The Prehistory of *Post-Scarcity Anarchism:* Josef Weber and the Movement for a Democracy of Content (1947-1964)[1]

MARCEL VAN DER LINDEN

International Institute of Social History
Cruquiusweg 31
1019 AT Amsterdam, The Netherlands
Email: mvl@iisg.nl

Translated from Dutch by Lee Mitzman

ABSTRACT

Murray Bookchin dedicated his celebrated book *Post-Scarcity Anarchism* (1971) in part to 'Josef Weber', who 'formulated more than twenty years ago the outlines of the Utopian project developed in this book'. The present article reconstructs the links between Weber (1901-1959) and Bookchin. It focuses especially on Weber's political theory and on the activities of the international Movement for a Democracy of Content (1947-1964), which he inspired and in which Murray Bookchin participated during a number of years.

Murray Bookchin's *Post-Scarcity Anarchism* has definitely been one of the most influential works on the international generation of 1968. Following the American edition in 1971, translations appeared in Japanese, Spanish, Italian and Chinese. The book has also figured in the discussions of green movements in several countries.

Bookchin dedicated his work in part to 'Josef Weber', who 'formulated more than twenty years ago the outlines of the Utopian project developed in this book'.[2] Who was this Weber? What was his Utopian project? What are the links between Weber's project and Bookchin's early 'social ecology'?

1. ORIGINS

In June 1947 in London the first issue appeared of a journal in German with the unrevealing title *Dinge der Zeit* ('Contemporary Issues'). The editors and

contributing authors used pseudonyms to conceal their identities. In an editorial, they disavowed 'a tradition, the result of which has usually been a crying disparity between word and deed'; they avoided making 'programmatic declarations, solemn assurances or promises', although they admitted having 'a programme or definite views'. They described the journal's common denominator as follows: 'The aim consists in the creation of a world organisation for a democracy of content (sharply differentiated from hitherto existing purely political or formal democracy) which is not to appear as a finished organisation, but to arise under public control.' Such a democracy could exist only 'where every participant has the unimpaired possibility of taking the individual democrat at his word'.

Emphasising their distance from all existing powers, they observed: The editors and friends of *Dinge der Zeit* consist of antifascists who have never accepted any government office (directly or "indirectly") and who have never supported any government propaganda (whether Russian or "democratic").'[3]

This statement revealed at the very least that *Dinge der Zeit* identified neither with the Western elite nor with the Soviet leadership. The feature article by 'Ernst Zander' stressed this point; the author noted the similarity between Hitler and Stalin and even submitted that Hitler 'needed only to adapt to German conditions the lessons of Stalin'.[4] Unlike some later authors, who noted such parallels to exonerate the crimes of the Hitler regime, 'Zander' believed (as Otto Ruhle and others had before him) that both indicated social barbarism. 'That the progressiveness of capitalism, essentially only relative, exclusive, partial, potential, and temporary, turns against itself in the end - as is the case with every organism that has passed its point of maturity - this appears today as a quite evident material fact. Progress turns into unmistakable retrogression, and capitalism, like a leper, rots while still alive [...].'[5]

The effort by the editors and authors of *Dinge der Zeit* to conceal their identities was sometimes a source of annoyance. Dwight Macdonald, a renowned New York critic who served as the journal's American agent for a while,[6] was dismayed to discover that some of those involved were personal acquaintances of his but had never told him of their participation:

I was a little bewildered (and annoyed) to discover recently from a friend that the guiding spirit *of Dinge* lives right here, and that he is some one I've known for years (as well as his group's theoretical output). Why all the mystery? Why doesn't he or one of his friends simply come around and discuss all these practical matters, instead of going through the farcical masquerade of correspondence across the Atlantic? Who are these writers in *Dinge* anyway, and why don't they write under their own names? [...] The heights (or depths) to which this kind of masquerade can go was shown a couple of months ago when one of your group was sitting on my own sofa [...]; the talk came around to *Dinge,* which I praised

highly [...]; I asked him whether he had heard of it, and if he knew anything about the people putting it out. He actually did not tell me a thing, and spoke of it as of something entirely separate from his own political group and ideas![7]

The group responsible for *Dinge der Zeit* has remained somewhat secretive. Even today, decades later, some group members refuse to reveal their cover names.[8]

Who were the forces behind the journal? And who was the 'guiding spirit' mentioned by Macdonald?

Dinge der Zeit was the fruit of an extended learning process rife with conflicts. Most founding members were German political exiles and hailed from the Trotskyist tradition. The central figure was Josef Weber, who was born in Gelsenkirchen in Germany's Ruhr region in 1901.[9] This son of a skilled worker (his father was a tiler, his mother a housewife) did not complete secondary school but later attended university lectures on philosophy and became fascinated with Hegel's ideas. He earned a living as a bandmaster, composer and pianist.[10] Following the abortive November revolution in Germany in 1918 and the murders of Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht, Weber became a member of the new Communist Party. Later, probably at the start of the 1930s, he joined the Trotskyist movement, where he played an important role. In 1933 he fled with his wife Maria Spiegel and their two children via Amsterdam to Paris; here, Weber continued his political activities as a leading member of the German Trotskyists (who united in 1934 in the Internationale Kommunisten Deutschlands or IKD). In 1938 he was part of the tiny group that founded the Fourth International. At the time Trotsky viewed Weber as 'a very good Marxist'.[11] Until 1941 the IKD (of which Weber had by then become a chief leader) adhered to the line of the International Trotskyist movement.[12]

Opinions varied about Weber as an individual. During his exile in France diametrically opposed views were already apparent. While some accused Weber of being narrow-minded and self-centred, lazy and unreliable," others considered him a great figure inclined toward sacrifices. The documents show Weber as a somewhat pedantic and narcissistic self-taught man, who did not consistently fulfil his commitments and sometimes deceived those around him but was highly charismatic and generally dedicated to his ideals.

In exile, however, the IKD progressively moved away from its original views. The clearest striking example was Weber's 'retrogressive movement' theory. This theory's main principle was that capitalism had passed its peak and - because of the labour movement's inability to subvert the system - was experiencing retrogressive change. Its essence (to be described in more detail below) emerged in the early 1940s and was commonly accepted among the small circle of supporters.

