

A text dump on Wildcat

1991–1998

Contents

An Introduction & a Critique	6
The Wildcat group's various phases	7
The Left Overs: How Fascists Court the Post-Left	8
Chapter 1: The Early Composition of Fascist Individualism	8
Chapter 2: The Creation of the Post-Left	11
Chapter 3: The Fascist Creep	14
Conclusion	18
 Issue 9 — 1986	 20
Revolution, or Self-Managed Capitalism?	22
Anarchism and the Spanish 'Revolution'	22
Self-Managed Capitalism	23
Organising the Rural Collectives	23
Free Access	24
The Wages System	24
Family Values	25
The Proliferation of Money	25
The Exchange of Goods	25
Market Competition	26
The End of the Collectives	26
The End of Anarchism	26
 Issue 15 — Autumn 1991	 28
Ozimandias — Review: Against His-story! Against Leviathan! by	
Fredy Perlman	30
Rock of Stages	30
Stage Fright	32
Fredy vs. Fred	33

The Hunt for Red October	35
Majority Ruhles	36
We Got the Power	41
The Firehose	43
Loyal Oppositions	44
For Anti-state Communism	46
 Issue 16 — Autumn 1992	 47
Bomber Harris Joins Anti-Fascist Action	49
Critique of autonomous anti-fascism	51
Hands Off Columbus!	60
Earth First! — Which Planet Are They On?	61
10 Days That Didn't Save the Earth	61
Support the Arizona 4!	64
Five Go Job-Hunting	65
Good old-fashioned trade unionism	66
Chartism	69
The Insurrectionary Tradition	70
The Luddites	71
The Recuperators	75
 Issue 17 — Spring 1994	 78
How Wild is Wildcat?	80
Introduction	80
The Left and Rights	84
1,000 Years of Resistance	86
Avanti!	89
Horny	90
Vorwaarts	90
Somalia: Development by other means	92
The War in Somalia	92
Another war for oil	93
Brutality	94

Smoked pork...	94
...and powdered milk	96
Development	97
 Issue 18 — Summer 1996	 100
 The new bad guys	 102
 Unmasking the Zapatistas	 106
Reasons for the Uprising	107
Nature of Mexican Politics	111
Don't Worry, Be Happy	116
 Against Prisons	 117
Against Judgement	119
Against Laws	123
Appendix: Wildcat's Reply — Making An Omelette Without Breaking Eggs .	125
 New world order: rhetoric and reality	 128
What is Imperialism?	135
 Pamphlets	 140
 Against Democracy	 141
What is Democracy?	141
Community of Struggle	144
Communist Society	145
 Outside and Against the Unions	 146
Introduction	146
That Speech	146
Anarcho-Leninism	147
The Unions	148
What Are Unions?	149
Corporatism	150
Degenerates	151
Bureaucracy	152
Base Unionism	153
The NUM	153
But What's the Alternative...?	155

Glossary of British Trade Unions mentioned above:	155
Misc.	156
Ted Kaczynski is no Madman	157
The Mass Psychology of Anti-Fascism	159
Gaza and Gilad Atzmon	163
Gilad Atzmon — Freedom of Speech: the right to equate Gaza with Auschwitz	164
Liberty and Authority	164
Freedom of Speech and Freedom of Thought	164
The Harm Principle	166
The Offence Principle and Free Speech	166
The Jewish Lobbies and the Liberal Discourse	167
Auschwitz Versus Gaza in the light of Political Correctness . .	167
Shedding Light on <i>Darkness in El Dorado</i>	170
Hobbes and Rousseau	170
Tierney's Data: the Raw and the Cooked	176
Chagnon — an Unlikely Mengele	179
Conclusion	183
Links and References	184
Reply by John Zerzan	185
Correspondence with Fifth Estate Magazine	187
On domestic terrorists in the US	187
On the Balkans	189
More Debate on the Balkans	189
On Keeping Our Critical Faculties	190
Split	197
Obituary?	198
Teachers	200
Riots	200
Reactionary Sections of the Working Class	201
Workers' Democracy	201
Subversion Issue 1	204
Introducing Subversion	204

An Introduction & a Critique

The Wildcat group's various phases

Source: <www.libcom.org/article/wildcat-journal-uk>

Early 80s: A free 2-sided Bulletin produced by a temporary collective made up of dissident members of the autonomous Manchester Solidarity Group and similar dissident members of the Manchester local ICC (World Revolution) group plus a couple of local anarchist communists.

Mid 80s: a large format newspaper. (Issues 1–10: 1984–1987)

A text dated March 1988 about a split in the group appears in Communist Bulletin #13 (p33). Some members of Wildcat then formed Subversion.

Late 80s: Issues 11–14 were produced in London. The “anti-democracy” phase.

1990s: From issue 15 onwards Wildcat developed an anti-civilisation (“primitivist”) position which culminated in an “abandonment of Marxism” in issue 17.

2000s: After the publication of the final issue (#18), Wildcat was based in America. The online texts by the remaining member became increasingly controversial and reactionary (for example promoting the work of Gilad Atzmon and David Irving).

(The group were internationalists and called *Wildcat* and not “Wildcat UK”. There is another, different, internationalist communist group called Wildcat which is based in Germany and known for convenience on Libcom as Wildcat (Germany).)

The Left Overs: How Fascists Court the Post-Left

Date: March 29, 2017

A few months ago, the radical publication, Fifth Estate, solicited an article from me discussing the rise of fascism in recent years. Following their decision to withdraw the piece, I accepted the invitation of Anti-Fascist News to publish an expanded version here, with some changes, at the urging of friends and fellow writers.

In Solidarity, ARR

Chapter 1: The Early Composition of Fascist Individualism

A friendly editor recently told me via email, “if anti-capitalism and pro individual liberty [sic] are clearly stated in the books or articles, they won’t be used by those on the right.” If this were true, fascism simply would vanish from the earth. Fascism comes from a mixture of left and right-wing positions, and some on the left pursue aspects of collectivism, syndicalism, ecology, and authoritarianism that intersect with fascist enterprises. Partially in response to the tendencies of left authoritarianism, a distinct antifascist movement emerged in the 1970s to create what has become known as “post-left” thought. Yet in imagining that anti-capitalism and “individual liberty” maintain ideological purity, radicals such as my own dear editor tend to ignore critical convergences with and vulnerabilities to fascist ideology.

The post-left developed largely out of a tendency to favor individual freedom autonomous from political ideology of left and right while retaining some elements of leftism. Although it is a rich milieu with many contrasting positions, post-leftists often trace their roots to individualist Max Stirner, whose belief in the supremacy of the European individual over and against nation, class, and creed was heavily influenced by philosopher G.W.F. Hegel. After Stirner’s death in 1856, the popularity of collectivism and neo-Kantianism obscured his individualist philosophy until Friedrich Nietzsche raised its profile again during the later part of the century. Influenced by

Stirner, Nietzsche argued for the overcoming of socialism and the “modern world” by the iconoclastic, aristocratic philosopher known as the “Superman” or “*übermensch*.”

During the late-19th Century, Stirnerists conflated the “Superman” with the assumed responsibility of women to bear a superior European race—a “New Man” to produce, and be produced by, a “New Age.” Similarly, right-wing aristocrats who loathed the notions of liberty and equality turned to Nietzsche and Stirner to support their sense of elitism and hatred of left-wing populism and mass-based civilization. Some anarchists and individualists influenced by Stirner and Nietzsche looked to right-wing figures like Russian author Fyodor Dostoevsky, who developed the idea of a “conservative revolution” that would upend the spiritual crises of the modern world and the age of the masses. In the words of anarchist, Victor Serge, “Dostoevsky: the best and the worst, inseparable. He really looks for the truth and fears to find it; he often finds it all the same and then he is terrified... a poor great man...”

History’s “great man” or “New Man” was neither left nor right; he strove to destroy the modern world and replace it with his own ever-improving image—but what form would that image take? In Italy, reactionaries associated with the Futurist movement and various romantic nationalist strains expressed affinity with the individualist current identified with Nietzsche and Stirner. Anticipating tremendous catastrophes that would bring the modern world to its knees and install the New Age of the New Man, the Futurists sought to fuse the “destructive gesture of the anarchists” with the bombast of empire.

A hugely popular figure among these tendencies of individualism and “conservative revolution,” the Italian aesthete Gabriele D’Annunzio summoned 2,600 soldiers in a daring 1919 attack on the port city of Fiume to reclaim it for Italy after World War I. During their exploit, the occupying force hoisted the black flag emblazoned by skull and crossbones and sang songs of national unity. Italy disavowed the imperial occupation, leaving the City-State in the hands of its romantic nationalist leadership. A constitution, drawn up by national syndicalist, Alceste De Ambris, provided the basis for national solidarity around a corporative economy mediated through collaborating syndicates. D’Annunzio was prophetic and eschatological, presenting poetry during convocations from the balcony. He was masculine. He was Imperial and majestic, yet radical and rooted in fraternal affection. He called forth sacrifice and love of the nation.

When he returned to Italy after the military uprooted his enclave in Fiume, ultra-nationalists, Futurists, artists, and intellectuals greeted D’Annunzio as a leader of the growing Fascist movement. The aesthetic ceremonies and radical violence contributed to a sacralization of politics invoked by the spirit of Fascism. Though Mussolini likely saw himself as a competitor to D’Annunzio for the role of supreme leader, he could not deny the style and mood, the high aesthetic appeal that reached so many through the Fiume misadventure. Fascism, Mussolini insisted, was an anti-party, a movement. The Fascist Blackshirts, or *squadristi*, adopted D’Annunzio’s flare, the black uniforms, the skull and crossbones, the dagger at the hip, the “devil may care” attitude expressed by the anthem, “*Me ne frego*” or “I don’t give a damn.” Some of those who participated in

the Fiume exploit abandoned D'Annunzio as he joined the Fascist movement, drifting to the Arditi del Popolo to fight the Fascist menace. Others would join the ranks of the Blackshirts.

Originally a man of the left, Mussolini had no difficulty joining the symbolism of revolution with ultranationalist rebirth. "Down with the state in all its species and incarnations," he declared in a 1920 speech. "The state of yesterday, of today, of tomorrow. The bourgeois state and the socialist. For those of us, the doomed (*morituri*) of individualism, through the darkness of the present and the gloom of tomorrow, all that remains is the by-now-absurd, but ever consoling, religion of anarchy!" In another statement, he asked, "why should Stirner not have a comeback?"

Mussolini's concept of anarchism was critical, because he saw anarchism as prefiguring fascism. "If anarchist authors have discovered the importance of the mythical from an opposition to authority and unity," declared Nazi jurist, Carl Schmitt, drawing on Mussolini's concept of myth, "then they have also cooperated in establishing the foundation of another authority, however unwillingly, an authority based on the new feeling for order, discipline, and hierarchy." The dialectics of fascism here are twofold: only the anarchist destruction of the modern world in every milieu would open the potential for Fascism, but the mythic stateless society of anarchism, for Mussolini, could only emerge, paradoxically, from a self-disciplining state of total order.

Antifascist anarchist individualists and nihilists like Renzo Novatore represented for Mussolini a kind of "passive nihilism," which Nietzsche understood as the decadence and weakness of modernity. The veterans that would fight for Mussolini rejected the suppression of individualism under the Bolsheviks and favored "an anti-party of fighters," according to historian Emilio Gentile. Fascism would exploit the rampant misogyny of men like Novatore while turning the "passive nihilism" of their vision of total collapse toward "active nihilism" through a rebirth of the New Age at the hands of the New Man.

The "drift" toward fascism that took place throughout Europe during the 1920s and 1930s was not restricted to the collectivist left of former Communists, Syndicalists, and Socialists; it also included the more ambiguous politics of the European avant-garde and intellectual elites. In France, literary figures like Georges Bataille and Antonin Artaud began experimenting with fascist aesthetics of cruelty, irrationalism, and elitism. In 1934, Bataille declared his hope to usher in "room for great fascist societies," which he believed inhabited the world of "higher forms" and "makes an appeal to sentiments traditionally defined as exalted and noble." Bataille's admiration for Stirner did not prevent him from developing what he described decades later as a "paradoxical fascist tendency." Other libertarian celebrities like Louis-Ferdinand Céline and Maurice Blanchot also embraced fascist themes—particularly virulent anti-Semitism.

Like Blanchot, the Nazi-supporting Expressionist poet Gottfried Benn called on an anti-humanist language of suffering and nihilism that looked inward, finding only animal impulses and irrational drives. Existentialist philosopher and Nazi Party member, Martin Heidegger, played on Nietzschean themes of nihilism and aesthetics in his phe-

nomenology, placing angst at the core of modern life and seeking existential release through a destructive process that he saw as implicit in the production of an authentic work of art. Literary figure Ernst Jünger, who cheered on Hitler's rise, summoned the force of "active nihilism," seeking the collapse of the civilization through a "magic zero" that would bring about a New Age of ultra-individualist actors that he later called "Anarchs." The influence of Stirner was as present in Jünger as it was in Mussolini's early fascist years, and carried over to other members of the fascist movement like Carl Schmitt and Julius Evola.

Evola was perhaps the most important of those seeking the collapse of civilization and the New Age's spiritual awakening of the "universal individual," sacrificial dedication, and male supremacy. A dedicated fascist and individualist, Evola devoted himself to the purity of sacred violence, racism, anti-Semitism, and the occult. Asserting a doctrine of the "political soldier," Evola regarded violence as necessary in establishing a kind of natural hierarchy that promoted the supreme individual over the multitudes. Occult practice distilled into an overall aristocracy of the spirit, Evola believed, which could only find expression through sacrifice and a Samurai-like code of honor. Evola shared these ideals of conquest, elitism, sacrificial pleasure with the SS, who invited the Italian esotericist to Vienna to indulge his thirst for knowledge. Following World War II, Evola's spiritual fascism found parallels in the writings of Savitri Devi, a French esotericist of Greek descent who developed an anti-humanist practice of Nazi nature worship not unlike today's Deep Ecology. In her rejection of human rights, Devi insisted that the world manifests a totality of interlocking life forces, none of which enjoys a particular moral prerogative over the other.

Chapter 2: The Creation of the Post-Left

It has been shown by now that fascism, in its inter-war period, attracted numerous anti-capitalists and individualists, largely through elitism, the aestheticization of politics, and the nihilist's desire for the destruction of the modern world. After the fall of the Reich, fascists attempted to rekindle the embers of their movement by intriguing within both the state and social movements. It became popular among fascists to reject Hitler to some degree and call for a return to the original "national syndicalist" ideas mixed with the elitism of the "New Man" and the destruction of civilization. Fascists demanded "national liberation" for European ethnicities against NATO and multicultural liberalism, while the occultism of Evola and Devi began to fuse with Satanism to form new fascist hybrids. With ecology and anti-authoritarianism, such sacralization of political opposition through the occult would prove among the most intriguing conduits for fascist insinuation into subcultures after the war.

In the '60s, left-communist groups like Socialisme ou Barbarie, Pouvoir ouvrier, and the Situationists gathered at places like bookstore-cum-publishing house, La Vielle Taupe (The Old Mole), critiquing everyday life in industrial civilization through art

and transformative practices. According to Gilles Dauvé, one of the participants in this movement, “the small milieu round the bookshop La Vieille Taupe” developed the idea of “communisation,” or the revolutionary transformation of all social relations. This new movement of “ultra-leftists” helped inspire the aesthetics of a young, intellectual rebellion that culminated in a large uprising of students and workers in Paris during May 1968.

The strong anti-authoritarian current of the ultra-left and the broader uprising of May '68 contributed to similar movements elsewhere in Europe, like the Italian Autonomia movement, which spread from a wildcat strike against the car manufacturer, Fiat, to generalized upheaval involving rent strikes, building occupations, and mass street demonstrations. While most of Autonomia remained left-wing, its participants were intensely critical of the established left, and autonomists often objected to the ham-fisted strategy of urban guerrillas. In 1977, individualist anarchist, Alfredo Bonanno, penned the text, “Armed Joy,” exhorting Italian leftists to drop patriarchal pretensions to guerrilla warfare and join popular insurrectionary struggle. The conversion of Marxist theorist, Jacques Camatte, to the pessimistic rejection of leftism and embrace of simpler life tied to nature furthered contradictions within the Italian left.

With anti-authoritarianism, ecologically-oriented critiques of civilization emerged out of the 1960s and 1970s as significant strains of a new identity that rejected both left and right. Adapting to these currents of popular social movements and exploiting blurred ideological lines between left and right, fascist ideologues developed the framework of “ethno-pluralism.” Couching their rhetoric in “the right to difference” (ethnic separatism), fascists masked themselves with labels like the “European New Right,” “national revolutionaries,” and “revolutionary traditionalists.” The “European New Right” took the rejection of the modern world advocated by the ultra-left as a proclamation of the indigeneity of Europeans and their pagan roots in the land. Fascists further produced spiritual ideas derived from a sense of rootedness in one’s native land, evoking the old “blood and soil” ecology of the German *völkische* movement and Nazi Party.

In Italy, this movement produced the “Hobbit Camp,” an eco-festival organized by European New Right figure Marco Tarchi and marketed to disillusioned youth via Situationist-style posters and flyers. When Italian “national revolutionary,” Roberto Fiore, fled charges of participating in a massive bombing of a train station in Bologna, he found shelter in the London apartment of Tarchi’s European New Right colleague, Michael Walker. This new location would prove transformative, as Fiore, Walker, and a group of fascist militants created a political faction called the Official National Front in 1980. This group would help promote and would benefit from a more avant-garde fascist aesthetic, bringing forward neo-folk, noise, and other experimental music genres.

While fascists entered the green movement and exploited openings in left anti-authoritarian thought, Situationism began to transform. In the early 1970s, post-Situationism emerged through US collectives that combined Stirnerist egoism with collectivist thought. In 1974, the For Ourselves group published *The Right to Be Greedy*, inveighing against altruism while linking egoist greed to the synthesis of social identity

and welfare—in short, to surplus. The text was reprinted in 1983 by libertarian group, Loompanics Unlimited, with a preface from a little-known writer named Bob Black.

While post-Situationism turned toward individualism, a number of European ultra-leftists moved toward the right. In Paris, La Vieille Taupe went from controversial views rejecting the necessity of specialized antifascism to presenting the Holocaust as a lie necessary to maintain the capitalist order. In 1980, La Vieille Taupe published the notorious *Mémoire en Défense contre ceux qui m'accusent de falsifier l'histoire* by Holocaust denial, Robert Faurisson. Though La Vieille Taupe and founder, Pierre Guillaume, received international condemnation, they gained a controversial defense from left-wing professor, Noam Chomsky. Even if they have for the most part denounced Guillaume and his entourage, the ultra-leftist rejection of specialized antifascism has remained somewhat popular—particularly as expounded by Dauvé, who insisted in the early 1980s that “fascism as a specific movement has disappeared.”

The idea that fascism had become a historical artifact only helped the creep of fascism to persist undetected, while Faurisson and Guillaume became celebrities on the far-right. As the twist toward Holocaust denial would suggest, ultra-left theory was not immune from translation into ethnic terms—a reality that formed the basis of the work of Official National Front officer, Troy Southgate. Though influenced by the Situationists, along with a scramble of other left and right-wing figures, Southgate focused particularly on the ecological strain of radical politics associated with the punk-oriented journal, *Green Anarchist*, which called for a return to “primitive” livelihoods and the destruction of modern civilization. In 1991, the editors of *Green Anarchist* pushed out their co-editor, Richard Hunt, for his patriotic militarism, and Hunt’s new publication, *Green Alternative*, soon became associated with Southgate. Two years later, Southgate would join allied fascists like Jean-François Thiriart and Christian Bouchet to create the Liaison Committee for Revolutionary Nationalism.

In the US, the “anarcho-primitivist” or “Green Anarchist” tendency had been taken up by former ultra-leftist, John Zerzan. Identifying civilization as an enemy of the earth, Zerzan called for a return to sustainable livelihoods that rejected modernity. Zerzan rejected racism but relied in no small part on the thought of Martin Heidegger, seeking a return authentic relations between humans and the world unmediated by symbolic thought. This desired return, some have pointed out, would require a collapse of civilization so profound that millions, if not billions, would likely perish. Zerzan, himself, seems somewhat ambiguous with regards to the potential death toll, regardless of his support for the unbomber, Ted Kaczynsky.

Joining with Zerzan to confront authoritarianism and return to a more tribal, hunter-gatherer social organization, an occultist named Hakim Bey developed the idea of the “Temporary Autonomous Zone” (TAZ). For Bey, a TAZ would actualize a liberated and erotic space of orgiastic, revolutionary poesis. Yet within his 1991 text, *Temporary Autonomous Zone*, Bey included extensive praise for D’Annunzio’s proto-fascist occupation of Fiume, revealing the disturbing historical trends of attempts to transcend right and left.

Along with Zerzan and Bey, Bob Black would prove instrumental to the foundation of what is today called the “post-left.” In his 1997 text, *Anarchy After Leftism*, Black responded to left-wing anarchist Murray Bookchin, who accused individualists of “lifestyle anarchism.” Drawing from Zerzan’s critique of civilization as well as from Stirner and Nietzsche, Black presented his rejection of work as a nostrum for authoritarian left tendencies that he identified with Bookchin (apparently Jew-baiting Bookchin in the process).¹

Thus, the post-left began to assemble through the writings of ultra-leftists, green anarchists, spiritualists, and egoists published in zines, books, and journals like *Anarchy: Journal of Desire Armed* and *Fifth Estate*. Although these thinkers and publications differ in many ways, key tenets of the post-left included an eschatological anticipation of the collapse of civilization accompanied by a synthesis of individualism and collectivism that rejected left, right, and center in favor of a deep connection with the earth and more organic, tribal communities as opposed to humanism, the Enlightenment tradition, and democracy. That post-left texts included copious references to Stirner, Nietzsche, Jünger, Heidegger, Artaud, and Bataille suggests that they form a syncretic intellectual tendency that unites left and right, individualism and “conservative revolution.” As we will see, this situation has provided ample space for the fascist creep.

Chapter 3: The Fascist Creep

During the 1990s, the “national revolutionary” network of Southgate, Thiriart, and Bouchet, later renamed the European Liberation Front, linked up with the American Front, a San Francisco skinhead group exploring connections between counterculture and the avant-garde. Like prior efforts to develop a Satanic Nazism, American Front leader Bob Heck supported a mix of Satanism, occultism, and paganism, making friends with fascist musician Boyd Rice. A noise musician and avant-gardist, Rice developed a “fascist think tank” called the Abraxas Foundation, which echoed the fusion of the cult ideas of Charles Manson, fascism, and Satanism brought together by 1970s fascist militant James Mason. Rice’s protégé and fellow Abraxas member, Michael Moynihan, joined the radical publishing company, Feral House, which publishes texts along the lines of Abraxas, covering a range of themes from Charles Manson Scandinavian black metal, and militant Islam to books by Evola, James Mason, Bob Black, and John Zerzan.

In similar efforts, Southgate’s French ally, Christian Bouchet, generated distribution networks and magazines dedicated to supporting a miniature industry growing around

¹ Black writes, “Bakunin considered Marx, ‘the German scholar, in his threefold capacity as an Hegelian, a Jew, and a German,’ to be a ‘hopeless statist.’ A Hegelian, a Jew, a sort-of scholar, a Marxist, a hopeless (city-) statist — does this sound like anybody familiar?” Full text available on The Anarchist Library at www.theanarchistlibrary.org/library/bob-black-anarchy-after-leftism

neo-folk and the new, "anarchic" Scandinavian black metal scene. Further, national anarchists attempted to set up and/or infiltrate e-groups devoted to green anarchism. As Southgate and Bouchet's network spread to Russia, notorious Russian fascist, Alexander Dugin, emerged as another leading ideologue who admired Zerzan's work.

Post-leftists were somewhat knowledgeable about these developments. In a 1999 post-script to one of Bob Black's works, co-editor of *Anarchy: A Journal of Desire Armed*, Lawrence Jarach, cautioned against the rise of "national anarchism." In 2005, Zerzan's journal, *Green Anarchy*, published a longer critique of Southgate's "national anarchism." These warnings were significant, considering that they came in the context of active direct action movements and groups like the Earth Liberation Front (ELF), a green anarchist group dedicated to large-scale acts of sabotage and property destruction with the intention of bringing about the ultimate collapse of industrial civilization.

As their ELF group executed arsons during the late-1990s and early-2000s, a former ELF member told me that two comrades, Nathan "Exile" Block and Joyanna "Sadie" Zacher, shared an unusual love of Scandinavian black metal, made disturbing references to Charles Manson, and promoted an elitist, anti-left mentality. While their obscure references evoked Abraxas, Feral House, and Bouchet's distribution networks, their politics could not be recognized within the milieu of fascism at the time. However, their general ideas became clearer, the former ELF member told me, when antifascist researchers later discovered that a Tumblr account run by Block contained numerous occult fascist references, including national anarchist symbology, swastikas, and quotes from Evola and Jünger. These were only two members of a larger group, but their presence serves as food for thought regarding important radical cross-over points and how to approach them.

To wit, the decisions of John Zerzan and Bob Black to publish books with Feral House, seem peculiar—especially in light of the fact that two of the four books Zerzan has published there came out in 2005, the same year as *Green Anarchy*'s noteworthy warning against national anarchism. It would appear that, although in some cases prescient about the subcultural cross-overs between fascism and the post-left, post-leftists have, on a number of occasions, engaged in collaborative relationships.

As *Green Anarchy* cautioned against entryism and Zerzan simultaneously published with Feral House, controversy descended on an online forum known as the Anti-Politics Board. An outgrowth of the insurrectionist publication *Killing King Abacus*, the Anti-Politics Board was used by over 1,000 registered members and had dozens of regular contributors. The online platform presented a flourishing site of debate for post-leftists, yet discussions over insurrectionism, communisation, green anarchism, and egoism often produced a strangely competitive iconoclasm. Attempts to produce the edgiest take often led to the popularization of topics like "'anti-sexism' as collectivist moralism" and "critique of autonomous anti-fascism." Attacks on morality and moralism tended to encourage radicals to abandon the "identity politics" and "white guilt" often associated with left-wing anti-racism.

Amid these discussions, a young radical named Andrew Yeoman began to post national anarchist positions. When asked repeatedly to remove Yeoman from the forum, a site administrator refused, insisting that removing the white nationalist would have meant behaving like leftists. They needed to try something else. Whatever they tried, however, it didn't work, and Yeoman later became notorious for forming a group called the Bay Area National Anarchists, showing up to anarchist events like book fairs, and promoting anarchist collaboration with the Minutemen and American Front.

An important aspect of the Anti-Politics Board was the articulation of nihilist and insurrectionary theories, both of which gained popularity after the 2008 financial crisis. In an article titled, "The New Nihilism," Peter Lamborn Wilson (aka Hakim Bey) pointed out that the rising wave of nihilism that emerged during the late 2000s and into the second decade could not immediately be distinguished from the far right, due to myriad cross-over points. Indeed, Stormfront is riddled with users like "TAZriot" and "whitepunx" who promote the basic, individualist tenets of post-leftism from the original, racist position of Stirnerism. Rejecting "political correctness" and "white guilt," these post-left racists desire separate, radical spaces and autonomous zones for whites.

Through dogged research, Rose City Antifa in Portland, Oregon, discovered whitepunx's identity: "Trigger" Tom Christensen, a known member of the local punk scene. "I was never an anti [antifascist] but I've hung out with a few of them," Christensen wrote on Stormfront. "I used to be a big punk rocker in the music scene and there were some antis that ran around in the same scene. I was friends with a few. They weren't trying to recruit me, or anybody really. They did not, however, know I was a WN [white nationalist]. I kept my beliefs to myself and would shut down any opinions the[y] expressed that seemed to have holes in them. It's been fairly useful to know some of these people. I now know who all the major players are in the anti and SHARP [Skinheads Against Racial Prejudice] scene."

For a time, Christensen says he hung out with post-leftists and debated them like Yeoman had done. Less than a year later, however, Christensen followed up in a chilling post titled, "Do You Think It Would Be Acceptable To Be A 'Rat' If It Was Against Our Enemies." He wrote, "I had an interesting thought the other day and wanted peoples opinions. If you were asked by the Police to provide or find evidence that would incriminate people who are enemy's [sic] of the movement, i.e. Leftists, reds, anarchists. Would you do it? Would you 'rat' or 'narc' on the Left side?" Twenty one responses came beckoning from the recesses of the white nationalist world. While some encouraged Christensen to snitch, others insisted that he keep gang loyalty. It is uncertain as to whether or not he went to the police, but the May 2013 discovery of his Stormfront activity took place shortly before a grand jury subpoenaed four anarchists who were subsequently arrested and held for contempt of court.

In another unsettling example of crossover between post-leftists and fascists, radicals associated with a nihilist group named Ultra harshly rebuked Rose City Antifa of Portland, Oregon, for releasing an exposé about Jack Donovan. An open member of the violent white nationalist group, Wolves of Vinland, Donovan also runs a gym

called the Kabuki Strength Lab, which produces “manosphere” videos. As of November 2016, when the exposé was published, one member of Ultra was a member of the Kabuki Strength Lab. Although Donovan runs a tattoo shop out of the gym and gave Libertarian Party fascist Augustus Sol Invictus a tattoo of the fasces there, a fellow gym member wrote, “Obviously Jack has very controversial beliefs and practices that most disagree with; but I don’t believe it affects his behavior in the gym.” Donovan, who has publicly parroted “race realist” statistics at white nationalist gatherings like the National Policy Institute and the Pressure Project podcast, also embraces bioregionalism and the anticipation of a collapse of civilization that will lead to a reversion of identity-bound tribal structures at war with one another and reliant on natural hierarchies—an ideology that resonates with Ultra and some members of the broader post-left milieu.

It stands to reason that defending fascists and collaborating with them are not the same, and they are both separate from having incidental ideological cross-over points. However the cross-over points, when unchecked, frequently indicate a tendency to ignore, defend, or collaborate. Defense and collaboration can, and do, also converge. For instance, also in Portland, Oregon, the founder of a UK ultra-leftist splinter group called Wildcat began to participate in a reading group involving prominent post-leftists before sliding toward anti-Semitism. Soon he was participating in the former-leftist-turned-fascist Pacifica Forum in Eugene, Oregon, and defending anti-Semitic co-op leader, Tim Calvert. He was last seen by antifas creeping into an event for Holocaust denier, David Irving.

Perhaps the most troubling instance of collaboration, or rather synthesis, of post-left nihilism and the far right is taking place currently in the alt-right. Donovan is considered a member of the alt-right, while Christensen’s latest visible Facebook post hails from the misogynistic Proud Boys group. These groups and individuals connected to the alt-right are described as having been “red-pilled,” a term taken from the movie, *The Matrix*, in which the protagonist is awakened to a dystopian reality after choosing to take a red pill. For the alt-right, being “red-pilled” means waking up to the “reality” offered by anti-Semitic conspiracy theories, misogyny, and white nationalism—usually through online forums where the competitive iconoclasm of “edge-lords” mutates into ironic anti-Semitism and hatred. Among the most extreme forms of this phenomenon occurring in recent years is the so-called “black pill”—red-pillers who have turned toward the celebration of indiscriminate violence via the same trends of individualism and nihilism outlined above.

“Black-pillers” claim to have shed their attachments to all theories entirely. This tendency evokes the attitude of militant anti-civilization group, *Individuals Tending to the Wild*, which is popular among some post-leftist groups and advocates indiscriminate violence against any targets manifesting the modern world. Another influence for “black-pillers” is Adam Lanza, the infamous mass shooter who phoned John Zerzan a year before murdering his mother, 20 children, and six staff members at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Connecticut. Zerzan has condemned *Individuals Tend-*

ing *Toward the Wild*, and months after Lanza's horrifying actions, he penned a piece imploring post-left nihilists to find hope: "Egoism and nihilism are evidently in vogue among anarchists and I'm hoping that those who so identify are not without hope. Illusions no, hope yes." Unfortunately, Zerzan developed his short communiqué into a book published by Feral House on November 10, 2015—the day after Feral House published *The White Nationalist Skinhead Movement* co-authored by Eddie Stampton, a Nazi skinhead.

Conclusion

In light of these cross-overs, many individualist anarchists, post-leftists, and nihilists tend not to deny that they share nodal networks with fascists. In many cases, they seek to struggle against them and reclaim their movement. Yet, there tends to be another permissive sense that anarchists bear no responsibility for distinguishing themselves from fascists. If there are numerous points in which radical milieus become a blur of fascists, anarchists, and romantics, some claim that throwing shade on such associations only propagates fallacious thinking, or "guilt by association."

However, recalling the information in this essay, we might note that complex cross-overs seem to include, in particular, aspects of egoism and radical green theory. Derived from Stirnerism and Nietzschean philosophy, egoism can reify the social alienation felt by an individual, leading to an elitist sense of self-empowerment and delusions of grandeur. When mixed with insurrectionism and radical green thought, egoism can translate into "hunter versus prey" or "wolves versus sheep" elitism, in which compassion for others is rejected as moralistic. This kind of alienated elitism can also develop estranged aesthetic and affective positions tied to cruelty, vengeance, and hatred.

Emerging out of a rejection of humanism and urban modernism, the particular form of radical green theory often embraced by the post-left can relativize human losses by looking at the larger waves of mass extinctions. By doing this, radical greens anticipate a collapse that would "cull the herd" or cause a mass human die off of millions, if not billions, of people throughout the world. This aspect of radical green theory comes very close to, and sometimes intertwines with, ideas about over-population compiled and produced by white nationalists and anti-immigration activists tied to the infamous Tanton Network. Some radical green egoists (or nihilists) insist that their role should be to provoke such a collapse, through anti-moralist strikes against civilization.

As examples like Hakim Bey's *TAZ* and the lionization of the Fiume misadventure, Zerzan and Black's publishing with Feral House, and Ultra's defense of Donovan indicate, the post-left's relation to white nationalism is sometimes ambiguous and occasionally even collaborative. Other examples, like those of Yeoman and Christensen, indicate that the tolerance for fascist ideas on the post-left can result in unwittingly accepting them, providing a platform for white nationalism, and increasing vulnerability to entryism. Specific ideas that are sometimes tolerated under the rubric of the

“critique of the left” include the approval of “natural hierarchies,” ultranationalism understood as ethno-biological and spiritual ties to homeland and ancestry, rejection of feminism and antifascism, and the fetishization of violence and cruelty.

It is more important today than ever before to recognize how radical movements develop intersections with fascists if we are to discover how to expose creeping fascism and develop stronger, more direct networks. Anarchists must abandon the equivocations that invite the fascist creep and reclaim anarchy as the integral struggle for freedom and equality. Sectarian polemics are the result of extensive learning processes, but are less important than engaging in solidarity to struggle against fascism in all its forms and various disguises.

Alexander Reid Ross is a former co-editor of the Earth First! Journal and the author of *Against the Fascist Creep*. He teaches in the Geography Department at Portland State University and can be reached at aross@pdx.edu.

Issue 9 — 1986

Source: <www.libcom.org/article/wildcat-uk-9-1986>

Revolution, or Self-Managed Capitalism?

Author: Wildcat

Source: Retrieved on 8 April 2012 from www.angelfire.com

Date: 1986

This year is the 50th anniversary of the Spanish Civil War, which began in July 1936 when General Franco led a fascist coup to replace the left-wing republican government.

It was no coincidence that this happened at a time of intense class struggle in Spain. Limited concessions granted by the left-wing of the ruling class — the Popular Front government elected in February 1936 — had not succeeded in restoring the economic and social stability needed by capitalism. Strikes, demonstrations and political assassinations by the working class continued, as did land seizures and local insurrections in the countryside. The right-wing of the ruling class recognised that strong-arm measures were needed and acted accordingly.

Initially, across one half of Spain the right-wing coup was stalled by armed resistance from peasants and the working class, and only after three years of civil war was the fascist victory secured. **But in one sense the fascist revolt was an immediate success:** the working class and peasants sacrificed the struggle for their own needs and demands and united with liberal and radical supporters of capitalism in a fight to defend one form of capitalist domination — democracy — against another — fascism.

We have already written about this aspect of the Spanish War in a previous issue of *Wildcat* (number 7). In this article, we want to focus on another important feature: the influence of Anarchist ideas during the events in Spain.

Anarchism and the Spanish ‘Revolution’

At the time of the war, a popular idea amongst the Spanish working class and peasants was that each factory, area of land etc., should be owned collectively by its workers, and that these ‘collectives’ should be linked together on a ‘federal basis’ — that is, without any ‘superior central authority’.

This basic idea had been propagated by Anarchists in Spain for more than 50 years. When the war began, peasants and working class people in those parts of the

country that had not immediately fallen under fascist control seized the opportunity to turn the Anarchist idea into reality.

And ever since then, Anarchists have regarded the Spanish ‘Revolution’ as the finest achievement in the history of the revolutionary movement — as the closest capitalism anywhere has come to being completely overthrown and replaced by a totally different type of society.

Self-Managed Capitalism

The ‘revolution’ in the countryside has usually been seen as superior to the ‘revolution’ in the towns and cities. Indeed, in an assessment shared by Wildcat, Anarchist historian and eyewitness of the collectives, Gaston Leval, *describes the industrial collectives as simply another form of capitalism, managed by the workers themselves*:

‘Workers in each undertaking took over the factory, the works, or the workshop, the machines, raw materials, and taking advantage of the continuation of the money system and normal capitalist commercial relations, organised production on their own account, selling for their own benefit the produce of their labour.’

We would add that in many cases the workers didn’t actually take over production, they simply worked under the direction of their ‘own’ union bureaucrats with old bosses retained as advisors.

The reactionary consequences of the working class taking sides in the fight between democracy and fascism, instead of pursuing the struggle for their own needs, was particularly evident in the way the industrial collectives operated. For the sake of the ‘war effort’ workers frequently chose to intensify their own exploitation — usually with the encouragement of their Anarchist leaders.

In 1937, for example, the Anarchist Government Minister in charge of the economy in Catalonia complained that the ‘state of tension and over-excitement’ caused by the outbreak of civil war had ‘reduced to a dangerous degree the capacity and productivity of labour, increasing the costs of production so much that if this is not corrected rapidly and energetically, we will be facing a dead-end street. For these reasons we must readjust the length of the working day.’

However, although some Anarchists are prepared to criticise the ‘Government Anarchists’ and the industrial collectives, all Anarchists are unanimous that the rural collectives succeeded in achieving ‘genuine socialisation’, or as it was termed, ‘libertarian communism’.

Organising the Rural Collectives

What typically happened in the peasant collectives was this. Once the fascist rebellion had been quelled locally, the inhabitants of the village got together in a big

meeting. Anarchist militants took the initiative in proposing what to do. Everyone was invited to pool their land, livestock, and tools in the collective: ‘The concept “yours and mine” will no longer exist ... everything will belong to everyone.’ Property belonging to fascist landlords and the Church was expropriated for the collective’s use. A committee was elected to supervise the running of the collective. Work was parcelled out among groups of 10 or 15 people, and co-ordinated by meetings of delegates nominated by each group.

Free Access

A few collectives did distribute their produce on the communist basis of free access — ‘to each according to their needs’. A resident of Magdalena de Pulpis explained the system in his village:

‘Everyone works and everyone has the right to what he needs free of charge. He simply goes to the store where provisions and all other necessities are supplied. Everything is distributed freely with only a notation of what he took.’

For the first time in their lives people could help themselves to whatever they needed. And that’s exactly what they did. Free access was not abused by ‘greed’ or ‘gluttony’. Another witness, Augustin Souchy, described the situation in Muniesa:

‘The bakery was open. Anyone can come for any bread he wants.’

“Are there not abuses of this?”

“No”, answers the old man who gives out the bread. “Everyone takes as much as they actually need.”

Wine is also distributed freely, not rationed.

“Doesn’t anyone get drunk?”

“So far there has not been a single case of drunkenness”, he answers.’

This of course was also partly a reflection of an Anarchist puritanism which in other places led them to ban tobacco and even coffee.

The Wages System

However, distribution of goods on a communist basis (i.e. free access) was *not* the norm. In the vast majority of collectives the level of consumption was not based on people’s freely chosen needs and desires, but just as it is under capitalism, by the amount of money people had in their pockets. Only goods in abundant supply could be taken freely. Everything else had to be bought from wages paid by the collective to its members.

Family Values

The 'family wage', which oppresses women by making them economically dependent on the male head of the household, was adopted by almost all of the collectives. Each male collectivist received so much in wages per day for himself, plus a smaller amount for his wife and each child. For women in fact, the Spanish 'Revolution' could hardly have been less revolutionary.

It did not challenge the family as an economic unit of society, nor the sexual division of labour between men and women. 'It is eleven o'clock in the morning. The gong sounds. Mass? It is to remind the women to prepare the midday meal.' Women also remained regarded as inferior social beings, frowned on, for example, if they joined the men in the local cafe for a drink after work.

The Proliferation of Money

The equal family wage was generally not paid in the national currency, which most collectives discarded for internal use. In its place the collectives substituted other means of exchange, issuing their own local currency in the form of vouchers, coupons, rationing booklets, certificates, etc. Far from being abolished as it would be during a communist revolution, during the Spanish 'Revolution' money proliferated as never before!

But the creation of literally hundreds of different currencies soon caused problems. Few collectives were self-sufficient, but trade among the collectives was hampered by the lack of a universally acceptable currency. In 1937 the Aragon Federation of Peasant Collectives had to reintroduce a standard currency in the form of a standard rationing booklet for all the Aragon collectives. It also established its own bank — run by the Bank Workers Union of course!

The Exchange of Goods

Not all transactions between collectives were affected by money. Central warehouses were set up where collectives exchanged their surplus product among themselves for the goods they lacked. Under this system 'hard cash' was frequently absent. However, the relative proportions in which goods were bartered was still determined by monetary values. For example how many sacks of flour a collective could obtain in exchange for a ton of potatoes was worked out by determining the value of both in money terms. Just as under capitalism, prices were 'based on the cost of raw materials, the work involved, general expenses and the resources of the collectivists'.

This was not a communist system of production for use and distribution according to need, but a capitalist system of rival enterprises trading their products according to their exchange value. No matter how desperately they needed them, collectives could

not obtain the goods they required until they had produced enough to exchange for them, since they were not allowed to withdraw a sum of goods more than those they had deposited. This frequently led to great hardship among the less wealthy collectives.

Market Competition

As well as trading among themselves, collectives also had to find markets for their goods in competition with non-collectivised enterprises. A common consequence of this system has always been that goods which cannot be sold profitably end up being stockpiled or destroyed, while elsewhere people have to do without without these goods because they don't have the means to buy them. The consequences of the Spanish collectives' capitalist mode of operation conformed to this pattern; for example:

'The warehouse owned by the SICEP (Syndicate of the Footwear Industry in Elda and Petrel) in Elda, Valencia, and Barcelona, as well as the factory warehouses, were full of unsold goods, valued at some 10 million pesetas.'

The End of the Collectives

The Spanish collectives were eventually destroyed by in-fighting among the anti-fascists and by the fascist victory itself. One can only speculate about how they might have developed had they survived the war. Our guess is that their basically capitalist nature would have become even more obvious.

In the capitalist economy market competition forces every enterprise to try to produce its goods as cheaply as possible as to undercut its rivals. The Spanish collectives, trading with each other and competing with non-collectivised enterprises would inevitably have been subject to the same pressures.

One of the ways in which capitalist enterprise try to cut costs is by increasing the exploitation of the workforce, for example by cutting wages or increasing the intensity of the work, or lengthening working hours. Where this happens in an enterprise owned and run by an individual boss or the state, workers can identify their enemy and fight against their exploitation. This is far less likely to happen where the entire workforce itself is the collective owner of and manager of the enterprise — as was the case with the Spanish collectives. The workforce has a vested interest in the profitability of the capital which it collectively owns; it identifies with and willingly organises its own exploitation. It has to in fact to keep itself in business.

The End of Anarchism

Many present-day Anarchists — such as the Direct Action Movement, *Black Flag*, and *Freedom* — still stand for the type of self-managed capitalism established by the

industrial and agricultural collectives during the Spanish civil war. Because of this we oppose them as resolutely as we oppose the supporters of any other capitalist ideology — and we urge any of our sympathisers who think of themselves as anarchists to follow suit.

From the point of view of working class people's needs, self-managed capitalism is a dead-end, just as reactionary as private or state-capitalism. The communist society we are fighting for can only be established by the complete destruction of ALL property, money, wages and markets, whatever their form.

The information and quotes in this article come from *The Anarchist Collectives* by Sam Dolgoff, *Collectives in the Spanish Revolution* by Gaston Leval, *The Spanish Revolution* by Stanley Payne, and *With the Peasants of Aragon* by Augustin Souchy.

At the time of the Spanish civil war the revolutionaries who published the journals *Bilan* and *International Council Correspondence* criticised anti-fascism and Anarchism from a similar point of view to that held by *Wildcat* today. If you're interested in reading some of the articles they wrote, we can send copies for the price of a £1 donation to cover the cost of photocopying and postage.

‘We ask the Catalan people to make an end to factional struggles and intrigues ... and think of nothing but the war’

‘Let no one think about increasing wages and reducing hours of work’

‘Our militia will never defend the bourgeoisie, they just do not attack it.’

ANARCHIST LEADER DURRUTI CALLS OFF THE CLASS WAR

Issue 15 — Autumn 1991

Source: <www.libcom.org/article/wildcat-uk-15-autumn-1991>

Ozimandias — Review: Against His-story! Against Leviathan! by Fredy Perlman

Author: R.B.

Date: 1991

Source: Retrieved on February 1, 2010 from libcom.org

Review: *Against His-story! Against Leviathan!* by Fredy Perlman, Black & Red, Detroit 1983.

Against His-story! is an attempt to take opposition to Progress to its logical conclusion. So is this belated review.

Perlman summarises the whole history of Civilisation from the viewpoint of its victims: we, the “zeks”, free people who were enslaved then taught to identify with the enslaving monster: Leviathan.

Rock of Stages

Civilisation, the antithesis of community, is only 5,000 years old. Communities existed in the New World for thousands of years without either “giving rise to” or becoming part of, the Civilisations of the Aztecs and Incas, which shrank. Civilisations did not arise inevitably because of the development of the productive forces. People have always tried to fight Civilization. So why did it arise, how did it spread and dominate the world, and why didn’t communities stop it?

The minority which created Civilisation did so initially, not in a place where the productive forces were rich, but where they were poor, and where Nature was harsh: Mesopotamia. The Sumerians had to build waterworks, so expertise and eventually kings developed. When the waterworks of Lagash overflowed into those of Ur, the king of Ur, or Lugal, persuaded his people to attack Lagash, and basically ended up enslaving its inhabitants and forcing them to rebuild both sets of waterworks, by now a full-time activity.

Communities try to resist Civilisation in various ways. But to form permanent military alliances, which is what is needed to seriously threaten the monster, is to

turn these communities into a new Civilisation. Walled cities need a permanent wall-building proletariat. What was a free activity becomes compulsory. What Civilisation touches turns to stone. People internalise compulsion. They become “armored”, to use Perlman’s term, creating morality and guilt.

Other communities ran away. The modern Leviathan is just now wiping out the very last of them in New Guinea and the Amazon. People have always tried to escape. Leviathans perpetually decompose. Hence the ruins in deserts and jungles. One of the most spectacular examples of decomposition Perlman describes is the decay of French colonialism, stretched out across the fur trails of North America, losing hunters and traders to the existing communities, until the British wiped them out. The first proletarian uprising in American history was the one led by Francisco Roldan against Columbus in 1498. Roldan and a mob of ex-convicts from Spain overthrew the government in Santo Domingo, and ran off into the hills to join the natives, fighting against Civilisation, which they knew from personal experience was far worse than the alternative. There were also tendencies toward primitive communism among English Americans: hence the New England witch trials.

Perlman’s critique of religion is more penetrating than Marx’s. Moses’ God was simply Leviathan made abstract. His program was a “declaration of war against all Life”: “Replenish the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth”.

There were numerous genuine primitivist crisis cults in the decomposing Roman Leviathan. Christianity was Civilisation’s way of recuperating and suppressing them. Christianity is not, as Marxists have argued, the essential capitalist religion. Perlman explains how Islam was the midwife of mercantile capitalism. Arab merchants taught Europeans commerce, maths, etc., and they have never been given credit for this. Capitalism grew, not out of the burghs of mediaeval Europe but out of the trading networks imported by Islam’s imitators. There is no God but Value, and Mohammed is his Profit.

The antithesis of Civilisation, communism, has always been possible. There is a constant tendency toward communist revolution: 4th century Persia, 16th century Germany. The aim of the revolution is to destroy the productive forces, not to develop them. Decadence is not a stage in the development of Civilisation, but a permanent tendency to decompose, the result of the invariant struggle of slaves against private property and the state. Progress is the result of a disruption of cyclical time. Our struggle reasserts invariant, cyclical time against progressive, linear time. Civilisation is not inevitable, but it is a permanent danger, and primitive communities’ myths warn them against it.

Myths such as Dream Time, Eden and the Golden Age when “They dwelt in ease and peace upon their lands with many good things, rich in flocks and loved by the blessed gods” (Hesiod) are humanity’s memories of pre-Civilisation. Leviathan’s myths are lies. Here is an example:

“Changes in the economy freed part of the population from the need to engage in subsistence farming, more men now became available to pursue other tasks (i.e. crafts, defence, religious life, administration and technology)” (*Penguin Atlas of World History*, Vol. 1).

Became available to whom? *The Penguin Atlas* continues:

“The centralisation of the state and the hierarchical ordering of society into sharply differentiated classes (rulers, priests, warriors, officials, craftsmen, traders, peasants, slaves) enabled the Egyptians to solve the problems which confronted every riverine civilisation”.

This is literally nonsense. The division into classes makes the phrase “the Egyptians” meaningless. “The Egyptians” did not differentiate themselves into slaves and torturers in order to solve their common problems. The slaves were enslaved. From this point on, to talk of humanity solving its problems, is to peddle the discourse of the State.

Stage Fright

The evidence discovered since Engels’ *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* (1884) derived from the racist anthropologist Morgan, shows that primitive peoples did not generally live in scarcity, nor were they cannibals. It was not the increase in the wealth of society which allowed Civilisation to emerge. It emerged in an area of scarcity, whereas Native Americans often lived in abundance, and, according to Perlman, consciously rejected the Civilisations on offer. This is hardly surprising. Civilisation has made more and more people more and more miserable for five thousand years.

