

A Modest Proposal for How the Bad Old Days Will End

Reinvention of Everyday Life
1975

Published by an American group called The Reinvention of Everyday Life, then republished in the UK by Social Revolution (who were forced out of the SPGB, joined Solidarity, and later joined Wildcat). This red texts version comes from what was hosted on the Subversion website at <https://web.archive.org/web/20090730042117/http://geocities.com/Athens/Acropolis/8195/blasts/badolddays.htm>.

Introduction from the Pandora's Books edition.

This article was first produced in 1975 by *REINVENTION OF EVERYDAY LIFE* in California. It was reprinted in the UK by Social Revolution (who have since merged with Solidarity). We are reprinting it because it's once again unavailable in this country, and because despite its rather starry-eyed optimism, it outlines very clearly social and political perspectives we would broadly agree with. That said, it's no sacred text and we don't agree with every word. No pamphlet will change the world – however we found this one interesting and we hope you do as well.

Pandora's Books, Dec. 1981.

A Modest Proposal for How the Bad Old Days Will End

THE COLLAPSE OF THE WORLD AS WE KNOW IT HAS ALREADY BEGUN.

EVERYONE KNOWS THIS.

EVERYONE FEELS IT IN THEIR BONES.

ALL THE ATTEMPTS TO DENY IT ARE ENOUGH TO PROVE IT.

It's as though everyone's waiting for something but no one knows what. Whether I find myself wandering around in the city or in the graveyard-like suburbs, this feeling of despair seems to haunt everyone even in their sleep.

Meanwhile we just grow more isolated from each other. When I meet someone on the street we really have nothing to say to each other because nothing has really happened. So empty words are exchanged and we stumble away awkwardly. Nobody seems to enjoy anything anymore. Nobody seems to know why they're alive. What everybody does know, however, is that this society is falling apart, and that all the attempts to hold it together just make it more hideous.

As far back as I can remember everyone around me spent most of their lives sacrificing in order to survive. There was, of course, always a certain degree of marginal freedom but now even this is vanishing. And as politicians talk about the need for yet more sacrifice, the mass media pumps out more ways to glorify misery.

It's not as though things used to be gem or anything. But perhaps never before have so many people had the feeling that everything has become so pointless – that each day is like the last, only a little more dull, a little more empty, a little more exhausting.

Surely there lurks inside each of us a subjective passion such as may-be we experienced in childhood but have been too embarrassed to think about for years – the desire to be in love always – the kind of inspiration which once unleashed could move mountains and remake the world. Currently our energy is being constantly used up just to keep things the same. Artists have nothing left to express but their emptiness, and the emptiness of a society which can no longer find any reason to exist. All joy has gone out of music. All the new processing and quasi-technical perfection cannot compensate for the total absence of inspiration. And whatever remedies are adopted are usually worse than the disease. Jobs are becoming so meaningless and so exhausting that many people would prefer to be unemployed. “Leisure time” is becoming as boring as work. All the “problem solving” of the sociologists, economists, psychologists and urban planners just become ways to make more acceptable the humiliation we experience every day.

Nonetheless, I know this misery will go on only so long as we allow it to.

The spectacle is like a supermarket of false alternatives. In spite of the supposed “opposition” between capitalism and “Communism,” the difference between them is like the difference between Pepsi Cola and Seven Up. “Communism” – as it exists in Russia, China, Cuba, Vietnam, etc – is just a state-monopolized form of capitalism. But whether you live under private corporate capitalism or bureaucratic state capitalism, it's essentially the same old crap. Everywhere people sell their lives in order to survive. Every where daily life has been reduced to a mere series of humiliations. Even [in?] “free time” there isn't any freedom. Our whole environment has been produced in an alien form.

And now, as world capitalism is falling apart, its spokesmen tell us that it's our fault for being too “greedy,” too “selfish,” too “affluent.”