During the early 1940s the leadership of the IKD published a few texts that systematically elaborated on this pessimism.[14] A text from 1944, meaningfully entitled 'Capitalist Barbarism or Socialism', described the retrograde process as 'the horrible battle for self-preservation of a society doomed to death'.[15] This battle thrusts 'the masses of the people' back 'into those conditions from which the development of capitalism once redeemed them (in great part by the use of violence): out of slavery, bondage, lack of national independence, industrial dependency and backwardness, into industrial backwardness and dependency, lack of national independence, bondage and slavery'.[16] Averting this course of events would require a democratic revolution, which might later be transformed into a socialist one. These views were considered heretical within the Trotskyist movement and led to a definitive break in 1946.[17]

After abandoning Trotskyism definitively, the 'Weberians' founded a new organisation intended to have chapters worldwide. Initially they envisaged a twofold strategy, aiming to issue both a radical-democratic journal catering for a fairly broad readership and a revolutionary marxist publication addressing a far smaller group of insiders.

The 'democratic' journal, fondly known as 'Aunt Demo', was to be free of political gibberish. The authors were expected to 'state everything that needed to be said while avoiding certain turns of phrase'.[18] Contrary to the publications for insiders, the 'democratic' magazine would steer clear of 'operations based exclusively on tenets'.[19]

Both interested readers and the authorities were to be kept in the dark about the revolutionary group behind the journal. Josef Weber admonished his brother Berni, who was also involved in the project, 'not to speak to anybody about our plans, our journal etc. other than very close friends. Outsiders have no business knowing the different sources of the literature, the driving forces, and the like. Above all, you are not to share our addresses with strangers.'[20]

The original plan to issue a journal for insiders was quickly abandoned to focus all energies on the 'democratic' publication.[21] In bringing the idea to fruition, Weber and his cohorts initially sought out long-standing IKD contacts but quickly included non-Germans with or without a Trotskyist tradition as well. In London the veterans Max Laufer and Fritz Besser received strong support from the former social democrat Ulrich Jacobs and the recent addition Pierre Walter. In New York, aside from established IKD adherents, such as Weber, Georg Mohr, Alex Olsen, Jacob Suhl and others, young Americans in their twenties became involved in the effort, such as 'Paul Ecker', Murray Bookchin, Chester Manes and Phil MacDougal.[22]

After efforts to launch the journal from New York failed, the London group took over the initiative. Jacobs (the son of Monty Jacobs, the well-known drama critic for the *Vossische Zeitung* during the Weimar Republic) became the official owner of Contemporary Press and arranged this publishing company's release of the first issue of *Dinge der Zeit* in June 1947.

2. WEBER'S THEORY

As described above, Weber had become deeply pessimistic as a result of the defeats during the 1920s and 1930s (Stalinism, Nazism). During World War II he consistently maintained that fascist regimes would prevail for some time to come and would not be vanquished through military force: he spoke of 'at least thirty years of fascism in Europe',[23] or even '50 years of fascism in Europe'.[24] After initially continuing the Trotskyist line by advocating the establishment of a new labour movement, he abandoned these politics in 1945/6. In several documents, some published after his death, he elaborated on this view.[25] Weber's general theory may be captured in eight points

First, the labour movement has not achieved the downfall of capitalism and has suffered total bankruptcy as a result of this defeat. '[The] classical workers' movement has perished through the betrayals of the Second and Third International, and will never rise again.'[26] The leaders of unions and so-called workers' parties have been thoroughly corrupted: These bureaucrats gain influence, power, positions, privileges, high salaries, even fortunes; they get well embedded in bourgeois society, lower the intellectual level to zero and sacrifice everything (especially one bit of political liberty after the other) except their positions, until they become either political oppressors themselves (chemically pure example: Stalinism) or the victims of their own policy (fascism), with the further alternative that either the people will dethrone them or that they perish with the system.'[27]

Second, capitalism has passed its peak and has entered a stage of decline and rotting. This trend will lead - barring timely action - to the downfall of human civilisation. The decades following World War I [28] have been a period of 'economic, political and cultural disintegration'.[29] 'If we fail to transform the capitalist mode of production into a socialist mode, barbarism is no longer an abstract threat but assumes the sharply delineated outlines for the doom of all modern society.[30]

Third, this stage of rotting coincides in political and economic respects with a remobilisation of pre-modern and early-modern forms of capitalism. Emerging in the nineteenth century, capitalism integrated various older types of societies (slave societies, feudal societies, etc.): '[Capitalism] devours many societies and subordinates them to its own structure. This is the first pre-condition of its origin and growth. Conversely, the same pre-condition compels it to affect other societies only partially or to leave them completely untouched. [...] The unevenness and combinations which are encountered are then in part developed, in part levelled, intensified, conserved, varied, combined, modified, systematised and (all in all) *reproduced.'* [31] Throughout capitalism's decay, the features of the older types of societies become more pronounced: 'Decay is *to a certain extent* devolution.' [32] Capitalism now 'seeks support for its self-preservation and falls back upon stages already undergone'.[33]

Fourth, the declining bourgeois society is developing a tendency toward ecological self-destruction. The main dangers include 'atomic and bacteriological war', 'reckless exhaustion of agricultural soil', 'despoliation of forests', 'extermination of fauna', 'so-called erosion or "land cancer"', 'contamination, dangerous to life, of rivers and coasts' and 'production diseases'.[34]

Fifth, the cultural trends accompanying the rotting include an impasse in literature, music, philosophy etc. The level has become 'incomparably low' in philosophical, intellectual and political-moral respects. 'No longer is anything being learned fundamentally and matured organically, but everything is being sniffed at in passing and disposed of with an impertinently "sure" judgement.'[35]

Weber spoke of 'the law of the dwindling force of cognition in bourgeois society'.[36] He believed the ruling classes (which were becoming increasingly anachronistic in historical respects) would each lose interest in true cognition over time, 'since such cognition is dangerous to their very existence'.[37] In political economics this trend was already apparent around 1830, as Marx had noted. He believed it had penetrated all sciences since then. On the one hand, 'the development of the sciences provides more and more reliable data of tremendous fertility', but on the other hand 'the scientists themselves [...] evade important conclusions and turn them into mysticism, metaphysics, idealism and agnosticism'.[38] Thus, declining capitalism became 'the age of science par excellence' and 'the most unscientific [age] through which mankind has ever passed'.[39]

