

Communist

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Voice



Successor to the
Workers' Advocate

The importance of the 'battle of Seattle'

The 20th century didn't end as scripted for the United States and other imperialist powers dominating the World Trade Organization. In fact it ended in somewhat of a fiasco. The Seattle WTO meeting of November 30 - December 3 could not agree to an agenda for negotiations, differences could not be papered over despite every effort to do just that, and several delegations from the poor countries went home publicly fuming about the arrogance of the delegations from the big imperialist

powers. Moreover, this was supposed to be a meeting where the trade ministers of the member-states coldly took decisions affecting the lives of hundreds of millions of people without interference or protest. But everywhere they went they were met with denunciations of the effects of their neoliberal policies on the world's workers and environment. Everywhere they went slogans like, "hey hey! ho ho! WTO has got to go!", or "WTO! ... Hell no!", rang in their ears. Being the representatives of the very biggest monopoly capitalists, that is, of the modern-day lords of the earth, they expected to be treated with reverence; but instead of this they received the public contempt of scores of thousands of protesters.

The Seattle members of the Communist Voice Organization vigorously participated in many of the street actions before and during the WTO ministerial sessions, both the legal and peaceful ones as well as those where fierce resistance to police assaults developed. We distributed about 1600 of the November 24 leaflet (see p. 6) and had many discussions with other protesters—before, during, and after WTO meeting. We also produced

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Not another war for oil!

Down with the Russian war against the Chechen people!

Russia, a country of almost 150 million people, is waging a dirty war against Chechnya, a small country of only one million people. Over 100,000 Russian troops have invaded Chechnya; towns and villages have been looted and ravaged; over 200,000 Chechens have been uprooted; and the Chechen capital Grozny has been subjected day after day for months to tons of bombs. This is the second war that free-market Russia has waged

against Chechnya since it broke away from Russia in 1991. And just as Russia captured Grozny in the first Chechen war of 1994-96, but lost the war anyway, so too this war won't end with the capture of Grozny.

The Russian government says that it is just fighting against some Chechen terrorists and Islamic fanatics who attacked Russian positions in neighboring Dagestan, but in fact it is waging a war against the Chechen people. Moreover, Chechens and other darker-skinned peoples living in Moscow and other parts of Russia have been subject to harassment and expulsion. The new, free-market Russia—the Russia of former President

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What is Communist Voice?

Communist Voice is a theoretical journal which not only exposes the capitalist system, but deals with the tragedy that has befallen the revolutionary movement. It confronts the thorny questions and controversies facing progressive activists today, and holds that the crisis of the working class movement can only be overcome if Marxist theory again enlightens the struggle for the emancipation of the oppressed. The liberating ideas of Marx, Engels and Lenin have been twisted beyond recognition, not only by outright capitalist spokespeople, but also by the false "communist" regimes of China, Cuba and others today, and of the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe of yesterday. *Communist Voice* denounces these distortions (revisions) of the ideas of Marxism-Leninism — whether Stalinism or Trotskyism or reformism — and stands for placing revolutionary theory on a solid basis through the criticism of revisionism and by analyzing the new developments in the basic economic and political structure of the world today. Through this work, the *Communist Voice* seeks to pave the way for communism to once again become the red, fighting banner of the revolutionary working class movement. Only the influence of the real communist theory can help the goal of a classless, communist society again spread among the workers and oppressed here and around the globe. Only the spread of anti-revisionist Marxism can overcome the influence of liberal, reformist and petty-bourgeois nationalist trends and allow the struggle against capitalism to break out in full force.

The revolutionary parties and movements of the working class in the 19th and 20th centuries never achieved their full goals. The working masses fought monarchy, fascism, colonialism, and various capitalist classes, and also made their first attempts to establish a new social system — however these attempts never went beyond the first steps. This class struggle will be renewed in the 21st century, as the masses are faced with how to escape from the escalating misery brought by capitalist development around the world. To hasten the day

of the revival of the revolutionary movement, the *CV* opposes the neo-conservative and reformist ideologies that are dominant today. It holds that progressive work today requires more than opposing the ultra-conservatives and more than trying to reform the marketplace. It means helping reorganize the working class movement on a basis independent of the liberals and reformists as well as the conservatives. The *CV* sees its theoretical tasks as helping to clear the way for a future reorganization of the working class into, first and foremost, its own political party, as well as other organizations that truly uphold proletarian class interests.

Communist Voice thus continues the Marxist-Leninist and anti-revisionist cause to which its predecessor, the *Workers' Advocate*, was dedicated. For a quarter of a century, the *Workers' Advocate* was the paper of a series of activist organizations, the last one being the Marxist-Leninist Party. The demoralization of the revolutionary ranks included the dissolution of the MLP and, along with it, the *Workers' Advocate*. But the *Communist Voice* continues, in a different form, with fewer resources, and with more emphasis on theoretical work, the struggle of the *Workers' Advocate* to contribute to the development of a mass communist party.

The *Communist Voice* is published by the **Communist Voice Organization**, which links together members in a few cities. The CVO calls on all activists who want to fight capitalism in all its guises to join with us in opposing all the bankrupt theories and practices of the past — from Western-style capitalism to Stalinist state capitalism, from reformism to anarchism, from reliance on the pro-capitalist trade union bigwigs to "left" communist sectarianism toward "impure" struggles. It is time to lay the basis for the revolutionary communism of the future by revitalizing the communist theory and practice of today. Only when communism spreads among the millions and millions of oppressed can the struggle against capitalism again become a force that shakes the world!

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Editor: Joseph Green

Seattle

Continued from the front page

a second leaflet of December 6 (see p. 11) to uphold the spirit of the "battle of Seattle" in the face of bourgeois calumny. But like everyone else we can only offer partial or general answers to the above questions. Like that the protesters were of all ages, but mainly very young. They represented various social classes, but there was obviously a large working-class presence even in events not organized by the AFL-CIO or Steelworkers' Union big-wigs. Protesters came from everywhere in the world, but mainly from the western U.S. and Canada—with the largest numbers coming from the Seattle area itself. Politically, they represented a significant oppositional force which has been building beneath the market-worshipping atmosphere fanned up by the prevalent neoliberalism of the past two decades. This force has been represented in protests like those at the APEC meetings of the past two years (Vancouver and Jakarta), the June 18, 1999 "global day of action", the London anti-WTO protests which took place simultaneously with the Seattle protests, etc. And the activists at its base come from a variety of origins: labor activists, anti-imperialists, environmentalists, students, indigenous peoples, others—all seeing a common threat from the new institutions and policies of world capital.

Anti-capitalism and anti-revisionism—

Moreover, our experiences in the protests revealed that the relatively scattered banners and picket signs explicitly attacking the capitalist system as being the root cause of the infamies

being so widely denounced actually represented the view of *thousands*. We saw the existence of this anti-capitalist trend as significant and heartening, and it accounts for the positive reception our leaflets received from many demonstrators, but at the same time we think the real ideological situation of this trend must be soberly appraised. One large section wants to leap over the many thorny political questions the movement faces today by taking up anarchism and denouncing organization itself, or even technology itself, as the evil essence of capitalism. Another large section is led by groups or individuals who in one way or another paint up minor modifications in capitalism as "socialism" and who tie the movement to the pro-capitalist labor bureaucrats or liberal politicians. The "alternative" to capitalism they propose is either simply more state regulation or is state capitalism—as in the former Soviet Union, or China (of Mao's time, but also even today!), or as in Cuba today. Furthermore, the popularity of anarchism among ordinary activists in recent years in good part reflects revulsion at such pseudo-Marxism from the Trotskyist, Maoist, *Monthly Review*, and other trends falsely proclaiming themselves Marxist. This pseudo-Marxism is generally believed to be real Marxism, and the capitalist establishment, through millions of books, newspapers, the electronic media, movies, etc., etc., is continually fostering this belief for it serves capitalism very well. Thus we must not only be encouraged by the existence of a large wing of the movement explicitly attacking capitalism, but realize that its present situation shows the need to work patiently to defeat state-capitalist, Stalinist and Trotskyist views about what Marxism and socialism is. This is what we call anti-revisionist work, i.e. work that combats the revision of the original revolutionary

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content of the ideas of Marxism and socialism into mere apologies for state regulation of any kind.

