

undercurrent

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undercurrent 8

chechnya
direct action movement
seattle
call centres

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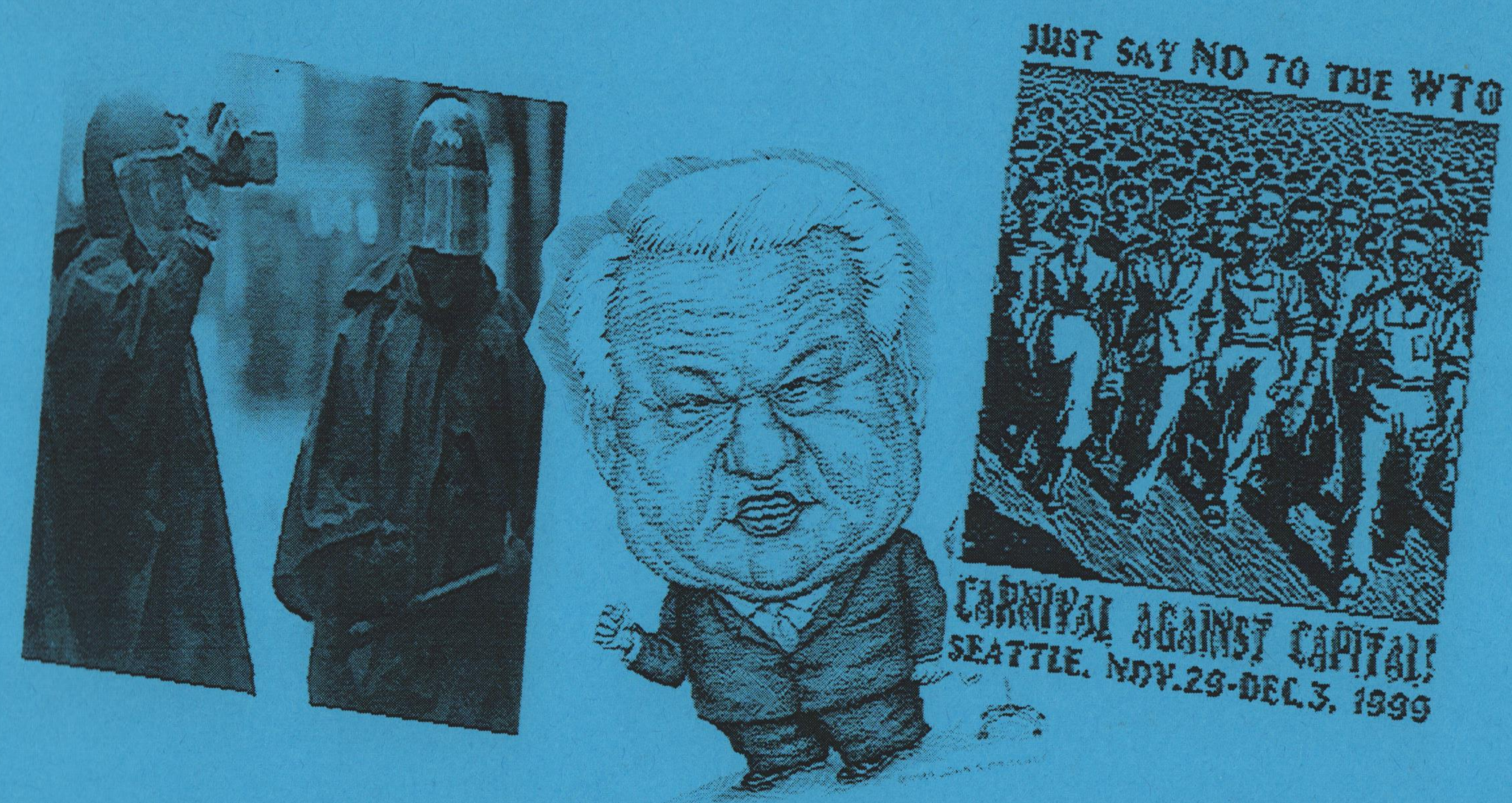
reviews:

beasts of burden

reflections on j18

workers against work in Barcelona and France

radical anti-capitalist journal



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Editorial

There seems to be a changing atmosphere in the UK. At a time when everything seemed to be relatively tranquil, when, despite the various mini-actions here and there, conformity was successfully maintained, the sudden explosion of the J18 events last summer came to shake the spectacle of social peace. After a while, and before anyone had managed to fully grasp the consequences and implications of J18, another explosion of violent confrontations with the state took place in Euston on N30. In another part of the capitalist world, not unconnected to events in Britain, another confrontation broke out between the guardians of this world and thousands of protesters in Seattle, followed by another round of disturbances in Washington in April 2000. For the first time since the 60's, the US experienced major civil disturbances around a political issue (since riots like, for example, in LA in 92 were primarily social and not political). Similar expressions of antagonisms have appeared all around the world. In Greece, angry proletarians ensured a warm welcome for Clinton in November, while a wave of arrests and raids by the police in Italy and Germany in the last few months have been interpreted as preparation by the state against emerging struggles following the restructuring of social relations. At the same time, the amount of (wildcat) strikes in the UK have increased, making us wonder if these are signs of approaching change. Yet, behind the *reality* of explosions of antagonisms lies the *truth* of increased capitalist domination, war and ideology.

Recent developments in France have seen the realisation of the long-time demand of the left for a 35 hour week, exposing its inherent reformist and reactionary character, since its realisation not only accommodates and facilitates the changing nature of the same capitalist exploitation, but also increases it. Its immediate result, i.e. the shortening of the working day, means (among others) the intensification of work, while the increased flexibilisation of labour visible everywhere in the western world increases the atomisation and fragmentation of the proletariat. Propagated by the left representatives of capitalist domination, and their hippie counterparts, these developments have hardly been contested, testifying once again to the position of social-democratic ideology and subculture at the cutting edge of capitalist innovation. The initially inspiring class struggles that kicked off in Greece against the modernisation of the education system[1] - and with it the restructuring of work relations - never managed to create a community of struggle capable of counteracting capital's offensive and were thus quickly neutralised. Moreover, soon after the end (?) of the Kosovo war, another war started in the North Caucasus, when Russia attacked Chechnya under the pretext of anti-terrorism, a saga of barbarism and destruction for which reactions have limited themselves to either liberal appeals for humanitarian (bombs) help or leninist (anarchist) support for national liberation.

None of the confrontations mentioned above addressed any of these issues. The June events in the City of London, however inspiring they might have been for the participants, seriously ignored the Kosovo war, and were problematically focused on finance capital. In Seattle and in Washington (though in Washington some radical tendencies tried to fight against this), the dominant ideology of the protestors was centred around institutions like the IMF and the WTO (a consequence but not a cause or at the root of advanced capitalism) and the demands for their democratisation...And while the riots that welcomed Clinton to Greece were positive, one cannot fail in noticing the reactionary character of anti-Americanism, a powerful ideology which mystifies capitalism by projecting its origins as lying in the distant US instead of the in everyday of Greek society.

In this issue we deal with the war in Chechnya, as an expression of capital's necessary tendency for war. At the same time we attempt to highlight some of the problems of the new 'anti-capitalist' movement, hoping in this way to critically contribute to its potential development. We found Goldner's article on Seattle an interesting starting point for such an attempt. We also consider the emergence of call centres, in an attempt to understand if they herald a new composition of class.

[1] See "Schools of Revolt" in *UniUndercurrent* #7, and "Heavy Burden for Young Shoulders" (TPTG) in *Collective Action Notes*, (<http://www.geocities.com/CapitolHill/Lobby/2379/heavyburden.htm>)

Short Account of a Proletarian Catastrophe: the War in Chechnya and the Problem of Capitalist Reconstruction in the Caucasus

Only a few months after the end (?) of the war in Kosovo, another war started in the Caucasus region. Russia staged a full-scale attack on Chechnya, with the official aim of destroying the terrorist cells functioning there. So far, the war has proved to be a steady, yet gradual, military victory for the Russian army. Its immediate result is the consolidation of the Yeltsinite apparatus in power, the reaffirmation of that disgusting element of contemporary social life called national unity in both Russia and Chechnya, the complete devastation of the population and the economic structures of Chechnya and the reassertion of Russian dominance over the north of the Caucasus.

The need to understand the ongoing war in Chechnya does not originate from a humanitarian concern about the catastrophe in the Caucasus. To take a humanitarian side means to set aside the class nature of capitalist society, and to appeal to a morality which is both misleading and useless in explaining the current situation. Rather, the need comes from the realisation that one form of violent resolution of social antagonisms in one part of the capitalist world corresponds to a 'more peaceful' one in another part, both constituting the different sides of the barbaric world of capital.

This war is neither a clash of the Christian and Muslim civilisation, nor - an even more stupid view - Russia's attempt to get revenge for the previous lost war in 1994-96. Every war in contemporary society represents an attempt to violently resolve the contradictions and social antagonisms which appear all the time in a class society ruled by capital and its 'voracious appetite' for surplus value. In the peripheries of capitalism, such as Chechnya, these contradictions take the form of archaic and pre-capitalist production processes, combined with which is a lack of a modern state, the necessary mediation for the creation of the conditions of uninterrupted (until the next break up of class struggle, that is) capital accumulation. For the aspiring modernising faction of the bourgeois class in Chechnya, the need to find a way to facilitate the emergence of commodity production, and to break away from the isolation imposed by Russia's dominance in the region, mathematically led to the boosting up of nationalism, i.e. the abstract community of capital. On its part, the Russian bourgeoisie attempts to hide the devastating reality of its economic reforms, whose only result is the impoverishment of the proletariat, through the unification of the population under the banner of the biggest of all lies: national unity.

The Caucasus region, which used to provide almost 45% of oil production for the Soviet Union, has been broken down into a mosaic of ethnic groups and semi-nations, and its relative stability stems from the fact that the interests of Russian capital force it to provide many of these semi-nations with big percentages of their budget in order to avoid their total disintegration. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, oil production has drastically decreased, the industrial plants have been largely abandoned due to a lack of technical expertise formerly provided by the Soviet Union, and the economies are only sustained through the illegal trade of drugs and weapons.¹ The rapidly increasing population of these countries, when not involved in this trade survives through petty agricultural production. For the countries of north Caucasus which belong to the Russian Federation, a minimal level of stability is maintained through Russia's subsidies. For those who chose independence from Russia but were unable to create profitable links with the west -e.g. Chechnya-, the only way out of this dead end is the constant attempt to expand towards any direction which would give them access to some of the areas resources. This constant stirring up of trouble however gravely threatens Russia's interests.



Although the collapse of the eastern bloc in 1989 meant that the eastern industrial economies were to be gradually integrated into the western free market, it was obvious from the very beginning that such a process was not going to be harmonious. Not all eastern economies had either the same impetus or the same financial capabilities to become fully operating economies of the type needed by western capitalist development. It was

seen as unavoidable that, at least for a long time, many eastern countries would be left outside the parade of integration and would be dumped into the 'third world' providing a source of a cheap and mobile labour force.

Regardless of the peculiarities and potentials of the economies of each country as it was formed after the collapse of the eastern bloc, all were destined to go through a privatisation process, a short sharp shock of mass unemployment, and a steady declining of the living standards of the proletariat. On top of all that it was proven that in some cases integration to the western market presupposed a break up of former countries, either in order to nationalise -and thus neutralise- the emergence of fierce class struggles (as was the case in Yugoslavia) or simply as a practical facilitation for the abolition of state subsidies from the richer parts of former republics to the poorer ones (as was the case for Czechoslovakia).

The abolition of state ownership of the means of production and of state control over the production process as hindrances to private capitalist accumulation also meant, by definition, that former notions of state protectionism or full employment were quickly abandoned. The mass of proletarians in the eastern countries had to suffer a steady decrease of their living standards, until the 'miracle' of the free market would restore all their previous aspirations towards the western economies that western propaganda presented them as so eager to join. Yet there is no miracle in free market capitalism. The fact is that capitalist accumulation and the full cycle of valorisation of capital cannot be realised at any given moment of time in any given place. It was considered as a given from the beginning of the process of integration that many countries would simply not make it in the world competition. And the fact is that so far only a few countries {Poland, Hungary, Slovakia and the Czech republic} have managed to integrate themselves -with low levels of economic growth- in the *fiesta* of western capitalism. For the rest of them a fate even worse than capitalist development awaited -as we said in the previous issue, there is one thing worse than being subjected to capitalist integration and that is being redundant for capital.

The economic policies dictated by the West meant that economic growth was simply not a likely development for many of the Eastern states, and Russia seems to be one of them. Dismantling of 'uncompetitive' industries, drastic reductions of state subsidies, letting prices go free and thousands of proletarians off work has only managed to devastate the population. And even if the ideological propaganda of the West wants to see a positive -yet gradual- development, the reality is far from it. Life expectancy has dropped to levels similar to many 'under-developed' -to borrow a capitalist vocabulary- countries in Africa, wages have been frozen for massive lengths of time and in many cases not even paid (as well as taxes obviously), while health provisions are almost non-existent. It seems to be the case that so far the only thing achieved by the integration process is the formation of a corrupt state apparatus, for which the notion of capital accumulation refers to the pockets of old party officials and cunning entrepreneurs. The conditions for 'normal' capitalist development are strikingly absent. The recent scandals in which it was proven that IMF loan money was neither used for the re-payment of old debts nor for providing potentials for future western investments, alarmed western capital to the degree of publicly admitting that even for a free market economy, a strong, stable and regulatory state is necessary to ensure that social and not individual capital is prioritised. And if the objective of western capital is to create the conditions for the 'normal' cycle of valorisation, the necessity of some sort of organisation of production overseen by a stable state, which ensures the 'smooth' process of capital's creation of value is strikingly obvious. With the country's GNP at 50% of its former status, and with a political scenery as explosive as the bombs which hit Moscow last summer, it becomes increasingly surprising how the bourgeois press insists on calling Russia's development a progress. In light of this, the over-optimistic utterings seem more like attempts to hide the fact that other possible alternatives to Russia's contemporary performance -be it a disintegration and collapse of the Russian Federation, a return to massive nationalisation or a proletarian uprising- are even less favourable for both Western and Russian capital.



