

Socialism – An Introduction.

Socialism can be defined as a social order that raises the living standards of the majority by a fair and equal redistribution of wealth and work, that looks after those most in need, doesn't consign them to the scrap heap of poverty and despair.

Based on compassion for all humanity, and the belief that a small minority should not hold the majority of wealth, socialism is not about one rule for all, a colourless world, but about allowing each individual the access to develop their own unique skills and character, thus benefiting the community as a whole.

Socialism does not discriminate on ground of creed, colour or sex, but embraces all peoples lives, a fervently believes in the good within us all and utilising these qualities for the benefit of everyone, not the selfish few.

Often attacked as idealistic, socialism is an easily attainable state, a true and powerful way of abolishing all inequality and prejudice.

Some socialist demands for the late 20th Century Britain.

1. Socialist measures in the interests of working people! Labour must break with big business and Tory economic policies.
2. Full employment!
3. No redundancies.
4. The right to a job or decent benefits. For a 32 hour week without loss of pay.
5. No compulsory overtime.
6. For voluntary retirement at 55 with a decent full pension for all.
7. A national minimum wage of at least two-thirds of the average wage. £4.61 an hour as a step toward this goal, with no exemptions.
8. The repeal of all Tory anti-union laws.
9. Full employment rights for all from day one.
10. For the right to strike, the right to union representation and collective bargaining.
11. No more sell offs. Reverse the Tories privatisation scandal.
12. Renationalise all the privatised industries and utilities under democratic workers control and management. No compensation for the fat cats, only those in genuine need.
13. The reversal of the Tories' cuts in the health service.
14. Abolish private health care. For a National Health Service, free to all at the point of need, based on the nationalisation of the big drug companies that squeeze their profits out of the health of working people.
15. A fully funded and fully comprehensive education system under local democratic control. Keep big business out of our schools and colleges.
16. Free access for all to further and higher education.
17. Scrap tuition fees.
18. No to student loans. For a living grant for all over 16 in education or training.
19. Action to protect our environment.
20. Only public ownership of the land, and major industries, petrochemical enterprises,

food companies, energy and transport, can form the basis of a genuine socialist approach to the environment.

21. The outlawing of all forms of discrimination.
22. Equal pay for equal work.
23. Invest in quality childcare facilities available to all.
24. Scrap all racist immigration and asylum controls.
25. The abolition of the monarchy and the House of Lords.
26. Full economic powers for the Scottish Parliament and the Welsh Assembly, enabling them to introduce socialist measures in the interests of working people.
27. No to sectarianism. For a Socialist United Ireland linked by a voluntary federation to a Socialist Britain.
28. Socialist internationalism. No to the bosses' European Union.
29. Yes to a socialist united states of Europe, as part of a world socialist federation.
30. Break with the anarchy of the capitalist free market.
31. Labour to immediately take over the 'commanding heights of the economy.'
Nationalise the big monopolies, banks and financial institutions that dominate our lives.
32. Compensation to be paid only on the basis of need.
33. All nationalised enterprises to be run under workers control and management and integrated through a democratic socialist plan of production.

Socialism in Song

Clause 4 replaced by Blairite pledges, stake-holder mentality superseding socialist ideology, Thatcherite U-turning taken onboard as Party dogma, Billy Bragg ousted by D:ream, the Labour *Anthem* soon to be replaced by, *Somewhere, Over The Rainbow* ? Perhaps the Smiley Wavey One himself could learn a thing or two about the true socialist movement by studying the words he sings along to at the Party Conference ...

The Red Flag

The people's flag is deepest red
It shrouded oft our martyred dead
And ere their limbs grew stiff and cold
Their heart's blood dyed to every fold
*Then raise the scarlet standard high
Beneath its folds we'll live and die
Though cowards flinch and traitors sneer
We'll keep the red flag flying here*
It waved above our infant might
When all around seemed dark as night
It witnessed many a deed and vow
We must not change its colour now

Chorus

It well recalls the triumphs past
It gives the hope of peace at last
The banner bright, the symbol plain
Of human right and human gain

Chorus

It suits today the meek and base
Whose minds are fixed on pelf and place
To cringe beneath the rich man's frown
And haul that sacred emblem down