Sixth, the only solution to the present situation is to mobilise the majority of the world population, which derives no benefit from the current changes. Today, a potential surplus exists. The end of the scarcity and poverty in which previous protest movements operated has changed the nature of social protest. 'Our thinking, whether for or against, has for millennia always centred around the problems arising from poverty'.[40] Scarcity consistently coincides with a ruling elite, 'minority-rule, i.e. true rule'.[41] Rebellious movements therefore consist of minorities speaking on behalf of the majority. 'Henceforth the solution of the task falls directly on the overwhelming majority of mankind whose interests increasingly coalesce and can be reduced to a common denominator socially as well as nationally and internationally.'[42]

Seventh, the mobilisation can and must emerge as a worldwide movement for a democracy of content. Such a movement must originate from a deliberate and purposeful struggle against every internal bureaucratisation, since 'The modern misery is the work of the Labour bureaucracy. [...] [L]ong bitter experience has confirmed the old popular belief that *all* parties are no good!'[43] 'In practice, therefore, the demand arises that political organisation in the traditional sense be destroyed.'[44] The new party should be an anti-party. The anti-party has no property, no apparatus, no by-laws, no fixed division of labour, discipline or official position. '[The] democratic movement achieves a relation to all things which is determined purely by content.'[45]

The Polis should be the foundation of the new movement. This is 'not an institution of the *state* but an assembly of citizens with equal rights who come voluntarily together for common deliberation, everybody speaks as it is given to him [sic] and how he [sic] pleases'.[46] The participants in the Polis educate each other. 'Everybody *places freely* at the disposal of the assembly what he [sic] has to offer of knowledge, advice, experience, proposals, critiques, ideas, etc.; the assembly discusses all of it, deliberates in the eye of the public and decides on acceptance or refusal.'[47]

The substance of a democracy of content becomes clear if one compares it with formal democracy. 'In capitalist democracy, the "right to work" is proclaimed without considering whether there are sufficient jobs or whether these will be lost through crises, rationalisation, restriction of production, etc. This abstract "claim" to work reduces itself in practice at best to the tautology that everybody has the right to work if - there is work, that is to say, capitalist work.'[48]

Eighth, the movement for a democracy of content should accommodate a comprehensive critique of the existing situation and should devise a concrete democratic alternative (a plan) for the present capitalism. Extracting the world from the crisis is 'a mere measure of administration', as the material conditions for a better society are present. The political-theoretical discussion is becoming less ideological: 'The position with regard to theoretical dispute is essentially the same as that of the practitioner who is engaged in saving mother and child by a Caesarean operation and no longer discusses whether historical materialism or Christianity is the correct doctrine.'[49]

'A plan for a rational society must not only show that satisfaction of the basic needs of modern man is possible on the given level of production in all branches but that other fundamental problems too are immediately solvable.'[50] '[If] the direct goal of a plan is to satisfy the needs of modern man with what is at hand under present conditions, intimately connected with it are the preservation of our resources, the repair of the damage done, the restoration of healthful conditions of life (literally the detoxification of our environment) and production on an enlarged basis.'[51]

3. THE ACHIEVEMENTS OF THE MOVEMENT FOR A DEMOCRACY OF CONTENT

Organisationally, the group - which called itself Movement for a Democracy of Content - got off to a good start. In the summer of 1948 the first issue appeared of *Contemporary Issues, Dinge der Zeit*'s English-language counterpart. In New York this new publication gave rise to first one and later two weekly discussion groups. A long-term support group arose in London as well in the late 1940s.

Following *Dinge der Zeit's* forceful publicity intervention in the German campaign against remilitarisation, readers in Cologne and Gelsenkirchen formed a circle of friends of *Dinge der Zeit* in Germany in late 1951.[52] Individual supporters were also active in Zurich, Boston and a few other cities

The assorted local groups applied the principles of democracy of content as best they could.[53] In addition to convening for discussions, the local branches engaged in many political actions. They distributed large numbers of pamphlets about various current issues, often focusing on the arms race, the danger of atomic warfare and colonialism.

The New York groups achieved their climax in 1956/7 during a solidarity campaign for the Hungarian rebels. The campaign's tone reflected a leaflet by Murray Bookchin urging the U.S. government to arm the rebels immediately. 'Guns, tanks, artillery should be poured across every available border and dropped from the skies.'[54] The appeal pleased some readers and especially the Hungarian refugees. Bookchin was sent on a tour from New York to Boston and around New England. Turnout at meetings was high.[55]

Contacts in South Africa led to a major expansion of the Movement for a Democracy of Content. In June 1947 Weber had received a visit from Vincent Swart and his wife Lilian (nee Kleinman) from Johannesburg. Both had been active in the Workers International League (WIL), a South-African Trotskyist faction that had participated in the Council of Non-European Trade Unions. In early 1946 the Swarts had left the WIL and were in search of a new political affiliation.[56] Weber had little difficulty winning them over. 'The Swarts', he wrote, 'have abandoned their previous views on the activities and organisational structures necessary for their country. We should therefore establish cooperation immediately. If all goes well, we will sooner or later have a chapter "down under".'[57]

Vincent and Lilian Swart initially settled in London, where they supported the local group in many ways. They are believed to have returned to South Africa in 1951[58] to establish a new section.[59] With help from pre-existing contacts they recruited several black activists, among whom the law student Dan Mokonyane was probably the most important.

