

# **The Libertarian Communist**

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A Discussion Bulletin:

In Opposition to the Rule of Capital in all its forms and  
for Anti State, Non Market Communism

Revolution and Class Struggle



**Theory versus Practice**

**Issue 21: Winter 2013**

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The purpose of The Libertarian Communist is to promote discussion amongst the Anti State, Non Market sector irrespective of whether individuals or groups consider themselves as Anarchist, Communist or Socialist as all such titles are in need of further qualification. If you have disagreements with an article in this or any other issue, wish to offer comment or want to contribute something else to the discussion then please get in touch. If any article focuses on a particular group then that group has, as a matter of course, the right to reply. So please get in touch with your article, letters and comments. You can do this by contacting (**please note the new email address**) [libcom.bulletin@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:libcom.bulletin@yahoo.co.uk) or writing to Ray Carr, Flat 1, 99 Princess Road, Branksome, Poole, Dorset.

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## **Issue 21**

This issue kicks off with an editorial noting a slight change of direction for the LC based on, what we view, as an over emphasis by some sectors of the ASNM movement on involvement in the class struggle. Remember when reading this that the LC is a discussion bulletin. Following on from this we have two articles by Joe Hopkins which focus on the mining industry in the USA. The first of these looks at the devastating impact on a family resulting from a mining 'accident'. As far as these are termed as 'accidents' they are confined to a system that by its nature has to continue to prioritise profit over the safety of workers. Joe's second article looks at the negative impact of the mining industry in a more general sense. The LC is delighted to include a further extract from Lyla Byrne's The Environment Book. This article, which is from part 3 focuses on the constraints placed on society by hierarchical systems and structures. This is followed by Part 1 of a three part article on the nature of the former system in the 'Soviet' Union. The first part asks the question: Could this system be described as capitalist in any sense? The next article offers the beginning of a critique of the relationship between class struggle and revolution and raises the question of whether we need to ditch the traditional view of the working class as the agent of revolution? Sadly on page 19 we have an obituary for Terry Liddle who died in late 2012. Terry had not been in contact with the LC for all that long but readers will have read his excellent article on William Morris in the last issue. The final article is a review of a pamphlet published by Chronos Publications: No Revolution Anywhere by Robert Kurz.

## **Editorial: Changes**

We should never fear changing positions we have taken in the past, if this means excepting that we presently feel that we have taken a slightly wrong stance then so be it. As some might already have noticed from the cover this issue marks a slight change in emphasis. This has been coming in the last few issues but one thing that has not and will not change is that the LC remains firmly in the ASNM sector. This sector is, or should be, the only one which seeks to delve into the root of the capital system rather than concentrating on surface appearances. However one reason for the change in emphasis of the LC is the belief that certain sections of our movement (if the ASNM is any type of coherent movement) appears to be closely mirroring a traditional leftist critique. There seems to be a danger that they are burying themselves in the "*class struggle*" and losing sight of the case for an anti state non market communist society and also satisfying themselves with gaining converts by looking for popular scapegoats rather than getting to grips with the system of capital itself. This tendency has developed with the onset of capitalism's latest economic crisis and the austerity measures that governments of capital all over the world have introduced to save their system. Too much attention has been focused on the institutions and individuals who benefitted from the various government bailouts around the world what such actions were really about was saving the system itself.

Another related factor is the emphasis that has been placed on the "*class struggle*" in a traditional sense. It could be argued that there is too much concentration on the "*working class*" this term views this sector as important because they are seen as the troops that could bring about the glorious day due to the direct confrontation with capital at the point of production. This is not to say that this sector is not important but the people who make up the "*working class*" do more than just go to work and may involve themselves in wider confrontations with capital. Another point arising from this focus on the labour – capital conflict is that this leads to the conclusion that all that is wrong with capitalism is that those who produce all the wealth are exploited at the point of production whilst the lions share goes to those who do the exploiting. Whilst this is true the conclusion one may come to from

this is one that concentrates on a society where those who labour receive their full entitlement. What you are left with is something like "*market Socialism*", in other words workers' capitalism; capitalism without capitalists; or which ever way one wishes to put it.

Our aim is not, or should not be tying workers to their workplace under the same system organised differently our aim is to free workers from such obligations in a free society where we organise production to meet needs directly but also free workers from the slavery inherent in the capitalist system. In abolishing the rule of capital we are also abolishing the working class, hence the description of our aim as a classless society. In short the aim has to be not the emancipation of labour but the emancipation of people from labour otherwise freedom will have eluded us again.

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## **Gary Quarles: Man of Sorrow**

This is the story of Gary Sr. and his wife Patty who live in a trailer located in Horse Creek Hollow, West Virginia USA. They've lived there for 30 years. The trailer has new paint. This story is also about Gary Wayne Quarles, the couple's 33 year old son who along with 28 other mine workers was killed in the Massey Coal Company, Upper Big Branch mine disaster 5<sup>th</sup> April 2010 – the worst coal mining catastrophe in the United States in the past 40 years. Patty has an image of her now dead son tattooed on her lower leg. Alpha Natural Resources bought Massey Coal Company after the fatal calamity of 5<sup>th</sup> April, maybe to blunt the visceral anger, outrage, and hate felt by the families of the dead workers – an effort towards perceptual distancing on the part of the corporation. The sign that read "*Upper Big Branch*" in front of the mine now reads "*Coal River East*".

Over two years after the fatal explosion that killed Gary Wayne and 28 others, an independent panel blamed it on a corporate culture that put "*the drive to produce coal above worker safety*". No Massey executive has ever been criminally charged; no new federal mine safety legislation has been passed either. Gary Sr. and others went to Washington, D.C recently and on a day that for Gary Sr. started with three antidepressants; he and all the others carried

poster sized pictures of their dead husbands, sons and brothers into the red carpeted and well appointed offices of senators and representatives. **"That was my son Gary Wayne"** Gary told them over and over, "we are here for safety".

Patty said she only ever saw her husband cry one time before Gary Wayne was killed. Now he cry's remembering crying. Gary Sr. cries remembering the night of the explosion when he and Patty gathered with other families in a mine building and a woman from Massey, clipboard in hand, stepped to the door and said **"if I call your name you are to report to the fire department to identify bodies"**. **"What kind of person says that?"** Gary Sr. said.

Patty wanted to know every single detail of how her son died to be able to imagine his last moments. Patty finally got Gary Wayne's autopsy report in 2011 – and Gary Sr. cried when she read it. The autopsy began, **"The decedent is identified by recognition of specific coal mining medallion and tracking number. The decedent is received wearing heavily soot stained coveralls ... heavy soot deposition on the anterior tongue surface ... diffuse cherry/red lividity"**. The last is a tell tale sign of carbon monoxide (CO) poisoning. The report went on to note that Gary Wayne had Black Lung disease and that the cause of death (COD) was smoke and soot inhalation.

A spokesman for Alpha Natural Resources said the company is committed to resolving problems it inherited when it bought Massey. Massey paid for all of the funerals; all 29 of them. Alpha offered Gary Sr. and Patty a financial settlement of \$3 million. **"At the same time"**, Patty said, and now she too was crying, **"This is your mom saying this is what your life's worth. Like your mom sold you out", "I wouldn't have settled, I wouldn't have settled ..."** she said. And then she did. **"I wanted it over"** she says. **"I just wanted it over so bad"**. Then the cheque from the coal company came and Patty recalls thinking, **"Gary Wayne, well, this is what you was worth"**.

On a typical day Patty watches T.V and takes a nap – then watches more T.V and goes back to sleep. With the coal company cheque Gary Sr. and Patty feel glad for Gary Wayne's children. Patty says, **"I know it's hard to believe, but I was a busy person before; I loved housework, loved gardening. I've**

**lost interest in everything, him too"** she says, pointing a finger at her husband, sitting in the living room listening to music through a new pair of white head phones and staring out the glass front door. Ralph Stanley is on and singing **"I Am A Man of Constant Sorrow"**. **Patty says "He just listens to that music and cries"**.

Even with the coal company cheque, or maybe even because of that cheque, Gary Sr. felt as sad as ever. **"It won't never leave me"** he said. Patty felt something different. **"Sick"** she said. **"I felt sick"**.

**Joe Hopkins**

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## **The insanity of coal mining**

*September 20, 2012*

By [Joe Hopkins](#)

### **Destroying miners' health**

National Public Radio (NPR) and the Centre for Public Integrity (CPI) teamed up to produce a special investigative report on the increased incidence of black lung disease in coal miners. The results of their combined investigations were released on the NPR's radio stations on July 9–10, 2012 and broadcast on Public Broadcasting Systems (PBS) television on July 9, 2012.

The investigation found that black lung disease in miners had quadrupled since the 1980s and doubled since June–July 2002. This doubling coincides with an increase of 600 hours in the work year of the average miner since 2002.

The NPR/CPI investigation focused on mining in West Virginia, Virginia, and Kentucky and found that over 10,000 miners had died of black lung disease and "massive fibrosis" (the most advanced and deadly form of black lung disease) between 1985 and 1994 and that over 2,000 had died from the same causes in West Virginia alone.

There is no treatment for black lung disease. Many victims report that at its "massive fibrosis" stage they can either eat or breathe, but not both at the same time. One victim interviewed on NPR and PBS said that he could not even hold his two-year-old grandson for more than a minute or so before

oxygen deprivation set in and he had to set the child down. It was too exerting for him.