Chorus

With heads uncovered swear we all
To bare it onwards till we fall
Come dungeons dark or gallows grim
This song shall be our parting hymn

Chorus

Words by Jim Connell, 1889

THE SECOND COMING: AN OPEN LETTER TO REVOLUTIONARIES

**This was the final open letter written by an anti-capitalist \ socialist organisation.
Read the script. Highlight what are the main aims of the organisation and state your views on their aims. Do you agree \ disagree with them? Why?**

We've had 18 years of unrelenting anti-working class government, 18 years of unceasing attacks on the interests of working class people by the state and the agencies of capitalism. Gains we fought for in the past are being slowly, and sometimes rapidly, eroded. We're heading towards a more brutal and uncertain form of capitalist exploitation, in many ways reminiscent of earlier times. The opposition - and by this we mean everybody who has an explicitly revolutionary outlook on the problems of the world - is few in number. We are marginal, fragmented and declining in influence. In short, what passes for a revolutionary movement in this country is pitiful. At a time when an unbelievable amount of s**t has been dumped on our heads, you would think that working class people, angry and p****d off, would flock to groups such as Class War in droves. Sadly this is anything but the case. After almost 15 years of sometimes intense and frantic activity, Class War is still tiny in number and, as far as many in the organisation are concerned, going nowhere. This issue of the paper will attempt to address some of the serious problems that beset Class War in particular and 'the movement' in general. We want to get some kind of debate going and get the revolutionary movement back onto more solid ground.

At present we concern ourselves with, and write about, a million and one things - the Job-Seekers' Allowance, Bosnia, fascists, the declining rate of profit, whatever. But as important as these issues may be, there is one question above all others we should be asking ourselves. That is, if our ideas are so brilliant, why do we collectively amount to so little and have so little influence?

It may be hard to believe right now, but revolutions are a common feature of history: they have happened in the past and they will happen again in the future. Two recent and close-to-home examples of revolutionary situations are the events of the late-1970s in Italy and those of May 1968 in France.

Despite what some people may say, we still live in a society that is divided along the lines of class. The material interests of the great majority of people, the working class, are opposed to those such as James Goldsmith, Anita Roddick, Richard Branson and Cedric Brown. This is an opposition based on economic, social and political grounds. The class struggle is a fact of life. As long as we live in a capitalist world people will fight against it - we are left with no choice. By fighting against it there is always the possibility that we will go beyond the limits of the class struggle and overthrow existing society. This is what we mean by 'revolution' and we look forward to it.

GANG WARFARE

Sometimes it seems as if there are unwritten rules about what can or cannot be said in a publication like Class War. In this issue we intend to break those rules. Here we come clean. What we mean is that self-criticism/analysis is rarely a feature of revolutionary publications or part of the practice of would-be revolutionaries. It is therefore long overdue. In the Class War Federation we freely admit that there is a problem, even though we are equally sure that many will seek to deny this. Some people may even find it shocking or disturbing. But our intention is to be open and very honest, even if this means saying the unsayable. Too often we look at things and do things from the perspective of 'group patriotism'. Too often there is this sense of loyalty to your own organisation above

everything else. With this goes a sense of one-upmanship, of trying to get one over on each other, and of regarding any problems as lying elsewhere. The attitude is: 'We're OK, we're sorted. If only everyone else was like us, things would be brilliant.' We see these things, this attitude, as being an enormous and fundamental problem.

We say openly and quite clearly that there are problems with Class War. We also know that we have said and done many things that were wrong, and that therefore we have been part of the problem. But then isn't it inevitable to be wrong sometimes? Isn't it part of a learning process? And of course, the only way to ensure that you are never wrong is to never do or say anything. There are too many groups and individuals around who are constantly negative, who never have anything good to say about anything, who can't wait to slag off Class War (and others) whenever we have taken some initiative and put our heads above the parapet.

Every political publication in this country has had its tuppenny-worth's of slagging Class War, and very little of it could be called comradely! Fair enough, we have shouted our mouths off and we have no problem with criticism where it's deserved. But at times it has been just plain ridiculous. Over the years we've rattled a lot of cages on the Left, though we've always tried to steer clear of sectarian slagging.

