

Capitalism and its Revolutionary Destruction

Wildcat
Mid-1980s

Originally posted at the Subversion group's website (now archived at <https://www.oocities.org/athens/acropolis/8195/>). Question marks indicate places where the preceding word in the online text was unclear.

Introduction

This pamphlet has been produced as a first draft to give brief introduction to the ideas of the Wildcat group [sic] are producing it not as some definitive statement revolutionary theory, but rather as a tool for dialogue. As our discussion and activity develop, many our ideas will be modified, become more detailed and more [?] clearly related to what's happening in the class struggle.

If you think that the following is in any way a contribution towards the revolutionary destruction of capitalism we welcome any correspondence or [?] criticisms you may have. Obviously we also look forward to working with other revolutionaries on both a practical and theoretical level.

Capitalism

We the working class create the wealth of society. But we do so only for the profit of the bosses on terms dictated by them. As workers, we are forced to work long hours in conditions which endanger our physical and mental health. We have no control over what we produce, how it is produced or what it is used for.

Every aspect of our lives is dominated by the need for money. At most, what we are paid allows us to consume a part of what the bosses decide it is profitable for us to produce. Even then the goods we buy often fall apart before we have paid for them. The food we eat is adulterated.

The working class is the dispossessed class. We depend on selling our labour power to the bosses. But since labour power, as a commodity, is bought and sold like any other commodity, the bosses can refuse to buy it when it is no longer required. Ever greater numbers of our class are denied even the "privilege" of wage labour, and forced to rely on state handouts or scavenge on the margins of the economy.

For the bosses who own and control the means of production, all production has a single aim: profit. Nothing is produced unless it can be sold profitably, however much it may be needed. For the sake of profit mountains of food are destroyed. Resources are denied for basic health care. The houses and cities we live in are allowed to decay. Instead resources are devoted to arms and armies so that the bosses can send us into war against rival profiteers. Resources are used to maintain and arm the police forces which defend the bosses from our anger. Nor do the bosses stint on luxuries for themselves.

None of this would happen in a rationally organised society. It is the outcome of a society propelled by the lust for profit.

Parliament and Rights

For all these reasons the working class has no interest in the continued existence of this society. However, we are continuously encouraged to see ourselves as members of it, as the public, as citizens, as possible voters. Such ideas have a history.

In the early stages of capitalist ascendancy, the up-and-coming capitalist class attained state power through various political revolutions. Universal suffrage, people's rights, the rights of man, justice, the democratic state: these were its slogans. The practical needs lying behind them were: the freedom of trade; the right to private property; and certain political freedoms, which, together with the rights of the isolated individual, were designed to ensure faith in the "people's" state, ie. in the power of the new ruling class.

Obviously it still suits the enemy today if we see ourselves as sharing interests with them. Take a look at the wide spread incitements to take part in 'public debates' on whether such-and-such a government or political lobby has 'right' or 'wrong' policies, or on which party should be in power. Central to the 'freedom of choice' allowed to those who see themselves as part of 'the public' is the right to vote.

Nobody who coherently grasps the fundamental reality that this is a class society could possibly doubt that the revolutionary destruction of capitalism implies the destruction of all parliaments. Today, parliaments are no longer even the executive committees of the ruling class, but an elaborate con trick to make us feel consulted. It follows from all of the above that revolutionaries do not, under any circumstances, participate in parliament or elections.

The End of Capitalism

Capitalism represented a great advance over previous societies, such as the medieval feudalism which it replaced in Western Europe. Under capitalism the world has progressed from a state of universal scarcity to one of potential abundance. But the drive for profit which has led to the rapid growth of the productive forces under capitalism, also prevents them from being used in a rational way to benefit the whole of humanity. This will be the task of a new society: COMMUNISM.

The era of capitalism is coming to an end. The continued existence of capitalism threatens the survival of humanity. The crisis of capitalism is propelling the world towards economic and ecological catastrophe, and towards nuclear annihilation in war between rival capitalist states.

World Crisis

The most important result of the crisis is the declining quality of life, in almost every country, of the vast majority of the population. This is happening at the same time as one of the greatest technological revolutions in the history of humanity. This contradiction shows the bankruptcy of the capitalist system.