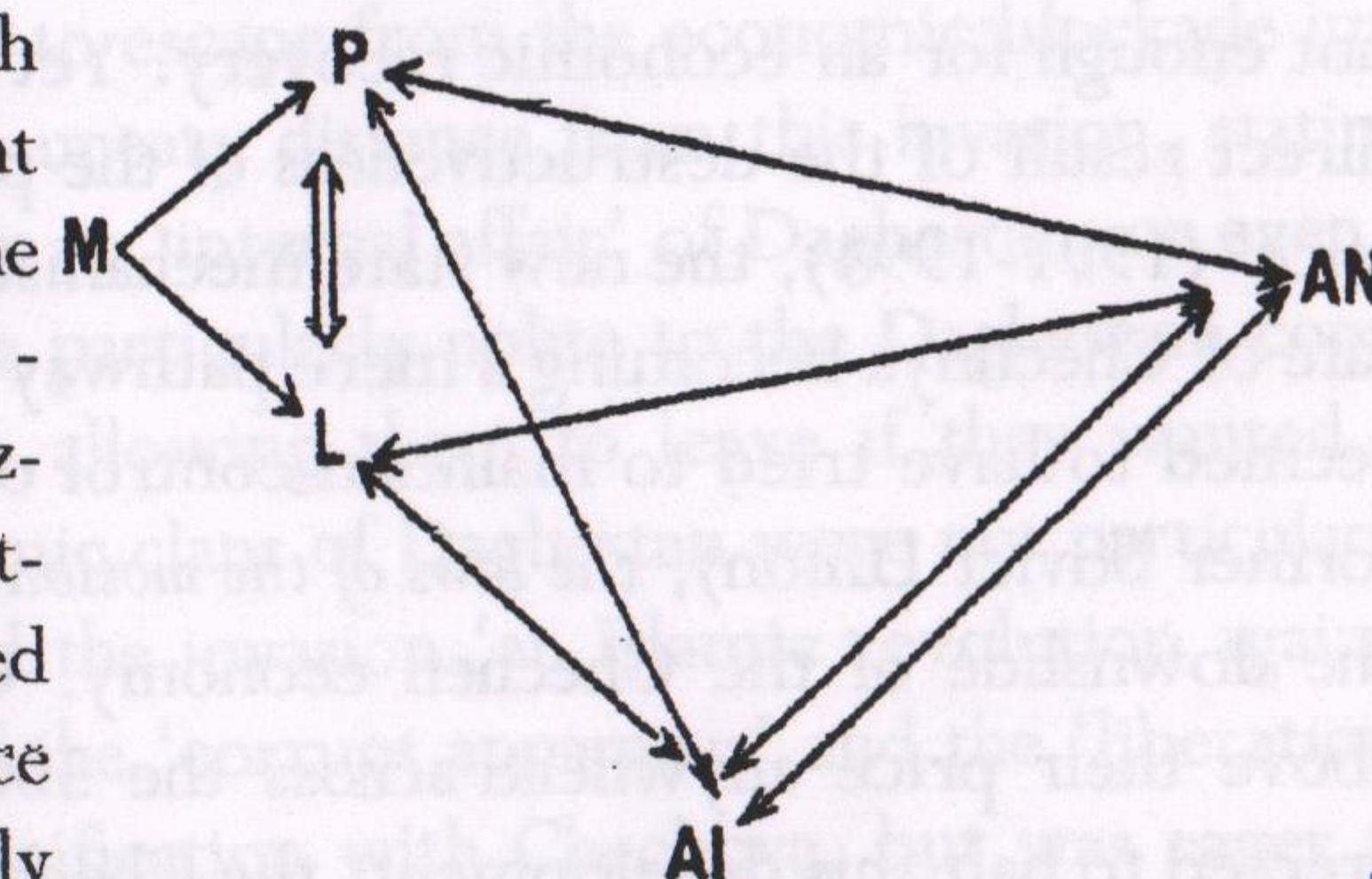
Western policy towards Russia is contradictory. On the one hand, Western capital is blatant in its denuncia-

tion of the nationalist factions of the bourgeoisie, fearing that the rise of a nationalist party in power would jeopardise Russia's commitment to the IMF economic reforms. On the other hand, by constantly undermining Russia in their international dealings, western capital creates the conditions for the rise of support for the nationalist factions, since Yeltsin and his lackeys are seen (for obvious reasons) as the pro-western modernisers who have brought the Russian economy to the brink of total collapse.³



Already before the collapse of the Soviet Union, and with the soviet administration facing huge internal problems, the Russian policy towards the various republics was summarised by the Kremlin's statement in August 1990: "take as much independence as you can incorporate". By supporting the separatist/de-centralising tendencies in the republics, the Moscow administration was hoping to get rid of the unnecessary spendings of the Russian budget towards the republics. This selective federalist approach led many of the former Soviet Union states to take their chance in the world market, something which presupposed the destruction of the soviet bureaucratic institutions and their replacement by new structures capable of legitimising the political power of the new leaders and incorporating the newly formed states to free market capitalism. Yet, the adoption of integration policies to the western-led world market were only made by those states which managed to gain control of the oil and gas resources formerly exploited by the Soviet Union (such as Georgia and Azerbaijan), whereas the rest chose to keep close to Russia which, although economically ruined, still provided many of them with the biggest percentage of their budget (e.g. 90% of the budget of Daghestan, 60% or so of Armenia, etc).

As soon as Russian capital managed to -even temporarily and with big problems- stand on its feet, it returned to the newly independent states and tried to reassert its dominance over the exploitation of the available resources. Major diplomatic and economic conflicts - primarily concerning the exploitation and transport of the oil in Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan- broke out between Russia, Turkey, western oil companies and the oil-producing countries. Turkey had tried after the collapse of the Soviet Union to gain important influence over resources in the Caucasus, an attempt which was ideologically filtered with appeals to the 'forgotten Turks' of the region. Yet, its wish to retain good relations with Russia, the lack of incentive of its NATO allies and serious internal social problems (such as the Kurdish separatists) did not allow such a development to take place. The conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia over the Nagorno-Karabakh area was seen as a chance for both Russia and Turkey to establish good relations with Azerbaijan (and its oil). Yet, Russia's unwillingness to accept Turkey as the mediator in the conflict, as well as pressure from the West, meant that Turkey's interference in the conflict was reduced to a mere diplomatic -and thus verbal- war. For the modernising faction of the bourgeois class of Azerbaijan, the issue was further complicated. On the one hand it was eager to assert its independence from Russia and to gain support from the West, a policy which resulted in the establishment of good relations with Turkey and western companies. On the other hand, it soon realised that neither Turkey nor the West were going to provide military help for solving the problem with Armenia, since any mention for such an interference immediately received threats from Russia. Thus, it turned towards Russia, hoping that the latter would exert its influence on Armenia for a quick solution. In return, oil deals favourable to Russia were discussed.



Although Azerbaijan decided to join the CIS (Confederation of Independent States), it kept balancing between Russia and the West in terms of oil interests, seeking a solution to its ongoing war with Armenia and a favourable economic deal for its oil. In March 1993, and with the more dynamic entrance of western companies in the "debates", the decision was taken to built an oil pipeline from Baku to the Turkish port of Ceyhan, a result which seriously threatened Russian interests in South Central Caucasus.

In an attempt to restore some dominance over the region, Russia tried to maintain control -either militarily or

politically- of the remaining countries (which were dangerously flirting with the west) and with the regions' oil and gas resources. When Chechnya blocked the pipeline which transferred oil from the Azeri port of Baku to the Russian port of Novorosisk, Russia decided to react in a dynamic way. A full scale attack on Chechnya was ordered in late 1994, but the ridiculous organisation of the army, the lack of incentive of the Russian conscripts⁶, the internal resistance to the war⁷ and the fierce resistance of the Chechens led to a Russian military defeat in 1996.



The victorious Chechen ruling class tried to take over the task of modernising Chechen society to a degree capable of facilitating the dictatorship of capitalist economy. Although the former Russian army official General Dudayev, aimed at establishing a special status for Chechnya within the framework of the Russian Federation, the experienced guerrilla fighter Basaev and the new president Mashadov, overwhelmed by the military victory over Russia, began the initial steps towards the formation of a proper nation-state, only to realise that any sort of economic restructuring proved to be an almost impossible task. The problem of the modernisation of the economy posed itself as a direct result of the development of history: the underdevelopment of the productive forces impeded the social structures which would make the transition to free market capitalism an immediate possibility. The expertise needed to function the industrial plants was as gone as the Russian technicians formerly positioned in Chechnya, who fled due to the war and sought refuge in Russian territory. Economic assistance from anywhere else than Russia was highly unlikely.

In the aftermath of the 1994-96 war the only thing left in Chechnya was national pride -and that was definitely not enough for an economic recovery. Yet the problems that the Chechen economy faced were not simply a direct result of the destructiveness of the previous war. Even before the war, during the years of 'independence' (1991-1994), the new state mechanism had come across extreme difficulties in its attempts to escape the fate of Chechnya becoming a mere pathway for international illegal trade. Although president Dudayev himself seemed to have tried to maintain control over prices (at a time when prices were being set free all over the former Soviet Union), the laws of the motion of capital dictated that 'good national will' was not enough to halt the downslide of the Chechen economy. Goods were being purchased in Chechnya *en masse* and then sold above their price anywhere across the 300 kilometres long border. Soon, and regardless of the measures erected to halt this development, the Chechen economy was nothing but a centre of illegal trade.

In terms of the oil in Chechnya the development was similar. Although production of oil had fallen drastically from the early 80's, Chechnya still had three oil refineries which could have been used to boost some hard cash in the economy. In fact, Dudayev did try to make some oil deals with the West, without however any results. At the same time, entrepreneurs tried to extract oil for themselves by making holes in the pipelines, something which created an illegal trade of oil, but which, being beyond state control, damaged the budget rather than relieving it (so much for national unity!). On the other hand, proletarians trying to survive dismantled the refineries and tried to valorise their acts of sabotage by selling them to the market. For that part of the population which did not (or could not) resort to this trade, the situation was worse. Even when Chechnya was still part of the Soviet Union, and subsidies were running high, the rural proletarians faced chronic unemployment of about 40 per cent, their survival being dependent on the possibility of seasonal migration to Russia. After independence however, this was no longer possible. As a result, most of them turned to primitive forms of agricultural production.

In this disintegrating society, the Islamic religion found a foothold. Financially backed to a certain degree by Saudi Arabia and other middle-east Islamic states, Muslim preachers found their way into the mountainous region of Chechnya with the aim of spreading the word of Islam, and establishing Islamic law. Although the rise of Islamic fundamentalism is overrated and thus highly misleading when used as the *only explanation* of the situation in Chechnya (and the rest of the Caucasus, for that matter), it is significant as an indication of the ways in which the Chechens, faced with the devastating characteristics of post-Soviet society, try to *re-organise their everyday lives*. For the disenchanted and lumpen youth of Chechnya and Daghestan, which organises itself

in gangs in order to face the increased poverty and the corrupt 'nouveau-rich', "...Islam appears as the only force capable of replacing the old certainties and clear social order which was previously provided by the soviet system".¹⁰ As a result, Basaev and other Chechen warlords turned to Islamism during the 94-96 war, as the Islamic sariah proved an effective tool in providing the necessary discipline of the soldiers. Yet, after the war, the rising ruling class found itself torn between armed Islamic warlords -who saw in Islam a new collective identity which would guarantee the obedience of the population -and bureaucrats, supporting the continuation of the soviet institutions. The violent conflicts between them increased the confusion and uncertainty of the Chechen population whose initial collective expectations after 'independence' turned into the need for protection from the Islamic warlords through clientelist relations. Although it was firstly the marginalised youth, which grew up in the post-soviet chaos, that identified with Islamic fundamentalism, gradually, and since no coherent alternative appeared, Islam turned into a new unifying ideology of the state by integrating all political forces. Even Mashadov flirted with this peculiar Caucasian *wahhabism*, a mixture of hardcore and militant Islamism that Saudi Arabia refuses to accept as a real descendant. If finally the ruling class chose Islamic fundamentalism as its ideological vehicle for the capitalist restructuring of Chechnya, the consequences of such a choice had the opposite effect. The 'moral economy' that the *wahhabites* promoted did not contribute to a smooth reproduction of human capital. The ruling class sought the solution of the dead-end in imperialist expansion.



In August 1999, a group of Chechen nationalists -or Islam fighters if you wish- and mercenaries led by Basaev and the Afghani (or Saudi, opinions vary) Khattab invaded the neighbouring Daghestan in an attempt to financially exploit the gains from a direct access to the Caspian Sea and to escape from the economic blockade imposed by Russia after the war. The Chechen government kept an uneasy distance from this invasion, stating that it represented a 'personal affair' of the Basaev-Khattab duo, or an 'internal affair' of Daghestan, or even a 'conspiracy of the West and Moscow'. The Islamic invaders were particularly polite to the Daghestani cops, whom they treated as '...brothers' and to the local population, allowing them to leave if they wanted - something which they did *en masse*. In themselves, the leading Islamic clans of Daghestan were not particularly happy about this invasion, and even though the Chechens labelled the invasion 'an Islamic revolution against the infidel Russians', whose expressed aim was the destruction of the 'corrupt apparatus' and the 'liberation' of the population of Daghestan, the latter not only refused the unification with Chechnya, but was eager to join the Russian forces that were sent to fight back the Chechens.

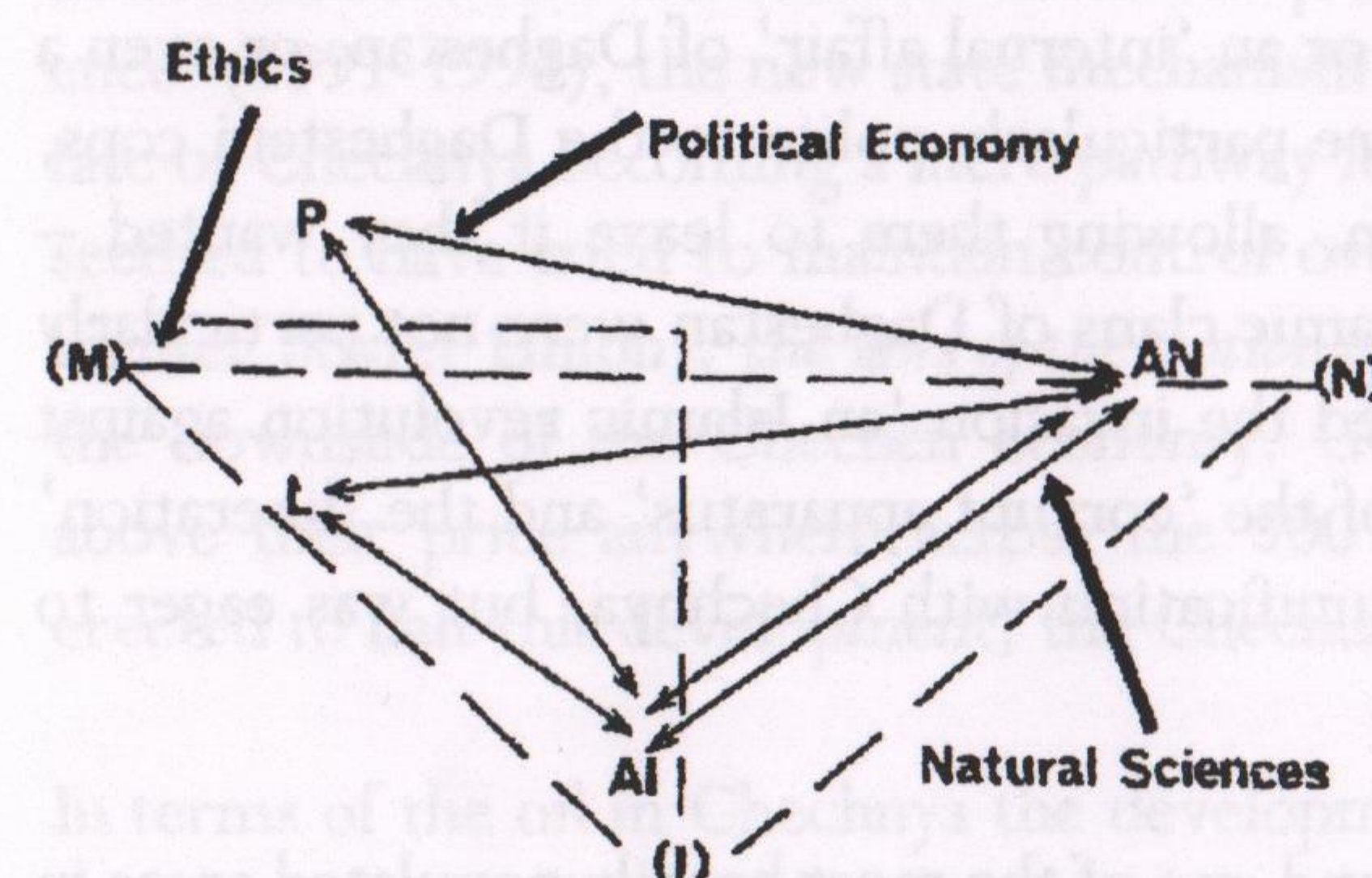
For Daghestan, a member of the Russian Federation since 1992, and one of the most heavily populated areas in the Caucasus, the prospect of unification with Chechnya was particularly undesirable. In a country of 2.1 million people and of 40 distinct ethnic groups, withdrawal from Russia would almost certainly mean civil war amongst the various clans. Furthermore, and most importantly, they would lose 90% of their budget which at the moment comes from Russia.¹¹ And although industrial plants hardly function, agricultural production is at a pathetic state, and unemployment has risen well over 30% (others speak of 80%!), financial help from Russia is seen as the only way to maintain the existing social peace which, at least, brings some wealth to the clans at the top of the hierarchy of the Daghestani society. Furthermore, the possibilities of seasonal migration to Russia, which temporarily relieves the impoverished unemployed population, would no longer be possible. Not to mention the fact that unification with Chechnya would mean, if Islamic law was to be followed, a redistribution of the existing wealth, something highly unfavourable to the chieftains of Daghestan.

