

ECOLOGY AND REVOLUTION

THERE ARE RADICALS WHO SAY THAT ECOLOGY IS A FALSE ISSUE. BUT TRUE ECOLOGY MUST NOT BE REGARDED AS A MEANINGLESS MIDDLE-CLASS HOBBY THAT TURNS PEOPLES' INTEREST OFF FROM THE "REAL" PROBLEMS. ON THE CONTRARY IT CAN RADICALISE MORE AND MORE PEOPLE INTO CONSCIOUSNESS ABOUT THE COMPLETE FAILURE OF THE WHOLE POLITICAL SYSTEM. THIS DEVELOPMENT IS CLEARLY VISIBLE IN SWEDEN WHERE A VITAL PEOPLES' CULTURE AROUND THE ENVIRONMENTAL PROBLEMS HAS EVOLVED.

We are in a hurry!

Today we see an increasing struggle between those who want to change the present order and those who want to keep it. The latter have the power while the former have the spirit, the morals and the arguments.

But we are in a great hurry. The cleft between the poor and the rich increases each day, which can only result in a devastating confrontation. And the ecological foundations for life are in the process of being ruined through pollution and the rape of resources.

New tactics needed.

That is why we have to ~~in~~ rethink our tactics wisely. What has been done has obviously not been enough. The vast majority in the industrialised countries still sleeps and still believes in the basic assumptions and values of the dominant culture. Despite of the clever analyses and encouraging actions of the New Left, the Black Panthers, the Yippies etc. the enemies still lead. The capitalists and the bureaucrats are in cool command.

Mass-mobilising.

In the middle of the 60s the Dutch Provos marched together with ~~a~~ workers in big demonstrations. During the May revolt in France, the big strikes were inspired by the actions of the students. Peoples' Park in Berkeley saw a support and participation from people of all sorts. But these examples are exceptions rather than rules.

All attacks at the the present system must be applauded, at least if they appear to have the potential of moving more and more people to consciousness and action. In the long run that is also the only true support to the peoples of the third world. Wide actions from within the industrialised countries in order to disarm the aggressive development - that help the struggle against imperialism as well as anything.

The political climate in Sweden.

The social, economic and cultural patterns vary quite much from country to country and the general situation in Sweden differs a lot from most other ~~countries~~ ~~places~~ places. Still, I believe that the experiences from the Swedish experiment will be useful to know of.

The notion of an unexpected attack by masses of people of all ages within a highly industrialised country has great relevance today.

The situation in Sweden is often said to be "cool as a duck-pool". There once was a mighty movement of workers that managed to take the power. But they were unable, for various reasons, to create an alternative to the bourgeois society. The development went quite alike as elsewhere in the western world. These Social Democrats however, managed to "humanise" capitalism a little bit. So that is why, despite of the striking inequality through unfair distribution, there is less poverty than in most other countries.

And thus the polarisation between the classes, generations or races is small and the most violent vibrations are rare.

Advanced capitalism and technocracy.

Due to the escape from two world wars the "development" has advanced very far. It has also advanced very fast. Many people still remember the old folk traditions and peasants culture. The old way of life has been replaced by a materialism of the most dreary sort and by a hard urbanisation. ~~It~~

As elsewhere, capitalism in combination with blind technocracy has created problems that people now are reacting against. They have their things and their basic material needs satisfied. In this situation they realise that still the countryside is exploited, that the cities ~~are~~ get less and less possible to live in, that their working environment gets more stressing and unpleasant and that the whole ecology is being ruined etc.

In a calm political climate many people are getting aware of deep failures in the whole political system!

The radical scene.

The extra-parlamentary scene in general has been very lively the last years. The antiwar activities in Sweden by the so called NLF-groups have resulted in a wide front with an ever increasing support. The student left has also been very active in the anti-imperialist field. Furthermore the students have analysed a lot and they have ~~shown~~ shown that everything is politics. But actually, they have done little at the home front that has really attracted the people.

Some internal fights between for example the double-Maoists and the semi-Trotskyists have been too much to the people who don't understand a bit of it. Lately however they have changed and now they are going out more to work among the people.

Politics and pedagogics.