Reformism, anarchism, and the role of the “networks”

When masses of people come together in protests like those in Seattle against the WTO they can see better than before that they’re not struggling alone. They learn about many other battles which are being fought against the common enemy. Political outlooks are broadened and there’s an inspiration to organize. But organize along what lines? The AFL-CIO bureaucracy, the anti-WTO church groups, the National Wildlife Federation, the Sierra Club, the Naderites, the RCP . . . you name the group and they all have an answer. They could agree on denouncing the WTO as the symbol of what was hated by the masses. But should it be reformed? appealed to? abolished? organized against? Should there be protectionism? What about sweatshops? (Incredible as it may seem, some of these groups actually buy into the line of the Third World capitalists, i.e., sweatshops should be tolerated in these countries because they’re a tool for economic “development”! Of course this reasoning forgets all about the struggle against sweatshop conditions in these very same countries. It doesn’t ponder over how *these* struggles bring economic development in their wake, and economic development more beneficial to the oppressed masses.¹ Was the WTO a symbol of the evil or the evil itself? They couldn’t agree on any of these questions. This is why the leaflets we distributed at the demonstration didn’t only denounce the evils of the WTO, but dwelt on clarifying the path forward for developing a revolutionary movement against these evils.

The networks (People’s Global Action, Direct Action Network, etc.) could agree to say a few words against capitalism, and agree to speaking very vaguely about alternatives (usually in a soft anarchist voice, and even suggesting planting gardens!), and they put out a call to shut down the WTO. But this shouldn’t be taken as meaning that they had much of any idea of what to do next or even that they were willing to organize independent of the big-wig politicians and labor bureaucrats. They uncritically advertised a speech by a “fair trade activist” and in their agitation they were silent against the reformism of the AFL-CIO bureaucracy while advocating activists work with local labor groups to “build alliances”. Practically speaking this amounted to leading the sheep to the wolves for in today’s conditions “local labor groups” is going to be taken as meaning local AFL-CIO unions and other local AFL-CIO organizations. This was practical capitulation to reformism disguised with chic slogans like “globalize liberation—not corporate power” More, in a DAN publication in which it was emphasized that “the WTO is not our institution” they came out in support of an Indian alliance which calls “for India to quit the WTO and campaign for an alternative institution to regulate world-trade in a democratic, pro-people

and environmentally sustainable way”. But “world-trade” (capitalism) today is dominated by trade between monopoly-capitalist concerns (including Indian ones). So when DAN says it wants to “help build a movement capable of standing up to the existing economic and political system at the root of our problems”, it isn’t calling for the building up of a powerful working class movement capable of waging major strikes and other mass actions against exploitation, but it is hoping that the big capitalists of India and some other countries will build a pro-people capitalism. It denies the fundamental economic laws which make it impossible for capitalism to be pro-people and environmentally-friendly while promoting the standard reformist illusions about democratic regulation.

Given the state of the movement today, probably the only way that the anti-WTO protests could have been organized is through the various networks. And it’s a good thing that activists with different points of view meet at demonstrations. But we can’t close our eyes to the fact that networks essentially represent a marriage of reformist with anarchist trends, and, like the single groups mentioned above, the groups within them are at odds and ends over the many issues confronting activists. They can only unite around organizing actions against MAI, WTO, etc. Such actions encourage activists everywhere, and show that there is another world underneath the one of business money-making. But if the capitalist devastation of the world is ever to be actually stopped, it requires the building of powerful, independent working class organizations—trade unions that fight, mass revolutionary parties around the world with a truly socialist perspective, mass movements of class struggle. The networks aren’t capable of advancing towards this. They played an important role in mobilizing people to come to Seattle, but this type of general protest is about as far as they can go. Being divided on every practical question and being unable to separate from the reformist bigwigs, they will inevitably disappoint activists who expect the mass victory in Seattle to be followed by a coherent strategy for further advance.

Mass initiative in the streets

One of the most valuable and exciting aspects of the demonstration in Seattle was the fact that it wasn’t simply a parade behind the reformist big-shots, but there was mass initiative, defiance of the authorities, and mass active resistance to police suppression. This upset the capitalists no end, and it is also responsible for the debates about tactics being waged right among the activists themselves.

For many months the establishment had been working out its plan for dealing with anti-WTO protests. All the federal and local intelligence and police forces of the most powerful country in the world were involved, and they even at one point publicly discussed using the Kingdome and/or its fenced parking lots as a place to detain protesters. But being terrorists themselves, they were fascinated with the possibility of terrorist attacks on the WTO confab and under-rated the role firmly held political convictions might play among the masses of protesters. Nevertheless, as it became clear that the protests were going to be big, and that large numbers were committed to defying the

¹The *Communist Voice* has discussed this issue several times. See, for example, the article “Imperialism in Papua New Guinea”, Volume 2, Number 2.

authorities, the bourgeoisie arrogantly thought that a little sweet-talking would turn the tide and it therefore threw a party for protesters at Key Arena the night before the WTO meeting was to open. At this party such liberal luminaries as the greenest city councilman, the mayor, Senator Paul Wellstone (Dem.-MN), and Tom Hayden (of SDS fame) pleaded with the crowd to be "peaceful" in their protests (e.g., just to bow down to the "law and order" rules worked out by the establishment in the previous months). By late the next afternoon, however, it was clear that this ploy had failed miserably. Those who had come to the protests committed to civil disobedience stuck to their guns. And when the police launched their tear gas and rubber bullet assaults on the crowds they were met with massive resistance from both those involved in the civil disobedience actions as well as those involved in other forms of street protest. Thus, caught in a dilemma of their own arrogant making, the bourgeois liberals could only bare their fascist fangs by calling out the National Guard and ordering police-state measures in order to ensure that the WTO meeting finally get underway.

This was a real fiasco for the bourgeoisie—not simply because they lost one day of negotiating, but mainly because the mass anger at their plans was vividly demonstrated.

The views of the various groups at the protests and of the networks have to be examined in the light of the great experience of this battle with the authorities. Anarchism doesn't come out very well. In our December 6 leaflet, in opposition to those anarchists who sneered at the civil disobedience action, we wrote that it "never enters such people's heads that the shutting down of the WTO was a significant political victory", and we ~~hailed~~ the latent political power existing among the peaceful

protesters. It can also be noted that the same anarchists also sneered at the protesters who fought the police.²

But the views of the civil-disobedience networks didn't fare very well either. The vital role of active resistance against the police, defended in our December 6 leaflet, went against the dogmas of nonviolent civil disobedience. Indeed, as our December 6 leaflet discusses, it was the actions of thousands of people not necessarily involved in the original civil-disobedience action—and often being quite *uncivil*—which allowed the Nov. 30 protests to remain in the streets hours longer than they would have had everyone followed the networks' "action guidelines".

Conclusion

Now that the protests are over, those who were involved are summing up their experiences and pondering the issue of what to do next. We face the need to defend our mass actions against the propaganda of the establishment, whose main concern is creating public opinion for the suppression of future demonstrations. But we also need to use the energy we gained from the Seattle protests to push forward discussion of where the movement should go next, and of what old ideas and practices must be discarded.

by Frank, Seattle □

²Besides the anarchists who sneered at the peaceful protesters there were many others who participated in all the peaceful protests over several days, including the civil-disobedience.

From Corrections (CV, vol. 6, #2):

Communist Voice, vol. 6, #1, Feb. 4, 2000:

A one-sentence paragraph was accidentally deleted from the lead article "The importance of the 'battle of Seattle'", which appears on the front page. Insert the following sentence between the present first and second paragraphs:

Who were these protesters, and where did they come from? □

Struggle against the WTO calls for conscious struggle against monopoly capitalism

The path forward

The following leaflet by Seattle members of the Communist Voice Organization (CVO) was issued on November 24 and circulated during the 'battle of Seattle'.

Thousands of people are pouring into Seattle streets to denounce the WTO. Rightly so! This is an organization of their enemies, the big capitalists of every land; an organization of those who grow fat through the exploitation of labor; an organization representing an economic system which by its very nature must wreck the environment. The protesters are also fed up with the neoliberal philosophy of the WTO, and its results. This set of ideas has dominated the thinking and economic policies of world capitalism since the time of Reagan and Thatcher. It sees a free-market society organized on the basis of individual self-interest as the natural state of humanity. Restrictions on the market are its enemy. Through market "self-regulation" all the problems facing humankind will allegedly be solved. Under this philosophy we've had 20 years of privatization, budget-cuts (except for police and prisons), and environmental wrecking. The gap between rich and poor has increased tremendously—within the powerful industrialized countries, and between these and the less developed and poor countries. And when confronted by the real effects of their policies the neoliberals can only mindlessly say: "T.I.N.A. (there is no alternative)".

It's not just the WTO . . .

