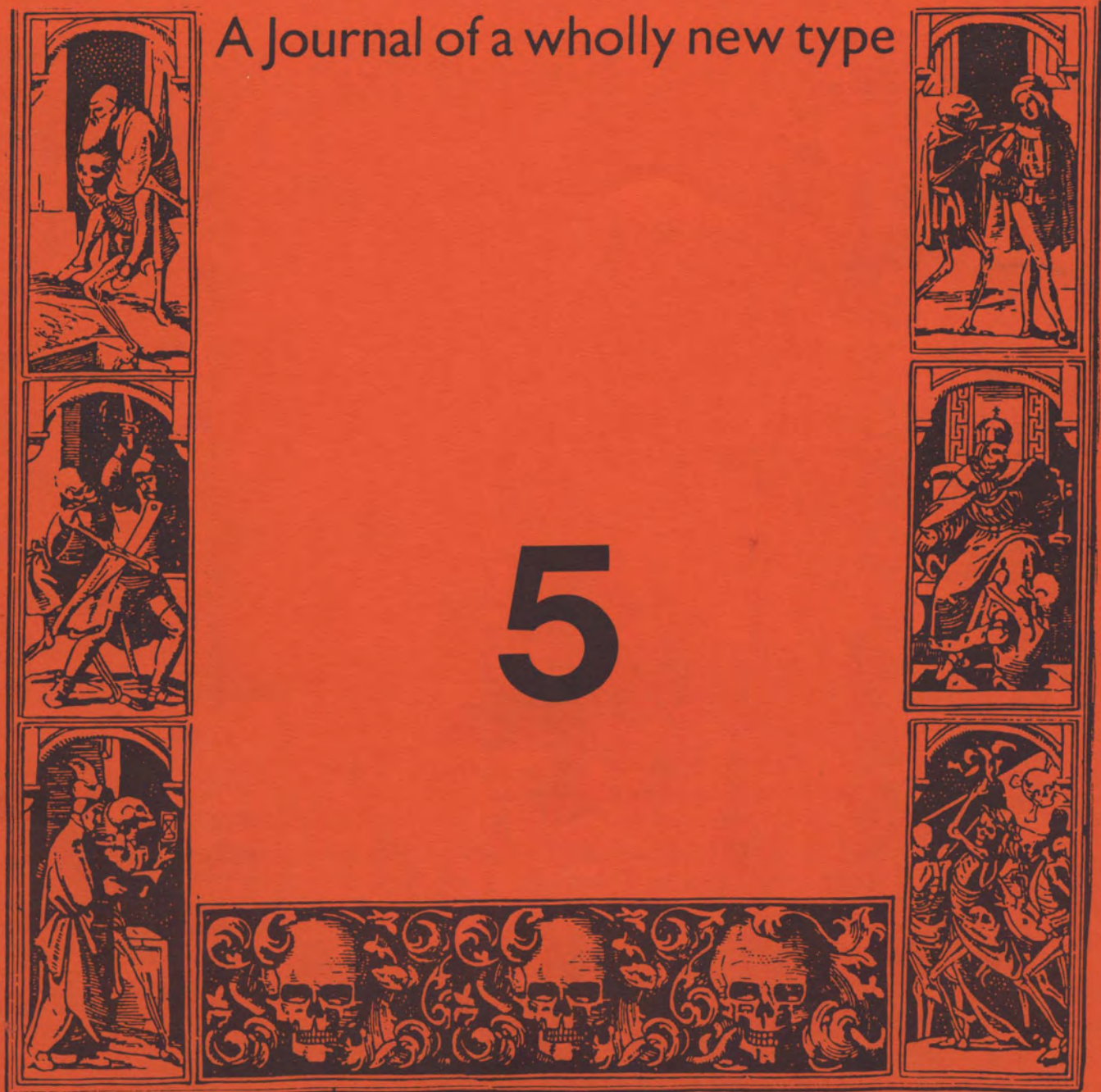




# Common Sense

A Journal of a wholly new type

5



# Common Sense

Issue No. 5 (July 1988)

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The sixth issue of Common Sense will appear in  
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Notes for contributors: send articles in clean typscript,  
single-space or space-and-a-half (not double-space).  
Leave wide margin on both sides, and wide gaps at top  
and bottom of each page. Start first page half way down.

Contact address: Werner Bonefeld, 16 Keir St. Edinburgh,  
Telephone: 031 228 1669. Richard Gunn, Telephone  
031 667 1011 ext. 6660. Richard Noris, Telephone  
031 442 4023.

# Common Sense

The journal Common Sense exists as a relay station for the exchange and dissemination of ideas. It is run on a co-operative and non-profitmaking basis. As a means of maintaining flexibility as to numbers of copies per issue, and of holding costs down, articles are reproduced in their original typescript. Common Sense is non-elitist, since anyone (or any group) with fairly modest financial resources can set up a journal along the same lines. Everything here is informal, and minimalist.

Why, as a title, 'Common Sense'? In its usual ordinary-language meaning, the term 'common sense' refers to that which appears obvious beyond question: "But it's just common sense!". According to a secondary conventional meaning, 'common sense' refers to a sense (a view, an understanding or outlook) which is 'common' inasmuch as it is widely agreed upon or shared. Our title draws upon the latter of these meanings, while at the same time qualifying it, and bears only an ironical relation to the first.

In classical thought, and more especially in Scottish eighteenth century philosophy, the term 'common sense' carried with it two connotations: (i) 'common sense' meant public of shared sense (the Latin 'sensus communis' being translated as 'publick sense' by Francis Hutcheson in 1728). And (ii) 'common sense' signified that sense, or capacity, which allows us to totalise or synthesise the data supplied by the five senses (sight, touch and so on) of a more familiar kind. (The conventional term 'sixth sense', stripped of its mystical and spiritualistic suggestions, originates from the idea of a 'common sense' understood in this latter way). It is in this two-fold philosophical sense of 'common sense' that our title is intended.

Why is the philosophical **sense** a two-fold one? Classical and Scottish thought was always alive to the circumstance that senses (i) and (ii) of 'common sense' are interdependent. On the one hand, a public or shared sense amounts to more than a contingently agreed-upon consensus only when those who share it are individuals whose experience is totalising: in other words they must be individuals who are self-reflective and thereby autonomous and answerable for what they do and say. On the other hand (conversely), individuals who thus totalise their experiences can do so only through interaction with others: that is, they can achieve totalisation and autonomy only as members of an interactive - a social or 'public' - world. Individuality is here social without remainder, as Marx signals in his construal of the 'human essence' as the 'ensemble of the social relations' and as Hegel also signals when he urges that self-consciousness (human self-aware subjectivity) exists 'only in being recognized'. Hegel draws the conclusion of the interdependence of the two senses of common sense when he urges that it is only in a community of individuals

who are mutually recognitive that truth can appear.

Having explained our title, it remains to justify it. The Scottish philosophers understood that common sense, in its two-fold meaning, enters crisis where ever (as in, according to their terminology, modern 'commercial' society) a social division of labour obtains. For then individuals become constrained to their role-definitions and functions; mutual recognition vanishes and, with it, autonomy; we can no longer see ourselves and our experience through others' eyes. (Just as we can no longer see others' experiences through our own eyes.) As in Burns, 'seeing ourselves as others see us' becomes less an actuality than a wish. In Hegel and Marx, the same theme is sounded under the heading of 'alienation'. Marx perceptively connects alienation from our 'species being (Gattungswesen)' (that is, alienation from our capacity to be autonomous and self-determining) with alienation from others with whom we associate and interact. At one and the same stroke, the two senses of common sense are nullified or at least rendered problematic. Capitalism is that social form (or practical totality) wherein common sense (practice's theoretical and self-reflective moment) enters crisis in a paradigmatic way.

That which enters crisis can exist only critically. In an alienated - a crisis-ridden - social world, common sense can exist only as critique; common sense exists as critical theory in a society which threatens to erode its roots. Conversely, inasmuch as truth and autonomy are (as Hegel emphasised) interdependent, the project of a critical theory can exist only as the project of a renewed common sense. Something of this appears in Gramsci, who urged that 'common sense' (in the sense of commonly agreed-upon obviousness) must be translated into critical 'good sense' (common sense in our title's meaning), and that such a translation can be finally effected only when 'universal subjectivity' (Hegel's 'mutual recognition') appears. To achieve this, common sense has to thematise the crisis of the social order which challenges it: the crisis of common sense is not merely its own crisis, but that of the social order wherein its project stands to be renewed. Critique and crisis (or 'theory' and 'practice') are no less interdependent than are the two senses of common sense distinguished above. Epistemological crises are social crisis and vice versa. To paraphrase Wittgenstein: to imagine a critical form of language is to imagine - but we don't have to imagine it - a crisis-ridden form of social life.

Hence, critique - the interrogation of existing circumstances - is the only brief which the journal Common Sense holds. In our initial publicity it was stated that, as a matter of editorial direction, 'the only material to be excluded or anathematized is material which is boring', 'Boring', here, has not just an aesthetic meaning. Rather, it refers to material which is uncritical in the sense of failing to place at issue the categories of the world it inhabits, i.e. the categories which proffer themselves as those of unselfreflective theorising whatever the topic of such theorising may be. Boring theory is theory which, lacking practical reflexivity, 'recognizes the world by means of different interpretation of it', to quote once more Marx. The immodest goal of Common Sense is to place at issue anything and everything. Where enstrangement prevails, mutual recognition (the space of common sense) can exist, at most, only on the margins and in the



interstices of a massified world. But crisis places the margins at the centre, and so this immodesty finds its justification.

Placing anything and everything at issue, Common Sense relates ironically to 'common sense' in the sense of received (or soi disant) obviousness. Projecting critical theory as common-sense-theory, Common Sense builds on but also qualifies 'common sense' in the sense of that mode of thinking which in an estranged world happens to be public or shared. In an estranged world a shared sense is an estranged sense. However, at the same time estrangement (alienation) exists not as a seamless monolith but as the movement of contradiction. Every social world, says Hegel, 'is not a dead essence but is acutal and alive': this applies to alienated social worlds too.

Common Sense is the movement (the movement-towards-resolution) of the resulting contradiction. Common Sense is the centralisation of the margins, and the margins can be centralised only as common sense.

The editors of Common Sense have no "power" - no apparatus of authority based on resources or professional prestige - and, in this regard, are non-existing. Our journal, which is as much an idea as a set of pages which can be physically held and turned, will have succeeded when a network of similarly-produced journals covers the land. Common Sense is an 'invisible college' devoted to the propagation of critical thought.

In order to provide opportunity for discussion of issues raised in Common Sense, we have organised a series of meetings to be held in the Edinburgh Unemployed Workers' Centre, 2 Cranston St. Edinburgh, on the first Thursday of every month. Our first meeting will be held on Thursday 1st September 1988 at 7 p.m., when Werner Bonefeld will introduce discussion on 'Thatcherism in the context of international crisis'. All welcome.



COLIN NICHOLSON

SIGNIFYING NOTHING:

NOTING BARTHES' EMPIRE OF SIGNS



Constructing a poetics of the mind, Barthes contrived never to write about poetry. Though haiku fascinated him, these he was normally content to quote. Associating closely with the journal Tel Quel, he absented himself from conventional politics. Claiming that 'through Michelet ... I discovered the sovereign place of History in the study of man and the power of writing,'<sup>1</sup> he is one of the great refusers of history. (You will search his works in vain for any mention of World War Two). Embracing as his subject the mind-spinning manifold of life's variform phenomena - from Racine to striptease - his subject remained always and everywhere one: writing. If we reformulate and adapt his own words on Michel Foucault,<sup>2</sup> we can say that Barthes became the very thing his works describe: a writer alive to the turbulent conditions of modern writing. He yet remained unperturbed. Declaring that the writer has for his field 'nothing but writing itself, not as the "pure" form conceived by an aesthetic of art for art's sake but, much more radically, as the only area for one who writes,'<sup>3</sup> he became, in Susan Sontag's accurate formulation, 'the subject of all the subjects that he praises.'<sup>4</sup>

In polemical vein, arguing for his own intellectual procedures, he opposed academically entrenched varieties of French criticism, and championed in their stead something we more readily associate with the indwelling, sealed-off analysis of American 'New Criticism': 'what French university criticism will not admit is that this interpretation and this ideology may decide to work within an area purely internal to the work. In short what is refused is *immanent analysis*.' For the French, he charges, 'anything is acceptable so long as the work can be related to something other than itself, to something other than literature.'<sup>5</sup> Meanwhile, sotto voce, as footnote in On Racine, he quotes approvingly from Marx's Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts (1844): 'it is only in social existence that such antinomies of subjectivism/objectivism, spiritualism/materialism, activity/passivity lose their antinomic character.'<sup>6</sup> Describing himself as, in linguistics, an amateur (the erotic is always adjacent with Barthes) he moves elegantly and challengingly from the assertion that 'clarity is a rhetorical attribute, not a quality of language which is possible at all times and in all places,'<sup>7</sup> to expose the baroque structure of codes by which language shapes, mediates, interposes itself, and thus patterns the world it articulates. Barthes came to praise the world; the grace of his style is a sign of his celebration, and for him Eliot's 'dark interstellar spaces' are only a blank virginity awaiting his stylistic penetration.

The arcanum of paradox and ambiguity is his natural habitat; and ambiguity, of course, is the breaking of the code par excellence: 'It is precisely through the admission, on the part of criticism, that it is only a language (or, more accurately, a meta-language) that it can, paradoxically yet genuinely, be objective and subjective, historical and existential, totalitarian and liberal.'<sup>8</sup> In a remark like this we register Barthes in all the fullness of his formalist subjectivism. The rigorous analyst of semiotic systems distrusts all closed forms. Despite his own disclaimer, the scientist of signs unbalances his exactitude by a counteractive aestheticism. Barthes revels in the role of aesthete, and the playfulness with which he communicates his capacity for feeling and sensation identifies him as fastidious stylist even as it invigorates his perceptions with a certain narcissistic flair. As far as his aesthetic derivation is concerned, there is an entirely appropriate and traceable, though hitherto undetected pattern of precedence: a precedence quite other than Barthes's Wildean predilection for the aphoristic, the epigrammatic. We can bring the pattern into focus with this, from the 'Conclusion' to Pater's The Renaissance (1868): 'To burn always with this hard gem-like flame, to maintain this ecstasy, is success in life.'<sup>9</sup> Then this, from Barthes's first book: 'Literature is like phosphorus, it shines with its maximum brilliance at the moment when it attempts to die.'<sup>10</sup> Then, as part of the same intertextual configuration, this from the adventure of events in the Japan of Empire of Signs: 'To count up these events would be a sisyphian enterprise, for they glisten only at the moment when one reads them, in the lively writing of the street.'<sup>11</sup> The echo is again emphatically registered, this time of Pater's final sentence: 'Art comes to you professing frankly to give nothing but the highest quality to your moments as they pass, and simply for those moments' sake' (loc. cit. p.61). So everything, and nothing, is a text as the rigours of structuralist decoding are counterposed to the inveterate play of paradox which itself takes many forms: from the paradoxical accuracy of the claim that 'the pachinko [slot-machine] is a collective and solitary game' (p.27), to 'this specious paradox: [Tokyo] does possess a centre, but this centre is empty' (p.30).

So we must tread carefully, for we tread on his semes. We may concede him nothing, for he everywhere precedes us. The range of his accounting for the ways in which perceivers and conceivers make sense of or process a perception is breathtaking. The great demystifier of bourgeois realism avoids the conventions of political response in order to respond at a level of rarefied subtlety. Decoding the systems by which dominant structures



permeate laterally and downwards to perpetuate themselves as 'natural', he creates the possibility of, and prepares the terrain for, as well as training his readers in, what Umberto Eco has called 'semiotic guerilla warfare'.<sup>12</sup> Fully alive to the fact that the word 'order' always already indicates repression, Barthes is able, when Edward Said sombrely (and rightly) warns against structuralism's concealed inclination towards a totalitarian cast of mind,<sup>13</sup> to reply, 'language is ... quite simply fascist; for fascism does not prevent speech, it compels speech' (Sontag, op. cit. p.461). For Barthes came to conceive of his own semiology as a deconstruction of linguistics. Empire of Signs marks the deconstructive turn in his writing, throughout which, almost as a sub-textual threnody, there runs a Nietzschean strain, wherein language figures as a mirage. Whether it is packaging, postal addresses or puppetry, Empire of Signs is itself a mirage of citations which are likely to prove evasive and insubstantial as soon as one attempts to grasp them, a dream which once uttered, leaves not a rack behind. (The book's last words are '... there is nothing to grasp.')

This, in a way, is the dream with which Barthes commences his poetics of Japanese traces. And trace, too, is a recurrent term in Barthes's writing. But not, now, carrying its more purely linguistic connotation that signifiers function only insofar as they consist of traces of forms one is not uttering. Here it is foregrounded rather differently - 'such traces (the word suits the haiku, a kind of faint gash inscribed upon time)' (p.82): trace, a delineation, a marking out; but also implying trace as the record of a self-registering instrument. So what might his dream be? 'To know a foreign (alien) language and yet not to understand it: to perceive the difference in it without that difference ever being recuperated by the superficiality of social discourse, communication or vulgarity.... To learn the systematics of the inconceivable' (p.6). To escape from meaning into the contemplation of pure form, 'the entertainment of pure signifier' (p.9). 'What a respite!' the aesthete in him exclaims, is this 'artificial emptiness, which is consummated only for me: I live in the interstice, delivered from any fulfilled meaning' (p.9).

Those interstices, those intervening empty spaces are the loci of desire in this book: 'an empty subject' (p.32), 'the nullity of meaning' (p.76), 'the abolition of the sign' (p.87). They will return to endorse the karma of the writing: to register, finally, as an overwhelming presence. Unabashedly figurative, the world perceived here is by declaration Barthes's own invention - 'a fictive nation ... an invented name,' and 'out of these features' he will

'deliberately form a system' (p.3). the self-conscious deliberateness of that formative act jeopardises the 'objectivity' of his text, destabilises his system-building, deconstructs its semiological aspect. In this sustained interplay formalist discipline turns away from the science of structuralist semiotics and towards the wayward provocations of deconstruction's perceptions and apperceptions, wherein 'each pole of an opposition can be used to show that the other is in error, but in which the undecidable dialectic gives rise to no synthesis.'<sup>14</sup> On the groundless terrain of Zen, West uncertainly embraces East.

Coming to praise 'this system which I shall call Japan' (p.3), the author finds in its plenitude of signifiers a nirvana for the modernist aesthete. But since semiology nonetheless seeks to elicit the real in places and by moments, Barthes contrives momentarily, glancingly, through fleeting glimpses and by meticulously detailed fragmentary observation, to convey a sense of essence for the country he conjures. (Pater, again, springs irrepressibly to mind - 'for our one chance lies in expanding that interval, in getting as many pulsations as possible into the given time' op. cit. p.61). By such pulsations the country of this text must inevitably precondition, given its intoxicating pre-scribing, any first encounter with Japan's geographical space or with its 'huge dictionary of faces' (p.96). *Bunraku*, in its 'separation of action from gesture' (p.54), prefigures the author's own initiating urge 'to discover certain unsuspected positions of the subject in utterance, to displace the subject's topology' (p.6). The displacement is effective. Barthes's book will pre-cede any first visit to Japan. It will also confound the visitor, since Empire of Signs makes no bones about 'leaving aside vast areas of darkness (capitalist Japan, American acculturation, technological development)' (p.4). That is a lot of Japan. One might be forgiven for wondering what could be left in the light. But what is sought here is 'not other symbols but the very fissure of the symbolic' (p.4). Fissures again, interstices, gaps. They become remarkable in the very density of their omitted content.

Emptiness, nothing, what Zen speaks of as *satori*. The exemption from meaning is an iterative configuration of this entire fictive enterprise. Its most arresting moment is the filling of a whole page with an ideogram. Two words translate for us the pictorial inscription: 'Mu, nothingness' (p.5). 'Empire of Signs? Yes, if one understands that these signs are empty and that the ritual is without a god' (p.108). For this venture, towards the coalescence of Frenchman and Orient, the spiritual idea must be 'an emptiness

of language' (p.4). Difficult assertions, both, for a man who so loved the Word that he gave to his books the worlds of his own begetting. Infinitely paradoxical; too, in that lexical content is a prerequisite for a semantic interpretation of 'emptiness'. In fact, the mantric regularity with which 'nothing' and its synonyms insist in the text forces it to speak again; and the body as sensuous refuge from nothingness repeatedly fills the void. 'The reason for this is that in Japan the body exists, acts, shows itself, gives itself ... according to a pure - though subtly discontinuous - erotic project' (p.10).

The dominance of empire thus takes an empiric turn towards the domination of sensuous experience. The exclusive dominion of a Japanese 'empire of signifiers ... so immense, so in excess of speech' (p9) which owes no allegiance to any foreign superior, but which wields paramount influence, absolute sway, undergoes a subtle, almost concealed shift in the perceptual arrangement of the foreign author. The empirical (with etymological roots in 'skill' and in 'experimental', both undeniably Barthes's attributes in this endeavour) relies upon the proficiency of the observer; originally one of 'the ancient physicians who ... drew their rules of practice entirely from experience' (OED). The ingenuity with which Barthes colonises his subject allows sensuous experience to obscure and defer the ever present danger of a slide from aesthetic delicacy into the potential dandyism of such phrases as 'the whole cuisine of emotions' (p49). The metaphor of bodily presence repeatedly rescues his text from this threat of evanescence. In Barthes's novel form cooking oil will become, lubriciously, 'this maternal substance' (p.24): a restaurant will be valued for the 'the virginity of its cooking' (p.25). To compensate for his claim that around 'the Japanese thing ... there is *nothing*, an empty space which renders it matte' (p.43), the text allows the whole body to play and, playing, to signify its presence in the midst of a plethoric absence: 'it is an entire odyssey of food you are experiencing through your eyes: you are attending the Twilight of the Raw' (p.20).