The coal seams in existing mines are thinner now than they were decades ago, and mining companies are extracting coal seams down to one inch thick. These seams are often embedded in quartz rock that has a high silica content. As deadly as coal dust is in itself, the dust produced from extracting these tiny seams is even more deadly.

### **Hiding the dust**

In 1960 Congress passed a law to protect the health of coal miners by regulating coal dust levels in mines. The Big Coal lobby and the elected politicians of the area (and beyond) had a hand in weakening safety protections in the law that was actually passed. Senator Robert Byrd (known as "the coal miner's friend") helped weaken the law for economic reasons – to make it cheaper for mining companies to comply and ensure that Big Coal would continue to contribute money to his many, many re-election campaigns. The Senator had a vested interest in protecting coal industry profits. All politicians want corporate profits to be large.

The law that finally passed to protect coal miners from the worst abuses of the industry was weak, flawed, and had many loopholes. The law was weak as it put in place the concept of self-policing by the company itself. It was flawed because inspectors were not allowed to enter the mines while production was going on (which was 24 hours a day) without the prior consent of the mining company.

One of the loopholes is that when the coal dust samples collected by the industry do not agree with the coal dust samples collected by regulatory inspectors, industry is granted what in golf is called a "Mulligan" — a replay — but one no opponent would ever accept. The company is allowed to collect dust samples from five locations chosen by itself and calculate an average that becomes the definitive coal dust concentration to compare with the figure derived from the samples collected by the government regulatory inspector. For some reason, the concentrations determined by the coal companies and those calculated by the inspectors very often do not agree! The coal companies, of course, come up with lower

figures.

Mining companies have still been cited with more than 53,000 violations during the last decade. For some strange reason fewer than 1,000 of them resulted in court action!

Dust pumps were installed to collect coal dust samples at the coal face, often mounted on the mining machine itself. At a Massey Mine the bosses directed that plastic bags should be put over the intake of the pump to cheat the test. The workers were told that if the concentrations of coal dust were found to be too high the mine would be closed and "they'd be out of work."

There is one tiny and tarnished silver lining. The Patriot Coal Company filed for bankruptcy on July 9, 2012. The tarnish is that Patriot miners are now without jobs.

### **Workers are cheap**

The reader may well ask why coal-mining companies would deliberately cheat on safety tests and regulations designed to protect the health (and thus the productivity) of their own workers. Big business is in business to make the greatest profit possible. Workers are expendable and can easily be replaced from the pool of the unemployed. Even during "good times" 3.5% to 5% of the workforce are unemployed. During times of high unemployment (like now) a lost worker is even easier to replace and may even be got at a lower wage rate than the lost worker was being paid. Big business is the product and ultimate consequence of the capitalist system.

Capitalism demands that companies grow their profits or lose out and die, to be taken over by more competitive companies. Competition, under the neoliberal ethos in vogue for the past 35–40 years, means upping productivity (through technology and/or getting workers to do more work in a shorter span of time) and cutting costs, the largest cost being the labor bill, i.e., reducing wages.

The capitalist system in its current form confounds many older folks who remember the capitalism-with-a-human-face of the Keynesian phase of capitalist development, when wages were tied to worker productivity. It also confounds younger workers, but for

different reasons. Younger folks born in the last forty years have experienced the rise of neo-liberalism as an inevitable progression, an economic necessity, almost a natural law.

In the capitalist world of today, the worker class hears big business bosses and corporate CEOs, economic experts, and even the workers' own union bosses proclaiming that "we're all in it together" and "we've got to do more with less." The worker class hears nothing of viable alternatives to the rat race that has taken over their lives. They just keep plugging along thinking TINA — There Is No Alternative.

The bosses, CEOs, economists, and union bosses, all committed to and doing just fine by the system, say that the status quo is natural, moral, and efficient on its own and that the "free market" system can only function at its highest potential if government stays out of the market. Otherwise it won't be "free" to fairly distribute its blessings to those who work hard and play by the rules.

### **Destroying the environment**

Such are the health consequences for those directly involved in the extraction of coal. What are the consequences of coal for the health of the geosphere and biosphere that make up our environment?

A report in the *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences* entitled "Full Cost Accounting for the Life Cycle of Coal" was released in February 2011 and given public attention on the NPR programme *Science Friday*. The report was produced by scientists from Harvard Medical School, Harvard School of Public Health, West Virginia University, Boston University of Public Health, Washington State University, the Gund Institute for Ecological Economics, the University of Vermont, and other institutions.

According to the report, each stage in the life cycle of coal — extraction, transport, processing, and combustion — generates a waste stream and carries multiple hazards for health and the environment. These costs are external to the coal industry and are thus often considered "externalities." The authors estimate that the life cycle effects of coal and the waste it generates are costing the US public from one third to over one half of a trillion dollars a year. Moreover, many of

these so-called externalities are cumulative. Accounting for the damage done doubles or even triples the real cost of generating a unit of electricity from coal, making wind, solar, and other forms of non-fossil-fuel power generation, as well as investments in efficiency and electricity conservation, economically competitive.

### **Greenhouse gas emissions**

The authors of the report found that burning coal produces 50% more emissions of carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub> — the main greenhouse gas) than combustion of an equivalent amount of oil and double the CO<sub>2</sub> emissions from burning an equivalent amount of natural gas. In addition, coal contains mercury, lead, cadmium, arsenic, manganese, beryllium, chromium, and other toxic and carcinogenic substances that are released into the environment during combustion. Finally, the crushing and processing of coal release tons of tiny particles every year that contaminate the water, air, and soil, with consequent negative impacts on public health and the biosphere.

Methane is also released in the process of coal mining. It is a greenhouse gas 25 times more powerful than CO<sub>2</sub>. Even when methane decays it yields CO<sub>2</sub> — a lose-lose situation.

### **Mountaintop Removal**

The coal industry makes wide use of Mountaintop Removal (MTR) in Appalachia (eastern Kentucky, West Virginia, and south western Virginia). To get to the coal inside a mountain, explosives blast away the summit, together with the forest covering it. The resulting rubble or "spoil" is dumped into the valleys below.

MTR has been used at about 500 sites in four states (Kentucky, Virginia, West Virginia, and Tennessee), burying 2,000 miles of streams and despoiling 1.4 million acres of scenic natural terrain. In Kentucky alone there are 293 MTR sites, with over 1,400 miles of streams damaged or destroyed and 2,500 more miles polluted.

### **Coal Combustion Waste = fly ash**

Coal Combustion Waste (CCW) — or fly ash,

as it is commonly called — is produced in the process of coal combustion. It contains toxic chemicals and heavy metals — pollutants known to cause cancer, birth defects, reproductive disorders, neurological damage, learning disabilities, kidney disease, and diabetes.

ALEC, the American Legislative Exchange Committee, wrote what they call “model legislation” that would define fly ash as “non-hazardous waste.” ALEC is a front group run by elected Republican Party officials and Republican Party members (see “Who The Hell is ALEC” on this site).

### **Biodiversity**

Globally, the rich biodiversity of the Appalachian headwater streams is second only to that of the tropics. The Southern Appalachian Mountains are home to the greatest variety of salamanders in the world, with 18% of all known species.

### **Transporting coal**

70% of all US rail traffic is devoted to transporting coal. The National Research Council found that in 2007 alone 246 people were killed in rail accidents during coal transportation, of whom 241 were bystanders and five railway workers.

### **Conclusion**

Due to the \$333–500 billions’ worth of externalities generated by the coal industry every year, with damage done by the coal industry amounting to an additional \$1–1.5 trillion per year, coal mining would be a thing of the past were the US government, with its monopoly on violence, not in collusion with Big Business — in this case, the coal industry.

There is no such thing as a “free market” — and never has been. Government, with its law-making, courts, standing army, and security forces and its self-sustaining monopoly on violence, is necessary to camouflage the tremendous inequality and disequilibrium between the social classes and create the deliberately misleading impression of a society of normal human relations.

If all of us, every working class person, were to just say no — and the military and police

are working class people too — the means of production would pass into our hands and we could stop the insane production that destroys the world and has been destroying the world for over two hundred years now under the capitalist system.

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### **From part three of the Environment book.**

### **The inherent unhealthiness of hierarchical systems**

The continuation of minority power over the majority, and the concentration of wealth into fewer hands, is probably inevitable in capitalism; and it is certainly what has happened. Having a little extra wealth than others makes it a little more possible to maintain that, and to accumulate more from others in numerous ways, and so on. A lot more wealth makes it a lot more possible to accumulate more; and the financial system holds the power structures in place. So minority ownership = minority rule.

Such minority ownership, and thus control over most of the environmental, technological and information resources, is however, inherently unhealthy; corrupt and corrupting.

This is because, to keep control, a minority have to direct the resources under their control into maintaining their wealth - and tend to try to further secure their positions by increasing it. Capitalism is defined by its name, in that its core principle is that *ownership is used to gain more capital to invest in further ownership and so on*. To achieve this has *in itself* been believed to be success.