Of course the purpose of the WTO is to set and enforce the rules for world trade. And under the neoliberal free-market fanatics this means tearing down barriers to trade, like tariffs, as well as non-tariff barriers like environmental regulations and consumer protection laws. But the setting up of the WTO represents more than just a neoliberal project. Like GATT before it, this institution represents a further development of the attempts of the international bourgeoisie, particularly the strongest among them, to avoid chaos in their world trading arrangements. The unregulated regime of the early part of the century featured such things as trade wars leading up to real wars; something they would prefer to avoid, but which they prepare for nonetheless. But no matter what international institutions the present world governments set up, the capitalist system which stands behind them will continue to exploit the masses and ruin the earth. Capital—whether in the hands of individuals, groups, or even the state—must accumulate, must grow, or the war with competitors on the market will be lost. The very nature of the capitalist system forces it to bring ruin to the majority of humanity.

Nor is it just neoliberalism . . .

New crises are building in the world economy which will inevitably explode again. And at some point the prevailing neoliberal ideas in the capitalist establishment may be abandoned for the idea that there should be more state regulation and intervention in economic matters. (With the Asian financial crisis of 1997-98 tendencies in this direction immediately surfaced.) But the abandonment of neoliberalism would neither liberate the workers of the world nor save the environment . . . nor prevent further economic crises. For example, when Keynesian ideas dominated ruling-class thinking in the middle part of this century, state-intervention and planning in the world's economies were hailed as the path to ending their cyclical crises. "Managed economy" or "progressive capitalism" would result in a never-ending upward spiral with no more unemployment or other ills afflicting it. Under Keynesianism, deficit spending was undertaken, subsidies were made to targeted industries, and money poured into military build-ups. Various social reforms were also made (unemployment insurance, social security, etc., in the U.S.) which were seen by many as a way of expanding the market for consumer goods and providing a "safety net" in case the system "failed" in some individual cases. (And although today's neoliberals view Keynes as being a socialist, Keynes himself said that such social reforms had to be taken to *prevent* revolution and socialism.) But Keynesianism failed to cure capitalism of its crises and it crashed on the rocks of the recessions and galloping inflation in the 1970s. Neoliberalism was waiting in the wings.

Today we have in the wings not only Keynesians, but also, a little farther back, those favoring versions of the social-democratic state capitalism which has been common in Europe most of this century, as well as those favoring state capitalism in its most developed form. The latter state capitalism was the system practiced in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe before its collapse, and it is still to a great extent practiced in China and Cuba. Despite the banners it flies, this system is neither socialist nor communist. The workers are beaten down, exploited and oppressed by a new capitalist class rising on the basis of nationalized industry, other sectors of the economy, and the misnamed "communist" party. And, as evidenced by the Soviet Union, this new bourgeoisie is militarist and imperialist. More, as is also evidenced by the Soviet Union, the damage to the environment caused by this system was outrageous. Despite all this, in today's climate of neoliberalism and the disasters of market-capitalist Russia, there are some who fondly gaze on state capitalism and its planning as an alternative. They think that the problems shown by this system are just the result of the wrong people being in power and not allowing democracy, or of

bureaucrats being stupid in their planning. The underlying economic system is good, they think, and with various political reforms (or a "political revolution" but not a "social revolution" a la the Trotskyists), and better economic planning, this system is the path to a better future.

But they're wrong. They don't deal with the class structure underlying the state economy and therefore miss the forest for the trees. So what did the state-capitalist economy look like in the Soviet bloc? Under the veneer of state planning, anarchy of production reigned. Private interests ruled the ministries, enterprises, and entire state sector. They were driven to compete with each other for their "rightful" share of the wealth created by the working class. And like capitalists everywhere, this drove them to cheating each other, cooking their books, etc., etc. Thus the continual efforts to plan the economy for their common state-capitalist interests constantly were undermined by the struggle of private interests to accumulate capital and grab revenues. Crises arose everywhere. There were boom periods and periods of economic downturn and stagnation. No amount of state planning could overcome the laws of capitalist economy which were in operation. The Soviet bourgeoisie could only respond to its crises by shifting their burden to the backs of the workers and other toilers. Thus we saw, for example, the erosion of social services during the stagnant last years of Soviet rule. Moreover, in good part, the state-capitalist bourgeoisie itself turned toward a market-economy as the solution to its crises. For many years it had experimented with Western capitalist forms (as China and Cuba do today). Under Gorbachev this was taken further as steps were made to dismantle price controls, etc. The logic of anarchic competition between different state enterprises, ministries, and economic interests led state capitalism in this direction. By the late 1980's and early 90's the state-capitalist bourgeoisie, in the main, was willing to abandon the old form of exploitation altogether. And it did so. Thus today's free-market system in Russia, with all its disasters, was born out of the state capitalism which went before it. Real solutions to the problems facing humanity won't be found by resurrecting state capitalism, and its disasters, all over again.

And the world market didn't begin in the 1990s

In the 19th-century era of competitive capitalism, the world market already existed. The 20th-century era of monopoly capitalism has brought about its vast expansion. Hundreds of millions of people have been forced off the land and into the capitalist relations of production. Hundreds of millions more remain on the land but are dependent on the market for their survival. Moreover, since the 1970's China has been opening its vast markets to the rest of world capitalism, and the late 1980's and early 1990's marked the collapse of state capitalism in Eastern Europe and the late Soviet Union (thus further expanding the world market). Meanwhile yesterday's colonies and semi-colonies are industrializing at various rates and some have become imperialistic in their own right. In the 1990s this was reflected in motion among former colonies and other less developed countries to form blocs like ASEAN (Association of

Southeast Asian Nations) to push their interests. The European Union was formed to compete with the U.S. for markets, sources of raw materials, etc., and it wants to expand its tariff-free zone to create a larger home market for European goods. And Japan would like to rig up its own free-trade zone in Asia. Thus the American administrations of this last decade have been under the pressures of seeing dazzling new markets opening before their eyes but of also seeing rivals for the profits looming up. They therefore work to do such things as expand NAFTA to include the rest of the Americas, unite with Japan in APEC to cut Europe out of the Pacific Rim, etc. And to line up support for such endeavors they've suddenly "discovered" the all-new global market. In unison with the CEOs of the giant corporations they represent they can't stop talking about the need to "go global!" or be aced by competitors. They hysterically shout for everyone to get on board their free-trade train. Never mind that it's bound for increased exploitation and ruin of the workers and other oppressed people of the world. Never mind that it's a suicide train, bound toward ruining Earth as a habitat for human life. Just get on board as the conductor shouts: "There is no alternative!"

Imperialism and reformism

The rise of monopoly capitalism hasn't meant the end of competition; it's only fueled it further, and given rise to imperialist wars and permanent militarization. In fact the WTO's monopoly capitalist framework makes it extremely difficult for this seeming monolith to even agree to an agenda, let alone agree on matters like trade in agricultural products. The U.S., European Union and Japan are its top dogs, with the U.S. and E.U. in particular being in disagreement on several trade issues. There are also lesser imperialist powers (like Canada) which disagree with the U.S., E.U., or other imperialists on various issues. These powers are the homes of the multinational corporations and their CEOs. It is to them that vast wealth garnered from logging in Patagonia, mining in Indonesian-annexed West Papua, or sweatshop labor in Asia goes. It is they who push free trade the hardest. And together, as well as separately, they use their economic might to force their way in the poorer and less developed countries. They also keep in stock "extracurricular" means (C.I.A.-sponsored destabilization or coups, private armies, imperialist troops) to use if a government adopts policies which too far infringes on their economic prerogatives (governments of Cuban-style state-capitalists or other national reformists).

"Third World" or "South" reformism

Naturally the bourgeoisies of the poor or less developed countries chaff under this burden. (In the WTO, India and Malaysia have been quite vocal in this regard.) They press for various protective measures. They would like to direct some of the profits garnered from sale of agricultural products (for example) on their own market toward development of domestic industries rather than seeing the agricultural sector wiped out by European-North American-Australian agribusiness. (Or if it is

to be wiped out, they want to collect duties) Thus, though they're limited by the economic and political force of the imperialists, they cry foul against the rich countries and press for reforms—especially where domestic capitalism has developed most. But these reform demands have to be judged by their actual content. They're being put forward by capitalist exploiters of the masses, after all. And they often involve such demands as that they be allowed to blatantly pollute or otherwise wreck the environment because they're too poor to produce or compete in any other way. And the big bourgeoisies of the imperialist powers are often only too happy to oblige them because pollution control is resented and viewed as an unnecessary expense.

