

# BACK TO BASICS:

volume #2

## The PROBLEM of the LEFT

# THE NATURE OF THE LEFT



Marx considered industry the “open book of human essential forces.” Nowhere on the Left is this formulation refuted. Its origins, logic, destination are taken for granted. We find here, in fact, a core assumption that unites leftists: that the means of production/technology should be progressively developed, its reach always extended. This notion is very close to the heart of the modern conception of progress. All of life must yield to its imperative.

Domination of nature and domestication are in no way problematic for the Left. Leftists fail to notice that this accounts, in a fundamental way, for the Left’s sorry record in practice concerning both the natural world and the individual.

Like other defenders of civilization and modernity, leftists uphold the “neutrality” of technology. They cling to this credo even as the horrors of genetic engineering, human cloning, the cyborg future for the self, etc. unfold for all to see. Soon, apparently, a wholly mediated and artificial reality will arrive, with the virtual/digital erasure of direct experience itself. Modern industrial “medicine”, for example, is on course to dispense with human contact altogether.

But no matter, this development is “neutral”; it all depends on how it is used or who is in power. As if these innovations weren’t hugely estranging and destructive processes in themselves.

Technology embodies the dominant values of the social order where it resides. It is inseparable from those values and is their physical expression. Technology becomes a system, as its society becomes a system. At a fairly early stage of the development of division of labor (specialization), tools become technology. Where once there were autonomous, equal individuals and tools accessible to all, the effective power of experts gradually takes over, promoting social hierarchy.

Division of labor is a fundamental motor of complex, stratified, alienated society, today as from the beginning.

The Left doesn’t question this basic institution that drives all the rest, and so must repeat the dominant lie about the neutrality of technology. In this way the Left works continually for the preservation of the values and the society that produce ever more powerful and oppressive technology.

Globalization is not only the cutting edge of the world system of domination; it also represents division of labor at the global level. The Left, of course, takes even this for granted, opposing only the excesses of certain policies, not globalization itself. Thus “Against Globophobia,” (*The Nation*, December 1, 2003) rails against those of us who do oppose it, e.g. “This might be a good time to junk local self-reliance as an ideal and embrace a deeply global perspective.” The current bible of the Left, Hardt and Negri’s *Empire* (2000), is at least as committed to contemporary society’s mainstays of productionism, technology, and the basic world system. This system is stamping out all difference, including indigenous lifeways, in favor of standardization and global homogeneity.

In his *Mirror of Production* (1972), Jean Baudrillard showed that marxism (and all of the modern Left) is just the mirror image of capital’s techno-economic essentials. Even earlier, Walter Benjamin understood that “mass production is the production of masses.”

The Left is not radical and really never was. Its adherents challenge none of the underlying givens of this rotten, massified anti-life world. On the contrary, the Left—including the anarchist Left—defends them all. What leftists *do* oppose is a qualitatively different vision, in the direction of decentralized, face-to-face, small-scale community where individual responsibility makes division of labor and domination obsolete, and human anarchy is part of nature.



# LEFTISM 101

by Lawrence Jarach

## What is Leftism?

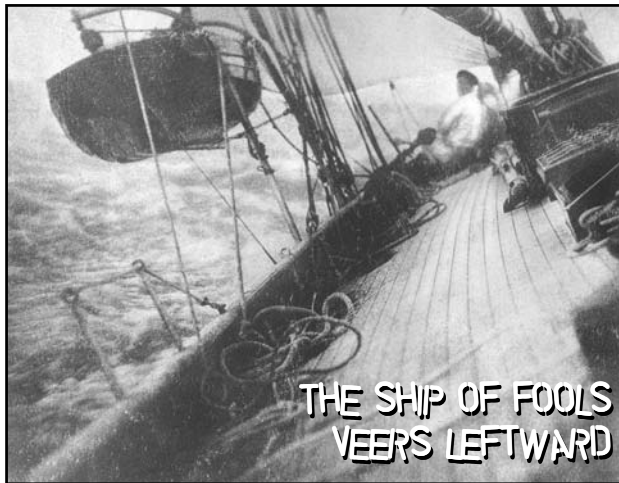
For most it means some form of socialism, despite the fact that there are plenty of leftists who are not opposed to capitalism (clearly from the actual history of socialism, not all socialists are opposed to capitalism either). Plenty of other arguments can be made about that, but let's just keep things simple and assume that the two terms are synonymous. As is the case with most vague terms, however, it's easier to come up with a list of characteristics than a definition. Leftism encompasses many divergent ideas, strategies, and tactics; are there any common threads that unite all leftists, despite some obvious differences? In order to begin an attempt at an answer, it is necessary to examine the philosophical antecedents to what can broadly be termed Socialism.

Liberalism, Humanism, and Republicanism are political and philosophical schools of thought deriving from the modern European tradition (roughly beginning during the Renaissance). Without going into details, adherents of the three (especially Liberalism) presume the existence of an ideal property-owning male individual who is a fully rational (or at least a *potentially* rational) agent. This idealized individual stands opposed to the arbitrary authority of the economic and political systems of monarchism and feudalism, as well as the spiritual authority of the Catholic Church. All three (LH&R) presume the capacity of anyone (male), through education and hard work, to succeed in a free market (of commodities and ideas). Competition is the overall ethos of all three.

The promoters of LH&R insist that these modernist philosophies—compared to monarchism, elitism, and feudalism—are advances on the road to human freedom. They believe it more beneficial for what they call The Greater Good to adhere to and promote a philosophy that at least proposes the ability of anyone to gain some kind of control over her/his own life, whether in the realm of education, economic prosperity, or political interactions. The ultimate goals of LH&R are to do away with economic scarcity and intellectual/spiritual poverty, while promoting the idea of more democratic governance. They promote this under the rubric of Justice, and they see the State as its ultimate guarantor.

