

Beasts of Burden: Capitalism, Animals, Communism

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This is a text which, we hope, faces in two directions. On the one hand we hope that it will be read by people interested in animal liberation who want to consider why animal exploitation exists, as well as how. On the other hand, by those who define themselves as anarchists or communists who either dismiss animal liberation altogether or personally sympathise with it but don't see how it relates to their broader political stance.

While there have always been groups and individuals with feet in both camps, for the most part discussion between those involved in animal liberation and communists has been at a derisory level. "Debate," in so far as it exists, consists mainly of abuse and rarely moves beyond the level of comments like "wasn't Hitler a vegetarian" (actually not – he injected "bull's blood" into his testicles, and does this mean you can't be a communist and a house painter or an Austrian?).

We hope to prompt the beginnings of a real debate about the relationship between the "animal question" and the "social question". This text does not claim to have all the answers or to be the "communist manifesto" for animals, but we think that it does pose some of the key questions. Over to you...

1. Capitalism and class society

All life on planet earth is becoming increasingly enmeshed in a global economy based on money, profit and exchange – capitalism. Virtually everything has a price on it – food, drink, the soil, homes, plants, animals, the labour of humans. Needs and desires count for nothing – those who cannot afford to pay the price have to do without even if the consequence is death.

For the majority of human beings the consequence is a life dominated by work, half-lived in schools, factories, offices and prisons. For many this is compounded by the effects of poverty, war and various forms of oppression. But humans are not the only creatures caught up in this net. Animals of all kinds are subject to the industrial application of suffering and death in the wild, in factory farms and laboratories.

It is obvious that the experiences of humans and animals are linked, having a common origin in the same system of production and exchange. But we want to go further and assert that the development and maintenance of capitalism as a system that exploits humans is in some ways dependent upon the abuse of animals. Furthermore the movement that abolishes capitalism by changing the relations between humans – communism – also involves a fundamental transformation of the relations between humans and animals.

1.1 Animals and primitive communism

When we talk of the relationship between humans and animals, it is important not to lose sight of the fact that humans are animals too. As we trace back our origins as humans, our ancestry merges with those of other primates. Hominids emerged about 25 million years ago, from which evolved various species of apes including, about 250,000 years ago, homo sapiens. Dental and other evidence suggests that like most modern species of apes, these hominids were primarily vegetarian. Humans do not have the sharp teeth, retractable claws or digestive systems common to carnivores. Although early humans, like other hominids may have sometimes scavenged meat killed by other animals, diet was probably based almost entirely on plant foods.

The hunting of larger animals for food, with the increased importance of meat in the diet, may have become more significant when humans encountered colder conditions in which plant foods were harder to come by, particularly in the last Ice Age. Large scale hunting brought with it a more rigid sexual division of labour, as the mobility required effectively excluded women who were pregnant or nursing young children.

Hunting also saw the earliest traces of the transformation of free human activity into something resembling work. This is partly because hunting requires more effort: "On average 240 calories of plant food can be gathered in one hour, whereas, taking into account the high failure rate of hunting, it has been estimated that one hour of hunting produces only 100 calories of food" (Ehrenberg). More importantly foraging could be undertaken by the whole community and fully integrated with other social activities such as singing, chatting and childcare. Hunting on the other hand depended on stealth and silence, and tended to become the specialised task of able-bodied males.

Even once hunting had become established, it is certainly not the case that all early humans ate meat all of the time. The popular image of bloodthirsty primitives slaughtering their way through the animal kingdom is nonsense. The notion of "Man the Hunter" whose "principal food is meat, and his principal occupation hunting" has been criticised as "largely a reflection of the interests and preconceptions of nineteenth-century Western male anthropologists and of the status of hunting as an upper class pastime in nineteenth century Europe" (Ehrenberg).

So-called "hunter gatherer" societies should perhaps be called forager societies as the gathering of plants, nuts and grains was in most cases far more fundamental than hunting, and accounted for a higher proportion of the regular diet. In most modern foraging societies, plant foods gathered primarily by women account for 60-70 per cent of diet (Ehrenberg). Different communities across the world would have had different ideas about animals, and different ways of treating them, but we can deduce something about their beliefs and practices from cultural artefacts left behind (e.g. cave paintings), and from similar communities that have existed until recently.

For most of the time humans have existed, they "lived in relatively autonomous and scattered groups, in families (in the broadest sense: the family grouping all those of the same blood), in tribes". Their way of life was essentially communistic. There was no buying and selling, no wage labour, no state and no private property: "Goods were not produced to be consumed after exchange, after being placed on a market... The community distributed what it produced according to simple rules, and everyone directly got what it gave him... Activities were decided (actually imposed on the group by necessity) and achieved in common, and their results were shared in common" (Dauvé and Martin).

In these societies, the relationship between humans and the rest of the natural world was completely different to the modern one. The most significant fact about animals in so-called "primitive communism" is that they do not belong to anybody. There is no

private ownership of land, trees, or animals, and no domestication. While some animals may be hunted, all animals run wild and free. People only take what they need from nature, and where animals are hunted it is on a limited basis. In any event there would be no point in indiscriminate mass killing of animals, as the community would have no means of using or storing the surplus, and no market on which to sell the surplus. Communities typically live in a harmonious relationship with their environment; it is their home and their provider and it is not in their interest to destroy it, by for instance, exterminating animal species.

Animals are not viewed as commodities, but are regarded with a mixture of awe, wonder, respect and fear. Instead of being seen as subordinate species, they are seen as separate beings sharing the world with humans. Often communities adopt a particular animal as their “totem”; animals may be regarded as ancestors or protectors of the tribe, and may even be worshipped.

1.2 Domestication and domination

The relations between humans and other animals, and between humans themselves, were radically transformed by the development of agriculture. Agriculture instituted a new relationship with the natural world: “The land itself becomes an instrument of production and the planet’s species its objects” (Zerzan). Domestication, marked by the cultivation of plants and the constriction of animals to a particular place, was a key turning point in the gradual replacement of nomadic lifestyles with the sedentary systems of states, classes, cities, work and private property. In this sense, Zerzan argues, “in domesticating animals and plants man necessarily domesticates himself”.

We should avoid ascribing to agriculture the role of “original sin”, the singular cause of humanity’s misfortunes and of our expulsion from some primitive communist Eden. The development of states and classes were contradictory, complex and contested processes taking place over many millennia. While the domestication of plants and animals was an important part of this story, we do not want to suggest that it was the whole story.

Indeed some archaeologists suggest that it was the emergence of social elites that gave birth to agriculture rather than the other way round. According to Hodder (1990) “The possibility exists that domestication in the social and symbolic sense occurred prior to domestication in the economic sense”. Whereas foraging offers immediate access to food (when it is available), there is a “delayed return for agricultural labour investment”; crops have to be planted, animals fed and raised before food is available. Thus, “The adoption of more intensive production techniques, leading to agriculture, served the interests of dominant groups in society in that the new economic regime ensnared people within social and economic structures on which they came to depend”. It is in this sense that “The domestication of wild cattle and of the external wild more generally is a metaphor and mechanism for the control of society”.

Some form of agriculture existed for thousands of years without particularly radical social change. The transition from foraging to farming is believed to have begun in the so-called Fertile Crescent (now covered by Iraq, Iran, Turkey, Syria, Israel and Jordan) around 10,000 BC and to have become well-established in this area by 6000 BC. However, only small numbers of animals were kept, with most meat still being obtained from hunting. The main focus of farming was on growing crops using simple technology, rather than the plough; archaeologists sometimes refer to this as horticulture rather than agriculture as such.

The real changes took place in the later Neolithic (from around 3000 BC) with the development of intensive agriculture. Animals began to be used for milk and wool products as well as for meat, and to pull the newly invented ploughs and carts. For the first time,

humans began to keep large herds and flocks of animals. Systematically separated from the wild and later selectively bred, these domesticated animals gradually became physically distinct from their wild cousins.

The social impact of this was enormous. Out of the practice of “animal husbandry”, Camatte argues, “grew both the notion of private property and exchange value” and “the rise of patriarchy”. The amount of labour required in society increased dramatically with a whole range of new tasks: clearing forests for grazing land, feeding and tending animals, milking, processing milk products, spinning and weaving wool, and so on: “farming and food production... changed from a comparatively small series of tasks which one woman, or group of women, could have performed with comparatively little equipment, to a series of complex operations which would have been a full-time occupation for the whole population” (Ehrenberg).