In response to the Chechen invasion of Daghestan, Russia send a considerable military force and managed to drive the Chechens out by the 30th of August 1999. The reason for Russia's decision was not, as it was claimed, a counter-attack against Islamic fundamentalism, but the knowledge that should Chechnya control Daghestan, the oil pipeline that was built through Daghestan to bypass Chechnya was going to fall into the hands of the Chechens. Moreover, Russia's other plan for another pipeline from Kazakhstan to Novorosisk, whose foundations were laid on May 1999, was also threatened.

As soon as this excursion was over, bombs started flying all over the place in Russia claiming more than 300 dead, and before anyone knew it, a full scale attack was launched against Chechnya, with the official aim of getting rid of the Chechen terrorists once and for all. Although the process of identifying those responsible for the bombs was surprisingly fast, and the real origin of the bombs is still highly contestable¹², the result was the same: with the excuse of counter-terrorist activity, the Russian state gathered its forces and attacked Chechnya¹³. Thus started the second military excursion of the Russian military in Chechen land which, in contrast to the previous one, has for the time been much more effective, since it follows the example set by Nato in Kosovo, summarised by the cynical 'bombs good, body bags bad'.



So what does Russian capital have to gain from this military attack? On the one hand, it is important to look at the internal situation of Russia itself in the beginning of the war. With parliamentary elections coming up on December 19th, and presidential ones in the summer of 2000, it was obvious that Russian capital was reaching dangerous rimes. With a constant decrease in living standards and growing poverty, with unemployment reaching explosive levels, and with no visible prospect of any escape from the imposed economic reforms, there was a growing realisation that the period of economic reform is a mere disguise for setting the basis for capitalist dictatorship. And although Yeltsin's administration of post-Soviet Russia was a disaster, it had at least managed to retain some social peace. But Yeltsin's rule was coming to a constitutional end, and widespread dissatisfaction¹⁴ could well be channelled towards less stable factions of capital's administrators - be it the neo-stalinists of Zuyganov or the incompetent centre-left. Any such election result was unwelcome by both the west and the local ruling class for reasons of stability. Combined with that was a feeling of isolation (summarised in the popular belief that "the whole world is conspiring against Russia") resulting in resentment towards the west, which has had the effect of fuelling a nationalist trend to every single party running for the elections in December. This resentment was pretty evident during the Kosovo war, yet its roots lay more in the ongoing process of economic reform which for the Russian proletariat is a process of growing impoverishment, and for which some see the west as responsible¹⁵. Although this feeling of isolation could to a certain degree be channelled towards the external enemy (the US, the west, etc), and thus mystify the true nature of capitalist social relations, it



was unable to provide stability inside Russia. A growing number of strikes and social turmoil testified that even the nationalism of the political parties could not accommodate the alienation of the disintegrating Russian society. Only the Chechen war managed to put the national above the social question, thus allowing Vladimir Putin to win the elections and continue with the economic reforms that Yeltsin started, with the knowledge however that its temporal prolongation could turn things on their head and render it a potential danger for social peace in Russia.

Externally, the attack on Chechnya represents an attempt of Russian capital to maintain some control over the explosive region of the Caucasus, whose oil and gas resources are vital to the Russian industry¹⁶. Although the loss of the dominance over the majority of oil resources in the Caucasus is now considered a given for Russian capital since two alternative oil pipelines have already been built which bypass Russian controlled land, Chechnya's invasion of Daghestan threatened the last remaining oil pipeline which brought oil to Russia through Daghestan. Furthermore, by achieving military victory over Chechnya, Russia does not only pursue its immediate economic interests but also pre-empts any domino effect that could result from Chechnya's insubmission, and which could potentially even lead to the demise of the Russian Federation. At the same time, this -so far- successful war gave Russia an opportunity to revitalise itself. Through the boosting of the moral of the army -the war was seen by many Russian conscripts as defensive- and its modernisation, Russia is given a chance to prove that she (as much as the West) can also act like an exporter of protection in the periphery, a very

modern commodity.

Basically, the central problem in Chechnya is reminiscent to that of Kosovo in the Balkans. With a backward and unproductive agriculture, with the rising problem of overpopulation, with high levels of unemployment, and a severe lack of capital accumulation, the problems that Russian capital faces in the Caucasus go far beyond the 'threat' of Islamic fundamentalism or the loss of oil pipelines which, although important, have seen a big decrease of their production rates for many years. As in Kosovo, the problem of the reproduction of human capital is visible. It has become increasingly obvious that a future process of modernisation of the Chechen economy requires the abandonment of unproductive forms of agriculture, the suppression of illegal trade (which, although beneficial for individual capitalists, does nothing to accommodate the dominance of social capital) and the integration of the population into modern capitalist structures, i.e. their proletarianisation. As soon as it was clear that the wannabe modernisers of Chechnya (Basaev and Mashadov, etc) were unable to perform these necessities with considerable success, war presented itself as the only possible resolution of the contradictions of the Russian Federation.

The Russian attack has also had the effect of re-igniting Chechen nationalism and uniting the nation against the 'common enemy', something that Basaev himself jokingly admitted to as soon as Russia began its attacks. In face of widespread dissatisfaction with the pathetic state of Chechnya, social peace was, in Basaev's words, hard to maintain for much longer. For the aspiring modernising faction of the bourgeois class, whose links to Moscow are well-established¹⁷, the nationalisation of social antagonisms is the only positive development.



In general the west has kept rather silent during the war in Chechnya, a result of the west's complex position. On the one hand, western interests for Caspian oil have led to an aggressive policy towards Russia which has effectively drawn Russia out of south-central Caucasus. US presence in Azerbaijan -either directly or with Turkey as a middleman- and in the Ukraine, seriously influenced Russia's decision to embark into another military expedition to retain some control in the North Caucasus. Similarly, the EU's policies -such as aid programmes in Eastern Europe etc.- were aimed more towards the EU's internal interests rather than the Russian ones¹⁸, and were generally disastrous for Russian interests. In this way the west has forced Russia to acknowledge its loss of dominance over the Caucasus and thus to attempt to maintain at all costs the parts which she can still control.

At the same time however, faced with the potential of an uncontrollable motley crew of armed-to-the-teeth warlords who dangerously flirt with the Islamic states of the Middle East, and who want a share of the regions resources, the west definitely prefers to have Russia in charge of both the existing resources and their further development.

The underlying principle is the fact that, although Russia's economy needs to be kept in check, it is crucial for western capital that it develops enough to be opened towards western investments and to be made a capable competitor/partner in the world market.



The war in Chechnya is a consequence of the nature of post-Soviet society, in the same way as the Yugoslav war or the war in Kosovo. It is an expression of the attempts to integrate the 'underdeveloped' parts of the capitalist world into the global division of power.

The outcome of the war might be favourable to either Russian capital or the Chechen ruling class, yet whether Russian or Chechen, wherever capital dominates there are only slaves. As such, the development of capitalism brings with it the subversive element that constantly threatens the established order and the explosion of class struggles is as unavoidable as capitalist society presents itself to be. In the current situation, this

radical element has not been expressed, and thus to take either side in this conflict means to prioritise one form of capitalist development to another. To support that is, either the interests of Russian capital, or the national-liberation capitalism of the aspiring modernisers of Chechnya. This however, is the task of bourgeois ideology, not radical/revolutionary critique.

Notes:

(1) "Daghestan has become the centre of illegal trade and smuggling. Ingushetia the peripheral centre of the illegal trade of gold and drugs. North Ossetia the main producer of illegal vodka and a point of transport for the tycoons of alcohol", (*Le Monde Diplomatique*, December, 1999)

(2) Although even that seems uncertain since, for example, during the whole period of economic reform in Russia in which hundreds of uncompetitive industries were shut down, not one single factory or industrial plant has been built! (*Aufheben*, #8, page 7, footnote 11)

(3) For some (see *Aufheben*, #8, article on Kosovo war), these historical developments were used to explain Nato's recent war in Kosovo. However one-sided this view seems though, it proves to be useful when dealing with the war in Chechnya. In accordance to this view, put forward by *Aufheben*, western capital was forced to realise that, faced with widespread dissatisfaction for Yeltsin's commitment to the western-led economic reforms, and with the Russian economy even more seriously damaged by the financial crisis of 1998, their loyal subordinates of the Yeltsinite apparatus might not survive the next elections, and that the nationalist factions of the Russian bourgeoisie might take control of the economy and threaten the -necessary for the west- economic reforms, by imposing a re-nationalisation of the economy. By attacking the last ally that Russia had in Europe (Serbia), Russia's isolation would be firmly established, and the weakness of the ultra-nationalist faction of the Russian bourgeoisie exposed -they would not be able to support their 'Slav brothers'. Thus, the US's decision to embark into a Nato offensive in the 'insignificant' area of Kosovo was essentially an attempt to show Russia that there can be no alternative to the IMF imposed economic reforms and that military force will be used to demonstrate the isolation of Russia and thus the necessity for following the western-led reforms.

The development and outcome of the Kosovo war however verifies that this view was problematic. On the one hand, this view ignores recent developments in the Balkans themselves and problematically focuses on Russia (and the US) to explain a war in the Balkans. On the other hand, and perhaps more importantly, although it is a fact that Russia's isolation was publicly demonstrated, the result of the war was not the strengthening of the Yeltsin apparatus, as the view implies, but rather its weakening. Although the nationalist tendencies of the Russian bourgeoisie were seriously impaired (as the election results show), Yeltsin's position was undermined since Russia's international position was undermined. In this way it is hard to see how *Aufheben* can claim that the result of the Kosovo war would be to pre-empt any alternative to the economic reforms of the IMF. Yeltsin's faction, which is seen in Russia as primarily responsible for the pro-western policies, was discredited due to its inability to cope with the Kosovo crisis. Through its successful appeal to national unity the economic reforms imposed by the west have been prolonged rather than threatened. What the standpoint of *Aufheben* ends up with implying is that western capital collaborated with Yeltsin to ensure that both Yeltsin's position, and the economic reforms, would remain unchallenged. Yeltsin's position after the war though, was not as safe as this view implies. In fact, the only thing that managed to save Yeltsin's *modus operandi* was the war in Chechnya, which managed to boost up the illusion of national unity, i.e. the necessary prerequisite for the continuation of the economic reforms, by setting aside the social reality of exploitation, and neutralising its potential explosiveness, through appeals for national unity.

(4) "In 1994 more than 250 Turkish firms were working in the Russian market, especially in the construction business. Russia was easily the most important trading partner Turkey had in the CIS accounting for about five times its volume of trade with all the Turkic republics combined", in *Contested Borders in the Caucasus*, Chapter

VIII, 'Turkey's Policies in Transcaucasia'

(5) Although Turkey wished to support Azrebaizan and not Armenia (for historical reasons as well), it seems to be the case that the influence of the Armenian diaspora in France and the US was strong enough to 'convince' Turkey not to take any drastic steps.

(6) Most of them preferred to sell their weapons to the Chechen nationalists than engage in war with them, something which provided the Chechens with modern weaponry and undermined the Russian army. In the most recent war on the other hand, apart from the barbarism of the thousands of murders, mutilations, rapes, of the destroyed houses and the looting, the trade of dead bodies and hostages is blooming. The Russian generals of the 'security zone' sell the dead Chechens to their families and the prisoners to the Chechen rebels who collect ransom from their families, sharing them afterwards with the Russian officers.

(7) On the one hand there were the mothers of the conscripts and the general outrage of the population, and on the other hand there was a faction of the ruling class (politicians, media, etc) which, frightened by the popular outrage, understood that the moment was not right for such a military expense. The war of 94-96 did not have the support of the majority of the Russian or Chechen population, and that explains why no nationalist conflicts from below appeared. In contrast, the Russian mothers which took to the Chechen villages, while the war was still going on, looking for their children, stayed in Chechen houses and often ensured the liberation of their sons. It is also hardly known that the Chechens named the main street of Grozny, Gorbachev, honouring him as the father of democratisation and of perestroika.

(8) Trained by the Russian army during the 92-93 war between Abkhazia and Georgia, Basaev fought with the Russians in support of the former. More than anything else, Basaev seems to be an opportunist: in the autumn of '96, a while after the victory of Chechnya over the Russian army, Basaev started created a cosmic image of himself, grooming his beard and appearing well-dressed for the interests of his electoral campaign, scorning the Islamic candidates for their 'newly-acquired' Islamism. This did not however stop him from invading Daghestan in 1999 dressed in the colours of the 'Islamic revolution'.

(9) Some evidence suggests that a Texan based oil company approached the Chechen government, but was soon discouraged from making any deal by a dispatch of the US embassy in Moscow. After that, Chechen officials made many business trips to European countries, trying to make new deals. These were not met with any success though, either because of the incompetence of the Chechen delegates, or because no western company was willing to invest in the uncertain economic and social environment of Chechnya.

(10) GM Derluguian, 'Che Guevaras in Turbans', *New Left Review* 237

(11) In late August, in a meeting between Yeltsin and Magomedov (president of the State Council of Daghestan) the Russian government promised a further help of 300 million roubles.

(12) In the town of Ryazan the Russian security forces were caught while planting explosives in an apartment building (in the *Economist*, October 9th 1999)

(13) The excuse of counter-terrorist investigations was not only useful for the Russian state at an external level. As soon as the bombs went off, the police used it as an excuse to arrest and interrogate hundreds of people in Moscow, most of which were not (surprisingly enough) Chechens but Russians.

(14) Opinion polls showed that 90% of the population did not feel very strongly about Yeltsin (see *Socialist Action*, December 1999, 'Russia Prepares for Elections')

(15) This view was re-inforced by the economic crash in August 1998 that many directly linked to the western-imposed harsh economic reforms.

(16) Even until 1993, Russia had not stopped the oil going into the refineries of Chechnya with the blatant excuse that such an action would threaten Russian interests.

