was a continuation in a new context of the revolutionary theory of the bourgeoisie, principally of the German idealist tradition. In his 1930 'Thesis on Hegel and the Revolution' he returned to this question and re-evaluated both Hegelian and marxist theory. Hegelian philosophy was not just the revolutionary philosophy of the bourgeoisie; it was the philosophy of the final phase of the bourgeois revolution and hence also a philosophy of the restoration. Thus the dialectical method is not the purely revolutionary principle that the Marxists imagined. Thus also the creation of a theory of the proletarian revolution on the basis of a "materialized" dialectic is only a transitional phase of the workers' movement. Marxism is not the theory of an independent proletarian revolution but the theory of a proletarian revolution as it develops out of the bourgeois revolution, and this theory shows its origins: it is still tainted with bourgeois revolutionary theory, that is to say with Jacobinism. This means that Marxist politics remain within the orbit of bourgeois politics. As Korsch said explicitly in his 1950 Ten Theses on Marxism Today, Marxism adheres unconditionally to the political forms of the bourgeois revolution.

The break with bourgeois politics has been carried through only by the anarchist and syndicalist movements, in the form of the break with politics as such.

Only these movements were still revolutionary in practice. For Korsch their importance was that they still maintained the ideal, everywhere else sacrificed, of class solidarity above immediate material interests and they based themselves on the self-activity of the working class as expressed in the principle of direct action.

When, the Spanish Civil War broke out in 1936, Korsch supported the CNT militants' attempts to introduce workers' management in opposition to the political line of the right-wing socialists, Stalinists and bourgeois republicans. This development to a syndicalist as opposed to orthodoxy Marxist socialist position went parallel to a re-interpretation of Marxism.

Although Korsch remained a Marxist his view of Marxism became increasingly critical. By 1960 he had completely rejected Marxism as the only theory of the proletarian revolution and had made Marx one, among others, of the numerous 11 precursors, founders and devel-

opers of the workers' socialist movement." In 1961 he was working on a study of Bakunin and believed then that the basis of the revolutionary attitude in the modern bourgeois epoch would be an ethic Marx would have rejected as "anarchist". In his 1950 Ten Theses he also criticized Marxism's overestimation of the state as an instrument of social revolution and the two phase theory of socialism whereby the real emancipation of the working class is put into the indefinite future. Thus he explicitly rejected the elements of Marxism which separate it from anarchism.

Korsch's life's work is both an exposition and a critique of Marxism from a political position close to anarchism. Although, as Korsch himself showed, Marxism is not sufficient for a modern revolutionary movement, a study of Korsch's own Marxism allows one to preserve the best elements of the heritage of the classical workers' movement.

(1) While this was certainly true at the time this article was written, in the interim several collections of Korsch's works in English appeared. See especially the special issue of TELOS devoted to Korsch and Douglas Kellner's Korsch anthology, which is still in print as of 1997 - CAN note)

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"The pursuit of revolutionary struggle by what Marxism and Philosophy



called an "ideological dictatorship" is in three ways different from the system of intellectual oppression established in Russia today in the name of the 'dictatorship of the proletariat'. First of all, it is a dictatorship of the proletariat and not over the proletariat. Secondly, it is a dictatorship of a class and not of a party or party leadership. Thirdly and most importantly, as a revolutionary dictatorship it is one element only of that radical process of social overthrow which by suppressing classes and class contradictions creates the preconditions for a 'withering away of the State', and thereby the end of all ideological constraint. The essential purpose of an 'ideological dictatorship' in this sense is to abolish its own material and ideological causes and thereby to make its own existence unnecessary and impossible. From the very first day, this genuine proletarian dictatorship will be distinguished from any false imitation of it by its creation of the conditions of intellectual freedom not only for 'all' workers but for 'each individual' worker. Despite the alleged 'democracy' and 'freedom of thought' in bourgeois society, this freedom has never been enjoyed anywhere by the wage slaves who suffer its physical and spiritual oppression. This is what concretely defines the Marxist concept of the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat. With it disappears the otherwise apparent contradiction between a call for 'ideological dictatorship', and the essentially critical and revolutionary nature of the method and outlook of Communism. Socialism, both in its ends and its means, is a struggle to realize freedom."

□ Karl Korsch Marxism and Philosophy, Pages 125 and 126

Libertarian Socialism

Libertarian socialism has many different interpretations, but its primary meaning is found in opposition to a range of bureaucratic tendencies within a hierarchical society to seek ever increasing levels of control over work, social life, and personal relationships. For the purpose of this exposition the term 'bureaucracy' refers to a range of institutional arrangements by which a dominant stratum, the state, or the slick operators of the market, seek greater control over people's objectives, where people are treated as means or instruments whose own objectives are regarded as insignificant.

For the greater part of this century socialism has not reflected the libertarian ideal. One reason for this failure is the acceptance of the party model of political activity which, in practice, has superimposed its own objectives on to the class whose interests it claimed to represent. This bureaucratic substitution has not only alienated and demoralized many rank and file activists it has also contributed to the more general disillusionment with socialism which is prevalent in both Eastern and Western Europe today.

In what follows I shall argue that any way forward for libertarian socialism must involve a total rejection to the party model of political change. I shall then attempt to resurrect certain aspects of Hegelian dialectics as a method of conceptualizing political struggle in a libertarian framework, and draw attention to some inherent contradictions within the bureaucratic ideal.

Any attempt to understand the philosophy and practice of contemporary socialism and its eventual demise, must comprehend the concept of party organization. This presents no problem in the case of social democrats and labourist parties, whose organizational concepts and objectives simply reflect a desire to manage people better than their counterparts on the right. But the party in revolutionary socialist or communist thought cannot be comprehended in terms of its organizational framework alone; the party is not merely a means to an end, but both ends and means together. Built into the concept of the party are a series of philosophical assumptions and generalizations about reality, truth, the historic process, the unity



between theory and practice, the relationship between leaders and led, the vanguard and the subordinate class.

For the Marxist-Leninist, the party was the bearer of classconsciousness, representing both the ends of the subordinate class and the means of establishing its objectives. But from the beginning this concept of organization revealed an inherent contradiction: the party whose historic function was to serve the class as its means or instrument, in actuality perceived the class as a means or instrument for the fulfillment of its own objectives. This is a classical Hegelian reversal of the relationship between means and ends, whereby the servant as means is transformed into the essential end. There was no escape: no matter how stridently the party insisted that its interests coincided with those of the class, as servant to the aspiring class, it became its master. The rest, as we have seen in Eastern Europe, is history.

The relative ease with which Marxist Leninists reconstitute political problems - unemployment, poverty, racism - into party programs often blinds one to the

fact that a revolutionary party has never emerged naturally from the experiences of a subordinate class. Britain was the first industrial society and its working classes were studied intensively by Marx and Engels. Yet even after its enfranchisement in the 1870s it took at least two decades before it thought of organizing a working class party despite the predictions of Macaulay, Mill and Bagehot, who spoke with dread of a party that would establish the tyranny of the majority. When a party did emerge it was organized under the leadership of skilled Trades Unionists, firmly committed to Gladstonian liberalism, not revolutionary socialism.

Whenever the European working-classes embarked on a revolutionary course the institutions they created were never parties. In the post-war struggles of 1918-21, in Spain during the 1930s, in Hungary in 1956 and throughout Europe in 1968, neither strategies nor objectives revealed any natural emergence of the party. However radical and confrontational their program, socialist parties have functioned as a cushion between the subordinate class and the

interests of those who seek to manage production and social life. The discipline believed necessary for the smooth functioning of advanced industrial countries requires extensive control and managerial intervention in almost every aspect of life.

A subordinate class can be brutalized into factory discipline, but for the execution of more refined tasks it must experience a sense of purposive freedom. Blind obedient automata cannot perform the creative tasks which are essential to the routine functioning of a modern working environment. The subordinate class must be educated, enfranchised, admitted into society, and encouraged to develop its own value system and objectives - even if they occasionally conflict with the interests of the dominant group. Throughout the greater part of this century, revolutionary socialist parties facilitated this transition, bringing the subordinate class into the existing framework of political discourse and curtailing its aspirations to the parameters or a reality which was accepted by the party. The Marxist-Leninist party never opposed the discipline and arbitrary imposed authority of the work place nor did it seek to exploit the inherent contradictions of bureaucratic management; instead it exalted bureaucratic management and extended discipline even further.

At the risk of gross under-simplification it might be said that the events of 1989 in Eastern Europe, the destruction of the socialist parties, and the emasculation of collective protection for workers, not only expresses the decline of the usefulness of the party to the bureaucratic elites on the right, but a recourse to cruder mechanisms of control based largely upon fear of unemployment and destitution. In Eastern Europe the collapse of communism in the name of democracy resulted in 'liberal' regimes which have done nothing for the majority, but have merely enabled a rich minority to expropriate collective property. But the inherent tensions within market democracy ensures that it cannot work without a strong repressive state apparatus. Market democracy has inherent contradictions. Democracy requires that any change should rest on broad-based social support. But the privatiza-

means represent a permanent potential to impose their ends in any power relationship. In the Science of Logic he depicted the social tension between ends and means in the discourse appropriate to syllogistic logic, although his syllogisms bear no relation to formal logic as it is usually understood.

The Hegelian syllogism has three terms: a middle term [means, instrument] which mediates the two extremes; an end [skilled worker] and an object [raw material]. In Hegel's analysis of labor the means [a tool or plough] is employed by an end [a skilled worker] against the object [the natural world], whose resistance is overcome by a combination of the practical knowledge and desire of the skilled worker. Hegel's point is simple to grasp. The teleology- mechanism, free-will-determinism, dichotomies can be transcended by locating conscious human purpose within the causal network.

The relationship between human needs and the instruments of labor is dialectical: the labor process 's rooted in human needs and desires, and in turn science and technology rest upon a social base which in turn generates the search for further causal relationships. In work one penetrates deeper into the causal processes of the natural world, overcoming its resistance, setting the forces of nature to work against themselves in the interests of human desire. The building of a house, he notes, requires the purposive manipulation of fire and wind to make it fire-proof and wind-proof. In purposive production nature is set against itself to fulfill the ends of human desire.

There are both epistemological and political lessons to be derived from Hegel's account of labor: the limits of knowledge and freedom are not transcendently drawn, but are the functions of the purposes human agents set for themselves. Whilst human labor can never go beyond the limits of causality new desires stimulated by advances in the awareness of what is possible lead to the discovery of hitherto concealed causal relationships. In turn the advancement of practical skills provides the basis for new desires and freedom from natural necessity, and so the process continues. Desire for a good harvest engenders practical farming skills the development of which - combine harvesters and fertilizers - give rise to a new set of needs and further problems to overcome, such as the expectations of better diets, elimination of starvation, and the problem of coping with the environmental problems created by technology. All of these require still further developments in practical skills, such as engineering and factory production of agricultural equipment and environmental sciences. In Hegel's eyes the fusion of finality and causality is the key to the growth of knowledge and freedom from causal determination.

The social dynamic of the labor process is dramatized in Hegel's PHENOMENOLOGY OF SPIRIT where

tion program requires the exclusion of the majority of people from any decision-making in these crucial areas. This inherent tension is the same in Western Europe.

Rolling back state regulation and destroying the influence of labor organizations leads to the exclusion of large numbers of people from any say in matters which directly affect their interest. The trick was in convincing large numbers of people that democracy and the market are linked. In reality the outcome appears to be that many Eastern Europeans are rejecting democracy in response to market failure and are retreating into authoritarian myths, although the possibility of moves towards a more democratic form of collectivism should not be discounted. It will be important, from the standpoint of the authorities, to retain an illusion of democratic involvement. We can therefore expect pro-market ideologists to concoct 'enterprise pacts' and various profit-sharing schemes as a means of forestalling total cynicism.

Notwithstanding media applause for the demise of communism there is the pertinent fact that capitalism, whatever its variety, is in a serious crisis. Its political institutions are moribund and do not command legitimacy. Despite the triumphalism of the marketeers and the end of history' prophets conflict has not been eliminated. Subordinate classes are obliged to resist ever increasing attempts to manage their lives and resentment towards the incompetence of the political managers is widespread. Moreover, as intervention extends beyond the traditional work place to the professions, where scientists, teachers, lecturers, doctors, nurses, lawyers, and even vicars and priests, protest at the increasing

levels of interference and the imposition of idealized industrial models of management on every profession, with their frustrating exercises in assessment and quality control - all geared to the assault on autonomy in the name of the consumer - the scope for a truly socialist and libertarian program is widened.

The Logic of Resistance to Bureaucratic Intervention

In his interview with Flux (issue 5, Autumn, 1992) Ken Weller of Solidarity spoke of an attitude among members of socialist parties in which subordinate classes are seen as potential clients rather than as people who are capable of articulating and achieving their own objectives. I would like to rephrase this in terms of a more general distinction between 'seeing people either as ends or as means'. In fact the distinction between ends and means has a long history. Aristotle drew a distinction between rational men whose capacity to formulate ends equipped them for a political role in the public sphere, and slaves and women whose function was to serve as means or instruments in the private sphere. In various forms the distinction between ends and means has drawn between humans and the natural world, masters and slaves, men and women, employers and employees, rulers and ruled. To be reduced to a means or instrument is to be robbed of autonomy and responsibility and consequently to be of no direct moral significance. If the planet is merely there for whatever purpose we desire we owe it nothing. The loss of a slave or animal is only significant insofar as its owner is adversely affected. The same can be said about attitudes to any exploited group who, at one time or another, have been deemed to be incapable of exhibiting purpose and

rationality.

From the early stages of the scientific and industrial revolution appeals to purpose and intentionality were banished from scientific discourse and were no longer held to be relevant to any explanations of the natural world. The demolition of the 'Argument from Design' by Enlightenment philosophers secured the hegemony of a purely mechanistic science which reduced appeals to a Divine purposive intelligence to the level of superstition. Today appeals to a natural purposive consciousness appear only among the followers of New Age cults.

Taking the denial of purpose a stage further, from the natural to the social sciences, we find the rejection of purposive action emerging in the explanations of human behavior. From Hobbes through to Bentham and to the various strands of behavioral science there is a preponderance in favor of determinism in which the majority of people are not initiators of purposive action but are reactors to stimuli, social conditioning and various innate mechanisms. Genetic determinism and sociobiological explanations are merely additions to this mechanistic philosophy.

The denial of ends is one of the modes of withholding any recognition of moral status and dignity. Factory hands are but means to the factory owners end; slaves are mere instruments to provide pleasure for the slave-owner, women mere commodities for the enjoyment of men. All of this is familiar. The ideal of bureaucratic control is a situation where those who are perceived as mere means not only accept this role but identify with the objectives of those who use them. The slaves rejoice in the military victories of the slave-owners, the women freely identify with the stereotypes of bondage depicted for them by the manipulators of the pornography industry. The bureaucratic ideal is a well-managed society wherein subordinate members have no ends of their own. Thus news bulletins present the prospect of over 3 million unemployed as a headache for John Major, the destruction of mining communities as an embarrassment for Michael Heseltine, but the cancellation of the aspirations of these millions of people is robbed of significance unless, perhaps, as many on the political left would have it, they can produce a revolutionary leadership that would leave its mark on history.

Towards the end of his SCIENCE OF LOGIC Hegel addresses the problem of ends and means in his examination of a battery of related distinctions drawn between teleology and mechanism, Purpose and causality, finality and efficiency, free-will and determinism. Rejecting the mechanist and determinist view that ie purpose has no scientific significance Hegel develops an analysis of labor in which the role of purposive freedom is essential. He questions the division between ends and means, offering a perspective on history whereby the



Devil's Island: A prisoner chained to his workplace by welded-on leg irons

freedom for the slave is not solely freedom from the master but also freedom from what was considered the natural limit of freedom - the hardness of the physical world. Here, however, the syllogism takes a different form. The slave, or skilled worker, has become a means for the masters' ends. The syllogism now consists of an end [a master], a middle term [slave] and the objects of the natural world. Using the skills acquired in purposive production the slave works to fulfill an alien end. Herein lies the contradiction: whilst purpose is essential to production the displacement of purpose is in conflict with the potential for the enhancement of knowledge and freedom. On the one hand the slave must increase knowledge and practical skills in order to dominate the natural world whilst on the other hand social powerlessness denies significance to the slave's objectives. This is the contradiction inherent in social relationships within an authoritarian ethos. The skilled worker, though treated as a means or instrument, is at the same time a conscious purposive agent. At one and the same time the logic of authoritarian production requires that the worker is both ends and means simultaneously: doing one's job, acquiring practical skills, whilst being required to submit as a thing with no other purpose than the satisfaction of her bosses.

Here is the key to the logical structure of the master-servant dialectic in Hegel's PHENOMENOLOGY OF SPIRIT. After a struggle which stops short of death the master uses the slave as a means for his own ends. Just as the plough mediates between the farmer and the harvest, so the master slides the slave between himself and the things he desires. He desires food without having to work for it. So he desires slavery and the means also become the object of his desire. The cotton plantation owners go to war for the defense of slavery. But the master becomes degraded and trapped in his enjoyment, whilst the slave learns how to dominate the natural world and, in turn how to dominate the master through the weakness of his desires. Thus it is ultimately through his attachment to things that the master loses his freedom. On this point Hegel reveals greater foresight than many Marxists, for desire for the universality of things need not lead to freedom but to even greater enslavement. Slavery to the means of production may exist in the midst of undreamt of riches.

What can we learn from Hegel's treatment of teleology? It provides a set of categories for the understanding of social dynamics within oppressive few relationships, which not only apply to factory production but to the manipulation of leisure as well as personal relationships. Hegel's emphasis on freedom and purposive production provides a philosophical grounding for future libertarian theory which, so frequently in recent years, has been eclipsed by various exponents of anti-theoretical activ-

ism, individualism and hedonism.