Gender relations were transformed. The demand for labour required women to have more children (in foraging societies childbirth tends to be spaced by three or four years). The intensification of women’s work in reproducing labour excluded them from other tasks. As the importance of hunting declined, men increasingly took over the farming tasks previously undertaken by women. Women’s social position declined as “they no longer contributed so much to the daily production of food, which had been a crucial factor in maintaining the equal status they had previously enjoyed” (Ehrenberg).

It has also been suggested that it was “the management of herds of domestic animals which first gave rise to an interventionist and manipulative conception of political life... Domestication thus became the archetypal pattern for other kinds of social subordination. The model was a paternal one, with the ruler a good shepherd, like the bishop with his pastoral staff. Loyal, docile animals obeying a considerate master were an example to all employees” (Thomas).

1.3 Animals as wealth

After domestication animals, or at least some species, no longer ran free. Now they could belong to somebody: Adam Smith noted that along with crops, herds of animals were the earliest form of private property (Thomas). This property was not just used to produce food and clothing; it was also a form of wealth. From the earliest stages of domestication “Meat consumption was the conspicuous display of dominant ruling power. The more cattle slaughtered, cooked and eaten, the greater the man” (Spencer).

Domesticated animals were a fundamental form of wealth “which could be accumulated and handed on from one generation to the next... as one family accumulated more cattle, or acquired better ploughs the gap between their wealth and that of their neighbours would increase progressively... A distinction between rich and poor, which is insignificant in forager societies, develops” (Ehrenberg).

As well as being maintained as an embodiment of wealth, animals not needed for immediate consumption could be traded with other property owners and even be used as money. In this early stage of the market, as Marx observed in *Capital*, “The money-form comes to be attached... to the object of utility which forms the chief element of indigenous alienable wealth, for example cattle”.

As animals became the property of groups or individuals they could be not only bought and sold, but stolen and fought over. While the development of hunting required the organisation of part of the community as a killing machine, the transformation of this into a war machine to systematically kill other humans may have arisen “when for the first time people owned a resource which it was both worthwhile and fairly easy to steal” (Ehrenberg).

1.4 Slavery

Many of those put to work in early civilisation were slaves. Once it is taken for granted that animals are mere objects provided for the use of humans the introduction of slavery simply involves assigning to certain groups of humans the status of animals. As Marx notes “under slavery, according to the striking expression employed in antiquity, the worker is distinguishable only as instrumentum vocale [speaking implement] from an animal, which is instrumentum semi-vocale [semi-mute implement], and from a lifeless implement, which is instrumentum mutum [mute instrument]” (Marx, 1867).

In the modern period, racist ideology defined black people as more animal than human, legitimising slavery. Slaves were treated as animals, having to endure “terrible conditions under transportation, the removal of children and the separation of families, branding with hot irons, the wearing of collars and chains and even medical experimentation”. Slaves were sold at markets modelled on livestock markets, with one contemporary noting that slaves were handled at markets “as we handle beasts”, tested for their fitness and strength and so on. Unruly slaves were sent to “nigger breakers” to be crushed in the same way that “horse breakers” were used to domesticate wild horses. “These techniques were not new, they had been developed over the last few centuries on farms, in livestock markets, in abattoirs and... laboratories”. (Meat and dairy produce: symbols of male power, sexual dominance and racial discrimination, 1997).

Similarly, “Animal domestication furnished many of the techniques for dealing with delinquency: bridles for scolding women; cages, chains and straw for madmen” (Thomas). We could probably add prisons to this list too, and more recently the use of cattle prods in torture.

1.5 Cows, boys and Indians: Primitive accumulation and animals

The animal industry, in particular cattle and sheep farming, has been central to the spread of capitalist social relations throughout the world. Marx argued that for capitalism to develop, there has to be a process of brutal dispossession which he called “primitive accumulation... the historical process of divorcing the producer from the means of production”. Capitalism requires that all the means of production (including the land) belong to capital, and that the majority of the population are reduced to proletarians – people who can only survive by selling their labour in return for a wage.

In pre-capitalist societies, these conditions do not exist. The land either belongs to nobody or it is divided up into small plots, with most people having their own plot of land which they either own or can use, and/or access to common land. People who can grow their own food have no need to earn money to buy food, and given the choice most would not take a job in a factory. For this to change, peasants have to be forcibly deprived of land through “conquest, enslavement, robbery [and] murder” – “this history, the history of their expropriation, is written in the annals of mankind in blood and fire” (Marx, 1867).

The historical evidence suggests that not only is capitalism dependent on ruthless primitive accumulation, but primitive accumulation relies upon the animal industry. In England, the process of “forcibly driving the peasantry from the land” and enclosing common land started as early as the late 15th century. But what was it that motivated the nobility to undertake this? Marx is clear that it was “the rise in the price of the wool”, which made it profitable to transform “arable land into sheep walks”. People were driven from their homes to make way for sheep, leading Thomas More to write at the time of a curious land where “sheep... swallow down the very men themselves”.

This process was accompanied by the clearance of forest, particularly in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. In this period, “An ideology of meat-eating (ennobling

the heart, enriching the blood, encouraging the soldiers) played its part in the formation of the eighteenth century person... The growth of London meat consumption has been linked to the development of scientific breeding practices, the extension of turnpikes and highways, the draining of marshes, the cutting down of forests" (Linebaugh). As well as opening up grazing land for animals, this was also aimed at clamping down on the forest-dwellers, many of them squatters living "free from the normal social constraints of church and manor courts" (Thomas).

The Highlands of Scotland were virtually emptied of people in the nineteenth century, as the inhabitants were forcibly removed to make way for sheep, and later deer as the Highlands were turned into a hunting resort for the rich. The Highland Clearances were resisted, but evictions were enforced by the military.

The genocidal colonisation of the Americas also featured the replacement of indigenous people with profitable animals, starting with Columbus who brought the first cattle and horses to the "New World" in 1494. Hollywood's myth of the epic struggle between cowboys and Indians might not be historically accurate, but it does express a basic truth. The dynamic for the dispossession and extermination of native peoples was often the wish to replace them with cattle.

Ironically some of the victims of earlier dispossession helped in this process. For instance in Patagonia, Araucanian Indians were rounded up and slaughtered in the 1870s, making way for cattle grazing. Some Scots helped in this slaughter, "exiled in the Highland Clearances, torn cruelly from their homeland and tossed on to the high seas, they fetched up in the Falklands, then took part in another brutal clearance at the other end of the world" (Wangford).

Cattle grazing was not the only aspect of the animal industry important to colonisation. In north America in particular the fur trade was important, as shown by the crucial role of the Hudson Bay Company. According to Fredy Perlman, in the late 18th century "Fur is Europe's oil. The French Empire in America revolves around fur. The nascent Russian Empire in Siberia is a fur trappers empire".

Primitive accumulation was not driven by a historically inevitable manifest destiny. There had to be an immediate economic incentive to dispossess those living on the land, and this was provided by the profits to be made from animals. In this sense the animal industry was the starting motor of primitive accumulation, without which the subsequent gains for the ruling class (the creation of a proletariat, access to mineral wealth etc.) may not have been realised.

1.6 Animals and the origin of the factory system

Capitalism tries to squeeze the last drop of life out of human beings, intensifying the work process to eliminate all non-productive movements. It seeks the "eradication of any uncontrolled movement of the hand, any unproductive glance of the eyes, any unwanted wandering of the mind" (Collectivities). Similarly with animals, the aim is to eliminate everything that does not contribute to the final product, to turn them into machines for the conversion of feed into meat or other commodities.

With animals as with humans, the factory system aims to restrict the movement of the body to maximise profits. Factory farming was already established by Roman times; Plutarch writes that "it is a common practice to stitch up the eyes of cranes and swans and shut them up in dark places to fatten". In seventeenth century England pigs, poultry and lambs were fattened by being confined indoors in darkness; "Geese were thought to put on weight if the webs of their feet were nailed to the floor" (Thomas). Then as now, the movement of animals was restricted because it burned up calories and therefore

slowed down weight gain.

