

revolutionary force Children are a bloody nuisance

Children are the enemies of alienation. They don't fit into schedules. Doctors and nurses draw up timetables for looking after babies and then parents feel inadequate because the babies don't conform. Childcare is a hassle on women not only because they are in isolation but because it always has to be done against the clock, to fit in with shop hours, men's or their own job hours, school hours, clinic hours, bank hours, post office hours, welfare hours, and it's impossible.

No matter how many day cares they set up and how much maternity leave they introduce, children's needs will always be in conflict with bureaucrats' and bosses' needs; children will always be an obstacle to achieving those things which are so highly valued, and often economically necessary, in this society.

So it's no wonder that the anarchist movement, which in so many other respects mirrors alienated class society, should be dominated by childless people and their values. Where you do find parents, they're likely to be middle-class, because middle-class people find it easier to get some freedom from their children (and because they predominate anyway on the left); conversely, where you find working-class anarchists they are usually childless young people.

Whatever we think in principle, the left joint with capitalism in regarding childlessness. Its policies are recreational, based on the male employee's schedule, since it was men who started the left, and we follow the same patterns today despite women's liberation — you go to meetings after hours and on weekends and you do things that cost quite a lot of money, like printing leaflets, because your money is yours to dispose of. So naturally even though there are a lot of women in left parties today, the women are socio-economic men — they have jobs and no kids; and now that men are assuming a fairer share of child-care, fathers play a somewhat more active role in the movement.

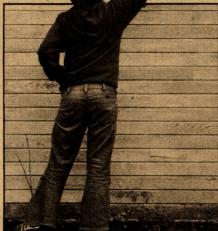
The issues concentrated on are mostly concerned with jobs or with comparatively remote things like frame-ups or foreign wars, seldom with the needs of families except as they relate to the wage issue. Parents who can't get to meetings or who can't do their share of the left producing, etc., or contribute money to the cause are made to feel like passengers. Instead of the left seeing its childlessness as a weakness, it sees parents as insufficiently revolutionary or it just ignores them altogether. One woman writes (in support of the left): "I don't think a single woman with kids is in a good position to be fighting the State." She offers revolutionary women the same choice as does capitalism: marriage/cohabitation or childlessness (dismissing communal childrears as something we haven't got yet) — only now it's imposed in the name of the revolution. She, like the rest of the left, doesn't know what fighting is. A single woman with kids is fighting the State every very existence. The State hates her like poison. It stigmatizes her children, degrades her at the welfare office, labels her a social problem, and blames homelessness on marriage breakdowns (society can't afford for women to have their own territory).

Staying Childless

The State can afford to liberate childless women as they'll always be the minority. You don't fight women's oppression by staying childless, you just lessen it. Of course a woman who doesn't want kids shouldn't have them just for political reasons, but neither should she tell those who do want them that it's unrevolutionary to have them.

The real reason why housewives (including single parents on welfare or men who stay home while their wives have jobs) are dismissed by the left is that they are outside their proper structure. No one in authority is likely to approve you for the job, we require no licence to do it (though plenty would like to introduce it, and the State's power to steal children is a negation of licence), we can organize our own work without a supervisor.

I think we should organize more private communal child care instead of pressuring for more State or industrial day care, which



are not the same as "community child care," although some leftists talk as though they were. Institutionalized day care that frees parents to join the alienated work force really isn't freedom for women, men or our children. It's freedom for robots.

What we should do is try to bring work patterns into harmony with child care. That means more self-employment, job-sharing, part-time and casual work, growing your own and doing it yourself to cut down on wages needed, going to the land — squatting if it's necessary; everything, in fact, which is liberatory.

Power Politics

The hard left considers all these things irrelevant, and self-employment down right reactionary. In this, as in the matter of children, it shares the values of capitalism which weights everything—in favour of status, benefits, opportunities—in respect of the long-term, full-time employee and makes others feel almost like criminals (which they literally are in Communist countries). The hard left is composed of power-oriented people who identify with union leaders and commissars even when they theoretically disapprove of them; after their own revolution they would just be union leaders under a different name and they don't like intractable human material.

Whatever their politics, most low-grade workers hate war and you're much more likely to encourage this natural source of revolutionary energy by offering the hope of some life and freedom now than by fantasizing about mass occupations, general strikes and revolutions 20 years in the future.

It's also important for people to form communes; indeed I don't see how an anarchist revolution can occur at all while we are stuck in our little holes struggling to survive as families, overworked, depressed, always in terror of homelessness, pennilessness, harassment, while reserving "political activity" for our weekly night out.

Communes and the like are justly derided when they consist of rich, leisured people who have no trouble buying houses and land, and imagine that their example will inspire the State to dissolve itself and the ruling class to give up their exorbitant property without a fight. It's much harder for poor people to form communes—the State's housing policy shows that it's aware of the revolutionary potential of communes and the repressive power of marriage. But we must start, and are starting to do it, by squatting and treating child care estates as communes. This makes it easier to survive on less wages and without child care which is alienated, inconvenient and inadequate (no evening and weekend care).

