

# On Class & Solidarity

## An introduction to economy & community

Sunfrog (Andy “Sunfrog” Smith)

2004

“I don’t believe in charity. I believe in solidarity. Charity is so vertical. It goes from the top to the bottom. Solidarity is horizontal. It respects the other person and learns from the other. I have a lot to learn from other people.”

— Eduardo Galeano

The following economy and community section deals at least as much with our visions for different and possibly better realities as it does with our critique of the current and devastating situations within capitalist economic relations. However, we can and should note that the statistics concerning global wealth and poverty are staggering. The elite classes experience unprecedented luxuries while the rest of the world struggles. The working class slips into disastrous debt and the under-class teeters toward catastrophic hunger, disease, and poverty.

Of capitalism’s numerous crimes, perhaps the greatest is the creation of starvation in a world of abundance and the institutionalization of a permanent under-class. (There are many sources to further study stunning and upsetting trends; for one example, several of us have recently read Mike Davis’s “Planet of the Slums” in *New Left Review*, which provides a pungent survey of the problems confronting us.)

The editorial collective members who produce this magazine come from varying class backgrounds, but as North Americans, we currently live mostly middle-class lives, especially in contrast with much of the global south. Whether we are workers or voluntarily underemployed, we share the class-consciousness that unites us all in international antagonism against the rulers. The radical economic proposals we endorse in this journal would not only render the concept of class obsolete but would destroy the ruling class apparatus, thus making all economic oppression impossible. In fact, we advocate not a new economy but a new world beyond economy, beyond barter, beyond exchange.

But in lieu of radical and utopian revolutionary transformation, how do we live from day to day? Can we be honest about the contradictions and compromises that confront those attempting to live our radical ethics? How do we address the vast class inequities that face our communities, the continent, and the world? Certainly, we can call for class war, but how does that manifest itself?

If we openly recognize the limited nature of today’s possible activities and choose those most suited to our values, we need not scoff at or diminish the endeavors of others but recognize that certain steps are necessary to maintain our integrity and humanity in these horrific times.

Voluntary poverty has a vast tradition in the radical subcultures of North America. Permanent or temporary decisions to consume less and live more may have modest impact on others but are often the first step to unlearning class-based bias and neurotic dependence on the alleged necessities of civilized living.

Communal living remains a challenging but exemplary activity for us. As much about a radical commitment to emotional honesty and anti-authoritarian psychology as it is about shared resources, the collective remains a model laboratory for testing new ways of interaction and action.

Many anarchists today have experience in organizing worker collectives and co-ops, building counter-institutions, or participating in existing unions. All of these activities have reformist aspects and social limits, but within the context of surviving in this society, these gestures can often make wage work and daily life less humiliating.

North American radicals always need to look past the confines that race and class impose on our lives. We need to seek alliances beyond our narrow milieu. We also need to understand that one-time acts of symbolic charity are not the same as chiseling out acts of sustainable solidarity.

Last year, several church-type charities went to rescue the residents of a homeless encampment, a brambly backwater hideout on the edges of Murfreesboro, Tenn. Despite the generous offer of temporary homes and part-time jobs, the residents of the tent village refused the charity. Giving several reasons, among them the prerogative of the campers to drink whiskey and fornicate at will.

So vast is the social poverty of suburban piety that poor folk in North America will choose an outsider life of quite marginal freedoms over the phony security of minimum wage servitude. Our revolutionary aspirations need to understand this imperative human hunger for a life more meaningful than mere handouts and food could ever provide.

# fifth Estate

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