



Excerpts from **Strange Victories:**

An analysis of the Antinuclear Movement in the US and Europe

“We are writing this paper because we are convinced that the anti-nuclear movement in general and the 'new' anti-nuclear movement in urban areas in particular could be a catalyst for struggles against the 'crisis' and capitalism's attack against the working class. Now the most urgent problem is: How can we organise against capital? In attempting to answer this question, we shall look at the anti-nuclear movement as a movement of social organisation, determined by the class interest of the people involved in it, by its relationship to capital, its historical, geographical and psychological conditions.”

-Midnight Notes, 1979

“The following piece of work, on the anti-nuclear movement in the US and Europe, although written in 1979, is still a valid

contribution to the search for clarity as a basis for struggle. Since the time it was written, the anti-nuclear, environmental, and peace movements have grown and multiplied mainly due to the mining of Europe with nuclear missiles. This growth has been of massive quantity, but the logic and quality remain the same as when the following was written. All the more reason then for a critical re-reading today.” -Alfredo M. Bonanno, 1985

Reading this 25 years later, in 2010, one still gets a feeling that history repeats itself. Currently there's not so much antinuclear movement going on, although there are some attempts. The same can be said for the siblings of the antinuclear movement, the green and peace movements. In order to support these attempts, we can try (this time around) to learn from the past and its repeatings. A movement often returns to its past as if unconsciously: we try to find or reproduce the feeling of the past climaxes of the movement, and end up aping bygone events in the hope that they come to life. Then we can't create anything new. Better would be to take apart the old models in our minds, and start from scratch to find out what it's all about. This text lends itself brilliantly to this purpose. The whole text can be downloaded or printed from "The Anarchist Library":

http://theanarchistlibrary.org/HTML/Midnight_Notes_Strange_Victories.html

This flyer serves some bits from it for a taster. Parts of the text are now out-of-date, but they can show some useful likenesses between the situation of 1979 and 2009.

For example, the Climate issue can be seen to parallell many here described features of the 'energy crisis' of the 70's: f.ex. the claim for the need to build more nuclear power. -editor

Nuclear Power and Capitalist Social Planning

“We shall not deal with the nuclear issue as a mere environmental and technical problem. We know that any technology developed by capital is used as a weapon against the working class, i.e. ourselves. Further, the nuclear industry is only one of the fronts of new technology, together with the computer and chemical industries. Nuclear energy production is used to break the struggles of the coal-miners in the US, and of the oil-workers in the Middle East and the US. There is no such thing as an independent 'technological and scientific progress' occurring outside class struggle. 'Progress' is another word for 'more effective exploitation' and has nothing to do with our needs and wishes. The present capitalist technology has been shaped for exploitation and control over our lives. It is not a neutral means that can be used in a different class context. There will be no 'liberated assembly-line', no 'socialist nuclear power', no 'acceptable risks'. On the other hand, there is no reason why capital could not use f.ex. solar energy against us, although so far they have not.”

“At this moment, capital is obviously testing out two possible futures: a risky, capital intensive nuclear future and a labour-intensive, low-energy version. Neither is very tempting though there will always be, after the priority is set, a combination of both. The choice we are offered is one between cancer and misery. The 'loyal opposition' to capital within the anti-nuclear movement seems to accept such a blackmail and is campaigning for the 'misery' version: 'Solar jobs', conservation and 'labour-intensive' production. In this sense, they are 'educating' the masses, but they face the same problem the dominant capital faces with its cancer-option. Imposing labour-intensive production on a working class that has been fighting around the refusal of work is as hopeless as the search for the responsible high capital-intensity workers needed for nuclear industry. However, if we are not able to reject the choice between cancer and misery, we will surely get both.”