The Class War Federation is not perfect; no group or organisation ever could be, although some ultra-left types act as if a perfectly coherent theory and practice were possible. We say that it isn't. One of the common criticisms of Class War is that we don't have an agreed 'position' on Ireland or unions, for example, that Class War members have had differing points of view. In fact we have always regarded it as a strength that there was no line, no dogmatic position. Although we are prepared to admit that problems have arisen because we have been an open church, nobody has yet been able to answer the question of how you get from A to B, from here to a revolution, with entirely pure and coherent politics. What happens when we confront the revolutionary masses of the working class and they don't subscribe to ideas perfectly conceived by Bordiga or Malatesta in the 1920s, or they don't have the 'correct' line on Ireland? Does the working class spring fully formed out of some revolutionary womb? We think not. What happens when we confront a working class full of contradictory ideas, maybe confused, reactionary even, as well as genuinely revolutionary? Do we get involved with what's going on? Or do we refuse to be tainted? We reckon the revolution could happen and be over before some so-called revolutionaries would dare to get involved. The fact is it won't happen according to preconceived plans, and at some level it will take all of us by surprise. But we will be even less prepared if we don't start talking openly and honestly to each other.

As we have said, we are part of the problem and we can't, and shouldn't, ignore it any longer. Class War is overburdened with baggage from the past: the myths, the lies, the illusions, the fantasies have all become millstones around our necks. They paralyse us and stop us achieving our goal - that is, playing a small part in facilitating a working class revolution that sweeps away capitalism forever. Basically, Class War is no longer able to function as a useful political organisation.

That Class War is at a low ebb is nothing new - we have shot up and down like a yo-yo throughout our short history. We have been down to a bare handful of people before (the period before the poll tax comes to mind). The fortunes of Class War have always waxed and waned in relation to the course of the wider class struggle. But Class War was born and shaped in the mid-1980s and what was valid then is no longer valid or appropriate now. The world moves on and, believe it or not, we intend to move with it.

KEEP IT SPIKEY?

Class War was designed with the intention of alienating the middle class and mainly pacifist Left. While their newspapers emphasised victims, Class War emphasised fighting

back. They had bloody demonstrators and strikers, Class War had Hospitalised Copper. Class War advocated returning the aggression of the immediate enemy, the police - something which many working class people do anyway. Strangely, this emphasis was unusual, but it was legitimate then and still is. We should remember that the police were created as a body charged with the task of keeping us in line - that is what they are there for. They may also give tourists directions and help old ladies across the road, but the bottom line is that they are an obstacle in the way of what we want and what we wish to achieve. Revolutionaries who do not accept this basic fact are digging their own graves.

If there is a serious political change in this country (or elsewhere) there will be violence. In itself violence is not a good thing, it is sickening. But the wealthy and powerful will not give up their privileges of their own volition, we have to make them. History teaches us that they always fight back: the American capitalist JP Morgan once boasted that he could pay one half of the working class to shoot the other half. The world is a violent place, but we didn't make it so, that's the way capitalism is. The lock-out of Merseyside dockers is violence, child prostitution is violence, the prison system is violence, living in a cardboard box on the South Bank is violence. We could go on ad nauseam. We don't have to justify our so-called violence - let others justify their passivity. We would much rather the world could change in a peaceful way but we believe it is unlikely if not impossible.

Violence or non-violence is a line drawn by the state and the media. The state decides what constitutes violent struggle and urges instead non-violent and constitutional means - reformism. We don't determine what passes for common sense in this world - after all, it was deemed perfectly reasonable for the USA and Britain to drop bombs from B52s from five miles high in the sky onto Iraqi civilians, for the SAS to kill unarmed people in Gibraltar, and for paratroopers to shoot unarmed civilians in Derry. But advocate throwing rocks at the cops on a demo or strike and you're vilified as a violent bunch of nutcases!

