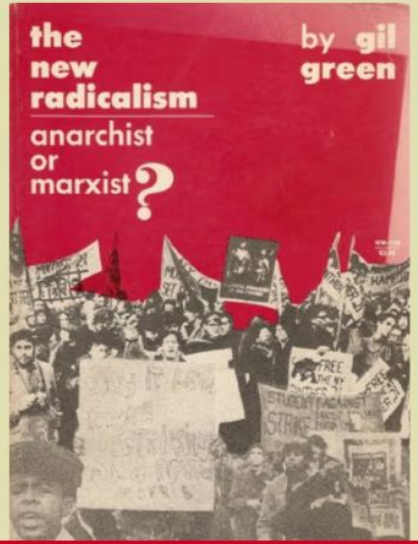


Talkin’ About a Revolution - Tracy Chapman

PEOPLES SCHOOL FOR MARXIST-LENINIST STUDIES ™



PSMLS

New Radicalism: Anarchist or Marxist?

PSMLS 10/27/2026

What we'll be learning today:

- Chapters 1-4
- Chapters 5-8
- Chapters 9-10, Comparison to Modern Day



New Radicalism: Anarchist or Socialist

by Gil Green

(Excerpts from Chapters 1-4)

The New Radicalism; Anarchist or Marxist by Gil Green



Gil Green, Author

Instead of calling it the New Left, Gil Green speaks of the New Radicalism, and that may be a better term, for some of its members are by no means of the Left, as he points out (p. 44 f.). Whatever its name, and whatever its merits or its sins of commission and omission, it can not be accused of an excess of unity. All the same it most certainly exists, and Green has undertaken to give a coherent account of it, so far as that is possible for a trend that exhibits so little coherence. I say "trend" rather than "movement" for two reasons: it is not organized, even though there are many organizations within it; and its composition could not be more heterogeneous. It is very much "against," and not very much "for." What are we to make of this congeries of flower children, apolitical hedonists, terrorists, anarchists, Progressive Labor, Maoists, ex-Maoists, adherents of the Frankfurt school, leftish psychoanalysts, dissident communists of various vintages, seekers of salvation through Yoga or psychodelic drugs or Zen Buddhism, police agents, panhandlers, sexists, would-be supermen, and much more? To confuse the picture further, the nostrums are rarely offered singly or in the pure state. As a rule, two or more panaceas are present in any given individual or group. What the effect of the mixture as a whole may be is hard to see, or foresee. Events in various parts of the world and various places in the United States have shown that it is not something that can be ignored.



CHAPTER 1: YOUTH IN REVOLT

The massive youth revolt that has been with us for more than a decade [Meaning the 1960's] is one of the most remarkable phenomena of our time, without historic parallel. What seemed at first to be just a new youthful fad soon to go the way of all fads has turned out to be far more than a **passing fancy.**

It is the young radicals who deserve the main credit for having broken through the stifling, complacent and conformist mood of a decade ago. They have confronted the Establishment on a thousand different fronts, with a freshness, vigor, imagination and audacity beautiful to behold. They have shouted for all to hear that the king is naked and now more and more people see—and admit—that this is so.*

In a sense there has always been and will always be some form of youth revolt. No two generations are identical; each faces problems distinctly its own. Even old problems reappear wearing new garb.



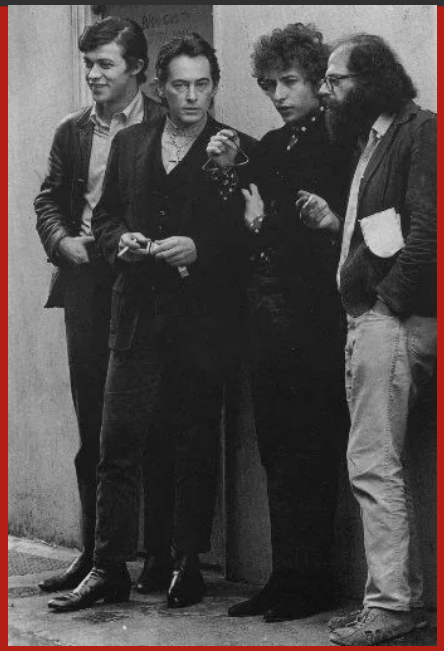
50’s “Beatniks” to 60’s “Hippies”

Youth in the Fifties was known as the “Silent Generation.” Yet it was by no means all silent, any more than was the generation of the Sixties all vocal, or that of the early Seventies all radical.

Silence does not always imply consent. Sometimes it is a period of quiet incubation from which a new articulation emerges.

In the Fifties too there were youth who were turned off by the society of their elders and who chose the beatnik pad, thereby becoming the unknowing forerunners of the later-day hippies.

It was in the early Sixties that young activists began to make news again, rejecting the McCarthy era and its Cold War mentality, and fervently entering the struggles for civil rights and peace as the two great moral issues of the day.



Dylan, Robbie Robertson, Michael McClure, and Allen Ginsberg in 1965. Photographed in the alley behind City Lights Books, San Francisco.

The 30's Youth- The Unwanted Generation

In the Thirties this country also witnessed a convulsive youth upheaval.

It was the period of the "unwanted generation," when young people could find no work in factory, field, office or profession.

The youth upsurge was a direct outgrowth of the years of bitter class conflict.

It was part, therefore, of a more universal people's insurgence and did not take on the same generational overtones as that of today.

Young and old alike were responding to an economic breakdown which directly and intimately affected them both.



The Disaffected Youth of the 70's

A considerable proportion of youth is not impressed with the system's ability to produce.

What shocks them most of all is the realization that the latest revolution in science and technology makes possible a society in which the essential needs of all can be met without excessive toil, drudgery, or long hours of labor.

Yet they see technology not as a neutral friend but as a monstrous demonic foe, running completely amuck, turning man into a mere cog devoid of individuality, and threatening the very extinction of life on earth.

This is the first generation to reach the moon. It is also the first to be alarmingly aware that science can also be used to kill and to kill in a hundred different ways and on a scale never known before.



May 4, 1970 Mary Ann Vecchio kneeling over the dead body of Jeffrey Miller minutes after the unarmed student was fatally shot by an Ohio National Guardsman

University Culture

Students live crowded into their own communities, sharing close, even intimate, living experiences with other young people, reinforcing their feeling of separation from productive life and the “outside world.”

The most knowledgeable and most sophisticated of the students also share a common revulsion to the meaningless and/or reactionary character of many of the studies required of them and the hypocritical notion that a college degree is a true measure of learning.

Continued aid from parents, at the same time that there is frequent estrangement from them, creates its own kind of tension and even gets translated into a sensation of oppression.

In time, the reality of this rarefied artificial existence creates its own false consciousness: it begins to think of itself as the real world and the real world as the anti-world.



Building Institutions

The movement of the Thirties, like that of the Sixties, also had its origin in and was constantly replenished by mighty gushers of spontaneous protest.

But what distinguished it from today's movement is that those spontaneous outpourings **were successfully channelled into the building of great popular mass organizations involving millions.**



The Spontaneous (1970's) Movement

Today's movement is different. The wonderful outbursts of spontaneous protest with their many highly imaginative forms of struggle have not led to the formation of new, great popular organizations of the people.

The new radicalism has had no fixed ideology. Spontaneity could produce no more than it did—a hybrid type of eclectic thinking passed off by some as "no ideology" and by others as "new ideology."

Lack of consistent world outlook and perspective have become the movement's greatest weakness.

Unless youth's seething restlessness finds expression in an ideology consistent with historic needs, its immense vitality and potentiality will become diffuse and dissipated.



Abby Hoffman (November 30, 1936 – April 12, 1989) American political and social activist who co-founded the Youth International Party ("Yippies") and a leading proponent of the Flower Power movement.

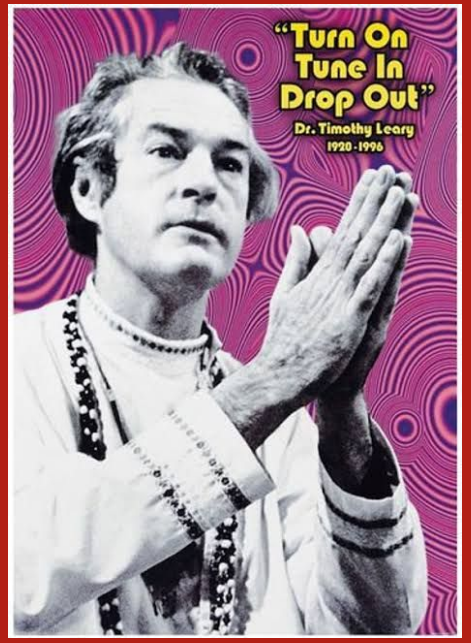
Two Tendencies of The New Radicalism: Building vs. Escaping Society

One tendency sought to build a solid, growing, serious movement for change. The other saw the movement in purely individualistic terms, as an outlet for personal frustrations and a place where individuals can do their thing—anything.