Antinuclear Movement and immediate survival

“The Government and the energy companies tell us that 'we' are in a squeeze since the 'energy shortage' forces 'us' to build nuclear plants and raise rates and prices. They tell us that the Arabs have us by a string and 'we' must 'protect' ourselves. Most people have not bought this story. Polls show that 70% of the people do not believe there is an energy shortage - simply because it is obviously false. 78% believe the companies 'just want to make more money'. (*New York Times*, April 10, 1979). All other fuel prices are going up as well: natural gas, coal, uranium and oil. This has nothing to do with the Arabs (all our coal and most of our uranium is mined domestically) nor with shortages (US coal reserves could last for hundreds of years and there is more crude oil available than ever before). The energy prices go up because the companies have the power to raise them. They control oil wells, coal-mines and power plants, and they can blackmail us at will because we depend entirely on their supply. We have only the choice between paying or freezing to death. Higher energy prices are a continuous attack on our wages and force us therefore to work more, and to work for the plans of the companies, who are not interested in supplying the people with energy, but are interested in making money and strengthening their control over us.

The nuclear power plants are the peak of this blackmail. The energy companies demand not only that we should accept higher energy prices, but also higher levels of radioactivity, cancer and fear. Not only must we work more and harder to pay the bills, but also we must lose our health and well-being. With the threat of nuclear danger, they can impose 'safety measures' on us; install a police State, order us to leave our homes, evacuate our families, respect curfews. How can we know that they tell the truth? Most people don't believe them anyway; polls showed that only 16% of the people believe what government and nuclear officials said during the Three Mile Island accident of 1979.

What can we do against this politics of fear and exploitation? First, we have to reject this crisis mentality they want to impose on us. We must know that there is enough energy, enough money (in 1978 the capitalists made record profits of 130.7 billion dollars), enough food, clothing and housing for everybody, employed or unemployed, waged or unwaged. And if problems of energy conservation arise, we must make sure that the people themselves control such measures and that they are not dictated to us by the energy-capitalists in order to make more money. Before we can speak of energy conservation, we must have more power.”

“In the case of the anti-nuclear movement, there is a risk that it could be used against poor urban people. As long as the anti-nuclear movement does not clearly attack the price-policies of the energy companies and does not link the 'health' and 'money' issues, it cannot be understood by people who are struggling for daily survival. In such a situation capital can play the anti-nuclear movement against the poor or vice versa. For example, the energy companies and the State (the government) can blame the anti-nuclear movement for the higher electric bills; or they can try to impose solar energy **and** higher energy prices.”

“Not to deal with the problem of energy-prices means to automatically play the game of capitalist class division, consciously or not. All types of symbolic or legal activities, like 'making the link with the atomic bomb' divert from possible activities in the community. “Nuclear danger” alone can trigger activity only if there is an immediate material interest involved. It is pointless to be afraid of something if you can't do anything against it. That's why nuclear disarmament movements provoke so little reaction, even with a global, horrible catastrophe being possible at any second. There is no “objective danger” and death is not immediately a political category. Power is. If we are not able to deal with the local electric company, how can we deal with the Pentagon? Why should we go to Washington if we have never been to the corner utility office?”

“Higher prices and radioactivity hit everybody everywhere: blacks, hispanics and urban whites as well as farmers, small-town residents and atomic workers around nuclear plants. This fact is crucial for the future development of the anti-nuclear movement, which started with a class composition linked to a type of highly valued intellectual labour force in rural and suburban regions. Will this be the social and geographic limit of the movement? With the Three Mile Island accident (1979) and the energy price attack, capital is saying to this movement: "Okay, folks, you got a point. But what about food-riots in the cities, which side will you be on?”

This may appear exaggerated, but this question expresses the main problem the anti-nuclear movement will necessarily face in urban areas. The urban working class forces a choice on the movement: will it stick to its old class-structure or will it try to extend beyond these limits? Will it be a movement of concerned intellectual workers, dealing with problems of alternative planning and restricting its form of struggle and organisation to this class sector, or will it deal with more immediate issues such as rate hikes and food prices? The anti-nuclear movement is still pondering over the risks of broadening its class composition (which could mean self-devaluation) versus the advantages of conserving its own high value as a labour force.”