In these conditions the workers shouldn't leave their fates in the hands of the domestic bourgeois governments (or bourgeois and petty-bourgeois oppositions) and their demands. They need to develop their own class politics and organization. There's no question that the path to the final liberation of the workers and peasants in these countries lies through capitalist development. But there's capitalism and capitalism. The domestic exploiters tell the workers and peasants to accept sweatshop conditions, semi-slave labor in the fields, ruining of the environment, etc., for the common good—national development and ability to compete on the world market (which translates: accumulation of capital and revenues for the bourgeoisie). But the truth is that the struggles of the masses against these capitalist outrages—against the “race to the bottom”—actually results in more development, and a development more beneficial to their class interests. This immediately raises the question mutual support between the workers in various regions, and international solidarity.

“Fair trade”

In the imperialist countries this slogan is put forward from the angle that jobs will be saved if protective measures are taken against commodities produced in overseas sweatshops or by slave labor. Often it's premised on pure national chauvinism: “let the workers of other countries be damned!” But it's also argued with the idea that protective measures will assist the workers of other countries in fighting against their abominable conditions. This idea ignores the risk of retaliatory protective measures, which would shrink the export-market of the country first erecting barriers, and lead to loss of other domestic jobs. It also ignores that the foreign industries being protected against can just be wrecked—thereby eliminating jobs there altogether. Further, from another angle, what's fair to one can be foul to another. For example, the domestic capitalists of the less developed countries often see it as their right to erect barriers against their richer rivals who have all the advantages. (And the peasantry being ruined by the flooding of the market with agricultural products from the imperialist countries often demands this.) This is only fair in their eyes. They want to expand their national capital too. But from whatever angle it's put, the demand for “fair” trade points away from the essential thing: what's being bargained over by the capitalists is the fruit of the labor of the working people. Betterment of the conditions under which this fruit is produced must come through the class

struggles of the toilers themselves.

Worker Rights

The Clinton administration has been talking up the issue of workers' rights. Talk's cheap and much of Clinton's is for domestic consumption. The Democrats want to keep the mass of American workers in their fold. There's more to this talk than just political grand-standing however. The globalization of capital has meant a vast expansion of the working class (globalization of labor). Legally and illegally workers are organizing trade unions and conducting strikes in countries where a working class barely existed a few decades ago. Clinton and his monopoly capitalist sponsors know this is going to continue and would like to steer these movements in directions least harmful to capital overall if they can't just smash them. Such steering may involve legalizing unionization while at the same time tying the unions down with a thousand legal threads. And if there are to be unions in these countries, what ideas will dominate in them? Will they be organized around the theory of common interest between labor and capital or under slogans like “abolition of the wages system!” (as was often done in the 19th century U.S.)? Here the capitalists relied on their great wealth and organization to bribe and beat the workers out of the latter tendency, or to set up competing unions, etc. They're famous for their victories in exporting this “Made in America” brand of tamed trade unionism too, i.e., in Latin America (using the C.I.A. and a department of the AFL-CIO). In the WTO there are reactionary regimes who don't agree with the wisdom coming from Washington however (including friendly regimes like Suharto's was). They have neither the money to toss around nor the experience the U.S. ruling class has in taming the workers' movement.

We 100% support the struggles of workers slaving under repressive regimes to win the legal right to form unions of their choice, as well as other rights (including in China). This will be to their advantage, and to the advantage of the workers of all countries. Decisive in these struggles is the activity of the workers themselves. But Clinton wants to ensure that the workers gain the least advantage from their sacrifices. And when all is said and done the AFL-CIO's John Sweeney ends up in Clinton's camp. He “criticizes” Clinton by emphasizing that the AFL-CIO wants *enforceable* rules, and this sounds nice. But remember that such rules would be enforced by the exploiters of the workers in the dominant imperialist countries, countries where the rights of the working class are under constant attack. (Try to go on strike if you're a U.S. postal or railway worker and see how many rights you have. Ditto re: support strikes.) Moreover, Sweeney says he's for internationalism. That sounds nice too. But he also wants the workers of the world to take up the American brand of trade-unionism, including its theory of common interest between labor and capital. In times of crisis or war this theory tells the workers they must line up behind “their” capitalists and join in slaughtering or starving the workers of other countries. Sweeney's internationalism is ultimately imperialist internationalism.

Illusions about democracy

The exploiters and plunderers who make up the WTO conduct their sordid dealings in secret and many reformist forces are raising the secrecy issue above all others. We too would like to see the WTO be more transparent. And world-wide pressures for this may result in a few steps being taken. But we have no illusion that the WTO won't open one window only to move into another closed room to conduct the dealings of real import.

And talk about illusions. . . .

The Naderites (i.e., *Public Citizen*) say that the WTO has organized a "coup against democracy". They say that corporate globalism is the source of this coup, and there's a certain truth to it. The rule of monopoly capitalism means the rule of reaction. Democracy for the masses is very restricted under it, and the ruling bourgeoisie is constantly attacking even this limited democracy. But from a small-capitalist (petty-bourgeois) standpoint the Naderites raise utopian "pure" democracy as the ultimate goal. This will allegedly resolve all the problems confronting the masses. They infer that something like this was once practiced, before the monopolies came along, etc. But even in the most democratic countries of the era of competitive capitalism money still talked and money still ruled. The workers and poor had neither the money nor the time for much participation in politics. More, if today's monopoly corporations were utterly destroyed, but capitalism remained, its built-in laws of competition would only give rise to new monopolies.

So yes, we must build the democratic movements: against sexism and racism, for the national liberation of peoples rising in struggle, the movements to defend or extend workers' rights, and others. But in doing so we shouldn't mystify the fact that democracy always has a class content, is always a method by which one class enforces its rule over others. In our era it's the method by which the monopoly-capitalist class enforces its rule—while hypocritically proclaiming all people have equal rights, etc. When the working class raises itself to being the ruling class it too will exercise democracy, democracy for the masses—while being totally honest. We will say that this is *our* democracy, the democracy of those who were yesterday exploited and oppressed. It's the method by which we exercise our political dictatorship over all those who fight to bring back the bourgeois order.

Lastly, on the right we have ultra-reactionaries like Pat Buchanan who also send up a cry for democracy. Buchanan, for example, is complaining that the transnational corporations and WTO are violating his precious U.S. national sovereignty. Of course, national chauvinist and racist that he is, he cares nothing about the national sovereignty of others. Under the banner of defense of national sovereignty (or national interest) Pat's U.S. government haughtily holds itself above all international laws, no matter how piddling. But on the left we also have those who are raising the issue of violation of national sovereignty. This includes well-meaning people who may be trying to defend the sovereignty of all nations, but they leave something out of the equation: uneven capitalist development and competition inevitably leads to violations of national sovereignty, and these

can't be judged abstractly. The member-states of the European Union, for example, gave up certain previous sovereign rights when they formed the E.U. Why? To be in a better position to compete with the U.S. and Japan in violating the sovereign rights of others, especially the weaker states. If the U.S. ruling class gives up certain sovereign rights in the WTO it's only because it finds this useful in its drive to violate even more the rights of others (its drive to remain top world sovereign), and it provides another angle from which to gut domestic reforms like environmental or public health legislation, i.e., to shout "the WTO is making us do it!". No, the struggle against imperialism and its outrages has to be mounted on a class basis and not get lost trying to uphold two-edged principles like defence of national sovereignty. When Buchanan worries about the sovereignty of the most powerful country on earth it's putrid national chauvinism. But the right of self-determination (right to have a sovereign state) for peoples who are truly nationally oppressed is another issue. We uphold this right. This is the only way that mutual trust and international solidarity among the workers of the world can be built.

There is an alternative!

This alternative lies in further building the struggles against all the negative effects of the policies of the WTO, IMF, World Bank, etc., which are negative effects of expanding world capitalism. These struggles repeatedly boil up on every continent, and in various forms, in rich country and poor country alike. Many representatives of them have come to Seattle to demonstrate these days and this is an exciting development. The old idea "workers of all countries, unite!" is never far beneath the surface. But there's more to it. We say that the capitalist system has to be *overthrown* . . . and that the alternative to capitalism is communism, the communism of Marx, Engels and Lenin. This communism holds that besides helping organize today's struggles, and making them more militant, we must work to build up a consciously revolutionary political trend in the working class—a trend which deeply believes that only when the huge productive apparatus of society is directed by those who run it will all of the people achieve a better life and environmental issues be effectively dealt with. This then is the path forward.