**So the resources of the Earth – including the majority of people, have been exploited by the minority for financial profit, basically, just so that the minority can maintain and extend their position as rulers.**

Profits have not only been used for investment in further profit making of course. The rich have also spent money on themselves personally. - But perhaps the majority of the profits have been used, privately and/or via the state to buy

politicians, justice systems, police forces and armies, intelligence gathering organisations, security systems and prisons, weapons development, research into psychology, public relations campaigns and advertising etc. – to control the majority.

Of course, the propaganda has said that this set up is for the benefit of the whole of society – but actually, its basic purpose is not to serve wellbeing/the common good, but to serve capitalism and its ruling minority. Even those public services which have seemed most benign have usually been far from efficient for providing community wellbeing, and in some ways have had the opposite effect, *because they are immured with the same basic purpose*. They have been another means by which the majority have been controlled – by making it seem as if they are well cared for.

Then, when problems in society have become obvious, the tendency has been for the blame to be directed at anything except the system; and welfare services in particular catch the flack, rather than the system that is making those services the way that they are. This has not only protected the ruling minority, but has given them the opportunity to manipulate public opinion so that the majority support the removal of those services from themselves. This enables the minority to retain more profit for other purposes.

The central point here is: **In this system, resources of all types tend to be directed for maintaining a wealthy minority - rather than for the wellbeing of the whole community/environment.**

In practice this has meant that resources of all types have been routinely directed for maintaining a wealthy minority *regardless of the harm done to individuals/communities/the environment*; and even, and every day, resources have been directed *knowingly to harm individuals/communities/the environment* – both in overt and covert wars – for financial profit.

A ruling minority will tend to function, and perhaps necessarily will function according to what has been described as 'self interest'; but I think that this is an oversimplification that can be misleading. It could seem to suggest that the ruling class lifestyle is altogether

beneficial to them as human beings, and even enviable; whereas in fact, overall, it is rife with unhealthiness and only beneficial for the continuation of a their rule for as long as possible. This rule is so destructive however, that it will not be for long. If the majority do not overthrow it – it is set to self destruct by destroying the entire human supporting environment of the Earth – and taking us all down with it.

It is more accurate to describe the ruling minority as tending to have – or perhaps necessarily having - 'a too limited self interest' or 'an unhealthy self interest'. This is not only in relation to others, but profoundly linked to this, *it is not actually healthy for anyone*.

This is because, when the wellbeing of the whole is systemically *not prioritised* it is inexorably depleted.

However unconscious it may be, to prioritise maintaining exclusive wealth/rule – which is what a ruling minority have to do to remain in power - amounts to a war of attrition against the wellbeing of the whole. To support this, even by just accepting it without challenge, is, however unconsciously, to go along with self destruction. For, as is becoming more and more obvious, environmentally and socially, it is the wellbeing of the whole that produces our individual wellbeing.

As already noted, the majority work; but the resultant wealth has been used to maintain minority power. It is important to specifically point out what this means: - **Wealth that has been mainly generated by the majority, has been used to exclude the majority from decision making**. This has many interrelated harmful effects in the whole society and on the whole ecosystem. For instance:

1) The wages/salary system has been used to get us to do what we are told. Within this we have still contributed to supplying for humanity's needs for wellbeing *in some ways*; but overall, in a system based on maintaining and extending minority power, we have produced the minority's choice of what we can buy, how it is made, and where and how we buy it. We have supplied what makes profit for the minority.



We have been told that we have choices, but, within the system, these choices are usually very limited by financial pressures and the general arrangements of capitalist society; and most of them are environmentally and socially harmful.

2) Throughout the system, as with other resources, the knowledge, passion, imagination, and decision making skills available in the community tend to be directed for the unhealthily limited self interest of a minority of individuals, rather than for the wellbeing of the whole community/environment.

3) When the whole community is not sufficiently involved in the management of resources, this is fundamental to the stagnation and degeneration of that community. The actions of the owning minority detrimentally affect the wellbeing of the community in numerous ways. This is very stressful in itself, plus recourse to justice (in terms of community wellbeing) is usually difficult and very time consuming, if not impossible. Also, when skills are not used or are channelled too narrowly, they atrophy or cannot healthily develop.

To lack sufficiently full involvement with the economic matters that can be managed – and which of course affect us - is to lack something essential to being human. It is bound to detract from the healthy development of our awareness and creativity, and to arrest healthy community development and environmental management in general.

4) Problems are multiplied because minority control gets thick with false justifications. The tendency – deliberate to varying degrees no doubt - is to control information and indoctrinate us with these false justifications. Financial wealth is of course applied to this. So a sizable proportion of the financial wealth that is *generated by the exploitation of the environment – including the work of the majority*, has been used to suppress, obscure, discredit or ridicule facts and ideas *that would be helpful to the majority – and particularly in relation to psychology and sustainable social and environmental practices*. This is a core example of how, in capitalism, wealth has *not* been used for our benefit, but to our detriment.

The campaign of justification has been so effective that many, despite their dissatisfactions, have believed that the ruling minority are especially clever, admirable and deserving - and that it is wise and good to go along with the system.

Here the reversal of the truth that George Orwell showed us in the looking glass of 1984 becomes complete: It is 'clever' to be ignorant, 'caring' to be selfish, 'courageous' to bomb people for financial gain and 'respectable' to buy stuff from corporations that thereby profit from animal cruelty, community breakdown, war, deforestation, pollution and poverty – much of which has horrific effects on children. It is 'responsible' to carry on working for and buying into a system that is rapidly destroying the entire biosphere – when it is in fact heartless insanity and mindless conformity.

The main stream seems to have been lulled into a kind of trance by small but hypnotic screens - newspapers, televisions, computers etc., that stand between us and vast swathes of reality. Although they are not always used like this, these screens have had the effect of preventing us from fully mentally and emotionally connecting with healthy and beautiful things in our environment, preventing us from understanding and appreciating them, and preventing us from working together to improve the quality of life. These screens have also functioned to keep our gaze averted from the systemic causes of many particular problems, as well as preventing us from seeing the big picture, *that the system as a whole is the greatest threat to humanity and to all life on earth*.

Meanwhile the damage being done to the environment has been getting progressively worse. The screens have contributed to keeping us supporting the system/the ruling class, and kept us tranquilised with vicarious experiences of life, whilst we sit getting furred arteries.

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All these effects together have tended to cause profound disconnections from our environment, from each other, within ourselves, and between these dimensions. So our awareness of the situation/ourselves/cause and effect, our analysis and imagination of how things could

be better, and our practice in general of sustainable living are far from being as well developed as they could be. It is no wonder that all of us to some degree have felt powerless to help in solving social and environmental problems.

The only way to ensure healthy life is to sufficiently apply our faculties to that project – and holistically. Of course we have to work on the parts; but the parts inevitably affect the whole. The whole includes all the parts, and they are all connected in various ways within the whole. In other words, effects don't stop, but come bouncing back.

If a harmful effect on the whole continues unchecked/unattended, it is not only an ongoing problem, but may be ultimately destructive of the whole. And to solve a problem, we have to study the relationships of the parts with the whole to learn what a healthy part *is* - and how to make it.

The two main points here are: 1) For intimately interconnected economic and psychological reasons, the whole environmental system is much less likely to be managed for the wellbeing of all by a ruling minority than by all of us as economic equals. 2) This is not only because of the corrupting effects of having economic power over others, but because the exercise of our faculties for self management as economic equals *is a basic need* for our psychological/social/environmental wellbeing.

So minority control is likely to be detrimental in any form, and to be more detrimental the longer that it goes on.

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**To sufficiently care for the whole community and environment we need a system in which the whole community is sufficiently involved in decision making. To achieve this, resources have to be owned in common because this is the only way that they can be controlled directly by communities for themselves using democratic processes.**

A large amount of control over economic wealth means a large amount of control over what we produce and use, and how we do so. This means a large amount of control over our environment, our time and energy, our

thoughts and feelings. For a long time a minority has had this large amount of control, arguably having stolen it from the community as a whole, to whom it really belongs. Certainly, this is true if we are judging the matter according to what is needed for human well being. If a large enough majority choose to organise themselves, then they can control what they produce and use, and how they do so. Common ownership can be established in which everyone can join and take part.

If the community has ownership/control, they will tend to direct resources *for the wellbeing of the whole community/environment*; and even more so because there is no systemic distraction from this, such as the profit priority, getting in the way. Common ownership=control by the whole community. In the nature of being *by all*, is also *for all*.

Huge amounts of resources, of all types, have been directed for maintaining and extending minority rule. If these resources are instead directed for community and environmental wellbeing, it will be relatively easy to repair much of the damage that has been done, and to create enjoyable ways of living that maximise healthy survival.

By choosing to hold wealth in common, with the wellbeing of the whole as our conscious core principle, we can fully set free environmental, technological and information resources, our time and energy, our thoughts and feelings to take care of each other and our environment.

The name 'common ownership' in itself gives 'ownership' the meaning 'responsibility'. The word is released from bondage to money, and beckons us to explore of the now secondary meaning - 'acknowledgment of the truth'. It is set free to be used to generate a more profound and expansive meaning for us altogether. If we consciously and commonly value this meaning *because* of wellbeing it brings, then our wellbeing can increase and endure.