Guided by Sapir's seminal idea that every cultural pattern and every single act of social behaviour involves communication in either an explicit or an implicit sense, Barthes scrutinises the 'languages' of posture, eating, clothing, accent, gesture, social context, to construct the country of his perceptions. Scrutiny of the closing moments of his book's fragmentary sections discloses a compulsive return to textuality, to writing, which pervades the whole work. Here are three instances: 'Sukiyaki has nothing *marked* about it except its

beginning ... it becomes decentred like an uninterrupted text' (p.22). Concerning the cook who 'inscribes the foodstuff in the substance ... it is you who eat, but it is he who has played, who has written, who has produced' (p.26). Thirdly, 'to visit a place for the first time is thereby to begin to write it: the address not being written, it must establish its own writing' (p.36). Again, everything, and nothing, is a text. But by the same token, everything is semiotic - an inscription of signs to be read. In the hope of relating a meaning to a form, let us read about chopsticks in the preparation, and the eating, of food.

i

First of all, a chopstick has a deictic function: it points to the food, designates by the fragment, brings it into existence by the very gesture of choice, which is the index; ... in the gesture of chopsticks, further softened by their substance - wood or lacquer - there is something maternal, the same precisely measured care taken in moving a child .... the instrument never pierces, cuts or slits, never wounds but only selects, turns, shifts. For the chopsticks (third function), instead of cutting and piercing in the manner of our implements; they never violate the foodstuff ... they push the alimentary snow from bowl to lips in the manner of a scoop. In all these functions, in all the gestures they imply, chopsticks are the converse of our knife (and of its predatory substitute, the fork). (pp.16-18)

Clearly, as figure the human body including its sometimes loving relationships, sometimes violent sexuality vies for centrality with the chopsticks themselves in this account. But what do we make of it otherwise? How might we read it? As pre-cision? As writing which is itself graphic in the accuracy of its mimetic representation, and which thereby partners the photographs with which it shares the book's envelope? As the most subtly flattering commercial overture ever, from one (Western) capitalist economy to another (Eastern) one? Or as a scripted equivalent of chess, perhaps, whose movement of figures on black and white squares has given rise to a bibliography of intellection which might, with answerable precision be termed extravagant? 'In this manner, we are told, the system of the imagination is spread circularly, by detours and returns the length of an empty subject' (p.32). Maybe as an elaborate vertiginous punning on the

aesthete's 'taste'? Writing as description of eating as analogy of writing? As imagism 'stretched' discursively, a taking of the minuscule, the fleeting, and a leaving of its semiotic (Oriental/Occidental) parameters writ large? Should we, with all these pleasures of the text recognise this as itself a metalanguage; the half-hidden repudiation of structuralism's notorious *decoupage*, its brutish *coupure epistemologique*,<sup>15</sup> by means of which the critic carves up the item he wishes to discuss, doing violence to a text, say, by slicing out a section, cutting down the discussable to manageable proportions? Barthes laughing at his own brio, parodying himself - and, of course, his readers?

Whichever combination we make our option, this self-reflexive interrogation of the writing is an inevitable consequence of its own insistence upon its nature as writing, as textuality. 'At bottom, structuralism is a set of attitudes to and of writing: grammatology' (Said op. cit. p.363). Certainly; but Empire of Signs is counteractively imbued with a sense of its own bravura, amused at the possibility that its own structuration undermines any programmatic approach to it. It actively promotes discrete signs and delights in its deconstructive turn. If semiotics anyway questions at root the distinction between literary and non-literary modes of discourse, then Empire of Signs is a joyful embodiment of that radical interrogation. As part of its own *jouissance* (Barthes's favoured term), the concept of the book as discursive model, bound and enclosed is openly mocked; discomfited even as it is composed, disrupted in diverse ways. One marvellously arch example inserts a late eighteenth century map of Tokyo above the caption

The City is an ideogram:  
the text continues

and since the configuration of the map has the look, the semblance of an ideogram, the caption, as well as citing the city as text in its own right (write?) may be claiming its continuity with the words written on the preceding page, saying something like 'since the city in this representation is an ideogram, which is a form of writing, it follows that the text is continuous.' The last word on the facing page though, which is 'energetic', is divided, split, hyphenated by the intervening map: ener- on page thirty, getic on page thirty- two. In this case the caption invites the reading that the city as ideogram interrupts the occidental inscription which, notwithstanding,

continues uninterruptedly. Inevitably there surfaces a dawning sense that Barthes's own text; this, his own discourse, also continues a process of surrounding both the city and its citation as ideogram. Empire of Signs proceeds out of, forestalls and pre-empts the Tokyo it inscribes.

By such means, and there are several different kinds of irruptions in the text, 'the onset of a kind of visual uncertainty, analogous perhaps to that *loss of meaning* Zen calls a *satori*' (p.xi), which is how Barthes prefatorially describes the projected effect of interacting text and image through the whole segmented volume, is enacted for the reader. 'Rendezvous' forms one iterative emphasis of the method. Figuring four times in the text as a kind of minimalist discourse - Japanese and (in this translation) English - and described in detail elsewhere in the book, a meeting, an encounter between West and East is subject and object of its whole design. Carefully enscripted, meticulously recorded, the longed-for conjunction registers more as desire than achievement, potential than actuality. For the meticulous style also registers a kind of precariousness. When we read, in the section headed 'Millions of Bodies', that arrival in Japan reveals 'the transformation of quality by quantity' (p.96), we know exposure to the slippage of signified under signifier.

The seductive shimmer of Barthes's own signifiers might perhaps be modified through the very different *realia* of discourse offered by Francis Bacon's Of Empire, and Of the True Greatness of Kingdoms and Estates: 'for Solon said well to Croesus (when in ostentation he showed him his gold), *Sir, if any other come that hath better iron than you, he will be master of all this gold.*'<sup>16</sup> But Barthes's mastery of his stylistic intervention also functions as a kind of prevention for the reader. The very clarity with which Barthes shares his own illuminations serves to obscure rival, or alternative possibilities, momentarily eclipsing, say, the immediate relevance of Bacon's famous economic maxim: 'the increase of any State must be upon the foreigner; for whatever is somewhere gotten is somewhere lost.'<sup>17</sup> A further turn might help, away from the empiric and towards other ways of seeing. Wittgenstein's equally famous utterance might then speak in our defence. 'Philosophy is a battle against the bewitchment of our intelligence by means of language.'<sup>18</sup> 'Empire' connotes overseas dominion. What is lost from the pointillism of Barthes's registration of Japan, what escapes it and what echoes within the richly refined yet quiet entrapment of his style is, precisely, the irrepressible energy, domestic and international, of Japan's sound and fury.



FOOTNOTES

1. Inaugural lecture, College de France (1977), in Susan Sontag, ed, A Barthes Reader, London, Cape, 1982, p.458
2. Roland Barthes, Essais Critiques, Paris, Seuil, 1964, p.168
3. Roland Barthes, 'To write: an intransitive verb?' in Macksey and Donato, eds, The Structuralist Controversy, Baltimore, Johns Hopkins, 1972, p.144
4. Susan Sontag, op. cit. p. xxxii
5. Roland Barthes, 'The Two Criticisms,' in Mackey and Donato, op. cit. pp.451-2
6. Roland Barthes, On Racine, tr Richard Howard, New York, Hill and Wang, 1964, p.53
7. Roland Barthes, Writing Degree Zero, tr Annette Lavers and Colin Smith, London, Cape, 1967, p.60.
8. Roland Barthes, 'Criticism as Language.' TLS, Sept. 27th 1963, p.740
9. Harold Bloom, ed, Selected Writings of Walter Pater, Columbia University Press, 1974, p.60
10. Roland Barthes, Writing Degree Zero, p.17
11. Roland Barthes, Empire of Signs, 1970, tr Richard Howard, London, Cape, 1982, p.79. All subsequent page references are to this edition, and will be given parenthetically in the text.
12. Umberto Eco, A Theory of Semiotics, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1977, p.150
13. Edward Said, 'The Totalitarianism of Mind,' Kenyon Review, vol. 29, 1967, pp.356-68
14. Jonathan Culler, The Pursuit of Signs, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1982, p.39
15. See Edward Said, 'Abecedarium Culturae: Structuralism, Absence, Writing,' in Modern French Criticism, ed J.K. Simon, Chicago University Press,

1972, p.363

16. Bacon's Essays, ed, S.H. Reynolds, Oxford, Clarendon, 1890, p.204

17. Quoted in G.P. Gooch, Political Thought in England: From Bacon to Halifax, London, OUP, 1950, p.18

18. Ludwig Wittgenstein, Philosophical Investigations, tr G. Anscombe, New York, Macmillan, p.47



**PUBLIC MAN, PRIVATE WOMAN:  
FEMINIST APPROACHES TO THE PUBLIC/PRIVATE DICHOTOMY**

**Judith Squires**

"The dichotomy between the private and public is central to almost two centuries of feminist writing and political struggle; it is, ultimately, what the feminist movement is about." Pateman (p.281)

In this article it is my intention to argue that the public/private dichotomy is a fundamental notion appealed to in almost all forms of feminist theory. Yet this dichotomy has been conceptualised in various distinct ways and these different conceptions have not always been clearly recognised as distinct, and have therefore been conflated within and between theories. Each of these conceptions challenges main-stream (or male-stream) conceptions of the public/private dichotomy by taking women as a fundamental category of analysis, yet each offers a different explanation of women's oppression.

That the public/private divide is central to feminist theorising in all its forms becomes clear from even the most brief study of the literature. Take for example the statement of Imray and Middleton; "When men act it is defined by them as acting within the public sphere; when women act men define it as acting within the private sphere." (p.26). The relation of the public/private divide to the oppression of women is in fact one of the few concerns common at all feminist theory. As Hester Eisenstein notes; "Mitchell and Firestone agreed on one point, and that was the relation of women's oppression to the ideological association of women with the private sphere." (p.19) Countless other examples of this concern can be found

throughout feminist literature (See: Z Eisenstein p.25, Barrett & McIntosh p.20, C Smart & B Smart p.6, E Gamarnikow et al p.5)

What becomes clear on a closer inspection of feminist discussion of the separate spheres is not only the extent to which the notion the public and the private has concerned feminists, but also the wide divergence of the actual conceptualisations of this divide and its relation to the oppression of women. I shall follow Mossink (A Meulenbelt p.38) in arguing that the private and the public spheres are used as "container concepts", in which everything can be put and in which all the oppositions between women and men have been accommodated.

There is a tendency within feminist theory to refer in passing to the public and private spheres, as though we were all clear about what these spheres are. And yet in fact it is rarely clear from one reference to the next whether it is the space, the people or the process that are defining criteria for these categories. For example 'privacy' is defined in the feminist dictionary as "Everything women as women have never been allowed to be or to have; at the same time ... everything women have been equated with and defined in terms of men's ability to have." This definition conveys nothing more than the confusion which surrounds the notion of privacy and the private in feminist theory. We need to clarify whether the categories of public and private being appealed to are biological, economic or political, whether it is a universal divide, or whether it developed with the rise of capitalism; whether it operates primarily to the benefit men or to capitalism; whether the distinction is a reality, or a mystifying category; whether women should seek to escape from the private sphere, or celebrate its values; whether it is to be undermined, or re-formulated. My aim is not to provide a single unified feminist concept of the public and the private - for there will inevitably be fundamentally distinct conceptions arising out of differing ideological commitments - but to highlight the extent to which different understandings of the public/private divide are being used (and confused) within feminist theory.

The distinction between public and private spheres within contemporary feminist theory is made in three dominant forms; culture/nature, impersonal/personal, production/reproduction. In short the public/private dichotomy is variously conceived within feminist theory as a primarily physiological, political and economic divide respectively.

#### 1. Culture/Nature:

The public/private dichotomy is characterised in this argument as the division between culture and nature - a division which is seen as having definite gender implications. It is argued that women are perceived, due to their role in the reproductive process, as being closer to nature whilst men are associated with culture. The exact relation of women to nature (whether symbolic or actual, universal or culturally specific) varies between the many theories which fall within this category of argument, but the basic defining feature of this group is that women's reproductive role is seen as associating

her with nature, the domestic and the private, and women's devaluation and oppression are related to this fact. Within this first characterisation of the dichotomy are two subdivisions, which have been characterised by Carole Pateman as the radical feminist and the anthropological (p.288), and which might also be referred to as the biological and the symbolic. The primary difference between the two being the question of whether it is women's actual physiological nature which leads to their oppression, or whether it is the cultural interpretation and symbolisation of the physiology which is devalued.

a. The Biological:

The public/private dichotomy is associated with the social/biological or creation/procreation dichotomy. The theorists who adopt this position - of which Firestone and O'Brien are probably the most prominent examples - argue that because of their role of the reproduction process, women are more closely related to nature, less free to transcend nature and to be as fully involved in things cultural as men. For Firestone the implication of this is that women are oppressed by their biology. For O'Brien it is that men are alienated from a biological process which forces them into the cultural sphere. Both see women's biology as the root cause of a distinction between public and private spheres - where public is cultural and private is biological. Those feminists who accept this definition of the public/private divide argue not only that it does exist, but also that it is based in actual physiological differences between the sexes, and can be changed only by altering women's reproductive capacities.

b. The Symbolic:

This approach is commonly adopted by radical and woman-centred feminists, who argue that the direct biological argument above is inadequate but who maintain that a universal association of women with nature does nevertheless exist, and explains women's oppression. According to theorists such as Sherry Ortner and Michelle Rosaldo the public/private dichotomy is equated with the culture/nature dichotomy, which is taken to be a symbolic representation of the devaluation of women. Associated much more closely than men to nature, women are therefore devalued with the inevitable and universal devaluation of nature by culture. Women's bodies and bodily functions are thought to be more involved with species life than are men's and the social relations that women are involved in as a result of these biological functions are considered at a lower level than men's social relations. Nancy Chodorow develops this argument a step further by arguing that these social relations specific to women give them a psychic structure, distinct from that of men.

The important difference between this symbolic account of the divide and the biological account above, is that the association of women with nature is presented as a cultural representation rather than a biological fact; gender relations, and the relations between the separate spheres could therefore be altered without altering the physical nature of the reproduction process itself. Thus this second formulation of the culture/nature divide is not open to the charges of biological determinism and essentialism to the same extent at the

first formulation; but it has come in for criticism on the grounds that it is a universalising, over-generalised theory and that no account is given of women's role in the public sphere of work. Each of these points is addressed in the following two conceptions of the public/private divide.

## **2. Impersonal/Personal or Personal/Political**

This characterisation of the public/private dichotomy is historically specific where the other was universalising, and political where the other was physiological. The private sphere is defined in opposition to a public sphere which is primarily defined by liberal capitalist relations. Within this group I have placed two quite distinct theories, tied together only by their common concern to limit the discussion of the public and private spheres to capitalist society, and by their belief that the distinction between the spheres is one of differing modes of social relations. Neither focus on the public/private distinction in terms of biology nor in terms of mode of production. Both adopt a notion of personal life and the search for self-fulfilment. The first of these positions assumes an idea of the public as the political or alienating sphere and the private as the familial sphere of intimacy and personal fulfilment; and the second assumes the idea of the public as political and the sight of self-fulfilment and freedom, and the private as the familial and therefore the repetitive and degrading.

### **a. Public alienation and private intimacy:**

Eli Zaretsky argues that this sphere of privacy developed with the rise of capitalism for the alienation of the public sphere led to a newly intensified need for a refuge of privacy, which was found within the home (1982). Others, such as Elshtain (1981), develop from this basic premise the argument that these values have come to be associated not only with the home, but with those who are defined by their role within it - women. She argues further that the values of the private sphere are important, that women possess them to a greater extent than men, and that women should therefore take them into the public sphere in a process of humanisation.

### **b. Public freedom and private subordination:**

One of the major problems with the above theory is that the private sphere has been shown to be nothing like the idealised refuge of intimacy and privacy envisaged by liberal theorists. Working within the confines of liberal theory itself, Betty Freidan (1963) recognised the extent to which the private sphere is oppressive, and argued that the private as the sphere of freedom and self-fulfilment is not a reality for women. In place of this idealised image of the family developed an understanding of the private sphere as repetitive and oppressive, structured by paternal rather than political power relations. As a result it is argued that women's oppression lies precisely in their confinement to this degrading private sphere. Far from glorifying and celebrating this association with the private (as advocated by Elshtain) women should dissociate themselves from it and seek to find fulfilment in the public realm with men.



This account of women's actual and desired relation to the public and private spheres has been severely criticised for accepting dominant patriarchal notions of what is to count as valuable and fulfilling, and for failing to perceive the class implications of the argument that women should also leave the private sphere to find fulfilment in the public (Bel Hooks 1984). It is noted that many women are already forced to work in the public sphere, in work which is far from fulfilling, and that entering the sphere of paid labour does not necessarily involve ceasing to labour in the private sphere without a wage. It is because of such factors that materialist feminists have argued that we need to look at production and reproduction in order to understand the empirical reality of the separate spheres for women.

### **3. Production/Reproduction**

The public/private dichotomy is here characterised as the distinction between paid work and domestic labour with discussion centring on the split of the family from the economy. The sexual division of labour is viewed as the basis for both the public/private split and the oppression of women. The implication is that women are oppressed by their particular role in the production and reproduction processes. But within this basic argument are various notions of how the division of labour oppresses women, and to whose benefit. There are those who believe that the sexual division of labour operates to the benefit of men, through the exploitation of women's work within the family; those who believe that the sexual division of labour operates to the benefit of capitalism; and those who believe that it benefits both men and capital.

The first of these positions is adopted most clearly by Christine Delphy. Adopting a brand of radical feminism quite distinct from the biologism of Firestone, Delphy argues that the subordination of women has its base in the domestic mode of production, through which women are exploited by a process in which they are not paid even an exploitative wage for their labour, but only maintained. This is a distinctly patriarchal mode of oppression which operates only within the private sphere of the family.

Adopting the second position, early marxists such as Engels also argued that women were oppressed by this sexual division of labour, though they saw the benefit as accruing to capital rather than men, and advocated that women enter into the public sphere of waged labour in order that they could join class struggle with men. (Engels, Vogel pp.63-72). A more recent alternative to this approach was developed by the Wages for Housework campaign, and more theoretically in the subsequent 'Domestic labour debate' (Margaret Benston, Della Costa, and Jean Gardiner amongst others). The upshot of this debate was that women should struggle for recognition of their labour within the home as a mode of reproduction creating value and as such should be seen as a form of class exploitation. Thus the marxist accounts of the operation of the mode of production, and of the site of class struggle could no longer be confined to the public sphere of the work-place, and was made to recognise the family as a site of exploitation and struggle.

Both of these approaches have since become commonly perceived within feminist theory as being overly economic and as marginalising the subordination of women by men. In response to these criticisms socialist feminists have attempted to develop dual-systems analyses of and operation of capitalism and patriarchy, explaining the sexual division of labour in terms of its benefits to both men and capital (See Heidi Hartmann, Juliet Mitchell and Iris Young). This represents an important development within materialist feminist analysis, but is still to be classified along with these other arguments in terms of the public/private debate in so far as they analyse the divide in terms of modes of production and the sexual division of labour first and foremost.

In opposition to each of the above three theories of the public and private as spheres of production and reproduction, exists the argument that the public is not in reality distinguishable from the private and that to accept this dichotomy - even as an explanation of women's oppression - is to accept a mystifying category of capitalist and patriarchal thought. The much used slogan "the personal is political" attests to the strength of the feminist commitment to eroding the existing perceived barriers between public and private spheres. "There is no private domain of a person's life that is not political and there is no political issue that is not ultimately personal. The old barriers have fallen." So states Charlotte Bunch (1970) implying that the public/private is not an actual divide in a political sense at all. The family is neither the haven nor the prison that some formulations of the dichotomy would have us believe, to argue that it is to uphold the mystifying cloak over the reality of women's oppression.

In reality capitalist and patriarchal power relations structure all aspects of life. In the words of Ros Petreschky; "Getting out of the false dichotomy of separate spheres is just as critical for our revolutionary strategy as it is for our theoretical analysis." (p.381) (see also Clare Burton p.34 1985, Carol Hanish 1970, Sheila Rowbotham 1973, Sara Evans p.21 1979, Kate Millet 1973). And yet it is exactly this dichotomy which the anthropologists Ortner and Rosaldo take as the basis for their explanation of women's association with nature; just this divide that radical feminists Firestone and O'Brien argue results from women's physiological natures; this divide that political theorists Zaretsky and Elshtain argue arose with the need for a refuge from alienating capitalist relations; this divide that liberal feminist Freidan sees as being the root of women's oppression as it excludes us from public success; and this divide which materialist feminists have adopted to explain the differing modes of production operating within the home and the work-place. If we are to get out of the false dichotomy between public and private spheres, we must look to changing not only patriarchal ideologies, but also feminist theories.

The public/private dichotomy may indeed be what the feminist movement is ultimately all about, as Pateman claims, but this is certainly not to argue that there is any single dominant concern within feminist theory. Indeed the examination of the plethora of

conceptualisations of the public and the private reveal the diversity rather than the homogeneity of feminist theory. As a result one cannot simply to refer to the public/private dichotomy and assume that that there is a shared understanding of what this dichotomy is, or even whether it exists. Within feminist theory public **has** been equated with men and private with women; but why this is the case, how the division operates, and the implications for future change are as varied as the forms of feminist theory itself.

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# ENVIRONMENTALISM?

## (THE EATING OF GREENS)

### AUTHORS' PREFACE

THE FOLLOWING ESSAYS DO NOT ATTEMPT TO DENY THE VALIDITY OF THE GREENS' ATTACK ON INDUSTRIALISM. INSTEAD THEY QUESTION THE CLAIM THAT GREEN THEORY IS SOMETHING RADICAL. GREEN 'RADICALISM' CENTRES ITS CONCERN ON PROBLEMS CONNECTED WITH INSTRUMENTALITY. THE ILLUSION IS THAT THERE SHOULD BE A MAINTENANCE OF THE PERFECT ENVIRONMENT. A CONTRADICTION EXISTS BETWEEN THE CONTROL OF NATURE AND SUBMISSION TO THE NATURAL WORLD. THIS NATURAL WORLD IS NOTHING OTHER THAN A THEORY OF PERFECT CIRCULATION. THINGNESS IS SET IN STONE. MENTAL HEALTH COSSETS THE MUDDLED HEAD AND ALLOWS IT SPACE FOR COMFORT, BUT THE HOLIDAY COMES TO AN END, THE SPACE CONTRACTS AND THE MALADJUSTED IS CONFINED IN A CRASH HELMET. THE GREENS SEE THINGS WHERE THERE ARE SOCIAL RELATIONS.

