

Anarchist library
Anti-Copyright



The Necessity and Impossibility of Anti-Activism

J. Kellstadt

J. Kellstadt

The Necessity and Impossibility of Anti-Activism

Retrieved on September 1, 2009 from www.geocities.com

en.anarchistlibraries.net

damentally *cleft* nature, their “dual” social existence, and pretend that they’re “just” workers. Because then they will truly have no way to keep tabs on their “other” side and its inherently elitist potentialities. And then they’ll begin to erect an new layer of social elites — this time under the rubric of the “anti-activist,” of the “authentic,” the “unalienated,” the “real” proles. And all the old crap will come flooding back again.

Contents

The Limits of Activism	6
Going Mental	8
Hitting the Wall	10
X-Ray Specs	12
You Can’t Blow Up a Social Relation	14
Nobody Here But Us Workers?	16
Criticizing the Critique	19

My own reading of Dauvé's position is to seize upon his assertion, quoted above, that within our present alienated society "positive utopia" can remain revolutionary "*as demand, as tension*." I take this to mean that the project of "living differently" is not simply to be discarded, tossed aside as simply impossible until "after the revolution," nor that we must simply resign ourselves to pursuing the "end of alienation" by "alienated means."⁵ Thus we should not simply throw up our hands and unquestioningly fulfill the conventional role of activist or militant, nor should we swallow the whole pill and become leading cadre in the Workers Revolutionary Communist Vanguard League of Bolshevik-Leninist Internationalists.

Rather, one ought to continue to try to live differently, to function differently and in "non-alienated" and non-hierarchical ways in one's practice. But one should do this "*as (and in) tension*," all the while accepting *the functional impossibility of doing this successfully in the present*, of doing this in any but the most tentative and prefigurative — rather than fully realized or "non-alienated" — way.

To put it another way: I think there is much to be learned by hurling ourselves, again and again, against the bars of our cage. It is in our *necessary failures* as much as in our partial, modest, and always fragile successes that we learn how this society has crippled us, what it strips from us in terms of dignity and fulfilled desire. But we shouldn't pretend that we're liberated when we're not, which could only turn us into a priggish aristocracy of the "authentic" and "un-alienated."

The fact is that even the folks in the various groups which are trying to develop an "anti-activist" and "anti-political" approach to anticapitalist revolution — from KK/Collectivities in Faridabad, India to the Insubordinate collective in Baltimore — are *simultaneously* workers and "not-workers," workers and "activists," even workers and — horrors! — *intellectuals*. And the most dangerous thing for people in that position to do is to lose sight of their fun-

Dauvé goes on to spell out both the causes and the consequences of this moralism. The former he locates in the narrowing of the SI's perspective to the realm of appearance and consumption, at the expense of production. In its theorizing of the revolutionary movement, says Dauvé, "the SI does indeed start out from the real conditions of existence, but reduces them to intersubjective relations. This is the point of view of the subject trying to rediscover itself, not a view which encompasses both subject and object." I would argue that this is precisely the problem with Andrew X's critique of the activist, which likewise adopts only "the point of view of the subject trying to rediscover itself" rather than considering the subject in the context of its complex, objective social mediations.

According to Dauvé, the consequence of this exclusively subjective point of view was that the Situationist International became "an affirmation of individuals to the point of elitism." "Against militant moralism," writes Dauvé, "the SI extolled another morality: that of the autonomy of individuals in the social group and in the revolutionary group. Now, only an activity integrated into a social movement permits autonomy through an effective practice. Otherwise the requirement of autonomy ends up by creating an elite of those who know *how to make themselves autonomous*."