Perlman’s uncritical description of Native American communities should not be swallowed whole. According to one of his main inspirations, F.W. Turner, scarcity, competition, warfare, intolerance and torture did exist among pre-Columbian Indians (see *The Portable North American Indian Reader*). Perlman manages to paint a glaringly black-and-white picture of community and Civilisation. European Civilisation introduced the horse into Native America. On the other hand, it exterminated the beneficiaries of this development. Some white supremacists used Morgan’s stages theory as an excuse. Nathan Meeker founded a cooperative concentration camp for the Ute Indians in Colorado, which he believed would raise them from savagery through the pastoral stage to barbarism, then to “the enlightened, scientific, and religious stage” (*Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee*, p372). Sounds familiar? The ideologists of the frontier didn’t need historical materialism. Christianity served their genocidal purposes adequately. The ignorant savages, unwilling to be elevated into barbarians, killed Meeker in 1879.

Fredy vs. Fred

Perlman dismisses the progressist ideas of Marx's *Preface to A Critique of Political Economy* as "moronic". Capitalism doesn't "develop the productive forces", it creates capitalist "productive forces" and "relations of production". "The so-called material conditions are Leviathan's garments, not the ground it stands on." Perlman is right to point out that the productive forces do not exist apart from their social form, and that the latter give rise to the former, not vice-versa. But his dismissal of Marx is a trifle brusque. He makes no attempt to give a balanced assessment of Marx and Engels' contribution.

Engels' position was ambiguous. Although he saw the state as a weapon of one class against another, he also believed it "arose from the need to hold class antagonisms in check". The concept of the "needs of society" implies some neutral force apart from the two antagonistic classes:

"At a certain stage of economic development, which necessarily involved the split of society into classes, the state became a necessity because of this split. We are now rapidly reaching a stage in the development of production at which the existence of these classes has not only ceased to be a necessity but becomes a positive hindrance to production. They will fall just as inevitably as they arose at an earlier stage."

Perlman confidently invites his readers to reexamine the theory of stages to see whether he has caricatured it. He hasn't. The argument that Civilization is an inevitable stage in the development of the productive forces is just as dangerous as the old chestnut about it being "human nature". To deny alternatives to Civilization's program of war against nature and peoples is to be an accomplice to their physical destruction. To those who say Marx developed a less progressist position (for example Teodor Shanin in *Late Marx and the Russian Road*), I would reply that it's a shame he didn't do it earlier. Nevertheless, it is simplistic to identify the whole of Marx's work with some of his, and especially Engels', mistakes. Perlman gives the impression that nothing good has happened since the state first arose in Sumer, and that non-civilised people were just as Hesiod described them. If the only alternative to life under Civilization is the "Stone Age", a life of hunting, screwing, being at one with Nature, etc., there is no question which is preferable.

Women in particular were better off before Civilisation, which has systematically stripped them of the power they used to have. But some technologies which have been developed during the last 5,000 years could be inherited by communism. No doubt the idea of a centralised world administration will be rejected. There will be a large degree of self-sufficiency. Without the waste of capitalism, the world could easily support its current population. The Stone Age couldn't. The population figure will depend entirely on how many children women choose to have and how much effort people are prepared to put into raising them (see *How Deep is Deep Ecology?* by George Bradford).

Perlman's arrogance is infectious. He dispatches Marxism in a couple of pages, the concept of "bourgeois revolutions" in one sentence. His method of dealing with anyone

he doesn't like involves its own totalitarian circular logic. His critics are dismissed as "armored". People who want some positive evidence before accepting his conclusions are guard dogs of the Leviathanic order. Perlman's anti-history is so all-explanatory, covering the whole of history in 300 pages, there must be a danger of *Against History!* eventually becoming a new bible for a political dogma, the fate which befell Situationist theory.

An eclectic approach is needed to avoid this dead end. In learning from the culture of primitive peoples, we are not obliged to abandon everything which has been developed since the waterworks of Mesopotamia.

RB, 8 September 1991.

The Hunt for Red October

Subtitle: Ten Days That Didn't Overthrow Capitalism

Author: Wildcat

Date: Autumn 1991

Source: Retrieved on 30th August 2020 from libcom.org

The article which follows this introduction views the Russian revolution of October 1917 from the viewpoint of the inhabitants of Kronstadt, a strategic island in the Gulf of Finland, which was universally regarded as the most radical part of Russia, until it was militarily suppressed by the Bolshevik government in March 1921. It measures theories of what happened in 1917 against the events of February to October, to see what relevance, if any, these events and theories have for the communist project today...

“No-one can belittle the huge importance of the October revolution and its influence on the course of world history and the progress of mankind”, announced the chairman of the Soviet parliament in November 1990. Nevertheless, we’re going to try.

The article which follows this introduction views the Russian revolution of October 1917 from the viewpoint of the inhabitants of Kronstadt, a strategic island in the Gulf of Finland, which was universally regarded as the most radical part of Russia, until it was militarily suppressed by the Bolshevik government in March 1921.

This introduction measures theories of what happened in 1917 against the events of February to October, to see what relevance, if any, these events and theories have for the communist project today.

The view that the Soviet system, resulting from the tactical genius of Lenin and the discipline of his party, is a great gain for humanity to be defended by the working class, has been somewhat eroded by that system’s collapse. So too has the orthodox Trotskyist variant of this position.

Analyses which endorse October, but say that at some point between then and now, Russia became capitalist, have more life in them. Immediately after the second world war, various tendencies, for example Tony Cliff’s, tried to make sense of the Red Army’s rule in Eastern Europe. They worked out that wage labour prevailed in these countries, and concluded that they were dominated by a form of capitalism, which they called “state capitalism”. The problem was when the gains of October had been lost.

This is not an academic question. Though we try to avoid the habit of seeing today in terms of 1917, there are some lessons to be drawn from then which still apply. We are still engaged in battles against the manoeuvres of Leninists in the class struggle in the 1990's. For this reason alone, this obituary is worthwhile. On the other hand, the funeral is long overdue. The conclusions of the following contributions are necessarily general, and many of them are non-specific to the Russian revolution.

The most dangerous of all errors made by non-Leninist tendencies analysing the Russian revolution is the critique of Leninism as undemocratic. Councilists and other democrats turn the ideology of Leninism on its head. Instead of a benevolent genius leading a clear minority through numerous dire straits to ultimate victory, councilists saw an evil genius, with an undemocratic minority party, which seized power without the approval of the majority of the working class, and thus was bound to do no good. The conclusion they draw is that only when the majority of the working class (usually in one country) have voted for the revolution is it safe for it to take place. This idea has been defended by councilists since the early twenties, and still finds an echo in the revolutionary movement of today. Democracy can only hinder the revolutionary minority. Depending on majority approval, whether in one workplace, one city, or one country, will always prevent this minority doing what needs to be done. As we argue throughout these text, what went wrong in Russia was not the result of a minority substituting itself for the working class.

Majority Ruhles

The council communist movement arose in the 1920's in response to the Bolshevik counter-revolution and the manoeuvres of the German Communist Party (KPD). The Communist Workers Party (KAPD) had emerged from a split in the KPD, on the basis of opposition to parliament and trade unionism. The council communists, most of whom came from the KAPD and its Dutch equivalent, went further than the KAPD in their critique of the Bolsheviks. Whereas the KAPD argued that the Soviet state, the official communist parties around the world, grouped together in the Communist International, became counter-revolutionary in 1921–22, the council communists discovered that they had never been revolutionary at all.

They defended a simplified Marxist “stages” theory of history, taking at face value the claim that there had been a series of “bourgeois revolutions” which overthrew the old feudal social relations and substituted capitalist ones. These revolutions included the English in the 1640s, the French in 1789, and the German in 1848. The capitalist outcome of these revolutions was inevitable, notwithstanding the involvement of the proletariat. The clearest defence of this position can be found in *From the Bourgeois to*

the Proletarian Revolution by Otto Ruhle¹. For our critique of the concept of bourgeois revolutions, see the article in Wildcat 13².

The councilists argued that Russia could not give birth to a proletarian revolution because it was too backward. This argument is the same as that put forward by most of the Mensheviks and Bolsheviks prior to 1917. Capitalism in Russia, precisely because it had taken root late, was more advanced than that of England. Petrograd had the biggest factory in the world. The fact that the territories of the Russian Empire were full of peasants could not make a workers' and soldiers' uprising in Petrograd capitalist "in essence".

Even if Russian capitalism had been backward, this is beside the point. Petrograd was a link in a chain of industrial cities which stretched around the world, and its workers knew it. That is why they responded to Lenin's calls for an internationalist revolution.

Councilists were if anything more dogmatic and didactic in their interpretation of Marxism than their Leninist opponents:

"According to the phaseological pattern of development as formulated and advocated by Marx, after feudal tsarism in Russia there had to come the capitalist bourgeois state, whose creator and representative is the bourgeois class." (³, p13).

But the tsars of Russia were capitalist from Peter the Great (1689–1725) onwards. Their religious beliefs did not make them feudal. The tsars, with the aid of foreign capital, had developed Russian capitalism, in particular in the shipping and related industries, creating a modern industrial base in Petrograd and Moscow. "Unlike in Western Europe, the State did not merely supervise the new industries; it directly managed the bulk of heavy industry, and part of light industry, thereby employing the majority of all industrial workers as forced labour" (⁴, p3). "State capitalism" was not introduced by the Bolsheviks.

We therefore reject the councilist analysis of the origins, course and outcome of the Russian revolution. However, they do have the merit of being the first to point out the evidence for the capitalist nature of the Bolshevik regime and the social relations it supervised. In 1920, Otto Ruhle refused to take his place in the Communist International in Moscow, as the KAPD had instructed. His journey through Russia had completely disillusioned him with the idea that socialism was being built there. Ruhle attacks the Bolsheviks' national liberation policy, their giving the right of self-determination to the nations (in other words, to the bourgeoisie) of Finland, Poland, etc. as "the

¹ *From the Bourgeois to the Proletarian Revolution*, Otto Ruhle, Revolutionary Perspectives, 1974 (out of print).

² *1789 and All That*, Wildcat no. 13, London, 1989.

³ *From the Bourgeois to the Proletarian Revolution*, Otto Ruhle, Revolutionary Perspectives, 1974 (out of print).

⁴ *Notes on Class Struggle in the USSR*, Red Menace, London, 1989.

outcome of bourgeois political orientation” (⁵, p14). He ridicules their giving land to the peasantry, though what the Bolsheviks should have done instead, he does not say. He attacks the treaty of Brest-Litovsk which brought peace between the Soviet state and German imperialism, giving the latter one last chance to step up the fight against both the Entente powers and its own working class. Ruhle points out that “nationalisation is not socialisation” and describes the Russian economy as “large-scale tightly centrally-run state capitalism... Only it is still capitalism”. He equates the massacre of the Kronstadt uprising of 1921 with the suppression of the Paris Commune and the German revolution.

The “left communist” current, in common with Cliff and other ex-Trotskyists, supports the Bolsheviks in the October revolution, but argues that the revolution degenerated because of Russia’s isolation. This point of view deserves to be seriously considered, before being dismissed out of hand. The problem of when Russia was no longer a workers’ state has caused tremendous problems to these groups, and most of them have given up trying to answer the question.

But they are generally in agreement on the primary cause of the degeneration: isolation. It is true that, if it were not supported by a revolution in the rest of the world, the Russian revolution would inevitably have led to capitalism. However, this is not why it did so. The Bolshevik regime did not try to create communism, find itself isolated, and end up implementing capitalist policies in spite of its best intentions. On the contrary, it enthusiastically administered and expanded capitalism — the exploitation of labour by means of the wages system — from its very first day in office.

“And the facts speak for themselves: after the October revolution Lenin did not want the expropriation of the capitalists, but only ‘workers control’; control by the workers’ shopfloor organizations over the capitalists, who were to continue to retain management of the enterprises. A fierce class struggle ensued, invalidating Lenin’s thesis on the collaboration of the classes under his power: the capitalists replied with sabotage and the workers’ collectives took over all the factories one after the other... And it was only when the expropriation of the capitalists had been effected de facto by the worker masses that the Soviet government recognized it de jure by publishing the decree on the nationalization of industry. Then, in 1918, Lenin answered the socialist aspirations of the workers by opposing to them the system of State capitalism (‘on the model of wartime Germany’), with the greatest participation of former capitalists in the new Soviet economy.” (A. Ciliga, *The Russian Enigma*⁶, pp 283–284).

The Bolsheviks were already imprisoning their revolutionary opponents before the outbreak of the civil war in 1918. They had already tried to strike deals to keep the capitalist managers in charge of the factories. As Mandel shows in *The Petrograd Workers and the Soviet Seizure of Power*⁷, the factory committees frequently came into conflict

⁵ *From the Bourgeois to the Proletarian Revolution*, Otto Ruhle, Revolutionary Perspectives, 1974 (out of print).

⁶ *The Russian Enigma*, A. Ciliga, Ink Links, London, 1979.

⁷ *The Petrograd Workers and the Soviet Seizure of Power*, D. Mandel, MacMillan 1984.

with the Bolsheviks, who wanted to dissolve them into the trade unions. He also quotes the leather manufacturers' organisation in Petrograd to the effect that the Bolshevik trade unionists were preferable, as people with whom jointly to manage production, to the "anarcho-communist" factory committees. Clearly, to some extent, the factory committees attempted to continue the revolution after October in the teeth of Bolshevik opposition. We do not however idolise the factory committees, as does Brinton in *The Bolsheviks and Workers' Control*⁸. Though containing useful information, it should be read in conjunction with *Factory Committees and the Dictatorship of the Proletariat*⁹, in which Goodey shows how simplistic it is to see the committees as the goodies and the Bolsheviks as the baddies.

Relations of production inside Russia never ceased to be capitalist. Hardly any attempt was made to abolish wage labour and the law of value, and none by the Party. The Bolsheviks did carry out nationalisations, under pressure from the factory committees, but these had nothing to do with communism.

In "Left-Wing" Communism¹⁰ written two and a half years after the October uprising, Lenin argued that in Russia the trade unions were "and will long remain" a necessary means for "gradually transferring the management of the whole economy of the country to the hands of the working class (and not of the separate trades), and later to the hands of all the toilers". Lenin didn't claim that at that time the working class even managed the economy. They had not even instituted workers management, let alone socialism. He argued that state capitalism was a step on the road to socialism, and urged Russian socialists to "study the state capitalism of the Germans, to adopt it with all possible strength, not to spare dictatorial methods in order to hasten its adoption" (On "Left" Infantilism and the Petty-Bourgeois Spirit, cited in E.H. Carr,¹¹, p99).

Lenin and the Bolsheviks conceived of a long period of transition, during which workers would gradually exert more and more control over production and society as a whole, eventually, after many years, converting it into socialism (see¹², pp 12–13, citing Lenin,¹³, p245). This would be assisted by "general state book-keeping, general state accounting of the production and distribution of goods", and would be "something in the nature, so to speak, of the skeleton of a socialist society".. In the meantime, the state would be in control of capitalist relations of production. Any Marxist should be able to work out that a state which is in control of capitalism — wage labour — is a capitalist state. In order to run the economy, it has to impose work discipline, and

⁸ *The Bolsheviks and Workers' Control*, M. Brinton, Solidarity, London, 1970.

⁹ *Factory Committees and the Dictatorship of the Proletariat*, C. Goodey, Critique no. 3, Glasgow, 1973.

¹⁰ *"Left-Wing" Communism, an Infantile Disorder*, V.I. Lenin, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1950.

¹¹ *The Bolshevik Revolution*, 2, E.H. Carr, Penguin, London, 1966.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ *Can the Bolsheviks Retain State Power?*, V.I. Lenin, Selected Works, 4, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1950.

all the accompanying forms of repression which capitalism is heir to. The idea of a “workers’ state” which will gradually transform wage labour into the free association of producers is an un-Marxist utopia. The involvement of the working class in the administration of capitalism, through Soviets, etc., just leads it into managing its own exploitation.

Supporters of the notion of a “workers’ state” will admit that, initially, such a state is in charge of a capitalist economy. What will prevent it becoming a capitalist state is the intentions of the people running it. They — organised in the Party — want to create communism. But it is again basic materialism to point out that states develop independently of the intentions of their functionaries. A state in charge of capitalism cannot transform it into communism by willpower. There has to be another way.

The concept of a “degenerated” workers’ state is absurd. States are administrative bodies based on armed forces. They defend particular social relations. A state cannot degenerate. It cannot gradually change from defending the proletariat to defending the bourgeoisie. This would involve a period of transition in which it abolished wage labour with less and less enthusiasm, followed by a phase in which it defended it with greater and greater vigour, divided by an interregnum in which it couldn’t quite make up its mind!

To summarily demonstrate the nature of the Bolshevik regime, we will briefly look at three areas of society in which the new regime strengthened capitalism with a resolve which must have been the envy of the liberals they had just overthrown.

The Extraordinary Commission to Fight Counter-Revolution, or Cheka, was founded on December 8 1917 “to watch the press, saboteurs, strikers, and the Socialist-Revolutionaries of the Right” (Daniels,¹⁴ p90, citing the Cheka’s founding decree, our emphasis). Strikers were now labelled agents of the counter-revolution, and subject to rapidly increasing repression, starting with “confiscation, confinement, deprivation of (food) cards”, and ending with summary execution.

In March 1918, Trotsky abolished the elective principle in the army, replacing elected officers with former tsarist officers who, “in the area of command, operations and fighting” (in other words, everything), were given “full responsibility” and “the necessary rights” (¹⁵, p93). One year after the revolution which destroyed the tsar’s army and navy, Trotsky restored them.

Finally, in the economy, Lenin said in April 1918: “We must raise the question of piecework and apply and test it in practice; we must raise the question of applying much of what is scientific and progressive in the Taylor system, we must make wages correspond to the total amount of goods turned out...” (¹⁶, p96).

And he didn’t just raise these questions, he answered them.

¹⁴ *A Documentary History of Communism*, 1, ed. R.V. Daniels, Tauris & Co., London, 1985.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

When a particular state imprisons strikers, decimates soldiers, militarises labour, cooperates with factory owners and negotiates territory with imperialist powers, its nature is clear. Such a state defends the capitalist class and the capitalist mode of production against the proletariat and the communist movement. Such was the nature of the Soviet state created by the October revolution.

We Got the Power

Between February and October 1917, the working class had a significant amount of power in Russia. Following the Petrograd mutiny of 27 February, when troops refused to shoot demonstrators and striking workers and joined them, the whole edifice of tsarist autocracy collapsed. Kerensky commented that throughout the whole of the Russian lands, there was “literally not one policeman”. They crowded into the jails to avoid lynching, taking the place of thousands of hardened revolutionaries of all factions who wasted no time in getting stuck in. From February to October, a situation of “dual power” existed, with a weak bourgeois government and numerous organs of working class power. Even at the lowest points during these eight months, when the bourgeoisie was on the offensive, workers defied the bosses, and soldiers and sailors chose which orders to obey. The Soviets of Workers’, Soldiers’ and Peasants’ Deputies, led by the Petrograd Soviet, had more power than the Provisional Government, though they persistently refused to use it to destroy the latter, in fact they propped it up by sending ministers and giving it “socialist” credibility.

Finally on October 25, the Military Revolutionary Committee of the Bolshevik-dominated Petrograd Soviet smashed the Provisional Government and announced that the Soviets were now the power in the land. The Congress of Soviets elected a government, the Council of People’s Commissars, or SovNarKom, to which the Soviets now gave increasing amounts of their own power. From the viewpoint of the working class, it is difficult to find any major gains resulting from October. There is one major exception: peace.

It is understandable that the Soviets, after much debate, accepted Lenin’s arguments for signing a peace treaty with Germany. Most of the Soviets initially bitterly opposed the idea, arguing that a revolutionary war, even a guerilla war which would not actually beat Germany, would hasten the advent of the world revolution. But the argument that Russia was exhausted won the day. The Brest-Litovsk treaty was disastrous for the working class. It freed German militarism from fighting a war on two fronts, giving it the Ukraine, and boosted its morale (its power over its own workers), which enabled it to launch the March-July 1918 offensives on the Western front, prolonging the war.

It is impossible for us to say exactly what effect a refusal by the working class to accept Brest-Litovsk would have had. Certainly the Germans would have advanced towards Petrograd, but a communist guerilla war would have tied up vast numbers of troops, bringing forward the collapse of the Central Powers and the wave of Revolu-

tions which eventually brought them down in November 1918. There was certainly a readiness for a fight, as shown by the debates in the Soviets, and by subsequent events in the Ukraine, where a large anarchist army fought the counter-revolution with considerable success, until it was suppressed by the Red Army (see Voline, *The Unknown Revolution*,¹⁷).

The Russian revolution was not defeated primarily because Russia was isolated by the civil war and the defeat of the German revolution — it had already been seriously undermined from within before isolation had a chance to take hold. Of course, the invasion of White Russian and imperialist armies in the summer of 1918 took its toll of surviving revolutionary gains, not least because it enabled the Bolshevik government to impose capitalist discipline and the militarisation of labour. But the Soviet government was already defending capital against communism before the outbreak of the civil war. So “isolation” is a feeble excuse. The suppression of Kronstadt in 1921, the most spectacular act of the Bolshevik counter-revolution, was the culmination of four years of constant attacks on the working class revolution of February 1917. Lenin succeeded where Kerensky had failed.

Nor were the Bolsheviks forced to conduct the civil war in the way they did by circumstances beyond their control. Insurgents in the Ukraine were capable of holding Soviet congresses to organise the struggle against the White armies. The Red Army under Trotsky ruthlessly liquidated such attempts to conduct a communist civil war against counter-revolution. Voline cites Trotsky’s order no. 1824 of June 4, 1919, which calls participation in a Soviet Congress of insurgents in various regions of the Ukraine, “an act of high treason”, and forbids it: “In no case shall it take place” (¹⁸, pp596-597). Whilst the “anarchist bandits” were fighting Denikin’s offensive, the Red Army attacked them from the rear.

One of the causes of the 1921 uprising was the capitalist organisation of the Red Army. This was not a consequence of the civil war, preceding it by four months. The arbitrary brutality of bourgeois military discipline is neither necessary nor possible in a class struggle army. We only have to look at Makhno’s partisans to see this (see Arshinov,¹⁹). Another was corruption. The armed guards who checked people bringing in food from the countryside took bribes to allow black marketeers through, and took what they wanted for resale or for themselves.

It is quite clear from Trotsky’s account²⁰ that the Bolshevik Party consistently tried to hold back the class struggle up to October 1917 until they were in a position to dominate the government which resulted from the insurrection. Had Kornilov taken Petrograd in August 1917, he would have murdered the left-wing leaders, yet when sailors from the Aurora visited Trotsky in prison, he urged restraint! (²¹, 2, p233).

¹⁷ *The Unknown Revolution*, Voline, Black Rose Books, Montreal, 1975.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ *History of the Makhnovist Movement 1918–1921*, P. Arshinov, Black & Red, Detroit, 1974.

²⁰ *The History of the Russian Revolution*, L. Trotsky, Pathfinder, New York, 1980 [3 vols. in one].

²¹ *Ibid.*

The Firehose

Some of the writings and speeches of Bolshevik leaders at this time are impressive. Lenin's April Theses²² served to radicalise the Bolshevik apparatus in 1917. The depth of this radicalisation can be gauged by the introduction of one-man management a year later. The State and Revolution²³, Lenin's most revolutionary work, was not published until 1918, when the counter-revolution was well under way, thus made no positive contribution. The Bolsheviks talked of a "commune-state", of "the arming of the whole people", of the "abolition of the police, the army and the bureaucracy", and proceeded to create a capitalist police state which disarmed the working class and gave birth to the biggest bureaucracy the world has ever seen. The more radical elements of Bolshevik propaganda had the effect of disguising a social democratic party as a communist one.

The Bolsheviks were, of all the Russian underground groups, the most opposed to the formation of Soviets in 1905. In February 1917,

"Inside Russia, the most active group in St. Petersburg, the Bolsheviks, refused requests for arms from the strikers and tried to dissuade them from further demonstrations, convinced that the tide was on the ebb and that consolidation was needed." (²⁴, p39).

In August, "The Bolshevik leaders themselves often joked about the similarity of their warnings to the political leit-motif of the German social democracy, which has invariably restrained the masses from every serious struggle by referring to the danger of provocateurs and necessity of accumulating strength." (²⁵, 2, p311).

A generally held view of revolution is that timing is of the essence. The prospective revolutionary class or party must choose its moment well. Too early an insurrectionary attempt will provoke repression; too late, and the revolutionaries will have missed their chance.

A proletarian revolution is only possible when the ruling class is in severe crisis, which is likely to last for months. Such was the case in Russia in 1917. In such situations, it is unlikely that the proletariat will lose much by going on the offensive. Even in the normal day-to-day life of capitalist society, it is unusual, though not unheard-of, for a genuine revolutionary group (as opposed to a leftist one) to urge restraint.

Military analogies are over-used in the class war, and often misleading. The class war is fundamentally different from a war between states. The workers are not an army until they start fighting. But in straightforward physical confrontations between classes, an understanding of timing, the balance of forces, and so on, is important. We cannot condemn the Bolsheviks simply because they held back the armed struggle. However, revolutionaries would not spend most of their time trying to hold back the class where the government is weak and the working class has real autonomous power

²² *The April Theses*, V.I. Lenin, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1951.

²³ *The State and Revolution*, V.I. Lenin, Foreign Languages Press, Peking, 1976.

²⁴ *Clarity and Unity in the Russian Revolution*, Communist Bulletin no. 10, Aberdeen, 1987.

²⁵ *The History of the Russian Revolution*, L. Trotsky, Pathfinder, New York, 1980 [3 vols. in one].

in sections of society, including the armed forces. They would not try to prevent strikes as the Bolsheviks in the Vyborg district did (²⁶, 2, p10).

The Bolsheviks' strategy of holding back the class war was not based on fear of provoking the government (what would the government have done when provoked that it couldn't have done in any case?), but on the argument that there was no coherent force to take power. They left the Provisional Government in power while they were unsure of their ability to provide an alternative administration. The government could not even control the naval fort which defended Petrograd. So when Lenin urged "caution, caution, caution", he was trying to hold back the class struggle until the Bolsheviks were in a position to use it for their own ends. To do this, he needed a more disciplined party, so he described Bolsheviks who had supported the slogan "Down with the Provisional Government" against the more moderate official Bolshevik slogan "Long Live the Soviet" as guilty of "a serious crime". "Long Live the Soviet" in July 1917 meant supporting the body which, as Lenin constantly pointed out, was the main prop of the capitalist government.

In Petrograd, even at the militant Putilov factory, the Bolsheviks tried to stop the July demo, but were swept aside by the workers. The party in the Vyborg district decided it had to go along to "maintain order" (²⁷, 2, p17). Although Lenin did everything he could to prevent the July 4th armed demonstration, he explained why he had to support it once it was inevitable: "For our party to have broken with the spontaneous movement of the Kronstadt masses would have struck an irreparable blow at its authority".

Describing the genesis of the July Days, Trotsky admits: "With an embarrassed shake of the head, the Vyborg Bolsheviks would complain to their friends: 'We have to play the part of the fire hose.'" (²⁸, 2, p10). He candidly describes how he persuaded the 176th regiment to defend the "socialist" ministers against the demonstrators. When the demonstrators demanded to see minister Tsereteli, leading Bolshevik Zinoviev came out and spoke: "I appealed to that audience to disperse peacefully at once, keeping perfect order, and under no circumstances permitting anyone to provoke them to any aggressive action." Trotsky adds: "This episode offers the best possible illustration of the keen discontent of the masses, their lack of any plan of attack, and the actual role of the Bolshevik party in the July events" (²⁹, 2, p45). It certainly does.

Loyal Oppositions

Our critique of October is not that it was an undemocratic coup d'etat. Firstly, because we do not believe that a majority of the working class has to endorse an

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

assault on state power by a minority, and secondly, because the Bolsheviks did have the support of a large proportion of the most militant workers. We would not quibble over the description of the result of October as a “workers’ state”, since it was based on the Soviets. But this is no guarantee that it will defend the interests of the working class.

Neither do we argue that the party was internally undemocratic. The Kommunist faction (see³⁰), composed of some of the leading Bolsheviks in Moscow, argued against the party’s decisions, saying that they “Instead of raising the banner forward to communism, raise the banner back to capitalism.” The left communists also opposed the Brest-Litovsk treaty. When the civil war started, the left described the situation inside Russia as “War Communism”. Housing was redistributed (see³¹), rail and post were free, electricity and water free when available, rent was abolished, and so, it appeared, was money. But in practice, most of the food was obtained on the black market, otherwise even more people would have died of starvation (³², p101). Cannibalism also helped supplement Russia’s meagre diet. Money was abolished only in the sense that inflation devalued it to such an extent it was replaced with barter.

Kollontai’s Workers’ Opposition advocated workers’ control of capitalism, via the trade unions. Nowhere in *The Workers’ Opposition*³³ does Kollontai understand that Russia is capitalist. The Workers’ Opposition were “the first” to volunteer for the suppression of Kronstadt in 1921 at the 10th Party Congress. At this congress, the left communists lurched to the right, defending private trade. After this, factions were banned, sent to Siberia, or shot. There were nevertheless numerous oppositions formally inside the Party even after this point, some of them quite positive, for example Miasnikov’s Workers’ Group and Bogdanov’s Workers’ Truth Group:

“The soviet, party, and trade-union bureaucracies and organizers find themselves with material conditions which are sharply distinguished from the conditions of existence of the working class. Their very well-being and the stability of their general position depend on the degree to which the toiling masses are exploited and subordinated to them.” (Appeal of the Workers’ Truth Group, 1922, cited in³⁴, p147).

Other examples can be found in Daniels,³⁵ and Ciliga,³⁶. The latter describes the debates among oppositionists in prison and in exile in the late twenties and early thirties, many of whom had managed to work out what had gone wrong. But by this time it was too late.

³⁰ *Theses of the Left Communists*, N. Bukharin et. al., Critique, Glasgow, 1977.

³¹ *The Russian Revolution*, 1, W.H. Chamberlain, Grosset and Dunlap, New York.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ *The Workers’ Opposition*, A. Kollontai, Solidarity, London.

³⁴ *A Documentary History of Communism*, 1, ed. R.V. Daniels, Tauris & Co., London, 1985.

³⁵ *The Conscience of the Revolution*, R.V. Daniels, Harvard University Press, 1960.

³⁶ *Open Letter to Comrade Lenin*, H. Gorter, Wildcat, London, 1989.

For Anti-state Communism

It is obvious that conditions today are far removed from 1917, so we would not mechanically transfer the lessons of the proletariat's mistakes in Russia to today. However, there are some general points which can be drawn from the Russian experience. Between February and October, the proletariat had considerable power in Russia, but then rapidly lost it, and a strong capitalist state was created. When class warfare reaches a certain level, a Soviet state may emerge. However it will only be a step on the road to communism if the revolutionary workers refuse to accept the Soviet state as their own, and oppose it as intransigently as they did its predecessor.

There is no substitute for the immediate task of socialising the entire economy, abolishing money, destroying all bureaucratic hangovers of capitalist rule, and rapidly internationalising the revolution. Any organisation which tries to hold back these measures should be swept aside.

There are no forms which guarantee the success of the revolution, neither is there much point in trying to avoid particular forms, nor making rules about which pre-ordained tasks each type of organisation must take on or refuse. With obvious qualifications, Herman Gorter's 1920 formulation against formalism still stands: "...during the revolution, every Trade Union, every workers' union even, is a political party — either pro or counter revolutionary" (Gorter,³⁷).

No one organisation, whether formally political or ostensibly economic, will hold a monopoly of correct positions. The "revolutionary party" is the sum of all individuals and organisations, whether formal political organisations or not, which actually defend the needs of the social revolution at a given moment. It is impossible to centralise such a minority under one command. However, immense discipline and more importantly, solidarity, will be required for such a party to act in a unified way against the bourgeoisie and its well-organised political forces, let alone its military ones.

This minority can certainly take any action — for example, the overthrow of the state — which serves proletarian goals, without endorsement from the majority of the working class. It cannot however impose communism — this can only be the product of mass activity — therefore it does not seek to create a new state power — a "workers' state" — in place of the old administration. It remains continuously in opposition to any state which is set up, participating in organising the class war until its final victory in the destruction of all states, and the creation of world communism, a free association of producers, in which the freedom of each is the condition for the freedom of all.

³⁷ *The Russian Enigma*, A. Ciliga, Ink Links, London, 1979.

Issue 16 — Autumn 1992

Source: <www.libcom.org/article/wildcat-uk-16-autumn-1992>

Bomber Harris Joins Anti-Fascist Action

Author: Wildcat (UK)

Note: Article on the limitations of anti-fascism. Whilst this is generally a good piece, the comment about anti-fascists having “internalized the democratic/Zionist guilt trip” is especially concerning given the later trajectory of Wildcat in the 2000s.

Source: <www.libcom.org/article/bomber-harris-joins-anti-fascist-action>

The basic proletarian position on fascism and anti-fascism can be stated simply. Fascist and Nazi governments are anti-working class, and have murdered millions of working class people in the interests of capitalist accumulation. When not in government, fascists have often played an important role for the state in spreading racism, dividing and weakening the proletariat. Judged by these criteria, all other capitalist political tendencies are no different. Democratic governments have killed just as many people as fascist ones, and through nationalism, reinforce racist divisions. The left have used anti-fascism to persuade people to support democratic parties. During the Second World War, this was useful to the Allies. The main purpose of anti-fascism was to justify the war, and crush the working class. This was the central aim of the war effort, as shown by Britain’s attitude towards resistance to Hitler inside Germany : the Foreign Office argued “the Gestapo and the SS have done us an appreciable service in removing a selection of those who would undoubtedly have posed as ‘good’ Germans after the defeat of a Nazi Germany” (Guardian, 23 July 92). When Milan’s workers rose against the fascist government in 1943, Britain and the US bombed them.

In Britain today, anti-fascist fronts divert those who wish to fight racism towards the almost irrelevant tactic of chasing small groups of skinheads. There is no evidence that racist attacks on black people are primarily carried out by Nazis: ordinary British patriotism is the problem. Anti-fascists do not challenge patriotism, in fact they support it. They demonstrate every year against fascists marching with the other capitalist parties, who fully supported the World Wars, to remember the dead. They object to fascists tainting the patriotic ceremony with their nasty foreign ideas. On Remembrance Sunday 1991, a speaker from Anti-Fascist Action argued against burning the Union Jack, and instead set fire to an imperial German flag.

In Labour-controlled Camden, when the council started deporting Irish and Bangladeshi workers, the left pleaded with them to stop doing it, because it “played into the hands of the Nazis”. It never occurred to them that the Labour Party were doing what the fascist groups could only dream about. In another London borough, Tower Hamlets, Labour and Liberal councils ran a de facto apartheid policy, putting Indian and Bangladeshi families in separate estates from whites. Targeting fascists is a deliberate strategy by icepick-heads to shield Labour politicians in local government, though the anarchists involved in anti-fascism lack the analytical ability to see that they are being used for this purpose.

The anti-fascist movement’s analysis of the fascist resurgence in Germany today is basically that Germans have an inbuilt urge to wear jackboots and march around doing Nazi salutes. There are even anti-fascists in Germany who have internalized the democratic/Zionist guilt trip so completely that they defend the bombing of Dresden by the Allies! The following article hopefully goes some way towards explaining the problem of neo-Nazism from a more internationalist perspective.

So much for the situation in Britain. Beyond the white cliffs of Dover, things are a bit more complicated. Fascists supported by Germany have democratically taken power in Croatia and started a civil war. Fascist parties have gained 15% and more of the vote in Germany, France and Italy. Though these parties have little chance of winning power — their role is to help the state divide white workers from immigrants to keep wages down, rather than prevent immigration altogether — they are obviously more important than their counterparts in Britain or the USA. Here we publish an account of an anti-fascist demo in Germany by the German communist group *Wildcat*. We don’t completely agree with it. For example, we don’t like the conclusion that people join anti-fascist groups because communists have nothing better to suggest. We always have something better to suggest: as Wildcat know better than anyone, there is always some sort of class struggle going on. The relative downturn at present is no excuse for supporting the left.

Critique of autonomous anti-fascism

Subtitle: A Tough State and Soft Heads or: “Your Courage and our Cunning”

Author: Wildcat (Germany)

Date: Early 1990s

Source: <www.libcom.org/article/critique-autonomous-anti-fascism-wildcat-germany>

& <www.libcom.org/article/tough-state-and-soft-heads>

Note: Article about the background to the violent attacks on foreign workers in Hoyerswerda in ex-DDR at the end of 1991 and the anti-fascist demonstration which followed.

Set in the context of the then-recent reunification of the German state:

“It deals with the background to the violent attacks on foreign workers in Hoyerswerda in ex-DDR at the end of 1991 and the anti-fascist demonstration which followed. After this event, attacks and various counter-mobilisations have continued and often been widely covered in the traditional and the leftwing press. The following article gives an analysis of the Hoyerswerda demonstration and the practice and attitude of ‘autonomist’ demonstrators which in our opinion are interesting and well worth reproducing.” (*Echanges*)

From; *Echanges* 72/73, 1993.

‘Wessi’s’ and ‘Ossi’s are slang for West Germans and East Germans respectively.

Wildcat article on an anti-fascist demo in Hoyerswerda, Germany, in response to a week of racist violence in the town in September 1991.

Submitted by Fozzie on July 28, 2021

Copied to clipboard

The following does not claim to be a comprehensive critique of the demonstration in Hoyerswerda. A vehement discussion is currently taking place in Berlin on this. The demo was successful on a number of scores: there was a lot of spraying and sticking

up posters (for a few days Hoyerswerda must have been the most colourful town in the Federal Republic). On the day a lot of things were discussed in general and this probably had consequences which went beyond the day of the demo. Instead we want to draw attention to a few weak points in autonomous anti fascism and pose a few questions which are, unfortunately, not being raised by anyone at all. The following is, therefore, a mere start and not an analysis of the overall situation; just a few ideas on how our struggle against racist tendencies and our intervention in the class struggles of '91/92 might look.

Until the 1960's Hoyerswerda was a small village in Saxony. Then a "workers' town" with 60,000 inhabitants was built overnight, with almost everyone there working in the brown coal mines. From the early 1980's on, the G.D.R. imported tens of thousands of cheap labourers from Mozambique and Vietnam to work in the Cottbuss brown coal mines. They were crammed into hostels, with frequently 4.5 men to a room. With the end of the G.D.R. and the projected closure of the gigantic open pit, brown coal mines they were gradually sent back to their home countries. About 200 were still there when a group of fascists drove Vietnamese traders from the weekly market in the middle of September. The latter retreated into the hostel. That night stones were thrown at the hostel... For some time the management of the brown coal mines had been making life difficult for the foreign workers. For example, they had raised the bonus for German workers by more than DM 800, whilst raising it by about DM 200 for the foreigners and simultaneously making an "offer" to these workers to terminate their contracts prematurely. Instead of accepting this they went on strike for the same bonuses, and the management responded by forbidding them entry to the company premises. Subsequently, negotiations followed in the hostel without producing any results three hours later the attacks on the hostel started. In order to get rid of the foreign workers, the enterprise would have had to give them severance pay. (There is also a rumour that the owners paid or incited the fascists; some people claim to have seen them talking.) The following night the fascists returned, and this time there were two dozen of them. The workers finally lost their tempers and hit back with a counter attack. Afterwards the attacks shifted to the hostel for refugees applying for political asylum and intensified each night. Fascists came from the whole surrounding area, and gradually about 300 people gathered around the scene, clapping every time mollies hit their targets. The crowd also included a number of youths who wanted to have a go at the police and who couldn't care less about the fascists and the foreigners. For days on end the state played little games with its ostensible helplessness before suddenly arranging for most of the workers and all the refugees to be transported away on 29th September: through rows of applauding residents from the neighbourhood.

"Hoyerswerda" was the most concentrated mobilisation of the state to take place so far. At the same time it revealed the most concentrated agreement between the left and the state: from pamphlets to the taz (left/alternative newspaper) to Springer's Morgenpost agreement prevailed: the Ossis (East Germans) had to be taught democ-

racy. The taz even went so far as to demand BGS (Federal Border Police), barbed wire and stricter laws for the Ossis.

On 9th September a convoy of some 1,000 people set off from Berlin for an “anti racist demo” in Hoyerswerda. After gathering on a car park outside the town, the demo proceeded towards the new town: an incredible mixture of 60’s style rabbit hutches one slab of concrete after another, visibly beginning to disintegrate built for the working class in the period of real socialism. There were the standard slogans “Nazis out, foreigners in” (not being able to think of anything better we decided to stay quiet), there were those who, with foaming mouths, planted themselves in front of the blocks of flats, pointing up at the people on the balconies shouting “You should be ashamed!”, “Anyone who remains silent agrees!”, “Nazis out!”. Such clear expressions of one’s political standpoint were followed by deeds: cars were attacked and stones thrown at private dwellings.

Then the cops formed a thin line in front of the (deserted) refugee hostel and wouldn’t let us go any further. Demonstrators began, as a result, to break up concrete slabs and to prepare to charge through the police line only to be immediately surrounded by others wanting to stop them. The masked demonstrators retorted with “autonomous reformists!”, punches and hitting people on the head with batons. Finally, the demo leaders decided to turn back. We could no longer stand it in the demo with the moralistic, anti fascist slogans, its inner confusion and the aggression directed at each and everyone there, and five of us set off for “enemy territory”. During our walk through the new town we ran into people who were, almost without exception, horrified about the attacks on foreigners but who did not see any way of intervening personally or of at least standing up and stating quite clearly that they thought that what was happening was shit. One young woman said: all the older people think like my mother, that what the fascists did was good. In the future it will be embarrassing if someone asks you where you come from. When we returned to the demo it had been standing in front of a second police cordon of the BGS. Negotiations were conducted for about two hours. This time outside pressure had once again ignited bloody disputes within the demo. In the meanwhile its character had also begun to change: an increasing number of young people from Hoyerswerda began to join the demonstration, making announcements over the loudspeaker. An old man standing on a balcony waved his red flag and lowered drinks, others distributed sandwiches among the demonstrators ... As it was already beginning to get dark, we were finally given permission with vicars leading the way to start demonstrating. When we set off there were about a thousand of us and probably about a thousand came out and joined in; by the end of the demo there were about three thousand of us i.e. several hundred people from Hoyerswerda had joined in (in front of the demo, behind the demo, most of them alongside it, but quiet a few of the courageous people joined in). The demo came to an end at the workers’ hostel, where 21 people from Mozambique were still staying. They were in the two top floors (probably the 11th and 12th) and hung white sheets out of the windows. Now the emotional climax was reached: “We’ve got a song for you.” And then it was played through

the loudspeakers at full power: “Deutschland verrecke! (Go to hell Germany)”. This is when most of the demonstrators with black masks discovered the child inside each of them, their knees went weak and they began to dance and shout for joy. International solidarity had been re established, the demo was a complete success at least for all those who thought that they would be running into 60,000 fascists and now saw that this was not the case! For everyone else a number of questions remain open:

1) With the new Law on Foreigners, with the fascist groups bawling their heads off at the Polish border, with the systematic attacks on hostels for foreigners, and not least with African workers and asylum applicants being driven out of Hoyerswerda together with the gestures by politicians and the Police operations, the Federal German state is preparing a new sector of the labour market: the (illegal) exploitation of several million new immigrants “Hoyerswerda” was the provisional climax of a state campaign against the immigrants coming here and the foreigners who live here.

This constellation is remarkably similar to that of 1986: industrialists in the Federal Republic are faced with the problem that immigration is now declining substantially (in the building industry, catering and agriculture there are bitter complaints about a “shortage of labour”) following the 1.1 million coming across from the East in 1988 and 1989. In analysis and strategy papers prepared for their own use, industrialists and their consultants assume that the Federal Republic will require several million new immigrants in the 90’s. For some months now politicians have been stirring up the “refugee question” (although people applying for refugee status only constitute a minute proportion of immigrants). The FRG needs more immigrant workers who should not, however, come here feeling self confident but intimidated and as “tolerated” workers. The state is experimenting: huge waves of immigration have, to be sure, always led to explosions within the class, but have usually and rapidly also brought fresh wind into the class struggles (“Italian strikes” in the sixties, “Turkish strikes” at the beginning of the seventies, etc.) Whereas earlier state measures aimed at “integrating guest workers”, they are now directed towards “making immigration precarious”: work permits for persons applying for refugee status, eroding the laws on political asylum, the new Law on Foreigners, the toleration of fascist groups, the media campaign over the “issue of political asylum” (racist conditioning of the indigenous working class), the sudden outcry in the media over attacks on “foreigners” (with the desired imitations). These are all aspects of a state strategy which is intended to prepare the ground for the immigrants arriving in the next few years.

2) This campaign is also directed against the entire working class and, in particular, against the threat of struggles in the former GDR.

The many attacks on hostels for foreigners over the past few years were generally published as short reports on the “colour page” of the newspapers. In the week in which the press suddenly took a fancy to publishing these attacks on the first page of the paper, a few thousand workers at the Tridelta Werke (an electronics company) occupied the Hermsdorfer motorway intersection a few miles away, shutting it down for the entire Friday afternoon. They had discovered that Tridelta was to be shut down.

This kind of struggle was unprecedented in the history of the Federal Republic (at best there had been the one minute motorway occupation under the strictest control of the unions following prior consultation with the police) and it was not to be allowed to spread under any circumstances.¹ For in the coming months, hundreds of thousands of dismissals are impending in the south of the GDR. And in the Hoyerswerda area two events are taking place almost simultaneously, as in the rest of the former GDR: two days after the demo took place the rents were increased five and even six fold. A one room flat in one of the glorious housing blocks now costs DM 250 (= £87 per month). Secondly, at the end of the year the short time working regulation will cease to apply: almost all the 60,000 workers in Hoyerswerda work in the open pit brown coal mines and in coal processing, which are to be reduced in size at the end of this year. Unemployment will be sent soaring. What will happen if the workers revolt? What will happen if they discover their power in the conglomeration of Hoyerswerda? The working class in the former GDR has not ceased struggling and putting up resistance since the GDR was driven to collapse. By stirring up “hatred of foreigners” two things have been achieved: the people have been given a scapegoat within reach for their own impoverished situation, and at the same time all Ossis have been branded potential racists in order to intimidate them and to keep a lid on the impending class struggles.

3) Hatred of foreigners grows from below. There are countless isolated reactions (in the family, in the “German” housing estate, groups of different nationalities in the factories, during leisure time, etc.) to the uncertainty and, in some cases, aggravation of material conditions by the 1.1 million “immigrants from the east”, to the stagnation in class struggles in the old Federal German state, to the widespread social rejection and mobilisation experienced through “re unification”, to the traumatic events taking place at the level of “foreign policy” (the Gulf War, the civil war in Yugoslavia ...). There is widespread fear of the future (ecological, with the war, with mass unemployment or for whatever reason). There is growing aggression and an increasing tendency to make “too many foreigners” responsible for one’s own problems and even more so for fears projected into the future. People are becoming more aggressive. And, in general, the situation is reminiscent of the sixties and the defamation of the “Itacker” (a pejorative term for Italians): as being lazy, depressing wages, chasing the German women etc ... Two things are different: today there are far more movements, but there is far less of

¹ Note by *Echanges*:

This event is mentioned in another Wildcat document as follows: “Whilst everyone is looking at Hoyerswerda, workers of the rationalised factory Tridelta near Gera occupied a central motorway intersection for hours — which had not happened in Germany before.”

We are puzzled by the remark of Wildcat about such an action being “unprecedented in the history of Germany”. For example, if we look at the stryggles of the Rheinhausen steel workers against closures and redundancies, especially from December 1987 onwards, their had been a number of autonomous initiatives and actions which to some extent and in some periods must be said to have been outside the normal union perspectives and actions — including blocking streets, important bridges over the Rhine and the autobahn, as well as a number of other actions.

the spirit of upheaval and revolt than in the sixties. This has made it very easy for the state so far to exploit these tendencies in the class for its own use.

4) There is no left in the world which cares so little about the “proletarian world” yet is so ready to put the blame on “racism, fascism, sexism, Teutomania” etc. etc. when problems arise. These slogans have one prime goal: to keep the social reality at bay and to confront them on a moral level only.

The mobilisation which followed Hoyerswerda took place under the banner of moral outrage: “You make us sick and now we’re gonna show you!” Some anti fascists saw it as a “punitive expedition” and let themselves go accordingly. They still maintain after the event that “90 or 99%” of the inhabitants of Hoyerswerda are fascists.

Nobody took the trouble to see whether there were real problems between the “foreigners” and the “Hoyerswerda locals” (all of whom are “newcomers”), or how people have dealt with the situation up to now. These are problems which exist in any (alternative/leftist) scene pub and in every squat in which German comrades and foreigner workers try to live together. For example, there have also been fights with Africans in Kreuzberg scene pubs because they tried to get off with the women; there were also fights at the demo between “Germans” and “foreigners” Is it an accident when it happens “in our circles”? Racism when it takes place among workers?? Something that has to be kept hushed up when it happens among refugees???

5) “Hoyerswerda” was and is being used by the political class (from the [neo fascist] Republicans to the Greens) for their own use. The state created a *fait accompli* when it deliberately rushed the “endangered foreigners” away in buses: an invitation to Nazis and their drunken mates to continue. It succeeded far better as a state spectacle directed against new immigrants than the brutal expulsion of Albanian refugees from Italy in that case the state was visible, in Germany the “mood of the people” is presented as something which the state can hide behind or oppose.

