

6541  
w

# Wildcat



No. 18,  
Summer  
1996 \$4/£2.50



## Yugoslavia: from wage cuts to war

Inside : Yugoslavia, Mexico (without any Zapatista communiqués or interviews with subcomandante Marcos), Civilization, The Media, Prisoners, Oklahoma, Anti-fascism, Democracy, Fan mail.



## Subscriptions

Subscriptions are the best way of helping us produce this magazine. A four-issue subscription costs £6 or \$12 from the London station. If you want to send more than this, don't be shy. Use cash for small amounts, US or British stamps, money orders, international money orders, or postal orders in Britain, with the name left blank. *Please do not send cheques.*

Most back issues of *Wildcat* are still available. These are £1 or \$2 for issues 1 to 9, from the London address. Numbers 10 to 16 and 18 are £2 or \$4 from London, and 17 is \$3 from Portland. Bundles of 10 are \$20. Bookshops get them on consignment; 66% of sales returns to us.

## Pamphlets

In addition to producing this magazine we also produce pamphlets from time to time. The ones available at the moment are:

*Open Letter to Comrade Lenin* by Herman Gorter, 1920. Send £3 or \$5 in cash, stamps or money orders to the London address.

*Outside and Against the Unions* is a response to a trade union hack, mostly about the miners' strike in Britain. Send £1 or \$2 to the London address.

*Fascism/Anti-fascism* by Jean Barrot. This is available on PC disk (1.44M 3.5" unless otherwise specified) from the London address for £2 or \$4.

Write only as follows, without putting *Wildcat* on the envelope:

**BM CAT, London, WC1N 3XX,  
Britain.**

**or**

**PO Box 14549, Portland, OR 97293-  
0549, USA.  
(NOTE NEW ZIPCODE)**

## Contents

<b>Yugoslavia:</b>	
From wage cuts to war	3
The Class Nature of Sanctions	23
The Inhumanity of Humanitarian Aid	24
The New Bad Guys	26
Pacific NW Paralysed by Mass Strike	28
Unmasking the Zapatistas	30
<b>Prisons:</b>	
<i>Against Prisons</i> by Catherine Baker	36
Making An Omelette Without	
Breaking Eggs	40
Prisoners	42
New World Order: the Rhetoric and the Reality	45
<b>Letters:</b>	
Class struggle today	51
Correspondence with Julio Wicks	51
The Great "Civilisation" Debate Continues...	53

## A Non-Apology

Those of our regular readers who haven't been asleep for the last few years will have noticed that there is a considerable gap in time between this issue of *Wildcat* and the last one – over two years, in fact. But as the old cliché has it: reports of our death have been much exaggerated.

We like to feel that what we lack in quantity of issues we make up for in quality of analysis. As you should be able to work out from the articles, we have not merely continued our activities but expanded the level of cooperation with other comrades, particularly internationally.

You may also have noticed that the quality of lay-out has improved dramatically. Yes, we've finally met someone who knows about that kind of stuff – an important step forward.

# Yugoslavia from wage cuts to war

1. This article takes its information from a wide variety of sources. A lot of information comes from tantalising single paragraphs in the mainstream bourgeois press of Britain and France and the numerous journalistic books which have been written about Yugoslavia in recent years. A small amount comes from British leftist publications.

The only political contact we have in the region is with the comrades of "Torpedo" in Smederevo, Serbia. They have provided much useful information about the class struggle and conditions of life of the working class in that country. The only regular information we get from Croatia comes from the English language newsletter *Zaginflat* which appears to be produced by anarcho-punks. The only info. about the situation in Bosnia which we have, apart from the bourgeois press, comes from gossip relayed via Serbia and Croatia.

Much useful basic information comes from conversations with friends from the region. *Hvala l(ij)epo!*

Well-researched information about the social and economic background to the war can be found in the German pamphlet *Jugoslawien: Klassenkampf, Krise, Krieg* produced by Osteuropaarchiv. It has been translated into Serbo-Croat but has never been published in English. An English edition would be very useful.

We also recommend the article "Yugoslavia: Imperialist War Against the World Proletariat" in *Communism* No. 9, (Internationalist Communist Group, August 1995) which covers similar ground to this article.

The war in former Yugoslavia has raged for more than four years and has attracted more media attention per death than any other war in history. Bourgeois commentators endlessly speculate about the military and political balance of forces, in other words about the significance of the war for this or that fraction of their class. To understand its significance for *our* class, the world proletariat, we have to look at the effect of the war on the class struggle and vice versa. We have to examine the struggles which the war was launched to repress and the struggles which it provoked amongst the proletarians directly affected by it. This is not any easy task given the lack of reliable sources of information!

The news from the Balkans is likely to remain depressing but this shouldn't stop us analysing how the bourgeoisie were able to get away with this assault on our class and how the proletariat resisted. The future large-scale effective resistance to capitalist war which we hope to see, and which as communists we work towards, will not fall out of the sky – it will develop out of already existing struggles, however limited, and the lessons which proletarians have been able to learn from them.

Like the last Gulf War the outbreak of war in Yugoslavia was an attack on a rebellious and relatively affluent section of the world proletariat. As in the Gulf, the war led to an almost immediate and catastrophic fall in their living standards. There the similarity ends. Unlike the Gulf states, Yugoslavia does not contain vitally important raw materials or other economic resources. During the Cold War it was important politically and militarily as a bridge between East and West. Now the nations of ex-Yugoslavia are of no more importance to world capital than dozens of others across the globe.

Although the interests of the most powerful states in the region are not primarily concerned with immediate business opportunities, we should not forget that there is plenty of money to be made in any war. It's no coincidence that the country which lobbied hardest for the lifting of the arms embargo against ex-Yugoslavia is the USA, which is also the world's leading arms producer, with over half the world arms market<sup>2</sup>.

The importance of the Yugoslav conflict for world capital is primarily ideological – it's a testing ground for finding out which nations, national alliances and capitalist institutions proletarians are really prepared to believe in and die for. It is more a media and political event than a military one. With the creation of the "International War





A map showing the towns and geographical areas mentioned in this article, named as they were at the start of the war

Crimes Tribunal" in Holland the world's most powerful states can simultaneously shed crocodile tears for the dead of the war and use the threat of International Law to do deals with the warring parties (for example, by the indictments against Karadzic and Mladic). As usual the small-fry will be scape-goated while their political masters will remain free to plan more massacres.

For the Western media it is a matter of contrasting the barbarism of the war with the civilised, humanitarian values of the Western politicians who, of course, are doing their best to bring about peace, and of hiding the fact that it was the "Westernisation" of the barbarian East which brought about the war. The media daily invoke the words "ethnic cleansing" as if they are describing some evil which is unique to the war in ex-Yugoslavia, or even unique to the evil Serbs. They want to make us forget that institutionalised pogroms and forced migrations have always been part of the history of those war machines known as nations. Examples include: the "repatriation" of Germans from Eastern Europe sanctioned by the Allies in 1945; the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne between Greece and Turkey, sponsored by the League of Nations, which required an exchange of populations amounting to one third of the Greek population or the "ethnic cleansing"

2. According to a series of reports published in Washington in May 1995, the US was at that time a major supplier in 45 of the 50 regional conflicts, often to both sides (*Guardian*, 30.5.95).

3. In Yugoslavia the distinction is clearly made between Muslims (with a capital 'M') meaning people of the "Muslim" nationality and muslims (with a small 'm') meaning people who practice Islam. The Bosnian Muslims were considered to be one of the constituent nations of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, along with Serbs, Croats, Slovenes and so on. Although recognised as a "national minority" when Socialist Yugoslavia was founded at the end of World War II they were not granted the status of nation until 1971. This was done in order to reduce the power of both Croatia and Serbia within the federal state. In terms of ancestry, Muslims are mostly descended from Serbs and Croats (mostly Serbs) who converted to Islam under the Ottoman Empire. According to a survey carried out in 1990, only about a third of people in Bosnia who considered themselves to be Muslims also considered themselves to be muslims (*Le Monde Diplomatique*, December 1994).

4. An article in the British newspaper *The Observer* (10 September 1995) is particularly revealing. It details how there were systematic attempts to destroy film showing the UN forces (in this case those of Britain and Holland) remaining passive while the Bosnian Serb Army organised the massacres which it carried out after capturing Srebrenica in July 1995. Apparently a video was destroyed on the orders of the Dutch Commander in Chief, Hans Couzy, and some film taken by Dutch troops was "accidentally" destroyed by the wrong chemicals being used in its development!

carried out by Western European immigration officers every day – which will certainly intensify against Yugoslav refugees now that "peace" is officially declared.

The media's vilification of "the Serbs" follows a well-worn pattern. Serbia was the region of Yugoslavia in which there was the greatest resistance both to the IMF-led austerity programmes of the 1980s and to the war when it began in late 1991. For the media and other sources of bourgeois propaganda the most evil dictators are always those who confront a rebellious section of the working class. Supposed opposition to the regime provides a justification for measures against the proletarians who live under it – starvation-inducing trade sanctions, travel restrictions, military attacks and the encouragement of racist attitudes towards anybody who has had the misfortune to live under that regime. Liberal calls to "isolate the regime" always mean, in practice, "isolate the contagion of class struggle".

A less important ideological offensive has been the attempt to create a *bloc* of Orthodox nations – Russia, Serbia, Greece etc. There have also been attempts by Saudi Arabian-backed charities and paramilitary groups to turn the largely secular so-called Muslims<sup>3</sup> of Bosnia-Herzegovina into actual practitioners of the Islamic religion. These have largely been unsuccessful. Coupled with this are attempts by Islamic regimes to get their citizens to join with their rulers in condemning the Western powers for ignoring the plight of their Islamic brothers.

The UN has again played its role of ideological camouflage for the bourgeoisie. The UN may be universally reviled for being "incompetent", "lacking political will", "soft on the Serbs" and so on, but we can not be allowed to doubt that it *is*, or can be, an instrument of peace, a humanitarian whole which is greater than the sum of its war-mongering parts. This requires that the complicity of UN troops in massacres is carefully hidden<sup>4</sup>. The latest "peace initiative", starting with the bombing of Republika Srpska military installations in September 1995 by US warplanes under the aegis of NATO, is yet another attempt by the US government to demonstrate that American might is right and proper. That it is not likely to lead to lasting peace in the region is shown by the simple fact that it involves the lifting of the arms embargo, enabling Croatia to become an even stronger military power, and the Bosnian forces to reduce their dependence on an alliance with Croatia. In the discourse of anti-imperialism the Western powers are generally assumed to have some sinister hidden plan for countries at war, usually linked to the idea that the imperialists want "a strongman in the region". But why have just one strongman when you can have two or three? The "imperialist" powers have not significantly favoured one side or the other, they have simply created the conditions where the war will keep going – as they did in the Iran-Iraq war, which lasted for eight years and killed a million people without the borders shifting by as much as one metre!



## War and Capital Accumulation

Capitalist society is characterised by a war of all against all at all levels. At the level of the capitalists themselves there is a continuous struggle over markets leading to the continuous "revolutionising of the means of production". Capitalists who fail to adopt the latest methods of production must quickly catch up or risk being eliminated entirely. State intervention measures such as nationalisation and state subsidies can alleviate the effects of competition for some sectors but only by taking surplus value away from other, more profitable, sectors. Capitalists can never just sit back and let the profits roll in – they have to keep devising new methods of squeezing more surplus value out of the proletariat. When the working class organises itself collectively to resist this process the tension in society can become unbearable for the capitalists – they can't restructure but at the same time they *must*. War is an obvious "solution" to their problems. From the point of view of capital as a whole, rebellious, and potentially rebellious, proletarians are sent off to massacre each other. From the point of view of individual capitalists, and capitalist fractions, they can solve their short term profitability problems by immediately imposing a whole series of austerity measures (from price increases to the militarisation of labour) on "their own" working class and by directly seizing markets and capital assets from other capitalists.

The bourgeois media like to tell us that war destroys everything – the implication being that it is a folly that nobody, bar mad dictators, could consciously wish for. In reality war destruction is often a lot more selective than they would have us believe. For example, the bombing of Dresden in February 1945 left its industry almost untouched. In Bosnia the nationalist militias couldn't be expected to show quite the same precision as RAF Bomber Command but they generally avoided direct military confrontation with the UN. Consequently, in each town where the UN had a presence its base was situated on the main industrial plant, ensuring that only residential districts were shelled.

An important feature of conflicts within the ruling class in the former "Eastern Bloc" since 1989 has been the tendency for more modern, competitive fractions of capital to dissociate themselves from less competitive ones by waging a struggle against the centralised states which share out surplus value between more competitive and less competitive capitals. This can be seen in the secession of the Baltic states from the Soviet Union, in the fighting between Armenia and Azerbaizhan over Nagorno Karabakh, in the separation of the Czech Republic from the Slovak Republic and so on. These divisions often conveniently correspond to historic linguistic, religious and other "ethnic" divisions. Where these ethnic divisions don't exist they can always be invented. This is precisely the course which the war took in Yugoslavia.

The first of the republics to declare its secession was Slovenia. This was the republic with the most modern industry and most devel-

5. This is summed up beautifully in a passage in the book *Yugoslavia's Bloody Collapse* (Christopher Bennett, Hurst & Co., 1995):

"Before war broke out, Slovenia was in much the same position as the rest of eastern Europe's former communist states ... major restructuring was necessary to transform the economy from planned to free market and this would almost inevitably entail a decline in living standards and a jump in unemployment. ... a prolonged period of labour unrest and strikes appeared on the cards, with potentially destabilising political consequences. However, as a result of the war, Slovenes were much better prepared psychologically to deal with the pain of restructuring and, in contrast to the rest of eastern Europe, labour unrest never materialised.

War instilled a sense of discipline and national pride in the Slovene labour force ... Just ten days of fighting was more than enough to convince Slovenes to count their blessings ... While the Brioni Accord, the peace agreement which officially ended the war in Slovenia, was followed by a three-month moratorium on independence, it effectively gave Serbia, via the National Bank of Yugoslavia, three months in which to sabotage the Slovene economy. It was a continuation of war by other means and the economic downturn in Slovenia was immediate and sharp. However, this, too, proved a blessing in disguise, since it provided Slovenes [sic] with a perfect scapegoat for the economic crisis and, at the same time, compelled Slovene businesses to force the pace of reconstruction and aggressively seek out new markets. ... Surveys of public attitudes since independence have revealed profound changes. The idealism which characterised Slovene society in the 1980s ... has largely disappeared and been replaced by a hard-nosed realism and a virtual obsession with work."

oped trade with the West. The bourgeoisie of Slovenia also had another very straightforward economic reason for seceding. Slovenia was Yugoslavia's border with Western Europe. Most of the duty on Western goods was therefore paid at this border. Secession was a major blow to the hard currency finances of the Yugoslav state, and an immediate gain for the new Slovenian state. The brief (10 day) war which Slovenia experienced in June-July 1991 helped enormously in creating the national unity required for restructuring<sup>5</sup>. Within Yugoslavia (while it was still in one piece) the Republics of Slovenia and Serbia came to represent the two most extreme political poles. The Slovene leadership, who had economic power but little political and military power, stood for a less centralised "Confederal" state. The Serbian leadership, who had a growing monopoly of military and political power but declining economic power, stood for increased centralisation of the state under Serbian domination. The Slovene Communists were the first to walk out of the 14<sup>th</sup> (last) Congress of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia (LCY) when it broke up in early 1990. They immediately ceased contributing their portion of the "Fund for Underdeveloped Regions" earmarked for Serbia – an act of war if ever there was one!

In Bosnia and large parts of Croatia, successive waves of "ethnic cleansing" have created a more and more atomised population, ready to go to wherever they are least likely to be massacred and to work for almost nothing. The US "Dayton peace plan" supposedly allows for refugees to return to their homes but this is obviously bullshit. All sides have seen to it that it is almost impossible for most refugees to return. Amongst other things they have carried out the systematic destruction of housing – for example, after over-running Krajina, causing the flight of almost the entire Serb population, the Croatian Army destroyed over 60% of houses and plundered virtually all of them. Official backing for the refugees' right to return will simply encourage the poor to fight each other more ferociously over who gets the remaining houses.

Hundreds of thousands of Yugoslavs are now living in refugee camps in Germany where they have been told they will be sent back to "their own" country as soon as it is declared "safe" (at the time of writing German politicians are already talking about doing this now that there is "peace"). These refugees have almost no rights at all, apart from the most important right granted by bourgeois society – the right to work! Around Berlin, for example, they might get the chance to earn 2DM per hour working in a factory or 1DM per hour as a servant in the homes of the rich. The effect of this on the overall rates of pay of all workers in Germany hardly needs spelling out.

In Serbia, Croatia and Bosnia austerity has often taken the simple form of workers not being paid. In the Bosnian government controlled regions of Bosnia workers have carried on working for months on end without being paid because it's for the good of their







country. Trade union delegations to Western Europe are happy to point this out. In Croatia there was a solid rail strike in early 1995 against unpaid wages. The media denounced the strikers as "pro-Serb" traitors and the strike was broken largely by the Minister of Defence threatening that all the strikers would be drafted and sent to the front lines.

As we have already discussed in our article on Somalia in *Wildcat* 17, war is also an important means by which capital expropriates the peasantry. Before the war Yugoslavia was still a largely peasant country. Unlike in the Soviet Union, the Socialist collectivisation of agriculture never got very far. Even industrial workers in large towns maintained links with the countryside, which took the edge off absolute poverty. Now much of the countryside has been ruined. In Bosnia not only have hundreds of villages been destroyed but fertile fields have been liberally sown with millions of land mines, making them unusable for decades. Much of the fiercest fighting has taken place in rural areas and ex-peasants have fled to urban areas. As always, the bourgeoisie are "expanding the populations of cities and saving millions from the idiocy of rural life".

### Causes of the War

The first military clashes took place on 17 August 1990 in the Krajina region of Croatia after the local Serbian nationalist party had organised a referendum on political autonomy for the mostly Serb area. From then on the political and military tensions between the republics of Serbia and Croatia escalated rapidly leading to a state of full-scale war in August 1991, supposedly around the issue of the status of the Serbs living within the borders of the Republic of Croatia. This war did not happen by mistake. It had been painstakingly prepared in advance by both sides in direct response to the movement of struggle launched by the proletariat and making use of the weaknesses of that struggle.

In this preparation Serbian nationalism played the most important role. There were two reasons for this. Firstly, there was the central role that the fraction of the ruling class associated with the Republic of Serbia played in the administration of the army, the police and the state bureaucracy. Secondly, there was the fact that significant numbers of people who considered themselves to be Serbs (or who could be persuaded to consider themselves to be Serbs with the help of media misinformation and physical threats) could be found in all the regions of Yugoslavia apart from Slovenia and Macedonia. Serbian nationalism thus had a potential to divide and terrorise the proletariat across almost the whole of Yugoslavia in a way that other ethnic nationalisms didn't. In this sense the dominant Western media view that "the Serbs started all the trouble" has an element of truth in it, although, being itself a nationalist point of view, this deliberately ignores the fact that the most serious resistance to the war effort would

### The Working Class Mobilises

develop in Serbia itself. The ideology of Serbian nationalism (in so far as it can be distinguished from other nationalist ideologies) is analogous to Zionism – the Serbs are a historically persecuted people who suffered horrific massacres at the hands of the Nazis (and, of course, during 500 years of Turkish rule, the Balkan wars, World War I...); the threat of genocide (a favourite Serbian nationalist word) could return at any moment if national unity falters; the Croats were given their own state by the Nazis during World War II so all Croats are Nazis (and Germany was the most enthusiastic supporter of Croatian independence, so say no more...); anybody whose grandparents visited the mosque now and again must be a crazed Islamic fundamentalist.

With the death of Tito in 1980 a terrible secret came to public notice, the size of the national debt – this was at least \$14 billion. It had grown to this size for much the same reasons as elsewhere – increases in energy prices as a result of the "oil shock" of 1974 and the policy of high interest rates by the Western powers. At the beginning of 1980 Yugoslavia became a member of the IMF and in 1981 it received the largest amount of credit ever given by this organisation. In 1983-4 Yugoslavia carried on funding negotiations with 600 Western banks as well as the IMF. The IMF called on the Yugoslav government to impose wage cuts on insolvent businesses, to lift price controls, to increase interest rates and to devalue the Dinar by 25%. The larger banks were propped up with foreign credit and given the function of closing down smaller insolvent banks which had made loans to unprofitable businesses. This was an attempt to deal with a major structural problem in Yugoslavia's economy – its financial institutions were completely mixed up with its industry so many businesses, particularly ones with politically powerful bosses, could effectively print themselves money by granting themselves unlimited credit. In other words, Yugoslavia was expected to carry out an East European variant of the "anti-inflation" measures being carried out in the US and Western Europe.

In 1984 a wave of strikes broke out, starting in Macedonia, which was mostly against redundancies. For example, a textile firm was to have been closed, taking away the jobs of majority of the local population. Three hundred workers successfully struck for 46 days against the dismantling of self-management and in the name of the masses against the "bureaucratic mafia". faced with this kind of militancy the government could not carry out its aims. The number of successful bankruptcy proceedings actually decreased from 156 in 1979 to 97 in 1985. Instead the banks printed more and more Dinars in order to try to reduce wages without closing unprofitable businesses.

Meanwhile, attempts at direct wage cuts continued. In Summer '85 the Koper port administration announced a wage cut because of al-



*I don't have anything against working 9 to 5, but it's hard to give up the habit of napping after lunch.*





*We are thirsty, hungry and barefoot*

leged under-usage of the Harbour capacity. The strike was broken after two days by means of sackings and police repression against ringleaders but it led to strikes almost all over Yugoslavia. In the course of the strikes the state controlled unions became almost completely discredited, not least because they had supported all the state's austerity programs. In Slovenia several large factories had struck and workers had handed in their union cards. In Kosovo the miners had struck, partly against corrupt union bosses who were forced to resign.

In March 1986 the government of Milka Planinc stepped down because it was completely unable to impose the IMF's austerity program. The new government, under Prime Minister Mikulić, promised a six-month pay freeze and price rises. This was not to be. The workers forced through an 8% rise in real wages over the course of that year – according to the unions the workers were "eating up the equipment and machines". Once again the government devalued the Dinar and brought a new banking law into effect designed to create bankruptcy of unprofitable businesses through preventing them from obtaining unsecured loans. The first company to go under was a building firm in Titograd (now Podgorica). 2000 workers were sacked and unemployment in Titograd rose to 20%. Then followed the famous "scandal" of the Bosnian food distribution group Agrocomerc. This company effectively printed money for itself on a scale of several hundred million dollars. Its director was one Fikret Abdić, who later set up an independent Bosnian statelet backed by the UN. In Macedonia, Montenegro and Kosovo (the poorest regions) all the banks failed and many enterprises were simply abandoned. Unemployment jumped to 1.2m – in a country of 24m. Inflation reached 130%.

At the end of February 1987, in response to an increase in various prices, a wage freeze and an intensification of work, several strikes broke out which were described as "wildcat" by the authorities. For a month and a half there were some 80 strikes without warning across Yugoslavia, particularly in Croatia. The authorities threatened sackings and military intervention but the movement continued to grow. After a short interruption at the beginning of April a strike developed in the coalfield of Labin which lasted for 30 days. The miners demanded the cancellation of all price increases, a 100% increase in wages (a common demand at this time) and a change of mine management. Faced with the possibility of the strike spreading the bosses conceded a wage increase of more than 40% and dismissed various unpopular functionaries.

Demonstrations in front of the Republican parliaments by striking workers became common. In July 10,000 workers in a shoe and tyre company went on strike – 5,000 of them went to Belgrade to demand the doubling of their wages and the resignation of the former director, who was then Minister of Foreign Trade. They called for the dismissal of the whole management as well as the whole of the town



*Interruption of Work, Work  
Stoppage, Strike. You decide!*

council of Vukovar. They didn't just go to shout out their demands to the Federal Parliament but also to express solidarity with workers in Belgrade and to call for a general strike throughout Yugoslavia. This represented an important break with the republic-by-republic containment of the movement.