But outside the student ghetto seminars many things have been going on and a people's movement has evolved.

An alternative must be pointed out to people before

they want to get rid of the existing system. Some people tried something ~~new~~ different. They started to tear down the fences that divide the back-yards and then arranged parties there. They created different toys and games where the children co-operate instead of compete.

The philosophy was to create good experiences of communion and co-operation for people thus changing the attitudes of isolation and competition and making it possible in the future to change the frames of society itself.

To create alternative experiences requires much pedagogical insight, understanding and imagination. You don't break the indoctrinated patterns of attitudes, goals and ways of life in one day. Still, a real change is done through, with and by the People only.

Byalag - local communities.

During the fall in 1968 there was a festival in a park. A building play ground was erected by some activists. There ~~was~~ planks, hammers, nails etc. ^{WERE} The children started to build and they loved it. The house grew with many paths and passages. Their parents could see how their children were both cool and energetic while working with their "castle" and they could also see that they didn't quarrel or fuss. Suddenly the festival was over and the authorities wanted to close the whole thing. "What?" the parents thought. "Why? Isn't this our park? We live here and the bureaucrats who give the rules don't!" There they stood, having seen the groovy game. During the time they had gotten to know each other and now they had something mutual to fight for.

They arranged a meeting. Then they continued to have meetings on a settled day of the week. The meeting was open and they discussed what to do with their part of town. They formed smaller groups to work out what had been decided. No leaders, no board etc. Everyone was in it and felt his importance. Thus started the first byalag.

A people's movement.

The word byalag is difficult to translate but it ~~existed in the pre-industrialized society~~ goes back to the local village getting together that existed in the preindustrialised countryside. Today around 200 byalags are holding their meetings in Stockholm and they grow like mushrooms all over the country. It is a movement and it is the people, because the meetings consist of housewives, middleaged men, teenagers, pensioners, children etc.

It is people everywhere getting together and doing it on their own. People who are tired of letting their responsibilities be taken care of by representatives and who start to work new forms of co-operation out, based on direct-democracy and the involvement of the many. These methods have shown to spread the movement rapidly but it is also a good strategy against the authorities who have great difficulties in handling it.

They don't find any spokesmen, no party, just more and more of those unpleasant, disturbing ordinary inhabitants. They cannot attack the people and arguments like "minorities of long-haired bums violating democracy" sounds more and more hollow each day.

Different byalags during different times devote their energy and actions to different things. Perhaps the main thing, however, is simply getting together. Talking, coffee-drinking, playing with each others children etc. and just enjoying the meetings could in a generalising manner be said to be the base of the byalag. Spontaneously things like helping each other~~x~~ to look after the children, arranging big open parties etc. follow~~x~~.

The traffic problem.

Gradually however, the things to be done in order to improve the mutual environment get the people to approach the authorities. If a playground is bad and has to be changed for example, if a landlord in a house refuses to make necessary reparations and so on.

One of the questions that is very much a problem in several parts of the city is the traffic mess. That is perhaps the best example of how the wishes of the people conflicts (heavily) with the intentions of the authorities.

The exhaust fumes, the noise, the dirt, the unsafety, the ugliness and the "space pollution" make the cars the most ~~thorn~~ obvious obstacle to communion and pleasure in the urban environment.

The numerous protests during the last years from the byalags and other organisations reflect new aims. These new aims are in the direction of clean air, quietness, safety and space for playgrounds and ~~x~~ parks etc. The authorities on the other hand keep referring their old ones: "the freedom of the car-driver", "you can't stop progress" and other equally unsatisfying arguments.

Alternative City.

The tactics of the authorities however, have been to divide and rule. When the inhabitants in one area protest against an urban expressway that is supposed to thunder by within ten meters of their bedrooms, the technocrats and the politicians answer: "But you are egoists. If you don't take this road, your neighbors will have to get it!" And that is not what the inhabitants want.

The example shows that there was a deep ^{NEED} for some acting on a more general city planning level. And in February 69 a group with the name of Alternativ Stad (Alternative City) was formed with exactly that purpose. It was thought of as an independent supplement to all the local engagements in the city. And for some time the principal question of city transportation became the main preoccupation of the group. Alternative experts in planning, architecture, medical and social ~~sciences~~ sciences joined. Technical alternatives were worked out on how to replace the private car driving in the entire city with increased and improved public transportation.

