

From owner-aut-op-sy@lists.village.virginia.edu Sat Feb 19 14:34:59 2000
 Date: Fri, 18 Feb 2000 18:49:13 -0600 (CST)
 From: "Harry M. Cleaver" <hmcleave@eco.utexas.edu>
 Subject: AUT: (Rediscovered) Cleaver Response to Begg's Reply.

Folks:

While cleaning out a "postponed" e-mail file I came across some comments on Zanny Begg's reply to my response to Begg's initial attack. Hopefully this will terminate this particular line of argument.

Harry

Preliminary remark:

I coined the term "autonomist Marxism" in the course of researching the historical threads of analysis and politics that led to "autonomia" in Italy and groups like Zerowork in the United States in the 1960s and 1970s. The term is meant to designate those threads of analysis and politics that run through some domains in the history of Marxism that have recognized, highlighted and honored the determinative power of workers to challenge capitalism and offer alternatives --a power that has both shaped capitalist development (as it has responded and adapted) and repeatedly laid the only possible basis for getting beyond this way of organizing society.

There has never been, to my knowledge, any group or tendency of real human beings who have defined themselves as "autonomist Marxists." There have only been people involved in rethinking Marx and trying to change the world. In my research on, and participation in, those "areas" of struggle where such ideas and politics have been valorized I have found a wide diversity of people with equally diverse ideas and politics --often contradictory, often at odds with each other. This is in no way a homogeneous history, a simple linear genealogy. Indeed, following these threads of recognition and preoccupation has sometimes led me beyond Marxism, or at any rate beyond those who have considered themselves Marxist, to those whose conceptual frameworks for understanding capitalism are different and whose visions of the future have little to do with traditional Marxist concepts of communism.

On Thu, 2 Dec 1999, cbac2 wrote:

Reply on Autonom(ist) Marxism

Harry Cleaver's reply to my paper "Autonomous Marxism: DIY revolution" attempts to slip away from some of the real disagreements between his views and those of Marxists, singling out his rejection of Leninism as the key divide. But his comments reveal that it is also many of the ideas central to Marxism which he is rejecting.

It is a sure sign of sectarianism when one Marxist claims that another is not a Marxist. It is a sure sign of fundamentalism when one Marxist claims to speak for "Marxists" in general.

To begin I would just like to say that I am sure the activists on this list are grateful that Harry has pointed out exactly how many volumes (over 50) and manuscripts (1844) Marx wrote. This sort of academic point scoring can be alienating and should not be the most convincing argument for those trying to change the world. Marxism is interesting for the left not because we want to intimidate others by quoting slabs of Marx, but because it is a method of understanding capitalism better so that we can overthrow it.

An absurd comment. The point about the 50 volumes was not that I knew the number and Begg didn't, but that in a huge body of work, written over many decades, one can find, as in the Bible, bits and pieces of writing to support almost any desired interpretation.

It is worth also pointing out that theoretical debates within the left are often dominated by men as women (and other groups marginalised within the education system) are socialised to be much less confident in intervening. But for the student left to develop all of us need to get a better grasp of theory and how this applies to our activist practice.

What is the motivation for this statement? The statement is true enough, but why is it made here? It would seem to derive from some preoccupation outside the current exchange.

I am going to briefly look at three points: 1. Role of the working class 2. The state and state capitalism 3. Leninism

1. Role of the working class

As someone who has been active in a variety of campaigns for the rights of unemployed people I am mystified that Harry claims I have an “abysmal ignorance” of the reality of unemployment and the work involved in making ends meet.

The comment was made with respect to a discussion that showed no realization of the ways and degree to which the “unemployed” actually work --a making the labor market function, reproducing labor power, etc.

On a broader level Marxists do not under estimate how the “reserve army” of the unemployed is used to lower wages and undercut conditions for those in work. Nor do we under estimate the role of unemployed people in struggling for better conditions (like during the 1930s) and resisting the imposition of “work for the dole schemes” and so on.