The same basic techniques are still in use in modern factory farming, with the addition of new methods of confinement such as individual cages for chickens and piglets. It seems highly likely that the development of the factory for humans in the modern period was influenced by this long history of factory farming. The aim of the factory system was to concentrate human bodies in one place to increase control over their movements. The main difference from factory farms is that humans are only confined for part of the day; capitalism needs their bodies to last longer in order to maximise the labour it can extract from them. With animals, the aim is to fatten them for slaughter in the minimum time – broiler chickens, with a natural lifespan of seven years, are killed when they are seven weeks old.

The origins of assembly line production are to be found in the US beef packing yards of the late 19th century: “The packing houses were the first American industry to create assembly lines, unable to cope with the constant stream of cattle coming in every day the packinghouse giants hit on a way of streamlining the slaughter process – they invented the conveyor belt” (Rifkin).

A 1942 publication, financed by a meat-packing company, says: “The slaughtered animals, suspended head downwards from a moving chain, or conveyor, pass from worker to worker, each of whom performs some particular step in the process. So efficient has this procedure proved to be that it has been adopted by many other industries, as for example in the assembling of automobiles”. Henry Ford acknowledged that the idea for the automobile assembly line “came in a general way from the overhead trolley that the Chicago packers used in dressing beef” (Adams).

As Carol Adams observes it is appropriate that the slaughterhouse has been used “as trope for treatment of the worker in a modern capitalist society” in works like Upton Sinclair’s “the Jungle” and Bertolt Brecht’s “Saint Joan of the Stockyards”. Aside from the historic link, both the animal and the assembly line worker are treated as “an inert, unthinking object, whose creative, bodily, emotional needs are ignored”, while the dismemberment of the animal’s body is echoed by the “fragmentation of the individual’s work” on the assembly line (Adams).

1.7 Good Breeding: the genetic intensification of production

Jacques Camatte has talked of the anthropomorphization of capital, whereby capital raises human beings in its own image: “Capital becomes autonomous by domesticating the human being. After analysing-dissecting-fragmenting the human being, capital reconstructs the human being as a function of its process”. With humans, this process is accomplished not just by ideology but by subjecting the body to a range of disciplinary regimes: the school, the prison, the factory.

With animals things have gone a stage further with a modification of the physical bodies of animals to make them more productive. There is a long history of selective breeding of animals in this way, described by John Zerzan: “the domesticating of animals... defies natural selection and re-establishes the controllable organic world at a debased artificial level... Transmuted from a state of freedom to that of helpless parasites, these animals become completely dependent on man for survival. In domestic mammals as a rule, the size of the brain becomes relatively smaller as specimens are produced that devote more energy to growth and less to activity. Placid, infantilized, typified perhaps by the sheep, most domesticated of herd mammals; the remarkable intelligence of wild sheep is completely lost in their tamed counterparts. The social relationships among domestic animals are reduced to the crudest essentials. Non-reproductive parts of the life cycle are minimised, courtship is curtailed, and the animal’s very capacity to recognise its

own species is impaired”.

The twentieth century has seen a number of attempts to apply animal breeding techniques to humans, as promoted by the eugenics movement. Forced sterilisation and other efforts have been applied to stop the “unfit” and disabled from breeding. While this was applied with the most ruthless determination in Nazi Germany, eugenics programmes have also been implemented in social democratic Sweden and elsewhere. In Britain, eugenics may not have been systematically applied but its ideas were very influential amongst sections of the ruling class earlier this century and influenced various state policies. For instance, birth control pioneers like Marie Stopes were partially motivated by such concerns.

Selective breeding of animals is now being refined through the development of a range of genetic/bio-technological methods. Animal species are being genetically manipulated to develop xenotransplantation (cross species organ transplants), pharming (the production of drugs and other products from genetically-mutated animals) and increased food productivity. Examples of the latter include attempts to develop chickens without feathers and animals whose immune systems attack their own fat cells to produce leaner meat.

In a further move in the commodification of life, the European Parliament has recently voted to allow the patenting of genetically-mutated animals and plants. Biotechnology companies can now claim that a mutated animal they have “invented” is their exclusive private property.

Camatte anticipates that one possible long-term development of capitalism could be the “mutation of the human being, or rather a change of the species: production of a perfectly programmable being which has lost all the characteristics of the species Homo Sapiens”. The Critical Arts Ensemble suggest that this has already begun as “Individuals of various social groups and classes are forced to submit their bodies for reconfiguration so that they can function more efficiently under the obsessively rational imperatives of pancapitalism (production, consumption, and order)”. In the immediate future the main mechanisms will be “the blending of the organic and the electromechanical”, new eugenics (linked to genetic screening) and mood-controlling drugs. Human clones, cyborgs and replicants are the stuff of science fiction, but the technologies are being developed with animals which could be used in an attempt to modify human bodies at a future stage of class society.

1.8 Extermination

As with humans, those animals that cannot profitably be integrated into the productive process are simply discarded. Domestication has focused on a narrow number of species; others not entirely domesticated have been preserved for recreational slaughter – such as deer. But many other species have been exterminated altogether, threatening the biodiversity of the planet. In “colonial India and Africa, the flower of British manhood indulged in veritable orgies of big game slaughter”. In north America, the wolf “became the symbol of untamed nature” and was exterminated in most areas, as earlier in Europe, while between 1850 and 1880, 75 million buffalo were killed by hunters (Thomas). In each case, mass slaughter was seen as part of the divinely sanctioned transformation of wilderness into civilisation.

The same mania of extermination fuelled the hunting of humans defined as animals, such as the Aboriginal peoples of Australia, or the indigenous population of the Philippines, the subject of “goo-goo hunts” after the US conquest of 1898.

Many other animal species have disappeared because of the destruction and fragmentation of their habitat. The animal industry is often directly involved in the wrecking of fragile local ecosystems, particularly when forests are cleared to make way for grazing land.

Today we are used to seeing the last survivors of endangered species conserved in zoos. The origin of these zoos formed part of the same colonial mentality that exterminated so many creatures: “the spectacle of the zoo animal must be understood historically as a spectacle of colonial or imperial power” (Baker) with the captive animals serving as “simultaneous emblems of human mastery over the natural world and of English dominion over remote territories” (Ritvo).

1.9 Vivisection

Vivisection has been part of scientific practice since the late 17th century. Today experiments on animals are carried out on a vast scale by, among others, private corporations, academic institutions and the military. Nobody seriously denies that this causes suffering to animals, but the counter claim is made that this contributes to meeting human needs.

To argue over whether a particular experiment, or class of experiments, is potentially beneficial is to miss the point: capitalist progress, of which vivisection is a part, is a fraud. Put simply it is a myth that science at the service of capital will deliver a never ending series of products which will make our lives easier, healthier, longer.

On the contrary, the intensification of the abuse of animals often contributes directly to improving the techniques of domination of human beings. In some cases this is self-evident. The classic example is military research. In the UK, the use of animals in experiments at the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency (DERA) at Porton Down in Wiltshire increased steadily in the 1990s, with tests including shooting pigs and monkeys and a range of biological warfare experiments.

It may be true that some new drugs could benefit some individuals in spite of being tested on animals. But there are plenty of well-established cures that the majority of the world's population are denied access to because of their poverty. The same drugs companies which claim to be crusading for human health would rather let people die than allow their patented products to be made available on a non-profit basis. Research into new drugs is aimed at increasing profits not solving medical problems.

In any case improving human health is not just a matter of plentiful pills; the most efficient way to help people is to provide clean water, sanitation, food and basic medical care to those currently lacking. The very industrial process which holds out the promise of new life enhancing commodities actually manufactures ill health. New drugs don't just mean abused animals; they can also mean more factories polluting the air and water with chemicals, more people working longer hours and suffering stress, depression, repetitive strain and the other diseases of civilisation.

The answer to the question “why does capitalism experiment on animals?” is “because they can't get away with doing it to humans”. But there are exceptions – since Porton Down was set up in 1916, tests have also been carried out on more than 12,000 humans, chiefly military “volunteers” duped into taking part for a few perks without being properly informed of the consequences. Substances tested have included nerve gas, mustard gas, anthrax and LSD. Hundreds of ex-servicemen claim that they are suffering from disabilities including skins and eye disorder, kidney and liver complaints and depression as a result. It has only recently been revealed that in the 1950s tests of the nerve gas Sarin killed a 20 year old conscript, Ronald Madison (Guardian, 20.8.99).