In the underdeveloped world workers assemble the latest computer technology in sweatshops whose conditions would have shocked Marx and Engels while the majority of the population there sinks towards starvation and destitution. In the industrialised world, despite the automation of industry, the pace of work increases while wages stagnate or fall. Unemployment leads to "third world conditions" in our cities. In the so-called "socialist" countries there are rationing and lengthening food queues – except for the ruling elite.

World Class Struggle and the Myth of National Liberation

This experience of the working class and dispossessed masses throughout the world has produced world-wide struggle against the effects of the crisis. The necessity for this struggle is the best disproof of the various false nationalist solutions to the crisis.

The struggle continues in the “liberated” countries of the underdeveloped world. National liberation is no solution to the crisis there. In the 19th century some liberation struggles led to the creation of new nation states which played a dynamic role in the development of world capitalism. This is no longer possible. Today, the new rulers may achieve a measure of political independence from the great powers but they can never free their country from the grip of the world economic crisis. For the working class in these countries “liberation” simply means exchanging one set of bosses for another – the new ones as violently opposed to working class struggle as the old ones.

The struggle continues in the countries of the Russian bloc, such as Poland. The so-called socialism in these countries is simply state capitalism. The Russian bloc is not only just as capitalist as countries in the West, it is also just as imperialist. Despite their conflict of interest with the ruling class in the West, the Russian rulers form part of the same class, and are just as much our enemies.

In the West the struggle continues under Labour Party and “Socialist” governments just as much as under conservative ones. Across the world, left-wing governments attack the working class just as much as right-wing ones. The socialism which the left-wing parties claim to stand for is in fact state capitalism. Nationalisation of industry is a state capitalist measure which offers no benefits whatsoever either to the workers employed there or to the working class as a whole.

State Capitalism

Nothing could be further from the truth than the idea that state capitalism equals socialism, or a step towards it. There are as many left wing versions of state capitalism (such as Stalinism) as right wing ones (such as Nazism), as well as “democratic” ones (such as Roosevelt’s “New Deal” in pre-war America, or present-day Scandinavia).

In mixed economies, nationalisation – like privatisation – has been a common method of carrying out wholesale industrial restructuring. In 19th century Europe, nationalisation was used to help develop “infrastructure” (railways, post, credit...). In Russia after the defeat of the revolution, the class which owned the economy was faced with conditions inherited from the defeat of the working class revolution. Large scale private capitalism was politically ruled out. State capitalism provided the means by which the “underdeveloped” country was able to catch up in capitalist development with the world leaders. After World War 2, the Russian model of bureaucratic state capitalism was exported to Central Europe by means of military conquest. It was also adopted as a political model of development by many “Third World” national liberation movements.

In Western Europe nationalisation played an important role in the reconstruction of economies devastated by the war. It ensured that capital was invested where it was most needed. At the moment, however, the priority is to increase competition in the labour market, and privatisation is proving an efficient means to this end.

In the Russian bloc, there are superficial differences with the West. Most capital is owned by the state, there is no free market in labour, and the poor have the “right to work”. Fundamentally though the conditions of life for the working class are the same. Capitalism still exists, because workers sell their labour-power and consequently are dispossessed of the means to freely create the conditions of life. Just like in the West there is a ruling class which lives off the surplus (in the form of surplus value) produced by the

workers. In Russia this class consists of a central Party elite which owns the state.

In practice state capitalism is rejected whenever, for example, there are strikes against nationalised industries or “socialist” governments, or when there is rioting or looting in “Socialist” countries. Nevertheless, the idea that state capitalism is or could be beneficial to the working class is still a powerful force holding back the class struggle. Despite the fact that “socialist” and “communist” parties continually attack the interests of the working class, the belief that they are “workers parties” is still very strong. Advances in the class struggle, if they are to happen, will bring working class people more and more into conflict with these parties, and with the far left organisations. The latter either “critically” support the mainstream left or else they crave more extreme versions of their policies for managing capitalism (such as nationalising everything, or self-management).

Frontism and Anti-Fascism

We are opposed to all capitalist front organisations, such as CND. We are also opposed to the anti-fascist fronts which seek to channel people’s resistance to fascism and racism into support for capitalist democracy, which maintains the very system which is responsible for these evils. We stand for independent working class direct action against racists. The idea of a front of workers with “progressive” capitalists against “nasty” ones was used by the left to mobilise the working class into the holocaust of the Second Imperialist World War.