At the end of May 1988 another strike movement broke out, mostly in the mining and transport sectors in Serbia and Bosnia-Herzegovina, in response to a "redistribution of revenue" law being passed by the Federal Parliament which would have meant dramatic cuts in wages. In October of the same year there were violent clashes between workers and special police units in Montenegro. For two days Titograd was cut off by the units but the movement still led to the resignation of Montenegro's government. Shortly afterwards the government of the "autonomous province" of Vojvodina also felt obliged to resign. Finally, in December 1988 the federal government itself resigned and reconstituted itself under the aegis of Prime Minister Ante Marković.

Marković announced the stunningly original program of freeing prices, restricting credit and devaluing the Dinar. This led to another wave of strikes during the first months of 1989 with the now familiar call for 100% wage increases. Industrial unrest continued throughout the year. In December 1989, 650,000 labourers from Serbia, Montenegro and Macedonia declared themselves on strike against government policy and once again called for 100% pay rises. The enterprise bosses gave in, contrary to government directives, and granted the demands. Over the course of the year workers managed to force an increase in real wages of around 25%. The resistance to this new austerity programme was particularly strong in Serbia. In Slovenia there was a successful spate of bankruptcies and the emergence of significant unemployment for the first time, but in Serbia the authorities were forced to ignore the wage freeze and to continue bailing out bankrupt enterprises. Within months the average income in Serbia equalled that of Slovenia, with no corresponding increase in productivity. In September 1989, 10,000 striking workers demonstrated in Belgrade and Skopje and threatened to launch a general strike if the Federal government didn't stop inflation. They also demanded that the Deutschmark should be the principle currency they were paid in. As in Britain and elsewhere in the 1970s, inflation was transformed from a weapon of the bosses into a focus for political mobilisation by the workers, who understood that it wasn't enough just to screw more money out of each individual enterprise.

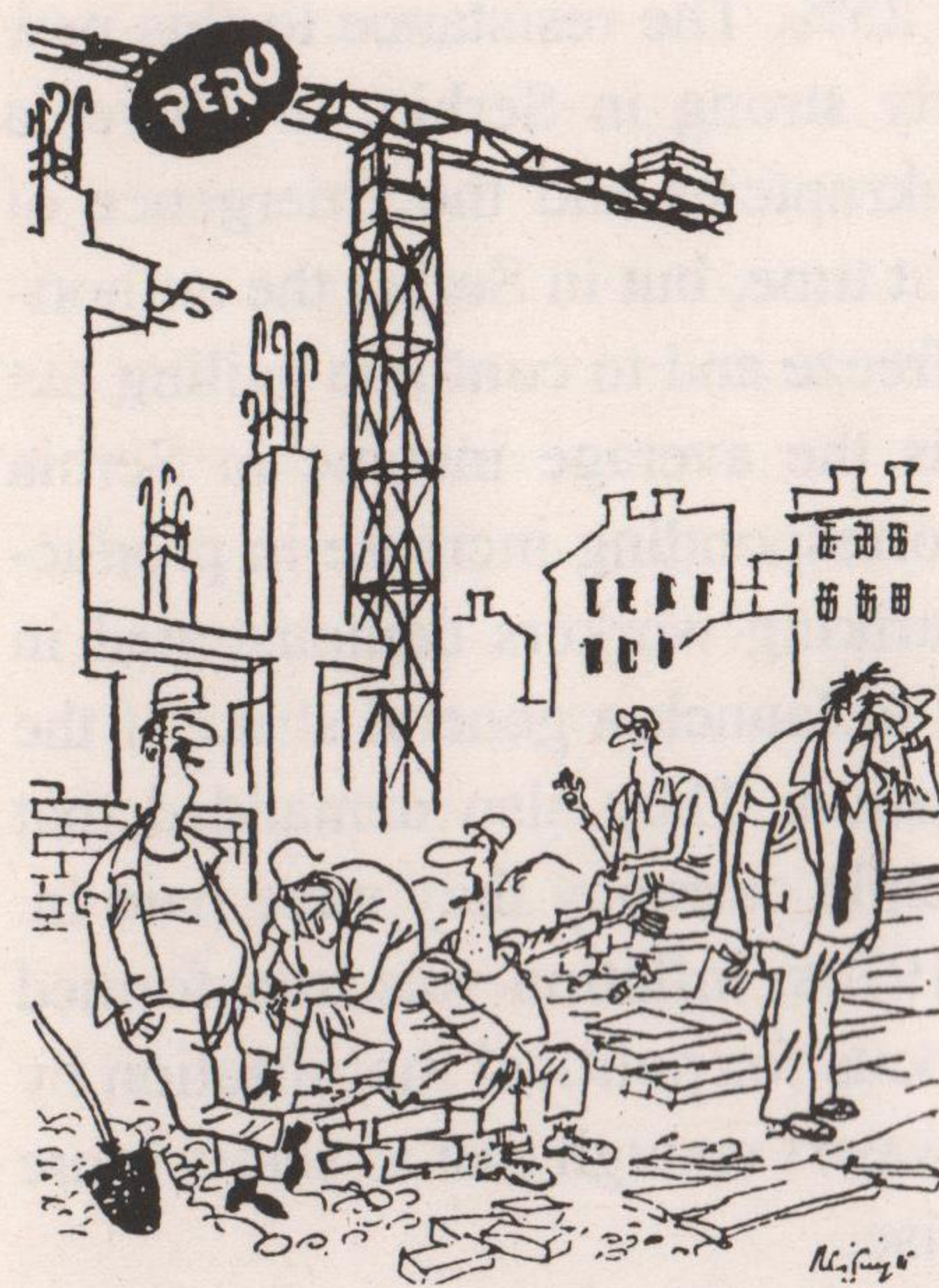
In February and March of the same year Kosovo exploded. There were strikes and uprisings in all the towns of this province – police stations were attacked, trains were attacked, shops were plundered, cops were shot at from the roofs of houses. The university was occupied. Secondary school students boycotted classes. A State of Emergency was declared, followed by a curfew on 27 March. The next day



the Serbian parliament voted unanimously for the Autonomous Provinces of Vojvodina and Kosovo to lose their constitutional autonomy and become fully integrated into Serbia. The immediate aim of this was to legalise the suppression of the uprisings by troops from outside the province but it also fitted in well with the Kosovo policies of Serbian nationalist politicians and gave Serbia two more votes on the collective Federal Presidency which contained one representative from each of the six republics and two Autonomous Provinces of Yugoslavia.

The strike movements in the 1980s had many positive features, apart from their sheer size. The strikes were completely unofficial (due to the unions being openly part of the state bureaucracy) and were often very active, involving occupation of work-places to prevent scabbing. There were also numerous demonstrations and blockages of roads in solidarity with the strikes. Yugoslav workers had never been domesticated into the Western European style of strike where everyone goes home and watches TV until the union tells them to go back to work. For this reason any official figures relating to number of strikes or days on strike (even figures used by us!) should be taken with a large pinch of salt. Here we are not talking about well-defined "labour disputes" which begin and end at set times with a specific list of demands. It was not unusual for one factory to have more than one wildcat strike in the same week or even for there to be two separate strikes going on in the same factory at the same time.

Despite the simultaneity of the struggles, they were uncoordinated, tending to confine their scope to specific provinces. This was the main weakness that the bourgeoisie came to exploit. This was helped by the fact that, like other manifestations of the class struggle in Eastern Europe, workers' anger was overwhelmingly directed at the "corrupt, bureaucratic, one-party state". This sort of perspective fitted in very well with the projects of the nationalists who could present themselves as the "voice of the people" which had long been suppressed by the evil Communists. This "subjective" factor was also helped along by the "objective" economic factor that austerity and restructuring had not been completely held back. Economic divisions between the regions had been exacerbated. For example, unemployment in Slovenia was still only 1 or 2%, while in Kosovo it had reached 30%. This intensified regional resentments within the working class - "the Croats are privileged", "Serbs and Montenegrins are poor because they are lazy". Since the 1970s jobs for migrant workers in Western Europe had become less available. As a consequence more and more workers from the poorer regions (e.g. Serbia) were migrating to Slovenia instead, leading to the usual divisions between natives and immigrants.



Go on, mate, move that shovel so the Comrade Director doesn't think we're on strike.

## The Bourgeoisie Responds

Slobodan Milošević began his exploitation of these divisions by making a successful bid for leadership of the Serbian League of Communists in September 1987. The issue which he made use of was the status of the Serb and Montenegrin minority in Kosovo, where there was a large Albanian majority (around 90%). The media, increasingly under the control of Milošević's faction, began to pump out stories about how Serbs in Kosovo were being driven from their homes and faced "genocide" at the hands of "terrorist separatist" Albanians. In reality there was hardly an Albanian nationalist movement, let alone a separatist one, and what there was certainly didn't have the means to drive out Serbs. The Kosovo issue was also chosen because of the symbolic nature of Kosovo in Serbian nationalist mythology - it was the site of an important battle in 1389 where the Serb forces were crushed by the Turks, leading to almost five centuries of Ottoman Turkish rule. Serbian nationalists celebrate the anniversary of this battle as if it was a victory, in much the same way that British nationalists remember Dunkirk. In concrete terms the use of this mythology helped to mobilise all the Serbian nationalist forces behind Milošević's fraction, from academics and novelists to the Party, the media, and the Orthodox Church.

Milošević organised a series of large-scale rallies and demos throughout Serbia, Vojvodina, Kosovo and Montenegro which were used to force the resignation of Yugoslavist LCY bureaucrats so that they could be replaced with Serbian nationalist LCY bureaucrats. This was known as the "anti-bureaucratic revolution". Serbian nationalism in general was as much about recuperating discontent amongst "Serbian" proletarians as it was about intimidating non-Serbs throughout Yugoslavia. In 1988, for example, rallies were deliberately held in Montenegro to capitalise on an upsurge of unrest which developed after the Republic declared itself bankrupt. As soon as Markovic's austerity programme was unveiled it was attacked by the Belgrade press as "anti-Serbian". Because of this role it could provide a social-democratic framework for making the necessary strategic concessions to the working class without encouraging them to ask for even more. Milošević's fraction always understood very well that in order to maintain national unity the policy must be, to some extent, "guns and butter". Milošević's election victory in December 1990 wasn't just a result of monopoly control of the media. He had arranged an illegal loan (of around \$1.7 billion) from Serbia's main bank to the Serbian government. He used this to grant hefty wage and pension increases.

The climax of the nationalist demo movement was the celebration of the 600th anniversary of the battle of Kosovo on 28 June 1989 in which a million or so Serbs from all over Yugoslavia and the world were gathered on the site of the famous battle for a festival of Serbian cultural kitsch and nationalist speeches. The significance of such a gathering so soon after Kosovo had been shaken by uprisings, and



6. The attempts by Serbo-Croat-speaking ethnic nationalists in Serbia, Croatia and even Bosnia to define their "languages" as separate is one of the more laughable aspects of the war. In Croatia an official "Croatian" has been created which has been purged of "foreign" words (apart from German ones) and which has incorporated many "Croatian" words not used since before the Second World War. The Serbian nationalists have interfered less with the language but *have* revived the Cyrillic alphabet for most official purposes. In Serbia itself this was not so ludicrous because most people had some familiarity with it. In "Serb" regions of Croatia, however, many people had never used it and had to learn it as quickly as possible to show that they were proper Serbs! If someone tries to convince you that "Serbian", "Croatian" and "Bosnian" are separate languages *don't* say "Your ideas about Balkan linguistics are interesting but I must however disagree with them". Just say: "Crkni, nacionalistički drkadžijo!" ("Drop dead, nationalist wanker!") – this should be understandable in all three "languages".

pacified by tanks, should be obvious. This gathering was a triumph for Milošević, sealing his domination of Serbian politics from then on.

At the beginning of 1989 radio transmitters in Vojvodina were re-directed to beam Serbian nationalist propaganda into Bosnia-Herzegovina and the Serb-populated regions of Croatia and Serbian nationalist rallies began to be held in Croatia. In the same year Serbian nationalist militias armed by the state began to be trained in Serbia – these would later form the shock troops of the Serbian side of the war in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina. Throughout 1990 and up to the outbreak of war in 1991 Serbia's Interior Ministry secretly supplied weapons to Serbian nationalists based in the majority Serb areas of Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina.

The opportunity for civil war offered by Milošević was gratefully seized with both hands by Tuđman. One of the first actions taken when Tuđman's party came to power was the repeal of a large chunk of the Titoist legislation protecting the rights of national minorities – a calculated attempt to encourage the growing nationalist paranoia in Serb regions of Croatia. This was followed by the systematic sacking of Serbs from government jobs and many private companies. There was a whole series of other measures designed to incite ethnic divisions – names of streets and squares were changed so as to erase anti-fascism, Socialism and anything to do with Serbia; the "Croatian" language was officially re-invented, supposedly without "Serbian" words<sup>6</sup>; the flag of the new ruling party became the official national flag and was flown everywhere. Tuđman's famous comment during his election campaign that "I am doubly happy that my wife is neither a Serb nor a Jew" was hardly likely to endear him to people whose grandparents had been murdered by Croatian Nazis.

In Slovenia the leaders of the Communist League had promoted a campaign of Slovenian national pride in the mid-1980s around the slogan "Slovenia My Homeland", which consisted primarily of a series of TV adverts portraying the beauty and diversity of the Slovene countryside. Tee-shirts displaying this noxious slogan also became extremely popular. Later they increasingly used the media to blame the other republics for the country's economic ills. However, it was the political forces emerging outside the Communist League which had the greater influence on the development of Slovenian nationalism. In the 1980s a whole range of Western-style single-issue campaigns arose – ecology, conscientious objection to the military, human rights and even gay rights. No doubt most of the idealistic young people and intellectuals who participated in these movements would have been horrified by the idea that their efforts would be used to contribute to the break-up of Yugoslavia and hasten the descent into civil war, but nevertheless this is so. By the late 1980s the Republic of Slovenia's Youth Organisation had ceased to serve the LCY and become a major focus of opposition to the regime. In particular its

7. During Janša's court case he was even supported by Western anarchists. The anarchists in Trieste organised a press conference with him to denounce the Yugoslav regime which "represses basic freedoms". In France the review *Iztok* circulated a petition for him.



8. These were: the Muslim SDA – Stranka Demokratske Akcije ("Party of Democratic Action") which also had a smaller branch in the Sandžak region of Serbia where many "Muslims" live; the Serb SDS – Srpska Demokratska Stranka ("Serbian Democratic Party") which also existed in Croatia; the Croatian HDZ – Hrvatska Demokratska Zajednica ("Croatian Democratic Community") which was an offshoot of what became the ruling party in Croatia.

9. The territorial defence units were the local organisations of national defence which were supposed to be capable of acting independently of the JNA in the event of a foreign invasion.

newspaper *Mladina* ("Youth") had become a major thorn in the side of the military. On 31 May 1988 Janez Janša, a senior *Mladina* writer on military affairs was arrested on suspicion of betraying military secrets. Later two more journalists and a non-commissioned officer were arrested after classified documents were found at the newspaper's office. The trial of the four led to a massive public campaign in their support and although they were initially sentenced to terms of between 5 months and 4 years they ended up serving much reduced sentences. The trial of the four was very widely seen as an attack on Slovenia since the JNA (*Jugoslovenska narodna armija*, "Yugoslav People's Army"), with its overwhelmingly Serb and Montenegrin officer corps and Serbo-Croat (not Slovenian) as its language of command, was perceived as a Serb institution. Janša was to become Minister of Defence a year before Slovenia declared independence and played a major role in organising its 10-day war<sup>7</sup>. Similarly, when the Slovenian opposition, with massive popular support, organised a rally in Ljubljana in February 1989 to condemn human rights abuses in Kosovo, it provided an opportunity for the Communist leadership in Slovenia to openly defy the LCY for the first time.

The first "free" (i.e. multi-party) elections held in the Republics of Yugoslavia, in 1990, were a veritable referendum on war. In all the major protagonist Republics: Slovenia, Croatia, Serbia and Bosnia-Herzegovina, ethnic nationalist parties won clear victories over Yugoslavist representatives of the old Communist League and non-ethnic liberal parties. Elections in Slovenia were won by Demos ("Democratic Opposition of Slovenia"), a coalition of five opposition parties who were so confident of their ability to break away from Yugoslavia that they immediately began preparations for issuing a new Slovenian currency. In Serbia in December, Milošević's Socialist Party of Serbia (SPS) won 194 out of the 250 Assembly seats. In Croatia, Tuđman's HDZ won enough seats to form a homogenous HDZ government. Even in supposedly "multi-ethnic" Bosnia the three ethnic parties<sup>8</sup> gained over two thirds of the votes cast, enabling them to carve up power between them. Effectively, the citizens of Yugoslavia were asked: "Are you in favour of ethnic slaughter? Yes/No". Voting for ethnic nationalist parties legitimised secession – the secession of Croatia from Yugoslavia, of the Serb minority from Croatia, of the Serb and Croatian minorities from Bosnia and so on. In any nation state secession is an act of war.

Having won seats in the Croatian parliament the Serbian Democratic Party (SDS) MPs did not take them up. Instead they formed the "Union of Communes of Luka and Northern Dalmatia" out of the six constituencies they had won. It had its own parliament, the Serb National Council, in Knin. Its first act was to declare its independence from Croatia. It immediately received the protection of the JNA which had already disarmed the territorial defence forces<sup>9</sup> of Croatia and Slovenia (although Slovenia managed to keep a large part of its

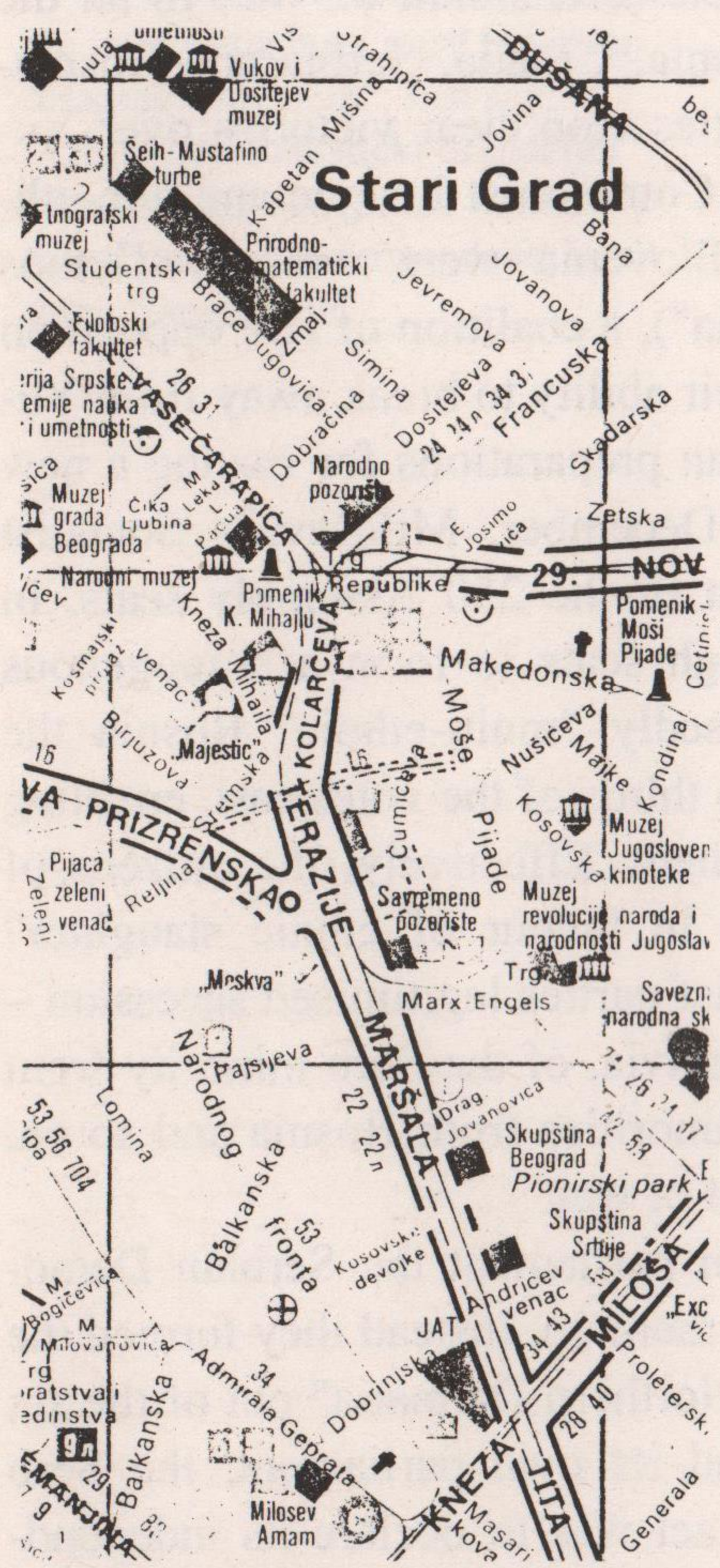


weapons). The creation of this mini-state constituted a major act of economic warfare against Croatia by Serbia since it cut major road and rail routes between Zagreb and Dalmatia, disrupting production and immediately wrecking the Dalmatian tourist industry. This pattern was to be repeated in Bosnia-Herzegovina with the SDS constituencies there.

These political manoeuvres were not enough in themselves to silence the working class – only heavy artillery and nationalist death squads could do that. In the meantime the class struggle carried on. For example, in April 1991, 700,000 workers struck in Serbia, almost a third of the Republic's workforce. Many had not been paid since before the December elections.

In March 1991 there was an impressive riot against the regime in Belgrade. The occasion was the calling of a demo on March 9 by the "opposition" parties in the Serbian Parliament, principally the SPO (*Srpski Pokret Obnove*, "Serbian Movement of Renewal") led by Vuk Drašković. They were protesting about bias in the official media. The demo was banned by the government and everyone knew it would lead to a massive confrontation with the forces of order. As such it attracted almost everyone who had a grudge against the regime. The nationalist supporters of the organising parties were undoubtedly out in force as they had travelled from all over Serbia but they were quickly joined by large numbers of workers who hadn't been paid for months, together with students, school kids and the unemployed. Most of the participants were not carrying flags or banners of any description and a few people even burned the flags of Yugoslavia and Serbia. The police had been preparing for the event for several days with thousands of them being returned from occupying Kosovo. They were all equipped with riot shields and gas masks. The demo was due to start at noon in Republic Square. Half an hour before this a major riot had already broken out in and around the square. The crowd initially drove the police out of the square. They then listened to nationalist speeches while the police reorganised to attack them with tear gas and water cannons. This in turn led to several hours of intense rioting in which shops and banks were smashed throughout the centre of town and police vehicles were torn apart by rioters armed with rocks and iron bars. A cop was killed, as was one demonstrator when the cops drew their pistols and fired on the crowd. Order was only restored when JNA tanks appeared on the streets in the evening. Drašković was arrested and held for several days which worked wonders for his political credibility – leading liberal intellectuals to campaign for the release of a man who would later send his own nationalist militia ("The Serbian Guard") to fight in Croatia and Bosnia.

The next day saw more rioting as students who had participated in a series of meetings marched toward the centre of town from Student City, a huge collection of crumbling high-rise concrete blocks situated across the Sava river. Fighting began on the Brotherhood and



The parts of Belgrade where most of the riotous events occurred on 9-10 March 1991.

Unity Bridge and *simultaneously* in the centre of Belgrade – clearly a large number of non-students had immediately taken the opportunity to attack the pigs. This, though, was a more orthodox political demo with thousands of students carrying placards and banners calling for Milošević to resign. After more fighting with the cops the demonstrators managed to occupy Terazije, a main thoroughfare South of Republic Square. This led to a week-long vigil involving hundreds of thousands of people which became a veritable tribune of the people with non-stop speechifying by students, academics, lawyers, famous actors and, apparently, even the odd worker. The demands put forward by this tribune were purely political. There were calls for the resignation of various top state functionaries and for the non-SPS media to be allowed to function without hindrance. Most of these were eventually granted and everyone went home.

