

Towards A Citizens' Militia

a review

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SHOCK! HORROR! It's the basis for most of the non-events that fill the pages of so many British newspapers. Used the most often to spice up the trivial affairs of a newlyweds' honeymoon of horror ("Dad made off with my wife" confesses a distraught groom) or a mother's feeling of hopelessness over her teenager's actions ("Susan shocked me with staying out late"), this SHOCK! HORROR! syndrome of British journalism was recently unleashed when Cienfuegos Press released their latest publication: *Towards A Citizens' Militia: Anarchist Alternatives to NATO and the Warsaw Pact*.

Described as a "Book of Do-it-Yourself Guerrilla War" (*Daily Record*) and "irresponsible" (Belfast *Telegraph*), *Towards A Citizens' Militia*, a 28 page magazine-size pamphlet which explains, in detail, how people might be able to resist and fight against, as the authors put it, "totalitarianism in its various political forms, whether a domestic government or a foreign invader," was presented to 'British Subjects' as a pamphlet produced by cunning and fiendish anarchists who were ready to take away their "freedom" and, heaven forbid, their newspapers! Of course, it was all a lot of guff but like everything else that graces the pages of rags like the *Daily Mirror*, *Daily Record*, the *Sun*, and *Observer*, etc., it provided people with just enough entertaining terror that they could neatly put aside the SHOCK! HORROR! of their daily lives. How could anyone possibly get upset with their own state of affairs when bloodthirsty deviants are threatening world order and Mrs. X's daughter is on the pill!

But like many of the inflated tales that are published in British papers, the reporting of the new Cienfuegos pamphlet does have a basis in reality, even if it's far removed from the main gist of the stories.

"This is one of the most dangerous documents I have ever seen. In the wrong hands it could cause security forces a great deal of harm."

—a spokesman from New Scotland Yard (*Daily Record*, 6/13/80)

In the United Kingdom, like so many other European countries, people are not even permitted to have guns (except the occasional hunting rifle) hence the "protection" of the population is the sole domain of professionals—the police and armed forces. Consequently, anything that might even suggest that this state-run racket be relieved of its monopoly over everyone's lives, as does this pamphlet, will be met with the strongest defensive/offensive measures from top government mobsters.

Separated into three sections, covering everything from organising guerrilla groups to "Fighting Techniques Used By The Enemy While Suppressing Uprisings," this Cienfuegos publication mainly gives insightful information and instructions concerning tactical operations when confronting what could be a superior (numerically and "fire-power"-wise) opponent.

In a world where our decision-making abilities have been eroded and even the wherewithal for taking care of our own bodies has been removed and institutionalised, the re-learning of methods that could help us regain this power and protect it with physical force, if the need be, can only be a plus. Those parts of the pamphlet are all well

and good. It's the sections concerning organisational methods that have brought about many a discussion and argument here at the Fifth Estate.

“We are bound by our social and political beliefs to modes of working that further our goals. The manner in which we carry out our tasks is as important as the task itself. Our means cannot, must not, be separated from our ends. We must create a working model of the new society.”

— from Part 1: Principles of Armed Resistance

With this statement, the authors open the first section of the pamphlet and despite the unsettling bits that imply exemplary actions * —“we must create a working model”—it's refreshing to see this sort of statement rather than the usual racist and authoritarian drivel that accompanies most weapon and combat publications. But the “security” and organization that are necessary, if not inherent, in the types of clandestine groups talked of in the pamphlet, quickly put the well-meaning intentions and desires of the authors in jeopardy.

The authors must have also realised this, for in their introduction they seemingly contradict the previous excerpt by writing, “physical force is a coercive means of attaining an end ... a free society is unlikely to be born from a coercive measure ...” This doesn't mean that the writers and producers of this pamphlet are muddle-headed, but rather it amplifies the contradictions of an unavoidable reality, between a totally authoritarian act: war, and the goal of a “society of freedom and a world of true liberty.”

But while this contradiction is unavoidable in times of revolution, unfortunately any massive social upheaval will probably be one of extreme violence; such violence must be checked by a vision and a goal of a society that will render such violence unnecessary. The nature of clandestine guerrilla groups only complicates the matter.

The fact that a group has to function clandestinely presupposes that there is no general uprising, that the majority of people, for one reason or another, are not taking part in any real social transformation. For that reason a clandestine group needs tight security and in this case, security means police actions—the very actions that the anti-authoritarian group is trying to combat. Consequently, the guerrillas take an already contradictory position—the building of a general uprising through coercive means—and are forced to add to it.