And building a revolutionary trend must involve theoretical struggle—over issues that arise in the present mass struggles, and issues concerning the socialist alternative. If communism (or socialism) is identified with state capitalism, for example, then no worker in their right mind is going to fight for it. Yes, it's obviously absurd to think that on the morrow of a revolution the masses are going to be able to nationalize the economy of an entire country or region and control and run it on a planned basis. Measured steps will have to be taken. Sectors of the economy which temporarily remain in the hands of private interests and produce for profit, etc., will have to be regulated through state-capitalist forms, etc. It's also absurd to think that the workers won't need their own state: a revolutionary state with the armed working class as its backbone and which pays officials the wages of an average worker (and subjects them to

instant recall); a state made necessary by the fact that the overthrown bourgeoisie will inevitably attempt to regain power; and a state organized to lead the mass effort to plan and carry out production in concert with other mass organizations. Hence between capitalism and communism a transitional period is needed. A transitional state and a transitional economy. The latter will entail new productive relations in fierce struggle against the old exploitative ones. And the crucial question will be whether a true social control of production is coming about. The revolutionary task of the time will be to ensure that it is.

We urge all those wanting an alternative to capitalism to look into what Marx, Engels and Lenin themselves had to say on this

alternative (not just what others say they said). We also urge you read the anti-revisionist *Communist Voice* journal and correspond with us. In *Communist Voice* you will find many articles critiquing state capitalism and defending Marxist-Leninist ideas on the transition from capitalism to communism. We believe that theoretical clarity on these issues must be developed and spread if the working class is to confidently raise its fist in the air and lead all the oppressed in shouting *there is an alternative!*

—Seattle members of the Communist Voice Organization (CVO), November 24, 1999 □

Uphold the 'battle of Seattle'!

A new call for action

The following leaflet by Seattle members of the Communist Voice Organization was issued on December 6.

The lying has started. Officer Smith of the Seattle Police Department: "Whenever we used tear gas or bullets with pepper gas, we warned people. We gave them five minutes to leave." *The Post-Intelligencer* in a Dec. 4 "news" article: "Some of the protests turned violent, and the police responded with tear gas and rubber pellets." B.S.! For two days running, repeatedly, and for hours on end, the police fired tear gas, concussion grenades, rubber bullets, hard-rubber pellets, and wooden bullets into crowds of peaceful protesters. So much so that they temporarily ran out of projectiles.

But it's only beginning. We now face weeks of sickening "analysis" and tragi-comic finger-pointing by the capitalist establishment. A recent scene at the Washington Athletic Club: "Blame Schell! No, blame Gates and Condit! No, off with Stamper's head! No, no, let's unite to buy more munitions and equipment for the police! Yes, that's it, and let's savage the anarchists too! Yes! Yes! Shh . . . for God's sake don't anyone mention capitalism, sweatshops or the environment when we leave this room."

Yes, we do have some more fundamental matters to discuss. Led by Gates, Condit, Nordstrom & Co., with Locke, Schell, and Stamper in tow, the local bourgeoisie hated the protests and set out to smash all but the tamest. They threw Constitutional rights out the window and exposed that behind bourgeois democracy, including under the Democrats, stands the police state. To us, however, the demonstrations and protests were glorious. We loved them. We emotionally embrace the thousands who participated, and encourage them to politically defend themselves (as they've already begun to do). Down with all the lies, evasions and political incitements of the bourgeoisie! It wasn't the anarchists who "caused trouble" at the WTO meeting . . . it was the armed detachments of capitalist "law and order", the police! Free all of those still in jail!

The mass protests were not only glorious, but an inspiration to deepen the critique of not just the WTO, but of the monopoly capitalist system which it represents. One heard calls for the necessity to raise the political level everywhere, and Marxist leaflets were very warmly received. The protests also inspired motion among activists to get more closely linked together. More, the protests provoked discussion on the political trends among protesters and of various tactics pursued, by many thousands of people. Any lasting victories of the protests must come through the development of these tendencies (i.e., to deepen the critique of monopoly capitalism, to get more organized, to better understand the various political trends among those protesting). As a contribution to such development we would

like to briefly comment on some of the issues being discussed.

The trashing

The capitalist establishment goes nuts with this issue, insanely calling the smashing of *things* violence, while justifying the very real violence of its police. And the media lies about it by pointing to one or two extremely isolated and minor instances of damage to small merchants and implying this was what it was all about. But the truth is that it was the million and billion dollar corporations that got hit, the vicious exploiters of temp labor and sweatshop labor at home and abroad, the plunderers of the earth, corporations which lock the women of the "Third World" in factories for 12 hours, pay them pennies, subject them to sexual abuse, etc., etc., while charging sky-high prices for the commodities they produce. But the bourgeois media just can't understand how anyone could hate such fine corporations, which in essence are the WTO. And they weren't just hit by anarchist groups. After the police launched their assault many protesters consciously took vengeance on the most notorious of these corporations by smashing their windows and furniture, etc. And in the aftermath, thousands of people have been saying "good, it's good that the bastards got it". We support that sentiment, that class hatred of the exploiters. Without it no serious political movement of the working class and other oppressed people can be built. At the same time 99% of the same people very much realize that trashing won't build such a movement. We're not fools. The path forward on the 30th was best represented by those who strove to keep the political protests going right in the face of the police assaults. Thus we support those who took vengeance on the corporations as our sisters and brothers. But at the same time we hold that the trashing really was a diversion away from the pressing political tasks of the day (and of our time). The fact that the police concentrated on attacking the mass protests rather than chasing trashers says something about what was of most concern to the establishment.

Anarchist groups coming to the demonstrations just to trash is a different issue and will be dealt with below.

Active resistance

Concussion bombs and tear gas are designed to terrorize and cause panic. If fleeing people trample each other to death it's just "collateral damage". The police and their masters knowingly gambled with people's lives in their Nov. 30th assaults — all for the greater glory of the multinational corporations. But the masses in the streets didn't panic. They continually regrouped and resisted on a mass scale. That wasn't supposed to happen. Besides their loss of \$17 million downtown, *this* is what has

shaken the "city" (the capitalist establishment). And it bodes very, very well for future protests in Seattle and across the country.

As the police assaults intensified on Tuesday afternoon scores, and then hundreds of protesters began to hurl tear gas canisters and other projectiles right back at the cops, while at the same time counseling everyone to hold their ground, retreat only when necessary, and slowly, slowly. They were cheered on by thousands. Hundreds of other protesters also struggled to keep the demonstrators together and shouting political slogans, but opposed throwing things at the police (perhaps with the exception of tear gas projectiles). They too were supported by thousands and their overall actions were honorable. But we think that they were mistaken in their opposition. Certainly, everyone can agree that throwing tear gas back on the police slowed their advance (they had some problems seeing through the smoke). It also forced them to use more, to such an extent that they temporarily ran out. These actions actually allowed the protest to stay more firmly together and on the streets hours longer.

But what of the issue of sticks and bottles?

Everyone knows the police launched the attacks, not because they were angry about being hit by objects (and they weren't, not in the beginning) but because they were out to break-up the protests. They were firing point-blank into peaceful demonstrators who were sometimes even sitting down! So all the usual rubbish about "provoking" the police can be left aside. Besides this people were justifiably angry at being shot and gassed and had a right to defend themselves with whatever was at hand. Still, the argument was made that throwing sticks or bottles caused the cops to fire more. This argument is problematic. At the same time it was being made the cops were lobbing their projectiles hundreds of feet into the crowds, not just at the front lines. And it misses the main point...which is this: The masses are going to be in much more serious and scary of situations with the police than existed last week—in bitterly contested strikes, or struggles against racist outrages in the black communities, for example. To win they will have to engage in defensive as well as offensive operations against these guard-dogs of capital. But for that to occur they have to believe that they can defy and overcome the authorities ("we can do it!"). And that has to be a mass belief. The actions of the projectile-throwing protesters on the 30th and 1st helped inspire such a belief and establishes a great tradition. If anyone wants to see what this tradition looks like in practice check out the scenes of the Korean working class in struggle over the last decade and more. The victories which this contingent of the international proletariat has achieved in the past decade are a rare thing in comparison to the defeats the workers have generally suffered in most other countries. And these victories are not unconnected to the Korean workers' and students' tradition of giving the authorities tit for tat when they attack. They didn't come from a pacifist approach, even a militant and active pacifist approach.

Anarchism

Today's youth are surrounded on all sides by tremendous wealth and power. But all capitalism offers most of them is

"temp"-labor, sweatshop conditions in places like Amazon.Com, drugs (those the capitalist market-place readily provides), and prison (in this era of budget cuts there's always money for more prisons and police—even when violent crime is declining). More, they're constantly on the verge of homelessness as rents skyrocket. They see the earth being ruined by capitalist development. They see abominable acts, like U.S. imperialism's starvation of the Iraqi masses through sanctions . . . acts which go on and on. How can they not want to rebel against this Babylon?