Socialism as a modern movement has been

greatly influenced by these three philosophies. Like those who adhere to LH&R, leftists are concerned with, and are opposed to, economic and social injustice. They all propose ameliorating social ills through active intervention or charity, whether under the auspices of the State, NGOs, or other formal organizations. Very few of the proposed solutions or stopgaps promote (or even acknowledge) self-organized solutions engaged in by those directly suffering such ills. Welfare, affirmative action programs, psychiatric hospitals, drug rehabilitation facilities, etc. are all examples of various attempts to deal with social problems. Given the premises of these overlapping philosophies and their practical frameworks, they have the appearance of being the results of intelligence and knowledge mixed with empathy and the desire to help people. Cooperation for The Common Good is seen as more beneficial to humanity than individual competition. However, socialism also takes the existence of competition for granted. Liberals and socialists alike believe that human beings do not naturally get along, so we must be educated and encouraged to be cooperative. When all else fails, this can always be enforced by the State.

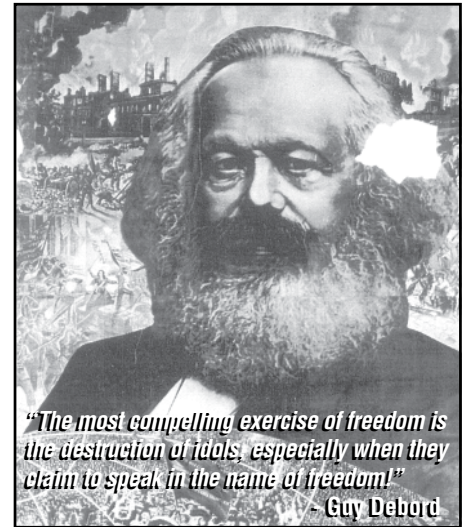


## Moderate, Radical, and Extreme Leftism

### Tactics and strategies

Regardless of the fact that there is plenty of overlap and blending—precluding real, discrete boundaries—I hope that describing these various manifestations of leftism will be a way to identify certain particular characteristics.

In terms of strategy and tactics, moderate leftists believe that things can be made better by working within current structures and



institutions. Clearly reformist, moderate leftists promote legal, peaceful, and polite superficial alterations in the status quo, eventually hoping to legislate socialism into existence. The democracy they champion is bourgeois: one person, one vote, majority rule.

Radical leftists promote a mixture of legal and illegal tactics, depending on whatever appears to have a better chance of succeeding at the moment, but they ultimately want the sanction of some properly constituted legal institutions (especially when they get to make most of the rules to be enforced). They are pragmatic, hoping for peaceful change, but ready to fight if they believe it to be necessary. The democracy they promote is more proletarian: they aren't worried about the process of any particular election, so long as gains are made at the expense of the bosses and mainstream politicians.

Extreme leftists are amoral pragmatists, a strategic orientation that can also be termed opportunistic. They are decidedly impolite, explicitly desiring the destruction of current institutions (often including the State), with the desire to remake them so that only they themselves will be able to make and enforce new laws. They are much more willing to use force in the service of their goals. The democracy they promote is usually based on a Party.

### Relationship to capitalists

All leftists privilege the category of worker as worker/producer, an entity that exists only within the sphere of the economy. Moderate leftists campaign for workers' rights (to strike, to have job security and safety, to have decent and fair contracts), trying to mitigate the more obvious abuses of the bosses through the passage and enforcement of progressive legislation. They want capitalism to be organized with "People Before Profits" (as the overused slogan has it), ignoring the internal logic and history of capitalism. Moderate leftists promote socially responsible investing and want a more just



distribution of wealth; social wealth in the form of the much-touted “safety net,” and personal wealth in the form of higher wages and increased taxes on corporations and the rich. They want to balance the rights of property and labor.

Radical leftists favor workers at the expense of the bosses. Workers are always right to the radical leftist. They wish to change the legal structure in such a way to reflect this favoritism, which is supposed to compensate for the previous history of exploitation. The redistribution of wealth envisioned by radical leftists builds on the higher wages and increased taxation of the corporations and the rich to include selective expropriation/nationalization (with or without compensation) of various resources (banks, natural resources for example).

Extreme leftists promote the total expropriation—without compensation—of the capitalist class, not only to right the wrongs of economic exploitation, but to remove the capitalist class from political power as well. At some point, the workers are to be at least nominally in charge of economic and political decision making (although that is usually meditated through a Party leadership).

### *The role of the State*

Leftists view the State on a continuum of ambivalence. Most are clear that the role of the State is to further the goals of whatever class happens to rule at any given period; further they all recognize that the ruling class always reserves for itself a monopoly on the legitimate use of force and violence to enforce their rule. In the political imaginations of all moderate and some radical leftists, the State (even with a completely capitalist ruling class) can be used to remedy many social problems, from the excesses of transnational corporations to the abuses of those who have been traditionally disenfranchised (immigrants, women, minorities, the homeless, etc.). For extreme leftists, only their own State can solve such problems, because it is in the interest of the current ruling class to maintain divisions among those who are not of the ruling class. Despite the ambivalence, an attachment to the functions of government as executed by the State remains. This is the pivotal area of conflict between all leftists and all anarchists, despite the historical positioning of anarchism within the spectrum of leftism—about which more below.