(17) A big scandal erupted in Moscow when it was proven that B. Berezovski, the model self made Mafioso businessman of the Russian economy who controls major oil companies and most of the media in Russia, as well as being the major influence behind Yeltsin's "Family", has never stopped his financial connections with Chechnya and, more specifically, Basaev.

(18) "Money was being channelled to Western consultants rather to the needs of Russia's people and their economy", and " ... Europe's leaders have been guilty of pursuing short term interests, such as the disposal of the EU's agricultural surpluses under the guise of food aid to Russia..." (*Le Monde Diplomatique*, December 1999). Of course it reaches the limits of stupidity to claim that any sort of economic policy could be aimed at meeting the needs of the population, yet the remarks are indicative of the EU's attitude towards Russia.

Practice and Ideology in the Direct Action Movement

"The call to abandon their illusions about their condition is a call to abandon a condition which requires illusions".

Recent explosions of discontent (such as in Seattle in November or in the City of London on J18) have expressed themselves in ways not worthy of their radical practice. The radical content of their practice (such as violence against the police, destruction of property, the sense of collective strength against the state) has been accompanied by a distorted image of capitalism which insists in seeing capital as nothing more than the financial centres, the 'dodgy' companies (as if there are 'non-dodgy' companies), and the shadowy international organisations (such as the WTO, the IMF, the World Bank, etc). They identify capital with its most superficial appearances, failing to see it in its totality. On the other hand, these actions definitely inspire the people involved in them, they do cause considerable trouble for the gatekeepers of law and order, and they do spoil the routine of the day-to-day business of the muppets who are being targeted. The problem immediately arises: how can the reformist language of the protests co-exist with their subversive practice?

In a sense, the two are not in contradiction. Movements are never homogenous (practically or theoretically) but rather consist of contradictions and immediate limitations, which could potentially be overcome the more the movement develops. Moreover, however much the official language of a movement represents its content, no homogeneity exists: the people involved in re-appropriations and violent acts of disorder are not necessarily the same who draw up the ideology underlying the actions. At the same time, contrary to appearances, there is nothing intrinsically contradictory between having the desire to destroy the existing world and its glass window and having misconceived ideas of the same world. The history of the revolutionary movement against capitalism is full of examples of such tendencies.

But the above explanation quickly dissolves into a problematic excuse, especially when it is used to pre-empt any radical critique of these struggles. In the two previous issues we carried what was later to be termed a harsh and unjustified attack on the expressed theory of the events leading up to J18. We were essentially attacked for being too dismissive, arrogant and 'idealistic' when dealing with J18. Some of the criticisms expressed were truthful. Our analysis of J18 was indeed problematically focused on the expressed ideology of the movement and not its real content. It would definitely be more accurate and complete to look at the history of the movement that inspired actions such as J18, and to have a more radical approach to its limitations.

However, and without getting into arguments about how our critique was practically and temporally limited (we were, after all, writing *before* J18 happened and could not have known exactly how it would develop), our critique has largely been confirmed. Regardless of the radical expressions of actions such as J18 and the 'battles' in Seattle, most of our critics end up with dismissing *any* critique of the ideology of the movement, i.e. part of its content. In an attempt to counter-react against our critique, the result is a rather uncritical approach to reformist and reactionary expressions. There are no apologies to be made. Radical critique is not about exchanging compliments, but about looking at the limitations of movements which claim to be anti-capitalist and trying to contribute to their development. The task of over-emphasising the 'sexy and inspiring' sides is better left to the various direct action conferences and gatherings, whose only purpose seems to be exactly that: big doses of self-reassurance and the absence of critical engagement.

The direct action movement primarily comes out of the anti-roads struggles of the early 90's. Developing as a response to the attempts to accommodate part of the emerging needs of capital which took the form of ambitious road-building schemes, the anti-roads movement was a struggle both *ancient* –reminiscent as it was of the peasants' attempts to resist the early stages of capital accumulation through land occupations – and *contemporary* –resisting the needs of advanced (western-European) capitalist development.

Despite its incoherencies and internal inadequacies, the anti-roads movement expressed a side of the class struggle. It did so by attacking (theoretically) the ideology of capitalist progress, and by resisting (practically) the attempts to further alienate people from their immediate environment, by turning it into dead space whose only purpose is the facilitation of the dictatorship of the economy. For those who took part in these struggles, the potential for moving beyond its immediate limitations was visible –and by many, this was realised. Scientific progress, the ideological filter for the justification of capitalist modernisation, was exposed as rooted in capital's interests. Democracy, the powerful ideology of capital, was (practically, at least) rejected and replaced by collective action. Many of the seemingly uninterrupted plans for the creation of massive roads were seriously delayed and, in some cases, abandoned.

In the process of its development, the anti-roads movement created a community of struggle against capital and the state, but –as it can be observed today –one which was only a small island within the capitalist desert. However inspiring and creative the communities of struggle of the anti-roads movement were, they were problematically based on the limits of an ecological movement (not to mention subculture and life-stylism).³ Even though in some cases positive links were made with the locals, these never managed to move beyond immediate necessity and towards the formation of a long-standing basis for anti-capitalist struggles.

Despite its antagonistic relation to capitalist modernisation, the anti-roads movement was unable to break its isolation and to transform itself into a generalised movement which would link the ecological movement (by overcoming its inherent reformism) to the overall movement against capital in its totality. As is usually the case with movements that fail to address their history critically, today the direct action movement is unable to realise that its foundations lay on the alienated result of struggles which never managed to contest capitalist reality in its totality. Based on the corpse of subculture and life-stylism, the direct action movement finds itself rejuvenating ideologies which were already wrong when they first appeared. It fails to understand its inherent contradictions, replacing critique with an –almost –incomprehensible enthusiasm.

People have tried to overcome the problems arising in the direct action scene by claiming it is essentially a problem of theory and practice. The two of course are not separate. Whoever claims that 'theoretical' interventions are inferior to 'practical' ones is either stupid or paternalistic. The two complement each other or they are both useless. To prioritise one over the other is simply to separate our struggle against capital and to justify the existing division of labour which gives a *raison d'être* to the numerous 'professional revolutionaries'. The problems faced by the direct action scene are not, in this respect, the results of a contradiction between theory and practice. Both theory and practice of the direct action movement are reflections of our present

situation, primarily characterised by the absence of a widespread movement contesting of capitalist normality. In this environment, it is not a surprise that the direct action movement seems stuck in its contradictions.

The tendency is there, especially at non-revolutionary times, to applaud the emergence of any violent confrontations between proletarians and the state. And to a certain degree it is justified, for it is for many of us an escape from a routinely organised life which offers nothing at all. It carries however the danger of fetishising incomplete expressions of our struggle and thus perpetuating their existence *as incomplete*. To organise 'days against capitalism', even if that in itself marks an important step forward from the super market of single issues that most of the direct action movement is involved in, is nothing but an expression of our inability to attack capital in its root in a systematic way. Capital is a social relation, and hence our struggle against it is either centred on our everyday life or it is nothing. The only use of 'days against capitalism' is that it provides a chance for many of us to meet outside of boring political frameworks and to **collectively** express our disgust at the existing world.⁴ But that's about it. However positive that may be, it does not in itself point towards the emergence of a 'global anti-capitalist movement'.



The movement around events such as J18 and Seattle is largely disconnected from existing struggles against capital's offensive against us.⁵ However much the direct action scene has picked up the term 'anti-capitalism', and however that may in some ways be an advance, it is common place that capitalism is essentially a system of production. None of the 'sexy and inspiring' actions that took place under the banner of 'anti-capitalism' were in the slightest focused on the production process. Instead, the focus was on finance capital, international monetary institutions and the illusory opposition between 'free trade' and 'fair trade'. The 'targets' that the direct action scene has chosen thus far represent capital's mechanisms for the regulation of decisions *already made in the production process*.

We are not, as we have pointed out before, fetishising the factory. Production is not only taking place in the factories. But 'anti-capitalism' is not an *idea* that people pick up on, but a tendency, a *movement*, arising out of our social conditions (the first of which is our relation to work) aiming at destroying capital in its totality. However important finance capital or the IMF is, a partial attack on capital can only have partial results. And half-made 'revolutions' only dig their own grave.

Failing to identify any 'sexy and inspiring' situations outside its own, the direct action movement stands in the fringes of social antagonisms. Most of its preoccupations do not arise out of immediate social conditions, but are in many cases the result of essentially moral considerations which accompany a specific lifestyle. We thus have the bizarre spectacle of direct action activists *choosing* which struggles to take part in,⁶ a remnant of the direct action's background as a super market of single issues. The refusal to take part in struggles which do not fit the common denominator of 'sexy and inspiring' by some people simply shows that in fact they *do live* in a 'political comfort zone' (at least in their minds) in which we have the luxury to decide which part of the totality we will attack, usually a different one every day.

What used to be only a potential danger of creating a separate 'class of revolutionaries', with a specialised position in subversive struggles, is now a reality for the direct action movement. The militant role is the dominant spectacle of the direct action movement and it is aware of it. The role of the militant has been properly discredited elsewhere⁷ so it is of no point to get into it again. It is interesting however to see the development

of the radical part of the direct action scene towards a bizarre fetishism of violence. Although it is right to attack the pacifist elements and to expose their reformism,⁸ this has resulted in a glorification of violence which seems detached from the social reality that gives rise to it. "The materialist conception of violence excludes any *principled position*, either in favour of these methods or against them. It does not revert the principles of the bourgeois society in order to transform [violence] into an absolute good, nor does it condemn it as an absolute bad." (Barrot)

The more capital tries to complete its domination upon our lives, the more is our need for a community intensified. This is reflected in every struggle against capital, which is, most importantly, our attempt to connect with other people and to transcend the isolation imposed to us. Yet, the danger of creating a pseudo-community is obvious. In line with the uncritical adoption of the militant role, the direct action movement has tried to fight against isolation by creating a pseudo-community of activists, separate from the rest of 'normal people', one which possesses a clear revolutionary consciousness that people are simply waiting to learn. Like a petty-bourgeois family, the direct action movement sees itself as the centre of the world, and conceives itself as *the* community, seeking to recreate itself as such in every opportunity. This illusory community is strongly sustained through constant self-reassuring 'sessions', in which the supremacy of the direct action scene is skillfully demonstrated. This is usually done in comparison to the 'boring lefties', to which the direct action movement stands opposed to as the enlightened militants. Obviously the lefties are boring and their ideas of action are neither imaginative nor inspiring, but that's not the real problem. This opposition fails to expose them as what they really are, i.e. capitalist organisations. Instead, the well-intentioned critique is misplaced and ends up implying that the main problem of the lefties is their lack of imagination! It becomes obvious that this 'critique' of leftist organisation is more directed towards the re-affirmation of direct action activists as the *proper* revolutionaries rather as an attempt to expose the leftists' counter-revolutionary function. It is surprising to see how anarchists consider it as an integral part of their identity to constantly attack trotskysts, something which is done by simply pointing at the hierarchical structure of their party accompanied by a necessary denunciation of any sort of authority. Yet, even this critique would be useful, if only they directed it against the direct action movement itself, whose structure, although more fluid, also includes hierarchical tendencies.

Similar to the leninist conception of the vanguard party which they so much despise, the direct action scene shares many of its characteristics. The notion that 'normal people' only need to get in touch with *their* ideas in order to become revolutionaries, the educational tone of their public outreaches ("a festival of anarchist ideas" or "a spoof newspaper...explaining anarchy"), the idea in general that revolution will only occur when 'normal people' come in contact and get influenced by the 'revolutionary consciousness' that the direct action scene is so full of. At the same time, leftist parties are slagged off in every chance because of their 'vanguard-ism'.

In terms of organisation, although the claim is that the direct action scene consists of 'autonomous' and non-hierarchical structures, the underlying agreement is that things like June 18th or Seattle could never have happened unless they were *properly* organised. Regardless of the non-hierarchical rhetoric, this fact exposes once again the separation between the 'professional activists' and the 'normal people'. In this way, the 'non-hierarchical' Direct Action Network behind the events of Seattle was able to impose a set of rules and guidelines⁹ for those who wanted to take part in the 'anti-capitalist' actions prepared for the WTO conference—to which most objections concerned the actual *content* of the principles without challenging the notion of principles as such—, while the 'anti-authoritarian' anarchists behind the Mayday preparations have also adopted similar 'principles' and rules in order to exclude the hierarchical trotskysts.¹⁰ The illusion that hierarchy can be abolished through the drawing out of 'anti-hierarchical' principles, shows that they (as much as the direct action movement) have an *ideological* conception of hierarchy, failing to see it as a problem to be overcome by the development of our struggle.

Part of the 'anti-globalisation' ideology of the direct action movement is the focus on its consequences on the 'underdeveloped' countries, an effect of which is the fuelling of uncritical support for liberation movements in

the third world, a practice reminiscent of leninist babble. The struggle of the Zapatistas in Mexico, the landless peasants in Brazil, maoist guerrillas in Tibet etc., all have received enthusiastic and uncritical support, justified through the argument that 'we', as westerners, who live in the 'political comfort zone', cannot possibly criticise the struggles of people whose experiences and struggle we cannot 'understand', being as they are, so far beyond our 'zone'. But, these struggles are relevant to us only to the extent that we can learn from them and relate them to our struggles. Finding a *minimum* common denominator between the various struggles in various parts around the world, the direct action scene ignores the content of these movements, and attempts to create a spectacle of unity. The fact, for example, that the Zapatistas are speaking about national unity or civil society, or that the maoist guerrillas are (simply) maoist, is obviously irrelevant for the direct action militants. Instead, the focus is on the spectacular elements of these struggles (people in balaclavas and guns in proper guerrilla fashion). Any radical critique of their content is redundant.

The separation between developed and underdeveloped countries, between 'political comfort zones' and third world national liberation struggles with immunity to radical critique because of their 'revolutionary' spectacle, is by far the biggest pile of shit to come out of the direct action scene. Bizarrely, twenty years ago, revolutionaries would not have the slightest hesitation in discrediting any such bollocks as leninist. Today though, everything is justified if it fits the recipe: sexy, inspiring or exotic.

In the midst of enthusiasm and grandeur, the direct action movement sees a growing anti-capitalist movement *everywhere*. This illusion stops them from recognizing that, in its present form, the direct action movement is going *nowhere*.

(1) It seems to be the case that the 'battle' of Seattle was predominantly characterised by extreme police brutality and by peace-types violently (!) protecting property rather than destruction of property and attacks against the cops. Hardly what we would call a 'battle'.

(2) Like gardening in a graveyard: there are some flowers, but rooted in death and decay.

(3) A more general analysis/critique of the anti-roads movement can be found in *Aufheben*, #3, 1994, 'Can We Slay the Roads Monster?'.

(4) Recent developments in the direct action scene indicate a neglect of its most important elements: rather than a genuine attempt to understand and move forward from J18 and Euston (N30), the tendency is one of a return to a green agenda (guerrilla gardening) and an anarchist conference.

(5) An example of that is rightfully pointed out in *Do or Die*, #8, 'War is the health of the State: An Open Letter to the Direct Action Movement'.

(6) Most activists, for example, refuse to take part in struggles against the unemployed benefit cuts, although most of them are unemployed themselves. These struggles are not, obviously, as 'sexy and inspiring' as occupying the offices of Shell for an afternoon or dressing up like a turtle downtown Seattle.