Anarchism says that one should rebel, that the capitalist state has to be smashed if there is to be a better life, that communism (or communalism) is the goal. Thus many young people are attracted to it. But that anarchism says these things is not it's problem. Its problem is it's non-politicism, or anti-politicism, which leads it to impotence. It rejects bourgeois politics (it thinks) but it doesn't abandon bourgeois ideology. Although many anarchists are workers, and very exploited ones at that, the class standpoint of anarchism is petty-bourgeois (small capitalist). Hence its elitist attitude toward the working class and other oppressed people. It may see that the working people are smothered by the rotten reformism of the AFL-CIO leadership and it's American-flag-waving "fair trade" ideas, for example, but it can't lower itself to doing the years of patient political work necessary to win the mass of workers (not Sweeney and Co.) away from these ideas, something which must be done if the working class is ever to mount the stage of history as an independent political force capable of destroying the capitalist system and replacing it with communism. Such a proletarian-revolutionary approach is just too political for anarchism. Instead it draws the petty-bourgeois elitist conclusion that the "backward" masses need to be aroused by the "daring" actions of a handful of autonomous groups, or aroused by anything but scientific political analysis. Thus it deserts the field in the face of bourgeois politics, especially bourgeois reformist politics like those of the AFL-CIO bureaucracy.

In the final analysis, anarchism's whole "concept" of revolution is utterly barren. Autonomous groups will somehow incite a mass rebellion. Suddenly the unenlightened workers will realize that they need to smash the capitalist state machine and this will be done. Then we'll have communism, environmental problems will be solved, etc., etc. This bareness leads to despair. And part of the despairing politics of some anarchists is the politics of "inflicting material damage on the bourgeoisie". Even if groups which practice this were capable of smashing much more than a few thousand dollars worth of glass in billion dollar corporations it would still be rot. Capital is a social power which must be overthrown in a social revolution of the politically aroused masses. But the elitism of anarchism leads some groups to sneer at the masses and sneer at the anti-WTO protests. This includes one group boasting that it suffered no arrests while the stupid peaceful demonstrators suffered hundreds. It never enters such people's heads that the shutting down of the WTO was a significant political victory, or that more latent power existed among those peaceful protesters than in a thousand anarchist groups. The sneering of such groups can hardly be considered progressive.

This all said, we would emphasize that although we're enemies of anarchist ideas, and their class standpoint, we're not the enemies of people attracted to anarchism.

"Fair Trade" and the rotten role of the AFL-CIO misleaders

We want to assist the development of the trend for proletarian revolution. Decisive in this is the development of a truly Marxist-Leninist trend. Such a trend must be anti-revisionist—that is it must fight in theory and practice against all the rotten revisions of Marxism made by the state-capitalist parties of the late Soviet Union, Cuba, China, etc., as well as by the CPUSA, various Trotskyist groups, and Maoists in this country. The building of such a revolutionary trend will give rightfully rebellious youth turning to anarchism an alternative. But these are really a small minority. The vast majority of rebellious youth, workers, and other exploited and oppressed people who came into the streets maintained various reformist ideas. And the most organized and concentrated expression of these ideas on the streets was the AFL-CIO leadership.

The AFL-CIO bureaucracy represents a small labor-aristocracy and not the vast masses of workers. Its basic theory is that the workers and capitalists have a common interest and it's a political representative of capital (including capitalist "law and order") in the workers' movement. For this reason it's a bitter enemy of Marxism, and revolutionary politics in general. We saw what this leads to in practice on November 30. Allegedly to "protect" the workers in their march the AFL-CIO bureaucrats organized thousands of marshals. The real purpose of this was to ensure that the march stayed several blocks away from the WTO meeting and then hurried back to the Seattle Center. But when the march got downtown there were ten thousand protesters already there confronting the WTO. Speeches denouncing imperialism and calling for proletarian internationalism were being given at the People's Assembly rally. Marxist leaflets were being distributed. The bureaucrats didn't want the workers to become infected with that spirit and those ideas. So they couldn't be democratic and say "you can stay here or go back to the Seattle Center". No, workers either had to form wedges and physically break through the line of marshals or sneak under the rope. (At one point, to great applause, a group of several hundred machinists forced their way through. There were several other mass break-throughs as well.)

Once more on "fair trade"

Given the expanding exploitation, human misery, and environmental rape which neoliberal free trade (the policy of the WTO) is causing, the protectionist "fair trade" slogan has an appeal. But it's premised on maintaining the same capitalist system bringing all the misery and ruin in the first place. Thus it would shift who has jobs and who does not have a job around, for example, but it can't solve the question of unemployment. Take the American steel-workers. Capitalism creates a "surplus population" much faster than expanding production can provide jobs. Moreover, the productive capacity of the world steel and aluminum industry has outstripped the market. Given this, the American steel-workers are confronted with defending what they can of past gains and giving every support to the struggles of their brothers and sisters overseas. But under the red, white and blue "fair trade" slogan the USWA bureaucrats marched steel-workers to the docks on December 1 to mourn "jobs going overseas". The workers were supposed to demand that duties be slapped on (curse-word) foreign steel. This benefits the American steel capitalists nicely. But does it save jobs? Not in the countries whose steel is being protected against. And even in the U.S. it can't save jobs for long. The capitalist laws of competition will still ultimately drive the steel monopolists to innovations in productive technique, which will make workers superfluous. Anarchy of capitalist production will still cause cycles of boom and bust in this industry. Unemployment in this or any other industry just cannot be ended as long as capitalism exists.

* * *

Fellow protesters, if you like the ideas in this leaflet spread them in your circles. We're in for a period of lying and diversionary assaults by the bourgeois politicians and media so it's important we strengthen our ranks. More, it may be a long time before we again have large demonstrations in Seattle. Now then is a good time to follow up on the links we've made during the past few weeks. Correspond with us and let's find ways to link more closely. Let us deepen the discussion of the Marxist alternative to capitalism and all its infamies. Let us strive to build a revolutionary trend in society with the same tenacity we exhibited during the WTO protests.

—Seattle members of the Communist Voice Organization (CVO), December 6, 1999 □

The failure of the Seattle WTO meeting

by Phil, Seattle

While the city still lay under a state of civil emergency on Friday, December 3, the last day of the WTO meeting, crowds of activists gathered in front of the county jail and the Westin Hotel to demand the release of those imprisoned by the police. Some of the activists at the Westin chained themselves to the hotel doors, while the rest blocked the street, chanting and dancing and discussing the weeks events. Around the corner, out of sight and near another entrance to the hotel, stood a group of cops. For the time being, they chose not to bother the activists, but their very presence lent an air of menace to the evening.

The main slogan of the evening, besides the demand for the freedom of the prisoners, was *Africa, don't sign!* This slogan reflected the realization that the internal politics of the WTO meeting had reached a critical point, at which the failure or success of the meeting rested on the decision of the African delegations whether or not to sign the final communique. At about 9:30 in the evening, one of the leaders of the crowd announced the collapse of the meeting, and as each phrase of the announcement was read, the crowd repeated the phrase so that all could hear it clearly. At the end of the announcement, a loud cheer went up from the crowd, reflecting the sense of victory filling the night air.

It would be tempting to ascribe the failure of the Third WTO Ministerial Meeting wholly to the efforts of the activists who crowded the streets of Seattle on November 30, and to the sacrifices of those who risked arrest because of their opposition to the police during the curfew clampdown over the next few days, but a sober analysis of this event reveals a much more complex set of reasons. In truth, the staff of the WTO had been unable to decide on an agenda before the meeting, and they had come to Seattle with only a vague idea of the script they were to follow. Important meetings like this are usually carefully scripted in advance by the bureaucrats and functionaries who staff bodies such as the WTO. The ministers and trade officials typically spend their time networking and wining and dining influential people and listening to politicians elaborate on matters already decided on. Not so at the Third Ministerial. Because of the failure to decide on an agenda, many key matters were to be decided on at the ministerial level, in *green rooms* attended by key ministers from the great powers and the developed countries. Because of the atmosphere of crisis stemming from the activities on November 30, these negotiations were impeded and the glare of publicity fell on the undemocratic character of the negotiations.