THESE ESSAYS FEED OFF AND INTO THE GREEN DEBATE. THE ASPECTS OF ENVIRONMENTAL THEORY WHICH LACK TASTE OR WHICH CANNOT BE DIGESTED ARE SPAT OUT. BUT THIS REJECTION DOES NOT SIGNIFY AN ANTI-GREEN APPROACH; FALSE IDEAS ARE THROWN AWAY TO DECAY AND ALLOW ROOM FOR FRESH GROWTH. THE ONLY THING THAT IS ALLOWED TO WASTE IS WASTE.

THE AUTHORS,  
13TH DAY OF MAY,  
A FRIDAY,  
NINETEEN-HUNDRED AND EIGHTY-EIGHT.

## ENVIRONMENTALISM?

Brian Mc Grail

# Environmentalism: Utopian Or Scientific?

December 1987 - January 1988

*This essay was originally written as part of a course requirement and is an attempt to answer the question "Is there an 'alternative' political economy?", which has been the topic of much discussion within the Green movement over the last few years.*

### Part I : Alternatives?

Political alternatives arise out of disenchantment; what was once rational now appears irrational, but only to the disenchanted. For "what is rational is actual and what is actual is rational"[1], thus if some evil exists (that is, it is actual) then it is still rational, no matter how evil it is because it is necessary. Hence, Engels writes "this state is rational, corresponds to reason, in so far as it is necessary; and if it nevertheless appears to us to be evil, but still, in spite of its evil character, continues to exist, then the evil character of the government is justified and explained by the corresponding evil character of its subjects. The Prussians of that day had the government that they deserved"[2]. In this respect it is the same with environmental issues: if lead pollution, acid rain, nuclear power, soil erosion, and in general industrial mechanisms of production (factories, hospitals, schools, transport systems) all continue to exist then they must all still be rational and necessary. They are no more than the people of our society deserve.

All too often people, faced with this evil, have thrust forward alternatives which are/seem rational alternatives to an irrational existence, but have presented these as an appeal to reason, enlightened (long term) thought, truth and justice. They did not see their ideas as coming about through historical necessity, but as if by magic they had stumbled upon the 'good life' (a prescription for everyone) and "might just as well have been born 500 years earlier, and might then have spared humanity 500 years of error, strife and suffering"[3]. The three great exponents of this method were of course the utopian socialists Saint-Simon, Fourier, and Robert Owen (but they were by no means the only ones) and their subsequent failure proved what wishful thinking their ideas were. The problem with all utopian alternatives is that they are idyllic solutions worked out in the human brain to real social problems; they lack discussion and the more they are worked out in greater and greater detail the more they cannot "avoid drifting off onto pure phantasies"[4]. Utopias, being sets of ideas, must be



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imposed on society from above as people must be educated and enlightened. But "the educator himself needs educating. Hence, this doctrine necessarily arrives at dividing society into two parts, of which one is superior to society"[5]. Thus, if there is an 'alternative' political economy why is it that only a few grasp the notion at first and how do they impose this alternative on other people, even if it is by persuasion education or appeal to reason? What can be done about the person who says "Why should I care about other people starving because I eat red meat? After all I enjoy eating red meat!"

Another problem with utopian alternatives and thought is to what extent they are fundamentally different to what already exists. Many environmentalists and ecologists claim that environmental political theory thinks in a 'fundamentally new way', but to what extent is this true? Alternative thinking can construct something new by reorganising concepts and categories which are already in existence without ever questioning the concepts and categories themselves. For example, some environmental theories have put forward the idea that we must restrict ourselves, our natural instinct and use of tools, because it is this nature which is excessive, but this merely accepts human nature, and in particular greed, as given once and for all. The same story as always ensues: we need human rights (laws) to protect us from our human nature. One does not have to restrict greed if there is no greed, and to accept greed as a fixed part of human nature actually reinforces the necessity of existing society rather than criticises it.

A more specific example of this problem is to be found in Ivan Illich's writings when he uses the title The Right To Useful Unemployment. Again although Illich's work tackles social and environmental problem with a critical perspective he takes certain principles for granted. The title 'The Right To Useful Unemployment' suggests that, firstly, the concepts of Rights and, hence, private property are taken for granted since all rights stem back to the "do as I will" right to property and abstract possession, secondly, that the concept of employment (and thus wage labour) is accepted as one cannot have *unemployment* without employment, and thirdly, the word useful implies purpose otherwise the whole useful-useless distinction disappears: thus the whole phrase 'The Right To Useful Unemployment' is a contradiction in terms since if something is useful it is *employed* for some purpose (employ = to use as a means). But employed by what or by whom? By society? But what happens to individual rights? By oneself? But this is no longer unemployment it is self-employment. Being unemployed is synonymous with being useless, whether we are talking in terms of tools or humans, who are treated as tools, until the moment of employment.

To talk of alternatives we must first of all comprehend our existing society so that we know when we are stepping beyond the restraining categories of this society. Hence, Marx points out that people in communist society will not be atheists since atheism means the denial of god, but if god does not exist there is nothing to deny -- atheism only lasts as long as theism does. More to the point, however, when Barry Jones[6] talks of a "golden age of leisure and personal development based on the co-operative use of resources"[7] he merely reinforces the conception that there is a distinction between leisure and work, where "the word leisure derives from the latin word *licere*, meaning to be lawful or allowed. This implies that leisure activity is not 'free' but, on the contrary, subject to some form of constraint. The importance of this lies in the following idea: leisure is not free time, but an effect of systems of

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legitimation"[8]. Thus, the idea of more leisure turns out not to be an alternative at all but merely more of the same.

Before I can talk about rational alternatives to an irrational existence (an 'alternative' political economy) I must first of all understand present political economy, which exists and is therefore necessary and rational and why it is rational. "To comprehend what is, this is the task of philosophy, because what is, is reason"[9]. By doing this we avoid having to defend an ideal which we have no practical experience of. Rousseau made sure he was never forced into the position of defending democracy, which he had never seen, but instead always showed how irrational the existing system of feudalism was. And although "the philosophers have only *interpreted* the world, in various ways; the point, however, is to change it"[10], we must first of all understand what the world is about so that we know what it is that we want to change.

### Part II : Political Economy?

In view of what I have said above, how can one now understand political economy and the question 'Is there an 'alternative' political economy?' If we understand political economy as meaning a set of economic policies, economic plans and structures at a political (ie. governmental) level then we must understand an alternative political economy as meaning alternative economic policies, plans, structures, etc. which are of course ideas within peoples heads which can be taken at two different levels. Firstly, there are utopian alternative political economies which are at the heart of all political parties (environmental, social-democratic, liberal, communist, nationalist), and as each one pops up with its version of paradise what do we say to them? We say "Hic Rhodus, hic salta!" -- Rhodes is here. Leap here and now! Secondly, there is the pragmatic approach to creating an alternative political economy which centres around making the most of what is available; making the best choices for the desired effect. But all choices and policies have several different effects. What is desirable to one person may be undesirable to another, for example, a reduction in acid rain could mean an increase in electricity prices or a clampdown on pollution may lead to a loss of jobs. Furtherstill, why is it that certain choices are available whilst others are not? Where does the agenda of political questions come from? Why *pollution* in the first place? Overall, seeing political economy, and thus an alternative political economy, in terms of changing governmental policies, plans and structures, etc. is equivalent to seeing people in terms of manipulation and manipulability, as if objects which will logically follow ones plans. This view takes no account of peoples' resistance to policy implimentation and is mainly concerned with the egos of politicians who think that they have a 'great' effect on history to such an extent that everybody else is a mere automaton. What we inevitably end up with, however, is the opposite of this, as these great politicians turn round and admit "Oh no! We can't possibly do that now we're in *power* as it would be against our election interests (ie. the status quo)", since the only other option is dictatorship (or in the case of the Green parties, eco-fascism).

However, we can understand political economy in a different light in which it is a science that tries to interpret the underlying movements of capitalist society. The first to attempt such a scientific exposition where the classical political-economists Adam Smith and David Ricardo (the Ricardian School). And "Smith was concerned

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with a type of economy recognisably 'capitalist' in outline, and his purpose was to expose the basic laws of motion which govern its operation"[11]. Nevertheless, why is such a scientific study necessary when "all science would be superfluous if the outward appearance and the essence of things directly coincided"[12]? Precisely because the outward appearance of capitalism ("Freedom, Equality, Property, and Bentham"[13] in the realm of circulation) does not correspond to its essence (the reality of unfree - enforced - work, subjection to the authority of the capitalist, propertylessness of the worker and the exploitation and undermining of "the original sources of all wealth - the worker and the soil"[14] in the realm of production). Thus, a study of political economy only became necessary with the emergence of full-blown capitalism, whereas, under feudalism where the political-economic relations were obvious there was no need for political economy. So by the same token, political economy (and all social science) becomes superfluous once the appearance of capitalist society corresponds to its true essence. However, before this can happen "the forms of appearance are reproduced directly and spontaneously, as current and usual modes of thought; the *essential* relation must first of all be discovered by *science*. Classical political economy stumbles approximately on to the true state of affairs, but without consciously formulating it. It is unable to do this as long as it stays within its bourgeois skin"[15]. Thus we have the situation in which political economy, like any other science, set itself a task, then once it had achieved its aim it would itself become superfluous, but as Marx points out classical political economy was unable to solve its own task.

Hence, when Marx subtitles his major work Capital 'A Critique Of Political Economy' he is not criticising political economy in the usual sense of the word but is, instead, taking on board into his own theory the task of political economy ('to expose the basic laws of motion' of capitalism) and its 'moment of truth', for to Marx 'critique' means "the act of 'tearing away the veil' of mystification that surrounds the 'moment of truth' present in every theory. This 'moment of truth' is then subsumed or superseded within a truer theory"[16]. The truer theory in this case being that of scientific socialism, which obeys the same rules as all sciences and becomes superfluous once the appearance of our society corresponds to its true essence, but unlike political economy it breaks out of its 'bourgeois skin', therefore containing the ability to solve the mystery, and takes on the task of comprehending every aspect of capitalist society (gender, religion, race, etc.). Therefore, to ask "Is there an 'alternative' political economy?" in the late 20th century is like asking "Is there an 'alternative' form of slavery?" when we have already moved on to the stage of asking "Is there an 'alternative' to slavery?" To put it bluntly, Sartre said that Marxism is the philosophy of our age, and keeping in mind Hegel's definition of philosophy as being concerned with what is, not with what ought to be, then, the question "Is there an 'alternative' political economy?" belongs with pre-1867 utopian wishful thinkers from whence the question has not progressed.

### Part III : Scientific Environmentalism?

Any society, like our own, which is based on the exchange of commodities and money has a logic all of its own, that is why it is rational and that is why it exists. The job then of environmental political science must be to comprehend why such a society still appears rational and logical in the face of ecological disaster. Like all science in order to understand something it must break through appearances, whilst at the same

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time it must start out at the level of appearance -- the way in which we normally regard and talk of things. In the rest of this essay therefore I will restrict myself, because of limitations, to looking at the appearance of three categories -- technology (including medical science), time (as in speed of travel, etc.), and space -- and the logic which underlies them in existing society.

When Ivan Illich writes of the last hundred years "The hypothesis was that machines can replace slaves. The evidence shows that, used for this purpose, machines enslave men"[17] he is in fact saying nothing new as "John Stuart Mill says in his Principles Of Political Economy : 'It is questionable if all the mechanical inventions yet made have lightened the day's toil of any human being' "[18]. The idea that machines can do all our work for us and are beneficial to everyone is the way in which technology appears under capitalism, which is also the reason why anti-technology feelings appear as heresy. Indeed, I can remember one television commentator opening a programme with the statement 'One day space technology will benefit everyone, .... but any nation which does not invest in space now will be left behind'. Here, two things must be remembered, firstly, that appearance means more than mere illusion as it is a real moment of capitalism, and secondly, that technology does actually contain the *ability* to benefit everyone as the "reduction of time spent producing necessities is the *precondition* [my emphasis, see Appendix I] for any possible liberation. For this reduction allows the expansion of a sphere in which economic logic no longer applies"[19]. However, on reading Bataille, it becomes apparent that it is impossible to say what is *necessary*, and at the same time technology as a precondition to liberation depends upon ones view of 'technology' as all societies use some sort of technology. So why is it that technology so far has not had this effect of liberating people from work (instead, it has assigned them to the dole queue and the boredom of assembly line work), and why is it that people want to be liberated from *work* (their life activity) in the first place?

For to liberate people from work, or the production of necessities, is "by no means the aim of the application of machinery under capitalism "[20], rather it serves a twofold purpose. Firstly, it increases productivity (production) without ever having to increase the length of the working day nor the ability/ skill of workers and at the same time it changes and levels out the skills of workers ("The labour of women and children was therefore the first result of the capitalist application of machinery"[21] because of their nimble fingers), all without having to *decrease* the length of the working day. Hence, greater productivity means that a larger part of the working day is given over to producing profit for the capitalist (rather than producing wages), who wants to stay in business/ stay competitive, and has the greatest interest in 'productivism', where "Productivism is when you say production has got to get faster and faster so we can produce more and more, because more equals better. But if you say we must produce the maximum in the minimum time so we all have the time to do what we want -- thats not productivism. Because the goal isn't to increase production; it's to increase free time. Productivity is simply a means to this end"[22]. Before discussing the second aspect of technology, which is directly related to the first, we must return to the question of why people want to be liberated from work, and subsequently, what form does this liberation take?

People want to be liberated from work because under capitalism their work is not free; it is controlled from above by someone else and ultimately by 'the market'. Due to their propertylessness (their lack of owning any means of production -- tools,

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machines or land, or capital), in order to survive, a person must find waged employment where by they are forced into permanently carrying out a one-sided job (although they have many abilities). They become in many ways nothing more than an 'appendage to the machine', which can be seen by the way in which their minds and bodies are deformed by their work (the bent backs of mine-workers, the weak limbs of mental labourers and the feeble minds of manual labourers -- for people do not do the most awful jobs because they are 'stupid', but are 'stupid' because they are forced to do supifying jobs). People have no control over their own work just as they have no control over their environment. Who controls what happens to our environment? *The* people? *Our* government? The captains of industry like Ian MacGregor? Or is it nobody? Against this lack of control over their own lives people have rebelled in the workplace, and in society as a whole, again and again by means of sabotage, strikes, riots, with-holding rent and tax, squatting in houses and on land, occupying factories and offices, going 'political' shopping and by obstructing every interest of capital from construction companies to the officers of *our*? / the law in an attempt to create a truely democratic society in which people can control their own lives. "Capitalists themselves have said so loudly and so clearly that from the mid-70's their struggle was for the arrogantly proclaimed 'right to manage', the right to rule, the right to impose boredom and death on living labour"[23]. Just as the capitalist tries to manage the factory where the battle is over *who* runs the factory, so the state tries to manage society in general but faces the same fight over who manages power-generation, transport systems, healthcare, pollution control, housing programmes, etc, to such an extent that if the state loses its grip then so does capital, for, to give but one example, the state ensures that "those who are unemployed, retired or retired early are not allowed to become auto-productive, because whatever they produce for themselves and their friends reduces the outlets for commodity production"[24]. This obstruction to auto-production ensures that "faced with the alternatives 'full-time work' or 'dole' people still prefer work"[25]. Thus, the state deals with any problems which are beyond the scope of the single capitalist, for example, the struggle over environmental issues and the overall control of the workforce. But in doing this the state tries to maintain its legitimacy by not using outright oppression, rather, it absorbs the conflict by either making it a 'political' question to be dealt with by the official state procedure, or by undermining the basis for conflict by applying new technology.

I now return to the second aspect of the application of technology which is to iron out any resistance to capitalist domination. If workers strike (and constantly disrupt production, etc) one way to defeat them is to undermine their particular skills and make them redundant by means of new technology, and "it is possible to work out an history of inventions which are made solely for the reason of 'supplying capital with weapons against the revolts of the working class'"[26]. And it is not just in the workplace that technology has an effect as a weapon against struggle, for imagine what the discovery of atomic fusion would do for the nuclear industry and environmental groups concerned with nuclear power -- as there would be no radioactive waste material the 'environmental' question would be answered. Environmental groups could pack their bags and leave for the gates of the coal burning power stations (if there were any), but the political question of who controls the nuclear industry would still be left unanswered. Now we touch the corner stone of the Green movement: is it concerned with the environment because of the effect that industry then has on the

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affluent middle-classes of the first world ('in the long term'), or is it concerned with the horrors that 'industry' imposes on people, not only via the environment, but directly, through their daily life activity -- the dead boredom of work?

The idea of the application of technology should not be restricted to mechanical machinery and natural sciences, however, as the dictionary tells us that one of the definitions of technology is "3. the total knowledge and skills available to any human society"[27]. Thus, the state machinery can be seen in the same way as other types of machinery. Resistance to the state brings about applications of new state machinery and techniques. Resistance "is as productive for the development of the forms of state power as strikes are for the invention of machinery"[28]. Hence, in recent years "the scale of unemployment and the payment of non-workers are disguised by measures such as: a higher school leaving age; paid training schemes and higher education courses clearly lacking career outlets; extended conscription; poorly paid, para-military 'work experience' schemes and 'youth opportunities' programmes ....; increased arms production ... etc."[29] as the state tries its best to maintain control and uphold the permanent - waged - employee work ethic in the face of unemployed workers resistance. For "domination is never an easy matter, and any ruling class must constantly struggle to impose its own will, to harness life for its own deadly purposes"[30]. Thus, "the automatic functioning of power, mechanical operation, is absolutely not the thesis of Discipline And Punish. Rather, it is the idea, in the eighteenth century, that such a form of power is *possible* and *desirable*. It is the theoretical and practical *search* for such mechanisms, the *will*, constantly attested, to organise this kind of mechanism which constitutes the object of my analysis"[31]. The will of any ruling class is to discover methods and mechanisms which will keep them in control.

Medical science can be seen as such a mechanism of control; one which workers brought about/upon themselves through their struggle. When Ivan Illich, in 'Two Watersheds' (the first chapter of Tools For Conviviality) states "the Westernised public learned to demand effective medical practice as defined by the progress of medical science"[32] he forgets who commissions medical research, by means of investment, in the first place, and that workers demands differ from those of the 'Westernised public' just as much as they go along with (the logic of) them. When a worker suffers from "tension on the job"[33] their first reaction is to throw a spanner in the works and demand new work practices, etc. They know what is wrong and do not need the medical profession to tell them, but it is the capitalist and state which responds with psychologists, psychiatrists, job designers, social workers, keep fit classes, dieticians, etc. Illich goes on to say "indirectly, industrialisation profited from the new effectiveness attributed to medicine; work attendance was raised, and with it the claim to efficiency on the job"[34]. But before work attendance could be raised, by the 'effectiveness attributed to medicine', it first of all had to fall. When workers were paid no sickness benefit (nor the 'higher' wages of Fordism) they were forced to attend work as much as possible in order to earn a living wage, but once the payment of sickness benefit and all the other conditions of Fordism, which "was characterised by the close articulation of mass consumption with the mass production of standardised commodities by a semi-skilled workforce working in large factories"[35], came about the attendance of work began to drop dramatically, due not just to benefits and higher wages (which helped capital by increasing consumption) but to the exhaustive boredom of assembly line work.



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Against this threat capital had to respond by imposing methods that would insure attendance at work, but how does the factory manager know if a worker is truly sick? They do not *know*. Thus the medical profession must be deployed to decide over questions of health -- to legitimise that someone is sick with ever increasing accuracy. And if they are sick the medical profession must cure them as quickly and cheaply as possible at an ever increasing rate; so long as they are a vital part of the production process their health is worth 'wasting' profit on (hence, the decline of the welfare state with mass unemployment, after all, who wants to spend money on the 'useless' when the useful can look after themselves through personal equity plans, medical insurance and pensions).

Compared to the distorted capitalist view of progress (more means better, the worship of material goods for their own sake) Illich seems to have *no* vision of progress, and romanticises and laments over how people used to be looked after in the home by non-professionals who cared whilst now they are serviced in hospital. But the point here is not to lament over what was or what could be, rather it is to see how hospitals play their role in the overall process. Hospitals mean that working women can keep working while their husbands are ill or when their parents get too old to look after themselves. This both releases women to work for capital and releases women from one aspect of domestic life. Looking after at home needs somebody at home and therefore requires one 'woman' to each sick person; this goes against the logic of both economic efficiency and the socialisation of workers (who enjoy working in teams). Thus, advances in medical methods of treatment are not necessarily a disadvantage to workers (as with the advantages in all technologies), but this does not mean that worker' and capital's interests are the same, as Bahro thinks when he writes "workers in the metropolis have become companions or fellow - travellers of capital"[36]. Bahro quite simply does not understand that labour lives within capital; that if labour could live independently from capital we would not have capital (see Appendix II). Under capitalism *everyone* has interests in both capital and labour; in both the wallet and the heart. Everyone wants faster cars and everyone wants safer roads. Everyone wants cheaper electricity and everyone wants a cleaner environment. Everyone wants more wealth and everyone wants more time in which to enjoy it.

