Antagonism
Technoskeptic

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The meaning of technology is more and more contested within radical movements. The archetypal positions are those of technophilia and technophobia. Technophiles emphasise the potentially liberating aspects of technology such as the labour saving possibilities (abolition of work through automation) or greater communication (providing for the first time the conditions for a world community). Anti-techno thinkers argue that not only is technology itself alienating but that it requires an economic base to support it which must be either capitalist or just as harmful. While both of these currents produce useful material, both are one-sided ideologies which cannot deal with the complexity of a radical opposition to this society. At its worst, technophilia degenerates into worship of capitalist technology as it is, of capital in its physical form. Technophobia (present in deep ecology & anti-civilisation communism) at worst is a moralism, putting forward a life-style that is impossible to live. Technophilia obviously helps bolster the capitalist market, but techno-fear is also used as a basis for niche products (green consumerism) and for clever advertising (e.g. there is a Holsten Piss ad which is a pretty funny take on cyber-hype).

It seems that an understanding of technology must draw from the best elements of both tendencies whilst rejecting the black and white opposition they each pose. This zine collects together four articles which fall in the middle ground where most of us choose to live.

The current wave of techno-worship that is found in radical movements is influenced by more main-stream theories. Various journalists, writers and pundits influenced by futurologist Alvin Toffler, put forward the suggestion that current info-tech such as the internet, virtual reality, satellite comms, mobile phones, faxs and so on form the technological base for a new wave of civilisation. This new, diverse society will engender a resurgence of local community coupled with greater global communication. Old, massive structures such as monolithic multinationals and centralised states will be replaced by more open social relations. This ideology has become popular amongst the rising sections of the (techno-)industrial bourgeoisie and has been promoted by various post-modernist writers. Toffler has interesting things to say about the way society is changing, but there is no getting away from the fact that he is a capitalist ideologue. The adoption of his ideas about the liberatory nature of the whole swathe of new technology is the adoption of the thought of modern capital. The article "Big Brother Covets the Internet" demolishes many of the stupidities of today's cybertheorists. "Is It Anarchy on the Internet?" narrows the attack to fellow anarchists that spurt this kind of rubbish. Both of these articles give important information for radicals who are using or thinking of using the internet for subversive activity. This is true also of "A Computer Spy Unmasked" which should give hackers pause for thought. (An obvious consideration that must be made when dealing with the security services is that the story itself is just black propaganda, produced to sow confusion amongst those involved in computer intrusion. If this is the case then we still know that the security services are targeting hackers, if not for infil-

tration and control, then as targets for disinformation. Regrettably, the story rings true as the computer underground has an ignoble history of its constituents turning grass as soon as they are caught. See for instance the books "Cyberpunk" or "Hacker Crackdown").

The article "The Chiapas Uprising and the Future of Class Struggle in the New World Order" by Harry Cleaver is not aimed at destroying myths about the internet, but instead gives information about how the medium was used to build solidarity and communication around the Chiapas rising. This text details the way modern technology is used by radicals, but does not touch on any of the problems that the internet raises. Its strength and its weakness is to look at struggle as it actually is. This goes not just for its comments on technology but for its central theme, the struggle in the Chiapas. Cleaver reports much interesting information on the fight of the Chiapas Indians but (typically for an autonomist) is extremely uncritical of the weaknesses in this struggle. He is probably right in saying that the Zapatistas are not just another Marxist-Leninist nationalist movement, for-doomed to repeat the horrors of "national liberation". But the EZLN's dallying with parliament, and its negotiations with the government should surely show that it cannot lead the struggle in an effective, uncompromising way. With all their talk of justice, democracy and revitalising 'civil society', the Zapatista spokespeople are reminiscent of the citizens' movements of Eastern Europe at the end of the 80's. Perhaps Subcommandante Marcos is as much in the mould of Vaclav Havel, as of Fidel Castro? If the class struggles in the Chiapas intensify, then it is highly likely conflicts will emerge between the Zapatista leadership and the peasant and proletarian masses they have tried to represent (if such conflicts haven't happened already). If Cleaver's ideology were situationist or "communist" (i.e. Barrot-ist) then he could almost without thinking, have categorised the EZLN as a representation of the proletariat, opposed to the proletariat as revo-

lutionary subject. (As if there were no dialectical relationship between the two categories; as if the land seizures, liberation of prisoners etc, would have happened anyway, without the EZLN's prior agitation.) This unthinking application of ideology is what all too often passes for revolutionary theory. It is also what makes autonomist marxism so refreshing: whereas the autonomist impulse is first and foremost solidarity and practical struggle, situ's and communists more often appear to be the quality controllers of the class struggle, checking-off which aspects of the struggle match up to their pre-existing requirements, writing off the struggles which fail to match up. It seems imperative to find some synthesis of these different tendencies, an attitude and activity, a form of engagement, which relates directly to the class struggle as it actually is but which doesn't rely on stifling criticisms based on the hard won lessons of the previous experience of our class.

The way in which technology is used has always been contested. The Coca-Cola company produces distinctive glass bottles for its product. The form the bottle takes has been carefully decided on by specialists employed by the company. The bottle is designed to withstand a certain amount of pressure without fracturing; the strength of the bottle has been weighed up against the cost to produce it. The shape of the bottle itself is a trademark of the company, and is designed as part of the product's image. Any changes to the form of the bottle must take into account the image the company tries to project. The Coca-Cola bottle is capitalist technology through-and-through. Nonetheless, if the bottle has been designed with a particular purpose, its purpose can be subverted. The bottle can be three-quarter-filled with petrol, then topped up with oil or soap. Add a petrol soaked rag and you have transformed the classically styled capitalist product into an ever popular example of proletarian technology.