Underpinning much of post-Enlightenment thought are rigid dichotomies between freedom and necessity, theory and practice, purpose and mechanism. The location of conscious human purpose within natural mechanisms reveals how inappropriate these dichotomies are to the understanding of social change. Nevertheless, traces of mechanistic thought were incorporated into Marxism and the theories of the revolutionary left. Whilst Marx emphasized the importance of class conflict in the transformation of social life, his classes were portrayed in mechanistic terms. The proletariat was presented as the exploited producing class which, according to the logic of the productive forces, would overturn the existing power structure. But Marx never gave any serious thought to the class struggle within the sphere of production

Seeing the worker as a passive object exploited for labor power, Marx never considered the worker's interest in imposing his or her ends on the productive process. The worker was seen as a passive means whose output and surplus value could be objectively determined. As such class conflict was depicted as a struggle to reduce profits and increase wages. But as Hegel would have noticed the history of class struggle is more than wages and profits disputes: it is the history of resistance to the management of production within the workplace. The employer does not buy an hour of passive labor as the Marxist model suggests; he buys an hours output which will vary according to the worker's resistance. In this important sense, workers are not passive automata but people with a definite say in the determination of the exchange value of labor power. In short: Marx's theory of pauperism was too mechanistic in that it failed to consider the dialectical unity which Hegel observed between nature's necessity and purposive freedom.

To be sure, Marx's theory of pauperism is concerned with relative, not absolute, pauperism, but even so, the action of social classes is neglected. Whilst factory production seeks to reduce the worker to a thing, it can never really succeed without becoming dysfunctional. Purposive production and human freedom cannot be completely eradicated from the sphere of production. The struggle for workers autonomy is not for an additional luxury over and above the requirement for adequate wages; it is a necessary feature of purposive production. Autonomous action - where people who are regarded as means struggle to impose their ends - is a feature in every place of employment. It involves the many informal methods of resisting production - strikes, works to rule, malingering, creative loitering, ridiculing tear-arses, pretending to be stupid, absenteeism and sabotage. But not all autonomous action is directed at resistance to production. Control over

"... the history of class struggle is more than wages and profits disputes: it is the history of resistance to the management of production within the workplace. The employer does not buy an hour of passive labor as the Marxist model suggests; he buys an hours output which will vary according to the worker's resistance."

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one's work can be demonstrated in confrontations with employers where workers actually increase both the quantity and quality of production. This might include work-ins, occupations, and doing the job better when the foreman is absent. There is 'good-work' sabotage, usually in service industries, where disgruntled workers give the customers 'fair measure' in defiance of a company policy to cut standards. In fact 'good work' sabotage - sabotaging the employer's sabotage - which is widespread, offers libertarian socialists an opportunity to publicize and encourage autonomous actions which have the added benefit of enlisting the support of the consumer.

Marx did, however, recognize that under certain conditions factory production generated contradictions. The more the worker creates machines, said Marx in his Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts, the more he is dominated and dehumanized by them. Such was the alienation which had its genesis in the division of labor in nineteenth-century factory production. But Marx saw this as a philosophical problem about which little could be done. If production were to continue in a communist society, a degree of alienation would remain. The realm of freedom, as Marx says in CAPITAL, would be established outside of production. But what Marx saw as a philosophical contradiction is a literal one in a most profound sense. In the interests of greater production, in both the capitalist and former communist countries, there is a tendency to reduce the worker to the status of an artifact. But at the very same time she is required to participate as a free and conscious human being, learning how to overcome the obstacles thrown up by the natural world, learning how to meet the resistance of the machine. Thus the logic of production in an unequal society generates an inescapable contradiction whereby the laborer is both excluded and included in the productive process. In simple terms, It is a contradiction between doing what one is told and doing one's job. If workers respond as au-

tomata - which they should do according to the logic of production - the whole system can ground to a halt; for if people are passive objects they cannot produce. Yet if they seek to control their own movements, initiate their own decisions, they pose a threat to the distribution of power within the system.

Throughout this article I have focused primarily on factory production. But the analysis of the contradiction between purpose and passivity applies to any system of social relationships involving unequal access to power. [2] Despite all the machinery of coercion no prison can function without the free consent and cooperation of the inmates who, at the same time, must be depersonalized and reduced to the status of objects. In schools, universities, banks, offices, hospitals, armies, and churches, there are conflicts arising out of the incompatible requirements for autonomy and bureaucratic intervention.

Libertarian socialists might well address these issues, giving prominence to struggles where subordinate groups, which might well include a vast number of over-managed professionals such as scientists, teachers and health-care workers, attempt to establish their autonomous ends. Newsletters and Bulletins should never report struggles as seen through the eyes of any potential elite but address the objectives of the participants. But this raises a problem which dominated many meetings and conferences of the libertarian left during the 'sixties and 'seventies: what kind of autonomous actions should we support? I recall many heated arguments which turned on whether or not a commitment to autonomy was incompatible with a condemnation of the autonomous actions of racists, fascists or sexists. Demands would then be made for a socialist content to autonomous or self-managed movements. The problem was that once the socialist blueprints were produced, which emphasized ends at the expense of the autonomous means, the standpoint would then revert to one of vanguardism or elitism.

In fact this was never a serious

problem. Political judgments can be made with reference to vast experiences of conflict throughout history. A few questions about the origins, structure, and ideology of any political movement should provide enough information with regard to its significance for libertarian socialists. Do we really need access to the blue-prints of revolutionary socialism to decide whether or not to support the Union of Democratic Miners, or defend members of Militant who face expulsion from the Labor Party? The search for some kind of standard of socialist consciousness is a hangover from the party model, where the party functioned as a revolutionary school teacher assessing the consciousness of the masses, awarding conditional support for this or that struggle insofar as it came up to standard.

Despite the so-called death of revolutionary socialism there is a war going on in which suffering and poverty is being inflicted on many people whilst intelligent people, who can see through the lies and nonsense of our political leaders, remain inactive through despair and disillusionment. In this situation libertarian socialists must have a serious re-appraisal of their priorities. The traditional socialist standpoint of Leninists and Fabians, which sought first the conquest of the state and the 'commanding heights of the economy', should be first on the list for reassessment. This is not to say that libertarian socialists should withdraw interest in these areas, but that the many diverse struggles which are taking place all around us should not be assessed with reference to strategies for the attainment of statist objectives. Emphasis should be primarily upon conflicts where people's autonomy is directly threatened. Too many people are bullied by employers, banks, bureaucrats and street thugs. It is amazing that some anarchists still see the criminal lumpen proletariat as a meaningful avenue for social improvement. But insofar as libertarian socialists pursue autonomy as an end in itself then freedom from muggers and housebreakers is also a priority. Why should the respectable right claim all the virtues associated with the protection of law and order?

There is no simple formula for the way forward. In a climate where interference from the authorities is on the increase, and democratic gains are under assault, where collective struggle has almost been forgotten, where people live in fear of unemployment and the unemployed are harassed by the state, bailiffs and loan sharks, the prospects look bleak. But according to some of the arguments presented here, the game isn't over.

Notes

[1] See, Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, *Sabotage*, IWW, Cleveland, April, 1915; reprinted by Carl Sleinger. 1978 and by Pentagon b, 1993.

(2) The significance of Hegelian dialectics for feminism has been noted.

See Susan Easton, 'Functionalism and feminism in Hegel's Political Thought', Summer, 1985, pp 2-8.

□ Dave Lamb

Reprinted from *Animal: Unrepentant Voice of Class War* # 1. A slightly longer version of this article is available from *Animal* [PO Box, 467, London, E8 3QX] Please send four first class stamps if you would like a copy.

" Autonomous action - where people who are regarded as means struggle to impose their ends - is a feature in every place of employment.

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Self-Activity Of Wage Workers:

Towards A Critique Of Representation And Delegation

(Theories and practices of representation and delegation are a stumbling block in the self-activity of wage-workers. They hinder wage-workers resistances and steps of change. What follows is a part of a larger critique of representation and delegation that we are engaged in.)

Kamunist Kranti/Collectivities, April 1998

Lead-ry

For over four years now we have encountered numerous arguments and counter-arguments in conversations amongst wage-workers on the role of leaders in routine factory life. The backdrop to these conversations has been the unfolding of events in factories where workers find themselves trapped. What is attempted here is a systematization of numerous experiences and observations to obtain a

better understanding of shop-floor life in order to confront it more effectively.

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"On the shopfloor we are at all times in direct antagonism with the supervisor/ foreman. This antagonism is because of the supervisor's constant attempt to maintain work flow."

"Supervisors constantly keep their eyes on us. They threaten us with chargesheets & suspension, placate us with overtime & advance payments and use outright deceptions to keep us in check."

"Supervisors constantly nag us to fulfill production quotas and maintain quality. They perpetually hassle us to ensure a minimal rejection of products. Raw material utilization is another never-ending bone of contention."

"We never tell supervisors what is in our hearts. No supervisors can know what we

are thinking and planning. They are actually in constant fear of us."

"Routinely we engage in slowdowns, quality slackening, wastage, breakage and clogging. Breakage and clogging are what we all do, all the time - but never talk about it, even with each other. We never even voice our appreciation or acknowledgment of what someone has done its an open secret."

"Whenever the discontent on the shopfloor becomes very sharp and the atmosphere surcharged, supervisors lose their voice."

Routine Lead-ry

"Leaders are from amongst us. We have an ambivalent relationship with them."

"Because they are from amongst us, leaders know a lot about us, about our inclinations and our thoughts. Lead-

ers do not work themselves. They tell us to ensure that production does not fall and promise to take care of the rest as they claim to be our watch-dogs (pahredar)."

"Leaders have financial clout. This is not just from union dues & other collections. A lot of money comes from cuts & commissions in the purchase of uniforms, shoes, festival sweets, festival gifts like blankets, almiraahs, suitcases, watches and kitchen-ware. Cuts from canteen contractors and scrap-dealers. Lumpsums from managements for long term agreements. Control of cooperative societies and welfare funds."

"Contenders for leadership spend a lot of money during elections (in the factory). Because leadership means financial clout."

"Being a leader entails no work in the factory and much money. This is enough to sway a lot of workers."

On small benefit networks

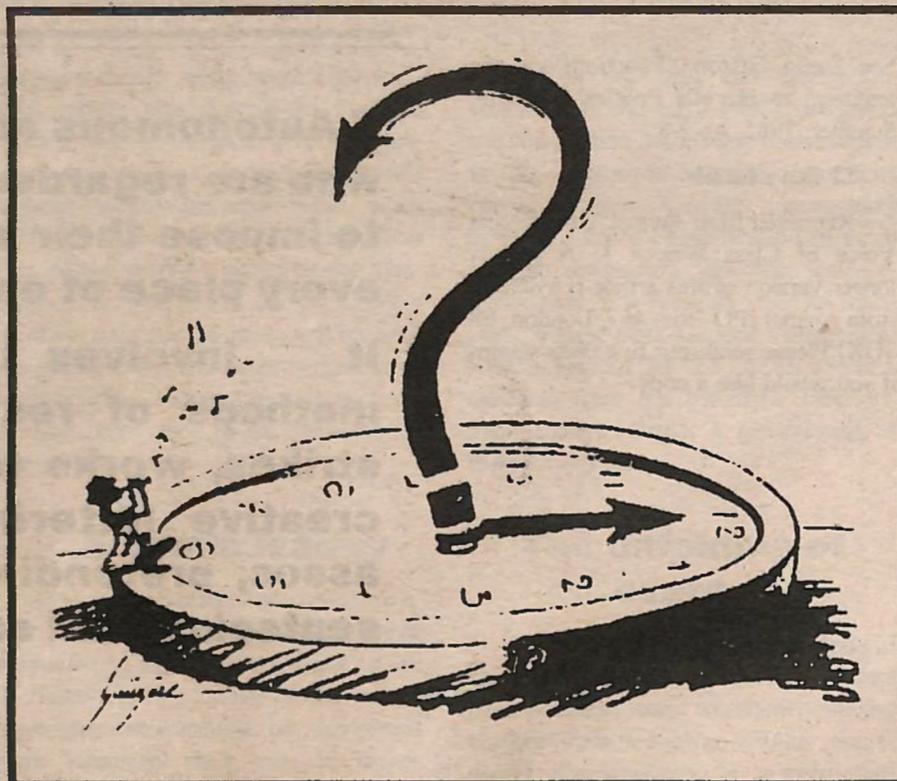
"Leaders, ex-leaders and potential leaders create and maintain an intricate network spread throughout the factory through incentives like advances, loans, lighter jobs, preferable shifts, employment to kith & kin, gate passes, tours, better food from the canteen without any payment, grants from welfare, first preference."

"Networking by leaders also uses caste and regional identities."

"Leaders and ex-leaders are often found ensconced in the offices of the personnel manager or some other official. Persons with close links to this or that managerial faction can provide facilities to their close followers (lagua-b-hagua). Leaders and their camp-followers makeup ten to fifteen percent of the factory's workers."

"Those who constitute the networks are articulate in various ways - from muscle power to slippery tongues."

"These networks which are constituted on the basis of ma-



terial incentives and favours are very intricate. They make a "tantra" and "jaal" (apparatus and mesh) to keep constant tabs on, as well as affect the weather and temperature on the shopfloor."

"Those who constitute the networks are conduits for the circulation of rumours, baits, airy-fairy promises, and even lies. These networks make constant efforts to justify and valorize leaders and their powerful social & political links."

"Leaders are basically middlepersons. And like all middlepersons they sometimes get small things done for us on an individual basis."

"We have everyday fears of disciplinary actions, chargesheets, suspensions and physical attacks. Leaders' networks routinely highlight, heighten and exaggerate these fears to keep us pacified."

During shopfloor confrontations

"Supervisors run away from the shopfloor whenever worker discontent grows and workers take an openly confrontationist stance. In such cases management refuses to talk to workers directly. It sends leaders to the shop-floor."

"Most of us weigh the situation again and again, and hesitatingly take steps back and forth on contentious issues. Leaders' networks try to pacify

us by exaggerating our fears. Meanwhile, the networks of ex-leaders and potential leaders try and instigate us to an openly confrontationist stance in an attempt to establish their leaderships."

"Leaders' pet rant to pacify us is that - 'you start the work, we'll take care of the matter'. When workers refuse to listen and open confrontation continues, selective suspensions and dismissals begin."

"In such situations, suspensions and dismissals force workers to talk to the leaders. The leaders then scold workers for having taken steps without their advice. They present the suspensions and dismissals as a consequence of not heeding them."

"The issues of contention are effectively sidelined by the leaders. They shift the focus to suspensions and dismissals."

"Routinely, when workers demand small relief on individual or group basis, the management does not act. When leaders say the same thing, the management acts. This increases the power of the leaders."

Some conclusions

"We used to give union dues on the understanding that we would get benefits in exchange. Wages will increase and our jobs will be safe. But during the past twenty years things have been just the op-

posite."

"For twenty-eight years I have been witnessing a reduction in the number of workers and an increase in production."

"Earlier we used to give union dues but now the management deducts union dues from our salary."

"Trapped by one assurance or another, we contribute union dues. It is only later that we find that all these assurances were hollow."

Lead-ry: department of conflict management

Lead-ry is an art and a science, mastered only by a few, and used to sit on our heads. It requires:

□ Sharp skills in discontent measurement and the ability to arrive at swift quantitative solutions (i.e. 'at what' and 'at how much' will the workers accept the disagreeable. This involves a wide spectrum of activities ranging from passing on sums of money to slapping a supervisor's face).

□ Highly developed rhetorical skills, which are used to sway, to create prejudice and to convince.

□ Organising skills, which are used to build and sustain well-oiled networks at minimal cost. These skills involve astute psychological reading of individuals and groups of individuals. They also require a down to earth grasp of identity politics and maneuvers.

Managements' regime of work, productivity and discipline is routinely confronted and opposed by wage-workers. Routine activity of lead-ry is to coax, cajole and threaten wage-workers into accepting these regimes.

Lead-ry routinely negotiates agreements with management and attempts to implement them by overcoming wage-worker opposition. "Whenever a new machine or fixture is brought workers refuse to work on them. Leaders are the main instruments to implement these changes. Placation, suspension and fear are used by leaders for this."

The main activity of lead-ry is to actively discourage the routine self-activity of wage-workers. Individually and in small groups, workers are always taking steps on their own that disrupt the work-routine. These seemingly minor irritants are a major threat to production and discipline. Leaders and their networks, i.e. lead-ry, is constantly engaged in hindering, devaluing and hijacking the self-activity of wage-workers.

To put it bluntly: higher manage-

ment makes strategies, leaders & personnel managers act as tacticians, and supervisors & leaders' networks execute these strategies.

Self-activities of wage-workers

Perhaps not universal, it is still true that most people have the capacity as well as the ability to act and participate "NOT AS UNEQUALS" in small informal groups. The layering of experience, the excitement and the unpredictability associated with what takes place each day is not because we participate as 'equals'. Instead, it is because each of us carries our individuality and is able to express it freely in such groups.

This participation of "NOT UNEQUALS" is spread over various facets of life and an individual is often a participant in more than one informal group at most times.

The wider implications of these informal groups of "NOT AS UNEQUALS" stand out clearly when we look at their play in some detail in institutional structures, whether factories, offices, banks or the media.

The moment of entry into a factory is the moment of entry into the discipline grid of work & productivity, as well as a jungle of informal groups. Strict entry schedules set up by managements are transformed into stretchable entry times. The act of punching-in is often put into disarray by proxy-punching or transformed by kicks that literalize the machine into a punching bag.

'Entry time' is made distinct from 'commencement of work' by long handshakes - backslaps - chitchat. It is often that work commences after 9 o'clock tea in an 8 A.M. shift.

Management strategies like changing the placement of the 'punch-in' from factory gate to departments, the imposition of fines like a fifteen minute wage-cut for one minute late are visible signs of managerial desperation.

Proxy-punching in the Goodyear Tyre factory has forced the management to issue identity cards containing computer floppies, even though it has meant an increase in cost. Workers' kicks in the Bata Shoe factory repeatedly dysfunctionalized the punching machine and forced the management to appoint an attendance clerk to go to each department and mark workers' attendance.

Using lead-ry networks, management conducts time studies to work out grids of intensification. These are the periods when the wink of an eye and the utterance of a phrase put into practice well thought-out schemes involving coordinated steps by small affinity groups of seven-eight workers. And, whether they are premised on time studies or on agreements with leaders, the biggest stumbling block to increases in the workload are the informal groups of

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All unfit for human consumption

workers.

Keeping the immediate supervisor in check is a task that all workers have to take up. It is a very common sight to find five-six workers heckling a supervisor when s/he is trying to boss over some worker. Immediate supervisors are often nervous, tense and anxious despite the brave face they put up. In a hand tools factory, a supervisor who bullied and humiliated workers was lucky to survive. On a cold winter night shift, the machines lay idle because of shortage of material and the supervisor went to sleep in his cabin with a coal fire to keep him warm. Workers slept on as a factory ghost locked the supervisor's cabin door. It was the routine round of security personnel that led to the breaking open of the door and the saving of the supervisor's life.