⁵ Dauvé himself, in the Foreword to the original edition of *The Eclipse and Re-emergence of the Communist Movement*, still affirms the necessity of this task: "In spite of its shortcomings, the Situationist International has shown — among other things — what Marx had explained more than 100 years ago: It is not only important to understand the historical movement and act accordingly, but also *to be* something different from the attitudes and values of the society the revolutionary wants to destroy. The *militant* attitude is indeed counter-revolutionary, in so far as it splits the individual into two, separating his needs, his real individual *and* social needs, the reasons why he cannot stand the present world, from his action, his attempt to change this world. The militant refuses to admit that he is in fact revolutionary because he needs to change his own life as well as society in general. He represses the impulse which made him turn against society. He submits to revolutionary action as if it were external to him: it is fairly easy to see the *moral* character of this attitude. This was already wrong and conservative in the past; today it becomes increasingly reactionary." www.skatta.demon.co.uk

"For my part, I do not believe there is 'one solution' to the social problems, but a thousand different and changing solutions in the same way as social existence is different and varied in time and space."

— Errico Malatesta, 1924

"Revolution is the communising of society, but this process is more than just the sum of direct actions."

Gilles Dauvé, 1973

This article responds to issues raised in "Give Up Activism," a critique of the J18 protests in England by Andrew X. "Give Up Activism" has been getting some attention lately on this side of the Atlantic: the editor of *Red & Black Notes* brought it to my attention some time after it had been posted on the Mid-Atlantic Infoshop's webpage of J18 critiques, and it was also reprinted in the latest *Collective Action Notes*.¹

I think there are two main reasons for the article's timeliness. The first is the sense of "diminishing returns" which have followed the sequence of "post-Seattle" protests, from A16 in DC to the Republican and Democratic national conventions in Philly and LA. There's a feeling afoot that what was new and striking about Seattle might now be growing a little old and stale — not to mention thoroughly anticipated by the repressive apparatus of the capitalist state. The second reason, a little closer to home, is the formation of the NorthEastern Federation of Anarcho-Communists (NEFAC), which appears to be operating in the more or less conventional mode of direct-action activism. Will efforts such as NEFAC be able to offer something useful to those in struggle, or do such efforts lead only to the dead-end of "activism for activism's sake" and the spectacle of militancy?

¹ The text of "Give Up Activism" can be found on the web at www.geocities.com or www.infoshop.org

Andrew X offers “Give Up Activism,” as, in his words, “an attempt to inspire some thought on the challenges that confront us if we are really serious in our intention of doing away with the capitalist mode of production.” It is an attempt to open the debate rather than to be conclusive, and it’s in the same spirit that I offer these remarks. No doubt some readers will find my position frustratingly ambivalent, but I hope that this is not simply the result of confused thinking on my part. Rather, I think that a rather high degree of ambivalence and the ability to *live the tension* of seemingly irreconcilable contradictions is central to the problems of formulating an “anti-activism” and “anti-politics.” In short, I argue that we must embrace simultaneously *the necessity and the impossibility* of “giving up activism.”

The Limits of Activism

There is much of value in Andrew X’s critique, particularly the points raised in the “form and content” section. In this section the author points out the limits of conventional activism when applied outside of the context of single-issue campaigns. Such activism, writes Andrew X, is totally useless for the task of bringing down capitalism as a whole. “Activism can very successfully accomplish bringing down a business, yet to bring down capitalism a lot more will be required than to simply extend this sort of activity to every business in every sector.” In other words, capitalism won’t be brought down by the mere quantitative addition of “actions” (or the number of activists); instead, a *qualitative* transformation of some kind is required.

Andrew X also shows how even the purported “successes” of single-issue activist campaigns are open to recuperation by capitalism, for example by helping the bosses figure out better ways to stifle opposition or by assisting “the rule of market forces” in driv-

inal context, become holy writ for a publication such as *Anarchy! Journal of Desire Armed*).