Violence is a tactic though, not a strategy. We are in favour of mass working class violence, out in the open; not created or led by Class War or others, but developing according to its own dynamic, as a means of self-empowerment, a means amongst others of giving people a belief in their ability to overthrow the state. The violence of a working class community in struggle is always preferable to that of an elitist armed struggle group. Despite what we've said, it doesn't mean there are no problems with violence in a political context. It's not something to be taken lightly - Class War's problem has been that we have done exactly that. Class War has been known for its violent image, something that we have all too readily played up to. This has been detrimental to the many other things that we have said, things that have no connection with a violent approach - sexuality, drugs, to give just two examples.

It has been said within Class War that every emphasis became an over-emphasis - maybe we are just too casual as regards such things. On occasion, the paper has become a parody of itself and Class Warriors have tended to fetishise violence. Worse, this has led to us under-emphasising struggles that didn't involve violence. The glorification of violence ended up attracting people who were more interested in talking about fighting than changing the world. Any attempt to steer Class War into territory where people actually thought about what they were doing, and why, has been taken as being 'soft' and 'liberal' (and even 'middle class') by those who refused to see further than violence. This has created a constant tension within the organisation. On many occasions Class War's macho approach has in turn alienated many people, especially women.

THE HAND THAT ROCKS THE CRADLE

This brings us to another of our problems, the lack of women within Class War - although it has to be said we are not the only organisation with this problem. Ironically, when Class War was first started, half the people involved were women. Unfortunately it's not the case

now. Of course there have been some women involved over the years, but sadly they have always been a minority. We have always said that women were just as capable of getting stuck in as men and this has been proven many times. But the fact remains that there are not enough women within Class War. Maybe as we attempt to change ourselves we will be able to rectify this and in future work together on a more equal basis. But it has to be said that there may be some cultural aspects of the problem that are beyond our influence. In many ways we have faced a similar problem with respect to black people: Class War is, and always has been, an almost exclusively white organisation. Maybe black people's reluctance to get involved with revolutionary groups stems from their experience of being manipulated and patronised by middle class white leftists. Maybe the overwhelmingly white cultural emphasis of anarchism and Class War is also a reason. And, of course, there is the straightforward fact that racism exists within our society and black people are therefore suspicious of getting involved in what is in effect a white movement. We don't have any easy answers to this problem. We have tried many times to put it right but always with a lack of success - we are open to suggestions.

SOCIALISM OR BARBARISM

When Class War was started it was never conceived as anything other than a step along the way. No political organisation is an end in itself - all organisations degenerate eventually. When you have to put more energy into maintaining the group itself than pursuing your original goal, then it is time to stand back and reflect on what you are doing.

There is a certain ultra-leftist or situationist point of view that is antagonistic to all forms of organisation. This point of view believes there is some pure, untainted (by the likes of us) working class out there that will at some point rise up spontaneously. B*****ks! If there is a fundamental shift in the political situation in this country, then groups like Class War will be involved out of necessity. If you seriously believe that a revolution will occur without political organisations being involved, then you're wrong. Organisations may or may not be a hindrance according to what they say and do, but recent events in eastern Europe show that social upheaval on its own is no guarantee of a better world.

Part of the problem is that many revolutionary organisations insist on seeing themselves as somehow separate from the working class. Class War has always opposed this idea. We are very much part of the working class - not some mythical homogenised working class but one that is atomised and fragmented, with differing but ultimately common interests. We're not on the outside looking in but very much part of it.

We realise that the experience of the recent past has been bad for many people. We have had a series of what at times has felt like unending defeats. Many people are demoralised and just keeping their heads down. But we are revolutionaries and we have a dream of a better world. We're also revolutionaries because we know that revolution is the only real answer to the problems in our lives. Because of this, we have no choice but to fight. We all know the possibilities that exist. For every person who is actively involved, there are dozens who have moved away but still keep those ideas of revolution.

Again we have to be clear about things and say the unsayable: revolution is not on the agenda at the present time. Maybe the best thing we can hope for is a small upturn in the class struggle in this country. Of course, most people's perception of revolution is at least partly shaped by the disastrous revolutionary experiences of this century, above all in Russia and China. Everybody knows that Stalin was scum, everybody knows that the secret police were running the show and the negative consequences of these experiences are incalculable. Most people are aware that the world in which we live doesn't work in their best interests - direct experience rams it home every day of our lives. But capitalism continues to exist at the moment because the majority accept it as being 'reality' or 'common sense', and until they begin to challenge or question this fact, we're stuck with it.