But there is nothing mysterious about the present breakdown of social production. It is nothing other than the outcome of the contradiction between the forces of production ¹ and the social relations of production. Now capitalism has become a fetter on our existence and development as genuinely human beings. But capitalism is only the highest form of commodity ² (exchange-value) production. While for thousands of years the

¹ By “forces of production” I mean everything which serves to enhance our ability to reproduce ourselves and to enrich ourselves as human beings. This includes not only improvements in “technology,” but also in organizational methods and our own skills, energy, creativity and imagination as well as our ability to realize these. Every student can see this contradiction when he/she finds that much of his/her activity consists of juggling “credits,” “grades” and “units,” and waiting in line and hassling at the registrar's office – and that the whole content of their “education” is subordinated to these silly things. At colleges and universities there is a gigantic administrative bureaucracy, the function of which has nothing to do with education as such, but is necessary so long as the principle function of such “educational institutions” is merely to prepare people for the senile job market, and for lives as helpless spectators in a world beyond their control.

² By a commodity I mean something which is produced primarily to be exchanged rather than for use as such. Its producer is interested not in the product itself, but in what he can get in exchange for it – usually money which he can then exchange for other commodities. Thus it is not the particular qualities of a product, but rather its (exchange-)value which motivates production in a commodity economy. As capitalism develops, the primary motivation for production is to increase exchange-value, or its implicit form, value as much as possible. The particular qualities of the products (i.e., their capacity for use, including use for pleasure – or as I call it, their use-value) become, at best, secondary. Anyone who has ever been on welfare or unemployment has had the experience of going to offices, spending hours being questioned and hassled, waiting in lines, filling out forms and going through countless other humiliations in order to receive some silly pieces of paper (checks) which are exchanged for other silly pieces of paper (cash) which can then be exchanged for various commodities. But the things you ultimately buy would be every bit as good if you simply took them. The entire paper world of the welfare bureaucracy is completely worthless. Not only the hours of humiliation which all welfare recipients have to spend to get their check, but furthermore absolutely every hour, day, year and second spent on

commodity form helped to develop the productive forces and thus to prepare the conditions for a really free society, it has now become a fetter (and in fact the last essential fetter) on our further development as human beings.

Though this contradiction exists in every part of the world, it is first most visible in the most advanced and overdeveloped countries (especially the U.S.). Thus the active contradiction between use-value and exchange-value can be seen constantly in the most common acts of our daily life. Every time you stand in a line at a supermarket checkstand you do this not to accomplish any productive or socially useful function. The only reason you're waiting in line is to pay for the food, even though it would be every bit as good whether or not you pay for it. But unless you pay for it, it cannot be realized as a commodity, as exchange-value. In terms of its social use-value it would be much simpler and indeed more efficient, if you simply walked out with it. (But don't get caught trying!)

But exchange-value is not a mere accessory tacked on to an otherwise neutral reality. On the contrary, value is the motivating force of all production in capitalist society. Everything is produced as value and its use-value is shaped accordingly.

Thus, it is no accident that everything is being designed to break down or be thrown away, that "education" is as shitty as it is, or that "culture," "art" and "entertainment" have become so uninspired. The entirety of the existing mode of production is specifically capitalist. While at work we experience no real freedom or self-expression of any kind. The only reason we work is to get paid. But when we get off work we still are alienated – i.e., we still have little or no control over any of the conditions which determine how we spend our time.

Thus "leisure" time – or "free" time – can be used for nothing but a repetition of the most meaningless and tedious trivialities – such as shopping, watching boring television shows, etc. Even when we're eating and sleeping – perfectly normal human activities – we're really only recuperating to prepare ourselves for more alienated work.

As the contradiction grows more explicit we see the trend of contracting social reproduction. In many parts of the world capitalists are finding that now they can sell more (in dollar terms) by producing less – hence the phony "shortages" of various sorts, as well as the rapidly rising prices. They are finding fewer profitable things in which to channel the labor force (hence "unemployment"). Capitalism's weakest elements are rapidly falling onto the historical scrapheap: more and more small shopkeepers are going under (just take a walk downtown and look at all the closing out sales), smaller firms are going bankrupt or being bought out.

Capitalism's most rugged form will probably prove to be in countries where there is the most developed State rationalization of the capital accumulation process (e.g., China), i.e. the so-called "Socialist" and "Communist" countries.

As the collapse becomes more evident each day, spokesmen for all the different factions of Capital rush to compete with their respective "explanations." And as though the "opposition" between "liberals" and "conservatives" weren't absurd enough, the circus has added the official "Left" as an even more comical sideshow.