Criticizing the Critique

It is for this reason that a few of the SI’s more perceptive critics have seen the critique of the militant as one of the weaker aspects of the SI’s overall theory. Gilles Dauvé, in his “Critique of the Situationist International,” is particularly sensitive to the hidden elitism in the SI’s critique of the militant. In *The Revolution in Everyday Life*, writes Dauvé, Vaneigem has produced “a treatise on how to *live differently* in the present world while setting forth what social relations could be. It is a handbook to violating the logic of the market and the wage system wherever one can get away with it.” But, Dauvé argues, this perspective becomes a form of moralism:

Vaneigem’s book was a difficult work to produce because it *cannot be lived*, threatened with falling on the one hand into a marginal possibilism and on the other into an imperative which is unrealizable and thus moral. Either one huddles in the crevices of bourgeois society, or one ceaselessly opposes to it a different life which is impotent because only the revolution can make it a reality. The SI put the worst of itself into its worst text. Vaneigem was the weakest side of the SI, the one which reveals all its weaknesses. The positive utopia is revolutionary as demand, as tension, because it cannot be realized within this society: it becomes derisory when one tries to live it today.

Instead of revolutionary critique, argues Dauvé, Vaneigem slips into *moralism*, and “like every morality, Vaneigem’s position was untenable and had to explode on contact with reality.”

form makes appropriation a right belonging to everyone and from which everyone is excluded, a right one can obtain only by renouncing it. As long as it fails to break free of the context imprisoning it (a break that is called revolution), the most authentic experience can be grasped, expressed and communicated only by way of an inversion through which its fundamental contradiction is dissimulated. In other words, if a positive project fails to sustain a praxis of radically overthrowing the conditions of life — which are nothing other than the conditions of private appropriation — it does not have the slightest chance of escaping being taken over by the negativity that reigns over the expression of social relationships: it is coopted like an inverted mirror image.

I wish in particular to underline the importance of that last sentence: short of overthrowing “the conditions of private appropriation” themselves, all attempts at “authentic” and “un-alienated” existence will become simply another part of the spectacle. One’s “positive project” — to stay with Vaneigem’s terms — *must* “sustain a praxis of radically overthrowing the conditions of life,” or else it won’t stand “the slightest chance” of escaping alienation. The “break” that allows one to truly appropriate an authentic self is thus not “giving up activism,” it is instead “a break that is called revolution” — which is necessarily the *collective* project of the oppressed. Activism can’t be “given up” by the individual; it must be *superseded* in the collective process of overthrowing capitalism and creating communism.

At its best, the situationists’ version of “anti-activism” was originally integrated into a holistic perspective of total revolution. Vaneigem moved further and further away from this integrated perspective and more towards something resembling lifestyleist or individualist anarchism (hence his works, severed from their orig-

ing weaker companies out of business. The section’s conclusion merits quotation in full:

The form of activism has been preserved even while the content of this activity has moved beyond the form that contains it. We still think in terms of being ‘activists’ doing a ‘campaign’ on an ‘issue’, and because we are ‘direct action’ activists we will go and ‘do an action’ against our target. The method of campaigning against specific developments or single companies has been carried over into this new thing of taking on capitalism. We’re attempting to take on capitalism and conceptualising what we’re doing in completely inappropriate terms, utilising a method of operating appropriate to liberal reformism. So we have the bizarre spectacle of ‘doing an action’ against capitalism — an utterly inadequate practice.

In the main, however, “Give Up Activism” is taken up with a critique of what the author labels “the activist mentality,” and it’s here that the argument’s greatest weaknesses are to be found. Activism, I would argue, has both a “subjective” and an “objective” dimension, and both need to be taken into account. Andrew X himself acknowledges the “objective” side of activism in the opening of his critique, observing:

Activism, like all expert roles, has its basis in the division of labour — it is a specialised separate task. The division of labour is the foundation of class society, the fundamental division being that between mental and manual labour. The division of labour operates, for example, in medicine or education — instead of healing and bringing up kids being common knowledge and tasks that everyone has a hand in, this knowledge becomes the specialised property of doctors and teachers

– experts that we must rely on to do these things for us. Experts jealously guard and mystify the skills they have. This keeps people separated and disempowered and reinforces hierarchical class society.