All work and no play; all play and no work: these are the positions of the worker and the owner of capital respectively. Under capitalism everybody struggles for time. Every gain the worker makes on the capitalist in terms of time, the capitalist has dreadful nightmares about the fact that they might have to 'earn a living'. Every gain women make on men, like going out to work, men take fright at having to do their own dirty washing. A lot of environmental theory has focused on peoples' lifestyle and consumerism without ever connecting these things to the way in which people work. When work is not free and is prolonged for someone else's benefit, when time is not one's own, then what little time is left which is one's own, in which one is in control, becomes of prime importance. Why are people in a hurry? Because they do not have all the time in the world; for the capitalist time means money and every moment the worker 'wastes' cuts into profits; as for workers, they are trying to increase the amount of time they have to themselves; the private life in which everyone can withdraw from the evil society to which they belong. Technology helps to quicken every aspect of life. The faster people travel to work the more time they have to themselves, the more time they have at home; the quicker the plane gets to Spain the more time people have to enjoy their precious two-week holiday there.

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People need time to heal, but the longer this takes the more money they lose through missing work. What ever activity a person is forced to carry out continuously is repulsed and certain other activities are emphasised as being good and enjoyable, etc. Thus cooking and shopping are seen as wasting precious time and must be compressed into as little time as possible, and so we have fast-foods and microwaves, all-in-one shopping centres (supermarkets) and, most recently, specialised shopping so that whatever nifty-gift or odd pair of socks you want you can find them quickly. But is there any single activity which is greater than another -- the single brush stroke in the making of a picture, the squashing of a single grape in the making of wine or the cutting of a single potato in the making of a meal? Is it just looking, drinking and eating that we enjoy? Or do we enjoy the painting, squashing and brewing, and cooking just as much? We no longer have the time to make and taste, merely to buy and consume. The irony of it all is that unemployed workers have all the time in the world, but must be kept permanently inactive because their autonomy would decrease the profits and authority of capital. If workers could live independently of capital they would. The time is available to cycle to Spain, educate ourselves, look after the sick, build proper homes, to learn several skills and use them, and to cook and eat healthy food.

The last category I want to look at is space. If the division of labour is going to persist with one person doing one job, with the individual labour power receiving an individual wage, with people working in a world in which they have a stake but no control, then each person is always going to try and cut out a *space* in which they *are* in control, in which they are boss -- whether at home or at work. But as long as people regard a particular space as *their's*, on which they can spend *their* money; as long as society builds houses in units for the nuclear family then the earth's resources will be needlessly wasted producing locks, televisions, music-centres, cookers, washing machines, dishwashers, and toys for each particular space (whether each house or room). Bahro is right when he says that the rest of the world cannot expect the lifestyle of North America, Europe, Oceania and Japan, but then the people of the 'underdeveloped' world have never lived in a society which is so estranged that its citizens have to withdraw into their private lives which then use up resources with the 'need' for detached bungalows by the sea. As long as people repulse their enforced one-sided work they will want to live as far from 'work' as possible, and will subsequently need the car as a means of transport for all their individual criss-crossings and commuting. The bigger your house is then the bigger the space is that you control. The struggle for space is as great as the struggle for time, and just as destructive to both humans and the environment.

## Part IV : Conclusion - Thou Shalt Be Done?

Maybe I have not done what I was supposed to in this essay by not discussing an 'alternative' political economy, but then I believe that talking in terms of utopian alternatives like everybody living in a self-made hut, cultivating their garden and eating only free-range eggs is inherently dangerous. For how does one expect to reach such a utopia? By grabbing power (even if it is through the ballot box) and then not knowing what to do with it? As if this kind of power could actually change anything. How is Alice Coleman[37] going to reach her utopia in which every city-dweller has a garden? By amending the constitution to include the right to a garden? These

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utopian visions are "Thanatos, the desire to return to the cosy womb. I understand the Green movement clutch Bloch[38] to their breasts, as philosopher and justifier of their impossibilist vision of lots of happy people not hurting each other; even if this sort of utopia were possible, it is overwhelmingly negative"[39]. Utopian thoughts are dangerous when put into practice because they are the appliance of a simple solution to a complex problem, and "history has held enough examples of what happens when simplistic principle is practiced, backed up with all the resources a country has at its disposal (I'm thinking of things like the terror, the Cultural Revolution, Year Zero in Kampuchea and of Nazism) "[40].

As I have tried to show, the job of any political science is not to dabble in designing utopian alternatives (of course, by no account should people stop thinking in absolute terms, even if they could), but instead it is to comprehend what is and there by shed light on the world. It is to discover the truth of what is beneath the theoretical which has led itself to mysticism. At the present time many environmentalists may take heart from the *facts* that people are changing their 'lifestyle' by not eating meat, by giving up smoking and in not buying certain industrial goods because of awareness of the pollution they cause in their production, etc. But none of these things are necessarily due to a conscious change of mind, due to education. Buying meat and cigarettes may have become too expensive forcing people to change what they *buy* not their tastes (it was recently reported in The Independent that the greatest move towards 'vegetarianism' was amongst the poorest sections of the community -- is it the case that the poor are finally getting a better education than the rich!), or if wealthier people do give up these things all it means is that they then have more of *their* money available to spend on other things such as clothes, hobbies and sports, and holidays. More money going to political groups or charities, etc only means that some high-minded people have more to give, not that all of a sudden their guilty consciences want to punish themselves even harder for having money in the face of enforced poverty.

It is just not a case of *persuading* people to change the way they live by changing their mind as a persons mind is not the only thing which controls their desires but the social relations in which they interact with other people and their material existence determine a persons thoughts as well (Where do our desires come from? Why are people possessed, from rapists to yuppies?). People cannot just change their desires, their material (ie. social) existence (what they value), otherwise 'deviants' could have been eradicated by Christian ministers years ago with their vision of the proper ethical life. Feminism, homosexuality, adultery and pornography would all be things of the past as people had a value change and all became good clean living Christians. Society lives in a certain way because it is organised in a certain way by past experience. A society with a large amount of alcoholics will require a large amount of drink, but the answer to alcoholism is not to ban drink, nor to persuade/educate people into not drinking, but they drink because of the way their lives are organised and have the answer themselves when they get fed up trying to solve all their problems by throwing drink down their necks and seek other ways. Other ways which are not merely alternative thoughts but have a real practical impact on whether it is themselves or someone else/something else that controls their lives. "Social life is essentially *practical* . All mysteries which misleads theory to mysticism find their rational solution in human practice and in the comprehension of this practice"[41].

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### Appendices

#### Appendix I:

Technology which reduces the time necessary to produce essentials is a *precondition* for liberation, but does not necessarily bring it about. In any free society people would be free to use whatever technology they liked (whether they use a chisel or an electric jig-saw to cut wood would be entirely up to them). Whereas, in present society due to economic logic (competition) only the very fastest, most productive technology can be used if one wants to survive in the market place.

People must be free to work at their pace, not the pace of a machine. Thus, Walter Benjamin points out in his essay Theses On The Philosophy Of History that during the French Revolution the clocks were stopped, indicating the emancipation of time, for without clocks you cannot have 'deadlines' (finish the job by such and such a time, or else), time and motion studies, the division of time into 'work', 'sleep', 'lunch break', 'leisure', etc, to the same extent as you can with them.

#### Appendix II:

The way in which labour lives within capital can be seen by the way in which living labour tries to escape from death (capital) whenever it has the opportunity (for example, see Marx's story (taken from E.G.Wakefield) of Mr. Peel \* who tried to export capitalist relations of production to the Australian outback only to be 'left without a servant' as all his 'workers' ran away to set up their own communities, or The Spanish Collectives by Kenneth Brady in Common Sense Number One, or anything on the 'Paris Commune', the Mondragon Co-operatives, etc).

Thus, capital must constantly prevent living labour organising itself on any scale separate to capital. The unemployed must be kept useless, and workers' leisure time inactive. Why are teenagers always saying they are bored and have nothing to do? Because basically they don't have anything to do as certain aspects of life, such as real productive activity, must be reserved for the world of 'work' (capitalist commodity production -- you don't build houses and cars in your spare time). Spare time activities must be kept to the area of consumption, thus clothes (fashion), sex (from pornography to problem pages), drugs, alcohol, music (Rock & Roll) all play an *over* important role in the lives of young people. Heroin is no longer just a drug, its a way of life which keeps the unemployed worker busy. And for the yuppies lying on a sunbed and taking cocaine are no different. Heart disease and soap operas are the way in which the MacMillan generation has 'never had it so good'. The modern division of labour means that no-one *does* anything anymore, no-one plays the piano, no-one puts on plays at home as these jobs are reserved for professionals who appear on the box. Poor people watch stinking rich actors play the role of poor people in soap operas and are taken in by the fantastic down-to-earth stories about themselves.

(\*).see pages 932-3, K. Marx., Capital, Vol. 1, Pelican.

### Notes:

1. G.W.F Hegel., The Philosophy Of Right, page 10.

2. F. Engels., Ludwig Feuerbach And The End Of Classical German Philosophy, in Marx and Engels Selected

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Works, Vol.3, page 338, (from now on MESW).

3. F. Engels., Socialism: Utopian And Scientific, MESW, Vol.3, page 117.
4. *ibid*, page 119; The problem being that once the utopian book has been opened, it cannot be shut until it has covered everything under the sun.
5. K. Marx., These On Feuerbach, Third Thesis, MESW, Vol.1, page 13.
6. One of the Post-Industrial Utopians discussed in Boris Frankel's book of that name.
7. *ibid*, page 25.
8. The quote is from C.Rojek Capitalism And Leisure Theory (Tavistock, 1985), found in Hugo Whitaker Leisure, Encyclopaedia Supplement, Edinburgh Review Number 76, page 127.
9. G.W.F Hegel., The Philosophy Of Right, page 11.
10. K. Marx., These On Feuerbach, Eleventh Thesis, MESW, Vol.1, page 15.
11. Introduction to Adam Smith., The Wealth Of Nations, Books I to III, by Andrew Skinner.
12. K. Marx., Capital, Vol.3, L&W, page 817.
13. *ibid*, Vol.1, Pelican, page 280.
14. *ibid*, Vol.1, Pelican, page 638.
15. *ibid*, Vol.1, Pelican, page 682.
16. From 'Glossary Of Key Terms', K. Marx., Early Writings, Pelican, page 430.
17. Ivan Illich., Tools For Conviviality, page 10.
18. K. Marx., Capital, Vol.1, Pelican, page 492.
19. A. Gorz., Paths To Paradise: On The Liberation From Work, page 70.
20. K. Marx., Capital, Vol.1, Pelican, page 492.
21. *ibid*, Vol.1, Pelican, page 517.
22. A. Gorz., Paths To Paradise: On The Liberation From Work, page 71.
23. J. Holloway., A Note On Fordism And Neo-Fordism, in Common Sense Number One, page 58.
24. A. Gorz., Paths To Paradise: On The Liberation From Work, page 71.
25. *ibid*, page 71.
26. W. Bonefeld., Open Marxism, in Common Sense Number One, page 34.
27. Collins Paperback Dictionary, 1986.
28. W. Bonefeld., Open Marxism, in Common Sense Number One, page 35.
29. A. Gorz., Paths To Paradise: On The Liberation From Work, page 36.
30. J. Holloway., A Note On Fordism And Neo-Fordism, page 56.
31. M. Foucault explaining Discipline And Punish, found in The Foucault Reader, edited by Paul Rainbow.

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32. Ivan Illich., Tools For Conviviality, page 1.
33. ibid, page 2.
34. ibid, page 2.
35. J. Holloway., A Note On Fordism And Neo-Fordism, page 54.
36. R. Bahro., From Red To Green, page 205.
37. See Alice Coleman., The Loss Of Productive Land in Green Britain Or Industrial Wasteland.
38. See Ernst Bloch., The Principle Of Hope, Blackwell 1987.
39. J. Turner., Response To Bonefeld And Gunn, in Edinburgh Review Number 77, page 106.
40. ibid, page 106.
41. K. Marx., Theses On Feuerbach, Eighth Thesis, MESW, Vol.1, page 15.

ENVIRONMENTALISM?

Paul White

Small is Small  
Or The  
Shrinking Of  
Schumacher

March 1988

Atmospherically, the ozone layer disappears and in California skin cancer is pursued as a fashion.

Schumacher is out of his tree and wants to get back in. He thinks there must be a natural way. But naturally small as Schumacher is, he does not have a head for heights and finds no easy solution. He descends to a radical position. "To be radical is to grasp things by the root." (1) Schumacher realises that if he were truly radical his tree concern would lose its base and topple to the ground. His response to fear is to be alternative. To be alternative is to be allowed. It is difference with official sanction. The alive can ignore their island existence because they choose to ignore dead life. Contradictions go unseen. Some Green theorists see themselves as already Green. This they do against the backdrop of the capitalist mode of production. It is this outlook that leads to the world-negation of an "Alternative Careers Fair." (2) In the abandonment of reality society skips to doom. Critique is displaced by dislike and in this turning-away from understanding the new social existence is characterised by charity. It is a life of concern which does not examine its concerns. Grisly television spectacles projected to expunge common angerguilt become the norm. Shared emotions enter the home via the Nationwide Appeal by Celebrity and exit in a cash commitment to change. So it is that poverty and Third World extinction are mourned by the laughter of ten million red noses. (3)

A painful difficulty that Green theory enjoys is the attempt to achieve communion with nature. It is the obverse of capitalist accumulators trampling over earth in their sprint to destroy the hallowed finite resources. Here the subject jumps on the object and finds it does itself no harm. This is upturned when the realisation arrives that human being is a part of nature and that with every jump, with every squeeze on the natural world, the subject, man, is flattening his existence. The Green response is to pursue an absolute pancake height: "On a level plain, simple mounds look like hills; and the insipid flatness of our present bourgeoisie is to be measured by the altitude of its 'great intellects'." (4) The appeal to the ancients, the rejection of life, is for the Greens both an escape and a journey into a rock face. Arcadia is approached in reverse and film reels whirl backwards as the Golden Age is retrieved by "homecomers" in city suits of William Morris fabric. But at the gate to convivial living, discomfort occurs in the hammer blows required to weld subject and object. The thought of this process brings disarray and in the push to forget

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difference people will to harvest themselves. This is why radicals wear camouflage trousers.

The question of the tension and space between subject and object is one of many contradictions Schumacher refuses to explore. "Modern man does not experience himself as a part of nature, but as an outside force destined to dominate and conquer it." (5) By this statement Schumacher implies that there was a time when man experienced himself as somehow located deep within nature. In the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Horkheimer and Adorno illuminate primeval darkness with arc lights and couple genetic engineering with fertility rights. They explore the interdependence between enlightenment and myth and the equalizing tendencies they share. Enlightenment involves the weapons of critical reflection and instrumental reason. For Horkheimer and Adorno myth involves some form of enlightenment, and the roots of instrumental reason are located in magical attempts to control nature. Enlightenment can facilitate freedom as long as it embodies *critique*, but irrational rationality is always just outside. Oppression enters as philosophy exits, convergence displaces divergence, fact conquer concepts. This is the positivism which tries to stop history. In myth, supplication to the tree god precedes the fall of the tree. With positivism, all trees disappear with no displacement allowance for wood nymphs. Wood nymphs are people who pretend. They believe they are eternal because they will not acknowledge what day it is. Out of the woods and into the chainsaw as Schumacher chops himself down to size.

The response to "Why?" is "Why not?". Irrational rationality is never irrational because it exists. Anything outwith this approach ceases to exist as soon as it comes into view. It ceases to exist in the light of instrumental reason. Within instrumental reason there are no eyes to witness its internal contradictions. It is here, inside, as a part of its corpse life, that an understanding of the social relations can be achieved. Outside there is nothing but glare. This is not to deny or underestimate the significance of phenomena outwith the limited vision of positivism: it is to say that when marginal interests allow themselves and are encouraged to remain marginal, one way to irritate instrumental reason is to climb inside its own terms and expose its always vulnerable death-in-breath condition. From stagnation comes turning. This rotation can only come through a recognition of the difference between outside and inside. However a recourse to structuralism is not urged. Structures are fluid, but there is danger in not seeing them as they appear. It is needful to see the truth of their appearance as well as the truth behind their appearance. The Greens, who identify with nature, can bring only more blindness by refusing to locate themselves in the world which hates nature. (6) The real partnership between man and animal is an attempt at sadism which is ultimately expressed in masochism. "Animals are only remembered when the few remaining specimens, the counterparts of the medieval jester, perish in excruciating pain, as a capital loss for their owner who neglected to afford them adequate fire protection in an age of concrete and steel." (7) Any other remembrance is superfluous.

## The Value Change

The humour of the value changers is evinced by the food they eat.



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Handfuls of grain contain no grain of truth. World change comes through a treat for the intestines. The question here is a question of style, it is one of lifestyle. The value change is an abandonment of hunger. Produce a reason for change: "I was brought up on processed foods. You can't just change to a Third World diet overnight. Also, science has been trying for 100 years to make food last longer. Now everyone wants to go against it."(8) The scientists, the depersonalised witchdoctors of capitalism, are able to accomodate a whim. New digestion is not new direction. It is a block on a real grip of the social relations. White bread is wicked, prefer brown in a display of positive discrimination. "Look at that brown stuff. Do you think it's any different? It's just a bit of dye that brown stuff. It's the same stuff without any white stuff in it. Well look, you don't eat meat, right? It just means that you are too mean to nip out for a nice bit of steak. You buy the brown bread because it looks a bit like steak."(9)

The stake here is one between life and lifestyle. Lifestyle is a commodity. In the commodity lies death, dead labour. Yet it is the commodity which appears as if it is pulsing with blood. It pursues a social life, whereas the intercourse between independent producers does "not appear as direct social relations between persons in their work, but rather as material relations between persons and social relations between things."(10) This is the level at which style plays. The value changers adopt a healthy diet through a fear of death, but in their freedom of choice lies a killing. It is shopping with conscience which allows the EEC to rescue Ethiopia with radioactive milk powder. The difference between conscience and action must be understood. Conscience, ie, the entire operation of conscience rather than a manifestation of particular conscience, is something historical. In the 1980s, in Britain, conscience is pulled between the disintegration of social welfare and the expansion of charity. Both tugboats are part of free-market philosophy and are essentially concerned with private individuals. The problem is that charity is seen as a public activity while participation takes the form of pledging money through a telephone. The conscience exhibited here disappears with the disappearance of the sad event. What remains is a public commitment to privacy. In contrast, action is not necessarily a matter of conscience. It is a matter of acting, of practicality. Underlying the level at which style operates is life which is manifested in flesh and bone collision.

People live in circles but they never notice the pointless circularity until they get dizzy. And then they think it is only their head spinning when it is really their total substance rolling over itself. The Greens believe rejection halts this situation when it is negation that is required. In their rejection they embrace ancient values. But there are other things which are old. Nietzsche understood the mistake: "I have discovered the arrogant theologian-instinct wherever anyone today feels himself to be an 'idealist' - wherever anyone assumes, by virtue of a higher origin, a right to cast strange and superior looks at actuality..."(11) Death-in-breath is ancient and new. It does not vanish with silent contemplation.

In breaking away from the dehumanised present Schumacher retraces routes to dehumanisation. He disowns capitalist appropriation and puts capitalist appropriation in its place. He wants freedom, and says: "Everything in this world has to have a *structure*, otherwise it is chaos."(12) With his Captain of Industry

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medal as proof of competence, Schumacher hands out freedom with the profit share. He quotes his role model, Ernest Bader, to give his argument weight. He has already swallowed the tablets God gave to Moses. Ernest the idol had a dilemma. "The problem was twofold: (1) how to organise or combine a maximum sense of freedom, happiness, and human dignity in our firm without loss of profitability and (2) to do this by ways and means that could be generally acceptable to the private sector of industry." (13) The world shakes and the paragraph has to end.

It is worth knowing the ground which Schumacher occupies. It is not as if he could object to role definitions. He is a Christian, an elitist, a utopian, a believer in fixed human nature, an ex-adviser to the National Coal Board. He is a man who knows how things work. The hermeneutics help explain what Schumacher says but they do not tell why his combination of discredited creeds is seen as a point of new departure. History provides the answer. For the West, every example of religion and the entire world story of philosophy is simultaneously present. They exist side by side. They overlap. They are waiting to be selected like fruit. When consumers can take their pick they persist with mouldy stock because they will not see what they have. Like Jehovah's Witnesses these religions and philosophies wait on God to vindicate their position. God the restorer flies in on a jet of aeroplane. Self-protection prevails while self-change and world-change are in waiting. The Greens eat organic vegetables in preference to eating the organic state.

How does Schumacher come to support small-scale production? He advocates technology appropriate to the global significance of humanity, "to the actual size of man. Man is small and therefore small is beautiful." (14) Aside from his narcissistic conclusion, Schumacher's approach to the question of size is ingenious in that it avoids the problems his shallow theory will not hope to encompass. The retreat from real dimensions is a denial of responsibility. It is a curling-up to avoid detection. Schumacher seeks freedom within a cage. "The fundamental task is to achieve smallness *within* large organisation." (15) What this organisation is is already made clear. Schumacher, father Fritz, is content to hide in the convenient, and for him natural, unit of the individual. Suddenly the winds abound with whimpers for human freedom. This is the freedom to innovate. For the liberals, the barrier to enterprise is state machinery. For Schumacher the devil is in hi-tech machines. "Their very exactitude is a sign of the absence of human freedom, the absence of choice, responsibility and dignity. As soon as human freedom enters, we are in an entirely different world where there is great danger in any proliferation of mechanical devices." (16) Machines spring up like mushrooms and everybody wants to walk the million miles to work. Schumacher proclaims the negative freedom of "suum cuique tribuere", with its respect for private property and individual rights. In an Ernest Bader society freedom oozes through the doors and windows of the factory. The happy workshop mentality exists in firms like **Texas Instruments**, whose "Idea Input" scheme revels in the entrepreneurial spirit. Here factory personnel are allowed to vote independently of management on whether to allow a worker/innovator a grant of 25 000 dollars to pursue his idea. Isolation conquers interaction, and new discoveries only arrive via the individual. For "There is something natural and healthy about the ... private property of the working proprietor." (17)

Green theory need not be destroyed, but it must be revealed to end the situation where it sees itself, and is frequently seen, as something radical. Most

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times the environmentalists succeed in discrediting themselves.