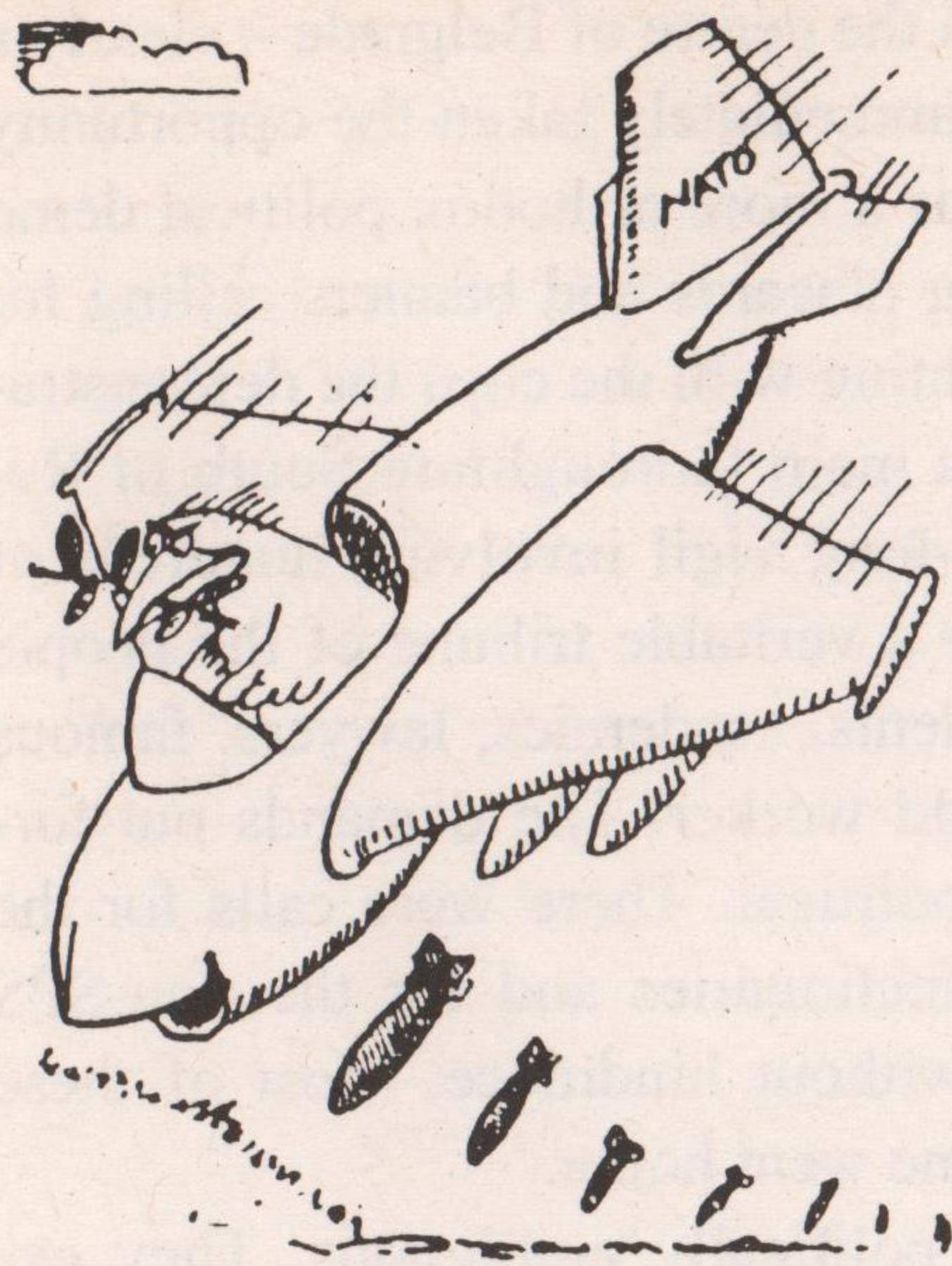
Both these demos were highly politically ambiguous. They expressed both the depth of social discontent and the ease with which it could be recuperated into nationalist and liberal politics.

### The War Begins

The Croatian nationalist irregulars lagged behind their Serbian counterparts but by early 1991 the more militant elements of the HDZ, together with the more extreme Croatian nationalist formations, were distributing weapons and blowing up homes and shops belonging to Serbs. Throughout Spring and Summer 1991 there were numerous small provocative actions by both sides. The JNA was regularly intervening on the side of the Serb nationalists by safeguarding their territorial gains. As the ten-day war started in Slovenia there was a drastic upsurge in fighting in three areas of Croatia between Serb irregulars and the JNA on one side and the Croatian police and the Republic's embryonic army, the National Guard, on the other. In regions such as Eastern Slavonia and Banija nationalist militias arrived in the villages and carried out massacres according to ethnic criteria, forcing those of the "wrong" ethnic group to flee either to the large towns or to other rural areas where they would be under the "protection" of the rival militia. The people carrying out these actions were generally not from the local area. It was *not* a question of people who'd lived side by side for decades suddenly deciding to kill each other. Neither was it an eruption of long-suppressed ethnic hatreds, as the media make out. It was a well-organised state policy. Most of the Serb irregulars came from organisations led by well-known political figures in Serbia, such as the Chetniks led by Vojislav Šešelj of the Serbian Radical Party and the *Arkanovci* (literally: "those who belong to Arkan") led by Arkan, a mafia-style gangster from Belgrade. Many of the Croatian irregulars were recruited from Croatian *émigrés* who had returned to fight for their endangered fatherland. Others were simply mercenaries<sup>10</sup>. Many of the actions carried out by the JNA were not even ethnic cleansing –

10. An idea of the complicity between Serbia and Croatia can be gained from the case of a young aspiring mercenary from Britain who's knowledge of geography left something to be desired. Apparently motivated by a sympathy for the Croat cause and a dislike of Communists, nineteen-year-old Neil Valentine arrived in *Belgrade*, where amused officials redirected him to Croatia!





## Resistance

11. Admittedly we have little information about this. According to a report by the "Conscientious Objectors Group" of "Anti-War Campaign Croatia" from February 1994, there is an "unofficial and unverified estimate" that about 30% of reservists didn't answer the call-up in 1991 and 1992.

12. We must make a distinction here between the real movement of desertion against the war and the tendency for the JNA to disintegrate into national sections – something which was going on at the same time. There were numerous instances of "desertion", particularly by members of the officer corps, which were, in reality, just a changing of sides from one army to another. This was a result of the decentralised nature of national defence in Yugoslavia.

they would simply blow villages apart with heavy artillery, forcing the entire population, irrespective of supposed ethnicity, to flee wherever they could. These operations came to be aimed more and more at the big towns such as Osijek.

It is no coincidence that the first big town to be destroyed was Vukovar, which was besieged and bombarded by the JNA for three months, starting in July. There was almost certainly complicity between the two sides – in Croatia there were widespread rumours that the Croatian government had prevented arms getting through to the city's defenders. Militarily the JNA needed a quick and easy victory to boost the morale of its increasingly mutinous troops and politically Croatia needed a spectacular Serb atrocity to show the world media. Both were happy to devastate a traditionally militant section of the working class which was proving to be resistant to ethnic segregation. The inhabitants tried to organise an armed resistance which was separate from that of the nationalists – when the JNA entered the town a whole series of corpses were found which had been shot from behind, summarily executed for refusing to join the National Guard or the Croatian nationalist irregulars.

In Croatia there was relatively little resistance to mobilisation orders<sup>11</sup> (except among those considered to be Serbs) but in Serbia and Montenegro there was massive resistance to conscription into the JNA. Significantly, *all* called-up Albanians refused to join the JNA – this was a significant blow in itself given that there are up to 1.5 million Albanians in Serbia. There was also widespread desertion<sup>12</sup> affecting *all* sections of the army, even military intelligence personnel! In December 1991, after numerous JNA victories, the Croatian forces began to achieve important successes. This signified that the JNA was beginning to disintegrate. The level of disaffection in the ranks became apparent in the form of a widespread petty insubordination similar to that of US troops during the Vietnam War – soldiers failed to wear proper uniform, refused to salute officers, drank alcohol and took drugs on duty... In the words of one JNA conscript who described an officer trying to tell him off for some minor infringement of regulations: "he knew he couldn't make me do what he wanted because I had a Kalashnikov and six hand-grenades and he didn't know quite what I was going to do with them". One conscript in the Knin region stole a tank and drove it all the way back to Belgrade, parking it in front of the Federal Parliament as a protest against the war. For this eminently sane act he was confined to a mental hospital.

In Belgrade thousands of young men were regularly sleeping at a different flat every night to avoid the call-up and draft dodging became downright fashionable! When a mass mobilisation of reservists was ordered, only 10% of those liable turned up. In many villages whole communities cooperated in resistance by warning each other

13. At this point we should mention a serious con trick which has been perpetrated against those attempting to show solidarity with the anti-war resistance. This concerns the "Zitzer Spiritual Republic". This was supposedly a local anti-militarist initiative based in the mostly "Hungarian" village of Trešnjevac in Northern Vojvodina in which, following militant local demos against the draft, the Zitzer Club (a pizza parlour and pool hall) declared itself to be an independent republic and became a centre for anti-war organising. Its supposed activities were widely advertised in "alternative" and anarchist-leaning publications in the US (including *Anarchy* magazine), Western Europe and even in other parts of ex-Yugoslavia (we acquired its address in Trešnjevac from a Croatian fanzine!). In fact, as far as we can ascertain, this initiative was largely a publicity stunt by the Hungarian-nationalist party DZVM (Demokratska Zajednica Vojvođanskih Mađara, "Democratic community of Vojvodinan Hungarians"). Using the name "Zitzer Spiritual Republic" they could approach various Western pacifist and civil rights organisations and get hold of large quantities of money and computer equipment. The contact name for the "Spiritual Republic" was Lajos Balla, a local politician involved in DZVM.

If nothing else this episode should serve as a terrible warning as to the dangers of the "send money to this address" style of pseudo-solidarity widely practised by Western anarchists.

about the approach of the military<sup>13</sup>. All over Serbia and Vojvodina young men hid themselves with the help of their families and friends, and tens of thousands fled the country. According to an article in *Le Monde Diplomatique* (June 1994) the total number of draft dodgers and deserters who have fled ex-Yugoslavia is over 100,000.

When stories began circulating that hundreds of Montenegrin reservists were being killed in Slavonia, resistance to the war developed even more swiftly than in Serbia. This was the reason for the JNA's offensive into Eastern Dalmatia and its attack on Dubrovnik – the virtually non-existent Croatian resistance provided an opportunity for easy victories (and a great deal of plunder) for the Montenegrin conscripts.

In December the duration of military service was extended from 12 months to 15 months and the army admitted that more than 10,000 reservists had refused to join their units. The military authorities threatened draft dodgers and deserters with long prison sentences under Article 121 which even prescribed the death penalty for a deserter who left the country. Some draft dodgers who had made a public protest against being mobilised were grabbed off the street, imprisoned for 2 or 3 days, and then sent to the front to clear mine fields.

In addition to the steady individual attrition of the JNA there were numerous collective revolts, although these never coalesced into an organised movement. The biggest refusal took place at Kragujevac, a garrison town in central Serbia, where 7,000 reservists presented themselves at the call-up without their arms. They shut themselves in the camp and refused to move. The military authorities ended up exempting all of them from service and had to content themselves with just putting them on a local employers' black list. At the end of August 1991, 700 reservists from Smederevo refused to be taken from Bosnia to the war zone in Croatia. In November 1991, 200 reservists stood in front of the office of the district president in Valjevo until their commander signed their military books stipulating that their service was complete. On 18 December, at Markušica, on the front in Slavonia, 700 reservists refused to fight after already having done their 45 days of recall. A general ordered the arrest of their officers but backed down when troops threatened to shoot him. At the beginning of January 1992, 150 reservists deserted as a group from the front at Osijek after spending more than a month on the front line and returned to Belgrade to protest at their conditions of life. In March 1992, more than 700 reservists on leave at Gornji Milanovac revolted and refused to return to the front in Eastern Slavonia. There were also numerous revolts by reservists from Vojvodina who frequently mutinied or ran away, irrespective of whether they were "Serbs" or "Hungarians" or whatever. Thousands of soldiers were brought before courts martial.

The undermining of the JNA didn't stop the war but it definitely shortened it in Croatia – Milošević and Tudman were to sign a



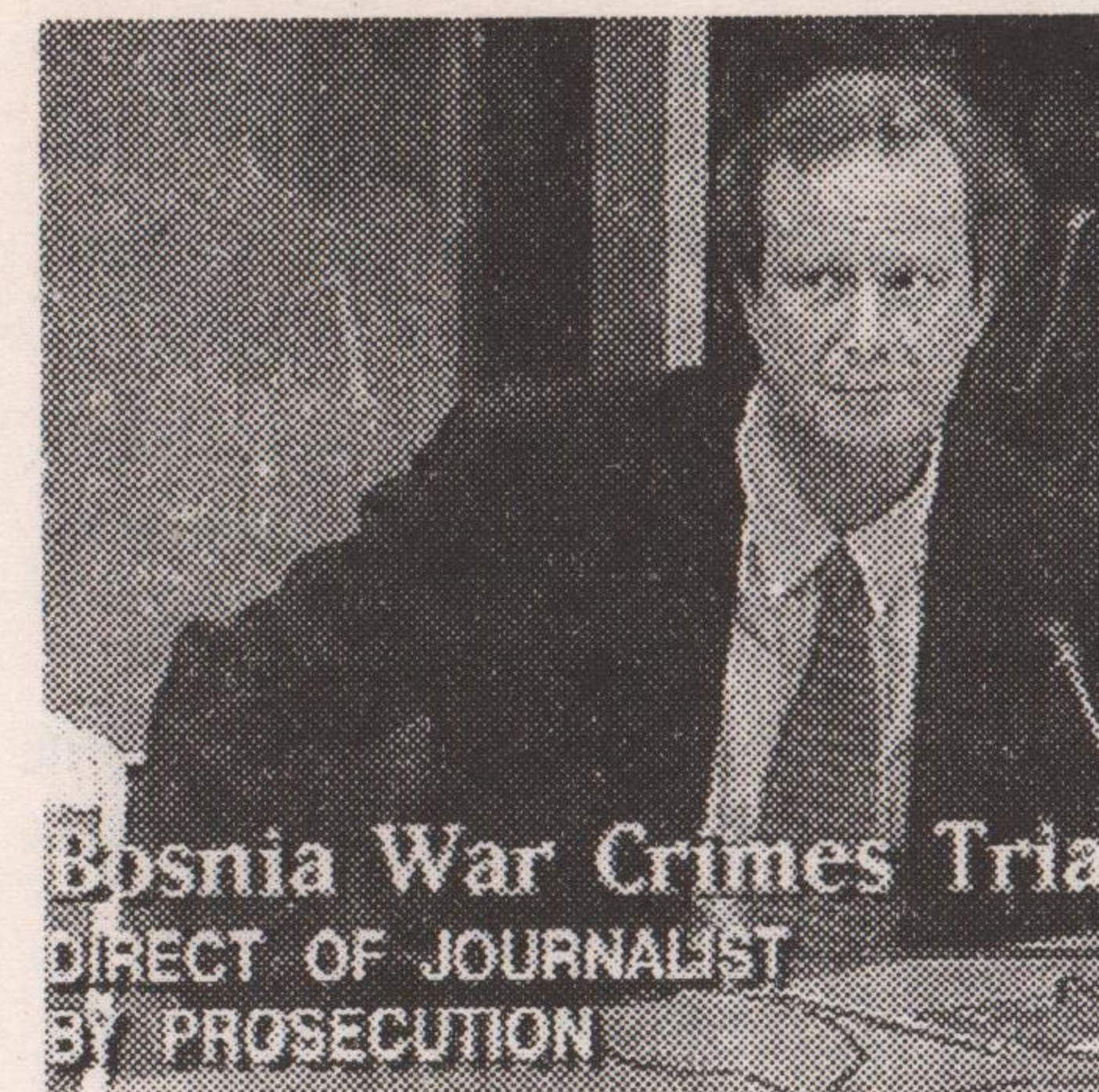
14. Vojska Jugoslavije, "Armed Forces of Yugoslavia". The name changed after the governments of Serbia and Montenegro declared themselves to be the Savezna Republika Jugoslavija, "Federal Republic of Yugoslavia", (SRJ) on 27 April 1992. This was supposed to be the successor state to Socialist Yugoslavia and is sometimes referred to as "the third Yugoslavia".

UN/US brokered peace treaty on 2 January 1992. When the war in Bosnia began in April 1992 it followed much the same pattern as in Croatia with the JNA protecting the territorial gains of the Serbian nationalist militias. But the JNA, now called the VJ<sup>14</sup>, withdrew from Bosnia in May, leaving large quantities of equipment and officers with the newly-formed Bosnian Serb Army (that is, the army of Republika Srpska). This army rapidly conquered around two thirds of Bosnia-Hercegovina but there followed a period of more or less stalemate between the competing sides which lasted until mid-1995. This undoubtedly constituted an incredibly gloomy episode in proletarian history – throughout former Bosnia-Hercegovina massacres, mass deportations, mass rapes and all the other horrors of capitalist warfare reigned on a scale not seen in Europe since 1945. But even in conditions like these *national unity is never as complete as the bourgeois media would have us believe*. This is shown by the fact that all sides have had to use terror to make proletarians participate in the armed forces – in besieged Sarajevo young draft dodgers have been seized from cafés by the military police and immediately taken to dig trenches on the front lines (*Guardian*, 2 November 1993). In the Serb nationalist held regions of Bosnia and Croatia in Spring 1995 there were a whole series of summary executions of people accused of desertion, insubordination and stealing from the army (*War Report*, June 1995). Martić (the Knin leader) and Karadžić even had to issue a public appeal for deserters to return to their units by July 5 or face prosecution. Charity workers have reported their convoys being robbed by "armed ex-soldiers". The lack of national unity is also shown by the "morale problems" reported by military commanders on all sides and, particularly clearly, by events in Banja Luka in September 1993.

### Mutiny!

The mass revolt in the ranks of the Bosnian Serb Army in Banja Luka (the largest town in the Republika Srpska region of former Bosnia-Hercegovina) in September 1993 was the most significant act of rebellion by soldiers in the whole of the war. The political consciousness of the participants was almost certainly pretty reactionary. Their slogans and demands essentially corresponded to the usual patriotic whining about how "war profiteers" were having an easy life while decent patriots were giving their lives at the front. But even if what they were thinking about was "a fair day's pay for a fair day's killing", in their *actions* they undermined the war effort (and stopped it dead for several days) by putting their needs before the needs of capital's war economy.

On 10 September three units of the Bosnian Serb Army, the First Army Corps of Krajina, the 16th Motorised Unit and the First Armoured Brigade, mutinied on their return to the front. They drove into town in their armoured cars and took over the main official



### The Future

buildings, notably the local radio and TV stations, the town hall and the Head Quarters of the Army. They were led by an "emergency general staff" led by NCOs and sub-alterns.

Their demands were for an increase in their pay (which stood at around \$1 per month for an ordinary soldier) and the arrest of "war profiteers, who instead of standing watch in the trenches are getting rich with the blessing of those in power". A black list of 700 profiteers was drawn up and they began arresting them, including the mayor of Banja Luka! The insurgents seized the power stations and provided the town with an uninterrupted electricity supply, something it hadn't had for months. The rebels began broadcasting from the TV station but this was quickly blocked as the transmitters were located in other parts of Bosnia. Soldiers in other brigades began to send telegrams of support but the movement did not generalise in a practical way, although newspaper reports on 14 September said that rebellion had spread to other units such as in Sokolac near Sarajevo.

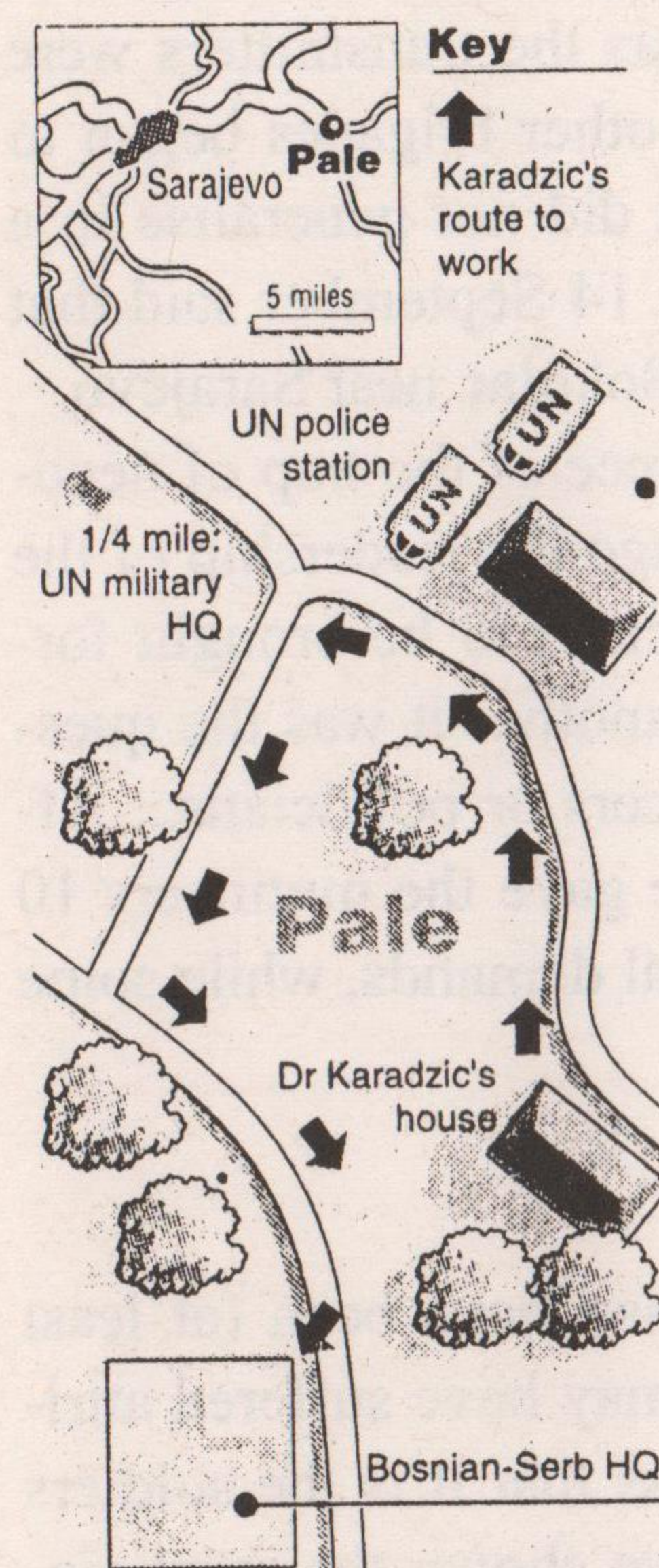
The movement was defeated by its acceptance of the trap of negotiations and even parliamentarism – at one stage the leadership of the mutiny called for the anticipated general election to be brought forward. In one unit pay was negotiated for, in another it was the question of the dismissal of certain "corrupt" officers or politicians... After a week the movement was over. The state gave the mutineers 10 days leave and a promise to address their social demands, while some leaders of the mutiny were arrested.

However inspiring the Banja Luka mutiny may have been (at least when it started), and however much all sides may have suffered attrition of their forces by desertion we must stress that it is the soldiers and potential soldiers of the JNA/VJ who have shown the most significant resistance to the war effort. This largely explains the lack of *direct* involvement by Serbia in the war in Bosnia-Hercegovina for most of the time that it has raged. Over the last three years or so there have been recurring panics about the VJ becoming directly involved in the war again, but these have proved to be the result of mere sabre-rattling by Milošević. The attack on Krajina by the Croatian Army in August 1995 was the most recent example. This time there was a general mobilisation in Serbia and Montenegro with military officials knocking on the doors of potential recruits all over Belgrade. They knew that just sending out draft papers was a waste of time! Tanks were sent to the Croatian border. Once again there was widespread avoidance of the call-up. In Montenegro only 6% of those called up reported to the barracks (*War Report*, October 1995). Even in these parts of ex-Yugoslavia, though, the anti-draft resistance has not taken on any kind of organised form, apart from small knots of people who know each other well.

But it is no use simply bemoaning the lack of organisation of our



15. A very useful text on this subject was published by the Greek group TPTG in no. 3 of their magazine. They can be contacted at: P.O. Box 76149, Nea Smirni 17110, Athens. The text is available in English from them or from us.