### *The role of the individual*

Missing from all these different strains of leftism is a discussion of the individual. While LH&R refer briefly to the individual, these philosophies do not take into account non-property-owning males, females, or juveniles—who are indeed considered the property of the normative individual: the adult property-owning man. This led to the complete lack

on interest in (and the accompanying exploitation of) peasants and workers, a disregard that is supposed to be corrected by socialism. Unfortunately, virtually all socialists only posit the category Worker and Peasant as collective classes—a mass to be molded and directed—never considering the desires or interests of the individual (male or female) worker or peasant to control their own lives. According to the ideological imperatives of leftist thought, the self-activity of these masses is seen suspiciously through the ideological blinkers of the competitive ethos of capitalism (since the masses aren’t yet intelligent enough to be socialists); the workers will perhaps be able to organize themselves



into defensive trade unions in order to safeguard their wages, while the peasants will only want to own and work their own piece of land. Again, education and enforcement of cooperation is necessary for these masses to become conscious political radicals.

## **A Generic Leftism?**

So all leftists share the goals of making up for injustice by decree, whether the decree comes out of better/more responsive representatives and leaders, a more democratic political process, or the elimination of a non-worker power base. They all desire to organize, mobilize, and direct masses of people, with the eventual goal of attaining a more or less coherent majority, in order to propel progressive and democratic change of social institutions. Recruitment, education, and inculcating leftist values are some of the more mundane strategies leftists use to increase their influence in the wider political landscape.

All leftists have a common distrust of regular (non-political/non-politicized) people being able to decide for themselves how to solve the problems that face them. All leftists share an abiding faith in *leadership*. Not just a trust of particular leaders who portray themselves as having certain moral or ethical virtues over and above common people, but of the very principle of leadership. This confidence in leadership never brings representational politics into question. The existence of elected or appointed

leaders who speak and act on behalf, or in the place, of individuals and groups is a given; mediation in the realm of politics is taken as a necessity, removing most decision making from individuals and groups. Leftists share this commitment to leadership and representation—they believe themselves able to justly represent those who have traditionally been excluded from politics: the disenfranchised, the voiceless, the weak.

The leftist activist, as a representative of those who suffer, is a person who believes her/himself to be indispensable to improving the lives of others. This derives from a dual-pronged notion common to all leftists:

1. Non-political people, left to their own devices, will never be able to alter their situations in a radical or revolutionary manner (Lenin’s dismissal of workers as never being able to move beyond a “trade union mentality” without some professional outside help comes to mind here); and

2. Those with more intelligence or a better analysis are both wise and ethical enough to lead (whether through example or by decree) and organize others for their own good, and perhaps more importantly, the greater good.

The unspoken but implicit theme that runs through this brief assessment of leftism is a reliance on authoritarian relations, whether assumed or enforced, brutally compelling or gently rational. The existence of an economy (exchange of commodities in a market) presumes the existence of one or more institutions to mediate disputes between those who produce, those who own, and those who consume; the existence of a representational

political process presumes the existence of one or more institutions to mediate disputes between diverse parties based on common interest (often with conflicting goals); the existence of leadership presumes that there are substantive differences in the emotional and intellectual capacities of those who direct and those who follow. There are plenty of rationalizations contributing to the maintenance of such institutions of social control (schools, prisons, the military, the workplace), from efficiency to expediency, but they all

ultimately rely on the legitimate (sanctioned by the State) use of coercive authority to enforce decisions. Leftists share a faith in the mediating influence of wise and ethical leaders who can work within politically neutral, socially progressive, and humane institutional frameworks. Their thoroughly hierarchical and authoritarian natures, however, should be clear even after a cursory glance.

(continued on next page)

**The PROBLEM of the LEFT**

### **57 varieties**



All unfit for human consumption

# Are All Forms of Anarchism Leftist?

All anarchists share a desire to abolish government; that is the definition of anarchism. Starting with Bakunin, anarchism has been explicitly anti-statist, anti-capitalist, and anti-authoritarian; no serious anarchist seeks to alter that. Leftists have consistently supported and promoted the functions of the State, have an ambiguous relationship to capitalist development, and are all interested in maintaining hierarchical relationships. In addition, historically they have either tacitly ignored or actively suppressed the desires of individuals and groups for autonomy and self-organization, further eroding any credible solidarity between themselves and anarchists. On a purely definitional level, then, there should be an automatic distinction between leftists and anarchists, regardless of how things have appeared in history.

Despite these differences, many anarchists have thought of themselves as extreme leftists—and continue to do so—because they share many of the same analyses and interests (a distaste for capitalism, the necessity of revolution, for example) as leftists; many revolutionary leftists have also considered anarchists to be their (naïve) comrades—except in moments when the leftists gain some power; then the anarchists are either co-opted, jailed, or executed. The possibility for an extreme leftist to be anti-statist may be high, but is certainly not guaranteed, as any analysis history will show.

Left anarchists retain some kind of allegiance to 19<sup>th</sup> century LH&R and socialist philosophers, preferring the broad, generalized (and therefore extremely vague) category of socialism/anti-capitalism and the strategy of mass political struggles based on coalitions with other leftists, all the while showing little (if any) interest in promoting individual and group autonomy. From these premises, they can quite easily fall prey to the centralizing tendencies and leadership functions that dominate the tactics of leftists. They are quick to quote Bakunin (maybe Kropotkin too) and advocate organizational forms that might have been appropriate in the era of the First International, apparently oblivious to the sweeping changes that have occurred in the world in the past hundred-plus years—and they then have the gall to ridicule Marxists for remaining wedded to Marx's outdated theories, as if by not naming their own tendencies after other dead guys they are thereby immune from similar mistakes.