Helping one-another does not remain confined to affairs dealing with the company. Discussions of events in one-another's residential locality, schools, hospitals, etc. are very common amongst groups of workers during breaks which are often extended, to the constant chagrin of managements. Intricate interlinking amongst workers coagulates them into entities where a member is never alone. This plays a major role in keeping the bossism of management or the goonery of lead-ry in check, whether in the factory, on the road or in residential localities. Anyone mistaking an individual to be only an individual is immediately shown the real side of things. In fact, the affinity groups in factories are a continuation of affinity groups at large in society.

Innumerable actions, immense diversity and an extremely high unpredictability of affinity groups keep management and leaders in check. A phrase often floating in management-lead-ry negotiations is "Will the workers accept this?"

Rules and regulations are easily

made. Agreements can easily be signed. Workers not accepting or fulfilling given production targets can have their services terminated. Given the universal co-option of unions and leaders by managements, there seems to be nothing stopping managements from doing what they want. Then, why the ever-present, ever-troubling question "Will the workers accept this?"

In a factory manufacturing wires, management stream-rolled workers from one job to another. Anyone saying 'NO' was shown the gate. The coolness and quietness with which small groups of workers accepted this and interchanged operations, from acid to water to oil back to water, oil and acid, only infuriated the management when they discovered that ninety tonnes of wire was sent back by a consignee as being defective. Arbitrary job changes came to an abrupt end.

To counter the delay in wage-payment, a handful of workers working for a contractor in a textile factory simply went to the canteen and sat there. The workers' silence in response to the haranguing of the chief executive completely unnerved the management.

A management of a tractor factory increased production quotas using agreements with the union. Workers operating computerised machines responded by changing around the tapes that governed work sequences. The management had to very quickly replace the machines.

Anyone blowing the whistle is shown his or her place. In a hand tool-manufacturing factory, new machinery even further cut down the time between two operations. In order to obtain some breathing space, two cranes were made to move from opposite sides, clash and cause a breakdown. A maintenance worker complained to the management. One day, cranes were in operation but were said to be not working.

The maintenance worker was called for repair. He climbed a crane and when he was checking it, the other crane began moving towards his crane. His shouts for mercy braked the other crane, but they proved to be a brake for management schemes as well.

And then, things like not greeting a boss. The management of a factory stopped overtime payments to pay clerks. The five pay clerks responded to this loss of dues by moving like automata whenever they came across their boss. The silence of the clerks got on his nerves and the management had a nervous breakdown. Overtime dues were restarted.

It is these constant innumerable, insidious, unpredictable activities by small groups of workers that underlie the stress that managements give to representation - articulation - long term agreements.

Representation-articulation-unity-long-term agreements versus wage-workers' silences-mumbling-incoherence-constantly nagging non-unitary demands are expressions of the functioning of a large number of small informal groups in an institution. They are the signs of expressions of the individualities of workers.

In a factory, workers in small groups would often go to the general manager to put up their grievances or seek relief. The harassed manager met this self-expression of workers by posting a guard in front of his office and issuing explicit instructions that workers were not to be allowed to enter his office in-groups and only one worker would be allowed to go in along with a leader. In this way, not only was his paternal mask shattered but also the upkeep of his position demanded new costs.

Management responds to the adamancy of these small groups of workers by harping on the threat to harmonious industrial relations. Lead-ry denounces the actions and demands of these small groups as a selfishness that poses a threat to workers' unity. Sixteen hot chamber workers in a factory left their place of work on a hot summer day complaining of excessive heat. Operations involving five hundred workers came to a standstill. Hot chamber workers had been demanding relief during summers through a lowering of temperature, but the management was not willing to agree, as this would lessen the pace of drying and therefore slow down the chain of work. Assurances had been aplenty and many a long-term agreement had completed its tenure. This step of the hot chamber workers was met by the leaders with such epithets: "All these years they did not feel the heat, it is only today that they have acquired this delicacy. They want to spoil our relation with the management. Wheat advance is around the corner - now the management will refuse to give it. They only look at themselves. Their selfishness is harming all the other workers. The man-

agement listens to us because we represent you. But if small groups do not listen to us and take steps on their own, then why will the management talk to us? It is only our unity that is holding back the management, otherwise it will do whatever it wants. These hot chamber workers are harming our unity, and if tomorrow the management takes action against anyone we will not be responsible."

In the Escorts Yamaha motorcycle manufacturing factory, disenchantment with and denunciation of leaders was similar to innumerable other places. In a confrontation with the management, 300 workers on the assembly line refused to have anything to do with leaders and jammed the assembly line on their own. Leaders denounced these workers and reciprocated by saying that they would not intervene on their behalf - this would teach them a lesson. Workers in other departments did not lay down their tools in sympathy with the assembly line workers. Instead, what was observed was that management and leaders were conspiring for a lockout/strike to launch a major attack on the workers. There are two thousand five hundred workers in the factory. All the workers side-stepped the leaders and decided to continue production in other departments while the assembly line workers would keep the line jammed, while money would be collected department-wise to compensate their financial loss. As the assembly of a motorcycle per two minutes stood still, management and leaders bid their time, confident that the past would repeat itself and workers would have to accept the mediation of leaders. A week after the jam, overtime payments of the

previous month were made. One hundred rupees was contributed by each worker, and collected in a rota department-wise. It was decided that a like amount would be contributed when monthly wages were to be paid. This step of the workers unnerved the management as well as the lead-ry. Leaders on their own started holding talks with the management and an ex-parte agreement fulfilling the assembly line workers' demands was made to get the assembly line moving.

Seismic lead-ry

It is not un-often that competitiveness in the market demands sharp rise in productivity. This entails a major attack on wage-workers. Major attack means large-scale retrenchment, big increase in work intensity, sharp cuts in wages besides other cost cutting and efficiency drives.

In these conditions managements plan new strategies and lead-ry adopts new tactics. The unfolding of events is very intricate. To discern the intricate web of strategy and tactics we take as an illustration the unfolding of events in Gedore Hand Tools, Faridabad in 1982-1984 of which we have a first hand experience.

Background

Gedore Hand Tools, headquartered in Germany, had three plants in Faridabad exploiting 3500 wage-workers. U.S.A was a major market for its produce. Hand tools enterprises located in China and South Korea were Gedore's market competitors. Shrinkage of pro-

duction in the auto and engineering industries in the early 1980s sharpened the competition in the hand tools market. In this scenario, in order to maintain its competitiveness, Gedore management planned a major intensification of work through automation and large-scale retrenchment. For installation of an automatic plating plant Gedore management took a loan of Rs. 2.5 crores (~ \$2.5 millions) from the Industrial Development Bank of India, a government of India enterprise.

The unfolding of events

In the beginning of 1982 incidents of chargesheeting, suspensions, transfers from one department to another, shifting workers from one job to another, wage-delays, downgradation in canteen quality, insistence on quality in production, strictness about production targets, time strictness, no rest during shift hours etc. increased noticeably.

In a gate meeting on June 7, 1982 union leaders spoke at length about capitalism, global crisis, company in crisis, and then asked the workers to make sacrifices in the larger interest. They put forward three alternatives to choose from: - 25% reduction in wages - Go on special leave for six months at half wages - Retrenchment of 600 workers.

Workers rejected outright all these options put forth by the leaders. At this rejection, managements' escalated their strong-arm tactics and instigation. Leaders and ex-leaders oiled their networks and accelerated mobilisations around caste and regional identities.

Workers disenchantment with leaders increased rapidly. Their self-activity became more pronounced. Large number of workers stopped paying union dues, attending union meetings, side-stepping leaders in day to day activity and began to deal directly with management individually and in small groups. Graffiti inside the plants increased.

A group of workers belonging to, or influenced by, the fringe left posed inconvenient questions in a signed handbill on June 12, 1982. The handbill read "management says that it does not have money even to buy raw materials - then where are the crores of rupees (millions of dollars) for automation coming from? Is it not because of automation that 600 workers are being told to resign? Soon, will you not talk of the need to retrench a thousand workers? Instead of struggling against it, haven't union leaders become advocates of the management?"

The confidence of the leaders was shaken. Management was put on the defensive. Uneasy questions in the workers' minds became points of widespread discussion. The tactic deployed by leaders and management - of announcing their attack in the gate meeting - had turned out to be a blunder. For damage control, the leaders adopted silence and

the management took steps: - show cause and advice letters were issued to the signatories of the handbill.

Through a circular, management warned workers to beware of disruptive forces. It said that automation was for the health of the workers. The management claimed that it had never had any intention of retrenching workers who would be made surplus by automation. If the management had wanted, it could have retrenched half the workers as it had been paying full wages to idle workers for one and half years. The circular ended with a rhetorical flourish: "Increase production OR perish!"

A twisted version of the management slogan: "Increase production AND perish!" became popular amongst the workers.

The sequence of events at this point is as follows - there are prolonged delays in the payment of wages, machinery for automation reaches the plants, leaders maintain a strict silence, and ex-leaders attempt to form a rival union. There are physical attacks, by leaders and their network, on workers who still try to focus discussion on the looming retrenchment. To silence these voices, management uses suspensions. Besides the delay in wages, the issue of the annual bonus is used as another diversionary entanglement. Further on, the management goes for work suspension at half wages for three days and says that this may continue for quite some time.

Leaders complement these steps taken by the management for an open confrontation by ordering a tool down strike on February 12, 1983. Fiery speeches at gate meetings became a regular feature. Dissenting workers who have been trying to focus attention on looming retrenchment are denounced as disruptive elements and attacked. On February 21, 1983 leaders announce at a gate meeting that they have reached an agreement with the management. In the agreement it is agreed that no further work suspensions would take place but wages of January '83 would be paid in January '84. The workers reject this agreement. The management then tries, unsuccessfully, to instigate violent confrontations amongst workers through ex-leaders.

The same agreement is again put for approval at the gate meeting of February 28, 1983 after a number of thundering speeches challenging the management to lockout the factory if it wanted. The workers again reject the agreement.

After the second rejection, the leaders announce that the way now is to go for an 'open struggle'. A meeting of factory delegates (who had been elected in 1980) and other militant workers is called and suggestions asked for. Leaders then reject the suggestion for demonstrations on the plea that the conflict was with the Gedore management and not with the government. However, as soon as the question of steps against the

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ACCESS TO MOVEMENT

management comes into focus, the leaders somersault and announce a demonstration and a sit-down at the district administration chief's office to be organised on March 21.

On March 20, leaders call another gate meeting. Besides members of their network in the three plants, leaders bring their supporters from other factories and spread them out strategically. The same agreement is announced yet again. It is immediately hailed by the strategically placed supporters! And before the workers can react, leaders and their henchmen jump the factory gate and rush in to the plant to switch on the machines.

The leaders had here used a time tested and most effective strategy. By switching on machines and restarting the plants, the workers would now be split into confronting groups, where one section would demand a continuation of the tool down strike while the other would be in favour of resuming work. This clash amongst the workers, and the concomitant unfolding of violence, would then facilitate large-scale retrenchment.

But in this case this strategy failed miserably. Enraged, the 3500 workers rush into the plant, shut down the machines and then beat up the leaders who are forced to run away. The President of the union who was also beaten and had to turn tail, had been the president of the union for ten years and was also the President of CITU, Faridabad district unit of the central trade union of Communist Party of India (Marxist).

Production does not resume. There is now massive police deployment. Leaders again try to start the machines at night. They are again forced to retreat. Tool down continues.

Some workers belonging to the fringe left call a general body meeting on 23rd March, the weekly rest day. All the workers attend it. A committee proposed by militant, articulate workers and ex-leaders to obtain the resignation of leaders is not opposed. In view of the mounting discontent of workers, the leaders have to resign. After the resignations, the struggle committee, however, does not materialize and the ex-leaders take over.

Tool down continues till April 14, 1983. The workers reluctantly accept the agreement that they had rejected earlier.

Stalemate. The issue of retrenchment has got bogged down.

The cycle of shopfloor instigation and wage-delays reemerges as a part of renewed attempts to retrench workers. Police are now posted inside a plant. Mobilisations being made on the basis of region and caste come to the fore. There is now a delay in the payment of wages to supervisory and clerical staff.

Government approval for retrenchment of 300 workers is obtained by the management. Leaders hide the list and

deny that there is any retrenchment on the cards. They start talking about a new long-term agreement and preparation of a demand charter for it.

At this juncture, management steps up attempts at violent confrontations amongst workers. Old leaders form a committee with the claim that they will negotiate a good agreement with the management. Mobilisation by the two lead-ry networks on the basis of caste, region and plant identity became frantic. The management flames the fire by locking out the third Gedore plant in February 1984. Enraged workers attack the existing leaders and the committee of old leaders uses this opportunity to take over leadership. Lockout in the third plant is lifted.

The finishing off

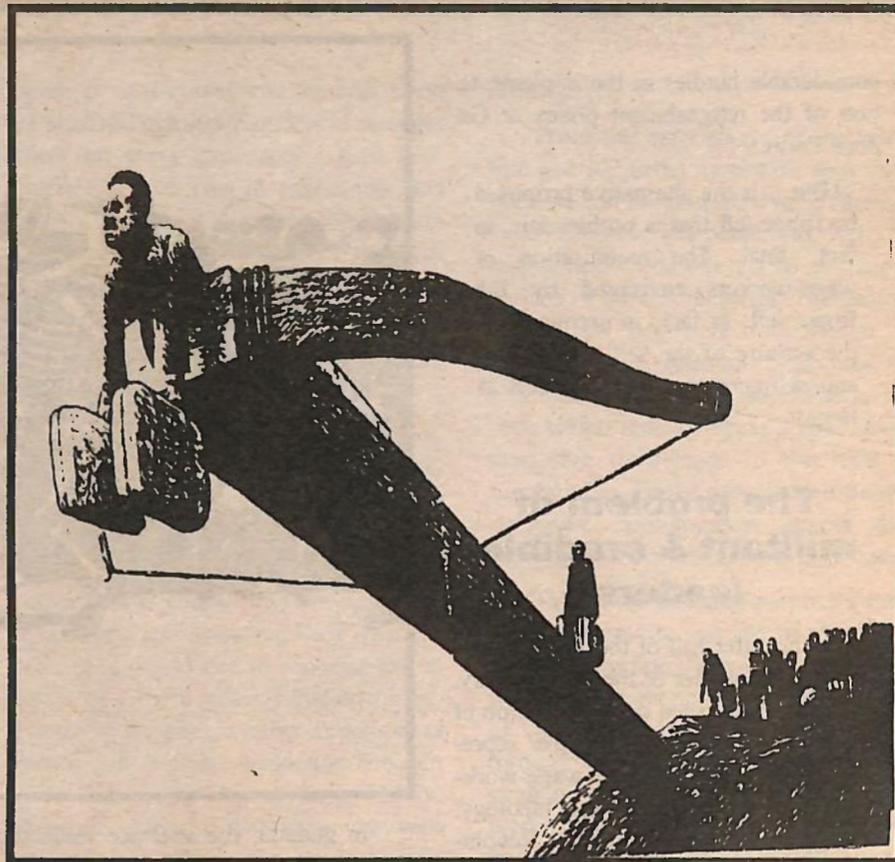
And then began the joint act of management, leaders, police, state administration and press to retrench workers in Gedore Hand Tools. A gang of 15 to 20 leaders and their musclemen freely roam the three plants. They pick workers from their machines, take them to the plant time-office and force them, through physical violence and threats, to sign resignation letters. In this way, up to 50 workers are forced to resign in a single day. Workers coming to factory for work and those leaving after shift hours are attacked on the roads and forced to resign. Workers are threatened at their homes and forced to resign. Workers who had lodged complaints with the police find that the police have framed cases against them. Government administration merely files away the complaints made at the DA's office. Newspapers do not print any news of these events. Not even letters about a fellow worker who committed suicide on the rail tracks after he was forced to resign.

In these circumstances hundreds of workers sought shelter in their villages for months. And the environment at Gedore? Armed police in tents inside the factory, armed police in trucks making rounds of the three plants.

This is how the stalemate was broken and retrenchment implemented. Even then, it took one more year to retrench 1500 workers out of the 3500 in Gedore Hand Tools, Faridabad. Fallout

Inability of the management, lead-ry and state administration to entrap wage-workers in time tested snares force them to take of their militancy and constitutional garbs. They had to resort to brute force to implement their policies. This repression could not bring along with it a new mask of glorious defeat with its martyrs and heroes to mortgage wage-workers' critical evaluations of the process.

Not getting entrapped is not sufficient for wage-workers because stakes for clinical repression are even then not high. Stakes not being very high was



because of the fact that workers self-activities remained disjointed, unlinked, un-coordinated even within the enterprise whereas a dynamic growth of wage-workers' self-activities is a prerequisite for linking wage-workers of one enterprise with those of other enterprises. A stumbling block to the unfolding of workers' self-activity was the not questioning of representation & delegation as such.

Seismic lead-ry at a higher level

The frequency of extensive area-wide, region-wide, nation-wide attacks on wage-workers, compressed in ever-shortening periods of time is increasing. The attacks entail huge wage-cuts, enormous increase in work-load and mass scale retrenchments. And they are implemented, primarily, in two ways. One: through instigation to mass violence by playing the politics of identity, and Two: through the foisting of credible, militant leaders.

In Indonesia, 1997-98, through the massive attacks on wage-workers, one can see these strategies being played out: (1) Media highlighted riots between 'ethnic Indonesians' and 'migrant Chinese'; (2) "Confirmed reports say that the US has been pressuring Jakarta to release one of the top political dissenters from imprisonment. 'The US move is to enable Jakarta to cool the rising temperature down to some extent', say sources". [HT, Delhi 29 March 1998]

Activities of a fringe left

The fringe left that was a participant in the events in Gedore Hand Tools in 1982-84 existed around a monthly workers newspaper. Some workers of Gedore were members of this fringe left and we have emerged from this background.

The activities of this fringe left had been geared:

- to unmask the collaboration of leaders with managements.

- to keep in focus the issues that managements and leaders seek to hide. - to unmask formal and phoney steps like one-day token strikes, token demonstrations and formal mass meetings that are organised by leaders.