### Intermediate Technology

Much of Schumacher's theory is designed for the Third World, with the alleviation of poverty his primary consideration. However, the West does not escape his concern. On one hand he sees a separation between developed and undeveloped countries, while on the other he recognises the global interests of capitalism. He attributes Third World poverty to the West's insistence on applying its own large-scale industrial practices to places unsuited to them. At the same time he sees no problem in offering his homespun antidote to "the Western disease" to the people suffering most from it. The Greens distinguish between "deep" and "shallow" ecology, and shallow as Schumacher's theory is, he succeeds in drowning himself in the depths of his misunderstanding. He wants "a life-style designed for permanence." (18) He wants permanent misery. Truisms explain every contradiction. In his sophistication he can support the division of labour because he believes it reduces the workload. (19) "Women, on the whole", he says, "do not need an outside job." (20) He is comfortable with capitalism, but does not realise that the capitalist wants women to work and that in capitalism women have no choice but to work. His confusion builds upon confusion: "to work is to make a sacrifice of one's leisure and comfort, and wages are a kind of compensation for the sacrifice." (21) He does not see that for the wage-labourer work is a matter of practicality.

On the question of technology Schumacher makes what may be regarded as his greatest contribution to the "scientific" Green approach in introducing the concept of Intermediate Technology. Before approaching this concept it is worthwhile to examine his grasp of technology as it stands. "Strange to say, technology, although of course the product of man, tends to develop by its own laws and principles." (22) The Machine is born into freedom. The Machine makes its own life as it makes what it chooses. This conception makes the mistake of seeing society and its tools as distinct entities. But belief in value-free technology falls in the same way as the value change by refusing to interrogate its situation. Schumacher recognises the tension between self-determination and technology, but fails to question why technology behaves as it does. He ignores the issues of technological control and the control of technology. He does not apprehend the immediate struggle between living labour and lifeless machines.

Intermediate Technology does not pretend to be revolutionary. The case for its implementation is advanced in terms of limitation within capitalism, an argument which presents a fountain of contradictions. (23) Schumacher backs a "mixed economy", a middle way between the poles of freedom and planning. People should not overstretch but should operate in accordance with their capabilities. These capabilities are limited. Enterprise should be small-scale as anything else compromises human dignity and real efficiency. Intermediate Technology is an exercise in modesty. It encourages the dual-personality of the self-checking entrepreneur. Here Schumacher is suspended between New Right veneration of market forces and what he sees as the need to limit the range within which these forces express themselves. Like Hayek he requires state intervention to bring the negative freedom he endorses. While decentralisation is vital to Schumacher's philosophy, some kind of central control is needed to "reinforce

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success and discriminate against failure."(24) He also asserts that "it is dangerous to mix business and politics."(25) Like the free market thinkers he sees profitability as the only criterion for accountability in the business circus. Through the preservation of creative freedom and responsibility in the modest business concern, the authority and efficiency of the centre is reinforced. Happy with his happiness, Schumacher goes abroad.

India is our focus for the potential application of Intermediate Technology in the Third World. Diving into history, Schumacher asserts: "The colonial power was primarily interested in supplies and profits, not in the development of the natives."(26) This is to insult the philanthropic agonies the colonialist had to experience. The development of the natives is of fundamental importance to the colonialist as he witnesses their metamorphosis into creators of surplus value. Intermediate Technology is to recognise the limitations of poverty. The capitalist long ago mastered this recognition.

Schumacher understands the alienation inherent in the capitalist production process when he advances "technology with a human face ... (which) reintegrates the human being, with his skilful hands and creative brain, into the productive process. It serves *production by the masses* instead of *mass production*."(27) This is a technology based on simplicity. But even without considering the questions of dimensions and the level of sophistication involved in Intermediate Technology, it is clear that the distance between Schumacher's utopia and its realisation is in reality. The solution to Third World poverty is "is to bring into existence millions of new workplaces in the rural areas and small towns."(28) This answer springs from confusion. The confusion dwells in the West. Schumacher broaches population and asks "why additional people cannot do additional work." He continues: "It is said that they cannot work because they lack 'capital'. But what is 'capital'? It is the product of human work. The lack of capital can explain the low level of productivity, but it cannot explain a lack of work opportunities."(29) The rage that jumps from this thinking screams at Schumacher, but he sees its raw force as a deficiency in education. He fails to see that the owner of capital is the owner of opportunity. The pioneer days are over. The unemployed live on subsistence level precisely to guard against the entrepreneurial spirit. They are dissuaded from gaining capital as a matter of social control. Were capital readily available, who would work for the capitalist?

The theory of Schumacher is essentially reclusive; he conceives of change in terms of existing structures, believing his ostrich philosophy can give enterprising dimensions to their intrinsic worth. The dwarf thinker never understands what it is he thinks he is transforming. His grasp of the world is reached by the "silent contemplation of reality."(30) Schumacher would be happiest in the self-congratulatory confinement of a prison full of Stoics. When he feels moved to consider real activity he shrinks back to his bourgeois shell. "Everywhere people ask: 'What can I actually *do*?' The answer is as simple as it is disconcerting: we can, each of us, work to put our own inner house in order."(31) Schumacher asks for nothing and gets nothing. In his cosmetic joy Schumacher embraces the world. "Freedom you all want, you want *freedom*. Why then do you higggle over a more or less? *Freedom* can only be the whole of freedom; a piece of freedom is not *freedom*." (32)

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Where is it going if it is coming from nowhere? While it is a mistake to equate Green theory with Schumacher, it is a mistake not to equate Green theory with Schumacher. He has the biggest name.

What is rejected is not the absence of a realistic route march from present to other present. That would be to dismantle gas chambers and reassemble them as funeral pyres. What is wanted is a lack of the absence of incision.

Things that can be questioned are many.

Do cigarettes support the National Health Service, or does the NHS support cigarettes?

Why do murals feature on tenements? Where is a mansion with a mural?

Schumacher offers salvation: "The teaching of the Buddha ... enjoins a reverent and non-violent attitude not only to all sentient beings but also, with great emphasis, to trees ... Much of the economic decay of south-east Asia (as for many other parts of the world) is undoubtedly due to a heedless and shameful neglect of trees." (33) The directive emerges meekly. Coffee tables are polished with environmental soundness.

## APPENDICES

### (1) Expense

Schumacher is obsessed with the destruction of luxury. "Only by a reduction of needs can one promote a genuine reduction in those tensions which are the ultimate cause of strife and war." (34) Who needs, and what controls the satisfaction of needs?

There are needs and there are luxuries. We all know "the fateful propensity that rejoices in the fact that 'what were luxuries to our fathers have become necessities for us'." (35) We also know that earthenware is expensive.

### (2) Obsequies

"If I have a car, a man-made thing, I might quite legitimately argue that the best way to use it is never to bother about maintenance and simply run it to ruin ... But if I have an animal - be it only a calf or a hen - a living, sentient, creature, am I allowed to treat it as nothing but a utility? Am I allowed to run it to ruin?" (36) Has Schumacher forgotten "respect for the dead", the dead labour in the commodity?

## Notes

- (1) Marx - pge 251 'Introduction to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right' in "Early Writings" (Pelican)
- (2) The "Alternative Careers Fair" was held by the Schumacher Society at Edinburgh University, February 24 1988
- (3) Comic Relief Day, February 5 1988
- (4) Marx - pge 654 "Capital" Vol. 1 (Pelican)
- (5) Schumacher - pge 11 "Small is Beautiful" (Anchor Press). Hereafter referred to as Schu. .
- (6) "But man is no abstract being squatting outside the world. Man is the world of man, state, society." pge 244 (See reference (1))
- (7) Horkheimer and Adorno - pge 251, of the essay on 'Man and Animal' in 'Notes and Drafts' to the "Dialectic of Enlightenment"
- (8) and (9) - Mark Smith of The Fall in "Melody Maker", March 5 1988
- (10) Marx - pge 166 "Capital" Vol. 1 (Pelican)
- (11) Nietzsche - pge 199 "'Twilight of the Idols' / 'The Antichrist'" (Penguin Classics)
- (12) Schu. pge 62

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- (13) Schu. pge 257
- (14) Schu. pge 148
- (15) Schu. pge 226
- (16) Schu. pge 227
- (17) Schu. pge 245
- (18) Schu. pge 17
- (19) Schu. pge 49
- (20) Schu. pge 51
- (21) Schu. pge 49
- (22) Schu. pge 136
- (23) The capitalist eats tomorrow's breakfast yesterday. Goldilocks is an impossibility.
- (24) Schu. pge 232
- (25) Schu. pge 251
- (26) Schu. pge 201
- (27) Schu. pge 148
- (28) Schu. pge 162
- (29) Schu. pge 160
- (30) Schu. pge 279
- (31) " "
- (32) Max Stirner - from 'The Ego and His Own'. pge 341 "The Young Hegelians" (Cambridge University Press)
- (33) Schu. pges 54 and 55
- (34) Schu. pge 79
- (35) Schu. pge 244
- (36) Schu. pge 98

Peter Martin  
NATIONAL STRIKE AT FORD-UK  
February 1988

11 February 1988

Dear F,

I know that you have an enduring interest in the continuing battles of Ford workers against the mighty Ford empire. I'm keeping a small diary of the present national strike, and since the diary is filed on computer disc it's no effort to send you the following. All in the spirit of internationalism and making links across national borders.

National Ford Strike - The Picket Line at Ford-Dagenham

Ford-UK is on strike. The picket line is now 4 days old. A hut has been bought for the top end of Kent Avenue. Somebody has provided a tent. There are no official union placards of any sort, no official slogans, no nothing. Fortunately local union members printed up 9 different posters on Tuesday night, and these are now doing the rounds: "Official Picket"; "Picket Line - Do Not Cross"; "TGWU 1/1107 Branch - Notoriously Militant and Proud of It!"; "No Strings!". That sort of thing.

There's a brazier and a constant supply of hot food and tea. Cars arrive every hour or so with loads of firewood - all thanks to the recent hurricanes... people's garden fences that have blown down etc.

What are the points of strength in this strike?

First that it is completely solid, nationwide. There was a hiccup with the Ford-Woolwich plant (which is scheduled for closure later in the year), but this was ironed out

Second, that the solidness of the strike has meant that the Ford plants in Europe have been hit hard and fast. Ford-Genk is already laying workers off, and other plants will follow. The recent period of social peace at Ford-UK has led Ford to set aside its earlier policies of dual-sourcing of components. Ford workers are impressed by this sense of their own strength: the strike action clearly is costing the Company a lot of money, and this strengthens the workers' case.

Third, that there is a tremendous sympathy for this strike among progressive people in the country as a whole. Links have been set up between striking Ford workers, and striking teachers, nurses and TV technicians. A Ford delegation took a collecting bucket to Central Hall Westminster and collected £492.00 in a single session. This is a very impressive figure. The newspaper coverage of the strike has been broadly sympathetic - the Ford workers are seen as slightly heroic, rather than (for once) as

wreckers of the national economy.

Fourth, that the trade union officials recommended acceptance of the Company's latest deal, and the workforce spontaneously threw out the recommendation. The gulf between the collaborationist leadership and the rank and file worker has been confirmed, and the fact that there is a strike at all is a tribute to the feeling on the shop floor. This is a remarkable fact. It is also the first national Ford strike in ten years... these things tend to go in ten year cycles, and so the cyclical pattern is confirmed. Incidentally, the Ford-Dagenham Assembly Plant, where many of the most militant comrades work, has revealed itself as the heart of the strike. If the strength is anywhere, it is here.

The weaknesses of the strike, though, are obvious.

First, there is no real leadership. Unlike ten or even five years ago, there is nobody among the convenors who can be trusted or respected. The strongest characters among a weak-spirited bunch are the convenor of the Bridgend plant, and he is a notoriously wild variable; and the convenor of the Dagenham Assembly Plant - who sometimes sways this way and that, and is probably only as good as the solid groundrock of militancy among workers in his plant. The rest of the Ford convenors wanted the Company's scabby deal to be accepted, and are doing everything to limit the spread and extension of this fight. There is much back-door negotiation and corridor confabulation going on, and this bodes ill. We have a mole who is able to inform us of the progress of talks at this level.

The news from Ford-Halewood is depressing. The local plant leadership is showing none of the militancy for which the plant was famed even five years ago. They are keeping picketing very strongly under control: only accredited shop stewards are being allowed to picket, and the Left groups are being sent away from the picket line. The branches are taking very little action in terms of propaganda, sending out fund-raising delegations etc. This, at least, is what we hear.

Apparently at the Convenors' meeting to discuss the latest Company offer, a vote was taken to reject the offer. The Transport Union official Mick Murphy insisted that the offer be put to ballot among the membership, now. Others insisted that a further vote be taken among the convenors present. The Communist Party members - Steve Hart, Airlie and one other - abstained from the vote. There are no minutes available of that meeting. There is no record of who voted for what. The Halewood convenors (it is rumoured) voted for the deal, but are now telling an angry membership that they voted against it. All this is going on behind closed doors. Fortunately, though, the news was leaked, and leaflets were put into the Dagenham plant, I believe by 1107 Branch. There was enormous anger - even among the traditionally right-wing Engine Plant stewards. Apparently Steve Hart was mobbed; rumour has it he was also assaulted in the car park; he



certainly does not dare show his face on the PTA picket these days.

Hart is playing an interesting role in limiting the extension of the dispute. The only way a strike like this can be won is by involving ordinary workers in the ordinary (and extraordinary) business of the picketing, on speaker-delegations etc. Hart is the local TGWU official. He is responsible for getting posters, badges, picket marshalls etc organised. Our comrades say he is doing none of this. More importantly, he is arguing that the Strike Committee be comprised only of the Dagenham Panel of local union officials and plants convenors. He has argued against the secretaries of local branches being allowed on the Strike Committee, or shop stewards and pickets being coopted onto it. This is scandalous. He also opposed holding regular shop stewards' and pickets' meetings - which had been held weekly in the 1978 strike.

However, he has blundered tactically. The 1107 Branch has decided to set up its own strike fund, which will give them a measure of independence from the national structures. They have paid for 10,000 solidarity badges to be printed, with the slogan: 1978-1988 TGWU 1/1107 Branch: Support the Ford Workers' Strike. They are moving towards setting up their own propaganda and publicity committee, which will have considerable power (especially since they have ready access to comrade printers). They are also planning to set up a delegations committee, which will send people round the country on fund-raising tours. This will also be a powerful tool, since those speakers will raise money for the strike fund. At the moment they will collect for the independent TGWU 1107 strike fund, rather than for the official fund. This is perfectly justifiable, on the grounds that the official Union machine is doing next to nothing.

For the moment, unfortunately, there is no force operating independently of the trade union branch structure. The militants in this strike are operating not as members of the independent Ford Workers' Combine, but as members of the Union machine. A strong and independent rank and file position simply does not operate - the political forces do not exist to carry it forward. It is possible that the Combine membership will begin to rally under the "Fraud" banner once the official union begins to put pressure on the local branches. For the moment, though, Ford Combine members are concerned to avoid becoming isolated. This means that for the first time the "Fraud" sign is not in evidence on the picket lines.

Some of us regret this disappear-into-the-union-ism. A proposal has been raised that the Combine does a leaflet exposing the local union leadership - Hart in particular - under the title of "Whose Strike Is It Anyway?" A further proposal was raised that the pickets should go and demonstrate outside the next meeting of the Dagenham Panel. It is also proposed that the Combine produces a strong and positive strike poster. We shall see how much of this happens.

I shall keep you posted. Perhaps in letter-form rather than diary-form.

Yours,

Peter.

17 February 1988

Dear F,

Ford has been on strike for 9 days now. 32,500 Ford workers are on strike. And the strike is solid, solid, solid.

The crux of the strike is: Ford wanted a 3-year deal - a guarantee of social peace for that period; Ford wanted to have skilled tradesmen working directly on the assembly lines - part of the general change-round of grading patterns that has followed massive automation; Ford wanted the introduction of Japanese-style "quality circles" as a means of undercutting (in fact destroying) the power of shop stewards in the factories.

They also wanted to introduce "temp" labour into their car factories, on short-term contracts.

All this is part of the pattern of "Japanisation" that has affected British car plants in the past 5 years.

The Union leadership negotiated some of the small print of the deal, but basically (in the spirit of the "new realism" that governs labour relations under Thatcher) they supported the deal. To be precise, they recommended it for acceptance. They made no effort to mobilise against the deal. Quite the contrary. They made every effort to stifle mobilisation.

Nothing new in all this, you might say.

But yes, there is something new. Under the Tory labour laws, the Company's final offer had to go to a ballot of all workers at Ford, their votes to be counted on a per capita basis rather than the (previous) plant by plant basis. When voting took place, the offer was rejected, and this led inexorably to nation-wide strike action, which was spearheaded (for the first time in a long time) by the comrades from the Assembly (PTA) Plant at Dagenham.

On the one hand, it is a novel fact that Dagenham has regained the leadership; the Bridgend (Wales) and Halewood (Liverpool) plants have been noticeably slow to move.

On the other hand, it is extraordinary that this (unanimous)

action by Ford workers nationwide has, within a very few days, had the effect of entirely crippling the production-levels of the Ford multinational in Europe. It has taken us only a few days to achieve what, in the 1978 strike, we had barely achieved after seven whole weeks.

The reason for this is that (under the guarantees provided by Thatcher's labour laws, compliant Union leaders etc), Ford had come to expect social peace in Britain. Indeed offensive rather than defensive struggles at Ford seemed to have become a thing of the past. As a result, Ford confidently abandoned the dual-sourcing policy which had been their buffer against labour struggles. They no longer maintain separate dual suppliers for component parts. Even more importantly, they operate the Japanese "Just-in-Time" policy, which means that stocks held in the factory are only sufficient for short period of production... stocks are shipped in on a regular and daily basis.

The effect has been that, as soon as Ford workers in Britain started their strike, Ford's multinational production in the rest of Europe was crippled because of shortage of supplies. The next effect is that Ford of Detroit have started screaming at Ford-UK, to settle the strike and get production moving again in Europe. And a further effect is that this strike is going to cost Ford a very large amount of money. On the one hand (obviously) they are losing sellable cars because of the strike, and their market share will decline; on the other, they are going to have to rethink entirely their strategic class-war planning in order once again to reduce their vulnerability to workers' action.

There is an extraordinary irony to all this. There is virtually no leadership in this strike; the level of organisation is pitiful; the strike is a case, pure and simple, of Ford workers saying "We won't be treated like dogs any more", and voting with their feet; they have gone home, and they are staying home; we have an early Spring this year, and I imagine that 32,500 Ford workers are digging their gardens and decorating their houses... they appear in no hurry at all to go back to work...; and yet, despite the lack of any political or trade union cohesion to these events, we are witnessing the strongest, most powerfully effective strike that Ford workers have had for almost two decades. The Ford Company is running, running scared, and it is exhilarating to see it. All of a sudden, the comrades are no longer talking about "not losing"; they are talking about "winning".

Last night one comrade was saying that there would be a terrible repression in the factories if the strike was lost. But it is almost as if the Ford workers cannot be defeated any more because they have already been ground into the soil and beaten down, and there's not much lower that they can go. It is almost as if the Company has no further sanctions against them. What seems to be happening in this strike is an almost pure confrontation of capital and labour in their rawest, most essential states.

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You would have enjoyed the scene last night. We met in the pub. We had a rank-and-file Ford Combine leaflet to print.

The comrades were having an argument in the corner about the relative merits of Stalinism and Albanian-style socialism. M's poodle was much admired by the Irish barmaid, which suited M. well because he was chatting her up. Another comrade was nodding dozily by the fire, catching some sleep during a respite from his picketing schedule.

We lashed the old press into some sort of working order, and it hummed and whirred most willingly. The typesetter fortunately purged the text of the Combine leaflet of some of its more antiquated political phrasings, and within a short while printed paper was tumbling into the Multi's feed tray.

There was a good feeling. It felt like the old days... the days when we used to win. The comrades (dog included) had not much to do, since it was by now well past midnight and the last buses had gone. So they went out scavenging. They returned with huge pieces of cardboard that they'd found outside a Bengali factory down the road. With the help of an aerosol spray and a few felt tips they set brains and hands to work.

I don't remember all the slogans. They were intended for use at the demonstration this morning, outside the Company-Union negotiations in Bayswater. One said: "Half-Time Score: Thatcher - 0, Ford Workers - 1". Another said: "We've Dented the Iron Lady - Now Make Ford Pay". Crude, but effective. And finally, at about two in the morning, we stumbled out into the night air, and home to bed for an hour or two.

The leaflets were thoroughly distributed on the picket line this morning. The placards almost didn't arrive, because somebody's car broke down. However, the political line of both the leaflet and the placards was approved, and they set the tone for the morning's demonstration.

More to the point, they also set the tone for the strike nationwide. I have just watched the seven o'clock news, and there they all were... photographed in glorious colour, and transmitting the message from Dagenham directly to Ford workers all over the country, in a way that would have taken a week of preparation and an army of leafleters to do by other means.

There is a simple lesson here: when the conditions are ripe, a simple intervention by comrades with a little imagination, albeit with the sorriest and most pitiful of physical resources, can achieve striking results.

Now, though, two hours later, the television news announces that a fresh deal has been agreed between Union and Company. The

Unions are calling lightning-quick mass meetings for this Thursday - the day after tomorrow. But our comrades are clear: the Company is on the run, and there is every reason to pursue them further; the strike must continue.

So tomorrow we oil up the press again, buy some more paper, and set those motors rolling.

On that happy note, I leave you. There is, however, a set of realisations that our comrades have gleaned from this strike. They want these realisations to be spread to workers all over the world:

1) The reduction of the labour force in the factories and the increasing automation has greatly increased the potential strike-power of those workers who remain.

2) The multinational organisation of factories was created in order to strengthen the hand of capital against labour; we are now in a phase where the reverse may be true.

3) Any worker, anywhere in the world, whose employer operates the Japanese "Just-in-Time" system should learn from the Ford strike. The lesson to be learnt is that the "Just-in-Time" system makes the employer enormously vulnerable to disruption, once social peace breaks down. Workers should use this understanding in order to build their power in this phase.