The campaign is better prepared and with more advance planning than the “Flutkampagne” denouncing the flood of refugees, especially via East Berlin of 1986 (at the time the state campaign tended to produce solidarity). That also led to a considerable dissolution of solidarity among institutional groups and the liberal left. Today almost everyone, from left to right, from green to brown, church to “pro asyl”, Turk to Ossi agrees on two points: first we haven’t got anything against foreigners. Secondly, the boat is full. The only ones who aren’t in this front are the industrialists. The *Wirtschaftswoche* (c.f. the *Economist*) carried the headline “There is still room in the boat”, adding quite bluntly that the whole dispute was mere “electioneering”. The CDU was trying to gain votes with the “asylum question”. Lafontaine, who for years has counted among the most savage demagogues opposing applicants for asylum and immigrants from the east, made an effective media pose standing on the market square at Hoyerswerda. The “taz” demanded border police and barbed wire against the “Ossis”, who weren’t yet ripe for democracy. The German left more or less “nationalised” itself (from the green to the autonomous social workers). At best they

envisage “politics from below” as street work. Their practice confirms the fascist view of the world: oppose the left and their state ...

6) The West German state uses the fascists. The German state cannot cover the “new Federal Länder” as extensively as it would like to, and in a manner to which we Wessis are accustomed. There is little police presence, social workers are scarce, etc.. But this state is in the process of coming out of its position of weakness. Southern Italy is an example of the way in which weak state presence need not mean anarchy at all: there the mafia has assumed the functions of the state. Hoyerswerda demonstrates that this state can use a dozen fascists in order to show all foreigners with the help of the media (including the “left”) that this time the wind of change is blowing: that is why those who fled from Hoyerswerda will continue to be given bad treatment in an exemplary fashion (through being torn apart, not legalised, etc). Yet the power of the state really is too weak in the area which was formerly the GDR, and not only against the hooligans. It hasn’t had any means so far of proceeding, for example, against motorway occupations, strikes, etc.. A few fascists are certainly not enough to make up for this. on the other hand, an excuse was needed: one cannot openly send in troops trained in putting down civil disobedience just one year after re unification. The excuse for moving in the border police is now there (the taz has grounds to celebrate!).

Triggered off by the politicians and the media, there were systematic attacks on hostels for foreigners throughout Germany. For the first time the fascists had a broad public impact. Hundreds of right wing drinking pals finally felt called upon to act.

Nor can the observation of a LKA (state criminal investigation department) cop be dismissed out of hand, i.e. that some of the attacks were “in their precision, untypical of the far right scene”, and untypical was also the fact that there were not any letters claiming to have been responsible ... What was the story behind “Gladio”? (see Wildcat 53 p16, c.f. also the use of fascists by the state in other NATO countries, e.g. Italy.)

7) The West German state uses the anti fascists. Political fascism as a revolutionary strategy is finished. It is no longer able to do anything which cannot be functionalised by either the state or the Nazi squads. It has no political substance: when organised anti fascists announce that the situation now is the same as in 1933 they only make fools of themselves. They have no moral substance: the hardest fights and the largest number of casualties came about as a result of demonstrators attacking one another at Hoyerswerda. The functionalisation of young kids who see to it that the heat really gets turned on at demos is now rebounding. Political anti fascism is now only a recruiting ground for hierarchically structured, political organisations and, of course, continues to be a field of activity for militant big shots. However, this should by no means distort our view of the many new people who are simply sick of the way in which foreigners are being treated here, and who want to do something about it. As long as we have nothing better to suggest and to practice, they will first politicise themselves through the anti fascist groups ...

8) Let’s turn “Hoyerswerda” on its head. The demonstration in Hoyerswerda was a concentrated experience which could happen anywhere in this society: decisive action

can rapidly become a crystallisation point, since the atmosphere has become highly politicised everywhere.

- In a Berlin factory, with an almost exclusively Turkish workforce, the mass employment of Vietnamese, and then of immigrants from the east, and finally of Ossis, completely undermined the combativeness of the collectivity. Following the Gulf War huge splits appeared among the workforce: playing cards, eating, talking with one another in the breaks all these things were done almost exclusively according to nationality. The press reports about Hoyerswerda did a lot to break this down and set things in motion: the Turks first started to discuss it a lot among themselves, asking how they could deal with the situation (it is important to know that they started to conquer the surrounding area this summer together with their families: you can now buy döner kebabs at all weekly markets within a radius of 50 km, as well as Turkish clothes etc.). Then there was a lot of aggression directed primarily against Ossis with short hair: “Hey, are you also a fascist?” and so on. Over the next few days this behaviour was greatly stepped up by the Turkish and Vietnamese workers and directed against all German supervisors. After a while they no longer dared go near the assembly lines because they were greeted everywhere with cries of “Heil Hitler!” and so on. The day the state expelled the foreigners from Hoyerswerda the supervisors felt compelled to issue a formal declaration that they were not Nazis, had nothing against foreigners and that they regretted the incident. In this heated and highly politicised situation the Ossi’s and the Turks did at least start to talk to one another. Yet a week later the discussion subsided: the debate in the Bundestag on the current situation and the newspaper reports were generally understood as an all clear signal, the German state would protect people because it still wants to have foreigners working here.
- People in Berlin occupied a house in Königs Wusterhausen, the stronghold of the regional fascist scene. When they moved in they first had to paint over the Nazi slogans inside the house. They are trying out a mixture of living, making music, doing cultural projects, creating a meeting place for youths and space for everyone. They have had trouble with the Nazis and things have been demolished, mollies thrown, cars wrecked in front of the house, etc.. At the annual “beach party”, which has been violently disrupted by Nazis for the past three years, it comes to the (prepared) show down: 40 fascists with baseball bats are driven off by 20 people. One fascist is left lying on the ground with a cracked skull. The next evening a group of people are shot at from a big BMW passing by, someone is hit in the upper arm. But these are acts of desperation by the fascists. Anti fascist activities follow, scaring the young Nazis to such an extent that they leave their outfits at home and stop running around in Königs Wusterhausen and call a “peace conference”. But, above all, the people in the squat have

succeeded in rapidly establishing good contact with their neighbours and they write: "The Ossis are provincial somehow, you notice that because they are so damned human. Thank God we are immune to that because we walk around in a suit of armour full of prejudices which we would call racism elsewhere." The (autonomous) left, with its (superficial) morality distorts analysis of any social reality. The real phenomenon, i.e. that the class is directing its hatred against itself in some cases, is only dealt with as fear (mixed up with the fear of their own decline). Shouting their own fears into the society: "Foreigners, don't go to the DDR!", "Girls, don't go on the streets!", "Tomorrow it will be your turn!!!" are no substitute for revolutionary politics.

Instead of withdrawing and isolating ourselves in line with the general trend we must intervene!

Not as a punitive expedition of people with a superior morality, but in confronting the situation day by day. That presumes that we learn to distinguish between real problems and fascist slogans. And that we have some idea of the way to overcome these problems.

We need access to the entire class situation if we want to intervene in a revolutionary sense.

**DON'T STAND AND WATCH!! DON'T STAND BACK!! DON'T BE SCARED!!
GO AMONG THE PEOPLE!! TALK WITH THEM!! ASK IF THERE IS ANYTHING
YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND!! GO INTO THE HOSTELS FOR FOREIGNERS!!**

Hands Off Columbus!

Note: A parody article by Wildcat (UK), satirising a mechanical Marxist materialist conception of history.

Source: <www.libcom.org/library/hands-columbus>

The events commemorating the 500th anniversary of Columbus's discovery of America have led to a predictable outcry from numerous leftist and Indian pressure groups, who point to the disappropriation suffered by their ancestors. It has become fashionable to decry Columbus and the other European adventurers. Horrific though some of the conquistadors' activities may seem, as Marxists we have to look at historical events objectively, not merely in terms of their immediate effects.

Whereas anarchists only see events through the distorting lens of eternal moral principles, Marxists defend a scientific materialist view of history. Though racial holocausts may be a symptom that capitalism is no longer progressive, in its infancy they were signs of robust health. Judged by this historical method, Columbus and his successors "played a most revolutionary part" (Marx) in liberating the productive forces of an entire continent from the archaic relations of hunting and gathering societies. Against the bleeding-heart moralists of his day, Engels summarized the Marxist view on these tribes of backward savages in the following passage from *The Origins* : "People were therefore almost completely dominated by nature as an external, alien, hostile and incomprehensible power, as is reflected in their childlike religious conceptions".

The European explorers freed the Native Americans from this domination, and more importantly, enabled the development of America's immense reserve of natural wealth. Though this process was achieved at great cost in human lives, this was the inevitable price that had to be paid. The development of America, and the vital boost it gave to man's mastery of nature, laid the material foundations for communism. Without this capitalist revolution, mankind would still be in the thrall of nature.

Earth First! — Which Planet Are They On?

Source: <www.libcom.org/library/earth-first-which-planet-are-they>

“In 1987 the Tagaeri [native inhabitants of Ecuador] attacked a group of oil exploration workers who were laying seismic lines which cut through the Tagaeri gardens. The oil companies enlisted the help of the Catholic Bishop in missionizing and “taming” the Tagaeri. The bishop and a nun flew into the area bearing gifts and were found a week later with 17 spears embedded in their bodies, ceremoniously killed.” Earth First! November 1991.

Direct action to defend the planet against its destruction by industrial civilization is assuming more and more radical forms. The methods of the nocompromise environmental movement Earth First! have spread from America to Europe, Australia and the forests of Borneo and the Amazon.

10 Days That Didn't Save the Earth

At the politicians' Earth Summit in Rio, over 200 top scientists issued a statement attacking Green extremism, stating that toxic chemicals and radioactivity are inescapable facts of modern life. “We are worried, at the dawn of the 21st century, by the emergence of an irrational ideology which is opposed to scientific and industrial progress and impedes economic and social development.” Independent, 1 June 92. We are pleased to hear they are worried, and resolve to do our bit to contribute to the emergence of the movement they oppose.

The needs of the working class include the requirement for a planet to live on. Monkeywrenching the sabotage of machinery involved in building motorways, cutting down forests, extracting peat, etc. directly attacks capitalism, whatever the views of the saboteurs. Earth First! itself has broken with some of the more conservative views of its founders and made some attempt to link up with the hidden history of working class sabotage from the Luddites to the Wobblies. Earth First! supported the LA riots. However, the journal is still mainly inspired by “deep ecology”.

The first major problem with deep ecology is that it perpetuates the division between human beings and the rest of nature. This split was unthinkable to preColumbian

Americans, who lived in harmony with their surroundings. That division lies at the root of all 19th century progressive capitalist ideologies, the most coherent of which is Marxism. Whereas Progress teaches us that we must conquer nature, deep ecology, recognizing that this has been a disaster, wants things to be the other way round. "If a war of the races should occur between the wild beast and Lord Man, I would be tempted to sympathise with the bears" writes John Muir. Some deep ecologists go so far as to argue that a certain amount of "die off" is inevitable, welcoming the AIDS epidemic as nature's way of curbing the destruction which inevitably results from human population growth. They support the capitalist myth that the world is over-populated, blaming the victims for their predicament. The world could easily support more than its current population if the waste of capitalism were eliminated.

Secondly, the idea that it is "our" greed that is destroying the planet accepts the humanist premise that all people share common interests. "We humans are collectively killing this planet", as one of the Arizona defendants put it recently. But this society is not a collective entity, but rather a vast labour camp. Starvation is not caused by human beings running out of food sources, but by the production of crops for the world market. In 14th. century England, they used to say "sheep eat men". In 20th. century Brazil and Ethiopia, its coffee and sugar. Lacking a class analysis, to put it mildly, deep ecologists fail to grasp that it is a tiny minority of human beings, who at the risk of sounding old fashioned we call CAPITALISTS, who are responsible for the destruction of nature, including millions of human beings. The planet isn't dying, it's being murdered, and the murderers have names and addresses.

One of us went to the first gathering of Earth First! in Britain. Just before this conference, an anonymous group destroyed hundreds of thousands of pounds' worth of machinery belonging to Fisons on the Yorkshire moors, to delay the company's disastrous peat extraction programme. Not surprisingly, Friends of the Earth denounced the action as harmful to their attempts to persuade Fisons to be nice to the environment.

What is more surprising is that within Earth First! itself there are people arguing that the group should condemn sabotage. At the other extreme, it tolerates people who are prepared to talk to the press in the following terms: "Bombs have been used in the United States and Europe and we're bound to see desperate acts here" (The Independent on Sunday, 19 April). This was actually said: the press was not lying for a change.

Nothing could be further from the truth. Earth First! is overwhelmingly composed of middle class pacifists. Whereas the American group had a wholesome redneck image, its British offshoot has much in common with middle class environmental and peace movements. Earth First! is the Green Party with wire cutters. The press distortion which most riled Earth First! was the claim that it is an "offshoot" of the US group. "We want our own [British] identity" they whined. I tried hard to overcome my initial revulsion towards people talking about workshops and women only spaces, allowing their children to disrupt the meeting and wearing dungarees. But the fight for the Earth is too important to allow petty prejudices to get in the way.

Their attitude to organization makes anarchists look like disciplinarians. Instead of the organizers making it clear who is in charge, reading out the rules, and setting the agenda, as happens at the meetings we organize, the gathering wasted hours deciding whether to have workshops or just one big meeting. Eventually, workshops prevailed. At the end of a “workshop”, you have a “reportback”, in which the “facilitator” reads out a travesty of what happened in each workshop to the assembled gathering. None of the workshops seemed to produce anything relevant to what they were ostensibly about.

They went out of their way to choose the least effective organizational methods at all stages: dissolving into workshops just as the discussion was getting somewhere; pathetic “anti sexist” types chairing meetings when what was needed was someone with the self confidence to lead the discussion; and the general promotion of incompetence. Decentralization is regarded as an established desideratum. Not just the decentralization of activity which is absolutely necessary for security reasons, but political decentralization — in other words, allowing anyone to say what they like. I noticed a deep rooted fear of confronting other people’s views, for fear of being aggressive. Without this debate no movement can resolve issues. At our meetings we feel obliged to argue with anything we don’t agree with. They have actually discovered a worse form of organization than majority voting: allowing everybody to have their say and refusing to decide anything until everybody is happy.

Many people feel, rightly, that one of the things that needs doing is direct action of various kinds against the earth raping capitalist military industrial monster. In the current period of low class struggle many people will no doubt get involved in these things. Unless they reject the organizational practices and open attitudes of the Green Party and the peace movement they will be defeated.

Earth First! UK is hopeless. Those who want to do what needs to be done should avoid them like the plague. Organizing in small anonymous groups of people who know each other is the only way to avoid obvious dangers. We want to see a movement which rejects openness, moralism and workshops, in favour of clandestinity, professionalism, and solidarity.

I went to a much more inspiring meeting addressed by the veteran American social ecologist Murray Bookchin in May. Murray gave about 300 greens a lecture on class ecology. He explained how arguments that “we” are responsible for the destruction of the environment are dangerous, because they make us identify with corporations. Against the view “that recognises the equality and inherent worth of every form of life” (Green Revolution, Spring ’92), Murray welcomed the forthcoming elimination of the Smallpox virus.

Support the Arizona 4!

4 Earth First! militants have been jailed in Arizona for up to 6 years for damaging an environmentally harmful ski resort. In spite of their deep ecological ideas, they have to be supported. Solidarity is the minimum startingpoint for a discussion about the relationship between class struggle and eco-defence.

The following addresses are copied from the American Earth First! journal. Ilse Asplund and Marc Baker c/o 1385 Iron Springs Rd, Box 104, Prescott, AZ 86301, USA. Peg Millet, 23118008, 37900 N 45th Ave, Dept 1785, Phoenix, AZ 85027, USA. Mark Davis, 23106008, Federal Correctional Institute, RR 2 Box 9000, Safford, AZ 85546, USA.

Readers may be interested in *Live Wild or Die!*, which is available from POB 411233, San Francisco, CA 94141. This is similar to *Earth First!* and contains loads of interesting information about doing things without getting caught. A more detailed class based critique of deep ecology, *How Deep is Deep Ecology?* by George Bradford, can be obtained from Fifth Estate, 4632 Second Avenue, Detroit MI 48201, USA. Also available from them is *Eco-defence* (Ned Ludd Books 1987), an outrageously irresponsible manual of individual sabotage, which substitutes the formation of small elite groups of rigidly disciplined self-appointed professional saboteurs, for the real working class tradition of mass meetings and collective (contd. p94).

Five Go Job-Hunting

Source: <www.libcom.org/article/wildcat-uk-16-autumn-1992>

In recent months, there has been a well-publicized tiff within the British law enforcement community. The buggers of MI5 (part of the military) are short of work following the collapse of the Soviet Union, and are trying to muscle in on police work such as chasing the IRA. MI5 justify their increased involvement in Irish affairs by the fact that the Special Branch (part of the police) are obviously too stupid to beat the IRA. This in turn means that the Branch have to justify their employment by finding other supposed threats to chase. We recently discovered definite evidence of interference with our mail. We suggest that correspondents try to use false names and addresses, and use box numbers or apartment blocks which receive their mail in a common collection box.

Good old-fashioned trade unionism

Author: Wildcat

Note: Wildcat argue that unions have sabotaged working class struggle since their inception.

Source: <www.libcom.org/article/good-old-fashioned-trade-unionism-wildcat>

The year 1842 was a very significant one for the proletariat of the British Isles. On the positive side it was the occasion of a great struggle against wage cutting and on the negative side it marked the formation of the first modern national trade union. This was the Miners' Association of Great Britain and Ireland, an organisation every bit as anti-working class as the trade unions today, which used almost identical methods to undermine the workers' struggle for their interests. This was an event of significance for the proletariat of the whole world since the trade union form (once perfected) was one which was to be exported across the globe. Unionisation was not the only important event in the "domestication" of the proletariat of Britain but it is one of the clearest examples of a general trend from the uncontrollable mobs of the 18th Century to the passivity of the modern Labour Movement.

But first let's start as we mean to go on, with mass strikes and uprisings. In mid 1842 conditions for the working class were even more desperate than usual. In some industrial towns half the population were unemployed and those "lucky" enough to be in work were often on short-time and subjected to frequent wage cuts and speed up. The first sign of a fight back was in West Bromwich in May when miners went on strike. The strike was smashed by the police and army and the workers were forced to accept a 10% wage cut but the strike had only been over a fortnight when more than 10,000 iron and coal workers struck in the Black Country. From here trouble quickly spread to North Staffordshire and by the end of July all the North Staffordshire mines were closed and industry ground to a halt across the whole of the Midlands. This was just the beginning.

In the textile towns large crowds of strikers and other proletarians roamed about emptying the factories and filling the streets. Many had sticks and did not hesitate to use force to extend the struggle. They pulled plugs from factory boilers so in Lancashire and Yorkshire the strike became known as the Plug Plot Riots. At Shelton, North Staffs., Lord Granville's pits had two furnaces blown up. They still had not been

replaced two years later. At Bingley in Yorkshire strikers threatened to burn down any mill that carried on working. They meant it.

At this time the police force barely existed. In the Scottish town of Airdrie, for example, one superintendent and four constables attempted to control a mining community numbering 33,000! The total force in Staffordshire was 184 men. Rescue of prisoners was very common. On 6 August a large crowd surged through Burslem, North Staffordshire, in response to the arrest of three colliers for begging. They broke into the police station, freed the men and then smashed all the windows in the Town Hall. A few days later in the same town Thomas Powys, a magistrate and deputy lord lieutenant of the county, ordered troops to fire on a strikers demo in the market square. One was killed and many wounded. A crowd of 500 set off to burn Powys' house. Later various rich scumbags had their homes pillaged and burnt. Coalowners and magistrates were singled out for special treatment. So were the clergy — as well as most of them preaching in support of coalowners some of them actually were coalowners. God may forgive, the proletariat doesn't!

Many of the early clashes occurred because of attempts by the authorities to crack down on poaching and the stealing of vegetables, which went on on an enormous scale. In Cheshire a special mounted force was formed to ensure that information about attacks on farms was quickly sent to the army.

When the strike movement ended in September, it was a partial victory for the workers, despite the vicious repression meted out by the state — hundreds were imprisoned and sentences of over 20 years transportation were common. But employers were not able to impose the large-scale wage cuts (around 25%) which they had intended. Some workers (such as the spinners of Bolton) even won small increases. The situation was summed up well by Richard Pilling, a mill worker on trial for calling his fellow workers out on strike when the bosses announced a wage cut. In court he said "if it had not been for the late struggle, I firmly believe thousands would have starved to death".

It was clear that the workers had won this victory not through peacefully withdrawing their labour but through the traditional methods of rioting, freeing prisoners, plundering and burning the houses of the rich, theft, sabotage and undemocratically spreading strikes through going directly to other groups of workers. The numerous unions founded shortly after this time set about blatantly suppressing all of these activities in favour of legality, peaceful behaviour and, sometimes, the myth of the "General Strike" in which the workers would redress all their grievances without a shot being fired.

The Miners' Association was not the only union formed at this time. The Potters' Union was formed in 1843, so was the Cotton Spinners' Association. In 1845 the local bodies of the printing trade were united as the National Typographical Association. The tailors and shoe makers were being enrolled into national societies as were glass makers and steam engine makers. It was the most significant though, given its size (at one stage it may have had 100,000 members) and the important role played by miners in the strike/riot wave.

The trade unions, including the Miners' Association, openly opposed all forms of struggle apart from the peaceful withdrawal of labour. At one of the founding meetings of the Miners' Association at Wakefield in November 1842 every pit was asked to appoint delegates and urged to make "unity, peace, law and order" its motto. This meant accepting the logic of capitalist economics since obviously workers are less able to achieve anything by peaceful strikes when there is a surplus of labour. This doesn't mean they can't fight at all : it means they have to use different methods. The struggles of 1842 were against economic logic, taking place in the middle of a "recession" and succeeding where peaceful strike action would undoubtedly have failed. This wasn't the only way unions attempted to impose economic logic — the Miners' Association made regular appeals to employers to unite with the workers in demanding higher coal prices!

This period wasn't just critical for the development of modern unions but modern social democratic politics as well. The National Association of United Trades for the Protection of Labour, formed in 1845, even seriously debated launching a Labour Party. Fortunately this particular attack on the proletariat had to wait another half century or so.

It was also an important time for the state reform of working conditions, that is; for planned preemptive concessions to the working class designed to buy social peace in the long term. This was the year of The Midlands Mining Commission Report and the First Report of the Commission on Children and Young Persons — this was the first official exposé of the widespread employment of children (often sent down the mines at the age of four or five) and the appalling conditions under which they worked. There was renewed parliamentary agitation for the ten-hour day for women and juveniles in the cotton industry. This was led by Tory philanthropists such as Lord Ashley (later Lord Shaftesbury) and finally became law in 1847. In 1848, when many bourgeois commentators thought that Britain was on the brink of revolution, the Secretary of State wrote to Lord Ashley saying "I shall declare without hesitation ... that the passing of the Ten-Hours Bill has kept these vast counties at peace during this eventful period". In 1864 Gladstone declared in the House of Commons that the law had been beneficial "both in mitigating human suffering and in attaching important classes of the community to Parliament and the Government". At first sight it may appear that this "movement" had very little connection with what was actually happening within the working class but in fact there were numerous links between trade unionism and philanthropic reformers. The Miners' Association passed many resolutions praising Lord Shaftesbury's work and continually plied him with data. He once replied to them, saying he was "only an instrument, and possessed little power unless the working classes stood at his back".

Chartism

Most of those involved in setting up and running the unions in this period, particularly the Miners' Association, would have described themselves as "Chartists". This meant they supported the "six points of the People's Charter" on the reform of parliament. These were: adult male suffrage, no property qualification, annual parliaments, equal constituencies, salaries for MP's and the secret ballot. This was first formulated for a specifically working class audience in 1836 by the London Workingmen's Association, a small society largely formed on the suggestion of the rich radical MP, Francis Place. Their program was hardly original — 58 years previously one Major Cartwright had introduced a Bill in the Commons containing the same six points.

As can be imagined, Chartism was a very broad church indeed, encompassing everyone from those who thought that adult male suffrage would somehow enable the country to be run a bit better to those, such as James Bronterre O'Brien, who honestly believed that it would lead to the abolition of private property. Numerous progressive historians have written that it was a "revolutionary demand" — in "the context of the times", of course. We won't waste time trying to refute this absurd idea except to ask a rhetorical question: how come the famous Chartist leader Feargus O'Connor was actually elected to parliament in 1847 by the middle class electors of Nottingham, and with a comfortable majority? It is often described as the "first working class organisation". It would be more accurate to describe it as a middle class movement dedicated to recuperating working class struggle. The intention of Chartism was always to divert working class anger into demands for an extension of the franchise. In 1848 when the working class urban centres of much of Britain were engulfed in strikes and riots their response was... a massive petition to parliament, though they couldn't quite make up their minds whether to appeal to the Cabinet or directly to the Queen.

As might be expected of a movement with such conservative aims its main activities consisted of organising petitions to parliament (with millions of signatures) and mass peaceful demos and rallies (hundreds of thousands of people). The fact that it was possible to assemble this many proles peacefully shows how much the working class had been tamed by the 1830's. This had not gone unnoticed by Francis Place: "Look even to Lancashire" he wrote a month after the vicious pig massacre of a pro-democracy demo at "Peterloo" (St. Peter's Fields near Manchester) in 1819:

"Lancashire brute' was the common and appropriate appellation. Until very lately it would have been dangerous to have assembled 500 of them on any occasion. Bakers and butchers would at the least have been plundered. Now 100,000 people may be collected together and no riot ensue, and why?... The people have an object, the pursuit of which gives them importance in their own eyes, elevates them in their own opinion, and thus it is that the very individuals who would have been the leaders of the riots are the keepers of the peace."

There were, however, those who believed in achieving the goals of the Charter by insurrectionary means. These were known as "physical force" Chartists, as opposed

to “moral force” Chartists. Sometimes they were as good as their appellation. One night in November 1838, for example, several thousand workers marched into Newport intending to free the imprisoned Chartist leader Vincent. They were led by Frost who had just been sacked from his post as a magistrate and was the chairman of a Chartist Convention which had just dissolved. They were attacked by troops and special constables and ten workers were killed. Violent rhetoric was also very common. The famous Chartist “extremist” Julian Harney once advised his audience to carry “a musket in one hand and a petition in the other” — an early example of “the armalite and the ballot box”! This was, after all, an age in which the state had very little legitimacy and the idea of taking up arms was very widespread amongst the working class. Harney wrote of the winter of 1838–9:

“In small villages lying out from Newcastle the exhortation to arms was being taken quite literally... a strong tradition of owner-paternalism had been replaced by an extremely class-conscious Chartism, and fowling pieces, small cannon, stoneware grenades, pikes and ‘craa’s feet or caltrops — four-spiked irons which could be strewn in a road to disable cavalry horses — were being turned out in quantities. It was localities like this which, on hearing rumours that troops would be present at the great meeting in Newcastle on Christmas Day, sent couriers to find out if they were to bring arms with them.”

The Insurrectionary Tradition

*“The Levelution is begun,
So I’ll go home and get my gun,
And shoot the Duke of Wellington”*

- an 1820’s street song from Belper, Derbyshire

Since the 18th Century there had been an almost unbroken tradition of organised violent resistance to capital. The 19th Century was ushered in with a rash of riots across England against high food prices caused by Britain’s war with France. Much of the rioting seems to have been organised in advance with handbills being distributed. One, from London in September 1800, said: “How long will ye quietly and cowardly suffer yourselves to be imposed upon, and half-starved by a set of mercenary slaves and Government hirelings?... We are the sovereignty, rise then from your lethargy. Be at the Corn market on Monday”. Six days of rioting at the Corn Market followed. Another called upon “Tradesmen, Artizans, Journeymen, Labourers &c.” to meet on Kennington Common. The meeting was prevented only by the use of troops.

For the first two decades of the century rural Ireland was swept by one revolt after another. Secret societies — Threshers, Caravats, Shanavests, Carders — used various forms of violence to defend tenant rights, to force down rent and prices, resist tithe payment and drive out landlords. In 1806 the Threshers virtually controlled Connaught. According to the Irish Solicitor-General in 1811 the countryside suffered

from the “formidable consequences of an armed peasantry, and a disarmed gentry”. The Lord Chief Baron, sentencing a teenage boy to death for stealing arms, declared: “Can it be endured, that those persons who are labouring by day, should be legislating by night?”.

The Luddites

“In the three counties, the agitation for parliamentary reform commenced at exactly the point where Luddism was defeated.”

- E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*.

The information in the following section is almost entirely taken from E. P. Thompson. This is because he seems to be the only lefty historian who’s written anything decent about them. Many of the academics who deign to mention the Luddites are such blatant brown-noses of the bourgeoisie they’re not worth reading — for example, one hack describes them as “simple-minded labourers... smashing the machines which they thought responsible for their troubles” (*The Age of Revolution*, E. Hobsbawm, p55). EPT, on the other hand, regards Luddism more as an honest mistake made by the workers on the long and tortuous path which led to the election of Harold Wilson. As you can see from the above quote, though, he is honest and often gives factual examples which contradict his progressive, social democratic ideas. From a communist perspective there is nothing “outmoded” about the forms of action described here. Some kind of Luddite-style community organisation would be appropriate for workers in small, scattered work-places today and, as for Captain Swing, perhaps a few burning hayricks and smashed farm machines might be just what rich farmers need to persuade them to share some of their fat EC subsidies with their miserably paid labourers.

The Luddite movement was focused around three main industrial objectives — the destruction of power looms in Lancashire, the destruction of shearing frames in Yorkshire and resistance to the break-down of custom in the Midlands framework-knitting industry. But the movement went well beyond these objectives, drawing in proletarians from outside these sectors and raising all kinds of political demands. It was a movement of such strength that for several months it could successfully resist 12,000 troops, not by military confrontation but social means — unbreakable community solidarity and spreading disaffection in the troops’ own ranks. In June 1812 the Vice-Lieutenant of the West Riding declared “...except for the very spots which were occupied by Soldiers, the Country was virtually in the possession of the lawless... the disaffected outnumbering by many Degrees the peaceable Inhabitants.”

The “croppers” of Yorkshire were highly skilled (and highly paid) wool cloth finishing workers whose status was threatened by two important inventions, the gig-mill and the shearing frame. The gig-mill was a device for raising the surface of cloth by passing it between rollers. It was at least as old as the mid-16th Century since there was a statute of Edward VI prohibiting its use. Workers had prevented its widespread use ever since.

Who says you can't stand in the way of Progress? This struggle had been particularly intense at the end of the 18th Century. In the West Country bodies of rioters 1,000 or 2,000 strong had attacked the hated mills. In 1809 Parliament repealed all the protective legislation relating to the woollen industry — covering apprenticeship, the gig-mill and the number of looms which could be owned by one master.

The grievances of the framework-knitters of the Midlands (mostly Nottingham, Derby and Leicester area) were a bit more complicated. They mostly worked in small industrial villages in workshops containing three or four looms. These were rented from their employer. Since the end of the 18th Century they had suffered a severe worsening of general conditions as the development of uncontrolled prices and shoddy goods had undermined their earnings and craft status. The cotton weavers of Lancashire were also used to an artisan status which was directly threatened by the factory system.

The movement began in Nottingham in March 1811. A large demonstration of framework-knitters was dispersed by the army. That night 60 frames were broken in the village of Arnold by rioters who didn't try to disguise themselves. They were cheered on by the crowd. For several weeks similar incidents occurred throughout north-west Nottinghamshire. Despite the presence of troops and special constables, no arrests could be made.

In November of that year Luddism appeared in a more organised form. Frame-breaking had become the work of disciplined bands who moved rapidly from village to village at the dead of night. From Nottinghamshire it spread to parts of Leicestershire and Derbyshire, and continued without cease until February 1812. On 10 November a hosier in Bulwell defended his premises with arms. A Luddite was killed but, after taking away his body, his comrades returned, broke down the doors and smashed the frames. Three days later a large force of Luddites armed with muskets, pistols, axes and hammers destroyed 70 frames at a large workshop in Sutton-in-Ashfield.

Only those frames were attacked which were associated with reduced wages or the production of lower quality goods. This "reformist" spirit of the Nottingham Luddites is expressed well by the popular ballad of the time, General Ludd's Triumph:

*The guilty may fear but no vengeance he aims
At the honest man's life or Estate,
His wrath is entirely confined to wide frames
And to those that old prices abate.
These Engines of mischief were sentenced to die
By unanimous vote of the Trade
And Ludd who can all opposition defy
Was the Grand executioner made.*

The Luddites were masked and had a well developed system of signals, sentinels and couriers. Whoever led the raiding party on the particular night would be referred to as General Ludd. They also had "inspectors" who went around investigating pay and conditions and collected money for the workers made unemployed by the frames being broken.

At the beginning of February 1812 this phase of Midlands Luddism quickly died away. There were three main reasons for this. Not least of these was the fact that the use of terror by the workers had been quite successful, and wages had risen. Secondly, there were now several thousand troops in the area. Thirdly, there was now a Bill before Parliament to make frame-breaking punishable by death. This didn't stop the movement but did cause considerable panic in the workers' ranks. It also created a space for parliamentarism and trade unionism. A quasi-legal association, the "United Committee of Framework-Knitters" was formed to petition parliament for a Bill to protect pay and conditions. The Committee tried to suppress machine-breaking but feelings were running high in Nottingham, where seven Luddites were sentenced to transportation. In April a hosier was shot and wounded outside his house. He was accused in a letter from "the Captain" of attempting to force his women workers into prostitution by paying them such low wages. After the inevitable defeat of the Bill a union was set up. The prime movers of the union were Henson and Coldham. Henson was an experienced activist in the secret "Institution" to which all framework-knitters belonged. Coldham was the Town Clerk of Nottingham! It had an effective existence for two years and seems to have been powerful enough to prevent a serious resurgence of Luddism.

The Nottingham events directly inspired the Yorkshire croppers. Luddism appeared modelled on the existing tactics but accompanied by a much greater number of threatening letters. A leaflet was distributed in Leeds which was far more insurrectionary than anything seen in Nottingham —

"...You are requested to come forward with Arms and help the Redressers to redress their Wrongs and shake off the hateful Yoke of a Silly Old Man, and his Son more silly and their Rogueish Ministers, all Nobles and Tyrants must be brought down..."

These Luddites expressed solidarity with struggles in Ireland and elsewhere. One letter goes

"...the Weavers in Glasgow and many parts of Scotland will join us the Papists in Ireland are rising to a Man, so that they are likely to find the soldiers something else to do than Idle in Huddersfield and then woe to the places now guarded by them..."

Many of the smaller manufacturers just gave in, destroying or storing their own shearing-frames. After six or seven weeks only a few substantial mills were still holding out. In particular there were two owners who were notorious for their determination to defy the Luddites, they both kept armed company goons and troops on the premises day and night. According to tradition, the luddites drew lots to decide which mill to attack. The choice fell on Rawfolds in the Spen Valley. Around 150 Luddites attacked it. They failed. Many were wounded, two of them mortally and they had to be left behind. The first blood had been shed and it did not go unavenged. Later the same month the other notorious owner, one William Horsfall from Ottiwell, was shot dead.

In Lancashire the movement was more one of open mass riots. On 20 March the warehouse of one of the first manufacturers to use the power-loom was attacked at Stockport. In early April there were numerous riots aiming to force down the prices

of potatoes and bread. On 20 April in Middleton a power-loom mill was attacked by several thousand. Its defenders fired muskets, three attackers were killed and many wounded. The next morning the crowd assembled in even greater strength. They were joined by a body of men armed with muskets and picks with an effigy of General Ludd and a red flag at their head. Finding the mill still impregnable the crowd burned the mill-owner's house instead. Four days later a large mill was successfully burnt down in Westhoughton.

April-May 1812 was a real high point in the class war. Outside the Luddite areas there were serious food riots in Bristol, Carlisle, Leeds, Sheffield and Barnsley. In Cornwall the miners struck and marched into the market towns demanding reductions in food prices. In Sheffield a militia arms store was broken into. On May 11 the Prime Minister, Perceval, was assassinated in the House of Commons. Joy amongst the proles was unrestrained. In London large crowds gathered outside the Commons and cheered the assassin as he was led away. In Nottingham order could only be restored by military force and the reading of the Riot Act. It was widely assumed that Perceval's death must be the result of some revolutionary conspiracy. There was widespread disappointment when it turned out to be the work of a solitary hero.

One of the factors which brought this movement to an end was more repression — more troops, more spies, more arrests and an increasing number of executions. But probably more important was a major concession. This was the repeal of the so-called Orders In Council in June 1812. This was the policy of blockading France as part of Britain's war effort. Its repeal led to an immediate improvement in trade, greatly relieving the famine conditions existing in many parts of the country.

But the ending of the bosses' recession didn't completely kill the movement. Luddism in Yorkshire and Lancashire largely gave way to preparations for an insurrection. During the summer of 1812 there were numerous raids for arms. Lead for making bullets was also being taken, in the form of pumps, water-spouts and guttering. The conspiracy extended well outside the Luddite areas but, unfortunately, never got as far as an actual uprising.

Over the next two or three decades the tactics of Luddism did much to inspire other movements of class warfare.

In the early 1820's in Monmouthshire, Wales there existed a secret organisation known as the "Scotch Cattle" based on the colliers. They claimed that Ned Ludd was their founder. Like the Luddites they had a well developed system of threatening letters, night meetings and military-style signals. They specialised in blowing up furnaces and terrorising scabs. Their leader was said to be Lolly, obviously Lol — the Lord of Misrule.

In 1830 the discontent of agricultural labourers exploded through the southern and eastern counties of England in marches from village to village, breaking threshing machines and demanding higher wages. Night time arson and machine-breaking were very widespread. "Captain Swing" was the signature most often attached to the threatening letters sent to landowners, farmers and parsons. Wages were successfully raised for a

time but the main lasting effect was that the widespread introduction of threshing machines in rural England was delayed until the 1850's.

An important feature of all these movements was the commitment to secrecy. The clandestine hit squads of the day were premised upon a mass culture of non-cooperation. Whole working class communities refused to collaborate with the authorities. Often secret mass meetings were called which were only occasionally infiltrated by the state. This is why so few Luddites were ever caught despite the affected areas being saturated with troops and the extensive use of spies from outside the areas. The harsh sentences imposed by the judiciary were a sign of the desperation of the authorities.

Contrast this with a statement made by the executive of the Miners' Association in 1844 to the employers. It began: "We have no secrets; all is done openly and to any of our meetings all are invited. Manufacturers! Traders! and Shopkeepers! You are deeply interested in our welfare".

The legalisation of certain forms of organisation such as the repeal of the Combination Acts in 1824 is not something which enabled the working class to organise itself better — the Luddites were pretty well organised and everything is legal if you don't get caught! What it did do was enable the recuperators, particularly middle class ones from outside "impenetrable" working class communities, to become better organised. The attitudes which the working class had had towards rich reformers was summed up by Francis Place "The laws against combinations... induced [working people] to break and disregard the laws. They made them suspect the intentions of every man who tendered his services".

The Recuperators

It would be a mistake to think that the development of trade unionism and parliamentary politics was just a middle class conspiracy. If petty bourgeois and even bourgeois elements had an influence out of all proportion to their numbers it was because, for the most part, the proles saw nothing wrong with this. As E. P. Thompson says in *The Making of the English Working Class*:

"Only the gentleman — Burdett, Cochrane, Hunt, Feargus O'Connor — knew the forms and language of high politics, could cut a brave figure on the hustings, or belabour the Ministers in their own tongue. The reform movement might use the rhetoric of equality, but many of the old responses of deference were still there even among the huzzaing crowds".

But the role of middle class types should not be underestimated. Most of the top leaders of the Miners' Association had never worked in the coal industry despite the continual cry from the members for the appointment of sacked miners as officials. The Association's treasurer, for example, was a pub landlord from Newcastle. A particularly important role in the union was played by W. P. Roberts, a solicitor from Bath, who was the union's legal officer.

In so far as Roberts and his friends had a political program for the union it can be summed up as the Right to Strike. That is, a class deal whereby the bosses allow the workers to struggle by peaceful, democratic means in return for guarantees that they won't go any further than that, that they won't threaten the bosses property rights or control over the production process. The right to strike implies the right to manage. It also implies that the Rule of Law should, to some extent, apply to all classes. Obviously, workers will only have any respect for the law if they can sometimes win court cases. This is where Roberts came in.

The Miners' Association was the first union in Britain to use the law courts in a systematic way to defend its members. Roberts became known as the "workingman's Attorney General". He used to travel up and down the country representing miners, and often other workers, in magistrates courts. "We resisted every individual act of oppression, even in cases where we were sure of losing", he explained. He was very good at his job, winning many small victories against the employers, here freeing a man imprisoned for leaving work without permission, there taking back wages illegally withheld. He once boasted that he had taught the magistrates law and how to make legal warrants. He regularly had the decisions of magistrates overturned by the Court of Queen's Bench in London. The fact that the authorities allowed him to get away with all this shows how much the ruling class were prepared to make concessions to integrate the proletariat into civil society.

The commitment of the union to the rule of law was nothing short of fanatical. They always told miners to be peaceful, even when they were being evicted from their homes. This happened on a massive scale during the strike in Northumberland and Durham in 1844. The Northumbrian miners' union leader Thomas Burt (later to become a Liberal MP) describes how families "stood with tears in their eyes and saw villainous wretches throwing to the door articles to which the memory of past years had given sanctity; but they had been taught by their leaders that if the peace was broken, they might bid farewell to their cherished union; and such was the power, eloquence, and advocacy of their leaders that the peace was not broken, even under such trying conditions". Rule 12 of the union's constitution (agreed in May 1843) stated "That this Association will not support or defend any member who shall in any way violate the laws of the country".

As well as assisting Queen Victoria's judiciary the union also attempted to suppress strikes, even legal ones, in a way which today we find very familiar. During 1844 there were strikes in almost every coalfield in Britain but the union doggedly maintained its position of opposing all "partial" strikes. Only a "general" strike of the whole industry was supposed to be good enough.

The union conference in Manchester in January 1844 was held in the midst of a strike wave in the South Lancashire coal-field. There had been 20 strikes and 100's of men had been out for 5 months. Since the last conference had condemned partial strikes they had not received a penny in strike pay and union officials had been sent to try to get them back to work. Not surprisingly, thousands left the union over the next

few months. In many cases the men had succeeded in winning large pay rises through their unofficial action!

But the union didn't have things all its own way. As well as the unofficial strikes (many of which it had to officialise) there were numerous occasions where the veterans of 1842 failed to fully observe the spirit of Rule 12. During a strike in Yorkshire in 1844 scabs had been brought in from Derbyshire in large numbers. At the Soap House pit near Sheffield they were housed in a barracks in the pityard. A large crowd scaled the walls, broke open the doors, smashed every window and gave the scabs a good kicking. During the same strike, at Deep pit in the same area, strikers blew up the engine boiler. These sort of incidents, though, had already become few and far between by 1842 standards. The Miners' Association largely disappeared after the anti-Chartist repression and recession of 1848, but the damage had been done.

Issue 17 — Spring 1994

Source: <www.libcom.org/article/wildcat-uk-17-spring-1994>

How Wild is Wildcat?

Subtitle: Don't Participate in the Ruin of Creation... Participate in the Creation of Ruins

Author: Wildcat (UK)

Date: Spring 1994

Source: Wildcat UK #17, Spring 1994. <www.wildcat.international/w17-howwildiswildcat.html>

285. Progression: motion forwards — N. progression, arithmetical p. 71 n. series; march, course, career; march of time 111 n. course of time; progress, stride, leaps and bounds 277 n. spurt; gain, advance, headway 654 n. improvement; overtaking 306 n. overstepping; next step, development, evolution; furtherance, promotion, advancement, preferment; progressiveness, 'onward and upward department' 654 n. reformism; enterprise, go-getting 672 n. undertaking; achievement 727 n. success; progressive, improver 654 n. reformer; go-getter, coming man 730 n. made man.

Introduction

Following the short review of *Fredy Perlman's Against His-story, Against Leviathan!*¹ which appeared in issue 15 of our central organ, we have nailed our colors to the "anti-Civilization" bandwagon.

But the abandonment of the Marxist theory of history, and its replacement with an as-yet uncompiled jumble of insights, is not to be undertaken lightly. We are in a period of transition, and this series of articles is intended to express this, with all the hesitations and contradictions inevitable in such a non-trivial exercise.

The central question we wish to address is this : was the development of class society in any sense a necessary precondition for its opposite? The traditional Marxist answer to this has been an unqualified "yes". As Marx put it in the Preface to A Critique of Political Economy: In the social production of their life, men enter into definite relations that are indispensable and independent of their will, relations of production which correspond to a definite stage of development of their material productive forces. The sum total of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society,

¹ Against His-story, Against Leviathan!, Perlman F, Black and Red, Detroit 1983.

the real foundation, on which rises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness. The mode of production of material life conditions the social, political, and intellectual life process in general. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but, on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness. At a certain stage of their development, the material productive forces of society come in conflict with the existing relations of production, or — what is but a legal expression for the same thing — with the property relations within which they have been at work hitherto. From forms of development of the productive forces these relations turn into their fetters. Then begins an epoch of social revolution... No social order ever perishes before all the productive forces for which there is room in it have developed; and new, higher relations of production never appear before the material conditions of their existence have matured in the womb of the old society itself... In broad outlines Asiatic, ancient, feudal and modern bourgeois modes of production can be designated as progressive epochs in the economic formation of society. The bourgeois relations of production are the last antagonistic form of the social process of production — antagonistic not in the sense of individual antagonism, but of one arising from the social conditions of life of the individuals; at the same time the productive forces developing in the womb of bourgeois society create the material conditions for the solution of that antagonism. This social formation brings, therefore, the prehistory of human society to a close.

This was later vulgarized by Engels: “the determining factor in history is, in the final instance, the production and reproduction of immediate life” (The Origins). But there is continuity between Marx and Engels; although Marx talks about consciousness “corresponding to” the economic foundations, and intellectual life being “conditioned” by the mode of production, he also says social being “determines” consciousness. The phrase used by Engels, “in the final instance”, has about as much content as the expression “at the end of the day”. It is meaningless. Either something is determined by something else, or it isn’t.

Engels argued that, although there was a communist society prior to the emergence of Civilization, this was only “primitive” communism. The primordial community had to be broken, and thousands of years of slavery and war had to ensue, in order to develop the productive forces enough for humanity to return to communism on a higher level. The development of the productive forces, a story written in the annals of Mankind in letters of blood and fire, was necessary in order to create the material preconditions for communism.

One of the problems Marxists inherited from this fire-and-brimstone teaching was this: if the productive forces need to be developed in order to create the preconditions for communism, and they are not yet sufficiently developed, are revolutionaries obliged to support their development? He who sups with the devil needs must use a very long spoon: after an early bout of enthusiasm for the prospect of immediate communist revolution in 1848, Marx and Engels settled down to a more “tactical” period in which various capitalist factions were backed on the grounds that they had more chance of

developing the productive forces than others, increasing the chances of a successful communist revolution in the future. The canonical example is their support for the Union in the American Civil War.

At the other extreme is the view that an advanced form of communism — a society of abundance with no exploitation and little conflict — could have developed directly out of the primitive communist societies which existed in most of the world for most of the time that human beings have been around, and that resistance to Civilization has ALWAYS had the potential to lead to the global human community. This may seem academic, since Civilization now covers the world, and if communism is going to happen, it will have to arise from the world as it is. But as we shall see, rejecting the necessity of developing the productive forces as a precondition for a global human community has important consequences today. As well as the writings of Perlman, Marshall Sahlins, John Zerzan etc., a radical break with Progress includes the Russian anarchist Kropotkin, the Italian communist Bordiga and his French successor Camatte. What the left communist tendency around Bordiga termed the “invariance” or continuity of the communist program was originally described by Kropotkin. The concept is simple. As long as there has been class society there has been a movement towards a communist society — the abolition of all class societies. Kropotkin was a geographer turned revolutionary. He, unlike probably any other revolutionary theorist of the last two centuries, personally witnessed (and lived among) all forms of human societies, from gatherer-hunters to peasants to the industrial working class. For him, an anarchist communism was available at any point in history. A traditional Marxist would deny that a revolution could occur (or succeed) in the peasant society in 17th century Europe because mass production (and thus the mass worker) had not come about to give it a social content.

Although it may have been possible to develop communism in areas of the world where class society, or Leviathan, to use Perlman’s nomenclature, was weak and disintegrating, such as America, was it inevitable that, sooner or later, Europe would invade, with guns and smallpox? Given the Native Americans’ almost total lack of awareness of the world outside them, they would have been unable to prevent such an invasion. It has always been possible to directly create a communist society but this can only be done permanently on a world scale, because any Leviathans left alive will sooner or later spread their tentacles. In the past it was still possible to avoid or drop out of existing civilizations, sometimes for centuries at a time. Today it obviously isn’t. If communism can be created in one valley, or one continent, there would be no desperate urge to spread it. Sooner or later, communism would be crushed by one of the Leviathans lurking about. It is hard to imagine how the natives of America could have resisted the Conquistadores WITHOUT having an explicit knowledge that such people existed and would one day come to get them. For all the wisdom that they must have possessed, it remains a striking fact that pre-capitalist peoples (communist and civilized) knew almost nothing about the parts of the world inhabited by people not

of their culture. Communism has always been possible. But it is arguable that stable, permanent communism depends on the development of a world proletariat.

This argument is subtly different to the elegant and seductive verses of the materialist excuse for history outlined above. Whereas the Marxist theory of stages has led many of its followers, including Marx himself, to support capitalist development, the view that permanent communism depends on the development of a world proletariat does not lead in that direction. Marxists argue that the chief productive force is the proletariat itself. We disagree. For us the proletariat is the working class as a revolutionary force, precisely to the extent that it opposes development and sabotages production, ie. to the extent that it isn't a productive force.

Although the concept of "the development of the productive forces" leads to attacking the class struggle, the development of the proletariat as a revolutionary class leads to supporting it at all times. The struggle against class society may be unable to permanently abolish it until some unknown date in the future, but that does not lead us to support Leviathan rather than the struggle against it. (It is impossible to have it both ways. To the extent that Marx supported Lincoln, he supported the crushing of the class struggle against the war effort, and there was plenty).

Anyone can find examples of the proletariat benefitting from accidental by-products of capitalist development. The "model villages" created by the Guatemalan army during the Terror of the 80's helped the Native Americans organize by concentrating people from scattered and divided communities together, helping them understand their common interests, though this is not the kind of example usually favoured by Marxists to defend development. The discovery of the cure for smallpox is taught at school as a splendid product of Progress. What is overlooked is that epidemics of the disease, with a body-count in the tens of millions, were equally products of the same social force.