The drawbacks and problems with Marxism, however—for example that it promotes the idea of a linear progression of history of order developing out of chaos, freedom developing out of oppression, material abundance developing out of scarcity, socialism developing out of capitalism, plus an absolute faith in Science as the ideologically neutral pursuit of pure Knowledge, and a similar faith in the liberatory function of all technology—are the same drawbacks and problems with the anarchism of Bakunin and Kropotkin. All of this seems lost on left anarchists. They blithely continue to promote a century-old version of anarchism, clearly unaware of, or unconcerned by, the fact that the philosophical and practical failures of leftism—in terms of the individual, the natural world, and appropriate modes of resistance to the continued domination of a flexible, adaptable, and expanding capitalism—are shared by this archaic form of anarchism as well.

Those of us who are interested in promoting radical social change in general, and anarchy in particular, need to emulate and improve upon successful (however temporary) revolutionary projects for liberation, rather than congratulating ourselves for being the heirs of Bakunin (et al.). We can do this best if we free ourselves from the historical baggage and the ideological and strategic constraints of all varieties of leftism.

BACK TO BASICS volume #2



## We Were Born Into a World Where:

**Dreams and desires have been locked within the cages of psychotherapeutic interpretations;  
Revolt has been bound with the fetters of moribund leftist ideologies;**

**Creativity has been enslaved to the sadistic masters, art and literature;**

**The marvelous has been handcuffed to the cops of mysticism and mythology;**

**Reality has lost the ability to laugh at itself and its foibles and so suppresses a truly playful spirit;**

**Thought has become a rigidly armored fortress protecting its ideological foundations from every criticism;**

**Revolution has had its passion organized out of existence leaving only structural rigor mortis where once insurgence breathed and danced.**

**This world has ceased to bring forth amazing monsters;**

**It is no longer a conduit for the marvelous;**

**It has lost touch with the convulsive beauty of love and lust;**

**It can no longer give birth to babies with wings;**

**It has ceased growing and begun to rot;**

**It has suppressed surreality wherever this marvelous flower has bloomed.**

**Therefore, from now on, surreality will manifest in:**

**Dreams and desires freed from all interpretation and sublimation, being the living energies of free-spirited individuals;**

**Total revolt against every aspect of social reality including the ideologies that strive to squeeze this revolt into the limited mold of leftist activism;**

**The free-spirited creation of our lives for ourselves, lived to the limits against every role and rule;**

**The discovery of the marvelous in each unique being, free from any mystical or religious guidelines;**

**The humor and playfulness of free-spirited individuals who realize their strength and creativity in their own joyful foolishness;**

**Open, expansive, generous thinking which grows from the inner strength of free-spirited rebels;**

**An insurgent dance, a feral insurrection that refuses all limitations, exists beyond all structures and is the realm of indomitable free spirits.**

**Today, social reality is a lifeless, passionless corpse. Let's bury it. Now the amazing monsters of surreality must come forth in the world playful and terrifying in their wild energy, freed of the cages and chains that have bound them; our dreams, our desires, our humor, our revolt can populate the world with the most marvelous creatures.**

**Social reality is dead; long live surreality!**

**—Wolfi Landstreicher**



# Liberation, Not Organization

If I Have to Pay Dues or Carry a Membership Card,  
I Don't Want to Be In Your Revolution. by A. Morefus

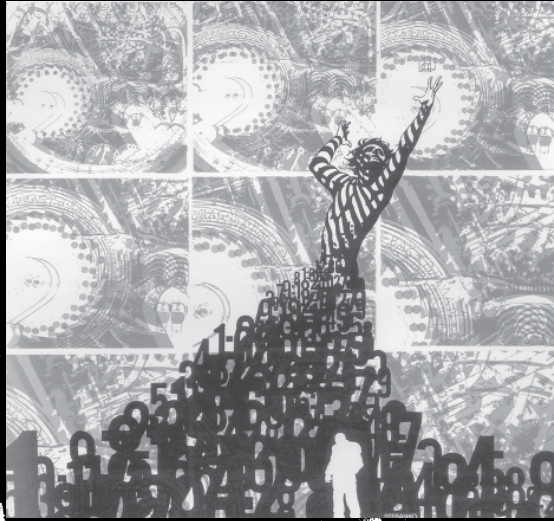
I desire *liberation*, not *organization*. While most leftists would claim that the two go hand-in-hand, or at least that the second is necessary to achieve the first (and for some the second might even “wither away” sometime after “The Revolution”), to me, the two seem contradictory. I am not fighting for a world which is run better (more efficiently and more fairly), I am fighting for a world which doesn't need running (one which is radically decentralized). Here lies the contradiction between the Left, and those fighting for autonomy and anarchy.

If the politics of the left (including leftist-anarchists) could be distilled into one phrase, it might be “Social Justice” — a vague longing for a social system which ensures equality (socially and economically, although not necessarily politically) for everyone, and the political apparatus necessary to ensure/enforce their particular notion of what that would mean. But only by people controlling their own lives, and all decisions which pertain to them, will people ever be free. This should be a basic concept, at least for anarchists, but unfortunately for those still tied to a leftist mode of operation and thinking, it is not. In fact, this simple notion is attacked for being too “individualist” or “unrealistic”. I guess some people just think they know what is best, especially for the “lumpen” and “the masses.” They wish to plug everyone into an infrastructure which adheres to the “correct” ideology (a notion anarchists should reject at face value): as Michael Albert (*Z Magazine*) has said, the “good morality”. These notions of “the way” are an insult to independent thinking and openness, and stand in direct opposition to anarchy, and deserve only disdain.