What we do point out, however, is the role that waged workers can play in disrupting production through withdrawing their labour power. It is this power, along with the fact that the working class has no objective interest in private ownership, which give the working class its “revolutionary potential”. Without the labour of workers capitalism could not continue to operate.

Without the labor of students, schools close and the reproduction of labor power is stopped. Without the labor of students most research at the university, especially in the sciences would come to a virtual halt and with it capital’s ability to find new technological solutions to its class problems. Without the labor of houseworkers, procreation and the daily reproduction of labor power ends. Without labor power capitalism “could not continue to operate.” Without the labor of the unemployed in seeking jobs, capital would have no leverage over waged workers and capital would have to concede to their demands or shut down. And so on. “Capital” as a social relation of class and class struggle “could not continue to operate” faced with a wide range of refusals. It weaves its web of domination throughout society and that web can and must be ripped asunder and a new fabric of social relationships woven. There is no singular terrain universally and endlessly privileged to hold the “key” to the unraveling of the existing order.

Harry argues that “orthodox Marxists” try and exclude “students and women” from the “august title” of movements of “waged workers”. Call me “orthodox” but I still think the best definition of what defines a worker is their relationship to the means of production (and their social role). This definition is not reducible to the “old industrial proletariat” as Sergio alleges but includes most women, white-collar workers, indigenous and migrant workers and so on. The development of technology and the information age has not fundamentally undermined the basic class antagonism between those who own the means of production and those who have to work for a living.

The orthodox preoccupation with the relationship of people “to the means of production” is both reasonable and absurd. Reasonable because, yes, today as always machinery, computers etc are used a vehicles for the enslavement and exploitation of people. Absurd because of the narrowness usually implied by the use of the term means of production: constant capital employed in commodity production. Today machinery, computers etc are also used to regulate the rhythm of life outside the factory and office via everything from automobiles and mass transit to the technology of entertainment and physical reproduction. The “class” relationship is not confined to the production of those commodities whose value is measured by the market and counted in GNP, but includes the production and reproduction of labor power --without which all the rest is moot. When Begg says the working class “includes most women, white-collar workers, indigenous and migrant workers and so on,” the statement begs the central issue: includes these people in what roles? Of course they are included, but not just because they are to be found in factories, offices and agribusiness fields, but because of all their other roles in the class relation.

Students do not have a defined relationship to the means of the production and so cannot really fit the title of “waged worker”. The usual Marxist definition for students is a “layer in transition” - some students go on to be bosses, most go onto find work.

There are so many problems with this brief dismissal of students it is hard to know where to begin. Here the narrowness of the definition of “means of production” becomes obvious. The description of students simply ignores the very defined relationship between student-worker-researchers and the “means of production/research.” In university laboratory after laboratory students do the real work of research under the supervision of their professors whose work is often limited to writing research grant proposals, often on the basis of advances made by students in the laboratory. Research, whether it is in a university or a corporation or a government lab is an integral part of “production”; it is mental labor allocated to a specialized subgroup of workers --students, and sometimes professors and professionals. As a matter of fact many students are waged, as teaching assistants or research assistants.

Beyond this, the statement also posits that students don’t “work”. It is said that only after they complete their studies that students that they “go on to find work.” Thus “work” is defined in such a way as to exclude the labor of producing and reproducing labor power --the most fundamental commodity of all. That many, perhaps most students are not waged is

obvious; what the comment above hides from obviousness is that they are engaged in the very real work of producing labor power --without which, as I have said, capitalism "could not continue to operate." Moreover, as the role of mental labor has grown in the communications-information epoch of capitalism the centrality of the work of students to the whole productive apparatus has grown with it. Whereas once upon a time higher education was restricted to a tiny minority of ruling class kids on whom it conferred a gloss of civilization, today it is a mass production industry churning out research and labor power for the apparatus of capitalism at all levels.

As for the comment that some students go on to become bosses and some to "find work", well, the implicit simple dichotomy between bosses and workers displays a dismaying lack of appreciation for the complex hierarchy through which all workers are drafted into being both workers and managers, even if only of their own labor, but more commonly of all lower than they in the hierarchy.