(7) The SI provided a very concise critique of this counter-revolutionary tendency. For more recent attacks on the militant role see the useful, yet somewhat hesitant, critique in *Reflections on June 18th*, 'Give up activism'.

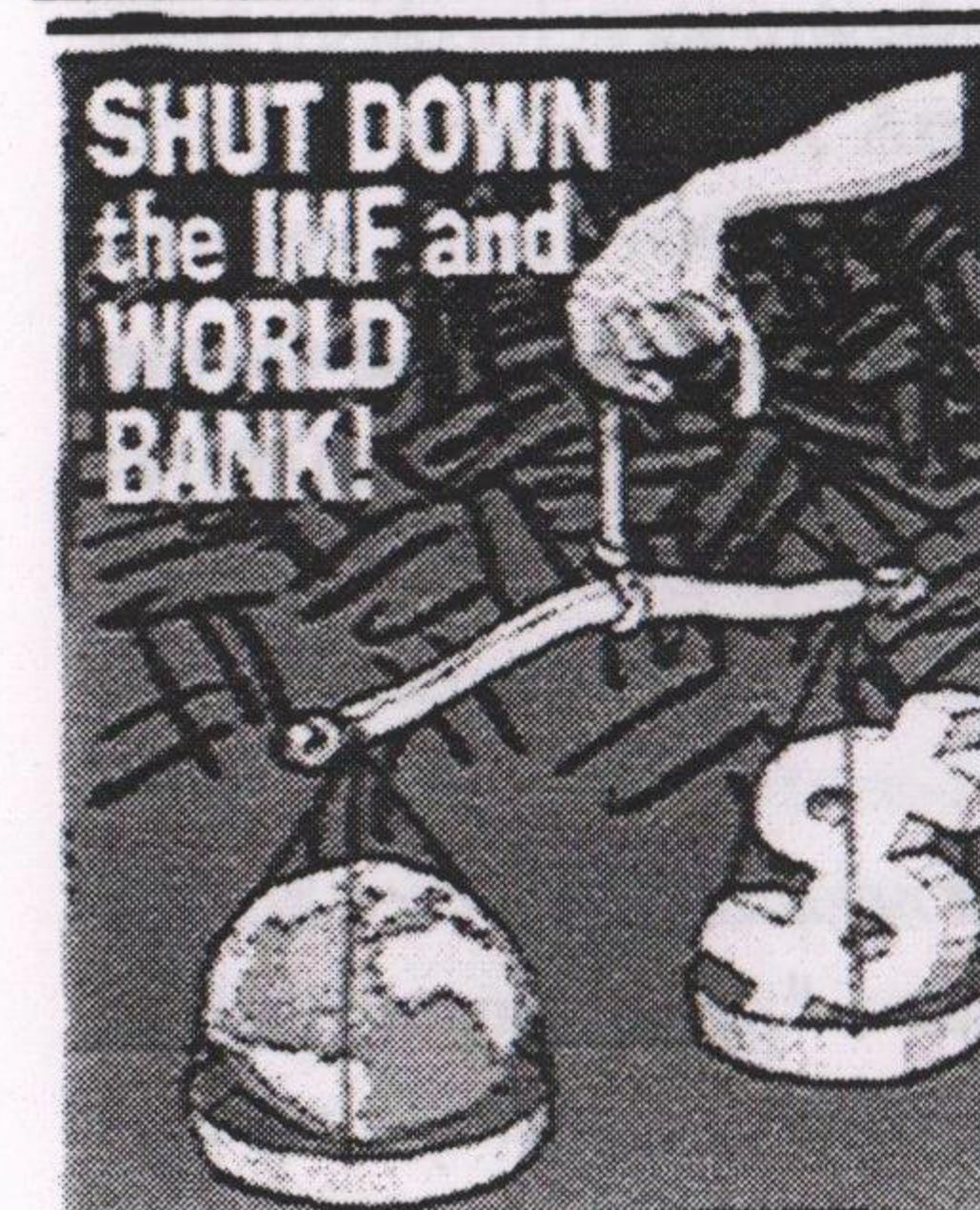
(8) Although to talk about 'pacifism as pathology' really misses the point (see *Do or Die* #8, review of 'Pacifism as Pathology'). In fact, the proposed remedies for this are as 'pathological' as the 'disease' it aims to 'cure'.

(9) The problem is not the 'undemocratic' nature of the Direct Action Network. If the majority of people abided to these rules, this meant that there was *already* an agreement as to their content. To claim that it was these 'rules and guidelines' which prevented people from using violence is obviously wrong.

(10) It was both funny and extremely sad to see the way in which 50-60 'anti-authoritarian' anarchists spent one hour of

the mini-conference in order to exclude the *one* member of the (trotskyists) workers' party, a process which was justified later on with the claim that 'we don't want to be shot like partridges'. Obviously, according to the anarchists, that was a likely possibility of Mayday...

Seattle: the First US Riot Against 'Globalisation'? Loren Goldner



Mass politics in the streets disappeared in the U.S. between 1970 and 1973. In retrospect, it is clear that the years 1964 to 1970 were not a "pre-revolutionary situation", but anyone who lived through those years as an activist can be forgiven for thinking it was. Any number of people in the ruling circles shared the same error of judgement. The black urban insurrections of 1964 to 1968, the working-class wildcat rebellion (often led by black workers) from 1966 to 1973, the breakdown of the U.S. military in Indochina, the "student" and "youth" rebellions, and the appearance of militant feminist, gay and ecology movements were all indicators of a major social earthquake. Thirty years after they ended, the "sixties", for the left and for the right, still hang over American society like smoke after a conflagration.

The "oil crisis" and world recession of 1973-75 closed that era, and the revolutionary movement in the U.S. and everywhere else has been retrenching and regrouping ever since. If the ebb has seemed deeper in the U.S. than in Europe, it is only because U.S. capital is the cutting edge of the dismantling of the old Keynesian "social contract", such as it was, a dismantling in which Europe is still at the halfway point. The ebb of open struggle in the U.S., punctuated briefly but hardly reversed by actions against the Gulf War in 1990-91 or by the Los Angeles riots of 1992, expresses a vast "recomposition" of class lines in a world restructuring of capital. Many formerly successful forms of struggle, most notably the wildcat strike, have all but disappeared. The movements of the sixties were internationalist in sentiment, but they rarely transcended the national framework in practice. However much one wants to quibble about the reality of "globalisation", it has been clear for a long time, even to avowed reformists, that any meaningful strategy, even in the day-to-day sense, has to be international, or better, "transnational", from the outset to win anything worth talking about. "Think globally, act locally" may sound like a solution, but its practical result usually comes down to rearranging deck chairs on the Titanic.

Some American and Chinese workers may have had a more radical consciousness, and perhaps were even more internationalist rhetorically, in the 1920's than today, but today conditions exist in which they are compelled, practically, to make internationalism concrete in a way that was unthinkable in the 1920's. Awareness of the need for a global strategy has been around, and widespread, for a long time, but it has been extremely difficult to make practical. The reformists at places such as the Institute for Policy Studies, supported by a few capitalists, are working hard to develop something like a "global Keynesianism" and a "global welfare state", once they solve the little problem of the "separate body of armed men", the sovereign nation state, which has not exactly disappeared. Meanwhile, the "centrist" Clinton administration has since 1993 pushed through NAFTA, the WTO, the ASEAN agreement, and the dismantling of welfare, a set of attacks on working people in America that would have been opposed in the streets if undertaken by the "right". It has delivered everything the globalists have asked for.

American workers have reacted to this situation in contradictory ways. There has been an important protectionist sentiment among American workers for a long time: "Buy American", "Save American Jobs", "Park Your Toyota in Tokyo", support for anti-immigrant legislation, occasional violence against Asians, the vile anti-Mexican propaganda of the Teamsters, the USW's (United Steel Workers) anti-dumping campaign, or the working-class electoral base for Buchanan's "Fortress America" are all ugly examples of this. Beyond it all ultimately lies the sentiment: lay off someone else, or don't hire someone else, and save my job, not to mention a fair dose of anti-Asian, anti-Latino racism. Many workers have been won over to sympathy for their employers, who are beleaguered by imports, and have swallowed big concessions on that basis. On the other

hand, traditional unions such as the UAW (United Auto Workers) as well as respectable reformist opposition groups such as Labor Notes have made some serious attempts to hook up with workers (usually along industry lines) in Mexico, Asia and Europe, but strictly within a union and often corporatist framework. There have been some co-ordinated job actions in auto between the U.S. and Mexico, or the Bridgestone-Firestone campaign of U.S. and Japanese workers. But all these actions have been strictly under the control of some faction of union bureaucrats, in or out of power, and represent the extension of sectoral trade union reformism to a world scale.

There exists an inchoate desire in the U.S., including among some American workers, (which surfaced during the campaigns against NAFTA or 1995 "fast track" legislation), for a DIFFERENT KIND OF INTERNATIONALISM than that offered by either the globalist ruling class or by the timid actions of official unionists who unquestioningly accept the framework of capitalism.

If, as seems to be the case, the world economy has become a "negative sum game" for workers, a "race to the bottom", then a "different kind of internationalism" would mean creating a situation for a "positive sum game" in which workers can concretely fight for their own interests on a CLASS FOR ITSELF basis, in a way that implicitly or, better still, explicitly, recognises the practical unity of interests of working people in the U.S. and China, Japan and Bangladesh, Italy and Albania. Since society, like nature, abhors a vacuum, without this kind of perspective, the protectionists and/or the anti-protectionist, internationalist reformists will rush in, and contribute to a new anti-working class reshuffling of the deck, in the capitalist "sum which can never be a totality", as Bordiga used to say.

From a revolutionary viewpoint, it is easy to be sceptical about the events in Seattle. The American participants, both among the trade union contingent and the direct action groups, were overwhelmingly white, in a country in which 30% of the population is now constituted by people of colour. The slogan "Fair Trade, Not Free Trade" could certainly be seen as a slightly-concealed variant of protectionism by those (and there were many) who wished to do so. The dominant nerve of the demonstrators was activated by the very real prospect of little groups of transnational corporate appointees overruling and overturning national labour and environmental laws and agreements, but just behind that animus was, for some, the idea of Chinese bureaucrats having such influence. Steel workers threw foreign steel into Seattle harbour and others held a "Seattle Tea Party" against foreign imports, with China the obvious main target. Few questioned as vociferously the negative impact of WTO entry on CHINESE workers, who obviously could not be present.

Throughout, the trade union bureaucracy remained firmly in control of the worker contingents, (determined, and successful, in their plan to have nothing but a peaceful, disciplined, unthreatening march independent of, if not indifferent to, the "crazies" of the direct action groups), and few if any workers seriously challenged that control. The animus of the Sweeney leadership of the AFL-CIO clearly came from the sense of "betrayal" at the recent US-China agreement on China's entry into the WTO. The failure of the Seattle meeting took the Democrats off the hook of having to push hard for China's entry into the WTO in an election year, when both the USW and the Teamsters have clearly gone for the protectionist option. Clinton's kind words for the rights of the demonstrators should be seen in that context, particularly after it became known that powerful forces at the top had pushed for heavy repression when the police lost control on the first day, and that US Army intelligence units disguised as demonstrators had been all over the place with concealed lapel cameras and all the new paraphernalia of the technotronic, "New Paradigm" surveillance state. In the Boston area, where I live, much of the "post-Seattle" organising has an even more overtly protectionist agenda, with repugnant slogans such as "Not One More American Job to Mexico", and I doubt that this is exceptional.

Nevertheless, despite all the elements of "uneven", parochial or simply reactionary ("Buchananite") consciousness it may have contained, one has to characterise Seattle as a breakthrough. There was, in the patent lack of official preparedness for what happened, an unrepeatable singularity (no international trade summit will ever

again take place, anywhere, with so little readiness for heavy repression) an opening to exactly that element of the unknown and unexpected that characterises a situation momentarily beyond all manipulative control, whether by the state or the unions or the "left", when power lies for a moment "in the streets". In 24 hours, Seattle ripped away the "one note" unanimity of the tolerated "public discussion" of international economic issues of the past 20 years or more. Millions of people who never heard of the WTO learned what it was, and what it does, more thoroughly than through decades of peaceful opposition and think-tank chatter. Even strongly protectionist American workers were thrown together in the streets with activists, including worker activists, from 100 countries, and had to confront the human face of the producers of "foreign imports" in a way that had never previously occurred on such a scale, not to mention in such an open situation (as opposed to tedious international trade union conferences of bureaucratic delegations). Teamsters, bare-breasted Amazon lesbian warriors and tree-huggers were thrown together, and talked, on an unprecedented (for the U.S.) scale. The Seattle events gave a concrete target to opponents of the seemingly abstract forces that have made serious action on the appropriate level so difficult for so long. In accounts I heard from people who had been there, and in material I was able to gather, there was a genuine whiff of the spontaneous awakening, in the heat of confrontation, to the power of capital and the state that has not been seen in the U.S. since the sixties, a genuine demonstration by masses in motion of the truth of the Eleventh Thesis on Feuerbach, to wit that classical materialism "does not understand sensuous activity as objective".

The great majority of demonstrators in Seattle, particularly in the direct action contingents, had not been born or were children when the sixties ended, and had never experienced their own power in the streets in this way, anywhere. Trite as it may sound to the small numbers of sixties activists who still consider themselves revolutionaries, and who are jaded from having been through it all before, a first clubbing, a first tear-gassing, seeing the police go berserk against people detained in a holding cell, a first concrete experience of what bourgeois "rights" really mean when the state tears them up in a confrontational setting, is an irreversible crossing of a threshold, an irreplaceable experience of collective power and of the role of those who job is to repress it. People who go through this, whatever the consciousness or intentions that brought them to Seattle, can never be the same. The brief, ephemeral opening of the sense that "nothing will ever be the same" experienced by some in Seattle and in the wake of Seattle will close again quickly (just as the opening, such as it was, of the LA riots, or that of the December 1995 strike wave in France, closed quickly) without a strategy for a real internationalism, an internationalism in which criticisms of slave labour in China or child labour in India are joined to, e.g. a practical critique of the mushroom-like proliferation of sweatshops and prison labour in the U.S. A perspective encompassing the most oppressed layers of the working class and its allies is always a safeguard against the parochialism, including militant parochialism, which sets the stage for a "reformist" reshuffling of the capitalist deck, as occurred in the 1930's and 1940's. Ever since "1973" closed the era of meaningful "wildcat" direct action on the shop floor of one factory, the workers' movement in the U.S. and many other countries has been groping toward a new concrete terrain on which to fight something beside endless losing local battles against plant closings and downsizing, or outright reactionary battles demanding in effect that the layoffs happen "somewhere else". In their greatly heightened global mobility, the capitalists stole a march on the world working class that more than 25 years of losing and defensive struggles has not yet overcome. If Seattle is in fact to be a positive turning point, at which history did in fact finally turn, it can only be on the path to solidifying and greatly expanding this terrain.



Think globally, smash locally!