The group from Johannesburg soon became involved in local social conflicts, especially the famous bus boycott in the Alexandra township in 1957. The instigation was the considerable rate hike announced by the PUTCO bus company early that year. The black inhabitants of Alexandra, who depended on buses to get to work nine miles away, called a boycott under the motto *Azikwelwa!* (We Will Not Ride!). For three months most people in the boycott walked to and from work every day. The struggle was coordinated by the hastily established Peoples' Transport Committee of 24 persons, who represented six local interest groups. The Movement for a Democracy of Content (MDC) was one of those six groups and contributed three members: Dan Mokonyane, Simon Noge and Arthur Magerman. Mokonyane was initially Publicity Secretary and

later became full Secretary. Every week a mass assembly of hundreds or thousands of participants met in the township to discuss the situation. The MDC was largely responsible for ensuring a democratic decision-making process

> The boycott platform itself was free. Any black or white person, ideologically orientated or not, Communist or Christian, businessman, landlord or tenant, had unimpaired freedom of speech and participation. Many previously unknown men and women of sterling qualities came to the fore and several African languages which were not usually heard at public meetings were used.[60]

Their struggle culminated in victory. A few years later the experiences in Alexandra were a source of inspiration to the struggles of African-Americans.

The members of the Movement for a Democracy of Content devoted much of their energy to political analysis - although Weber remained the unchallenged genius behind the group. Obviously, they also discussed the issues addressed by many other leftist movements (e.g. international affairs and political economy). Nevertheless, the articles in *Contemporary Issues* and *Dinge der Zeit* differed in two respects. First, the group's members paid less attention to workers' struggles, undoubtedly motivated in part by their loss of faith in the labour movement. Second, many pages were devoted to subjects virtually or entirely overlooked in the mainstream leftist press. One such case concerned the deteriorating quality of goods in general and food in particular.[61] Murray Bookchin provided an enlightening analysis of the data gathered by a committee of the U.S. Congress in 1950 on the use of chemicals in food products. Bookchin used this material to demonstrate that chemical food additives were increasingly widespread, and that there were foods that were 'almost entirely synthetic'.[62] The article instigated an uproar and led among other things to a speech by Lord Douglas in the British House of Lords.[63]

The group's second major focus was the critique of urbanisation and related problems. By 1950 Weber had called his domicile New York 'a stinking monstrosity', which residents were fleeing in their cars. Anticipating Fred Hirsch's *Social Limits to Growth* (1976), he observed that this flight's massive nature doomed it to remain illusionary: 'Together with the fleeing car, tens of thousands of others flee in the same direction, and tens of thousands in different and opposite directions. The smooth roads [...] reproduce the picture of the conveyorbelt [...] which isolates them once again hopelessly from each other.'[64] Bookchin later presented a more elaborate analysis, mentioning the physical limits of the ever-expanding cities (administrative disintegration, crisis in urban transportation, air pollution, slums, shortages of housing, etc.), revealing car traffic's progressive dominance of urban life, and arguing that the only hope lay in the break-up of the modern metropolises: large cities have to be 'pulled down and the growth of urban areas rigorously limited by a "face-to-face democracy"'.[65]

Around the same time Murray Bob also contributed a remarkable insight: 'The car [...] is responsible, among other things, for: insoluble traffic problems, enormous highway fatalities and injuries, the transformation of whole cities into mere traffic arteries or adjuncts thereof. It is also responsible for making public transportation, which every car owner indirectly supports whether or not he ever uses it, increasingly unwieldy and uneconomical. Consider the last point rationally for a moment: Does it make sense to have an enormous number of private vehicles capable of carrying only 4 to 6 people in view of the fact that public vehicles can transport many times that number of passengers per unit?'[66] At the time neither Weber nor the other group members associated car traffic with pollution.

Cultural affairs were covered in detail as well. In keeping with Weber's theory, the guiding principle was that nearly all modern art represented social decay.[67]

The group's serious consideration of sexual problems was well ahead of the era. John Clarkson argued that sexual repression was the product of 'productive systems under scarcity'. Modern capitalism, however, made 'the immediate transition to an economy of abundance the urgent issue of the day'. This transition paralleled the 'much publicised and deplored "breakdown" in sexual morality', which was not a symptom of 'decay and decadence', but largely a progressive development: 'the "sexual rebellion" constitutes a breakthrough of vital force that refuses to be bound by a strangulated culture'.[68]

4. FRAGMENTATION

Josef Weber died on 16 July 1959. His health had been failing for several years. A year before his death he had returned to Germany, where many later believed he had intended to die.

In retrospect, the movement's heyday had been between 1951 and 1957: starting with the rather successful campaign against German remilitarisation (1951/2), followed by solidarity with the Hungarian uprising (1956), and concluding with the bus boycott in Johannesburg (1957). Toward the end of the 1960s *Dinge der Zeit's* editorial board summarised the later years as follows: The subsequent years were quiet as a graveyard in terms of political activism, the number of contributing readers diminished, understaffing reduced the journal's publication frequency, and the lower frequency led to additional cuts in staff.'[69]

Understandably, the lack of growth gave rise to tensions. Especially in the New York groups, several younger American members felt the Movement was ready for a thorough change in procedure by 1957/8. After Weber's death dissent mounted. Though formally anti-authoritarian, the movement had regarded Josef

Weber as a powerful intellectual leader. His passing left a void, as several adherents had anticipated many years before. By 1949 the London group had noted with shock when Weber suffered a heart attack 'to how little we amount without Jupp [Weber] and how supreme his role is in the organisation. [...] Indeed, Jupp is our absolute spiritual leader'.[70]

Between 1958 and 1964 the movement disintegrated. The first to leave were a few young New York intellectuals, with the brilliant mathematician Jack Schwartz as their chief spokesman. The impetus for their departure was Schwartz's article against dialectical materialism, which the majority believed should not be published in *Contemporary Issues*. The underlying motive appears to have been the position of the dissidents that the Movement was short on theory and did too little to recruit new supporters. The group launched the publication *Cornucopia.*[71] In the early 1960s Jack Schwartz published a book entitled *Lectures on the Mathematical Method in Analytical Economics,* which dealt with economic planning and economic stability and was probably intended as a contribution to the discussion about the World Plan that Weber proposed but never elaborated.[72] A few years later the group was 'absorbed' into the Vietnam movement.[73]

The second secession was caused by the falling out between the London and the New York groups. From the outset London (i.e. primarily Pierre Watter) had been responsible for producing *Contemporary Issues,* but the majority of the New Yorkers felt that the journal appeared too irregularly and was insufficiently accessible to a broad readership. When the production was subsequently transferred to New York, the journal became more 'popular', and the subtitle changed from 'A Magazine for a Democracy of Content' to 'A Magazine for a Rational Society', an open conflict resulted. In 1964 the London members founded their own journal under the old name.[74] The members of the New York group included Helen Klaster Wurf and her husband Harold Wurf, 'Paul Ecker', John Clarkson and Mina Grossman, and, somewhat at a distance, Murray Bookchin.[75] The London group, 'weakened by the bloodletting',[76] revolved around Fritz Besser and Pierre Watter. *Dinge der Zeit* sided with the New Yorkers. The central figures at this end were the other Londoners Max Laufer and Ulrich Jacobs.