My problem with Love and Rage is that they describe domestic labourers, students and the unemployed as "equal partners in the struggle with waged labour". While I was careful to point out the crucial role struggles by students and other sectors can play in building and inspiring movements for change these movements cannot over-throw capitalism unless they bring into political struggle the mass of the working class. They are therefore equal in "importance" (i.e. Marxists should not rank the importance of any struggle for liberation over any other) but not equal in their power to change society.

No group, including any sector of waged workers, can "overthrow capitalism", "unless they bring into political struggle the mass of the working class." The question always is, at any point in time, whose struggles have the capacity to ignite other, wider struggles. Sometimes it has been waged workers who have taken to the streets and drawn many others after them; at other time it has been students who have done so. The history of class struggle demonstrates that there is no a priori answer to this question, no always-privileged sector of the class has been confided this power.

More generally, the problem of strategy is to discover ways of strengthening the linkages among struggles so as to accelerate the circulation of mobilization to as many sectors as possible with all of their varied power to mobilize yet others. To privilege one group, to hook ones political program to a particular sector of workers has been one of the recurrent failings of all vanguardist political groups --who usually wind up making fools of themselves as crass opportunists.

Resistance believes that the liberation of the oppressed must be the work of the oppressed themselves. This is why we support independent movements of the oppressed; the women's liberation movement, gay and lesbian movements and so forth. We support these movements both before and after the revolution. But we also understand that to eradicate the basis for the oppression of these groups we need to eliminate capitalism itself and this requires drawing the links between these struggles and developing revolutionary consciousness amongst the working class.

Against whom is this polemic addressed? Against some liberal reformist platform? Obviously capitalism has to be abolished; but not IN ORDER TO achieve the abolition of "other" oppressions. These are not separate phenomena, capitalism here, "other oppressions" there. They are integral to one another. Capitalism has made racism, sexism, etc. integral parts of its strategies for dividing and conquering people. While racism, sexism, etc predated capitalism, and while certainly we want to prevent them outliving it, what we fight today is "capitalist racism," "capitalist sexism", etc. And those who consider themselves fighting "racism" or "sexism" etc. again and again find themselves eventually confronting capitalism.

This poses for the student left the issue of moving beyond campus in our orientation and politics.

The orientation of the "student left" needs to "move beyond" the site of (re)production in exactly the same sense as must that of any particular group of workers. Capital organizes itself at a global level; so must we. But the basis for taking broader action is local action. Today there are tens of thousands of protestors besieging the WTO in Seattle, Washington, USA. Some may be there because of a set of abstract ideas, but I would put to you that most are there because they have understood from local struggles what is at stake in the capitalist strategy of using international trade laws to outflank local democracy and local political mobilization. To suggest simply that students need to leave their campuses to find the "real working class" reiterates the most pathetic Leninist ideology of the early 1970s during the tail-end of the Movement of the Sixties.

Harry's demand "refuse to work" misses the point.

Harry made no such "demand"; Harry said he made no such demand; Harry said, and Beggs conveniently ignored and hopes that readers will forget (or never read) that what Harry said was that the refusal of work is not a doctrine but a reality. But what is really comical here is that Beggs just got through touting the power of waged workers to shut the system down. And how do they do that? Obviously by refusing to work, by going out on strike, on a general strike that brings everything to a halt.

Most unemployed people would regard this demand with contempt as would most worker's who are fighting to keep their jobs or improve their working conditions.

It may be that some unemployed people look for work; it is much more accurate to say that a lot of the unemployed look for jobs, and more specifically a wage. If you want to know what workers think about "work" talk to those who have to do it! They almost inevitably want less of it, as history amply reveals they have fought and fought to have to do less of it! To confuse a fight to keep a wage with a fight to work, or a fight to make work less dangerous with a fight to work is either an intentional ideological misrepresentation or a demonstration of the lack of contact with real people and their work.