Only WE can fully understand what WE are fighting for, and our own interests and skills. We waste too much time trying to form affinity and artificial unity with those with whom there is very little meaningful agreement. Decentralized autonomous groups, making all of their own decisions, are the key to effectiveness and to staying motivated. Only when resistance comes from our hearts can we have any chance of fulfillment. I am not just “two arms for the revolution,” as some guilt-ridden, uncritical, and uninspired leftists and leftist-anarchists have proclaimed. I am not a foot soldier for a vanguard or an “oppressed people.”

And, the last thing we need is more standardization, mechanization, and militaristic approaches...the logic which projects this whole system forward.

I am fighting for my own liberation, and from this stems my support for my family, my community, others' struggles, and the rest of life. Does this mean we cannot learn from others, share ideas, or join together in projects of resistance? Certainly not, but these junctures **MUST** be without coercion, manipulation, and domination. They should be seen as temporary and organic, and their continued connection cannot be at the expense of our autonomy. We need to prioritize the deep and meaningful relationships over the superficial and political ones.



We must avoid the “lowest common denominator” approach to liberation, one which sums up our collective desires and struggles in vague catchwords like “freedom”, “equality”, and “justice”, or the “One Big Union” approach, which superficially embraces diversity, yet in reality, works to diminish all individuality and autonomy.

Some anarchists, and all leftists, propose large monolithic federations, parties, and structures to “get shit done” and “hold people accountable.” We must reject this fetishization of organization and control. Our liberation should not be dependent on a political or economic structure — it should come from our own desires and willingness to fight for another world. A leftist-anarchist friend of mine wants to know how we hold people accountable

when they continually “flake.” To which I respond, learn the patterns of those you work and live with, and know what you can depend on, and what you cannot. If they are continually unreliable, then don't rely on them. It's simple. It all comes down to bringing about a deeper understanding of one another, not some adjudication process to enforce agreements...that is how the state works. Even in regard to abusers, some would like established policies and rigid methods for dealing with people, but each scenario is different, and each victim and community demands a different outcome. It is taking the easy way out, when we attempt to programmatically apply a solution to a problem. Taking responsibility for a situation and working towards the most effective outcome takes time, energy, and commitment to one another, and while it may seem difficult at the time, in the end it is usually the most meaningful.

Smaller groups are more able to make decisions which are relevant to the individuals involved, while large organizations require tremendous amounts of resources and bureaucracy just to perpetuate themselves. Constant decisions need to be made just to keep them “running,” and this will inevitably lead to representation and hierarchy. The further we are from any decision-making process, the more alienated we are from the decisions it makes. This is not a healthy model for taking control of our own lives, it is a model for being controlled. As anarchists, we need to take responsibility for our own decisions and their outcomes.

This is not to say that we should only be concerned with decision-making on an individual level (although there are certainly decisions which only apply here), but also as small, decentralized communities. Here, decisions are made face-to-face, with each member of our family, band, or collective deeply entwined with one another and our environment — a bio-regional perspective which reflects how natural ecosystems function. We only need organizations and large structures if we want to keep most of the racket known as civilization going (including technology, production, the military, mass society, globalized reality, etc), but if we reject all of this, we can bring our lives back to a human scale, lives worth living.

The PROBLEM of the LEFT



**"The pleasure police don't always wear uniforms. They wear ideologies — rigid, theoretical constructions in their heads. And their heads in turn rule over their bodies and oppress them."**

—Smirk #4 (Post-Leftist Pleasure Politics)

In spite of its abysmal, largely totalitarian history, the various political tendencies that comprise what we call the "Left" are attempting to make a resurgence in North America — basically by trying to exploit situations like the war in Iraq and capitalist globalization as new opportunities to promote their hopelessly outdated and downright ridiculously statist programs for "change." It would be easy enough to just ignore these socialist champions of duty and sacrifice — these would-be world-betterers who tilt at the windmills of established power and ultimately accomplish nothing — were it not for the fact that they've infested the anarchist movement with their authoritarian, guilt-ridden politics and are essentially waging war on the free exchange of ideas between radicals and dissidents. Cloaking themselves in "concerns" about racism, sexism and homophobia, these anarcho-leftists seem primarily interested in impeding the development of revolutionary theory and revolutionary action, by setting rules about what can and cannot be said (or even *thought*) by those who are interested in examining the *totality* of the System we live under.

When they're not trying to lure anarchists down the dead-end path of "identity politics," these self-styled "experts in oppression" are

# THE LEFT-HANDED PATH OF REPRESSION

working overtime to impose new "politically-correct" moralisms and constraining codes of behavior *on other people*, adding new layers of repression to an already unbearably repressive and artificial situation, i.e., modern civilized "life." In a world where virtually every aspect of our lives is governed and controlled, where the majority of our "choices" and "options" are false, manufactured ones, and where our every instinct and biological impulse is stifled by an authoritarian order, the Left proposes *more* (or at least, *new*) rules and regulations as the solution! Like the genocidal Catholic missionaries of the Columbian invasion or the grim-faced, anally-retentive Puritans of New England, these internally tormented Leftists want to *universalize* their own inhibitions and psychological hang-ups, by creating a new governing structure that mirrors their own fears and personal misery.

The personal is *very* political when it comes to the *Left*, as your typical leftist is neurotically obsessed with how others live, what they eat and consume, and most alarmingly, with the words and *thoughts* that stray from the Left's approved range of opinions. The main difference between the Left and the "Right" is that the Left's intrusiveness into other peoples' lives is justified on *political grounds*, while the "Right" generally justifies it on Biblical or religious grounds. In either case, we're dealing with *morality*, with external codes of conduct and behavior that some self-dictated "superior" believes is the prescription for a more tidy, orderly and efficient society.