Most people know that the world is s**t, what they lack is a belief in their abilities to change it for the better - and that could come very quickly, almost overnight. All it needs is one little chink in the armour of capitalism for the situation to change beyond all recognition. The anti-poll tax movement is a good example. To begin with, it was 'just another campaign' - nobody expected it to become so massive. So maybe revolution is just around the corner, after all. The point is it's impossible to predict.

'MUST TRY HARDER!'

We live in the world's oldest capitalist country that ironically has one of the most backward political cultures. Maybe the passive and conservative outlook of so many working class people in this country is partly the result of the frozen theme park society that we live in with institutions that are rooted in the distant past. Even in capitalist terms the institutions that govern us are becoming untenable - they need more efficient, up-to-date ways of exploiting us, and what they have instead is a backward-looking and fossilised mess. And at a time when the monarchy appears to be on the way out, any attempt to tinker with it may mean the whole edifice will fall apart. Maybe the system we see before us is a house of cards.

At the moment, those of us interested in revolutionary ideas are few in number and have a limited influence. Class War has always believed in screaming from the rooftops and has always acted on the belief that we can make our own history, that we can change the world in the here and now. Anarchism or communism is not some torch that we carry for future generations, something that we wait maybe 500 years for - it is something which exists in what we actually do now.

We have always believed that we can have an effect. But if the rest of the working class aren't up for it, we can't force them and no matter how loud we shout, this isn't likely to change in the short term. Over the last ten years too many people in Class War and elsewhere have fallen into the trap of thinking that 'one more leaflet' or 'one more picket' will magically bring success. The end result has been burnt-out, disillusioned cynics. But it is not just the wider world that we are concerned about here, it is ourselves and others who are like-minded. Because within the pond that we (the Left) inhabit we can have an enormous effect. But we are split into tiny groups, riven by sectarianism, dominated by personalities, refusing to work together, refusing to talk, spending too much time fighting each other. Are we revolutionaries or are we fools?

Is it any surprise that the working class as a whole gives revolutionaries (that's us, remember) a resounding thumbs down? Being a revolutionary is not exactly an attractive prospect - harping on about the past, stuck in dogma, unable to act co-operatively with each other or in an autonomous manner. The average person's concept of a revolutionary is someone who is at best a muddle-headed dreamer. At worst, revolutionaries are seen as devious, lying, manipulative and only in it for themselves. Are we satisfied to be in our small but dogmatically perfect groups? And why are we so chronically unable to work together, to form a functional revolutionary movement that can seize the initiative from the ruling class? Maybe there are bigger problems in some quarters than others, but in the end these problems affect us all: we are all responsible.

OPPORTUNITY KNOCKS

On the other hand, the situation is not as bleak as we've painted it. In many respects the field has been cleared for libertarians and there are historic new possibilities. The mainstream political parties are held in unprecedented contempt. Large numbers of people refuse to participate in a political system that gives them no real say in their lives. Whatever pretensions the Labour Party had to being a working class party are well and truly over. Sure, millions of working class people have just voted for Blair and his cronies,

but how many really believe in them? How can you believe in something which is in effect an upwardly mobile bunch of middle class people, who think themselves eminently qualified to run our lives for us? The Labour Party has always worked on the basis of a nice cosy capitalism that works in everyone's interests. But it isn't like that, and never will be. This time they didn't even wait until they were in power to make it very clear whose side they're really on. The influence of the unions is at an all-time low and so their ability to have a negative impact and limit working class struggles is diminished. (In saying this we don't mean that unions are monolithic organisations that always act against the interests of working class people - there is a great deal of difference between union members and union leadership.) This also means that in many ways we are more vulnerable to capitalism's worst excesses. Strong trade unions were very much part of the post-war 'consensus': alongside other institutions, their main function was to dampen class struggle. The working class was both protected - we had a health service, social security, full employment, etc. - and imprisoned.