1.10 Commodity fetishism and meat

In 1998 two pigs escaped from a slaughterhouse in Wiltshire, swam across the River Avon and ran off into the surrounding countryside. On the run for a week, the “Tamworth Two” became the focus of an intense media circus; when recaptured they were spared the slaughterhouse, a newspaper bought the pigs off the owner and found them a safe home. The contradiction between the sentimentalisation of these particular pigs and the simultaneous mass consumption of other pigs can only be explained with reference to Marx’s theory of commodity fetishism.

Commodity fetishism is the process whereby commodities are imbued with a life of their own with their origins as the product of labour concealed. It is particularly well-developed in relation to animal products, whose origins are systematically disavowed by supermarket packaging and linguistic distancing (pork not pig, beef not cow). This in turn creates a space for the circulation of a range of semi-magical symbolic meanings around these animal commodities. Meat is seen not as the product of factory farm and slaughterhouse, but as a token of masculinity (“real men eat meat”) or as a national totem. So in France steak “follows the index of patriotic values: it helps them to rise in wartime, it is the very flesh of the French soldier” (Barthes) while across the channel nothing is quite “as British as roast beef”.

Recently this fetishism has been partially fractured by disclosures about the animal production process resulting from health scares. In France, blood and offal from animal carcasses, sewage and untreated water were revealed to have been used in making poultry and pig feed; in Belgium dioxin contamination was found in poultry. In Britain there was the BSE epidemic in cows (and in some humans) linked to the practice of feeding cows with protein pellets made from the remains of chicken, as well as outbreaks of E. Coli food poisoning from contaminated meat.

The health impact is not confined to those who eat meat. Even the British government’s advisory committee on the microbiological safety of food recently warned of the “calamitous consequences” of the overuse of antibiotics in farming (Guardian, 19.8.99). The use of drugs to speed growth and their routine prescription for whole herds or flocks to prevent disease is leading to the development of micro-organisms resistant to antibiotics.

Are these problems of capitalism or of meat production per se? Clearly the thirst for profit is a major factor and specific practices could be reformed, and indeed are being reformed. But meat production on anything like the current scale would be impossible without intensive farming. There is a limit to how far it could ever be possible to sanitise an industrial process involving slaughter, blood and the eating of flesh.

If meat eating answers a human need, it is a need that many human cultures and an increasing number of individuals do not feel. It is certainly a need for the huge food corporations who depend on it. In modern capitalism it is a need, like smoking, that has to be continually reinforced by marketing, regardless of its effect on people, animals and the environment.

1.11 Hunting and class power

In the ancient slave states, hunting “became increasingly an opportunity for the ruling elite to publicise its dominance over lesser beings” (Serpell). In the Roman Circuses, Emperors would oversee and participate in the mass slaughter of captured wild animals including lions, elephants, bears and crocodiles. Archers paid for the privilege of shooting animals from ringside seats. Gladiators killing each other, or heretics being tortured, were also part of the entertainment.

Hunting has performed a similar function as a display of ruling class power in modern Britain. For much of the 18th century, fox hunting was “the casual and disorganised pursuit of backwoods squires and farmers”. The development of regular hunts with their own territories in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries came about as fox hunting became the favoured leisure pursuit of the great landowners. As well as a means of socialisation for upper class males, fox hunting “reaffirmed their prominence in the local community” (Colley).

Interestingly in view of the hunting lobby’s claim to defend the rural way of life this process saw the further subordination of the countryside to the interests of the wealthy: “The very scenery of Great Britain was now reorganised and re-envisioned in keeping with the leisure priorities of men of land and substance. Hedges were torn down, ditches filled, gates and bridges built, tenants’ privacy invaded, all in pursuit of the unfortunate, uneatable fox” (Colley).

In the twentieth century hunting has provided a means for the social integration of the non-aristocratic rich into more traditional wealthy circles, and it remains primarily a pursuit of the rich and powerful from the royal family down.

Despite this, abolishing hunting would no longer threaten the interests of the ruling class as a whole. Capital is becoming more impersonal and is not dependent on the kind of socialisation offered by hunting to create a coherent dominant class. In fact it is barely dependent on individual rich people at all – the top 200 wealthiest families could be wiped out without affecting the reproduction of capitalism one iota. As a display of ruling class power, hunting is a minor footnote compared with the modern spectacle of high-tech televised warfare. In this context, hunting can now be treated as a moral issue and opposed even by parts of the ruling class. At the time of writing, the prospect of some hunting being banned in the UK is becoming more likely.

Such moves will meet with resistance from rural-based sections of the ruling class and their supporters. The movement to defend hunting demonstrates all too clearly how the right to kill foxes is tied up with a wider agenda of defending the interests of landowners (opposition to rambling etc.). With its threat to unleash a violent petit-bourgeois small farmers’ backlash under aristocratic patronage, the pro-hunting Countryside Alliance resembles a classic fascist movement in the making (albeit one with no chance of taking power), especially as in its right wing populist take on rural life “The Countryside is seen as a place of all things traditionally British... white, cultured, patriotic, heterosexual, family centred, beef eating, conservative” (Animal magazine).

1.12 Working class violence – against animals

In addition to the corporate abuse of animals, there is a more diffuse field of cruelty, exploitation and extermination. Partly this is driven by economic imperatives – if the choice is between extreme poverty on the one hand or poaching an elephant to sell its tusks on the other, it is hardly surprising that animal welfare is low on many people’s priorities. But there is also an element of the powerless venting their frustration on those they have power over – animals or children. Marx notes that the slave treated as a beast of burden or a tool “gives himself the satisfaction of knowing that he is different by treating the one with brutality and damaging the other” (Marx, 1867).

The internalisation of relations of domination partially explains why some working class men take pleasure in killing animals. Even fox hunting, while organised by and for the rich, relies on the paid and unpaid participation of terrier men and a cross-class mix of hunt followers. This was evident on the mass rally in favour of hunting in London’s Hyde Park (1997). The presentation of this as some kind of spontaneous cross-class rural revolt disguised what it actually demonstrated: the semi-feudal relations of patronage

that still exist in the rural economy. Yet while many were paid or pressured to take part, it is undeniable that faced with some of the lowest wages and longest working hours in the country, a section of the rural working class is prepared to line up with its bosses to defend their miserable situation. We are reminded of Louise Michel's insight that "The more ferocious a man is toward animals, the more that man cringes before the people who dominate them".

1.13 Beyond humanism

Human domination of animals has been justified by Christianity and humanism, both of which posed the human being at the centre of creation, the king of the beasts, in nature but not of it. The boundary between humans and animals was absolute and rigidly policed. Before the widespread advent of pet keeping, any intimacy with animals was suspect: "in at least half of the well-documented witchcraft cases which were brought to trial in England, the accused was implicated by the fact that he or she possessed and displayed affection for one or more animal companions" (Serpell).

The construction of "man" in this image has involved the denial and repression of human needs and desires. Thus whole categories of human life, such as sex, dancing and nakedness have been denounced by moralists throughout history as "bestial". Women who step out of line can be referred to as dogs, bitches, shrews, vixens or cows (Arkangel).

The Italian socialist (and apologist for domestication) Antonio Gramsci wrote approvingly that "The history of industrialism has always been a continuing struggle ... against the element of 'animality' in man. It has been an uninterrupted, often painful and bloody process of subjugating natural (i.e. animal and primitive) instincts to a new, more complex and rigid norms and habits of order, exactitude and precision which can make possible the increasingly complex forms of collective life which are the necessary consequence of industrial development" (Prison Notebooks).

In cultures less penetrated by the values of capital, this animality is something to be admired rather than degraded. Thus an elder of the Dogon people in Mali once said: "Animals are superior to men because they belong to the bush and don't have to work. Many animals feed themselves on what man grows by painful toil" (Horniman).

In fact wildlife does provide an implicit critique of human society, as an inspiration, and contrast with "domesticated" society. Despite attempts to portray all animal social life as amounting to a permanent war for survival, anyone with cats or dogs knows that much of their lives are spent playing and lazing around.

As Fredy Perlman shows animal activity is the opposite of alienated labour, much like human activity in "primitive communist" societies: "A time and motion engineer watching a bear near a berry patch would not know when to punch the clock... the bear makes no distinction between work and play. If the engineer has an imagination he might say that the bear experiences joy from the moment the berries turn deep red and that none of the bear's motions are work".