At this point, it's worth asking: What deranged emotional disorder leads to the formation of such authoritarian tendencies in the human personality, and what aberration of the psyche convinces the Left that it has the knowledge and the right to refashion and reprogram other people into its new morality? We believe that the research of Wilhelm Reich provides invaluable insight into the "mass psychosis of Leftism" and the remainder of this essay will explore Reich's theories of "character armoring" and how it applies to the Left as an inherently authoritarian political current.

## Sexual Repression: The Root of All Social Control?

**"The person afflicted with the emotional plague limps characterologically. The emotional plague is a chronic biopathy of the organism. It made an inroad into human society with the first mass suppression of genital sexuality; it became an endemic disease, which has been tormenting people the world over for thousands of years. According to our knowledge, it is implanted in the child from the first days of life. It is an endemic illness, like schizophrenia or cancer, with one notable difference, i.e., it is essentially manifested in *social life*."**

—Wilhelm Reich

Wilhelm Reich was a radical psychotherapist (and former student of Freud) who, in the 1920s,

began to make observations about human sexual repression that we believe have a lot to contribute to the anti-civilization critique. The linchpin of civilization, the defining process that holds it all together, is *domestication* — the suppression and restructuring of what was once wild and free. In the human animal this translates into the repression and bludgeoning of our natural instincts by outside social forces. Reich believed that human beings formed what he termed "character armor" as a chronic result of the clash between instinctual demands and an outer world, which frustrates those demands. This "character armor" is formed when the ego undergoes a structural change in order to carry out the inhibition of instincts demanded by the modern, civilized world and to be able to cope with the energy stasis which results from this inhibition.

Reich described this change in the human psyche as a *hardening*, a cementing of civilized repressions that take on a chronically operating, automatic character, as if the affected (repressed) personality has developed a hard shell around itself to deflect and weaken the blows of the outer world as well as the clamoring of unfulfilled inner needs. As a protective psychological formation that has become chronic, Reich felt that this character hardening merited the designation of the psychic mobility of the personality as a whole. The maintenance of this character armor always proceeds according to the pleasure-unpleasure principle and consists of multiple, interrelated layers that serve to ward off the most deeply repressed impulses.

And the most deeply repressed impulse in the civilized world, according to Reich, is the natural human need to give and receive love and to experience orgasmic, libidinal gratification and pleasure. But human sexuality had been repressed and disfigured, claimed Reich, by the compulsory sex morality of the dominant culture.

Reich linked sexual repression to the formation of authoritarian personalities and believed that there are *libidinal* energies, which are employed in the anchoring of the authoritarian social order, as he explained in his 1933 book *The Mass Psychology of Fascism*.

Reich believed that it was in this anchoring of the social order in the character structure that we find an explanation for the toleration on the part of the suppressed layers of the population toward the rulership of an upper social class that has the means of power at its disposal, a toleration that often goes so far as to affirm authoritarian suppression at the expense of its own class interests. Reich's analysis of sexual imagery within Nazi propaganda and Hitler's hypnotic oratory performances led him to believe that Germans achieved some sort of orgasmic satisfaction from their dedication to the *führer* and his *weltanschauung* of sexual repression. Myron Sharaf, Reich's biographer, commented that, "This intense libidinal excitation, combined with a sense of moral righteousness, was strikingly similar to the atmosphere at religious revival meetings."



Reich went on to apply his same critique of the Third Reich to Soviet Russia and the Communist Party, and came to the following conclusions:

- Humankind is biologically sick.
- Politics is the irrational social expression of this sickness.
- The character structure of the masses is formed by socioeconomic processes and it anchors and perpetuates these processes. Humanity's biopathic character structure is the fossilization of the authoritarian process of history. It is the biophysical reproduction of mass suppression.
- The fear of freedom — and the *incapacity* for freedom — of masses of people is expressed in the biophysical rigidity of the character and the inflexibility of the organism.
- Interest in money and power is a substitute for unfulfilled happiness in love, supported by the biologic rigidity of masses of people.

We want to make it clear at this point that we don't uncritically embrace all of Reich's ideas. Like most visionaries, Reich's life was riddled with contradictions, and even as anarchists, we regard some of his later writings as marginally crackpot. And despite his advocacy of "free love" and non-monogamy, Reich seemed to be pretty sexually repressed himself and maintained throughout his life that homosexuality was a "disorder." Nonetheless, we feel that Reich stumbled upon a "piece of the puzzle," and if we accept that even a *fraction* of what he postulates is feasible, then it revolutionizes our understanding of how both social domestication and authoritarian political rackets work. Human beings as a species have been deeply scarred and traumatized by 10,000 years of colonization, domestication and sexual repression, and no social order that emerges from this collective dysfunctionality/psychosis can offer us anything but more repression. As Reich described it, "The human masses have become apathetic, incapable of discrimination, biopathic and slavish as a result of the suppression of their vital life over thousands of years."