The effort by Murray Bob and Phil Macdougal to found a publication in California more attuned to the emerging protest movement led to the third break. The new periodical first appeared in 1964 and was entitled *Despite Everything.* Briefly, it wielded a modest regional influence.

The South Africans went their own way. Despite several setbacks (including frequent arrests and Vincent Swart's death in December 1962), the group continued its admittedly marginal existence.

Around 1967/8 both the New York and the London editions *of Contemporary Issues* ceased publication.[77] *Despite Everything* appeared until about 1971. *Dinge der Zeit* lasted until 1997.

CONCLUSION

Today, the Movement for a Democracy of Content lives on almost exclusively in the memories of a small number of largely elderly former members. The movement's historical location is indeed remarkable. Politically, the deeply pessimistic stance resembles that of the late Frankfurter Schule.[78] In other respects, however, *Dinge derZeit* and *Contemporary Issues* targeted deliberate social change. Organisationally, the pursuit of 'the liberation of [...] the party from the party'[79] reflected a position halfway between trotskyism and anarchism. Such manifestations of ambivalence probably curtailed the movement's influence severely.[80]

Murray Bookchin's intensive participation in the Movement for a Democracy of Content is often ignored. In his great history of anarchism, Peter Marshall writes: 'As a young man [Bookchin] steeped himself in Marxism; first he was a Communist and then a Trotskyist in the 1930s to 1950s [!]. But he was prepared to think against himself and his intellectual masters, and in the sixties emerged as a powerful and controversial anarchist thinker.'[81]

This interpretation, which is representative for much of the topical literature suggests that Bookchin's social ecology was born *ex nihilo.* The myth is especially surprising in light of Bookchin's repeated attributions of the foundations for some of his ideas to Josef Weber and his movement. During the early 1950s Bookchin often visited Weber every other day; Weber even intended to designate Bookchin as his heir.[82]

Clearly, Bookchin's *Post-Scarcity Anarchism* owes much to Weber's movement. Seven of the eight elements from Weber's analysis are discernible in the work.

- Bookchin emphasises that the labour movement is no longer an agent of revolutionary change in any of its varieties: The class struggle in the *classical* sense has not disappeared; it has suffered a more deadening fate by being co-opted into capitalism.'[83]

- Bookchin, too, notes social disintegration, where 'capitalism returns to its mercantilist origins of a higher level of development andreassumes the state-aided monopolistic form'.[84]

- Bookchin also perceives an ongoing process of ecological self-destruction caused by the 'contradiction between the exploitative organisation of society and the natural environment'.[85]

- Bookchin points out that the end of scarcity has led to a situation that is unprecedented in history. '[The] problem of want and work' is no longer the central focus,[86] and 'the absolute negation of *all* hierarchical forms *as such'* thus becomes materially possible.[87]

- Bookchin observes the need for a new type of revolutionary vanguard organisation 'to propagate [...] *Ideas which promote the concept of self-management'*.[88]

- Bookchin further views the Polis model as a foundation for a new society, in which 'the popular assembly of the local community, convened in a face-to-face democracy, takes over *the fall* management of social life'.[89]

- Bookchin, too, believes that such a future direct democracy will be a 'rational society', where working hours 'could be reduced enormously [...] without losing high productive output' and where the quality of this output 'could be so improved that its durability and usefulness would more than cancel out any reduction in productive capacity'.[90]

These similarities between Bookchin and Weber's respective works are striking. Still, the author of *Post-Scarcity Anarchism* differs from his mentor on *one* significant point. While Weber believes that his 'law of the dwindling force of cognition in bourgeois society' applies for *all* scientific disciplines, Bookchin considers the science of ecology a crucial exception 'that may yet restore and even transcend the liberatory estate of the traditional sciences and philosophies'.[91] By assigning an immanent-critical function to ecology, Bookchin escapes Weber's deeply pessimistic logic. This 'discovery' equips him intellectually to make the transition from 'half-trotskyism' to social anarchism, as ecology and anarchism are in his view related; both 'in their own way, regard authority as inhibitory, as a weight limiting the creative potential of a natural and social situation. Their object is not to *rule* a domain, but to *release* it.'[92]

Bookchin's *partial* deviation from Josef Weber has thus enabled him to become the original thinker he clearly is.[93]

APPENDIX

Some Core Members of the Movement for a Democracy of Content and Their Cover Names

Real name	Cover Name
Fritz Besser (London)	Ernst Most
Murray Bob (New York)	Alan Dutscher
Murray Bookchin (New York)	Lewis Herber
	Robert Keller
	Harry Ludd
	M.S. Shiloh

Real name	Cover Name
	Nathan Davidson (New York)
Virginia Davis (New York)	
	Paul Ecker
Klaus Ephraim (Zurich)	Claude Clausen
	Claude Schwartz
Mina Grossman (New York)	Marian Pearl
Jack Grossman (New York)	Yak
Robert Ilson (New York/London)	John Ball
Ulrich Jacobs (London)	Paul Brass
Max Laufer (London)	Fred Lohenbill
Phil MacDougal (New York)	Asa E. Bain
	Stephen D. Banner
Daniel Mokonyane (Johannesburg)	
Issy Pinchuk (Johannesburg)	David Kemp
Ernst Schein (Zurich)	E.E. Ackermann
Jacob T. Schwartz (New York)	Giacomo Troiano
Jacob Suhl (New York)	
Lilian Kleinman Swart (Johannesburg)	
Vincent Swart (Johannesburg)	
Pierre Watter (London)	Andrew Maxwell
Josef Weber (New York)	Erik Erikson
	Wilhelm Lunen
	Ernst *Zander*
Helen Klaster Wurf (New York)	
Harold Wurf (New York)	

* Real name not revealed for privacy reasons

NOTES

[1] I am indebted to Neville Alexander (Cape Town), Heiner Becker (Bochum), Murray Bookchin (Burlington), 'Paul Ecker' (who wishes to remain anonymous), Klaus Ephraim (Zurich), Ursula Franck (Woodland Hills), Stefan Goch (Gelsenkirchen), Robert Ilson (London), Urs Kalin (Zurich), Arthur Mitzman (Amsterdam), Dan Mokonyane (London), Ernst Schein (Zurich), Stanley Trevor (Dornoch), Pierre Watter (Puigpunyent), Lucien van der Walt (Johannesburg), Dick de Winter (Ridderkerk) and the late Jacob Suhl (Portimao).