**Lyla Byrne**

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## **WHAT WAS THE 'SOVIET' SYSTEM?**

### **PART 1: IN WHAT SENSE (IF ANY) WAS THE 'SOVIET' SYSTEM CAPITALIST?**

**By Stephen Shenfield (Stefan)**

#### **Introduction**

For two centuries the main stream of Marxian discourse has focused on criticism of 'private enterprise' capitalism from the perspective of its negation in a general conception of socialism (which I do not distinguish from communism). Let me call this 'the capitalism-socialism paradigm'.

The appearance of a previously unknown 'Soviet' [1] social system (eventually in a range of variants) challenged this paradigm. Marxian socialists responded to the challenge in one of three ways:

The most common response was to accept the new system as 'socialism' (now meaning a lower phase of the collectivistic post-capitalist society, the word 'communism' being reserved for the higher phase) or as a transitional system in between capitalism and socialism.

An alternative response was to interpret the new system as a modified form of capitalism – new only superficially but not in fundamentals. Although these two responses implied diametrically opposed political stances, they were alike in the sense that both preserved the capitalism-socialism paradigm intact. In terms of *concepts* these were conservative responses.

The third kind of response was to interpret the new system as something fundamentally new rather than as some variety of 'capitalism' or 'socialism'.

The resulting theories generally stressed the concept of 'bureaucracy' (e.g., 'bureaucratic collectivism'). [2]

In this first part of a three-part essay, I explore the meaning of the terms *capital* and *capitalist* in Marx's thought. In particular, I draw a distinction between broader and narrower usages of these terms. This enables me to consider in what sense (if any) the 'Soviet' system was capitalist.

In Part 2, I similarly investigate the meaning of the term *communist* in Marx's thought and discuss in what sense (if any) the 'Soviet' system was communist?

In Part 3, I build upon the results of Parts 1 and 2 to formulate my own view of the character of the 'Soviet' system and its place in historical development. I also consider the relative advantages and disadvantages of the 'Soviet' and Western systems for working people.

#### **The terms 'capital' and 'capitalist' in Marx**

In most contexts Marx uses 'capital' in the sense of 'self-expanding value', where 'value' means exchange value (not use value). The value that constitutes capital takes various forms, including money capital, means of production (fixed capital) and commodities serving as production inputs (circulating capital). Capital is constantly changing from one form to another.

The expansion or accumulation of capital is driven by competition among capitalists or 'capitals' (separate units of capital). These capitals may be individual capitalists or corporations – or, at a higher level, groups of capitalists associated through the state as national capitals. Capitals compete to sell commodities at a profit in the market. Profit has its origin in surplus value extracted through the exploitation of wage labour. It is the goal of production and the source of increments to the accumulating stock of capital.

These then are the basic features of what I call the 'standard model' of the functioning of the capitalist mode of production. Marx and the Marxians elaborate the model in much greater detail, but this should suffice for my purposes.

Note that this model does *not* assume private (in the sense of non-state) ownership of the means of production. It remains essentially unchanged when some or even all corporations are taken into state ownership, *provided that* the managers who run the state corporations on behalf of the state continue to pursue the same goal by the same means. It is no more problematic to call this 'state capitalism' than it is to call capitalism dominated by corporations

'corporate capitalism'. State and non-state capitals may coexist in a single 'mixed' capitalist economy. [3] It is also possible to conceive of a fully state-capitalist economy in which all firms are owned by the state but compete with one another in the same way as any other type of capitalist firm. [4]

However, there are two contexts in which Marx uses the terms 'capital' and 'capitalist' but the standard model clearly does not apply.

The first of these contexts is that of the period when 'capital comes into the world soiled with gore from top to toe and oozing blood from every pore' – the era of the '*primitive accumulation of capital*'. This embryonic capital expands not by exploiting wage labour but by dispossessing, plundering and enslaving peasants at home and native peoples in the colonies.

Two forms taken by the primitive accumulation of capital were chattel slavery in the Americas and serfdom in early modern Russia. The American slave plantation and the Russian serf estate, which persisted unreformed until the mid-nineteenth century, were already basically capitalist enterprises, producing for domestic and world markets. In that respect they differed fundamentally from ancient slavery and medieval serfdom. [5] The standard model, which presupposes the exploitation of wage labour by capital, must at least be modified (if not jettisoned) to accommodate these 'peculiar institutions'.

The second context in which the standard model does not apply is Marx's discussion of '*crude communism*' in *The Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*. [6] He uses this term to refer to the conception of a future society held by certain egalitarian thinkers – notably, the late 18<sup>th</sup>-century French revolutionary Gracchus Babeuf. Under crude communism, as Marx interprets it, 'the category of worker is not done away with but extended to all', while 'the community [becomes] the universal capitalist'. Marx explains that 'capital' here means 'the acknowledged universality and power of the community'.

Of what use is the standard model in understanding this communal 'capitalism'? Here we have no competition among separate capitals, because capital as a whole belongs

to the community. We do not even have classes; because all are 'workers' receiving equal wages and all participate in 'the power of the community'. In formal terms, Marx's 'crude communism' is not far removed from the definition of socialism used by the World Socialist Movement ('common ownership and democratic control of the means of life by and in the interest of the community as a whole'). What nonetheless makes it a special form of capitalism is the philosophical *attitude* of members of the community toward themselves, one another and their environment – an attitude that generates the oppression of the individual and the continued exploitation of nature [7] by a reified 'collective being'.

It is not clear whether and under what circumstances Marx thought that 'crude communism' might be established in reality. He describes it as 'regression to the simplicity of the man who has few needs and who has not only failed to go beyond private property but has not yet even reached it'; this might imply that an attempt at 'crude communism' could arise out of a successful insurrection by impoverished masses under material and cultural conditions insufficiently developed for 'refined communism'.

### **Broader and narrower senses of 'capital'**

To me this suggests the need to distinguish among three successively broader senses of 'capital' (capitalist, capitalism). Capitalism in the narrowest sense is a system that fully fits the standard model described above. A somewhat broader usage will then encompass socio-economic forms that do not fit the model exactly but can be accommodated by a modified version of the standard model.

But how are we to conceptualise 'capitalism' in the broadest sense? My suggestion is that we define it as a socio-economic system dominated by a powerful dynamic of 'self-expansion' (or accumulation) of wealth, measured in some fetishised quantitative unit. The presence of such a powerful expansionary dynamic qualifies a society as broadly capitalist irrespective of the exact mechanism by which the dynamic operates, how wealth is owned or controlled, and the unit in which wealth is measured. No doubt other definitions would merit consideration. I choose this particular

definition for two reasons. First, the self-expansive dynamic seems to me to be *the* central element in Marx's model of the functioning of capitalism, whether the standard model or a modified version. Second, this definition captures a very important feature that Western capitalism and the 'Soviet' system shared and that marked them as segments of a single world civilisation despite important differences in their modes of production. [8]

### **Marxian theories of the 'Soviet' system: content and labels**

Here I wish to make a general point. There is no close correspondence between the *content* of theories of the 'Soviet' system and the *labels* they attach to that system. Advocates of essentially the same theory may use several different labels, while the same label may be used by advocates of several different theories. For substantive understanding it is content that matters, not labels. Labels matter too, but only insofar as one label may be more effective than another in conveying a given content.

Among writers who label the 'Soviet' system 'state capitalist' there are advocates of three different theories:

-- Some interpret the 'Soviet' system as 'capitalist' in a broad sense without trying to apply the standard model to it. Examples are Paul Mattick and Andrei Zdorov. [9]

-- Others try to apply the standard model to the 'Soviet' system by treating entire national economies as giant capitalist corporations owned by the central ruling group (e.g.: USSR, Inc.). [10]

-- Yet others try to apply the standard model to the 'Soviet' system by treating individual enterprises as separate 'capitals' owned in practice by their directors.

### **Structure and functioning of the 'Soviet' economy**

I cannot adequately describe the structure and functioning of the 'Soviet' economy here, but I need to make a few basic points. [11] This was a 'command economy'. Although the direct managers of means of production – the directors of industrial enterprises and the

chairmen of collective farms – were allowed some room for manoeuvre, they had to obey commands 'from above'. For industrial managers the commands came from state bodies at three levels – 'chief administrations' responsible for sections of industries, ministries responsible for whole industries, and central agencies responsible for the whole economy (the Council of Ministers) or a certain aspect thereof (the State Planning Commission, State Supplies Commission, etc.). In agriculture the lower levels of the hierarchy were organised on a territorial basis (county, province etc.). [12]

At least in formal terms, this was also a 'planned economy'. [13] Quite detailed production plans were formulated and had to be followed (unless overruled for some reason by higher authority). Most important was the one-year plan, which was broken down by month; there were also five-year plans. Besides production targets, a plan specified the sources from which a particular enterprise was to be supplied with inputs (raw materials, spare parts etc.) and the places to which it was to send its output. Unlike a capitalist firm, it was not in a position to arrange these links itself, by negotiation with other enterprises of its own choosing.

So 'Soviet' enterprises did not have the autonomy to engage in market competition (except for a marginal 'gray market' that played a stop-gap role). They did not compete with one another to sell their products in the market, because the allocation of output to other enterprises and to consumer outlets was set in advance.

True, the 'Soviet' economy bore certain resemblances to capitalism. People worked for money wages and spent them on consumer goods to which prices were attached. Profits made by enterprises were calculated, and managers had their performance assessed to some extent on the basis of those profits. Money, wages, prices and profits are capitalist categories, surely?