Preliminary Notes on Recent Call Centre Struggles

Call centres are appearing everywhere. Representing a new way of integrating telecommunications and computer technology into the process of reshaping the division of labour, they are predominantly situated in the circulation process of capital – although some are within the production process itself. Bosses and politicians herald them as an example of the future of labour. Britain, whose national economy revolves around the finance sector, has 40% of the total call centres in Europe and this number is increasing every year. It is estimated that there are 350,000 workers employed in 4000 call centres, expected to rise to 500,000 in the next three years.(1)

In Brighton, they are literally on every street corner, as well as in the surrounding towns. Sucking-in the student, unemployed and casual workers which make up a large proportion of the local labour-force, a mere cursory glance reveals numerous telemarketing companies, telecommunication companies such as BT, Cable and Wireless and Ericsson, financial companies such as Lloyds/TSB and American Express (the largest employer in the Brighton area), as well as privatised utilities such as Seeboard. In a town like Brighton, with an economy primarily based on the retail and service sectors, call centres are seen by many workers to be a stop gap to something bigger and better (a thousand and one ways of avoiding the fact that you *are* and will *remain* a proletarian). Yet, some of the underlying antagonisms between workers and capital have started to take shape.

Before Xmas, workers at BT struck for the first time in 13 years. Occurring in the 150 and 151 repair (call) centres, it has been claimed as the first strike at a call centre in Britain. A series of three one-day strikes had been called by the Communication Workers' Union (CWU) in protest against the increasing influx of agency workers (seen by the permanent workers for what it was: a strategy for lowering their wages and eventually replacing them with the lower paid agency staff) and the heavy handed pressure and intensification of work that management imposed on the workforce. However, only one of the three-day strikes actually happened, since the CWU and the management naturally came to some sort of agreement over increased union recognition in the workplace.(2)



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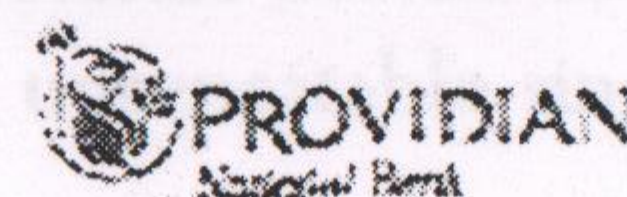
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The labour force at BT call centres was at that time supplied by the employment agency, Manpower. However, in March 2000, they lost this contract to Hays Management Consultants, who, though promising not to cut down wages, did exactly that on the first day that they took over from Manpower. After promising that there would be no pay cuts, in one day they slashed at least £30 from most workers' pay packets by reducing the evening rate from time and a half to time and a quarter. Hays had hoped that there would be little reaction to these measures, but subsequent events showed that they were mistaken. On the first day, many workers walked straight out of the job refusing to sign the contract which would mean their acceptance of the pay cut. Others responded by taking other action: large amounts of overseas phone calls were reportedly made, apparently totalling over £15,000. One call was claimed to have been made to the speaking clock in Zimbabwe with the receiver left off the hook over night; as well as this,

well as this, top of the range stock was sent out to householders with faulty BT equipment. Many worked-to-rule, refusing to perform any 'extra' tasks than the ones in their job description. And whereas before the office had been a tense and hostile environment, now it was coloured by workers chatting merrily and putting their feet up disguising their refusal to do any work. Although, it is not possible to measure how many agency staff have left BT in Brighton in the last month, constant recruitment by Hays suggests that they have a constant shortage of staff. And due to the reaction of the workers they have been forced to suspend their pay cuts for at least a few months.

This is only a basic description of last month's worker activities in Brighton – there is not space here to go into more. We are also sure that plenty of other actions, which we are unaware of, took place at other BT call centres all over the country. These tensions could be the precursors of future struggles to come. Take Pembroke Dock in South West Wales for example, where the decline of manufacturing industry has created the space for call centres – specialising in e-commerce – to start moving in, to the extent of renaming the area 'Cyber Bay'.

Pembrokeshire's economy was previously based on the energy industry. Today, out of the four oil refineries, only two remain, whilst the local power station was shut down under pressure from environmental groups, like Friends of the Earth, who protested against the proposed burning of a high-polluting mineral, Orimulsion. While the burning of Orimulsion was obviously not very pleasant, the attitude of the Greenies exposed once again their disgusting ideology: none of them are complaining now that the call centres are being established, while the local people, desperate for any work, are pushed into working in the new sweatshops for £4.60 an hour. With unemployment levels at 13.2% (3) the bosses couldn't be happier: seen on the one hand as providing the local labour-force with the 'opportunity' to escape unemployment, on the other, the call centres are welcomed by the local bourgeois factions as the key to the economic revival of the region which has become like a ghost town since capital abandoned the manufacturing industry. The Pembroke Dock call centre was built even before it had a company to fill it, while due to the low skill levels of the local workforce, a special call centre training camp has been built near by. As in Brighton, employment agencies are to supply the workforce for the new call centre and it is Manpower who have the contract at the present time. How long it will be before the proletariat of South West Wales sees through the bullshit of the myth of the cyber-god of exploitation remains to be seen.

This is a mere preliminary analysis of workers' activities in some of the new 'sweatshops'. The emergence of call centres has been treated by bosses and capitalists from all around as signifying a new composition of social relations, an ideological approach filtered through constant references to the merits of the service and information society. For us, their ideological mutterings are mere disguises for their attempts to constantly expand capital's 'voracious appetite'. It is not in our interests to solve the problems of the economy, but to aim for its complete destruction. For that reason, taking on the proposal made by the German Communist group, Kolinko (4), we intend to investigate call centres as new areas of workers' concentration and thus areas of potential subversive struggles.

We welcome all correspondence, contributions and exchanges.

(1) *Revolutionary Perspectives* #16

(2) Some of us went to the picket line in Brighton where we encountered some disgusting CWU leaflets, calling on workers to work harder for shareholders. This speaks for itself.

(3) In nearby Milford Haven the rate is nearly a fifth of the working population (18.4%), in Tenby it is 14.2% while in Haverfordwest it is less at 7.7%.

(4) The Kolinko proposal can be found at: www.nadir.org/nadir/initiativ/kolinko/index_e.htm

Class War in Barcelona—Jean Barrot

The following text is the translation of a pamphlet of the group *Mouvement Communiste*, written in 1973 by Jean Barrot (aka Gilles Dauve), as a means of solidarity for some Spanish revolutionaries arrested in Spain facing harsh penalties. It might seem a bizarre selection, considering that the armed struggle (which so much shaped the struggles of the 60's and 70's) is largely non-existent today in Europe, especially so in the UK. Yet, the text does not simply deal with the armed struggle. It deals with the issue of violence in general, not in an abstract way but in clear connection with the social movement of the proletariat. Taking it out of the limited framework of the situation in Spain in the 70's, we believe this text to be a useful critique/analysis of the fetishism of violence, a tendency which is also visible in parts of the direct action scene in Britain.

Introduction to the Greek edition of 1974 (ΠΕΖΟΔΡΟΜΙΟ)

The Spanish State arrested in the end of September 1973 around ten revolutionaries, whom it presented as 'gangsters'. Three of them are threatened with the death penalty. They could be sentenced by a court martial and executed within 48 hours.

If some of them indeed robbed banks, they did so to fund the printing of texts that are circulating in the radical workers' movement of Barcelona. And if a policeman died, that happened after an ambush of the police.

The point is to understand what some proletarians are historically forced to do. Violence is always a means for the satisfaction of a demand: in Spain, where the police shoots unarmed strikers in cold blood, violence appears directly as a social relation. The simple writing of texts or the circulation of pamphlets carries the penalty of many years in prison. Thus those who want to resist exploitation resort to violence more often than in other countries.

Democracy drowns workers struggles through politics and reformism. Fascism has fewer reservations and crushes them with violence. Whoever recognises in the State the monopoly of violence denies the proletarians the right to abolish their condition: wage labour.

Those of the Spanish proletarians who managed to escape into other countries are now wanted by Interpol as criminals. The democratic and fascist States help each other: the international arrest warrants allow their handing over to the Spanish police. Many of them are threatened with the death penalty.

In order for us to save them the truth has to shine about the real -proletarian- nature of their activities. Whoever does not expose the lie becomes a collaborator not only of the Spanish state, but of the French and all the others.

Class War in Barcelona

On the 16th of September 1973, the police caught two Spanish revolutionaries after the attack against a bank near the French border. A wave of arrests in Barcelona followed. During one of them, on the 24th of September, a member of the "guardia civil" was killed, while the culprit of the murder was seriously wounded. The Spanish police and the press want people to believe that it was a bunch of gangsters. There are at least 12 with charges against them, three of which are threatened with the death penalty.

In reality the attack on the bank was part of a series of armed actions, which started a few years ago by various amorphous autonomous groups in the area of Barcelona. The purpose of these actions was to collect money for the support of revolutionary activities in the workers' movement. Anyway, many of the groups signed their actions as "Autonomous Groups of Struggle", thus showing with the common signature the common character of their actions, although they do not in fact consist of a single structured organisation. These actions did not have a political purpose, in the sense that politics consists of actions on others, they did not aim for the coordination

and organisation, the formation of recognised power that seeks a position in society. The bank robberies did not turn the bank robbers into *vendettas* of the spectacle, they did not aspire to capture the imagination, but merely provided the material means for action in a country where a large quantity is often needed. (For example, illegality often makes the publication and circulation of texts difficult and costly). Whoever blames them for their actions is even further back than Proudhon, who knew that property = theft. Of course theft does not destroy property. But it is a means -limited but useful in many cases- for the organisation of the struggle against the world of property. It is totally useless to express *a priori* judgements "in favour" or "against" methods whose use is the matter of circumstances, thus in the final analysis a matter of social conditions. These actions cannot be made irrespective of time and place. It is not by chance that in the beginning of the century the Russian revolutionaries resorted to similar actions in a society swept by brutal repression, in a State which -as the Spanish one today- did not hesitate to drown unarmed workers in blood.

The materialist conception of violence excludes any *principled position*, either in favour of these methods or against them. It does not invert the principles of bourgeois society in order to transform terrorism into an absolute good, nor does it condemn it as an absolute bad.

The revolutionary does not steal in order to give to the poor, like the French maoists who distributed caviar to the immigrants. He steals in order to satisfy a -social- need of the revolution. Of course, to the degree that he explains his action (something that the Spanish comrades did repeatedly by addressing those present in order to express the purposes of the robbery), his action gains a new dimension. It reveals the existence of another social movement, of a different dynamic within society, and this revelation is subversive. But this is a consequence, a mere secondary result. Those who resort to armed violence with the main aim of winning over the spirits or the hearts in order to extort pressure for their official recognition, either fail or they impose themselves as the new power (for example: the Palestinian commandos in the first case, the Irish IRA in the second).

In reality it is capital which by its very nature robs and expropriates, stripping people from their environment at all levels. It denies people, even things (see the polluted nature) from their being in order to integrate them, it transforms them into its objects, its monsters -since they are neither themselves nor solid spanners of capital- and all they know is a divided life and society. It is very natural then that those who rise against capital engage into all sorts of re-appropriations: material, psychological, theoretical, and also economic or financial. So long as capital exists, money remains the privileged mediator of all social activity. So long as the enemy triumphs it imposes its mediation everywhere, without exempting revolutionary activities. In some cases, radical people or groups are inevitably led to the violent appropriation of sums of value, even though their purpose, their same logic and their being, directs itself against all forms of value. This will surprise and scandalize only those who do not need means for action simply because they are not active or those who have a bureaucratic mechanism (state capitalist organisations), or in the extreme cases those who have the support of a State (like the Spanish Communist Party which is supported by Russia).

In parallel with the terrorist actions, the workers' movement of Barcelona developed an effective network of connections, especially with the proletarian libraries and with the active engagement in the autonomous workers' struggles. We would have to remind that after the double defeat of the proletariat (which was crushed after the coordinated attacks of fascism and of anti-fascism), the Spanish proletarian movement experienced a rise at the beginning of the 1960's; this rise was expressed in 1962-65 with the appearance of the "Workers Committees", as a direct result of the wave of spontaneous strikes which started from the mines in the Asturias. In 1966-68 all the traditional parties and organisations infiltrated the Workers' Committees (in fact the CP infiltrated in the state union C.N.S.), took control of their leadership and transformed them into reformist structures. In between 1968 and 1970, the impact of the French and Italian movement, in relation to the Spanish situation, caused within the Workers' Committees a series of ideological struggles, splits, and, in general, developments in the direction of the extreme-left. After, in 1970-73, there is a rise of workers' struggles

which refuse the bureaucratic and hierarchical controls (burning of leaflets, kicking political members out of workers' meetings, etc). Exactly this phenomenon is what the State is trying to attack, by equalising all those charged and those in prison, which it tries at the same time to destroy and to slander (one aim facilitates the latter). It aims at the destruction of one of the expressions of the autonomous action of the Spanish proletariat.

Decisively opposed to all forms of reformism and of democratic anti-fascism, these groups and circles had as an eventual aim the proletarian programme of abolishing wage labour and of exchange. It is characteristic that they translated and distributed a series of French communist texts, like J. Barrot's study of the Russian Revolution, the introduction of the book "La Bande a Baader", an article of "Negation", and Beriou's text about Ireland. Moreover, they showed a zealous interest in reading Pannekoek and Bordiga, without however theoretically following one or the other.

With the progress of these actions, some elements who have resorted to robberies decided to abandon such activities. The robberies had proven useful of course at the beginning of the movement (we are not able to say whether their influence was decisive), but in the next phase they were becoming increasingly pointless and dangerous. We ignore today why and how the comrades who were arrested on the 16th September organised another robbery; we therefore refrain from forming an opinion on the matter until more information is available. It is however certain that the State aims with this chance of diminishing the seeds of the totality of those activities" 1) by presenting the actions of armed struggles as gangsterism, but mostly 2) by equalising the most radical elements of the workers' movement who had no relation with these actions with the actual culprits. We have to do whatever is possible to make the truth shine on these two points, without mixing them up.

Revolutionary violence is not another means that is used because other means were proven to be ineffective. Neither is it a defense against an attack, as if we always have to defend a violent action by presenting ourselves as "defensive". The theories of defensive violence simply play the game of the enemy. Moreover, it is not an end in itself and does not find its justification in itself. It is used (as material violence, psychological violence, etc) for the accomplishment of an aim. In this sense it belongs in every society, even in the communist one which will include conflicts since every relation implies a conflict. Neither harmony nor anarchy exist in an absolute and static situation; one determines the other. In the communist society, individuals and groups -who will have the capability of transforming their lives all the time- will have conflicts and at the same time the means to deal with them without hurting or mutilating others or themselves. The very content of "violence" thus gets a sense so new, that the term is used here only for technical reasons: it's the language of the contemporary-prehistoric society.

Violence is the essential character of the existing society against the contradictory nature of capital. Even in periods of prosperity and peace capital destroys goods and people, it leaves certain productive forces unused, it creates hunger. It is well known that the car has killed more French people than the 2nd World War. Violence is also ideological: forcing people to speak a specific language, erasing the local historic past, imposition of a strictly defined sexual practice. Capital even accomplishes the *murder of the dead*, i.e. of the past labour accumulated by previous generations, when it neglects or destroys the material infrastructure that it does not want or does not want to maintain. Capital, simply through its function, deteriorates, and crushes the bodies and spirits. The truncheon is an exemption. The "police State" is a component element and the product of a much more generalised phenomenon.

Collective resistance against capital includes violence as a means for the destruction of oppressive social relations. Or actually, something more: isolation is abolished in a collective practice that is, among others, violent. During the revolution, the human community re-emerges through violence. Violence is a means for the alteration of the relations of production and its use towards that direction is a collective act. Thus, violence becomes a positive way of refusing the social organisation, from the moment it goes it turns against its roots.