- to create and establish an effective alternate leadership to be constituted by militant, credible leaders from amongst the workers.

- to unify workers around this alternate leadership.

- to launch organised, conscious struggles under this alternate leadership.

- to push for demonstrations, mass meetings & strikes.

A critique of a fringe left

□ The process of unmasking management-leader collaborations brought into focus contentious issues that management and leaders seek to hide. This centre-staging of otherwise hidden agendas helped unleash the self-activity of wage-workers. Management notices and leaders rhetoric, demand charters and agreements, all came under constant scrutiny by wage-workers. "What to do?" and "How to do?" became topics of routine discussion. Routine self-activity of workers as individuals and in small groups increased.

The medium of circulation of information around these activities was through a regular monthly newspaper, frequent handbills, wall-letters and conversations. These simple acts created

considerable hurdles in the implementation of the retrenchment policy at Gedore Tools.

□ But it is the alternative proposed by fringe left that is problematic, in fact, fatal. The mobilisation of wage-workers envisaged by the fringe left, in fact, is premised on the erasure of the self expressions and self-activities wage-workers at large.

The problem of militant & credible leaders

In the latter half of the 19th century and the first quarter of the 20th century, fierce polemics raged on the question of real and phoney representations/ representatives of the interests of wage-workers. The polemics spanned ideology, strategy and tactics. 'Reform or Revolution' was often the high point of the debate. The reality that has unfolded since has, however, made the very premises of this debate redundant.

Towards the last quarter of the 19th century, requirements of production enterprises for accumulated labour reached such dimensions that individual ownership of production enterprises became unfeasible. <Joint stock> -to-<large number of shareholders> -to- <loans> as the main/ major source of funding for production enterprises are what have unfolded in these one hundred years. Individuals as owners/ part owners of production enterprises have increasingly become insignificant. Acts leading to bankruptcies of individuals have lost their cutting edge. Enterprises have acquired institutional forms. With enterprises becoming monoliths of massive amounts of accumulated labour, head-on collisions of living labour with these institutional monsters are counter productive for living labour, whether in the form of an individual wage-worker, a group of wage-workers or a mass of wage-workers. And, working for head-on collisions is the raison d'etre of the fringe left.

In this scenario, the blurred boundaries between phoney, formal and real struggles have melted, become indistinguishable, giving way to a continuum. Formal-token, phoney-instigated-provoked, militant struggles, despite some differences of form, have in essence become indistinguishable. It is through repeated experiences that large numbers of wage-workers have learnt that these are harmful for them. It is this that underlies the unwillingness of workers to struggle - the word 'struggle' is here being used in the sense of the dominant meanings that it has come to have. And it is this that underlies the fringe left's activities to 'agitate workers' in order to overcome what it decries as the apathy and passivity of wage-workers. It is in this context that the fringe left creates the polemics of militant & credible leaders.



In general, the alternate leadership, the militant & credible leaders for whose creation the fringe left is geared, is a fringe phenomenon like itself. It is only in the event of major attacks on wage-workers that the alternate leadership of militant & credible leaders can and often does acquire leverage amongst large numbers of workers. And it is only then that the 'dead-endness' of militancy, and the fact that it actually causes serious damage, becomes obvious.

Unity and unifocality are the mantras of state and proto-state apparatuses. Even those fringe left groups that are explicitly anti-state have as their axis activities that are geared to unity and unifocal forms. This is what makes even such fringe left groups proto-state.

In fact, it must be stated that it is very doubtful if representation was at any time in the interest of wage-workers. A hundred years compel us to engage in a critical retrospective analysis. With all that wage-workers have experienced in this time, history proves that any and every representation is counter-productive for wage-workers.

Demonstrations, mass meetings and strikes are all events premised on unity and unifocality, and implicit in them are both representation and delegation. The logic for these events is that these are shows of strength and thus in the interest of wage-workers. Facts, however, point to the contrary.

□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ Demonstrations

Demonstrations involve an elaborate plan of date, time, route, destination, pace, slogans, demands, those to lead, those to maintain order, those to address and those to talk 'on behalf'. Organisational infrastructure is a prerequisite for a demonstration. Ninety-five percent of wage-workers cannot organise demonstrations themselves, they can only join in as followers. For a worker to become a part of a demonstration, the worker has to in effect erase any idea of self-activity and self-expression, or, has to

deceive him or herself by parroting the pre-written script as self-expression.

Demonstrations are means and occasions for displaying the strength of organisations and leaders. The index of strength is numbers and the index of militancy is the number & intensity of skirmishes with the police, which range from charges by mounted police, water cannon charges, tear gas shelling, arrests, and firing. The success of a demonstration is measured by the grandiosity of the spectacle it provides to the media. What are erased are the injuries and the long court cases inflicted on wage-workers. Those who are killed are made into martyrs and transformed into icons to shackle any criticism or questioning.

Workers, by and large, are aware that demonstrations make them easy targets for police attacks besides gagging their self-expression. This is evident from the distance that workers maintain from demonstrations. In fact demonstrations often have to be organised during shift hours with the connivance of managements.

Mass meetings

Most frequently, mass meetings that wage-workers have to encounter are gate meetings at the factory and office. Gate meetings are held by leaders. The rule is that only leaders will speak in the gate meetings. The logic put forward is that any other vocalization will show disunity amongst workers to the management and weaken bargaining power. To see to it that the rule is implemented, lead-ry musclemen are strategically placed in gate meetings in order to summarily deal with any worker who tries to speak. Recognition of a new leadership happens with the successful holding of a gate meeting, because holding a gate meeting constitutes a challenge to the existing leadership.

The most encountered mass meetings, i.e. gate-meetings, exclude wage-workers self-expression both by logic and force.

The fringe left often called for general body meetings (GBM) away from the factory premises in order to overcome the prohibition of any expression of dissent at gate-meetings. However, an elaborate organisational apparatus is also a prerequisite for holding general body meetings. These are occasions that require venues, agendas, stages, stage-managers, order keepers and elaborate time management. By their very nature, general body meetings are arenas for fights between leaders, ex-leaders and potential leaders with their lists of articulate speakers and cheer groups.

General body meetings demand from wage-workers time bound (two to three minutes) coherent presentations on specific agenda. These presentations have to be speeches to audiences of hundreds or thousands. This demand on the workers by itself excludes most workers from expressing themselves in general body meetings. Those who are not thus excluded have to filter through the lists of speakers of contending lead-ry networks.

Workers have seen through general body meetings for what they are. Now the norm is that out of a thousand workers, approximately 150 will attend them.

There are other kinds of mass meetings that play on higher scales of representation. An illustrative example: >From 1977 to 1979 in Faridabad, there were sporadic multi-nodal outbursts of workers discontent in hundreds of factories. In October 1979 unions jointly called a mass meeting. Around 100,000 workers assembled and the atmosphere was very charged. The huge number of workers spilled out of the meeting ground and road and rail traffic was forced to halt. Well-prepared police and paramilitary forces then began indiscriminate firing. Factories functioned normally from the next day. This incident ensured a smoother functioning in the industrial belt for the next few years. And a martyrs' column was duly erected.

Strikes

This fringe left's activity regarding strikes was on two planes. One - phoney strikes called by leaders for the implementation of management policies and formal strikes to make their presence felt, were denounced. Two - The call was given for real strikes, and for militancy in real strikes.

Denunciation of phoney and formal strikes opens greater possibilities for workers self-activity as questions regarding what to do, what not to do, how to do, how not to do are unleashed. However, calling for real, militant strikes has disastrous consequences for wage-workers.

Vis-a-vis management, work stoppage at either factory or larger levels is no longer a powerful weapon of wage-workers. On the contrary, lockouts by managements and strikes by leaders are

powerful instruments used to launch major attacks on wage-workers. In the last twenty years we have not come across any strikes, anywhere in the world, that have not resulted in large-scale wage cuts, retrenchments, work intensification or closures.

A few illustrative examples: Bombay Textile Strike of 1982-83 in 60 textile mills. 250,000 workers unified under a militant leadership on a charter of demands. Management policy was to retrench 90,000 workers and close down old mills & sell the premium land. Under normal circumstances, such large-scale retrenchment would have taken more than ten years. Through the strike, however, this policy was implemented in one year.

East India Cotton Mills, Faridabad, 1979. Automation was to be implemented. Management needed to retrench 3000 out 6000 workers. A strike was called by the union for a one-percent increase in bonus. Militant strike, and a lot of violence. Three thousand workers dismissed.

Lakhani Shoes, Faridabad, 1983, 1988, 1996. Three major strikes by three different unions. Each time there is violence and militancy. Each time all workers are dismissed. Lakhani Shoes has registered a very fast growth rate in output. Number of factories of the company has increased from 3 in 1983 to 22 in 1997.

Requirements of a strike

The requirements of a strike are factory-wide issues and an elaborate organisational structure. Also, mobilisation of workers through persuasions, deceptions, hopes and threats.

The activity of fringe groups during strikes that are not organised by them is geared to make the strikes increasingly militant. In factories where they have a physical presence and they are able to get an echo they may be able to take over the leadership of the strike by forming struggle committees of militant workers. What are the courses open to these struggle committees?

Prolongation of the strike does not help. Rather, the longer the strike is stretched, the weaker becomes the strength of the workers vis-a-vis management. Such being the reality, struggle committees are forced to resort to:

□ Direct confrontations with state administration to pressurize the state-apparatus to act on the management. The steps are big and volatile, be they demonstrations, mass meetings, road jams and railway stoppage. These steps provide easy and visible targets to repressive organs of the state-apparatus. Given past experience, workers rarely follow those advocating these steps.

□ Mobilisation of media, artists,



stars, influential persons, other representatives, parliamentarians, grass-root activists to persuade state administrations to act on management. Wage-workers are initially hopeful spectators to these performances and then slowly disperse as disenchantment sets in.

Both these action-courses lead to an **immobilization** and **dispersion** of workers and ensure an implementation of management policy.

Unified militant struggles, whether in the form of demonstrations, mass meetings or strikes, are akin to military operations with their generals, captains, sergeants and, of course, foot soldiers. Organisations linked to the management or organisations that are proto-state are alone capable of running such operations.

Conclusion

In general, when wage-workers resistances and struggles are discussed, the imagery that crop up is that of mass demonstrations, mass meetings, strikes, pitched battles, insurrections. The corollaries to these are the non-mundane qualities of heroism, sacrifice, bravery, martyrdom, courage, wisdom, articulation, discipline and unity. By these very definitions, the self-activities of most wage-workers are excluded. This imagery inherently posits a spectacular arena for leadership to deprive the wage-workers of their voices.

More painful still is that big, mass, spectacular movements make easy targets of wage-workers for managerial apparatuses to control, manage and, if necessary, crush.

Big implies mobilisation on a mass scale. Conducting and directing committees are intrinsic to such events. Seemingly a large number of people become active, but actually it is representatives and leaders who think, decide and issue orders whereas numbers at large have to march to the tunes trumpeted. Mobilisations by representatives are for representatives.

Defeats are camouflaged as victories in order to legitimize the re-creations of these representational forms. Repeated experiences with 'big' have led wage-workers at large to keep aloof from them. This is often characterized as passivity and apathy of wage-workers.

When wage-workers daily routine oppositions become too much for a management or when a management has to go in for a major restructuring, retrenchment, wage-cut or intensification, it often resorts to spectacular work stoppage. Since production enterprise is no longer the private property of individuals (capitalist), prolonged stoppage of production is no longer a question of life and death for a management as it was for a capitalist. When necessary, managements resort to strikes, lockouts, work suspensions, suspension of operations by creating big factory-wide, area-wide issues with the help of representatives. With strikes becoming the weapon of managements, those attempting to genuinely represent wage-workers' interests are crushed. Furthermore, individuals have become so insignificant vis-a-vis institutional structures that commitments or personalities hardly make any difference.

For all of us self-activity of wage-workers is of paramount importance. It is this area that we want to open out for

discussion and debate.

As wage-workers we know that all of us, everyday and at everyplace, have to contend with oppressive and exploitative conditions around us. Individually and in small groups we take steps on our own. In small groups, we interact with each other 'not as unequals' ensuring the self-expression and self-activity of each one of us.

Confining ourselves to workplace experiences we can say that each one of us has an affinity group of half a dozen or so amongst whom all participate 'not as unequals'. In these affinity groups a lot of premeditation and co-ordination takes place. The activities of affinity groups span from mutual help to routine resistances against productivity and discipline, and to steps of change that question and challenge hierarchy, competition, money relations and wage slavery.

The problems as we see are: 1.) The importance of self-activity as reflected in these steps taken by affinity groups is denied. The steps by themselves are small and thus belittled. When they are talked about, they are derisively characterized as insignificant workplace skirmishes, or merely survival calisthenics. 2.) Constant attempts are made by managements to suppress these self-activities through representation. 3.) Wage-workers often do not give much importance to their self activity because of the invisibility of the social effects of the small steps engendered by their self-activities. 4.) There is a tremendous lack of linkages between affinity groups (which can only be horizontal and multi-nodal). This lack makes wage-workers vulnerable to getting coagulated into a mass whenever wider level issues are forced or arise. This coagulation if not created by representatives (which is often the case), then in itself engenders representation. 5.) More importantly, co-ordination between affinity groups is hampered by a lack of discussion on experiences of affinity groups.

Lest we be misunderstood, we would like to make it clear that we are not for small steps per se but our concern, rather, is for self-activity. Self-activity in terms of routine resistances and steps of change by wage-workers at large on a sustained, extended and expansive scale, encompassing a multifaceted global reality.

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Kamunist Kranti/Collectivities: Presentation and Critical Dialogue

Introduction

The following article grew out of a four-week stay in India in fall 1997. During that time, I had occasion to spend about a week with members of the Kamunist Kranti/Collectivities group, first in Faridabad, an industrial suburb of Delhi and then in Delhi itself. Before meeting them, I knew Kamunist Kranti from their two English language pamphlets, *Reflections on Marx's Critique of Political Economy* and *Ballad Against Work*. These pamphlets, while interesting and important as signposts in the evolution of a current, do not in themselves stand out as unique in the international discussion. It was rather conversations with members of KK, in which they elaborated their perspectives, told me the 20-year history of their group, and provided me with running translations of their Hindi press, which convinced me of their (to my knowledge) relative singularity, in spite of my own disagreements with aspects of their outlook. The world has its share of revolutionary P.O. boxes, but Kamunist Kranti, which means "Communist Revolution" in Hindi, stands out as one of the few, if not the only ultra-left current with a genuine, years-long working-class presence, not merely in the Third World, but in the world. They have evolved over twenty years from Maoism to anti-Stalinist vanguardism to anti-vanguardism through an extended experience of factory struggles in one of India's principal industrial centers. The richness of this experience, and the conclusions which KK has drawn from it, deserve to be better known and debated internationally. I do not by any means agree with all of Kamunist Kranti's formulations, but as the following will show, I do think unequivocally that they deserve a hearing and a response in the international movement. More valuable than anything I could write would be an English anthology of selections from KK's Hindi-language press, which documents more than 15 years of struggles from which they have arrived at their current perspectives. Particularly in a country such as India, where the left is still weighed down by an enormous legacy of statism, in its Congress, Stalinist and Maoist "Marxist-Leninist" varieties, the appearance of a working-class current that rejects and combats this statism unequivocally is a phenomenon worthy of international attention. If the follow-



ing article helps bring about further attention to and debate of KK's perspectives, it will have achieved its purpose. To that end, I invite CAN readers and of course KK itself to respond with comments/criticisms of their own.)

Geographic Context

Faridabad, India, is a Third World working-class town of one million inhabitants of which 300,000 are factory workers, one of the "cities of the South" in Jeremy Seabrook's phrase. (2) It is most easily reached by one of those commuter trains one sees in all urban centers of India, seemingly packed at all hours with people hanging out of windows and open doors, and in which one is well advised to start inching toward the door three or four stations before one's stop. Situated in the southern industrial suburbs of Delhi, Faridabad might strike the casual visitor as a late 20th-century version of Engels' Manchester. A seemingly permanent haze of smog and pollution (provoking a high rate of respiratory ailments, including asthma) hangs over the city. For block upon block of mainly unpaved streets, old and new factories mix helter-skelter with shanties, more permanent houses and small shops, as well as pools

and canals of fetid water and industrial waste. All of these intermingle in crazy-quilt fashion, a hybrid of rural and industrial life, with open fields where water buffalo graze and are milked, and whose dung is gathered and dried for fuel. Women wash clothes by hand in the available pools of water, and malaria-infected mosquitos hover above them. In cities such as Bombay, one finds slums and shanties abutting an ultra-modern corporate office building; in Faridabad shanties and lean-tos are built right outside the (well-guarded) factory gates. Pigs, a kind of alternative municipal sanitation system, roam the streets, eating garbage and the various kinds of excrement, animal and human, which regularly surface from the gutters with the slightest rain. At rush hour, the pigs largely cede the streets to fleets of motorized rickshaws which constitute the main form of public transportation. Small shanties housing six, seven or more people line canals of sludge and industrial waste. Since many are without running water or toilets, (not to mention air-conditioning), in the 100-plus degree heat of the summers the shanties become infernos in which people have to walk blocks to a public well and have to relieve themselves where they can. In these same summers, strong young men fresh from the Himalayas or the country-

side work next to open steel foundries where, by the age of 30, they are husks.