“In larger groups, intelligence functions may be designated to comrades in a position to accomplish these tasks easily (such as a police typist or clerical worker, collection agency or patrol company) or by comrades that hold some other special position in the community which makes inquiries acceptable. New recruits and all original members of the group should be investigated thoroughly. If someone objects to a background investigation, it is really unlikely that they might be trusted, and should not be allowed any further contact with the group directly. It would be wise to watch them in the community, however, and to attempt to ascertain whether or not they are a police agent.”

—The Functions of Land Combat: intelligence

Certainly any guerrilla group needs the tightest security if its members want to stay off of the gallows, but this could just as easily have been written by any secret police. This definitely adds innumerable complications for those who agree that “Our means cannot, must not, be separate from our ends.”

It should be obvious to everyone that authoritarian guerrilla organisations like the Red Brigades in Italy or national liberation groups like the Sandinistas in Nicaragua (now the ruling elite in that country) have no problems with the contradictions between “liberation” and authority. For them, “liberation” doesn't mean a “society of freedom and a world of true liberty,” but the taking of state power. Their project is the police and what better spawning grounds for their ideas than in a tightly disciplined clandestine organisation adept in the collection and use of intelligence. No contradiction here for these tyrants and would-be tyrants

But what of people who want a world free of tyrants, free of those rules, regulations, morals and institutions that make our desires for an anti-authoritarian society seem so distant? A social view that “is the only bulwark against authoritarian groups when the upheaval comes”?

Although anarchist and libertarian movements don't suffer from the problems of leaders in the same way as authoritarian movements do, they certainly do suffer from a recurring cult of the personality. Personalities who,

whether they want to or not, take on the character of the benevolent leader, not simply because of their actions, but more through people's willingness to adore them for their "exemplary" actions.

There are many reasons why people have the irrational need to search out a person or group of people to follow, and it's not the object of this article to figure them out, but in discussing the organisation and function of underground groups we cannot, must not, ignore the trap of unwittingly promoting leaders and personality cults that are so common with clandestine groups. Clandestine not only explains a group's relation to the state, but also its relation to the larger population that passively watches its activities. For most people their only interaction with these groups is from hearing of their heroic deeds or reading of their activities, spectacularised by historians and propagandists. There is no better example of this misguided admiration than the cult of the personality that surrounds and smothers the name of the Spanish anarchist Buenaventura Durruti.

This is not to say that guerrilla groups with a libertarian view of the world do not at times play an important role in attempts to transform society or that people should wait until there is a general uprising before they physically confront the state, but rather that we should never lose sight of our desires nor the consequences of the methods we might employ in realising those desires.

Hopefully this new publication from Cienfuegos Press, and this review, will generate an in-depth discussion on how we will organise ourselves in the case of a general uprising or the continued escalation of totalitarianism throughout the world.

I hope, along with the authors, that "The tactics and strategies outlined in this manual may never have to be used, as every act of violence no matter how 'justifiable,' diminishes our humanity—but it is clear to us that the possibility of a conflict such as is postulated (in this pamphlet) does exist (after all, each and every nation state spends a considerable part of its budget on preparing for such an eventuality), and when diplomacy, persuasion, discussion and military coercion have all failed in wars of national domination or struggles for freedom and social justice, then guerrilla warfare and civilian resistance (both armed and non-violent) will be the inevitable outcome in the final stages."

If nothing else, *Towards A Citizens' Militia* may help you stay alive in a violent confrontation.

* This is not to say that one shouldn't attempt to live out his/her social ideals; that should be a given. But those ideals take on a completely different character when one purposely does it for propaganda or consciousness-raising reasons—exemplary/vanguard actions. And by making exemplary acts out of military operations can only help carry on the myth of the guerrilla and the reality of a passive population.

This may seem like I'm reading quite a lot into such a small statement, but this unquestioned belief in model building leads directly to the misbelief that scattered guerrilla actions will pave the way (vanguard?) to a general uprising (as the authors seem to believe). Not only may this lead to defeat for those who would fight for an anti-authoritarian world, but certainly does reinforce vanguard attitudes amongst clandestine guerrilla members and the acceptance of authority by the population at large.

Towards A Citizens' Militia: Anarchist Alternatives to NATO & the Warsaw Pact is available from FE Books for a mere \$3.25.

Other Cienfuegos Press publications are also available from FE Books or from: Cienfuegos, Over The Water, Sanday, Orkney, Scotland—KW17 2BL

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