"Wild" remains an insult passed on the free (or those who would be free), just as rioters continue to be denounced as animals and militant workers as wildcat strikers. But the flipside of this is that the idea of wildness as liberation will always have a hold on the imagination of rebels and insurgents ("rise like lions after slumber, in unvanquishable number" – Shelley). If, according to Martin Luther in 1530 and Pope Leo XIII in 1891, possession of private property is an essential difference between man and beast (Thomas), then we should be happy to shake off our "human nature".

1.14 Capitalism and animals today

In previous stages of class society, animals were the main form of wealth and sometimes of exchange. Capitalism's subsequent development was dependent on primitive accumulation, and in many parts of the world it was the rewards of the economic exploitation of animals that provided the incentive to clear people from the land. In early capitalism, animals still provided the main means of transport and were absolutely central to the economy.

Today capital has diversified and the animal industry is one among many. Some would no doubt argue that capital has no imperative to exploit animals, and that a consistently "cruelty free" capitalism is a possibility. Indeed this view seems to be shared both by pro-capitalist advocates of market forces liberating animals (through consumer boycotts), and by anarchists and communists for whom this is "proof" that opposition to animal exploitation offers no threat to capitalism. Of course it is possible to imagine a theoretical model of capitalism that does not depend on animals, but this is to confuse an abstraction with the actually existing capitalism that has emerged as a result of real historical processes. Similarly we could imagine a capitalism without racism or women's oppression, yet both of these have played a crucial role in maintaining capital's domination and continue to exist despite superficial changes to the contrary.

It would be a mistake to think that the exploitation of animals is now only of marginal concern to capital. The companies involved in funding animal experiments are some of the world's largest multinationals. Agri-business is becoming increasingly capitalised. In the past capital was largely invested in the manufacture and retail of products made from animals reared by relatively independent farmers. Today, farmers are going out of business as larger companies take over every stage of the animal industry. For instance, one company, the Grampian Country Food Group supplies one-third of UK chickens to eat (200 million a year). Direct corporate involvement in farming will be accelerated as capital expands its new biotechnological frontier.

The animal industry continues to dominate land use in many parts of the world. In Britain 80% of agricultural land is used directly or indirectly for meat and dairy production (Spencer). In many parts of the "Third World", food production is dominated by the growth of cereals to sell for animal feed in the West rather than to meet local needs. Animals in factory farms produced huge amounts of waste, with frequent incidents of pollution of water and land.

In Marxist terms, meat production represents the destruction of use-value to increase exchange-value. Food that could be used to feed people is instead fed to animals in order to increase profit. Most of the energy and nutrition this provides is (from an economic point of view) wasted in keeping the cattle alive, rather than directly transferred into muscle. Ten acres of land will support 61 people on a diet of soya beans, 24 on wheat, 10 on maize but only 2 on meat from cattle. Cattle are thus used by capitalism as a form of fixed capital, consuming living and dead labour in order to produce a product (meat) containing increased surplus value.

McDonalds has become a totem of capitalist expansion, at the cutting edge of the development of low-waged, casualised work combined with the most advanced spectacular techniques of marketing. No part of the world is held to be completely subordinated to the global market until a McDonalds has opened there. The continuing enclosure of space, marked by deforestation and dispossession is as dependent on the animal industry as the earlier stages of primitive accumulation. Forests are still being cleared for animal grazing or to grow animal feed, peasants cleared from the land to make way for international agri-business. The dynamic of capitalism is towards more control over all life, human or animal. If things move in the opposite direction it will only be because capital

has been forced to take a different turn or abolished altogether.

2. Communism

“Communism is not a programme one puts into practice or makes other put into practice, but a social movement. Communism is not an ideal to be realised: it already exists, not as a society, but as an effort, a task to prepare for. It is the movement which tries to abolish the conditions of life determined by wage-labour and it will abolish them by revolution” (Dauvé and Martin). Communism is not a utopian blueprint for the future nor has it got anything to do with the “communist” regimes of the past where capitalism was managed by the state. Communism is the movement towards the abolition of states, classes, private property, money and hierarchies of power, and the collective creation of the means to satisfy our needs and desires.

“Communism is the continuation of real needs which are now already at work, but which cannot lead anywhere, which cannot be satisfied, because the present situation forbids it. Today there are numerous gestures and attitudes which express not only a refusal of the present world, but most of all an effort to build a new one” (Dauvé and Martin). We believe that many of the activities carried out against the exploitation of animals fall into this category of “gestures and attitudes” and are therefore expressions of the communist movement.

Radicals who scorn the notion of animal liberation have a long tradition to draw upon. Marxist political economy adopted the enlightenment project of the domination of nature in its entirety with the natural world being perceived as an unlimited raw material for industrial progress. Faced with the disastrous ecological consequences of industrial development on the one hand, and the challenge of radical ecological groups on the other, some communists have begun to criticise this model. But few of them have been prepared to extend this critique to the notion of human beings as the only creatures worthy of consideration. To them we say: enemies of civilisation and progress, one step further.

2.1 The secret history of animal liberation

We have our own hidden tradition to inspire us. We may not be able to turn to the “founding fathers of communism inc.” for legitimisation, but over the centuries there have been plenty of rebels and revolutionaries who have fought for their own liberation and that of other human beings whilst also denouncing the abuse of animals.

As Colin Spencer demonstrates in *The Heretic's Feast: A history of vegetarianism*, arguments against eating animals have been put forward for at least as far back as written records stretch. While many have eschewed meat for health reasons, or as part of an ascetic package of self-denial and sacrifice, it has often been concern for animals that has been the key factor. In ancient Greece for instance, the Orphic mystery religion held animal sacrifice and meat eating to be equivalent to murder. Similar views were apparently held by Pythagorus and his followers. Many of the arguments still used today for and against eating animals have been rehearsed for thousands of years. For instance, the Greek writer Plutarch (AD 46-120) wrote that “We can claim no great right over land animals which are nourished with the same food, inspire the same air, wash in and drink the same water that we do ourselves; and when they are slaughtered they make us ashamed”. He called on carnivores to try meat raw and not to “disguise the murdered animal by the use of ten thousand sweet herbs and spices”.

Then as now, vegetarianism was not simply a dietary choice, but had wider implications in view of the social/symbolic power associated with meat: “To change one's diet is to throw into doubt the relationship between gods, men and beasts upon which the whole politico-religious system of the city rests... To abstain from eating meat in the Greek city-

state is a highly subversive act” (Detienne).

In some areas of the world, whole communities have been primarily vegetarian. This may be associated with the influence of Buddhist or Hindu ideas, but it may also be the case that religious ideas simply reflected the existing social practices. The anti-British Indian Mutiny of 1857 was sparked by British ignorance of the importance of vegetarianism. The immediate cause of the Mutiny was the refusal of Indian troops to use rifle cartridges greased with animal fat (since pig fat was used this also offended the Muslim troops).

Vegetarianism has often been associated with religious heresies, a fact adding to their persecution. Cathar heretics brought before the Emperor Henry III in 1052 were accused of having “condemned all eating of animals, and with the agreement of everybody present he ordered them to be hanged” (cited in Spencer). In China, an 1141 edict declared: “All vegetarian demon worshippers... shall be strangled”.

It was amongst such heretic tendencies that radical communistic ideas often flourished, circulating amongst the poor and providing inspiration for “millenarian” revolts. In this context the refusal of meat may have had a class dimension: “another thing about not eating meat which gave it a social power as a spiritual message, and it was a message which was preached not only by the Cathars but by other religions which opposed Catholic orthodoxy in this period, was that meat was the food of the hunters, of the dominators, of the people who rode horses, the people who exploited the cultivators of the land, most of whose life was singularly meatless” (Moore).

During and after the English Civil War, vegetarianism was advocated by some Ranters like John Robins; by a Hackney bricklayer called Marshall who argued that it was “unlawful to kill any creature that had life” and by Thomas Tryon, who condemned “killing and oppressing his fellow creatures” as well as slavery, war and the treatment of the insane (Thomas).

Concern about the treatment of animals, and in some cases, vegetarianism was found amongst eighteenth century radicals like William Blake who wrote that “Each outcry of the hunted hare/ A fibre from the brain does tear”; the atheist John Ritson; and John Oswald (1730-93), English Jacobin and author of *Cry of Nature*. Early in the next century the poet Shelley advocated vegetarianism in his work *Queen Mab*, which also denounced war and the rule of kings and commerce.

