

D and N, for the Autonomous Anarchist Group

The central dilemma facing the anarchist movement in Britain today is its relationship with revolutionary violence. Throughout Europe revolutionary groups have taken up arms against increasingly repressive states while we in Britain have remained (for most of the time) passive spectators of events which are of the greatest importance to us. It seems somewhat ironic that an ideology that places so much emphasis on action should produce so little, in the British context, of what we regard as genuinely revolutionary activity. Since 1972 there has been no organised resistance here, and we have to ask ourselves the question why. Of course, we recognise that an armed response isn't the only response and that over the past ten years in particular anarchists have been misplaced. Doubtless great strides were active and effective in numerous areas in search for self-management, individual and collective freedom, sexual politics, prisoners aid, the ecology movement and so many others. What we do recognise, however, is that we cannot afford to ignore the analysis that an armed response to state repression is possible now, and that it might be effective in strengthening already existent struggles.

Historically, British revolutionaries have been averse to the use of violence as a political means. There appear to be some clear reasons for this. Where, for instance, does anarchism fit into a society with no lineage of revolution in which the dominant leftist ideology has been marxism/social democracy? Precedents certainly create possibilities for the future and, no doubt, stepping over the line between legality and illegality is much easier if it has been done before, preferably several times. The relatively early success of the British working class in creating their own unions has meant the earlier capitulation of the bureaucracies of those unions to the strictures of the state. Mass rank and file activity has been largely superseded by negotiation, usually by a hardcore of professional union careerists. There have been no regular massive, rank and file confrontations between people and state, with the resultant use of violence, as we have seen in Spain and Italy. The faith many of us placed in the counter-cultural revolution of the late sixties has been shown to be misplaced. Doubtless great strides were made in developing individual's capacities for action and in exploring new forms of organisation and relationships, but capitalism survived intact and indeed was strengthened in its ability to absorb the counter-culture, to plasticise it and turn it into a commodity package. In addition, the British state has adopted a less overtly intransigent attitude to revolutionary activity than has been shown in Spain, Italy and West Germany. Its means of control, with the obvious exception of the Catholic minority in Northern Ireland, have been subtle, geared not to create a sense of impending social breakdown, to play down the political content of social unrest, to recuperate our struggles.

Anarchy magazine has already produced an issue on urban guerilla warfare, around May-June 1972. A lot has gone on between then and now, and the debate which Henri Bonny exhorted us to initiate needs a new lease of life. His proposition that we learn how and when to move from the arm of criticism to criticism by arms is even more necessary now. What we're going to try and do here is present our critique of the present-day guerrilla movement, compare them with past examples and suggest a specifically anarchist theory of arms.

Those taking up arms against the State today find themselves in a confusing situation. They are criticised from both the liberal-democratic viewpoint and from the orthodox left. It is important to examine the ways in which these modes of thought have permeated into our own consciousness, since anarchists themselves are sometimes vociferous critics. The liberal-democratic criticisms of revolutionary violence stem from the (ideological) belief in the ultimately reconciliatory nature of politics. Such criticisms should not worry us overmuch. In fifty years of stable democratic politics few real gains have been made by the working class; such as have been made have been fought hard for and are subject to withdrawal at any time (for instance, the prohibition of free collective bargaining - a Tory policy initiated by the Labour party). The continuing massive inequalities of power and resources, the carefully managed repressive tolerance, the iron fist beneath the kid glove, serve to render meaningless the State's appeal to the values of debate and compromise.