For the "Left," of course, the problem with private capitalism is only that it doesn't do what it's supposed to on its own terms – that there aren't enough "jobs," that people don't get high enough ("fair") wages for selling their lives, that women and "third world" people don't get their fair share of the shit pie, that Capital accumulation doesn't go on peacefully as it should.

the job by employees at the welfare bureaucracies are completely useless and unnecessary. It is completely wasted and unproductive labor which has nothing to do with the use-value of the goods which it is supposed to help people attain.

The “Leftists” have so little understanding of the actual workings of capitalism that when its tendency toward centralization and monopolization is pushed to an extreme such as in Russia or China – they think that it is no longer capitalism. In spite of their self-acclaimed “radicalism” they are really the staunchest of conservatives. And as capitalism – the highest form of hierarchical society – is falling apart, they dutifully try to come up with new ways of holding it together.

But all the confusion created by the “Left” and the “Right” alike cannot hide forever the fact that since the time capitalism began there has been a real movement for a new and genuinely human way of life, for a society in which the full and free development of every individual forms the ruling principle. This movement has emerged again and again. Each time it has been crushed, but only to re-emerge, perhaps years or decades later. And almost every time it has emerged in the twentieth century the “Right” and the “Left” have formed a Holy Alliance to suppress it.

Thus, for instance, in Russia amidst the famine and general breakdown of production which occurred during World War One and the Civil War which followed – the workers and sailors of Kronstadt (a naval fortress city on an island near present-day Leningrad) took social production directly into their own hands. Without any specialized or separate “leadership,” they reclaimed all social territory, carried out expropriations, redistributed land and began a comprehensive program to coordinate socially the use of all available resources, as well as improving and expanding production in agriculture (on hitherto unused land on the outskirts of the city), construction of buildings, etc. All this was organized responsibly throughout the city (approx. pop. 50,000) as a whole. In addition the workers and sailors of Kronstadt maintained an “operating fund,” so to speak, from voluntary donations by the people of whatever was beyond their own immediate needs. This was used to acquire various resources (tools, seeds, etc.) by the city’s population collectively, and in addition, to send revolutionary speakers and agitators throughout Russia.

All major decisions were made by the people themselves in workplaces and popular assemblies in other public areas. Coordination of action was carried out through elected delegates (from among the Workers and sailors) who were strictly mandated for specific tasks only and who could be recalled by their assemblies at any time.

In March of 1921, after three and a half years, the workers’ and sailors’ revolution at Kronstadt was crushed. Its participants and sympathizers were either shot on sight, imprisoned, or forced to flee “revolutionary” Russia. But the final suppression of the Kronstadt Commune and the massacre of its people was not carried out by the “White Army” or by foreign imperialists. They were crushed militarily by the so-called “Red Army,” with Leon Trotsky at its head and with explicit orders from Lenin and the rest of the top Leaders of the Russian “Communist” Party.

None of this should be surprising. The workers’ and sailors’ revolution which broke out at Kronstadt was qualitatively different from and in direct opposition to the movement which was led by Lenin and the other top Leaders of the “Communist” Party. It was, though in a crude and embryonic form, a movement for a free and classless society – the real movement I have been speaking of.

For several decades now, the “Right” and “Left” have conspired to hide this movement from us or to falsify and distort its reality beyond recognition. Both the “Right” and the “Left” would like us to believe that totalitarian state-capitalism (which they call “Communism”) is the only possible alternative to private corporate capitalism, and that shit-heads like the “Symbionese Liberation Army” are revolutionaries. All these people have a stake in keeping things the same.

But I will surrender nothing voluntarily to my enemies. Not even words. Thus, in spite of all the ways, in which reality and the words associated with it have been distorted and misrepresented by these people, I insist on calling this movement, this desire, by its real historical name. I insist on calling it what its most articulate protagonists have called it for over a hundred and thirty years – it is the communist movement. The real communist movement.