Later in the 19th century the anarchist and Paris communard Louise Michel declared “The origin of my revolt against the powerful was my horror at the tortures inflicted on animals”. Michel’s fellow Paris Communard Elisée Reclus, the anarchist communist and geographer, was a vegetarian who opposed the slaughter of animals for food.

Occasionally, opposition to animal abuse was taken up by wider sections of the working class. In Battersea, south London, there were riots on the working class Latchmere Estate in 1906 as locals defended the “Brown Dog” anti-vivisection statue from attack by doctors and medical students.

2.2 The modern animal liberation movement

The modern animal liberation movement includes a diverse range of groups and individuals opposing practices such as hunting, vivisection and the slaughter of animals for food. Given what we have argued about the centrality of animals to capitalism, a movement challenging the position of animals could hardly help but impact on capital.

However, we are certainly not arguing that this movement is in totality a revolutionary movement confronting capital. Like all social movements, the animal liberation movement contains contradictory tendencies – at the one pole a socially conservative position, uncritical of capitalism, parliamentary politics, hierarchical single-issue campaigns, at the

other a non-hierarchical, direct action-based approach placing the particular issue in the wider context of radical social transformation. Between these poles various combinations exist (e.g. socially conservative, single issue-based direct action). These contradictions cut across organisations and even individuals.

Despite the criticisms that can be made of animal liberation ideology and practice (some of which we will set out later), some animal liberation actions and attitudes are certainly expressions of communism.

A clear example is the practice of liberating animals from farms, kennels and laboratories in the kind of raid pioneered by the Animal Liberation Front in the 1970s. Saving these animals from suffering and an early death directly confronts the logic of capital, abolishing their status as products, commodities and raw materials by reinstating them as living beings outside of the system of production and exchange.

Communists have criticised capitalist progress and development, including the idea that science and technology are neutral and will lead to a suffering-free golden age. Animal liberationists have put this critique into practice by, for instance, disrupting research and attacking laboratories.

Ideas of animal liberation enrich communist theory by posing the key question of the relationship between humans and the natural world. Marx recognised that communism involves the “genuine resolution of the conflict between man and nature and between man and man” (1844), but his vision of communism as a life where you could “hunt in the morning, rear cattle in the afternoon” suggests that he did not really think through what this would involve.

As Camatte argues, “The proletarian movement unfortunately retained certain pre-suppositions of capital, in particular... the vision of progress; the exaltation of science; the necessity of distinguishing the human from the animal, with the latter being considered in every case inferior; the idea of the exploitation of nature.... All this meant that the demand for a human community was kept within the limits of capital”. Apparent single issue movements focusing on, for instance, animal liberation are therefore necessary to correct “the shortcomings of the classical revolutionary movement... which had become infested with notions of power and domination”.

Animal liberation perspectives enable us to see that if the reconciliation of humans and nature is to be more than an empty wish, concrete measures have to be taken to change the way humans relate to animals, such as dismantling the technology of factory farming. They also raise the question of extending the notion of community beyond humans to embrace other species – the fact that animals may not be able to participate in the community as active subjects does not mean they have to be simply objects for human use. As Elisée Reclus argued: “When our civilisation, ferociously individualist as it is, and dividing the world into as many little hostile States as there are separate properties and different family households – when its last bankruptcy shall have been declared... then we shall remember all these species that have been left behind on our forward route, and shall endeavour to make of them, not servants or machines, but veritable companions”.

Some anarchists and communists argue that the “animal question” is irrelevant because animals cannot fight for themselves: “Animals can never play a part in class recomposition” (Aufheben, 1995). Yet any class recomposition that does not express the inter-relatedness between humans and other forms of life risks staying on the terrain of capital. By this we mean that the working class needs to overcome its fragmentation and assert itself not only to get a better deal as a component of the capitalist machine, but to challenge the relationship between this machine and life on the planet, human, animal and

vegetable.

2.3 Everything that walks on the earth is governed by blows

This brings us to the main “communist” argument against animal liberation, that those involved are “projecting the horrors of capitalism away from themselves” rather than “fighting for themselves”. This is sometimes linked to the situationist notion of radical subjectivity in which revolution is seen as the expression of individual needs and desires.

Such an approach tends to ignore the fact that people are social animals who do not exist as independent beings in themselves. They exist through social interaction, with other humans, animals and the wider environment. The communist impulse is not just a matter of enlightened self-interest but an expression of our wider communal being in this sense. In any case the need to live in a world where the alienation between humans and nature is overcome has always been part of the communist project, and is as important a need as the more obvious material ones like food and housing.

We don't see those who actively express this need as being alienated from their own, real needs. On the contrary, as an article on the mass opposition to live animal exports in the mid-1990's put it: “The fact that people are moved to confront the state by the suffering of animals at least gives us hope that people are not completely alienated” (Do or Die).

The basis of working class concern about animals is not misplaced sentimentality (though we think that sentiment is at least as legitimate a human response as detached scientific rationality) but empathy arising from a shared condition as beasts of burden: “everything that moves on the earth is governed by blows” (Os Cangaceiros). As we argued earlier, the techniques of domination of humans and animals are historically inter-linked. For instance, animals are used in experiments precisely because they are similar to humans in some way. If some one feels revulsion at the experiments where a cat or monkey has electrodes planted into their brains, then that is a valid survival “instinct”. Those animals are only tortured in those experiments because capital wants to be able to do the same thing to people.

If this empathy has been largely absent from revolutionary theory, it has found expression in revolutionary situations. During the Diggers occupation of St George's Hill in 1649, Gerrard Winstanley reported that “tender hearts” grieved to see their cows beaten by the lord of the manor's bailiffs – after all hadn't they been subject to the same beatings? In the Paris Commune (1871) Louise Michel found time between shooting cops and guarding the barricades to rescue a frightened cat, arguing in her memoirs that “everything fits together, from the bird whose brood is crushed to the humans whose nest is destroyed by war” (Lowry and Gunter). In prison in 1917, Rosa Luxemburg expressed her empathy with the buffalo she saw being mistreated from her cell: “The suffering of a dearly loved brother could hardly have moved me more... Poor wretch, I am as powerless, as dumb, as yourself; I am at one with you in my pain, my weakness and my longing” (Letter to Sonja Liebknecht, Dec. 1917).

Compassion is not a word found very frequently in revolutionary discourse, but as Communist Headache argue in relation to animals: “Part of class struggle is the struggle against domination. This includes understanding how we are dominated and understanding how we are taught to fetishize domination and so dominate each other within our class. Domination can be countered by compassion, however this compassion needs to be rediscovered as part of a class struggle in which people are coming together in the human community”.

2.4 Confronting the state

In practical terms, participation in action against the abuse of animals involves people in confronting the state (the police, the courts, the law, etc.) and developing imaginative strategies for so doing. Hunt sabbing for example can involve the elaborate use of vehicles, communications, maps and other tools to frustrate the efforts of police and hunt supporters to stop them. It also involves a mass defiance of trespass laws, a general refusal to recognise that the countryside belongs to wealthy individuals who are entitled to do what they like to the animals (and people) who live there.

Hunt sabbing is one of the few forms of animal-related activity to get a begrudging respect from traditional communists. Uniquely it can involve an unmediated confrontation with individual members of the ruling class. Many hunt sabs despise hunters because of what they do to foxes and because they are rich, although those who go sabbing in the expectation of a weekly re-enactment of the peasants revolt can be disappointed at the reality of hours sitting in the back of vans or sneaking through the woods.

While opposition to hunting might not in itself be a marker for subversive attitudes, the act of attempting to sabotage it directly is another matter. New Labour opponents of hunting continue to support the use of repressive legislation against hunt sabs because they recognise the threat posed by groups of (mainly) working class people taking matters into their own hands in defiance of the law.

Other struggles have involved mass confrontation with the state. The movement against live animal exports (1994/95) at Shoreham in Kent and Brightlingsea in Essex saw thousands of local people blocking roads and standing up to the police over several months. The successful movement to close Hillgrove Farm in Oxfordshire, a cat breeder for vivisection, involved frequent violent clashes on the regular demos leading up to its closure in summer 1999. In all these cases, thousands of police were unleashed with baton charges and intense surveillance – at Hillgrove police used section 60 of the Criminal Justice Act to stop and search everybody within a 5 mile radius of the farm who appeared to be on their way to demonstrate (*Animal magazine*). Whatever the limitations of these movements they posed fundamental questions for those involved about the role of the state and the nature of industrial processes.