When President Clinton arrived in Seattle to speak at the meeting on Wednesday, December 1, it was clear that the fragile consensus on trade issues between the Democratic Party and the AFL-CIO labor hacks was fraying at the seams. The presence of a large labor contingent on the streets the day before and the unity between the environmental and human-rights activists and the workers sent a clear message to the President which he had

to answer with some verbal assurances. And answer it favorably he did, and by this mainly symbolic kowtow to the power of the crowds in the streets, he further exacerbated the divisions inherent in the already divided meeting. The United States had wanted a *narrow* agenda, which would reflect its opposition to European agricultural subsidies, demands for the freedom of electronic commerce, and restrictions on dumping of low-cost Asian goods. The Europeans had wanted a *broad* agenda, one that addressed a number of other issues such as services, industrial tariffs, investment and competition rules, and *core labor standards*. Another bloc in the meeting was the bloc of less-developed nations in Africa, Asia, and Latin America, which had begun to feel very left out of the *green-room* discussions and backstage horse-trading between the major industrial powers. In previous meetings, they had taken positions against environmental safeguards and protection of workers rights, viewing these measures as the source of costs which the industrial world had refused to bear on its own right during earlier times. Now, upon hearing President Clinton pander to the crowds outside, they were further alienated from the WTO agenda, and the deep differences between the American and European views left them wondering what the real benefits of WTO membership would be. Even though Clinton's call for a working group on labor rights would not have changed any of the existing rules of operation for the WTO, it still sent a disquieting message to the delegates from the less-developed countries.

The delegates from the less-developed countries found themselves put on the defensive for their positions on political issues, labor rights, and the environment by activists from their own countries who had traveled to Seattle from all over the world to bring the deliberations of the WTO out into the light of day. Furthermore, it should be clear that both sides of this dispute were not acting out of any concern for the working masses; quite the contrary. When the industrial countries called for more attention to issues of labor rights, they did so not from any sincere concern for working people, but out of a cynical bid for political advantage. It is well known that strikes in the industrial world are frequently repressed with just as much savagery and ruthlessness as in the less developed countries. And in addition, the capitalist ruling class keeps paid labor hacks on a string to do its bidding in sabotaging the struggles of working people in their countries. And it hardly needs to be emphasized that the leaders of the less-developed countries have little regard for their working masses as well, because in their mad rush to grab a share of the surplus value left to them by the rampages of the imperialists, they will stop at nothing to foster sweatshop conditions and the brutal exploitation of child labor.

For the rest of the week, the US delegation tried to patch together a consensus. They sought to overcome the differences in views on such issues as *dumping*, agricultural subsidies, capital investment rules, trade in services, protection of intellectual property, biotechnology, and regulation of electronic

commerce. The European delegations viewed these US efforts as *bullying*, while the African delegations, hamstrung by gigantic foreign debts, saw no benefit in a free trade agreement under which all the advantages accrued to the major industrial powers. On Friday evening, it all came unglued, and the delegations had to admit that these issues would have to wait until another day and another meeting.

Was this "the beginning of the end" of the WTO, as some have said? Although this is a tempting evaluation, the importance of this event lies more in the lessons which a new generation of activists draw from it, in the course of an eventual struggle against modern-day imperialist monopoly capitalism. Were it not for the role of the activists in this event, it would be simply the failure of one session of trade negotiations. But because of the peculiar circumstances of this failure, it revealed that all the capitalist governments, both of the developed and of the developing countries are the enemies of the working class movement. Neither hypocritical talk of labor standards while wages are being forced down around the world, nor the open defense of starvation wages can replace the need for the workers to develop their independent class struggle. The demonstrations in Seattle become one more event in a growing chain — against APEC in Vancouver, the MAI agreement in Montreal, the WTO in Geneva, Switzerland and now Seattle — which has been frustrating the imperialist free-trade agenda of the US and the other major industrial powers. These demonstrations reveal the depth of the anger at this agenda. The ideas guiding this movement do not explicitly target the capitalist system, but the objective thrust the events do, and in order to increase the effectiveness of these actions, this anti-capitalist content must be made more explicit. This means that the activists must

fundamentally criticize the varying political views expressed by the different trends at these demonstrations, and find a way to encourage the development of a revolutionary working-class movement. They need to sharpen their understanding that both "free-trade" and protectionist state-capitalism serve the interests of the rich and powerful corporations, and that they necessarily rest on the superexploitation of the poor and oppressed peoples of the world, the rape of the environment, and the destruction of indigenous culture by the homogenized onslaught of Western commercialism.

The growth of a protest movement against neo-liberal trade agencies, at a time of the general decline of the left, is an encouraging development. But this movement cannot restrict itself merely to stopping international trade meetings, because the international bourgeoisie will find a way, by hook or by crook, to have their meetings and to move their agenda forward. What these actions can do is to mitigate some of the worst evils accompanying the free-trade agenda. At the same time, they can also provide a *field of battle* in which activists can gain experience and sharpen their political consciousness. The movement will inevitably come face to face with its own contradictions. As it has developed so far, it bears the stamp of many disparate trends — of the anarchist, populist, reformist, revisionist, or narrow labor-movement ideologies that are a feature of the movement today, and the activists must become aware of the misconceptions inherent in these ideologies. Also, to really have a lasting effect, the activists will have to learn to distinguish between protectionist state-capitalism which falsely parades as "Marxism" and real revolutionary Marxism, and this will revolutionize their understanding of socialism and Marxism. □

Day by day on the front lines against the WTO

by Frank, Seattle

Below are excerpts from a series of letters about his work and what he saw at the WTO demonstration written by Frank as the events unfolded.

November 28, 1999

Comrades,

Today there occurred the first preliminary demonstration before the opening of the WTO meeting (Tuesday, when the really large demonstrations will occur). This one was attended by about three thousand people who marched up and down a main street [Broadway] for several hours and also briefly marched around in a large market, temporarily disrupting business. Anarchism and reformism marched side-by-side, with anarchists holding large banners explicitly denouncing capitalism while at the same time praising a Steelworkers' Union contingent giving the conservative "fair trade" slogan. Frank distributed about 220 leaflets and had numerous discussions.

These roughly broke down this way (including some discussions held the previous day at a demonstrator hang-out):

(1) people who were very happy with the "It's not just the WTO..." subhead and happy that we were discussing the alternative to capitalism. Several times I received praise for the fact that we had NOT gone into long lists of the outrages of the WTO and instead concentrated on the issues we had. A couple of young women said they would read it on a pirate radio station... who knows?

(2) people from out of town who wanted to link us up with various individuals who they thought were "communists who say the same things you say"—individuals from the East Coast, India, California.

(3) people from out of town who had some familiarity with the work of the MLP¹ in the Bay Area and wanted to see what we had to say on various issues.

(4) local left-wing activists we've known for years and who were happy to see us.

.....
Thus far we've been fortunate in not having a lot of competitive papers being passed out. Ours was almost the only really political leaflet in evidence today. FSP, ISO, and WWP were completely absent. RCP had a couple of people low-key distributing. SWP had a table and tried to sell papers but they oppose the demonstrations (on the basis that they're for "fair trade") and they didn't tag along. *News and Letters* from San

¹The Communist Voice Organization springs from activists who were around the MLP (Marxist-Leninist Party), a party which dissolved in 1993. The *Communist Voice* is a successor to the *Workers' Advocate*, the theoretical-political journal of the MLP.—CV.

Francisco had a small table. Yesterday about 6-7 PLP people from Los Angeles showed up at the hang-out with a special issue of *Challenge* dealing with the WTO. (Sectarian as always. Absent today.)...

Frank

November 30, 1999

To: CVO circles

From: Frank

A truly inspiring day! Scores of thousands of demonstrators, 800 CVO leaflets distributed (so far), friends helping us. Tear gas. Police shot first so we "shot back" with sticks, bottles and canisters. Wind was in our favor part of the time and big applause when we smoked the police. Yours truly still has a good arm. Masses very impressive. No panic when gas fired, etc. Must get back to stapling leaflets for tonight.

Later on November 30, 1999

More on today

The bourgeois press is saying 40,000 demonstrated today although it was probably 10 or 15,000 more. The authorities stepped on their own feet from almost the beginning: First they fired teargas and rubber bullets on peaceful demonstrators apparently only to clear a pathway for WTO delegates. That led to some pretty good trashing by the anarchists (still in the morning). In mid-afternoon the cops started firing again apparently to clear certain streets and maybe begin to divide the tens of thousands of protesters still downtown into groups. That led to the events I referred to earlier.