The new capitalist face of Asia takes many forms: the almost Los Angeles-like sprawl of Seoul and Taegu in Korea; the 40-story working-class high rise apartment buildings in Hong Kong and over the border in the "free economic zone" of Shenzhen; the round-the-clock jackhammers of a hundred skyscrapers under construction in Shanghai, and the eery silence in the night of a hundred other skyscrapers, already completed, and empty; the lunar "interstate" feel of (equally empty) high tech office space, scattered through rice paddies worked by water buffalo, along the freeways of China's Guangdong province; the weird enormous shopping malls and 30-story skyscrapers that appear as if from nowhere in the smallest provincial towns in rural China, waiting like cargo-cult landing strips for the affluence that has yet to arrive; the Manhattan-like aspirations of Bombay, with its financial district and with its vast stretches of empty textile mills, recently abandoned to de-industrialization and out-sourcing, and awaiting condominium conversion for the benefit of the city's repulsive, arrogant, parvenu yuppie class, while Hindu fundamentalism makes inroads in the shattered, unemployed former textile proletariat still living in the nearby slums. (3) It is to be seen in India's "Silicon Valley", Bangalore, to which Lufthansa (like many Western firms) recently transferred its entire accounting operation for 10% of the cost of the 4,000 high paying jobs it simultaneously abolished in Germany. But most of these places, ones the casual Western visitor is most likely to see, mix patches of an older Asia with the outward signs of the management and consumption of fictitious capital and real estate speculation on a grand scale; to see Asian capitalism in its unrelieved, unvarnished grit, where the untrammelled production of surplus value in all its starkness is the business at hand, it is necessary to go to a city such as Faridabad. (4)

But Faridabad, for all that it visually conjures up of the Dickensian rawness of the early phases of industrialization in the West, is nonetheless very much a city of the end of the 20th century. On paper, India has enlightened labor legislation and high job security, which in practice are circumvented in many instances by management collaboration with union goon squads. Faridabad's working class

has had decades of experience with so-called Communist parties and their unions. Faridabad management practices the latest methods of downsizing and devotes tremendous amounts of energy and resources to controlling the work force, a control in which the left parties and unions play a major role. The factories brim with MBA's with cellular phones, who apply killing speed-up to the assembly lines, and who almost brazenly provoke strikes, with union help, aimed at retrenchment. None of these characteristics particularly distinguish Faridabad from other comparable industrial centers scattered around India (or elsewhere), but it was here that a current with no counterpart in India or, to the best of my knowledge, the rest of Asia, emerged.

Political Context

Around 1972, state repression came down hard on India's Maoist ("Naxalite") movement, a New Left revolt of disaffected middle class students and intellectuals who were against the bureaucratic sloth and sleaze of post-independence, Congress Party-dominated Indian society, and against the accommodation of the (then pro-Soviet) Indian Communist Party to these realities. Echoing the Russian Populists of a century earlier, Naxalite cadre gave up urban middle-class lives and went to the rural peasantry, often in remote villages accessible only on foot, to be "fish among the water" of the people. However skewed their perspectives, ultimately drawn from the bureaucratic-peasant revolution of Mao tse-tung (and in this way no different from comparable movements around the world in those years), the Naxalites did have modest initial success among the poorest peasants, until they began exemplary "executions" of somewhat mythical but widely hated "large landowners" (often merely slightly poorer peasants) and made themselves vulnerable to the full weight of state repression. (Nonetheless, repression did not completely annihilate the movement and there are still armed Maoist insurgencies scattered around rural India.)

In 1975, Indira Gandhi's Congress government proclaimed a state of emergency, aligned itself on a generally perceived "pro-Soviet" foreign policy stance, came down hard on strike-prone railway workers and jailed and silenced hundreds of Maoist militants, often presented, in the shrill atmosphere of the day, as "CIA agents" in leftist guise. The earliest origins of Kamunist Kranti are to be found in the fallout and regroupment of the Indian Maoist milieu following the state of emergency, when that milieu had already broken up into various warring factions. But with Mao's death in 1976, the subsequent arrest of the "Four Dogs" (or Gang of Four), the official burial one moonless night of the "Cultural Revolution", and the consolidation in power by 1978 of the "capitalist roader" Teng

shao-peng and a full blown reorientation to "market socialism", it was getting harder to be a "Maoist", in India and anywhere else. By 1978-79, after the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia, China's U.S.-backed retaliation on Vietnam's border, and the resulting threat of confrontation between the Soviet Union and China, many of the world's frontline "Marxist-Leninist" states seemed about to go to war . . . with each other. It was in this context that the future nucleus of Kamunist Kranti decided that something was terribly wrong with their earlier perspectives, and embarked on the "long march" out of Maoism to what and where they are today.

The corruption and cynicism of dominant Indian society cedes nothing in international comparison, however it beggars belief. In many countries at the end of the 20th century, North, South, East, West, the line between official public institutions and blatant criminality has blurred into grey on grey, from the godfathers of French Riviera cities to the seamless continuum of Japanese politicians/yakuza gangsters/police/real estate and construction companies/extreme-right militants who terrorize Tokyo's casualized labor force, by way of virtual Mafia states like Yeltsin's Russia or Chervanadze's Georgia or the drug-dealer states of Asia and Latin America. In India, corruption scandal follows scandal at the highest levels of government, with "investigations" forever bogged down in long and expensive proceedings. For example, local officials twice-acquitted on murder charges, with more charges pending on endless appeal, remain in office and openly use thugs to silence critics and opposition. The system reaches down to the lowest Congress Party ward-heeler, who takes a cut as the government store providing subsidized food and fuel to the poor instead sells off its inventory on the black market and hires goons to intimidate ration-card holders with enough temerity to complain. The idea of going to the police or "local authorities" for redressment of such cases only provokes a belly laugh. Indira Gandhi secretly backed armed Sikh opposition in the state of Punjab to harrass her political opponents there; they assassinated her when she left them to hang in the wind. Rajeev Gandhi tried the same thing in Sri Lanka, and suffered the same fate. What slightly takes aback the unapprised visitor (such as this writer), is how deeply this corruption and cynicism reaches into the left-wing parties and trade union movement. It was against this backdrop that Kamunist Kranti developed their reconsideration of all their early perspectives, tinged as they were with the noisy "Marxism" which currently holds municipal and state power in places such as West Bengal (and Calcutta) or Kerala province in the far south.

The Genesis of Kamunist Kranti's

Perspective and Faridabad Struggles in the 1980s

In 1982, as the future nucleus of Kamunist Kranti was leaving Maoism behind and beginning to focus their activity on the working class in Faridabad, a strike occurred at the East India Cotton Mills which illustrates in a nutshell the dynamics which they began to generalize into a theory. The mills employed 6,000 workers; management wanted to automate 3,000 jobs out of existence. The Communist Party's union had been ousted by the workers in 1977, and replaced by a union affiliated with the BJP (Bahartiya Janata Party, the Hindu fundamentalists now the minority ruling party in India). (5) The strike was provoked, as is often the case, over a seemingly small point, in this instance a disagreement over whether the annual bonus should be 19% or 18%. It lasted six months. The strikers were replaced by scabs, and fights and murders broke out among workers; sporadic violence of this kind continued for two further years. Through all of this, the plant continued production with 3,000 workers, exactly the management's goal.

In Kamunist Kranti's conception, the basic paradigm of strikes in India is this: management, as in the case of the cotton mills, wants to achievement wage cuts, layoffs, speedup, automation, whatever. They call in the union and basically say: "we have 2,000 employees; we want to lay off 1,000. We'll announce a plant closing. You people call a strike and stay out for 6 months; we'll re-open with 1,000 workers, and you proclaim a victory." In what follows, it will be seen how often this scenario is enacted in Faridabad, and in the rest of India. For Kamunist Kranti, the 18-month, 1981-83 Bombay textile strike of 250,000 mill workers, the "strike of the century" led by the (recently assassinated) populist demagogue Datta Samant, which was smashed and led to dozens of mills closing (as mentioned earlier), was just such a management-union provocation from start to finish.

But Kamunist Kranti goes further, and does not mince words. In their stark formulation: in the 19th century strikes were a weapon of the working class; at the end of the 20th century strikes are a weapon of management. Not just in Faridabad, or in India, but everywhere. Before examining this provocative assertion, let us examine further struggles from which KK drew this conclusion.

One of the more paradigmatic episodes illustrating KK's analysis took place at a Faridabad tool factory in the early 80's. (A further struggle of an even more extreme kind is taking place at the same (renamed) plant today, now known as Jhalani Tools.)

In 1982, a struggle erupted at the German-owned Gedore Hand Tools works, consisting of three plants and employing 3,500. The dominant union

was the CITU, the affiliate of the CPI (M). Gedore management demanded 600 "resignations" (6) and a 25% pay cut or six months of "special terms" for pay. All demands were rejected. Management attempted a "pinprick" strategy, to which the union responded with a "tools down" strike. Management attempted a lockout, and the union struck. As is often the case, the union called the strike just before payday, ensuring that the workers would go into the strike with the least possible financial cushion. A month passed, and two contracts were rejected; with a third offer, the union packed the strike meeting and ordered a return to work. The strike continued nonetheless, as strikers occupied their own union hall and demanded the resignation of the leadership, which took place, after which a new leadership took over the CITU. The strikers returned to work, but nine months later management locked out one of the three plants. A "Committee of 15" was formed to get a better agreement, but it was then learned that the new leadership, which had taken over in the original ouster, had collaborated with management in the lockout. This brought the "Committee of 15", which had ties to the original leadership, to power in the union. The "Committee of 15" in turn began forcing people to resign by force. Armed police and police trucks were posted inside the plants. On some days as many as 50 workers were forced to resign and were beaten by union goons. Many workers went back to their villages to avoid being forced to resign. In these conditions, it took a year to force 1,500 resignations (7), and in May 1985 the struggle was over. Later, the German management sold off the company, which became Jhalani Tools.

The CITU in 1983 was involved in another militant strike in Faridabad, this time at Lakhani Shoes, which then employed 500 workers and is now much larger. The CITU carried out physical attacks on managers and supervisors, but the strike, which lasted for months, ended in defeat. It later came out that Lakhani had paid 35,000 rupees to the Faridabad leader of the CITU. (Subsequently, the CITU was ousted and replaced by unions affiliated with the Congress Party and then with the JD.)

Such union activity is not merely limited to manipulating struggles with management while covertly collaborating with the latter. In 1983, Dewanchand Gandhi, a CITU leader in Faridabad, was involved in a brazen use of union goons for a real estate scam. People from a nearby village had occupied land in Faridabad's Sector 6 and had set up a tea shop, thereby becoming de facto owners. The owner of the land sold it to Gandhi and his brothers. The Gandhi brothers' own goons would not vacate the land for them because some of them were from the same village as the occupiers. Thus Gandhi organized a union in a nearby factory of 300 young workers, and called a strike. While they were on strike, he used the workers to forcibly

vacate his land and to wall it off, in one night, telling them it was to be the site of a union hall. This accomplished, the workers went back to their picket lines, but the union stopped food deliveries to strikers. The workers resumed work and left the CITU. Gandhi kept the land.

In the same year, a militant CITU union at J.M.A. Industries called a strike. Bombs were thrown, and the state arrested and brought to trial four strike leaders. Regional CITU leaders came in to replace them and announced a deal. It later emerged that the company had built a new roof on the house of one of the regional leaders; meanwhile, the four local leaders stayed in jail, 18 militants were laid off, and management's aim were imposed.

In 1988, a struggle began at the Bata Shoe Company, a Canadian-based firm also operating plants in Batanagar, (near Calcutta), in Bihar, and in southern India. Bata Shoe launched a plan to restructure and diversify into marketing. The offensive began with a lock-out of the roughly 13,000 workers of the Batanagar plant, where both Communist Parties had unions. As part of the strategy, the management of the Batanagar plant went from a 5-day to a 7-day work week, with the cooperation of the CP unions there. A month later, an all-India one-day strike against Bata Shoe was

called; two months later, this was followed by a 3-day all Indian Bata strike. Four months after the management offensive began, it imposed all 37 of its restructuring demands. The union in the Faridabad plant called another strike in April 1989, and 10,000 workers went out, followed by further strikes later the same year. At the beginning of the management offensive, Bata Shoe in Batanagar had 13,000 workers; at the end, 7,000. (KK points out that at every turn the Indian media gave very favorable coverage to the unions' toothless strike strategy.)

In 1989, at K.G. Khosla Compressors Ltd., a plant with 2,000 permanent workers and 350 casuals, the signed an agreement with the company in which they gave away the workers' dues ("dues" in India mean severance pay, outstanding wages, pension funds and bonuses. It is common for management to quietly loot these dues in anticipation of a plant closing.) (Six years earlier, in 1983, the INTUC had led a militant strike which was crushed, ending in layoffs. When confronted, the local INTUC leadership said they signed the contract because the national leadership signed, and the national leadership said they signed because the local leadership signed. Things came to a head in August 1991 as Khosla management declared a lockout, terminating 250 casuals, announcing 326 layoffs of the permanent work force, and offering only the minimum annual bonus of 8.33%, threatening closure of the plant if these demands were not accepted. No wages were paid for August and the lockout began in early September. It lasted 8 months and broke worker resistance.

A similar downsizing was pushed through at Thomson Press, a printing plant in Faridabad, which reduced its personnel from 1700 to 900 between June 1989 and June 1991.

In 1987, Thomson brought in a new manager, replacing one who had had a close working relationship with the Congress-affiliated INTUC. The new manager preferred to introduce the JD-linked HMS, to the relief of the workers, who hated the INTUC leader. The new HMS leader was himself a dismissed Thomson worker. To start off the new regime, the company agreed to make casuals permanent. In 1989, however, Thomson demanded 200 layoffs and the new HMS leader signed a giveback agreement. In August 1990, the workers responded by bringing back the old deposed leader. In response to this, the company announced the closing of one of the plant's printing operations, cutting jobs. Two factions of workers formed around the two leaders. The state government exacerbated the division by cultivating ties to the INTUC leader, and fights broke out between the two factions. In March 1991 management suspended all production because of the fighting. Whereas the media had given wide coverage to the situation up to that point because of the state's ties to the INTUC leader, there

was a complete blackout of news on this lockout. Both leaders convinced the Thomson workers to leave the factory during the lockout, and that night the management removed machinery from the plant. The lockout continued for 70 days, at the end of which the HMS leadership announced that the workers did not want a fight. The plant reopened, with a very bad agreement in effect, and over the next 4-5 months 800 workers were forced to resign.

Relevant Struggles Elsewhere In India

One icon of the official left in India is the worker buy-out of Kamani Tubes Ltd. in Bombay, the Indian variant of the French LIP strike of 1973 (8), or the more recent ESOP's (Employee Stock Option Purchase) in the U.S. Kamani Tubes Ltd. was taken over in 1987 by its work force of 450, after 60 workers were laid off. The workers raised the buyout funds by taking out mortgages, and received support from the Bureau of Industrial Finance and Reconstruction. The Kamani Tubes experience of self-managed austerity is still used as a paradigm by India's NGOs and official left, and has been copied in a few other well-publicized instances, such as the Kanoria Jute Mill in Calcutta after 1993.

Not all workers' struggles in India, however, are successfully contained or manipulated by the unions. In 1989, 35,000 textile workers in Kanpur, an old industrial city in Uttar Pradesh, revolted against all local unions and blocked the railway lines through the city, taking turns by shift. 100 trains were cancelled, and the government conceded their demands in 5 days.

In this case, in contrast to the nation-wide, union-controlled Bata Shoe strikes, government propaganda and the media weighed in heavily against the action, and trade union officials also attacked it. (In 1977, just after the internal emergency had been lifted and the anti-emergency Janata Party had taken over reigns of power, the government had fired on Kanpur textile workers inside the Swadeshi Cotton Mill, killing between 30 and 150 workers and running off all trade union leaders. The textile mill had been nationalized shortly after the shootings.) In 1989, however, an impending election year militated against government violence. Nonetheless, once the struggle had died down, the government announced a retrenchment program and pushed it through over the next 4 or 5 years.

Similarly, in December 1988, at the No. 7 mining area at the Dhanbad Coal Mines in the state of Bihar, the piece-rate workers, fed up with the unions and their goon squads, revolted. They drafted demands and started a hunger strike at the union regional headquarters. They then surrounded the regional management offices shouting slogans denouncing both corrupt management and

corrupt unions.

In July 1990, another struggle outside and against union control erupted. 5,000 miners from the Munidih mines of the Bahrat Coking Coals Ltd. (BCCL) struck on their own. The police opened fire, killing two miners. All unions opposed the strike, and denounced the influence of "outsiders". Management refused to negotiate, until Aug. 7, when 2,000 workers surrounded BCCL headquarters and forced talks in which management persisted in pressing charges against the strikers. On Aug. 10, fighting erupted with police, and union goons also threatened workers. Under this pressure, 50-60% of the strike force went back to work, but after an Aug. 17 solidarity demonstration that mobilized 1,000 workers, management caved.

The workers at Bengal Jute, living under the "Marxist" state government of the CP(M) in West Bengal, were not so fortunate. Bengal Jute operates 49 jute mills, in which the PCI(M)'s own union, the CITU, and the INTAC, were dominant. In 1984, in a previous strike, management had agreed to no layoffs of 250,000 workers, but subsequently managed to retrench 110,000. In June 1992, the two unions launched a strike demanding the reinstatement of the laid-off workers; during the ensuing, failed strike by its own union, the PCI(M), with state power, said nothing.

1990's Struggles in Faridabad

Lakhani Shoes, which currently operates 19 plants in Faridabad, was the scene of mass layoffs in 1983 (described earlier) and 1988. By the mid-90's, it had become a joint venture with Reebok, using a large number of casuals in very hard work with low pay, rapid aging on the job, and loss of fingers. Many workers are Nepali. The work force is young because of the previous mass layoffs.

In these conditions, in May-June 1996, the workers decided to organize and went to the Hind Majdoor Sabha (HMS), mentioned earlier as the union affiliate of the Janata Dal. In July-August 1996, management suspended the union activists, and in September the union called a strike. Permanent, casual and contracted workers all struck. The strike continued into the spring of 1997, when workers began to disperse. The management resumed work using new hires, with the ex-leaders from the HMS as the labor contractors. A court order demanded that strikers stay 100 yards from the gates, and all strikers were ultimately fired.

In June 1995, a new struggle erupted at the East India Cotton Mills in Faridabad, where the 1979 strike was one of KK's first experiences in the working-class milieu. In 1995, the mills employed 3,000 workers in two factories. While some equipment was dismantled and workers complained, 6 of them were suspended. 2,500 workers

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walked out and the 6 were reinstated.

Management, however, wanted 600 layoffs. Without leaders among the workers, they were unable to control the work force. In the run-up to a confrontation over the layoffs, hunger strikes took place, and a group of rank-and-file leaders, demanding a "good contract", took over. In June-July 1996, 295 workers were forced to resign. Management floated a voluntary retirement scheme which found no takers. On July 10, they declared a lockout. 18 days later, the lockout was lifted and an agreement to resume work was signed, with 18 days pay lost.