Many people who are or have been involved in action against animal abuse have also been involved in other struggles. In this way, the range of practical skills developed in the animal liberation movement have circulated around struggles, becoming tools that can be applied in different situations. This covers everything from printing a leaflet, or moving vans of people around at short notice to clandestine forms of organisation and prisoner solidarity.

2.5 Beyond the ideology of animal rights

Struggles against animal exploitation are (in many cases) an expression of the communist movement, a real social movement suppressing existing conditions. While it addresses only a single issue, animal liberation does pose fundamental questions about the relationship of humans to the world. This can be a starting point for a fundamental questioning of the way we live our lives; on the other hand animal rights ideology can become a limit which prevents a wider critique of society. We need to go beyond this ideology without abandoning what is subversive within what it represents.

“Spectacular production is obviously keen to keep the unpalatable side of production hidden” (Law). Those who take the trouble to look behind the screen can be so overwhelmed by the horrors they find there, that everything else seems almost irrelevant. The conflict between humans and animals can come to be regarded as completely overriding

any social contradictions, including class, and some individuals can even develop a form of misanthropy in which all humans are seen as intrinsically “bad” with the exception of the valiant few who totally abstain from animal produce.

Total abstention is more or less impossible, and to moralistically condemn others for not going far enough only limits the scope for a movement to develop. Nevertheless, vegetarianism/veganism is not just a matter of sanctimonious handwashing. The “question of a loving and respectful relationship with other living beings” necessarily involves “a rejection of nutrition that comes, not only from the genetic manipulation of animals, but also from their cruel treatment in battery conditions or laboratories” (Dalla Costa). Not eating animals brings about qualitative improvement in the well-being of animals (as well as quantitative reduction in animals killed), even if as an isolated act it can be commodified and turned into another lifestyle marketing niche.

From the standpoint of animals a vegetarian capitalism would be a step forward. But for reasons we have set out earlier, this is an extremely unlikely outcome given the vested interests of the animal industry and the ingrained habits of daily life under capitalism. Moreover vegetarian capitalism would still be dependent upon the exploitation of human animals and the subordination of all forms of life and their habitats to the needs of the economy. So we would have to say Neither McDonalds nor McCartney but international communism!

An overemphasis on boycotting the products of particular companies is based on a misunderstanding of the nature of capitalism. Capitalism is more than the combined efforts of “bad” multinational corporations. It is based on social relations mediated by property and money. As long as these relations exist capitalism will reproduce itself, regardless of the fate of any particular company. In any case, we can't really separate any one enterprise from the workings of the economy as a whole. Capital flows freely wherever there is a profit to be made, with the same individuals or institutions investing happily in both “bad multinationals” and “cruelty free corporations”.

The lack of understanding of the dynamics of present day society, of a class analysis, can result in attacks on low-level workers in industries which exploit animals, as if they are as equally responsible as the managers or bosses. It is ludicrous, as occasionally happens, for McDonalds workers to be denounced as “scum” when their exploitation is as central to the company's profits as the dead cows in the buns.

We can all recognise these problems, and it suits the views of many anarchists and communists to pretend that all animal liberation activities take place in this reactionary framework. This is not the case. Notably the movement against McDonalds is an actually existing international struggle that takes on work conditions, the critique of the spectacular-commodity and ecological issues as well as animal exploitation, and has even managed to involve meat eaters.

2.6 What's wrong with rights?

We are critical of the notion of animal rights for the same reason that we criticise human rights. The ideology of rights arose with the capitalist revolutions of the 17th and 18th centuries, in particular the French Revolution. This ideology played a political and moral compliment to capitalist economics. In the capitalist market, commodities are exchanged on the basis of equality to a sum of money, whether that commodity is sugar or a week's work. In the political sphere, people are made equal through the granting of rights to everyone. Behind the facade of rights, the dictatorship of capital perseveres, just as the domination of the worker by capital perseveres behind the equal exchange of the labour market.

The notion that we all have rights disguises real inequalities. As Anatole France once said, the rich and the poor alike have the right to sleep on the streets. We all have the right to buy a palace, but we don't all have the means to do so. As a legalistic concept, rights imply a state to defend and enforce them, which means the preservation of the alienation of individuals from each other, and hence alienation between humans and nature, including other animals.

The bourgeois character of rights has become increasingly apparent with the emphasis on rights and responsibilities. In other words, rights are conditionally granted only to those who play the game and can just as easily be taken away. Rights are a limited recognition granted by the powerful to the less powerful, and as such "animal rights" implies at least a separation between people and animals, and the definitive superiority of people. The end of animal abuse requires the destruction of the capitalist, and indeed civilised relationship between humans and the animal world, and its replacement not with an abstract equality (a capitalistic notion, as in the equality in market exchange of dissimilar goods), but with an appreciation of the difference of the other as an element in social reality.

There is a need to move beyond "animal rights" as such, in order to fight more effectively. People need to understand why animal exploitation occurs as well as how. This is not because we think that everything has to be postponed until "after the revolution" but because the real emancipation of animals and humans requires a fundamental social transformation in the direction of communism.

2.7 Animals in a Communist Society

Although we would regard aspects of animal liberation as expressions of communism, opposition to the abuse of animals does not always sit comfortably with other aspects of the communist movement. Animal liberation "doesn't just pose an aspect of what appears to be wrong with capitalism which revolutionaries can then fit into their general blueprint for class struggle. It makes demands on a both a perceived revolutionary process and a perceived revolutionary direction" (Communist Headache).

In some areas there may be apparent contradictions. For instance in Brazil, landless labourers are occupying land belonging to big landowners and cultivating it, including rearing animals. This is an expression of the communist movement too. But the communist movement is not a monolithic entity united around a party line. It is a dynamic entity composed of diverse, and sometimes contradictory efforts. There are many issues on which a range of different positions are possible – for instance the use of technology.

Disagreements would continue even in the society that would emerge as the communist movement developed to a stage where capitalism was in the process of being abolished across large parts of the world. Communism is not the application of a universal moral code, or the creation of a uniform society, and there would be no state or similar mechanism to impose, say, veganism, even if many people thought it desirable. The question of how to live with animals might be resolved in different ways in different times and places. The animal liberation movement would form one pole of the debate.

Others might take a different position, arguing perhaps for free range, non-intensive domestication of the goat in the garden variety (although this apparent idyll would probably still have to involve cruel practices like castration and the separation of animals from their social units).

We can say with confidence though that the status quo would be untenable, and that there would be a radical transformation of the relations between humans and other species.

With the abolition of capitalism, the vested interests of the animal industry would no longer exist; there would be no corporate propaganda for meat. The origins of animal products would no longer be disguised; the production process would be transparent. People would make the decision about whether to eat animal products on the basis of a clear understanding of the health and social benefits and the impact on animals not on the basis of supermarket packaging. This would take place in the context of a process of radical change involving a questioning of much that passes for “normal” in everyday life. We would also expect the removal of systematic violence from human relations to create a generally more compassionate society.

As part of the factory system, factory farms would come to an end – who would want to work in them anyway? We would also expect a move to restore wilderness and reduce the amount of land given over to agriculture. As we have seen, growing food for animals and then eating the animals uses up a lot more land than just producing vegetables for humans to eat.

Anthropocentric humanism has been detrimental to humans as well as animals: “The brutal confinement of animals ultimately serves only to separate men and women from their own potentialities” (Surrealist Group, cited in Law). What Camatte calls “the biological dimension of the revolution” will involve the rediscovery of those aspects of humanity, some labelled as “bestial”, that have been underdeveloped by capital such as rhythm, imagination and wildness.

One consequence of this would be that humans would no longer see themselves as always above and distinct from other animals: “Communism... is not domination of nature but reconciliation, and thus regeneration of nature: human beings no longer treat nature simply as an object for their development, as a useful thing, but as a subject... not separate from them if only because nature is in them” (Camatte).