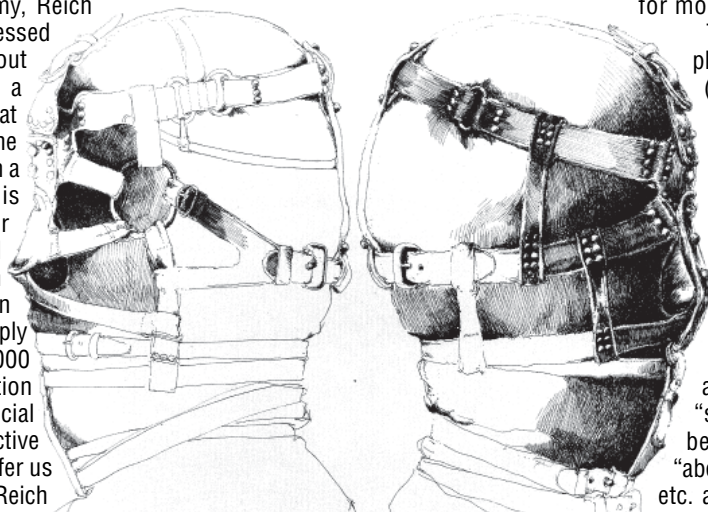
This is an amazingly basic insight, and yet so profound in its implications! If left-wing states and political movements originate in the same authoritarian gene pool as so-called "right wing" regimes, then we can be assured ahead of time that they won't reproduce anything but continued slavery and control. The political Left is nothing more than a *particular form* of authoritarianism and is in essence and character *identical* to any other version of statism.

The "progressives" who yearn to install a left-wing state want to use the power of that state to control other people's habits, living patterns, moral conduct and worldview. This has been demonstrated time after time since the 1917 Russian Revolution, yet shockingly, many younger radicals (especially here in Eugene) continue to subscribe to the myth that the Left

is the good guy in an overly-simplistic, cartoonish struggle against the "reactionary" capitalist class. But as anarchists, it's obvious that there can be no cure for the disease of capitalism if the supposed "antidote" (the Left) is itself a carrier of the same virus of control and rigidity.

## The Machine as Sadomasochistic Overseer and Technology as a New Layer of Character Armor

If sexual repression forms an early and major layer of our "character armor," then how many additional layers of domestication are added as human life begins to merge more and more fully with technology? And why is it that all leftist models for a "socialist future" seem to resemble the workings of a machine? The second question is the easier one to answer and it lies in the fact that leftists have always seen themselves as social engineers and have always had a nearly religious faith in continued linear progress and the limitless development of scientific and technical knowledge. The machine age and the "machine-age consciousness" it promulgates translates into an engineering vision of human



beings reworked according to properly mechanical precepts. In the leftist techno-utopia the repressed sexual energy of the "masses" will be sublimated into work, as we all trudge in uniform fashion to the conveyor belts that will deliver us to our dreary, mind-numbing tasks each day, becoming effectively human extensions of the machine.

The cumulative result of all this is clear: more misery and more repression, as technology penetrates our lives even more thoroughly, creating mechanical patterns to which we are expected to conform.

## Welcome to Eugene, Leftist Capital of the World or "It's Starting to Get a Little Kooky Around Here"

Several years ago a leftist "emotional plague" swept through the Eugene anarchist milieu, leaving a trail of shattered lives and sabotaged

projects in its wake. The "plague" was introduced into the community by a small group of former or currently enrolled, middle-class college students whose objective seemed to be not only silencing opinions they didn't like but also *destroying*, both personally and publicly, the individuals who expressed those opinions. A huge preoccupation of this "vanguard intelligentsia" was the imposition of politically correct speech codes and the calculated, manipulative use of certain politically-loaded buzzwords (like "racist," "sexist" and "homophobic") to stigmatize anyone who had an "unapproved" point of view.

Hiding behind legitimate issues of oppression (and camouflaging themselves for a short time as anarchists) this nasty, humorless sect promoted a group identity and employed all the hallmark leftist strategies of bullying and browbeating anyone who was too naive to see what was going on. Particularly fascinating was watching this constipated, dour-faced crew attempt to formulate a new, community-wide leftist morality, one that was decidedly anti-erotic, and even *anti-pleasure*. Like most leftists, they seemed to have zero interest in freedom and actually appeared to be fighting for more pain!

The "administrators" of this leftist plague, the small cadre of self-appointed (and self-oppressed) "teachers" who believed that they — *and only they* — possessed the "superior knowledge," academic training, and social design to restructure human nature, began to develop a pedagogical style that isolated and demonized anyone they saw as "backwards" and "uneducated" — as well as anyone who desired to have egalitarian relationships with others and wasn't willing to be treated as a "subordinate." A new Thought Police began to emerge under the guise of "abolishing sexism," "smashing racism," etc. and implicitly sent out the message to stay quiet about the new leftist orthodoxy, lest you become the next victim of a "reputation assassination." It was a clever strategy and helped to distract people from recognizing just how devoid these power-tripping socialists were of radical ideas and analysis!

Sadism and masochism seemed to be the psychological mechanics employed to foster group-think, along with "sin" and repentance, guilt, shame, fear of freedom, punishment, unworthiness, and distrust of one's own thoughts and instincts: in short, the usual reprogramming techniques utilized by any other cult, from the Moonies to the U.S. Army. The whole "plague" began to take on an eerie resemblance to Catholicism, and fortunately, only infected our community just long enough to serve as a graphic, firsthand example of how the Left wants to *control our lives* through the imposition of new, uniquely leftist, forms of repression.

(continued on next page)

The PROBLEM of the LEFT

## The Robots Will Not Get Through!

Authoritarians can be most easily distinguished from anarchists by the fact that authoritarians make *their* demands of life not merely on themselves but, above all, on other people and on *the social environment as a whole*. The person afflicted with the authoritarian plague imposes their mode of life upon others *by force* and will not tolerate views that threaten their authoritarian, repressed character armor or unmask their concealed motives. The repressed-authoritarian personality fights against other modes of life (and thought) even when they don't (or shouldn't) concern them in any way; they are impelled to fight because they perceive the *very existence* of other beliefs and ways of life as a provocation.