Nationalism and War

The nation state is the political organisation of capitalism. Under communism nation states will disappear. As communists we oppose every attempt to rally the working class to the cause of nationalism whether in the name of “national liberation”, the “defence of freedom and democracy” or the “defence of socialism”. We call on the working class to oppose all wars between rival capitalist states by taking up and intensifying the class war against capitalism in all its forms, against all governments and bosses, black and white, “socialist” and conservative. We call for mutinies in the armed forces of all warring states, and for united action of working class people in uniform on both sides against both their ruling classes.

Bosses throughout the world are united in their ferocious opposition to our struggles. The working class must unite against them.

Religion, Sexism and Racism

Nationalism is only one of the many reactionary forces which at present divide and weaken the working class.

Religion arose as a means for individuals to find some order in what otherwise appeared to be an inexplicable and irrational world. The development of science and industry means that the world can now be explained without resort to mysticism. But the capitalist ruling class, like others before them, has institutionalised religion. Irrational respect for religious authority is used to gain obedience to an equally irrational social system.

Many of the most barbaric atrocities, carried out for reasons of “faith” and/or reactionary self-interest, are publicly justified in the name of religion. Numerous forces within the ruling class have not been slow to ferment and capitalise upon religious frenzy. Islamic or Judaic fundamentalists, Sikh or Hindu zealots, sectarian rampages from Belfast to Beirut, Christians bombing U.S. abortion clinics: the examples are endless.

Racism has deep roots in the colonial history of capitalism. Much of the wealth of early capitalism was founded on the enslavement of black people. In modern times, in times of economic boom, immigrant labour is used to perform the most menial and low paid work. In times of crisis racial minorities are the first to suffer its effects.

Across the world religious and racial divisions are maintained and exploited are by the ruling class to set working class people against each other.

Sexism. The sexual division of labour and the general oppression of women existed in class societies prior to capitalism. However, as with racism these divisions have been maintained and incorporated by capitalism for its own ends.

The very word “family” has its origins not in some image of domestic bliss but is from the Latin word “famulus” meaning a household slave. Under capitalism the family unit becomes a unit for the production and reproduction of the labour force, where the role of the woman is to “service” the male worker by looking after the home and children. This usually happens even when she has to go to work as well.

It is the institution of the family wage which makes women economically dependent on the male “breadwinner”. When in work, women are treated as second class wage-slaves in much the same way as immigrant workers throughout the world. They are a surplus pool of cheap labour to be shuttled in and out of the workforce to suit the needs of capital. The man is made responsible for wife and children by effectively making them his property. The work ethic – and even scabbing – are justified by the male “having the family to think of.” Everyone has their place in capitalist normality.

The maintenance of oppressive sex roles contributes to the sexual misery which reflects and reinforces the general lack of real community under capitalism. The family is one of the prime institutions for reproducing these roles in male and female children. Women are subject to widespread discrimination and sexual harassment including rape and the threat of rape. Gay men and women are discriminated against insofar as they present a threat to “family values” and sexual “norms”.

It is not some “unity of the oppressed” across class barriers which will end oppression. All these oppressions are an integral part of class society and can only be ended with its abolition. This does not mean that these oppressions will automatically start to be fought when the class struggle advances in other areas of society. They must be actively fought now both because of their effect on our daily lives and because they prevent the working class unity necessary to overthrow capitalism.

The Struggle Today

As the crisis deepens, the class struggle in Britain and other industrialised countries continues and is more and more faced with the need to intensify. This struggle is not just the day to day fight by employed workers over wages and conditions but involves a much broader section of the working class. The families of employed workers play a central role in the struggle against redundancies. The unemployed take to the streets. School students are rebelling. Ever-wider sections of the working class have been drawn into recent riots, and riots are becoming feature of workplace struggle as well. All these struggles, whatever their immediate aim, are at the same time a struggle against the growing police repression by which the bosses hope to contain and defeat us.

We cannot predict which section of the working class will take the lead in future struggles. What is essential is that all these different struggles link up and unite in a single struggle to put an end to capitalism.