Car-free street

Some actual cases can exemplify the movement and its enemies.

Karlbergsvägen is a beautiful ~~main~~ road with many trees and gardens and it was planned to become a through road with lots of traffic. The neighbors in the area got to know about the plans two days before the decision (!) With the help of name-lists and other actions they succeeded in stopping the plans after several months. ■ It inspired a number of similar actions all around the city where inhabitants managed to stop the traffic from going on their streets.

But it went elsewhere! Those kinds of actions resulted in marginal changes only. The traffic policy in general remained.

Car-free city!

An ~~The~~ other case was when the future plans for the Stockholm city center (Brunkeberg) were to be decided. They contained a number of traffic-sucking parking garages and many highways right through the hart of the city.

Now, Alternative City and others worked out an alternative plan where the cars were taken away and replaced with a lot of electric buses. Distribution traffic was suggested in the already dug underground tunnel system. Plenty of space was thus possible to devote to the pleasure of pedestrians and bicyclists. With a carfree city center it was fully possible to suggest a car-free innertown and a carfree Stockholm!

This alternative plan was exhibitied in easily understood pictures and perspective drawings before the decision was taken. Furthermore it was much discussed in the media and many people showed that they were more in favor of a green and quiet environment than of a dirty and thundering one.

But this was opposing the long accepted dogmas of city planning. It would unlike e.g. the case of Karlbergsvägen mean a deep change of the whole traffic policy. And so the authorities' plan was decided upon.

Symbolic elm-trees.

The demands from a growing movement was nonchalantly neglected by the authorities from time to time. Before the election, politicians of all ~~main~~ parties payed some lip-service to the public opinion in order to win voters. But in reality they had refused to change their aims. The polarisation between the inhabitants and the city authorities culminated in the elms battle - a milestone in the history of Stockholm.

A subway station was projected together with a drugstore. The drugstore was planned right under 13 beautiful elmtrees. For one year, Alternative City and others worked hard to change that plan. Actions petitions, debates and meetings were arranged. Architects showed how easily a redesigning of the station could be made in order to save the trees. But the authorities ~~refused~~ refused to listen to the opinion of the people once again. Stubborn technocrats and

prestige-filled politicians lied about technical arguments and referred to the hurry that new plans would demand.

The authorities plan was decided upon in the city ~~city~~ council (while people screamed from the stands). It was appealed against and it then went to the national government, which also favored cutting. Everyone wanted to keep the trees and there were no rational arguments to cut them. But fighting for them the legal way obviously was not enough. A telephone alarm list was made up in order to get people to the trees when they were to be cut down.

The elms battle.

The saws arrived a few hours after midnight on May 12th, 24 hours before the city government had said they would come. But the people were prepared and the alarm list worked like a chain reaction. Within the hour thousands of people were ready to take their stand around the trees. Trained dogs and mounted policemen couldn't move them and finally they gave up.

The battle then developed into a spontaneous folk festival with day and night entertainment by volunteer troubadours, musicians and other entertainers. Opera singers as well as hippies saluted the moment. In this free arrangement many Stockholmers also went up to the microphone and told about their ~~memories~~ memories in Stockholm, how they had experienced the decline of the city, etc.

Victory.

This people's manifestation went on for a week. Then the politicians gave in. They said that the trees were not to be cut down before the autumn and it seems unlikely that they will ever be able to cut them down. The underground station is now in the process of being redesigned!

The importance of the elms battle went far beyond the trees themselves. If the action was, as the politicians said, a violation of the democracy, then what is democracy? Would it have been more democratic to cut the trees down? Many people started to wonder and an intense debate around the concept democracy began in the press. All of us learned many experiences. It showed that people really are ready to move if the issue is clear to them. And if I have the patience I can get clear issues through. It showed that if we are many who co-operate we can really manage to change things, even political decisions.

But the most important feature was perhaps that everyone started to reflect on the development of the environment. Where are the next trees to be cut? Are they really going to double the number of private cars ~~in the city~~ in the city within 15 years? Etc. It is widely believed that local politics in Stockholm will never be the same again!