My best wishes to you and yours,

Peter.

19 February 1988

Dear F,

There was a strange atmosphere at the factory yesterday morning, the eleventh day of the strike. It was the morning of the plant-by-plant mass meetings that would vote on the Company's latest offer. The Union officials had recommended that the offer be accepted; local convenors and shop stewards committees throughout Britain had also recommended acceptance. The voices recommending rejection were pitifully few.

The most notable thing was that there was no leadership. I am convinced that if there had been a clarion clear call for Ford workers to stay out on strike, in order to combat one specified aspect of the Offer (for example the "productivity strings"), then they would have stayed out. However, this was not the case. I say this, not as the classic leftist's lament about "blame the

union leadership", but as a simple historical fact. The masses were there, strong, ready and willing for a fight (for at least another couple of weeks), but their generals gave them no tactical or strategic indications; the army therefore had nothing to fight for; so they voted to return to work. By a majority of something like 70%. The strike is over.

Undoubtedly the most interesting mass meetings will have been at Ford-Halewood (where the shop stewards recommended rejection, but the workers voted to accept, by 15,837 to 6,717) and the Dagenham Assembly plant. At the Dagenham plant, the meeting was very heated and lively, and this was the only plant to have voted by a majority to stay on strike. It is also the plant where most of our comrades work, and where the greatest propaganda effort was mobilised.

I enclose a copy of the Ford-Workers' Combine leaflet, which argues for rejecting the offer and staying on strike.

I also thought that you might appreciate the enclosed. A poster. It has a political line which is crude but precisely correct (and which applies just as much, now that the strike is over): "We've Got them by the Bollocks - Now Squeeze". Bollocks, in case you are wondering, are "coglioni". The slogan refers to the fact that the Company had been relying on a prolonged period of social peace, in order to operate with a minimum of stock-holding (the Japanese "Just-in-Time" notion); the strike has exposed their historical vulnerability to struggle at this moment in time. The photograph was taken at one of the demonstrations outside the Company/Union talks at Moscow (sic) Place, Bayswater; it was taken by an ex-Ford worker. The slogan was phoned through early one morning; "this is what the lads on the picket are saying". The artwork was done by a libertarian Marxist, and the negatives (by donated labour) by a comrade with Stalinist tendencies who works at what used to be an anarchist press. The printing was done by an anarcho-syndicalist comrade at another press cooperative, and so on, until the early hours of the morning. It was given away, as a leaflet, down the lines of traffic that queue at the rightward green filter traffic lights down the vile and disgusting A13 at Dagenham. It is a good poster. It rejoices in its Freudian symbolism - the bollocks, the squeeze, the scissors and the strings... Psycho-archivists of the labour movement would be interested to know that the Ford worker portrayed in the original photograph had tight jeans and prominent genitals. In the interests of decorum the genitalia were edited out of the picture. Decorous or not, however, the photo did not (needless to say) feature in this morning's newspapers!

Being communists, we are interested in quality as well as quantity. The voting figures are interesting as statistics, but we need to know more closely what they express. If I can, I shall write a further letter on the subject of the mass meeting at the Dagenham PTA. My own expectation is that this phase of tactical weakness on the part of the company will lead to an increase of

sporadic guerrilla (understood in the purely industrial sense) activity on the shop floor, and some small victories. Let's hope so.

By the way, to your knowledge, is there any truth in the story that, at some time in 1916, Lenin wrote a letter to his wife, in Switzerland, saying that he couldn't see much prospect for revolution, and could she look out for a nice little printing business in Switzerland?

With that thought, I leave you.

All for now,

Peter.

21 February 1988

Dear F,

The final letter of the quadrology.

There was a meeting of rank and file comrades from the Dagenham plant today, to discuss the outcome of the strike. They were in good humour. The outcome of the strike was, in a sense, a victory: the Company was forced to back down (although they will try to make up ground in the weaker plants).

The voting figures for the final ballot show that something like one third of Ford workers did not bother to vote. It is not clear whether these abstentionists would have been for or against continuing strike action. However, the abstention level is fairly high. It represents the way that workers feel powerless in the face of manoeuvring by the union leadership. At the Dagenham PTA, the vote to reject the offer was 57%, and about 1,400 workers were missing from the ballot.

The PTA voted to continue the strike partly because they have been in struggle since Christmas. They have lost about 5 weeks' money (compared with other plants losing 2), and they wanted results to make up for their sacrifice. They won one small victory - that victimisation charges that were pending, against the local plant leadership, have been dropped, upon agreement that some overtime be worked in the plant.

The foremen (as usual, piggybacking upon the struggles of the manual workers) were yesterday threatening strike action; Ford's plan to give supervisory authority to a wider stratum of the workforce (white collar and skilled workers) would mean job losses among the foremen. The foremen were at first threatening

to strike tomorrow, but have now backed off; it appears they have been offered more money, and they are easily bought.

The principal weakness of this strike is that it was so passive. We had the shittiest strike committee that has probably ever been seen at Dagenham - in fact it is rumoured that it never even met during the strike. Dagenham shop stewards were sitting at home while ordinary union members were carrying the brunt of the picketing. A lot of the newer, young people in the plant simply sat at home. They feel estranged from the Union, and there is no other political/organisational force that is capable of mobilising them. This is where rank and file forces like the Combine have failed. The union branches, incidentally, are in a crisis: attendance at union meetings (all over the country) is very low. Unless "the Union" as a social structure can renew itself, it risks disappearing. The Ford Company thought they understood this; it was for this reason that they pushed their "Japanisation" proposals, which are designed to undermine the traditional pattern of motor industry trade unionism. However, even though the Union is a mere cypher at Ford, the workers responded massively as trade union members during this strike.

There was no scabbing, and the picket lines were respected. Unlike many other employers in Thatcherite Britain, Ford themselves made no attempt to invite potential scab workers in to work. There is a reason for this. During a recent 24-hour strike, scabs were allowed to come and work in the plant. The next day there were 19 separate stoppages in the plant, in protest against the scabs. As a result Ford lost 2 days' production instead of one. This absence of scabbing is remarkable. In every dispute of the past 8 years at Dagenham we have had a scab problem. Not this time. Perhaps it was because the strike was national, and declared official. Perhaps it is the changing mood of things. This question of scabs is difficult. In the PTA there have been several instances of workers refusing to work with people who have scabbed. A face-saving formula is found, whereby the scabs are instructed to pay their wages, for they day they scabbed, to a charity. In fact they rarely pay it, and the comrades feel that the shop stewards should take stronger action against them.

Rank and file militants are nervous of identifying themselves publicly with autonomous, independent workers' groups such as the Combine ("The Fraud Squad", as it has been called in the media). They are not scared of the Company - they are scared of the Union. They could be charged (by the Union) with "bringing the Union into disrepute" and could be expelled. Things like this happen regularly in the Midlands motor industry. The result of this is that, with 32,500 Ford workers on strike, the possibilities of a mobilisation of workers around an autonomous class politics have been severely limited.

This makes it hard to draw the new layer of militants who have emerged during this strike, into the periphery of the Combine. We should be building and consolidating, but it is hard to expand beyond the old "historic group"...even though it is



certain that very many people in the plants agree with our political line, and identify with Combine positions. Somehow we shall have to break out of this limitation, which derives from the contradiction of people holding trade union positions, and at the same time trying to build an independent, non-affiliated, autonomous, revolutionary organisation of workers.

We all agree, however (and this is the lesson of the Wapping printers' strike) that the most important thing is to build the pickets. This lesson will be remembered in future. Valorise the picket line. Produce daily picket bulletins. Make songs. Posters. Organise flying-picket visits to other plants. Keep the pickets active, and make the picket feel that it has a corporate identity all its own.

The opportunity may arise for this again. It is proposed that Ford-Dagenham workers hold a 24-hour strike in support of the Health Workers, who are at present in dispute over wages, conditions and restructuring of the Health Service (the Tories are trying to destroy it and replace it with private, paid-for health care). This will probably be on 14th March.

It was truly remarkable to see the lengths that the Union officials were prepared to go to, in order to demobilise the strike. Bernie Passingham (ex-River Plant convenor, and present chair of TGWU 667 Branch) said that it was vital to keep as many people as possible AWAY from the plant during this strike. Therefore both the TGWU and the AEU local officials were planing to send out strikers' strike pay BY CHEQUE to their homes, in order to stop them coming to the factory to collect it. This is unprecedented, and is aimed solely at blocking possible points of mass aggregation. The Company did the same - sending out wage slips (featuring "nil" wages for "nil" work) to people's homes.

The Combine comrades are planning to put out a "Fraud News", to sum up the lessons of the strike. There will be many photos, and workers' comments and short articles. The line is that "now that the strike is over, the battle against the productivity strings must take place on the shop floor". Needless to say, I'll send a copy when it's done.

This letter has been a bit rushed, but I hope that it gives you an idea of what has been happening. Things are moving. Let us hope that they move even further.

All for now,

Peter

(The Ford Workers' Combine is an independent national organisation of rank and file Ford workers belonging to many different currents of the Left. It has been in existence since 1976, producing newspapers and leaflets on a national and a local basis. It plays a key role in advancing the interests of shop-floor workers, against the interests of Ford management and the trade union bureaucracy.)

The following is the final strike leaflet that was issued by the Ford Workers' Combine, summing up the outcome of the 1988 strike.)

\*\*\*\*\*

THEY'VE DROPPED FROM 3 TO 2 YEARS, BUT ALL THE STRINGS ARE THERE.  
WHY PICK UP THE PENNY WHEN WE CAN TAKE A POUND!

#### ON THE VERGE OF VICTORY

We're on the verge of a major victory. Ford-Europe is collapsing. The strike is strong. Workers are solid. We've dented the "Iron Lady", but Europe is beyond her rule. Ford HQ in Detroit are bashing "Herr" Hougham over his arrogant egg-head with their sacred golden spanner. The scrooge Yankee bosses are screaming "Get the profit machine rolling again..."

Despite one of the weakest and dirtiest negotiating teams ever, we've somehow stumbled onto the verge of victory. Ford have tripped themselves up with their Japanese tricks. "Just in Time" has become "Now is the Time" for the Ford strikers. NEVER have Ford workers in Britain been in a better position to press home the advantage.

#### CRAFTY TRICKSTERS

But the crafty tricksters of the Ford Motor Co. are not beaten yet. They've dropped the 3 years to 2 years up front, but dealing from the bottom of the pack, all the strings are still there. Only the wording has been shuffled around. LOOK AT ATTACHMENT 10 OF THIS LATEST OFFER. Words have been put in to let Murphy and the skilled officials off the hook. But TEMPS locally are there. TRADES "BY" production lines are there. GROUP LEADERS are there. QUALITY CIRCLES are there. SUPERVISION by any authorised staff is there. LABOUR POOLS and "no service on the job" is there. AND talks on the above to start within a month after "national agreement in principle".

AND look at the MONEY. About £8 each year after tax for a Grade 2. Once again Ford workers will be bottom of the automobile pay heap. PENSIONS miserly as before. HARMONISATION over 2 instead of 3 years, subject to agreeing the Company's needs, plus the cost to be met by further efficiencies. SHORTER WORKING TIME AND EXTRA HOLIDAYS - Nothing. And Foundry Terms for REDUNDANCY refused to be put in the Blue Book.

Remember our Claim? (16% WAGES, 10% on pay and extra 4% on

productivity allowance + extra 2% on line allowance). SHORTER WORKING TIME + EXTRA HOLIDAYS (Germany is getting 37 and a half hours plus holidays!) HARMONISATION (better pensions, sick etc, no second-class employees, end industrial apartheid). JOB SECURITY, including Foundry Terms in the Blue Book, a benchmark to build on.

#### A BIG VICTORY OR A LITTLE VICTORY?

So we've won one year off. That is an achievement, and publicly that's a victory. Privately Ford will be laughing. In 2 years time we'll get another rotten deal - but in 2 years we might not be in the strong position that we're in now. So why accept this CON when we're on the verge of a real victory?

Don't be tricked by Union officials who stood on their heads to recommend a half a per cent last time.

Stewards committees in the major plants in Liverpool, Wales and the PTA Dagenham are recommending "REJECT". Other committees have buckled under. Other workers in Britain, and around the world want us to win big. The knock-on effect will help them. Don't let them or ourselves down.

Don't sell yourself short now. The choice is yours. You are the real union. We pay the officials' wages. Now let the workers speak clearly. STAND FIRM AND STAY OUT TO WIN MORE. MAKE OUR VICTORY REAL. Why pick up the penny when we can take a pound? Now is the time!

NO GOING BACK WITHOUT OUR WHACK!

REJECT THE CON!  
REJECT THE TRICKS!  
REJECT THIS OFFER!

#### Advertisement

Join the TUC Rally on 5th March  
Defend the Health Service from Thatcher's Claws!  
Support the Nurses and Health Workers!  
\*\*\*25 Nurses joined the PTA picket line in Dagenham on Monday\*\*\*

Printed and published by the Ford Workers' Group ("The Combine"),  
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(This is a poem that was written for the 1988 Ford Strike by a comrade from the Ford-Dagenham plant. The fight goes on.)

WE WERE, WE ARE, WE EVER SHALL BE

The year is nineteen eighty eight, written on a page in history,  
For again we take the bosses on, in the cause of workers' victory,  
A victory that marks the road to our ultimate hour,  
We were, we are, we will ever be the power.

The power of industrial workers, oft betrayed, but never beaten,  
To take this winter palace where tycoons and tsars have eaten,  
Eaten from those silver plates, with their pockets full and swollen,  
Swollen by their wealth untold, from our pay packets it was stolen.

We are production workers, by day and night we man the lines,  
Building cars one by one, but oppression all the time.  
But time is both an enemy and a friend to us alike,  
Time stores up profit's dam, and this year we breach the dyke.

We have breached that dam before and again to breach it now,  
The question's when - We know full well the why and how.  
Then from that dam will profits flow, though its walls be strong and tall;  
Let workers unite in a workers' fight, this is our battle call.

For the bosses give us promises of maybe this and that,  
All year long they live like kings, yet on the workers they have spat.  
So to our enemies in Britain and in the USA,  
We tell you this, we will win this year, the rich will have to pay.

Hear the battle call, Ford workers, it means the gauntlet's downed,  
Now step aside, faint-hearted ones, let the fighters take the ground,  
As fighters once did in Russia, then in Cuba's treasured land,  
We only fight with Union cards, they fought with guns in hand.

To rise and fight for workers' rights can never count as crimes,  
Our bosses count in bars of gold, then throw us cents and dimes;  
Thus here, on the picket line, just to pay our bills and live,  
We tell Detroit and their Tory friends, we will take what you will not give.

And when this fight is ended in a workers' victory coloured bright,  
The bosses with their allies will sink back out of sight,  
Out of sight of all those bravest, their memory long remains,  
Though they be slaves of capital, they arose to break their chains...

B.P.

January 1988

(A Note for Readers of "Common Sense": Newspapers and publications of the Ford Workers' Combine can be obtained from: The Secretary, Ford Workers' Combine, c/o 634 Green Lanes, Ilford, Essex. Send a stamped A4 envelope and a donation.)

Note - Although the particular events dealt with in the following commentaries may appear to be somewhat dated - as well as different and thus separate - from the standpoint which regards events in the same light as any other material, to be quickly dressed up and put out for immediate unabashed consumption, the issues, of which these particulars are mere indices, or perhaps more properly, symptoms, are very much alive, related, unresolved and therefore worthy of consideration - even post festum. These few poor particulars are, as it were, thoroughly infected with universality, just as this universality suffers, at times seemingly terminal, infection from the particulars.

BT ROBERT MAHONEY

## On Civility & Terror

### I

I remember once listening to a man, a teacher, tell of a nation built upon the ancient and noble ideal of stoicism. What an admirable people were these men and women, a people who might endure the worst hardship without complaint, indeed, in dignified silence. And for the sake of what? Civility.

Certainly history appears most often as a record of blood and deceit and Britain's is no exception. But if history is to prove other than a dead testimony of fact to man's irrationality then must it not be animated by such a principle?

So I thought. And when British Foreign Office minister David Mellor outraged his hosts in Israel by not being discreet in the face of an "affront to civilized values" it seemed as if such a principle, archaic though it may be, might still spark life in an all too sanitary but as yet uncivilized present. However, in light of the past few months, particularly the Gibraltar shooting and its aftermath, perhaps certain difficult questions need to be asked of Britain where to be suspect is obviously enough to be presumed guilty before guilt has been proven; where the presumption of guilt is enough for one to be summarily executed in public;

where the government leadership, both official and opposition meets all substantial enquiry and criticism with self-righteous contempt, as if life were strictly a matter of 'for or against'; and where to be against is tantamount to complicity with those forces allegedly threatening its existence. Such contempt, however, reveals but one thing - an unseemly fear of freedom and truth.

Is this civility?

What was revealed in Israel is a philistine barbarism, the consequence of a fear of man's irrationality and a contempt for history's claim to be rational.

Revealed in Britain, however, is a sinister barbarism, one as willing to shed blood in its interest as any of the forces perceived to threaten it or at which it feigns revulsion; one which on one day knowingly lies to the world in order to cover up an error of judgement, and on the next, rather than rectify the error, subtly rationalizes, in its noblest house, a violent pre-emption of justice - the very heart of civility - on the utilitarian grounds of speculation and deterrence, and all to the overwhelming din of "Here, Here!"

Although terrifying enough in itself, it has since proved an expedient which contained the germ of ever increasing consequences, so that now the impulse of suspicion seems to rule absolute over the course of events, rendering security indistinguishable from insecurity.

Surely then it would appear that Britain still has her stoics, if stoicism is simply taken to mean indifference; indifference, however, not to hardship in the cause of principle, but merely indifference to principles whose cause may appear to mean hardship.

8 March 1988

"Whereof one cannot speak,  
thereof one must be silent"\*

"Never Forget!" "Never Again!" How often have Israel's public lamentations and recriminations reminded the world of its alleged silence, intentional blindness and consequent complicity regarding the ghettos, deportations and exterminations during the last war? As if the world should constantly be reproached for forgetting before it has forgotten. As if Israel's certainty of the world's secret desire to forget legitimates putting herself above reproach from the rest of the world. Although these specific cries have yet to be uttered during the present episode, Israel is again "outraged" and the bitter memory of her people's horrible war experience always lurks close beneath the surface of her indignation and her words.

Israel has been outraged in particular by British Foreign Office minister, David Mellor's and in general the international community's "public" condemnation of both the appalling conditions in the Palestinian refugee camps of the occupied territories, conditions sustained at the very least by the quiescence of the occupying power, Israel, and the brutal suppression of the riots by that so called power. Her attitude was best figured in the words of Israeli Labour MP, Simcha Dinitz: "If there are wrongdoings by the Israeli authorities we do not require the advice of a visitor." Or as it was put somewhat more politely by Dr. Belzar, aide to Prime Minister Shamir and the host who cancelled Mr. Mellor's official send-off luncheon: "Mr. Mellor has not acted as a guest should act." (ITV)

How then, one certainly wonders, 'should' a guest act? Does civility oblige silence when confronted with barbarity, discretion in the face of an "affront to civilized values" even under the roof of one's host? No doubt a dubious indiscretion on the part of Mr. Mellor.

Indeed, whether or not Mr. Mellor committed his indiscretion under the roof of his host is itself a dubious matter, even for the Israelis. On the one hand, Prime Minister Shamir writes to President Mubarak renouncing responsibility for conditions in the occupied territories in order to reassure Egypt of Israel's integrity: "If someone is at fault for the conditions in the refugee camps it is not our fault" (BBC), meaning the occupying power is powerless to do anything but maintain the status quo --misery. The Israelis claim they are prevented from aiding the inhabitants of the camps because the P.L.O. has the population so thoroughly "terrorized" that they outrightly refuse succour from the Israelis, and, according to Defense Minister Rabin, the P.L.O. is also responsible for "instigating" the riots by "forcing kids to demonstrate." (Time)

Just who is the occupying power? Is the P.L.O. so powerful as to compel the mass of inhabitants in the territories to live in misery and face the Israeli army in open defiance as well? If so, how has the P.L.O. grown so powerful under the occupying power, unless, of course, they serve some real need of the population? The question has arisen in the British media (ITV) as to whether the Israelis turned a blind eye, as it were, to P.L.O. activity in the territories because it was economically convenient. The P.L.O. has provided an informal support network for a large portion of the population, in particular the families of P.L.O. members. This responsibility would otherwise need to have been assumed entirely by Israel. At the same time Israel has been able to draw on the populations of the West Bank and Gaza thousands of low wage workers without having to provide a standard level of social welfare. (Guardian) The case for such a strategy of advantageous neglect and informal tolerance is not weakened by either military or ideological considerations. A continued P.L.O. presence in the occupied territories



serves a number of useful purposes. As well as economic utility, the P.L.O. presence provides the Israeli government with a substantial strategic rationalization for continued occupation of the territories. Also, as Prime Minister Shamir and Defense Minister Rabin seem intent on demonstrating, in the case of actual Palestinian social unrest in the territories the P.L.O. serve as convenient scapegoat for the government, which can console itself (as well as assure onlookers) with its good intentions towards a needy but recalcitrant population. Thus one can see how Israel may have fallen into a policy of "acceptable containment" --the tactical blind eye of states. It is little wonder then that a Newsweek article (1/11/88) reported: "One senior [Israeli] official concluded approvingly that 'the indefinite maintenance of the status quo [in the occupied territories] is even more possible than before'."

Does such egoism constitute a legitimate claim to occupy a territory and take offense at "the advice of a visitor"?

On the other hand, when pressed on such questions the Israelis fall back on the exclusivity of self-certainty. "We thank them for their advice," says Prime Minister Shamir, "but we shall act according to our own understanding." (Newsweek) "Why should we sit down with an international conference," Dr. Belzar ironically asks. (ITV) The implication being quite simply, 'mind your business, what do you know!' And indeed what does the rest of the world know, especially when it comes to the mire of Middle East politics? As the Israeli ambassador to Great Britain said in a television interview: "There is a different kind of a logic at work in the Middle East." (BBC)

What kind of logic?