After this, however, the “objective side” of activism as a concrete social and historical phenomenon is relegated to the background (at least until the author bumps up against it again in the concluding paragraphs), and the “subjective side” – the cast of mind, attitudes, and beliefs of the individual activist, the “activist mentality” – takes center stage.

Going Mental

The activist, writes Andrew X, “identifies with what they do and thinks of it as their role in life, like a job or career ... it becomes an essential part of their self-image.” According to the author, the activist’s specialized self-image inevitably brings with it a sense of “being somehow privileged or more advanced than others in your appreciation of the need for social change, in the knowledge of how to achieve it and as leading or being in the forefront of the practical struggle to create this change.”

Later on the author writes that the biggest problem confronting the activist “is the feeling of separateness from ‘ordinary people’ that activism implies. People identify with some weird sub-culture or clique as being ‘us’ as opposed to the ‘them’ of everyone else in the world.” He continues, “The activist role is a self-imposed isolation from all the people we should be connecting to. Taking on the role of an activist separates you from the rest of the human race as someone special and different.”

The author seems more interested in how individual activists *see and experience themselves* than in *what position they actually occupy in society*. Activists suffer from a *feeling* of separateness, they *identify* with cliques, their isolation is *self*-imposed, their roles are

nor should they be doing so “for others.” They should engage in this fight first and foremost *for themselves*, for their own radical pleasure and as an outlet for their love and rage.

But there are two related points about this aspect of situationist theory that I would like to make. The first is that this was part of a *total (and totalizing) critique and practice*, one which respected the unity of theory and practice and the necessity of theory as well as (and in constant interaction with) practice.⁴ The second is that, when *removed* from this context which I am calling “total critique,” the Vaneigem refusal of the role of the alienated militant can become both puerile and elitist (which is indeed what happened with Vaneigem himself).

Let me draw the reader’s attention to something Vaneigem himself wrote in “Basic Banalities (I)” (*Situationist International* #7, 1962), several years before the publication of *Revolution in Everyday Life*. In this passage (“thesis” #12), Vaneigem addresses the essential *falseness* and *alienation* of the individual’s “private life” under capitalism:

“Private” life is defined primarily in a formal context. It is, to be sure, engendered by the social relations created by private appropriation, but its essential form is determined by the expression of those relations. Universal, incontestable but constantly contested, this

⁴ Let no one venture here on that silly-sinister etymology which equates “totality” with “totalitarian.” Certainly I reject the idea that one’s individual point of view can yield up some kind of absolute truth to which others must bow down. I think that we need to acknowledge that our efforts towards “totality” will necessarily be *radically incomplete approximations* which need to be complemented and contrasted by many others’ theoretical approximations of “totality.” But neither does that absolve us of the responsibility to make the effort. A certain amount of skepticism about the empirical status of the “big picture” is healthy, but may be taken to debilitating extremes. Ultimately, the real “totality” is the class itself, constituted in its practical movement rather than in a “program” or panoptic “world-view.”

Nobody Here But Us Workers?

I think that Andrew X's voluntarist approach to abolishing activism (individually "wishing/willing" a social relation out of existence) points towards a false contrast between "inauthentic" activism and some imagined form of "authenticity" — a fantasy of non-alienation — which has an incipiently elitist dimension. It represents, in fact, a "return of the repressed" of the elitism that Andrew X tried to exorcise in the first place.

If this were a strictly individual "tic" of the author's, there wouldn't be much cause for worry. But the anti-theoretical (or at least *a*-theoretical) bias of many anti-activists goes hand in hand with this sentimentalization of "real, popular life," a misplaced belief that, somewhere on the other side of a great divide, "real" workers are somehow leading less alienated and more authentic lives.

