SHAPES OF THINGS

As we emerge from the somnambulant seventies, several issues have appeared which are providing new foci of activism for the immeadite future. However, there is a danger that, by failing to view our problems in a broader social, economic, and political context, we may once again miss the point.

Nuclear energy is one such issue. The anti-fission movement is world-wide, as is the proliferation of breeder reactors. Most of our criticisms deal with health, safety, and envirnmental concerns. From the left we hear attacks on the callous profit seeking of monopoly capitalism. All quite correct. Yet they are building nuclear power plants in the U.S.S.R. and China as well. How do we pin that Pepco, Vepco, and the Marx brothers ensemble of power dealers?

We cannot. The real question involves the centralized control of necessary goods and services. Who decides what are, how they will be filled, and at what cost to everyone involved? Unless you can answer "Me!" to that question, you are dependent, and as long as you are dependent, you are not free. It does not matter whether your decisions are made by an economic elite, as in the U. S., or by a political elite, as in the U.S.S.R. - the state is presumed to know what is good for you.

A second weakly defined point of dissent is the draft. Seven years ago, after field testing the latest destructive technology and initiating an inflationary spiral from which we still suffer, the state stopped conscription for military service. We never "beat" the draft, the state let us off the hook because they had no further use for bi-pedal sandbags. Now they do. Until we challenge the right of a "government" to make our decisions, and insist on more direct forms of democracy, we will have to take to the streets every few years to protect ourselves, then our younger siblings, children, and finally, grandchildren.

The state attempts to control your very body from day to day. They tell you what substances you can put in it, and under what circumstances you can and cannot sell it.

In the Fourteenth Street area of Washington, D.C., as in any urban center, there are a great many people who can not or will not be integrated into the approved sectors of amerikan society. They survive, even more than most people, on their wit, wisdom, carm, and sometines fierceness. They offer goods and services to freely willing persons who often come from miles away to indulge in an evening of glorious decadence. It would seem to be laissez faire capitalism at its best. Yet, someone (anyone we know?) has decreed that prostitution and drug dealing are not suitable markets, and that wiping toilets or opening limousine doors are far nobler spheres of humane activity.

Since the defence slaying of one professional busybody several weeks ago, D.C. "Superior" Court judges have formulated a plan to prohibit "known" prositutes and drug dealers from entering proscribed sectors of the city. Is there a qualitative difference between this and banning anti-nuclear activists from within a mile of the Department Of Energy, or forbidding pacifists from approaching the Defence Department? Will gays be forced to wear pink triangle, as under the Third Reich, while yellow stars are distributed to all "known Jews"? The comparisons are not ridiculous. The judges' proposal is. But power, as Napoleon said, is never ridiculous.

Before 1914, it was possible to travel from Moscow to Lisbon without showing a passport. Today, one cannot even get to Gorky. Next year you might have to explain why you are waiting for an "S" bus after 8p.m..

The Firesign Theater said it best:

The future is fun!
The future is fair!
You may already have one.
You may already be there!

Personally, I think we're all Bozos on this bus.

-- Ernst Staatsfeind

WORKER CONTROL part two

"Anarchists are the only revolutionaries who do not promise a rise in the standard of living. They offer a moral gain -- self-respect and freedom."
Gerald Brenan, Personal Record

It's a myth that central control in production makes for efficiency. Its a lie that Mussolini made the trains run on time. Its another that "public servants" serve anyone other than themselves.

It is a truism that The System has two faces: one to speak sweetly in persuasion and self- justification, the other to say: "Obey or else!" It is history that anarchists are here to see through the sham and disrupt The System to reveal the human possibilities beneath the mask-like psychology of hierarchy and dominance. And it's a fact that the power to bring such a transformation is in your hands and mine.

Call it capitalism, state socialism, "representational" republicanism, or a union of soviet republics. Give it the dignity of the technocrats' phrase "mixed-economy partnership", or the sleazily high-minded designation of "production-for-the-people". It always comes down to the same little can of worms: the worker is only a worker (unprepared for important decisions or handling difficult information), the boss is always the boss (the one who must command the mysteries of management), the profits belong to the priviledged -- for Capital cash rules over capital labor, and the base of the pyramid must carry the weight, while the topmost fatass steals the pretty view.

Our personal geography is composed of the community, the workplace, and owe kinship relations with fellow humans. Each overlaps the other, but the workplace dominated our lives. Even when we are away from the factory, office, or fields it continues to control. Its qualities, temper and coloration shape our psychology and our cultural responses and decisions. Our children learn the mentality of the workplace very early in life -- and often, as well, the violence of workplace exploitation. The social revolution that anarchists struggle for will be made in the workplace as much as in the community, for the two are inseparable.

Capitalism sees the person as "Private/Economic Man", one willing to trade away much of his/her life for wage payments. Socialism's view of "Social/Economic Man" attempts to create "economic community" while asking that we trade away personal freedom and justice for the individual (and often huge numbers of individuals and individual communities).

To for anarchists, the concepts of justice and community cannot be exchanged one for the other, and the concept of worker control or self-management is a logical and necessary part of their social/ethical/spiritual vision. To make basic workplace and community decisions and to participate in the long-term planning for one's workplace are essential to the anarchist demand for a truly free, ecologically-sane society.

Anarchism is not an ideology as that term is commonly used, and it is not an "ism" in the usual sense. It is instead a body of basic principles, of practical ethical tools for helping humankind achieve the freedom which is its birthright.

Giovanni Baldelli, a scholar and anarchist activist since the 1930's, outlines these principles in his classic work Social Anarchism, recently made available in an English translation. He sees five fundamental principles: (1.) The Human Person Is Primary -- the individual alone is a seat of consciousness; (2.) Human Life Is Sacred -- Man alone creates his/her own values, his/her own rational and affective attachments, and his/her own motives for action; (3.) Coercion Must Be Rejected -- coercion, whether by society or individual, runs counter to the needs and purposes of the individual and is therefore evil; (4.) The End Does Not Justify The Means -- the tree is known by its fruit but the so-called ends of political organization and movements seem never to manage to ripen; and (5.) Double Standards Are Unacceptable -- belonging to one society or section of society or gender rather than another is mainly an accident of birth, and a truly moral standard abstracts from such accidents, and no one is to be disqualified as a human being by the label "enemy".

There are two anarchist methods or "battle-plans" for making worker control successful: (1.) the direct action of creating relatively self-sufficient, worker-owned, decentralized