Obviously it is a logic in which the Geneva Convention has little or no significance. Article 49, prohibiting the deportation of individuals or groups of citizens from occupied territory, is specifically aimed at the principle of deportation, a principle the consequences of which have been many of modern history's most shameful and intractable disasters, a history of which the Israelis need no reminding. Yet regarding the immanent threat of deportation against the rioters Dr. Belzar claims: "There is no deportation ...We are deporting 9 out of 1 million ...What is wrong with that?" (ITV) --a rhetorical question for both Dr. Belzar and the Israeli government since they already possess the answer. "Deportation," says Rabin, "is part of our system." (Time) Being that roughly 2,500 Palestinians have been deported by Israel since 1967 (Time), their answer bespeaks a logic incapable of distinguishing principles save in the vulgar forms of utility and quantity, and which judges in its local courts that its particular laws supersede international law, thus rendering universality a farce and occupied territory private property. "We will continue the arrests, punishments and deportations," answers Rabin to the international community. (Newsweek)

It is a logic that decries the criticism and advice of others because it assumes that no insight is greater than its own, that the "complexity and uniqueness" of its own condition is comprehensible only to itself. Yet in the same breath it delights in pointing out the same historical sins of those offering their criticism and advice. "I enjoyed," said Rabin, "reminding the BBC that the laws in force in the territories today are the laws the British left us," (Time) thus negating all claims to an exclusivity of insight

and unique experience.

It is a logic which then immediately forgets. It claims: "Whoever is willing to live in peace is welcome to live with us." (Belzar, ITV) Yet it cannot remember that violence and terror do not emerge from a vacuum, or that a population cannot be so successfully agitated by a "few" unless there are fertile conditions and real frustration. It cannot remember that real frustration over time drives rational beings to violence, because misery, degradation, ignorance and domination do not constitute appropriate conditions for life, let alone peace in occupied territory or anywhere else in the world. So it is a logic which refuses to negotiate with the rioters until they acquiesce, nor negotiate with the P.L.O. ever. Why? Because to do so affirms violence and terror and consequently creates "vulnerability." "Israel will not negotiate with terrorists," she says deducing that this shall make her invulnerable. Yet her logic affirms terrorism by according former terrorists, namely her last and her present prime minister (who was himself deported under the British mandate) positions of the highest prestige and power. So this logic recognizes and preserves its own need to have fought in order to engender itself, but recognizes no other's need.

Perhaps worst of all, Israel's logic reveals the assumption that history provides a just mandate for, as Defense Minister Rabin put it, "using any means necessary" (BBC) to secure one's interest, revealing only an utter contempt for history. "Had he [Mr. Mellor] studied the history of the British involvement in the territory," said Mr. Rabin, "he would not have been so talkative." (BBC) Israel condemns the world for its one time silence, now she bids the world be silent.

At a glance Israel seems to have become the grotesque caricature of both the inherent egoism and egotism of our age. A reading of her logic certainly indicates a state begotten of the insecurity of man's irrationality, a state which reasons that its only hope of security depends on its becoming a successful embodiment of that irrationality. To say that the logic in the Middle East differs from that of the rest of the world is to lay down the premise of the potentially cataclysmic deduction. The distinction between 'I' and 'them' is the first crucial step in the idealization of oneself and the reduction of those who disagree to something other, eventually to something less than 'I', then to something less than human, until one has created a realm in which the use of "any means" to ensure the consistency of one's logic becomes sensible and above all "necessary." Who needs reminding of the consequences of such reasoning? Who has forgotten?

No one has forgotten. In order to forget one must first have learned. It would seem that the only thing both Israel and the world have learned is what Hitler's Germany lacked --subtlety. The world has learned to deceive itself publicly. Rather than the ghetto we have the apparently less purposeful refugee camp, and various other forms of geographical segregation all over the world. Deportation, which continually sprouts anew worldwide, has in fact been made part of the "system," and extermination has been diffused into more utilitarian forms of terror and/or state power.

None can deny, of course, that there is a certain truth in Israel's position, just as there are grains of truth in the reproachments going back and forth. But partial truths constitute the worst falsity, namely hypocrisy, and denials of responsibility are the most damning self-incriminations. We all see with crystalline clarity the sins of our neighbors while remaining

blind to our own. Israel is not the pariah state that she seems to be cast and is offended at being cast. For the world at the moment she has merely become the less distorted image of its own egotism. Her underlying logic is the world's logic and vice versa, and what that logic seems to be muttering beneath the din is this: "My propositions are elucidative in this way: he who understands me finally recognizes them as senseless, when he has climbed out through them, on them, over them." (Ludwig Wittgenstein)

For Israel, after the debacle in the Lebanese camps and what now seems to be her course in the handling of the occupied territories, never again will she have a claim to a chosen status among peoples, states, or in history. She has proved as capable and guilty of inhumanity as the rest to more or less varying degrees. Realists in Israel (as well, surely, as out) believe that it is absurd to think that the Jewish people were charged by history, particularly by their historical experience in the last war, to create a state more human, more rational, than any other state in the world. Given the way things are in the world, given Israel's placement in the Middle East, there is one ultimate rule --survival. It is a fact. It is necessary. It simply is. There is only one response to such a position. Welcome to the fold.

8 January 1988



George Davie

ON COMMON SENSE

Editorial note: What follows is a reply to Richard Gunn's 'George Davie: Common Sense, Hegelianism and Critique' published in Cencrastus No. 27 (Autumn 1987). In the course of reviewing George Davie's The Crisis of the Democratic Intellect (Polygon 1986), Gunn questioned Davie's linking of common sense philosophy to 'secular Calvinism' and asked whether it might not equally be seen as flowing into 'the revolutionary scenarios of apocalyptic redemption articulated in different ways by Hegel and Marx'. Here, Davie states the case for the 'secular Calvinist' filiation. An extended version of this reply will appear in a future issue of Common Sense.

The common sense trio of Hume, Smith and Reid - in spite of obvious disagreements - do indeed put forward ideas about our knowledge of our own minds, and of one another's, which approximate to those in Hegel and Marx. (Actually, it is in Schelling that we find an epistemology which bears traces of direct knowledge of Scottish work. He uses the mirror analogy in his account of self-consciousness in much the same way as Adam Smith.) The main difference between the Germans and the Scots is that the former quickly run through, or (Schelling) explicitly omit, the problem of knowledge via the sensory modalities - sight, touch, hearing - to which the Scots between them devote (if you include the minor men) thousands of pages. But that is incidental and does not affect the substantial

identity of common sense doctrine of our knowledge of mind with that put forward by Hegel, Marx, etc. Their common point is that they get round the conundrums of our knowledge of other minds which give Wittgenstein, Ryle, etc. so much trouble because of the behaviouristic presuppositions of the twentieth century.

To come now to the main point: which is this. While common sense philosophers coincide with Hegel & Co. as to our knowledge of mind and of one another, the common sense doctrine of our knowledge of body coincides not with Hegel and Marx, but with Kant and his things-in-themselves - roughly speaking. The point emerges clearly in what Hegel says in his nature-philosophy about the doctrine of latent heat put forward by Joseph Black, a great friend of Adam Smith and also of Reid (the latter writing in a letter to an Aberdeen friend a first-hand account of the latent heat discovery). At the time, Black's doctrine was challenged by a Glasgow colleague, Irvine, on the ground that latent heat is an unscientific, metaphysical idea since, if it means anything, it is heat which cannot be sensibly perceived! The dispute between Black and Irvine was so to speak headline news among the scientific community. Hegel (who read everything), commenting on these issues, comes down on Irvine's side. Hegel, then, seems to be positivistic about our knowledge of body, and Marx too has, I have the impression, similar views to Hegel. At least there is the passage in Engels (in Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy) where he says that the ability of chemists to reconstitute a natural substance artificially, effectively demolishes the Kantian ideas of things-in themselves.

The classic reply of common sense to these criticisms of the ding-an-sich is found in a distinction clearly presupposed in Adam Smith's essay on the history of astronomy and made very explicit in Francis Jeffrey's argument with Dugald Stewart as to the nature of science and its difference from mere speculation. The distinction is not Kantian, but connects with common sense. It is the distinction between observation and experiment. There are bodies which one can see, and tactilely manipulate for experimental purposes, with a view to being able to predict and control their behaviour - physically control - in the service of man. There are also bodies or bits of

nature which one can observe but cannot manipulate, or bring under control or reproduce for manufacture, because they are out of reach. Chemistry (i.e. in Engels' sense) is an example of the first sort of science. Astronomy is an example of the second, which, in consequence, is not a science: the fragmentary data of sense can be organised only speculatively in the light of analogies with the behaviour of familiar things. Physics is still more problematic. How is one to decide between Newton's corpuscular theory of light and the wave theory of Huygens, Adam Smith asks. He plumps for Newton, because the corpuscular analogy explains better the empirical data of light, then available, but admits that the wave theory is not thereby refuted.

I have said enough, and will not speak about Reid. But I ought to mention that what made the problems important in Scottish philosophy and science is the question of the relations of heat to light and to electricity which was the centre of research from the late eighteenth to the middle of the nineteenth century - the breakthrough in regard to heat, and to electricity, actually being achieved in Scotland itself. Exemplified in Clerk Maxwell's physics, these common sense distinctions between observation and experiment (see Ivan Tolstoy's book on Clerk Maxwell, Canongate Press) went out of fashion with the new physics but were never forgotten - especially by Einstein himself - and could stage a comeback.

These remarks will, I hope, show why the tradition of common sense philosophy finds some sort of Calvinism more congenial than the apocalyptic (Lutheran?) view. The mastery of nature can be achieved only to a limited extent, because the things-in-themselves - the parts of nature which elude our fragmentary observations - keep springing surprises, some of them very unpleasant.





## NOTES ON MEDIATION-ANALYSIS

Kosmas Psychopedis

In this paper I discuss some problems raised by the mediation-analysis (MA) in Common Sense.(1) I share which the MA many theoretical views, especially the critique of structuralism but also the commitment to elements of a 'derivationist' standpoint.(2) Nonetheless I should like to present some critical points which, as I believe, differentiate my understanding of the mediation problem from that of the MA.

### I. The constitution of appearance as a methodological problem

According to the MA, appearance is not a 'veil' covering essential relationships but rather activity, the mode of existence of essence.(3) (R Gunn refers to the Hegelian dictum: 'The essence must appear'.) By putting the appearance-problem in this way the MA attempts to avoid a substantialist approach to essence and to underline the praxis-dimension of everyday life. Yet the MA is still confronted with the problem of grasping the 'real metaphysics' of bourgeois societies, i.e., the exploitation and valorization processes which do not appear as such but which are mediated through contractual forms, economic atomisation, etc. As I argued in my paper on dialectics,(4) in Hegelian dialectics 'essence' cannot be thematized independently of the categorial analysis of appearances and it can be grounded only through the medium of appearances. In this sense the argument of the MA could be, to an extent, valid for Hegelian dialectics. Yet, in opposition to this methodological approach, Marxian dialectics deals with societal 'essential relations' as a methodological object which can be described independently of the appearances and which is presupposed by the explanation of appearances.

This means that, for Marxism, the 'essential' is constructed by abstracting from the forms of appearance. The nature of this abstraction is not to be understood in a structuralist sense. (The structuralist sense leads to an acceptance of 'two ontologies', one for the essential level of abstraction and one for the level of appearances.) Nor is it to be understood in the manner of a

scientistic approach, which sees in abstraction an empiricist investigation of laws by means of 'retroductive method'.(5) Instead, I would argue that emphasis must be given to the idea that, through abstraction, there can be established a qualitatively new knowledge of social reality, a knowledge which reveals essential relationships that do not appear as such at the empiricist level of appearances. Such an abstraction is the precondition for a reconstruction of appearances, as complex phenomena which are mediated with the essential relationships of capitalist societies. As long as this reconstruction has not taken place social relationships do not appear as what they are; rather, they appear in the ideological and fetishized forms which are typical of the forms of consciousness, and interaction, of the actors in the (capitalist) societies concerned. From these forms of interaction and of empirical consciousness there is no possibility of reconstructing, theoretically, the conceptual framework of the essential social relationships. Thus, a theory of appearance has to be completed through a theory of the process of social reflection and of the practical possibilities of associating apparent contradictory relationships with the essential contradictory relationships of the mode of production.

## II. Mediation, form, content

I now consider the conception of 'form' in dialectical theory as it has been discussed by the MA. It appears that a plurality of categories or forms (e.g. the value-form, the money-form, the wage-form, the state-form)(6) are to be seen as 'mediations' - as 'modes of existence' or appearances - of the capital-labour relation. Here we miss the differences between mediation, form, appearance, etc., and we are confronted with a polarity: from the one side the plurality of unstructured 'forms', the relationship between which is not explicated, and from the other side a privileged 'content' which mediates itself in the forms. The MA seems, here, not to take into consideration that the capital-labour relation is also 'form' no less than it is content (namely it is the form par excellence of the mode of production) and that the mediating forms reflect, also, its abstract formal characteristics. The dialectical exposition of categories does not allow a polar opposition of content and forms, but on the contrary clarifies the nature of the content by specifying the essential form of the 'specifically capitalist mode of production': it specifies this form as a contradictory relation between classes in capitalism, a relation which can be analysed in terms of the reproduction of the whole society, of the relationships of value-exchange between sectors of production according to production prices, and so on. In the formal development of categories a crucial significance attaches to categories like production prices, which are abstracted from abstraction levels, i.e., which are synthetically constructed in order to mediate the analytical level of values with the analytical level of prices and to constitute a methodological framework for the analysis of production processes between production sectors.

The interpretation of Marxian content-form analysis just outlined opposes itself to a reading of Marxian theory (a reading seemingly adopted, in part, by the MA) which sees in the forms of

exposition, promptly, mediations of 'struggle' and which equates 'struggle' with 'revolutionary subjectivity' as the core idea of Marx's work. It is in a way correct to argue that economic, social and political phenomena have to be seen as objects and results of struggle and that the contradictory relationships of class struggle reproduce themselves in the apparent societal forms. But it is not correct to reduce the idea of essential relationships in Marxian critique to the idea of struggle, and hence to separate it from the conceptual framework of the valorization process in which struggles take their shape in bourgeois societies.

### III. Theory of value and the concept of struggle

Marx develops the idea of struggle in Capital in the context of the theory of value and in opposition to his earlier spontaneistic conception (i.e. in The Poverty of Philosophy). The conceptual approach of value-theory already realises a militant, partisan position: the concept of value as a product of capital can only be formed at a level of abstraction presupposing the idea of society as a totality of labour forces engaged in objectification in the social production process. This holistic approach, identifying social reproduction of values with social labour, constitutes society out of the idea of labour-activity and hence of labour-class activity. But there is always a tension between the idea of objectified labour in values and the idea of labour-class activity. Valorization means that individual labour is involved in the process of the social division of labour and is formed and expended, in it, as an element for the production of social surplus value. So the very core of the valorization process presupposes the enforced relation between labour and capital; it presupposes coexistence of labour with the capital-owned means of production (themselves the product of objectified past labour), discipline in the factory, etc.

This idea of struggle as immanent in the very constitution of the labour theory of value finds, by means of value-theory, its expression in the analysis of social relationships and political institutions in historical societies. It also finds expression in the analysis of real social struggles, i.e., the struggles of the working class for conditions of labour, for wages and the regulation of the working day, and the struggles of the reserve army to find and secure employment - and so on.

Methodologically, the concrete outcome of the empirical struggles in historical societies does not affect the central argument of value-theory concerning the constitution of value as a result of class relationships and class antagonism. On the other hand, the methodical exposition of categories does not allow us to deduce directly, starting from the antagonistic element in value-theory, an emphatic idea of 'praxis as necessity (the 'actual' and 'alive' politics of spontaneism). The practical idea resulting from value-theory-analysis consists in the possibility of emancipatory praxis; this possibility turns on the generating of 'local' contradictions to the essential issue of the constitution of society as a class society. The reality of society as analysed by Marx consists in the social process which leads labour, reluctantly but constantly, to the means of

production and thus reproduces society as a class society and the social process as value. This process is the process of the reproduction of the system of the division of labour in the form of value production and within the historical limits of the mode of production. As such, it is the reproduction of the totality of human activity and struggles. This process of essential social relations cannot be artificially separated out as, simply, an 'essential' element consisting in 'struggle' and its 'mediating' forms. (This is what the MA appears to attempt.(7)) Analysis premised on such a separation would abstract from the categorial framework which expresses the historical conditions of struggle. It would disregard the nature of the 'essential' element in society as an historical relation of production and the division of labour; it would disregard it as an historical (material) form of contradictory human co-operation - a capitalist form - in which social struggles are constituted. An 'existential' moment of struggle would be elevated to the level of the essential (thus separating it from its preconditions) so that, albeit unwillingly, the analysis would move into the dangerous neighbourhood of anarcho-syndicalist, and also Carl Schmittian, conceptions of struggle as an essential element of social life.

#### IV. Mediation and the historicity of categories

In respect of the analysis of the historicity of categories and of its relation to the problem of abstraction, we have to take into account a specific critique of historical relativism formulated by Marx.

This critique can be traced by considering how, according to Marx, capital can incorporate precapitalist elements in its 'logic' and reform them according to its own mediations. Stating that it does so without showing the specific mediation process of the 'traditional' in the 'modern' would lead to a functionalistic understanding of the mediation concept as a mode of 'integration' of diversity. Paradigmatic for a non-functionalist approach to the problem of reforming traditional contents on the basis of capitalist relations is the Marxian analysis of ground-rent, a concept which presupposes the notion of capital and the reproduction schemes in a capitalist society (even although ground-rent had been historically developed as a category referring to phenomena which existed before the emergence of capitalist relations).

Marx's critique of historicism is also implicit in the analysis of the abstract character of categories such as 'labour' in the Grundrisse. According to this analysis the point of the mediation of the abstract and the concrete does not consist in showing that the 'common traits' and common characteristics of all epochs have to be mediated in an historically specific society, thus becoming the 'mode of existence' of that society.(8) By restricting itself to this operation, analysis would coincide with the historicist analysis which analyses types of combinations of abstract modes in historical-social constellations. In contrast-distinction to this approach, the point of the mediation of abstract and concrete is to show that the abstract category of labour presupposes capitalist society (i.e. the abstract element

in the notion of labour presupposes the real abstraction of labour sans phrase in this society). The further point is to show that historical analysis of precapitalist categories presuppose the notion of 'abstract labour' - Human anatomy contains a key to the anatomy of the ape'(9) - so that, consequently, the construction of the categories applying to 'all societies' is affected by the mode in which we conceptualise our own contradictory relationships. That is, it is mediated through a concept of essential relationships in contemporary (i.e. capitalist) society.

#### V. Demediation, immediacy, spontaneism

The points briefly discussed above allow us to grasp theoretically the relationship between the real mediating processes in capitalist societies and the possibility of transcending ('demediating') these processes. Mediation processes must be analysed with reference to the division of labour and the valorisation and devalorisation process; so we have to conceptualise the demediation process also as a problem of remediation, a process which deals with new forms of the division of labour and develops new forms of critique. In this sense, as the MA correctly stresses, there is no 'authentic immediacy' under mediation's shell.(10)

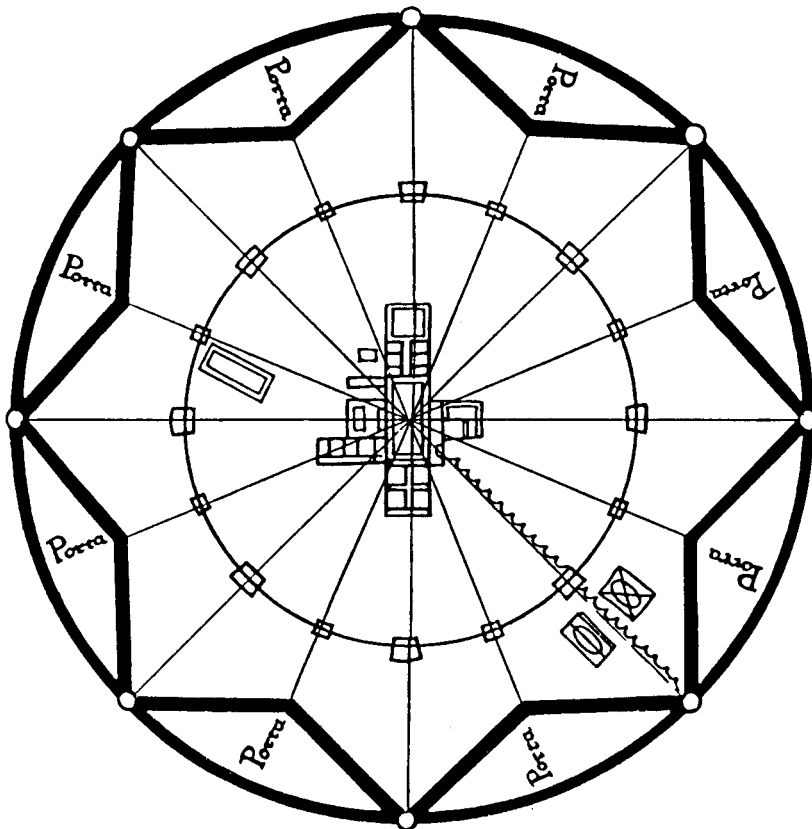
What really lies under mediation's shell, however, is not an Hegelian 'turn into nothin' but rather the essential forms of the social labour process, i.e., the forms of the material production process of society. The totality of the social mediations is not organised as a functionalist whole allowing smooth transitions from the one mediation-form to the other; on the contrary it is an historically determined whole of social relationships referring to the social division of labour and the material reproduction process. We have to analyse these relationships as praxis, although not, in the manner of Luxemburg and Lukács,(11), as oriented to an historical goal totally outside of existing society (as spontaneist theory suggests). Praxis refers to the reality of existing society. It derives its legitimation, as the theoretical tradition deriving from Adam Smith and Hegel has stressed, from the co-operative character of the labour process and it proposes, in the tradition of Marx, to overcome the existing form of historical co-operation (i.e. the alienated division of labour which is established through class antagonism, private property and the market economy). The practical 'value' which is confronted with the alienated valorization process is based on the idea of co-operative and solidary human activity. Thus praxis refers, by demediating alienated social forms, to the given historical level of social organisation, to the division of labour and to social struggles in society, considering in these real social relationships the possibility of transcending alienated structures and of realizing solidary and co-operative forms of life.