Trade Unions

One of the biggest obstacles to this happening is the trade unions.

The best that can be said about trade unions is that in the past they merely bargained for a slightly bigger slice of the cake for their members. But the unions existence as “mediators” depends on the continued existence of capitalism. They have never sanctioned struggles which might threaten the rule of the bosses.

In this period of economic crisis there is no more room for compromise and bargaining. Struggles are marked by increasingly open conflict between unions and their members. Militant workers are quite willing to defy their union leaders. But this is often linked to calls for “rank and file control” of the unions. But it is not just the political power and privileges of the union leaders that makes the unions our class enemies. It is the inevitable result of the unions’ acceptance of capitalism. Any rank and file organisation which remains within the traditions of trade unionism will sooner or later – usually sooner – go the same way as the existing unions. The unions as a whole are now part of the capitalist system, with the job of keeping order on the shop floor, selling our labour power to the bosses, and selling the bosses’ austerity programmes back to us.

If all else fails, and these days it usually does, the unions tell us to “vote Labour” or “launch a campaign”. In this way they help divert workers discontent into the charade of capitalist democracy.

Workers continued acceptance of the unions and the traditions of trade unionism has been a major cause of the failure of recent struggles.

Trade union traditions are based on compromise, obedience to the rule-book, and acceptance of capitalist legality. They reinforce the division of the working class into different trades, industries and regions. Based on the organisation of employed workers, trade unionism also reinforces the divisions between men and women, and between employed and unemployed. Union traditions limit the participation of the majority of workers in a struggle to the simple act of withdrawal of Labour, while the leaders reach agreement on their behalf.

All this is the very opposite of what is required in the struggle for communism.

The struggle for COMMUNISM

A. Seizing control from the unions.

Despite the limitations of today’s struggles they contain the seeds of a future struggle for communism. We already know from the experience of past struggles how, in broad outlines, this transformation will occur.

In its present stage the struggle in the workplace is generally marked by a conflict between a militant minority who more or less clearly see the need to break from union traditions, and the largely passive majority who accept them. So long as this is the case the minority are forced to act independently and often against the wishes of the majority.

For a while the fate, of an entire struggle may depend on the courage and resolve of a small minority of militants. They need to organise themselves independently to carry out whatever actions are necessary. They are in the forefront of attempts to raise the aims and broaden the scope of the struggle. They strike up links with other similar minorities, working together to try to spread the struggle. They produce leaflets arguing their case. One of the most positive results of all this is often that they try to understand the wider political significance of what they are doing, by contacting and discussing with revolutionary political organisations. However they are right to have a sceptical attitude

towards all such groups.

But a small minority cannot win the struggle on its own. Nor can its aim be to replace the existing reactionary trade union leadership with its own “enlightened” leadership. Their primary aim must be to get more and more people actively involved in the struggle, in the organisation of the struggle, and in the discussion of strategy and tactics. On this basis a new form of organisation can emerge during the course of mass struggle through which the working class can seize control of its struggle from the trade unions.

In the communities, a similar process will free the struggle from the reactionary influence of religious and so-called ‘community’ leaders.

B. Organising Ourselves

From the mass struggles which have occurred in: East Germany '53, Hungary '56, France '68, Spain in the late Seventies and early Eighties, Poland '81.... as well as the historical experience of the Russian and German Revolutions: we can see what the basic form of this organisation will be. It will be based around mass assemblies of everyone actively involved in the struggle, both in the workplaces and neighbourhoods, meeting daily or in permanent session. These assemblies will elect delegates to regional and international assemblies to co-ordinate the struggle. These delegates will be chosen, mandatable, revokable and dismissible by the meetings which elected them.

Unlike capitalist democracy which is based on the passivity of the individual, this working class self-organisation is meaningless unless it is based on mass struggle and the active participation of the vast majority of those involved. It reflects the collective fighting spirit of the working class.

Many mass struggles that have taken this form have been defeated. Attempts to preserve the form when the active, potentially revolutionary content has disappeared has only left empty organisational shells. Where they have not simply disappeared they have played a reactionary role in subsequent struggles.

Nevertheless such forms of organisation, whilst not guaranteeing the development of the class struggle towards communism, provide the best framework for an active and militant class to control and extend its struggle.