We do not intend to take a position here on whether a global communist society has always been possible, or whether class society was in any sense a necessary detour. A question like this cannot be answered in a few pages. We hope these articles stir up the debate.

It is difficult to say at present exactly what consequences will follow from the abandonment of Marxism. Supporting and learning from the struggles of indigenous peoples, nomads etc., against Progress is one of them. Another is a definitive rejection of Eurocentrism. The traditional Marxist view is that the most capitalistically developed parts of the world must be the centre of the revolution, since here the transition to communism is made easier by highly socialized production. This is wishful thinking. The parts of the world where capitalism is most highly developed are also the ones where the working class is most separated from community. The socialization of production can help the class struggle — a strike-bound factory in South Korea can disrupt the economy of Germany and vice-versa. It can just as easily hinder it — often the ability of urban proles to resist starvation is critically dependent on their links to the land, eg. peasant relatives. In the sixties and seventies, French workers around St. Nazaire were still able to significantly supplement their diet by hunting whilst on strike.

The Left and Rights

The social-democratic view of socialism as evolution (ie that socialism would be the next stage beyond capitalism) was a major cause of the downfall of the 1917–21 revolutionary movement, much of which saw state capitalism under workers' control as a step towards communism. Communism became an inevitable outcome of the general progress of society. Social democracy promoted a dependence on a passive working class response to the crisis as the mechanism of transition from one "mode of production" to the next. This sees workers as victims of capitalism, only becoming revolutionary in reaction to capitalism and the actions of the capitalist class. All factions of social democracy subscribed to this notion. Marxists argue that it was impossible to create communism prior to the development of the productive forces made possible by the explorers of the 15th and 16th century, with their Bibles and smallpox. This argument is like the famous quip from the Vietnam war, "it was necessary to destroy the village in order to save it", writ large. It is equivalent to saying "it was necessary to exterminate the communities of entire continents in order to lay the foundations for a global human community". This is called dialectics, or speaking with a forked tongue.

For the social democrats, communism meant capitalist prosperity for all so factory production, and therefore factory discipline, had to be maintained at all costs. The refusal of work was as important as ever in practice but was almost never consciously advocated. In Petrograd in 1917 the workers organized into Factory Committees frequently decided to fine themselves for lateness and other healthy expressions of proletarian indolence.

Together with Progress, the left peddles the concept of civil rights. Rights are defined by capitalism as what it can give to the proles, usually to buy off an attack. But rights are attacks upon traditional freedoms which guaranteed personal autonomy. Rights take away freedom and make the working class even more integrated and dependent upon capitalism. A useful way to conceive of the difference between rights and freedoms is to look at Housing. Now, in classical capitalism, one has the right to own property, even someone else's house, which leads to the creation of homelessness in order to make housing a valuable commodity. In response to the working class's defence against homelessness, etc. the left wing of capitalism demanded the right to housing, a program which, at its most extreme, became one of the key programmatic components of Stalinism, the right to housing supplanting the right to own property. But nowhere in the continua of these extremes of "rights" lies the freedom to house yourself. There is a big difference between the right to be warehoused in a tower block in Moscow, Brixton or Watts and the freedom to build and live in a mandan/longhouse/tipi/yurt or "organic" home in a medieval Arabic/African/Chinese/Japanese town.

["Come on lads! Another 5000 years and you'll have created the material preconditions for communism!"]

There are trends within Marxism which do not follow the logic of Marx and Engels' progressive errors. According to the Autonomist wing of Marxism the attack on in-

dustrialism and work (the “revolt against work”) is fundamental to class resistance to capitalism. Such people have always, in practice, to some extent, fought against capitalist Progress. Other Marxists argue that although historical stages (Slavery, Feudalism, Capitalism, etc.) were necessary, all necessary stages have now been completed, and that there is therefore no reason to support the further development of class society in order to help create the preconditions for communism. In spite of these exceptions, we think that the Marxist theory of stages is a weak basis for a communist platform, because those who accept the need for the development of the “productive forces” as a precondition for communism, must consider the possibility that they haven’t developed far enough yet. This at least opens the POSSIBILITY of giving critical support to some aspects of capitalism today, and of telling sections of the working class to wait.

Intransigent opposition to Progress is certainly closer to a direct expression of the needs of the proletariat. The Luddite movement in 19th century England is probably the most famous example of resistance to the development of the productive forces. Oppressed classes have always opposed the extension of exploitation. The exploiters and their allies have often found ways of arguing for the “necessity” of this or that development. There is a seamless continuity between Marx’s support for the wonderful Yankees in the American Civil War and German social democracy’s support for the First World War. This was no “betrayal” of their ideology; they thought the victory of Germany would help the development of the productive forces, and they may well have been right. In the late seventies, the Iraqi Communist Party justified their alliance with the Ba’athists against the Kurdish Nationalists by saying that Saddam stood for capitalist progress against the backward Kurdish bourgeoisie. In one crucial sense, though, even Perlman’s *Against His-story* can be used to defend historical inevitability. In his description of the spread of Civilization, he argues that successful attempts to resist it usually lead to the creation of permanent armies, which become the basis of state power. Communities of resistance gradually degenerate into new Leviathans. For example, he describes how this happened to the communist movement in 15th century Bohemia. Although he says that the defeat is complex, and not predetermined, his actual description has a fatalistic ring to it. Although the Bohemian Taborites were conscious of the predicament, this didn’t enable them to get out of it. Between 1420 and 1434, they defeated five assaults by Crusader and German Imperial armies. Initially, they resisted the tendency to set up a military machine. Their military leaders, Zizka, Proscop and Zbynek, were temporary chiefs, and not initially generals. But the Empire was a machine for grinding out armies, and each time it was defeated, it came back. Although the Taborites successfully defended themselves, the continual fighting gradually turned them into a mirror image of what they were fighting. Among the specializations which permanent militarism enforces is a division between soldiers and peasants who toil to feed the army. The Taborite military leaders negotiated with barons to supply the army with food produced by forced labor. The more radical Taborites were still attacking the barons, undermining the military front. The Taborite

leaders eventually organized a crusade against these more radical communists, and the degeneration was complete.

Perlman's book contains, in embryo, a theory of historical development. His account of the origins of ancient Sumer is unquestionably materialist. Leviathan has been through numerous stages, as has resistance to it. Only modern capitalism has instituted the "worship of Leviathan unadorned" — previous class societies tarted up Babylon with hanging gardens, etc.. Compare Florence with Seoul. Perlman predicted the emergence of One Big Leviathan, and hinted that this period, which has now begun with the collapse of the Soviet bloc, may have great potential. Certainly, the proletariat of the world is more culturally homogenized than ever before, but it is difficult at present to see how the New World Order of Madonna and MacDonald's contains its own negation. We don't consider that the succession of societies, and the development of greater and greater productive forces have led to the possibility of abundance for all after about 5000 years of war and slavery. Primitive societies were societies of plenty. Whatever the reason for the origins of class society, it was IMPOSED on the majority of humanity by its originators and their successors. It did not "arise" because of the "need" to "develop the productive forces". Technologies and the forms of social domination which accompany them have always been instruments of political control rather than methods of satisfying given human needs. Needs are created by society, along with the means to satisfy them. Societies are not determined by their "material basis" — precisely the reverse. As Perlman put it, the so-called material foundations are the claws and fangs of Leviathan, not the ground on which it stands. Perlman briefly discusses the abandonment of Civilization by pre-Columbian Americans. The first article below examines it in more detail, and digresses into the theoretical implications. The second and third articles are reviews of recent publications dealing with the issues of Progress and Primitive Communism from different angles within the revolutionary movement.

1,000 Years of Resistance

Around 1500 BC, Civilization first blighted the Americas. The mysterious Civilization of the Olmecs appeared on the shores of the Gulf of Mexico. The Olmecs carved giant heads with African features, and one stela with a bearded, Babylonian-looking bas-relief. The Mayas of Copan and Palenque buried their kings in pyramids, like the Ancient Egyptians. The first Mexican archaeologists assumed that MesoAmerican Civilization must have originated in the Old World. It may have been possible to cross the Atlantic in a boat of that period. With the consolidation of nationalism, and particularly the Mexican bourgeoisie's affiliation with the Aztecs, it became fashionable to see the Olmecs, Aztecs, Mayas etc. as home-grown. It was considered insulting to Native Americans to suggest they couldn't have built their own Leviathans. Today, the tide has begun to turn full circle, and perhaps it will again become possible to

investigate the possibility of a transatlantic origin for the Olmecs. Some academics seriously discuss the possibility of a Chinese origin for Maya culture².

If Civilization was imported, the consequences would be helpful to our position; it would mean that Civilization only originated in Eurasia. Its subsequent spread would be the result of the fact that attempts to resist it lead to the formation of permanent armies and thus states; resistance is recuperated. If it arose in two places, this would add weight to the argument that Civilization is inevitable; but not much, since there is no doubt that, however many origins the Beast has, the vast majority of its victims were taken captive by expanding Leviathans, rather than “giving rise to” their own. Perlman gives odds that Civilization arose in one place, ancient Sumer. This view was fashionable in Victorian Britain, ie. until the sixties, whereafter it became trendy to believe in multiple origins, as this was compatible with the more democratic ideology of multi-culturalism which had only just caught on — though it had been *de rigeur* among US anthropologists since the 1910’s. The Olmecs were succeeded by the Maya, whose civilization stretched from Northern Yucatan through the Peten jungle to the highlands of what is now Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador. The Maya kings appear to have formed city-states which warred and made alliances, like the Ancient Greek metropoli, rather than a centralized Leviathan. One of the reasons for the downfall of the Olmecs was resistance. Olmec sculptures were systematically vandalized. Though little is known about exactly how this happened, archaeologists have tended to cohere around the view that it was the result of a rebellion of the lower orders. This position has been under attack in recent years.

The blatantly political nature of patri-archaeology is well demonstrated by the work of leading MesoAmerican researchers Linda Schele and David Freidel. *A Forest of Kings*³, describes the creation of a Maya city state, Cerros, as a decision taken by the whole community : “The people of Cerros did decide consciously to embrace kingship as an institution”, though they don’t make it clear how they know this. Building the temples was “an effort of master builders, masons and laborers DRAWN from the COMMUNITY, COORDINATED by the ruler and his counselors” (p106). We have emphasized some of the more problematic words. How were the laborers “drawn”, since when have rulers merely “coordinated” production, how can a class society be described as a “community” except by those who have a vested interest in disguising class antagonisms?

This book is full of similar pseudo-neutral scientific discourse. “The labor costs in quarrying stone, burning limestone to yield plaster, and finally building the structures, must have been enormous. If the elite of Tikal were constantly expanding this public space, we can assume that the prosperity and prestige of this kingdom were attracting a steady influx of new people whose participation in the ritual life of the kingdom

² The Maya, Coe M, Thames and Hudson, London 1993.

³ *A Forest of Kings*, Schele L and Freidel D, Morrow, New York 1990.

had to be accomodated” (p136). On the other hand, we can investigate the origins of slavery, resistance to it, and apologies for it.

American Leviathans were generally fragile. They were prone to disintegration as a result of resistance by the mass of the population who thought an uncivilized life was preferable to being sacrificed to the gods. When discussing the causes of the Maya collapse, Schele and Freidel take pains to avoid the simplistic views of the previous generation of Mayanists, for example JES Thompson, who, when invited to a seminar on the collapse, reportedly wired back, “No need for seminar. Peasant uprising.”. This was written when class struggle was still fashionable in academia.

“For many, however, the end came when people turned their backs on the kings, as they had done a Cerros eight hundred years earlier, and returned to a less complicated way of living” (p379).

Why? Schele and Freidel list a dozen or so factors:

1. Dense population;
2. Malnutrition;
3. Sickness;
4. “A hard life indeed”;
5. Neglect of raised fields due to military competition between rulers; 6. Crisis of faith;
6. Conquerers unable to legitimate themselves to the conquered;
7. Growth of the nobility, in more than one sense. The average noble was 10cm. taller than the rest of the population. They were better fed, and their children survived, therefore there were too many of the bastards;
8. The rich scumbags were driven to wage wars for tribute to pay for their upkeep. Endless war caused further problems;
9. Barbarians began to assert control of the trade routes;
10. Uprising. At Dos Pilas, for example, “a desperate nobility threw up a huge log stockade around the sacred center of their city, trying to shield themselves against the vengeance wreaked upon them by their former victims” (p383).

None of these factors explain anything without an understanding of the class struggle.

A more recent “explanation” blames ecological catastrophe for the collapse of Civilization. But Civilizations thrive on disasters. The ecological narrative, like many

others, attempts to make the oppressed passive objects of crisis. The idea that they may have left Leviathan because they didn't like it never occurs to academia. For archaeology, the problem is to explain, not why Civilization was overthrown, but why it took so long for the "former victims" to wreak vengeance on those who had "drawn" them into the ritual life of the kingdom.

The uprisings wiped out Maya Civilization throughout the Peten region. Stelae, written dates and monuments came to an end between about 790 and 890 AD. What replaced the Classic Maya Civilization was not communism. But it was a lot better than human sacrifice. A communist revolution would have led to an offensive against the other Leviathans of the Americas. The rebelling population returned to what anthropologists call a "hunter-gatherer" life, though it is known that these societies are not dominated by production. It would be at least as accurate to call them "shaman-storyteller" societies. They also did some farming, but abandoned the intensive agribusiness of their deposed kings. They continued to use the cyclical calendars, but abandoned the "Long Count" which counted the days since a certain point in the past, since they did not need linear history. They also abandoned writing, since they could remember all the information they needed. They created a truly post-historic society.

Avanti!

We have no intention of idealizing primitive society. Perlman refers to the pre-Civilized condition as "the state of nature", but this is too simplistic. There are at least two main stages in primitive society, and it is worth considering what kind of life pre-human hominids lived before society emerged. From studies of our close relatives, some anthropologists have concluded that before the emergence of homo sapiens, our ancestors lived in harems. Tyrant males would monopolize groups of females, excluding the majority of males. This behaviour maximized the chances of a successful male's genes being transmitted. Evolution produces SELFISH gene-transmitting behaviour, not the behaviour which is best for the species as a whole. To have sex with as many partners as possible increases the chance of a male's genes surviving. It may even be genetically "fitter" for a male to kill infants of other males, ensuring that females spend all their time looking after HIS offspring. Conflict between males prevented the emergence of community. At some point, there was a revolution which led to the creation of human culture. The most convincing explanation of how this happened can be found in Chris Knight's book *Blood Relations*⁴. Females had different interests than males; their genes are best reproduced by looking after their children. Eventually they overthrew the individualistic tyrants, and forced males to cooperate in going hunting, by refusing to have sex until the males returned home with game. They organized a periodic "sex strike" during which none of the females were available, since if any females broke the strike, it would quickly undermine the whole system. This then

⁴ *Blood Relations*, Knight C, Yale University Press, 1992.

is the basis of culture; cooperation imposed by females by means of a strike. With this cooperative hunter-gatherer lifestyle, humans had it made. No other species could touch them. They quickly spread round the world around 50,000 years ago, and found vast game reserves wherever they went, with occasional dearths when they crossed deserts, etc.. This was the Garden of Eden. But the story of the Fall was rewritten. Eve was not responsible.

The Australian Aborigines have some remarkably lucid stories about how men overthrew women, and introduced the patriarchal society which most primitive peoples lived in. But patriarchy did not inevitably give rise to Civilization, as proven by the numerous examples of patriarchal peoples living for thousands and thousands of years without the slightest inclination to build ziggurats and throw each other off the top of them. The “Mesolithic crisis” of c. 10,000 BC supposedly led to the emergence of Agriculture and hence Civilization. But if Civilization was an inevitable response to a world-wide crisis, how come so many people managed without it until very recently? Why did it have to be imposed at such cost?

Horny

Marxists, who place today’s horny-handed industrial proletariat in a subordinate position to pre-capitalist rebels (though even Marxists instinctively identify with all communist rebels — witness how many Marxist groups are named after Spartacus), could ask why didn’t the Maya rebels go on to create communism? A fair question, but no more so than the same question asked of the participants in the 1917–21 revolutionary wave. Our position that communism has always been possible is perhaps stronger because we can point to considerable successes in pre-capitalist anti-Civilized movements, for example the Maya had 700 years of relative freedom before the Spanish invasion. The Bohemian communist movement of the 15th and 16th centuries was far more successful than the 20th century workers’ movement. There were no Marxists around to tell them that the means of production weren’t developed enough, so they brazenly set up large-scale communist societies which lasted for decades.

Vorwaarts

There has always been some awareness of the danger of class domination and how to oppose it. People with leadership obligations, eg. shamans, try to permanently usurp their responsibilities and turn them into a system of class domination. The communist program has always been immanent in the struggle to prevent this happening, and to reverse it once it has occurred. This position turns Marxism on its head; the political has precedence over the economic. If this makes us closer to Anarchism than Marxism, then so be it.

Arguments about Progress seem academic. But much working class passivity is reinforced by the belief that progress is inevitable — people identify with the economic success of “their” company or “their” country, and thus find it hard to fight lay-offs and wars when these are explained as economically necessary. Just as it is useful to know that for most of human existence, there were no classes, refuting the popular belief that they are natural, it is encouraging to know that people have always resisted Progress, sometimes with overwhelming success. We are not suggesting that winning this “battle of ideas” is going to convert people into revolutionaries. Generally, people adopt more radical ideas as a result of struggle; their conservatism is mainly produced by fear of the bosses’ power. But showing that struggles can be won can only undermine this fear. The evidence against the inevitability of Progress shows that we CAN win, that class society has NEVER been inevitable, and that its continuity is less assured than its apologists of left and right contend.

Somalia: Development by other means

Author: Wildcat

Note: Article analysing the war in Somalia in the early nineties, and the destruction of pre-capitalist social relations there through both military and ‘humanitarian’ means.

Source: <www.libcom.org/article/somalia-development-other-means-wildcat>

The War in Somalia

The defeat suffered by the death squads of the New World Order at the hands of the heroic proletariat of Somalia has made it clear that warlord Clinton didn’t send in his gunmen to give food to the starving but to terrorise the proletarian population. This is not because fearless journalists have exposed the UN’s war aims, but on the contrary , because fearless proles have killed journalists.

We don’t have any means of knowing directly what’s going on but the revolt of the proletariat has been strong enough to leave traces in the bourgeois media in the form of events which it simply can’t explain if clan-based armies and their supporters were the only source of resistance towards the UN. They have not been able to deny that many clashes between UN troops and Somalis have been with largely unarmed civilians rather than with the soldiers of General Aideed. On occasions residents of working class districts of Mogadishu have built barricades which even Aideed’s militiamen are not allowed to pass. Often the media will try to make out that there is just a blind nationalist, or even racist, rage against foreigners – ignoring the fact that almost all the foreigners in Somalia are journalists, soldiers or others directly involved in the UN war effort.

Some of the most outrageous media bullshit is that concerning the “warlord “ General Mohammed Farah Aideed. In June 1993 there was a UN offensive, supposedly in response to the deaths of 24 Pakistani UN soldiers sent to close down Aideed’s radio station, in which numerous buildings were attacked around Mogadishu. The stated aim was to capture Aideed and bring him to trial for the deaths of the soldiers. The real aim was clear – it was to strengthen support for Aideed in the same way as the

US bombings of Baghdad were designed to strengthen support for Saddam. Aideed at first welcomed the American invaders but then saw how hated they were and became a champion of anti-imperialism, his radio station pumping out anti-UN propaganda. This improved his standing with the proletariat no end.

Another war for oil

The economic and strategic reasons for the US/UN intervention in Somalia are fairly clear. Somalia has enormous reserves of oil. Four major American oil companies (Conoco, Amoco, Chevron and Phillips) obtained the rights to prospect nearly two thirds of Somalia's surface area just before President Siad Barre was overthrown at the beginning of 1991. Somalia was classed by the World Bank as one of the most promising African countries in terms of petroleum resources. It does not yet possess a significant oil industry or oil producing proletariat but it almost certainly will in a few years time. Creating social peace through terror there could pay handsome dividends for the bourgeoisie (literally for those investing in oil). The geographical location of the country is also important, allowing control of the tanker routes to the Red Sea and the Gulf. But it's easy to make too much of these sorts of considerations. Capital has strategic interests all over the world – why should there be a need for such an overwhelming display of force in this particular little corner of it?

The main reason is that the US government thought that they could win without too much effort, installing a Somali government of their choice and helping American national unity recover from the battering it was given by the uprisings of May '92. At the same time the image of the UN could be improved. Everybody loves famine relief agencies, so what could be better than showing UN troops protecting them? A few thousand US troops could have been stationed there for a spot of counterinsurgency training. In other words, Somalia could have played the military training role for the US that Northern Ireland has for Britain. At present the US Army is being reorganised as a force which can actually take over pieces of territory and police them for long periods of time rather than one which only knows how to bomb them to bits and then get the hell out. Unlike British troops, most American troops don't know how to be cops. This is changing.

At the Fort Chafee army base in Arkansas 50,000 soldiers a year are put through a special training programme involving an artificial country called "Cortina". This has a guerrilla army (played by a US infantry battalion) and police, army and civilian authorities provided by a defence consultancy firm called BDM International. The troops are taught how to liase with the local authorities and which suspects to free and which to hold. They are given the necessary ideological preparation for carrying out massacres – angry demonstrations by villagers often shield guerrillas. None of this prepared them for the horrors they would face in Somalia.

The US bourgeoisie must have thought that after years of war the Somali proletariat would be so crushed that they wouldn't resist the US/UN invaders, and might even welcome them as liberators. They were wrong.

Brutality

The brutality of the UN forces is something that the media don't even try to hide. On 13 June at least 14 Somalis were killed when UN troops from Pakistan fired a heavy machine gun directly into a crowd protesting at the American bombing of various districts of Mogadishu, supposedly arms dumps for General Aideed. The commander of the Pakistani troops justified the shooting in words chillingly reminiscent of those used by British military commanders after Bloody Sunday in Northern Ireland, or those used after various massacres in Vietnam. He said that Somali "gunmen" routinely use civilian crowds as human shields. No guns were found on any of the dead. The head of UN peace-keeping operations, Kofi Annan, said that the incident showed the need for UN forces to be better equipped with tear gas and other riot control gear. On other occasions US helicopters have fired cannon shells and rockets at hospitals and even at the offices of their beloved relief agencies.

As soon as they arrived the UN troops made it clear that they were there to act as cops. When the US Marines first arrived in Mogadishu they encountered no military resistance at all. The first violence they were involved in was beating up some unarmed Somalis sleeping in a hangar at the airport! A wave of brutal "weapons searches" followed. Sometimes the lads even went a bit too far for their masters to tolerate. In March a Somali civilian was beaten to death while being detained at the Canadian UN compound at Relet Huen. Four paratroops were charged with torture and second-degree murder, the first time any Canadian soldier has faced such charges resulting from UN operations.

Much of this brutality, though, is in direct response to working class militancy. On 24 February there were widespread riots against the UN. Thousands of unarmed Somalis, described in the press as "supporters of General Aideed", fought UN troops and attacked the US embassy using just knives and rocks and shouting anti-American slogans. They were fired on with machine guns from US Cobra helicopters. The UN have never admitted how many they killed. The French embassy was also attacked. On September 9 Pakistani UN troops were attacked by a mob of hundreds of Somali men, women and children. A hundred or so were killed when UN helicopters opened fire.

Smoked pork...

During a battle starting in Bakara market in Mogadishu on October 3 at least 500 Somalis were killed. Two US helicopters came down. Given the importance of helicopter

pilots in carrying out massacres it's hardly surprising that the charred bodies of some of these pigs were dragged through the streets of Mogadishu by a jubilant crowd. Another one was protected from the righteous wrath of the proles by Aideed's men, raising the spectre of a "hostage crisis" for the US government. The attitude of the local population is well illustrated by the following quote from the *Guardian* (5 Oct 93):

"“There were six Americans inside the helicopter. I saw it had been hit and then it crashed down on six children who were coming out of the Koranic school”, said Hassan Issa Ahmed, whose house was five yards from the crash site. ‘The Americans defended themselves by opening fire on all sides. So people went into their homes to get their guns. We killed three of the Americans and one of them ran away’”. </quote>f

On other occasions UN troops have been dragged into crowds at feeding centres and hacked to pieces. And it's not just soldiers who are being brutally dealt with. When the Americans first arrived in December '92 there were around 600 journalists about, including more than a hundred photographers and cameramen just at the famous beach landing of the marines. Now there are just eight Western correspondents. Recent TV pictures have been produced by means of a miniature video camera left in the hands of the Somali driver of the Reuters team. This mass withdrawal of the media is the result of the deaths of three Reuters and one Associated Press journalist, all deliberately killed by angry mobs. In July '93 three photographers and a soundman were killed after American helicopters rocketed an alleged "command and control base" for General Aideed in an area packed with civilians, killing at least 30. According to the testimony of Scott Peterson (*Daily Telegraph*, 13 July 93), a journalist who narrowly escaped with his life, the hacks were under the protection of Aideed's men at the time. Another surviving joumo-pig, Mohamed Shaffi of Reuters, described how he burst into a nearby residential compound to escape but a woman living in it chased him back on to the street (*Independent*, 13 July 93). This incident led to calls from the Italian government for military operations to be suspended. The few media scum who remain are generally too frightened to leave their hotel rooms.

At the time of writing the US troops are still scheduled to leave by March 31, 1994 and the French and Belgians before then. Half the 16,000 US troops stationed in Somalia are kept well out of harm's way – they're at sea. The rest are mostly based at the huge fortified UN compound in Mogadishu and aren't even in a position to defend the UN's own property. According to one UN official, Somalis slip over the wall night and day, ripping off anything they can. "We're losing vehicles from the port before we even inventory them" (*Guardian*, 27 Nov 93).

No police force can operate without some degree of cooperation from the policed population; UN troops are no exception.

...and powdered milk

The US invasion of Somalia was originally called “Operation Restore Hope”, with the stated aim of maintaining food aid to the starving children whose images had graced the TV screens of the Western countries. This is true up to a point, in that “aid to the starving” is a well-used capitalist code word for the use of food as a weapon against the proletariat. Capital creates famine. In Africa this is usually the result of the destruction of non-capitalist ways of obtaining food – subsistence farming, herding, hunting and gathering. It might do this through a declared war between states (extremely common in Africa) or through its “peaceful” development – a bloody war against the independent producers! In other parts of the world where there is already a proletariat famine may be deliberately created by means of sanctions as a means of crushing proletarian resistance. Either way, food aid is then dangled in the faces of the starving to ensure that they do capital’s bidding. “Food for Work” schemes, the Third World equivalent of workfare, are just the most blatant examples of this.

Food “aid” might be organised through the UN or through charities, otherwise known as NGOs (non-governmental organisations) or PVOs (private voluntary organisations). As every cynic knows, charities are businesses – but not just because they provide fat salaries and conferences in Rome with generous expenses. Charities must obey the logic of capitalist expansion, they must use money to make more money and so expand capital’s Evil Empire of alienated labour. In the Western countries where they are based this means such things as paying for more adverts showing starving children, putting money into the coffers of advertising agencies, public relations companies and newspaper owners and opening more charity shops which gullible idiots work in for free. Charities must compete with each other for the money available and so are forced to expand and restructure. In the famine-stricken regions where they operate it means creating dispossession and the means of maintaining it, so creating more “clients” (starving people) for the charity and thus attracting more aid.

Food aid is often just a hidden form of subsidy for whichever regime happens to be in power, being used to feed the army – this applies to Bosnia as much as Somalia. In Angola UN aid is being distributed through the military on both sides in the devastated city of Kuito, even though there are no civilians on the UNITA side of town. In Kurdistan famine and food aid are used to strengthen the Kurdish nationalists and to take back the gains of the 1991 uprising by forcing starving insurgents to sell their guns, anti-tank rockets and printing presses..

Food which doesn’t go directly to soldiers ends up being sold by local merchants, and buildings and vehicles must be rented from other entrepreneurs who become dollar millionaires in the process. The presence of all this money and commoditised food

accelerates the destruction of subsistence food production and encourages cash crop production. In the case of Somalia the country went from being self-sufficient in food in the early '70s to being one of the most food-dependent in Africa by the mid-1980s.

Many of the large houses in Mogadishu which are rented to relief agencies and the media are owned by one Osman Atto, one of the richest men in the country. He used to be the representative of the US oil company Conoco and owns their office, which is being used by the US special envoy to Somalia, Robert Oakley. Atto is also General Aideed's main financier. Whenever a plane carrying food flies into an airport the relief agency concerned has to pay several thousand dollars to Somali middle men for landing rights and security. Atto was held in preventive detention for a few days but the UN have done nothing to curtail his legitimate business activities.

Development

Somalis are a distinct ethnic group who, prior to capitalism, were mostly farmers in the South of what is now Somalia and nomadic pastoralists in the North. The colonial era saw the North under British rule and the South under Italian rule. Fortunately for the nomads in the North the British did very little with it. In the South development began – the best land was grabbed by Italian farmers who grew cash crops such as cotton and sugar cane. Life for the nomads has never been easy but mass starvation was very rare before capitalism. When the rains failed they could migrate long distances – something which became impossible with the creation of nation states and private property in land.

Serious capitalist development in Somalia began with Siad Barre's military coup in 1969. The country was put under "scientific socialism", what little industry existed was nationalised, close relations were established with the USSR and a massive military build up began. The administration was centralised in the name of "eradicating clannism and tribalism". Barre was committed to development through war and the militarisation of society. The already existing famine enabled the regime to accelerate its plans for settling nomads, who made up 80% of the population at the time. They were forced into agricultural "communes" where they were expected to work under military discipline. This was part of a regional trend. The nomadic way of life of millions of Africans was, and is, a major headache for the capitalist class because nomads don't respect national borders, don't attract Western aid and are almost impossible to tax, conscript or control.

In July 1977 Barre launched a major invasion of the Ogaden region of Ethiopia – its inhabitants were "Somalis" too – rapidly capturing the whole region and dramatically boosting his own support. Ethiopia had also recently become a client state of the USSR and the USSR decided to back Ethiopia with 18,000 Cuban troops. Barre turned to the Americans and by 1981 Somalia had become a client state of the US and the economy began to be privatised. The Somali troops were run out of Ogaden but the

war was continued by the Western Somalia Liberation Front guerrillas organised by Barre's regime. Life for the nomads in the region became intolerable and hundreds of thousands ended up in refugee camps in Somalia. Concentrating them in arid localities resulted in overgrazing by the animals they had left. Western relief agencies arrived with food – far more than was necessary. Most of the food was going to the Somali army to maintain the war to dispossess the nomads to create more refugees... Many camp commanders were WSLF officers and the WSLF and the Somali Army would come to the camps to conscript teenage boys. Just like in Barre's pro-Soviet phase the inhabitants of the camps were instructed in political ideology by state officials called "politicians" – this time they were taught to blame the Russians and Cubans for their plight. Aid was turning "empty" desert into burgeoning towns. Barre's program of military-led accumulation was being enthusiastically supported by hordes of young middle class Western do-gooders who built the infrastructure and tried to teach former nomads how to grow food so that they could settle down and become peasants and agricultural labourers. Who, after all, could object to the building of roads – even if most of the people who used them were soldiers, cops and refugees being herded from one place to another? The camps were supposed to be temporary. Many of them are still there. In 1981 a study done by aid workers found that the relief industry accounted for two-thirds of the country's economy. Towards the end of his reign Barre was also receiving \$100 million a year in military and economic aid from the USA, making Somalia the third largest recipient of US foreign aid behind Egypt and Israel. It didn't do him much good.

The '80s were characterised by even more war than before as regional nationalist movements seized more and more areas of the country – in the North West (former British Somaliland), the Somali National Movement; in the Central and Western regions, the United Somali Congress; in the South, the Somali Patriotic Movement. In July 1989 there were two days of anti-government demos and riots in the capital. The writing was on the wall for Barre. Washington suddenly discovered that he was a human rights violator and cut off aid. At the end of 1990 the USC took the capital. In January 1991 Barre fled, leaving the capital in the hands of an unstable alliance of regional and clan leaders. This quickly broke down leading to a war in which hundreds of thousands died. General Aideed was the military commander of the USC and a former ambassador to India under Barre.

The war in the capital reduced its population of one-and-a-quarter million by half. The southern countryside was looted by soldiers to the extent that whole villages were left with no food and no animals in the middle of the dry season. Throughout the war troops protected the luxury houses of the capital and the agri-business plantations. Villagers in Qorioli starved to death next to huge banana plantations. If they even gathered grass to eat they were likely to have their hands tied together and a bullet put through the palms.

So the Somalis lost the battle against dispossession through war, a process that made the Highland Clearances look like a vicarage tea party. They became proletarians (

apart from the few who became bourgeois generals and nationalist leaders) .But what sort of proletarians have they become? A large percentage of the men have been soldiers in the. various nationalist/clan armies and are no strangers to the use of fire arms. In general the wide availability of guns has had a detrimental effect on working class solidarity by intensifying the war of all against all. In other parts of the Horn of Africa traditional tribal disputes over natural resources which might have occasionally resulted in a few spearings can now turn into massacres. On the streets of Mogadishu robbery of fellow proles by men with guns is pretty common. At the same time guns are often used by workers against their employers, which these days usually means the charities and the UN, who are just as keen to force down pay as any other boss. For example, following the disappearance of several food trucks in November '92 the World Food Program laid off its long haul Somali drivers for three months and brought in Ethiopians to work for half the wages. In response to these kind of attacks, charity administrators have been known to be besieged in their compounds by their own security guards demanding more pay. At the end of 1992 a UNICEF house manager was nearly killed when he tried to sack some workers.

The Somali proletariat also have an undying hatred of the UN and all its works – no doubt heightened by the knowledge that Boutros Ghali, Secretary General of the UN, used to be the foreign minister of Egypt when it supported Siad Barre. The fact that they have forced the most powerful nation on earth to drastically alter its foreign policy should inspire class struggle militants across the world. There is much we can learn from them – not least that terrorising journalists really spoils the game for international capital. The struggle of our class in Somalia can only sharpen our understanding, and hatred of, food aid charities – those insidious capitalist rackets with shops and offices on almost every main street in every town in Western Europe and America.

A very useful article about food aid charities, written by a disaffected ex-aid worker can be found in the *Village Voice*, 19 Jan 1993. A major article about the use of food as a weapon against the proletariat can be found in *Zerowork* #2 (1977).

Issue 18 — Summer 1996

Source: <www.libcom.org/article/wildcat-uk-18-summer-1996>

The new bad guys

Author: Wildcat

Source: *From Wildcat #18, Summer 1996.*

Note: A critical look at the various theories surrounding the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing, which claimed 168 lives and left over 800 injured. While we disagree with some of the article we reproduce here for reference.

The political consequences of the bombing in Oklahoma City on 19 April 1995 show how the two sides of the American political system, liberal and conservative, work together. Since the Republican takeover of both houses in November '94, the general trend has been to the right: social spending is being cut, prison building has been increased etc.. This article examines the complementary and simultaneous agenda followed by the liberal wing of the state, reinforcing state power by promoting fear of an imaginary extreme right-wing threat.

Both parties' law and order policies have been boosted. Republicans have dropped their opposition to gun control in return for Clinton's help in restricting appeals to the death sentence. Meanwhile Congress and the President used the angry aftermath of the bomb to pass a draconian set of anti-terrorism measures, giving the FBI additional powers of investigation, and the President the power to decree any group illegal at will. Congressmen have claimed that some of the unofficial militias supported the bombing. This is an outrageous lie, but as we explain below, there has been an attempt to create a climate in which it could be believed. The National Rifle Association grovelled before the gun-grabbers. The media kept up a barrage of innuendo against the accused, which no jury can be immune to.

We haven't a clue who planted the bomb, nor why. Neither have all the people who have been quick to draw political conclusions from it. We should maintain a sceptical attitude to the prosecution case, as we should whenever the police are under enormous pressure to get someone. "The FBI zeroed in on the two men with remarkable speed" (Oregonian, 22 April 95). Though the worst crime in US history, it doesn't have much of a long-term significance in itself. It is not part of an ongoing wave of right-wing violence. There have been no more bombings. What is significant is what has been made out of it.

The fact that the government are the main beneficiaries does not mean they did it. Another beneficiary has been the liberal establishment, that is: the liberal wing of the

state and its hangers-on. This includes journalists, the publishers of most “alternative” papers, anti-racist politicians, most feminists and some Zionists. Its outer fringes include the publishers of anarchist papers. The role of the liberal left is not just to stir up moral panics in order to strengthen the state ideologically. It also materially helps the pigs. The Southern Poverty Law Center, for example, spies on people it considers to be “hate groups” and gives the information to the police. The Anti-Defamation League considers any group critical of Israel as anti-Semitic and adds them to the files.

On the basis of a few vague rumours that the alleged bombers may have attended a meeting of one of the militias, an attempt has been made to generate a climate in which “anti-government” sentiment is equated with mass murder. Even verbal opposition was explicitly condemned by Clinton as contributing to the bombing by spreading “hate”.

The Southern Poverty Law Center has remarkable foresight. Last year, its director demanded that Attorney General Janet Reno, following her Waco victory, turn her attention to “unorganized militias”. Covert Action Quarterly, a Washington DC magazine that claims to oppose the government, was also ahead of the game with a major article on the threat of a fascist uprising in America, published before the Oklahoma tragedy in the Spring '95 issue. On the case of Randy Weaver, the white separatist besieged by the FBI in an Idaho cabin in 1992, Covert Action concedes that “The behavior of federal law enforcement agencies merits criticism”: they shot dead Weaver’s 14-year-old son, and killed his wife whilst she held their baby in her arms. This mild rebuke is a mere footnote in a fourteen-page feature, “Angry White Guys With Guns”, linking gunnies, militiamen, pro-lifers and Nazis, whom it claims are on the brink of kindling an American fascist movement. These strange bedfellows are considered more dangerous than the Federal Bureau of Immolation and the BATF. Paradoxically, part of Covert Action’s definition of paranoid right wing groups is their tendency to “perceive a global conspiracy in which key political and economic events are manipulated by a small group of elite insiders”, exactly the position defended in every issue of Covert Action.

The Village Voice (23 May) attacked the right to bear arms as a wacky idea dreamed up by right-wing extremists. The June issue of the Progressive claims that forming a citizen’s army to overthrow the government is “criminally treasonous”. In their self-induced hysteria, these liberal democrats forget the Second Amendment and the Declaration of Independence which the US state claims to be based on. Not only did the authors of the Constitution see fit to bar any infringement of the right to bear arms, the colonial upstarts explicitly guaranteed the option of violently overthrowing the government in their founding document. Of course, whatever the constitutional rights, no government will tolerate its own destruction. It was not the right to bear arms that drove the police off the streets of LA in May 92, but the act of bearing arms.

Calling for the rigorous enforcement of laws against paramilitary activity, (p27) the Progressive comes as close to supporting the Waco massacre as you can get without actually saying so. The victims of so much FBI provocation and terror in the not too distant past now support the strengthening of the secret police in the name of

anti-terrorism. Remembering this, it condemns attacks on civil liberties... when used against the left. It supports freedom of expression for those who agree with it. As for Presumption of Innocence, the Progressive finds Timothy McVeigh guilty, not only of the bombing but, as if this were not enough, of being a heterosexual (how do they know?) white male. Love and Rage desperately tried to demonstrate that the government is really on the side of the militias, complaining that it has given them airtime with the Waco hearings (L&R Nov/Dec 95). It could hardly add that these hearings were a victory for the liberals, who skilfully manipulated the prejudices of the current political climate by washing Reno's bloody hands with emotive allegations of child abuse, since L&R's politics are part of that climate.

The scare-mongering is not confined to the fringes of the liberal establishment. Here is the New York Times, 30 March, describing the investigations of an abortion clinic: "Planned Parenthood began to uncover a co-mingling of anti-abortion extremists, new world-order paranoids, Waco wackos, Reconstructionist Christians, white supremacists and assault-weapon fanatics in a national paramilitary subculture. Abortion turned out to be merely the come-on issue, designed to attract followers to a rabid, anti-government crusade".

The nearest liberals come to an analysis, as opposed to a panic, is to reduce the arguments of the right to a distorted response to economic hardship. There is a material basis to the right-wing libertarian movement. Over-grazing, logging and mining have damaged the environment so much that powerful interest groups have forced sweeping environmental legislation. Not only environmentalists want to rest the West: hunters, fishermen and the tourist industry need to preserve Nature as a resource. Farmers and loggers have a more immediate need to survive. Small farmers have come into conflict with public land managers. The libertarian right, which denies federal authority to drive cows and chain saws off public land, is, roughly speaking, the political expression of this fight. But fear of the FBI, the DEA and the BATF after Waco is a judicious response to a massacre, not a substitute for complaining about economic hardship. Anti-abortion campaigners are simply people who take the not completely irrational view that an unborn child is a human being to its logical conclusion, a position which is no more (or less) crazy than animal liberationism. In other words, economic interest explains people's behaviour, except when it doesn't.

It's important to see the target of the current campaign as reasoning people, rather than the goose-stepping fanatics portrayed in the demonology of liberalism. You have to understand something in order to defeat it. The new McCarthyism of the left is not aimed at demolishing the more conservative section of American society, but at diabolising it. A discourse which contains old FBI newspeak words like "hate groups" is calculated to advance its promoters, not solve the problems which led to the formation of the militias.

The law-and-order lobby of the left is our enemy, a far more significant one than the Ku Klux Klan. Overestimating the importance of the extreme right is an attempt to frighten people who would normally oppose the state into supporting it. When asked,

members of racial minorities in America usually say they are more threatened by the police and other state agencies, and are almost completely indifferent to “hate groups” (PDXS 7 Nov 94). We should certainly defend the “right” against slander and murder, because misrepresentation does not help us understand them, because we care about the “Waco wackos” and their kids, and because giving the feds the right to wipe out any organisation the President takes a dislike to, is against our interests and the interests of the working class. Whereas another Oklahoma City is unlikely, another Waco, or Philadelphia, or Pine Ridge, is almost certain. This should be obvious, but anti-fascism is so prevalent that it needs spelling out. Even the Fifth Estate added an anarchist “analysis” to the official line:

“McVeigh and his buddies obviously wanted to rip flesh. Whether or not there was direct involvement, it is clear the perpetrators came out of the extensive network of heavily armed militias, neo-nazi and Klan formations, and the violent wing of the anti-abortion movement” (FE 346).

Rather than join the prosecution, we must reject this latest version of the perennial anti-fascist crusade.

Unmasking the Zapatistas

Author: Wildcat

Note: A critical analysis of the Zapatista movement in Chiapas, Mexico and “an alternative to the almost universal uncritical laudation which Marcos and co. have received.”

Source: <www.libcom.org/article/unmasking-zapatistas-wildcat-uk>

It may seem smug to knock the Zapatistas from the sidelines. But this is a perennial red herring. The fact that the Zapatistas and their supporters live in hardship and risk their lives does not in any way demonstrate that their program is what the Mexican proletariat needs. This article should provide an alternative to the almost universal uncritical laudation which Marcos and co. have received.

“Today, we repeat: OUR STRUGGLE IS NATIONAL”

(EZLN, Third Declaration of the Lacandon Jungle, January 1995).

Given its identification with the project of reforming the Mexican nation, why did anyone think the EZLN (Zapatista Army of National Liberation) might be something more? The answer is what it has done. The EZLN liberated prisoners, attacked police stations, burned down town halls, and has thrown out some of the big landholders. Many of its demands for material improvements in living conditions are fair enough. It claims to combine clandestinity with participatory decision making, which we assumed were incompatible. If they really do carry on discussions until they all agree, as they have told journalists, this must be the first time in history an army has organised on the basis of consensus. Their claim to have almost abolished sexism and homophobia within their ranks is also difficult to believe, but according to what Amor y Rabia supporters actually saw in May 94, it is basically true, and we cannot contradict their account.

But if their organisation is remarkably close to the latest anarchist fashion, their aims are far from revolutionary, and their analysis banal. The Mexican electoral system is less than perfectly democratic. The population of Chiapas is poor, relative to most of Mexico. Conversely, it is rich, relative to most of Central America. They were not driven to despair by starvation, as some of the EZLN’s proclamations seem to say.

There are more complex reasons for revolt than the simplistic poverty explanation favoured by most commentators. If poverty explained anything, most of the world would be in revolutionary ferment. This is our attempt to account for this unexpected uprising, which briefly illuminated with its crimson glow the sombre clouds which enshroud the planet. But let's leave the poetry to Marcos.

Reasons for the Uprising

The most important spur to rebellion is the weakness of the social structure. Chiapas was part of Guatemala until Mexico bought it in 1830. It still has a Central American-style semi-feudal ruling class, of Spanish, German and English extraction, who have little notion of the subtleties of Mexican politics, for example they are openly racist toward the indigenous majority. The reactionary *coletos* of San Cristóbal, descendants of the original conquistadores, are a joke. Their attacks on the lefty archbishop have only helped his struggle with the Vatican. When Marcos provoked the *coletos* by claiming to be gay, they took the bait, trying to discredit Marcos by publicising the story. The redneck *rancheros* in the countryside are more serious, redisappropriating land and murdering opponents in the wake of the army. Consciously or otherwise, the struggle in Chiapas is an attempt to modernise the state, and bring its politics in line with the rest of Mexico. The peasants know that they can get some of their demands granted: under pressure, the state has redistributed land before. They voted to join the EZLN and launch the armed struggle when Mexico supposedly joined the First World via the North American Free Trade Agreement. They calculated that the time had come: if Mexico is to be part of North America, Chiapas should not be left behind.

Another reason is the political awareness which grew out of the 500th Columbus anniversary, which did not coincide with a period of defeat for the *indigenas*, as was the case in Guatemala and elsewhere. Indigenous movements are flavour of the month, and the EZLN has made much mileage out of the ethnicity of its members. Another is the simple fact that Marcos and co. chose Chiapas to hang out in the eighties; brilliant leaders can make an important contribution. Then there is the radical Catholic Church. Liberationist priests organised among the indigenous peasants more successfully than the rest of the left. The EZLN were unable to make much headway when they first arrived because they were atheists. So they changed their position.

According to Ojarasca, February 94, citing Amnesty International's Mexico: Human Rights in Rural Areas, most land disputes in the seventies (87 out of 115) were caused by wealthy farmers invading communal land. In the eighties the tide began to turn. The Organisation of Indigenous Peoples of South East Mexico, for example, was founded in Chiapas in 1983, declaring *"We fight for a better life, for which justice is needed for the urban and rural poor. The government of our country, which is a government of the rich, represses and murders us, and we have found from the study of the history of man and of Mexico that only organised struggle will enable us to obtain a new way*

of life..." (*Ojarasca*). 128 fincas were invaded by one group of armed peasants in 1983. In June 1985, the head of one of the peasant organisations announced that his people had occupied 109 large properties in various parts of Chiapas.

In response, the state government allowed landlords to employ paramilitary forces and municipal police to prevent squatting, assisted by "anti-drug" units with helicopters and planes paid for by the USA, and the state police detained, tortured and murdered peasant leaders. Entire communities were evicted by police and private thugs, who swarmed in before dawn, forcing people to abandon their homes and possessions, which they burned. Then they took the peasants by truck to the nearest highway and dumped them. But with all due respect to the bereaved and dispossessed, this is small beer by Central American standards. During the eighties, about 50,000 refugees preferred Chiapas to Guatemala, where at least 110,000 civilians have been murdered by their government. In Chiapas, repression was sufficient to provoke resistance, and insufficient to crush it. The government spent more on social programs in Chiapas than in any other state. From 1989 to 1994, federal spending rose more than tenfold to \$250m.. Since this was obviously a concession to political unrest, it encouraged it.

The Zapatistas did not arrive in a vacuum. They had to work with, or compete with, liberation theologians, Maoists and indigenous groups in the slow cooking cauldron of Chiapas. None of these factors explain the uprising; rebellions happen, not because of any combination of causes, but because people decide to rebel. The Zapatistas, with their vague ideology, are well suited to recuperate the class struggle in Chiapas, turning it into a campaign for national democratic reform.

In naming themselves after the original Zapatistas, the present lot are being romantic rather than historical. Zapata's contribution to the Mexican Revolution of 1910–17 was avowedly parochial. He and his followers had the aim of resisting enclosures and sugar agribusiness in Morelos. Though this state is adjacent to the Federal District, they rarely ventured outside their own backwater. It is difficult not to laugh when one reads of the fire engine incident in the capital. So unfamiliar were the moustachioed bumpkins with the big city, they assumed it was a military vehicle, and opened fire, killing all on board¹. They were defeated by reactionary generals with a less localist perspective. It is tempting to see this as an example of natural selection. But at least Zapata and his followers wanted to defend traditional peasant community against capitalist development, which is more than can be said for the latterday Zapatistas.

The promises of the Revolution (in a word, land to the peasants, both collectively and in small plots) were often unfulfilled. By the mid-eighties, only 2.7 million families had received the promised plots, whilst 3 or 4 million peasants waited, patiently or otherwise.

Owners of big landed estates are rich bastards who live off the backs of the poor, but they are not typical capitalists. In fact their existence can be an impediment to capitalist development. Their labourers are often not wage slaves but tenant farmers who

¹ *Zapata and the Mexican Revolution*. John Womack, Random House, NY 1970

pay rent in labour and in kind, though in Mexico, and particularly in Chiapas, there is an ancient tradition of debt slavery, which in practice is almost indistinguishable from actual slavery. The land owners sell produce for money but don't feel the need to invest it in new methods of production. Unlike the dour burgers of capitalism's rosy dawn, these rakes and degenerates, after allowing for a few incidental expenditures such as arming their goons and lackeys, spend their ill-gotten gains on pleasure and luxury. The development of capitalist agriculture requires the breaking up of these landed estates. This is where peasant movements for progress, such as the Zapatistas, come in. Peasants can be used by politicians to struggle for development against reactionary landlords. Often this is done under the guise of social justice, under the slogan Land to the Peasants. The idea is to turn the serfs, debt slaves and bonded labourers into petty bourgeois proprietors who will then compete against each other to sell their produce on the open market. Many will be ruined, and driven into the urban proletariat, desperate to work and relatively easy to exploit, and a few will become millionaires. This process has been central to capitalist accumulation throughout its history. It is continuing today on an unprecedented scale with the break-up of the collective farms in China.