Andrew X's argument relies on this dichotomy between "real" or "ordinary" people on one side and "alienated" activists on the other. He writes, "Our activity should be the immediate expression of a real struggle, not the affirmation of separateness and distinctness of a particular group." Citing Raoul Vaneigem, Andrew X says that "as role-players we dwell in inauthenticity." Further on he adapts one of the situationists' central ideas: "You cannot fight alienation with alienated means."

Much of this does indeed come from situationist critique of the self-sacrificing militant. Placed in its proper context, there is much of value in this aspect of the situationists' work. It usefully criticizes the residual christianity of much of the left, the martyr syndrome that guilt-trips others into becoming passive followers. The critique includes a refusal of the self-denying work-ethic, and it attempts to formulate (with necessarily limited success) some kind of resistance to the specialization, separation, and alienation that are endemic to spectacular capitalism.

Certainly no one engaged in trying to bring down capitalism should be doing so because they "should," because it is their "duty";

taken on, etc. This rhetoric runs throughout the critique, representing its predominant point of view. Certainly Andrew X considers the consequences of these attitudes, such as the tendency to self-serving recruitment to raise one's own level within the group, the reproduction within the group of the oppressive structures of the larger society, isolation of activists from the larger communities of the oppressed, and ultimately the recuperation of struggles back into capitalist social relations. But given the author's emphasis on the subjective side of the equation, these consequences come across as the secondary effects of a primary cause: individuals assuming the stereotyped and elitist attitudes of the "activist" role.

The critique's greatest weakness is this one-sided emphasis on the "subjective" side of the social phenomenon of activism. The emphasis points to an obvious conclusion implicit throughout Andrew X's argument: If activism is a mental attitude or "role," it may be changed, as one change's one's mind, or thrown off, like a mask or a costume. The author warns us that "the harder we cling to this role and notion of who we are, the more we actually impede the change we desire." The implication is clear: cease to cling, let go of the role, "give up activism," and a significant impediment to desired change will be removed.

This subjectivist emphasis leads the author to advance some fairly questionable formulations, in particular the following: "The role of the 'activist' is a role we adopt just like that of policeman, parent or priest — a strange psychological form we use to define ourselves and our relation to others." I don't doubt that being part of the armed fist of the bourgeois state carries with it a psychological "role" that the individual cop "identifies" with, but from any kind of perspective that seriously wants to get rid of cops (and the state) altogether, this has got to be a pretty trivial consideration. The author has slipped here into a bourgeois, individualist way of viewing the question, in which social groups such as cops, parents, and priests come about because some aggregate of individ-

ual people have “chosen” to become them (in the “free marketplace of roles,” no doubt).

Hitting the Wall

Social groups of whatever kind — be they cops, priests, and parents, or anarchists and activists — come into existence through complicated social processes. There is a powerful element of *historical necessity* in the existence of cops (i.e., every state *needs* cops; only a stateless society will not need them). Individual “choice” plays a part in these processes, but these choices are always made within highly constrained and conditioned circumstances. We can’t get rid of cops by making a moral appeal to the police to abandon their cop “roles.”

I’m sure that Andrew X does not believe this about the police; my point is that he loses this perspective when thinking about activism and activists. I also realize that Andrew X does not blithely assert that all the problems of activism will be magically solved by a simple “change of heart.” Indeed, by the end of his article Andrew X acknowledges the objective difficulties of his case, but in a way that is simply not integrated into the main body of his “subjectivist” argument.

In the article’s concluding paragraphs, the author speculates that:

we find ourselves in times in which radical politics is often the product of mutual weakness and isolation. If this is the case, it may not even be within our power to break out of the role of activists. It may be that in times of a downturn in struggle, those who continue to work for social revolution become marginalised and come to be seen (and to see themselves) as a special separate group of people. It may be that this is only capable of being corrected by a general upsurge in strug-

whole social process that creates them in the first place, rather than simply urging individual activists to “give up” their role. Cops and priests, activists and intellectuals — doing away with all of these social groups will be the collective work of oppressed people acting in their own interests. “Activists” can help or hinder this process in varying degrees (and let’s not overestimate their ability to do either), but what they *cannot* do is simply *wish or will themselves out of existence* as a social category.