It is only by abolishing capitalism can we create a society without imposed work and clearly we are a way from that goal right now. This means that the tasks of the movement are a few steps back from those appropriate for a classless society (where we could talk realistically about the withering away of labour).

Fortunately, the working class has rarely listened to such rationalizations for the continued imposition of work. I can hear Jimmy Cliff singing: "they tell me of the pie up in the sky...." Fortunately, workers have fought and bled and won dramatic reductions in the working day, the working week, the working year and the working life-cycle despite such admonitions that they should wait for a "classless society" to talk "realistically" about the withering away of labor!! Unbelievable.

Do Marxists argue that "human beings are defined by work"? Under capitalism yes, most of our lives are defined by the struggle to survive/work. But the goal is to liberate human beings from imposed labour; so we are no longer alienated from it or by it.

This is a simple appropriation of what I said previously, but unfortunately belied a moment later (see below)

It is therefore a mischaracterization of what I am saying to argue, as Sergio does, that I regard the "essence of humanity" as "work". It is our ability to labour which distinguished human beings from animals and led to the development of consciousness.

How can anyone believe that it is a "mischaracterization" to say that Begg thinks the "essence of humanity" is work when in the very next sentence Begg argues that it is our work which defines us as human, as different from other animals! Gee, so much for Marx, who argued that our "species-being" lay in our will and that was why not only the worst of architects was better than the best of bees, and why, presumably, the work of bees never leads to human-like consciousness.

For the majority of human existence this labour was unalienated (ie as in hunter gatherer societies), but since the emergence of class society human labour has been alienated and alienating. It is only after we abolish class society can we really talk about eliminating imposed labour and freeing human creative potential and leisure time.

Listen well to the mumblings of Stalin and the cries of the Gulag echoing in the above statement. Read it well: "It is only after we abolish class society can we really talk about eliminating imposed labor and freeing creative potential and leisure time.!" Hell, the capitalists are more progressive than that! They have bowed to the collective will of the working class and reduced the time of wage labor (until recently) increasing leisure and the possibilities of human creativity. Of course they have also sought to colonize free time to guarantee that life becomes the reproduction of labor power and they have sought to channel creativity into commodity production, but at least they have not argued, as Begg does, that any relief from the current imposition of work must await the coming of the millennium!

2. The state and state capitalism

Autonomist Marxism falls into the anarchist camp by their rejection of taking "state power" as a key goal for the revolutionary movement. Harry argues that the point of revolution is not to substitute the "power of one class for another". But what other point is there for revolution? Do we want to build a huge movement against the system and then leave the capitalist class in power?

Either/or. Either we substitute the dictatorship of the proletariat for the dictatorship of capital, or we leave the latter in place. Why does Begg forget, at this moment of argument, his/her previous reference to a classless society. In a classless society there is no class dictatorship, by definition. That has always been the point of the Marxist idea of revolution: the abolition of classes. But Begg forgets, we know, because Begg is trapped in the Leninist model of capitalism-transition/socialism-communism/classless-society. First one, then the next and then the next. And lets not talk about the third until we are into the second. The same logic which puts off the discussion of the abolition of imposed work til "after the revolution." I prefer the Marx who said that communism is not the goal toward which we strive but the society that we are building with our struggles today.

A key debate between Autonomist Marxists and Marxists is the question of the transition from capitalism to communism. Marx was not proscriptive on this issue as he expected the experience of struggle to reveal the necessary organisational forms. In the Communist Manifesto Marx argued that the capitalist state was to be replaced by the “proletariat organised as the ruling class”. After the experience of the Paris Commune (where revolutionaries held Paris for a short period of time) Marx wrote that the organisational form “at last discovered” by revolutionary struggle was a “working class government”.

Ah, there we are: “the transition”, the catch-all category that has long rationalized the continued subordination of life to work and hands power over to a self-appointed “revolutionary elite” which knows what’s best for everyone else. At the time of the Manifesto Marx was supporting bourgeois revolution, the supplanting of the absolutist state by the bourgeoisie. What he liked about the Paris commune was that its rules made it easy to get rid of bad representatives --unlike the Leninist police state whose democratic centralism is all centralism and no democracy.