Some countries, France being the exemplum, have deliberately kept a class of conservative peasants, against purely economic logic, for political reasons. In Mexico, the inefficient small producer and ejido systems have been perpetuated because of the unrest which would greet their abolition.

Even when collective landholdings are created, they have to impose capitalist discipline in order to produce for the market. More frequently, small landholders become owners of individual plots, and have to work overtime to survive. The market price of a commodity is determined by the socially necessary labour time involved in producing it. An American farmer produces a pound of corn in a fraction of the time taken by a Mexican peasant; this determines the price. Land redistribution is also subject to the limitations of wealth redistribution in general. If wealth is more fairly distributed, without the abolition of the market and wage labour, some people will quickly gain an advantage over others through their skills at buying and selling. Soon, wealth will once again concentrate in few hands. 'The rich get richer and the poor get poorer' is in the nature of property. It cannot be ended by redistribution.

This is not to say that all peasant struggles are inherently pro-capitalist. There are very strong pressures towards a peasant becoming a simple petty bourgeois commodity producer (as in rural France) but this is not the only reason for trying to get hold of a smallholding. It can also be a place to live where you're not paying rent to a landlord and you can use it to grow food for yourself. There have always been elements of this in the rural struggle in Mexico, but it has mostly been recuperated in the interests of capitalist development. The current uprising in Chiapas is no exception.

In 1911, Zapatismo was localist when the bourgeoisie was nationalist. Today it is nationalist, but meanwhile, the bosses have regrouped on a global scale. At the beginning, in response to government allegations of foreign influence, the Zapatistas

strenuously denied that any Guatemalan Maya Indians were involved. In other words, the Zapatistas' Maya indigenism is subordinate to their Mexican nationalism, which is passionately expressed in many of their writings. In contrast, the bosses have no country. The US and Mexican ruling classes cooperated against the uprising, the Chase Manhattan bank told the Mexican government to crack down, and the Guatemalan army openly sealed the border against Zapatista escapees in February 1995. The Zapatistas' internationalism is restricted to talking to foreign journalists and appealing to liberals to put pressure on Congress. This is logical, since international working class solidarity is not necessary to achieve land redistribution in Chiapas, nor more democracy in Mexico.

Amor y Rabia is not among the organisations "*that strive, with honesty and patriotism, for the betterment of Mexico*". They asked Marcos a lot of hard questions about nationalism, and he gave some slick answers. They said "*The 'Nation' is used with an abstract feeling of a patriotism that ultimately does nothing more than pit us against one another, country against country*" (interview in Love & Rage August 94). Marcos replied "*When we speak of the nation we are speaking of history, of a history of common struggle with historical references that make us brothers to one group of people without distancing us from other groups*". This is called having your cake and eating it. The question of autonomy is complicated. We do not want a dreary, homogenous world ruled by the World Congress of Workers' Councils. We recognise that there must be different communities with their own traditions and cultures. Some indigenous communities refer to themselves as "nations". However, communists oppose the nation state, whereas the EZLN equivocates on the issue. Marcos wants a more federal Mexico, with respect for the autonomy of different groups and areas. But the USA was founded on this basis. This does not challenge the operation of the market economy, which forces a tendency toward centralisation on any nation state.

Not only are small farmers forced to produce for the market, neither are they good ecologists. When poor peasants take over land in Chiapas, the first thing they do is often to chop down the trees. There have been fights between peasants and police trying to defend ecological reserves. Some of the main demands of Zapatista peasants are for better roads to get their produce to market, electricity to drive machinery and television, etc.. These uncomfortable facts are generally ignored by their supporters. People assume that the poor are good, and the rich are bad, and therefore we must support the former. The point is not to assign good or bad, but to face the fact that much environmental damage in the world is being done by desperate poor people, not just by MacDonald's. Obviously, they are driven to do this by the world market economy which has deprived them of a livelihood, but uncritical support is no solution to this. Neither is a moralistic antagonism to corporations without a critique of the capitalist mode of production. This is where we hope this article will fill a gap.

Nature of Mexican Politics

In contrast with other Latin American regimes, the Mexican state is a consummate recuperator. The Mexican army and police are almost fluff compared with their counterparts elsewhere. Mexico is far more sophisticated in dealing with armed insurrection than Chile, Argentina, Guatemala, El Salvador, or even Britain. That is why the repression in Chiapas has been so tame. In January 94, with support for the Zapatistas apparently widespread within Mexico, fear of the insurrection spreading was a factor in the state's hesitancy. But the continuation of the softly-softly approach is rooted in the nature of Mexican politics. The state instinctively grants some of the demands of any serious opposition, so its apparent climbdown to the Zapatistas on 12 January 94 was not so humiliating as it appears. Since then, it has again granted rebel demands, for example the resignation of the governor of Chiapas. Militarily speaking, the Mexican army could have taken out the EZLN in a few days. The biggest parade the EZLN staged for the press involved only 400 rifles, some of which were fake. In February 95, the troops deliberately allowed Marcos and the rest of the Indigenous Committees to escape before parachuting into Las Cañadas. Recuperation, or cooptation of resistance, does ultimately derive from fear of resistance, but then so does repression, so in itself this says nothing. Generally, the ability to recuperate rather than repress is a sign of strength. An Interior Minister once said of the opposition "*What resists also supports*". In 1970, left-wing president Echeverría secretly organised peasant land seizures in Sonora and elsewhere, giving him an excuse to disappropriate his wealthy latifundista opponents. In the period leading up to the Chiapas events of New Year 94, president Salinas continued the policy of incorporating rebellious peasant organisations into the state, and implemented the Solidarity program which provides subsidised food and health care to millions, even while amending Article 27 of the Constitution to enable the sale of communal lands (ejidos), though this was less relevant to Chiapas, where the land reforms of 1915 and 1934 had never been implemented.

To summarise, NY Times hack Alan Riding: "*A traditional way of advancing politically is to emerge as an independent peasant agitator. Having gathered a group of landless peasants under the banner of 'the fight for justice', the aspiring leader can then negotiate with — and, it seems, invariably sell out to — the authorities. But the system will normally try to coopt him without destroying his appeal, thereby enabling him to continue living off 'his' peasants and, when deemed necessary by officials, to divide other groups of militant peasants*". *Distant Neighbors*², p269. This is too cynical, since it casts aspersions on the sincerity of simple, honest folk who risk their lives daily. But Riding is cynical because recuperation has worked. It didn't work in Chiapas mainly because of its dinosauric dynasties of backward bourgeois bastards.

Even after the massacre of left-wing students in 1968, the new government under Echeverría was able to coopt most of the survivors, letting them out of jail, announcing

² *Distant Neighbors*. Alan Riding, Random House, NY 1986

a “democratic opening”, and an anti-imperialist foreign policy. Echeverría boasted that lefties who were on the streets in the late sixties were in the government in the early seventies. Others were found dead in ditches — but these were, of course, an extremist minority. The Zapatistas are too clever to fall into either of these traps.

However impressive the PRI (Institutional Revolutionary Party)’s pragmatic populism, the rest of the world’s ruling class have turned against the social-democratic corporatist style of management. The OECD admitted Mexico in March 94, during the first stage of the Zapatista uprising, signalling confidence in the PRI’s ability to dismantle the social contract. The next stage in the integration of Mexico into the world economy came in January 95. Zedillo didn’t exactly stage an economic crisis, but it was no accident. This crisis “forced” him to borrow heavily from the IMF and the USA. Mexico doesn’t always dance to the US tune. She has successfully blackmailed the USA into rescheduling debts in the past by pointing out the consequences of a Mexican default on the US financial system. But Zedillo can conveniently cast Uncle Sam as the villain as he introduces austerity, blame repression on conditions imposed by these creditors, and promote the scam of nationalism for the masses whilst being an internationalist himself, acting with the rest of the world’s ruling class. He can always rely on the left to whine about “*national humiliation*” (*Proceso*, 30 January 95) and so on. Five days after offering “*the participation of the indigenous communities in the sustainable development of Chiapas*” and the usual verbiage, “*una paz justa y digna*” (*La Jornada*, 5 February 95), and immediately following the \$20bn. American loan to hold up the peso, he moved thousands of troops into the Zapatista strongholds of the Lacandon rain forest, causing some fatalities and thousands of refugees. But most Zapatista supporters simply hid their weapons and went back to their fields.

Almost everyone sees the crisis as proof that Zedillo’s government has failed. The 20 February *Proceso* talks of industry being “on the point of economic and financial collapse”. But it isn’t a collapse, just a restructuring. Rather than being a symptom of fundamental bugs in the objective operations of the economic system, crises are intimately connected to the class struggle. Although crisis can be forced on the bosses by workers refusing to work, in times of low class struggle it’s the other way round; the crisis is a strategy for implementing austerity. 35% was added to fuel prices, 20% to transportation. VAT went up to 15%. The price of tortillas was raised 26% in April 1995. The minimum wage rose 10% when inflation is estimated to be 42%. Driving large enterprises like Grupo Sidek to the wall is good for the economy, since the goods will be produced by workers in smaller units, less well organised, for lower wages. The demoralisation produced is an opportunity for austerity, and the falling peso boosts exports and reduces imports. Many of the firms that went out of business during the February 1995 currency crisis couldn’t pay off their workers.

The crisis has started to attack its main target: the large sector of workers accustomed to jobs-for-life at a living wage, with health and welfare benefits, without having to work too hard. Federal and state employees number around three million, and related sectors like banking offer similar sinecures to millions more. Mexico is rightly

famous for its inefficient and corrupt bureaucrats. This is anachronistic, considering that Mexico and the USA virtually overlap. Perestroika, or making workers work, is overdue. For Mexico to play its role within NAFTA, this sector has to be broken. Other targets of the debt squads include the subsidies on transport, cooking oil, tortillas and beans, and the health and social security programs. This will take years of crisis, which will marginalise recent events in Chiapas. Thirty thousand layoffs have been announced in Pemex, the national oil company. Redundancies will drive the unemployed into the maquiladoras on the border, and over it.

Poor immigrants are generally prepared to work harder and longer, in worse conditions, for lower wages. The US economy needs its illegals, so the anti-immigrant campaign is not really about repatriating immigrants, but making them more insecure and easier to exploit. In California, Proposition 187 passed by a 2 to 1 majority. This measure cracks down on alleged illegal immigrants, requiring that all the other state agencies cooperated with the INS. Social workers, teachers and nurses are required to deny services to anyone suspected of being an illegal, and to report anyone without proof of legal residency to the immigration pigs. The Personal Responsibility Act, passed by the House of Representatives on March 24, also targets immigrants. This cuts off a wide range of benefits even to those with legal status. The aim is to restore a reign of terror to the underground labour markets, making illegals cheaper to maintain, by denying them benefits, and more insecure, thus easier to exploit. Though it appeals to US-born workers, the campaign aims to make all American workers worse off. The way to oppose it is by explaining how it harms our interests, rather than by trying to persuade workers it's wrong to be racist.

On April 8, the Mexico City government closed down the capital's state-owned bus company, laying off all of its nearly 13,000 workers, then using the police to run a reduced service. (The police are themselves an over-employed sector, ripe for restructuring). The "alternative" union SUTAUT, its leader Ricardo Barco and the government used classic tactics to undermine the battle against the layoffs. The union leaders urged the workers to cool off, but were beaten up and jailed, making them into martyrs. In fact, SUTAUT, despite its non-affiliation to the Labour Congress, is part of the corporatist state.

Despite the frequent use of the words "volcano" and "earthquake" to describe the Mexican proletariat, there has not been a major outbreak of class struggle. This is not to say there has been none. When the PRIista Trade Union Congress, afraid of riots, cancelled the 1995 May Day parade, 100,000 turned out anyway, and a few windows got broken. In 1994 some anarchists led by Amor y Rabia protested against army repression in Chiapas and elsewhere by hijacking a bus and using it to block the main road outside the army headquarters in Mexico City. Then they poured out of the bus and starting spraying graffiti all over the walls of the barracks. The two sentries on duty ran away when they saw all these people in balaclavas streaming off the bus, thinking that the Zapatistas had reached the capital. After 20 minutes or so and a few arguments with soldiers they headed off home, trashing a few cop cars on the way.

Petty harassment of political opposition has been widespread since the uprising began. Amor y Rabia had their Mexico City box number closed by the government.

The opposition, from the Zapatistas to big business interests, criticise the PRI for its continuous 66-year rule. In fact, sections of the PRI may want to go into opposition. There is certainly a fierce internal debate about reforming the system, evidenced by assassinations. But there is no neutral civil service, ready to serve whichever party wins. From the National Palace to the villages, the PRI is the environment, not the competition. In Mexico City, the PRI is that department of the government which organises winning elections. A couple of examples can illustrate the all-encompassing nature of the party at grass-roots level. In the town of Chamula in Chiapas there have been several expulsions of hundreds of people who have converted to Protestantism. The state says it can't intervene in the affairs of the indigenous people. Given the divisive role of Pro God Squads in Central America, this sounds fine. But in fact, the expulsions are the work of PRI thugs, and the expulsados those who refused to vote PRI. Chamula, like most indigenous communities, often returns over 100% PRI. Here is a one reason why, from the town of Paste: *"Gomez and his neighbor are Tzoltzil [sic] natives who live in the village's poor section, where residents support an opposition political party. Ruling party supporters, who dole out government work, live in nicer homes and save plum jobs for their own kind". (Oregonian, 27 March 95).* This is supposed to be shocking. The arrogant assumption that everyone in the world would appreciate American-style freedom of expression seems amusing to us, but this is the fuel that flies the B-52. The difficulty of PRIzing Mexico out of the one-party system was illustrated by events in Tabasco in early 1995. The government tried to replace the PRI governor with an opposition one who claimed the election result was fraudulent, but the local PRI organised against this, and threatened secession of the oil-rich state.

There is no movement capable of seriously challenging the PRI. Cárdenas's PRD (Party of the Democratic Revolution) was only founded because the PRI did not choose Cárdenas as its candidate. He may have won the 1988 election, but the PRI unsportingly manipulated the election computers to ensure the succession for Salinas. This is one of the main reasons the EZLN urged people to risk their lives fighting the "dictatorship". One of the first things the EZLN did was to demand the resignation of the government and the formation of a transitional government to convoke free and democratic elections for August 94. (L'Unita, 4 January 94). In case the PRI once again defied the Democratic Will Of The Mexican People, the Zapatistas held a National Democratic Convention in the Lacandon jungle just before the August 94 elections to organise resistance. The futility of opposing the PRI from this perspective was well illustrated by the PRD, which used classic PRIista techniques to control the make-up of the Convention, to ensure it would vote for them. Lots of people could not obtain credentials because they were not members of the PRD. That is the way politics works in Mexico. The idea that people should be free to have whatever opinion they want, so long as they don't do anything about it, is not deeply ingrained. The Convention was a soggy collection of journalists, union delegates, urban and peasant organisations,

human and women's rights activists, plus our spy, listening to speeches about Democracy and Justice. To their credit, Amor y Rabia refused to participate, whilst their US counterparts, Love and Rage, do support the Commission for Democracy in Mexico, (L&R March 95 p17) showing the absurdities of a decentralised approach. The EZLN urged the indigenous people to vote for the PRD, since abstentions are counted for the PRI. As it turned out, the PRI won more or less fair and square, with the PRD coming in third at 17%, learning the hard way one of the problems with democracy; people might vote for the wrong candidate.

The piqued PRD formed an "alternative government". In Tabasco, they got well stitched up by the local PRI, and in Chiapas, the alternative government has been rather accident-prone. At the moment, the EZLN is calling for a united front of all the opponents of the one-party system, whom they refer to collectively as "Civil Society": *"We call on all social and political forces of the country, to all honest Mexicans, to all of those who struggle for the democratisation of the national reality, to form a NATIONAL LIBERATION MOVEMENT, including the National Democratic Convention and ALL forces, without distinction by religious creed, race or political ideology, who are against the system of the state party"*. This includes the overtly free-market opposition PAN (National Action Party). Marcos says *"If there is a neoliberal proposal for the country, we shouldn't try to eliminate it but confront it. If there is a Trotskyite proposal, a Maoist proposal, an anarchist proposal, or proposals from the Guevaristas, the Castristas, the Existentialists or whatever 'ists' that you may think of, they shouldn't be eliminated..."*, and goes on to propose a national debate involving everyone except the PRI. Neoliberal economics is not just an idea, it means starvation and cholera. Most of the "ists" listed above should be eliminated, through the authoritarian imposition of the needs of the working class.

The EZLN tells people what they want to hear. Talking to the Mexican media, they go on about Democracy and National Sovereignty. Talking to anarchists, they diss the left as vanguardist, in contrast to the humble, democratic, libertarian approach. According to Marcos, the EZLN learned from the indigenous people about direct democracy and instant revocability (elected officials can be recalled at any time). *"You have to convince the people that your opinion is correct. This will radically change the concept of revolution..."*. Haven't we heard this before? Rosa Luxemburg's intervention in the German Revolution of 1918/19 was based on just such a false dichotomy. The content of her politics was the same as the "dictatorial" Bolsheviks (or maybe even a little worse). Only the form was different. The counter-revolution was no less severe because the workers had voted for it. More recently, the disastrous events in Eastern Europe were also launched by direct democrats who convinced the people that their opinions were correct. Ensuring that leaders are required to convince people does not "radically change the concept of revolution".

Don't Worry, Be Happy

The media love the Zapatistas and Marcos has replaced Ché in the iconography of the left. But being sexy and writing bad poetry is no substitute for a coherent revolutionary program. The reason the EZLN is so vague is because its program is open to anything except the current status quo. When they say “*We believe that an authentic respect for freedom and the democratic will of the people are the indispensable prerequisites for the improvement of the economic and social conditions of the dispossessed of our country*” (*Communique, 6 January 94*), have they not heard what these fine sentiments led to in Russia and Yugoslavia? They need not even look beyond Latin America to see that more democracy has corresponded with worse, not better, conditions. If it succeeds, the campaign for democracy in Mexico will have the same results as the one in Eastern Europe. Loosening the PRI's grip on power will make things worse for the majority of Mexicans. It is an uncomfortable fact for the Zapatistas' supporters that millions of workers and peasants support the PRI. It divides the masses by offering significant sectors a secure existence, while the rest barely scrape by. The only positive result of the current crisis, including the one in Chiapas, will be the possibility of unity based on universal misery. Even that is probably too sanguine, since the privatisation and democratisation of the world has not provoked widespread resistance, but the war of all against all. When the reactionary revolts in Eastern Europe were underway, we tried to see something positive in them. But the crisis cannot trick the working class into taking up a revolutionary perspective.

No doubt some readers will say “it's easy for you to sit there and criticise”, and they are quite right. It may seem smug to knock the Zapatistas from the sidelines. But this is a perennial red herring. The fact that the Zapatistas and their supporters live in hardship and risk their lives does not in any way demonstrate that their program is what the Mexican proletariat needs. This article should provide an alternative to the almost universal uncritical laudation which Marcos and co. have received. We would like to have links with class struggle militants in Mexico, but with our limited resources, and hardly knowing anyone else who can be relied on, we have found this impossible. Pessimism can be self-confirming — would it not be better to keep quiet? Why not go further, and tell lies? This is the road to leftism. We prefer to tell the truth, as far as we can see it.

Against Prisons

Author: Catherine Baker

Date: Summer 1996

Source: Retrieved on 2025/10/22 from <www.wildcat.international/again-stp.html>

Notes: Wildcat #18 (Summer 1996). Translated by Doug Imrie and Michael William.

This text is a talk which was given by Catherine Baker at the Abolitionist Congress in Amsterdam in June, 1985. We are reprinting it because we think it raises a lot of important questions about what it would really mean to abolish prisons and justice. Nevertheless, we have quite a few criticisms of it which we put forward in our reply on page 40. Catherine Baker has written several novels and is the author of two books denouncing obligatory schooling: Insoumission à l'école obligatoire (Barrault, 1985), and Les cahiers au feu (Barrault, 1988). She can be contacted by writing to: Catherine Baker, 25 boul. de Belleville, 75011 Paris, France.

We are living in a cynical time, when things have become simplified as far as prisons are concerned. The days when we could imagine that convicts would “become better” are over. No one dares to adopt this discourse, and even the stupidest penologists and the journalists who echo such nonsense recognize that even if the learning forced upon a few very rare prisoners gives them the means to better express their desires, how much more beneficial it would be if it was given to the same exceptional cases outside prison.

Today it can be said aloud that dungeons are dungeons, cages are cages, and that nothing can be done about those who are locked in, since the main thing is not to do them good but that offenders be banished inside the national borders. They are purely and simply suppressed. This is why short prison sentences appear inept and totally meaningless.

Long prison sentences, on the contrary, correspond perfectly to a collective desire to murder. We eliminate bothersome people, like any crook would. If the death penalty has disappeared in some countries, it was because it was too exceptional. It was not that death itself seemed indecent, but all the fuss that was made about it. Even those who call themselves revolutionaries always calmly imagine death for the enemies of their

freedom; from the army general to the terrorist, through the perpetrator of a hold-up and the policeman, everyone agrees with the saying “You can’t make an omelette without breaking eggs.”

The death of those who prevent us from living has never bothered anyone, provided people don’t make a fuss about it. If the citizens of Philadelphia expressed their discontent in May 1985, it was not because the police dropped an incendiary bomb on a house full of people whom the neighbors had denounced for living too squalidly, but because in doing so, they destroyed part of the neighborhood.

So prison is the ideal kind of death, because it eliminates *en masse* those whom society could only physically kill in very small numbers. It economizes emotion.

However there is an enormous problem, a fundamental problem that makes this eliminatory system inadequate for modern society. Apart from those who commit suicide (who therefore take “the law” into their own hands), the rest, in most countries, eventually get out of jail.

This is not the place to analyze how we have arrived at this aberration, but prison only misses its vocation by a hair’s breadth: the death it dispenses only lasts a few years or decades. Prison confinement seldom takes its logic to its conclusion, if only because society must recognize a scale of prison sentences that corresponds to its own scale of values. In emotional terms, crime has a monetary value: cheating on your wife is not punishable by law, whereas cheating your business partner makes you liable to be brought to trial; “self-defence” is “legitimate” when policemen confront thieves, but not the other way around; killing in order to steal is more serious than killing out of anger; after all, you would be sentenced to a longer term for stealing twenty million dollars than for stealing one million. These are all common examples of the commercial value that judges attribute to offences.

So prisoners get out. Imprisonment will, at the very least, have got them “riled up”. No sensible person could stand the thought of living with people who have been deliberately driven to anguish and made violent and enraged. So not only does prison not protect “decent people” from criminals, it daily releases delinquents who are labelled and provoked as such into unimprisoned society. It is absolutely mistaken to think that prisons make anyone feel secure. The well-being in a few people’s minds that sometimes results from the existence of prisons does not correspond to a desire for security at all, but of one for vengeance. What they want is not prison but punishment, and this is why they are not at all opposed to prison abolition as long as prisons are replaced by “something better”.

Public opinion does not exist; it simply hides the pressure groups that the media echo: thus, little by little, the viewpoint of a few administrators is taken up in the media to the effect that prison is useless, and above all that it is out of date: it is not a good investment. During the riots of May 1985 in France, newspapers that were considered the most reactionary asked the question which is itself the subject of this Congress, and which the *Parisien Libéré*, for example, placed on the front page in big print: “It is true that prison is useless, but what should it be replaced with?”

Thus, prison abolition follows the trend of history. There is no doubt that questioning the merits of prison has been widespread during the last ten years, not just among “specialists” (criminologists, sociologists, educators and psychologists), but also among their usual outlets (journalists and politicians).

It is important to be aware that this Congress is modern. We are apparently slowly reaching a stage where prison will be eliminated in 80% of all cases, for which alternative measures are being sought. For the remaining 20% considered dangerous, the eliminatory aspect is strengthened, either by inventing “non-traumatic” death penalties (death by injection), or by actually imprisoning delinquents for life, or by classifying them as mentally ill people who either can or cannot be returned to society cured and calmed down. The agreement that is being reached regarding the need to begin the abolition of prisons with that of short prison sentences takes little notice of this affirmation’s immediate corollary, which consists of imprisoning the remaining 20% (or 30% or 3%; one can imagine the kind of bargaining the figures will be the subject of) under the heading of “dangerous”. As scapegoats and symbols these people would be the playthings of a sinister *mise en scène* that would be even more hate-filled than today’s. One cannot consider freeing minor offenders without implying that offenders that are considered serious must not be freed.

When there is talk of reducing prison terms, once again it is to “soften the punishment”, to make the prison sentence “more bearable”. But we should question the absurdity of wanting to reduce the suffering that is inflicted precisely by the justice system.

Reformists, whether they are animated by mere profitability or by so-called humanitarian reasons, have in common their modern outlook. It is reformism that allows prisons to endure. Today, making prisons “more liveable” means making them better adapted. Not better adapted to people, however, but better adapted to our times. Modernization of punishment can only be carried out because charitable souls and enlightened minds take the time to think of a modern way of punishing.

Whence the idea that an alternative to imprisonment must be found.

Against Judgement

Others, we hope, will critique the system of fines or “freely accepted” forced labor.

We shall limit ourselves to observing that such punishments are as old as the hills, and that their modern aspect is only due to their cynical nature.

Alternative solutions, not to punishment but to judgement, seem more interesting.

It has been said of “negotiations” between the victims and perpetrators of misdemeanor offences that they are to prison what diplomacy is to war.

As abolitionists, we are aware that, if prisons are to be suppressed, there must be a wish to avoid any judicial apparatus or sanctions. We also acknowledge that it is as desirable to look for conciliation from the victim as from the offender.

Nevertheless, we are not sure whether either the offender or the victim will want a friendly arrangement. Indeed, the non-offender, a priori, does not expect to begin “conciliation” to find an arrangement that enables him to accept social rules. Will the offender, who does not accept the whole game, be willing to come to terms and collaborate with or fraternize with the enemy? (We are obviously not talking about the victim here, but the whole social apparatus of support for the victim).

Therefore we are posing the question of this system and the systemization of this conciliation. Who would be the conciliators? Reconciliation professionals? Psychologists? Volunteers? What interests will they defend?

We reject any kind of confinement. The hyper-policed life we are offered, in which people arrogate the right to understand what caused us to act, bears too much resemblance to the confinement of social control as it already exists in certain monstrously over-developed countries. Social workers, psychologists and doctors who think it is their duty to mend the holes in the fabric of the community do so not out of a wish to preserve their own happiness, but for the survival of systems for which they wish to be the maintenance teams.

On the other hand, we can quite accept and hope that every person might count on people who would associate with him to help him resolve a conflict situation, provided this help be punctual, unique and individualized, and this is why we mistrust all conciliation procedures, which would just be a further institutionalization of relationships. For we all especially suffer from not being able to create relationships that are not immediately reduced to social machinery.

Conflicts are not handled by those who experience them but through so-called “objective” legal procedures, which in reality make objects out of all of us.

We do not need to vent our indignation or judgements on society. Clearly, some actions or behavior upset and scandalize us, but we do not consider ourselves “rewarded for our troubles” by the creation of a machine that is no more interested in what is particular about my opinion than what is particular about the perpetrator’s opinion of his action. Justice is done in our name, that is, in place of us. But if my place can be taken I no longer exist. The problem of Justice can never be brought up without looking each person’s uniqueness in the face: murderer, victim or judge, no one can put himself in another’s place.

The question “What is to be done with criminals?” is the very type of question that turns “criminals” into abstract beings separated from their own being; alleged criminals are only a tiny part of themselves: they are not individuals, that is, “people who cannot be divided without being destroyed”.

The above question, which seems to fascinate crowds so much, must be completely reconsidered. It is not a matter of knowing what an abstract social entity can do to another abstract social entity, but to see what each person (myself, yourself) should do when faced with someone who attacks him (myself, yourself). The only worthwhile question is knowing how I myself can be neither a criminal nor a victim.

By far the worst danger lying in wait for us is the total loss of our uniqueness. As abolitionists, we want to repeat that we are against imprisonment, against all prison systems, because there is a monstrous fraud involved. In the name of all and of each one of us we are judged innocent or guilty, our actions are swallowed into the social and everything we are is only taken into account after this digestion, where we are no longer ourselves but an undefined element of the only possible whole, the "social body"; each person is sent back to his assigned place as a functional member: murderer, journalist, woman, bandit, child, etc...

"What is to be done with criminals?" is a criminal question, a question that perpetuates the trap we want to avoid falling into, the trap that consists of perpetually negating the individual.

If a terrorist who had just placed a bomb in this room was discovered here right now, we all might ask ourselves, "What will we do, he and I?," but already the sentence "What will we do to each other?" would seem shocking.

So how should we act in an emergency to escape death? The one a bomber intended for me, but also the one I would be condemned to by any vision that would make an interchangeable unit out of me, one that would kill me as an individual?

We are not saying that this society is poorly fashioned and that after the revolution things will be better. Thus, revolutionaries who ask themselves how the problem of delinquency could be approached in a future society continue to suppose as an unquestionable fact that there must be a system to regulate relationships, to allow their social machine to function. This judicial system actually exists today, and putting red, green, or black judges in the place of white ones can be of no interest to abolitionists.

The idea that in an intelligent economy, technical progress could bring about such satisfaction that no one would want to oppose such a golden age is outdated. Moreover, it is clear that anarchists can no longer advocate banishment without being absurdly hypocritical, since no society can imagine including anti-social people without wanting to socialize them in one way or another.

To the question, "What is to be done with those whom society will not be able to recuperate, and whom it therefore considers the lowest kind of garbage?", we think there is only one solution: to stop wanting to socialize people. What should torture be replaced with? What should prisons be replaced with? What should trials be replaced with? With nothing. These three questions remain interchangeable, because all of them assume that what does not bend must be broken. We completely refuse to ask ourselves, "How shall we break people?" The opposite of this, which we make our own, consists of asking ourselves, "How shall people not bend?" In this respect, delinquency concerns us. It interests us in that it expresses something irrecoverable, not in its forms, which nearly always bear the imprint of the most appalling normal social relations (sexism, violence, leader worship, money worship, etc...).

As abolitionists, we have other ambitions than maintaining social systems of any type. We do not want isolation; this goes without saying, otherwise what would we be doing here? We want to think with others about ways of living with others outside

pre-existing systems. It is the community that secretes isolation. In any cogent notion of community — we must repeat this — each person appears to be no more than an infinitesimal part of the only complete being: the community. Man, then, always lacks others instead of freely, in his uniqueness, desiring others. We believe that each individual constitutes a whole. His desire to meet other “wholes” just expresses his freedom, not a kind of gregarious determinism. The abolitionist movement is not a militant movement; we have no cause to defend, the prisoners’ any more than other ones. We are struggling neither for them nor even with them, but for ourselves. We are neither humanists nor leftists; we don’t want to work for more humane prisons. Prison is only our affair — and even then! — is just a part of our affair when we are imprisoned. Some abolitionists are imprisoned today, but each person, wherever he is, struggles against his confinement and against a social organization that can only logically lead to punishment and elimination. From this it follows that we are not “outside contacts” who, for example, would serve the prisoners by circulating information. Today, prisoners or not, we simply want our individual freedom. If I were in the prisoners’ place, perhaps I would fight for improved prison conditions, but I am here, outside jail for the time being, and I speak from the outside. (When I say “we”, then, I know that only abolitionist prisoners and non-prisoners, that is, a very small number of individuals, recognize themselves in this “we”).

We cannot bear being locked up, in prison or elsewhere. We cannot bear being deprived of freedom. For us on the outside, prison is no ordinary threat: it is what harms us, not just because it is the symbol of all of our confinements, but also because it is the real conclusion of an unbearable logic of normalization.

Individuals are judged not in conformity (guilty) or in conformity (innocent), but in any case, judged. We say that if we agree to be assessed, we deprive ourselves of our judgement, our thoughts, our being. The tragic division between the innocent and the guilty, those in conformity with the system or not, destroys all of us. Anything that reinforces this gap is antagonistic to us; this is why we cannot feel concerned by reformist struggles that aim to make prisons less painful. For us, abolitionists inside and abolitionists outside, it is the very idea of prison and trials that suffocates us. We know there are prisoners who are trying to arrange society in such a way that its punishments are acceptable. They are our enemies, as are all those who are determined to restrain us in a life that we cannot make our own. Prison is an ideal angle from which to attack our own individual confinement. We recognize ourselves in prisoners’ refusal precisely when they revolt against confinement. Because we are outside we know that we are imprisoned inside walls of constraint. But we cannot take up on our behalf any revolt that intends to reproduce social relations in prison that might still be missing, for, contrary to a widespread idea prison socializes prisoners as much as it can (respect for hierarchies, authorized kinds of leisure activity, blackmail at work, privation and privatization of inter-individual relationships, etc...). Prison is not a disease of our society at all; there is nothing monstrous about it: it is the height of society, the height of all societies, of all community organization of social relations. The media, the police,

the justice system, but also education, morality and culture — everything aims to maintain the cohesiveness of the whole by force. Prison punishment is necessary for order and order is necessary for society. We could never imagine a society without order, and order without prison punishment. We have all internalized this so well — reinforcing the bars and guillotines in our minds to the point of going mad with anguish because of it — that the State keeps us under its thumb quite “naturally,” because we are, in reality, “irresponsible”. But the State is only a machine serving something more terrifying than itself: behind the State there is a will, a human will. Man is there with his laws. Down with Man.

We are men who are in revolt against Man. That animal is a social animal. Are we happy about it?

Against Laws

We want to abolish Justice. Does that mean the abolition of laws, and therefore of any kind of society? Because laws are undoubtedly essential to life in a society. No one doubts this: neither do we. The law guarantees each person’s rights. It forbids or permits, but in any case it is imposed from the outside. To speak of an inner law would be meaningless. The members of any society, bourgeois, socialist, communist, anarchist or some other kind, have common interests to defend; they have to envisage a common response to anything that can threaten it; they must devote themselves to considering, in common, the question of external enemies and war, or internal enemies and delinquency. From a societal or community point of view, logic requires an organized defence, a judgement shared by the whole, a punishment. Some think that Justice will not be good Justice as long as it remains separate from the people; they want a Justice that emanates from the community. As far as we are concerned, judgement can only remain individual. Even if the judgement of several individuals on some event were unanimous, it would not be communal and could not be generalized. On the contrary, the characteristic feature of a judgement that asserts itself as being one of the whole community is that it no longer belongs to anyone.

By saying “We have every right”, abolitionists abolish laws, for each person becomes his own sole reference. If there are acts we do not commit it is because we do not want to commit them. That’s all. Forbidding rape is of interest to no one. On the other hand, each person will no doubt find it of interest to consider means of being neither a rapist nor a rape victim. Recognizing that everyone has a right to rape me or hack me to pieces expresses my awareness that laws can in no way protect me. It is as aberrant to say, “If killing was permitted everyone would kill” as it is to say, “Since killing is forbidden I will not be killed”. We feel secure with people we trust and no law in the world will change that. We can only be of interest to each other if judging people is reduced to a minimum; we need to rethink things starting from our personal viewpoint. Life would not be any more barbarous without laws. It is within a society

with laws that people kill and rape; it is particularly in a society with laws that “decent people” are ready to lynch or flay those they assume are guilty of a crime that they find disturbing. Moreover, it is from this viewpoint that advocates of prison abolition are considering creating refuges for delinquents who refused conciliation. But protecting and punishing the criminal are two sides of the same thing: it is a matter of assigning the criminal to a place. He and the victim are locked into roles that were defined earlier and independently of them. And again we lapse into this very, very old idea that everyone must stay in his place if we want the system to function. The perpetuation of this system, of this organized set of relations, still remains each person’s sole aim. But this sole aim is always outside of oneself.

The definition of law is “A mandatory rule imposed on man from the outside”. It is obviously because they are outside us that we reject all laws, including, of course, the law of the strongest: we are opposed to force so long as the force in question seeks to restrain us. So it is useless to rehash that delinquency, as such, embodies none of our aspirations: competition, sexism and rackets are laws that we fight, all the more so because society makes them its own, condemning only what is criminal, as Thierry Lévy has shown very well in his book *Le crime en toute humanité* because it is not on a par with the crime that society indulges in. It is true that for its survival, society can only integrate all individual impulses that pass through its nets by labelling them delinquency and locking up delinquents; making people believe through the media that what is dangerous for it is dangerous for everyone enables the systems we are familiar with to redirect to their own ends what is very often only disgust, anger or weariness at the outset.

It plugs up the cracks with respect to any behavior that opposes it and could thus appear deviant or revolutionary. In doing so, its victory restores a new dynamism to it and allows it to further enlarge its field of activity. (Our optimism consists in affirming that only what is recuperable is recuperated. The irrecoverable is possible. For individuals cannot totally identify with society; they know that they realize what is best in themselves outside of society — through friendship, love, art, brilliant thoughts, etc. — and that every individual aspires to what makes him a unique being).

So society tries to socialize crime with trials, and then criminals with prison. It monopolizes every person’s acts because there is in effect a rivalry between owners: myself and the community, to which it is tragically said that “I belong”. As soon as they are carried out our acts escape us: if they are judged “anti-social” they are punished, and independently, of course, of ideas we might have about good or evil; the insane, the rebellious, and alleged criminals are all locked up. Being locked up in a prison, a camp or a hospital is only the culmination of a confinement apart from ourselves that all of us suffer. As abolitionists, we want the individuals in question to reappropriate their acts, whether or not they are called crimes. Crime does not exist as such. If there are indeed painful circumstances and horrible acts that are inflicted on us, we ask nothing more than to try to avoid them by considering, alone or with a few others, means of protecting ourselves from any infringement on our mental or physical

integrity. We note that progress is a notion that is absolutely devoid of meaning: we think, therefore, that we must break free of a way of thinking that has only led us to dead ends. It is not the Law but freedom that can allow individuals to live in harmony by forming relationships that start from themselves, not from the social relationships they are forced into today.

We have been stripped of everything and made strangers to our own lives. We cannot bear it. The word “revolution” has been confiscated by politicians, so we will use it sparingly, which is no problem, but we certainly hope that our ideas are taken for what they are: a concrete change. So when we affirm that we do not recognize anyone’s power to judge us or our acts, we are really abolishing the infamous social consensus, which is just based on turning oneself over to the community. Men have never broken with the idea that they had to give up their singularity for the benefit of the human species. On the contrary, not only would we like to consider ourselves specific individuals, we would like to consider as such every person who wants to be so. As abolitionists, we behave in such a way that criminals and others can reappropriate their acts, because we want to live among people who think about their lives and do not abandon them to social authority. The idea of society does not go without saying. The abolitionist movement is one sign of this, among others.

Appendix: Wildcat’s Reply — Making An Omelette Without Breaking Eggs

Catherine Baker says, promisingly, “we [prison abolitionists] are neither leftists nor humanists”. Unfortunately, the whole article is shot through with a humanistic moral sentiment based on recognising the intrinsic worth (“uniqueness”) of every individual. The most important moral principle that she asserts is that of “we mustn’t ever lock anyone up” (“We reject any kind of confinement”). This obviously has a great deal in common with pacifism: “we mustn’t ever be violent”.

It’s easy to see why people adopt these principles in capitalist society. It’s true that one of the things which is disgusting about this society is the fact that it consigns millions of people to prisons, mental hospitals, concentration camps and all the rest of it. It’s also disgusting that violence pervades all areas of life and that millions of people are murdered every year. Because capitalism is an inherently antagonistic society, particularly in class terms, there is such a thing as the “thin end of the wedge”. It can literally be true that if, for example, a state is allowed to execute a child-murderer today it will execute a political activist tomorrow. Hence the temptation to condemn the Death Penalty, any Death Penalty. But it logically follows from adopting absolute principles that if we advocate locking anyone up, or beating them, or killing them, we become the same as the state. This is exactly what Baker says when she amalgamates army generals, policemen, “terrorists”, armed robbers and revolutionaries because they

all agree that “You can’t make an omelette without breaking eggs”. Similarly, she amalgamates violence with sexism, leader worship and money worship.

What is clearly reactionary about this approach is its classlessness. Baker’s position implies that there is no significant difference between the state putting workers in jail for going on strike illegally and workers locking their boss in his office until their demands are met.

To this kind of moralism we can only reply: why should we respect everyone’s individual uniqueness? In any case, if rioters were to kill a man for wearing a police uniform it is not *they* who have turned him into an object — the uniform and the Law have already turned him into an object, a killer robot which needs deactivating.

Baker correctly identifies Justice and exchange. One of the strong points of the article is her discussion of Justice and the *precondition* for exchange: namely turning human beings into interchangeable units stripped of their individuality. She likes to rail against any mention of “society” or even “community”, but it is clear that what she is talking about is an abstract society, a society of equal citizens. In this sense, she is not just criticising Justice (fair exchange) but any system of Law which the principles of Justice might be applied to. What she doesn’t see is that her beloved individual freedom is the basis for such an abstract society, just as freedom of trade creates a world of interchangeable objects.

We don’t intend to reject individualism in favour of collectivism — after all, “The reality which communism creates is precisely the true basis for rendering it impossible that anything should exist independently of individuals” (Marx, *German Ideology*). But we do reject the extreme individualist fear of collective organisation which is so common amongst activists. “*If there are indeed painful circumstances and horrible acts that are inflicted on us, we ask nothing more than to try to avoid them by considering, alone or with a few others, means of protecting ourselves from any infringement on our mental or physical integrity*” — why with just a few others? Why not with lots of others? And why not in an organised and systematic way? This seems to be the central problem with Baker’s approach — she doesn’t try to make any distinction between judging people as interchangeable, abstract beings and collectively defending ourselves against anti-social behaviour.

Baker says we have “internalised” order. We all tend to think we know what people ought to be like, and explain the deviations from this norm by metaphysical concepts like “internalised”, “armoured” and “alienated”. But we didn’t exist, pristine individuals, before internalising compulsion. How does she know what is really us, and what is merely internalised alien coercion? People really are the way they are. It is not true that liberty is the essence of our being. Liberty, and articles like hers, are products of political events like the French Revolution. We don’t believe in the sanctity of human life, or the inherent worth of an individual, reject absolutely submitting one person to the will of another. Why should we?

She attacks the idea that we need laws for society to function. Laws do not prevent violent crimes, and they are not intended to. Anarchists generally encourage groups

of working class people to defend themselves against drug dealers or whomever is spoiling their neighbourhood. Logically, she criticises this as incompatible with the extreme respect for the individual which is the basis of anarchism.

Our critique of “class justice” comes from the opposite direction: the class struggle. At its worst, the anarchist position supports the IRA policing of Northern Ireland slums as an example of working-class self-activity. But even at its best, there tends to be an assumption that there is a “normal” working class lifestyle, presumably based on honest work and consumption, which is disturbed by an undisciplined underclass. This ignores the fact that it is this “normal” Reproduction of Daily Life which leads to the tensions in society which express themselves in “anti-social crime”. This way of looking at things becomes even more problematic when what the lowlife are involved in is simply some illegal form of business. In American inner-city ghettos drug dealing is often a major sector of the local economy — if it was somehow shut down an awful lot of young kids would be without an income. What would they do if they weren’t employed selling drugs? They’d probably go out mugging and burgling. Similar considerations apply to prostitution, another activity said to “spoil” neighbourhoods.

Anti-social crimes such as mugging are overwhelmingly a product of the intensified war of all against all found in particularly poor neighbourhoods. Tackling them cannot be separated from attempts to reduce the level of poverty — in other words, the suppression of *anti-social crime* is inseparable from the development of *social crime*, proletarian reappropriation in all its forms. To proceed on any other basis would just mean trying to impose an alternative system of law and order, with all the usual problems associated with this. Community defence brigades would not be paid and would be composed mostly of poor people. This means that they could end up being as corrupt as any police force, with their priorities being determined by whatever back-handers (“sources of revolutionary community taxation”) are available. It could well be a case of: *“I am a drug dealer, but I only sell cocaine to yuppies from outside the area so here’s a donation to your cause, comrades”*.

It’s also hard to see how they would stand aloof from faction fights within the “community”. The anarchist solution seems to be that sheer ideological commitment alone is enough — everybody would be so anti-racist, anti-sexist etc. (see the article *An Unparalleled Evil?* in issue 11 of *Taking Liberties*) that they wouldn’t dream of doing anything anti-social in the name of fighting anti-social crime. But ideological commitment doesn’t put food on the table. Organised theft from the bourgeoisie certainly does, and might well draw in those otherwise tempted to steal off their own kind. Historically, the only times that “crime-ridden” neighbourhoods have become safe places to walk about in is during uprisings — in the townships of South Africa this is a well-known, and even documented, phenomenon. The only kind of “community” worth defending is a community of struggle against capital, and it is only through the development of such a community that anti-social acts within the working class can begin to be truly suppressed.

New world order: rhetoric and reality

Author: Wildcat (UK)

Subtitle: *“The fourth beast... shall devour the whole earth, and shall tread it down, and break it in pieces... But the judgement shall sit, and his dominion shall be taken away to be consumed and to be destroyed unto the end”.*

Source: From *Wildcat* #18, Summer 1996.

Note: Wildcat’s analysis of the post-Cold War “New World Order.”

The phrase “New World Order” was originally used by George Bush following the destruction of social democracy in Eastern Europe and the massacre of the proletariat in Iraq. Between 1989 and 1991, a dramatic series of events culminated in cooperation between all the major powers, with the USA in overall charge. Democracy and the market are the heavy artillery with which the New World Order has battered down all Berlin walls.

See *Is imperialism a useful category of historical analysis?*

[For a response to Wildcat’s views on imperialism, see [here](#).]

The phrase “New World Order” was originally used by George Bush following the destruction of social democracy in Eastern Europe and the massacre of the proletariat in Iraq. Between 1989 and 1991, a dramatic series of events culminated in cooperation between all the major powers, with the USA in overall charge. Democracy and the market are the heavy artillery with which the New World Order has battered down all Berlin walls.

We argued that the proletariat “now confronts one united world capitalist class, ruling a world with an increasingly homogenous culture and even one language, which potentially unites capitalism’s gravediggers” (Wildcat 15 p4). We identified the New World Order “not as a piece of mere rhetoric, but as a distinct phase in capitalism’s reversal of the gains the working class made in the late sixties and early seventies” (Wildcat 17 p55).

Other journals of our ilk argued that the New World Order was a politician’s catchphrase. This apparent unity would rapidly disintegrate, and be replaced with the familiar system of “rival imperialist blocs”. These were tentatively predicted to be a US

bloc, a Japanese one, and a European Community. In this case, one out of three is no better than nothing: if today there is only one superpower, there are none.

In this article, we trace the background to the theories of “Imperialism” which consciously or otherwise underlay the assumptions which led to this error. Using that much-maligned method, the benefit of hindsight, we show how it came about and what was wrong with it, and suggest what it should be replaced with.

The differences between the powers are trivial compared with the rivalries which led to the first and second world wars and the cold war. At the time of writing, the policy differences between the EC countries on Yugoslavia usually exceed the differences between any one of them and the USA. Every year, Japan and the USA reach the brink of a “trade war”; every year, they call it off. Their imperialist rivalries amount to disagreements about how many third world proletarians they should collectively slaughter. They all agree on the need for simmering ethnic conflicts to divide the proletariat and create millions of desperate dispossessed, willing to work for peanuts. The proletariat is currently so supine it doesn’t take the kind of inter-bloc conflict which characterised international relations for the two hundred years up till 1989 to keep it down. As we gradually became aware during the late eighties (see Wildcat 12), capitalism had replaced its supposedly inexorable war drive with a remarkable ability to broker a period of relative world peace.

Marx and Engels had little to say on the subject of Imperialism. Their remarks on colonialism and foreign trade, particularly the section on counter-tendencies to the tendency of the Falling Rate of Profit, have been used by their epigones to give authority to their own investigations, and blown up out of proportion (Capital Volume 3¹ pp 344–347). These three pages were used to justify anti-Imperialism, but all they basically say is that a national capital tries to avoid the crisis caused by the Falling Rate of Profit, which in turn is caused by the increase in the ratio of constant to variable capital, of machinery to workers, by investing in foreign countries. The Falling Rate of Profit is fully explained in², 13, p318. Briefly, capitalists are forced by competition to produce cheaper goods by increasing the ratio of machinery to workers. Because labour is the only source of value, the rate of profit is given by dividing the proportion of living labour in the product by the proportion of dead labour, or machinery. This rate must fall as the proportion of machinery rises.

Capital invested “at home”, in production for foreign trade, can also yield a higher rate of profit

“because it competes with commodities produced by other countries with less developed production facilities, so that the more advanced country sells its goods above their value”.

¹ *Capital*, 3, K. Marx, Penguin, London 1981.

² *Ibid*.

This enables the more advanced country to dominate the less advanced, by making more profit. Capital invested directly in production in the colonies also produces more profit:

“the reason why this can yield higher rates of profit is that the profit rate is generally higher there on account of the lower degree of development, and so too is the exploitation of labour, through the use of slaves and coolies, etc.”

What this hastily-written passage means is that a higher rate of profit is obtainable in countries where exploitation is less developed, where more variable capital (labour) is required to turn out a given quantum of value from a given unit of constant capital (machinery).

Marx doesn't make too much of this counter-tendency to the Falling Rate of Profit. He adds that though the more advanced country “receives more labour in exchange for less”, it is all “pocketed by a particular class, just as in the exchange between labour and capital in general”.

Both foreign trade and capital export are just particular examples of capitalism in general. They are not qualitatively different from what capital does within its “home” country. The “super-profits” of anti-Imperialist theory are, in other words, simply larger quantities of ordinary profits. Taking over competitors with less developed production facilities by destroying them by selling cheaper goods, and taking advantage of these less developed facilities to make more profit, is part of capital's daily life. Moralistic whining about the unfairness of Imperialism, as opposed to ordinary capitalism, is an attempt to confuse us about the nature of the beast. This is not to deny the far worse conditions imposed on the colonies compared to the metropolises. The enslavement of Africans was qualitatively worse than the forced deportations of the English, Scots and Irish poor, but if a capitalist power is more savage and parasitic abroad than it is at home, that is only because the class struggle at home has restrained it. If metropolitan workers have been “bribed”, that is because they have forced the bosses to bribe them.