This little map appeared in *The Guardian*, 13 July 1996 together with the usual rhetoric about "the UN must be really incompetent not to have arrested this evil war criminal". The article failed to draw the more obvious conclusion: that Dr. Karadzic is provided with a UN police station for his personal protection.

class brothers and sisters in the Balkans. As long as proletarians remain trapped within the walls of nationality they will continue to be taken by surprise whenever "their" ruling class starts to send them to the battlefields, they will continue to look for some local solution to their problems, to hope against all reason that some peace agreement will hold or that some more humane fraction of capital will come to power. This war has been a great success for the bourgeoisie. Firstly, in the short term, they have crushed resistance to economic restructuring. Although the heavy guns are temporarily silent the war against the proletariat continues in its "peaceful" forms – millions of workers continue not to be paid and austerity deepens. Secondly, they have significantly advanced one of their most important projects of the last two centuries, the nationalisation of the proletariat. This is not only true within ex-Yugoslavia itself but also in the neighbouring states. For example, both Greece and Bulgaria have profited from the use of the "Macedonian question"<sup>15</sup>. In Greece the major political parties were able to organise two major nationalist demonstrations in 1992 which together mobilised around 10% of the Greek population. We cannot deny that *our* project, the re-internationalisation of the proletariat, has suffered a serious setback.

As communist internationalists the most important way we can show solidarity with proletarians in ex-Yugoslavia is, of course, by taking up the struggle against "our own" bourgeoisie. It was, above all, the isolated nature of the class struggle in Yugoslavia and, in particular, *the success of the introduction of the free market in the rest of Eastern Europe*, which enabled, and compelled, the bourgeoisie to impose such a bloody solution to their problems. However, this should not be an excuse for failing to create solid links of international solidarity. It is only by building such links that the rich experience of resistance to restructuring and war gained by proletarians in ex-Yugoslavia can be shared with the rest of us and that we can share our experiences of struggle with them. This may not sound like a very inspiring conclusion given the sheer scale of the crime against our class which the international bourgeoisie have got away with, but it is the only realistic course of action and the only way to prepare ourselves for the class battles of the future – battles which the bourgeoisie will undoubtedly try to win by means of the tried and trusted methods of nationalism and war.

## THE CLASS NATURE OF SANCTIONS

International trade sanctions imposed against various states in recent years can be roughly divided into two categories:

1) **Token sanctions** like those imposed on South Africa in the 1980s. The function of these is more diplomatic than economic.

2) **Real blockades** like those imposed on Iraq and Haiti. These are designed to directly crush the proletariat through mass starvation and to reinforce national unity by enabling the regime to blame austerity measures on the foreign blockade.

The arms embargo against the whole of ex-Yugoslavia is an example of the first type. It certainly hasn't prevented Croatia from developing a formidable army, as has clearly been shown since August 1995, when "Republika Srpska Krajina" was overrun by the Croatian Army in a few days.

The general sanctions against Serbia and Montenegro are an example of the second type which became a lot less successful than intended.

A general economic blockade was declared by the UN Security Council on 30 May 1992, just a month after the declaration of the "Federative Republic of Yugoslavia" (SRJ) at the end of April. A month after the blockade began the SRJ authorities put a set of austerity measures in place involving a partial freezing of prices preceded by large increases in the prices of petrol and electricity. As the effect of sanctions increased there was an almost complete shut down of industry – jokes became common about how Belgrade had become an "ecological city" with almost no industry or cars. There was a spate of suicides by elderly people who did not want to be a burden on their families, but real starvation was rare. This was because Serbia was largely self-sufficient in food due to the existence of a large peasant sector.

The policy of the state became more and more one of simply attacking working class living standards through inflation – a traditional method of paying for a war. Whilst in 1992 the annual rate of inflation was a mere 20,000%, towards the end of 1993 it reached 100% per day! The effect of this was to render wages virtually worthless – people carried on going to work just so as not to lose their jobs and to steal or reappropriate whatever their work-places had to offer. The Deutschmark became the *de facto* currency. This meant that many proletarians who had acquired savings in DM which they used to buy occasional luxury items had to use them up to buy food. Inflation, though, is a double-edged sword – it wipes out income *and* debt. In the modern world it's very easy to go into debt – for example, by writing a cheque or by having an outstanding bill. Electricity and telephones became effectively free, as did train journeys – before long there weren't any notes of low enough denomination to pay the fares with. You could even pay your taxes in full at almost no cost. This meant that effectively the state had no revenue.

The state had, however, developed a novel form of taxation/fraud in the form of banks taking hard currency deposits and offering generous rates of interest. One of these was the Dafiment bank which collapsed in April 1993. It had links with many famous politicians and paramilitary leaders. As long as deposits kept pouring in it could keep making the interest payments. The bubble inevitably burst and the founders of the bank disappeared with the deposits of hundreds of thousands of customers. The bank's half-built headquarters still towers over Slavija Square in Belgrade.

At the end of 1993 and the beginning of 1994 the working class became increasingly rebellious with strikes of some description breaking out in most of the sectors still functioning. In particular, there were industry-wide simultaneous strikes by the miners and the railworkers at the end of 1993 which paralysed the country. Partly in response to this the ruling class simply abolished inflation. This was done literally overnight (23-24 January 1994 to be precise) by the introduction of a New Dinar, tied to the Deutschmark. This brought inflation down to a manageable 100% per year and, to some extent, restarted the economy and, most importantly, restored state revenue. The restarting of the economy was possible because sanctions were becoming less and less effective as appropriate prices were negotiated with capitalists in the surrounding countries.

It hardly needs saying that this didn't improve matters very much for the working class. In the words of a leaflet distributed by the *Torpedo* group:

*"There are more and more people who openly yearn for the days of hyperinflation when they manipulated cheques to be able to survive and to pay all the 'obligations' to the state. Today, with miserable wages and high prices of food, electricity, clothes and shoes, and those high taxes, it is almost impossible (of course, we must also consider the mean-spirited partial payment of wages, with a delay and partly in food or with a loan with interest). Then, besides the 'regular' job there is the indispensable speculation on the black market necessary for bare survival."*

Sanctions have certainly enabled leading members of the ruling party, and their gangster allies, to amass enormous personal fortunes through black market operations, but the ruling class have also had to sacrifice profits in order to maintain the social peace.

At the time of writing (early 1996) the official economy is still largely state controlled and the economic policy of the state is still oriented towards providing something approaching full employment, or at least something closer to it than in most other parts of Europe... Even during 1993 there were no mass lay-offs. This is changing, but most of the state sector still carries on providing the same level of jobs – a large percentage of the workers on the pay-rolls of big factories literally have nothing to do. State owned shops are also a major source of employment – even a small one might employ several staff and do almost no business. For a worker the best situation is to be laid off on reduced pay,



that way you get a guaranteed income from the state and you can use your time to make money on the black market. The existence of the black market means that workers are less afraid of being sacked because they can easily find some kind of work there. Essentially the black market functions as a very large inefficient retail sector. You're never going to get rich selling cigarettes and chocolate by the side of the road but you can probably earn as much as working in a factory. Not surprisingly the state has recently starting trying to reduce the role of the black market with increased police raids on street sellers. There is even a proposal to legalise black market activity but in designated places where it is easily controlled. The absurd pretence that the New Dinar is worth one Deutschmark has been abandoned and the official rate is now very close to the black market rate.

All the while the ruling class have blamed every attack on living standards on sanctions and tried to claim that the lifting of sanctions will solve everyone's problems. In reality this will almost certainly be the signal for a generalised restructuring of Serbia's archaic industry and the removal of social guarantees. The reintroduction of sanctions will remain a real possibility if the resulting social revolts cannot be contained.

In January 1996 the UN chief war crimes prosecutor Richard Goldstone said that sanctions might have to be reimposed (they were suspended as part of the Dayton agreement) if the Serbian government didn't cooperate in handing over "war criminals". In February the US Secretary of State pitched in with a statement that SRJ could not be rehabilitated until it not only handed over war criminals but also "restores human rights" in Kosovo. This effectively gives Milošević and the rest of the international bourgeoisie the capability of restoring sanctions any time they think it's necessary for the control of the working class in Serbia.



## THE INHUMANITY OF HUMANITARIAN AID

In Yugoslavia, as in Somalia and in every other war-torn region, humanitarian aid functions as a means of maintaining the war effort. Outside the affected region it provides a wonderful alibi for intervention by the armies of the most powerful states and makes these states appear caring. Inside the region it directly supports military operations through the large percentage of food aid which is used to feed front-line troops.

This reality is clearly expressed in an article from the Slovenian magazine *Mladina* (April 1993) entitled "The Battle of the Parcels". Here are some excerpts:

*"On both sides of the front line the humanitarian parcels nourish the combatants. Serbs, Croats and Muslims eat the same canned food. Inspected, looted, the humanitarian convoys have become a means of political blackmail. A battle by itself. Up to the point where TV networks have become more interested in what is happening to them than to the war victims."*

*"... Coming from the sea side near Mostar, the trucks belt along day and night. Trucks with multicolour stickers on them: Equilibre, Merhamet, ICRC, Médecins sans frontières, Pharmaciens sans frontières, Egyptian Agency for Humanitarian Aid, Nachbar in Not, Red Cross, UNHCR, Secours populaire français, Caritas, Agir pour réagir ... From a distance you would think it was an army of crusaders whose standard is children with outstretched arms, children protected by adult hands, children that look at the world ... On each parcel, on each box or bag the same labels have been stuck, mentioning its origin: donated by UNHCR, donated by the European Community, donated by the Government of the Netherlands, donated by the people of Germany. So that people won't mistakenly think that these parcels have just fallen down from heaven. The most incredible box of all has the form of a pyramid, a box of beef cooked in its juice, wrapped up in blue paper with the twelve stars of the EC printed on it in gold letters, but without any indication of its content. Just the thing itself, the "Twelve" cooked in their own juice! On some other trucks you can see the images of Jesus on his cross, of a crescent moon on a green background, or an incredible variety of logos of the UN."*

*"... Those who are entitled to receive the humanitarian aid are claiming it. The others just take whatever they think they deserve. From the moment when the Croats and the Serbs of Bosnia-Herzegovina understood that the Muslims had definitely lost the war and that the international community was ready to ratify their defeat in official documents, they didn't see any reason to continue the war. Whatever could possibly be looted, already had been. The economy broken down, the shops empty: the only wealth left is the humanitarian convoys. They have a double function. On one hand, they are the basis of some additional profit, the basis of a new economy and they serve the logistics of several armies,*

*because all army units that make war in Bosnia-Herzegovina eat the same cans from the same humanitarian convoys. On the other hand they are a means of political blackmail."*

*The convoys that arrive from Split are progressively relieved of the fuel they transport while the arms are transferred to Croatian garrisons and the most valuable freight simply disappears. At Kiseljak, on the border between the Serbian and Croatian territories, the convoys arrive much lighter. At Ilidza the Serbs prepare a humanitarian trap for them."*

*"Your convoy is humanitarian, isn't it?"*

*"Yes, completely. We want to help our fellow man."*

*"Fine. So the political differences don't interest you?"*

*"Not at all."*

*"So you will willingly leave 30% of your cargo to the Serbian Red Cross, won't you?"*

*What can the man in charge of the convoy do when he's got a machine gun pointed at him? He willingly leaves 30% of his cargo while slipping 1000 or 2000 DM in to the hands of the chief of police so that no additional problems arise. What this 30% means, only the Serbian police can say. What determines this, of course, is the quality of the contents. If it's coffee, then "30%" means "to the last bean". With some luck the convoy has been able to keep half of its cargo upon arriving in Sarajevo. The other half can be found either with the soldiers in the mountains or with the Serbs who sell it to the Croats of Kiseljak, who in turn sell it to the soldiers of UNPROFOR, to the drivers of the trucks and to the population who were entitled to receive the cargo in the first place. A convoy that does not respect these rules can wait for days or even weeks to get through."*

More subtle is the use of aid as a means of social control. Food aid can be used to lure people to a refugee camp that they don't want to go to or to persuade them to stay in a besieged city that they would rather leave. It can be distributed selectively – as in Sarajevo where the authorities have prevented aid from reaching the families of draft dodgers.

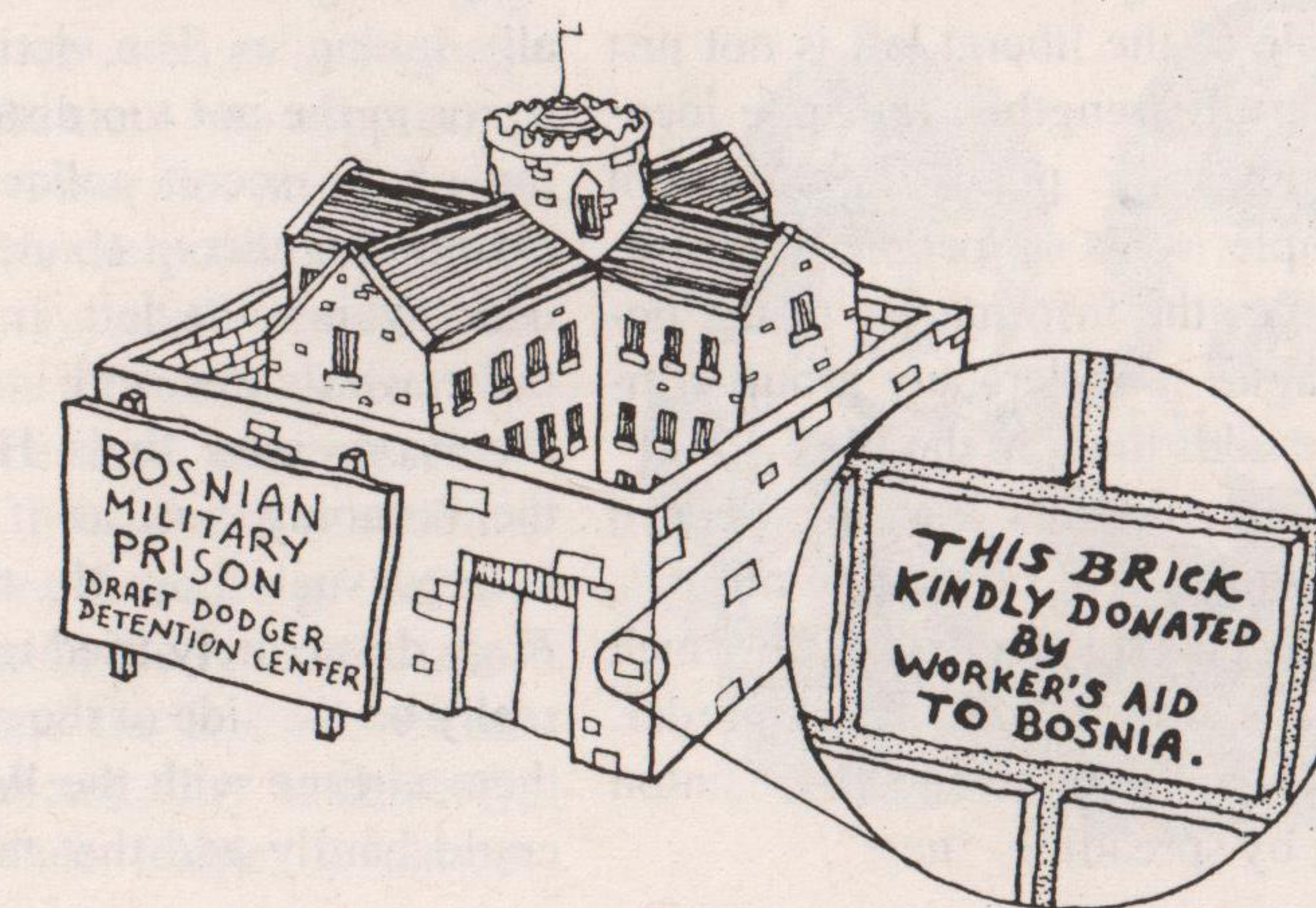
Occasionally, starving proletarians have resisted the capitalist logic of aid in the most direct way: by plundering aid convoys. In January 1994, angry crowds from around Kakanj on the main road between Zenica and Sarajevo set up a barricade of logs to stop an aid convoy guarded by the

Bosnian military police (*Guardian*, 29 January 1994). According to the UN, the crowd shot at the cops and threw a grenade, injuring six of them. They then looted several trucks. A senior official of UN High Commission for Refugees admitted that there was a "suspicion" that supplies were being used to feed the Bosnian Army at the expense of civilians and refugees. He added: "We've now got Bosnian shooting Bosnian to steal food. This is a dangerous escalation". Indeed it is "dangerous" – for those who would rather see a thousand proletarians slaughtered on the battle fields than see a single cop fall in the class war.

Even where it reaches people who are really starving, humanitarian aid is always a conservative enterprise because it aims to provide people with food so they can go about their capitalist daily lives, working for "their" bosses and fighting for "their" country. What appears to be a favour to starving proletarians is actually a subsidy to the local bourgeoisie. It reduces their bills for wages and military supplies, as well as enabling them to make fortunes by simply selling aid goods – across ex-Yugoslavia it's not at all unusual to find "humanitarian" medical supplies on sale in private pharmacies. This is particularly obvious in situations where the aid organisation simply hands over supplies to the local authorities to distribute as they see fit. This also has the advantage that the aid organisation can deny all responsibility for blatant cases of corruption and diversion of goods to the military, as UN spokespeople are fond of doing.

In the case of the humanitarian aid organised by the UN and the big charities all this should be clear to anyone with a grain of class consciousness, but it's equally true of leftist versions of humanitarian aid such as the Trotskyist-organised "Workers' Aid to Bosnia". Despite their workerist (usually trade unionist) rhetoric and their refusal to give part of their aid to the Croatian Army in return for safe passage, their aid was not going to workers in struggle but to citizens fighting to defend their state. This was particularly true because the heroic Tuzla miners that the Trots are so fond of were almost all in the army on a part-time basis. The aid was largely distributed by the miners' union, which is a good old-fashioned Stalinist state-run union which happens to have switched its allegiance from the Yugoslav state to the Bosnian one.

The only kind of "aid" which doesn't aid the capitalist war machine is that given selectively to proletarians in struggle – to draft dodgers and deserters and not to loyal troops; to strikers and not to cops and scabs.





# The New Bad Guys

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

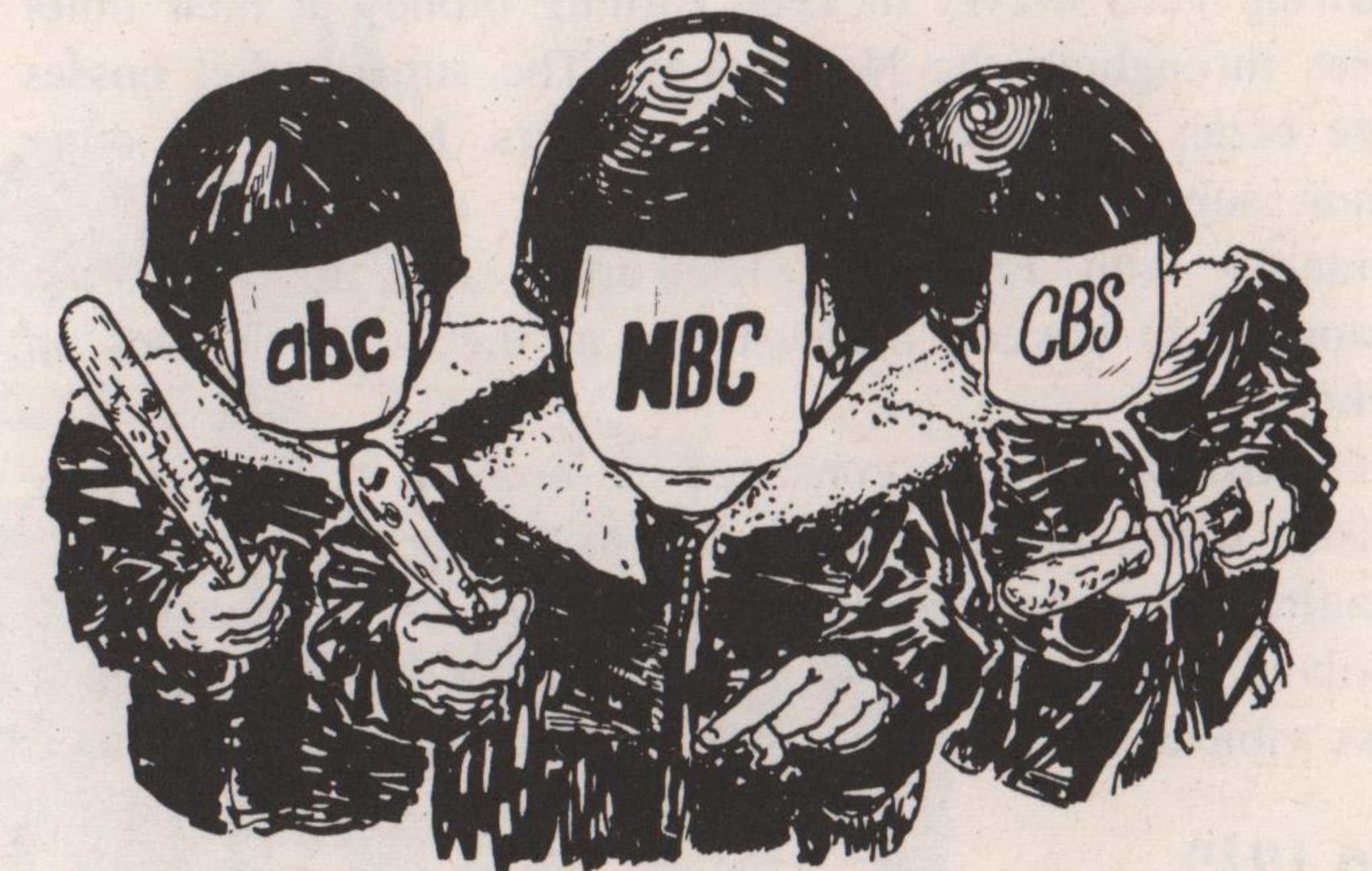
certain. This should be obvious, but anti-fascism is so prevalent that it needs spelling out. Even the *Fifth Estate* added an anarchist "analysis" to the official line: "McVeigh and his buddies obviously wanted to rip flesh. Whether or not there was direct involvement, it is clear the perpetrators came 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.

## Massacres and the Media (II)

Following the Trafalgar Square riot of 1990, there was a debate about the role of photographers. Much of the evidence used by the police to convict people was obtained from newspaper photographers, and there was a brief discussion about the possibility of excluding all photographers from demos. The Trafalgar Square Defendants' Campaign was very much against this idea, not because it was impractical, but because some of them were film-makers and so on, and wanted to use films and photos to help the defence by showing police brutality, etc..

In Central America during the eighties, the issue was more serious. For example, Jeremy Bigwood, a lefty photographer who covered the war in El Salvador, provided numerous photos of major figures and political events and so on to New York photo agencies. Bigwood looked through the files of one of the agencies, and "to his horror", discovered that the State Department had been buying all his pics - up to 20 rolls a week. He then got the State Department's Central America desk to admit that the pictures are sent down to the embassies. The embassies used them for "intelligence" - in other words, gave them to death squads to identify subversives.

Our spy met Bigwood in Chiapas. Bigwood gave them an article from the *Village Voice* from 1988 explaining the story. He's still at it, snapping away, obviously thinking that having exposed the photo agencies is enough. No wonder the Zapatistas wear ski masks.





# Pacific North West Paralysed by Mass Strike\*

The class struggle in Washington, Oregon and Northern California provides a microcosm of our view that the US working class is going through a period of defeat, to put it mildly. Given the economic growth in the North West, we might at least expect a wave of money militancy. The 1930's was a period of economic recession which saw a catastrophic defeat for the working class of the whole world and culminated in the Second World War and a period of complete triumph for capitalism which lasted until the mid-sixties. But even this was a militant period compared to the present.

The thirties showed that you can have a wave of militancy on a world scale, and still be defeated. Even internationalism was turned against the workers; people who thought they were off to fight for the interests of the working class in Spain were used by Stalin and his socialist and anarchist fellow-travellers to fight for the interests of Russia in the Spanish Civil War. The working class did not have the political consciousness or organisation to prevent that defeat. But if militancy is an insufficient precondition for political clarity, it is a necessary one. Most of today's workers haven't a clue, as the recent Fred Meyer strike illustrates.