In fact, these resemblances are less significant than they seem, or even misleading. Thus:

-- Money as a universal means of exchange did *not* exist in the 'Soviet' economy. There were *two* non-interchangeable moneys, each

serving a separate purpose – (1) the cash money distributed as wages and spent on consumer goods; (2) the non-cash money used to help monitor enterprises' non-wage transactions. Neither of these moneys performed the central function that money possesses in capitalism.

-- Wages and prices were set by the state and therefore did not indicate the presence of markets in labour power [14] and other commodities.

-- Managers had their performance assessed and bonuses determined on the basis of production results. These results were measured by various 'indicators', which might be physical (e.g., total weight of output, number of items) or financial (e.g., profit, cost of production). But even when the key indicator was profit, the goal of production was not to maximise profit, but to fulfil the profit plan. [15]

In short, the standard model of capitalism cannot be applied to the 'Soviet' system by treating enterprises as competing capitals. [16] However, this still leaves open the possibility that the standard model might still be useable if we treat the whole 'Soviet' economy as a single capital – USSR, Inc.

### **USSR, Inc.?**

Once the 'Soviet' economy is viewed as a single giant corporation, the issues of its *internal* functioning become irrelevant to the question of whether or not it was capitalist. After all, the capitalist nature of a corporation like IBM or Texaco depends not on how it is organised internally, but on its participation in world market competition as a centre of profit making and capital accumulation.

Of course, there was fierce competition between the USSR and other states, and states too can be regarded as centres of capital accumulation. The question is: what sort of competition? There was competition in the military sphere, and therefore also in the technological sphere. There was political competition for spheres of influence. But these kinds of competition exist in any system of interacting states, whatever their modes of production. Such competition existed in the ancient world, for instance, or in the encounter between capitalist Britain and pre-capitalist imperial China.

In order to describe the USSR as capitalist in this sense, we would have to argue that the overriding goal of 'Soviet' economic activity was to compete successfully in export markets in order to reinvest the profits and accumulate capital – like the export-driven growth of the 'Asian tigers'. But this would be greatly to exaggerate the importance of foreign trade for the USSR. 'Soviet' planners aimed in principle at autarky. While this ideal was never attained, foreign trade was confined to an auxiliary function in the service of the plan. Goods required by the plan that could not be produced at home were imported; exports were then geared to a level necessary to pay for the planned imports – and not maximised, as in export-driven growth.

I should enter a reservation here. I have been talking about the 'Soviet' economic system in its mature post-Stalin form. Foreign trade did play a more central role during the forced industrialisation of the 1930s, when Stalin relied heavily on machinery imports from the West, paid for by exports of grain while people were starving (as in the Irish potato famine). It is precisely in this period that we find the strongest parallels between the 'Soviet' system and capitalism, especially if we focus not on mature capitalism but on the phase of the primitive accumulation of capital, [17] which (as noted above) also does not fit the standard model.

### **Cycles**

One topic that highlights the inapplicability of the standard model of capitalism to the 'Soviet' economic system is the business cycle of alternate boom and crisis, which socialists have always rightly seen as one of the main evils of capitalism. Although there are different Marxian theories of the business cycle, it is at least clear that the standard model and its categories are helpful in thinking about this phenomenon.

The 'Soviet' system was not free of cyclical patterns, but they were cyclical patterns of a different type, associated with the planning cycle. One example was the intense economic activity ('storming') toward the end of a plan period, when everyone was working hard to fulfil the plan on time and get their bonuses for plan fulfilment, followed by the lull at the beginning of the next plan period, when

everyone was recovering from 'storming' and waiting for the arrival of new supplies. There were also longer cycles associated with investment planning. But none of this bears the least resemblance to the capitalist business cycle. [18]

### **Expansionary dynamics**

Whatever term we may eventually choose to describe the 'Soviet' system, it should acknowledge as clearly as possible both the fundamental differences that existed between it and capitalism (in the narrow sense) and the deep affinity that existed between the two systems as inherently expansionary industrial orders.

The expansionary dynamic of the 'Soviet' system came both from the top leaders, who saw themselves as engaged in long-term competition (though not primarily *market* competition) with the major capitalist states, and from lower levels of the bureaucratic hierarchy.

In the pre-war period leaders of the USSR saw their state as being in competition mainly with Britain and later Germany (and in the east Japan). After 1945, and especially after Stalin's death, the chief rival became the United States. Khrushchev called upon the country to "catch up with and overtake America"; under Brezhnev the goal was much more modest – not to fall even further behind the US.

A range of criteria were used to compare the USSR with its rivals, but great emphasis was placed on crude physical measures such as tonnes of steel produced. Such measures reflected the internal goals of 'Soviet' economic administration and became less and less relevant to the real power equation as technology developed. The Chinese leaders also attached enormous significance to steel tonnage: Mao's goal in launching the 'Great Leap Forward' in 1959 was for China to catch up with and overtake Britain in steel output.

The expansionary pressure from lower levels was a result of the 'empire building' of managers seeking to enhance their own power, status and perquisites in (non-market) competition with one another for resources allocated from above. [19] The Hungarian economist Janos Kornai writes: 'In the socialist economy decision-makers are

motivated by a strong internal expansion drive on every level, from executives to shop foremen. The investment hunger is permanent and almost insatiable'. [20]

From certain points of view, the fact that both systems were driven by some sort of powerful expansionary dynamic is much more important than the differences between the two dynamics. In particular, both expansionary dynamics had a devastating impact on the natural environment, which was taken into account neither in calculating the rate of profit nor in assessing the level of plan fulfilment.

### **Notes**

[1] 'Soviet' is just a convenient label. At this stage I do not wish to prejudge the character of the system. The inverted commas are to acknowledge the fraudulent nature of the claim that the system was based on the power of workers' councils (Soviets).

[2] The theory of the 'Soviet' system as 'bureaucratic collectivism' is often attributed to the ex-Trotskyist Max Shachtman, but an earlier theory of this kind was that of Bruno Rizzi. His book, first published privately in 1939, is available in English under the title *The Bureaucratization of the World. The USSR: Bureaucratic Collectivism* (Tavistock Publications, 1985).

[3] See Chapter 2 ('State Capitalism in the West') in Adam Buick and John Crump, *State Capitalism: The Wages System Under New Management* (Macmillan, 1986).

[4] Historical approximations to this situation were the industrial sector of the Soviet economy under the New Economic Policy in the 1920s and the Hungarian economy following introduction of the New Economic Mechanism in 1968.

[5] See: Peter Kolchin, *Unfree Labor: American Slavery and Russian Serfdom* (Yale University Press, 1987).

[6] In the section entitled 'Private property and communism'. An alternative English-language term for this is 'vulgar communism'.

[7] 'The relationship of private property persists as the relationship of the community to the world of things.'

[8] Paul Mattick's definition, though somewhat narrower, also serves this purpose: a 'capitalist' community is one that 'believes in steadily increasing its wealth-creating capacity by a constant investment of resources in productive capital' (*Marx and Keynes: The Limits of the Mixed Economy*, 1969, Ch. XX; <http://www.marxists.org/archive/mattick-paul/1969/marx-keynes/ch20.htm>). The last phrase is circular (defining 'capitalism' by reference to 'capital') but can be omitted as superfluous.

[9] See note 8. It is significant that Mattick uses the terms 'state-capitalist' and 'state-capitalism' (with a hyphen) to

emphasise that 'capitalism' and 'state-capitalism' are distinct though kindred systems.

Andrei Zdorov lives in Odessa, Ukraine. See his book: *State Capitalism and the Modernisation of the Soviet Union: A Marxist Analysis of Soviet Society* (in Russian; Moscow: URSS, 2006).

[10] See Chapter 4 in Buick and Crump, *op. cit.* This also seems to have been the viewpoint of the Polish dissidents Jacek Kuron and Karol Modzelewski in *An Open Letter to the Party* (Socialist Review Publishing, 1966). However, their definition of the goal of economic activity as 'production for the sake of production' (as distinct from 'production for the sake of profit' in non-state capitalism) implies a broader concept of capitalism.

[11] Two introductory texts are: Alec Nove, *The Soviet Economic System* (Allen & Unwin, successive editions) and David A. Dyker, *The Soviet Economy* (Crosby Lockwood Staples, 1976).

For the sake of brevity I ignore similarly organised economies outside the Soviet Union, though some of them had highly distinctive features at various periods (e.g., Cuba, China, North Korea, East Germany).

[12] For several years under Khrushchev industry was also organised on a territorial basis, through regional 'councils of national economy'. To keep the picture simple, I omit consideration of the role played in economic management by the Communist Party bureaucracy.

[13] Some analysts argue that the planning process did not amount to 'real' planning and prefer the term 'administered economy'.

[14] Enterprises were able to compete for labour to some extent, through non-wage benefits that they were able to offer.

[15] More precisely, to overfulfill the plan but only a little – not by 'too much'. While overfulfilling the plan by a substantial margin would increase the manager's bonus, it would also reveal that the enterprise had been concealing its full capacity, with the result that uncomfortably high plan targets would be set for the following year.