Once again I must emphasize that the relationship between the real communist movement on the one hand, and the bureaucrats and aspiring bureaucrats of totalitarian state-capitalism – the so-called “Communists” – is a relationship of total opposition and complete antagonism. It cannot be otherwise. It makes no difference whether they’re Trotskyists, Maoists, Stalinists, Guevarists, or just part of the neo-Leninist mish-mash. It is precisely because I am a communist that they are my enemies. I am in opposition to them every bit as much as the revolutionaries of Kronstadt were in opposition to the “Communist” Party bureaucrats who ordered their massacre.

Despite the suppression from all sides, the real communist movement did not perish with Kronstadt. It has emerged again and again since; in the Spanish Revolution of 1936-37; in the Hungarian Revolution of 1956 – which was crushed by tanks from Russia (much to the enthusiasm of Mao-Tse-Tung); and in the insurrection in France of May-June 1968 – which the French “Left” did everything possible to subordinate to their “leadership” and to reduce it to a bunch of reformist “demands.”

It has emerged as well in events such as the street festival in Detroit in 1967 and the revolt which broke out in “socialist” Poland in 1970-71 where workers happily looted state-owned stores and burned down the “Communist Party” headquarters while singing the Internationale!

As for ourselves: In place of capitalist society with its classes and class antagonisms, we shall have an association in which the free development of each individual is the condition for the free development of all. Production for profit will be replaced by production for pleasure. The end of the law of value will be the decisive beginning of the end of all alienations, of all the fetishes to which people have been sacrificed since the first human beings walked the earth.

The great insurrections of the past (Kronstadt, Hungary 1956, Paris 1871, Spain 1936-37, Seattle 1919, France 1968, Poland, 1970-71, etc.) and the new life which they announced, were only the faintest hints of the fantastic possibilities of modern world revolution. As we take over we can begin immediately to rebuild the world in a form which is fit for our playful habitation. Some structures can simply be eliminated. Many other things – such as houses, machinery and transportation – can be entirely redesigned and rebuilt.

No “system” can guarantee successful social production. The life blood of production in communist society can only be the conscious desire and energy of each of us. Nonetheless the organizational forms of past communist experiences (such as Kronstadt and the Spanish Revolution of 1936-37) as well as the nature of the present productive forces, strongly imply much of how the new world could be organized.

During the earlier parts of the revolution, the organizational mode of the new society will be growing organically in the process of over throwing the old one ³. As we steal back more and more of the means of social production we can use these not only for our own immediate needs, but also as a means to escalate the revolutionary process further.

³ Many times in past revolutions, such organizations – which workers have created to coordinate revolts and in some cases to resume production under their own management – have been called workers’ councils.

When the ruling classes are fully overthrown we will be free to take on the re-organization of everything. We can then meet publicly to discuss our real needs and desires.

We could easily begin production by regularly holding popular assemblies in local public areas and production places of all sorts. Here ideas and plans could be initiated and elaborated with the full and direct participation of all those concerned. (Obviously not everyone will be interested in every question: the point is that anyone could, if they chose, participate in making any decision they think is important.)

When initial decisions have been made, the people at the assemblies can elect delegates who will then meet in regional and finally global councils with other delegates sent from assemblies throughout the world. They will meet simply to coordinate decisions already made by the people at their assemblies and will have no separate governing power of any kind. Their function will be rotated periodically among the population and monopolized by no one. Furthermore, they could be removed and replaced by their assemblies at any time.

Even for planning and coordination of world-wide production, it is hard to say to what extent such meetings of delegates will prove necessary. With telecommunications equipment already existing, it would, in many cases, be simpler for the local assemblies to contact each other directly via the airwaves, and take part in each other's discussions. Such methods would be especially useful if you consider that in some cases even initial plans could not be made only locally and might immediately require direct dialogues between the respective assemblies.

By means of such telecommunications networks as well as modern data storage and processing, each of us could be in instantaneous contact with each other in any part of the world, as well as with all the wealth of knowledge of the entirety of human history. Resources could be coordinated globally in order to maximize use-value and minimize difficulties in fulfilling desires.

Not all projects would necessarily be carried out even initially by people who are already concentrated in a particular geographic area. Any individual would have immediate access to broadcast his/her ideas all over the world in order to find others who are interested and who might have particular knowledge and skills he/she would find appropriate.

People from different parts of the world who shared a common fantasy, fascination or innovative idea could if they chose, come together and shape entire landscapes.