They are out to change society by "dropping out,"' by seeking to escape to their own rarefied, slum, utopian, psychedelic counter-communities. They are voluntary outcasts, the new breed of self-imposed untouchables, who by their clothes, appearance, language and total life style aim shockingly to demonstrate that society is not for them and they not for society.

Escape from society is no more possible than from gravity.

Even men under conditions of spatial weightlessness must still depend upon links with earth for survival.



Timothy Francis Leary (October 22, 1920 – May 31, 1996) was an American psychologist and proponent of psychedelics.

Replacing Reformism with Rhetoric isn't Revolution

Revolutionary rhetoric has become a substitute for strategy and tactics and a cover-up for frustrations and failures.

The policies of the "New Left" have swung from extreme to extreme. Each swing has corrected one set of errors by replacing it with another.

Now we witness certain small elitist groups making a cult out of their lack of confidence in the ability of the people to decide anything, whether now or in the future, and who view their own self-anointed roles to be as substitutes for the people.



Scene from "All in the Family", a TV sitcom in the 1970s. Rob Reiner played Michael Stivic, Archie Bunker's liberal son-in-law. Archie, a working class man living in Queens NY, was largely defined by his bigotry toward a diverse group of individuals: blacks, Hispanics, "Commies", Freemasons, gays, women, hippies, Jews, Asians, Catholics,"women's libbers", and Polish–Americans.

This pop culture example portrays the flippant rhetorical exchanges between the false dichotomy of conservatives and liberals. Cynical dialogue between New Left and Reactionaries passed for humor in the 1970's. Then as now, it is misleading.

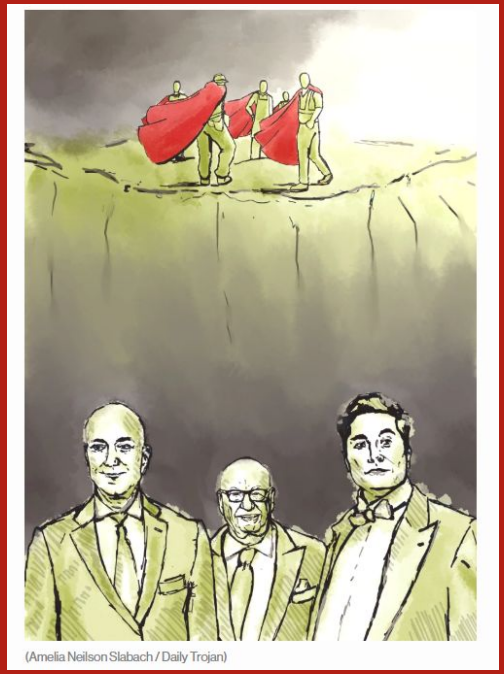
Where is the Working Class?

This last point cannot be overstressed. The great working-class struggles of the Thirties provided the magnet that pulled intellectual youth to the radical orbit, giving them inspiration and perspective.

But the relative dormancy of the working-class movement in the postwar period, the venality and corruption of labor leadership, had an opposite effect on radical youth.

The most telling blow of all was when they were told by Black leadership—with justice—that their task was to fight against racism and to help organize whites, not Blacks. Not knowing how to communicate with ordinary white working people, influenced by their own middle-class prejudices against workers, the new radicals began to turn in on themselves.

As a consequence the tendency toward anarchistic individualism assumed the ascendancy at the same time that the movement took a leap in revolutionary consciousness.



(Amelia Neilson Slabach / Daily Trojan)

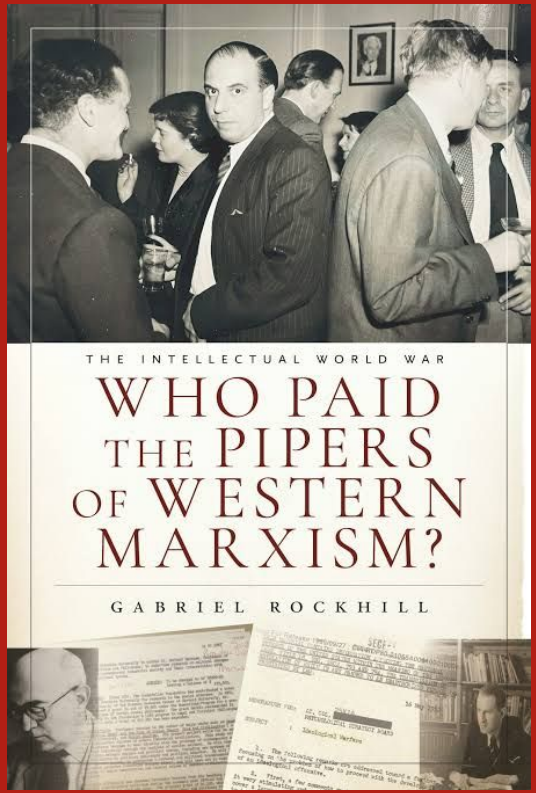
New Radicalisms' False Theories

The new radicalism has made important contributions to a better grasp of some of the new features of postwar capitalist society.

But it has also spun false theories reflecting a subjective reaction to the specific conditions of the time, seeing these not as temporary and fluid, but as fixed and frozen.

It is these false theories that have taken on a life of their own and have now become a major obstacle to the further advance of the movement, particularly at a moment when all signs point to a new period of mounting class struggle ahead.





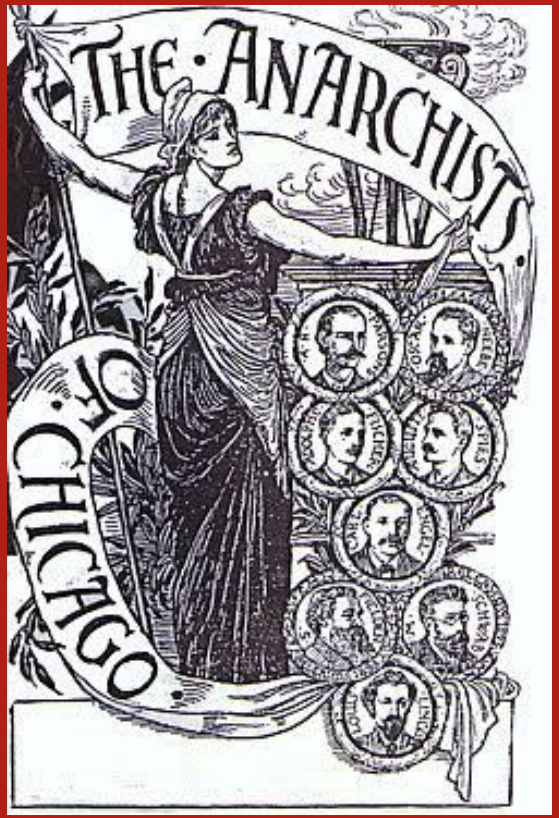
CHAPTER 2: MAN AND SOCIETY

Marxism and anarchism have this in common: Both claim a deep concern for the fate of man and a firm belief in the possibility of a society in which, in the words of the Communist Manifesto, “the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all” (p. 31).

Where they part company is in their understanding of the nature of man and society, their estimate of the crisis that grips society, and their approach to its solution.

Anarchism starts its analysis of this crisis with the plight of the individual—abused, oppressed, crushed by the juggernaut of centralized bureaucratic power.

Marxism starts its analysis with society and its division into conflicting classes, exploiting and exploited, as the root cause of all oppression and the reason why no man is truly free.



CHAPTER 2: MAN AND SOCIETY



What appears as new in anarchism is in reality very old; what is old often masquerades as new and as being justified by new times.

As times and conditions often change radically, it is more difficult for a new generation, searching for its own answers, to discern the old posing as the new.