Some individuals or groups are forced to organise the collective use of violence in order to impose the satisfaction of their demands. In contemporary France, rarely is the issue of revolutionary violence posed in radical activities; but it becomes an issue of increasing vitality when the struggle against the State, the left and of the extreme left, takes the proportion of an open conflict and it is necessary to impose yourself practically in order to be able to express and to develop certain activities. In Spain, social relations promote a more pressured need to resort to violence, including armed struggle: in this way certain "military" duties are more pressing. But, even in this case, violence is the result of social needs that cannot be met otherwise, and not of the self-empowering logic of military mechanisms, cut off from social life and composed of people who have understood the need to resort to the armed struggle and as a consequence are organised and they recruit for that purpose.

The movement is forced to resort to violence, and in the organisation of this violence, in order to meet certain needs. Of course in this sector, total improvisation leads to failure. But also a constant and specialised organisational form will not have better results. The "preparation" for the use of violence is not the task of organised groups with exactly that perspective: it is a matter of *bonds* and *means* that exists within the proletariat and through it. The proletariat is not only the "outcast" and the negation of this society: in order to refuse its condition, it puts into practice the very means that the "proletarian experience" offers to it, its social existence and its function. It finds within its own being the elements of its programme, but also the means to realise it. At a social level, the armed struggle is conducted mainly in the network of relations that are a consequence of the proletariat's existence. The "preparation" for revolt is mainly a matter of theory, engagement in the social struggles, contribution to the progress of certain ideas, creation of relations and contacts, etc. There is no need for the creation of "specialised" military units with a label and with an organisation aimed at the use of violence. Every single action can be accomplished with the collaboration of individuals and groups which are neither organisationally constructed nor specialised; and it should be judged in accordance to its content and not to the logic of specialised "military" groups. The need for a label means that an organisation of armed struggle adopts as a criterion violence itself and not activities connected to real needs. The Guevara logic of guerilla fighting consists of exactly the creation of a military pole unconnected to any social movement. When a group considers itself the nucleus of a future "revolutionary" army, it acts outside of the proletariat and in most cases against it; it thus tends to be transformed into a micro-power, to a kind of preliminary State which stands as a candidate for the replacement of the old state mechanism.

In Spain there is a direct connection between revolutionary activity and "military" infrastructure, since every activity comes into conflict from the very beginning with the military violence of the State (repression of strikes, of gatherings/demonstrations, of the distribution of texts, etc). The necessity of a "military" infrastructure, i.e. of an organisation of violence, is thus obvious. But there exists a problem: what sort of infrastructure? In our opinion this infrastructure should not be an end in itself, but should be the instrument that allows the realisation of the rest of the activities, because it is them that play the decisive role. When for example a brochure is printed the problem is for it to circulate, and not to maintain a "military" structure which might be necessary for bringing it in the country from abroad. The revolutionary organisation organises the various specific duties that compose its reason of existence, and not itself. Its aim is not hijacking struggles in order to include them into its *accomplishments*: on the contrary, it makes sure that its activity theoretically and materially belongs to all, and that it helps, to an increasing extent, the initiatives which do not stem from itself and are beyond its control. *Political* organisations do the exact opposite. It should be added that the former way of organisation proves to be more effective against repression.

Of course there can be groups of struggle, but only as means for the class struggle. The purpose is the most effective possible expression of the subversive perspectives within the social struggles -which include the potential for armed struggle within this framework- and not the existence of well-organised and ready-for-all military groups. In the latter case, the groups that were formed outside the proletariat will remain external to it. The organisation of the organisation, on the one hand, and the organisation of the specific activities on the other, result into totally different relations within the social movement and the working class.

The practice of the Spanish revolutionaries did not aim either at the formation of a military mechanism nor to terrorism against individuals or buildings which represent the existing order of things, but the accomplishment of a limited material function. But every activity reproduces the conditions of its existence which tend to perpetuate it beyond the limits of its function. The less powerful is the social movement, the more the means are transformed into objectives. Thus the organisation of armed activities in illegality tends to create its own self-empowering logic: new financial needs, reasons for new robberies, etc. The only way for one to escape this dynamic is to have a clear conception of the targets of the movement. It is much more important to create groups of workers and to perform robberies if they think that it is useful, than to organise a military mechanism. The decisive criterion is not *either* centralisation *or* autonomy: the importance lies in the content of their activities. If they proclaim themselves as a constant and specialised mechanism, they lose all contact with the social struggles. There is the proletariat that struggles and there are individuals who organise themselves and might potentially decide to commit a robbery; not a military organisation from which stem all the rest as logical consequences. When it is necessary the social movement resorts to violence. And [translator's note: illegible word], those who do not use it, explain it and justify it theoretically.

The danger would be to recreate, under the pretext of practical necessities, a new type of a *professional revolutionary*, who stands out of the proletariat, not by inserting consciousness to it, but by fulfilling a duty that the proletariat, "left to its own powers" is unable to fulfil. We would thus revive "leninism", by substituting a violent act of the proletariat (to which we belong) the activity of groups (whether centralised or autonomous) composed by specialists of violence. The history of the movement shows that the groups of struggle that are organised outside of the proletariat end up, regardless of their good intentions, to autonomise themselves from the class struggle, by recruiting people very different from revolutionary proletarians and acting on their own behalf: for money, for self-projection or simply for their survival. This is what happened to the Bolsheviks. The understanding of the phenomenon is a necessary precondition of a radical critique of leninism.

Revolt destroys people and goods, but with the purpose of destroying a social relation and to the degree that it succeeds. Violence and destruction are not identical. Violence is mainly the appropriation of something with dynamic means. Revolutionary violence is a collective appropriation. Although capital needs to destroy in order to triumph, the communist movement on the contrary means the control of people over their lives. The "positivist" or "rational" or "humanitarian" conceptions neglect the real problem.

State-capitalists insist on the acquisition of power, whereas the point is the acquisition of the ability to act, to transform the world and ourselves. We do not need structures of power, but the power to change the structures. Moreover, they speak about arming the proletariat without connecting that to the *content* of the movement. Civil war plays the game of capital when it does turn against it. The problem is not arming the workers and their armed struggle, but the use of their weapons against commodity relations and the State. Civil war is not the absolute good opposed to the absolute bad of the imperialist war. A civil war can be totally *capitalist* and in fact posits two factions of the bourgeois state as opposed. The criterion for its evaluation should be the productive relations and the army: so long as commodity relations, and the military violence that upholds them, triumph, there is no movement towards the direction of social subversion. We always have to pose the question *what does violence do, what do the workers do*, even if they are organised in militias; if they support a power that maintains capital, it is nothing but a more developed form for the integration of workers to the State. The war in Spain brought into opposition two forms of the development of capital, different but anti-proletarian nonetheless. As soon as the workers' militias, that were formed to fight Franco's coup, accepted to be integrated in the democratic State, they made peace and they prepared a double defeat: against Democracy (crushing of the proletariat of Barcelona in May 1937) and against the nationalists. In this case the proletarian movement was once again a matter of content and only after that a matter of form.

In non-revolutionary periods, radical groups may have as a duty —among others and when it is needed— an organised violent practice. But they cannot act as an armed faction or a military part of the proletariat. Simply

these revolutionaries remain proletarians like the others, who are led to enter a moment of armed struggle that results in a certain degree of illegality. The danger is for them to consider themselves as a separate and autonomous group, destined to use violence indefinitely. If they proclaim themselves and they act as *specialists* of violence, they will have a monopoly over it and they will detach themselves from the real social needs that exist in the subversive movement. Indeed they will tend not even to express their own needs. In relation to the rest of the proletariat, they will be transformed into a new power which seeks its recognition, as a mechanism which is at first military and then political.

The term "terrorism" could be used in a wide sense as the use of terrorism: in this sense capital is by nature terroristic. In the narrow sense, as a particular practice or some times strategy, it is the application of violence in the vulnerable parts of society. When it is not a constituent element of a social movement it leads to a violence detached from social relations. In countries where there is a harsh repression and in which the working class is atomised, there is a dynamic of terrorism in the cities that soon appears as the conflict between two mechanisms: of course victory belongs to the State. In the same way as workers often consider political struggles as a world above them, they often observe the conflict between the State and the terrorists, counting the victims. In the best of cases they feel a moral solidarity. We can in fact wonder if this conflict doesn't actually help in maintaining the social problem as secondary.

The means can potentially be transformed into the aim: here's a truth that does not only apply to violence. Theory, for example, a means for understanding and acting more effectively, can be reduced to a substitute for action. The results of this phenomenon are nonetheless very serious in the case of violence. Nobody can play with the "armed struggle". There are actions which, even though the point is not to "condemn" them (that is the function of judges), we can neither support them or consider them a positive fact. Capital desires the *self-destruction* of radical minorities. It forces certain revolutionaries to feel that they can no longer stand it: a way of neutralising them is to force them to take up arms against it. We are not referring to "*agent provocateurs*", but to social pressure. In such a case we cannot say that certain comrades were forced to act in this way and that's all. For a function of the social movement, as well as of the revolutionary groups, is to organise the resistance against these pressures. Of course theory does not fix everything. The understanding of a thing does not mean that a correspondent practice will follow. But theory is a part of practice and that we cannot ignore. Those who condone or refuse to criticise any violent act, fall into the trap of capital.

There are two illusions. It is thought that violence, because it is more directly related with reality, transforms it more than, for example, texts. But violence, in the same way as texts, can be used as a substitute of another practice. To be revolutionary has as a criterion a real tendency towards subverting the existent. Baader initially wanted to awaken the German proletariat, but he found himself isolated, not numerically but *socially*. At this point we have to deal with the other illusion, concerning the violence of the "masses". The criterion is never numerical. A small numbered minority can accomplish positive violent actions, if it is part of a social movement (something that applies to non-violent acts as well). Subversive action does not need to find refuge within the masses nor does it try to impress them with particular actions. By definition, those who oppose "minority violence" to the "violence of the masses", use the term masses while referring to the mechanisms that organise them, the big parties and the trade unions.

The more contradictory society becomes, the more it separates and atomises people, the more it intensifies the need for a community. Violence is revolutionary and it contributes to the formation of the human community only when it attacks against the foundations of the existing society. When it merely maintains illusions of pseudo-community, it is counter-revolutionary and it leads either to the destruction of subversive groups or to their transformation into extra power structures.

These observations are nothing but a small contribution to the discussion of the problem and they were collected hastily with the purpose of helping the Spanish comrades. Those imprisoned need, on the one hand, the

truth to shine in relation to the revolutionary character of their energies and also the press to be notified of their case so that pressure can be exerted to the court; on the other hand, the revolutionary movement has to take care of their defence and the clarification of their actions. "Revolutionary" help cannot but come from the subversive elements themselves. In fact the second duty is a precondition for the first one, for it is not possible to expect the left or the extreme-left to essentially help people who fight against them.

Solidarity has no meaning outside of a practice: for that reason the usual campaigns "against repression" are by definition self-advertising actions of the organisations undertaking them. The individual can only offer his sympathy and the organisations that specialise in solidarity gather these individuals without doing anything. Solidarity suffices itself with organising solidarity. It is in fact highly reactionary when it condemns "scandals", at the moment when the supposed scandalous fact is a simple result of a cause which is conveniently placed outside the scope of critique. They thus end up denouncing or re-arranging the most obvious facts of social repression, while at the same time they save or modernise the whole.

Properly speaking the revolutionary movement does not organise any particular support. Its members – individuals or groups – support each other naturally through their activities and give each other the necessary help. The problem of "support" is only existent for those outside of the revolutionary movement. The subversive movement supports only those who need help through deepening its action, both in the field of relations and contacts and in the field of theory.

It goes without saying that when we fight for the accused to have a "political" trial we do not demand any sort of privilege for the "political" prisoners as opposed to the "criminal" prisoners. We might identify in their gangsterism capital's extreme tendency to live with clear cons and to create businesses without capital, and in turn show that the accused of Barcelona are not gangsters. Yet that is far from demanding any form of superiority of the "political" prisoners as against the "criminal" ones. As if any person who knows how to reproduce some Marx quotes has an advantage over others!! "Political" prisoners are not superior from the others. We do not demand this quality to be recognised in the name of a principle, but as a tactical means for decreasing their penalties.

Mouvement Communiste, 1973

Beasts of Burden – Antagonism Press 1999



This pamphlet appeared recently with the expressed aim of being read by 'people interested in animal liberation who want to consider why animal exploitation exists, as well as how', and 'by those who define themselves as anarchists or communists who either dismiss animal liberation altogether or personally sympathise with it but don't see how it relates to their broader political stance'. Its overall argument is that animal and human exploitation are intrinsically related, and that the fight for communism is inseparable to the struggle against animal exploitation.

In general terms the pamphlet is very good. It traces the history of animal exploitation and it attempts to link that with the history of human exploitation by capital (and not only). A variety of valid points are made: the practice of animal exploitation

is directly linked to the needs of capital and its ongoing quest for profit, instead of being characterised as an abstract 'evilness' of humans in general against animals.

More particularly, the author identifies that there exists a striking commonality between the exploitation of

humans and animals, and this is traced back to capital's domination over our lives and its subordination of every human or animal need to the needs of valorisation. The author thus says at some point: "...with animals and with humans, the factory system aims to restrict the movement of the body to maximise profit", or, further on, "...[both animals and humans are treated as] an inert, unthinking object, whose creative, bodily, emotional needs are ignored...".

Furthermore, the practice of mass extermination is linked to the treatment of 'unproductive' and 'redundant' (from capital's point of view) humans and animals. Vivisection, this disgusting element of advanced capitalism, is openly linked to particular interests of capital, whereas medical research (whether it uses animals for experiments or not) is exposed for what it really is: a profit-oriented business which "...would rather let people die than allow their patented products to be made available on a non-profit basis".

Moreover, animal exploitation is shown to be interrelated to capital's projection of itself through commodity fetishism. The fact that animals are only seen as commodities with a 'natural' exchange value attached to them, instead of living organisms (in the same way that humans are seen as such) is stressed, as well as the way in which capital's marketing practices manage to conceal this ("...pork not pig, beef not cow").

Coming to the analysis of political struggles, certain aspects of animal liberation are strongly criticised. The practice of boycotting particular companies for their part in animal exploitation is correctly discredited as a misleading view which ignores the totality of capitalism, while the disgusting practice of attacking workers in animal factories as equally responsible for the maltreatment of animals is shown to be a fucked up practice which shows a "...lack of understanding of the dynamics of present day society, of a class analysis...".

Finally, the author is quick to renounce any notion of 'animal rights' in the same way that 'human rights' are attacked as a capitalist construction aimed at disguising existing inequalities and exploitation, and as an institutional construction for the facilitation of capital's domination.

However, despite these valid points the article encounters a number of problems when trying to argue that "...the development and maintenance of capitalism as a system that exploits humans is in some ways dependent upon the abuse of animals."