We could begin to relate as human beings instead of as commodities. No longer would people be compelled to be competitive with each other. Instead the enrichment of others would only be a further enrichment of ourselves when we experience each other. The full and free development of each individual around us will be our own direct self-interest.

Each of us will be a co-owner of the entirety of the world's wealth and means of production, as well as of the entire natural environment.

Whereas in capitalist society each individual can usually only pursue his interests narrowly, at the expense of others, in communist society every individual will have as his own the entirety of society and of social wealth. Each individual's pursuit of an ever-richer life would mean the pursuit of an ever-richer society.

Planning and decision making will not be a separate or specialized activity. It will be an integrated part of production and of life, just like any other.

The direct control people will have over the production process applies also, of course, to their immediate environment. For the day-to-day matters of running, for instance, a given factory, decisions will be made at assemblies of all those involved.

But nobody's activities need be restricted to a given "job" or locality. Each person can fish in the morning, plow the soil in the afternoon, compose and play music before dinner and write poetry in the evening, chop wood one day, cast steel the next, build castles one month and sail around the world the next (perhaps distributing the goodies they've made). And all of this without ever having to become as such a fisherman, a farm-worker, a musician, a poet, a woodsman, a steelworker, a construction worker or a sailor.

There will no longer be a "work day." Nor a separate "leisure" time. Just life – just the process of consciously creating and recreating ourselves and our world.

Communist society will be not only the full appropriation of the ideas of all the great visionaries, dreamers and mad geniuses of the past (Scriabin, William Morris, Fourier, the Pre-Raphaelites, Lautreamont, William Blake, the early surrealists, etc.), but furthermore the realization of their outrageous dreams and fantasies (as well as our own), made concrete and possible now by the development of the real forces of production, as well as by the decay and collapse of the present "system."

With all the modern means of production at our individual disposal, each of us will have a direct self-interest in the building and rebuilding of the world in the image of our desires, and in participating fully in the accurate executing of this. Successful production in communist society will depend only on the real and immediate determination of each individual to live their life fully, to realize their wildest imaginations – in the real world (that, by the way, is "how the work will get done").

As for the Trotskyists, Maoists, and neo-Christians of the "Left," they can take their "transitional demands," "correct leadership" and "revolutionary" self-sacrifice – and shove it up their respective asses. The communist movement can develop only as an insatiable thirst for life – the same inspiration which made Scriabin insist that he could fly – or, as a 19th century egomaniac (Karl Marx) put it: "a revolutionary daring which hurls at its adversaries the defiant phrase: I am nothing, but I must be everything!"

There will no longer be any fetishized abstractions to mediate people's lives – there will be no law of value no commodity exchange, no State and no religion to decide our activities for us; no "general interest," no "national interest," no pre-defined "human nature." Just us. Just our desires, skills, imagination, passions, and intelligence – developed over centuries and now freed for the first time – with all the world at our disposal.

"THE SOCIETY WHICH HAS ABOLISHED EVERY KIND OF ADVENTURE,
MAKES ITS OWN ABOLITION THE ONLY POSSIBLE ADVENTURE." - Wall
painting, Paris, May 1968

Communist revolution like all revolutions, is the outcome of a struggle between antagonistic classes. Every mode of production has produced insurrectionary classes who ultimately overthrow or effectively abolish that mode of production and all the social relations built on it.

Capitalism has produced the largest and the most important (potentially) revolutionary class in all history – the proletariat. The proletariat consists of all of us who are separated from control of the means of social production and therefore have no control over our own life activity ⁴. The means of social production includes everything used for the

⁴ In fact we – the proletariat – are quite obviously the overwhelming majority of the people in the world today. Our class includes not only industrial "blue collar" workers, but furthermore, white collar and "service" workers (skilled and unskilled alike), teachers, unemployed, welfare recipients, most students, agricultural workers, and even a growing number of "professionals," artists and musicians (in spite of all the illusions many of these people try to maintain) not to mention miscellaneous shitworkers of all sorts.

production and reproduction of human beings and of society: not only factories, mines, raw materials, agricultural land, etc., but also all the implements and all the space and territory which are part of our overall life process – everything from printing presses, television equipment and educational institutions right down to the very air we breathe, the water we drink and the sounds which we hear around us. We have no control over any of these because Capital has taken them all over and uses them all as Capital. Everything that is produced – and increasingly everything that is even tolerated – is produced and tolerated only insofar as it serves the needs of Capital – i.e., of exchange-value which expands quantitatively for the mere sake of expanding (regardless of form).