We should make our politics revolve around our own interests, not restricted to after-job hours. (Every couple knows that when a meeting or demonstration is on, it's the person who stays home with the kids who's working, making a sacrifice, and the person who participates in the so-called struggle who's having a good time.) We should reject the bureaucratic politics taken up most typically by those who don't mess up their lives with anything so untidy and uncontrollable as children.

(This is a condensed version of an article written by Mme de Stael in the British magazine *Anarchy*, "Children are a Bloody Nuisance," Revolutionary Force." *Anarchy* address is 29 Grosvenor Avenue, London, N.5, England.)

"It used to be described as the most extensively developed alternative economic system in the U.S." But in more recent days, the North Country co-operative movement, centred in Minneapolis-St. Paul, Minnesota, has been lucky to make ends meet.

It wasn't that North Country couldn't make a go of it in the world of business and finance, or that the co-op members got drained of their energy. Trouble came in the form of the misnamed Co-op Organization (CO), a self-styled Marxist-Leninist-Stalinist outfit that has attempted to force its hierarchical organizational forms and its authoritarian political style onto an unwilling co-op movement for the past two years.

What started as a debate over the co-op movement's class orientation and its internal policies eventually became a complicated series of mass meetings, position papers, occupations, arson, sabotage, threats and violence. In the process, the CO's escalating provocations and sectarian tactics virtually tore apart a loose, decentralized federation of more than 30 co-ops, warehouses, bakeries, cafes and other enterprises doing two million dollars worth of cooperative business annually.

The CO initiative was launched in early 1975 during a time when many co-op members were questioning why the co-op movement had failed to widen its base from its "hippie" origins to bring in working people. CO members, many of whom had been actively involved in North Country, were obviously frustrated by the unwillingness of the working class to accept their leadership, and, ironically, they carefully laid plans to reach workers through the much-despised counter-culture institutions by taking over North Country.

The strategy of the CO was two-fold. First, to infiltrate the key institutions, including "the means of production" (The People's Warehouse). Second, to push every debate into a meta-physical "two-line struggle," with the opposing line being labelled fascist and reactionary in order to force people to clearly take sides in "the class struggle."

This authoritarian form of conflict resolution actually

involved debates around practical issues, such as single mark-up vs. dual mark-up, bulk vs. processed foods, etc. — disputes with valid arguments supporting either side. A position paper prepared by co-op activists, anarchists and feminists, it was pointed out that the two-line struggle tactic represents an "attempt to force reality to fit abstract theory. Of course, this is the opposite of a dialectical approach, which is opened and rooted in the concrete."

Community Control

The CO branded its most prominent opponents as "bourgeois," and said they had "instituted a deceitful line — community control — to maintain its class ideology and control of the system." This unprincipled attack completely ignored the fact that, while all the co-ops met together to form some common policy, each co-op was independent and run by a collective of its own members.

As one of those victimized by the CO's attacks explained later, North Country was built on openness, trust and comradeship. No wonder, he said, it was "susceptible to any undisciplined, unprincipled group."

In early May, 1976, the CO attempted to push CO members circulated a plan calling for restructuring of the co-ops, installing democratic centralism and themselves as the new revolutionary leadership. The CO claimed the People's Warehouse would go broke unless the hippies abandoned their anti-profit mentality. In a new twist on the two-line struggle, the CO said there's nothing wrong with profit, as long as it goes to benefit the workers rather than the ruling class.

When its demands were shelved, the CO took the road of violent insurrection. Armed with pipes and other makeshift weapons, CO members descended in full strength on the warehouse and gave the non-CO workers a half hour to leave. One woman who put up some verbal resistance was clubbed before she and her co-workers were evicted.

The CO had already withdrawn \$6,000 from the North Country bank account before the occupation. Co-op members gathered at the warehouse, confused as to what to

do. The police were called and sent away; a third force group supporting the CO's criticisms but condemning its tactics.

Effective Action

In the end, the only effective action was taken by the co-op members themselves. They reorganized nearly all the co-ops in the network and established a new distributing warehouse, which was eventually formalized as the Distributing Alliance of the North Country (DANCo), an acronym taken from the Emma Goldman quote, "If I can't dance, I don't want to be part of your revolution."

Without the co-ops' business, the occupation collapsed in a week, but CO people were allowed to remain in control of the warehouse operation, which was now in a weak financial situation. As one co-op member said, "They (CO) thought that they had taken over the focal point of the co-ops, but now they found that the focal point was expendable, and we were capable of regenerating what we need."

CO then started to work against DANCo, first by calling for the new warehouse to turn over its assets, and then by embarking on a campaign of "boogalooism," including firebombing one co-op, destroying a truck and other acts of sabotage, and beating up co-op members.

CO's last gasp was an attempt to sabotage DANCo by getting the San Francisco Common Operating Warehouse (SFCOW), the primary broker for the region and an avowed Marxist-Leninist organization to put pressure on the co-ops. Again, solidarity among co-ops prevailed, and SFCOW was dropped as the midwest broker — cutting its total business by one-third.

Purges have been made by the CO, and the People's Warehouse is in process of being sold to pay off the CO-acquired debts. North Country is holding for a period of relative stability in order to recover from its bout of authoritarian socialism and to rebuild itself as the model of the new, non-hierarchical society.

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