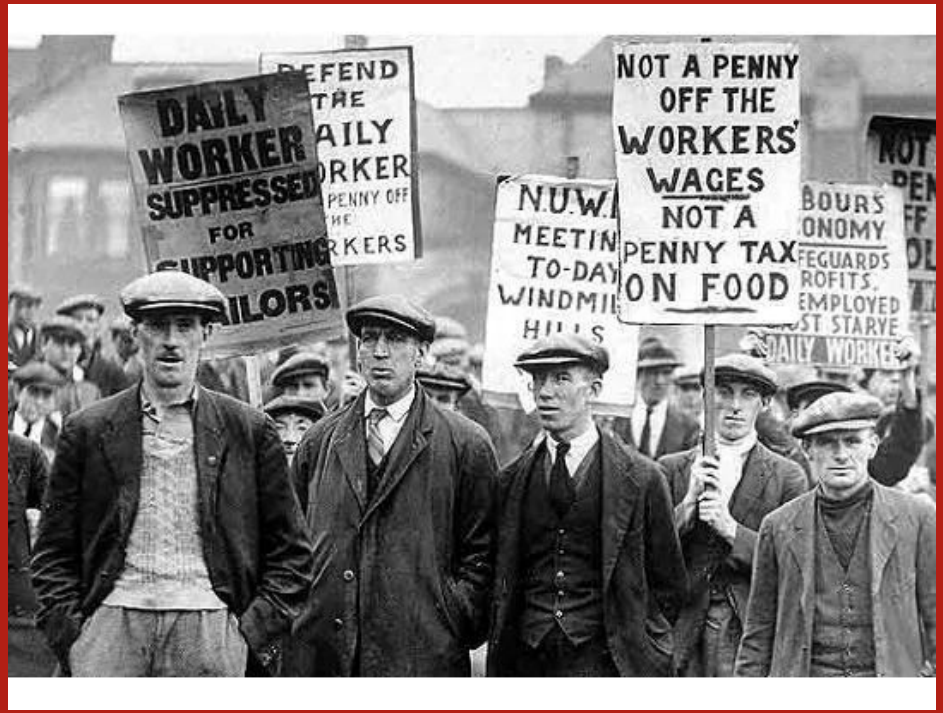
Anarchism has had more lives than the proverbial cat. It is as old as resistance to oppression and as young as the hippies and the Weathermen. It has been a recurring phenomenon arising in periods of sharp social tension and crisis, particularly at times when rapid technological change radically alters people's lives and the way they earn their living, eroding their former sense of class cohesion and stability.

CHAPTER 2: MAN AND SOCIETY

The “Old Left” generation of the Thirties had experienced a great awakening of the working class and the consequent majestic class battles of that period after years of slumber.

The young generation has had no such experience. It saw the working class as affected by a period of relative prosperity and had neither the theoretical grounding nor practical experience from which to judge this as a temporary and passing phenomenon.

The older generation, on the other hand, while correctly stressing the ultimate decisive role of the working class, frequently tended to underestimate what it would take to pry loose the paralyzing grip of a venal and corrupt labor leadership.



CHAPTER 3: FREEDOM AND SOCIETY

The between Marxism and anarchism is not over a greater or lesser concern for man, the individual.

It is over how the individual is to achieve the conditions needed for his fullest development and greatest personal freedom.

Freedom is not and cannot be absolute. It never has been and never will be. It is always limited by the bounds of necessity. These are not only social, as some anarchists seem to think, but also natural.

The laws of nature are in many ways more authoritarian than those of man.



CHAPTER 3: FREEDOM AND SOCIETY

The anarchist worships more primitive forms of social organization for he believes he can escape from authority. It is true, of course, that the more complex the technology the more need there is for authority.

But even in primitive society, in the face of natural disasters like forest fires, droughts or famines, where tight discipline is required for survival, authority to make decisions must be vested in certain individuals; and even if authority is delegated, it is still authority.

The truth is that the counterculture that was meant to prevent integration into the system, has been t**aken over by Madison Avenue and the system's hucksters, lock, stock and barrel, or should we say, hair, beads and clothes**.



CHAPTER 4: THE ROOTS OF INDIVIDUALISM

Individualism we have said, is the classical ideology of the bourgeoisie. Anarchism is not its opposite pole, only a more radical variant of the same theme.

This is particularly so in the United States. The roots of individualism are deeply imbedded in the American historical experience and in the nation's psychology and mythology.

In many ways the United States has been the most bourgeois minded of all countries.

The notion that all individuals enjoyed equal rights and opportunities was largely a myth even in the heyday of early American capitalism.

It was always a strictly limited right and never existed for the Black, Indian or Chicano peoples. Nor have women ever enjoyed full equality with men.



THE CHILD WHO WANTED TO PLAY BY HIMSELF.

PRESIDENT WILSON. "NOW COME ALONG AND ENJOY YOURSELF WITH THE OTHER NICE CHILDREN. I PROMISED THAT YOU'D BE THE LIFE AND SOUL OF THE PARTY."

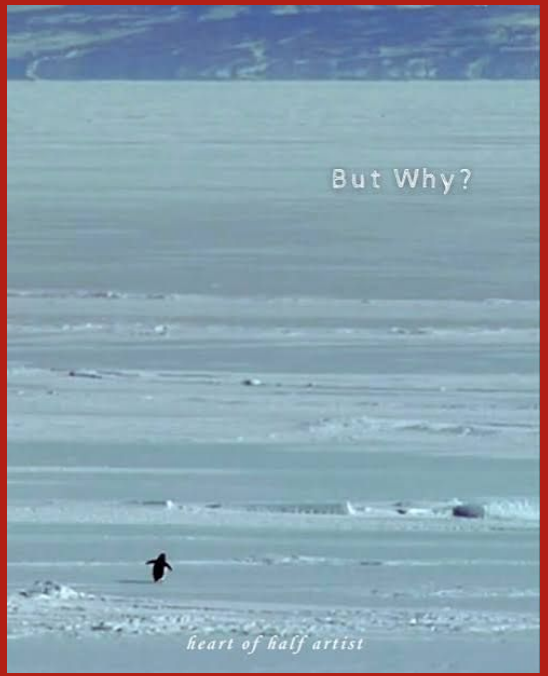
CHAPTER 4: THE ROOTS OF INDIVIDUALISM

What is significant about the present period is that liberalism as a system of beliefs, as the panacea for what ails the system, is being challenged on a wider front and more basically than ever.

This is because liberalism has shown itself to be totally incapable of explaining the crisis of our times.

An ideological break with liberalism is indispensable for a truly revolutionary point of view. But anarchism and the psuedo-Left romanticism that resembles it are not that point of view.

They represent a nihilist negation of liberalism without any real substitution for it.



The Nihilist Penguin, viral video of a penguin running headlong into the frozen wastes to his certain death for reasons undetermined by science. But Why?

CHAPTER 4: THE ROOTS OF INDIVIDUALISM

Just as the failures of liberalism feed anarchist moods, so in turn, the failures of anarchism with its total dependence on spontaneity and its rejection of political struggle, leave the masses at the mercy of one or another bourgeois current. For the ruling ideology of any given period is the ideology of its ruling class.

Without an ideology that fundamentally challenges the ruling ideology, and shows why and how society can be reconstructed along entirely new and revolutionary lines, the working class cannot develop an independent political perspective, in-dependent class organizations, and is always ready prey for one or another bourgeois fad.

Hence anarchism, which considers itself to be the sworn foe of liberalism, actually induces the people to go back to liberalism.



Anarchism and Liberalism are two sides of the same vexing and counterintuitive coin.

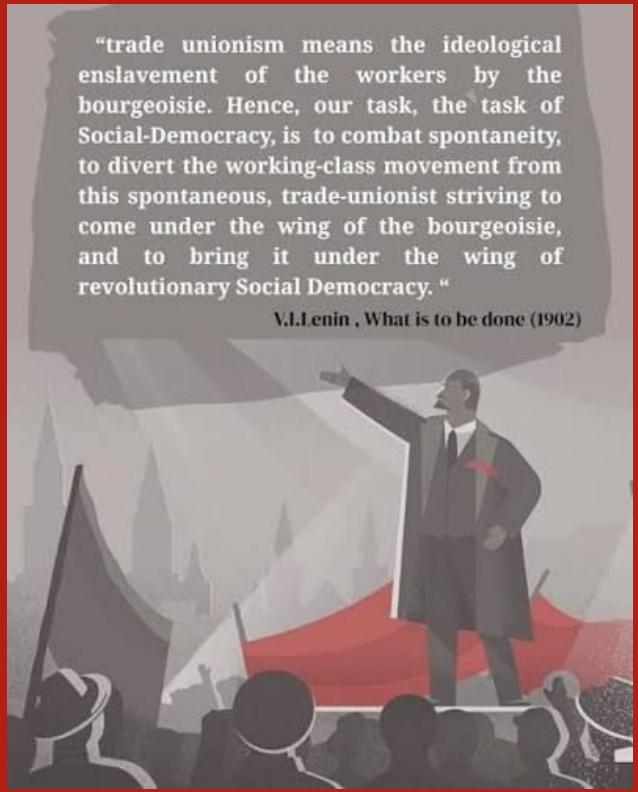
CHAPTER 4: THE ROOTS OF INDIVIDUALISM

Spontaneity must be seen as an indispensable factor of the very greatest significance in every mass struggle and upsurge. No revolutionary movement can succeed without it.