Capital is busily shaping all the world in its image. Just look around you – anywhere. But Capital is not some natural or supernatural force determining our activity. It is nothing other than our own activity when we disown it – which reproduces this form of life. Capital is not a thing, but a social relation between people mediated by things. Quite simply, Capital is something we do every day. Every day the means of social production pass through our hands. We reproduce society and we reproduce it as Capital. It is only our willingness to comply and our lack of conscious organization for ourselves as a class, that allow the world to go on in its present, hideous form.

Imagine now that one day no one came to work, no one went shopping and no one went to school. If this were sustained, within a very short period of time capitalism would grind to a halt. Unfortunately, in this case, so would human society. But imagine, on the other hand that one day proletarians everywhere took over all the work places-factories, offices, schools, stores, television stations, gas stations, telephone facilities, oil refineries, computer centers, etc. – in every part of the world at once! No military force in the world could possibly be large or powerful enough to stop us. I realize I have exaggerated what is actually possible ... but only slightly. All we, i.e. the world proletariat, lack is the conscious desire and unity to pull it off. Until we realize this desire and unity, we will continue, collectively, to kick our own ass every day. So long as, at any given time, the majority of us are willing to comply, each isolated individual or small group of individuals is powerless to resist.

But above all, if we are ever to regain our own lives, we must begin attempting to regain our own minds and our own emotions. From the time we were born we have been conditioned to become submissive, humble and crippled. We have been taught to be “realistic” and repress our desires, to accept humiliation as a natural and necessary part of life.

This authoritarian conditioning begins in our families while we are infants and is further carried out in school, in church and in all the other institutions of capitalist society. It is just such conditioning which makes us complaisant in our misery and thus suitable for the slavery of capitalist society ⁵.

It is this same authoritarian character (as Wilhelm Reich called it) which bureaucrats and aspiring bureaucrats are appealing to when they attempt to “lead the masses.”

⁵ I can remember now how in my earliest childhood I just assumed the world and my life were mine to play with, and how restraints and restrictions seemed so irrational and unnecessary. I remember how shocked I was when I found that everything I enjoyed was forbidden, every spontaneous act frustrated. When I was about four I had this idea that I was going to build a ship and go sailing with this girl I knew ... and we'd keep sailing till we came to some unknown island where we'd live outside and sleep in the sand till we built a big carnival city for all of our friends to come and live in ... but without any-parents and without any baby-sitters to boss us around because we'd know how to run the place. Of course, I never got to do any of those things, so continually I would just create microcosmic dreamworlds when there was nowhere else worth being. I remember even these being crushed until finally I stopped dreaming. For so long since, such dreams seemed silly and embarrassing. It's only quite recently that I've understood again how important they really were, how seriously they should be taken. I have only recently begun again to dream ... and hopefully with still more coherence.

But worst of all, many proletarians try to justify and defend their authoritarian character and will even resent others who begin to break out of their own. There is nothing more counter-revolutionary than self-denial and fear of freedom. Nothing.

The contradiction between the forces of production and the social relations of production exists inside each of us. We are the greatest productive force of all – and every day the individuality of each of us comes into direct conflict with our role as members of an enslaved class – with the way of life that is forced upon us.

Unlike any previous revolutionary movement, the communist movement must be carried through actively and consciously by the overwhelming majority of the world's people. No "vanguard" Party can "lead" us, "represent" us, or seize Power "on our behalf."

Instead we must begin organizing ourselves. We can begin opening an active dialogue among all of us who are already consciously revolutionary, in every part of the world. But the dialogue must also extend to the rest of the proletariat.