The strike at Fred Meyer supermarkets started in Aug. 94 when workers rejected management contract offers, demanding larger pay increases, and guaranteed hours for workers. This last item is very important, since if you work below twenty hours a week, you lose most of your rights and benefits. Without guaranteed hours, managers can easily punish the less subservient with less work, hence less money and benefits. Grocery workers barely earn enough to get by on a full week's pay, so the threat of uncertain hours was a major motive in the strike.

There was solidarity from customers, whose boycott of the stores cost the owners a lot of money. The real Fred Meyer is long dead. The store is now owned by an investment corporation called KKR, a pioneer in modern management techniques, downsizing, part-time work, and so on. Needless to say, many workers complained about the change of ownership, seeing it as a cause of their problems, rather than a symptom.

The unions limited the strike to the 26 Portland-area stores, allowing Fred Meyer to keep earning money at their other stores throughout the North West. The supermarket bosses were better organized than the workers. Most of the other major supermarkets locked out their unionized staff in solidarity with Freddie's. The union did not even ask customers to boycott these stores, as they did the ones on strike.

Opposition to scabs consisted of shouting at them as they walked across the picket lines. Only one man is charged with assaulting a scab. For a strike that lasted three months and involved 7,000 workers, in a country with a fine tradition of class violence, this is depressing. This is easily said, though.

\* in 1919

The scab truck drivers were not easy to deal with, many of them brazenly packing pistols.

Perhaps it would have been difficult to win, even with the right attitude. But the attitude was frankly pathetic. At one meeting, a steward said "We just want to work, and we just want the government to recognize that we're human". This was a trade union rep, but this is not unrepresentative of the sort of things said by the workforce on the picket lines.

However, behind the scenes, and against the unions, there was an underground struggle. The workers at unionized stores, locked out by their bosses, were in the vanguard, defying the union's attempts to keep them safely at home. Among other unreported incidents, there was a spate of monkey-wrenching of freezer trucks, resulting in tons of food getting spoiled.

Back in the glorious thirties, the workers knew a thing or two about how to deal with strike-breakers. The famous longshoremen's strike in the Portland docks in 1934, involving about 3,000 workers, also lasted about three months, was about hours and wages, and also included Teamster truck drivers. By consistent and imaginative violence, both in mass confrontations and clandestine hit squads, the longshoremen won. The workers attacked the buses taking scabs to the waterfront, beat up the scabs, and destroyed company cars. One night, the strikers paid a visit to the Admiral Evans, a passenger ship housing scabs. They stormed on board, beat the scabs with broomsticks, then let the ship loose. Unfortunately, it wedged against a bridge long before drifting out to sea.

In response, the picket lines were attacked by police and security guards with shotguns and tear gas. On this occasion, the pickets were beaten. But trains were unable to deliver goods to the docks because strikers had smeared grease on uphill portions of tracks leading into town. After two months, the government considered using the army, but demurred, fearing fraternization. The National Guard, a more patrician body of armed men, was brought in. But the shipping industry was afraid more violence would provoke solidarity action from around the country and internationally (dockers had a fine tradition of international action), so they caved in to the workers' demands in mid-summer 1934.

The Fred Meyer strike lasted until the end of October. There were five separate union negotiating teams. When one of these persuaded its section of workers to go back, the others had little choice but to follow suit. The workers went back more or less on management terms. Workers who stayed on strike till the end now work alongside scabs, with a contract which explicitly makes them cross any future picket lines, in an atmosphere in which any backtalk or feet-dragging can be punished by shorter hours. To be fair, the workers did stage a go-slow for a few days after the return to work, in some cases even refusing to ask customers how they are today. But this is pretty tame compared with the battles waged by their grandparents.

An almost identical strike occurred at Safeways stores in Northern California in April, over the issues of medical benefits, overtime and holiday pay. The supermarket bosses again locked out all unionized workers, but the unions encouraged people to shop at some of the scab stores, picketing only Safeways. The unions signed a deal with the bosses on April 14, in which medical benefits are paid out of the union's fund, in other words the workers' own money, and rushed round the stores ordering the workers back to work. No matter how many times this kind of thing occurs, workers see each case as an individual sell-out, because they have no way of knowing the historical role of unions. Despite their proximity to Oregon, the workers were unable to learn anything from the Fred Meyer strike. How could they, when their only means of communication, the mass media and the unions, are controlled by their enemies? Informal channels of communication, like knowing someone whose aunt used to work at Freddie's, are completely inadequate for generating class consciousness. The need for independent organization was shown again. This organization has to be political, since it cannot be open on such issues as trade unions, or it would be quickly sabotaged by leftists. Yet the only people who are savvy enough to realize this - people with roughly the same ideas as us - are incapable of organizing their way out of a paper bag. This dire state of affairs is a symptom of the profound period of defeat we are now in.

It's not all doom and gloom. The biggest strike in Oregon for over 50 years ended on May 15 when the Oregon Public Employees Union ordered its members back to work. In November, Measure 8, which makes low paid public employees pay for their pensions out of their wages, lowering their salaries by 6% at a stroke, was passed by the voting public. The newly-elected governor also announced a 2-year pay freeze. There was plenty of threatened violence during the strike. The Democratic governor and Republican senators who want to cut the state employment sector were harassed at work and at home. The state and the union quickly got together to nip it in the bud. Negotiations took place in an atmosphere threatened by large mobs of noisy pickets. This was effective at making the state withdraw most of the threatened pay cut, and the union quickly called the strike off. The union's excuses are well summarized by Pat Hamilton, president of Local 089. This is from a flyer distributed by the local icepick-heads, who make no attempt to criticize the union: **Trots: Why did the OPEU call off the pickets?**

**Hack:** There were two reasons. First, we wanted this to be a warning shot at the governor and the legislature. We wanted to demonstrate that we are strong and solidly against this pay cut. Secondly, the strike wasn't designed to penalize the public. It was designed, however, to demonstrate how essential state workers are to the running of the state. And to demonstrate how essential the unions are to the running of the state, he might have added. The courts responded to the strike by declaring Measure 8 unconstitutional, restoring the workers' 6%, and the state cancelled the strike agreement. Workers were still confident enough to demonstrate against this, demanding both the 6% and the strike deal. There have also been mini-strikes amongst Oregon's isolated Mexican fruit-pickers and hospital workers at OHSU in Portland, which has been privatized, with speed-ups, job cuts and so on.

The basic role of unions is the same now as in 1934: negotiating the price of labor power. They can hardly avoid "selling out" their members if their purpose is to sell their bodies for so many hours a day, to the highest bidder, when you're lucky. But if workers really fought for their interests as ruthlessly as their enemies fight for theirs, the unions would be swept aside.

On 19 November 1995, the union tried to call off a strike at Boeing in Seattle, Gresham, and other locations. The aviation company's 32,000 production workers had struck on October 6 for more pay, job protection against sub-contracting, and against paying their own health insurance premiums. The union recommended accepting a deal which would have involved the company telling the union in advance of plans to "outsource", or sub-contract, work, and if the union put forward a plan to fulfil orders by exploiting its own members instead of outsiders, the company would be required to "seriously consider" the proposal. On the wages front, the union recommended accepting a wage deal below inflation levels in the booming North West. But though the workers rejected the "sell-out", and got a better deal by staying out for another month, they hardly kept the bosses awake at night. During 1995, Boeing regained 70% of the world commercial aircraft market. The relative growth in workers' militancy last year has to be seen in the context of the overall period of defeat. For every act of defiance, there are dozens of submissions. Rather than simply cheering every sectional strike, we need to have an honest analysis of the overall situation. We have to look at the continuing successes of the capitalist offensive as well as resistance to it.





# Unmasking the Zapatistas



"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 board<sup>1</sup>. 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 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 fluffy 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



Marcos answering questions on the first day of the uprising

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*<sup>2</sup>, 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 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 SUTAU, 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, SUTAU, 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 Prodig Squad 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 Tzeltzil [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 expres-

ssion 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".

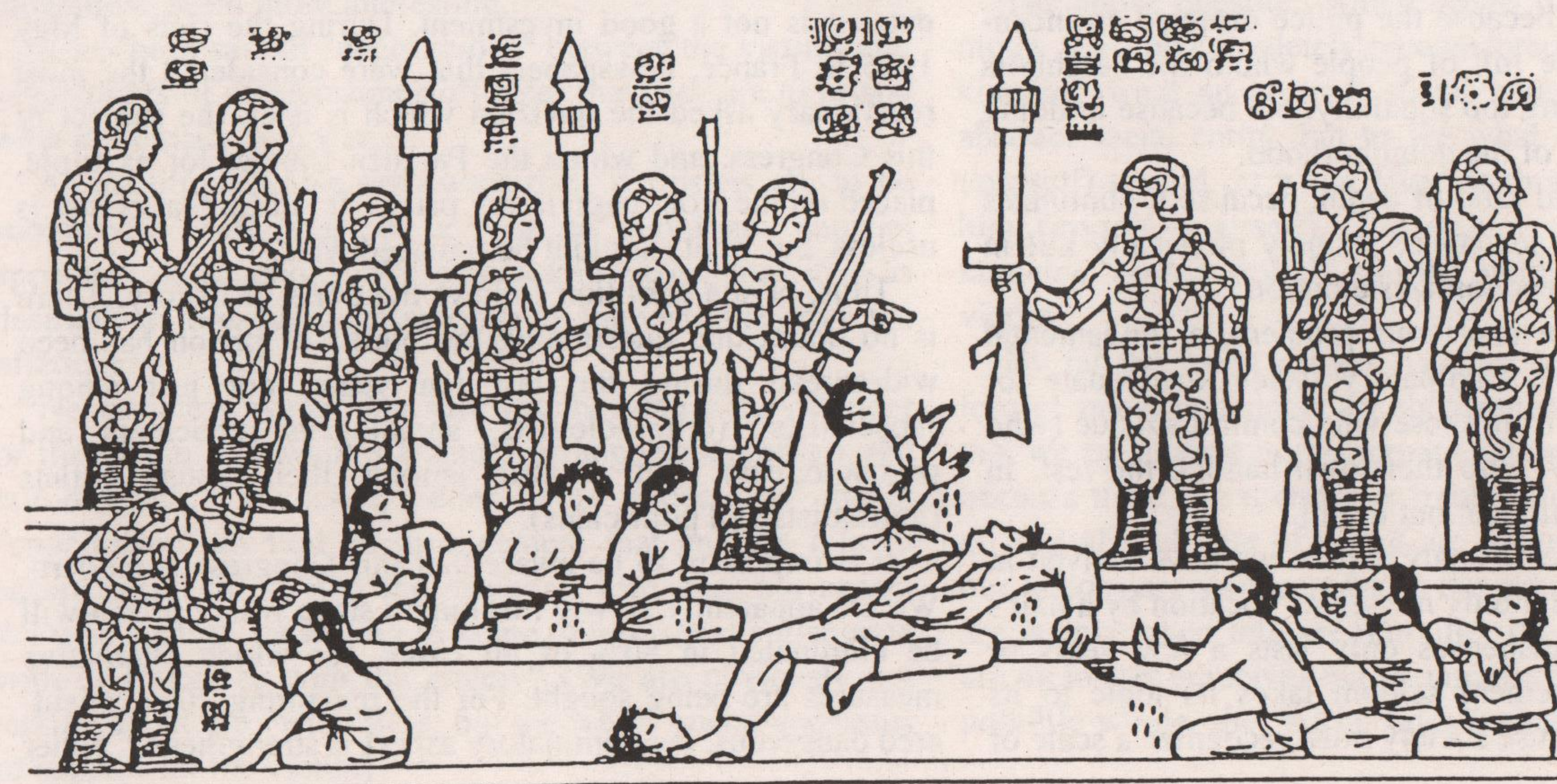
### Don't Worry, Be Happy

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.

1. *Zapata and the Mexican Revolution*. John Womack, Random House, NY 1970.
2. *Distant Neighbors*. Alan Riding, Random House, NY 1986.





# Against Prisons

by Catherine Baker

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 I 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.

Translated by Doug Imrie and Michael William

Our 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.





# After Mumia...



The campaign to save Mumia Abu-Jamal showed that we can have an effect. At the time of writing, he is still in jail, still under sentence of death, but the sentence was postponed because of the protests. Though the media blocked out news of such events as the blockade of the Brooklyn Bridge, the mini-riot in San Francisco and the militant demonstrations around the governors' conference in Burlington, Vermont, the federal and state judicial system certainly took notice of the international campaign of demos, vigils, phone calls, letters and direct action. Mumia looks forward to an appeal against what tens of thousands now know was a blatant frame-up. We won't be satisfied til Mumia is back on the streets, exposing the murdering police of Philadelphia. Keep up the pressure! More information about Mumia's case can be obtained from, among other places, EQUAL JUSTICE USA, PO BOX 5206, HYATTSVILLE, MD 20782.

If there is a number one priority, it is the fight against the judicial system. This is a list of other prisoners and organisations who would benefit from our support. Trivial things like postage stamps make a lot of difference to prisoners, whose income is to say the least limited. Stamps should be sent in a whole book, and at the top of the accompanying letter, you should write "Encl: book of stamps" or what else the letter contains. Most importantly, political prisoners can be helped by knowing that people on the outside are thinking about them. It makes it harder for the authorities to isolate them when they see letters from supporters coming in.

← Much of the latest information about prisoners in the USA can be obtained from RAZE THE WALLS, PO BOX 22774, SEATTLE, WA 98122-0774, together with a far more comprehensive list of support organisations. The following advice on writing to prisoners was also extracted from *Raze the Walls*:

1) Please forget any preconceptions or stereotypes you may have of people in prison. They are no different from people outside of prison.

2) In your first letter, explain a little about why you are writing and ask if the person would like to be writing to you. Introduce yourself, describe yourself, your family, your work, where you live, and also the concern which leads you to write.

3) Feel free to ask questions about prison life, about the person's interests, where they are from, whether they have any appeals in progress, etc..

4) Do not ask right away about "the crime", but let them volunteer that information.

5) It is good to ask questions, because it gives the person something to respond to, but do not ask too many at once especially in the first letter. Let trust build between you, and always try to share as much about yourself as you ask the other person to share.

6) If you feel you will only be able to write, for example, monthly, make this clear to the prisoner. It is important to not promise things that you will not be able to follow through.

7) If you want to send things like books, stamps, stationary, or food, ask first whether the person wants them, whether they will be allowed to enter the prison and how they will need to be sent.

8) The person may ask you to send money. If you feel good about that, then send it. Never feel obliged to respond to a request for money, and always respond honestly. If you do send money, be sure to find out in what form it must be sent, and if you need to be on a special list to send it.

9) You may want to visit this person in addition to writing, that would be great! Just ask him/her whether they want you to visit and what the hours and restrictions are.

10) Save letters from the prisoner as they could be helpful in their appeals process or clemency hearings.

Another useful source of information is PRISON LEGAL NEWS, PO BOX 1684, LAKE WORTH, FL 33460.

Books or donations (US money orders) to Books for Prisoners projects are much appreciated. There is always work to be done, so if you live near one, volunteer.

BOOKS TO PRISONERS, BOX A, 92 PIKE ST, SEATTLE, WA 98101.

BOOKS THROUGH BARS, NEW SOCIETY PUBLISHERS, 4527 SPRINGFIELD AVE, PHILADELPHIA, PA.

PRISON BOOK PROGRAM, 92 GREEN ST., JAMAICA PL, MA 02130.

PRISON READING PROJECT, C/O PAZ PRESS, PO BOX 3146 FAYETTEVILLE, AR 72702.

BOOKS FOR PRISONERS, BOUND TOGETHER BOOKS, 1369 HAIGHT ST., SAN FRANCISCO, CA 94117.

BOOKS TO PRISONERS, 315 CAMBIE ST, VANCOUVER, BC, CANADA V6B 2N4.

Information about prisoners and prison struggles in Britain can be obtained from: TAKING LIBERTIES, C/O 121 RAILTON RD, LONDON, SE24 0LP. Donations are of course solicited.

KATHERINE POWER. In 1970, at the height of the revolutionary class movement which ended the Vietnam war, many people were involved in armed robberies to support the poor,

bombings of Officer Training Corps, and so on. Katherine Power was one of them. She and her comrades robbed a bank, and in the process a policeman was fatally injured. For 23 years she lived under false identities, raising a son (now 17) and ended up running a restaurant in Corvallis, Oregon. For whatever reason, in 1993 she decided to bargain with the authorities for her surrender. She got eight to twelve years. One of the conditions her lawyer negotiated was that she serve her time near her family in Oregon. This condition was broken. The latest address we have for her is : C/O MCI-FRAMINGHAM, PO BOX 9007, FRAMINGHAM, MA 01701-9007.



Katharine Power

JERRY DALE LOWE. During the 1993 miners' strike, scab contractor Eddie York was shot dead at Arch Mineral's Ruffner mine in West Virginia. Jerry Lowe was charged with federal firearms violations, and seven other miners were charged with lesser offences. Lowe got 10 years 11 months. The United Mine Workers of America's officials at the scene persuaded the reluctant strikers to give statements to the police without lawyers being present. The union divided the miners, getting some of them to testify against Lowe. The UMWA's president condemned picket-line violence and the union never printed a word about the case, trying to isolate Lowe and the others. Unfortunately, most of Lowe's supporters are icepick-heads who won't reply to letters about the case. Honest information can be obtained from COLLECTIVE ACTION NOTES, POB 22962, BALTO. MD 21203. The latest address we have for Lowe is : C/O SOUTH CENTRAL REGIONAL JAIL, 1001 CENTER WAY, CHARLESTON, WEST VIRGINIA 25309.



Jerry Dale Lowe and his wife Lee

Notwithstanding the above comments about Trots, another political prisoner who should be supported is a member of the Socialist Workers Party, MARK CURTIS. He was arrested for rape and burglary on March 4, 1988, and sentenced to 25 years. The charges are ridiculous. He was framed up because he was active in the struggle of meatpackers. More details can be obtained from MARK CURTIS DEFENSE COMMITTEE, BOX 1048, DES MOINES, IA 50311.

JULIO WICKS #79367 UNIT 32B, PARCHMAN, MS 38738, is an important prisoner activist. More details about Julio can be found on the Letters Page.

PELICAN BAY is a notorious modern prison in Northern California, with perspex barriers instead of bars, and a reputation for brutality. With a total population of 3500, Pelican Bay has had 3 prisoners shot dead, 2 of whom were not the ones at whom the screws were aiming. Another 21 prisoners have been hit by gun shots. Pepper spray is also frequently used at point-blank range. Currently various lawsuits are being taken out against the authorities by various prisoners, and even judges have found most of their complaints justified. A highly informative newsletter can be obtained from PELICAN BAY INFORMATION PROJECT, 2489 MISSION ST. 28, SAN FRANCISCO, CA 94110.

ERNIE LOTCHES is a Klamath/Modoc Indian who is currently on death row in Oregon, wrongly convicted of aggravated homicide. On 22 August 1992, Ernie was confronted by an Economic Improvement Department security guard. After being approached and provoked by the security guard's excessive use of force, a gunfight erupted. After being fired on repeatedly Ernie Lotches was forced to return fire. In the armed confrontation the EID security guard was killed. In such a shootout, there is no way a jury could be certain that one of the parties was guilty of first-degree murder, but that is what happened, due to numerous irregularities in the trial, details of which can be obtained from the ERNIE LOTCHES DEFENSE FUND, PO BOX 3022, SALEM, OR 97302. Ernie Lotches is #3649258 at OREGON STATE PENITENTIARY, 2605 STATE ST., SALEM, OR 97310.

*Can't Jail the Spirit* is a list of American left-wing political prisoners, though somewhat out of date. A new edition would be useful. The editors argue against support for "right wing" prisoners. This shows the dangers involved in the terms "left" and "right". Politics is no longer as simple as that, if it ever was. We support those imprisoned after the Waco massacre, as much as the MOVE 9 from Philadelphia, imprisoned after a similar massacre (see article in last issue). We support them both because we don't want the state to get away with murdering or imprisoning whoever it wants. For the same reason, we oppose moral panics, whether by Christians against gays, or liberals against "hate groups". *Can't Jail the Spirit*, Biographies of US Political Prisoners, Editorial El Coqui, October 1992. 1671 N. Claremont, Chicago-IL 60647.



MICHAEL NEW is a 22 year old Army Medic. He refuses to go to Bosnia ostensibly because he will not serve under UN rather than US command. In other words, his opposition appears to be right wing, patriotic and populist. But some of the Gulf War refusers objected to the war on what they claimed were religious grounds. We don't agree with black Muslims either. We support opponents of the war machine, virtually regardless of ideology. The MICHAEL NEW DEFENSE FUND is at PO BOX 1136, CRESTWOOD, KENTUCKY 40014.

## EXECUTIONERS FOR EQUALITY

Since the restoration of the death penalty in the USA in 1976, nearly 40% of those grilled in the electric chair, shot by firing squad, or injected with poison by the state have been black. In the interests of equality. Rep. Don Edwards (D-CA) wants to ensure that execution is more evenly applied: "As the Congress prepares to undertake a general restoration and expansion of the federal death penalty, we need to ensure that the procedures are in place to prevent and remedy this kind of racial bias". The noble goal of Equality is taken seriously in America. Sexual inequality in the workplace was combated by reducing men's salaries to bring them in line with women's. Now racism in the execution industry is to be addressed by frying more white people.

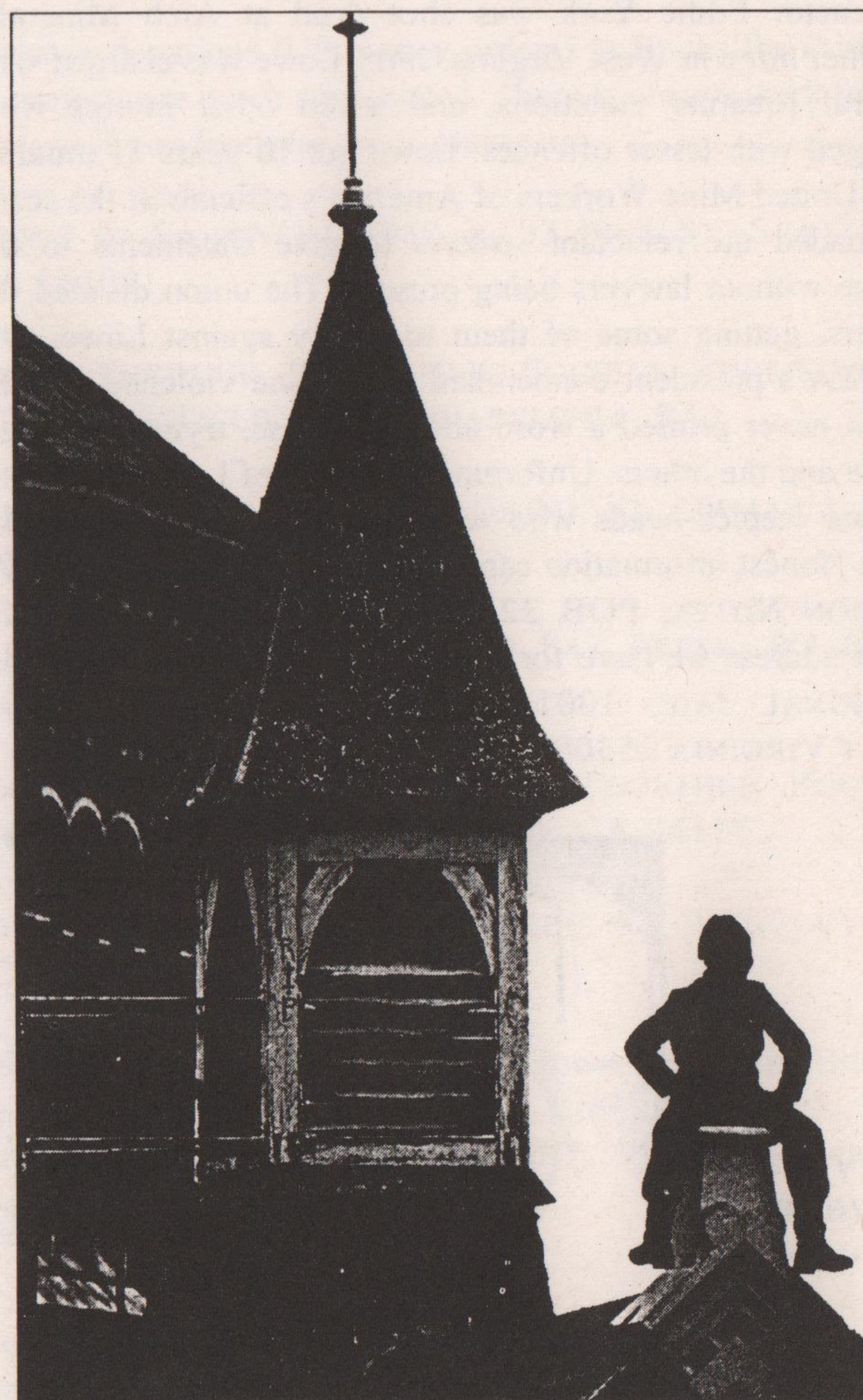
The blatantly racist nature of the judicial system is one of the major causes of resistance against it. The biggest prison uprising in the USA for years erupted on 19 October 1995 in response to the refusal of Congress to heed the request of the Sentencing Commission to reduce the enormous disparity between sentences for possession of cocaine powder and crack cocaine. The uprisings started at Talladega in Alabama. At Allenwood, Pennsylvania, 150 inmates tore up the dining hall. In Memphis, according to Reuters, prisoners set fire to housing units. In response, the government ordered 90,000 prisoners to remain in their cells in 70 federal prisons across the nation, with only cold meals, and no visits or phone calls. This provoked the one-day uprising at Greenville, Illinois, which was put down by guards and SWAT police, despite which, the uprisings continued to spread. For example, the prisoners at Lewis Run, Pennsylvania, seized four cell blocks on 24 October.