[2] Murray Bookchin, *Post-Scarcity Anarchism* (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1971), p.30.

[3] 'Redaktionelle Notiz', *Dinge der Zeit,* 1 (June 1947), p.II.

[4] Ernst Zander, 'Zum Thema Deutschland und die Weltentwicklung', *Dinge der Zeit,* 1 (June 1947), pp.l-16, here 4.

[5] Zander, 'Zum Thema Deutschland', p.7.

[6] Ulrich Jacobs (London) to Dwight Macdonald, 30 December 1947, in: Archive Dinge der Zeit, Schweizerisches Sozialarchiv, Zurich [hereafter SSA], 201.39.4/1.

[7] Macdonald to Jacobs, 1 March 1948. SSA 201.39.1/1948.

[8] I have listed the core members known to me in the appendix.

[9] For a brief biography of Weber, see the introduction of: Joseph Weber, *'Dinge der Zeit'. Kritische Beitrage zu Kultur und Politik* (Hamburg: Argument, 1995), pp. 16-28.

[10] Weber presumably derived his main cover name from a publication for choirmasters: Ernst Zander, *Fuhrer durch die weltliche Chorliteratur mil Orchester. I. Teil: Oratorien und groBe Chorwerke* (Berlin: Deutscher Arbeiter-Sangerbund, 1930).

[11] In a discussion with US-American supporters. *Writings of Leon Trotsky (1937-38)* (New York: Pathfinder, 1970), p.292.

[12] Robert J Alexander, *International Trotskyism, 1929-1985. A Documented Analysis of the Movement* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1991), pp.422-429; Stefan Goch, 'Westdeutsche Trotzkisten im Widerstand gegen den Nationalsozialismus und im Exil', *Internationale Wissenschaftliche Korrespondenz zur Geschichte der deutschen Arbeiterbewegung,* 32 (1996), pp.143-171.

[13] [Georg Scheuer], 'Johre: Notizen zur Psychologie eines "Arbeiterfuehrers"' [stencil, c. 1944], Scheuer Papers, International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam, 430. 'Johre' was Weber's cover name in the Trotskyist movement.

[14] The first important document is dated October 1941: 'Die nationale Frage. Drei Thesen der Genossen der IKD' (19 October 1941), in: *Georg Jungclas 1902-1975. Eine politixche Dokumentation* (Hamburg: Junius, 1980), pp.110-115.

[15] Auslandskomitee der IKD, 'Capitalist Barbarism or Socialism', *The New International,* 10, 9 (September 1944), pp.275-284, here 280.

[16] Ibid, pp.279-280.

[17] See also: AK of the IKD, 'The Crisis of Socialism and How to Overcome If, *Bulletin of the Workers Party,* 1/17 (24 May 1946).

[18] NN [Max Laufer] to Jo [Josef Weber], 11 June 1946. SSA 201.39.1/1946.

[19] Jupp [Weber] to Marcel [Laufer], 17 July 1946. SSA 201.39.1/1946. The idea of a journal like *Dinge der Zeit* was far from new. In the late 1930s in Paris, Weber had conceived the idea of a fully *legal* organ of universal literary expression (even for satire, so-called art etc.). The journal's mission would entail 'replacing the missing radical-bourgeois critique and interceding to our advantage where only a large vacuum exists'.

(Weber to Ottsch [Otto Schussler], 26 October 1941, in: Rodolphe Prager papers, IISH Amsterdam, 152.)

[20] Jupp to Berni, 21 November 1946. SSA 201.39.1/1946.

[21] NN [Laufer] to Joe, 25 April 1946. SSA 201.39.1/1946.

[22] Bookchin claims that '[m]any members of the American group - indeed, most - came to know Weber, directly or indirectly, through my contact with him.' Bookchin had met Weber in December 1944: 'I was a member of the Socialist Workers Party (Fourth International), and became fascinated with Weber's writings, especially "Socialism or Capitalist Barbarism." Then I went into the army. When I came back, I saw him again and became part of the group.' Bookchin to the author, 30 March 1998.

[23] [Scheuer], 'Johre', p.2.

[24] 'Juergen' to 'Marcel' and 'Willy', no date, Scheuer papers, 426, p.1.

[25] 'The Great Utopia', *Contemporary Issues* [hereafter: *CI*], *5* (Winter 1950), pp.3-22 was by far the most important of these documents. Other texts by Weber (using several cover names) include: Ernst Zander, 'Majority and Minority: Reflections and Comments on Stephen Ascot's Contribution', *CI*, 10 (Winter 1952), pp.107-118; Wilhelm Lunen, 'Appeal for an English Edition of Diderot's "Jack the Fatalist"', *CI*, 15 (July-August 1953), pp.149-201; Wilhelm Lunen, The Ring of the Nibelung', *CI*, 19 (August-September 1954), pp. 156-199; Ernst Zander, 'The Campaign Against Remilitarization in Germany', *CI*, 23 (May-June 1955), pp. 170-214; Ernst Zander, 'The Campaign Against Remilitarization in Germany', *CI*, 27 (May-June 1956), pp. 186-235; Wilhelm Lunen, 'The Problem of Social Consciousness in our Time', 31 (October-November 1957),pp.478-528.