PostScript: Anarcho-punk, the ALF and the miners’ strike – a cautionary tale from the 1980s

I have a sense of both fear and repugnance when I see comrades who hate their past or, worse still, who mystify it. I’m not denying my past, for example my workerist past; on the contrary, I claim it. If we toss everything away, we live in a condition of permanent schizophrenia. (Sergio Bologna, quoted in Wright 1996)

This account of the movement through anarcho-punk to class politics in the 1980s is very much based on our own experiences. We think that it is worth talking about because it is also relevant to other times and situations. Questions about animals and the environment are often associated with so-called “counter-cultural” scenes, and tend to be jettisoned as people engage with more traditional radical politics. We can see parallels with the way significant numbers of politicised “hippies” were absorbed by the International Socialists (now the SWP) and similar groups in the late 1960s/early 1970s. Today with numbers of anti-roads protesters adopting or moving towards communist positions, its as well to point out the errors that were made by the early 80’s generation. Adopting communist analyses can be a step forward, but not if it means abandoning what is already subversive in your activity.

In the early 1980s the anarchist movement in Britain got the kick up the arse it sorely needed with an influx of politicised punk activists. The anarcho-punk scene was associated with nationally-known bands like Crass, the Poison Girls, and Conflict but in towns across the country (and indeed across Europe and beyond) thousands of people formed bands, put on squat gigs and generally raged against the machine. Politically the

emphasis was on a mixture of lifestylist abstention from “the system” (refusal to work, boycotts of everything under the sun) and direct action against “multi-death corporations”. The high point in Britain came in 1983/84 when thousands of people converged on the financial centre of London for the Stop the City actions, particularly targeting firms associated with the arms trade, ecological destruction and animal exploitation.

Animal liberation was central to anarcho-punk. Seemingly every band had at least one song about hunting or vivisection, and record sleeves featured graphic images of animals in various postures of suffering. Many punks adopted a vegan lifestyle and threw themselves into animal activism – punks made up the majority of many hunt sab groups.

The same period saw the direct action animal liberation movement reach new heights. The Animal Liberation Front had been established in 1976 and by the early 1980s raids to rescue animals from laboratories and acts of economic sabotage against hunting, factory farming and vivisection targets were becoming increasingly common and enjoying widespread support. The ALF was, and remains, an organisation of decentralised cells, with a parallel supporters group structure putting people in touch with each other, handling press releases, and helping organise prisoner support. As well as the core of regular activists there was a broader fringe of people using the name as a flag of convenience for acts of low-level sabotage such as breaking windows and gluing up locks.

Alongside the ALF there was a wider movement of direct action, including militant demonstrations (2000 people entered the military’s Porton Down lab site in 1982) and mass raids on laboratories to gather evidence of animal cruelty (rather than to liberate animals). In 1984 hundreds of people took part in Northern, South East and Eastern Animal Liberation League raids on major laboratories including ICI, Unilever and Wickham. Inevitably state repression and the criminalisation of the movement was stepped up – 25 people were jailed for the Unilever action.

1984 also saw the start of the longest and bitterest fought episode in the class struggle for many years in Britain – the miners’ strike. The strike posed a major, and ultimately terminal challenge for anarcho-punk ideology. Crudely, this world view tended to moralistically divide the world into two camps – the good (people who thought and acted like anarcho punks) and the bad (those who collaborated with the system). At the start of the strike many punks would have put the miners in the latter category – after all didn’t most of them eat meat, and weren’t they only fighting because they wanted to work? Facing with increasing social polarisation around the strike, and the inspiring resistance of militant miners, almost everybody jumped the right way off the fence. Led by the Leeds-based Chumbawamba (years before their Top of the Pops days), most anarcho bands including Crass had played miners benefits by the end of the strike.

The violence of the miners’ strike also weakened the hold of pacifism on the punk scene. The new mood was given expression in the paper Class War, launched in 1983, which combined punk style graphics and imagery with a language of class violence and revolution. The early Class War was fairly clear that animal liberation was part of the revolutionary movement against capitalist society. Announcing the launch of its 1984 “Spring Offensive” against the rich, the front cover of the paper featured a picture of a fox hunter and the slogan “you rich fucking scumbag – we’re gonna get you”. An article in the same issue declared: “Class War fully supports the movement for animal liberation. Many of us are active in Hunt Saboteurs and take part in attacks on animal exploitation labs and factories around the country”.

Class War intervened at antivivisection marches denouncing “the bureaucrats of the BUAV” (British Union for the Abolition of Vivisection) for their fear of “the growing militancy of the animal liberation movement, the increased daring of its attacks on property and

confrontations of the police". For their troubles they were denounced by the BUAV as agent provocateurs after clashes with police at Biorex laboratories in Islington. Class War saw the militancy of the movement as an inspiration, expressing the hope that "violent attacks on animal exploitation establishments will spill over into violent attacks on other parts of this shit society". However as Class War turned itself into a national federation (without some of its founder members) embracing more traditional workerist politics, animal liberation disappeared from view.

The anarcho-punk scene began to fragment. Crass called it a day, and scenes across the country fell apart into sometimes acrimonious factions. Some people tried to just carry on as before – an anarcho-punk scene defined by the politics of the early 1980s continues to this day, albeit as a narrow subculture rather than a thriving movement. Some took the lifestyle option to its extreme, taking to the road as travellers or heading off to live on the land in Ireland. Some pursued the drugs option. Some just put it all behind them as a youthful (mis)adventure.

Some of those who remained primarily focused on animals were caught up in a spiral of increasing repression and the isolated militancy of a small number of activists. Mass direct action was increasingly eclipsed by arson campaigns, poisoning scares, and even bomb attacks claimed by the Animal Rights Militia.

Most of the (ex) anarcho-punks who remained politically engaged were moving in a completely different direction, rediscovering various forms of class struggle politics. Class War benefited most from this, but all the currents of the libertarian/communist milieu experienced an influx of new blood, including the anarcho-syndicalist Direct Action Movement, the Anarchist Communist Federation and the various ultra-left and post-situationist scenes.

From the point of view of the development of a radical anti-capitalist movement this could have been a major step forward, combining the subversive practice and imagination of the anarcho-punk scene with a clearer understanding of capitalism and communism. But this didn't happen. Instead most people simply jettisoned their previous views and adopted traditional anarchist or Marxist ideologies wholesale. Haircuts, clothes and diets changed rapidly as people rushed to adopt the dead end "working class identity" that they had earlier tried so hard to escape from.

Animals were now irrelevant, and if anything eating meat was a badge of the "ordinary people". Some "Vegan police" who had moralistically condemned others for eating meat, now criticised vegetarians for not eating meat: the diet changed but the self-righteous attitude stayed the same. Concern about animals was derided as middle class and liberal.

These views continue to shape the perceptions of many radicals today, particularly those who trace their political development back to the 1980s split in the anarcho-punk scene.

With hindsight, the most that can be said about developments of the 1980s was that it represented a step sideways from one confused set of ideas to another. People were no more or less working class when they adopted their patronising "prolecut" lifestyle than when they were punks. Being working class has got nothing to do with what you wear, eat or how you talk – it's about being subjected to a life dominated by work (this applies not just to people in waged work, but the unemployed whose conditions of existence are determined by their relation to the labour market).

Ex-punks starting to eat meat went hand in hand with the reversal of pacifism into the advocacy of violence and terror, down to the level of "red-blooded" flesh devouring communists advocating a "red terror". But what was (and is) needed is not the

replacement of one mistaken position with its negative, but a synthesis that goes beyond the mirror-image opposition.

Class struggle anarchists recognised the fundamental social conflicts shaping people's experiences. But often their critique of the world went little further than a call for the working class to run things, factory farms, slaughterhouses and all. Presumably for them the problem with McDonalds was that it wasn't democratically run on a not-for-profit basis. Despite its individualist and moralistic emphasis, anarcho-punk did in some ways pose a broader critique of capitalism as a way of life. It refused to take the products on the supermarket shelf at face value, sometimes obsessively documenting the chain of human and animal dispossession leading up to the burger in the bun.

And despite having a more coherent world view, many born-again class struggle anarchists actually had a less subversive relation to the world than before. Anarcho-punk did involve a practical critique of the way things are, not just at the level of direct action but in the development of different ways of doing things such as creating alternatives to the commercial distribution of music. For many class struggle anarchists, the development of subversive relations between people was endlessly deferred until after the revolution, or at least until after the next paper sale. We can even see the resurgence of traditional workerist politics as the reintegration of a radical questioning of life under capitalism.

Animal liberation may have been written out of the personal biographies and political histories of revolutionary politics, but we would argue that it has made a significant contribution to the development of the communist movement. It has equipped people with a range of practical skills that can be applied in different situations. It has also helped pose the fundamental social question of the relationship between humans and the rest of the natural world.

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