In tracing the history of animal exploitation, the author makes the remark that in primitive societies, humans were initially vegetarian, thus trying to assert that there is something natural about choosing this sort of diet. Yet, he fails to recognise that in these primitive societies most habits were determined by necessity and not by a conscious and moralistic choice. A totally unjustified glorification of primitive societies follows from this approach, resulting in the author saying that "...[primitive] communities typically live in a harmonious relationship with their environment; it is their home and their provider and it is not their interest to destroy it, by for instance, exterminating animal species". Again, the author mistakenly glorifies the primitive community by presenting only one aspect of it and ignoring that this 'harmonious' relationship was also dangerous, limited and dictated by a kind of necessity which we have nothing to be jealous for. The wild characteristics of animals of that period, which the author addresses in a positive way, also resulted in the constant fear of humans of being consumed by them, and was also partially responsible for people's choice to 'domesticate' themselves and the animals. Moreover, to claim that people's harmonious relationship with their environment led them to refrain from destroying it implies that 'people' (in general) today have an interest in destroying the environment, an attitude which comes in contradiction with the way in which the author later on links the destruction of the environment with the class nature of society and not with 'people's' attitude in general.

At another point, the author quotes Cammate who argues that "...out of the 'animal husbandry' grew both the notion of property and exchange value", a view which wrongly implies that exchange value (i.e. the mode of appearance of things produced as commodities) existed long before production was generalised commodity-

production.

It becomes increasingly apparent that, in analysing the origins of animal abuse, the author exaggerates its development and argues things like "From the earliest stages of domestication meat consumption was the conspicuous display of dominant ruling power" (our emphasis), thus implying that even *today*, the same social status is given to meat-eating. Moreover, this exaggeration reaches ridiculous levels, when the author implies that even the practice of war between humans was only made possible because of the domestication of animals and the attachment of value to their ownership. The fact that conflicts over things of value was the origin of war between humans is clearly irrelevant of what *exactly* these things were.

This reversal of subject and object is further committed by the author, when he argues that primitive accumulation primarily dependent on the animal industry, in the sense that peasants were driven off from their land in order to make room for sheep. Although primitive accumulation was generated through the exclusion of peasants from the land, to argue that the animal industry was its primal motor only results in mystifying the origin of capitalism. Sheep were only an expression of capital's development and *not* its underlying motor. The author exacerbates the argument when claiming that "the animal industry was the starting motor of primitive accumulation, without which the subsequent gains for the ruling class (the creation of a proletariat, access to mineral wealth, etc) may not have been accomplished". The fact that sheep happened to be vital for primitive accumulation in its starting points does not imply in any way that capitalism would not have developed if animals were not regarded as commodities.

Coming to a more contemporary analysis of capitalist social relations, the author states that "...the development of the factory for humans in the modern period was influenced by [the] long history of factory farming", and that "...the origins of the assembly line production are to be found in the US beef packing yards of the late 19th century". To say that the assembly line production process started in one part of industry and later influenced others because of its effectiveness in innovating capitalist production, again says nothing about the actual *product* of this industry. And although it may be the case that "...Henry Ford acknowledged that the idea for the automobile assembly line 'came in a general way from the overhead trolley that the Chicago packers used in dressing beef'...", this is irrelevant. The fact that the first industry to use assembly-line organisation of labour was animal-related does not mean that it could not have been another industry. There is nothing inherent in the animal industry which makes it the cutting edge of technological/exploitative innovations in the factory system, and thus the link between the development of the factory system and animal abuse seems, to say the least, highly coincidental.

In his examination of the animal liberation movement, the author argues that there is something inherently subversive in its practice, something which is initially based on the fact that "...given that we have argued for the centrality of animals to capitalism, a movement challenging the position of animals could hardly help but impact on capital". However, if that centrality is challenged, the argument collapses.

In a way it is right to argue that "...saving [the] animals from suffering and an early death directly confronts the logic of capital, abolishing their status as products, commodities and raw materials by reinstating them as living beings outside of the system of production and exchange". From another standpoint though, the same argument could be made for shoplifting, which, in a similar way abolishes the exchange value of commodities, and reinstates (in a sense) their use-value. Yet, it would hardly be plausible to argue that capitalism is threatened by it. However positive shoplifting is, it essentially expresses a need for 'free consumption' of the existing commodities, and not a subversive relation to a system of commodity production. The re-appropriation of *some* commodities does not necessarily imply a starting point for a generalised critique of capital in its totality, and saving some animals from a lab is no more a pathway to revolutionary consciousness than a variety of other situations, which might even occur in meat-eating environments.

Following the general argument that humans and animals are equally mistreated by capital, and that the exploitation of the former is interrelated to that of the latter since both are considered as commodities, no obvious connection is made between the struggle of proletarians against capital and the struggle for the liberation of animals. Nobody would deny that animals are treated in despicable ways, and that this stems from them being seen as commodities. But this does not convincingly result in equating the struggle for the liberation of animals with the movement of communism. (1) In other words, although it is indeed shown that generalised animal abuse is as much a result of capitalist social relations, reading the pamphlet did not result in realising the inseparability between the struggle for communism and that of animal exploitation. It merely re-asserted the fact that animals are as much commodified as humans.

Communism is in fact the reconciliation of man and nature, and the end of the domination of one by another. Yet, the arguments brought forward in *Beasts of Burden* never manage to confront the inherent moralism of the animal liberation ideology, regardless of whether it can be shown that animal abuse is historically constituted.

At times when revolutionary practice is strikingly absent from our everyday life, when the movement that abolishes existing conditions appears to be in (temporary) retreat, and when the animal liberation movement attracts more people than struggles against capital per se, the pamphlet seems misplaced. Unless, that is, it convinces activists of animal liberation to reconsider the class character of animal abuse and to direct their attacks towards the society which gives birth to such practices and not merely one of its appearances.

(1) At some point in the pamphlet, the author argues that "...Marxist political economy adopted the enlightened project of the domination of nature in its entirety with the natural world being perceived as an unlimited raw material for industrial progress", but with the development of capitalism and the ongoing destruction of the ecological system, "...some communists have begun to criticise this model". In fact, communists criticised and fought against this Stalinist model which identified revolution with the development of the productive forces and industrialism long before the destruction of the environment became the starting point of such a critique, and even for Marx communism "...as fully developed naturalism, equals humanism, and as fully developed humanism equals naturalism..." (Early Writings).

Reflections on June 18th

June 18 saw the biggest riot in London in years. A broad alliance of mostly ecological groups had called for a "carnival against capital" as on that day the political character masks of the world's eight biggest economies had their annual summit in Cologne, Germany. The event itself was as diverse as the alliance that had initiated it. Many enjoyed the sound-systems, some got pissed, others smashed up London's financial centre. This disrespect for private property and the cops is certainly correct; however, in what relation does the actual street fighting stand to the political contents of the campaign that led up to June 18? Is the whole "party as protest" approach an adequate form of resistance?

"Reflections on June 18", a booklet published last October, brings together a near twenty "contributions on the politics behind the events that occurred in the city of London on June 18". It is fortunately not preoccupied with the technical details that often substitute analysis, and it hardly bursts of riot euphoria. Quite the reverse — "pulp." thus writes: "it has always been a mistake to fetishise street rioting...and constantly try to read something social revolutionary in it. (...) Smashing windows is smashing windows...and throwing things at police is throwing things at police, a buzz yes, but none of these things automatically imply the refusal of capitalist wage labour and commodities, the creation of common wealth and the building of world human community." Instead of celebrating J18 for the damage done, most pieces develop critique of J18 in regard to both the ideological *contents* of the pre-J 18 propaganda as well as in terms of the *form* of activism and street party.

As far as the content of the mobilisation is concerned, many contributions underscore the critique we advanced in

our last two issues (which are, by the way, also included in the booklet), i.e. most importantly the highly problematic notion of "globalisation" and its implications. Too often when people talk about "global capitalism", it seems that what they reject is not so much the noun but the adjective: as if *local* or *national* capitalism was any better. Dutch activists point out that "the critique of free trade has long been a speciality of the extreme right, and has proven to easily turn anti-Semitic"; a point supported by the forceful polemic by George Forrestier which, amongst many other things, takes issue with the anti-Semitic implications of the "fetishistic and reductionist attack on financial capital". The focus on the evil bankers the J18 propaganda had is obviously something that many find, if not even dangerous, then at least completely misleading. It manifests a reified view on capital which misses the crucial point: that capital is a social relation we all reproduce permanently by working or buying commodities. Thus, a series of articles stresses the necessity to attack wage-labour and the state instead of joining the ranks of those lefty reformist ideologues who oppose democratic state regulation to "globalisation", symbolised by the cosmopolitan, a-national financial centres. Whilst it is a nice surprise to see this central ideological notion of J18 being under massive attack, it in fact gets redundant after a while - some articles merely reassert the points made by others but don't come up with new arguments.

If capital is not the sum of evil corporations and banks but a totality of social relations, then this also affects questions of strategy and forms of resistance. An article titled "Give up activism" states: "Our methods...are still the same as if we were taking on a specific corporation or development, despite the fact that capitalism is not at all the same sort of thing and the ways in which one might bring down a particular company are not at all the same as the ways in which you might bring down capitalism. (...) So we have the bizarre spectacle of 'doing an action' against capitalism - an utterly inadequate practice." The point is not to combine existing particular campaigns kept running by activists. Rather, the role of the activist, an expert in social change, in itself is quite problematic because it considers capital and revolutionary opposition to it "an issue" separated from her life just as chopping rain forests or road construction is "an issue". Yet capital is not something in the vicious city - "them" - where you can go and protest, but it is virtually everywhere and most importantly it is based on our everyday practice. What is involved here is also the relation between the activist community and what is often patronisingly referred to as "ordinary people". While it is true that revolution won't come about by everybody becoming activists, the claim that "...of course class struggle is happening all the time" sounds like whistling in the dark. It is telling that the same contribution ends by stating that "activism is a form partly forced upon us by weakness", i.e. the downturn in (class) struggle. "It may be that it (activism) is only capable of being corrected by a general upsurge in struggle when we won't be weirdos and freaks any more" - so, there we have the "us" again that the author set out to question by reference to class struggle which is initially presented to be almost something as a law of nature (here: second nature, i.e. society). Another contribution suggests that the contemporary proletarian silence "is not apathy at all" but a sign of collective intelligence as they have learnt the hard way over decades not to get dragged into every limited partial struggle, particularly in cases where there is no chance of winning." (paulp., Mustn't grumble).

However, the booklet mainly represents the diverse and contradictory positions around J18. While "Give up activism" belongs to the most inspiring pieces in the booklet as it criticises the political forms of the direct action scene fundamentally, the following text comes up with a lengthy proposal for how to make activist campaign politics even better - i.e. it wants to make things worse by not only keeping the focus on finance capital, but furthermore concentrating on nodal points instead of aiming at its totality because this "remains an abstract proposition for most people". This is the patronising way in which teachers talk about how to enlighten their pupils - make it simple!

There are a bunch of stupid contributions like that one, but as a whole, "reflections on june 18" is encouraging through its sharp criticisms which alone can get us further. However, it remains a mystery to us that the Kosovo war which hardly found the attention of the activist community busily preparing for the big event is quite absent from these critical contributions - because for us this lack of involvement in the anti-war-movement says as much about the shortcomings of the direct action scene as does the critical analysis of J18

propaganda and activist forms.

Workers Against Work: Labour in Paris and Barcelona During the Popular Fronts,

Michael Seidman, University of California Press

This 400 page book is also available in a much shortened pamphlet version, which is probably easier to get hold of, and despite sounding dull as shit it's actually really interesting. It deals with the situations in France and Spain during their Popular Front governments of the 1930's, focusing on developments in Paris and Barcelona, drawing out the differences and similarities between the two. As Michael Seidman points out, there are a lot of books available on this period in both countries - what distinguishes this one is it's focus on the everyday lives of workers, rather than the actions of the unions, political parties, military forces etc that usually make history. What this reveals is that workers consistently tried to avoid work as best they could, a fact that's usually been hidden or ignored by the left.

France and Spain in the 1930's were in very different situations. In France a dynamic bourgeoisie had created a modern industrial economy, separated church and state and generally put the military under firm civilian rule. In Spain, however, even the most modernised areas as Catalonia were economically backward compared to France, the clergy was still a very powerful conservative force and the armed services were almost autonomous centres of right wing and fascist activity. In France the labour movement had been accommodated to an extent and was geared towards reformism, while in Spain it had little choice but revolutionary struggle. Despite these differences in both countries there was a widespread refusal of work, which proved a problem for both the anarcho-syndicalists who controlled most Barcelona unions and their reformist socialist and communist counterparts in France. Although they had many political differences, they were both committed to an ideology of glorifying work and developing the productive forces. For example, both resented capitalists as 'unproductive' and 'parasites', contrasting them with the hard working masses.

In Spain, where a revolution had given unions control of industry, they were faced with a dilemma - the ongoing war against Franco needed increased production, but workers refused to work any harder now their organisations controlled the factories than they did before. In fact they often tried to work less! The anarcho-syndicalists thought that all that was needed was for the workers to control industry and run it themselves. Workers showed sod all interest in doing so, however - in many places the only way to have mass meetings was to have them during the day, at the expense of production. Instead workers preferred to avoid work as much as possible by working slowly, leaving early, calling in sick and even insisting on respecting every religious holiday that could be found (not that many felt like using their Sundays to go to church). Faced with this the anarcho-syndicalists ended up abandoning their idea of workers control and tried to force people to work harder, re-imposing piece-work, factory discipline and so on. Not recognising a conflict between their goal for a free, stateless society and their ambition to run and develop industry, they put production first, even to the extent of becoming the world's first (and hopefully the last!) anarchist government ministers.

In France, where the unions were never actually in control of the economy, they were in some ways more consistently supportive of workers actions, since workers resistance to work was still the bosses problem and not theirs. However, serious differences still emerged between the rank and file and the leadership, which largely supported the popular Front government. After the Popular Front's election victory, a massive wave of strikes and factory occupations took place, "sensing a favourable political climate...2 million workers impulsively left their machines or laid down their tools in May and June 1936" (p. 220). Although concessions from the employers largely defused the situation, direct and indirect resistance to work continued at a high level, taking many of the same forms as in Spain. The left blamed this on the bosses, fascists and saboteurs rather than the working class they claimed to represent, when in fact it was workers resistance to work that created some of

the Popular Front's most difficult problems. While enjoying the Popular Front's reforms, such as the creation of the weekend as holiday, workers refused to take up their side of the 'deal' and take on the left's vision of happy proles working harder. Instead they tried to reduce their worktime still and the state to maintain and increase production, eventually managing to restore a large measure of work discipline.

By revealing this hidden history of working class people refusing to identify themselves as workers, Seidman contributes to our understanding of what revolutionary change actually means. By glorifying production and the role of 'worker', groups with the best intentions ended up forcing actual working class people into the roles and factories they rejected. People will not willingly work at things they don't like, even if they can control their own workplaces, and no amount of revolutionary speeches or even revolutionary situations seems to change that. (The fact that such an obvious statement should sound surprising coming from most left/revolutionary groups shows just how many myths they've created about working people). Given that people won't work at the kind of shitty jobs that form the basis of the economy unless they're forced to, (whether just by having to survive in a world of wages and commodities or by more blatant coercion as well) we come to a choice between maintaining the state, perhaps dressed up as workers councils, unions etc and the industrial system, or getting rid of both. Seidman concludes that the State can't be abolished until a science fiction utopia of robotic production has been achieved, but there's no reason to take the current level of industry as a given. Just what level of technology and production people would want to maintain in a free, classless society we can't say, but it's safe bet that it wouldn't include the heavy industry and factory system developed by the inhuman needs of capital and currently fucking up both workers health and eco-systems around the world.



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