In August, management simply paid no wages, and on Sept. 12 it declared a lockout in both plants, backed up by the arrival of the police. In an unusual move in a lockout situation, the rank-and-file leaders told the workers to leave the factories. The lockout continued into the fall, with the workers dispersed. The rank-and-file leaders threatened to close down Faridabad if the lockout did not end before Diwali (a Hindu festival). At the same time they avoided demonstrations because they were afraid of losing control. The leaders tried taking the case to the Supreme Court. In January 1997, the smaller plant reopened, but two months later resumed the lockout, with management still demanding 600 layoffs. As of December 1997, the lockout was still ongoing.

The struggle at Jhalani Tools Ltd. is one of the most recent struggles in which *Kamunist Kranti* has been involved, one of the most dramatic, and the one about which I have the most documentation so, at the risk of overkill (cf. *KK's* accompanying report) I will give it more space. *Jhalani Tools* provides unusually clear illustration of what Faridabad workers (and workers in other parts of India) are up against.

Workers everywhere are familiar with asset-stripping by management. But most workers in Europe and America, when their company goes bankrupt or is absorbed in a leveraged buyout, can at least expect to be laid off with a final paycheck, collect some unemployment compensation, and perhaps eventually some part of a pension. Of course in the fly-by-night sweatshops of Los Angeles and New York, as in similar maquiladora operations on the US-Mexican border, there are constant cases of companies folding up and disappearing while owing workers weeks of pay. But to date there have been few cases of decades-old, well-known "mainstream" companies operating for nearly 2 years without paying any wages.

Not so in Faridabad. *Jhalani Tools Ltd.* (9), the successor to *Gedore Hand Tools* (cf. above for the account of the 1982-85 struggle there) has not paid wages to 2183 workers since March 1996. Since there has been no hiring at *Jhalani* since 1978, (and the forcible "downsizing" of the work force in 1984) these 2183 employees have been at

Gedore/Jhalani for a minimum of 20 years. They are the target of an asset-stripping strategy that is not uncommon among Indian firms.

Jhalani Tools is not merely attempting to loot 2 years of back wages; it is also looting money owed workers for 2 annual bonuses, three years of "leave-travel" allowance, 3 years' payments to the group medical plan, and other "contracted" benefits. It is able to blackmail workers in this way because of the difficulty, not to say impossibility for them to find other jobs by walking away from their "legally guaranteed" employment.

After reducing staff almost by half by using goon terror in 1984, as described earlier, *Jhalani* in 1989 colluded with the union to ram through a contract containing three secret clauses that were withheld from workers (the contract was read aloud, minus these clauses, at a gate meeting). The clauses linked wages to production targets (requiring a minimum of 200 tons before any wages would be paid), absolved the company of the obligation to pay workers when production was impossible because of electricity blackouts or raw materials shortages, and gave the company the right to assign work irrespective of job classification. Even after pay had been docked for electric outages and materials shortages, these clauses remained in a new contract pushed through in 1993. Pleading poverty from various causes, *Jhalani Tools* in December 1995 got an "ad hoc committee" to agree to a 50% pay cut until further notice. The company began paying wages months in arrears and finally, in March 1996, stopped paying wages altogether, largely blaming work stoppages and indiscipline for the company's problems, using further endless salami tactics and maneuvers, and blithely ignoring the occasional labor board and court decisions in the workers' favor (the latter hardly being news).

Seasoned by decades of these tactics by management and the unions, *Jhalani* workers refused to be provoked into a set-up strike or other easily targeted actions making it easier to fire them and instead took their case to the Faridabad working class as a whole with roadside informational pickets. (For further details cf. accompanying article). As of this writing (March 1998), the standoff remains unresolved.

Faridabad Struggles and the Evolution of *Kamunist Kranti* 1979-Present

When *Kamunist kranti* began its focus on Faridabad in the late 1970's, the group was still recovering from Maoism; it remained within some kind of vanguardist perspective until 1992, at which point it evolved to its current, anti-vanguardist "affinity group" outlook. The preceding sketch of the major struggles which shaped *KK's* evolution gives some idea of the environment in

which the group evolved. In *Kamunist Kranti's* view, workers in India (and not merely in India) confront a set of interlocking rackets: corporate management, unions, the left political parties, the state at every level from local to national, labor boards and labor courts (where workers pursue legal redress for flagrant violation of the law for up to 15 years, and when they happen to win, find that the company's assets have been looted three times over by management, banks and state officials). None of these phenomena, in themselves or taken as a whole, are unfamiliar to many of us who are far from the Indian context (and *KK* would deny that there is anything specifically "Indian" about them). In Faridabad, thousands of workers see all unions, including oppositional currents in unions, and left-wing political parties as uniformly on a continuum with all the other interlocking parts of the racket, as merely further forces against which they have to defend themselves by refusing to be provoked into confrontations that are rigged in advance. This is what *KK* means when it says that, in contrast to 100 years ago, strikes are today the weapon of management. *KK* tells stories of management calling in groups of perceived "troublemakers" and insulting them in the most personal way, calling them wimps and cowards who stand there and take such insults, while the workers refuse to be provoked; in the middle of the management's tirade, the police van, which had been called in anticipation of a row, pulls up at the factory gate. For *KK*, part of the unions' strategy in working with management on retrenchment schemes is calling of sometimes violent strikes and confrontations in order to set in motion a "struggle

scenario", with leaders, fiery speeches and martyrs, in which the result is always defeat for the workers.

As I said at the onset of this article, neither *KK's* published (English-language) theoretical writings nor even its assessment "on the ground" of the official left and the unions in their main arena of intervention particularly distinguish them from a number of other groups in the international ultra-left milieu; what does seem to me to be unusual, if not unique, is the depth of *KK's* presence in a big working-class center, and their evolution of a strategy to combat their enemies. This strategy is what gives meaning to their self-description as "termites", quietly eating away at the foundations of the left spectacle of opposition, and the whole hoopla of the high-visibility, losing struggles the latter promotes.

KK refers to their pre-1992 vanguardism (even when it became anti-Stalinist vanguardism) as their "preach-teach" phase, when they still conceived of themselves as essentially addressing workers from a revolutionary tribunal. In that earlier phase, they confronted "bad vanguards" and "bad leaders" with the idea of becoming a good vanguard and good leaders. By December 1997, they had published the first issue of their (monthly) newspaper entirely written by factory workers.

In 1984-85 *Kamunist Kranti* withdrew from intervention and threw its energies into a fundamental theoretical reconsideration of perspectives. In their 1984-85 study group phase, they read through the three volumes of *Capital* and discovered Rosa Luxemburg's *Accumu-*



lation of Capital, which they embraced, with some qualifications, as an alternative to the Leninist theory of imperialism and monopoly capitalism which still dominates the Indian left. In 1990, they published an abridged edition of Luxemburg's book, intended to begin a debate with the Indian left; they found no takers, and ran up against the common "I've only read Vol. 1, and that was a long time ago" and evasion and illiteracy which is hardly limited to India. The study of Capital and of Luxemburg showed KK the utter poverty of the Lenin-Hilferding-Bukharin "monopoly capital" - "anti-imperialist" "economics" (in contrast to the critique of political economy) in which they, and most of the international left, had been immersed.

In their pre-1992 "preach-teach" phase, KK sold a monthly newspaper at the factory gates in Faridabad which by 1990 had reached a circulation of 1,000. The paper was made up of accounts of struggles like those related above. Their 1990 publication of Luxemburg's Accumulation of Capital and their maintenance of the Majdoor Library in the heart of a Faridabad slum were further parts of what they see today as their "educational" outreach. But almost no one was interested in debating Luxemburg with them, and few workers made use of the written material available in the library.

The turning point came in 1992 when they published an anthology (in Hindi only) of the best articles in their newspaper from the previous decade. The idea was to provide a tool for struggle to combative workers and they expected an enthusiastic response. Instead, workers thumbed through it, put it down, and said "This stuff is for leaders", i.e. specialists. This response to their whole previous "preach-teach" phase that led KK to an even more radical questioning of any kind of vanguardism. The struggles in which they

had been involved since 1982 were a litany of management and/or union provocations of workers to achieve management goals. They had again and again seen new leaders thrown up by the rank-and-file and pulled into the same mode of behaviour. On the other hand, KK's very real ties to affinity groups on the shop floor (in which their members were active) made them acutely aware of how workers acted to counter these provocations and noisy scenarios of defeat.

What KK saw, and further evolved as the alternative to any kind of vanguardism, was a strategy of "small steps". From Faridabad workers, they learned that "bees united in a hive can easily be put off by smoke and their honey taken away. But if affinity groups of bees swarm about, no one dares touch their honey". KK's critique of their earlier methods, and of those of all would-be vanguards, is aimed at what they call "unifocal struggles", i.e. big confrontations where the whole spectrum of repression from state, army, police and management to "Marxist-Leninist" parties and unions zero in on a big target. They point to most of the struggles recounted above as examples of such unifocal struggles. They counterpose the actions of small "affinity groups" that paralyze management attacks without becoming vulnerable targets. Instead of openly refusing and making themselves vulnerable to discipline and dismissal, workers assigned to work dangerous machinery for which they are not trained, work the machinery, let it break down, paralyze the factory, and force management to establish guidelines for training. Workers denied bathroom breaks from the assembly line start pissing on the shop floor and win bathroom breaks. They confront management over in-plant complaints in groups and refuse to delegate leaders who could be singled out or co-opted. When management started locking a

factory gate at 8:00 AM sharp, workers, knowing that many busses arrived nearby only at 8:15, gathered at both sides of the gate during the shift change, preventing anyone from going in or out, until management abandoned the policy. At Jhalani Tools, (cf. KK's accompanying article on that struggle) when workers saw that management was preparing to loot the enterprise in classic fashion, they went in small groups to the local labor department, flooding it with complaints about non-payment of wages and publicized the situation to the

whole Faridabad working class with roadside placards, generalizing an awareness through the whole city of these looting tactics.

In Kamunist Kranti's post-1992 break with "preach-teach" practice, they aim at a completely different kind of multilateral communication with workers. They stopped selling their newspaper and (as part of a critique of commodity relations), began giving it away at factory gates, but only to those who asked for it, and accepting contributions for further publication. In this way their circulation stabilized at 5,000. They are often approached by workers who write stories for the KK paper on developments in a specific plant. Individual workers in trouble with management come by the Majdoor Library for suggestions and help. KK and their newspaper are widely known in Faridabad, even by people who do not agree with them or work openly with them, as an alternative network of information and "small steps" strategy and tactics to deal with a situation where the official left and the trade unions are part of the problem. KK's "termite" strategy has succeeded in opening a space for genuine worker discussion in an industrial city of 300,000. KK articulates the hostility the workers already feel toward their parties and unions. KK members have been beaten up many times by goons of the left parties and the unions, but more recently they are left alone.

Once again, many if not all of Kamunist Kranti's most recent ideas have been articulated before, and elsewhere. (The issue here is of course not originality; it is substance.) The critique of work in KK's *Ballad* echoes similar ideas articulated by *Zero Work* and *Midnight Notes* over the past 25 years. Stan Weir and his collaborators in the U.S. have for several decades argued that workplace affinity groups and horizontal communication among plants are the natural and real self-organization of workers and as an alternative to vertical unionism and vanguards, even if they do not reject unionism per se, as Kamunist Kranti does. (10) Back in the 1950's, the Facing Reality group in Detroit around C.L.R. James attempted to publish a factory based newspaper written by and for workers, although they never (to my knowledge) achieved the shop floor presence, quantitative or qualitative, which Kamunist Kranti has in Faridabad. I am sure there are further examples of which I am unaware. On the other hand, I have never encountered another tendency which states so unequivocally that today "strikes are the weapon of management", nor have I ever encountered such a systematic rejection of what KK calls "unifocal struggles" as guaranteed defeats, however many defeats, in India and just about everywhere else, can be pointed to in recent decades. It is around this problematic, having laid out their ideas as judiciously as I can, that I begin my "comradely criticism" (as opposed to a full-blown critique) of Kamunist

Kranti.

Criticism of Kamunist Kranti

Kamunist Kranti's two English-language pamphlets, *A Ballad Against Work* and *Reflections on Marx's Critique of Political Economy*, are the two main theoretical statements by which the current is known internationally. As stated earlier, I think that for all their interest, they do not reveal clearly the uniqueness of what KK is about in its real presence in Faridabad, and space prevents me from taking them up in detail here. What follows flows rather from a reflection on the material already presented and from further conversations with members of KK.

To state my principal criticism as bluntly as possible: Kamunist Kranti, as a current, is overly focused on worker struggles at the point of production. The lessons of their Faridabad experience, however rich, are not as generalizable as KK thinks. They offer only so much, and not enough, to revolutionaries in countries where a large part of the proletariat has never made it to the shop floor, or has more recently particularly in the West been downsized out of it. In breaking totally (and mainly rightly) with "unifocal struggles" in the context of one city, Kamunist Kranti has also broken with the CLASS-FOR-ITSELF, which is a totality, not a sum, and which therefore cannot be a linear addition of affinity groups in a linear addition of factories, but becomes something qualitatively different in direct proletarian dual power political form, presaging actual working-class power over society as a whole, such as the soviets of 1905 (Russia), 1917-1921 (Russia-Germany), or 1936 (Spain). (Kamunist Kranti might of course rightly point out that all the latter examples also ended in defeats, but that would be a fatuous conflation. All struggles short of the final overthrow of capitalism will sooner or later be defeats in some way.)

KK evolved against the incredible inertia of the official left in India (of which the above narrative presumably gives at least a whiff), which is almost hopelessly dominated by the legacy of the Indian Communist Party's accommodation to the Congress state, and by more radicalized versions of the same which began breaking away from the ICP with the Maoist revolt of the 1960's. These, in turn, are part of a larger context of statism which besets the left internationally, and particularly in Third World countries. Kamunist Kranti had to polemicize with an environment deeply influenced by statist nationalism, justifying the kind of "anti-imperialist" alliances with the "progressive bourgeoisie" against "comprador elements" and "feudal remnants" at home, and "monopoly capital" abroad, the old tired refrain which has so badly declined in recent decades. Kamunist Kranti evolved



in this context to a resolute internationalism, taking care to substitute the term "wage workers in India" for "Indian workers". All these elements are, in India and anywhere else, a breath of fresh air.

Kamunist Kranti thinks that conditions of wage workers are, today, pretty much the same everywhere, and radically question the distinction between the "developed" and "underdeveloped" world. One does not have to accept blindly productivist-technocratic ideas of development to wonder about this. KK will point to the downsizing, increase of electronic surveillance at the workplace and in society generally, the lengthening of the work week, speedup, loss of purchasing power and all the elements of the attack on wage workers in the West since the 1960's, and show their more or less exact counterpart in India. Even Bombay has been seriously de-industrialized by out-sourcing and decentralized cottage production which helped shut down its century (or more) old textile industry. Hong Kong has been de-industrialized by Shenzhen, where wages are 10% of Hong Kong wages, and Shenzhen is losing jobs to cities further into China, where wages are about 10% of Shenzhen wages. KK's *Ballad Against Work*, using examples from India and all over the world, documents this intensification of work by cordless phones, pagers, computer networks, "karoshi" (Japanese for "death from overwork"), "quality control", "agricultural revolutions", on-line work in the home, airline commutes, freeway commutes, mass transit commutes, and domestic piece-work out-sourcing of manufacture, all over the world.

There is doubtless a large element of truth in this. But it is at the same time somewhat breathtaking to hear a current in a city like Faridabad, where a skilled industrial worker earns the rupee equivalent of \$50-200 per month, in a country where 16% of the world's population produces 1.5% of the total world product, say that conditions are essentially the same as in the Western countries where a skilled industrial worker earns \$15 per hour and 16% of the world's population produces over half the world's product. I know that every one of these figures (except for population) is subject to the most withering critical scrutiny, but I still note massive labor emigration to the West from the "Third World", and not in the other direction. It is certainly true that wage workers are one international class and that there is no revolution in one country, but this has been true for a long, long time. It is also true that the conditions of the post-1973 world crisis have significantly blurred the distinctions between "developed" and "underdeveloped" countries, in particular in the accelerating creation of one world labor market (e.g. Lufthansa accountants in Hyderabad).

The point, however, is not to quibble about "developed" and "underdeveloped" countries. What is most



striking about Kamunist Kranti, as a review of the history of Faridabad struggles recounted above will show, is that for the past 20 years they have been dealing with the kinds of struggles which revolutionaries in the West used to deal with in Detroit, Manchester, Alsace, the Ruhr, and Turin, i.e. struggles primarily centered on the point of production, that is the factory. The capitalists in Europe and America for 25 years also have a critique of "unifocal struggles" and big confrontations, because in the 1965-1973 period, throughout the West, contrary to what KK might think, the capitalists were LOSING them, and those "unifocal struggles" (such as May 1968 in France or Italy's 1969 'hot autumn') were also interacting intensely with "small steps" struggles on the shop floor, which the capitalists were also losing. Their strategy since 1973 has been to pulverize, wherever possible, the big units of production which created large-scale concentrations of proletarians (such as one finds in Faridabad today) and replace them with decentralized, "flexible" cottage-type production, a strategy largely realized in the demise of the old "worker fortresses" like Renault-Billancourt and Turin-FIAT which caused them such headaches, as they lost control of the work force and the shop floor.

The (to date largely successful) capitalist strategy in Europe and America for 25 years has been to fragment the old working class, and along comes Kamunist Kranti saying that the problem is "unifocal struggles"! They are rather, from the other end, theoreticians of the same fragmentation, as a strategy for workers, and they have no idea how to combat it because it has not yet hit them as it has hit workers in the West. However astute they may be about how workers in Faridabad have fought back against the snares of their arrayed political, managerial and trade-union enemies, they have no grasp of the way these problems present themselves in Europe and America, where growing numbers of (ex) wage workers have been thrown onto the scrap heap, and even more are being born already in the scrap heap, (as they are in India)

It may seem somewhere bizarre to criticize a working-class current in India for what it says about Europe and America. But since KK claims that its perspectives are without borders, and that the problems of wage-workers are everywhere the same, if KK is wrong somewhere they are wrong everywhere. Their error, once again, comes from a fallacy of linear composition of certain local trends with which they are familiar. (But, to paraphrase Hegel, the familiar is not always the known) To make Faridabad the "known" in this sense, Kamunist Kranti would have to locate it in the global context of this "race to the bottom". ties to affinity Ex-auto workers in inner-city Detroit can piss on the shop floor all they want, because GM and Ford long ago packed the assembly line off to Puebla and Chihuahua; steel workers who used to hold cake-bakes on the job in Gary, Indiana, are now scattered through the Chicago suburbs, delivering pizzas; the ex-longshoremen of the containerized San Francisco waterfront today can barely find each other in the phone book. Not to mention the children of these auto, steel and longshore workers, ground up in the casualized inferno of temp agencies and dead-end Macjobs. Not to mention the black ex-auto workers who participated in the 1972 Lordstown, Ohio wildcat, and who are now doing slave labor in Ohio state prison.