The spontaneous anger and action of the masses can arise so suddenly and strike with such elemental fury as to lead to insurrection itself and to the toppling of government.

The 1905 and February 1917 Russian Revolutions were such combustible explosions.

But without revolutionary theory and leadership, mass spontaneity is helpless to replace the old with something fundamentally new.





Discussion & New Members Introductions

New Member Introductions

- What is your name, pronouns and state (or country/territory)?
- Where do you work? Is it unionized?
- How did you find out about the People’s School?
- What do you think about tonight's class?

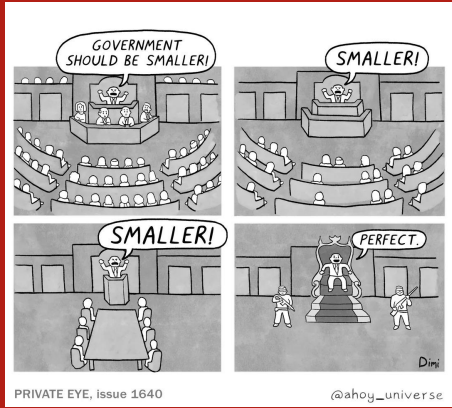


New Radicalism: Anarchist or Socialist

by Gil Green

(Excerpts from Chapters 5-8)

Ch. 5 - The State as the Enemy



Two recent developments have given a new lease on life to the anarchist doctrine of the State. The first of these is the gargantuan increase in State power, which affects more and more every aspect of social life. This concentration of power—political, economic and military—is particularly striking in the United States and is in sharp contrast to the nation's earlier history and tradition.

The second development is the disillusionment of many with what they consider to be similar tendencies in the socialist countries—over centralized power, bureaucratic methods, lack of personal liberty, and friction between socialist states. This has led anarchists to charge that socialist states are no better than capitalist ones, and some have even compared the socialist states with fascist ones. As a consequence, writes Karl Shapiro, "The governments are losing their young. ... At present we are going through the stage of withdrawal from the old political psychologies of organized governments". Daniel Guérin, in his book *Anarchism*, writes that in the face of recent happenings in socialist countries, "the anarchist critique seems less tendentious, less unjust; sometimes it even seems to have a prophetic ring" .

Has history really vindicated the anarchist position of anti-statism ?

Combatting the Habits of Centuries

Without doubt the building of a new society has proven more complex and difficult than first imagined. We now know that the habits of centuries are not easily shed and constantly reassert themselves in new ways. Bureaucracy, too, is a real menace and not easily overcome. Socialist countries have been plagued with bureaucratic excesses, with cults of personality and of mediocrity, and with remnants of nationalism and chauvinism.

All these faults exist and cannot be condoned. They have led and can still lead to grave reverses for socialism. Nor will they disappear spontaneously. It will require deeper theoretical probing and political struggle for their eradication. But in order to do this it is necessary to see them in historic perspective and in the context of the worldwide struggle of our time. This the anarchists are incapable of doing.

It should not be forgotten that the revolution came first to a Single country and one economically underdeveloped. With the birth of the Soviet State the class struggle took on a fierce international character as well. The origin of the Cold War, as has been pointed out by others, goes all the way back to the Russian Revolution and the attempt to strangle it in its infancy.



Soviet Anti American Chemical Weapon Propaganda Poster

“The Original Sin”

This international class war, for that is what the Cold War is, has become far more intense and protracted with the rise of the other socialist states. Imperialism, and in the first place U. S. imperialism, has never acquiesced to the existence of a new social system which, by its very nature, is a constant challenge to capitalism in the rest of the world. Capitalism seeks to destroy it. If this cannot be done all at once, it is attempted piecemeal. Socialism must be “contained,” new revolutions must be kept from succeeding, the socialist countries divided among themselves, their contradictions and weaknesses taken advantage of, and so forth and so on.

The fact that the revolution came first of all to the countries of lesser economic development, and has yet to come to one of the big, highly developed western countries, has compelled the socialist states to take the path of forced economic development. And we now know that the struggle to overcome underdevelopment is far more difficult, as Fidel Castro has noted, than the struggle for power itself.

These historic peculiarities of the way the process of world revolution has developed should not be used to excuse bureaucratic distortions, but must be taken into account as objective facts. Anarchists see centralized state power as the original sin from which all others stem. But had Proudhon’s and Bakunin’s anti-statist views prevailed there would be no socialism being built anywhere. In the world of today the only viable alternative to capitalist-imperialist states is socialist states, and not the completely stateless society the anarchists advocate.

The Imperative of the Dictatorship of the Proletariat

There can be no escaping the fact that the centralized socialist State—yes, the dictatorship of the proletariat in one form or another—is absolutely imperative so long as the struggle between the old and the new systems has not yet been resolved conclusively on a world scale. The struggle for greater internal democracy and personal liberty in socialist countries must be seen in this context. Seen outside of it, it degenerates into petty-bourgeois liberalism. It is precisely the dual need of the socialist countries for strong State power and for the greatest involvement of the people themselves in the building of a society without privileges for anyone, that creates the contradiction so difficult to resolve. That is why the anarchist criticism of socialist countries, even when valid in one respect or another, is fundamentally invalid. Its premise is false. It seeks the weakening and destruction of the socialist State vis-a-vis its imperialist foes and not its strengthening. When Guérin points to Algeria and Yugoslavia as examples where more democratic forms of workers' management are emerging, he only adds to our feeling of unease. It is questionable whether Algeria is actually building socialism and we have grave doubts as to where Yugoslavia is heading. As previously noted, the big divide between Marxism and anarchism is not over the objective of a classless, stateless society. Nor is it over concern for the individual. It is over the question of the class struggle and the need to recognize its imperatives. Proudhon's passionate diatribe against the horrors of the State previously quoted is typical of the abstract anarchist, a-historical conception of the State. But the State can never be fought as an abstraction, only as the concrete embodiment of the rule of a given class. To fight it as an abstraction is to tilt at windmills.

Ch. 6 - Violence, Terrorism, and Guerrilla War

It is debatable whether the U.S. is the *most* violent country in the world. But no one can deny that it is one of the most violent. Our police are among the most brutal. An English bobby, for example, carries no gun, but in this country police often shoot first and ask questions after. It is also commonplace for crime suspects—especially when young, Black, Brown or Indian—to be mercilessly beaten and maltreated, with confessions wrung from them by sadistic torture, whether guilty or not.

Our history as a nation is replete with violence. The Indian peoples were subjected to genocidal slaughter and then herded into reservations to starve. The Africans were brought here in chains and have been kept in chains ever since. In the century since their "emancipation" more than five thousand have been recorded as lynched, i.e., wantonly and sadistically murdered by racist mobs. The frontiers of the United States have been ruthlessly and violently expanded with lands stolen wholesale from both Indians and Mexicans. In 1898 the United States grabbed Cuba, the Philippines and Puerto Rico. The latter is still in its clutches and only Cuba is truly free.

The United States is the only country in the world to have used the atom bomb. Assuming the need to drop it at all—which we do not—some sparsely populated region of the earth could have been found to demonstrate the awesome power of the new weapon. Instead, it was deliberately and cold-bloodedly dropped on two of the most densely populated cities in the world. And in Vietnam today this country is guilty of a thousand Mylai massacres, for its policy and practice are genocidal. Nor is it accidental that its most barbaric atrocities are committed against colored peoples.

Bloody Encounters



An Example of the Growing Militarization of the US Police Force

The history of class war in the United States is also one of bloody encounters. When a striker or demonstrator is shot or killed in a West European country a great hue and cry is raised. In the United States it is taken as one of those things—another fatality, a statistic to be computed. Faced with mounting discontent and a growing radical mood, our rulers are concerned less with reducing violence by reducing or ending repression, and more with using the issue of violence demagogically to win popular approval for even greater repression. This is the true meaning of the "crime in our streets" issue. Sure, there is growing crime in the streets. The causes for this lie in poverty, joblessness, racism, and the highly profitable, police-protected narcotics traffic, as many must know. But the issue of crime is cunningly used to obtain the means for escalating violence. The size of the police force is being increased everywhere: millions of dollars are being appropriated to store more tear gas, mace, shotguns, rifles and every which type of "anti-riot" weaponry; U.S. soldiers, the National Guard and U.S. marshals are being trained for "domestic emergencies"; the armed occupation of the ghettos tightens; and college and high school premises are invaded with the permanent presence of the police.