[16] Nor could other administrative units – ministries, say – be treated as competing capitals, for analogous reasons (although I am unaware of anyone having tried to do this).

[17] Indeed, Russian economists at the time made use of the mind-boggling concept 'socialist primitive accumulation'!

[18] This is not to deny that the 'Soviet' economy, to the extent that it interacted with the economy of the capitalist part of the world, was affected by the business cycles occurring in that economy. But it cannot be concluded from this, as do Buick and Crump (pp. 95-6), that the USSR was fully integrated into a single world capitalist economy. If it had been so integrated, the decade of its fastest industrial growth (starting in 1929) could not have coincided with the Great Depression in the West.

[19] This kind of competitive expansionary pressure is also easily observed inside bureaucratic structures in the capitalist economy, though there it is constrained by the counter-pressure to cut costs.

[20] Janos Kornai, *Contradictions and Dilemmas: Studies on the Socialist Economy and Society*, MIT Press 1986, p. 107. I

beg the reader not to be distracted from the substance of Kornai's observation by his misuse of the word 'socialist'.

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## **The Working Class Movement, Class Struggle and Revolution**

### **Preface.**

As someone who has been involved with the working class movement in some way or another for a long time and has regarded "*class struggle*" as a vital component in the struggle for socialism/communism this article has not been produced without having to challenge views held over some time. However the LC is a discussion bulletin/journal and the views presented here are for that purpose. We can only clarify matters by discussion and sometimes this means coming to terms with the possibility that beliefs we have held for some time may be in need of revision. **(R C)**

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Two well known quotes from Marx regarding the working class and revolution.

***"The proletarian movement is the self-conscious, independent movement of the immense majority, in the interests of the immense majority."***

And.

***"... but with this too grows the revolt of the working-class, a class always increasing in numbers, and disciplined, united, organised by the very mechanism of the process of capitalist production itself."*** [Both quoted in Rubel: 1987, p.22 and 24] **(1)**

Commenting on the first of these quotes from The Communist Manifesto; Rubel raised some relevant comments. Could it really be argued that in the time of Marx and Engels that the working class movement could live up to that description? The same point can be made, Rubel points out: ***"... if we formulate it for our own era, when no trace of any such working class movement is perceptible!"*** We can certainly endorse those comments twenty five years later. Commenting on the second quote Rubel states: ***" we are no longer in the field of empirical and thus scientific observation, in the usual sense of the term, but once again, as with the expressions used in the manifesto, in the***



***sphere of normative judgements and thus of ethics.*" [ibid; pp.23-4] (2)**

Critiquing the development of the working class movement a Krisis pamphlet stated the following:

**"The movement's focus was on workers' "rights" and the amelioration of living conditions within the reference system of the labour society whose social constraints were largely internalised. Instead of radically criticising the transformation of human energy into money as an irrational end-in-itself, the workers' movement took the "standpoint of labour" and understood capital valorisation as a neutral given fact".**

[Krisis: Manifesto against Labour]

In Marx's time it might have seemed that a working class movement similar to that described in the quotes attributed to him was a possible and perhaps likely development. Workers were being massed in factories, trade unions were progressing even if only in fits and starts and movements such as Chartism had shown that the working class were a force to be reckoned with. Though it is with the benefit of hindsight the above quote from Krisis seems a more correct analysis of how the working class movement developed and what its main emphasis was on. The only period when it did look likely that the working class were likely to organise for the purpose of turning the world upside down was around the time of the First World War. What type of society might have developed had a revolution occurred in countries besides Russia we will never know. Those developments are now close to a hundred years ago and since then the working class movement and the working class in general have shown very little inclination for revolution even in dire economic circumstances but despite this we still retain the notion that this is the sector we must concentrate on to build a revolutionary movement. To this it must be added that the working class of the 21<sup>st</sup> century is vastly different from that of Marx's time or indeed from much of that of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Workers are, in most cases, no longer massed together in large factories, the manual working class which most people think about when using the term are in a minority with large portions in sectors such as the service sector which is difficult enough to

unionise that alone build a revolutionary movement from.

### **The Concept of Class Struggle**

What do we mean by class struggle? Whilst class struggle can refer to other areas of life such as housing, social benefits and so on, for most it refers to workplace struggle, exploitation in the Marxian sense, the conflict over maximising and minimising surplus value extraction. Also other aspects of workers lives such as shelter, food, clothing, health, education is related to their employment situation and wage or salary levels: for most families this in the modern context is likely to include two wage or salary earners. Therefore in most cases the class struggle is viewed as taking place at the point of production/service. Most of the conflict at the point of production takes place over wages/salaries, jobs, health and safety some of these issues may indirectly be about the level of the extraction of surplus value but in general the working class at the point of production/service, unless they are aware of Marxian theory do not see themselves as contesting the level of surplus value extraction.

That there is conflict between those who sell labour power (their ability to work) and those who purchase it is probably undeniable. Companies have to remain profitable to survive, workers wish to retain their jobs, earn enough money to lead a comfortable life and hopefully work in as safe and healthy environment as possible. What may be questionable is if this is a struggle between people, workers and capitalists or a conflict due to an inhumane system which has outlived its progressive period. The real problem for the useful majority is capital itself, capitalists are merely those who personify capital, whether they are nice or nasty is not the point: It could be argued that capitalists are just as much prisoners of the capital system as are workers, although it is of course true that in a overwhelming majority of cases they are prisoners who live in much spacious and comfortable cells, the point is under the system we live capital has to accumulate. Organising the system without capitalists would do little or nothing to improve the situation. There are two other aspects of the class struggle within the system of capital; **1)** In general only a small section of the working class is in conflict with

capital at any one time (***here is should be noted that there are some conflicts that have nothing to do with the system of capital but these are rare and limited***).

**2)** The working class is not one coherent segment, always united there are numerous divisions within it and on occasions one segment is in conflict with another.

### **A limited class struggle.**

Labour and capital are two sides of the same coin, capital is merely accumulated dead labour and as indicated previously the programme of all working class parties was the liberation of rather than from labour and the class struggle is limited to fighting opposing interests within the limits of a system of commodity production [***Manifesto against labour, p .6***] The labour/working class movement is obviously a product of the system of capital and is entrapped within the boundaries of that system. There is not even a hint of revolt against the system the duty is to try and make gains within it, higher wages, more jobs, even jobs that involve the manufacturing and delivery of military weapons, more jobs even if they are helping to destroy the planet that supports life itself. Look for example at the recent TUC marches in Britain, they are not interested in any critique of the system, the left sign up and support marches for jobs. The real problem we face is not mass unemployment but the employment system itself. Could there be a class struggle that could lead to a different form of society stemming from a class which is so entrapped in the capital system. Even the more radical elements of the working class such as anarchism seem mostly concerned with maintaining some element of the present system, indeed this very journal must plead guilty as well with its article in issue 15 on workers self management, we must all learn from our mistakes. The point here is the concentration on forms of ownership and control rather than the purpose of production because if we remain tied to a system of commodity then no matter what form of ownership and control we have we are tied to the capital system without capitalists, still having failed to break free of the prison walls.

In issue 16 of this journal Mike Young commented on the article on Workers' Self Management in the previous issue and this

does sum up the limitations of seemingly positive movements.

***"I would love to be more positive about Workers Self Management, but I am far from convinced that as it stands this social movement is in any way equal to the force of (or even truly concerned with) property ownership and the means of production. The question is, in a situation of profound economic disintegration, would Workers Self Management be the seed bed of socialised production, or does Workers Self Management carry within itself (and would reproduce) the capitalist character of the forces of production?" " ... whatever enjoyment Workers Self Management gives me as a manifestation of workers' solidarity isn't enough to make me believe that in its essential character it is anything beyond a movement for palliative reforms which cannot seriously damage (and can easily be retained within) the commodity system".***

Where we were correct was to have no truck whatsoever with so-call "*market socialism*" (See issue 17) There seems to be a problem with elements of the anarchist movement in that they are so concerned with being involved in the "*class struggle*" that they have lost sight of the society they are aiming for. Indeed some of them seem to share the position of the left which seeks to perpetuate and glorify the "*class struggle*" instead of engaging in it for the purpose of organising to end it. One problem for much of the anarchist movement in offering a critique of commodity production is that this would involve them in accepting a Marxian position and they are so busy with tying that to Leninism that they cannot see the wood for the trees. A few years ago the Anarchist Federation produced a anti work pamphlet which looked promising but in the last few years they have been too busy burying themselves in the "*class struggle*" to have time to further this line of critique. This does not distract from our view that there should be much common ground between anarchism and Marxism \*but at the moment a realisation of this seems some way off.

### **Does this mean we should not support workers in their limited struggles?**

We have already indicated that there are many reasons for conflict between workers and their employers mostly due to the capital system. The point here is that workers do not need us to tell them that they need to organise to resist the encroachments of capital, Marx himself made this point.