Theorists of Imperialism may have misunderstood Marxist economics, but they genuinely tried to base their positions on his methodology. In *The German Ideology* (1846), Marx outlined the materialist conception of history, the premises of which are:

“the real individuals, their activity and the material conditions under which they live, both those which they find already existing and those produced by their activity. These premises can thus be verified in a purely empirical way.”³

But Marx was no head-banging empiricist. He was also a poet:

³ *The German Ideology*, in Karl Marx: Selected Writings, ed. D. McLellan, OUP 1977.

“At a certain stage of their development, the material productive forces of society come into conflict with the existing relations of production, or — what is but a legal expression for the same thing — with the property relations within which they have been at work hitherto. From forms of development of the productive forces these relations turn into their fetters ... new, higher relations of production never appear before the material conditions of their existence have matured in the womb of the old society itself”⁴.

The more radical elements within the Second International had good organisational and political reasons to see themselves as the successors of Marx and Engels. Around the turn of the century, various debates took place among these radical social democrats about Imperialism and Nationalism. The most famous of these is V. I. Lenin.

Lenin argued that Imperialism was in part a conscious strategy to buy off the working classes in the Imperialist countries. His evidence consists of one quote from arch-imperialist Cecil Rhodes,⁵ p93, and one from Engels to the effect that the workers of England “merrily share the feast” of its colonies. What would these severe Victorians say if they could see the workers of England today in its Indian restaurants? From Rhodes’ opinion that Imperialism would help avoid revolution in Britain, Lenin derived his theory of the Labour Aristocracy, which shows his moralism at its crudest. His condemnation of the “economic parasitism” by means of which the English ruling class “bribe the lower classes into acquiescence” is completely antithetical to materialism, as are his complaints that the “Imperialist” countries oppress the weaker ones.

The ruling class in all countries pay workers as much as they think they have to, calculated from:

- a) the need for workers to stay alive and, to a greater or lesser degree, healthy,
- b) the shortage or otherwise of workers capable of doing the job, and
- c) the class struggle.

Where does a wage rise gained by struggle end and a bribe begin? Lenin’s position implies that British workers should deduce what proportion of their pay checks are the proceeds of the exploitation of the colonies, and hand that proportion back to their employers, declaring their refusal to be bribed.

Lenin shored up his views with off-hand remarks by Marx and Engels, ignoring the better worked-out passages which can be used to develop an analysis of the world

⁴ *Preface to A Critique of Political Economy* (1859) in *Karl Marx: Selected Writings*, ed. D. McLellan, OUP 1977.

⁵ *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism*, V. Lenin, Foreign Languages Press, Peking 1973.

economy without the concept of Imperialism, as Geoff Kay does in *Development and Underdevelopment*⁶.

Lenin's position was not a mistake. The Labour Aristocracy theory had the political purpose of enabling the Bolsheviks to argue for the workers in the colonies to form united fronts with their local ruling classes against Imperialism. This in turn had the aim of dividing the working class internationally, and turning it into cannon fodder for capitalist war.

It would be simplistic to write off the Bolsheviks as nothing but defenders of capitalism. Another member of the Bolshevik party, Nikolai Bukharin, presented a theory of Imperialism which paid lip-service to the Labour Aristocracy position, but placed more emphasis on the necessity for revolution. The reasoning behind Bukharin's theory was simple. If it could be shown that capitalism was inevitably divided into warmongering states, that hence the horrors of the first world war were going to be repeated until capitalism was overthrown, this would constitute a convincing case for revolution.

In *Imperialism and World Economy*⁷, following the dialectical method outlined in Marx's Preface⁸, Bukharin tried to show a contradiction between nation states and international capitalism. Capitalism has created the world economy, the material basis of communism, but "national economies" and "state capitalist trusts" contradict this, leading to Imperialism and war. Nation states were the "forms" which helped develop the "forces of production", but now they are "fetters" on their further development. *Imperialism and World Economy* was intended to show that Imperialism is an inevitable stage of capitalism, in order to refute the possibility of a peaceful solution to the first world war. This was in turn necessary in order to oppose the "centrists" among social democracy, who were trying to sit on the fence on the question of the necessity of a proletarian revolution to end the war. The more radical socialists needed a dialectical contradiction between nations and the world economy to reject the theory of ultra-Imperialism, put forward by the leading centrist, Karl Kautsky. Like Lenin, Bukharin distorted Kautsky's theory. They both claimed that Kautsky had completely abandoned Marxism, and now believed that capitalism could reform itself, eliminating its nasty bits, and evolve into a peaceful new world order. Kautsky actually said:

"From the purely economic standpoint, therefore, it is not excluded that capitalism may live through another new phase, the transference of the policy of cartels to foreign policy, a phase of ultra-Imperialism, which of course we must fight against just as energetically as we fought Imperialism. Its dangers would lie in a different direction, not in that of the armaments race and the threat to world peace"⁹, p88.

We need hardly add which of the two theories, Imperialism and ultra-Imperialism, has best stood the test of time.

⁶ *Development and Underdevelopment*, G. Kay, MacMillan, London 1975.

⁷ *Imperialism and World Economy*, N. Bukharin, Merlin, London 1976.

⁸ *Preface to A Critique of Political Economy* (1859) in *Karl Marx: Selected Writings*, ed. D. McLellan, OUP 1977.

⁹ *Selected Political Writings*, K. Kautsky, ed. P. Goode, MacMillan, London 1983.

Bukharin attempted to deal with ultra-Imperialism:

“The development of world capitalism leads, on the one hand, to an internationalisation of economic life, and, on the other, to the levelling of economic differences, — and, to an infinitely greater degree, the same process of economic development intensifies the tendency to ‘nationalise’ capitalist interests, to form narrow ‘national’ groups armed to the teeth and ready to hurl themselves at one another at any moment”¹⁰, pp 106–107.

This is because, he said, state capitalism is the capitalism of existing, national states. Though the economy is increasingly international, “Acquisition, however, assumes the character of ‘national’ (state) acquisition where the beneficiaries are huge state companies of the bourgeoisie of finance capital”¹¹, p106.

Considering how central it is to his theory, he is obliged to explain what he means by “national”, which he put in inverted commas throughout the book. The reason he did so is clear from the footnote on p80 which is the only place he tried to explain this crucial concept.

“When we speak of ‘national’ capital, ‘national’ economy, we have in mind here as elsewhere, not the element of nationality in the strict sense of the word, but the territorial state conception of economic life.”

What is clear is that he cannot define what nations are. This weakens his whole thesis, which depends on the contradiction between nations and world economy. Bukharin assumed that capital is divided into particular “narrow ‘national’ groups” when this is what he had to prove in order to hold the line against ultra-Imperialism. Capitalism has proved itself more flexible than many of its critics realised. In Bukharin’s time, it was obligatory to try to show capitalism is an inherently irrational system, that the bourgeoisie are driven, against their will, to do all sorts of wicked things by the genie they have unleashed but cannot control. In contrast, socialism will be a planned social system. Today, it is almost axiomatic that “planned socialism” was just another form of capitalism. We could add that capitalism is not unplanned, and that the capitalist class is not driven to make war; on the contrary, war is part of the plan.

Is there any reason why single capitalist firms should be tied to one state? It is possible for capitalism to dissolve particular national states and replace them with larger entities, such as the European Community. Is there any limit to the size of such entities, and does there have to be more than one? Bukharin answered yes, but didn’t successfully explain why.

Rosa Luxemburg’s most important contribution to the debate on Imperialism was her opposition to the idea that Imperialism could be opposed by supporting national

¹⁰ *Imperialism and World Economy*, N. Bukharin, Merlin, London 1976.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

liberation struggles. Whereas Lenin's guilt-trip about how "we Russians" (and by implication, we British, we French, etc.) have no choice but to support national struggles against "our" Imperialist ruling class¹² has justified support for numerous anti-imperialist wars, Luxemburg's arguments, based on the experience of the Polish working class in its struggle against "its" poor oppressed national bourgeoisie, have been largely forgotten.

In Foreword to the Anthology (1905)¹³, for example, she tried to show where Marx's support for some national struggles was wrong by looking at the facts of Poland's integration into the Russian Empire (p95). As Russia, "the prison-house of nations", incorporated Poland, it tended to unite the working class of Russia and Poland. On the other hand, Polish nationalism acted against that unity during the Russian revolution of 1905. Luxemburg rejected "eternal truths" like support for national liberation in favour of an empirical, case-by-case approach.

Her arguments were seriously debated at the time, and many social democrats, including a significant section of the Bolsheviks, supported her views against Lenin's "right of nations to self-determination". Eventually Lenin's views won the day, and the Communist International supported national liberation movements and thus the defeat of the working class in China, Germany, etc., etc.. The Russian Revolution did not help end the first world war. By taking out one of the powers on the side that was just beginning to gain the upper hand, it prolonged the war. Equalising the two sides enabled Germany and Austria/Hungary to concentrate on the Western Front. Similarly, anti-Imperialism supports the "oppressed", i.e. weaker, side, prolonging the war.

The most obvious reason for the success of Lenin's views was the power of the Bolshevik state. It had both the means and very good reasons for supporting national liberation struggles. Another reason for the weakness of opposition to Lenin's liberal moralism was that his opponents were themselves not unafflicted by the same mental paralysis.

For example, Luxemburg defended the proletariat as the true defender of democracy against Absolutism, and even as the bearer of Western Civilisation against Tsarist barbarism, a position which, if defended consistently, might have had serious consequences. Her commitment to democracy seriously weakened Luxemburg's opposition to the idea of national self-determination. Rather than simply showing that nationalism is the enemy of the working class, she claimed that the bourgeoisie distorts or makes meaningless the idea of nationalism. This was part of the weakest but most famous argument against Lenin: national liberation is impossible because of the domination of the planet by Imperialism. (See *The National Question and Autonomy* in¹⁴, pp 130–131). Until this happened, she maintained, there was a case for supporting

¹² *The Right of Nations to Self-Determination*, V. Lenin, Progress Publishers, Moscow 1967.

¹³ *The National Question*, R. Luxemburg, Monthly Review Press, New York 1977.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

certain national movements in the 19th century. We reject nationalism as anti-working class not because it's impossible, not because the bourgeoisie distorts or betrays it, but because it has always tied the proletariat to its class enemy and divided it amongst itself: the workers have no country.

These confusions were not the result of revisionism corroding the legacy of Marx and Engels. The heroic legends of the revolutionary bourgeoisie fearlessly slaying the dragons of feudalism and developing the productive forces were told better by Marx than anyone else. With such a starting point, Marx's followers were bound to end up bickering about which faction of capitalism was more progressive, at what date capitalism had achieved its historic mission, and so on.

What is Imperialism?

In this section, we briefly consider some of the most important definitions of Imperialism to see whether it has ever been a useful concept.

“The policy of finance capital pursues a threefold aim: first, the creation of the largest possible economic territory which, secondly, must be protected against foreign competition by tariff walls, and thus, thirdly, must become an area of exploitation for the national monopoly companies”

Hilferding, Finance Capital, cited in¹⁵ p107.

Hilferding's definition, on which most of his socialist contemporaries depend, depends in turn on the concept of nation states. To see that invisible but concrete Thing, Capital, moving around the world in search of profits, using nation states to divide the exploited, would require a level of abstraction similar to that achieved by Marx in *Capital*. Instead, he defines Imperialism in terms of national monopolies exporting Capital and commodities. In other words, nations are more basic than capitalism, and Imperialism is their policy. However, Imperialism was not always carried out by nations. India and Indonesia were founded by companies.

As we saw with Bukharin, nations are hard to define. Hilferding's definition can only be understood as the policy of nation states, which are particular coalitions of capitalist groups with sovereignty (the monopoly of violence) over a particular acreage of the earth's surface. We do not deny that these coalitions exist. But we need to address the question of how fundamental these particular formations are, compared to others. Is the bourgeoisie really split into national groups above all others? Unless it is, Hilferding's definition of Imperialism falls to the ground.

Almost every country is more powerful than others, and tries to dominate its neighbours, apparently ignorant of Marx's advice that a nation which oppresses another can

¹⁵ *Imperialism and World Economy*, N. Bukharin, Merlin, London 1976.

never itself be free. Even the smallest countries harbour designs on bits of their neighbours' territory. "Imperialism means the tendency of nations to dominate others" leads to the view that they are all Imperialist, which would render the term meaningless.

Communists sometimes define Imperialism as the current "stage" which International Capitalism is passing through. Imperialism is synonymous with Decadence. This is the phase of capitalism when it is no longer progressive, when it has completed its historic mission of developing the productive forces to the point when they are high enough to give rise to Communism, the next stage in the forward march of Humanity, when the relations of production are now fetters on the further expansion of those forces, which have now ripened on the tree, and are ready for picking. They have matured in the womb, baked in the oven, and fermented in the brewery.

The most coherent version of Decadence is the view that capitalism created the world economy and thus created the possibility of a world community, something which was never possible before. Having achieved its historic mission, capitalism is now in decline. But this is difficult to put a date on. Capitalism is still developing its domination of the world, and still creating a more and more international proletariat.

During the twenties and thirties, capitalism appeared to be on its last legs. Theorists of Decadence literally thought that capitalism was in an epoch of decay because the forces of production had stopped growing. But after another world war, capitalism gained a new lease of life. It was able after 1945 to develop the productive forces more than ever before. The bombing of Hiroshima was therefore progressive, because they helped develop the forces of production. A really consistent follower of the method of the left communists of the twenties would argue that they had made a mistake, that capitalism turned out still to be progressive after all.

Earlier, in the discussion on Lenin's theory, we alluded to the use of Imperialism as an ideology. At the end of the last century, some of the rulers of the most powerful capitalist states consciously decided to try to tie their working classes to the state by persuading them they had material interests in the conquest of Africa and Asia by the mother country, promoting pride in the imperial power of their homelands, and faith in the superiority of the white man.

Though Kipling soon gave way to the war poets, this strategy had some success. British and French workers, for example, have been fairly saturated in Imperialism for a century or so. This has helped the bourgeoisie to suppress the possibility of revolution by getting them to die by the million for "their" respective nation states. The 1982 Falklands War showed that old-fashioned jingoism is far from dead among Britain's lower orders.

But pernicious and effective though it may be, it has been no more so than any other form of nationalism. Anti-Imperialism, the ideology which tells workers to suppress their class interests in order to help "their" national bourgeoisie win its struggle against Imperialism, has also been highly effective in keeping millions of workers under control in the interests of international capitalism. The defeat of the Vietnamese working class by anti-Imperialism enabled Vietnam to invade Cambodia, whereas the American

working class, whose resistance helped end the war in Vietnam, continued to paralyse the warmongering aims of the US ruling class. Although the USA has now overcome its “post-Vietnam syndrome”, Vietnam never had one.

It is questionable what role ideology plays in making workers fight for the interests of their masters. Most are less than enthusiastic, and are simply conscripted. But whatever importance we attribute to ideas, Imperialist ideology is no worse than anti-Imperialism. Successful anti-Imperialism becomes Imperialism. This is well illustrated by the example of Germany. The Communist International supported the Nazis in the early twenties on the grounds that they were a national liberation struggle. Germany was an oppressed nation, occupied and looted by French and British Imperialism. The Nazis fought the occupying troops, so the Comintern supported the former, militarily and politically. A decade later, this anti-Imperialist movement had become German Imperialism. Israel was founded in a national struggle against the British Empire. Although Imperialism as an ideology has been useful to the bourgeoisie of certain countries, it has been no more useful than any other form of national chauvinism. Racism is not unique to Europeans, as liberals would have us believe. Outright racial hatred of the “interfering foreign devils” has been central to the attempt to maintain the integrity of the Chinese nation for centuries.

Capitalist organisation is assumed to be based on the nation state. This is why the working class of each country must “first of all settle matters with its own bourgeoisie”, why “the main enemy is at home”.

But capitalism preceded nations. The feudal world had no conception of nations because it was ruled by a global religious hierarchy which had no intrinsic territorial limitations. Neither Columbus nor the ruling classes of the ancien regimes had nationalities, nor the Pope, nor the Bourbons, nor the Hapsburgs. These interrelated divinely appointed rulers did not belong to particular bits of the world.

The emergence of nations is explained by Benedict Anderson in *Imagined Communities*¹⁶ as the result of three main factors. One is the collapse of religion. According to Anderson, the existential angst caused by the decline of religion partly explains the rise of nationalism as a substitute community. The destruction of communities in general by capitalism partly explains nationalism. Capital has tried to replace the various historic communities it has destroyed with an imagined community, the nation.

Another major factor is the print industry. The Latin market became saturated, and it was economical for printers to create large reading groups based on fusing numerous dialects together into languages. At one time, there was no point at which you could say Dutch ended and German began. Today, there are two distinct languages with a border between them.

But the most interesting factor noted by Anderson is the conscious creation of nationalisms by the ruling class. Old dynasties did not need to be overthrown by Marx’s mythical “revolutionary” bourgeoisie in order to develop the forces of production.

¹⁶ *Imagined Communities*, B. Anderson, Verso, London 1983.

They just became bourgeois themselves. Japan is a shining example. Pre-national dynasts deliberately promoted nationalism. Anderson gives bucket loads of empirical examples to support his argument — the Romanovs, the Hapsburgs, Chulalongkorn — all promoted “official nationalism” to preserve their power over labour.

Nineteenth century nationalisms became models. Since 1918, these models have been adapted by bourgeois students from around the world at European Universities, and taken “home” to create nations. Some of these creations are more obviously arbitrary than others. Anderson points out that Indonesia “does not remotely correspond to any precolonial domain”, and goes on to describe its enormous variety of peoples, cultures, languages and religions, how the people at one end have far more in common with their neighbours across the national frontier than with their fellow “Indonesians”, and how its shape is determined by the last Dutch conquests¹⁷, p110.

The bourgeoisie is a global class. Nations mostly emerged after capitalism. Consciously or not, and there are numerous examples of conscious strategy, capitalism created nations. It should therefore not be assumed that the nation state is essential to capitalism. Uniquely among the commentators discussed in this article, Anderson asks the right question: what are nations, and where do they come from? Partly a spontaneous false community caused by the decline of other communities, partly the result of the linguistic centralisation’s brought about by the emergence of the mass production of vernacular (non-Latin) books in the 16th and 17th centuries, and partly as the result of conscious decisions by a) the old non-national dynasties, and b) the modern international bourgeois intelligentsia, “Nationalism is not the awakening of nations to self-consciousness: it invents nations where they do not exist” — E. Gellner, cited in¹⁸, p15.

Anderson starts by showing that nations are imagined communities — we tend to think we have something in common with our fellow-nationals, most of whom we will never meet — and then tries to work out how they were created and by whom. The consequences can be summarised in the phrase “The Bosses Have No Country”.

The truth of this slogan is becoming increasingly clear. It was particularly confirmed by the Gulf war, its overture and follow-up, which saw Imperialists and anti-Imperialist forces united against the proletariat, pushed to the front lines by Iraq’s Republican Guard, then bombed by the UN. As we showed in our leaflet *Ten Days That Shook Iraq*, the USA backed Saddam Hussein just enough to enable him to crush the proletarian uprising against his rule, working with Kurdish nationalists and bombing mutineers to save his regime. There were two sides in the Gulf: the international bourgeoisie and the international proletariat. Though increasingly united, the bosses need to keep us divided. Politicians promote petty nationalism around the world, Eastern Europe and the fragments of the Soviet Union bearing the brunt of this strategy. The United Nations’ prolongation of the war in Yugoslavia by giving the weaker side just enough

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

encouragement to allow it to fight on is a particularly obvious example of a deliberate policy of international capitalism to crush the class struggle.

Homogenisation and centralisation have been built-in to civilisations since their origin, but never before has one power ruled the world. This is a completely new historic period. We cannot pretend to understand all the implications of this, but we can at least insist on the recognition of the New World Order and the discarding of obsolete theories.

In order to hedge our bets, let's admit that we cannot rule out the possibility of the emergence of rival blocs again. We are not in a position to say just how permanent the New World Order is. Our guess is that China would be the only basis for a bloc to seriously challenge the USA. The European Community, with its inability to submit to its natural leader, doesn't have what it takes.

If the red-hot flames of the class struggle flare up once again to haunt the bourgeoisie, it could organise massive inter-bloc conflicts like world war two to attack the class struggle. But as the current period continues, it becomes increasingly obvious that this is not an inevitable product of the very nature of capitalism. On the other hand, the New World Order is a product of the basic centralising nature of Civilisation itself: "Thou shalt have no other Gods before me". Fredy Perlman was prescient to say that Leviathan is "single and world-embracing for the first time in His-story"¹⁹, but perhaps optimistic to add that it is "decomposing". We should recognise that there is no theoretical basis for understanding the New World Order, just a few insights which need to be developed. This article has demolished theories of Imperialism, but has hardly replaced it with a coherent analysis of the world today. Such an analysis is sorely needed — in its absence, conspiracy theories abound.

¹⁹ *Against His-story, Against Leviathan!*, F. Perlman, Black & Red, Detroit 1983.

Pamphlets

Against Democracy

Author: Wildcat

Source: Retrieved on 2016-09-08 from web.archive.org

[This is the text of a introductory talk which was given to two discussion meetings held in London and Brighton in 1993. It's been typed up and made available to the communist public due to massive popular demand...]

The purpose of this little talk is to convince you that revolutionaries should oppose democracy in it all its forms.

Before we go any further, I want to get the argument about the use of words out of the way. A lot of people will agree with a lot of what I'm saying (or will think that they do!) but will say "Ah, Yes, but what you're talking about is bourgeois democracy. What I mean by democracy is something quite different." I want to suggest that when people talk about "real" or "workers'" democracy in opposition to bourgeois democracy, in fact they do mean the same thing that the bourgeoisie mean by democracy, despite superficial differences. The fact that they chose to use the word democracy is actually far more significant than they claim. This is why it is important to say "Death to democracy!". A less obscure analogy might be that of the word "development". Third Worldist lefties will generally say that they are in favour of development. When you say "Isn't that what the IMF want?", they'll say "No, we want real development". When you talk to them a bit more you find out that in fact they do want the same as the IMF... it's just that the IMF have got a more realistic understanding of what it means.

My basic contention here will be that however much you claim to be against property (as Lenino-Trotsky-Stalinists do) or even against the state (as anarchists do), if you support democracy you are actually for property and for the state.

What is Democracy?

In the most general terms, democracy is the rule of rights and equality. It's pretty easy to see that this is capitalist. "Rights" implies the existence of atomised individuals in competition with each other. It also implies the existence of the state, or some quasi-state form of authority, which can guarantee people's rights. "Equality" implies the existence of a society in which people can have equal worth — that is, a society

based on abstract labour. Democracy is often defined as the Rule of the People — the People always being understood as a mass of atomised citizens with rights.

On a very abstract level you can say that capitalism is always democratic. You can say that democracy expresses the essence of capital — if you like putting things in those sort of terms! — that equality is just an expression of the equivalence of commodities.

Marx made the ultimate abusive comment about democracy when he described it as “Christian”:

“Political democracy is Christian inasmuch as it regards man — not just one man but all men — as a sovereign and supreme being; but man in his uncultivated, unsocial aspect, man in his contingent existence, man just as he is, man as he has been corrupted, lost to himself, sold, and exposed to the rule of inhuman conditions and elements by the entire organisation of our society — in a word, man who is not yet a true species-being. The sovereignty of man — but of man as an alien being distinct from actual man — is the fantasy, the dream, the postulate of Christianity, whereas in democracy it is a present and material reality, a secular maxim.”

Marx, *On the Jewish Question*

So what are the practical consequences of all this?

The most common ways that the democratic counter-revolution expresses itself in the class struggle is around the questions of class power and the organisation of that power.

By “class power” I mean the recognition of the fact that we are in a class war situation and that to advance our side in that war and ultimately win it we have to ruthlessly crush and exterminate our enemies. Obviously this implies despotic power in itself. You can’t respect the rights of a cop if you beating him to death! If a trade union leader tries to address a meeting and we respond by shouting him down or dragging him off the stage and kicking his head in, it’s absurd for us to say that we believe in freedom of speech. “The revolution will not be televised” — nor will it be monitored by Amnesty International...

In the same way that we don’t grant rights to our enemies, nor do we ask for rights from our enemies. This is obviously a complicated issue because, in practice, it’s often difficult to distinguish demanding something and demanding a right to it. I won’t try to deal with every aspect of this question. I’ll just look at the Right to Strike as an example. In general, as I think Hegel said, “for every Right there is a Duty”. So, for example, you have the Right to travel on public transport and a Duty to pay your fare. The right to strike implies that workers are allowed to peacefully withdraw their labour in return for respecting public order and generally not doing anything to make the strike effective. What else can it mean? After all, a right is something granted by

law — you can hardly approach a cop and ask him to protect you while you burn scab lorries.

I think that, in general, demands for rights are an expression of the weakness of our class. Instead of saying to our enemies “if you lay a finger on us you’ll get your fucking head kicked in”, or even just kicking their heads in anyway, we tend to say “please respect our rights, we don’t really mean you any harm”. Of course, our class is in a weak position, and there’s no magic answer to this. But I think one step we can take is to recognise that middle-class do-gooders who campaign for rights are not on our side — even if some of them are nice lefty lawyers who sometimes get us out of a lot of trouble...

What I’ve said so far probably isn’t that controversial. What I have said so far concerns excluding certain categories of people. Wanting to exclude people from democracy is perfectly compatible with being a democrat — it’s amazing how many liberals will say that they unconditionally support freedom of speech and then suddenly change their minds when if someone says “well, what about fascists then?”.

More controversially, I now want to talk about democracy “within our own ranks” — that is, amongst proletarians in struggle. The usual “workers’ democracy” argument, for example, will say “OK, we don’t have democratic relations with the bourgeoisie but amongst ourselves there should be the most perfect equality and respect for rights.” This is usually seen as a way of avoiding bureaucratisation and domination by small cliques and ensuring that as many people as possible are involved in a particular struggle. The idea is that if people are allowed the right to speak, the right to vote etc., then you can just go along to a meeting and immediately be part of this democratic collectivity and so immediately be involved.

What does democratising a struggle mean in practice? It means things like:

1. **Majoritarianism** — Nothing can be done unless a majority agree to it.
2. **Separation between decision making and action** — Nothing can be done until everybody has had a chance to discuss it. This can be seen as analogous to the separation between the legislative and executive arms of a democratic state. It’s no coincidence that discussions within democratic organisations often resemble parliamentary debate!
3. **Embodiment of the view that no one can be trusted** — Democratic structures take the “war of all against all” for granted, and institutionalise it. Delegates always have to be revocable so they won’t pursue their own hidden agenda which, of course, everyone has.

All of these principles embody social atomisation. Majoritarianism because everyone is equal and usually has one vote. The separation between decision making and action because it’s only fair that you should consult everyone before acting — if you don’t you are violating their rights. A particularly obnoxious example of the third thing —

embodying the view that no one can be trusted — is the demand for “Faction Rights” put forward by Trots. Usually they call for this when some organisation is trying to throw them out. What this right amounts to is the freedom to plot and conspire against other members of what is supposedly a working class organisation. Obviously, no genuine communist organisation could ever entertain any idea of faction rights.

It is probably the second of these principles which is the most important and which needs to be stressed here.

These democratic principles can only stand in complete opposition to the class struggle since, by definition, the class struggle implies a break with social atomisation and the formation of some kind of community — however narrow, transient or vague this may be.

Major events in the class struggle almost never begin with a vote or with everybody being consulted. They almost always begin with action by a determined minority who break from the passivity and isolation of the majority of proletarians around them. They then try to spread this action through example rather than through reasoned argument. In other words, the division between decision making and action is always being breached in practice. Right-wing populists (and a few anarchists) complain that trouble-making activities are organised by self-appointed cliques of activists who represent no one but themselves... and, of course, they’re right!

The miners’ strike in the UK in 1984–5 provided many inspiring examples of how the class struggle is anti-democratic in practice. The strike itself did not start democratically — there was no ballot, no series of mass meetings. It began with walk-outs at a few pits threatened with closure, and was then spread by flying pickets. Throughout the strike there was an unholy alliance of the right-wing of the Labour Party and the RCP (Revolutionary Communist Party) saying that the miners should hold a national ballot. The most militant miners consistently rejected this, saying things like: “scabs don’t have the right to vote away another man’s job” — which is a democratic form of words but I think you will agree that the attitude behind it certainly isn’t. On occasions, members of the RCP were quite rightly beaten up and called “Tories” because of their support for a ballot.

There were also numerous examples of sabotage and destruction of Coal Board property, often organised by semi-clandestine, so-called “hit squads”. Obviously, such activities, by their very nature, cannot be organised democratically — whether or not they are approved of by a majority of the strikers.

Community of Struggle

A concept which I’ve already used here, and which I’m quite attached to, is “community of struggle”. Obviously, a question which will be asked is: “If a community of struggle doesn’t act democratically, then how does it act?”. There is no simple answer to this, except to say that the basis of action will be the trust and solidarity between

the people involved and not their supposed equality or rights. For example, if we want to send someone as an emissary (well, I don't like the word "delegate") to spread the struggle we wouldn't insist on them being voted for by at least 51% of the meeting or on them carrying a mobile phone so we can recall them at a moment's notice and replace them with someone else. We would insist on them being trustworthy and reliable — one trusted comrade is worth a thousand revocable delegates! Of course, there would be a large political component to this trust — we wouldn't send a member of the Labour Party because their political views would automatically lead them to act against the interests of the working class.

Communist Society

Finally, I want to say a few words about the implication of all this for the nature of communist society.

The idea of communist revolution as a vast democratic reorganisation of society is a very strong one, even within political tendencies which we think might have something going for them. The council communists (such as Pannekoek) literally saw the workers' councils as parliaments of the working class. Even the Situationists had serious hang-ups about democracy — talking about "direct democracy" and so on. If you read "Enragés and Situationists in the movement of the occupations" you'll find them making various claims about how their actions expressed the democratic will of the Sorbonne Assembly while it's obvious that they were continually breaking with the decisions of the assembly or just asking it to rubber-stamp the things that they'd done.

In general, it's no coincidence that people who advocate democracy also tend to advocate self-management — that is, taking over chunks of this society and running them ourselves. The connection is a simple one — communism is about transforming social relations, not just about changing the political regime, which is what the democrats want to do.

In the case of the council communists, self-management was pretty obviously what they were about. With the Situs it was more a case of them not making a real break from their self-managementist origins.

Another example of this kind of problem might be the concept of "planning", which I know a lot of people are quite attached to. To me, "planning" implies that we all get together and decide what we are going to be doing for the next 5 years and then we go away and do it. This sounds like another example of fetishising the moment of decision-making. So, as communists, that is to say: enemies of democracy, I think we should be very suspicious of the concept of planning. As opponents of social-democracy we need to reject democracy every bit as vigorously as we reject socialism.

Outside and Against the Unions

Author: Wildcat

Source: Retrieved on 8 April 2012 from www.angelfire.com

Note: A communist response to Dave Douglass' text "Refracted Perspective"

Introduction

This pamphlet is written in response to the pamphlet "Refracted Perspective" (available from: 121 Bookshop, 121 Railton Road, Brixton, London SE24). As you may have guessed, this is mostly a flimsy excuse to make a general critique of the trade unions — something we in Wildcat haven't done for quite a while. It focuses on the situation in Britain in recent years, particularly the 1984–85 miners' strike. This is not because of some nationalistic obsession with what goes on in these islands but because we want to make our analysis as concrete as possible — this means writing about things we know from reliable sources or were actually involved in. We also want to refute Mr. Douglass' arguments as thoroughly as possible so we can't avoid talking about particular things done by the NUM.

A detailed article on the origins of modern trade unionism in Britain, focusing on the crucial year of 1842 when the Miners' Federation was founded, can be found in Wildcat No. 16.

In the British Isles and North America at the present time (late 1992) the trade union question may seem a bit irrelevant given the low level of workplace class struggle. Since 1979 membership of TUC-affiliated unions in Britain has declined from 12 million to 8 million. We can be sure, though, that once workplace struggle starts to pick up again trade unionism will once again rear its ugly head and wherever workers are struggling **as workers**, be it Germany, South Africa or South Korea, the issue is as important as ever.

That Speech

The purpose of Douglass' speech at the Class War international conference (the text of which was published as "Refracted Perspective") was quite clear. It was to stifle

criticism of trade unionism in and around the anarchist movement. Before getting stuck into some serious criticism of what he said we should point out that he was not just expressing his opinion but defending his role in society. He is not, as he likes to describe himself, a “Yorkshire miner” but a full-time NUM delegate.

The main way he attacks criticism is by means of the classic Stalinist “amalgam technique”. This means deliberately mixing up two or more very different political positions which you don’t like in order to create confusion and uncritical support for your point of view. For example during the Second World War the Communist Parties referred to “Trotsky-Fascism”.

Similarly, Mr Douglass tries to amalgamate idiotic lefties like the Workers’ Revolutionary Party with people he calls “Situationists” — this is obviously a code word for class struggle militants who are against the unions from a communist point of view. I assume he calls us Situationists because he wants to give the impression we’re a bunch of misfit art students. This is not what the Situationists were but its a popular stereotype of their **followers**, which has some truth in it.

The amalgam technique at its crudest is shown when he claims that the Socialist Workers’ Party are “venomously anti-union”. Since when? The SWP don’t just **support** unions, often it’s SWupPies who keep union branches going. The same goes for his “The Leninist with his [sic] vision of the trade union as an obstacle to the struggle...” comment. Most Leninists stare at you in amazement if you suggest that the unions are anti-working class. Try it sometime. You might even say that “The Leninist intellectuals of and by themselves can only achieve a trade union consciousness”.

To be fair though, a lot of what he says about lefties and the 1984–85 miners’ strike is true. For example, the SWP believes that the only thing wrong with the mass picket at the Orgreave depot in S. Yorkshire was that it wasn’t big enough. This view is still supported by SWupPies to this very day. His description of some icepick head selling “Workers’ Power” in the middle of a riot is both amusing and familiar.

Anarcho-Leninism

Dave Douglass attacks the lefties for arrogantly telling the workers what to do and for seeing workers’ struggles as just a means of spreading their politics. But what he’s really slagging them off for is for being too honest — they **openly** try to push their ideology and present themselves as leaders. Dave Douglass would like to see Class War do it more subtly. That his perspective is not much different from the Leninists is shown by his attitude toward Orgreave. He gives a really good account of what’s wrong with trench warfare against pigs on a terrain they have chosen. BUT he publicly supported it (and therefore encouraged participation in this defeat at the hands of the pigs). This is not much different from those lefties who encourage workers to do things that they know are a load of crap — like voting Labour and calling on the TUC to call a general strike.

No doubt those of us who said at the time that Orgreave was a waste of time were just “vanguards” who were “telling ordinary workers what to do”.

His attitude is further revealed in the last paragraph of his Really Fucked Perspective when he defends the classic Leninist separation between the masses and the Party — “THEY ARE NOT WAITING FOR US”. Who are “THEY”? Who are “US”? “We should assist them in the way THEY wish to be assisted” — This is patronising drivel. What if “THEY” want us to help “them” lobby the Labour Party conference? We would tell them this was a stupid thing to do. If this makes us “vanguardists” then, Yes, it’s a fair cop, guv.

Why should one section of the working class put itself “at the disposal” of another? If our comrades in struggle makes mistakes we have to criticise them and sometimes even physically stop them from doing what they want to do. The reason for this is simple: if they fuck up it fucks up things for all of us. There can be no question of “self-determination” for any section of the class: we’re all in this together. If this approach means we don’t sell as many papers as we’d like, that’s too bad.

The Unions

What Douglass doesn’t talk about at all in his reminiscences of the 1984–85 Great Strike is the antagonism that existed between the union apparatus and the unofficial actions of the miners and others in the mining communities which he thinks were just extensions of the unions.

Let’s start with an example from before the strike. In mid-1983 Arthur Scargill, NUM President, was about to meet then Coal Board Chairman Derek Ezra in Pontypridd. Some Welsh miners on wildcat strike against pit closures occupied the regional NCB office. Scargill came along in person to order an end to the occupation. Later in the day, though, he did maintain his reputation as a militant by “storming out” of the meeting with Ezra, revealing the Board’s hit-list of threatened pits.

Obvious examples from the strike were:

1. Anyone seriously involved in the miners’ strike who didn’t live in a mining area very quickly worked out (sometimes from bitter experience) that the only way to get money to where it was needed was to give it directly to the strikers and their families. Money given to the union bureaucrats generally never reached strikers at all and certainly didn’t reach those known to be trouble makers.
2. The union threatened to discipline and fire miners who threw bricks at the police at Gascoigne Wood.
3. Throughout the strike McGahey and his cronies issued orders forbidding mass pickets in Scotland.

4. At the beginning of 1985 the Yorkshire Area NUM took its minibuses away from the Fitzwilliam miners to stop them indulging in aggressive flying picketing.
5. In March 1984 in Ollerton, Notts. a picket was killed by a scab lorry. Scargill stood on top of a car and called for two minutes silence in order to stop the strikers from taking revenge against the cops and scabs.

I could go on...

It should be obvious from these examples that his metaphor about the workers driving the union bus as far as it will go is rather misleading. It's not just a case of the bureaucrats applying the breaks — more a case of them turning the bus around and using it to run over the workers!

In fact when he's writing about "the union" he conveniently forgets (most of the time) that there is a union apparatus at all. He talks as if the union was just a collection of autonomous union branches. This makes it much easier for him to repeat the classic lie of every left-wing union hack — "It's your union, you can do what you like with it. It's a democratic organisation and if you've got enough support from the membership you can give it any policies you want".

The lie that the union is its members is continually exposed in practice. The NUM is no exception. The 1977 productivity deal initiated by Tony Benn, which did so much to divide miners between regions, was forced through by the NUM executive despite a National Ballot rejecting it. In 1983 NUM leaders ignored an 80% strike vote in South Wales. In April 1984 the leaders of Lancashire NUM held an area delegate meeting to try to find a way to send the Lancs. miners back to work. Thirty of the miners who had been lobbying the meeting organised an occupation of the NUM headquarters in Bolton. They wanted to prevent further meetings, saying "you don't need a meeting to run the strike -only to call it off".

What Are Unions?

Dave Douglass would have us believe that unions are workers' self defence organisations. This is the traditional lefty view which you can read in every Trot paper ever written. It's also believed by millions of workers but not by us.

If unions don't defend workers' interests (even badly), what do they do? The answer is that they negotiate with the bosses. They negotiate the rate of exploitation.

We're not taking a moralistic "Death before negotiation" stance here. As long as wage labour exists workers will be forced to negotiate with employees from time to time, particularly when struggles are defeated. Most workers negotiate with their bosses individually in one way or another ("I'll let you go home early if you get this finished").

Negotiations, though, always involve an agreement to play by the rules of the game, for example by agreeing to honour productivity deals. It is a form of class collaboration. As the institutionalisation of the negotiating process unions must inevitably hold back

workers' struggles. It is no surprise that unions have almost always condemned forms of struggle which are difficult to negotiate, such as theft and sabotage. This is **not** a recent phenomenon. In 1889 Tom Mann, the famous leader of the London based Dockers' Union, signed several appeals for the men to work more enthusiastically. They were trying to force the bosses to increase manning levels and were making wide-spread use of "ca'canny" (going slow). In 1892 Tom Mann even suggested to the Royal Commission on Labour (of which he was a member) that piece rates be brought in!

Negotiation is not just an economic activity, it is a political one as well. Negotiating with the bosses on behalf of workers **is** a form of political representation. Representing people is **not** about fighting for their interests. It is about maintaining the loyalty of a passive "constituency". This can clearly be seen from union recruitment policy which is to try to sell membership to anyone who will pay the membership dues, no matter how reactionary they may be, as long as they work in the right trade/industry. It should be obvious that no working class organisation could ever operate this way.

It is no coincidence that the democratic ideology is promoted more vigorously in the unions than anywhere else in society. Workers' own struggles, though, almost always begin with militant action by a minority. They make nonsense in practice of "majoritarianism" (the idea that nothing should take place unless a majority agrees) and the separation between decision-making and action that is enshrined in democracy. Democracy, with its fetish for the airing of opinions, and the moment of decision as a preliminary to acting, offers nothing to workers. It offers everything to those who would divert, institutionalise or block their struggles, whether it's the Right with their secret ballots or the Left with their delegate conferences and mass participatory democracy.

Corporatism

Corporatism is the identification of workers with their workplace or industry. It is not just an idea. It is a material force resulting from the absence of solidarity between workers in different sectors and between workplaces and other areas of society (particularly where proletarians live). Unions are **the** corporatist organisation *par excellence*. The attachment of the NUM to the "Plan for Coal" was just one expression of this.

Admittedly corporatism can't simply be blamed on the unions. When workers on a picket line express suspicion toward "outsiders" who come to show support it's not just because they believe in "the union" (although it's usually the shop steward who's the first to ask "What union are you in, then?") Nor, unfortunately, is it just because "they don't want to be told what to do by middle-class students" as many apologists for working class conservatism would have us believe.

Any workplace struggle can fall into the trap of corporatism **as long as it remains just a workplace struggle**. Against the workerist lefties who claim that workers only have power at the point of production we would say that it is territorially based struggles which have the greatest subversive potential. This was undoubtedly one of

the strengths of the anti-poll tax movement (despite the obvious problem of “localism” — usually involving sentimental notions about “our local community”). In the miners’ strike too the high points were when the whole of the working class in a particular area became involved — e.g. defence of pit villages against the police. “Territory” includes workplaces and it is often strategically very important to disrupt, seize and/or destroy them. Workplace occupations, for example, are an important opportunity for undermining the role of the workplace as an “enterprise” separate from the rest of society — by inviting other proletarians into the site besides those who normally work there, by reappropriating resources such as printing and communications, by giving away useful products stored at the site... Then there’s straightforward destruction — denying it to the enemy! The miners who responded to coal-faces collapsing during the Great Strike by saying “to hell with the pits!” were expressing a real break with NUM corporatism.

Degenerates

An organisation can start off defending workers’ interests and degenerate into a trade union. That is, it can start off organising and extending the struggle and end up negotiating it away. This has often been the fate of independent strike committees in France, Italy and Spain (in Britain they usually just end up integrated into the official unions).

The question of when to stop participating in such a committee and start denouncing it is always a tricky one but with officially recognised trade unions there is no such ambiguity.

Certainly unions have to be flexible to stay in business. Under rank and file pressure they will often adopt a militant stance and to some extent will even allow workers to use the local union apparatus to conduct struggles — e.g. branch meetings, strike funds, picket caravans. Trying to “take over” the apparatus, though, is a dead end. Even on an organisational level a union is simply not designed for advancing workers’ struggles. The most basic rules of branch procedure are designed to hinder them. In mid 1984 some striking miners from South Kirkby tried to organise a team of miners who could not easily go out picketing due to stringent bail conditions. They were to go out knocking on doors trying to convince passive strikers to become active pickets. They started doing it anyway but tried putting a resolution to the NUM branch. It was rejected by the branch committee. It could still go through as correspondence so they tried packing the meeting with their supporters. The branch committee ruled it out of order. One of the strikers concluded “I think that shows you we’ve got to know the rule book...”. This is rubbish. What it shows is the need to throw the rule book out the window and the authority of the branch committee with it.

Unions are certainly not designed for spreading strikes outside the industry or sector where they start. Quite the opposite. On many miners’ picket lines non-NUM members

were regularly allowed to cross and in Lancashire there was no attempt to close down opencast pits in the area — these were not owned by the NCB and their workers were in the T&G not the NUM.

During the Great Strike NUM leaders (particularly Scargill) certainly made appeals to support from other groups of workers but this never went beyond meetings with other union leaders and televised public speeches. To have appealed directly to other workers would have breached the democratic etiquette between unions — one set of “laws” that the oh-so-radical Mr. Scargill has no intention of flouting.

Bureaucracy

Many people say that the trouble with the unions is that they are too hierarchical and bureaucratic. This misses the point. Unions don’t serve the interests of capital because they are bureaucratic. They are bureaucratic because they serve the interests of capital. The very process of negotiation fosters specialists in the sale of labour power. It inevitably involves a small team of active negotiators and a lot of workers hanging around waiting for the result. The negotiators and bosses need to develop personal understandings, to trust each other. Usually this is all done by union bureaucrats but even where strikers elect their own representatives, these almost immediately start to fight the control and revocability exercised over them. They will want to assume the role of leaders on a basis of equality with their opposite numbers in negotiation, and will be supported by strikers themselves who will want to be led by people who reassure them that everything is going well. When a deal is finally done there will no doubt be those who cry “sell out!”, but it is the workers who have sold themselves out by accepting the logic of negotiations.

Some people say that unions are infected with reactionary ideas, such as parliamentarism and statism (affiliation to the Labour Party in Britain for example). This also misses the point. It should come as no surprise that those who run capitalist institutions usually have shamelessly pro-capitalist ideas. But even where they don’t the fact of running a union imposes its own logic. In the years before the First World War the syndicalist Confederation Generale du Travail (CGT) in France had passed numerous motions at its congresses calling for a general strike in the event of war. It had even distributed handbooks informing its members of detailed practical steps to be taken to sabotage the war effort. But when war came the CGT rushed to join Poincare’s union sacree. This was a popular front in support of the war.

Closely related to these ideas is the commonly held view that there are “real unions” (such as UCATT and NUPE) and “scab unions” (such as EEPTU and RCN) and that it’s better to be in a real union than a scab union. This hardly stands up to the most superficial historical investigation. Every union has blatantly encouraged scabbing at some stage in its history. In the construction industry in Britain, for example, it’s certainly true that EETPU members have crossed UCATT picket lines but it’s also

true that UCATT members have crossed EETPU picket lines — sometimes justified on the grounds that EETPU is a scab union so its OK to scab on them!

Base Unionism

The particular brand of rank and file unionism put forward by DD isn't the usual Trot variety. He doesn't call on workers to lobby the union leaders. He even criticises Arthur Scargill at one point (a serious offence in the eyes of most lefties and militant miners!).

His view is that workers involved in subversive actions (hit squads, surprise pickets, organisation involving the whole of the working class not just miners ...) should still be encouraged to see themselves as part of the union and still try to act within the framework of the union. They should still be loyal to it even if they have their disagreements. So when Heathfield, the leader of the Yorkshire NUM, condemns them for defending themselves against the police, or the area NUM takes away the branch minibus, they should still respect the authority of these people.

Like many anarchists, DD has a lot of respect for "ordinary people". He wants them to stay ordinary, that is: submissive to capital. At one stage he asks "which has more loyalty FROM the class"? Unions or obscure lefty groups? The Royal Family have more loyalty than either.

The NUM

It's true that during the 1984–85 strike the behaviour of the NUM posed real problems for revolutionaries. It didn't **seem** to fit pre-conceived notions of how unions are supposed to behave. Outside one or two traditional industries (what's left of mining, what's left of craft unionism in the print industry ...) the working class experience of unions in Britain is pretty straightforward. They almost always oppose **any** strike until they realise they can stop it or it's been balloted to death. The anti-strike (so-called "anti-union") legislation passed under the Thatcher governments has made them sabotage workers' struggles even more blatantly than they used to. In short, The NUM is not the T&G. It is a radical, left wing union. The main reason for this is simple — the existence of a militant rank and file. An area official in the NUM who tried to behave like his counterpart in NUPE or NALGO would simply lose control. This doesn't in any way alter the fundamental nature of the NUM.

The militancy of the miners has been a real obstruction to capital accumulation — a blockage which could only be removed by closing the pits. Miners' militancy goes back a long way. In the 1930's the number of days "lost" (to the bosses) in strikes by miners equalled the number lost in the whole of the rest of British industry. After nationalisation in 1947 they were still accounting for a third of the days lost. It has

not been an unbroken tradition though. Throughout the sixties hundreds of pits were closed and many miners left the industry. In other words, full employment **at first** enabled the economy to be peacefully restructured; mining was no exception, by 1970 the workforce was 47% of what it was in 1960. But full employment and the central importance of coal mining in providing energy for a still-expanding economy created the conditions for a massive upswing in militancy in the '60's and early '70's. The example of the miners undoubtedly inspired many millions of workers to confront the bosses.

Since its formation on January 1 1945 the NUM (just like its predecessor the Miners' Federation) has always played an indispensable role in managing capitalist exploitation. After nationalisation in 1947 the National Executive of the NUM pledged itself to "do everything possible to promote and maintain a spirit of self-discipline ... and a readiness to carry out all reasonable orders given by management". In this period there were numerous wildcat strikes opposed by the NUM. When, seven months after nationalisation, a strike which began at Grimethorpe spread to 38 pits the Yorkshire Area General Secretary said that the men must choose "between industrial democracy and anarchy". Another union bureaucrat, Will Lawther, said that the NCB should prosecute the strikers "even if there are 50,000 or 100,000 of them".

A major factor in miners' militancy is that mining is about the only industry left (just about) where workers still live in a community which exists almost entirely to serve that industry. This means that links of solidarity are forged not just at work but in the street and the Miners' Welfare Club as well. The involvement of the union in the community means that it is much more a part of daily life than elsewhere. This makes it much harder for miners to even think about acting independently of the union. Contrast this with the situation for most workers, where "the union" consists of a membership card, cheap insurance deals and a group of hacks who attend an inquorate branch meeting every month.

This makes it easier for the NUM leaders to put across the classic lie that "we can't fight without our union". That this is a lie is shown by the history of workers' struggles. As we've seen, many of the important strikes in the coal industry have been unofficial, or at least started off that way. An even better example is the dockers in Britain before "decasualisation" (casual labourers being given permanent jobs) in 1967 who were a notoriously stropky group of workers. After World War II the T&G (the main union on the docks) didn't make any strike official until 1961 despite over a dozen major stoppages. In the mid-60's a third of Liverpool dockers weren't even in unions despite the high level of union control over hiring. From around the world we can think of far more dramatic examples: of mass strikes which have had nothing to do with union organisation at all — from the 10 million workers who went on strike in May '68 in France completely against the wishes of the 'Communist' Party controlled unions (to which most of them belonged) to the Iranian oil workers on strike in 1979 who stayed out despite being offered pay rises of hundreds of percent (they wanted to bring down the Shah's regime not just win a pay rise!).

But What's the Alternative...?