The Illusion Within New Radicalism

The pretext for all this is the so-called danger of “Left violence.” Ruling class repression and terror are being passed off as protective countermeasures, and not as the original and prime cause for whatever measures people do take to defend themselves and their rights.

It is true, unfortunately, that there has been an excessive preoccupation with rhetoric about violence in a few sections of the new radicalism. There has also been an inclination on the part of a small number of young people to play the dangerous game of individual counter-terror. Taking advantage of this, the media have misled a considerable number of people into believing that the violence comes from the Left and not from the ruling class.

To see how unfounded this illusion is one needs but recall that the new radicalism started out as a movement dedicated to nonviolence, even to the extreme of turning this into a form of gospel. Despite hundreds of police and racist mob attacks on the early civil rights and peace movements, these were never met with physical resistance of any sort. Even when demonstrators and activists were illegally arrested they did not resist; they simply went limp, refusing to cooperate with the police.



A white civil rights protester was dragged out of the middle of West End Avenue in front of Morrison’s Cafeteria. The mass arrests came on the third straight day of anti-segregation demonstrations. April 29, 1964. Photo by Harold Lowe Jr. Courtesy of The Tennessean

Ch. 7 - In Search of an Agency



Herbert Marcuse (1898-1979)
German-Jewish Philosopher

Strange as it may seem, many of those who shout the loudest for “revolution now” have no perspective for revolution at any time. They really do not believe that a broad-based, deep-rooted and growing movement for revolutionary change is possible in this country. It is a case of rhetoric used to conceal a lack of analysis and program.

The literature of the new radicalism is sprinkled with pessimism about the possibility of building a mass movement, especially among working people. It is filled with the belief that the capitalist economic system has somehow, willy-nilly been able to resolve all its internal contradictions.

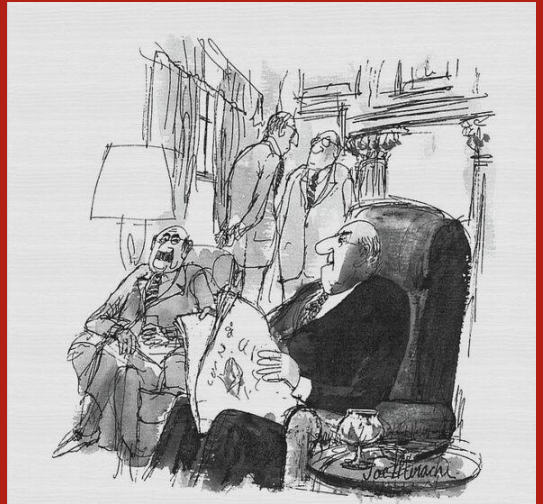
The main radical theorist of the view that modern technological society can and does meet the material needs of its people is Herbert Marcuse. He argues that modern capitalism has tremendous “absorbent power” through its capacity to provide material satisfaction “in a way which generates submission and weakens the rationality of protest.’ Thus for him too the economic system seems to be working diabolically well. The only fly in the ointment is the way the system uses the growing, spreading abundance to generate submission and to weaken protest.

The Haves and the Have Nots

It seems strange, therefore, that so many young people who consider themselves dyed-in-the-wool revolutionists should have viewed Marcuse as the very guru of revolution. Although his fame as the septuagenarian prophet of the "New Left" declined in the last few years, it is still remarkable that it lasted so long.

There is good reason why his ideas struck a responsive chord. They addressed themselves to new features of social development and gave the appearance of basic answers to new problems. In Marcuse's description of modern capitalist society many middle-class white youth saw a reflection of their own particular reality. These young people were in the main the sons and daughters of "the affluent society." They came from homes to which the postwar years and the new technology had brought considerable well-being. But greater material possessions had meant neither greater happiness nor had it increased their sense of security or community.

The revolt of middle-class white youth was not against material lack; it was against spiritual void. They felt loathing for society's stress on material possessions in direct proportion to their ability to have them.



"The Poor Are Getting Poorer" by Joseph Mirachi

The Hope for the Lumpenproletariat



Mikhail Alexandrovich Bakunin (1814–1876) A Russian Revolutionary Anarchist and Political Philosopher

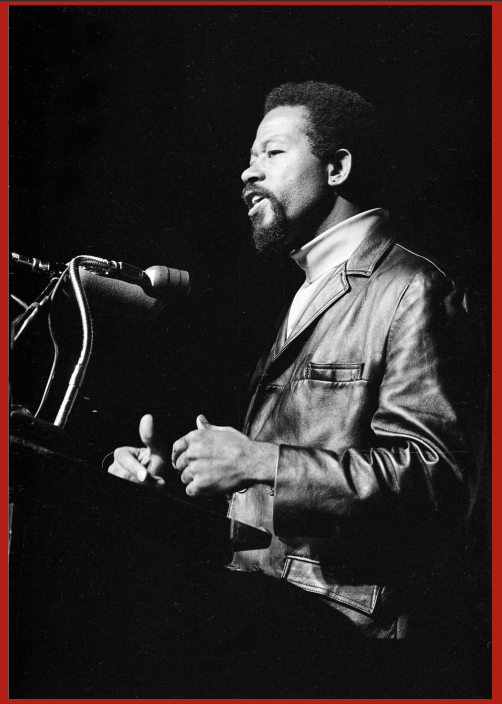
Marx and Engels noted that when the old order begins to crumble “a portion of the bourgeoisie goes over to the proletariat, and in particular, a portion of the bourgeois ideologists, who have raised themselves to the level of comprehending theoretically the historical movement as a whole.” But Marx and Engels noted also another phenomenon—that many of the lower middle classes come to the revolution for essentially conservative reasons, “in view of their impending transfer into the proletariat” (Communist Manifesto, p. 19). Both of these tendencies are at work today as the crisis of the system deepens. The latter tendency assumes mass proportions and frequently exhibits itself in a confusing and contradictory fashion. There is at one and the same time an impassioned hatred for the system and yet an even tighter clinging to certain elitist, individualist, middle-class concepts and prejudices.

Marcuse is by no means alone in turning wistful eyes to the lumpenproletariat in the hope that it will be the stratum to make the revolution. A whole literature now exists on the subject. While the view that the lumpenproletariat is now the truly revolutionary class is something of a current fad in sections of the new radicalism, it is not new. Bakunin made this a major point of difference with Marxism. He insisted that the lumpenproletariat was the real proletariat.

Ch. 8 - How Strong is the Tiger

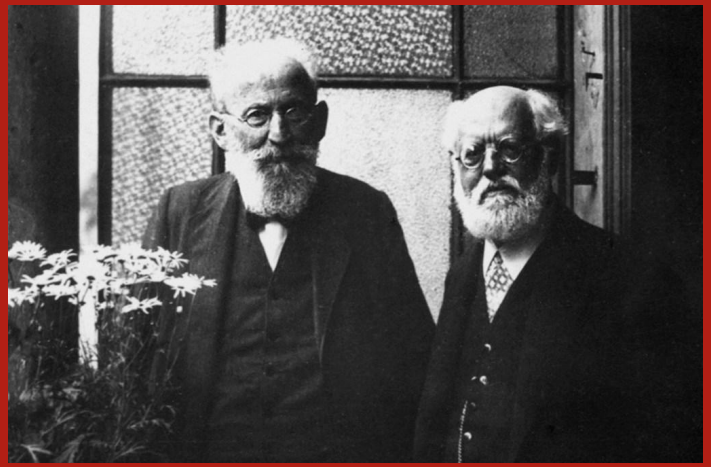
Those who believe as do Marcuse and Cleaver that the working class has lost the potential to be the revolutionary class, apparently believe that modern capitalism has achieved perpetual economic motion—it has ironed out the kinks in the economic system. This, at bottom, explains much of the false pessimism of Marcuse and the false optimism of Cleaver. Despite considerable talk about American imperialism being a "paper tiger," there is a great exaggeration of the tiger's strength and prowess. It is neither all-paper nor all-powerful. It is a wounded beast, even more dangerous because infuriated. But it is wounded.

As we have seen, Marcuse explicitly believes that modern technological capitalism can now meet the basic needs of all and thereby contain effective protest and revolt. Cleaver says it implicitly. He believes that this has already happened for the workers and that the only exceptions are the lumpens. But if the system is capable of meeting the needs of all, why not also the lumpens? If it is threatened by imminent revolution on the part of the lumpens, as Cleaver believes, would it not bribe this stratum also? Or are we to believe that lumpens are less susceptible to being bribed than are workers?