The experience in Russia, the first attempt at building a socialist society, gives more information about the period of transition from capitalism to communism. In October 1917 the revolution movement (yes led by the Bolsheviks) took state power. They abolished capitalism and set about as Lenin declared “constructing the socialist society”.

Oh, for pity’s sake, read some history. Lenin was quite explicit that what he was “constructing” was state capitalism, modeled after German state capitalism. He called it that. And Begg’s can say the revolution was “led” by the bolsheviks over and over again, but it doesn’t make it so. What the bolsheviks abolished was the power workers had seized during their rebellion and what Lenin constructed was a state apparatus capable of putting them back to work (and shooting those who resisted).

The revolutionary government was under siege from imperialist governments; 14 of whom invaded to crush the revolution. The Russian people also had the enormous task of reorganising society in the interests of the poor. A working class state was necessary to consolidate the gains of the revolution and ensure its survival.

That’s what the Bolsheviks said, and it was what many workers believed, until reality caught up with them. But what the Leninist state really consolidated was the power to end the revolution and reimpose the accumulation of capital, the reenslavement of the Russian working class.

The goal, however, was that the state “would wither away” as revolutions developed in other countries and the balance of class forces internationally was tipped against imperialism.

The “goal” was just as pie-in-the-sky as Begg’s notion that someday, after the revolution, we can talk about reducing work! Oh the evocation was there all right, in the ABC’s OF COMMUNISM, but a goal for the distant future. In the mean time, it was Accumulate, Accumulate, that was Lenin and the Troika.

Unfortunately by 1928 those who had helped build and lead the revolution were marginalised (murdered, arrested, imprisoned, silenced) by Stalin. The rise to power of Stalin is too big a topic for me to address here, but there other excellent explanations elsewhere for those who are interested. Suffice to say Stalin’s consolidation of power was a political defeat for the revolutionary movement, a defeat which demoralised revolutionaries across the world and tainted the idea of socialism with the spectre of totalitarianism and bureaucracy.

Lenin the saint; Stalin the anti-christ. The old Leninist litany that conveniently forgets all of Lenin’s efforts to consolidate the power to put what he saw as a lazy and inefficient bunch of Russian workers back to work with a vengeance. Read his “Immediate Tasks of the Soviet Revolution” or his essay “On Competition,” etc. It’s all there, all you have to do is read the man himself to get past this whitewashed Leninist history.

What sort of society was left in the Soviet Union after Stalin? Organisations such as the ISO, and people like Harry, would have us believe that Stalin reintroduced a new form of capitalism called “state capitalism”.

No Begg’s, the ISO and other Trotskyist spin-offs might have you believe that, but I have argued, as above, that it was the whole bunch, Lenin included, right off the bat, who set about crafting a local variant of already existing (German) state capitalism. Stalin just tightened the screws.

The ISO split from the Trotskyist movement in 1948 when their founder Tony Cliff developed a theory that the bureaucracy in the Soviet Union had become a new ruling class which was essentially capitalist. Problem’s inherent to capitalism, such as crisis of over production, could be avoided in the Soviet Union

because of the importance of the arms race in regulating the rise in the organic composition of capital and thus the decline in the rate of profit.

Of course this theory is full of holes. If the Soviet Union was “capitalist” where were the multinationals, the private companies, competition, the stock exchange and so forth?

First, I'm not about to defend ISO arguments because I don't agree with lots of them. Second, Begg's belief that there was no capitalism because the organizational forms of capital accumulation were different is typical of an inability or a refusal to see past form to substance. Was Renault not a capitalist corporation because it was owned by the French state? Is PEMEX not a capitalist corporation because it is owned by the Mexican state? Once we examine the substance of what the Soviet institutions did --massively impose work, extract the largest surpluses possible, and use those surpluses to impose more work-- we find ourselves staring at none other than capitalism.