Left and Right-wing authoritarians all tend to view the human animal as a flawed machine that can be perfected through the installation of the correct "software" into our hard drive. But the Left is divided amongst itself, and there is significant (and often bitter) disagreement as to what the correct software program is, particularly with regard to human sexuality. Some leftists advocate compulsory homosexuality for "political reasons," while others, like the RCP, regard homosexuality as a "perversion" and a symptom of the decadence of bourgeois society. Other leftists go a step further and promote an anti-sex celibacy that they see as the solution to problems such as sexism and rape.

But one thing's for sure, the Left is *very* interested in the sexuality of other people, as are all authoritarians. Leftist regimes — from the Soviet Union to Cuba to communist China — have all created classes of sexual "criminals" and have all (just like Protestants and capitalists) used the repressed sexual energy of the larger human mass as an instrument of control and as fuel for their grand human and social reengineering projects.

Authoritarians all have a strong hatred against every process which provokes its own orgasmic yearning (suffering from what Reich called "orgasm anxiety"). This helps explain why almost nowhere in the vast canon of leftist theoretical works are subjects like *pleasure*, *ecstasy* and *self-determination* ever discussed... maybe the desire for Eros will be *disciplined* out of us by the State over time?

We know that sexual repression is only one of many layers of repression placed on the human animal by civilization and ruling elites (the suppression of violence and anger, so brilliantly discussed by Frantz Fanon, will be elaborated on in this Spring's "Rewilding" issue of *Green Anarchy*) but we wanted to tackle the subject of the left in a way that brings it back home, into our own lives. We've also attempted to provide something that's conspicuously absent from many of the newer "anarchist" publications, like *Onward* and the *Northeastern Anarchist*: a critique of authoritarianism.

## THE LEFT TODAY

Alas, still around to some degree, going through the motions and in some cases finding new ways to repackage the same old shit.

The eternally superficial liberal-left "progressives" are as transparently averse to liberation as are the few surviving leninoid authoritarians. Not even worth a line or two. But there are more current maneuvers possibly deserving a little critical attention....

The Social Forum, in its "Global" as well as more local forms, is a recent catch-all for leftists, including communists looking for a home in the post-Soviet Union era. At anti-G8 Genoa in 2001, Genoa Social Forum partisans did their best to deliver anarchists to the police and worked hard afterwards to spread lies about the Black Bloc effort in Genoa. At last year's Global Social Forum in Porto Alegre these statists—or those in charge, anyway—spent their time praising Brazilian president Lula's leftist regime and having anarchists physically attacked in the streets. Closet "anarchist" Noam Chomsky is one of the main Social Forum leaders.

The "anti-state communists" we still have with us, although they seem to be going nowhere. The term has appeal to some, but is meaningless and contradictory. The anti-state commies have yet to criticize mass production and global trade, because they apparently want to preserve all the techno-essentials of the modern setup. It is impossible to have global production and exchange without government—call it by any name you like—to coordinate and regulate any such mass system.

Michael Albert's participatory economics ("parecon") holds that the state function could



be replaced by an enormous amount of meeting-hours by everyone, in order to set production and trade quotas, etc. If one's priority is to run a world just like the one we now endure, I guess such an unappealing blueprint somehow makes sense.

A rather different phenomenon is the (largely European) "insurrectionalist" stance, which seems to be a kind of amorphous hybrid of several contradictory tenets. In order to maximize the unity required to achieve an insurrectionary condition, insurrectionalists find it useful to minimize a potentially non-unifying discussion of specifics. But this approach runs the risk of tending toward suppression of ideas. Meanwhile, insurrectionalist theorist Alfredo Bonanno can espouse national liberation fronts (states-in-waiting), while others in this camp are very lucidly anti-civilization (Bonanno, it should be added, has been prosecuted repeatedly and imprisoned in Italy for his courageous resistance over the years). Maybe insurrectionalism is less an ideology than an undefined tendency, part left and part anti-left but generally anarchist.

What all these left-leaners lack is a willingness to confront the basics of domination with the resolve and pointed questioning required if domination is to be erased.

BY JOHN ZERZAN

## Suggested Readings:

**Anything Can Happen** by Fredy Perlman (A collection of essays on themes ranging from authoritarianism, nationalism, and industrialism) *Phoenix Press*

**Marxism and Native Americans** edited by Ward Churchill (A provocative dialogue amongst native activists and Marxists) *South End Press*

**Industrial Society and Its Future (The Unabomber Manifesto)** by F. C. (While offering an excellent critique of technology, industrial society, and the left, it is lacking in other regards) *GA Distro*

**Anarchy After Leftism** by Bob Black (A great debunking of leftist anarchists, although we are discouraged by his dismissal of feminism) *CAL Press*

**Anti-Mass: Methods Of Organization For Collectives** (arguments against mass organization in favor of more autonomous action) *GA Distro*

**Elements of Refusal. Future Primitive, and Running on Emptiness** by John Zerzan (Compilations of some of John's critical essays on the Left and civilization) *GA Distro*

**Anarchy: A Journal of Desire Armed** (an excellent long-running post-leftist magazine which comes out twice a year) PO Box 1446, Columbia, MO 65205-1446, [www.anarchymag.org](http://www.anarchymag.org)

**The Irrational In Politics** by Maurice Brinton (An extremely in-depth application of Reich's theories of sexual repression to the former Soviet Union) See *Sharp Press*

**This World We Must Leave** by Jacques Camatte (anthology of essays critiquing leftist political rackets by a far-left anti-state communist) *Autonomedia*

\* Don't forget to check out the *GA Distro*