Leroy Eldridge Cleaver (1935–1998) African American Writer, Political Activist and an Early Leader of the Black Panther Party

A Movement for Qualitative Change



Eduard Bernstein and Karl Kautsky, 1910

If it is true that the system can now meet the needs of all, or that this is the trend, then Marcuse is right: the system will use such ability to contain the movement for qualitative change. But we challenge the assumption that it can and that this is the direction in which things are moving.

The period of 1872 to 1914, broadly speaking, was one of relative “peaceful” development for Western capitalism. The “peace” was based on a system of brutal colonial enslavement, but it was, nonetheless, a period of relative calm in which rapid technological change was ushering in an era of monopoly domination. It was in this epoch of capitalist expansion, of high profits and high wages, that Edward Bernstein, a German socialist and one-time collaborator of Marx and Engels, developed a revisionist departure from Marxism. He believed that capitalism was now solving its basic contradictions, especially the class contradiction, and that the path ahead would be one of gradual peaceful development and reform until capitalism had been metamorphosed into socialism. Lenin fought Bernsteinism. Reviewing a book on the subject in 1899, he agreed with its author, Karl Kautsky, that ‘Bernstein ascribes to purely temporary conditions of a given historical situation the dignity of a general law”

False Assumptions of Stability

This observation of Lenin is important to remember. The period we have been living through has by no means been peaceful. It has been a stormy one, of wars and revolutions. Yet there are features of the post-World War II period that have led to new false assumptions about the stability of the system and its ability to contain its internal contradictions.

In many ways it has been a unique period. Pre-World War II capitalism was characterized by periodic cyclical economic crises. The one that began in October 1929, was of longer duration, more acute, and more worldwide in scope than any economic crisis in the history of capitalism. But since World War II capitalism has avoided the outbreak of another devastating economic crisis. There have been a number of recessions, but these were mild compared with the wild plunges of the past.

This is something new. Never before in the history of capitalism has a deep economic crisis been avoided for so long a period of time, a full quarter of a century. It is this which provides the soil from which the new illusions have sprung. It is the main source of illusions within the working class as it is among intellectuals who have “given up” on the working class in the very name of revolution.



A Janitor Sweeps the Floor of the New York Stock Exchange Following the Wall Street Crash of 1929

False Attributions of a General Law



View of the Assembly Line and Workers at the Studebaker Automobile Manufacturing Plant in South Bend, Indiana, 1946

These latter assume that by flattening the economic cycle, capitalism has eliminated deep economic crises for all times and with them the acute class struggle in society. Thus, as Bernstein does, they too “ascribe to purely temporary conditions of a given historical situation the dignity of a general law.’ A number of factors have contributed to the lengthy postwar boom and relative economic stability. The war was followed by a pent-up worldwide demand for goods and services and a need to retool obsolescent plants and equipment. The rapid growth of world population and the emergence of scores of newly formed States at various levels of economic development have also spurred the expansion of world markets. There has been likewise a steady large-scale migration of U.S. capital abroad in the form of investments in foreign enterprises on a scale dwarfing anything in the past.

An extremely great impact has been provided by the revolution in science and technology in the advanced countries which some have called “a third industrial revolution.” This has absorbed immense investment funds in electronics and cybernetics; in transportation and communication; and in atomic energy, space, chemicals, plastics and related industries. Whole new branches of industry have sprung to life and no industry has been left untouched by the giant hand of scientific and technical advance.

A Mighty, Yet Mighty Sick, Tiger

The paramount contradiction of capitalist society is between production which assumes an ever more social (collective) character and accumulation which still remains private (corporate). This basic antagonism can be resolved in only one way—by society itself taking possession of the means of production. But the economic measures of state monopoly capitalism are not meant to resolve this conflict. They are meant to prolong the system of private accumulation while augmenting the share grabbed by the huge monopoly corporations. Yet by assuming public responsibility for keeping the economy out of the ditch, the State has made an oblique admission. It has said, in effect, that the answer to the anarchy of capitalist production lies only in the direction of greater social controls. This acknowledgement is exceedingly important and has now entered into the public consciousness. Thus far it has fed the illusion that capitalist government intervention is that social control. But what will happen when this proves to be the fantasy it is?

Whatever may happen, this is certainly not the path to domestic peace and tranquility. Sharp class and social struggles are inevitable. And let us ask: *What can the ruling class accomplish by a policy of lowering the standard of living and imposing the burden of producing weapons on the people?* Only ever growing unemployment and the very economic disaster it so anxiously seeks to avert. Or, a major war crisis that will shake the very foundations of American society.

Yes, the tiger is still powerful and extremely dangerous, but also mighty sick. A great deal depends, however, on how it is fought. That is the subject of our next chapter.



Discussion



Section 3

Chapter 9: An Approach to Strategy

Without a common approach to strategy it is impossible to build a common Movement. A common approach to strategy is needed to help pull together the present disparate, amorphous, confused and divided Movement into a serious, ongoing and growing force for revolutionary change. This is why the ideological battle for a common approach to strategy is so important at this time.

Our stress is on the word “approach.” It is impossible to achieve unity on all aspects of strategy, yet we must know the main direction we want to go and how to begin to get there. Without this, even the accelerated motion of periodic upheavals leads nowhere.



“As in Alice in Wonderland it takes all the running we can do to Stay in the same place”

From Organizing to Rhetoric



No one has, nor can claim to have, the map which charts the twists and turns of the revolutionary path ahead. The struggle helps carve its own path. Every battle won, lost, or drawn, changes the terrain of struggle somewhat, alters the stakes involved, compels the contending forces to re-evaluate their positions, to modify or abandon their tactics, and to choose the path to new battles. This may be the broad highway of massive offensive, or the more tortured, twisted path of partial advance or temporary retreat.

The time has come therefore for all of us to take stock of where we are and where we must go, without the cocksureness or arrogance of someone trying to prove that he or she, or his or her organization has always been right in the past and is necessarily totally right on all questions today.

From Organizing to Rhetoric

In an article evaluating the Movement, where it is and where it must go, Staughton Lynd comes to the conclusion that the main weakness of the new radicalism has been its failure to organize large masses of people, particularly ordinary people. Instead of organizing, he believes, the Movement has drifted toward rhetoric (Lynd, "'A Program for Post-Campus Radicals").

Lynd is certainly right. Yet we would disagree with him when he seems to think that this failure is unrelated to the question of theory. Answering those who say that the Movement's lack of theory is its main weakness, Lynd replies, "My own criticism (and self-criticism) is almost precisely the reverse".



Staughton Lynd

From Organizing to Rhetoric

There can be no doubt that objective conditions played their part in this failure to organize. But the trouble is that the “New Left” made a theory out of its difficulties. This now stands in the way of utilizing the new opportunities that have opened up. It will be impossible to change the situation if the Movement does not see the people as the makers of history, or if it looks down on the problems of ordinary working people and sees them as backward slobs, as part of the Establishment.

Wilfred Burchett, in one of his magnificent books on Vietnam, relates how the Vietnamese sent young Communists to live with the Montagnard mountain people to win them for revolution. They worked and lived amongst them for 25 years, contending with customs that to them seemed strange and even repulsive.

We do not have to wait 25 years to win the people for revolutionary change, nor is it necessary that we live among a strange, foreign people. More than 80 percent of the gainfully employed in this country are working people, either wage or salaried employees. What are missing is the consciousness of this 80 per cent that it is the nation and the will to constitute itself as the nation. But if this consciousness is to be brought to the people there must first be confidence in them.

REFORM AND REVOLUTION



Unless this Marxist theory of revolution is fought for and won in the Movement, as against the petty-bourgeois individualist, anarchist view, there can be neither mass organizing nor a mass movement.

Belief that the people can and will make the revolution requires more than a declaration of faith. It demands a style of work that makes this clear in every word and deed. Without trying to understand what makes the people what they are—why they think and act as they do—it is impossible to have either respect, love or confidence in them.

There are no people that are all good or all bad. No such nation exists nor can exist. Each is a product of history. Each, therefore, is the child of two traditions and two influences—that of degrading, corrupting, oppressing class society, and that of ennobling, heroic, revolutionary and progressive struggle against oppression and exploitation and for freedom. And each of these traditions is in constant struggle with the other.