This is the question lefties and trade unionist always ask of us weirdoes who are for workers' struggles but against the unions. The short answer is: we're not proposing an "alternative to the unions". If you want to negotiate the rate of exploitation and reinforce working class corporatism the unions are an excellent way of doing it. Just like the cops, union hacks are doing a difficult job and doing it very well under the circumstances. That's why we hate them.

A more relevant question is: "How should we organise in work-places to fight for our immediate needs and undermine capitalism?". The short answer to this is: the same way we organise anywhere else. We are not interested in representing anybody but in building up groups and networks of activists who want to escalate the class war by whatever means are necessary. The links we develop between class struggle militants **now** will be useful when mass struggles do break out, in terms of spreading and coordinating struggles, circulating information, seizing resources and so on. It should be clear from what we've said so far that this process can only take place **outside and against the unions**. How many more times do union officials have to promise to grass up workers involved in sabotage to the police before this becomes obvious to every class struggle militant?

Glossary of British Trade Unions mentioned above:

COHSE: Confederation of Health Service Employees

workers disorganised: hospital ancillary workers, some nurses

EETPU: Electrical, Electronic, Telecommunications and Plumbing Union

workers disorganised: electricians, printers, building workers

NALGO: National and Local Government Officers Association

workers disorganised: Local govt. office employees

NUM: National Union of Mine Workers

workers disorganised: miners

NUPE: National Union of Public Employees

workers disorganised: hospital ancillary, some nurses

RCN: Royal College of Nurses

workers disorganised: nurses

TGWU(T&G): Transport and General Workers' Union

workers disorganised: transport/doctors but mostly general unskilled

UCATT: Union of Construction, Allied Trades and Technicians

workers disorganised: building workers

Misc.

Ted Kaczynski is no Madman

Author: Wildcat

Source: <www.wildcat.international/ted.html>

Date: Jan 23, 1998.

“The Industrial Revolution and its consequences have been a disaster for the human race... We therefore advocate a revolution against the industrial system. Its object will be to overthrow not governments but the economic and technological basis of the present society.” — Ted Kaczynski, *Industrial Society And Its Future*. This is not the statement of a lunatic.

Lawyer Jokes

“Now we’ll have plenty of time to watch the Superbowl”. This comment by Ted Kaczynski’s lawyer, Quin Denvir, following Kaczynski’s plea of guilty to the Unabomber charges in return for life imprisonment without parole, summarizes the quality of his defense team.

Denvir, and his other representative Judy Clarke, complained that they had problems controlling their client. They deliberately prevented sympathetic people from meeting Ted by losing letters addressed to him. They refused to take his instructions. Of course, they could say that they were only trying to save his life, by pursuing a mental illness defense, the only strategy which could have avoided the death penalty given the evidence for the prosecution. But Ted Kaczynski is not insane. He is perfectly capable of weighing up the risks in a political defense.

The whining of the media, the judge, the defense and the prosecution all pointed to Ted’s success in terrifying them with the prospect of a political trial.

“The system is playing right into his hand... Except for the necessity to accord him a fair trial, the best solution would be to bundle him off to the federal prison equivalent of his Montana cabin and keep him there, incommunicado, until he dies a natural death. No speeches. No parading around the courtroom. No Internet sites. No book contracts. Nothing.” — San Francisco Examiner, January 14.

He was not allowed to use the services of Tony Serra, a brilliant lawyer who would have defended him for nothing. He was not even allowed to defend himself.

This article by Michael Mello, a prominent public defender, explains why Ted should have been entitled to the defense of his choosing, comparing him with abolitionist John Brown.

After he was diagnosed as schizophrenic, the government would have found it difficult to execute him. Ted was not some mentally retarded defendant like the one Clinton had executed in Arkansas to boost his election chances in 1992. Here was a man who could put the system on trial.

There was virtually no chance of the jury letting him off. But he would have made the prosecution squirm, perhaps forcing them to give a better plea bargain than the one he ended up with. He should have retained the right to appeal the legality of the original search of his cabin.

“Clearly, the government recognized the risk that a jury wouldn’t have sentenced Kaczynski to death, even if he had been convicted, because of sympathy or pity for him or his family. The Feds also probably understood that any conviction and/or death sentence for Kaczynski would have been terribly suspect and subject to reversal because of doubts about his competency to stand trial and the judge’s refusal to allow him to represent himself.” , wrote Andrew Cohen on Fox News.

But in any case, Ted has achieved an outstanding victory. *Industrial Society And Its Future* is now one of the most famous documents of our time. There is no question that his strategy — conducting a campaign of sporadic bombings against active promoters of industrial development — has worked. Civilization is being questioned. This is not to deny or minimize the ethical problems involved in sending devices through the post, whereby innocent people could obviously get hurt. We do not entirely agree with the Unabomber manifesto, but we are part of the same general trend — the struggle for the future, against industrial society.

The Mass Psychology of Anti-Fascism

Source: <www.wildcat.international/mpaf.html>

Who could fail to be against fascism, the movement which drove Germany and Italy in World War II, which culminated in the murder of millions of civilians in concentration camps? But anti-fascism implies a lot more than simply being opposed to fascism.

1. Before World War II, anti-fascism was used to persuade the working class to unite with the left wing of the capitalist state against its right wing opponents. This led to the Spanish Civil War. If the left had won, Spain would have become a puppet of Russia, but the most enthusiastic recruiting sergeants for the capitalist war effort were anarchists, and its best opponents were a group of Italian Marxist-Leninists.
 2. During the war, anti-fascism was used to recruit working class people to die by the million for the interests of the Russian and American ruling classes.
 3. After the war, anti-fascism was the hypocritical standard by which the war crimes of the Allies were covered up, by emphasizing those of the losers.
 4. Today, it exaggerates the importance of right-wing extremists, whereas the police are the main enemies of black people.
 5. Anti-fascism is used to weaken opposition to Israel.
-

It is illogical to support Israel because of the Nazi holocaust. That is the point of this leaflet — not just to repeat once more the fact that the Allies committed crimes comparable to those of the Axis, the fact that murdering people by bombing them is just as bad as putting them in gas chambers, and that the treatment of German women by the Russian Army rivals anything done by the Nazis. If anti-fascism was always an

ideology, today it is a neurosis. On the anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz by the Red Army, the prime minister of Israel made a speech explicitly stating that, if you oppose the murder of Jews, you must support Israel.



Zionists in the USA produced this poster celebrating the death of peace activist Rachel Corrie under an Israeli bulldozer

This nonsense is embedded in the emotions of millions of people, especially in the USA. The media consistently refers to the Nazi attempt to wipe out the Jews as 'The' Holocaust, a gratuitous insult to the survivors of numerous other such crimes. Even within the Nazi holocaust, other victims are generally forgotten — gypsies, gays, Poles, Russians and millions of German opponents of Hitler also died.

The growing number of holocaust museums in the USA, instead of remembering the murder and enslavement of millions of Africans and indigenous people, are almost exclusively dedicated to a crime committed by another country. The media and US leaders frequently talk of a 'rise in anti-semitism' in Europe. What they mean, of course, is a rise in opposition to Israel. Why do politicians from more powerful countries grovel

to Israel? It cannot be explained by reference to their material class interests. They recently travelled to Israel to pay homage at the new holocaust museum, which is within sight of Dayr Yassin, site of a major Zionist massacre in 1948. The message is clear: it is worse to kill Jews than other people. The constant reiteration of the uniquely evil nature of the Nazi crimes against Jews contributes to this message on a subliminal level. The left-wing Anti-Nazi League does as much to concentrate solely on these crimes, and de-emphasize other, similar crimes, as does the right-wing Anti-Defamation League.

It is arguable that the German holocaust was *quantitatively* the worst single crime in history, for its scale, its efficiency, its deliberateness, and its lasting consequences. One can believe this without accepting anti-fascism. But how can any sane person claim that German crimes were *qualitatively* different from those of America, Britain and Russia, which included burning cities to the ground using conventional and nuclear weapons, the murder of prisoners, ethnic cleansing, and mass rape? Yet this is effectively what we are being told, not only by the media, but by left wing anti-fascists. Anti-fascism means rejecting the view that the two sides in World War II were more-or-less equivalent. It means defending the official line that the Axis side was much worse; that murdering German and Japanese people is nowhere near as bad as murdering Jews. There is no point in anti-fascists saying they oppose Allied war crimes *as well as* those of Germany and its allies. If that were true, they would not be specifically anti-fascist.

Left wing writer Ward Churchill's controversial *On the Justice of Roosting Chickens* unwittingly exposes the contradictions of anti-fascism. Given that Germans were responsible for the crimes of the Nazis, he argues, Americans are responsible for the crimes of their rulers, so they can't complain about September 11th. Churchill takes anti-fascism to its logical conclusion; but its widespread influence has nothing to do with logic. Many people agree, on a rational level, with the contents of this leaflet, but will still act as if they do not. People who are capable of opposing the dominant society in every other way, half-believe that attempting to oppose Israel's influence would be a sign of anti-semitism. San Francisco Indymedia collective censored contributions containing the word 'Zionazi' from its website, though this word is clearly a critique of a political ideology, not of an ethnic group. No other political movement is given such deference. The Zionist guilt trip is particularly effective at weakening the substantial radical milieu in Germany. There was some resistance to distributing this leaflet via the usual channels because of this guilt complex.

We need to reject guilt and victim politics

Morality, identity with victims, is endemic to Christian civilization. Produce a victim, and rational scepticism goes out the window. In the nineteen-twenties, German psychoanalyst Willhelm Reich asked why masses of people supported fascism, clearly against their own interests. Today, we should try to answer the same question about anti-fascism. The next step is to reject the political correctness which led Indymedia to censor critics of Israel. It is clear that opposing US policies in the Middle East involves opposing its relationship to Israel. The collapse of the war effort in Iraq is the

best opportunity for the class struggle on the home front since the seventies, but this opportunity is being missed.

Notes

1. A critique of anti-fascism in the Spanish Civil War: www.spunk.org/library/anti-fasc/sp000833.html
2. The Destruction of Dresden, by David Irving: www.fpp.co.uk/books/Dresden

Some will be more upset that we have included this link to the site of ‘holocaust revisionist’ Irving than they are about the subject of the book — the massacre of the population of the German city of Dresden by Allied bombers in 1945.

3. Anyone who doubts that there was little to choose between the two sides on the Eastern Front should read this article about the Red Army’s invasion of Germany: www.guardian.co.uk/g2/story/0,3604,707835,00.html
4. On the Justice of Roosting Chickens, Ward Churchill, AK Press, 2003
5. The Mass Psychology of Fascism, Wilhelm Reich, Sexpol Verlag, 1933
6. The War for Palestine, eds. Rogan and Shlaim, Cambridge 2001

Gaza and Gilad Atzmon

Source: <www.wildcat.international/giladgaza.html>

This article was published in March 2008 on the website peacepalestine.blogspot.com in the days following the Israeli assault on the Gaza strip, which killed over one hundred people, most of them civilians, and the Deputy Defence Minister's threat that Gaza's inhabitants would suffer a 'shoah', the Hebrew word for 'holocaust', if they didn't behave themselves in future.

The rest of the writings of Gilad Atzmon, the Israeli ex-Jewish Jazz musician who is the *bête noire* of Jewish identity-mongers, Zionist and anti-Zionist alike, can be found at gilad.co.uk/politiks.htm.

The relevance of Atzmon's writings should be easy to work out by reading the other articles on this site about the influence of Zionism, an important part of the self-policing mentality of political correctness. Atzmon and his comrades are combatting in Europe what I and others have pointed out in the USA. America isn't ready for Atzmon yet, but the time will come when Palestinian Solidarity doesn't consist of explaining that it's not anti-Semitic to attempt to undermine American support for the Jewish State. The point of Atzmon isn't really whether you agree with him. In fact, I don't agree with it — I don't agree with John Stuart Mill, the concept of Justice, the right of peoples to self-determination, etc., etc.. I come from a quite different political background — in a nutshell, the critique of Anti-Fascism begun by the Italian Left Communist Amadeo Bordiga and his comrades in the nineteen-thirties and its subsequent development by a variety of tiny ultra-left groups such as **Wildcat**. Tiny and isolated as we were, we inevitably found ourselves working in the class struggle alongside others who may have lacked in clarity what they couldn't make up for in courage. To come to the point, in most important struggles in the Western world, there are anarchists on the front line. Unfortunately, anarchists are particularly open to emotional and moral influence. For example, anarchists were Stalin's cannon-fodder in the Spanish Civil War. Today, anarchists are still anti-fascists, and today, anti-fascism is Zionism. The point is that Atzmon, and a few others like him, cut through emotional blackmail and expose hypocrisy. I believe that his approach is the key, not just to combatting the mysterious and intractable influence of Israel in countries which clearly have every interest in opposing it, but to loosening the grip of the internal thought police who hold us all back in various other respects as well (**Jay Knott** March 6, 2008).

Gilad Atzmon — Freedom of Speech: the right to equate Gaza with Auschwitz

(A talk given on the First of March 2008 at Invitation to Learn's weekend retreat)

"They (the Palestinians) will bring upon themselves a bigger holocaust because we will use all our might to defend ourselves" (Matan Vilnai, Israeli Deputy Defence Minister, 29 February 2008)

It is clear beyond any doubt that the Israeli Deputy Defence Minister was far from being reluctant to equate Israel with Nazi Germany when revealing the genocidal future awaiting the Palestinian people, yet, for some reason, this is precisely what Western media outlets refrain from doing. In spite of the facts that are right in front of our eyes, in spite of the starvation in Gaza, in spite of an Israeli official admitting genocidal inclinations against the Palestinians, in spite of the mounting carnage and death, we are still afraid to admit that Gaza is a concentration camp and it is on the verge of becoming a deadly one. For some peculiar reason, many of us have yet to accept that as far as evil is concerned, Israel is the world champion in mercilessness and vengeance.

Liberty and Authority

In his invaluable text *On Liberty*, John Stuart Mill argued that struggle always takes place between the competing demands of liberty and authority. In other words, freedom and hegemony are set to battle each other. However, Western egalitarian liberal ideology is there to introduce a political alternative. It is there to nourish the myth that 'authority' and 'freedom' could be seen as two sides of the same coin.

Today, I will try to elaborate on the structural dynamic of liberal discourse and the different elements that are involved in maintaining the false image of 'freedom', 'freedom of speech' and 'freedom of thought'. I will try to argue that it is our alleged 'freedom' that actually stops us from thinking freely and ethically. As you may notice I said 'false image of freedom' because I am totally convinced that, as far as Liberal discourse is concerned, freedom is nothing more than a mere image. In practice, there is no such a thing. The image of 'freedom' is there to fuel and maintain our righteous self-loving discourse so we can keep sending our soldiers to kill millions in the name of 'democracy'.

Freedom of Speech and Freedom of Thought

I would like to introduce this with an elaboration of the distinction between 'freedom of speech' and 'freedom of thought'.

Freedom of speech can be realised as one's liberty to express one's own thoughts.

Bearing in mind that humans are expressive creatures, there is no easy policing method to guarantee the silencing of the dissident voice. Since speaking is inherent to

human nature, any exercise of litigation to do with the curtailing of such an elementary right is rather complicated: You ban one's books? One would then spread leaflets in the streets. You confiscate one's flyers? One would then agitate over the net. You cut one's power, confiscate one's computer? One may start to shout one's head off. You chop off one's tongue? One would then nod in approval when others are repeating one's manifesto. You are then left with no other option but chopping one's head off, but even then, all you do is make one into a martyr.

Two available methods are used by liberals to silence the dissident:

- a. prohibition (financial penalty and imprisonment);
- b. social exclusion.

However, it is crucial to mention that within the so-called liberal discourse, any attempt to ban an idea or a dissident voice is counter-effective, if anything it reflects badly on the liberal authority and the system. This is why liberals try to facilitate some rather sophisticated methods of censorship and thought policing that would involve very little authoritarian intervention. As we will see soon, in liberal society, censorship and thought policing is mostly self-imposed.

As much as it is difficult to curtail freedom of speech, suppressing freedom of thought is almost impossible.

Freedom of thought could be realised as the liberty to think, to feel, to dream, to remember, to forget, to forgive, to love and to hate.

As difficult as it may be to impose thought on others, it is almost unfeasible to stop people from seeing the truth for themselves. Yet, there are some methods to suppress and restrain intuitive thinking and ethical insight. I am obviously referring here to guilt.

Guilt, inflicted mostly via a set of axioms conveyed as 'political correctness', is the most effective method to keep society or any given discourse in a state of 'self-policing'. It turns the so-called autonomous liberal subject into a subservient, self-moderated, obedient citizen. Yet, the authority is spared from making any intervention. It is the liberal subject who curtails oneself from accepting a set of fixed ideas that support the egalitarian image of freedom and ecumenical society.

However, at this point I see the necessity to suggest that in spite of the liberal claim for peace seeking, liberal societies in general and the Anglo-American ones in particular are currently involved in crimes against humanity on a genocidal scale. Consequently, the more horrid the West is becoming, the greater is the gap between 'freedom of thought' and 'freedom of speech'.

This gap can easily evolve into a cognitive dissonance that in many cases mature into some severe form of apathy. It is said that 'all it takes for evil to flourish is for good people to do nothing'. This summarizes perfectly well the apathetic negligence of the Western masses. Not many care much about the genocide in Iraq that is committed in our name or the mass murder in Palestine that is committed with the support of

our governments. Why are we apathetic? Because when we want to stand up and say what we feel, when we want to celebrate our alleged freedom and to equate Gaza with Auschwitz, or Baghdad with Dresden, something inside us stops us from doing so. It is not the Government, legislation or any other form of authority, it is rather a small and highly effective self-inflicted ‘guilt microchip’ acting as policing regulator in the name of ‘political correctness’.

I will now try to follow the historical and philosophical evolution that leads us from the liberal-egalitarian-utopia to the current ethical and intellectual self-castration disaster.

The Harm Principle

John Stuart Mill, the founder of modern liberal thinking, tells us that any doctrine should be allowed the light of day no matter how immoral it may seem to everyone else. This is obviously the ultimate expression of liberal thinking. It ascribes absolute freedom of opinion and sentiment on all subjects, practical or speculative, scientific, ethical, political, religious or theological.

Though Mill endorsed the fullest form of liberty of expression, he suggested a limitation attached to freedom set by the prevention of ‘harm to others’. It is obviously very difficult to defend freedom of speech once it leads to the invasion of the rights of others. The question to ask is therefore, “what types of speech may cause harm?” Mill distinguishes between legitimate and illegitimate harm. According to Mill, only when speech causes a direct and clear violation of rights, can it be limited. But then, what kind of speech may cause such violation?

Feminists, for instance, have been maintaining that pornography degrades, endangers, and harms the lives of women. Another difficult case is hate speech. Most European liberal democracies have limitations on hate speech. Yet, it is debatable whether a ban of pornography or hate speech can be supported by the harm principle as articulated by Mill. One would obviously have to prove that such speech or imagery violates rights, directly and in the first instance.

Consequently, Mill’s harm principle is criticised for being too narrow as well as too broad. It is too narrow for failing to defend the right of the marginal. It is too broad because when interpreted extensively, it may lead to a potential abolishment of almost every political, religious or socially orientated speech.

The Offence Principle and Free Speech

Bearing in mind the shortcomings of the ‘harm principle’, it didn’t take long before an ‘offence principle’ had been called into play. The offence principle can be articulated as follows:

‘One’s freedom of expression should not be interfered with unless it causes an offence to others.’

The basic reasoning behind the ‘offence principle’ is trivial. It is there to defend the rights of the marginal and the weak. It is there to amend the hole created by the far-too-broad harm principle.

The offence principle is obviously pretty effective in curtailing pornography and hate speech. As in the case of violent pornography, strictly speaking, the offence that is caused by a Nazi march through a Jewish neighbourhood cannot be avoided and must be addressed.

However, the offence principle can be criticized for setting the bar far too low. Theoretically speaking, everyone can be ‘offended’ by anything.

The Jewish Lobbies and the Liberal Discourse

There is no doubt that the vast utilization of the offence principle ascribes a lot of political power to some marginal lobbies in general and Jewish lobbies in particular. Counting on the premise of the ‘offence principle’, Jewish nationalist ethnic activists claim to be offended by any form of criticism of the Jewish state and Zionism. But in fact it goes further, in practice it isn’t just criticism of Zionism and Israel which we are asked to avoid. Jewish leftists insist that we must avoid any discussion having to do with the Jewish national project, Jewish identity and even Jewish history. In short, with the vast support of the offence principle, Jewish ethnic leaders both on the left and right have succeeded in demolishing the possibility of any criticism of Jewish identity and politics. Employing the offence principle, Jewish lobbies right, left and centre, have managed to practically silence any possible criticism of Israel and its crimes against the Palestinians. More worryingly, Jewish leftist political activists and intellectuals outrageously demand to avoid any criticism of the Jewish Lobby in the USA and in Britain.

As we can see, the ‘offence Principle’ regulates and even serves some notorious Zionist as well as Jewish leftist political lobbies at the heart of the so-called liberal democratic West. In practice we are terrorized into submission by a group of gatekeepers who limit our freedom via an elastic dynamic operator that is there to suppress our thoughts before they mature into an ethical insight. Manipulation set by political correctness is the nourishing ground of our shattering cognitive dissonance. This is exactly where freedom of expression doesn’t agree with freedom of the thought.

Auschwitz Versus Gaza in the light of Political Correctness

We tend to agree that marginal discourses should be protected by the offence principle, so the marginal subject maintains his unique voice. We obviously agree also that such an approach must be applicable to the manifold of Jewish marginal discourses (religious, nationalist, Trotskyite, etc.). Seemingly, Jewish political lobbies want far more than just that, they insist upon delegitimising any intellectual reference to current Jewish political lobbying and global Zionism. As if this is not enough, any reference to

modern Jewish history is prohibited unless kosherly approved by a 'Zionist' authority. As bizarre as it may be, the Jewish Holocaust has now been intellectually set as a meta-historical event. It is an event in the past that won't allow any historical, ideological, theological or sociological scrutiny.

Bearing in mind the offence principle, Jews are entitled to argue that any form of speculation regarding their past suffering is "offensive and hurtful". Yet, one may demand some explanations. How is it that historical research that may lead to some different visions of past events that occurred six and a half decades ago offends those who live amongst us today? Clearly, it is not an easy task to suggest a rational answer to such a query.

Plainly, historical research shouldn't cause harm or an offence to the contemporary Jew or any other human subject around. Unless of course, the Holocaust itself is utilized against the Palestinians or those who are accused as being the 'enemies of Israel'. As we learn from Matan Vilnai recently, the Jewish State wouldn't refrain from bringing a Shoah on the Palestinian people. The Israelis and their supporters do not stop themselves from putting the holocaust into rhetorical usage. Yet, the Jewish lobbies around the world would do their very best to stop the rest of us from grasping what Shoah may mean. They would use their ultimate powers to stop us from utilizing the holocaust as a critical tool of Israeli barbarism.

As one may predict by now, in order to censor historical research into Jewish history and a further understanding of current Israeli evil, political correctness is called into play. Political correctness is there to stop us from seeing and expressing the obvious. Political correctness is there to stop us realising that truth and historical truth in particular is an elastic notion. Yet, you may wonder what exactly political correctness is.

Political correctness, for those who failed to understand it, is basically a political stand that doesn't allow political criticism. Political correctness is a stand that cannot be fully justified in rational, philosophical or political terms. It is implanted as a set of axioms at the heart of the liberal discourse. It operates as a self-imposed silencing regulator powered by self-inflicted guilt.

Political correctness is in fact the crudest assault on freedom of speech, freedom of thought and human liberty, yet, manipulatively, it conveys itself as the ultimate embodiment of freedom.

Hence, I would argue as forcefully as I can that political correctness is the bitterest enemy of human liberty and those who regulate those social axioms and plant them in our discourse are the gravest enemies of humanity.

I would argue as forcefully as I can that since the Palestinians are facing Nazi-like State terrorism, the holocaust narrative and its meaning belongs to them at least as much as it belongs to the Jews or anyone else.

I would argue as forcefully as I can that if the Palestinians are indeed the last victims of Hitler, then the holocaust and its meaning do belong to them more than anyone else.

Bearing all that in mind, equating Gaza with Auschwitz is the right and only way forwards. Questioning the holocaust and its meaning is what liberation of humanity means today and in the near future.

Shedding Light on *Darkness in El Dorado*

Author: Richard Tate

Date: December 31 2000

Source: <www.wildcat.international/darkness.html> & <www.wildcat.international/jzdarkreply.html>

Darkness in El Dorado by Patrick Tierney claims to be an exposé of exploitation of the Yanomami people of the Amazon by scientists. This book generated a dozen web pages devoted to refuting its allegations of genocide against geneticist James Neel and anthropologist Napoleon Chagnon before it had even been published. Now, it has been the subject of major debates, news articles and radio discussions. Before explaining what is wrong with this book, I will set out the context and explain why it should be of interest.

First of all, the book is primarily a critique of the life and work of Napoleon Chagnon. Chagnon is important because he is widely used in undergraduate anthropology classes because his work is clearly written and an exciting story [*Yanomamö*]. It also criticizes other anthropologists, politicians and the geneticist James Neel. This review does not attempt to deal with these secondary criticisms in detail, though it mentions them in passing as examples of Tierney's method.

Hobbes and Rousseau

For centuries, there have been defenders of the view that people before civilization were largely peaceful and cooperative, at least, a lot more so than they have been since civilization, with its division of labor, slavery and war, arose in the Middle East about 10,000 years ago. Foremost among them was Jean-Jacques Rousseau. On the other hand, there are those who say life before civilization was "nasty, brutish and short" in the famous words of Thomas Hobbes. A dramatic step in favor of the Rousseauian view was the publication of the work of Marshall Sahlins and Richard Lee [*Stone Age Economics, Man the Hunter*] in the late sixties/early seventies which looked at the !Kung San of the Kalahari, an ancient society of hunter-gatherers, and found that they

worked less, ate more, and had far less chance of a violent death than their agricultural neighbors.

If the violence of civilization is a deviation from the way humans lived for 99% of their existence, it is a passing nightmare, not a product of human nature. The important point is that if this is true, there is hope for the abolition of civilization, and thus the survival of the human race and numerous other species. Such an important point needs to be defended coherently.

Since Lee's and Sahlins' writings in the late sixties, the debate about whether primitive society was nasty, brutish and short or actually not bad has continued [*War Before Civilization*]. We are card-carrying members of the Rousseau faction, but we are critical of most of his fellow-travellers, for example Fredy Perlman [*Against His-story, Against Leviathan!*]. Perlman attempts to suppress any discussion of his assertions by describing those who ask for "Positive Evidence" as "guards". Instead of examining his anti-civilization view, he urges us to "throw off our armor" and "dance". Well, maybe. But we think it important to consider evidence from both sides. Is violence among the Yanomamö, such as it exists, evidence that people all over the world before civilization engaged in regular warfare? Originally, our position was based on Perlman's. Subsequently, we have become quite critical of his methods. However, we still defend his basic idea. Rejecting the Marxist idea that civilization inevitably arose as the productive forces matured, we regard the productive forces as a product of civilization, development as a war against life, and civilization as a disastrous mistake. Among the issues we have with Perlman are his contempt for evidence. He parodies the methods of scientists by claiming they demand "Positive Evidence" [p2] as a password to enter their elite ivory tower. But good scientists [Popper] try to *refute* their hypotheses, not prove them. No quantity of positive evidence can prove a scientific generalization, but a failure to refute it can provide strong support for it, if great effort has been made to do this.

Tierney is also an enemy of the open society. In one of his most absurd detours into personal attack, he accuses Chagnon [p180] of being the heir of the anti-communist witchhunter Joseph McCarthy because they both came from Michigan. Chagnon occasionally mumbles his annoyance at "left-wing anthropologists", since he and other Darwinians often come under ignorant attack from the liberal thought police. It is Tierney who is closer to a McCarthyite, when he seeks to slander, simplify and distort the views and actions of those he chooses to attack. If Tierney were Neil Young, he would have added "Michigan" to his songs about Alabama and Ohio. (Thought: there are 48 states about which a whining hit record has not yet been recorded. Market opportunity?).

The work of Dawkins [*The Selfish Gene*], Wilson [*Sociobiology*] and Chagnon [*Yanomamö*] are unacceptable to simplistic liberal thinkers, so they parody and distort their views on evolution and anthropology as eugenicist or even fascist. Tierney is a particularly extreme example of a kneejerk liberal so incensed by the apparently unacceptable consequences of Darwin's discovery that we are animals [*The Origin*

of *Species*] that he loses all respect for facts in his desire to make his “committed” political point. There are leftists of more intelligence and integrity.

Chris Knight [*Blood Relations*] is an example. I cite him because his work attempts to address the problem simple Darwinism fails to: why is human culture so *different* from the law of the jungle? Any hack can explain why men fight over women, or selfishly hoard the product of their labor, and so on: what is more difficult to explain is when the opposite happens. According to Knight, most organisms compete against members of their own species, even when they would gain from cooperating. Human beings do not behave according to Darwinian biology. For example, wealth leads to fewer children, not more. Yet Darwin’s theory is true of animals, and we are animals. It takes a smart scientist to begin to unravel this enigma.

Knight’s criticism of sociobiology is more subtle than the moralists of the American left [*Defenders of the Truth*]. In a nutshell, he sees the neo-Darwinians as the equivalent of the bourgeois economists on whose shoulders Karl Marx stood, who drowned the philistine sentimentalism of their predecessors in the icy water of egotistical calculation. Wilson, Dawkins and co. showed that genes care only about themselves, not their species, freeing anthropologists and primatologists from unscientific notions such as species-identity in understanding human origins. Examining gender conflict and other types of conflict within a species became acceptable thanks to the saber-toothed sociobiologists of the seventies. In other words, although left-wing students attacked the neo-Darwinians, in some cases physically, they were misguided, because the findings of Wilson and other biologists could help progressive ideology, if approached in the right way.

Only humans have “transcended” the law of the jungle via culture. How? In a word, because female members of the species *homo sapiens* stumbled on the earliest form of “solidarity” — the sex strike. Synchronized menstruation occurred as a way in which all the women in a hominid community could signal to the men. This coincided with the waxing moon — the best time for extended hunting trips. They had to ensure that none of them broke the strike, or all the men would give up the hunt and compete for the strikebreaking females. From this primitive solidarity, human culture evolved. The evidence remains in great myths such as the Rainbow Snake. Most of the research which backs Knight is by or derived from the work of Claude Lévi-Strauss. I can’t do Knight’s ideas justice in this short piece; it’s a bit wierd to begin with, but if you approach it with an open mind, it is a plausible theory.

Knight questions many of the assumptions of anthropology, but reintroduces a belief from Victorian days — progress. Most of anthropology, following the lead of Franz Boas, abandoned the idea that one human society can be said to be more advanced than another. When Knight describes the evolution of humanity from its primitive ancestor, he has no doubt it was a good thing. The most famous Victorian progressives Knight follows are Karl Marx and Frederick Engels.

“Nothing discredits bourgeois development so much as the fact that it has not yet got beyond the economic forms of the animal world” [Knight, p52, citing Engels].

He accuses Darwin of projecting bourgeois society onto nature, then using this distorted picture to justify capitalism. But the whole of his thesis depends on this view of nature — competitive, ruthless, red in tooth and claw. Human society potentially “transcends” this. One consequence of Knight’s theory is to relegate pre-cultural hominids to the status of animals. It is universally accepted that hominids with all the physical characteristics of modern humans, including large brains, existed for a million or so years before language [*Future Primitive*].

Knight talks of the distinction between animal learning and human culture. Vervet monkeys learn to dip dry seeds into the sap of a tree to make them edible during droughts. Individuals imitate each other. But this knowledge is completely lost during rainy periods, then rediscovered. Human culture is different. It lives for tens of thousands of years even when it has no immediate practical purpose. Myths such as the Sleeping Beauty go back to the beginning, and according to Knight, contain coded information essential to understanding how human culture originated. *“It is this kind of learning which — according to my origins narrative — anatomically modern humans transcended in the course of the momentous events which led up to and were consummated in the Upper Palaeolithic revolution whose reverberations began rippling across the world between 40 and 45 thousand years ago...”* [*Blood Relations*, p12].

Opposing this traditional distinction between nature and culture, Perlman would answer as follows: *“These managers are broadcasting their news too soon. The varied beings haven’t all been exterminated yet. You, reader, have only to mingle with them, or just watch them from a distance, to see that their waking lives are filled with dances, games and feasts”* [*Against His-story*, pp6-7].

Here’s a contrasting passage from Knight: *“...chimpanzees are not intrinsically gentle and co-operative, as used to be imagined twenty years ago, but often murderously aggressive, infanticidal and cannibalistic* [Bygott 1972, Teleki 1975, Goodall 1986]”. However, *“It all depends on circumstances, not genes, just as it does with us”*. [*Blood Relations*, p169]. But in general, Knight argues that apes and monkeys have their behavior governed by their individual genes, and the great mystery is, how did we overcome this? On page 135, Knight describes the genetically determined behavior of hanuman langurs. Like many primates, the males try to acquire a harem of females and monopolize them, keeping a horde of unsuccessful rivals at bay. When one of these bachelors conquers a harem and drives off its former sultan, the first thing he does is kill all the infants. The females will become fertile quicker, giving his genes more opportunity. He has no genetic reason to care about the offspring of another male. No human society has been recorded as barbaric as that. The question is, why not? Knight claims to provide the answer.

What is culture? Symbols. What are symbols? Imaginary objects which stand for real objects and relate to each other according to rules. Knight says culture was a good thing which was invented by women, then stolen by men. For Zerzan, culture was always a disaster, and the “oppression of women” one of its consequences. *“...the ritual ‘Venus’ figurines appear as of 25,000 years ago, and seem to be an example of earliest symbolic likeness of women for the purpose of representation and control”* [Future Primitive, p26].

Manipulate, control, represent — for Zerzan, all these are bad things which the emergence of symbolic culture inevitably led to. Then came the division of labor, agriculture, domestication, war and disease, then civilization and the accelerating rush to annihilation.

Though Knight defends ritual, at the same time he describes it as totalitarian. This echoes his defense of dictatorial proletarian acts such as attacking people crossing picket lines during strikes, and similarly, the enforcement of the “sex strike” by women in primitive society. *“It is thought that no act which has to be directed or controlled collectively can be as valid as the spontaneous action of an individual. This, however, says much about the individualistic assumptions of Western Culture”* [Blood Relations, pp80-81]. Zerzan on the other hand is savage in his criticism of ritual [Future Primitive, pp26-27].

For Knight, human culture began as an act of forced discipline, though he doesn’t say what the primeval women would do to one of their number who broke ranks by having sex before the menfolk had brought home the bacon. Ritual, marriage and food taboos, and much of the compulsion that prevails in hunter-gatherer cultures all derive from this original strike. This is OK for Knight — he is a communist. He believes in suppressing the individual in the interests of the majority, not just during emergencies, but as part of the normal day-to-day life of society. Collective control and power is the only alternative to “a mere assemblage of egoistic, competing individuals” [Blood Relations, p80]. Instead, thanks to the “human revolution”, *“...availability or non-availability was no longer a private issue between the individual and his/her sexual partner but a matter for decision through negotiation on the basis of groups”* [p292]. Zerzan, as an anarchist, would endorse violence against recalcitrant individuals by collectives in struggles for survival, but for him, the compulsory nature of the origin of culture, if Knight is correct, would be an indictment of it.

I went to the American Anthropological Association’s annual meeting in San Francisco, where the Tierney scandal was debated. According to Tierney’s marketing team, Terry Turner and Leslie Sponsel

“In its scale, ramifications, and sheer criminality and corruption it is unparalleled in the history of Anthropology”.

Tierney spoke, after a series of speakers denounced him for forging evidence and adding weight to anti-scientific attitudes. Most of the speakers were scientists, who

showed, for example, how the Edmonston B measles vaccine does not cause measles, but prevents it, how Napoleon Chagnon's research was sound, and how James Neel was not a fascist. Tierney's attempt to defend himself was lame:

"If you have a heart... If you could see those villages with their roofs blown off by Super Puma helicopters..."

I thought he was talking about a military assault — all he meant was that anthropologists' helicopters blow off the straw roofs of Yanomamö houses when they land: hardly one of the great crimes of the twentieth century. He didn't so much defend his allegations, resorting instead to emotional blackmail to avoid the issues. Some of his critics regard him as a dupe of a bunch of Catholic priests called the Salesians who have waged a war of character assassination against Chagnon for decades.

If so, he is in bad company. Norman Lewis's book [*The Missionaries*] paints a bleak picture of the effects of missionary work on native peoples in Latin America and elsewhere. This is mostly a condemnation of the New Tribes Mission and the Summer Institute of Linguistics, two sects of protestants, rather than the priestfuckers to whom Patrick panders. But, papist or proddie, the whole missionary position — saving, converting, civilizing — is worse than that of the anthropologists, who at least *try* to observe without influencing.

This link cogweb.english.ucsb.edu at the University of California at Santa Barbara, in the section "Chagnon's 'turf war' with the Salesian Missionaries", suggests that the Salesians in the Yanomami area influenced Tierney to attack Chagnon because Chagnon had denounced them for encouraging Indians to live near missions, which renders them more susceptible to disease, and giving them shotguns, which increases their fatality rate. Hunters need dispersion. Concentrated, they quickly out-hunt the area. They become dependent on the mission for food. This gives the missionaries corporeal and hence spiritual power.

Lewis describes another Venezuelan Indian tribe, the Panare:

"The Panare mentality and character were shaped in a relatively protected forest environment over thousands of years. In this famines were impossible, plagues are not recorded, and the wars that shaped our history were reduced here at worst to a ceremonial skirmish".

[*The Missionaries*, p189].

The Panare live in the wetlands on the fringes of the Amazon. These areas are ideal for hunting and fishing. According to Lewis, the Panare in their undisturbed state are taller, fitter and healthier than their Spanish-Venezuelan neighbors. If he and Chagnon are both right, it seems that the inhabitants of the inner Amazon, like the Yanomamö, ended up on the wrong side of the tracks.

In June 1993, about 20 Yanomami were murdered by Brazilian gold miners at a place called Haximu in the Venezuelan Amazon. Chagnon was named to a commission

to investigate on behalf of the Venezuelan government, but was dropped after Salesian opposition. Part of the reason for their opposition was the conflict of interest of another proposed member, Charles Brewer-Carías, a close friend of Chagnon's, with whom he has worked since 1967, according to his preface to the fifth edition of *Yanomamö*, who owned mines. However, there was no evidence against Chagnon: nevertheless the commission on which he served was ordered out of the region, in favor of another which included the Bishop of Amazonas. Four miners were convicted of the crime. *Survival International*, one of Tierney's favorite causes, and one of Chagnon's *bêtes noires*, complain that the Brazilian courts overturned the convictions of miners for genocide (www.survival.org.uk), and urge us to write to the judges asking them to reinstate the original sentences.

www.anth.uconn.edu contains a delightful account of a priest trying to impress a Yanomamö chief with a crucifix. The Yanomami laughed, and said that he didn't need to be afraid of a spirit whose own people could nail him up. Chagnon loves telling this story, and apparently it annoyed the godbotherers immensely.

Tierney is selective in his account of the influence of corruption in Venezuelan politics on the Yanomamö. Whereas the president, his mistress, Brewer-Carías and various other colorful characters are venal, the *Fiscalía*, an independent government body [?] which investigated them, is heroic. Like *Survival International*, he can clearly distinguish the good bits of South American government from the bad.

Lewis's book *The Missionaries* is subtitled "*This book will make you angry*", and it did — but that was because it told me what I wanted to hear — "*It is about genocide, practised today, against helpless people in the name of God...*". Tierney also tells us what we want to hear, except in his case its in the name of Science, not God. Fortunately, because his case is weaker, his arguments are much weaker too, so it is easier to abandon one's prejudices as Tierney attempts to confirm them.

Tierney's Data: the Raw and the Cooked

- *Neel and Chagnon caused measles by administering Edmonston B vaccine.* This is a bare-faced lie. A superficial reading of some of the links at the end of this article will show that there is not a scrap of evidence that this vaccine can cause the disease it was designed to prevent.
- *Neel was a eugenicist.* This is true. However, this argument depends on emotional links between words rather than an honest assessment of his real position. "Eugenics" means nothing more than deliberately choosing the promotion of alleles which produce desirable characteristics against alleles in the same gene which produce undesirable ones. At its worst, this includes forcible sterilization of people whom the state regards as mentally retarded. At its best, it includes people with inheritable genetic illnesses choosing not to have children. The Nazi programs

were all evil, but in most cases, they were not eugenicist. Murdering people with inherited disabilities is eugenics; murdering people for their race is not. When US states sterilized black men with supposedly criminal genes, they were not being eugenicist. They were not “misusing” eugenics either. These men did not have criminal genes, therefore they were not victims of eugenics. The issues raised by James Neel and other scientists need to be debated, not suppressed. We all know that human beings are animals, that animals are highly subject to the ruthless forces of natural selection, but that we are not. We don’t leave our disabled to the wolves; deer do. Neel did not say we should, but he found it an interesting issue. Whatever the answer to this problem, it won’t be found if we allow our thoughts to be censored by the pinko Pasdaran.

Laments Tierney: *While almost everyone applauded the democratic freedoms that allowed women to choose their own mates, Neel glumly concluded that the “loss of headmanship as a feature of our culture, as well as the weakening of other vehicles of natural selection, is clearly a minus.” Neel even believed that students at American universities were all products of a mediocre gene pool – “a large, increasingly homogenous, quivering blob of jelly” – incapable of reproducing the superior qualities of Yanomami warriors. — [Darkness, p49]. Shocking!*

In his attempt to defend himself (www.darknessineldorado.com), Tierney cites Neel:

The military deferments for physical/mental reasons which obtain when armies are conscripted, as in the recent World Wars, render war an agent of negative selection.

In other words, war kills the fittest. Tierney is so blinded by his emotions, he thinks that Neel saw war as *an agent for removing the mentally and physically weak and rewarding the strong and capable*. This is the opposite of what Neel actually said.

He castigates Neel for believing *there is something wrong with the gene pool that must be remedied*. Like Huntingdon’s disease, muscular dystrophy and hemophilia? Although the influence of genes on behavior and on many illnesses has been exaggerated, it does exist and can be studied. The question of medical intervention in evolution is a complex one. Even the Unabomber considered the arguments before rejecting genetic tinkering.

- *Neel was funded by the Atomic Energy Commission*. This is not as bad as it sounds. Numerous pieces of genetic research were funded by the AEC. Some of that research, such as the injection of plutonium into unsuspecting patients, was a crime. Some of it, like observing the effects of atomic bombs on the genes of Japanese children, seems rather tasteless. But let’s not allow our emotions to get the better of us. Using the Yanomamö as a “control group” just means that Neel wanted to observe the genes of the people least affected by radioactivity, to

see how much genetic mutations were caused in people exposed to atomic bomb fallout and their descendants.

Tierney's last chapter "Human Products" reiterates the findings of a real investigative journalist, Eileen Wellsome, who, in 1993, uncovered the fact that American citizens in the 1940's were unknowingly injected with plutonium to see what it did. Tierney is unable to produce a credible indictment of anthropologists as Wellsome did with doctors. Guilt by association just won't do.

Even where Tierney may have a point, it is important to treat what he says with a grain of salt, because of the blatant disregard for facts which major sections of his tirade exemplify. Tierney throws the word "sociobiologist" [Wilson] around at anyone he dislikes in scientific circles as though it were as unacceptable as "racist". Sociobiology is too complex a subject to be left to a liberal hack to explain.

- *Chagnon caused most of the wars he claimed to observe* in vivo. This is a more difficult charge to refute, because of the complexity of the interactions between anthropologists, missions, miners and capitalist society as a whole and the fragile world of the Yanomamö. It seems there might be something in it. Chagnon didn't seem to realize that using underhand methods to collect his data might affect its quality. For example, he would use people's enemies to find out the names of their dead relatives. This is essential data in a study of kinship, which is kind of important to anthropology. But naming the dead is taboo among the Yanomamö, and Chagnon's duplicity may have made mortal enemies out of his informants.

The fact that Western people, anthropologists or whomever, have a considerable effect on small isolated tribes makes attempts to "study" the economics of such societies very difficult. One machete makes a man in a community which previously had no steel goods a king. Colin Turnbull [*The Mountain People*] is criticized for eating while Africans around him starved [Tierney, p184] while Chagnon is denounced for handing out machetes which enable Yanomami to eat [p217]. It seems you just can't win. It's true that Chagnon doesn't make it clear how much effect he's having, perhaps provoking battles rather than just observing them. Chagnon believed that the Yanomamö fight for revenge and over women: but Tierney's account argues that they mostly fight over anthropologists. Access to someone like Chagnon, with his axes, shotguns and motorboats could make a man rich in Yanomami land. If Tierney could restrict himself to studying anthropologists and their effect on the people they study, he could write a powerful indictment perhaps, rather than one easily rejected for its gaping errors.

- *Chagnon associated with dubious characters* such as the president of Venezuela's girlfriend (Tierney calls her his "mistress". It sounds so much more scandalous). His friend Brewer-Carías sounds like a real bad apple. If a quarter of Tierney's allegations against them are true (which would be an unusually high percentage) Chagnon should not have accepted her hospitality nor his helicopters.

- *Film crews working with Chagnon deliberately started fights* and refused to take a dying woman to hospital two hours away so they could film the ritual following her death. This story is believable. Documentary film makers are vile people. Various people, from the Mayans of the Chiapas highlands to the Yanomamö attack cameramen as agents of diabolical, soul-destroying powers, and they are right. Filmmakers want to make a marketable product. This is not the same as, and is often opposed to, the truth. They divide the people they film and turn them against each other, whether the documentary is about wrongly-convicted Irishmen in London (“In the Name of the Father” and the ITN documentary about the Birmingham Six) or the Yanomamö (“The Ax Fight”). Their role is always contrary to the interests of the people they film. “*National Geographic Research magazine had warned for years about contacting remote groups, and how 30 percent could die within a short time unless permanent medical attention was provided. But there was a total disconnect between the exploring society’s scholarly articles and the video-sales and ratings-driven behavior of its commercial television unit*” [Tierney, pp254-255].

In February 1992, *National Geographic* exploited the Yanomamö for a massively expensive film, and refused to bring a doctor with them. The British Broadcasting Corporation and the Brazilian tabloids also come across in a poor light in Tierney’s book.

Chagnon — an Unlikely Mengele

What does Chagnon [*Yanomamö*] actually say? He is modest enough to admit that the Yanomami whom he met for the first time in 1964 were nothing like he expected — eschewing diplomatic niceties, he says he found them quite revolting and wanted to get back to Michigan and do civil engineering! The reason he calls them “The Fierce People” is, firstly, that’s how they like to be known, and secondly, it’s true. He says they live in a state of almost continuous warfare. He is honest in expressing his feelings about them — at first he doesn’t like them. On the other hand, he finds their neighbors, the Makiritare, “pleasant and charming”. Such unabashed subjectivity! Chagnon is not a mealy-mouthed liberal, hiding unpleasant facts about native people. Neither is he too objective — the Yanomami are people, not objects.

His illiberalism often leads to insensitivity, and perhaps this has what has got the pinkos up in arms against him. There is a serious superstition among the Yanomami against mentioning the names of the dead. He is so determined to collect genealogical information that he often has to find someone who will. For the most part, though, he simply treats the Yanomami as equals. He expresses his opinions about them as freely as he would about his fellow Americans. He doesn’t treat them as precious specimens, the way liberal academics do. At the Anthropological Association’s annual meeting in Nov. 2000, one speaker got a rousing cheer just for being an indigenous woman.

If Chagnon subscribes to a theory which argues that male violence leads to reproductive success, this theory can only be falsified by evidence or lack of it, or undermined by logic, not by cries of outrage. Social Darwinism and so on needs to be combatted, or integrated into a grander narrative, not simplified, distorted and politically corrected by the likes of Tierney. Arguments about killing increasing reproductive success and Tierney's refutation of them [*Darkness*, pp158-180] are almost too trivial to discuss. Some men gain advantages from being violent which increases their likelihood of having children; some don't, eg. those who get killed. No particular society proves anything about society in general. The correlation between getting away with murder and having a lot of children is not causation: both may be the product of a third variable, such as, duh, economic success. Neither Neel nor Chagnon put forward the argument Tierney attempts to refute, in any case. Human societies are so varied that it is highly unlikely that a gene which predisposed someone to a particular kind of behavior, even if such genes exist, would produce success in many different societies. They change much faster than evolution. That is why there is no gene yet for financial ability!

Chagnon found Yanomami society to have high rates of abduction of women and murder of men. There was a serious division of labor between men and women, and some between villages. Villages trade women for labor and the protection of stronger villages. Villages use positions of strength to force weaker villages to cede labor, women and agricultural produce in return for protection from assassins.

There is widespread "domestic violence", and girls learn from an early age that they must slave whilst boys play. Still, boys learn to shoot arrows, partly for hunting, and partly for self-defence against raiders from other villages. "*Yanomami society is decidedly masculine*" Chagnon declares on page 81 of the first edition. This understatement comes after several pages of horrific descriptions of wars, treacherous invitations to feasts which end in massacres and gang rape, unequal exchange between more or less successful villages, and so on *ad nauseam*.

There is infanticide, particularly of girls.

There is plenty of political maneuvering, bluffing, and horsetrading. This is nothing new — the Spanish and the Portuguese reported similar things. Now of course all these observers could be "projecting" (Perlman) their "alienation" (Zerzan). But if we are to take centuries of evidence seriously, we have in the Yanomamö a violent, hierarchical, sexist society not unlike other third-world slums. There is no evidence that this has anything to do with pre-civilized people. Similarly, the absence of work and war among the San of the Kalahari [Sahlins] doesn't prove that this was the case before 8,000 BC..

Chagnon is accused of making his subjects look like pre-human primates. If I were to describe the behavior of some of the homeless people I see in California, I could be accused of de-humanizing them. It is not the observer who has made them this way, but the global society which has driven them to desperation. I don't know what drove the Yanomamö up the Orinoco, whether it was the arrival of the Spaniards, the predecessors of the Inca slave society, or just bad luck, but in any case, their internecine warfare, sexual violence and poverty proves nothing about the existence or otherwise

of the golden age before civilization. It is possible that the Yanomamö and other fierce people of the Amazon are descendents of civilization, not directly primitive community. It seems there were civilizations in the Amazon prior to European conquest [Tierney, p265]. The Mayan Indians of the Lacandon jungle in Mexico are descended from a literate slave society, but they abandoned its advantages centuries ago.