***By cowardly giving way in their everyday conflict with capital, they would certainly disqualify themselves from initiating any larger movement" [Marx 1997, p.61] (3)***

As long as the capital system exists workers must and will struggle in order to win limited gains or trying to avoid things getting worse, how successful such struggles will be is a different point, as is how they need to organise to make a fist of such struggles. The point is many of us see such struggles as a training ground for revolution and tend to become obsessed with them, in truth they are no such thing and have nothing to do with revolution so let's stop kidding ourselves. The major point here is when engaging in such conflicts we have to have a clear perspective of what it is we are doing, namely that we are limiting ourselves to struggles within the system and the question is how much time do groups who profess to have revolutionary aims want to spend in this sort of activity. So whilst we take the side of workers in conflicts in the here and now both what we can do and what we should do is limited. Going back to the above quote from Marx he of course went on to point out that in these limited struggles they are dealing with effects rather than causes [ibid] (4). The question being posed here is are the working class capable of turning a defensive struggle against the encroachment of capital into an offensive one to end it or do we need to turn our attention to areas beyond the economic struggle at the point of production.

### **Who or what is going to be an agent of emancipation if not the working class?**

So if the working class in the traditional meaning of that term is not to be the agent of emancipation who or what is going to take

that role? Of course if we define the working class as people who have to sell their labour power for a wage/salary in order to live, rather than in a narrower context we are talking about the overwhelming majority of people and therefore if we are speaking in terms of a majority revolution it has to come from this sector but perhaps via a different mechanism. In around the last two decades the major conflicts that have taken place have probably been via social movements such as anti capitalist, ecology, occupy, anti war and so on. The major question is how does the anti state, non market communist sector link up with these social movements? These social movements are potentially revolutionary as their aims are in conflict with the rule of capital. We know for example that the system of capital is standing in the way of anything meaningful being done to deal with the most important issue facing us at the moment, the ecological crisis. Capitalism seems to be production for the sake of production, although the overriding goal is profit. The only way out of its present economic difficulties is seen as economic growth, its very nature is in complete contradiction to solving the ecology crisis and time is not just short, in the here and now we are seeing weather patterns linked to global warming. The ecology movement has different currents within it with its mainstream failing to link the crisis to the capital system and suggesting that solutions can be found within the confines of that system. That strain of thought was described in the following way in an editorial in ***Principia Dialectica in 2006:***

***"... the new breed of capitalist-friendly environmentalists desperately try to avoid the one simple, plain truth staring them in the face: an economy based on the measurement of value as a form of wealth has reached the end of its life, and in its old age has a suicidal urge to take everyone down with it – including the very pundits busy at its bedside operating the life support system". [A World on Fire: editorial, Principia Dialectica, issue No2, Autumn/Winter, 2006]***

It is unlikely that the agent of emancipation is going to come from one particular movement, neither is it the case that certain aspects of the labour/capital conflict can have no role to play whatsoever. However at the moment the emphasis of most groups, even within the

ASNM sector is confined to fighting the austerity measures and more important the solutions being offered do not amount to a critique of the capital system at all. We do hear the word capitalism banded about but most of the analysis is limited to a surface analysis concentrating on individual corporations or individual capitalists rather than examining the system itself. As a system capital is coming up against certain limits and they are by no means just economic ones. As anti state, non market communists we need to try to connect more with social movements in a way that makes clear that it is a system based on commodity production which is the cause of our problems, that no answers can be found to issues such as the ecological crisis within that system, that there is no point advocating that this or that aspect of life should be spared the process of commodification in a society where everything is a commodity. These are movements who are, in reality, trying to deal with issues in a piecemeal way but whose solutions merit a careful critique of the system of capital itself. Maybe this is clutching at straws; maybe it is the way forward: What do think?

1) Maximilien Rubel: Non – Market Socialism in the Nineteenth Century pp. 10-33 in Rubel M and Crump J Ed Non – Market Socialism in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries

2) Ibid

\*See Maximilien Rubel: Marx, theoretician of anarchism, 1973 marxists.org

3) Karl Marx; Value, Price and Profit; p.61. 1993 International Publishers, New York

4) Ibid

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## Obituary: Terry Liddle (1948–2012)

Our comrade Terry Liddle died in mid-November 2012 after a long period of ill health. Sadly, he was alone at the time in his London home, so we do not know exactly when or how he died.

Terry's political career spans half a century. He was probably involved in more organizations than anyone else in world history. In his mid-teens he was in the Young Communist League and then the Trotskyite Socialist Labour League, but by his late teens (mid-1960s) he had rejected Bolshevism and become a libertarian socialist. That is, he

belonged to what we now call the ASNM sector. This remained his basic affiliation until the end, although his views on specific issues changed.

I knew Terry in the middle to late 1970s, when I was in a group called Social Revolution (SR), whose members were mainly people who had left or been expelled from the Socialist Party of Great Britain (SPGB). SR was approached by a council communist group called the Workers' League, consisting of two members – an elderly man named Joe Thomas,<sup>1</sup> at that time shop steward at *The Guardian*, and Terry. The two organizations decided to merge – that is, Joe and Terry joined SR. Terry also tried to link SR up with some of his friends in the Independent Labour Party (ILP), although that did not lead to anything.

A few years later, SR expelled Terry for joining the Labour Party. Those of us who voted to expel Terry (which included myself) regretted parting company with him, but felt that joining one of the parties that alternately run British capitalism was too much to stomach. Terry's rationale was the need "to be where the class is." Terry never finally made up his mind on this issue, joining and leaving the Labour Party repeatedly over the years. In 1991 or 1992 he even wrote a pamphlet entitled *Why Socialists Should Stay in the Labour Party*, where he says that he has been a "sectarian" for the last decade. That means he must have left the Labour Party again not long after joining it and being expelled from SR.

Terry's interests were astonishingly varied. They included – to name a few – anti-fascism, the history of radical thought in Britain and the Jewish Socialist Bund, free thought and atheism, environmentalism and animals' rights. He wrote political and historical works, and poetry too.

One of his interests that especially intrigued me (it is not mentioned in any of the other obituaries I have found) was the Hells' Angels. He saw no reason why enthusiasm for roaring around on motorcycles should have to be associated with nationalist and fascist politics, and he was closely involved in creating a counter-movement of leftist Hells' Angels.

Two or three years ago I re-established contact with Terry by e-mail. His main commitment in the last few years of his life was the movement for free thought. In 2003 he set up the Freethought History Research Group (FHRG). In May 2011 the FHRG held a joint conference in London with the French National Freethought Federation on the theme "Towards a New Freethought International".

Terry wrote lengthy memoirs. It is not clear to me how or whether they are going to be published. I hope they are. Not long before dying he also wrote a "death song"<sup>2</sup> in which he asks us to

Raise a glass of the blood red wine  
Or a mug of the barley brew,  
Bid farewell to your comrade,  
One of the foolish few  
Who thought we could rearrange  
the world,  
Dreamed we could make all things  
new.

## Notes

1. For a biography of Joe Thomas, see <http://www.revolutionaryhistory.co.uk/obituaries/obituaries/joe.htm>. From this source I learn that Joe had been expelled, together with another comrade, from the original Workers' League. No doubt he considered his own little group the "real" Workers' League.

2. For the full text, and also the condolences sent by the French comrades, see: <http://freethoughthistory.wordpress.com/>

Stephen Shenfield (Stefan)

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## **Pamphlet Review: No Revolution Anywhere By Robert Kurz. Published by Chronos Publications.**

Chronos Publications are intending to bring out a series of pamphlets and books in the next few years under the title of **-The Life and Death of Capitalism**. The first of these titled and authored as above came out in October 2012.

The Pamphlet **No Revolution Anywhere (NRA)** is split into three sections and the first

of these is **By Way of Presentation** which is in the form of an interview conducted with the late Robert Kurz by way of a series of questions. These questions raise some interesting points such as: The Nature of the present Crisis and how it differs from preceding ones: Is Capitalism near to reaching its historical limits? If there is no revolutionary class (Kurz and like minded theorists reject the notion that the working class can be the bearer of revolution) how is the revolution to be made? Regarding the present economic crisis Kurz argued that this has arisen due to the technological revolution (the third industrial revolution) which took on global proportions and: **"the bursting of the bubbles forced the lack of real accumulation to appear openly."** [Page: 11].

Dealing with another question he criticised most contemporary Marxists as merely adopting the classical and petit bourgeois view of a critique of finance capital. He suggests that their view is limited as it views the origin of the crisis in speculative greed rather than in the, **"insufficient production of surplus value."** [Page: 15].

The points about capitalism nearing its historical limits and the lack of any revolutionary class may be viewed as controversial. Dealing with the question of capitalism nearing its end he suggests that even if the system does come up against absolute historical limits then given the lack of critical consciousness any emancipation would fail leaving the possibility of barbarism [Page:12].