REFORM AND REVOLUTION

ONE COMMON error made by the new radicals who fear cooption is to pick and choose the issues and demands of immediate struggle with an eye to avoiding those that can be won. They fear winning worse than losing. They think that losing will heighten revolutionary consciousness, while winning will strengthen reformist illusions. But the American people are practical. They will fight in a mass, sustained way for things that are important to them and that they believe can be won either fully or in part. Even revolutions are fought around concrete needs, not abstract slogans. The Russian Socialist Revolution, for example, was fought around the slogans of Peace, Bread, Land. It was for these simple things that the Kerensky bourgeois regime was overthrown.

Slogans and demands must articulate real needs. If radicals forget this, if they merely try to impose what they think is revolutionary, they will build no real movement. People will look upon them as sloganeers and manipulators.



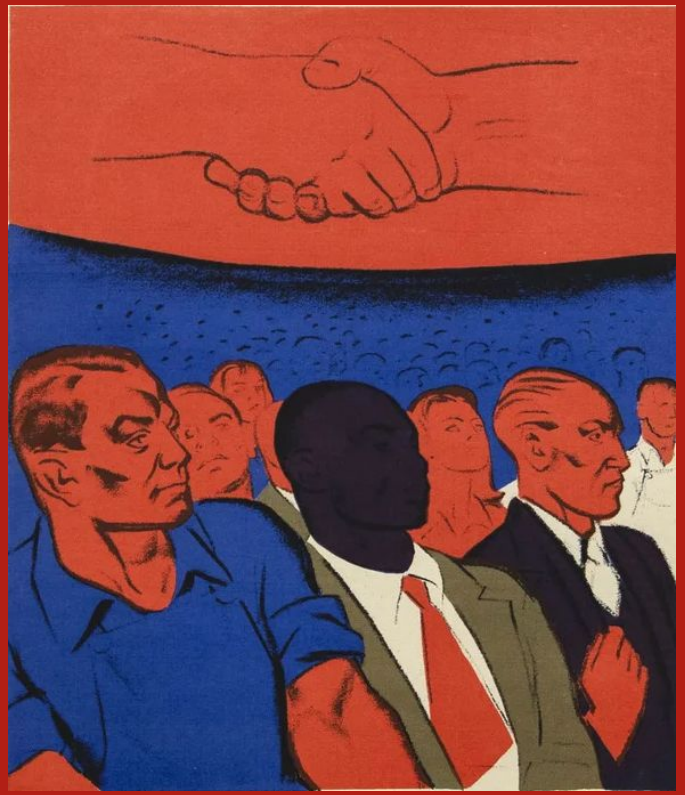
REFORM AND REVOLUTION

An example of this can be seen in the struggle for women's liberation. The demands being raised by the women's movement are essentially democratic and reformist in character. From a theoretical point of view it is even conceivable that they could be met within the confines of the present system. And from a practical point of view some of them will be, to one extent or another. This already can be seen in respect to the demand for legal abortions. But the net impact of this struggle for women's rights is not reformist. The reason for this is that the status of women is related to the nature of the system itself. The demands being raised are directed to the system as such. So long as this movement does not permit itself to become diverted into a war between the sexes and recognizes that oppressed women have more in common with all those oppressed and exploited by capitalism, including men, than with the women of the exploiting class, it can be of great revolutionary importance. One or another partial demand of women can be won under capitalism, but their complete liberation and freedom can never be won short of the social revolution and the building of a classless communist society.



REFORM AND REVOLUTION

How then can the seal of revolution, be put on all slogans and demands “including the least political ones?” Part of the answer has emerged from the new radicalism of the Sixties (and continues to this present time). The slogan “Power!” has arisen from all sections of the Movement. “Black Power,” “Brown Power,” “Indian Power,” ““Consumer Power,” “‘Woman Power,” and so forth. These have all merged into the more general one of “People’s Power,” or ‘Power to the People.’ At present these slogans are largely rhetoric, although they raise the central political question and indicate a growing awareness that power in our society lies elsewhere than in the hands of the people.



REFORM AND REVOLUTION

The way to avoid both the danger of reformism and that of an abstract rhetoric divorced from the daily life and needs of the people, is to link the slogan of power with that of immediate demands in an integral and dynamic fashion. Every struggle should be seen as one with power and for power. Every specific issue and demand should be related to the question of power— who has it, how it is being used, in whose interests, and how it can and will be used if ever more effective counter power is not mustered to block it.

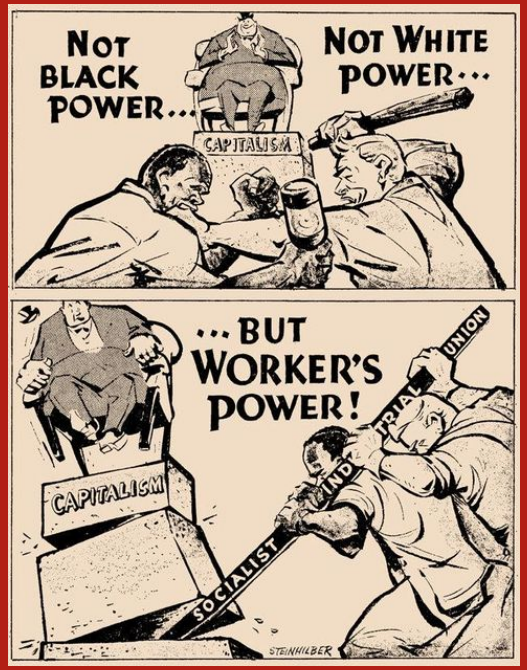
Without this, even concessions gained one day can be lost the next. A wage increase is won, but if the employers have a free hand to raise prices or increase speed-up, or through the government to increase taxes on working people, the wage gain is purely ephemeral. Thus the issue of a wage raise cannot be seen in isolation, but in its fuller political and class relations, its relations to those who hold and wield power. The same is true of demands put to government. Who is to pay for these? Which class? By making the people pay for social legislation through an increase in taxes the ruling class feathers its own profit nest and divides the people into warring groups—small homeowners, for example, blaming poor people on welfare for rising taxes instead of those profiteering from war, inflation and poverty.

CENTRALIZATION VS DECENTRALIZATION

While affirming the need for special approaches to people, we believe that the struggle for unity across racial lines cannot be postponed to the indefinite future. It must find concrete expression in what we do all the time.

This question is one of fundamental importance. Racism is the main ideology of the ruling class for splitting the working class along racial lines and for justifying to whites the double exploitation and oppression of Black and colored peoples. Thus the struggle against racism is central to the problem of class unity. More than that, in the United States the strategic allies of the working class in the struggle for socialism are the oppressed nationalities and, in the first place, the Black people. Thus for both reasons the question of white-Black unity is of paramount importance.

Few on the Left would dispute this. Yet over recent years a point of view has developed which says that the Blacks should organize themselves separately from whites and that whites should organize themselves separately from Blacks and then strive for unity between both organized masses.



CENTRALIZATION VS DECENTRALIZATION

It is therefore understandable why Blacks, or Chicanos, or Puerto Ricans, as oppressed peoples, should want to form their own organizations and movements to fight for their own liberation. But white people have no reason to organize themselves as whites, except to continue the exclusion of Blacks, or Chicanos, or Puerto Ricans. Therefore it is essential that radical-minded whites do everything in their power to help bring whites and Blacks together and to fight the very concept of "'white communities" and "white organizations." A modern day example can point to the rhetoric behind "Settlers" rhetoric of "indigenous vs. settlers".

There is a lesson to learn from the Thirties. In the drive to organize the new industrial unions, there were those who were ready to organize the whites separately as a matter of expediency. The Communists fought against this. Even in the heart of the racist South, where segregation was the law, the Communists refused to organize white workers if this meant organizing them in "white locals"' and segregating the Black workers to 'Black locals.' Despite the difficulties this created, and often the sharpest animosity of white workers, in the long run this principled stand made it possible to organize the new unions in basic industry along interracial lines. It is too bad that the expulsion of the Communists from leading positions in the CIO during the Cold War hysteria of the late Forties cut short further progress in the fight for the rights of the Black workers in industry and in the unions.

CENTRALIZATION VS DECENTRALIZATION

It is not enough to have a movement made up of local mass organizations that relate to each other in only a loose decentralized way. Far more is needed. The United States is not a loosely knit confederation of semi-autonomous principalities. It is not a country of self-sufficient agrarian economies engaged in a simple form of commodity exchange. It is the land with the very highest concentration of capital in the world, whose tentacles stretch into every continent. It is this that explains the ever greater concentration of political power, not only in Washington, but in the hands of the Presidency. At a time in history replete with crises, the ruling class wants assurance of prompt effective response to every domestic or international crisis or sign of crisis. And it is this too that explains institutions like the Pentagon, the CIA, the FBI, and the qualitatively new role of government in the nation's economy.