City expansion.

Trees that must be cut, parks that must be paved, monstrous suburbs that have to be built and heavy traffic that has to be increased. Those are just symptoms of a more fundamental development - the city expansion. Stockholm has undergone a very hard and fast urbanisation and more is to come. According to the plan for greater Stockholm by the year 2000 (Regionplanen) no less than one million people more are supposed to move to Stockholm (thus increasing the population to 2,5 million).

This development is of vital interest for the establishment. Big business want large units for "rationalisation" and central bureaucrats want everything to be centralised. City urbanisation "just can't be stopped" as these urbanisation romanticists put it.

But people are now questioning this philosophy. Thus the rising peoples movement is gradually confronting the very nerves of the economic and political system. People know from experience and increased knowledge what continued city expansion will mean. They realise that continued urbanisation will bring more exhaust fumes, noise, traffic accidents, destruction of beautiful buildings, housing shortage, ~~nightmare suburbs~~ slums, nightmare suburbs that create social problems. Parks, playgrounds, green areas, public transportation and other community commodities will decrease while the people who want to ~~stay~~ live and work in the countryside will be sucked to the city machinery unwillingly.

Growing awareness.

When people protest this, they are attacking myths like the value of industrial expansion, never ending production, economic growth, increased export for ~~the~~ the balance of payments etc. What is standards of living: Clean air or the production of shopping cars AND ~~or~~ tooth brushers? What is most important: to have a color-TV in the bathroom or to have public transportation, ~~and~~ day-care centers, parks and playgrounds etc.

This peoples protest against vital values of the dominant culture will grow and play an important role. It will widen its scope and include areas such as the plundering of natural resources, energy problems, food pollution etc. But even more important, it will focus more people's attention to the problems of influence and power. Who gives the rules and in whose interest is the development designed if it is not for the people?

Gradually people are becoming aware of the need ~~for~~ to decentralise the political decision-making as well as for democratic control over ~~means~~ ~~of~~ ~~production~~ ~~THE~~ production. Decentralised direct-democracy has been one of the keys to the movement and in the long run it is the only solution to the worst environmental problem today - the political pollution.

International actions

The same kind of movement goes on in many other countries. In October 1970 Alternative City took the initiative in starting the "international traffic-revolution" which meant decentralised actions

During the same day there ^{the} were actions in Sweden, Norway, Finland, Denmark, Netherlands, USA, Canada and Australia. This shows that at least some of the ecological problems are the same in many places and that people are prepared to do something about it. The Swedish example seems to be applicable in other countries.

An alternative to the UN conference...

During the time 5th - 16th of June 1972 the United Nations will have a huge conference in Stockholm on "the human environment".

For various reasons this will hide rather than solve the important problems. Marginal changes will be suggested in an endless flow of resolutions. The 1200 bureaucrats from all the UN member nations will talk much but they will not question the most vital problems: the technical-economic development as such, the present decision-making processes and the established way of life in today's dominant Western culture.

At the same time there will be alternative activities in as many places as possible. In Stockholm many actions are planned under the name of Powwow. Direct active involvement of numerous people - an international grassfire - means a solid alternative to pragmatic bureaucracy. A big internationally coordinated action is planned for June 4th i.e. the day before the UN start their thing.

Conclusion

A common mistake among radical people today is to regard ecology as a meaningless issue. But true ecology is not a middle class jippo, not undangerous to the establishment, not unconscious and not "counter-revolutionary".

To them one can only say: Don't spit at these new but serious attempts. Don't act as the theological scholars of the past who fought each other more than they fought heathendom. Ecology and similar approaches present possibilities for an enormous number of people to radicalise their views of the society instead of falling deeper into the drugs of consumption, alienated work and TV-watching.

In Sweden ecology has shown to be ^a powerful eye-opener that has all but taken energy away from other kinds of political work. The protests against the Indo-China war have, for instance increased very much during the past years. It has been no contradiction to work ~~in many sectors~~ politically in many sectors.

All help must be received with gratitude and a people's movement is one of the most potent weapons for the future.

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August 1971