Remember before Marx began the discussion of the money wage in chapter 19 he discussed the value of labor power and it was only after he discussed the wage that he discussed the forms of the wage, the forms of forms (hourly wage and piece wages). And guess what, when we examine the struggles of Russian workers we find the same struggles as those of workers in capitalism everywhere: struggles against work, for higher wages, for better working conditions, etc. A vicious police state limited the forms of struggle available to them, but they used every one they could. And the viciousness of the police state was itself a measure of the strength of those struggles --which, I might add, eventually brought the Soviet state down.

ISO leader Derek Howl was honest enough to point out some of these contradictions when he wrote in International Socialism 49 “for 60 years market mechanisms have not operated in the USSR. Prices have not been based on the labour value of goods, nor have they moved with supply and demand. Profit, in the absence of prices had been an artificial construct without the social content it has in the west. The allocation of workers to work, the ratio by which goods are exchanged, the profit to be made - none of these are governed by market signals. Instead they are the results of decisions by bureaucrats”. In the ISO's own words - capitalism was absent from the Soviet Union.

This whole ISO argument, typical of Leninists, is fallacious and can be uttered only to those ignorant of the real workings of the Soviet economy. It replicates Western capitalist propaganda which painted the cold war world in market vs plan categories, an ideology which hid what Western scholars of the Soviet Union knew very well: that there were lots of markets in the USSR just as there was lots of planning in the West. The allocation of workers to work, just to take one case, was governed to a great extent by market forces; there were many labor markets in the USSR and the state had to fix and refix wages under the pressure of “supply and demand”. They didn't order workers to Siberia, they paid 5 times the going wage to induce them to go there (those working outside the Gulag obviously). The “Black [market] Economy” of the communist block was infamous and filled in all the gaps and mistakes of state planning, just as state planning in the West filled in the gaps and mistakes of corporate dominated markets. Plus, of course, the very distinction between plan and market is a misrepresentation since every market is a terrain of the planned manipulation of both supply and demand!

But the theory of “state capitalism” persists because it is an accommodation to bourgeois pressure to conflate socialism with Stalinism. Rather than having to analyze the class nature of the Soviet Union those who support state capitalist theory just have to wash their hands of the whole show and say - well its just like capitalism and therefore we want nothing to do with it.

What a total misrepresentation, indeed, perhaps a psychological projection of the author's own mode of behavior. The development of the theory of state capitalism by was based on the most detailed, concrete analysis of the actual functioning of Soviet class society that has been done. Certainly the Leninist sycophants did no such work. Read the early work of Dunayevskaya, or the volumes of Bettelheim etc. Rather than washing their hands, they pitched in and actually examined the data to see what the hell was actually going on. As opposed to Begg's who just repeats old, stale arguments without a scrap of evidence to support them.

The problem with this is that reality gets in the way. If the Soviet Union and eastern Europe was “capitalist” how was capitalism restored in 1989 with the collapse of the Berlin wall?

Who says it was “restored in 1989”? Begg's? The Maoists thought it was restored by Krushchev in 1953? I'd say it was restored in the course of 1918-20. “Capitalism” wasn't restored in 1989, just many typically Western forms of capitalism. Actually they are still trying to do this as resistance continues.

Why has the balance of class forces shifted in favour of imperialism since the end of the Soviet Union?

As if “imperialism” was a purely Western phenomenon and not a characteristic of the Soviet empire as well. A “balance of class forces” does not exist between nation states, but between classes. What shifted in the 1980s was the initiative in the class struggle from workers to capital. The inability of Soviet block workers to craft alternatives allowed that initiative to expand as the old regimes crumbled.

Why are liberation movements in the Third World, who could previously get material assistance from the Soviet block now weaker?

Those few who were getting aid and lost it mostly collapsed, and that collapse demonstrated clearly how poorly rooted they were in local people's lives. Where struggles have been so rooted they were neither dependent on Soviet aid, nor did they collapse. Many are alive today, as in Chiapas or Ogoniland, etc.