Another question raised is the rejection of work and this is based on the nature of work within capitalism. **"In Marx"**, Kurz pointed out, **"abstract labour (or the abstract labour of human energy) is the substance of capital."** [Page: 27] Later in the same question Kurz suggested: **"That which in a post capitalist society must be planned, is not the quantity of human physical energy, but rather the use of natural, technical and intellectual resources..."** [pages:28-9]

The second article is the one that the pamphlet takes its title from; **No Revolution Anywhere (NRA)**. This was an open letter to those interested in the Exit group and dates from the end of 2011 and the beginning of 2012. Exit was formed after a split in the

Krisis group in 2004. NRA argues against the notion that 2011 was a year of revolutions starting with the uprising in much of the Arab world and spreading to Europe where the effects of the economic crisis had taken hold. Amongst development arising from this was the seeming rebirth of a radical student movement in various countries and the Occupy movement which featured strongly in the USA with the formation of Occupy Wall Street. Kurz noted that according to Marx: **"real revolutionary upheaval only proceeds to the extent that its beginnings and intermediate stages are criticised and ruthlessly so in order to overcome them and to push on beyond their half measures, wrong conclusions and errors".** [Page: 32]

Concerning the events of 2011 Kurz concludes that if what we mean by revolution is a fundamental socio-economic change then nowhere can we speak of revolution [page:34]. Even traces of reforms are hard to find, there was no distribution of wealth in the Arab world and no social demands made in Europe or the USA that merits the name. At the same time negative aspects have arisen such as the success of Islamic forces in elections in various Arab countries, the rise of national Fascism in southern and Eastern Europe, the cruel treatment of asylum seekers and migrants in Greece and anti Semitic tones in the Occupy movement [pages:34-5] Kurz overall point is that what we witnessed in this period, and it is still going on, is activism for the sake of activism without an idea of which direction we are heading in and without any real radical critique of the rule of capital which goes mostly unchallenged. As he argued; without revolutionary theory, there can be no revolutionary movement [page: 37]. Much of NRA makes for challenging reading but we need to come to terms with this sort of critique if we are to move forward.

The final article- **Beneath Contempt**- whilst written in 1999 was a foretaste of the type of critique Kurz was to develop in the years to follow. Here Kurz looked at capitalism and its relationship to war and the leftist critique which was and remains trapped in what he termed as the - **"capitalist ontology"** [Page:40]. Capitalism is a system where war is an inherent feature; the end of the cold war did not bring about the end of war, the so-called 'war on terror' followed.

Dealing with the critique of capitalism, Kurz argued there are two historical and distinctive paradigms. From the 16<sup>th</sup> to the early 19<sup>th</sup> century the concept of an emerging capitalism did not exist so neither could the idea of emancipation from a system based on commodity production. A critique of capitalism dated from the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century but the left and social movements that developed the critique of it offered only a constrained critique of capitalism. This included, Kurz suggested, - **"The positive ontology of labour and the so-called class struggle, a term which describes it as nothing more than one level of competition within capitalist categories (capital and labour as two positions within value realisation) are part of this."** [Page: 41]

Kurz ends by arguing that - **"The iron cage of capitalist ontologies has to be breached."** He sees the aim as - **"a self administered or council communist society beyond masculinity and femininity, beyond commodity and money, beyond market and state, beyond politics and economy."** To achieve this, he argued, **"... Critique has to reach the level of development of the capitalist crisis and therefore, in a transnational form, to consciously turn against sovereignty and 'national development'."** [Page: 48.

For many of us who may hold on to **some** of what might be termed as 'traditional Marxism', such as capitalism being ended by the class struggle, what Kurz and groups such as Krisis/Exit and some others have to say cannot be simply dismissed out of hand but needs to be discussed. Something has to be done because at present too many are trapped on the land mines of activism without a thought about where it is heading. We will be following future material put out by Chronos Publications.

Next out in the series - The Life and Death of Capitalism - **The Substance of Capital by Robert Kurz**

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**worldsocialistmovement/SPGB:**

worldsocialism.org/spgb: Postal address: 52 Clapham High Street London SW4 7UN.  
Email [spgb@worldsocialim.org](mailto:spgb@worldsocialim.org)

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**Balloons:** different colours with "*World Socialist Movement*". **15p each plus P&P.**

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For further details on all items contact Veronica at [veronica.clanchy@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:veronica.clanchy@hotmail.co.uk) or phone 01202 569826

**Issue 22 of the World Socialist Review: Publication of World Socialist Party US.**

*"Socialists take a look at Obama" Is Obama a socialist? He does not regard himself as one. Neither do we. This issue of World Socialist Review examines Obama's outlook and life story, his packaging as a politician, and his policy in such areas as healthcare, the economy and the environment. It also places Obama in the context of world capitalism and the American political system."*

Also available "*Role Modelling Socialist Behaviour: The Life and Letters of Isaac Rab*. There is a review of this book in the World Socialist Review 22 and further details can be obtained by contacting the address below.

**World Socialist Party US (WSPUS) website** [wspus.org](http://wspus.org) Postal address: World Socialist Party, Box 440247, Boston, MA 02144.

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**Visit <http://Stephenshenfield.net>**

contains all issues of The Libertarian Communist and a host of useful articles for the ASNM sector.

**Take a look at Andy Cox's website which looks at how socialism might be developed:**  
<http://socialistmatters.webs.com/>.

**World In Common:**

[www.worldincommon.org](http://www.worldincommon.org)

**Email**

[worldincommon@yahoogroups.com](mailto:worldincommon@yahoogroups.com)

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[www.Libcom.org](http://www.Libcom.org);

**Red and Black Notes**

You can obtain some RBN items from libcom.org as listed above. If you want to know more than read issue 6 Of The Libertarian Communist and the article by Neil Fettes pp.4-7  
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**Red Anarchist Action Network (RAAN)**

[www.redanarchist.org](http://www.redanarchist.org)

**The Commune**

**For workers' self management and communism from below.** Website: [thecomune.co.uk](http://thecomune.co.uk)  
Postal address: The Commune, Freedom book shop, 84b Whitechapel High Street, London E17QX

**Comrades may be interested in the following links:**

For Libertarian Communists in Russia and Belarus: <http://wiki.avtonom.org/index.php>

“Eretik” (Heretic) is a left communist journal in Russian and English that appears both on the net and in print. This is produced by a group in Moldova.

See: <http://eretic-samizdat.blogspot.com/2012/immunity-of-rich-and-powerful.html>

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A couple of places to purchase Literature and help support the ASNM sector.

“There is an Alternative!”

**STIMULANTS:** A collection of material highlighting an opposition to the Mantra that “There Is No Alternative” to how we live today. Journals, Pamphlets, Books, DVDs and Cds etc available [www.radicalbooks.co.uk](http://www.radicalbooks.co.uk)

**Libertarian Communist Literature** has a selection of pamphlets and journals related to the anti state, non Market sector. Journals Include: **Black flag, Aufheben, Socialist Standard, Organise** and others. We have a variety of pamphlets and a few books.

If you are interested please contact the postal or email address on Page 2 with your details, (please note the changed email address [libcom.bulletin@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:libcom.bulletin@yahoo.co.uk)) This list is also included in our blog which can be found at <http://lib-com.blogspot.com/> This also includes issues 1 to 19 of The Libertarian Communist. The Libertarian Communist can also be found at [www.scribd.com](http://www.scribd.com) and <http://stephenshenfield.net>

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**Chronos Publications**  
**BM Chronos, London WC1N 3XX**

The Life and Death of Capitalism Series  
 no.1

No Revolution Anywhere by Robert Kurz;  
 October 2012

The Substance Of Capital by Robert Kurz.  
 Due out in January 2013

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### Worth taking a look at

Institute for Anarchist Studies, the similar but separate, Anarchist Studies Journal and Anarchy Archives.

See also the Socialist Labour Party of America ([www.slp.org](http://www.slp.org)), and the Marxist Internet Archive Library

### Radical Industrial Unions

**Industrial Workers of the World: [www.iww.org](http://www.iww.org) Or P/O Box 7593, Glasgow, G42 2EX Email: [rocsec@iww.org.uk](mailto:rocsec@iww.org.uk).**

**Workers International Industrial Union. [www.wiiu.org](http://www.wiiu.org) or [www.deleonism.org/wiiu.htm](http://www.deleonism.org/wiiu.htm) see the article on Industrial Unionism in issue 9**

*The following groups although not strictly defined as anti state, non market, are worth taking a look at*

**International Libertarian Socialist Alliance: Formerly called the World Libertarian Socialist Network**

An excellent resource for groups who come under the heading of Libertarian Socialism many of which come within the remit of the anti state, non market sector [www.libertyandsocialism.org](http://www.libertyandsocialism.org)

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**Radical History Network of North London.**

For details contact Alan Woodward on 020 8800 1046 or RaHN at [alan@petew.org.uk](mailto:alan@petew.org.uk)  
 Email: [radicalhistorynetwork@googlemail.com](mailto:radicalhistorynetwork@googlemail.com)

**Wrekin Stop War** This can be found at [www.wrekinstopwar.org](http://www.wrekinstopwar.org) or contact Duncan Ball, 23 Sunderland Drive, LeegomerySalop, TF1 6XX email: [Duncan.ball@blueyonder.co.uk](mailto:Duncan.ball@blueyonder.co.uk).

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**The following publications have recently been brought to our attention.**

**Mayday.** Issue 6, Winter 2010 stated: “Mayday is an attempt to learn from critical Marxists, Anarchism, and to criticise the Ultra leftist streak which taints some anarchism. It is not often that anarchism is criticised from within, but Mayday has done just that, identifying an anarchist inability to think political growth and work with other groups who are not like them.”

For further information contact : Trevor Bark, 18 Walker Drive, Bishops Auckland, Co Durham, DL14 6QW or email [dr\\_trevorbark@fastmail.net](mailto:dr_trevorbark@fastmail.net) or visit : <http://workingclassbookfair.vpweb.com>

Also of interest: North East Anarchists at [WWW.neanarchists.com](http://WWW.neanarchists.com)



