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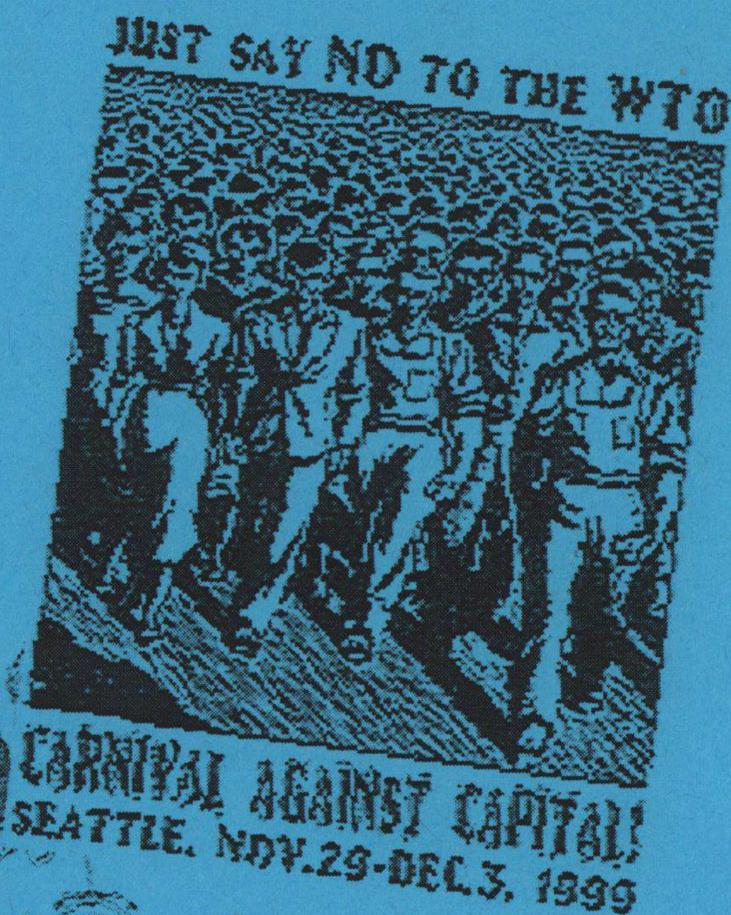
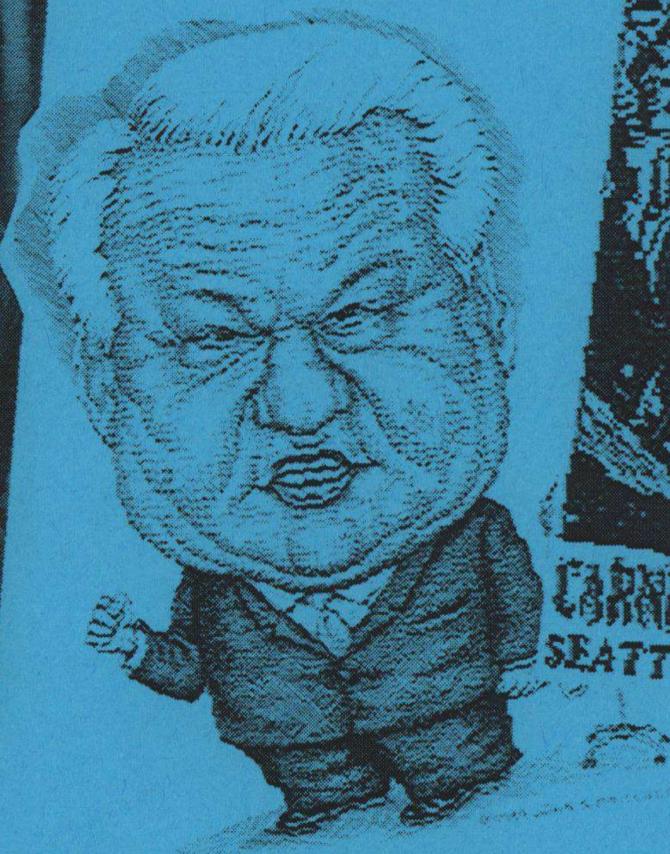
undercurrent 8

chechnya
direct action movement
seattle
call centres

j. barrot

reviews:
beasts of burden
reflections on j18
workers against work in Barcelona and France

radical anti-capitalist journal



summer 2000

50p

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 weapons¹. 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 valorisation², 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.



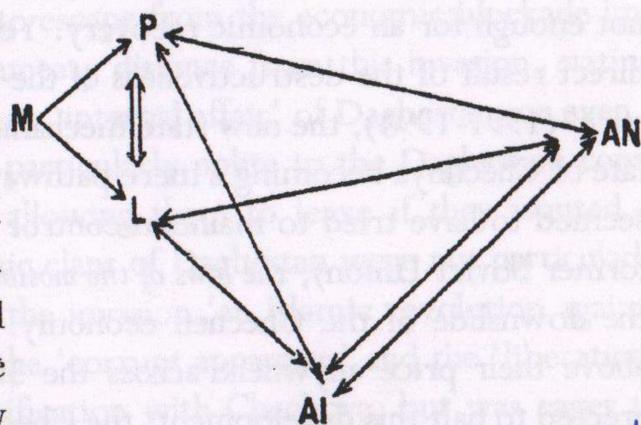
Western policy towards Russia is contradictory. On the one hand, Western capital is blatant in its denuncia-

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,⁵ 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 conscripts,⁶ 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 Basaev⁸ 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.⁹ 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 disenchanting 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 *wahhabitism*, 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.

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-established,¹⁷ 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 ones,¹⁸ 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 Abhazia 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-stylism³). 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 than 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'.

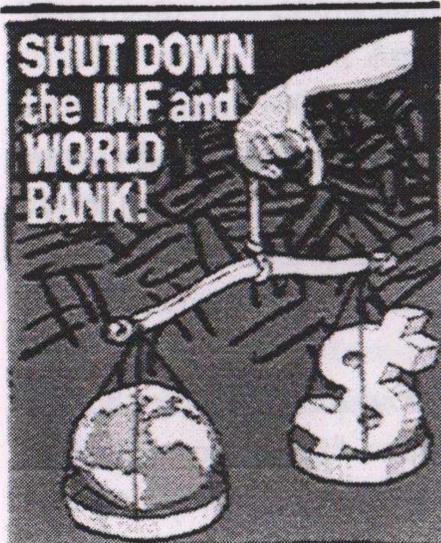
(8) Although to talk about 'pacifism as pathology' really misses the point (see *Do or Die* #8, review of 'Pacifism as Pathology'). In fact, the proposed remedies for this are as 'pathological' as the 'disease' it aims to 'cure'.

(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 unrepeatability singularity (no international trade summit will ever