Crack is the only drug that carries a mandatory federal prison sentence for mere possession. Conviction for possession of five grams of crack guarantees five years without parole, even for first time offenders. In contrast, it takes *five hundred* grams of powder coke to get the mandatory five years. Crack and powder are different, and arguably, crack is more addictive. But the 100-1 disparity has nothing to do with the medical facts. It is obviously a reflection of the fact that most coke users are white, and most crack users, black. Even the conviction rates reflect the fact this. 88% of those convicted for crack are black, 27% for coke.

The "war on drugs" has nothing to do with cutting down on violence and overdoses. That could only be achieved by legalising the whole business. It has everything to do with

keeping the poor divided and easily policed. It is widely believed, with good reason, that the authorities deliberately introduced heroin into communities of resistance in the late sixties (mostly black ghettos, but also hide-outs for draft dodgers like the Haight in San Francisco). Certainly, the CIA is widely involved in the international drug trade, as numerous exposures (Iran/Contra, Noriega, etc.) prove. The ruling class isn't interested in stopping the drug trade, but in encouraging it, making a profit out of it, using it to blackmail addicts into becoming police informants, using the violence and theft as a rationale for military intervention at home and abroad, but most importantly, keeping the poor fighting each other instead of the bosses.

The fact that execution is not primarily intended as a deterrent is illustrated by a recent case in South Carolina. Susan Smith was found guilty of murdering her two young sons, and the prosecution called for the death penalty. This is not because they think it will deter other mothers from killing their children ("I was going to shoot my two, but when I considered the electric chair, I changed my mind. Now, if it was only life imprisonment..."), but because it satisfies the deep rooted need for a fair punishment. What could be more just than a fair exchange, a life for a life? Swayed by sentiment rather than logic, the jury settled for life imprisonment.



Another gratuitous prison riot picture from the uprising at Strangeways in the UK, April 1990.

# New World Order: The Rhetoric and the Reality

*"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".*

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 catch-phrase. 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 3 (1) 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 in (1), 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".*

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."* (2)

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

*"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"* (3).

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, (4) 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 economy without the concept of Imperialism, as Geoff Kay does in *Development and Underdevelopment* (5).

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* (6), following the dialectical method outlined in Marx's Preface(3), 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" (7), p88.

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

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"* (6), 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"* (6), 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 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 class (9) 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)(8), 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* in (8), pp 130-131). Until this happened, she maintained, there was a case for supporting 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 in (6) 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 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.

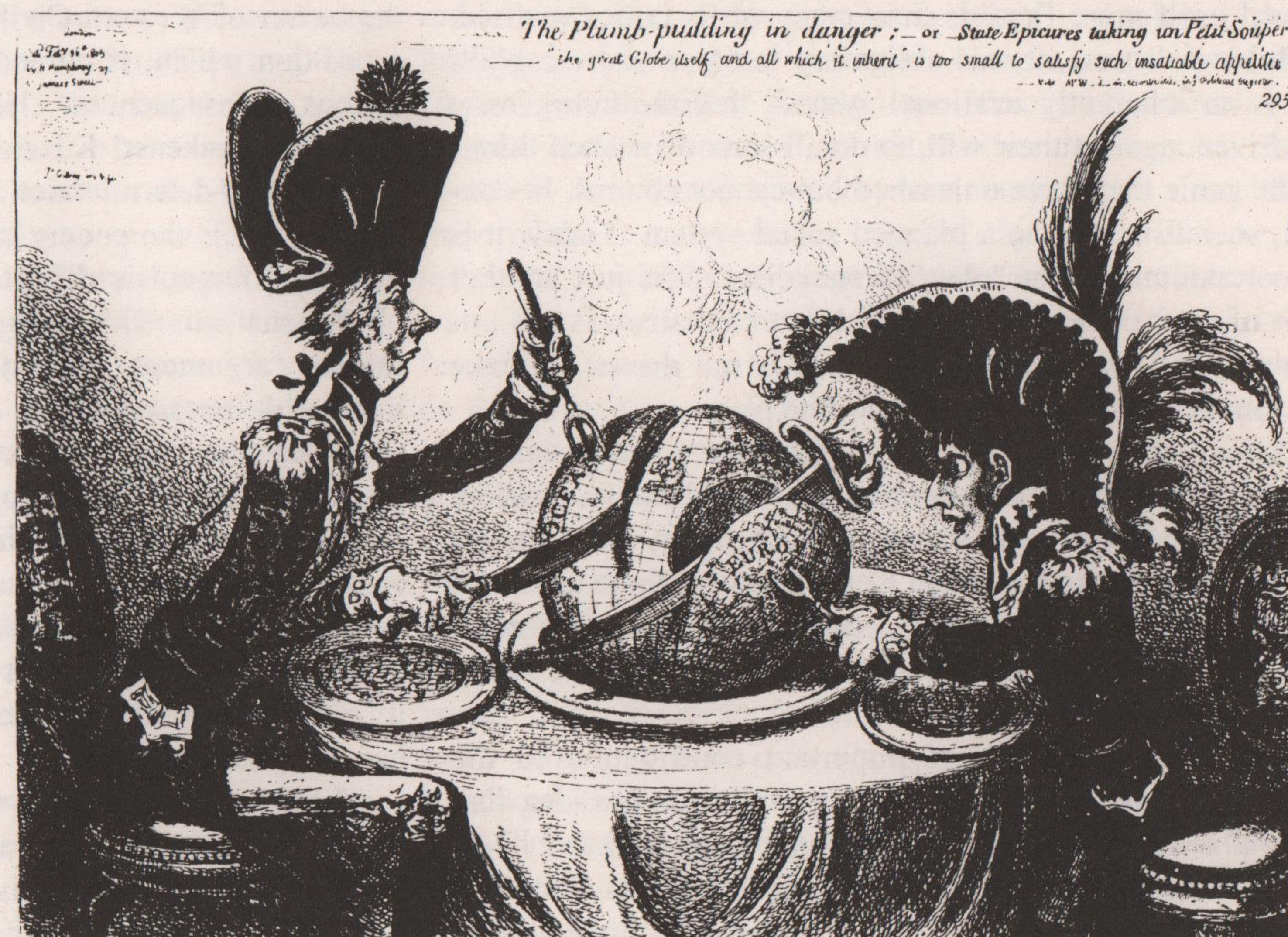
The emergence of nations is explained by Benedict Anderson in *Imagined Communities* (10) as the result of three main factors. One is the collapse of religion. According to Anderson, the existential angst caused by the decline of religion partly explains the rise of nationalism as a substitute community. 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. 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 conquests (10), 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



"The Plumb Pudding in Danger"  
- a drawing by James Gillray in 1805 shows Napoleon and Pitt carving up the world.



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 in (10), p15.

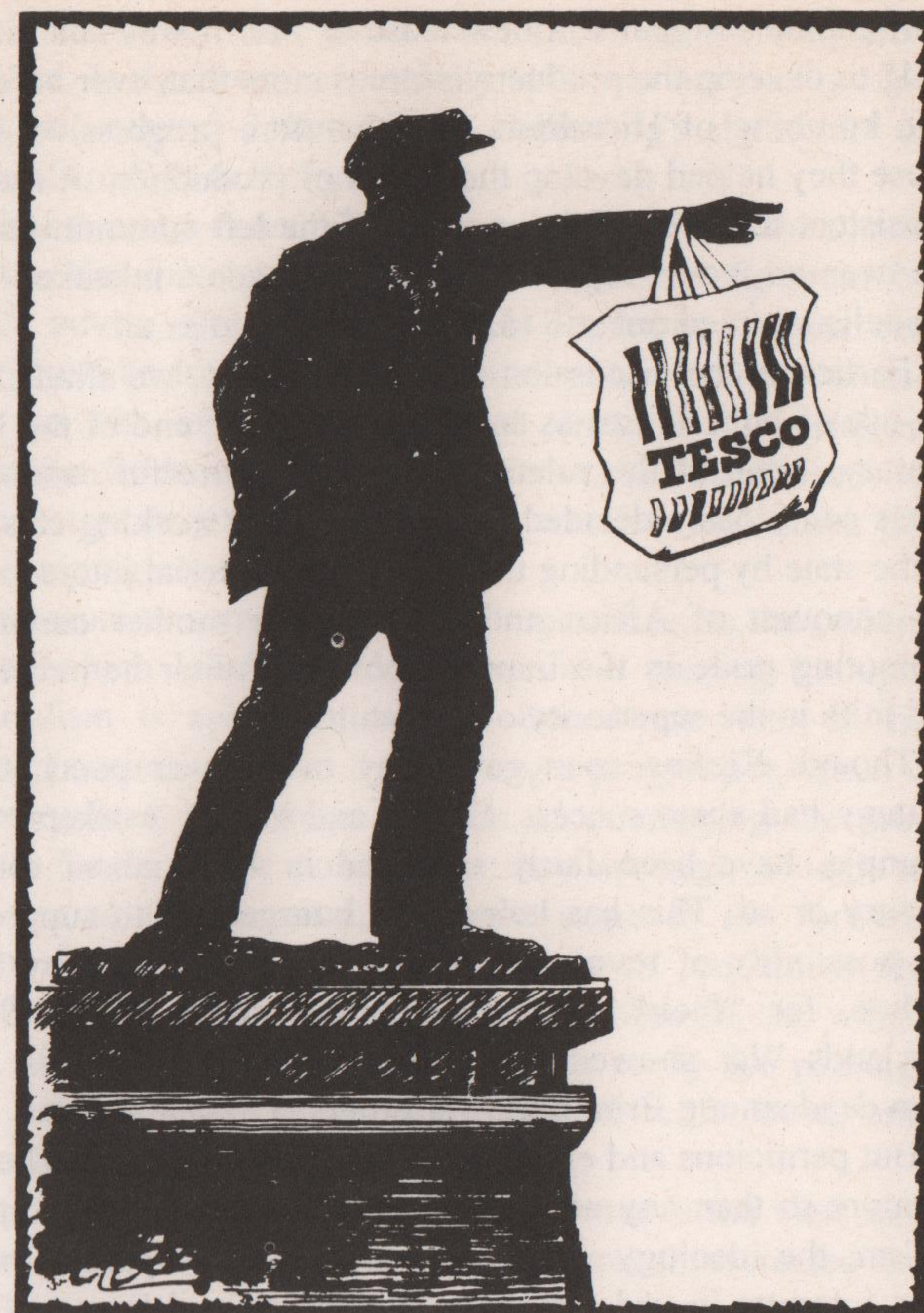
Anderson starts by showing that nations are imagined communities – we tend to think we have something in common with our fellow-nationals, most of whom we will never meet – and then tries to work out how they were created and by whom. The consequences can be summarised in the phrase "The Bosses Have 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 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.

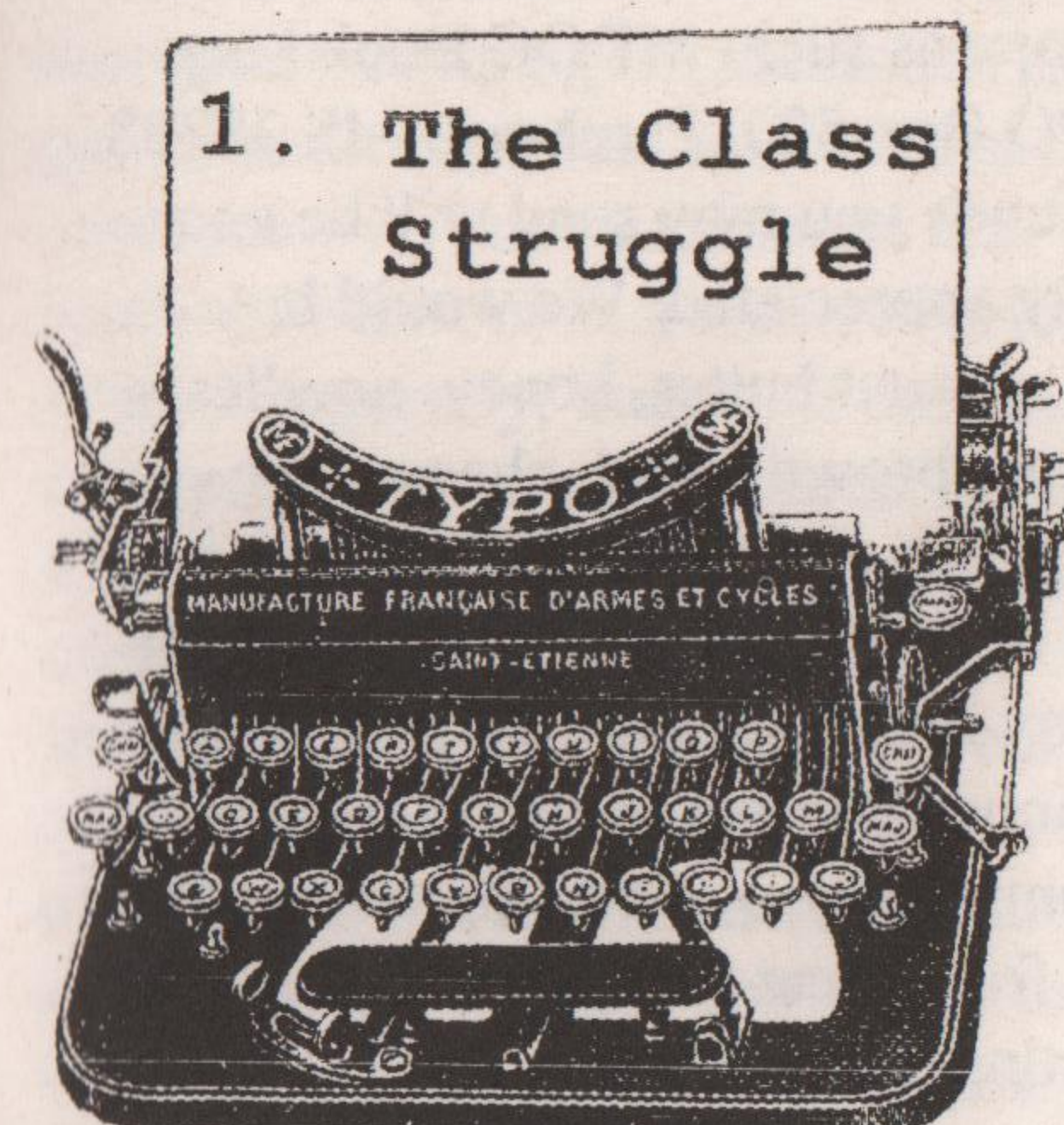
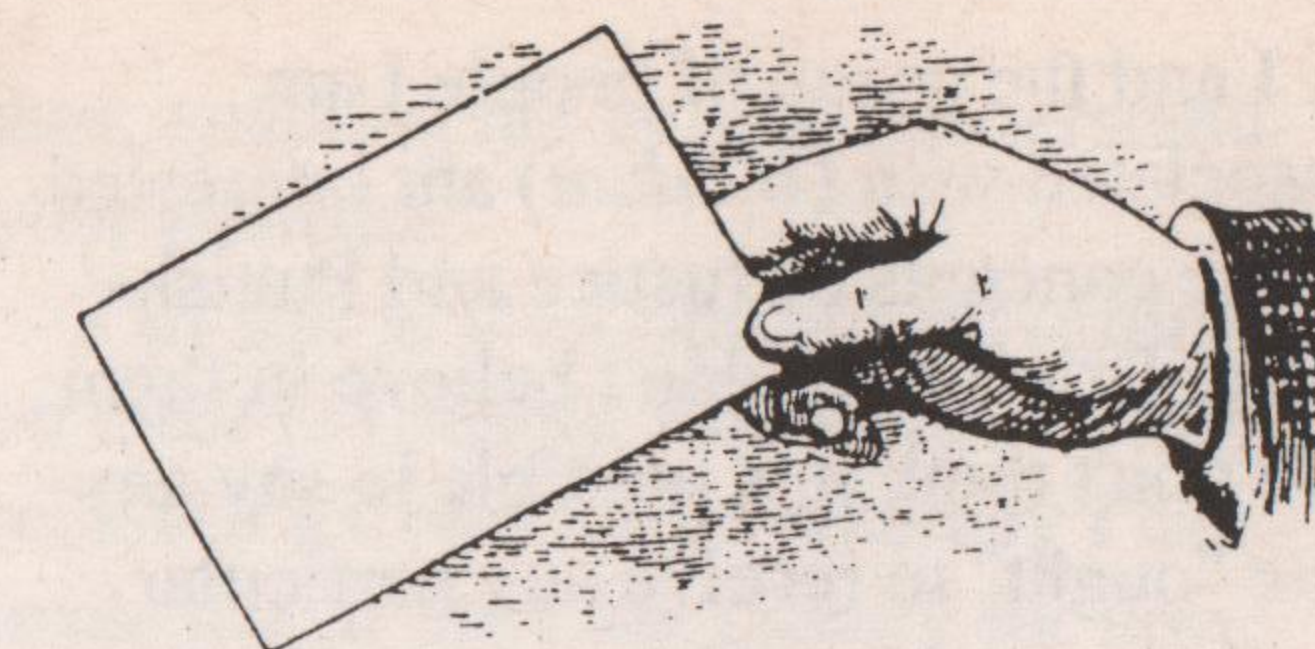
In order to hedge our bets, let's admit that we cannot rule out the possibility of the emergence of rival blocs again. We are not in a position to say just how permanent the New World Order is. Our guess is that China would be the only basis for a bloc to seriously challenge the USA. The European Community, 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" (11), 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.



1. *Capital*, 3, K. Marx, Penguin, London 1981.
2. *The German Ideology*, in Karl Marx: Selected Writings, ed. D. McLellan, OUP 1977.
3. *Preface to A Critique of Political Economy* (1859) in *Karl Marx: Selected Writings*, ed. D. McLellan, OUP 1977.
4. *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism*, V. Lenin, Foreign Languages Press, Peking 1973.
5. *Development and Underdevelopment*, G. Kay, MacMillan, London 1975.
6. *Imperialism and World Economy*, N. Bukharin, Merlin, London 1976.
7. *Selected Political Writings*, K. Kautsky, ed. P. Goode, MacMillan, London 1983.
8. *The National Question*, R. Luxemburg, Monthly Review Press, New York 1977.
9. *The Right of Nations to Self-Determination*, V. Lenin, Progress Publishers, Moscow 1967.
10. *Imagined Communities*, B. Anderson, Verso, London 1983.
11. *Against His-story, Against Leviathan!*, F. Perlman, Black & Red, Detroit 1983.

# LETTERS



To: Collective Action Notes, POB 22962, Balto. MD 21203 (e-mail: cansv@igc.apc.org)

25 July 94.

Dear comrades,

Thanks for the first 2 issues of *Collective Action Notes*. It seems a worthwhile if unexciting effort. We would just like to reply to a comment you made about our perspectives for the class struggle in issue #2.

Talking about the downturn in the "revolt against work" you say:

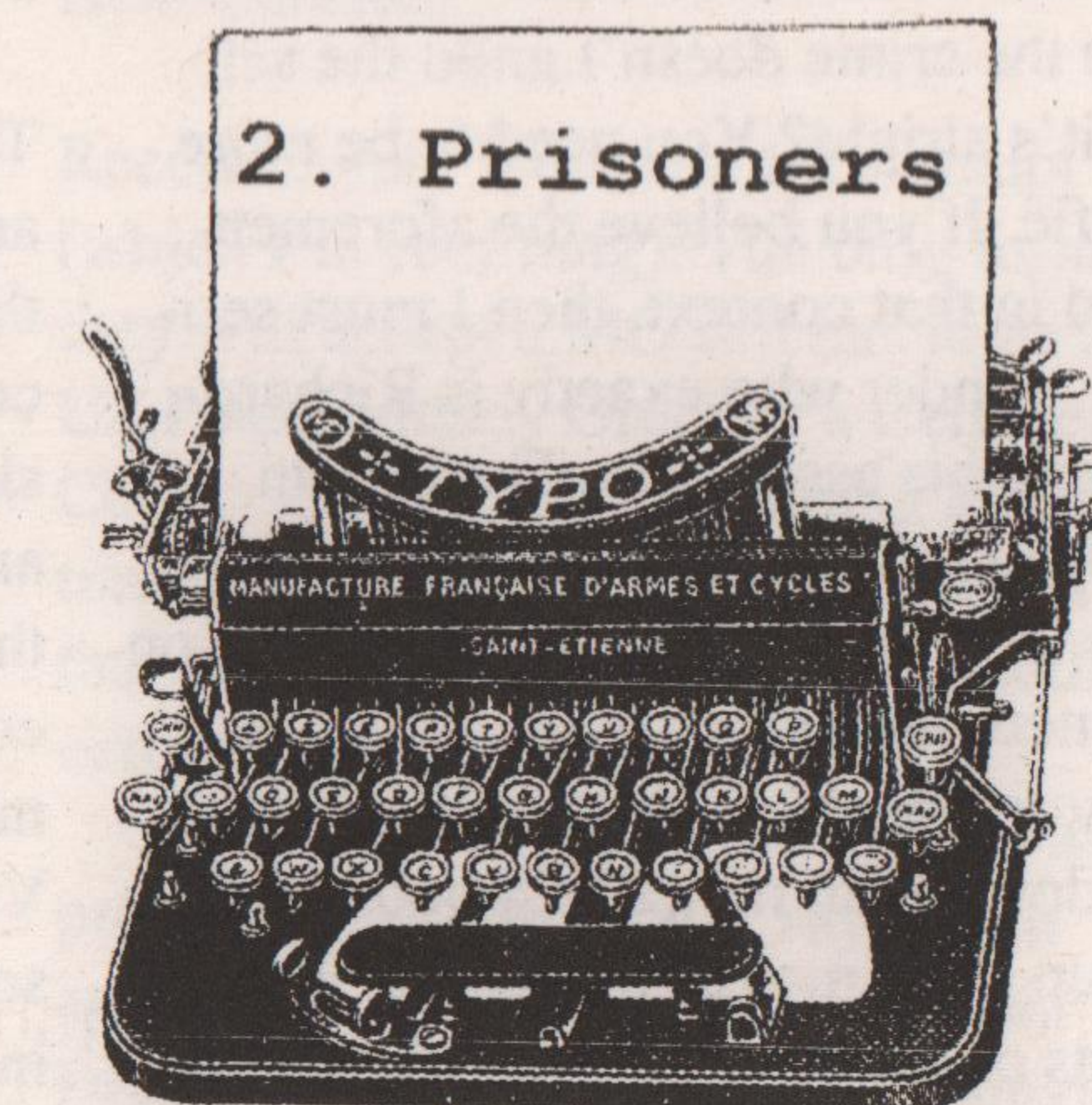
*To many people this is further proof that the working class is on a permanent downward spiral or even that "The American working class has been smashed" (as the WILDCAT UK group argued a few years ago in its journal, only to turn around a year later and hail the L.A. riots as proof of a new "proletarian" upsurge!)*

There are several errors in this statement. Firstly, the statement *The US working class has been smashed* is located within an article (*Wildcat* 15, Fall '91) which briefly describes the international class struggle, and is not entirely pessimistic. It does not say *the working class is on a permanent downward spiral*, it says *we don't know how long it will be before the international class struggle revives*. Our enthusiastic

response to the 1992 April/May uprisings was not a "turn around". It concludes *it will take more than a few riots to overcome the massive defeat the working class in the US has suffered since the sixties*. (*Wildcat* 16, Fall '92).