More importantly, Stalinism is dead with the Trotskyists not far behind. We cannot underestimate their destructive influence within the working class since 1917: there must have been upwards of 50,000 people through the ranks of the SWP alone. How many people have they managed to put off politics for life? The Trots parrot out a theory and practice conceived in the clandestine conditions of 19th century feudal Russia. It was absurd in the past and now it's plain reactionary. Nobody needs them or their leadership. Maybe, finally, we can snatch Marx back from these worthless Leninist usurpers to make what use of him we can. As these political traditions are confined to the dustbin of history the opportunity finally exists to create a uniquely British revolutionary politics suited to conditions here and now, not a load of baggage from the past foisted upon us from above, from another time, another place.

This politics may have to be 'European' of course, or something else. We're certainly not suggesting we can ignore what's going on in the rest of the world or that a global proletarian revolution isn't necessary. The world as it was has changed, the working class as it was has changed. In this country fewer and fewer people work in manufacturing. Fewer people have full-time secure jobs - casual labour and part-time jobs are now very common. We live in a global economy and the nation-state is in decline. If we allow capitalism to continue to exist, maybe the differences between the First and Third worlds will diminish, and exploitation and misery will be uniform the world over. The world is already dominated by huge transnational corporations, with annual turnovers larger than many countries' gross national product, moving production to wherever it is economically and politically advantageous.

The world may have changed beyond recognition but, then as now, it's still capitalism. The conditions that gave rise to the great social movements of the 19th and early 20th centuries are still in place - ironically, nothing has been reconciled. We still live in a world riven with anxiety for most of us. Now as then we sell our ability to work in return for a wage, and most of us are but one or two pay cheques from destitution. Clearly the working class has changed but we never saw it as a static concept in the first place - it has changed continually throughout its history. Capitalism tries to contain us and we change: capitalism changes us, we change ourselves, and in our turn we change capitalism - this is class struggle, the motor of history, as Marx put it. We are changing now, possibly (hopefully) in the direction of challenging some of the ideas that dominate our lives. What is clear is that old 19th century ideologies are largely useless when it comes to understanding this world as we enter the 21st century.

In this situation the possibilities for non-authoritarian anti-capitalist politics are enormous. It would be criminal of us to ignore, or waste, this historic opportunity to move from the margins of the Left into the mainstream of it. We suspect that there could be more support

for anarchist ideas than any of us have ever dreamed of. We only need to find some effective means to tap into most people's natural tendency towards an anarchist way of doing things.

In the immediate future we see some hope. Working class expectations will be higher under this new Labour government, expectations that Labour will be unwilling and unable to meet. We can seize this opportunity if we use some imagination, if we step outside our sometimes self-imposed straitjackets, if we talk to each other. Genuinely revolutionary politics is about breaking down barriers, not putting them up. It's about optimism, looking for opportunities and possibilities; it's about challenging ideas and 'givens', not being hidebound by romantic images of change, past or future.

But we must be realistic, we must see the world for what it is, not through rose-tinted spectacles. This isn't a call for anybody and everybody who simply calls themselves an anarchist or libertarian to come together. That would be pointless. The bottom line of any dialogue is a recognition that society is divided along the lines of class.

What we see is the possibility of achieving something very modest, not the immediate influx of thousands, but the creation of a base for doing something bigger and better. This is an attempt to marshal our movement's resources. We'd like to see a re-groupment, a realignment, of all the serious libertarian revolutionary forces in this country. At the moment we are massively underachieving: we can do so much more, be so much more. Let's make it crystal-clear: this isn't some underhand attempt to get everybody to join Class War, Mark II. If it's seen as such, then that partly underlines the problems that we have mentioned above. As far as we are concerned, Class War as it existed has finished. It is now time to move on. We want to do something completely new, though we're not entirely sure what that is. Perhaps we need to get away from the old-style political group with its newspaper, its meetings and its leaflets. Maybe we need to create some new forum for communicating more effectively, to initiate things. We must attempt to draw in the numerous individuals who have similar beliefs but are inactive, uninvolved - and this includes all the readers of our paper, past and present.