Why did Cuba lose 70% of its economic support from "capitalist" Soviet bloc after 1990?

Because a bankrupt Russian regime could no longer support an old client state.

Why is the capitalist class now gleefully asserting that communism is dead and its "Mac time now all around the world"?

For the same reason it pretended that the cold war was about capitalism vs communism instead of about two different forms of capitalism.

Harry is right to draw a distinction between "ownership" and "control" of the means of production in the Soviet block. Workers owned the means of production (ie they were state run and not privately owned as in the west) but they had no control over what was produced or how. For revolutionaries this meant that the task was to retake control of the means of production through a political revolution. Unfortunately the opposite occurred and those supporting capitalism (under Yeltsin) took control and have started to give ownership of the means of production back to capitalists.

The distinction here between control by the state and control by "capitalists" is based, once again, on an emphasis on form which ignores substance. Ownership is a means to control. But what makes capitalism capitalism, regardless of the form of control, is the use made of that control: the endless imposition of work as the central form of social organization and control. THAT didn't change, not in 1953, not in 1989. Only the institutional forms changed. And because that substance didn't change the content of the class struggle remains the same.

In state capitalism Autonomist Marxism has found a pessimistic grounding. Because state capitalists cannot understand the class nature of the Soviet Union they have to dismiss every revolutionary movement funded by the Soviet Union as simply recreating "capitalism" - the revolutions in Cuba, Nicaragua, Vietnam, Grenada were just colonial off shoots of the capitalist Soviet block. Governments, like those in the US, who funded anti-Communist wars against them were obviously just stupid and couldn't see this.

No one I know "dismisses every revolutionary movement". But the funding by the Soviet Union was for Soviet purposes, not for the purposes of the movement. The Soviet Union funded the Vietnamese communists, etc., as an integral part of their cold war strategy to spread their own form of capitalism --and after 1975 it became glaringly obvious when Le Duan et al declared an interest in foreign investment based on cheap Vietnamese labor. The Vietnamese peasants weren't stupid but their perfectly valid struggles were caught in the middle of a power battle between capitalists that cost them any hope of getting out of the system.

Furthermore Autonomist Marxism's position on the state means that they will reject every future revolution that succeeds. Every movement that actually takes state power, that is abolishes capitalism, will be discounted because of its success.

Beggs DEFINES success by the seizure of state power. I differ. I define success by the abolition of capitalism and the end of domination. Beggs DEFINES the taking of state power as the abolition of capitalism. I differ. I say the historical record shows that the taking of state power is a prelude not to the abolition of capitalism but to its reimposition and the end of the revolution. Not success, but failure.

The Zapatistas are held up by Love and Rage and Harry Cleaver as the key example of a successful movement.

Nonsense. By either of our definitions have the Zapatistas been "successful"; they have neither seized state power nor have they abolished capitalism. What they are is an inspiring struggle that sees not only what is NOT to be done, but has had the creative imagination to create new alternatives.

Inspiring though their struggle is, lets not forget they have not won yet. And if they are going to do more then be a thorn in the side of the capitalist class, and get rid of capitalism itself, they will also confront the question of state power. If they don't do this they will be surpassed by revolutionaries who will.

The Zapatistas HAVE confronted the question of state power, and they struggle against it. They struggle against it, not to seize it. They would abolish it, not take it for themselves and recreate the very problem they now fight against.

3. Leninism

I might be a little cheeky here but the Autonomist writer Antonio Negri actually provides a good starting point for a justification of the need for a revolutionary party. Negri writes in *Marx beyond Marx* “the catastrophes for capital are the party, the development of communist subjectivity, and revolutionary will and organisation”. As Negri points out the crisis for capitalism is when the working class and oppressed layers have revolutionary consciousness (communist subjectivity) and revolutionary will and organisation (a party).