While it is difficult to find in their writings (particularly in those available in English), KK has a rather bizarre sense of what this has meant for the workers in the West in the past 25 years. When, in discussion with them, I pointed to the accelerating disappearance of the working-class revolt of 1965-1973 (extended by a few years in countries such as Spain, Portugal, and Italy), and said that this had constituted (particularly in the U.S.) a very successful capitalist counter-offensive and effective response to the earlier revolt, KK insisted that I was focusing only on well-known "unifocal struggles" and that workers since 1973 had shifted to a "small steps" strategy, blacked out in the media. As evidence for this they point to the greatly increased amount of electronic surveillance on the job, evidence that manage-

ment has still not regained control of the shop floor. While this may be true, a lot of workers after the 1973-75 downturn were happy to have a job, period. KK sees management today as literally trembling at the depth of worker autonomy, (a panic for which I certainly find no evidence in the exultant American financial and business press, where the mood for the past two decades is rather that labor has been KO'd for good, as profits soar.) (11) Whatever truth there is to this (and I doubt there is much; rather electronic surveillance is first of all one of the tools of worker rollback), all these "small steps" have not prevented a 20% fall in workers' living standards since 1973, and 40% for American (black and Hispanic) minorities. But since KK rejects the idea that there was any increase in workers' living standards during the 1945-1973 boom in the West (pointing to longer hours, more travel time, more women obliged to enter the work force), they reject the idea that there was any rollback of struggle after 1965-1973 or that increased living standards and a more favorable labor market had anything to do with the relative ebb phase prior to 1965-1973 (12)

Again, I have no desire to lapse into productivist-technocratic notions of living standards. But I can't help agreement with the Communist Workers Organization (CWO) Internet reply to KK, on the same constellation of issues: "In the 1960's we could tell the boss to stuff his job and walk into another one the next week. Or...we could work for six months and then live on state benefit for six months." Tell a UPS temp about that today.

In fact, Kamunist Kranti's point-of-production problem is already contained in their favorite (and, in fact, syndicalist) metaphor about "swarms of bees protecting their honey". The "honey" of the working class is not in any individual factory, or in the additive sum of all factories; that is in fact a Ricardian, productivist, vols. 1+2 "simple reproduction" view of capitalist production. The "honey" of the working class is in the total social wage in a "vol. 3" (and vol. 4: *Theories of Surplus Value*) expanded reproduction of labor power, which includes education, medical care, and social infrastructure (e.g. sanitation, transportation, housing) however different any and all of these things will look in a society freed from commodity exchange. (It is significant that in their discussions with me about the critique of political economy, KK was skeptical in the extreme about including education and medical care in the total social wage; for them, education and medicine only exist to make it possible for the working class to work, as if a completely different kind of education and medicine will not exist in a communist society.) Kamunist Kranti's almost exclusive factory focus, for all its richness, and its "small step" eschewal of "unifocal struggles" is the radicalization

of a consciousness and practice circumscribed by the capitalist fiction par excellence, the individual enterprise.

When workers attempt to paralyze production at one factory, or even all factories, whether through "unifocal struggles" or "small steps", no matter how radical, they are still merely "negating" the dominant, alienated organization of production; they break with this (very necessary) day-to-day "negation" by posing themselves, as a class, as an alternate basis for the reproduction of society as a whole, not merely in one or all factories, but in all aspects of life, just as capital currently dominates all of life. Kamunist Kranti's exclusive focus on radicalized forms of "negation" (disruption of capitalist production), however interesting and important, is not enough.

I am no more interested than Kamunist Kranti in name-calling or citation wars from Marx's Capital. The point is this. For 25 years, world capital has whipsawed workers, and particularly workers in the West, with a global "rationalization" of production, featuring high-tech innovation, eliminating jobs, and the farming out of manufacture to the Third World, also eliminating jobs, all aimed at lowering the total wage bill. Hong Kong textiles replacing Manchester, Shenzhen replacing Hong Kong, and Wuhan replacing Shenzhen. Japanese capital outsourced to Korea, and when Korea became too expensive, to Indonesia, and they all live in fear of China. The process, in the West, is most advanced in the U.S. where real incomes have fallen 20%, the work week has increased 20%, housing now takes 40-50% of household income, nearly 1% of the population is in prison or on parole, and something like one-third of the work force is made up of part-timers and temps. Prison construction is the leading growth industry, and prisons are being built with factories in them, to recycle the newly-criminalized downsized work force into 30-cents-an-hour full time semi-skilled and skilled jobs, including computer programming.

This "American model" is now crashing down on what is left of the "welfare states" of western Europe. The long-term disappearance, since 1973, of what Kamunist Kranti calls "unifocal struggles" is the result of this global restructuring. Again and again, this process has crushed worker resistance, no matter how militant, in a single factory or industry or town (most recently, again, in the Decatur, Illinois "war zone"). Capital understands that the game is being played at the level of the total capital; no effective worker strategy has been developed to counter it, and no strategy focused exclusively on the point of production will. "Small steps" tactics, no matter how effective in one locale that still is more like the old "worker fortresses" of the West than like the new killing fields of highly mobile capital, provide no answer. I don't have the right answer, either, but I think I have the right questions, and Kamunist

Kranti has no answer to them.

□ Loren Goldner

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Footnotes

1. Kamunist Kranti/Collectivities publications, in both English and Hindi, are available upon request from Majdoor Library, Autopin Jhuggi, N.I.T., Faridabad 121001, India. Also available from the CAN Web site: <http://www.geocities.com/CapitolHill/Lobby/2379> or by mail from CAN in the US.

2. See his *In the Cities of the South*, (Verso), London/New York, 1996

3. For a factual expose of the real estate strategy for Bombay's conversion from a textile town into a finance-and-real estate paradise on the Manhattan-Singapore model, written from a human rights perspective but still damning enough, cf. *Murder of the Mills: An Enquiry Into Bombay's Cotton Textile Industry and Its Workers*, available from Lokshahi Hakk Sanghatana, Laxmi Niwas, 2nd Fl., 697 Katrac Road, Wadala, Bombay 400 031 (50 rupees).

4. India of course has not yet been fully integrated into the East Asian capitalist boom of the post-1960's (currently on hold until further notice), as the world financial press somewhat ruefully admitted in fall 1997 when India was, as a result, relatively unaffected by the collapse of the Thai, Malaysian, Indonesian and South Korean currencies, the Hong Kong real estate and stock markets, and the ensuing (and continuing) regional debacle. The global capitalists who are prying open East Asian economies to buy up their assets at bargain basement prices still have the effrontery to tell capitalists in India that they should make haste down the same road, to "take advantage" of globalization. India as a result is, according to the 1991 census (and the following categories, which can describe a child selling Chiclets on a street corner as a "service" worker, should be taken at less than face value) still nearly three-fourths rural, with 73.9% of the population living in villages and hamlets of 5,000 or less, and the remaining 26.1% in towns and cities. The breakdown of the work force shows the same rural preponderance, with 39% peasants and 26% agricultural laborers; in addition to the latter agricultural proletariat, the non-agricultural working class (some of it also rural) shows 7% in manufacture (with an additional 2% in household production), 3% in extractive industries (fishing, forestry, mining), 2% in construction, 8% in trade and commerce, 3% in transportation, and 10% in "other services". The census also mentions 28.2 million "marginal workers" and 55 million children (not including those working directly for their parents) working in agriculture (25 million), "services" (20 million), and 5 million in handloom, carper-making, gem-cutting

and match-making. 29% of the total work force, by these official categories, is made up of women. (These figures are from J. Heitzman et al. eds. *India: A Country Study* (1996), p. 325, a U.S. government handbook.) The annual per capita income is \$324 per year. In this context, Faridabad, for all its osmosis of urban and rural (for much of its factory work force is, as indicated earlier) drawn from all over India and Nepal), is, for India, a high concentration of industrial workers, who earn between 800 and 8000 rupees per month (\$20-\$200 at December 1997 exchange rates).

5. Just about every political party in India has a trade union affiliate. The Bharatiya Majdoor Sangh is the BJP union, and the largest; the INTUC (Indian National Trade Union Congress) is affiliated to the Congress Party; the AITUC (All-India Trade Union Congress) is linked to the Communist Party India (CPI); the CITU (Center of Indian Trade Unions) is linked to the Communist Party of India (Marxist); the CPI (M-L) and further breakaways have their unions.

6. "Resignations" are a classic management method of side-stepping India's tough job security legislation; these "resignations" are often extracted, by force, with the help of the unions' goon squads.

7. According to another human rights pamphlet, Gedore management claimed that the 1,500 resigning workers had opted for a "Voluntary Retirement Scheme"; workers claim that the union participated in drawing up lists of workers to be "resigned" and then worked with police to terrorize them into doing so. (cf. *The Company They Keep. A Report on Workers of Jhalani Tools Ltd.*, Faridabad. Available from Dr. Sudesh Vaid, D-2, Staff Quarters, I.P. College, Shamnath Marg, Delhi 11054. 3 rupees plus postage.) Even today, in legal arbitration by Gedore's successor Jhalani Tools, management refers to the 1984 events as the year of "Voluntary Retirement".

8. Copies of the excellent Negation pamphlet, LIP, or the Self-Managed Counter-Revolution, are available from Black and Red, PO Box 02374, Detroit, MI 48202, USA)

9.-Most of the following information is from the human rights pamphlet, *The Company They Keep*, cited earlier. While providing useful background information, this pamphlet is marred by excessive legalism and an attempt to show Jhalani Tools as a "human rights" case instead of a more visible instance of a systemic practice

10. Stan Weir's views, and those of others like him, can be gleaned from Staughton Lynd, ed. "We Are All Leaders": *The Alternative Unionism of the Early 1930's*, (University of Illinois Pr.), 1996. The strength of this book is its demonstration, in different contexts, that the CIO was top-down and bureaucratic

from the beginning.

11. After the August 1997 UPS strike in the U.S., which if not exactly the victory which most of the left and far-left made it out to be, certainly showed something more than the abject prostration of the previous 20 years of labor routs (UMW 1978, PATCO, 1981; Greyhound 1983; Phelps-Dodge, 1984; Hormel P-9, 1986; Jay, Maine 1989, Yale 1995, Detroit News 1996, etc. etc. etc.), and above all showed a depth of anger over temp work and support for the strike far beyond the UPS workers themselves, papers such as the Wall Street Journal went wild with invective aimed at Sweeney and Carey for having broken with such a nice consensus! Such invective over a strike that resulted in a 10 cents per year raise over a 5-year contract for temps (who had not had a raise in 14 years) is not exactly the tone one would expect from the cowed management, losing sleep over a post-1973 worker rebellion, portrayed by KK.

12. To put things into perspective (again using the American example, although a similar story could be told for any European country): after the 1945-46 postwar strike wave and the 1948-1953 McCarthyite purge of the labor movement, there were indeed important struggles that escaped management and union control, and were harbingers of the 1965-1973 revolt: the 1955 auto strike, the 1959 steel strike, and the perpetual struggle for control of the shop floor in auto. But management and the unions had not nearly lost control of rank-and-file workers as they did in the latter part of the postwar boom, when e.g. members of the UAW had a de facto 4-day work week through massive absenteeism. Whether "unifocal" or "small step", these are struggles of another era in the days of "lean and mean" management and "just in time" production, which is not to deny the existence of "small steps" struggle in the latter.

A Response to Loren Goldner's Presentation & Criticism

I We all 'frame' our own experiences or others' experiences in some form (theoretical, ideational & practical) or the other. This framing, which dominates all our symbolically mediated communication(s), is almost impossible to get away from. The process of framing is a fairly tricky affair because it cajoles us, urges us (at times thrusts us), sensitizes or de-sensitizes us to the nature of our (and others) experiences in only a specific dimension(s). To be conscious (and reflective) of this process and to be able to destabilize (de-legitimize) dominant & conventional modes of framing can be a significant oppositional practice, if we care to engage in it.

II Capital*(footnote at end of article) * finds it very annoying to see its relation to labour in its nudity. Thus, it continuously makes numerous assaults of varying amplification to dress us all in different collared costumes. This effectively cushions the sights.

We are quite dismayed at Loren Goldner's mode of framing his visit to Faridabad and his conversations with us (i.e. KK/Collectivities). The confidence with which Loren uses the term 'Third World', 'Asian Capitalism', 'Japanese capital' makes one squirm. It seems that he does not have any problem with the dominant definitional division of the world that is created, circulated and perpetuated by the ruling configurations of different factions of capital. How this definitional fancy dress so preferred by missionaries of capital goes totally unchallenged by Loren, who otherwise claims to be against the 'imperialist theses', is baffling.

Again and again the reference to the 'Indian left', it's 'inertia', it's this or that completely escapes us. The article makes it appear as if we are constantly fighting some entity called the 'Indian left', 'left parties' etc. What we are up against are managements, state and the politics of representation. These can have many hues and shades and we do not privilege one hue or shade as our main adversary. We are therefore unable to comprehend Loren's insistence on this 'left' angle.

"Particularly in a country such as India, where the left is still weighed down by an enormous legacy of statism, in its Congress, Stalinist and Maoist/'Marxist-Leninist' varieties, the appearance of a working-class current that rejects and combats this statism unequivocally is a phenomenon worthy of

international attention" - is this 'enormous legacy of statism' specific to a 'country such as India'? Or is it a legacy and a reality that has got a much deeper root in the dynamics of capital and can be seen in all places?

KK was formed in 1986. KK emerged from a group around a monthly newspaper intervening in industrial conflicts in Faridabad, with a Leninist framework (1982-84). Both practical experiences and an acquaintance with German-Dutch and Italian Lefts through International Communist Current (ICC) led to a critical reevaluation of the Leninist framework. Since there had always been a stress that intervention in industrial conflict needed an anchorage in a critique of political economy, these new experiences led to an examination of Rosa Luxemburg's 'The Accumulation of Capital' and re-readings of Marx's three volumes of Capital. Debates with ICC and IBRP(CWO), along with reading of their texts as well as the examination of texts such as Bukharin's critique of Rosa's Accumulation and Paul Mattick's work led to certain conclusions. These conclusions were presented for wider debate with the publication of KKI (July 1986). Correspondences and debates with groups [such as the EFICC (Belgium), CouC (France), ICP (England), Echanges (France), PCI Programma (Switzerland), Lal Pataka (India), Samajgati Sangha (India), Wildcat (Britain), Emancipacion Obrera (Argentina), Militancia Clacista Revolucionario (Uruguay), LRP (USA), Interrogations pour la communité humaine (France) etc.] led to the recognition that a huge barrage of uninformed debates and quotation flinging polemics were camouflaging inabilities to grapple with the reality through categories of the critique of political economy. In an attempt to overcome this, in 1990 we published an abridged version of Rosa's 'Accumulation' along with an introduction and appendices wherein we critically examined certain basic formulations of Marx, Rosa and Lenin. The book was circulated in the above milieu but no one took up the issues, even though the very premises of the groups were put to question.

In 1997, in 'Reflections on Marx's Critique of Political Economy' we again elaborated on the following: a questioning of the very premise of Marx's formulation of capital (M-C-M'); the preponderance of loan dependent production enterprises and the implications of this; the meaninglessness of the concept 'the

rate of profit' and of 'the law of the tendency of the rate of profit to fall' today; the anti wage-worker nature of theories of monopoly capital/ imperialism; etc. All these issues have a bearing on wage-workers' resistances and steps of change. For twelve years now, we have been in touch with various groups and individuals in different parts of the world but we are yet to come across those who are debating these questions. However, Loren Goldner says that these questions have been routinely debated in 'the international left'. We would certainly like to know of such debates. Moreover, his flagrant usage of the term 'capitalists' shows that he is trapped in terminology of the 19th century, and is unaware of the problematic of its usage today. This has also been dealt with in 'Reflections'.

In Loren's article, when describing conditions after WWII in North America and Europe, a nostalgic reverie of workers' power emerges (even when the text is a quote from another quarter) - "In the 1960's we could tell the boss to stuff his job and walk into another one the next week. Or we could work for six months and then live on state benefit for six months." The question is where did this bargaining capacity come from? This thesis is very strange and contradictory - that workers controlled the shopfloor but capital ran the show with massive leaps in intensification of work. By the way, describing conditions in North America and Europe, G.Munis writing in 1960 says, "In the strictly economic domain the situation of the working class was never worse than it is today. Everything said to the contrary is so much bullshit." ('Unions Against Revolution', available from Black & Red)

Let us get out of constructing 'bizarre' mythologies and try to describe conditions on the basis of still valid categories of the critique of political economy such as the intensity of labour, the working day and the rate of exploitation.

That capital time and again intensifies its offensive on wage-workers we all agree. Loren seems to agree that in the last 25 years there has been an intensification of attacks on wage-workers, gives very many examples to show this, but strangely refuses to talk about the process by which these attacks were actualized. The critical question is how capital implements the policies of downsizing, intensification and wage cuts? How did it break the old 'workers fortresses'?

What were its strategies? It would be helpful for us to debate these issues substantively, especially when we do get to know of the actual unfolding of events. A mere assertion about events does not make the events 'known'. We can exchange notes on methods of resistance(s) only when we are dealing with the HOWs of the attacks.

Capital, the social relation, has long been global in nature, and operating at a global level. Giving it a nation-ality or continent-ality, a la 'Japanese capital', 'Asian capitalism' only nurtures identity politics. Our activity is to participate in resistances and steps of change by wage-workers. The debates which are meaningful are those which evaluate the efficacy of steps of resistances and change through a continuous evaluation of experiences. 1905 Soviets, 1917-18 Russia-Germany, 1936 Spain can be evaluated and practical lessons drawn only when the impact of routine resistances and steps of change is scrutinized. All information that we have been able to access shows that representation & delegation were not challenged during these events. This lack contributed to the enhancement of proto-state tendencies.