Criticism from the orthodox left is only marginally more painful. All political party type Marxism is self-evidently non revolutionary. It is interesting, then, to observe the self-righteous condemnation voiced in papers like Socialist Worker of the RAF and the Brigade Rosse; adventurist, premature, elitist, etc., indeed anything but revolutionary. So much for the revolutionary solidarity of the left. The thought modes of Marxism have permeated even into the anarchist movement and it is as well to make them explicit. One essentially un-revolutionary aspect of Marxism is the belief in the necessarily progressive character of the social trends at work in capitalism - the belief that not only does capitalism contain within itself the seeds of socialism, but also that socialism will be reached by a kind of evolutionary process. The subordination of action to the theory of historical materialism has resulted in the European left becoming enmeshed in the bourgeois politics of the state. Bakunin foresaw this long ago and his rejection of 'constructive' politics, as the links that chain the proletariat to the bourgeoisie, was part of the reason for his expulsion (by the Marxists) from the IWMA. Let us put it simply. Scientific/political marxism is the most potent non revolutionary force on the left. Marx's elaborate and complex theoretical system has failed to predict accurately the development of socialism. One cannot help but be impressed by the superior predictive power of anarchist theory. It was Gustav Landauer, an anarchist writer at the turn of the century on the expulsion of the radical faction of the Marxist Social Democratic Party in Germany who said

...all party life leads to such miserable consequences and brings such unscrupulous characters to the fore... Here there is always a fear of radical propaganda, which occasions the party to designate the revolutionary temperament as either the creation of police spies, the spiritually ill or the helpers of the bourgeoisie.

How redolent that analysis is of the reaction of the bourgeois and leftist press alike to the actions of the RAF, Angry Brigade and BR. Landauer himself was to come eventually to embrace that half of anarchism that advocates creating new 'selves' outside the 'system' by exploring new possibilities in social and economic organisation, and eventually to advocate pacifism. The history of pacifism and the urgency of the circumstances facing us now must lead us to see it as incapable of affecting revolutionary change, but Landauer's critique of Marx and party politics, unavailable in English, is just one example of the way that the profound theoretical acumen of anarchists has been played down, due to the bourgeois/marxist hegemony of the printed word.

Never before has the State possessed so great a monopoly of fire power relative to its subjects. It is sobering to think that whilst you or I face heavy penalties for possession of offensive weaponry, we have permitted a situation in which a superficially benign state abrogates to itself a massive fire power. Historically this has not been achieved by force but by a perversion of the demand for political equality: this latter having been granted the state then promises to guard this precious freedom against private fire power and argues that only by possessing the sole right of physical coercion is such a guarantee possible. But political equality is today a sham, it is simply the right to choose who will represent one's oppressors for the next four or so years. Certainly, one key factor in past European revolutions has been a fairly even balance between the means and organisation of the means of coercion. In exchange for a hollow political equality we have sacrificed our right to self-defence and, surrounded by a massive state bureaucracy, we are sacrificing our capacity for self-determined action.

The RAF then had it right when they sought to expose the myth, the shallowness of the liberal State; the West German government was forced to reveal its highly organised, already existent, machinery of repression and control. In the period between 1972 and 1978 the RAF along with the BR have been the most successful practitioners of revolutionary politics through force of arms in Europe. Both groups are undeniably Marxist-Leninist (although this is not strictly true of later manifestations of the RAF). Both have stepped up their attack on the state in a series of more and more spectacular actions and it is clear that both are now highly developed in terms of experience, infrastructure and logistics. It doesn't seem possible that the group which undertook the series of bombings against US Army installations, police stations and Judge Wolfgang Buddenberg's car between 11.5.72 and 24.5.72 could have successfully carried out the series of actions in 1977 leading it to the kidnapping of Hanns-Martin Schleyer. It's the same with the BR. To kidnap Moro so successfully needed a sophistication of organisation which the earlier components of the group clearly did not have.