This reference to social reality and to the social division of labour as mediations of practical activity leads us to a differentiated understanding of the nature of socialist and solidary values. These latter are abstract practical ideas of social co-operation and solidarity, not 'lived generic essences' ('Gattungswesen').(12) Hence their becoming-concrete cannot be thought of as a condition of immediate 'mutually recognitive' relations, as the MA seems to suggest,(13) but has to be analysed as an already-mediated process of realising human solidarity in the contradictory reality of the real process of reproduction and domination (both in bourgeois and post-bourgeois societies). Thus, the practical idea of spontaneous and solidary social activity has always - even in the most 'socialist' form of society - to be mediated with a political idea: the idea of possible mobilisation and activity in order to render impossible threats against the solidary organisation of social life, against attempts to privatize social resources etc.. In this sense the idea of 'recognition without alienation' is an abstract limit-value, which has to be completed with corresponding political values allowing for defensive actions when violation of social activities takes place.

#### Notes

1. Richard Gunn 'Marxism and Mediation' Common Sense No. 2 (1987); Werner Bonefeld 'Marxism and the Concept of Mediation' Common Sense No. 2 (1987)
2. On 'derivation', see J. Holloway and S. Picciotto (eds.) 'State and Capital: A Marxist Debate' Edward Arnold, London 1978
3. Cf. Gunn p. 58; Bonefeld p. 69.
4. Kosmas Psychopedis 'Some Remarks on Dialectical Theory' Common Sense No. 3 (1987).
5. E.g. Sayer's approach in D. Sayer 'Marx's Method, Ideology, Science and Critique in Capital', 2nd edn. Harvester Press (1983).
6. Cf. Gunn p. 60.
7. Cf. Gunn p. 60; Bonefeld p. 67. Cf. the methodologically problematic problematic conception of a 'permanent primitive accumulation', which results from lack of clarification of the notion of struggle: Bonefeld p. 71.
8. Cf. Gunn p. 62: 'that which is abstract can be a mode of existence (a form) of that which is historically specific and no less real than any other aspect of the concrete totality in which it inheres'.
9. K. Marx 'Grundrisse' p. 105 Penguin Books (1973).

10. Cf. Gunn p. 64.
11. Cf. G. Lukács 'History and Class Consciousness' Merlin Press (1971).
12. K. Marx 'On the Jewish Question' in Marx/Engels Collected Works Vol. III, Lawrence and Wishart (1975).
13. Cf. Gunn p. 58.



Filarete  
SFORZINDA  
(1464)

John Holloway

**An Introduction to *Capital***

**(or: How I fell in love with a Ballerina)**

A stage. Six couples dressed in black, women sitting rigidly on straight chairs, men standing formally behind them. Music starts, Desire appears, dressed in white, irresponsible, sensual, sinuous. The music quickens, Desire stirs, dances, provokes, torments the couples, undermines their stiffness, breaks their bonds, throws them on the floor, frees them in an agony of pleasure. Death-previously-seen-as-life is no more; a previously unimagined, inconceivable, unmentionable life is born.

Not just a beautiful, erotic ballet, but a parable. Existence is like that: a set of formal, stiff appearances. We present an image, a front that looks firm and solid to all but the most intimate friends; but tears, despair, fury, pleasure, orgasm - experiences that totally transform our behaviour and our appearance, unmentionable, frightening experiences - are never far away. We all live on thin ice.

It is the same with capitalist society. It is firm and solid in appearance. Authority functions smoothly, the state is stable, management is in control. But capitalism too is built on thin ice, a fabulously rich and complex city. Built on ice.

There are different ways of looking at the wonderful city that is capitalism. One can become an expert in its architecture, one can impress listeners with a description of the many fascinating features of its wonderful buildings, one can



become an expert in its politics or its economics, one can describe in detail the black, stiff, intimidating figures on their straight chairs. Or much more simply, much less impressively, one can look at the ice. Look for cracks in the ice, look at the life suppressed by the ice, surging, groaning, screaming beneath it. Then, amid the black, dead formalities, irresponsible desire appears, desire for a better world. And desire is rage, madness, fury, irresponsibility, the unmentionable, the unmentioned, life.

Today, more than ever before, the world seems to be made up of couples dressed in black, desire is suppressed repressed, the unmentionable is unmentioned. Today, more than ever before, we need eyes of rage, eyes of madness. Today, more than ever before, in order to understand, we need a science of anger and desire. Not a combination of science and anger, not science from-nine-to-five and anger in the evenings, but a science which by its very concepts gives expression to anger, to desire, to the desperation and unpredictability of the life trapped beneath the ice. A science which expresses through its concepts the inconceivable, unmentionable life which is within us, a science that dances.

Where can such a science begin? In the first stirrings of desire, of negation, in an impotent, even incoherent scream of rage and frustration, never in the rigid formalities of bourgeois thought. Bourgeois thought sees only the couples dressed in black: it is blind to a whole vast, unmentionable world of protest and desire, to anything that does not dress in black.

The incoherent scream is a necessary beginning; without it nothing is

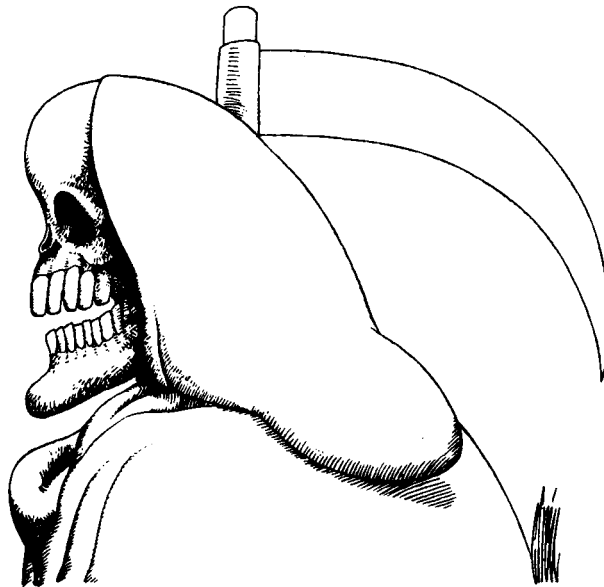
comprehensible; but it is only the beginning. You can see the white ballerina, but the world still seems composed of black, intimidating rigidities. Wanting to focus on the white seems a problem of individual maladjustment, talking about it is clumsy because the categories seem to have been monopolised by the world of formal rigidity. There seems no way of breaking through the black, no way of giving expression to the white desire which is the total negation of the dead-life of black formality. Clinging to the reality of the desire seems a childish dream, an infantile, at best adolescent, disorder. Black formal reality closes in, constantly, stressing the importance of responsibility, of seeing things as they really are: a world of people sitting stiffly, passively on their high-backed chairs.

Marxism gives strength to our childish dreams. It reverses the perspective totally and focuses on the absolutely destructive force of Desire. *Capital* shows us, through an analysis of the forms of bourgeois society and their contradictions, how, underneath their formal garb, those black-clad limbs are quivering. A million miles removed from the dry economic tomes portrayed by bourgeois mythology, and from the arid interpretations of so many Marxists, its pages are filled with sensuality, with the struggle of life against death. *Capital* gives us the basis for a science which, through its very concepts, is a science of anger, of desire, of rage and of laughter.

Desire is real, desire for a non-alienated life, desire incorporated in the ceaseless struggles of the exploited, the anger of the unmentionable. The more it is suppressed and its existence denied, the stronger and more destructive it becomes. Sometimes, the less visible it is, the more powerful its force. The approach of

<sup>always!</sup>  
orgasm does not appear on the face of bourgeois society (any more than it appears on the faces of those who surround us), but its force as a tendency cannot be done away with. When it comes, the death we experience as life will be no more, and an inconceivable, unmentionable life will be born. The unarticulated scream of frustration that fills the earth will turn to a scream of pleasure and then to the joy of life.

**Acknowledgements:** Many thanks to Andrea Ladányi and the Hungarian Ballet of Győr





Ewan Davidson

THE COMMONSENSE OF CONCESSIONS  
or  
'HE AIN'T HEAVY HE'S MY BROTHER'

(The aim of commonsense) "is to modify the average opinion in a given society by criticizing, suggesting, mocking, coreccting, modernizing, and inthe last analysis, by introducing new commonplaces".

Gramsci, Prison Notebooks.

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We at the Unemployed Workers Centre were glad that 'Common Sense' agreed to the suggestion of a concession policy for it's recent benefit. We were, in fact, surprised that the suggestion had to be made.

This may seem a rather ~~slim~~ excuse for filling a page here - however I think it is worth emphasising why 'concessions' are important - why groups like ours fight hard to have them included within the 'commonsense' of the labour movement.

Concession policies for the unemployed and other underprivileged groups are now broadly understood to be 'right' in a wide range of cltural activities - sports, theatres, concerts, local council facilities, shops and transport services - in other words a fair variety of corporate, municipal and petit-bourgeois groupings, which have been persuaded that they should include an 'ability-to-pay' element in their financial planning.

This historically, is quite a recent development, and represents a potentially radical position in these organisations. It is something which has been gained through determined argument by members and associates of these organisations, as well as through the activities of groups like ours which exert moral and political pressure, or develop mutual support arrangements.

The arguments for concessions have appealed to a particular 'commonsense' opinion - succinctly expressed in the hoary

old Beatles song I've quoted in the title of this piece. It is opposed to another 'commonsense' position often appealed to by the populizers of Tory ideology - that unemployment is a state of deserved deprivation where those too shiftless to labour for themselves learn the need for work discipline and responsible wage earnings. This might be called the 'Ant and Grasshopper' position.

The 'He (or She) Ain't Heavy S/He's My Brother/Sister' position appeals to the 'commonsense' of communality and class. Progress through considering the social implications of this position can lead people to useful speculation about a) the role of profit in capitalist society, b) the need for redistributive justice, and c) the structural nature of unemployment. In this argument the views and needs of the underprivileged will not be considered with 'Ant and Grasshopper' prejudices, but will be seen as a potentially creative and useful section of the working class.

I would therefore argue that concession policies are something which have an important role to play in maintaining potentially subversive, communalist and anti-capitalist 'commonsense' traditions in a hostile environment, and are therefore an integral part of present-day radical activity. Not to honour the achievements of this tradition in practice is to underestimate the value of 'commonsense'.



WHETHER at home in Tottenham or Tripoli, or at work on a London bus or in a clinic in Mozambique, whether in the streets of Enniskillen or Derry, or the parks or Hungerford or Moscow, WE CIVILIANS HAVE A RIGHT NOT TO BE ATTACKED BY ANY MEN'S GANGS !

We are the people our armed services are pledged to defend - including by lawful deterrent threats to attack armed invaders.

But if X is bullying us it's not our way to attack members of X's family, nor do we scatter poison which will inevitably cause millions of cancers and cumulative genetic damage all round for 1,000 generations.

Since that ISN'T HOW WE LIVE it's obvious that preparations to do just that couldn't possibly defend OUR WAY OF LIFE. In fact they betray our values, subvert our society, mock our hopes, menace our Earth-home.

WHATEVER our nationality, creed or colour, our age, gender or life-style, WE SHARE A COMMON DIGNITY, A COMMON CODE, A COMMON INTEREST IN HAVING OUR RIGHT TO NONCOMBATANT IMMUNITY FROM ATTACK RESPECTED.

Since harming the harmless is no defence, nor can there be any defence for it. Every country has laws against spreading poison and threats and preparations to murder even if only made conditionally.

Nearly every nation also subscribes to the Hague treaty protecting neutral nations and to the GENEVA CONVENTIONS of 1925, 1949, 1977 which outlaw the use of poisonous systems and extend special protection to prisoners of war; wounded and sick; health workers and emergency services; mothers, old and young; the natural environment and many buildings dedicated to peaceful humanitarian and educational purposes.

GENEVA CIRCLES can help us

- \*\* highlight the implicit consensus (lore/law) at the heart of society;
- \*\* encourage folk to take pride in the modest dignity of how they live;
- \*\* rally the disillusioned, fearful and vulnerable to come forward to show how much we do all care and to exert various kinds of moral authority (e.g. as the elders of the tribe, as children, etc);
- \*\* reclaim public space by demonstrating the Noncombatant Immunity From Attack that we are also demonstrating for.

GENEVA CONVENTION POSTER KITS can

- \*\* be used in displays in protected buildings or poster parades in high streets ; in actions at bases, vigils outside courts and in encirclements of police stations to offer them all our help to enforce our laws protecting peaceful people;
- \*\* encourage peace groups, trade unions, voluntary and other groups to experiment with actions and ceremonies where the clear message of each group enhances that of every other sector (community conventions and local enactments);
- \*\* educate concerning British, military and international law, thus taking 'law and order', 'family values' and 'love of country' back from the suave desperados of our current nuclear nihilist junta.



- EACH KIT CONSISTS OF (A) 11 large A1 posters on strong paper;
- (B) one cut-up poster with red words for pasting in blank spaces;
- (C) ten copies of info quoting and explaining Geneva Conventions, G.C. Act and Protocols and how we can use them;
- (D) one STUDY COMPANION ON LAW, PEACE AND NONCOMBATANT IMMUNITY with an essay exposing the unconstitutional claim to stretch the recognised defence 'prerogative' to cover the separate activity of spreading poison

£10 inc post from Keith Mothersson, 1B Savile Ter, Edinburgh EH9 3AD  
(extra (A) 50p, extra (D) £1.30 please plus some extra postage)



# NO POLL TAX

This Spring the Regional Council will begin to draw up a register which will be used as the basis for the collection of the poll tax, which begins next year. Canvassers will visit your home, interview you or leave questionnaires to be completed. **EVERYONE WHOSE NAME IS REGISTERED WILL BE EXPECTED TO PAY THE POLL TAX FROM APRIL 1989.** The Poll Tax will not only be twice as expensive to collect as rates, but it is also unfair - rich and poor pay the same amounts, businesses will pay much less than they do now. It can be stopped if people make it as difficult as possible to collect. Collection of the poll tax is a complex bureaucratic process which relies heavily on our co-operation. If we don't cooperate then it won't work. On this leaflet there is more information on the tax, suggestions on how you can delay and avoid registration, and how to support one another to successfully prevent the introduction of the poll tax.

## THE POLL TAX

Everyone over 18 will be liable to pay, except the severely mentally handicapped, long term prisoners, and those resident in homes and hostels.

### Couples

Couples will be assessed on a joint income and will each receive a bill for half of the total charge. Should they break up, then it is the responsibility of the remaining partner to inform the Community Charge Registration Officer or foot the whole bill.

### Claimants

Claimants of Unemployment and Supplementary benefit ('Income Support' from April 1988) will be expected to pay 20% rates - from April 1989, it will become 20% of the Poll Tax - and all of their water rates.

In Edinburgh and Glasgow, 20% rates and full water rates adds up to between £80 and £100. The proposed increase in Income Support in April 1988 to supposedly cover these charges makes no allowance for inflation or an increase in the Poll Tax in subsequent years.

### Pensioners

Pensioners not on benefit will be required to pay the full amount. Pensioners who do rely on benefit will be treated in the same way as the unemployed.

### Responsible persons

'Responsible persons' will be fined for providing incorrect or no information. Warning letters will be sent, followed by a £50 fine for a first offence, then £200 for each subsequent offence.

### Non Payment

People who refuse or can't pay the Poll Tax will be liable to pay for the arrears, interest on these (assumed to be 10%), and a fine of £50 (£200 for a second offence) or 33% of the arrears (whichever happens to be the larger).

For those in employment, a court order can be made to arrest wages, deducting the amount for non payment before these wages are paid.

For the unemployed, the only mechanism is a warrant sale of belongings to recover fines and costs.

**HOWEVER, SUCH METHODS ARE VERY EXPENSIVE AND TIME CONSUMING, AND LOCAL AUTHORITIES ARE RELUCTANT TO USE THEM. IF ENOUGH PEOPLE REFUSE TO PAY, THE COURTS WILL SIMPLY CHOKE ON LEGAL ACTIONS.**

Between April 1st 1988 and October 1st 1988, the Poll Tax Register will be drawn up by canvassers making a doorstep delivery of the form, followed by a collection visit and interview.

The Community Charge Registration Officer (CCRO) will then designate a 'responsible person' to each household, whose duty it will be to provide information to the CCRO.

Appeals can be made against being designated a 'responsible person' firstly to the CCRO, and secondly, on point of law to the Sheriff Court.

### National Identity card?

The CCRO will have access to the Electoral Register and all Local Government documents, (eg. Education Department; Hospital records; Housing Department and Housing Benefit records; Housing lists; Library records.)

Lothian Region has already spent £2.85 million on computers to file this information. Fears about a National Identity Card System may not be unfounded.

### Increases certain

Local authorities estimate that in Glasgow and Edinburgh, the full Poll Tax will be £361 per person in the first year. This figure is certain to rise sharply in the second year, **because businesses - who used to pay their share (28%) towards local services - will not be paying the Poll Tax as from April 1989.**

Instead, they will pay a sum direct to central government. When the cost of local services increases, the sum businesses pay will not increase by more than the rate of inflation.

### Privatisation.

The cost of local services in 1987 rose by an average of 22%. If the cost of services continues to rise at this rate, the Poll Tax will have to be increased by about 50% each year.

Within a few years, the Poll Tax would be so high that even fewer people could afford to pay.

Councils will then be forced to either privatise or scrap local services and the public left to pay for them, or do without. Businesses will then make an even greater profit from the people's needs.

**The Poll Tax is designed to bankrupt councils, reduce taxes for businesses, force the privatisation of services, and increase taxes on the individual - all in one.**



# HOW TO DELAY REGISTRATION

Some time between April and October this year a canvasser will call at your house and ask for details of all adults living there. Your answers to this will form the basis of the poll tax register. Some time later the registration officer will write naming a "responsible person", and giving details of the information held about the residents. You can query or appeal against this. The register is supposed to be completed in October and the first bills for the poll tax issued in April 1989.

## Non co-operation

Although it is an offence to refuse outright to give information there are many ways - not involving risk of prosecution - to delay, and even avoid, being registered.

### Not at home

\* If questionnaires arrive by post, send them back marked 'not known at this address'.

\* You do not have to admit to living on the premises.

Say you are babysitting, or a visitor, or looking after the premises while your friend is away. Later you can say you never received the questionnaire.

## Accidents will happen

\* Say you never received the questionnaire. The burden of proof is on the Registration Officer, not you.

\* Wait for a week or two after receiving the registration form, then write back and tell them your dog ate the form or it fell in the fire - any excuse will do - and could you please have another one.

## Take your time

\* When the canvassers come, do not fill in the questionnaire on the doorstep - say you are too busy or just leaving, and ask them to leave a form. Then you have 21 days to complete and return it.

## Keep them busy!

Wait 18-19 days, then return the questionnaire unanswered, asking what one of the questions means. When they return the form with an answer to your query, wait another 18-19 days and then repeat the process on another question. Keep doing this till you run out of questions to query.

Five or six questions should cause at least four months delay.

\* Ask to be known by another name - your maiden name for example. It is your right.

## Have fun!

Use your imagination - there are a thousand ways to delay bureaucracy and enjoy yourself

# What WE must do.

We must not leave neighbours - and especially pensioners - to worry on their own. Everyone is saying they won't pay (or can't pay) the Poll Tax. But talking about it - and leaving the work to others - is not enough. People will need to know who to turn to and where to find support, locally, quickly. Otherwise, at the first threat of prosecution, those who can afford to will take fright and pay the Poll Tax, leaving those who can't afford to pay to manage on their own. *Remember-The Poll Tax is a complex bureaucratic process which relies heavily on our co-operation. If we don't co-operate then it won't work.*

## No Poll Tax

Already, anti-poll tax groups throughout Edinburgh and Glasgow have held public meetings, organised pledge-petitions (where people pledge not to pay, and to support others who won't or can't pay), printed and displayed thousands of 'No Poll Tax' posters.

### Edinburgh

Groups have formed in MUSSELBURGH (where 75% of council houses on one scheme display 'No Poll Tax' posters), LEITH, GORGIE-DALRY (both of which hold regular public meetings, have organised pledge-petitions, and have printed their own leaflets and posters), and also in WESTER HAILES, PRESTONFIELD, SOUTHSIDE, EASTER RD / ABBEY-HILL, NEWHAVEN, CANONMILLS HAYMARKET / TOLL CROSS and STOCKBRIDGE

**It is essential that we all support each other - that we hold ourselves responsible to our neighbours.**

## Posters

\* Display a poster in your window to show your determination not to pay and to support others. Where you see a poster, you know you can rely on support.

## Street by street

\* Organise support street by street. Contact every house where a poster is displayed. Meet and discuss ways to support each other. If any one household is threatened, this should be of concern to everyone.

## Unwelcome

\* Don't make life easy for the registration officers/canvassers. Follow them around, delay them by talking to them in the street, tell them why they shouldn't be working for the poll tax.

\* take pictures of them to circulate - make them know how you feel!

## Contact the address below

We can put you in touch with others in your area, or other areas. We can help publicize what you are doing, help you produce your own leaflets, posters, etc., and provide you with more information.

## COMMUNITY RESISTANCE TO THE POLL TAX.

(EDINBURGH SOUTHSIDE),  
Pigeonhole CR, c/o 11 Forth Street,  
EDINBURGH.

and  
**ANTI-POLL TAX UNION,**  
c/o Cockshott, 1 Warrender Park Cresc.  
EDINBURGH.