His posthumous publications are: Ernst Zander, 'Reflections on "Reflections"', *CI*, 37 (November-December 1959),pp.lO-28; 'An Unfinished Letter [1956]', *CI*, 38 (May-June 1960), pp.92-112; Ernst Zander, 'A Fragment on Chemicals in Food and Other Questions [c. 1952]', *CI*, 39 (August-September 1960), pp.216-240; Ernst Zander, 'On the "Inner Limit" of Capitalism' [c. 1950], *CI*, 40 (February-March 1961),pp.268-302; [Ernst Zander], 'A World Plan for the Solution of Modern Society's Economic and Social Crisis' [c. 1950], *CI*, 41 (May-June 1961), pp.30-34; Ernst Zander and John Clarkson, 'Sex and Society' [exchange 1958-1959], *CI*, 42 (September-October 1961), pp.93-136; Ernst Zander, 'Some Comments on the Organisational Question' [1951], 44 (September-October 1962), pp.260-301.

[26] 'Great Utopia', p.5.

[27] Lunen, 'Ring of the Nibelung', p. 190.

[28] The exact date varies occasionally. 'Appeal for an English Edition', p. 154, mentions 'the historical period from 1912 up to this day'.

[29] Lunen, 'Ring of the Nibelung', p.157.

[30] 'Great Utopia', p.4.

[31] Zander, 'On the 'Inner Limit'', pp.276-277.

[32] *Ibid.,* p.284.

[33] *Ibid.*

[34] 'Great Utopia', p.7.

[35] Lunen, 'Ring of the Nibelung', p. 157.

[36] Lunen, 'Problem of Social Consciousness', p.480.

[37] *Ibid.*

[38] Lunen, The Problem of Social Consciousness', p.481.

[39] *Ibid.,* p.482.

[40] Zander, 'Majority and Minority', p. 107.

[41] Ibid.

[42] 'Great Utopia', p.6.

[43] 'Great Utopia', p. 14.

[44] Ibid.

[45] Ibid, p. 16.

[46] Zander, 'The Campaign Against Remilitarization', *CI*, 27, pp.209-210.

[47] Ibid, p.210.

[48] Zander, 'Majority and Minority', p. 112.

[49] 'Great Utopia', p.6.

[50] [Zander], 'A World Plan', pp.33-34.

[51] Ibid, p.34.

[52] 'Freundeskreis *vonDingederZeitinDeulsch\and'*,*Dinge derZeit,* 10(March 1952), pp.115-116. An evaluation of the anti-militarisation campaign in Germany appears in Paul Brass, The Campaign Against Remilitarization in Retrospect', *CI*, 28 (August-September 1956), pp.257-275.

[53] Individual arrangements nevertheless exempted one group member at another one's expense. This happened with Josef Weber, who was supported for a few years by Chester Manes. Murray Bookchin to the author, 29 March 1998.

[54] 'We Cannot Let Russian Armor Crush the People of Hungary!' [4 November 1956], reprinted in *CI*, 30 (July-August 1957), pp.444-146, here 446.

[55] A few members left the movement because of the campaign. Arthur Mitzman, for example, quit because he objected to working with ultra-rightist exiles.

[56] Baruch Hirson, *Revolutions in My Life* (Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, 1995), pp. 167-201; The Trotskyist Groups in South Africa', *Revolutionary History, 4/*4(1992-93), pp.25-56.

[57] Weber to Laufer, 16 June 1947. SSA 201.39.1/1947.

[58] Marcia Leveson, 'Introduction', in: Vincent Swart, *Collected Poems.* Edited by Marcia Leveson (Johannesburg: Donker, 1981), pp.7-24, here 17.

[59] Former WIL member Issy Pinchuk, a close friend of Vincent Swart, may have propagated the Movement for a Democracy of Content in South Africa before. Pinchuk began contributing articles for *Contemporary Issues* under his cover name David Kemp very early on.

[60] Dan Mokonyane, *Lessons of Azikwelwa. The Bus Boycott in South Africa* (London: Nakong Ya Rena, 1994), p.43. See also Tom Lodge, '"We Are Being Punished Because We Are Poor": The Bus Boycotts of Evaton and Alexandra, 1955-1957', in Philip Bonner (ed.), *Working Papers in Southern African Studies,* Vol. 2 (Johannesburg: Ravan, 1981), pp.258-303; Peter Dreyer, *Martyrs and Fanatics. South Africa and Human Destiny* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1980), pp. 161-170.

[61] This theme recurs throughout Weber's work. One case in point is his complaint about '"white" bread[,] which became a mass product on the basis of industrial farming and baking. From the point of view of nutrition, this product of industrial competition is worthless and even harmful. Through ever finer grinding, all nourishing substances are extracted from the cereals until at last only the "white" remains, the "pure" starch, the quantitative worthlessness. In this way, commodity production achieves the paradox of attaining with inferior products [...] higher profits than with superior ones.' Lunen, 'Ring of the Nibelung', p. 159.

[62] Lewis Herber, 'The Problem of Chemicals in Food', *CI,* 12 (June-August 1952), pp.206-241, here 206.

[63] From the introduction to the German edition of Bookchin's article: Lewis Herber and Gotz Ohly, *Lebensgefahrliche 'Lebensmittel'. Sind unsere Nahrungsmittel noch Lebensmittel?* (Krailing bei Munchen: Hans Georg Muller, 1953). See also 'Lebensgefahrliche "Lebensmittel"', *DingederZeit,* 15(January 1954),pp.108-113,and L. Herber, 'A Follow-up on the Problem of Chemicals in Food', *CI,* 21 (January-February 1955), pp.51-57.
Other articles about related problems were: M. Klerer, 'The Fluoridation Experiment', *CI,* 26 (February-March 1956), 119-167; Alex Scher, 'The Preservation of Foods by Irradiation", *CI,* 35 (October-November 1958), 191-196.

[64] Erik Erikson, 'Critical Review (New York eriksonized)', C/,7(Autumn 1950),pp.229-235, here 233.

[65] Lewis Herber, The Limits of the City", *CI,* 39 (August-September 1960), pp. 191-216, quoted from p.215.

[66] Alan Dutscher, 'Social Life in America', *CI,* 33 (April-May 1958), pp.56-72, here 63.