It appears that the Yanomamö retain some of the characteristics of their pre-civilized predecessors. It is mandatory for a hunter to give away all he has killed, for example. For a clear insight into how the Yanomamö and other illiterati retain elements of human community, and for a clear demonstration of an anthropologist's lack of understanding, read this passage, which has survived virtually unchanged in five editions of *Yanomamö*:

The Yanomamö do not openly regard trade as a mechanism the ulterior function of which is to bring people repeatedly together in order to destabilish an amicable basis from which more stable types of alliance can develop. Nor do they overtly acknowledge the relationships between trading and feasting cycles to village interdependency. In this regard they are like the Tobriand Islanders of Melanesia. They have a 'functional ignorance' of the more significant adaptive aspects of their trading institutions [Malinowski, 1922]. To both the Yanomomo and the Tobrianders, the mechanisms by which peoples from different groups are compelled to visit each other are ends in themselves and are not conceived to be related to the establishment of either economic or political interdependency. For the Yanomamö participant in a feast, the feast itself has its significance in the marvelous quantities of food, the excitement of the dance, and the satisfaction of having others admire and covet the fine decorations he wears — and hopefully an opportunity to have a clandestine sexual affair with one of the host women. The enchantment of the dance issues from the dancer's awareness that, for a brief moment, he is a glorious peacock that commands the admiration of his fellows, and it is his responsibility and desire to present a spectacular display of his dance steps and gaudy accoutrements. In this brief, ego-building moment, each man has an opportunity to display himself, spinning and prancing about the village periphery, chest puffed out, while all watch, admire, and cheer wildly, as shown in the film *The Feast* (listed at the end of this book).

[*Yanomamö*], 5th edition, p164.

Very simply put, there are four schools of anthropology. There is the British colonial school ("functionalism"), the French school ("structuralism"), the stage-managers ("Marxism") and the anti-colonial, anti-theoretical American school founded by Franz Boas. As we saw in the above citation, Chagnon is quite comfortable with the mechanistic hack Malinowski, who thinks he knows the real function of other societies' institutions. Chagnon makes one attempt to use French-style "theoretical" anthropology.

He argues that, even in small groups like Yanomami villages, behavior is determined by rules such as “*marriage is a stronger tie than consanguinity*”. One’s brother is a competitor for a mate; one’s brother-in-law is not, because he cannot marry the same women as you can. The problem with this is it reduces human behavior to the relationship between objects — kinship structures. It’s elegant, but human behavior isn’t. Mythology is the only area where structuralism still seems to work [*Blood Relations*]. In any case, Chagnon doesn’t have any more to say about his kinship theory. He’s not a theoretician: he tried his best to observe an interesting bunch of people, and wrote a few books about it. So Tierney’s attempt to portray him as a purveyor of incorrect ideology misses the mark: he doesn’t appear to have any.

Having attacked social science in the opening paragraph of his *Future Primitive*, John Zerzan says nonetheless “*the literature can provide highly useful assistance, if approached with an appropriate method and awareness and the desire to proceed past its limitations*” [*Future Primitive*, p15].

But Zerzan’s method consists of picking the literature which suits his argument, and ignoring that which raises uncomfortable questions — Sahlins and Lee rather than Chagnon and Keeley. Those who disagree with him are “ideologically loaded” whereas those who agree are “far more plausible” (p17). One point that Tierney does make well (pp 23–24) is that the “Fierce People” are not typical of the Yanomamö. Chagnon has dropped the subtitle and all references to this phrase from later editions of *Yanomamö*. It’s a complicated story, but, simply put, the area Chagnon studied is heavily affected by disease, slave-raids and massacres by European infiltrators. The Yanomami who live further from major rivers are more peaceful. Tierney’s tear-jerking style is reminiscent of Fredy Perlman, but Tierney makes the mistake of being specific, so it is easy to refute his claims.

But Perlman points to the main reason why all this data about primitive societies really doesn’t prove much about our distant ancestors in the time before civilization.

] [Graph simplified from UCSB Preliminary Report on the Tierney “scandal”.

Most “primitive” tribes no longer live in the “state of nature” idealized by Perlman and Zerzan, but in places where they have been driven by their need to escape civilization’s deadly embrace. They are victims, and like many victims of civilization, most of their violence is directed at each other rather than their real enemy. No-one would use the violence in Africa today to claim that Africans were prone to internecine warfare prior to slavery. It is obviously a legacy of the rape of Africa by the European powers. Neither should warfare among Amazonian tribes be used to claim that primitive society was more violent than civilization.

Lévi-Strauss puts it well about another Amazonian tribe. He says the Xavante *are not examples of archaic ways of life that have been miraculously preserved for millenia, but the last escapees from the cataclysm that discovery and subsequent invasions had been for their ancestors* — [Tierney, p39].

Colin Turnbull's studies illustrate in a dramatic fashion the view that poverty is the main cause of violence. Pre-civilized people had infinite material wealth. But as Perlman points out, the material things are the least of what has been lost in the fall into civilization. Visions, trances etc. have been replaced by religion. In the Yanamomo jungle, poverty has led to a suboptimal life. Jungles are not ideal — savannah and wetlands have a much wider variety of game and edible plantlife.

On some issues, Perlman and Zerzan take opposite positions. Whereas Perlman points to primitive agriculture and coppersmiths on the Great Lakes to ridicule the idea that the material forces “give rise to” civilization, Zerzan believes that agriculture is a one-way rollercoaster. He goes even further, and condemns all symbolic culture — language, for example — as inherently “manipulative”, which is a bad thing. From dugout canoes to nuclear submarines... it's a slippery slope. Perlman rejects such determinism.

However, we owe much to Zerzan. He asks questions nobody else does. He cites Foster in *Emergence of Modern Humans*: “*the symbolic mode... has proven extraordinarily adaptive, else why has Homo Sapiens become material master of the world*” adding “*the manipulation of symbols*” is “*the very stuff of culture*”, but as Zerzan points out, Foster “*appears oblivious to the fact that this successful adaptation has brought alienation and destruction of nature along to their present horrifying prominence*” [*Future Primitive*, p25]. Knight is more than oblivious to the problem.

One of Knight's unstated prejudices is that human culture was a good idea — was “progress”, or a “revolution”. Zerzan rejects such cheerleading, questioning — quite rightly, if not very adequately — whether the human cultural revolution was not an error with disastrous consequences. Perlman's arguments — if you can call them that — are even more inadequate, but his identification of *civilization* as the big mistake is both more realistic and easier to defend. Prior to about 10,000 years ago, human society was full of marvellous rituals, dancing, trances and so on. Food was abundant. At some point, probably in the Middle East, temporary village headmen somehow became permanent chieftains. The Fall began. Disease, warfare, slavery, famine and the other horsemen of the apocalypse began to drag us down the road to armageddon. You have to admit, he has a point.

Conclusion

Anyone sympathetic to the ideas of this website (Main page), Perlman and Zerzan, should take heed, and not fall into the trap of attacking scientists because you don't like their style, nor believe someone because they are ethnically indigenous. We should not conflate geneticists, eugenicists, genetic engineers and fascists without careful investigation.

What's wrong with anthropology is not that it spreads measles and myths of male supremacy but the idea that you can “study” other people. I don't study my neighbors

in North America — they would be offended if I said I did. Why then would you study people in South America? Anthropology *per se* if not exactly an act of colonial violence, is a bit dodgy. You can't be objective about other people — though as we have seen, you can be more or less truthful. One doesn't go to Latin America to study the Indians, but to defend them.

But opposing scientific inquiry has to be done very carefully, not by wild unsubstantiated claims. We would hope to distance our critique of science from the witchhunters of feminism and political correctness. The American Anthropological Association has an "ethics committee" which seeks to ensure that the subjects of research have given their informed consent, among other things. ("*You understand that your DNA is being used in base-pair comparisons using polymerase chain reaction*"). To give them credit, they are trying not to be too obnoxious, and are modest enough to recognize that it is difficult to know exactly how to behave in an Amazonian Indian village. But there is no difference in principle between the problem of how to deal with Yanomamö and how to relate to the people around you. Although you find things out about people you don't know when you become involved with them, you don't "study" people. The ethical problems are considerably less when you are involved in a common struggle with people rather than in using them to advance your career. Although the enemies of South American jungle tribes are somewhat diffuse, we can certainly identify the governments of the area, large corporations and free-market capitalism. Exactly how to help the last survivors of primitive society to survive a while longer is beyond the scope of this essay, but I would suggest it is not by making interactive CDs about their domestic disputes. The recent battle of Prague showed in a vague and disorganized way that there is awareness and anger against the world system and its faceless acronyms, the WTO, the IMF, etc.. It is the intensification and, er, ideological refinement of this struggle which will save the Yanomamö and the rest of us from extinction.

Links and References

Darkness in El Dorado, Patrick Tierney, W.W. Norton, New York, 2000

www.darknessineldorado.com

A useful page of links covering the controversy: www.anth.uconn.edu

Napoleon Chagnon's home page: www.anth.ucsb.edu

Yanomamö — The Fierce People Napoleon Chagnon, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, New York, 1968

Jean-Jacques Rousseau Association: www.wabash.edu

Leviathan, Thomas Hobbes, 1651: sites.netscape.net

The Ax Fight CD Peter Biella, Napoleon Chagnon and Gary Seaman, Harcourt College Publishers, 1998

The Missionaries — God Against the Indians Norman Lewis, Martin Secker and Warburg, London, 1988

Response of a team at the University of California at Santa Barbara to Tierney's allegations: www.anth.ucsb.edu

Against His-story, Against Leviathan! Fredy Perlman, Black and Red, Detroit www.spunk.org

Future Primitive John Zerzan, Autonomedia, NY 1994

Blood Relations — Menstruation and the Origins of Culture, Chris Knight, Yale University Press, London 1991. How to contact Chris Knight and his group: www.uel.ac.uk

Conjectures and Refutations: The Growth of Scientific Knowledge Karl Popper, Routledge, 1992 — Popper's fan club: www.eeng.dcu.ie

Thinking of becoming a missionary? Try the Salesians: www.salesianmissions.org

War Before Civilization, Lawrence H. Keeley, Oxford University Press, 1997

Saudades do Brasil, University of Washington Press, Seattle, 1995,

The Raw and the Cooked, Cape, London, 1970, Claude Lévi-Strauss

The Forest People and *The Mountain People*, Colin Turnbull, Touchstone, 1987

Symbolic Origins and Transitions in the Paleolithic Mary LeCren Foster, in *The Emergence of Modern Humans : An Archaeological Perspective* ed. Paul Mellars, Ithaca, NY, 1990

Sociobiology: The New Synthesis, Edward Wilson, Harvard University Press, 1975

The Selfish Gene, Richard Dawkins, Oxford University Press, 1976

Defenders of the Truth, The Battle for Science in the Sociobiology Debate and Beyond, Ullica Segerstrale, Oxford University Press, 2001

The Origin of Species, Charles Darwin, Bantam, 1859

Man the Hunter, Richard Lee and Irven DeVore, eds., Aldine, Chicago, 1968

Stone Age Economics, Marshall Sahlins, Aldine de Gruyter, 1972

Argonauts of the Western Pacific, Bronislaw Malinowski, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London 1922

The Plutonium Files, Eileen Wellsome, 1993

Reply by John Zerzan

Richard Tate's review is a very thoughtful and probing discussion that ranges well beyond Tierney's *Darkness in El Dorado*.

I'd like to comment on one basic distinction in order to clarify my own main emphasis. Tate agrees with Perlman that civilization is humankind's biggest mistake: *Rejecting the Marxist idea that civilization inevitably arose as the productive forces matured, we regard the productive forces as a product of civilization, development as a war against life, and civilization as a disastrous mistake.*

I agree with this eloquent judgement, but disagree with Tate and Perlman about the watershed event that led to that mistake. As I see it, the turning point is agriculture, or domestication, arriving as the culmination of gradually increasing division of labor.

Here we see, in my opinion, a dividing line with greater explanatory power. Violent practices such as cannibalism, human sacrifice, and headhunting, for example, have certainly been observed among primitive but agricultural people. In fact, though these practices are virtually never found outside of pastoral or agricultural societies, they are often seen prior to civilization.

If agriculture is benign, as Perlman and Tate would have it, how do they explain the institutionalized violence that often accompanies it? More basically, the preponderance of archaeological and ethnographic evidence suggests that domestication in general marks a dramatic decline in leisure time, health and robusticity, and the autonomy of women. It also introduces hierarchy, institutionalized religion, private property and organized violence.

There has been an extremely significant revision in our understanding of human life as it was before agriculture and civilization. A far rosier picture than the time-honored Hobbesian view (“nasty, brutish and short”) is associated with such reputable scholars as Marshall Sahlins and Richard B. Lee. The textbook question used to be “*Why did it take Homo so long to adopt agriculture?*” Now the question is “*Why did humans abandon an eminently successful gathering/hunting lifeway for agriculture and all its disadvantages?*” The origins of alienated life pre-date civilization, that much is clear, even if they emerged relatively recently (apparently no earlier than 10,000 years ago, a short span of time compared to humans’ estimated 2 million years as a species).

Especially since the 1980s, there has been an attempted counter-revolution, in the form of various books that attack the new, positive picture of primitive humanity. Their striking weakness, in my opinion, is a near-universal avoidance of agriculture as a watershed issue. These authors discuss violence and other objectionable social phenomena, but rarely or never do they ascribe these practices to pre-agricultural people.

If I seem to have made “selective” use of sources by ignoring this literature, it’s because these supposed attacks on the primitive do not hit the target. To me, domestication is the problem. I see no need to defend a vague, undefined “primitive” against those who only lodge their complaints against post-agricultural practices.

I hope these brief and general remarks can be seen as complementing Tate’s important exploration.

Correspondence with Fifth Estate Magazine

On domestic terrorists in the US

Author: Richard Tate / Wildcat

Source: Fifth Estate # 349, Summer 1997 <www.fifthestate.org/archive/349-summer-1997/letters-to-the-fifth-estate/>

Dear Fifth Estate:

As you will notice, our address has changed yet again. If the address has the word “Box” in it, the Post Office delays delivery, because they have a monopoly on boxes! But if you use the word “Suite” instead, they are happy. The government is making it difficult to use anonymous means of communication.

The excuse is terrorism, despite the fact that most of the bombs that go off in the USA have government fingerprints all over them. The anti-terrorism campaign is obviously manufactured by the state, and has the aim of increasing control of people’s lives, by getting them to accept “security” as a necessary part of life. I’m not sure that your own responses to this campaign have recognized this. As you will notice in the article, “The New Bad Guys,” in the enclosed *Wildcat*, we criticize your response to the Oklahoma bombing on the grounds that you assume Tim McVeigh is guilty. If he was black, you wouldn’t have done this.

Fall 1996 of your esteemed organ [FE #348] features a major piece about the Unabomber which doesn’t go so far as stating that Ted Kaczynski is guilty. Though he is white and male, he doesn’t have a short haircut like McVeigh. However, you fall somewhat short of offering Kaczynski the solidarity he requires, whether innocent or guilty. In many places in this article, you make a point of equating the Unabomber’s acts with those of the capitalist system.

It’s difficult to get a precise grip on your long and rather unfocused article, but I think its conclusions can be summarized thusly:

- The Unabomber’s attacks were unjustifiable, because his victims were innocent
- It is equally unjustifiable to turn in your brother to the FBI

- The Unabomber's critique of industrial civilization has nothing in common with ours
- It is irresponsible to mention the *Fifth Estate* as a possible inspiration for the Unabomber because the police might get angry with us
- No matter how wicked the Unabomber may be, Colin Powell is much worse
- People who sympathize with the Unabomber are mistaken
- The Unabomber's actions were part of the problem, typical of the smoldering disaffected men who are just as likely to kill their ex-wives as their boss
- Terrorist acts can never be revolutionary because they are nasty
- Terrorism is undemocratic, and only a majority can halt Leviathan
- Communities working together to transform society, not bombs, is the answer

Random quotes from Taoists and hippies fail to disguise the proximity of these views to those of the liberal left. Leftists counterpose mass action to individual terrorism, as if they are incompatible. They also contrast majorities to minorities, while adding that, of course, minorities can make a difference. They equate the terrorism of the state with its enemies, as you do throughout this article.

They "defend" those charged with terrorism by pointing out that the top brass of the army have killed more people. This amounts to putting them on the same level. In short, I think your fire has been so suffocated by feminism, pacifism and other liberal attitudes" over the years that you have been unable to notice just how much a part of the establishment these attitudes now are.

Having said all this, it is true that sending letterbombs is not a revolutionary tactic. The chance of a postman or receptionist getting blown up is high, and has happened many times. But solidarity, first with Ted Kaczynski because he is either innocent or a coherent enemy of civilization, and secondly, with the Unabomber, whether or not he and Ted are one and the same, is an essential precondition for criticism. Your response fell short.

Keep up the good work—in fact, improve it!

Richard Tate

Wildcat
1224 Broadway, Suite 108
Burlingame Calif. 94010

On the Balkans

More Debate on the Balkans

Author: Richard Tate

Date: 2003

Source: Fifth Estate #360, Spring, 2003. <www.fifthestate.org/archive/360-spring-2003/more-debate-on-the-balkans>

Dear Citizens:

David Watson's piece criticizing the *Alternative Press Review's* (APR) coverage of the show trial of Slobodan Milosevic in FE #358, Fall 2002 ["The Sad Truth: Milosevic 'Crucified': Counter-Spin as Useful Idiocy"] should be rewarded with a job at Human Rights Watch.

It's as if he's trying to respond to the increasing ranks of its readers who say the *Fifth Estate* has become a liberal publication by saying, "Look—I'm not a liberal—I don't even support the concept of innocent until proven guilty!" His only criticism of the NATO Tribunal in the Hague is that it appears to require the prosecution to prove its case.

The Tribunal is directed almost exclusively against Serbs. If there were an international court which specialized in prosecuting Jewish alleged war criminals, would Watson support it? The Tribunal doesn't just have "more than a whiff of victor's justice," it is a kangaroo court in which the likes of Madeleine Albright give evidence against small-scale butchers from the Balkans. Watson wastes no time in resorting to "reductio ad Hitlerum," a variant of the amalgam technique.

If Michael Parenti is a "Stalinist hack" for questioning the extent of Serb war crimes in Kosovo, David Watson is a NATO hack for trying to prevent us from making our own minds up by opposing the publication of alternatives to the official viewpoint, and smearing those who do publish those alternatives.

He amalgamates defenders of the Soviet invasions of Hungary and Czechoslovakia, supporters of Pol Pot, and the brave French communists who, defying the legal system, Zionist and leftist cops, and France's own anarchist establishment, insisted on taking the claims of Holocaust revisionism seriously. I'll make my own mind up about Nazi crimes against Jews via a careful examination of the arguments of both sides, thanks, citizen Watson.

Watson asks if we should publish statements by Pinochet or old Nazis? Certainly, if they expose Kissinger and the CIA! Milosevic and other Serb leaders have much to tell us about links between the CIA, the KLA and other Islamic fascist organizations. I don't want to defend Leninists, and still less, mass-murdering ex-heads of state, but if the likes of Watson slander them, what choice do I have?

The World Socialist Website is a useful source of information. So are conservative and libertarian sources, if one keeps one's critical faculties. For example, Nebojsa Malic explains the errors in each part of the prosecution case against Milosevic at www.antiwar.com/malic/m090502.html.

If it's convenient to blame NATO for events in Yugoslavia, it's much more convenient to take NATO's side! Contra Watson, the defenders of Milosevic do publish plenty of evidence that NATO countries were behind the breakup of Yugoslavia. It's true that the EU initially opposed the secession of Croatia, but Germany changed its mind. In claiming that Serbia "started the wars" in Yugoslavia by attacking the secessionist republics, Watson reveals one dangerous idea he shares with Leninists—national liberation.

To say Serbia "invaded" Croatia is to recognize Croatia's independence, and to take sides in a capitalist conflict: secession is an act of war. He even claims that Serbia had a "colonial" relationship with Kosovo. Nevertheless, it is true that Milosevic's defence is one-sided. NATO didn't simply attack Serbia and support its opponents. As you point out, it imposed an arms embargo on Bosnia, preventing Bosnian "Muslims" from defending themselves against Serbian and Croat nationalists.

I don't want to give the impression that I take sides in the Yugoslav tragedy. In many cases, all parts of the ruling class collaborated to massacre the working class at Vukovar, Sarajevo and other places. I am not aiming to take Milosevic's side, just restore the balance of facts, and most importantly, opposing Watson's attempt to suppress part of the story.

For a class analysis of the reasons why the ruling classes on all sides in Yugoslavia are war criminals, check out www.webcom.com/wildcat/Yugoslavia.html.

Here's hoping you rediscover your radical past,
Richard Tate for *Wildcat*

On Keeping Our Critical Faculties

Subtitle: A response to an ultra-left critic

Author: David Watson

Date: 2003

Source: Fifth Estate #360, Spring, 2003. <www.fifthestate.org/archive/360-spring-2003/on-keeping-our-critical-faculties>

I wonder if anyone else feels the same nausea and despair I experience when reading missives like R. Tate's [see in this issue "More Debate on the Balkans," FE #360, Spring, 2003]. Apparently, such jumbled, simple-minded invective, with its breathless disregard for the requirement to present serious evidence to support an argument, is what now passes for debate, for reasoning, in the so-called anti-authoritarian milieu.

Was it always like this? Do any of these people even bother to learn anything about a subject anymore before applying their one-size-fits-all template?

In debate, political or otherwise, one is generally expected (or should be) to cite books and serious historical evidence. In the best cases, there is an attempt to confront the breadth of the argument one is challenging, to address its strongest points, and to do so with some precision and sensitivity to the complexities and inevitable ambiguities of the historical record. This is particularly crucial in a subject as complicated as the history of the Yugoslav wars of dissolution.

There is evidence and there is evidence, to be sure, and therefore it is not quite enough to “keep one’s critical faculties.” (Given how little Tate appears to know, how could he discern just how critical his faculties are or are not?) There is no royal road to knowledge about complex matters; one might actually have to read some books.¹

My article was in no way “trying to prevent [people] from making [their] own minds up.” And readers are free to rake through the sewage Tate recommends, such as the right-wing, pro-Serb nationalist antiwar.com, with its semi-literate, crudely manipulative denials of the Srebrenica massacre, and its other equally worthless diatribes, or the WorldSoc website, produced by a trotskyoid cult. They do diverge from the official line, there is no doubt. But that alone hardly recommends them as serious sources for understanding.

Such “sources” bring to mind a passage from Julie Mertus’s useful *Kosovo: How Myths and Truths Started a War* (1999):

“An old Balkan tale tells of a man leafing madly through one newspaper after another. ‘Father, father, can I help you?’ his son asks. ‘No,’ the man brushes the boy aside and the other papers on the floor and continues skimming only the headlines of the papers. At last, he jabs his finger at

¹ One might even start with Human Rights Watch’s report on the pogrom and war in Kosova (which also examines NATO war crimes), *Under Orders: War Crimes in Kosova* (2001).

In passing, I might add that whatever its flaws, Human Rights Watch has done infinitely more good in the world than Wildcat, the ultra-left groupuscule and publication with which Tate is associated, and so I am hardly offended by Tate’s attempt at an insult by associating me with them. The HRW report is sound.

Of course, to understand the background and chronology, it is not enough. One might start with Branka Magas’s *The Destruction of Yugoslavia: Tracking the Break-up 1980–92* (Verso, 1993), Noel Malcolm’s histories of Bosnia and Kosova, and No Banac’s impressive *The National Question in Yugoslavia: Origins, History, Politics* (1988).

Writers like Christopher Bennett, Tim Judah, David Rieff, David Rohde, and Chuck Sudetic and others I have mentioned in previous articles also offer credible and nuanced journalistic treatments of the Balkan wars that include ample history. Branka Magas has recently edited, with No Zanac, *The War in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina 1991–1995* (2001), which will, I think, prove to be indispensable.

At a minimum, one might read the series Mark Danner wrote in the late 1990s in *The New York Review of Books*, including “America and the Bosnian Genocide,” in the December 4, 1997 issue. It is possible to read the Danner series in an afternoon at the local library. It is unfortunate that he has not yet turned it into a book.

one crumpled page and cries, ‘Here it is! I knew it all along.’ He throws the other papers on the floor and clings to his one headline. That the other papers contradict this story is irrelevant: He has found the Truth.”

This is how much of the left has functioned on the Balkan wars—citing one, another citing one another, and selectively culling, cafeteria-style, from the media. And most people who consider themselves dissidents go to the handful of leftist luminaries, pundits and conspiracy-theorists to receive their wafer of understanding the way that true believers flock to the high priest of a cult. This is the contemporary equivalent of reading the Communist Party’s *Daily Worker* to obtain the Pavlovian signals as to which line to follow this week. A radical understanding demands more.

Rather than offering reasoned debate or serious evidence, Tate fulminates. I urge people to examine the leftist dogmas and am accused of trying to prevent them from thinking for themselves. It doesn’t matter that I presented serious evidence and cited serious studies and highly credible testimony to support my argument that Milosevic’s defense and the diatribe printed with it are garbage; Tate simply ignores evidence and argument.

Thus, according to this ideologue, if one happens to accept the obvious (as I do) that, however transparent the hypocrisy of the Great Powers, and whatever the “iota of truth” in Milosevic’s denunciations of Western domination (all stated explicitly in my article), the public record is abundantly sufficient to prove Milosevic’s guilt, one is therefore guilty of supporting NATO’s depleted-uranium diplomacy. But even the APR editors acknowledged Milosevic is a war criminal—so what is the problem?

Such hapless Manicheanism should demonstrate clearly and painfully that for all their pretensions, most of the vestiges of the ultra-left and the anarchist milieu have fallen into the same decline and confusion that the marxist-leninists have since their wall fell down.²

Despite its ultra-radical pretensions (or perhaps because of them), *Wildcat* is an especially poignant example of confusion. In the Spring 1994 issue of the journal, for example, the chaos, starvation and warlordism in Somalia in the early-mid 1990s, and the battles these petty gangsters wound up fighting with the US military, are depicted as the work of “the heroic proletariat of Somalia,” and they declare, “Somalia shows the way.”

² This is the point made by *New Left Review* editor Tariq Ali in an infuriatingly wretched collection he has edited, *Masters of the Universe? NATO’s Balkan Crusade* (2000). Writes Ali, “Ever since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 and the triumph of capital, the international left has been in a state of great demoralisation. This is only natural. The scale of the defeat has been enormous and its effects have been disorienting. Some on the left have lost confidence in the capacity of people to emancipate themselves” (358).

That Ali thinks the collapse of the gulag empire should explain the decline in a belief that people are incapable of emancipating themselves is as laughable as it is revealing. Does it need to be said that this fondness for the Berlin Wall is hardly consonant with a philosophy of liberation?

In the same article, one also learns that since they are businesses, food aid organizations actually “creat[e] dispossession and the means of maintaining it” in order to promote starvation and subsequently better compete for international funding.

The UN offensive in 1994 to capture warlord Mohammed Farah Aideed after his militias killed twenty-four UN soldiers was, we are told, carried out in order “to strengthen support for Aideed in the same way [that] the US bombings of Baghdad were designed to strengthen support for Saddam.”

This kind of paranoia, with its tiny leavening of truth and its rigid, though absurd logic, is what substitutes for critical thinking among certain “revolutionaries.”

It is no exaggeration to say that nearly every line in Tate’s letter is either uninformed, visibly confused or both. In the one paragraph in which he comes closest to presenting an historical argument about the Yugoslav collapse, Tate evades my evidence that there was no Western European or German conspiracy to carve up Yugoslavia, preferring merely to repeat what I already refuted.

The defenders of Milosevic do present evidence that NATO countries were behind the Yugoslav breakup, he insists, but he doesn’t bother to provide any. In the process he quickly reveals his ignorance about the history of Serb-Albanian relations in Kosova, and the chronology and causality of the Yugoslav breakup—as if, for example, secession didn’t come when Yugoslavia had already been wrecked by Milosevic’s Serb ethno-fascist counterrevolution, and after Milosevic’s war had already begun.

Thus, secession was no “act of war.” Tate’s complacent formulation, a typical leftist trope, turns active agents of ethnic cleansing, conquest, and plunder into automata. More importantly, it conceals the stark reality that the attack on Bosnia in particular was nothing like a war; it was an out-and-out massacre until late 1992, when the Bosnians began finding the meager means to resist. The vast majority of casualties and conquest of territory had by then occurred. When people began fighting back, it became a war. Tate does not remotely understand this crucial distinction.

Similarly, the “class analysis” Tate recommends, which readers are welcome to peruse if they have unlimited amounts of time to squander, is staggeringly uninformed, despite its veneer of historical knowledge. (As is typical of this kind of literature, they went looking for disembodied “facts” that fit their template, and, not surprisingly, they found some.)

Briefly, among other inanities too numerous to mention, the text submerges the Serb-Albanian national conflict (and yes, the colonial relationship, which is why the Albanian Kosovars have been justifiably compared to the Palestinians) and the Albanian resistance against Belgrade into a kind of decontextualized workerist fantasy.³

Less forgivably, they also repeat the lie that the “competing sides” were equally nationalist and equally guilty. The reality, of course, is that one side—the Bosnian

³ In fact, Fredy Perlman wrote his doctoral thesis at the University of Belgrade in Yugoslavia in 1966 on the very subject of the exploitation and unequal development of Kosova, as a kind of internal colony, by the Yugoslav regime, a thesis that was disputed by the apparatchiks, but eventually accepted after his doctoral academic adviser advocated strongly for him.

side, not the “Muslim side,” which is a contemptible mystification—defended a multi-cultural, multiethnic society, and in fact was supported by significant numbers of all ethnic groups, and all ethnically mixed-families, of which there were and are significant numbers. In contrast, the Serb nationalists, as well as the Croatian nationalists, fought for fascist ethnic “purity.”

For all its revolutionary posturing, Wildcat evinces no understanding that this fundamental difference made all the difference: the Bosnian ideal was, and remains, worth defending, and it was vital to resist the murderous Serb and Croat ethno-nationalist projects. This principle is essential to a radical vision because it represents the basic minimum for a possibility of a viable future for all of us, a basic minimum without which no radical transformation will be possible, and ethnocidal bloodletting is inevitable.

Thus, as a number of radicals are gradually realizing, the entire for-or-against-intervention fetish over the Balkans is a kind of red herring. What is far more important is that we learn to articulate and to put into practice what it is we are for, the kind of social relations we desire. And the tragic fate of the Serbs, the struggle of the Albanian Kosovars, and particularly the promise of a multiethnic Bosnia, are at the center of that crucial question.

I believe it imperative to pay particular, and detailed, attention to the history of the Yugoslav breakup; this is not only because that conflict has been in important ways paradigmatic of the contemporary international chaos, with its spreading whirlwind of nationalist bloodbath, but because the failure to understand the breakup of Yugoslavia and its implications has been equally paradigmatic.

Tate chooses to “make [his] own mind up” about such matters—including taking even the claims of holocaust revisionists seriously, which suggests how little prepared he is for the task he has set for himself. He approves of self-styled radicals publishing Milosevic and similar ilk because they “have much to tell us.” This, again, is the lame rationalization the APR editors made.

Without bothering to respond to my article’s critique of this specious claim, Tate thinks it sufficient to repeat it doggedly, though he adds, as a particularly odious example, that Serb pogromists can enlighten us about the relationship between the KLA and islamic fascists—a statement that is roughly equivalent to arguing that printing Goebbels might have provided insight into the relationship between Jews and the international communist conspiracy. I imagine he’ll find a way to make up his mind about UFOs when he has done with the Balkans.

As I argued in my article, except perhaps as a case study in fascism, radicals have nothing to learn from publishing or reading Milosevic; everything that comes out of his mouth is a self-serving lie. Worse, it is steeped in fascist political myths that continue to poison any possibility of sorting out the collapse of Yugoslavia—most of all for the Serbs, who have a very long way to go collectively to honestly face the crimes committed in their name, and by brutes still moving about freely in their midst.

This is also true in Croatia, where there is similar resistance to the Hague tribunal.

By reducing the complex matter of historical justice to the idea that the tribunal is nothing more than a “kangaroo court,” Tate and the APR essentially affirm these reactionary forces, and indirectly legitimize Tadjman, Milosevic and their fascist supporters. The leninist text APR chose to explain Milosevic repeats the old same shibboleths, and largely legitimizes his lies.⁴

Tate does not seem to have read any of this; I do not intend to repeat it all here. People will have to read my article and judge for themselves. The undecided would do well to read the admirable book, *Taking Sides Against Ethnic Cleansing in Bosnia: The story of the Workers Aid convoys*, for much of the real story (including a very succinct refutation of the canard about German conspiracy, on page 34, and a moving repudiation of the political myth that all sides were to blame, on page 142). Readers can send twenty-five dollars to the FE in Detroit and I will send them the book. Money raised continues to go to support Workers Aid projects with Kosova miners.

Taking Sides and the convoys were assembled by people who were able to break from their ideological blinders—to learn from what was best in their radical traditions—and then to actually do something concretely to aid the beleaguered people of the fiercely anti-nationalist enclave at Tuzla, which was defending itself against Milosevic’s horde. Wildcat ridiculed their effort—and thus has earned its humble place in history’s great hall of shame for that gesture alone.

Finally, I have seen little evidence that “increasing ranks” of FE readers consider this publication liberal, though it would not change my views if this were true. I’d look for new comrades; I happen to respect the truth more than any label. But judging from the many brief notes on subscription renewals and conversations we have had, the material we have published on the Balkans has struck a chord with a lot of long-time readers who are sick of the bad faith, willful ignorance and inhumanity of the left on this issue.⁵

⁴ As for the paradoxes of justice I tried to illuminate in my article, Tate’s letter is particularly ironic; elsewhere in the 1994 issue of *Wildcat* cited above, the editors propose a notion of justice as cocksure as it is peculiar. Next to critiques of “libertarian prejudices” that fail to recognize “the necessity for organization,” one can read self-assured declarations that the “D.o.P.” (the dictatorship of the proletariat, no less) must “impose its needs despotically against its enemies.”

“Repressive measures,” they explain, “will be carried out on the basis of expediency rather than justice...”

Now, one might make a reasonable argument for organization; one might also argue, with less credibility, I think, for untrammelled revolutionary violence. But to combine the two, and to insist gleefully on expedience over justice, is to propose an old and familiar recipe—a “spicy stew,” as one precursor of Wildcat famously called it, of authoritarian nihilism.

⁵ In an email (which was later forwarded to me) explaining he wasn’t even going to read a letter critical of his publication of Milosevic, APR editor Jason McQuinn commented that it was clear this reader had been recruited to a *Fifth Estate* “hate campaign” against APR, a theme he takes up in the Fall-Winter 2002–03 issue of *Anarchy: A Journal of Desire Armed* in an article, “Contempt for anarchists: Contemporary hate campaigns in the anarchist milieu.”

Here, McQuinn writes of a tendency in the anarchist milieu for “pronouncements of contempt” with “a holier-than-thou attitude of political correctness reflecting their true belief in the one true

It used to be common in this movement to say that one's opponent, whom one might be accusing of showing bad faith or political hypocrisy, spoke "with a corpse in his mouth." The genocide denial of Wildcat and APR should remind us that the corpses in question are not always mere metaphors.

—February 28, 2003

correct line of their various ideologies. Any other anarchists who fail to uncritically believe in the same ideological lines with the same fervor are simply ridiculed and denounced."

In fact, the APR editors reacted with pointed scorn and defensiveness when FE staff members first brought the issue up to them. When McQuinn and his friends critique others, they are simply offering "more thorough logic and critique." When others criticize them, it is a "hate campaign." This is Humpty Dumptyism, not debate.

And McQuinn doesn't mind dishing it out. Refusing to respond substantively to my criticisms, he resorts to the most petulant, evasive attacks. In the same issue, one can read, in what is ostensibly a review of recent issues of Fifth Estate, Anarchy editor McQuinn's noble defense of APR—of which he also happens to be editor. According to McQuinn, I wrote my "pathetic diatribe" because APR has had "the temerity to consistently oppose the NATO bombing of Yugoslavia," and because—I am not making this up—APR had not asked my permission to publish Milosevic.

Predictably, I am then accused of supporting NATO. Now that's an argument. This is more like armed projection—or perhaps passive aggression—than "armed desire."

Split

Obituary?

Author: Wildcat

Date: Spring 1988

Source: Issue 13 of Communist Bulletin. <www.libcom.org/library/communist-bulletin-issue-13-spring-1988>

We print below what amounts to a self-obituary by the Wildcat group. The situation is still unclear, it not being inconceivable that the group will rise from the ashes in some form or another before too long — and we will comment in more detail when the full facts are at our disposal.

It should be stated at the outset that nobody in the revolutionary movement should take any pleasure at the disappearance of another organisation, particularly as it seems to involve militants abandoning politics altogether. The CBS rejects any notion of a ‘Darwinian’ survival of the fittest.

The death of Wildcat can be ascribed to several factors:

1. One opportunist regroupment too many.
2. The difficulties every group in Britain has experienced in surviving a particularly quiet period in the class struggle, accentuated by Wildcat’s problems in re-orientating their activity after the defeat of the Miners.
3. A failure to take seriously the issues raised by the CBS on the question of organisation; dismissing our work on monolithism and non-sectarianism as obvious and our analysis of the decline of the ICC as pointless.

Readers will note that the Statement refers to intense debates within Wildcat on various issues — was anyone outside the group aware that these differences existed? Why weren’t the debates made public so that the rest of the movement could join in? How did Wildcat come to take positions and deal with minority views?

We take heart from the stated desire of the ex-Wildcat members in Manchester to find some way to continue political activity. We hope to continue joint work with them, offer them space in the pages of the Bulletin and invite them to participate in the process of political regroupment in Britain.

March 1988

Dear Comrade(s),

This letter is being sent to you with the agreement of 3 of the last 4 surviving members of the Wildcat group. It effectively marks the end of the 'old' Wildcat and announces our intention to work together in a reorganised way under a new title (yet to be decided) along with some ex-members of Wildcat and other revolutionary communists.

Although throughout its existence Wildcat has generated continuing political interest — as witnessed by a steady stream of requests for literature, offers to distribute our journal and leaflets, reproduction of our original material, and regular correspondence from this country and abroad — none of this managed to materialise in the form of active membership. The group never exceeded a membership of about 12 at any one time, and losses of membership over the last couple of years eventually reduced us to just 4 people, located in 4 different cities.

As with many similar small groups the reasons for people leaving were a mixture of the personal and political. Some suffered demoralisation and exhaustion following our intensive activities during the defeated miners' strike. Others, committed to an 'activist' orientation for the group, became tired of seemingly endless internal debates over what they regarded as, at best, secondary issues. Equally, a few thought the discussion and debate within the group very inadequate. Added to this were the usual working class problems of employment, housing, unemployment and so on. Also there was the exaggeration of personal conflicts engendered by the hot-house atmosphere of a tiny political group.

Changes in the way Wildcat was organised — forced on us by circumstances — also contributed to the demise of the group. In its early days the entire membership was concentrated in the Manchester area. This encouraged a high level of active participation, accountability and fruitful discussion among all members. It also made possible the thriving local (but not localise) collective intervention in the class struggle which we regarded as essential to the group's political development. We hoped that similar groups would emerge in other parts of the country, and that 'Wildcat' would grow through joining up with such groups after a period of joint discussion and activity. It was this approach that prompted us to promote the 'Intercom' discussion journal and conferences. As it turned out, however, Wildcat became a 'national' organisation more through accident than by design: some members left the Manchester area, new members joined from other parts of the country, and there was the fusion with the Stoke-based 'Careless Talk' group, some of whom later moved to Nottingham. Thus within a fairly short period of time our resources became very thinly-spread, and the effect of this dispersal of our forces was to put great strain on the organisation as a whole. Members delegated to carry out certain tasks often did so without a sufficient sense of responsibility to the group as a whole, the internal communication of information about activities and political discussions was frequently inadequate, and many

political disagreements which might have been resolved or at least clarified face-to-face degenerated into sterile slanging matches when forced to be conducted through written polemics. In short, the all-important task of effective collective intervention in the class struggle became more and more difficult to carry out.

Having said this, it is necessary to record some of the more important political differences which have arisen during the last couple of years.

Teachers

The long-running disputes amongst teachers and the period of school student strikes and demonstrations saw a number of different responses from members of the group. While all members of the group supported the students' actions, there were differences in our attitudes towards the teachers. With the exception of one member, all agreed that teachers were part of the working class. Some members considered that teachers' role was a contradictory one involving social control & conditioning *and* genuine education (albeit within the restrictive framework of the capitalist state). This view regarded teachers as a backward section of the class, yet still capable through struggle — particularly during periods of widespread and intensive class struggle generally — of challenging both their own exploitation and their role as soft cops. Other members, on the other hand, regarded this prospect as too dim and distant to have any practical bearing on our interventions for the time being, and emphasised the teachers role as soft cops as the primary one in determining our response. They argued that pupils could no more support the demands of their teachers than prisoners could support the demands of screws. At the same time they saw strike action by teachers (or screws) as being useful since it broke down the structures of control and often allowed pupils (or prisoners) to take their own action.

Riots

The group as a whole was invigorated by the outbreak of major urban riots in the British cities and analysed them as an important part of the class struggle. We all expected that riots would re-emerge as an element of future struggle but differed on the significance of such struggle and its importance in relation to workplace struggle and other forms of working class community struggle such as rent strikes, mass squatting etc. One member regarded riots here and abroad as more significant even than the Polish mass strikes or the French rail strikes, primarily because of their violent confrontational nature. In opposition to this some members emphasised that riots were unlikely to provide a basis for wider mass confrontation, since they were geographically limited and sporadic in nature. Others considered that as riots were part and parcel of the broader class struggle any attempt to separate them from strikes and decide which had greater

value was divisive at a time when links needed to be made. The significant role of riots in the miners' strike and at Wapping coupled with the wave of prison riots in Britain seemed to make this balancing-out act particularly inappropriate. Internationally the resistance to capitalist austerity measures seemed to take the form of both riots and strikes and at high points of struggle the separation between these two forms tends to disappear.

Reactionary Sections of the Working Class

The group has always been concerned to address itself to the realities of the class struggle rather than simply repeat revolutionary slogans and this led to a re-examination of the perennial calls for working class unity in situations such as Northern Ireland and South Africa. Some members more or less wrote off, as permanently reactionary, the Protestants in N. Ireland and the white workers in S. Africa until after the communist revolution itself. In this situation, it was argued by at least one member, our propaganda should be specifically addressed to the 'most oppressed' section of the working class e.g. the northern Catholics in Ireland. In the case of N. Ireland this approach was rejected but over S. Africa the issue was rather fudged (viz. the headline 'All Power To The Black Working Class' in Wildcat 9), perhaps because from this distance the gap between black and white workers did indeed seem so unbridgeable.

Workers' Democracy

Wildcat had always argued for the generalisation of class struggle through mass assemblies, workers' councils, delegate strike committees, etc. We were clear that such 'forms' of struggle did not guarantee success or the movement of the struggle in a revolutionary direction, but were opposed to elitist and conspiratorial methods of organisation that consciously excluded the mass of workers from participation in the struggle. In this we were also concerned to point out the connection between today's struggles and the future communist society where social affairs would be decided either by consensus or 'democratic' decision-making through society as a whole. And yet clearly some actions in the present-day class struggle such as the miners' hit squads had to be organised by small minorities with, at best, only the passive support of other miners involved in the struggle. Also, it often happened that the mass assembly would take reactionary decisions or even hand over authority to outside groups. In such situations it seemed necessary for militant or revolutionary minorities to reject the authority of the mass meeting and try to organise in other ways. It was recognised that the process of class struggle was a contradictory one, requiring militant minorities to take action themselves *but always* with a view to drawing in larger and larger sections

of our class. In this process workers' councils etc were essential and had to be argued for, even if at a later date, when the struggle subsided, they became empty shells and a fetter on the progress of further struggle. The evolution of our views had been aided by a challenge to the concept of "workers' democracy" in the Workers' Playtime article 'What Distinguishes Wildcat' in 'Intercom' 5. Although certain views were mistakenly attributed to the group in this article, it nonetheless produced a lot of discussion in the group, forcing us to make our position clearer. Eventually a certain level of agreement was reached on the relationship between militant minorities and the mass movement (see *Capitalism and its Revolutionary Destruction*), yet a conflict between the "workers' democrats" and the "anti-democrats" remained. Some of those opposing democracy did so on the basis of a critique of democracy as an *atomising force*, an accountancy of opinions which goes hand in hand with commodity production. The community of struggle which arises against the attacks of capital must attempt to abolish the separation between decision-making and action — a separation the "anti-democrats" felt was institutionalised by the tradition of workers' democracy. Much of the conflict within the group wasn't helped by one of the "anti-democrats" who saw everything in terms of a clear-sighted minority fighting the state *despite* and against the mass of the working class which was dominated by ruling class ideas. This last position tended to distort the discussion away from elaborating a critique of democracy and towards balancing minority action against mass action. As with the question of riots versus strikes this was again a false opposition.

We can briefly outline the area of agreement we have reached on this issue as follows it is the position of the working class within capitalism which forces them to take action in the past workers councils, mass assemblies and factory committees have emerged as *organs of struggle*. The weakness of these organs has been the extent to which they reduce themselves to organs for "democratic self-management" of enterprises or to "parliaments of the working class. At any given time it is usually only a minority of the working class which is in struggle. They don't struggle because they are more "conscious" than other sections of our class but usually because they are more under attack. Consciousness emerges through struggle as we become aware of the terrain of struggle and the nature of our enemies. The role of revolutionaries in all this is to promote links between these struggles internationally and promote/participate in *and spread* those actions which are seen as the greatest threat to the maintenance of capitalist social relations. Minorities may be the spur to action but it is mass struggle alone, eventually encompassing the vast majority of the working class, which will overthrow capitalism.

Whilst all the group's members did not divide up in exactly the same way on every one of the issues described above, there was a tendency for a split to occur in which members found themselves sharing the same side as more or less the same collection of other members whenever a disagreement occurred. Thus, although this necessarily brief outline of the political differences which arose within the group can not do full justice to the evolution and progression of our views and all the subtleties

and shades of opinion on each issue, the same members who, for example, dismissed the teachers' strikes as politically irrelevant were also likely to place a greater value on the significance of riots, reject calls for class unity as abstract sloganeering, and emphasise the positive role of minority action in pushing forward the class struggle. Facing the 'faction' which took this line were the other members of the group who emphasised the 'opposite' point of view on each of these issues.

Thus, whatever our agreement on basic communist positions, the differences of opinion outlined above, combined with the personal and organisational difficulties described earlier, made practical collective activity increasingly difficult, and forced us to reluctantly conclude that the group was no longer viable.

The three members who have agreed to circulate this 'obituary' intend to continue working together along with some sympathisers and ex-members in the production of leaflets and the publication of a communist journal. The journal will be more open than 'Wildcat'; articles will still be discussed collectively but they will no longer try to reflect the views of the whole group. Hopefully this will lead to a more fruitful process of written discussion. All contacts and subscribers have been sent a copy of this letter. We will keep you informed of our future activities and welcome contributions and participation. We can be contacted at:

Box W, c/o Raven Press, 75 Piccadilly, Manchester, M1 2BU and

Box W, c/o 180 Mansfield Road, Nottingham

The fourth member can be contacted at BM Wild, London. WC1N. This member may or may not continue to publish in the name of Wildcat. Please note that this contact address is used by other revolutionary communists besides the individual referred to above. The following publications are available from the Manchester and Nottingham addresses:

CLASS WAR ON THE HOME FRONT £1-50

CAPITALISM AND ITS REVOLUTIONARY DESTRUCTION

LENINISM OR COMMUNISM (by Jean Barrot) 25p

WHAT IS COMMUNISM (by Jean Barrot) 70p

COMMUNISM no.4 (GCI) — *from Notts address only*

N.B. Please send *blank* cheques, postal orders, cash etc. as we *do not* have a bank account in the name of 'Wildcat'.

Subversion Issue 1

Date: 1st April 1988

Location: Leeds, UK

Source: <www.files.libcom.org/files/subversion-first.pdf>

Introducing Subversion

This journal is being produced by ex-members and sympathisers of the WILDCAT group, which dissolved itself earlier this year.

We got together in February this year because we wanted to see the continuation of a voice for revolutionary communist politics.

We want “**SUBVERSION**” to contain articles which are both interesting and informative — and most importantly free of the idiotic jargon and sectarian slag-offs of most of the left communist press. It is in this spirit of non-sectarianism that we have reprinted a number of leaflets produced by other groups.

“**SUBVERSION**” welcomes contributions from its readers, whether articles, leaflets or letters. We would prefer them to be typed and insist that writers attempt to produce them in a style that is easily understandable by anyone interested in reading them.

The deadline for the next issue is the end of June 1988.

“**SUBVERSION**” is not just a publishing project. We look forward to meeting people who are genuinely interested in the communist ideas expressed in this journal. If you like what you have read and want to meet us, either for discussion or to work together in our activities, please contact us.

Wildest A clarification

The WILDCAT group dissolved itself earlier this year. The reasons are too long and tortuous to go into here. However, anyone interested can obtain a copy of the dissolution statement by writing to our Mancheste address. One individual ex-member of Wildcat has recently brought out a journal calling itself WILDCAT 11. We would like to stress that there is no *organisational* continuity between this and the previous IC issues of WILDCAT. Having said that, however, issue “11” does contain a lot of interesting material, including one article on workers’ democracy and minority action

which we had intended to publish ourselves. It can be obtained for 50p plus postage from BM CAT, LONDON WC1N 3XX (without mentioning the name WILDCAT on the envelope).

The Ted K Archive

A text dump on Wildcat
1991–1998

Linked underneath each heading, but the main source is:
<www.libcom.org/article/wildcat-journal-uk>

www.thetedkarchive.com