The “role” of the activist is not simply “self-imposed”; it is also *socially-imposed*. Capitalist society produces activists the way it produces other specialists, the way it produces, for example, that close cousin of the activist, the intellectual. The efforts of some individual activists to commit “role-suicide” will not put a significant dent in the overall existence of activists as a social group. Andrew X, throughout his argument, returns again and again to the central insight that capital is a social relation. Well, as someone once said, you can’t blow up a social relation. And if you can’t blow it up, you certainly can’t wish or will it away. Activists, like intellectuals and other specialists, will not disappear from society until the division of labor itself disappears.

I’m not arguing that we should all just sit tight and wait until “after the revolution.” Such “objectivism” would be nothing more than the flip-side of Andrew X’s subjectivism. It would foster only fatalism and passivity, waiting for the revolutionary dawn for any chance of human dignity and putting up with all kinds of alienating crap until that time (which would then be sure never to arrive).

Instead, I think we should try to get beyond both a simplistic “subjectivism” and a simplistic “objectivism.” What’s needed, I think, is to keep both the subjective and the objective poles of this problem in mind and *sustain the contradiction* (i.e., *live* the contradiction in all its painful ambiguity and antagonism) throughout one’s theoretical and practical activity rather than one-sidedly suppressing either of its extremes.

Collective Action Notes).³ One of the first examples of “class composition” theory may have been Frederick Engels’ *The Condition of the Working Class in England* in 1845.

You Can’t Blow Up a Social Relation

These analyses are a far cry from the economic determinism of much Marxist “theory.” It’s from the perspective of this kind of class-composition analysis that I speak of the “historical necessity” which conditions the existence of social groups. This necessity is, ultimately, *humanly-generated*, but it appears in an alienated form because it is hijacked by capitalist commodity production. We are not the slaves of impersonal forces — the “economy” or whatever. But nevertheless, the collective human dynamic by which social groups and professions (cops, priests, or activists) emerge out of the division of labor cannot be denied or thrown over by acts of *individual* will, which is the level at which Andrew X addresses the problem.

I fully believe in the ability of people collectively to change the conditions of their lives in the most radical ways. But to abolish specific social groups such as activists requires a serious theoretical as well as practical attempt to come to grips with and intervene in the

³ Unfortunately Price’s anti-activist impulses lead him to shy away from acknowledging the necessity of his own theoretical efforts. At the end of his impressive article, he advances a proposal for networks of small groups organized around attention to “everyday” struggles, workers inquiries, and local newsletters incorporating the CLR James-style “full fountain pen” approach. But *Collective Action Notes* itself — as a publication and a project — stands distinctly outside the scope of Price’s proposals. *CAN* is self-consciously “theoretical” and communicates mostly with various “militants” rather than with “ordinary workers” (whatever those might be). In other words, Price’s proposals make no mention of this important aspect of *his own actual, concrete practice*. Why not? To be consistent, Price ought either to cease publishing *CAN* or else recast his proposals to make room for the theoretical work which, after all, he’s already doing. (We certainly hope he chooses the latter option.)

gle when we won’t be weirdos and freaks any more but will seem simply to be stating what is on everybody’s minds.

I would say that there’s no “maybe” about the fact that groups espousing “revolutionary” politics find themselves in a marginalized minority during periods when class struggle is at low ebb. Thus, to a certain extent, it is something that can be anticipated and dealt with without the need for much hand-wringing and soul-searching.