WHAT'S THE STORY? JACKANORY

One of our problems has been that many people have been under the belief that Class War is this enormous organisation. This could be seen as a sign of both our success and our failure. They believe we have thousands of people about to go on the streets and fight, that we are a group of super-active individuals who do it for them, an essentially passive readership. The truth is that Class War, in its entire existence, has never had more than 150 members, and membership numbers have often hovered around the 50 mark.

When people have got involved with a false idea about the size and the influence of Class War, they have tended to become disillusioned very quickly. It hasn't helped when, at times, we have played up to that enormous-organisation, super-active image. We have also suffered from the illusion that we could or should become a mass-based organisation. With hindsight, we have to say this has always been hopelessly wide of the mark, and politically undesirable in any case. These illusions of ours haven't been helped by the fact that a couple of times in Class War's history it really did look like we were about to take off in a big way. But we always come back to earth with a resounding crash (we dare say the state had a hand in it a couple of times as well).

PUNK'S NOT DEAD

A strength and weakness has been our ability to recruit people who would never in a million years dream of joining any other left-wing or anarcho group. This is connected to the 'extreme democracy' that has existed within the Federation. People could get involved and be writing for the paper within a couple of months - there's never been any central

committee to pass through. This has been a source of strength, but has also caused problems. Many people who became involved had a low level of political awareness, which in turn has caused mayhem within our ranks. A 'kick it til it breaks', anti-intellectual, anti-theory mentality has been prevalent within the organisation. This has been an obstacle. Class War has always been rightly paranoid about ending up like the Left parties and sects, defending particular unchanging theoretical positions and traditions, regardless of how much things have changed since 1917 or 1936. We set out to avoid this, but fell into another trap - defending a rebellious 'attitude' and 'image', rather than looking at what's wrong with the world and how we can best intervene to change it. In many respects it's true to say that Class War failed to become much more than a 'punk' organisation.

All these factors combined to make the Federation an organisation that has been incredibly conservative and resistant to change. At certain critical periods we failed to seize opportunities to re-invent ourselves and to take our political organisation and ambitions on to a higher stage. For example, the International Conference which we hosted in London in September 1991 brought hundreds of revolutionaries together, but offered nothing new. For some of the organisers this was not a problem: the conference was an end in itself. Yet in retrospect, it must go down as a missed opportunity.

More recently, we have been unable to respond to the upsurge in environmental/anti-roads activism or the rave/free party 'counter-culture' that partly overlaps with it. The 'anti-intellectual' culture within the Federation has stifled real political debate and left us mouthing the same slogans as ten years ago.

But, having said all that, we still feel that we have done an enormous amount even within the limitations of our organisation and its practice. And the question remains: if just fifty people achieved this much, what could we have done had there been five hundred of us or five thousand?

ONWARDS AND UPWARDS

We believe that our propaganda has had a resonance and an accessibility almost unique on the British Left. Class War has always said that politics didn't have to be dour and boring, that it's a mistake to take yourself too seriously, that we should use our imagination and have a bit of laugh in what we do.

Of course, with the best will in the world it's not always good times and sometimes political activity is a pain in the a**se. But we don't believe that politics should be self-sacrificial, and we have always argued against so-called 'professional revolutionaries'. The 'full-time' activist is trapped in a f****d-up social relation as much as anyone else. In our experience, this type of activist ends up splitting themselves in two, separating their own individual and social needs from their actions. It is a trap we have all fallen into at times - it's easy to forget the (personal) reasons why we can't stand the present world, and to forget the impulses that make us revolutionary in the first place. Class War always argued that life is politics and that politics is life in an attempt to avoid the robotic alienation of so much of the Left.

We believe that a great deal of what we have said politically has been right. Our task is still one of getting rid of capitalism. What we mean by that is getting rid of money, wage labour, commodities, the market system, and all of the other social relations of capitalism. The world we put in its place will be stateless.

We have always attempted to dispense with leaders, although any form of organisation is fraught with difficulties and some people shout louder than others. We even have a term for it within Class War: the dictatorship of the big mouths. However, we do recognise the fact that in certain situations some people come to the front and take the initiative. But this doesn't mean that they then have any god-given right to determine everything that happens from then on. The problem with the world is not leaders, it's followers, as we in the Class

War Federation have learned to our cost on a couple of occasions. We believe that future society should be non-hierarchical, non-authoritarian, organised along the principle of from each according to their abilities and to each according to their needs.