To think that this immense concentration of economic and political power can be beaten by a series of local skirmishes, without a centralized, coordinated national plan, without a strategic deployment of human and material resources for the attainment of specific objectives, is to underestimate the foe while fooling oneself. It is repeatedly to recreate the very errors that led to the crisis of the new radicalism.

ELECTORAL POLITICS

Two types of arguments are made against electoral participation. The first is the anarchist philosophical objection to doing anything that seems to sanction the existence of State power. But as we have discussed previously, the State is not just a state of mind. It will not disappear by mere civil disobedience. The capitalist State will cease to exist when it is replaced by a socialist State. This can only be the result of the revolutionary action of the people. For this they must first become convinced that the present State is an organ of repression directed against them, that its democracy is hollow, and that it cannot be made into their own.

The second type of argument is political. It is opposed to electoral participation on the ground that it inevitably sows reformist illusions and the belief that society can be revolutionized by means of the ballot.



ELECTORAL POLITICS

In his book ‘Left-Wing’ Communism, Lenin argued against Communists who opposed participating in bourgeois elections because they believed parliamentarism to be dead. Lenin wrote that so long as any considerable mass of people still have illusions in the system, parliamentarism “is not yet politically obsolete” and “participation in parliamentary elections and in the struggle in parliament is obligatory.” This is necessary, continued Lenin, precisely to help educate the backward strata and to awaken and enlighten the mass. “As long as you are unable to disperse the bourgeois parliament and every other type of reactionary institution, you must work inside them.” Otherwise, warned Lenin, “you run the risk of becoming babblers”





Discussion & Wrap Up

Announcements

- PCUSA Cell Chairs need to call members of their cells to remind them about attendance.
- The future issue of New Masses (2027) has begun planning. If you have art you want us to feature, email it to info@partyofcommunistsusa.net.
- Election Day is approaching - make sure you have a plan to vote!

Volunteers Needed!

We are in need of volunteers for the staff of the People's School! Here's a few roles we need filled:

- People to help manage posting on our social media and podcast platforms
- Video Editors, Audio Editors, Graphic Designers, Artists, Narrators
- Web Controls, Moderators

Email info@peoplesschool.us if you're interested and try to attend our next staff meeting if possible.

View From Left Field

https://viewfromleftfield.libsyn.com

The Old PSMLS Youtube is now the Youtube of View From Left Field, a podcast of analysis and discussion of current events from a progressive perspective.

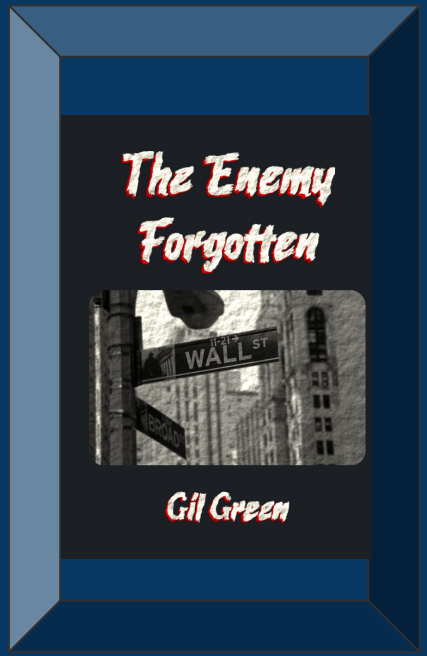
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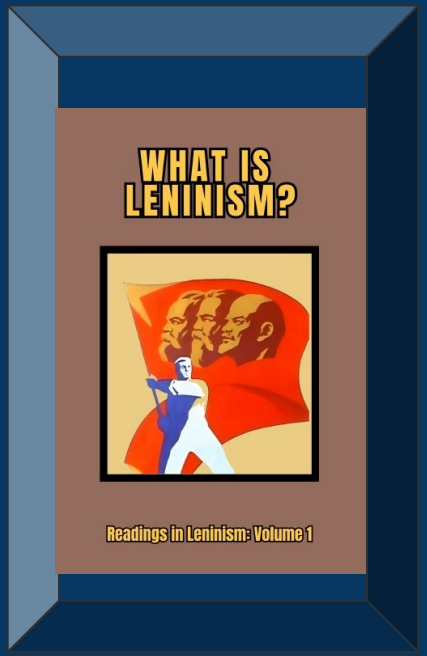


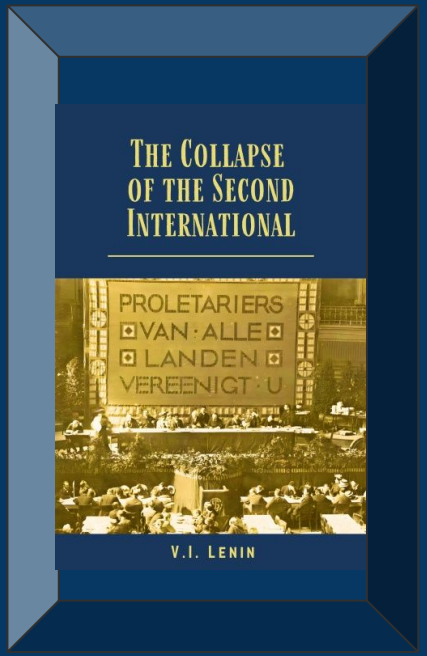
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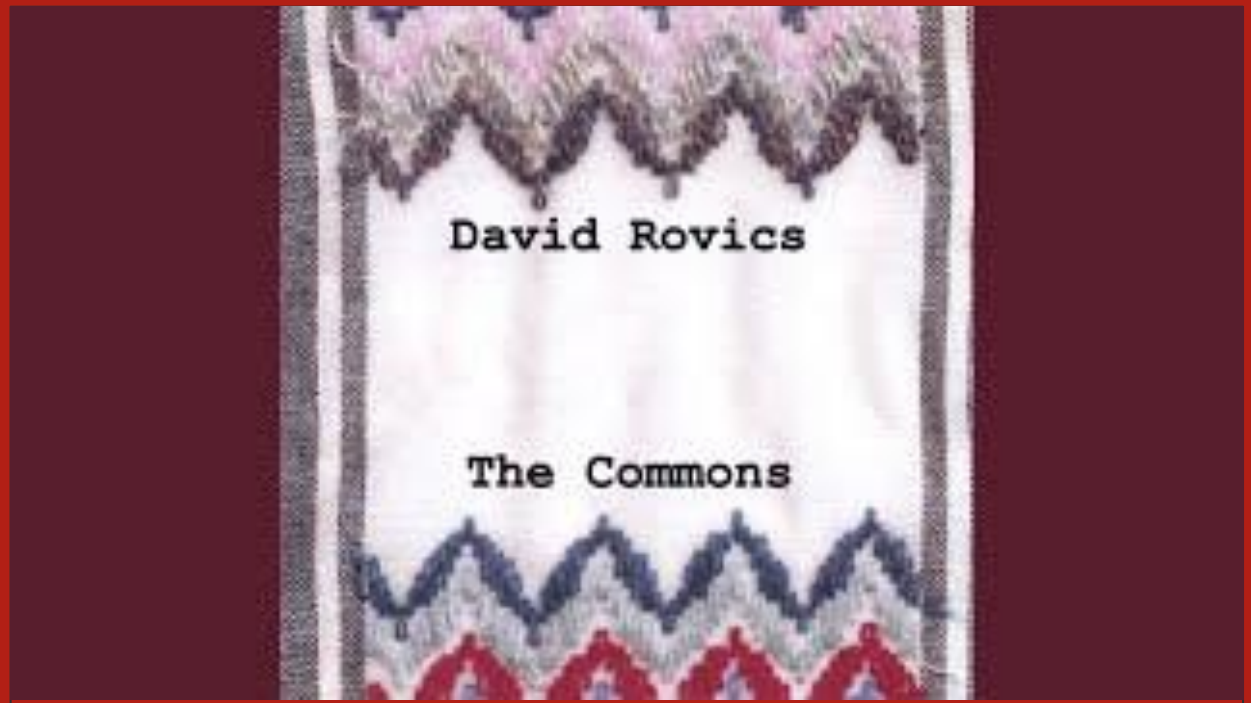


Harry Bridges School of Labor

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The Harry Bridges School of Labor is a monthly class covering a variety of topics aimed at building class consciousness among union members. For class schedule and other information, please visit the website at luel.us/laborschool.





David Rovics - I’m a Better Anarchist Than You