Such has been, for example, the position of many council communists and left communists, who recognized the necessarily minoritarian character of their existence throughout this century’s middle decades. An article by Sam Moss entitled “The Impotence of the Revolutionary Group,” published in the council communist publication *International Council Correspondence* in the 1930s, is representative of this point of view. In the article Moss writes:

The working class alone can wage the revolutionary struggle even as it is today waging alone the non-revolutionary class struggle, and the reason that the rebellious class conscious workers band into groups outside the spheres of the real class struggle is only that there is as yet no revolutionary movement within them. Their existence as small groups, therefore, reflects, not a situation for revolution, but rather a non-revolutionary situation. When the revolution does come, their numbers will be submerged within it, not as functioning organizations, but as individual workers.

X-Ray Specs

However, there's also the question of just what sorts of things constitute "struggle." From an "activist" perspective, no doubt such things as bigger and rowdier "carnivals against capital" and ever more militant and dramatic public demonstrations signify evidence of what Andrew X calls "a general upsurge of struggle." But this perspective overlooks a whole layer of more "everyday" forms of resistance — from slacking off, absenteeism, and sabotage, to shopfloor "counter-planning" and other forms of autonomous and "unofficial" organizing — which conventional activists and leftists (including most anarchists) have a bad track record of acknowledging. And this still leaves out all of those modes of struggle which take place beyond the shopfloor, such as various forms of cultural and sexual revolution. Maybe in such places we can find the groundwork of the class power and solidarity that burst forth during the periods of "general upsurge of struggle."

Furthermore, for different groups of workers, there are very specific forms of "everyday" resistance and autonomous organizing which have a close relationship with the very specific ways that surplus value is being extracted from their labor. Perhaps, then, the first steps towards a genuine anti-activism would be to turn towards these specific, everyday, ongoing struggles. How are the so-called "ordinary" workers resisting capitalism at this time? What opportunities are *already* there in their concrete struggles? What networks are *already* being built through their own efforts?

Having a perspective which recognizes this and even orients towards it requires something which doesn't get much mention in Andrew X's article: the need for a *theory* to go with one's practice, a theory that can *think the "subjective" and "objective" simultaneously*,

² This was addressed, however, in a good article in another publication out of Brighton, *undercurrent* #8, in their article "Practice and Ideology in the Direct Action Movement." Available at the *undercurrent* website: www.anti-capital.net or on the KKA website: www.geocities.com

seeing them in all their mutually-conditioning relatedness. In his entire critique of the J18 movement, Andrew X never seems to consider that its inadequacies might be attributed, in part or whole, to the weakness (or outright absence) of its *analysis*.²

We all know that one of the main characteristics of the traditional activist is a disdain for theory — they aren't called *activists* for nothing. We've all heard from those who want to "get on with it" and "build something" or "do something" rather than waste time niggling and nit-picking over something as irrelevant as theory. This is particularly prominent in the United States, where traditional anti-intellectualism (a deeply conservative ideological force in this society) makes activists insecure they'll sound like elitists or petty-bourgeois academics if they engage in theoretical reflection and debate. And, anyway, "ordinary" workers don't do theory, right?

At least that's how activists think about workers. But Marx was pleased that the first French translation of *Capital* was going to appear in serial form because he thought this would make it more affordable for "ordinary" workers, who would then be more likely to read it. Obviously Marx didn't think it was beyond their capacities, nor that its contents were irrelevant to their everyday struggles.

Perhaps Andrew X's inability to identify theory as the real weakness of the activist movement measures the extent to which the author of "Give Up Activism" remains himself locked in the "activist mentality." This timidity about theory is a hidden carry-over from activism which still afflicts many of those who are trying to break with activism.

The kind of theory I have in mind can be found, for example, in various examples of "class composition" analysis, including the works of Sergio Bologna, the earlier Tony Negri, and the Midnight Notes collective, Loren Goldner's *The Remaking of the U.S. Working Class*, or, more recently, Kolinko's investigations of call centers in Germany and Curtis Price's article, "Fragile Prosperity? Fragile Social Peace? Notes on the U.S." (the last two published in the latest