There is some serious confusion regarding what we have to say about conditions of wage-work all over the world. We are not saying that wage rates are the same all over the world - we would have gone nuts to make such idiotic claims. What we are saying is that the same processes are acting all over the world, with the scales of intensification, rate of exploitation, and working day varying from place to place, location to location. It is an undeniable fact that all these have increased exponentially, no matter what the location, in this century.

We are categorically saying that the levels of supervision, policing and surveillance show the range & degree of resistance to the regimes of work, productivity & discipline. The exponential increase in these control & coercion apparatuses shows also the weakness of state apparatuses & management. Whether one finds reflection of this weakening in the financial & business press that Loren refers to, we do not know. But we do find reflection of this 'process of weakening' in the phenomenal growth of security services and the expenditure over the mushrooming technologies of control. The expenditure on the other 'cloudy mushroom' can be left aside. Slave labor in state prison shows a besieged, decaying system - not a confident system.

**** Let us also try and define 'small steps'. These are steps of self-activity that wage-workers in small groups or individually take routinely. These are steps taken after a lot of discussion and deliberation, and do not follow any specific procedure. These are steps that everyone participates in, and acts without leaders & representatives. These are steps that managements are

very weary (and wary) of and are sources of constant tension for them. Supervisors, foremen and leaders are in constant fear of these steps. These are steps that are very low on visibility, almost wordless but extremely effective. The unregulated, diffuse, endless and rule-less nature of these steps are their strength. This strength, however, is also its major weakness because these are rarely discussed amongst wage-workers as significant and pregnant with possibilities. Probably the routine, everyday, non-heroic nature of these steps stop them from being taken seriously in a political milieu immersed in the worship of extraordinary, grand, heroic resistances, with more and more martyrs and less and less gain.

What are we at present grappling with is to find a practice that is based on the self-activity of wage-workers, which is anti representatives & leaders. A self-activity that everyone can participate in their own terms, and create modes of resistances that are within their own control. A self-activity that is routine and non-heroic (because heroism implies events, not processes). A self-activity that refuses to get abducted by the politics of representation and to become a target of already laid down assault paths. A self-activity that constantly expands its linkages through conversations amongst wage-workers on ever larger scales.

The workers of Jhalani Tools are not carrying 'informational pickets'. One of the activities that some workers of Jhalani Tools do before and after their shift hours is to stand along a road, during morning or evening shift-change hours, in groups of six or eight, with hand written placards. They have been doing this daily since August 1997. On the placards is written: "We are from the 2000 workers who have not been paid their wages for (so many) months"; "What is to be done when managements do not pay wages?"; "We have changed leaders four times and union flags three times, but each time it has been from the frying pan into the fire"; "We have made many complaints to govt. officials and ministers but conditions have gone from bad to worse"; "Metal Box, Delta Tools, Electronics Ltd. and now Jhalani Tools workers. Whose turn tomorrow?"; etc. Everyday they space themselves along a different road. Along each route that they stand on, workers from hundreds of factories pass by. Over this period of nine months, more than 200,000 workers have read their placards and thousands of workers have stopped to have extensive conversations with them. In almost all factories of Faridabad questions posed by these workers are being debated. What is being discussed by an ever-increasing number of wage-workers is how to act on their own strength against the triumvirate of state, management and representatives. It is a constant process of conversation, argument and counter-argument as to the whats and hows of resistance. There is awareness

that the charted out paths and networks of representatives, leaders and their organisations are all geared to subvert this process.

Loren's criticism that we are trapped in the logic of the 'individual enterprise' is simply untrue. For the last twelve years all our theoretical and practical activity has been geared to locating the discussion in terms of a global reality of capital, to show the global linkages of the social formation of wage-labour based production for the market. And to show the emergence of loan based production enterprises and the immense flexibility and mobility of capital. 'a ballad against work' & 'Reflection on Marx's Critique of Political Economy' were written to forefront this in debate and to facilitate conceptualizations for a global practice. When we say 'wage-workers in India' and not 'Indian workers', it is to articulate this reality. Our critiques of dominant modes of struggles have stressed the fact that the politics of territoriality (i.e. marking, control & defence of a territory), be it of a factory, or a region or a nation, is dangerous for wage-workers and is sure to lay the grounds for its defeat. Our critique of representation & delegation emerges from this realization. Representatives armed with delegated power need the *language of territoriality to make the workers return to productive labour in that hellhole of discipline and punishment called the factory.* Defence of territoriality unleashes nothing but this punishment. Making a fetish out of defeat does not in any way help us. Only when we can learn from a defeat can we know what NOT to repeat.

The metaphor 'bees united in a hive can easily be put off by smoke and their honey taken away, but if affinity groups of bees swarm about, no one dares touch their honey' was articulated by a worker in a spontaneous mass meeting outside the district administration office to counter the ageless rhetoric of unity and delegation (for negotiations with management & administration) put forward by leaders. It did very well to thwart leaders, management & administration's attempts to control the workers at that very critical juncture. We do not extrapolate more from this metaphor, and in fact anticipate thousands of more creative articulations from wage-workers in their struggle against the politics of representation and for newer and sharper methods of resistance.

To make wage-workers more productive, managements & state apparatuses make a lot of investment in living & working conditions and for the training of workers. These investments range from installation of an exhaust fan in a foundry to air-conditioning of factory premises, uniforms, shoes, gloves, canteen, roads and railroads, sanitation, accidents & injury care, disciplining and training institutes like school. Investments in these branches wax and wane in a specific location as per the requirements of capital at that point of time.



'Welfare state' is a term circulated by state apparatuses to enhance their legitimacy.

In a Goodyear Tyre factory, the management has installed state of the art technologies to see to it that not a fly, not an insect can pollute the factory canteen and become a health hazard for workers. The slogan is 'A Healthy worker is a Productive worker'.

As per critique of political economy, in the total capital, V (total wage) is the summation of wages of all the workers. We see no reason to change this formulation by bringing in the concept of social wage. Ensnaring the terminologies of 'welfare state' in concepts like 'social wage' is playing into the hands of the managements. 'Democratisation', 'totalitarianisation', 'welfarisation', 'dismembering the welfarisation', seeking the 'proper mix', etc. are all steps at grabbing the maximum possible portion of global produce by different state-apparatuses.

An elaboration on strikes (unifocal struggles) can be seen in our text 'Towards a Critique of Representation & Delegation'.

A clarification regarding a statement in the write-up "KK members have been beaten up many times by goons of the left parties and the unions, but more recently they are left alone", which we think can give rise to some erroneous ideas. What we discussed was that when we were staking claims for alternate leadership (in 1982-84, when KK did not exist) we were then in the direct line of fire and thus got ourselves thrashed by entrenched union goons. But when our practice shifted to self-activity by workers themselves and we would not provide targets, it then became very difficult for goons to indulge in direct assault. It is very difficult to arbitrarily start hitting any and everybody! But threats, suspensions and dismissals do not disappear. Actually many of us are at present under dismissals. This is not to quibble over accuracy but to say that 'left alone' should be used and read very judiciously.

We are sure that wage-workers everywhere, in all branches, whether in manufacturing, banking, agriculture, transport, marketing, research or even media, routinely resist the regimes of

work & discipline. We are attempting to share experiences and evolve multi-nodal modes of linkups with wage-workers in all branches. These are not 'linear additions' but non-linear connectivities. Mathematically it can be characterized as deterministic chaos as in the Mandelbrot set.

Most of the reports in Loren's write-up about Faridabad and other parts of India are concerned with downsizing. It is therefore strange that when he writes his criticism, he asserts that Faridabad has not been hit by downsizing as yet. Also, considering the fact that Loren holds to the axiom that 'emancipation of wage-workers is the task of wage-workers themselves', it is odder still to find him labeling our attempts at extension and expansion of wage-workers' self-activities as supplementing capital's acts at fragmenting wage-workers.

The wage-worker is rarely seen as a 'resisting self'. This not-seeing gives rise to narratives that need mass-forms and spectacular forms in order to see resistance. This search for mass-form makes one oblivious to resistances all around oneself, further hindering recognition of resistances all over. It is our firm conviction, arising out of the experience of so many, that it is possible to deeply connect with one another through recognition and appreciation of each others 'resisting selves', selves that routinely resist the regimes of work, productivity & discipline. It is only on this grounding that we imagine a dismantling of the existing global system.

(Footnote on page 1 reads : * What is meant by the term 'capital' is wage-labour based production for the market. Refer to our publication 'Reflections on Marx's Critique of Political Economy' for details.)

KK/ Collectivities 12 April, 1998.

ECHANGES ET MOUVEMENT

Presentation Pamphlet :

WHAT IS ECHANGES ET MOUVEMENT AS A GROUP?

Echanges is not a group in the traditional political sense of this word in the leftist milieu. The most accurate way to define it is to call it a "network."

A network, yes but of which people united by what and for what purpose?

Some elements of the history of Echanges will allow a better understanding of its present positions. The Echanges network was established in 1975 by left militants coming from various groups:

Some from the English group "Solidarity", these people were still in contact with a former "Solidarity" member (Joe Jacobs) expelled from this group for his opposition to the "Cardanist" line of the group (Castoriadis), mainly for his persistent defence of the importance of class struggle.

Some from the French group "I.C.O." (Information Correspondence Ouvrieres) which disappeared in the aftermath of 1968 among hard discussions raising the same question of the nature and importance of class struggle.

Some members of the Dutch council communist group "Daad en Gedachte"

A small group of militants in Belgium publishing the paper "Liasons."

The contacts between these groups and individuals had existed before, and mostly for a long time. Quite a lot of other individuals scattered all over the Western world were connected to this core, the link between them being not only the group's publications or exchange of correspondence but also international meetings. One of these meetings had furnished the material for a pamphlet more or less giving the common position of the mentioned militants. This pamphlet, entitled "The New Movement", was the ideological link between them. To keep alive the exchanges built for years around these various groups and individuals, it was decided to regularly publish a bulletin giving a minimum of information on class struggle and of the life of left groups in all countries. This bulletin was "Echanges" and the network was constituted by all the previously existing contacts. It gave the opportunity to initiate or to follow discussions on the evolution of capitalist society and of class struggle in the modern world.

THE BULLETIN ECHANGES

the bulletin was started as a means of spreading and receiving information.



Those participating in this project decided not to bother with the clarification of standpoints held in common (which usually accompanies the birth of a new group) but to accept the existing tacit agreement. The basic implicit agreement which underlay the content and form of the information published was still badly defined at the start, but as the project developed, it revealed a sufficiently unified approach among participants even if participants were very diverse as explained above.

This tacit agreement expressed itself in the analysis of various phenomena of the class struggle taking place every day and placed in the context of a more general understanding of the world. These phenomena include what many other people think to be individual forms of protest which are in fact part of a collective movement (e.g. absenteeism, turnover, refusal of work, etc.) This is necessarily linked to the critique of the existing theories of modern society.

To do this, we must have information about these conflicts and theories. If inside Echanges we sometimes draw different conclusions from a specific fact or from a set of facts, we still think that the information which describes these facts should have certain qualities. Here

too, a few simple principles guide our way of selecting the information published in the bulletin:

The *raison d'être* of the bulletin is directly determined by the double inadequacy of the official means of information: lack of information on class conflicts, exaggeration of the importance of political and economic information (two ways of masking reality)

Hence the double task of looking for information concerning the experience of struggle of all sorts and of making a meaningful choice from the mass of political, diplomatic and economical news.

We have few fixed preconceived conceptions limiting our gathering of information or of analyses concerning the meaning of class conflicts today or the forms these conflicts will take in the future. It is not what workers think, even about their own struggles, that matters but what they actually do and the real meaning of their activity. We think we have to learn from these struggles and to consider their links with the general movement of struggles and with the situation of capitalism as a whole. So we despise using empty bluff, empty rhetoric or self-satisfying proclamations or offering "advice" or "lessons" to the

workers. We see this attitude as an elitist conception seeking to use and dominate workers' struggles.

As its name implies, the bulletin Echanges wants to be more than a one way means of information. It is conceived rather as a collective letter to which each reader is encouraged to contribute according to his/her possibilities and need, in exchange for what he/she expects to get from others. However, several years experience shows that even with the best intentions, one cannot, just by wanting to, escape certain traditional forms of activity. Presently, the exchange of views and material, the contribution of texts and the practical production of the bulletin are the work of a minority as opposed to the majority of readers. But the original conception remains a goal of Echanges.

Some Basic Principles

A network, like any group or collectivity, is something having its own life and having an evolution related to the transformation of society as a whole. People left Echanges for a number of reasons, others joined it who did not have the same approach as the first participants. In 1980, some of us thought to write a statement expressing more clearly the common positions of Echanges. The resulting theses were a matter of permanent discussion and cannot be considered as an Echanges platform but rather as something to be improved through an open discussion. What follows is not the original text but the latest version discussed:

1) In capitalist society the true contradiction is not one of ideas - revolutionary, reformist, conservative, reactionary, etc. - but one of interests. No kind of will or desire can overthrow commodity production or abolish the wage system. This will only break down as a result of class struggle arising from the very position of the working class in the system of capitalist production.

2) According to a widespread opinion "class consciousness" and "unity" are seen to be the main and necessary conditions for what is considered as "revolutionary behaviour" or as "working class action." This view overlooks or misinterprets how action and consciousness are influencing each another. Workers don't act as a "revolutionary class" because first of all they are or become

"conscious" of what they want. "Unity" is not a precondition for, but is created in and as a result of struggle. Workers are a "revolutionary class" because their position as a class inside the capitalist system makes it inevitable that the mere defence of their own interests brings them into direct opposition to the fundamentals of the existing order. Such struggles are fought continuously in the factories and elsewhere, and potentially they are revolutionary.

3) The development of class struggle with all its changing forms is therefore far more important than the development of the so-called "revolutionary movement", regardless of the meaning given to this word.

4) The break with any form of exploitation or political practice and thought (reformism, etc.) is not a matter of theoretical discussion and conceptions but a matter of class struggle and workers' practice, a practice which is the result of their daily conditions of exploitation.

5) Trade unions are institutions in capitalist society whose function is to regulate the labour market. To be able to do so, they have to keep a balance between on one hand workers' interests (trying to maintain the loyalty and the support from the workers) and on the other hand the interest of capitalists (trying to maintain the confidence of as well as their usefulness for management.) But in modern capitalism the historical trend pushes toward their complete integration. Performing their initial function in these conditions they are more and more transformed into mechanisms of disciplining the workers. Calls for rejecting the unions or for their support or for reforms have no meaning at all. It is more important to see what is the specific and concrete role of unions in the development of class struggle. One has to be well aware of the fact that the same rank and file workers who at one time support unions will oppose them in practice when their own interests force them to go against the present social order. In general we can say that particularly in the highly developed countries the post-war development of class struggle has greatly reduced the possibility of mediating between the classes and has created a situation where workers find themselves permanently opposed to the unions. The same development of the actual class struggle has rendered obsolete any kind of syndicalist project.

6) For similar reasons it is useless to call for the rejection or support of parliamentarism. The fate of parliamentarism depends exclusively on class struggle inside the capitalist system. Whatever may be the reason for those who want to call themselves "revolutionaries" not to participate in parliamentary work or not to vote in an election workers have other reasons when they don't go to the polls. If they stay at home on election day, they don't do so

with revolutionary ideas in mind. They abstain because parliament, parliamentary parties and politicians don't have anything to say to them, because they have understood none of the political parties is defending their interests and that it does not make much difference if this party or another is in office. On the other hand workers who go to the polls and share parliamentary illusions will not refuse to participate in unofficial strikes or factory occupations if they seem necessary. Both categories behave in the same way in practice irrespective of their attitude in elections. They do so without a revolutionary theory about parliament and without being conscious that they are attacking the order of bourgeois society.

7) The so-called "revolutionary movement" and the "revolutionary groups" tend to be weaker and weaker nowadays and clearly suffer the fate of atomisation. They are weak because workers are more and more acting for themselves and by themselves. It is more and more clear that their means of action and methods of struggle are and cannot be prescribed or taught by any sort of movement or group formed for this purpose outside or inside the working class. Class struggle exists and develops independently of these "revolutionary groups" or "movements." The level and size of the so-called "intervention of revolutionary groups in the struggles" never determine or fundamentally influence the level and size of working class struggle. We may be individually involved in such struggles either because we belong to the collectivity involved in a particular struggle or because we participate in one or another of the host of temporary organisms created during a particular struggle and for that struggle alone. We consider that outside these struggles the exchange of information, discussions and the seeking of theoretical insights are an essential instrument of our own activity which eventually might serve others as well.

8) In very general terms "revolution" is usually defined as the overthrowing of capitalism. If we wish to characterize it in a different way we could say e.g. that it means on one hand the decline and disappearance of all kinds of practical organizational forms "representing" and repressing workers' interests and of ideological expression of such attempts, on the other hand the generalization at the same time of autonomous workers' practice.

What is Echanges today?

As we are not concerned with conquering any organization or being the leadership of anyone we have nothing to hide or to pretend. We are a small number of scattered militants

writing and distributing publications to between 300 and 500 people equally scattered and being more or less politically motivated people, among them certainly not too many workers and many of them showing political disagree-

ment with the basic positions developed in this presentation text.

We could, as so many groups do, pretend to be an "international" organization involved and "intervening" in a lot of struggles all over the world. We are, however, not at all worried to be what we are: a group as we have said above is the product of a specific situation in the development of present society. Its fate, be this growth or decline, will be the result not simply of our own involvement and activity, but of the evolution of class struggle. Trying to build something else only referring to our own "revolutionary will" would be inconsistent with our view on class struggle and rather inconsequential as well. To answer the usual criticism of being a mere "spectator" of class struggle we will say that it is not a matter of our own choice being constantly involved in the development of class antagonism or not.

To face some sensible curiosity we can say that the most active in Echanges are either individuals or groups located in

France

Germany

Holland

Italy

Norway

the U.K.

and the U.S.A.

and that these individuals or groups are in close contact with individuals or groups in Belgium, France, (Liasons), Holland (Daad en Gedachte), Italy (Collagamenti Wobbly), Scandinavia (Motiva Forlag), Spain (Etcetera), U.S.A. . . . though it is undeniable that these contacts are not excluding differences of opinion and distinct ways of action.

Echanges

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