Maybe some people reading this will get the impression that we are consumed with guilt for past crimes against anarchism, maybe for the sin of having talked to the media and welcomed their attention. But it's not like this for us: we're coming clean about our problems and mistakes in the hope that this will encourage others to do the same. We have had enough of the way that Class War has been. We believe that until we go through some movement-wide soul searching, and take a long, hard look at ourselves, then we are all condemned to go along the same tramlines, carrying out political activity within our own little ghettos and with an equal and singular lack of success. A regroupment of our forces is possible and greatly overdue. It could be as ambitious as we care to make it. We all deserve more than we have now.

REVOLUTIONARIES AND OTHER IMPEDIMENTS TO REVOLUTION

In his article 'Anarchists and other impediments to anarchy', the veteran US anarchist Bob Black argues that anarchism as it is now, rather than being an attempt to change the world, is a highly specialised form of accommodation to it, and that if they were to ever encounter a real revolution, anarchists would run a mile! In our estimation, this is very astute and all too true of many anarchists that we know. People become 'politicised' for all sorts of reasons and not always for the most obvious one of changing the world to something better. We are not interested in anarchism as a hobby or as a way of being superior to others who haven't yet had the good sense to become anarchists themselves. Some people would surely regard an upsurge in our numbers as a threat since it would undermine their 'superior' status of anarchists. We could do without people like that and maybe this is an attempt to sort out the wheat from the chaff even in our own ranks.

We dare say that many will read this Open Letter with glee and look with pleasure at the trouble that they perceive us to be in. But we don't care too much what such people think of us: if you get a kick out of the mess we're in, then the joke's on you - it's on all of us. It may be a naive cliché to say that we are all in the same boat, but it's true. The only thing that matters on our journey is the destination itself. Organisations come and go and no organisation is bigger than the struggle itself. No group or organisation that currently exists is up to much. We see nothing that lives up to our expectations. Once upon a time there was a large, determined and sometimes violent revolutionary movement in the United States that involved hundreds of thousands of working class people. Now there is hardly anything. What is left are a few lifestyle anarchists. But at least people in the States have the knowledge that their movement was physically smashed. Over here, we are simply in danger of letting what's left of ours waste away. If we refuse to recognise this, we have no chance of reversing the decline.

Rosa Luxemburg once said that the class war is the only war in which eventual victory will be secured by a series of defeats. Someone else said that we only have to win once, whilst the ruling class have to win time after time - very true. Class War is not producing this final issue of our paper because we feel in any state of despair. We look upon what we're doing now as a positive move at a time when there are many possibilities. We are attempting to reach as high as we possibly can. We see that as being entirely in keeping with the traditional big aims of Class War.

Our goal is to bring an end to the global domination of capitalism, to create a classless society, a human community that fulfils our hopes, dreams and aspirations. To achieve this we have pretensions towards making a worldwide revolution - and yet we, several hundred

of us, find it difficult to work with each other on even a limited basis. Does this inspire confidence in our own abilities or in the probability of it ever happening? Surely the way we work with each other now should be a reflection of what we want to create, something for working class people to look at as an example, as an inspiration.

NO TIME LIKE THE PRESENT

Times are hard for working class people at the moment. We're all being told to tighten our belts, and most of us have no choice but to do just that. These are hard times for revolutionaries too.

As revolutionaries we need to take a long hard look at ourselves and our movement. We need to go back to that question: with times so hard and party/reformist politics so bankrupt, why aren't people getting involved? This final issue of Class War is our attempt to spark a wide-ranging debate on this issue.

The future is open. Most working class people know the conventional parties can't offer them anything. Stalinism is dead, and it's clear that without Stalinism, Trotskyism and Leninism won't last much longer. The possibilities for a new revolutionary libertarian movement are endless, if only we put aside our squabbling and use our imaginations.'

We're looking forwards. We plan to work towards a regroupment of all serious revolutionary forces in Britain, a realignment of the whole revolutionary movement. In the short term, over the next year or so, we are planning a series of conferences to discuss all these issues. And after that who knows? It's our world, let's seize the time.