Negri has always been among the most Leninist of his generation of autonomists; just as the ex-Trots were in a previous generation (CLR James, etc). Unfortunately his book on Lenin hasn't been translated or this would be clearer to more people; but it was clear in Italy in the 60s and 70s when he was playing a central role in “autonomia organizzata”. However, the above quote from Negri about the “party” can be read in the way Marx's comments about “the working class party” should be read --as referring simply to a self-organized subjectivity rather than in the 20th C sense of a formal political party. But behind that ambiguous language lurks a heart imprinted with respect for Lenin's political intuition and organizing ability. Beggs converts Negri into a full fledged Leninist and in so doing overstates the case, but its easy to do given Toni's history. A priori I would have guessed that a Leninist like Beggs would pick up on such passages of Toni's work --passages which when kept to a strict reading aren't so bad, but are also among the least interesting and innovative of his work.

A revolutionary organisation is central to draw together the disparate struggles against the system into a movement against capitalism itself. This is not a proscriptive formula. The FSLN in Nicaragua was an amalgam of several different parties, the Bolsheviks in Russia were a split from a broader party, the July 26 Movement in Cuba was a broad movement which was made up of communists and revolutionary nationalists. Resistance does not claim that the DSP alone will be the party to lead a revolution. But we do argue that parties are important to collectivize the lessons of struggle, unite various sectors in the fight against the system and help develop an understanding of Marxism and revolutionary ideas amongst the population.

Once again, the reduction of “organizing” to “organization building” which is so characteristic of Leninism and which has led again and again to ossified bureaucratic parties that act to harness and contain the working class instead of being an expression of its struggles is among the weakest and most debunked of all their arguments. Look around.

Sergio asks “if the Leninist party is so important to win, how come the Bankstown occupation won without one?” No-one is more excited about the Bankstown occupation than Resistance but it would be a slight exaggeration to say it has torn down capitalism. If the students at Bankstown were to really win they would have to unite with workers and student across Australia in a movement against the system itself. Then the revolution would really “begin in Bankstown”. Until then, spare us the rhetoric.

Not knowing anything about “Bankstown” I'm hardly qualified to comment on this. But I will say that even a movement that swept Australia would be doomed to defeat (as in Russia, Nicaragua, etc) unless it “united with workers and students” across the world. Spare us the rhetoric, indeed.

Parties are organs of class struggle and ultimately every party has a class interest. Autonomist Marxists keep asserting that there are diverse terrains of struggle, that there are a multiplicity of struggles, that horizontal organisation supplants the need for centralism and so forth. But capitalism has always been complicated and the working class always fractured along gender and race lines, these are not new discoveries of Autonomist Marxism.

No, the “discovery” is that the problems of dealing with those fractures cannot be finessed via the Leninist party or any other single organization.

For those serious about challenging capitalist rule the question is how to develop revolutionary consciousness and transform this consciousness into action.

Ah, there's the other finesse: revolutionary consciousness. If only everyone understood the revealed Truth that we understand then we could all rise up together, throw off our chains and end capitalism tomorrow! The City of God is only a breath of consciousness away. This bit of gospel serves very well to convert the true believers into a priesthood, unfortunately, as politics, it just doesn't work.

Every time revolutionary opportunities have opened up there have been organs of working class organisation thrown up. It is only when there have been strong revolutionary organisations have these opportunities been transformed into successful revolutions.

“Successful revolutions”? Well, I guess that once you define success as the seizure of state power you can count lots of successful revolutions. Unfortunately, if you define successful revolution in terms of the overthrow of capitalism and the freeing of the world to be many worlds, then we haven’t had one yet. A final note: I don’t really like any definition of revolution which defines it as successful or not by whether it obtains a particular goal, be it the seizure of power or the overthrow of capitalism. There are, after all, many “successes” in the mere fact of revolt, and in many of the accomplishments of those who have revolted, e.g., the reappropriation of their human dignity, the crafting of new social relations, regardless of whether they ultimate achieve any particular goal. Do we not rever a legion of “revolutionaries” who have “failed”? And rightly so.

Harry