“The indifference of these other class sectors toward the anti nuclear movement (or better: issue) is not based on a “lack of education and information”, as anti-nuclear militants often bitterly complain. Even very uneducated class-sectors have always been able to grasp the essential knowledge about their problems, if the knowledge were in their interest and presented possibilities of struggle. There is of course no such thing as a “theoretical class interest”: the uneducated Iranian masses have been able to beat the CIA-trained Shah regime which was backed by the most educated capital in the world, U.S. capital; scores of poor people have the skills to cheat welfare; workers can deal with their union bureaucrats; etc. The problem is not education, but Organisation and finding ways of effective and direct struggle.”

“The anti-nuclear movement has developed a certain rigidity and a fear of uninvited guests. While being harmless in rural areas, this rigidity can become harmful in cities where different class-sectors live closely together. One arm of the anti-nuclear movement, 'alternative energy', can become just another hobby for higher income people or people with special educations. Thus, Carter's 1978 energy bill subsidises the installation of solar heating devices through tax write-offs, but only those who have houses to install them and taxes to write off can take advantage of the deal. In general, such individual or class restricted energy solutions put poorer sectors in an even tighter squeeze and deepen the divisions within the class. if a nuclear shut down only means solar privileges for some people, capital can divide the possible movement of all energy-consumers and we will lose the nuclear battle.”

“These questions concerning the movement's direction must be asked now, for the anti-nuclear movement has a real chance to play a role as a catalyst for struggles in a very critical situation. Being anti-nuclear means to be against capital, against the energy squeeze, against the 'Choice' of cancer or misery. The anti-nuclear issue is a possibility of autonomous organisation outside of all types of compromised party, union and ethnic organisations, an open field of creativity for all types of people. The characteristics of the 'old' anti-nuclear movement are partly an obstacle for such a function. The new anti-nuclear movement has to develop its own ways of organising, making decisions, and acting. It must insist on its own rhythms and cannot just be an appendix of the established organisations.”

Resist Control, Resist Nuclear Power

“All aspects of the general perspective of capital are concentrated in the nuclear industry: high capital intensity (70 plants in the US employ only about 79,000 workers and produce 13% of all electricity), extreme discipline and command over the labour force, combination of State and private capital (in research, financing, supervision), internationality, computerisation, and extension of the 'planning horizon' far into the future (nuclear waste). The nuclear industry is able to occupy all free spaces geographically (reactors are independent of local resources), politically (all police-State measures can be justified by radioactive dangers), and in time (even if we 'win', we will have to deal with the nuclear waste; our 'utopias' are infested for thousands of years).

Psychologically, nuclear reactors are symbols of permanent self-control and self-repression, re-presenting the psychological character of the fifties. The controlled expansion, the slow burn-out, corresponds to the process of exploitation of each since worker. Nuclear plants emit bad 'vibes' because they are like capital wants us to be. We are not allowed to explode socially - the reactor is not allowed to explode technically. Our control-rods are family-education, responsibility-ideologies (including 'alternative'), fear of death (the violence apparatus of the state). The nuclear plant is just another element of this blackmailing with death, together with traffic, machines, etc.

In the sixties, some of this technical reliability melted down: millions of intellectuals and other workers refused the stress of self-repression. In this respect, nuclear development was a counter-attack of capital to create new centres of reliability against the marsh of obscure wishes and desires. It was, and is, an attack on the working class because it aims at imposing tighter command and higher productivity on it. The anti-progress, anti-command, anti-concrete-and-steel-ideology within the anti-nuclear movement represents a basis for unity with other class sectors as it is a genuine expression of the class-situation of the intellectual proletariat as well as of factory and office workers, etc.

Slime against concrete - refusal of responsibility and command against capital's control - life against work - wishes against need; these are elements of an ideology and practice which could destroy the planning/alterplanning dead end.”

Midnight Notes, April 26, 1979