[67] In a letter to the author (25 January 1998), former member Robert Ilson mentions 'CI's apparent wholesale rejection of 20th-century culture'.

The most important cultural contributions were: S.J. Wyndham, 'Outline for a Critical Approach to T.S. Eliot as Critic', *CI,* 2 (Winter 1948), pp.106-116; Donald R. Pearce, 'The Degradation of Man', *CI,* 5 (Winter 1950), pp.40-45 (the 'crisis in modern literature' is 'a part of the general crisis of our time' [p.45]); Alan Dutscher, 'The Book Business in America', *CI,* 17 (April-May 1954), pp.38-58; Alan Dutscher, 'American Higher Education', *CI,* 25 (October-November 1955), pp.25-67; Perspicax, The New American Painting', *CI,* 37 (November-December 1959), pp.60-62 (The relationship between 'the alleged art' and 'the professional critic' is 'mutual complicity in senseless production for the sake of senseless production.' [p.61]); Francis Russell, The Cantos of Ezra Pound', *CI,* 38 (May-June 1960), pp. 117-142; Alan Dutscher, Toward the Re-Structuring of Education', *CI,* 43 (April-May 1962), pp.227-236.

[68] John Clarkson, 'The Function of Anti-Sex', *CI,* 34 (July-August 1958), pp.75-105, here 85, 103-105; E.I. Pye, 'Psychology and Society: Comments on the Views of Clarkson and Fromm', *Ibid.,* pp. 105-113; Alan Dutscher, The Limits of Psychoanalysis: An Answer to Clarkson and Pye', *CI,* 36 (May-June 1959), pp.252-263; Zander & Clarkson, 'Sex and Society'. See also Paul Ecker, 'Sex as a Problem', *CI,* 36 (May-June 1959), pp.264-275.

[69] The editors, 'Korrespondenz", *Dinge der Zen,* 34 (March 1969), pp.87-88.

[70] London Group to 'Liebe Freunde, lieber Jupp!', 17 June 1949. SSA 201.39.1/1949.

[71] *Cornucopia* pamphlets *included: A Political Declaration* (May 1960); *Report on Cuba* (July 1961); G. Troiano, *The Automated Crusoe: Chronic Unemployment vs. Abundance* (n.d.).

[72] Jacob T. Schwartz, *Lectures on the Mathematical Method in Analytical Economics* (New York: Gordon and Breach, 1961). Though the book does not refer to *Contemporary Issues* or *Cornucopia,* it defends the remarkable position that 'the rise of Keynesian theories signals the historical maturity of the world economy; that is, the capacity of the economy to produce general plenty' (p.277). See also the review by Kenneth J. Arrow in *Econometrica,* 30 (1962), pp.833-834. A later relevant work by Schwartz was: *Theory of Money* (New York: Gordon and Breach, 1965).

[73] Robert Ilson to the author, 25 January 1998.

[74] Andrew Maxwell, *'An Accounting', Contemporary Issues. Magazine for a Democracy of Content,* 48 (September 1964), pp.2-14.

[75] Bookchin had drawn away from *Contemporary Issues* for personal reasons, roughy since 1957, but he stayed in touch.

[76] Ernst Most, 'Empty Words or Firmness of Character: A Letter to the Editors *of Dinge der Zeit', Contemporary Issues* (London), 50 (June 1966), pp.73-78, here 73.

[77] In 1969-1971 the London edition was followed briefly by a few issues of a journal entitled *Confrontation.* Jacob Suhl described the disintegration of the New York group as follows: '[...] one part of the group was for unconditional withdrawal of the American troops from Vietnam, as did the bulk of the anti-war movement. The other part of our group was not for withdrawal. To them Ho was as bad as Johnson and as Chester [Manes] would say, sometimes you cannot choose any alternative. The personal acrimony, the impending split, and our isolation from the actual political movements, in short, our lack of political success, moved Helen Wurf, the owner of the style and title Contemporary Issues, to decree dissolution [...]. End of NY CI.' Jacob Suhl to Bob [Ilson], 30 November 1996 (copy in my possession).

[78] The only modern thinkers that Weber appreciated were the members of the Frankfurter Schule, especially Theodor Adorno. Weber believed that the output of the Institute of Social Research stood on a 'high technical level', despite some serious 'blunders' (Lunen, 'Ring of the Nibelung', pp.160, 167). A brief response from Adorno appears in: 'Notiz zur Erstausgabe' (Easter 1952), in *Versuch iiber Wagner,* in *Gesammelte Schriften,* Vol. 13 (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 1971), p.503. See also Ernst Most, 'On the Death of T.W. Adorno', *CI* (London), 54 (July 1970), pp.65-78.

[79] 'Great Utopia', p. 19.

[80] For an effort to critique the movement's theoretical principles, see Pierre Watter's *Towards a Critique of Production. A Philosophical Inquiry* (Pittsburgh: Dorrance, 1996).

[81] Peter Marshall, *Demanding the Impossible. A History of Anarchism* (London: Harper Collins, 1992), p.602.

[82] Bookchin to the author, 8 June 1996; 30 March 1998.

[83] Bookchin, *Post-Scarcity Anarchism,* p. 180.

[84] *Ibid.,* p. 185.

[85] *Ibid.,* p.38.

[86] *Ibid.,* p.92.

[87] *Ibid.,* p.40.

[88] Id p.216; also p.167.

[89] *Ibid.,* p. 106; also pp.79-81, 156-159.

[90] *Ibid.,* p.236.

[91] *Ibid.,* p.58.

[92] *Ibid.,* pp.77-78.

[93] Murray Bookchin attributes far less importance to Weber's influence on *Post-Scarcity Anarchism* than I do here: 'I dedicated *Post-Scarcity Anarchism* to Weber partly for sentimental reasons, and partly because, almost from the very first, he had made a major issue of the fact that in principle technological development had reached the point where scarcity and onerous toil could be eliminated. Hence the term 'post-scarcity', which I coined in the 1960s, properly emphasised a view that Weber and I shared: of an economy of material abundance. But this view was not limited to Weber and myself. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, it was being discussed very widely in the United States, even in social-democratic circles.' Bookchin to the author, December 19, 1998.