As part of that militant class the most clear-sighted minorities will be active in pushing the struggle forward. Inevitably in the early stages there will still be a conflict between the majority views of the assemblies and these minorities, who must maintain their independent existence and activity. But eventually if revolution is to succeed, the great mass of the working class must become conscious communists.

C. Revolution

By then the stage would be set for the seizure of power by these mass assemblies, organised into Workers' Councils – a modern form of the Raten and Soviets of the revolutions in Germany and Russia after WW1 – in a revolution which overthrows capitalism.

In communist society the Workers' Councils will provide the initial means by which people will maintain an equal and active part in the running of social affairs.

D. Violence

The violence inherent to capitalist society will disappear under communism, a society based on the free association of individuals. But the revolution itself will inevitably be a bloody affair. Even the limited struggles of today, for very modest demands, provoke a violent response from the ruling class. But this is only a foretaste of the ferocious

violence which the ruling class is already preparing to use against a future revolutionary struggle. At all times – before, during and for as long as is necessary after the revolution – the working class must be prepared to use whatever violence is necessary to drive its struggle forward and seal its victory.

To those who deplore the need for bloodshed, we reply: there is no alternative. Nevertheless, the experience of past mass struggle suggests that, at its highest points, the movement tends to acquire an irresistible force which simply cannot be opposed. The stronger, the better organised we are, the less actual violence will be necessary.

E. The Transformation of Society

The organisation of communist society will be based on the collective 'administration of things', not on the political power of a ruling minority over the majority. The State, which throughout history has been the organisation of ruling class power, will have been abolished.

The struggle of the working class, as a class, to seize power is, at the same time, a struggle to transform society towards communism. This struggle continues after the seizure of power. It takes place on many different levels.

It is a struggle to spread the revolution to all parts of the world, to remove pockets of resistance. To guard against sabotage, and to destroy all remnants of capitalist organisation – that is the structures of the state, parliament, the unions and the various parties which claim to represent the working class.

It is a struggle to overcome the limits which capitalism has placed on our imaginations – to find ways of organising ourselves and relating to one another which enable us to develop the full potential of the new society.

But fundamentally it is a struggle to replace competition by cooperation, production for profit by production for need. This will make it possible to redevelop the large areas of the world devastated by capitalism, and to institute a system of global planned production. A communist society such as we envisage is only possible on the basis of material abundance. The potential for this has already been created by the development of capitalist industry and agriculture.

Goods will be freely available and free of charge. Money will disappear. However, communist society will not be like a huge supermarket where passive individuals simply help themselves. Work will be done because we want it to be done and want to do it – not because we have to in order to survive. The focus of interest in our lives will shift away from passively consuming, to include the new form of productive activity. This does not mean that overnight all productive activities will become passionately interesting... but a free society will strive to make them so by continually transforming the aims and methods of production. There will no longer be a mad scramble to exploit resources without concern for the future, or a rush to buy the "latest model" which gives the illusion of inventiveness and newness.

The separation between work and leisure will actually disappear. People will freely associate and creatively use and transform their lives, by creatively using and transforming goods, activities and the environment, in an attempt to satisfy all our developing needs and desires. Community and communication will emerge in this common project: people will no longer be mere objects in the production process. The essence of communism is the passionate transformation of the world and of ourselves, in the creation of a world human community.

Revolutionary Organisation

Our role as revolutionaries in all this is, through our propaganda, agitation and active involvement, to publicise, support and encourage in today's struggle all tendencies which help lead to the spread of revolutionary ideas and a revolutionary spirit within the working class. And wherever possible to actively escalate the class war towards communism. As long as communist ideas are only held by a small minority, communists are forced to organise in political groups. But this is not a situation we wish to perpetuate. Some groupings of class-conscious working class people get together through the experience of a struggle, others get together through sharing political ideas. As the mass of the working class becomes active in the practical escalation of revolutionary struggle this separation will tend to disappear.

There are many other groups throughout the world which – broadly speaking – share our ideas but this “movement” to which we belong is very fragmented and torn by divisions, some real and some petty. Whilst not underestimating the difficulties involved, we seek to resolve the differences between us, both through discussion and where possible joint activity, as a step towards the unification of our movement at an international level.