This development in expertise is paralleled in both the RAF and the BR by an increasing ruthlessness in the actions they have carried out and also by a gradual but quite obvious disengaging of the active group from the base from which it developed. For instance: 19.5.72 the RAF bombed the Springer building in Hamburg and, despite repeated warnings, the building was not cleared and 17 people were injured. In the communique following the action the RAF express their shock at the wounding of the Springer employees and, it seems quite rightly, blame the building's security officers for ignoring their warnings. And yet, in 1977, the RAF organised with a splinter group of Dr George Habash's PFLP the hijack of a planeload of equally innocent people to back up their exemplary kidnap of Schleyer in the attempt to secure the release of other RAF comrades. Where is the consistency in that? Despite its nature, urban guerrilla warfare isn't a realm in which we can suspend all moral judgements and we should not applaud the use of violence and coercion uncritically, no matter how important to us the end. As we'll try to argue, there has to be a consideration of the means we use to our ends. There has to be a clear link between our practice, our ideology and the kind of future society for which we're struggling. It's not good enough to support the kidnap of the likes of Schleyer etc and then excuse the hijack on the ground of necessity. We have to be clear just what it is that our actions accomplish.

With the BR, the move of the guerrillas away from their mass base is the more evident. They first announced their existence in *Sinistra Proletaria* of 20.10.70 and in communique 7 they stated:

The Red Brigades are the first formations of armed propaganda, whose basic task is that of propagandising with their existence and their actions the organisational components and strategies of the class war.

The Red Brigades have thus always as a reference the objectives of the mass movement and their fundamental task is to gain the support and sympathy of the proletarian mass.

And so their early actions were rooted in the factories and communities. Burning cars of factory managers, destroying property of the Christian Democrats and the neo-fascist MSI and the kidnap of functionaries. But this struggle at the base, aligned as it was with legal struggles going on elsewhere, has now developed into an increasingly specialised battle with the Italian security services. A group of professional guerrillas thus fights a group of professional police. The prize? Political power - and for the BR that means them, in their role as proletarian vanguard.

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The 2 June movement, which developed out of the Hash Rebels and the Tupamaros West Berlin, has to be excepted from these criticisms. They kidnapped Peter Lorenz (27.2.75), the CDU candidate for Mayor of West Berlin and released him eight days later after communicating details of his own and his party's finances to the left press. (The recently captured Till Meyer and Gabriele Rollnick are presently standing trial in West Berlin along with four others for his kidnap, and for the shooting of Judge Drenkmann - 10.11.74 - in retaliation for the murder of Holger Meins in prison). In their earlier manifestations they attacked America House, the offices of El El and the American Officers' clubs, communicating details of these attacks to the leftist papers and also through their own illegal radio transmitters. Recently, the Revolutionary Cells have appeared in West Germany, reminiscent of June 2. They dispel the myth that those who practice armed struggle are super-human and stress that it is very much the work of ordinary people. As Bommi Baumann has said:

... do an action that anyone can do. Always make the bomb so primitive that anyone else can make one too. Even if we're not around any more, there are always people who can continue the style. Logistics have to be simplified, universal.

The analysis of the RAF and the BR is very similar. Most importantly, it concerns the primacy of armed struggle in the metropolises of Europe. And American imperialism is seen as the crucial element of European State repression. NATO's Security Committee's policy on anti-subversion strategy is guided ultimately by the US security forces. As the BR declare:

The United States is the strongest link in the imperialist chain... The intelligence system of the US police has one name: IBM. Information systems are a monopoly of the US multinational groups which guarantee the

export of sophisticated repression. It is important to attack its links, to dislocate the apparatus starting with the technical military personnel who manage and run them against the proletarians.

As Marxist-Leninists, however, their role in this attack on the apparatus of repression is guided by their function as vanguards. What we maintain is that the relationship between ideology and action is such that there is a qualitative difference between the functions of guerrilla actions for Marxist-Leninists and those for anarchists.

It seems to us that the most effective anarchist group active in the European guerrilla movement has been the 1st of May Group. In a communique issued in March 1968 they state:

If anarchism is to exist in reality, it is to draw the people and justify itself as a practical revolutionary ideology without being demagogic, it must not only re-affirm its anti-statism as a determining condition for the triumph of freedom, but must accompany this criticism of authoritarianism with the practice of permanent rebellion.