There is a story about the invention of the steam engine. Steam pumps were in use in the 18th century which required

the other hand the real movement utilises technology directly, from printing machines to fax machines, molotov cocktails to electronic mail. If it's not possible to speak clearly about the future, it can be said that communism as it exists today in the real movement that abolishes present conditions, both contests and makes use of technology as need arises.

Above it was stated that revolutionaries have been reluctant to specify exactly how the new society will be. But the fact is that many radicals still have their programmes ready for the proletariat to implement. The following quote from the Marx & Engel's communist manifesto, specifically attacking utopian socialists, can equally well be applied to many of today's radicals, from those with their detailed plans, to technophiles with their map to the future, to anti-civilisation communists with their map to the past. The implication of these people's politics is this:

"Historical action is to yield to their personal inventive action, historically created conditions of emancipation to fantastic ones, and the gradual, spontaneous class organisation of the proletariat to an organisation of society specially contrived by these inventors. Future history resolves itself in their eyes, into the propaganda and the practical carrying out of their plans."

the opening of a valve on each cycle. At one mill it was the job of a young boy to open this valve. This job would be extremely dull for the most domesticated worker, but for the boy in question it was just not on! He used a piece of wire to connect the valve to another moving part of the pump. The pump then worked continuously on its own, and the boy went off and played (but still earned his wages). Unfortunately, James Watt came by one day and saw what the boy had done. Watt nicked this idea and thereby "invented" the steam engine.

I heard this story years ago but could not find information anywhere that supported it when I tried recently. Perhaps its not true, or only half true. No matter. What I know to be true is that it is common for workers to come up with technological fixes to make their work easier. I've seen many workmates do similar things at various jobs and did this myself when I used to work as a printer. With one of the machines I used, running certain types of job, it was necessary to stand in front of the machine unloading each print as it came out (as they were too big to stack). But by extending the output tray with cardboard packaging, it was possible to make the prints stack. This meant instead of working intensely, it was possible to read a book or go and chat for five minutes or so between ten second bouts of work. This is typical activity seen in any workplace and amounts to developing technology in our own interests. Whereas capital develops technology to get us to produce more for less wages, we develop technology to allow us to work less intensely for the same wage.

Revolutionary theorists have always been reluctant to specify how a post-revolutionary society (communism, anarchy, call it what you like) will be. At best there are generalities about there being a community, and an absence of : the state, money, private property, alienation, nations, sexism, racism and so on. This attitude is completely correct; it is not possible to say how a society will be, when such a society will be (re-)made by people who are different from us, who have transformed them-

selves and their relationships with others, through massive class struggle. Even so, it can be helpful to read utopian fiction, just to get some idea, a merest glimpse of how the world might be. All the best modern utopian fiction seems to be science fiction (or is that just my prejudice?!). 'Classics' in this field are "Woman on the Edge of Time" by Marge Piercy, and "The Dispossessed" by Ursula K LeGuin. Another less often mentioned book by LeGuin is "Always Coming Home", set long after the collapse of civilisation. The book examines a tribal society and is strikingly similar in its themes to the work of dead anti-civilisation dude Fredy Perlman. At the other extreme, are the "Culture" series of books by Iain M. Banks. These deal with a technologically advanced communist society. (Its technophilia gets almost queasy at times.) Reading these books can't provide any blueprint, nor should they (one of the positive things about sci-fi is that few people take it seriously). But they give food for thought and can be just as inspiring as any political text.

What is communism? The horror of Russian style "state socialism" is what is normally meant by the word. But with its wage labour, commodity relations, class differences, state (prisons, police, borders) etc, this model is nothing more than a state owned capitalism. The word "communism" has been used by various radical currents, including some that attacked the Russian lie from that outset. Communism in this radical sense is as said above sometimes described as the negative of all the things we most hate about this society, or it is talked of as community. It has been described as "the free association of producers" and as a mode of production in which goods are produced for free not as a commodity to be exchanged on the market.

One of the interest groups that is organised through the internet is the freeware scene. Individuals produce software, computer programs, which are literally given away. These are distributed through computer networks and bulletin boards, some end up on the cover-disks of computer mags. Obviously these

are of variable quality and usefulness, but some are genuinely impressive. Best example is the Linux operating system, and the programs that go with it. This system is an alternative to DOS/windows used on most PC's. It is far more advanced than DOS/windows, and in many ways more than the much hyped Windows95. The Linux system is produced collectively by many people from different parts of the world, collaborating together out of their own choice in order to produce a product for free. The free association of producers, production for use not exchange, international community: is this communism? Well maybe, but if it is, then communism is no big deal. Freeware may well reduce the revenue of commercial software houses a small amount. Certainly the communist impulse of those that produce for free is exemplary and should be recognised as such. But there seems little in this activity that truly threatens the status quo. Perhaps the definition of communism should be refined more? Maybe the list of things to be abolished should be expanded? That would be clutching at straws. If communism is something that subverts this society, then it is not a list of changes to carry out, a programme to implement, or a set of aims and principles. What is subversive is the real movement that is always engendered by capitalism, the struggle of those without social power or social wealth against the conditions of their own existence. A future communist society is the victory of this movement over existing social conditions. And technology? What will be the technical basis of this society? There is little that can concretely be said (with the exception that a world community must have global means of communication and transport). More can be said of radical social struggles. On the one hand there exist various struggles directly against capitalist science and technology; the refusal of development (in Britain the anti-roads movement), the anti-nuclear movement, luddite strikes against new technology, animal liberationists' attacks on research establishments and individual vivisectionists. All these have at least partly a proletarian class content. On