

Lemming Notes

We begin with the metaphor of the lemmings who, when scarcity sets in, mill about in vast numbers until "nature" produces mass death, reducing the population until scarcity abates. Myth has it that huge numbers of lemmings rush blindly onward, propelling themselves over the cliffs of Scandinavian fjords, looking not where they go nor where they will land. Yet, to stretch and twist the metaphor, we suggest a second myth: that scarcity is for us a myth. Thus our metaphor of the lemming has the left and much of the U.S. working class leaping off a political cliff, driven by a mythical scarcity, a scarcity which exists only in political imagination or will.

Who are we to call the left a bunch of lemmings? The members of Midnight Notes have been in and of the left internationally. Each of us has, to varying extent, been caught in the peculiar logic of the left, and we know how disastrous this logic has been to ourselves and to the class struggle. To the extent we have been able to escape this self-defeating leftism, we have done so because at some point we could step back and say,

"Why am I doing this? What is it I really want? Do the actual struggles of the class, or parts of the class, have anything to do with what I want? Do we all want something close to the same thing, and do we dare to discuss that? Do left programs and practices speak to what I/we want?"

Those readers familiar with our past issues know we've discussed some replies to these questions. We've seen our needs and the underlying motion of the class in the refusal of work and the demand for the wealth we have already produced, an end to capitalist command in all areas of our lives; and we have seen the class struggle make visible the possibilities and the desires.

But, we think, the left in this cycle of struggles has had little or nothing to do with our desires or with the struggles of the class. Rather, despite important action on many issues, the left, at root, ended up attacking the demands of the class and thus helped to destroy a cycle of struggle which propelled capital into deep crisis.

That is, the left became an ally of capital against the class. We must see this and critically deal with it if we are to move ahead. If not, the class will again have to by-pass its 'left', as it did in the 1960's.

We are, on some levels, hurt, angry, bitter, perhaps resigned perhaps even amazed that so many of us could so twist and repress our desires until they become not even caricatures of but assaults on what brought many of us into the movement, so that what started as a struggle for freedom ends up as acceptance of the deepest logic of capitalist slavery, the glorification of work and discipline.

Perhaps not all is lost, in the left and in the class. Perhaps lurking over our collective shoulder, like a shadow dimension, is the reality of the dreams we once had and somewhere still have, the "flip side" of our selves. Can we reach it? If so, how can we reach it?

Lemming Notes has four parts: "How Can It Be Possible?" begins to discuss how the strategies of the left attacked the class and helped the right. "The Left Today" discusses how the same strategies, emanating from the same roots, continue to help block class struggle. "Thanatocracy" expands the discussion to ask why the working class now seems to accept and even support capital's attack on itself, why it exhibits a "prejudice for state power." "The Working Class Waves Bye-Bye" reviews Andre Gorz' "Farewell to the Working Class", an abomination combining Stalinism, Social Democracy and ecological alternativism which shamelessly rapes whole movements and presents the results as a great progress and strategy for us. We must say so long, never again, to all Gorz represents, or remain trapped in capital's relations.

After Lemming Notes, we present bolo' bolo, a discussion of how to get out of the crisis and of a possible "second reality." Finally, we conclude by discussing struggles at Medgar Evers College in Brooklyn, N.Y., which we find do push beyond the mere circularity of capitalist realpolitik in which the left is mired.