We can begin organizing where we live and where we work, forming "cells," so to speak, in workplaces and in all areas of social life. This is the beginning of the abolition of Capital from within (the proletarians, while essential to Capital, are also the living negation of Capital). Such groups can intervene into many potentially revolutionary situations – especially those which most directly reflect the crisis of Capital. We can intervene into every part of social production (in the broadest sense of the term) – at workplaces, college and high school campuses, shopping centers, public meetings, neighborhoods, buses, rock concerts, laundromats, waiting rooms (at everything from welfare offices to hospitals), unemployment lines, etc. – in short, everywhere that social life exists and has been colonized by Capital.

We can intervene with every means possible – leaflets, graffiti, wall posters, music, newspapers – and of course direct conversation.

Whenever it can be done effectively, direct encounter with people is best. There are so many situations every day where people really do see through everything and it would only be a matter of one individual being able to articulate what everyone there already knows. Such situations occur whenever the absurdity of exchange-value relations are demonstrated most explicitly – such as when people are forced to wait in lines for something they don't even want (such as to pay for something or to pick up a stupid bureaucratic "form").

Unfortunately, the spoken word and the acted gesture are usually quite limited in their effect over time. Someone can go home after a really good conversation with a stranger, but unless the encounter is followed up with something, in a couple of weeks it will probably be as though it hadn't happened. But the written word can also be used creatively and subversively.

With the written word (such as in a leaflet or wall poster) it is important to be able to describe well what people are experiencing at the time they see it – such as the hatred they already feel for the office or factory where they're working at the time, or the alienation and boredom they feel at the laundromat in which they're sitting. (Imagine yourself being bored stiff sitting in a laundromat and someone hands you a leaflet about being bored stiff sitting in a laundromat.) Hopefully such literature could then elaborate further in a way that would encourage the reader to look critically at the whole of his/her alienated life, as well as how the totality of this alienation could be superseded.

These different methods can, of course, be combined – such as if you stick around where you've distributed literature and are prepared to further discuss such ideas, or if you have literature on hand to help follow up a verbal encounter.

For really effective revolutionary organization to develop it will probably be necessary to concentrate continuously on a particular workplace or residential area, to develop an ongoing dialogue with people you see continually.

Factory and office organizations can even begin gathering information about their own workplace facilities and planning how these could be seized, diverted and utilized in a revolutionary situation.

It is crucial that, at a very early stage these groups link up with each other and begin sharing information and ideas, as well as whatever material facilities they might have (literature, tools, media equipment, etc.). This must not take place just regionally. Rather, we must link up our activities with each other all over the world. This will be especially crucial when revolts occur – our strategy must be worldwide and as revolution breaks out we must be already prepared to coordinate our action internationally. Otherwise, each revolt will be crushed in isolation.

Although such revolutionary organizations will sometimes be forced to engage in limited day-to-day struggles for survival, we must not turn these into “issues” to “organize around.” We must, among prerevolutionary proletarians, be completely explicit and open about our views and aims – that our desires can be realized only by the complete and forcible overthrow of all existing social conditions.

I have said nothing in this article that 99% of the readers didn't already know intuitively. Communism is in our bones. It is the real and highest form of human nature. In spite of all the authoritarian conditioning, and the distortions, lies and confusion presented by the media, these ideas are already in everyone's minds – however deeply they may be buried. It is now up to us and us only – to take control of our own lives.

The wall which must be knocked down is immense, but it has been cracked so many times that soon a single cry will be enough to bring it crashing to the ground. Let the formidable reality of the real communist movement emerge at last from the mists of history, with all the individual passions that have fuelled a thousand insurrections of the past. Soon we shall find that there is an energy locked up in everyday life which can move mountains and abolish distances.

Charles Lutwidge, October 1975

Social Revolution afterword

We are reproducing “A Modest Proposal...” because as far as we know it has become unavailable – in this country at least. The article describes some social and political perspectives which we generally agree with: the alienation which pervades all social activity today, even that of revolutionary groups; commodity production and its destructive effects socially; the necessity of useless bureaucracy to a system where profitable uselessness comes before unprofitable necessity; the presence of “The Left” and their contribution to the perpetuation of capitalism by encouraging trends towards the centralisation of control in the hands of the state; how the communist movement showed itself in the past, how it was crushed and how it has reappeared; the importance of authoritarian conditioning; and an outline of how the Bad Old Days might end.