And between 1966 and 1972 the 1st of May Group has been particularly active, primarily against property, symbolic of repression. For instance: 3.3.68, simultaneous bomb attacks on embassies (Spanish, Portuguese and American) in London, the Hague and Turin; 9.2.69, the Bank of Spain in Liverpool is bombed; 9.10.70, simultaneous bomb attacks on Italian State buildings in Paris, London, Manchester and Birmingham in response to the murder of Pinelli. These attacks have been well publicised, as have been their kidnaps (usually through Octavio Alberola). The emphasis has been on attacks on property symbolic of repression, and careful publicity which explains the function of the action and the significance of the target. Their activities did not take their attack to the 'heart of the state', but used violence to bring the world's attention to a particular injustice, or as a reprisal against State outrages or as solidarity for other revolutionaries. In other words, they weren't trying to defeat the state themselves, rather they worked in tandem with other comrades acting legally and illegally.

It is directly out of this tradition that the Angry Brigade grew. Their attacks on government (Carr, Davies, IRB), the security services (Rawlinson, Tintagel House computer, army), women's repression (Miss Word contest, Biba) and in support of industrial struggles (Batty, Ford, Bryant) came from an analysis which was specifically anarchist and which directly contradicted the presumption of the 'MP's, the Communist Party, the Union leaders, the old old left...to act on our behalf.' Their actions are exemplary in the British context, linked as they were to the day to day struggles which were comprehensible to everyone and which avoided any loss of life.

We are no mercenaries

We attack property not people

Carr, Rawlinson, Waldron would all
be dead if we had wished.

In communique 6 they explained the function of their actions:

Our role is to deepen the contradictions at every level. We will not achieve this by concentrating on 'issues' or by using watered down socialist platitudes...

Our attack is violent...

Our violence is organised.

The question is not whether the revolution will be violent.

Organised militant struggle and organised terrorism go side by side.

These are tactics of the revolutionary class movement.

At the time the actions of the Angry Brigade and the many other revolutionaries who decided to take the step from legality into illegality, in tandem with the militant industrial struggles of the organised working class, seriously undermined the British state apparatus.

But where are we now? The German Federal Republic has for years disposed of its revolutionaries without feeling the need for legal niceties. The list of murdered activists is long, culminating in the Stammheim

massacre. At Mogadishu the German GSG-9 anti-guerrilla squad combined with the British SAS to storm the hijacked plane, and in Italy these two arms of modern European imperialism helped, in vain, to find Aldo Moro and his jailers. Now, most recently a heavily armed group of the West German security services have stormed a beach cafe in Bulgaria to return Till Meyer and Gabriele Rollnick to the prisons from which they had escaped. In Britain four anarchists - Iris Mills, Ronan Bennett, Dafydd Ladd and Stewart Carr - are at present (27.6.78) charged with conspiracy to cause explosions and armed robbery. They have not been the first and certainly they will not be the last. In the face of strengthening links between European States against international revolutionary activity, we must organise ourselves. It is important now to give our solidarity to imprisoned comrades, not as innocents framed by the police but as combatants captured in action.

Our task is not to militarize the situation, that is to provoke open confrontation as say was appropriate for Carlos Marighela in Brazil; neither is it to sap the morale and political will of the government so that a new elite can fill the vacuum. No, our task is finer and more complex than that. Our tradition has placed great emphasis on preparing for the social revolution in our daily lives for anarchists have never believed it possible to build a new society from the same (human) materials as peopled the old. We must build our syndicates, our cooperative groups, our communities; in short, the facts of the future itself. Such institutions are sharpened and improved in the fight against State repression. Part of this struggle can legitimately be carried out by direct attacks on the State but these must be linked with the everyday struggles and comprehensible to everyone.

We must learn from the past ten years of revolutionary practice. some actions are good, some bad - an action is bad in so far as it fails to demonstrate the links between peoples' own subjection and the prevailing State set up. Each area, each country has its own expedients and there can be no blueprint for all circumstances. There is, however, a pressing need for international solidarity and we must be cautious of criticising actions in one socio-geographical area from perspectives derived in another. We feel that what is of crucial importance is the link between people and action and the clarity of praxis.

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