In the last three issues, we have developed an analysis of the state of the international class struggle which deserves a more serious response than distorting our argument by misquoting out of context. Although as you say it is worth listing the underground class struggle, this is not an analysis. The examples given in your journal hardly amount to a refutation of our gloomy prognosis.

**Note:** *Collective Action Notes* gets bigger and better, and each issue contains a longer list of strikes. Our letter was not published however, no doubt because it was too political. The declared aim of the publication is to publicise a minimum of facts about struggles around the world "independent of all interpretation".



To: Julio Wicks # 79367, Unit 32 B, Parchman MS 38738.

Julio Wicks is a prisoner in Mississippi who produces flyers opposing the corrupt prison regime. He is treated as a maximum security prisoner because of his agitation in favour of prisoners' rights. He needs your support. Write to him directly, or find out more by con-

tacting *Raze the Walls* at PO Box 22774, Seattle WA 98122-0774. This support group gave us the advice *Never lie to a Prisoner. Be totally honest and blunt*.

In his letter to us in October 1994, Julio described his situation as follows:

*I've been in this Maximum Security Unit (MSU) for just about two and a half years. I'm locked in my cell approx. 23-24 hours a day. I'm allowed a "maximum" of 2 hrs. outside recreation every four (4) weeks. Inside recreation is non-existent - minimal. Whenever I'm to come out of my cell, I'm placed in leg irons and waist chains. Shower, doctor, reclassification, etc.. My chains follow me wherever I go! Imagine that type of existence for two and a half years. Don't ever try it!! And guess what? I've never killed anyone, not a rapist (they should be castrated) I am just not an ass kissing, bootlicking conformist. It eats me up daily to know that those "keeping me" are in need of keeping themselves!*

Dear Julio,

Thanks for your letter.

I thought I'd quickly send you some stamps as it seems to be an urgent need.

I intend to get into more of a discussion with you about some of the issues you raise in your letter, but perhaps this can wait 'til later.

I just want to raise two points briefly. Firstly, I am not sure why you are concerned about corruption among the prison staff. Given that their job is keeping you in prison, does it really matter whether they are corrupt or as pure as the driven snow? Obviously, if that corruption adversely affects prisoners' conditions, it is important. I'd like to hear what you say about this.

Secondly, I don't think there is any point in being vindictive toward other prisoners. For example, you said that you think rapists ought to be castrated. Hopefully, you didn't mean that to be taken literally, but I thought I'd mention



it. I and the group of people I am associated with (*Wildcat*) am interested in the concepts of Justice and Punishment. Briefly, we don't believe in them. We don't think it is possible to say anyone "ought" to receive any particular punishment for a crime, since this is not going to undo the crime. Justice is based on the same principles as capitalist society in general: the idea of equivalence between given quantities of dissimilar things. For example, a certain quantity of punishment equals a certain amount of crime.

Anyway, perhaps I am making too much of your offhand remark about what rapists "deserve".

Please let us know what you think of these comments, and if you need anything else.

December 27 1994.

Dear Friend and Comrade (I hope we can become comrades anyway)

I received your card and stamps today, thank you very much for both.

Since having received your letter (dated Nov. 15th) I have been going through a turmoil as to exactly where you were coming from, or, more importantly, what type of image of yourself you were trying to convey to me.

You stated that you read my "flyer". You wrote me with what I regard as pure antagonism and ridicule concerning something I wrote. You stated you couldn't understand my views on corruption because of my being confined. That's preposterous! I cannot think of a more asinine analogy. So I take it, Nixon and Watergate, the S & L bailout, etc., because we live in, are part of the system, it should not matter that the Heads of our State use corruption at any and all levels. So I must ask you, does it matter to you that those governing the Free World are corrupt? I'm interested in your reply.

At the risk of being blunt. Most certainly corruption has an adverse effect on prisoners' conditions! Example: the master menu will read "Cheese-burgers". We will receive soy patties. Why? The Free World man who is Director of Food Services has his "boy" who make up and sell hundreds of cheeseburgers on the black market. The

"boy" is given a small cut, and the rest of the cash is splitted between administrators over that particular area. That type of corruption exists in each area of the prison to some degree. That being so, prisoners who have no funds to pay for food they righteously should be served are exploited by those officials that do the corrupting. That does make some sense to you I hope.

You went on to say that you are interested in the concepts of Justice and Punishment but you don't believe in them. One might ask, what is the purpose of the interest if you don't believe in either? Is it for the mere self knowledge or what?

Something else you wrote raised my eyebrows. What do you propose society does with child molesters, sodomizers, men who rape three year children and infect them with the Aids virus. The ninety year old blind woman who answers her doorbell to be greeted by two 300lb. robbers, who rob her, physically brutalize her, then put six bullets in her head. And don't forget the guy who uses explosives and blows up a family members house killing everyone. And those 200 children in the midst of prayer service at church who are Fire-bombed and murdered? What are you saying, that we live in a society (fairytale) where there is no law of any kind and no kind of order? You say because the crime doesn't undo the act, then it's alright? You need to be more specific. If you believe the aforementioned in that context, then I must seriously wonder who exactly is Richard Tate and his associates. Then again, perhaps I have misconstrued your intentions. I hope I have anyway. Now on to something else.

There are only a few brothers in lock-down with me (23-24 hours a day lock-up. Any move from cell is in restraints or hand-cuffs), who share my philosophy and ideology. Anyway, because the prison so heavily censors, delays and shreds my mail, my outside contacts are near nil. Cash on hand is non-existent! I am not allowed any food in packages which is a bummer. My nutrient and vitamin supplement is very low. We are losing weight because we are not eating right, and we are not eating properly because we have no money. We are in need of financial

support. I've heard it said that people run like hell at the mere thought of sacrifice. We will see. The only way we can receive money in here is by US Postal Money Order only.

Pay to the order of: Book-keeping (for Julio Wicks, #79367). Address the envelope as such: MDOC Book keeping, PO Box 500, Parchman MS 38738. Any funds you may send will be enormously appreciated. We would buy Spam, peanut butter, honey, noodles, crackers, brown bread, cheese, egg sandwiches, etc.. With \$20 or so we could have a feast. We are all vegetarians (my comrades) and all lack vital nutritious vitamins and food. Have one (1) comrade who is making a slow transition from meat to non-meat diets. He is coming along though.

Please don't turn your back on us. We need you! Stay strong and stay strong! Forever forward, never backward,

Julio.

10 April 95.

Sent to MDOC Book-keeping: \$20 money order. Enclosed: receipt for money order.

Dear comrade,

Thanks for your letter of Dec 27. To answer the question whether it matters that those governing the Free World are corrupt – the short answer is no. A slightly longer answer is as follows. We are glad you raised Watergate, because this is a particularly clear example of corruption and crime at the highest level mattering not a bit to the poor. Bombing Vietnam and Cambodia, now that was something else. But Nixon was impeached for organizing the burglary of the Demos' HQ. What does it matter if one gang of criminal mass-murderers steal documents from another? The Savings & Loan bailout is a bit more complicated, because working people had their savings in companies that went bankrupt. Obviously, we support campaigns to force the state to reimburse these people. But corruption in general should not be opposed. The individuals who made a lot out of the S

& Ls were no more guilty than anyone else who makes loads of money from the capitalist system. Only the law makes a distinction between legal and illegal profiteering. To us, it makes no difference.

In Italy at present, there is a big anti-corruption campaign. Traditionally, government contracts are awarded to someone who knows someone else's brother-in-law, or as a result of bribery, or less frequently, threats. If the anti-corruption campaign succeeds, contracts will be awarded to the companies that can do the work cheapest, in other words, those who exploit their workers more efficiently. Anti-corruption is part of privatization and the deregulation of sectors where workers don't have to work quite as hard, and where their jobs are more secure, in favor of a more American-style system.

On the other hand, as we said, if corruption adversely affects prisoners' conditions, it is important. It obviously affects prisoners if the prison kitchen department substitutes cheaper food for the official menu, reselling the original items.

To summarize, corruption sometimes makes things worse for us, sometimes a bit better, and usually makes no difference.

We cannot understand your apparent concern about "where we are coming from". You may disagree with us about Justice, but we can assure you that it is a genuine position which we have worked out gradually through involvement around various prisoners' issues, and through reading about the history of punishment, etc.. If you want, we could send you a couple of issues of the magazine *Wildcat* in which we develop this discussion. We hope this makes it clear why we are interested in the concepts of Justice and Punishment – we oppose them because they are central to the workings of this society.

We are not impressed by your lurid tales of children being blown up by robbers with AIDS. Send these stories to the *New York Post*. Sure, there are some nasty people about. Perhaps it may be necessary to eliminate certain individuals who are beyond a cure. But this is not Justice. Justice means punishing people, making them pay for what they have done. They have to pay

just the right amount of punishment for the quantity of crime they have committed. One of the reasons prison tended to replace other forms of punishment with the rise of capitalism is precisely that it is quantifiable according to the variable of time. Being able to measure punishment is one of the preconditions of Justice. The other is the ability to measure crime according to the same standard, so that the punishment can exactly equal the crime.

Instead, we would advocate using whatever methods work to deter anti-social elements, not those that equal the crime committed. This is an important distinction. For some people, it would be the difference between life and death.

Finally, we certainly did not write with "antagonism and ridicule". We don't think the idea of Justice is ridiculous, it is extremely widespread and quite understandable. We just don't happen to agree with it, that's all. Anyway, whatever disagreements we may have, be assured of our continued support.

Venceremos, Richard.

20 April 95

Dear Comrade,

Received your letter and MO receipt (which I'm returning). The only form they will accept a MO is it has to be a US Postal Money Order or a Certified Check. I imagine Bookkeeping has returned the MO to this receipt. I hated that because I'm dead broke and could certainly use the \$20.

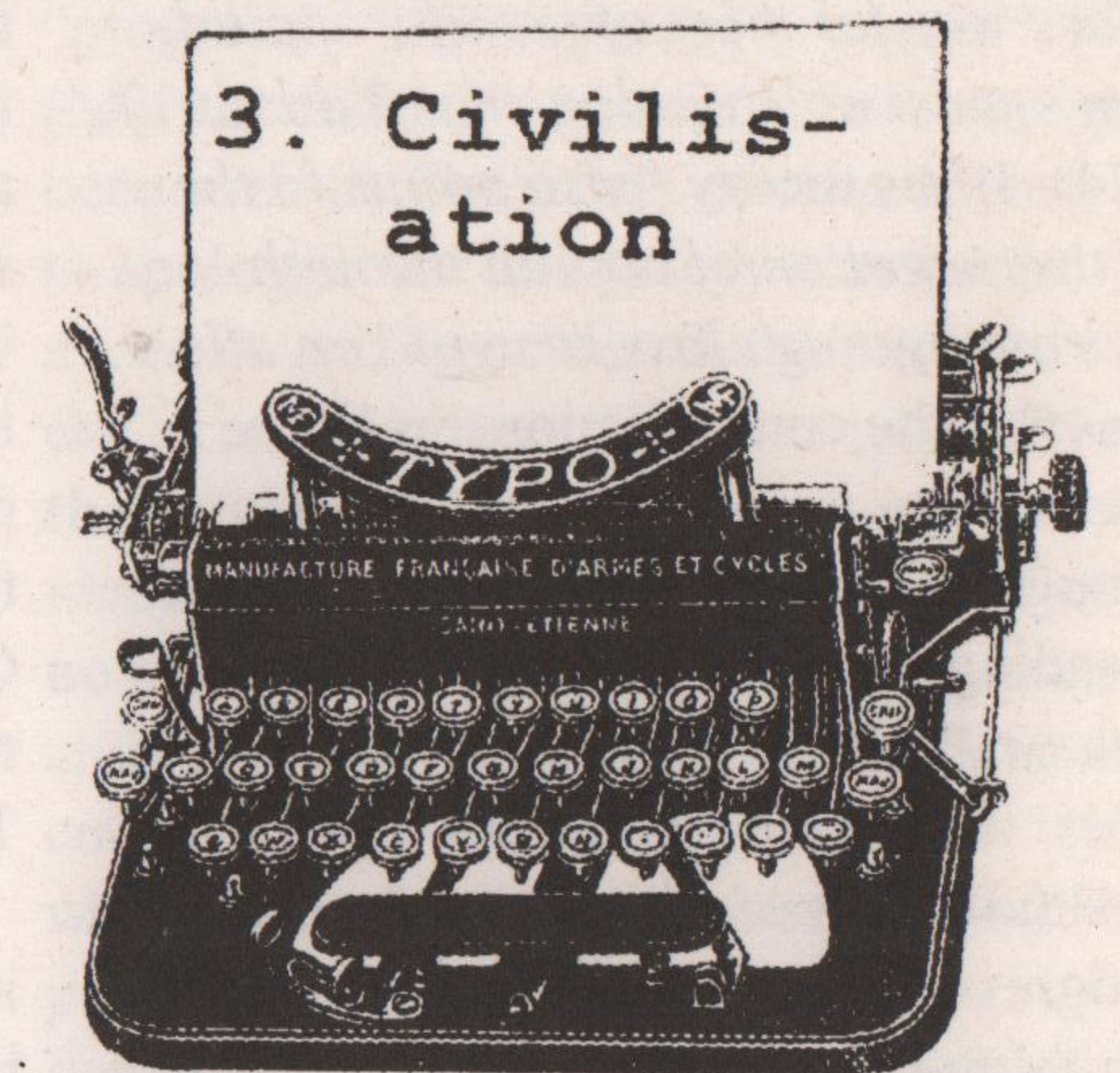
Your letter in itself, deserves an appropriate response. Can't say I'm in agreement with its entire substance, however, I can appreciate your convictions. I'm in the midst of a very important Federal trial of which I'm pro se. And between the Law Library and the Law Library I'm just smothered with legal work. This particular case is taking its toll on me. But that's my problem. Between now and the time I write back in answer to your letter, please do forward me with a copy or so of your magazine "*Wildcat*". I'm sure it will put me more in touch with your philosophy,

thus, enabling me to better understand your position.

I'm still in the Control Unit (going on three (3) years). And have recently received a Court Order whereby I can make use of the Law Library for now; I'm taking full advantage. Hope you understand my brevity.

You take care and don't wait so long to get back in touch. I do appreciate enormously your input and support. Until then,

Struggle we must, Julio.



"Books will be written to tell readers that Leviathanic 'modes of production' rise in the West when 'productive forces ripen', that the manors of the Lords 'develop into' territorial mercantile States, with Churchmen serving as 'midwives'.

Many of these books will be like 'before' and 'after' pictures with an elaborate argument that demonstrates how the earlier structure 'developed into' the later one. Written by dialecticians adept at showing how things develop into their opposites, many of the arguments will be convincing and some positively elegant, but they will tell readers everything except the fact that the earlier structure burned down" – Fredy Perlman, *Against His-story, Against Leviathan!*

*Aufheben* issue 4 contains what at first sight appears to be a parody of mechanical Marxist thinking, in the form of a review of Perlman's *Against His-story*. It would be easy to do a hatchet-job on this book. On the other hand, if you wanted to do a serious critique of Perlman's grand narrative, a good starting point might be Jacques Der-



rida's critique of Levi-Strauss for idealising primitive society. But *Aufheben* could hardly do that, since it would undermine their attempt to amalgamate "post modernist scumbags" and the anti-Civilisation current.

The Brighton tendency claims it is unfair to cite Marx's published work to prove that he supported capitalist progress. But we repeat: "In the Communist Manifesto, The German Ideology, the Neue Rheinische Zeitung, the Critique of Political Economy, through letters and articles supporting the American Civil War, to the Grundrisse, Marx was for most of his life, capitalism's most able apologist" (*Wildcat* 17, p24). If his theory "also points to the active negation of capital through thoroughgoing class struggle on all fronts", the contradictions in Marx's method are even more serious than we thought. Despite *Aufheben's* special pleading, *The Manifesto of the Communist Party* is just what its title implies: it is a clear statement of Marx's position. This rousing hymn to capitalist progress, more sophisticated than anything the philistine mill-owners themselves were capable of thinking up, claimed that the bourgeoisie had been "a most revolutionary class", and praised it for transforming the instruments of production, laying the foundations of the inevitable communist revolution, the next stage on the ladder of Progress. This error, we would argue, is not unconnected with some of the things which have been done in Marx's name.

*Aufheben* put the First International's support for the class struggle in the balance to outweigh putting out the flags for the American Civil War and other massacres. We would not judge an organisation today by saying "well, they supported the Gulf War, but on the other hand they did help organise the anti-Poll Tax struggle". So what has changed? When did cheer leading the slaughter of the proletariat change from being a mistake caused by "the limitations of the workers' movement" to a basic position? The only coherent answer to this is based on another theory they wish to avoid: Decadence, according to which it was necessary for Marxists to support capitalism when it was still Progressive. Without this abso-

lution, *Aufheben's* excuses for Marx's backing for Sherman's march would be consistent with exonerating social democracy's support for world war one on the grounds that a lot of workers agreed with it. "The limitations of the workers' movement" is either a slander against the workers - there was plenty of resistance to the Civil War, despite the International's efforts to persuade workers to support the progressive side - or it is the claim that the limitations of the International were caused by the limitations of the International. The assumption that the workers' movement has progressed since the Luddites, and that this is a good thing, is another example of traditional Marxism which seems to have slipped past *Aufheben's* vigilance. Their unquestioning acceptance of progressive time is one of the reasons for their failure to understand the contemporary importance of the Conquest and the Civil War. These things didn't just happen: they continue. The other reason is Eurocentrism.

They claim that anti-Civilisation ideas blossomed in the USA because its benighted inhabitants lacked "the long history of struggle that characterises the transition from feudalism to capitalism (and the making of the proletariat)". In other words, they missed out on European history. The reason the indigenous people missed the struggle that characterises the transition from feudalism to capitalism, is because they succeeded in the struggle to resist the transition to Civilisation, until the arrival of Progress. The genocide which followed was not passively accepted, and the struggle continues. *Aufheben* ignore 500 years of resistance "over there", because the resisters were not

European workers. Again, this lines them up with the worst of the mechanical Marxists they have supposedly exorcised with incantations from Marx's secret writings, though in the process they provide us with an elementary exercise in "deconstructing" the logical errors which can delude us into accepting the necessity of progress. The modern proletariat was, it is true, created in this struggle. But it is true by definition that any class was created by the "transitions" that preceded its existence.

If *Aufheben* are forced to overlook or excuse the bulk of Marx's work, they have a bigger problem with Engels, Marx's leading sponsor. He was in a particularly good position to read the sixth chapter of *Capital*, but this didn't stop him from continuing the progressive project of scientific socialism. Tragically, he and his successors all emphasised Marx's justifications for capitalist progress, missing such profundities as "proletarian subjectivity and self-activity".

Their failure to confront the central limitations of Marxism dooms them to repeat the mistakes of their forebears. Contemptuous of recent anthropological research, they are reduced to reciting the errors of Engels, assuring us that Agriculture was a product of population growth, when in fact it was the other way round. But their view of primitive people as helpless victims of Nature owes more to the progressive attitudes of Marxism than to a lack of factual research. Their determination to oppose academic fashions like post modernism has left them with a quaint Victorian view of prehistory. Their scenario of thousands dying in natural disasters

would have been very infrequent events before Civilisation, but it seems embarrassingly obvious to point out the main weakness in this kind of argument. Whatever disasters primitive peoples experienced, they can hardly compare with those created by Civilisation, which routinely kills tens of thousands, and is rapidly destroying life on earth.

If *Aufheben* have difficulty with areas outside traditional Marxist concerns, we might expect them to be able to discuss perspectives for the class struggle. In the Fall of 91, we said 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". Two years later, we said "it is difficult at present to see" how this would come about. For *Aufheben*, this is an example of swinging fixedly from unreasonable optimism to despair. The first citation above is an application of dialectics, according to which things turn into their opposites, and our later position a simple qualification of the initial one. You don't need a PhD. in Hegelian "logic" to realise that "defeat brings pessimism". They are throwing stones from glass houses when they accuse us of "resignation before Leviathan's irresistible progress". Surely Marxism has been more responsible for urging submission to Progress than our intransigent position? It was not Perlman but Engels who decreed "The power of these primordial communities had to be broken, and it was broken". We thought we had repeated this citation too often, but apparently not. *Aufheben* itself has nothing meaningful to say about current perspectives. To say we must avoid being unreasonably pessimistic or optimistic is a banality worthy of the British libertarian socialist milieu.

*Aufheben's* contribution is to tart up the tautologies with twaddle. But a workerist from Wigan could penetrate such platitudes as "The desire to transcend civilisation seems itself to be a product of class society", which is like saying the desire to escape from prison is a product of imprisonment. Perhaps this is all that progressive theory amounts to. Marxists usually explain their checkered history by referring to what Marxism

might have been if it hadn't been distorted or betrayed by renegades and revisionists. In *Aufheben's* case, it's "objectivist" Marxism that led the flock astray. This is the idea that capitalism will eventually collapse from its economic contradictions, regardless of the class struggle, but this is hardly the main problem. The questions we have been trying to raise are the problems inherent in Marxist theory, such as its adherence to scientific materialism.

Our work on Progress has been generally regarded as eccentric. This piece confirms our concerns: here we see some of the more radical Marxists falling into precisely the most dangerous errors we have identified as implicit in the materialist conception of history, not the result of betrayal, misunderstanding, or the backwardness of the proles.

*Aufheben's* review is not bad. It is execrable. But let's not allow it to lull us into complacency. We are not "fixed" on our current position: we are aware of our "hesitations and contradictions" (*Wildcat* 17, p9). There is room for discussion. The problem, at least in Britain, is finding anyone to discuss with. Reading these amateurish amalgams is like being on the jury in a case in which the defence tries too hard. Marx did not go around advocating "self-activity", and the inanities of some of his disciples must not distract us from his matchless theoretical achievements, which we continue to use to analyse the world. The Labour Theory of Value deserves abler advocates than this.

We have however received a more coherent critique of our views, from a less fashionable corner of Sussex. Below, we give voice to the Hastings branch of the proletarian milieu, followed by our response:

Dear comrades,

The material in *Wildcat* 17 regarding your definitive break with Marxism and the adoption of an "anti-civilisation" stance made very interesting reading. As the 20th century grinds to a close and capitalism shows with increasing clarity that it is unable to "progress" anywhere except further into the inhuman nightmare it has created it is un-

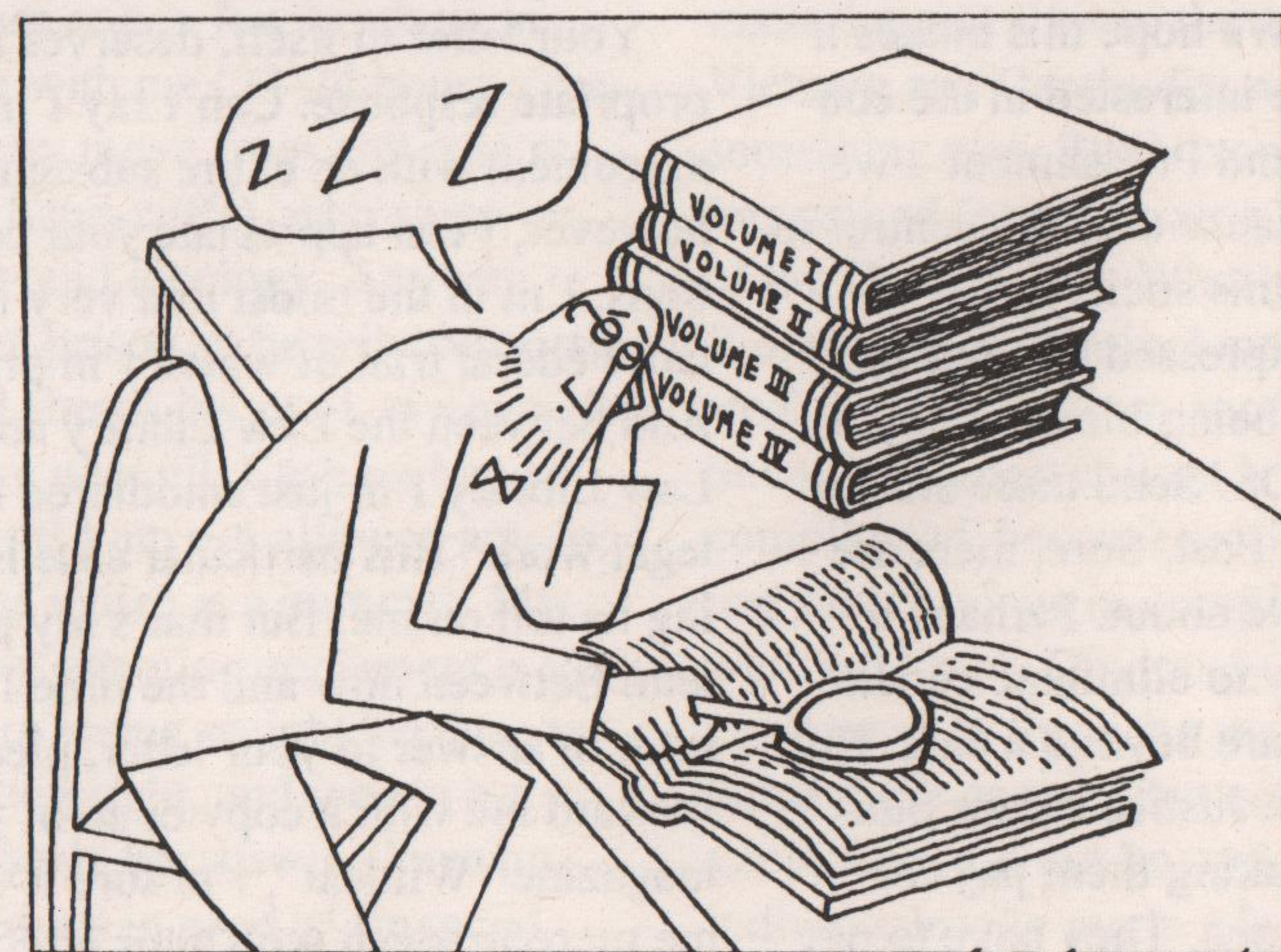
surprising that revolutionaries have adopted theories which reject civilisation in its entirety.

Personally I find these issues very difficult to get to grips with and I certainly haven't arrived at any sort of final position although I must say that in general I support the drift of what you are saying. Most importantly it is vital that revolutionaries realise and declare that class society has from its inception and in all its forms been a disaster for the majority of our species, for other species on this planet and for the biosphere as a whole. Theories of "progress", "development", "stages" etc. (Marxist and non-Marxist) have always been used by defenders of class society to apologise for and justify massacres, excesses and atrocities in the past and **the present** in terms of some pay-off **in the future**. In much the same way the ideology of wage labour urges sacrifice **now** in order to obtain satisfaction **later** and religion offers **life after death** as a compensation for the **death in life** which class-society imposes. As you point out Marxism **does** contain a theory of progress and leftists (both reformist and Stalinist) have used it for the same old purpose.

Having established (I hope) that we are basically on the same wave length I would like to explore briefly some of the problems I have with this perspective.

At the beginning of *How Wild Is Wildcat* you say "The central question we wish to address is this: was the development of class society in any sense a necessary precondition for its opposite?" and it is this idea of progress which is central. You see I think it is possible to argue that 10,000 years of civilisation/class-society for all its horrors and degradations has created a **potential** that did not exist before and that potential is for the real unification of the human species on a global level.

In pre-historic times people lived in bands, tribes or family groups (the details are debatable and contentious but the point I'm making is that they were **limited** groups with distinct **boundaries**) that may have been communist **internally** but that saw themselves in opposition to **other** groups of humans. This is not to suggest that they lived in some "nasty, brutish and short" "war of





all against all" as depicted by Hobbes. It is simply to say that the community these people enjoyed was of a small group. Each group would be unaware of the existence of the majority of the human species, and would see around it other groups, other communities. While it would be purely speculative to say anything about relations between groups in those far distant times I think we must assume that they were relations between groups and that community, solidarity and co-operation existed at the level of the small group.

Part of what defines communism for me is that it is global and unifies the human species, another part is that the reproduction of the material conditions of life (how we live and reproduce) is transparent, unalienated. While in prehistoric times this second situation undoubtedly obtained it was because that was the only way that humans could live. I say this because I assume that classes and alienation cannot exist before a surplus can be produced. It was the communism of necessity, of small groups. The unification of the species on a global level was impossible and to me this means that communism before and after civilisation must be seen as being radically different whether or not we want to talk in terms of "higher" and "lower" "stages" or "primitive" and "fully developed" "forms" etc.

Maybe on this point we disagree since you refer to "...the once universal human culture which stretched from Australia to the Arctic". If you mean that this was a real, conscious unity then I must say that I think it unlikely.

I must emphasise that none of this is to say that I don't recognise that for real individual humans life in prehistoric times, or outside of class society was/is more pleasurable and meaningful than life in the work camp that class society makes of our planet.

The reason that our species is now capable of creating a world human community, a communism of desire rather than necessity, of the whole species rather than small groups, is because of the development of communication and transport technology. The possibility exists for unlimited discourse within the species, any person could in principal converse with any other person anywhere on the planet, people

could travel to any point on the planet, live where they choose not where they are born, those things which need to be arranged on a global scale could be.

Obviously I am aware that all technology as it exists now serves capital rather than humanity and that transport and communications technology as it is now (cars, jet aeroplanes, mass public transport, mass media etc.) negates rather than enhances our freedoms to travel and communicate.

I suppose what I am trying to say is that the understanding and techniques we have now if put to use by a communist society, a liberated humanity could produce a life which would in some sense be an advance over what existed in pre-historic times. To give a few concrete examples: At the moment helicopters are used almost exclusively for military/police purposes or as playthings for the super rich but wouldn't a communist society retain a few to use for rescuing people from the sea or up mountains etc.? And isn't flight in itself a wonderful advance? - imagine floating across the Atlantic or the Amazon or the Antarctic in an airship. Again, at the moment submarines are almost exclusively used by the military but potentially they allow land creatures such as ourselves to explore, marvel at, understand and play in the oceans which form the majority of our biosphere.

You say that "...it will take incalculable efforts before we have even managed to regain the achievements of the pre-civilised community, never mind improving upon them." And I can agree with that since civilisation, and especially capitalism, is the negation of community; the task of recreating community, of learning to live as human beings again will be no small one but it won't be made any easier by totally rejecting every aspect of the technology that class- society has produced. In *Wildcat* 15, in the review of Fred Perlman's book, you said "An eclectic approach is needed to avoid this dead end." (turning Perlman's primitivism into a dogma) "In learning from the culture of primitive peoples, we are not obliged to abandon everything which has been developed since the water-works of Mesopotamia." And this seems absolutely right to me.

If our species has an "essence" it is (as you point out in the review of Cohen's book) not labour.... in my view it is our ability to understand and manipulate nature, without getting mystical about it you could say that our species is the universe becoming aware of itself. After 10,000 years of class society our species knows incomparably more about the nature of the universe we inhabit and our place in it than we did before and I would say that this is a good thing, it is something that our species has achieved. To understand evolution, to work out that the earth goes round the sun rather than vice versa, to start to understand the development of the universe itself, to be able to think about the nature of matter and energy.... to me these are activities and achievements which are worth something, which are expressions of the potential our species holds.

Maybe you totally disagree with the above since you quote, with approval, the ICG to the effect that "Science, as knowledge subsumed by capitalist valorisation, is rotten to the core. Like all of Capital's productive forces, Science is fundamentally inhuman: not only in its applications, but in its foundations" [this refers to the article "AIDS, pure product of science!" in the Internationalist Communist Group's magazine *Communism*, No. 8] ... now to me this is a problematical formulation since I am unsure of the distinction being drawn between "knowledge" on the one hand and "science" on the other - I regard science as being the attempt to discover knowledge about the universe- technology is another matter, that is developed according to the perceived needs and desires of those who control the resources of society. Obviously it (technology) is based on scientific knowledge but (I think it is possible to argue that) scientific knowledge (or "Science") has a rational core which is not determined by social context so that, for example, the theory of evolution by natural selection is the best explanation we have of the rich diversity of living things and their development despite the use to which it is occasionally put as a justification for racism or the market or whatever.

So am I saying that yes "the development of class- society is a necessary

pre-condition for its opposite"? I have a horrible feeling that this might be the case. Not in the sense that communism is impossible before class society, since a form of communism did exist before class- society, but in the sense that class society has made available the techniques and knowledge that will enable communism to maintain itself on a global level and indeed to progress, to take humanity forward.

If we accept that the technology developed by class society will play a part in enabling a future communist society to provide a life for our species even richer and more meaningful than that before civilisation then I think we are faced with the unpleasant fact that technology could not have been produced except by class society. This is because technology always emerges from and is dependent on previously existing technology. So... a great deal of what a global communist society might want to use (airships, submarines, radio, radar etc.) is dependent upon, for example, mining and the production and fabrication of metal. Now, in such a society I would expect that such activity would be carried on to a lesser degree than in the past and that automation etc. would ensure that it was not an unreasonable burden to anyone. But in the past this could not have been so - much of the activity involved in mining and the forging of metals in the beginning would, of necessity given the level of technology, have been extremely unpleasant and therefore no one would have performed it unless compelled.

"As one bushman (sic) told an anthropologist, 'why should we plant when there are so many mongongo nuts in the world'. Leisure time is valued very highly and preferred to increasing food supplies (which are already more than adequate) or producing more material goods (which can be a hindrance). Earlier this century the Siane tribe in New Guinea adopted modern steel axes instead of their traditional stone tools. This reduced the amount of time necessary to produce an adequate level of subsistence by about a third. The new spare time was not spent in increasing output but was devoted to ceremonies, leisure and

warfare. Similarly in 16th Century Brazil the Portuguese found that the Indian tribes, if not enslaved, would only work for them until they had earned enough to buy metal tools and then they wanted to enjoy their extra leisure."

(Clive Ponting, *A Green History of the World* page 21 - a better book than you might expect.)

This business of technology is a real bastard to think about isn't it? When you walk out of the front door and are confronted by our world of concrete, cars, idiotic advertising and mass media, pollution and all the rest it is easy to see all the products of technology/the means of production as being one unified inhuman entity standing in total opposition to humanity and its needs and desires. And it is this acute alienation from a world of technology gone mad which makes the primitivist/ anti-civilisation critique so appealing. But, it seems to me, we simply can't reject technology totally since as you say we can't go back - "Without the waste of capitalism, the world could easily support its current population. The Stone Age couldn't." (review of Perlman's book in *Wildcat* 15)

It seems to me that a communist society that came into being now would have no choice but to use what exists now as a basis for the total transformation of the material conditions of the reproduction of the species.

I suppose the argument I am putting forward rests on two planks:

1) A certain level of transport and communications technology is necessary before our species can create communism on a global scale.

2) That level of technology could not have been reached except via compulsion of some sort.

Stated as baldly as this it does sound rather like an orthodox Marxist theory of progress, doesn't it? Unfortunately although I wouldn't like to say I am 100% certain of either of these propositions I can't bring myself to seriously doubt them either. If this leaves me uncomfortably close to "Marxism" then "so be it", it certainly doesn't lead me to support any aspect of capitalism now (or in the past - is this contradictory?),

or to regard communist revolts of the past other than favourably. The fact is that all such revolts have failed in that they have not destroyed class society, our attitude to them should be one of a desire to learn. In particular it is interesting to consider the revolts in Europe in the 13th - 16th Centuries. If they had been more successful would they have prevented the rise of global capitalism? Could humanity have gone forward to global unity from that point? What would have happened if members of a communist community (rather than enslaving slaves and slave masters) had arrived on the shores of the "New World"?

1,000 years of class- society have not been progress in themselves, they have been a nightmare for our species and we have resisted all the way. But maybe they have provided tools which will be of use to us in the future?

From the point of view of a future communist society (should one exist) class- society, the whole of what we call history, will appear as a transition from humans living wild in the "state of nature" to humanity as a unified species.

I think I shall draw to a close now since I don't want this to become too repetitive, rambling and incoherent and also because I see that I am setting myself up to be shot down for defending "progress", "stages", "inevitability" and all the rest of it. However I think one last point is worth making.

You have attacked the idea that humanity progresses towards communism through the development of the productive forces by class society because it has been used by those defenders of capitalism who have adopted Marxism as an ideology. And it is true - it has. But at least it provides an explanation for the existence of class society. Its explanation goes something like this - "It is human nature to progress (= develop the productive forces) and progress is only possible at first through class society." If we reject this what is our explanation for the emergence of class society, Leviathan, call it what you will? I find Perlman's explanation unsatisfactory and I haven't heard anything more convincing anywhere else either.



Maybe I've been playing "Devil's Advocate" a bit (!) but I hope this contributes something to the debate.

15 May 95

Thanks for your letter of 12 Dec. 94. We've taken our time to reply because such a thought-provoking letter deserves a considered response.

Briefly, our main difference with your position is your distinction between the political natures of technology and knowledge. Technology is obviously not socially neutral. It is not the result of Man's striving to defend himself against Nature, but more the result of some men trying to control everybody and everything else. Knowledge is no different. Scientific knowledge is not something which "humanity" has discovered about the real world, it is part of the power which a particular civilisation has imposed on it. A good explanation of this can be found in Donna Haraway's masterpiece of monkey business *Primate Visions* (Routledge, NY 1989). Haraway is by no means an absolute relativist. She does however use deconstructive criticism to question the basic "facts" on which scientific knowledge is built.

In her Introduction, she explains how Linnaeus was able to classify and construct Nature by virtue of his time and place. He did not simply find out facts, he "inscribed" them, with European armies at his back, giving him the power to tell a particular story and eliminate the others.

However, Science is not just a "narrative", not just the viewpoint of Value, it is a tool of capitalist production and social control. The myths of science have to be continually tested against the real needs of capital accumulation, and therefore come up against the physical limits of the natural world as well as the social limits of what human beings will put up with. Despite the patronage of Stalin, the ideas of Lysenko (about the inheritance of acquired characteristics by, for example, strains of wheat) were eventually abandoned, not because they were "not really true" but because they did not play a useful enough role in modernising Soviet agriculture. Other theo-

ries of genetics have been far more successful in bringing about the dispossession of peasants and the industrialisation of the land.

It is in any case illogical to separate Science and Technology. The abstract equations of High Energy Physics would have no meaning whatsoever in a society which didn't possess cyclotrons and nuclear bombs. Theories about brain neurotransmitters would never have developed in the absence of a huge industry which drags the masses into submission with "tranquillisers" and "anti-depressants".

So, Science is practical, but not in some absolute, ahistorical sense. The Big Lie about scientific knowledge is that it can be used for any purpose you choose.

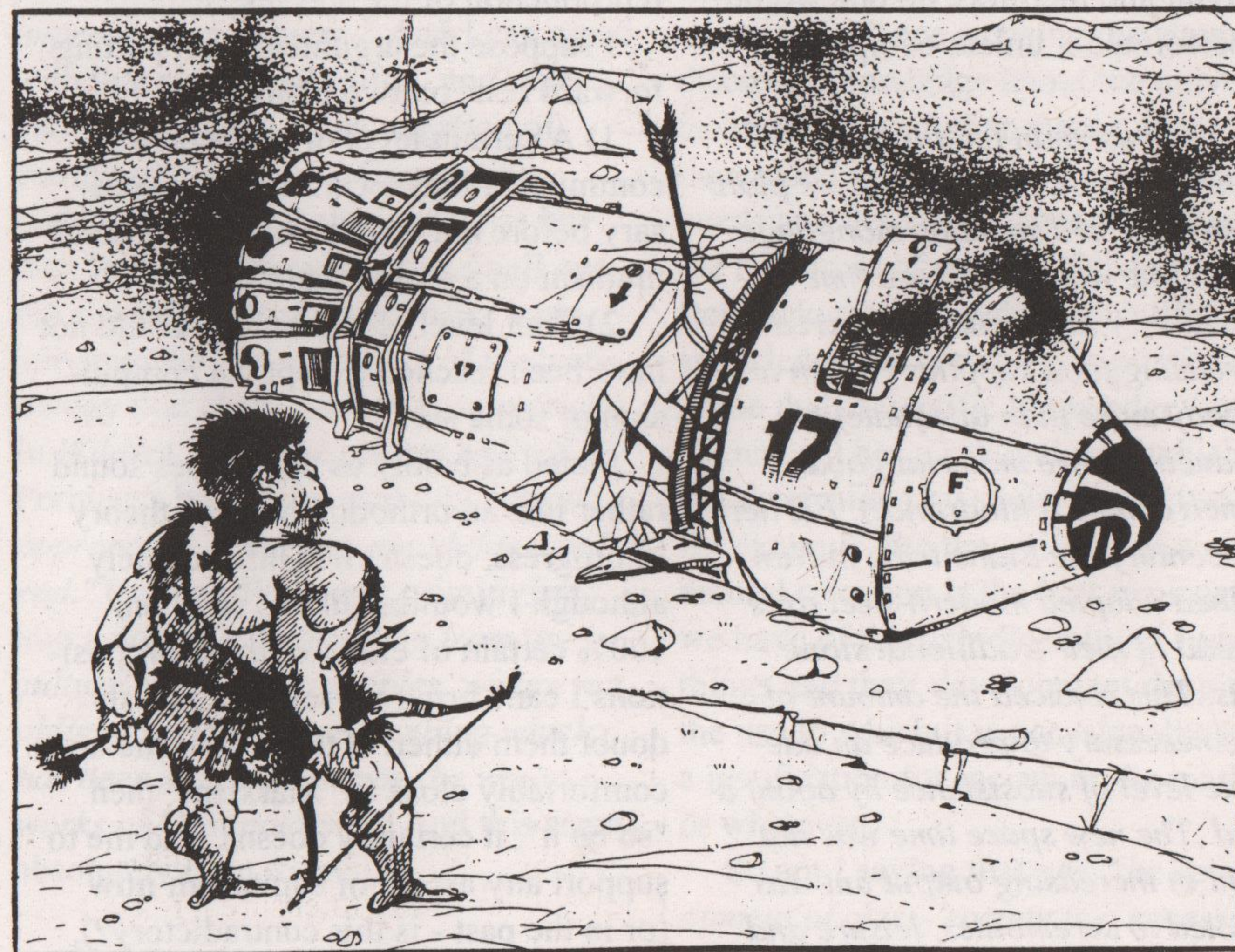
This seems to be your implicit position when you admit "I think it is possible to argue that scientific knowledge (or 'Science') has a rational core which is not determined by social context" and even more when you assert "class society has made available the techniques and knowledge that will enable communism to maintain itself on a global level and indeed to progress, to take humanity forwards". Of course, for us revolutionary critics of science there is the problem that it's very hard to say *a priori* what science can and can't do, but we'll deal briefly with a couple of examples.

There is a familiar Progressive argument which says: "Well, of course, Sci-

ence has given us nuclear bombs and poisoned rivers but one day it will give us a Cure for Cancer!". We don't actually know enough about the medical research industry to say whether it can one day find a cure for most of the complex range of diseases which it calls "cancer" (probably nobody does) but we're somewhat sceptical. In the US in the 1970s scientists and government launched an official War on Cancer designed to find a cure in time for the bicentenary of the colonial uprising in 1976. Since then scientists have devised thousands of ways (including, almost certainly, HIV) of inducing cancers but as for a cure, well, one day... just give us another few \$billion.

We find it particularly ironic that there is a cancer research foundation named after Marie Curie, a woman who actually died from cancer, unfortunately not soon enough. Her cancer was caused by her contributions to a field of scientific progress, nuclear chemistry, which has since directly caused cancer in millions of other human beings.

A less dramatic illustration might be the construction industry's use of the science of materials. Using complex computer models of the behaviour of materials under stress it is possible to design, for example, bridges that stay up using the minimum quantities of materials. Is this not an example of the useful, rational core of Science? But first we must ask why anyone wants to minimise the quantities of materials



used. Because we live in a society based on abstract labour, where life is divided between the work of making the materials and the leisure of driving over the bridge, that's why! Can such mathematical models tell us how to design a bridge which is fun to build and maintain, or nice to look at? Can they tell us whether we need a bridge at all? These decisions can only be the result of the expression of human collective subjective desire in all its complexity and not just of the narrow desires of isolated individuals imprisoned in the market, which is what is embodied in Science.

We think it is probably pointless to discuss the technology which will exist "after the revolution". Each society creates the technology which serves its needs. But we would like to answer your question: *but wouldn't a communist society retain a few [helicopters] to use for rescuing people from the sea or up mountains etc.?* No. We are pretty sure there won't be any helicopters. These are a particularly noisome example of capitalist technology. They require armies of workers to build, maintain and fuel them. They are an extremely inefficient use of the infernal combustion engine, a waste of resources even in their own terms. If we wanted a populist argument for technology, washing machines would be a better example.

You do defend a rather orthodox theory of progress. The argument that the first communities that existed inevitably had to be defeated by the first civilisations is certainly a coherent one. During the Stone Age, though there was, we believe, a universal human culture, nobody knew that. Each group only knew of its local area. This is one of the reasons Civilisation was able to spread; the people it invaded were taken by surprise. This is one good reason why Civilisation seemed inevitable; it had such an advantage over Community as it existed at the time. The fact is, slaughtering and enslaving people often works.

The other inevitability you talk about is the idea that conscious communism could not happen on a global scale unless a certain level of technology had been reached, inevitably by compulsion. You say this does not lead you to sup-

port class society. Well it should do! *He who wills the end, wills the means* (Nietzsche). But we are not going to reject the argument because of its unpalatable consequences. The reason we reject it is because we think each society builds the technology it needs. A project to create world communism, at whatever point it had started, would simply have built what it needed. Transatlantic wooden ships need not necessarily have been built by slaves. The only sense in which Civilisation is inevitable is that, so far, it has been able to force its opponents to turn themselves into new Leviathans - or perish. Though there has always been resistance, there are times when the chances of resistance being successful were slim indeed. The 1490's, the creation of the New World, was once such time. The 1990's, the creation of the New World Order, is another. Perhaps we will never be able to work out whether Civilisation was inevitable in the sense that it was bound to win militarily; but in the sense of being necessary in order for communism to be realised - no, we reject this. At the beginning of your letter, you reject it too (sacrifice today, pie tomorrow), but later on, you make some major concessions to it.

We think there are many flaws in Perlman's *Against His-story, Against Leviathan!* We do not recommend it as a theoretically sound piece, more as an inspiration. In places the logic is circular, his view of primitive peoples a bit simplistic, and his Mother Nature fairytale sentimental. But we think the account of the origins of Civilisation is far more convincing than any alternative we have come across. Particularly, his theory squares with the fact that Civilisation did not arise in most places because humanity needed to develop the forces of production, as bourgeois apologists like Marx maintain, but was imposed by one Civilisation spreading from probably just one place, Mesopotamia.

The mystery is why the people who founded Sumer stayed in Mesopotamia given the violent extremes of its climate. For some reason they did stay. They depended on primitive agriculture, like many communities around the world who did not develop Civilisations. The only way to ensure a reason-

able crop every year was to build extensive ditches. Violent floods force emergency ditch-digging. The elders cajole and pressurise the young men into digging the canals; the best organisers among the latter want to be recognised; the normal tendencies which defend communities against permanent leaders break down under the stress of frequent natural emergencies. Class society emerges. To preserve some aspects of the old society, it conquers and enslaves its neighbours, so that the original gangsters can avoid the curse of labour.

America is covered in abandoned proto-Civilisations. In the 15th century AD, large religious mounds were built in various locations in North America, with cities of labourers to service them. All of them were abandoned. Even the Aztecs were in trouble; the reason Cortés was able to beat them was because he could harness the resistance; malcontents joined the Spaniards; surely nothing could be worse than Tenochtitlan, reasoned the oppressed, and perhaps they were right.

But surely it was not inevitable that Civilisation spread across the Old World, when it was rejected time and again in the New? Of course, this is rather speculative. It is more fruitful to discuss what we're going to do about it now.