When I returned this evening a curfew had been declared for downtown but the cops started pushing about a thousand people uphill to Broadway (way out of the curfew zone). This was a 4-hour process, with the cops shooting hundreds of rounds of teargas, rubber bullets, plastic shot and wooden bullets and maybe 50 to a hundred people very actively throwing gas projectiles back at the cops and a few hundred more trying to get their hands on something to throw. Probably 80 to 90% of this crowd was *not* anarchist. Mainly protesters from the days events who wanted to continue longer—plus people from the neighborhood who had went home but joined back in.

I continue to be impressed by the level-headedness of 90% of the people—who didn't panic, learned very quickly that the projectiles being used hurt but do not injure at more than about 70 feet (I can testify that they do hurt), and continue to be interested in getting leaflets (I got a few dozen more into some very good hands I think) and talking. Re: the latter, the cops really helped in breaking the ice among the demonstrators. Now everyone is animatedly having their say and it's a lot easier to pick and choose whom one wants to engage.

Cheers,
Frank

December 1, 1999

To: CVO circles

The headlines in today's papers: "Chaos closes downtown—Police use rubber pellets, teargas thousands—Demonstrations delay start of trade meeting for hours—Schell orders curfew; National Guard called in" (*P.I.*); "Guard Over Shaken City" (*Times*)

Well, I really don't know who's shaken. It seems to me they should have written "enlivened, happy, excited city". But the bourgeoisie has no sense of humor and money's being lost downtown. Besides this Gates and Condit (Boeing), who head the welcoming committee for the WTO, and Gov. Locke, are all big free traders who probably hate all the demonstrators' guts. (And a demonstrator told me she heard two WTO delegate just steaming over the fact that the police weren't beating the shit out of protestors yesterday morning—she didn't know what country they were from.) Locke wanted to send the National Guard earlier and now he can claim he was right all along. There's a lot of laughing going on among the masses for what many see as ludicrous overkill. People are also thinking more about what the WTO really represents.

Today I spent quite a few hours listening and talking to people and distributed about a hundred leaflets with almost no effort. The leaflet is laid out such that "Struggle against the WTO calls for conscious struggle against monopoly capitalism" is actually the bigger headline, and, since almost everyone who takes it reads this first, they're not mistakenly taking something they're not interested in. (And I've actually received 2 or 3 "I really agree with that" comments in reference to the headline—a headline we never liked that well but left on because we couldn't think of anything better.) If we had a leaflet with a different appeal we could easily have distributed many thousands, but this leaflet has a narrower target and I'm therefore pleased that we've so far distributed close to 1200. Today I received 6 or 8 "that's a good leaflet" comments from people who'd gotten it previously.

Today started with just a few hundred peaceful protestors chanting and singing songs at various blocked intersections (the papers says 1000 people entered "the restricted zone"). The police popped tear gas a couple of times but it was nothing serious. Quite a few people were into refusing the orders of the police by sitting down in a public pedestrian mall several blocks away from the Convention Center, where they blocked absolutely no one, disturbed no one, etc., and the police hauled them off anyway. By late morning a group of 200 young people, most of whom looked like clean-cut college students, had formed a roving demonstration which went all over the place—walking briskly, stopping traffic, chanting slogans. At about 1:00 there was a procession of several hundred women marching single file from a forum on women and free trade. At about 2:00 there was a march of about 2000 (led by the USWA) to a dock to decry jobs going overseas.

Naturally, this and the other labor-traitor-led events raise the American flag and shout "FAIR TRADE!", but today this was considerably less noticeable (I didn't hear one such slogan during the march itself, although the rallies were undoubtedly drowned in "fair-trade(ism).") Of course other forces besides

ourselves have been trying to clarify the "fair trade" slogan but I don't think this had much to do with it. It was probably more like the rank and file being impressed with the activity of other demonstrators during the past few days and wanting to take up their slogans. And the inspiring highlight of the day was the joining of the fast-paced youthful marchers with the Steelworkers. We came down a hill right into the middle of the march soon after it had started. It was perfect timing and there was huge applause and shouting by all.

And I thought the day was over! Phil just informs me that I left too soon. After the Steelworkers' rally was over, several hundred people split off to go back up the hill to downtown. They've apparently now been attacked by the police and scattered.

More on the subject of the labor-traitors.

Yesterday's AFL-CIO march was of 35,000–40,000. Phil distributed all but two of his leaflets there and said it was good. There were contingents from striking or sick(ed)-out workers in Seattle, contingents from Oregon, and a large contingent from Canada. The march was routed in such a way that it didn't come as close to the World Traitor's meeting as the other marches or protests and the marshals tried to prevent mingling. Get in and get out was the plan. This didn't completely succeed. With encouragement from a group of protestors I was with, about a thousand people went through the marshals' line and joined us—led by machinists. Many others filtered through.

Yesterday I went to the Peoples' Assembly demonstration thinking there would be a few thousand people. There were actually about 200, but it was good anyway. The WWP, FSP and RCP are kissing up to a Filipino organization which I think is allied with the CPP in this coalition. At any rate, they give militant anti-imperialist speeches, have a slogan "proletarian internationalism!" which they repeat at just the right cadence, and are obviously experienced in conducting demonstrations in conditions of repression. They mobilized about 100 Filipinos (more than half women), formed ranks 8-abreast with lots of red flags and anti-imperialist banners, warned people that there was going to be tear-gas and rubber bullets (which we just then learned of), and militantly marched into the unknown. What I heard of their speeches at the end was very good. Also part of the Peoples Assembly is a Korean group which mobilized about 20 people, and a smaller Latin American group.

I forgot to mention that on Monday night there was a demonstration of about 10,000 people led by the good church people. The idea was to completely surround the Exhibition Hall during the WTO reps gala dinner. This was a complete success. Phil and I attended. Probably the most notable thing about it was the surprisingly large turnout.

Also on Monday was a march of about 2000 protesting the WTO's attitude to the environment, and particularly the sea turtle ruling. Frank attended.

One of the exciting things about all of the spontaneous marches and actions by the protesters has been the large number of youthful people who get up to give speeches and try to give some direction to things. A lot of what they have to say is very good, and they've pretty much had to figure it out on their own. Unfortunately, the protests are going to die to nothing very

quickly and we just don't have the forces to catch up with these people.

Lastly, a lot of the construction workers downtown either walked off the job or were told to stay home by the capitalists on Monday and Tuesday. Today quite a few jobs had started up again. Most of the workers on them had a good time cheering on demonstrators whenever they walked by. At one such occurrence a demonstrator shouts the usual "join us!". Another demonstrator good-naturedly shouts "kill your boss!" while his buddy quickly adds . . . "peacefully!". Everyone gets a good chuckle. Not too "shaken" of a city. But many thousands of people are going to be outraged if protesters were injured this evening. That hasn't occurred yet.

December 1, 1999

Dear Mark,

Briefly re: the trashing-

Starbucks, Banana Republic, Gap, Bank of America, and several other places notorious for sweat-shop labor got it good. Some of the anarchists came to trash anyway, but the police attack infuriated them. Others joined in. Among the other protesters I've been concentrating on talking with there's a big sentiment that the bourgeoisie got what it deserved, both because of the police attacks, and because the targets are all big international exploiters. I totally sympathize with this stand. There's also a lesser trend which abhors the trashing but still defends the trashers on the basis of the police starting things. Smaller still are pacifists and some others who scream at the anarchists.

But that's only among the people I've been concentrating on.

I'm sure there's a lot of denouncing of the anarchists going on among the conservative workers, but they get in some trouble trying to differentiate one group from another. The IWW, for example, has been marching in all the labor-traitor-led marches and has a good rapport with everyone progressive. Other anarchists march too. So who are they to denounce and who are they to attack?

Phil got a chuckle out of the fact that some workers at his place today were saying they needed some of the anarchists to come down and help them in their struggle for a new contract.

All I have time for . . .

Frank

Late night, December 2; morning, December 3

I missed last night's battles with the police but by all accounts they started in a similar fashion as the previous ones. The big difference was that the police were more aggressive in clubbing or beating anyone they caught. Needless to say there's an uproar over the police tactics this week and the Mayor has been trying to cover his and the police chief's ass (plus blaming everything on the anarchists). So this morning the bourgeoisie put on its good-guy face and allowed demonstrations outside its no-enter zone; and, not surprisingly, today's protests were mainly against the police. There have also been several quite good posters put up denouncing the police outrages and the martial law (all unsigned).

The number of protesters in the streets was about 2000. The

biggest march went all over the place before arriving at the jail, where a sit-in went on for about half the day. (568 people are being held and the protesters wanted them freed. They weren't, and it seems like most of them haven't even been booked yet!). Another demonstration protested the fact that the police drove demonstrators up into Capitol Hill, two nights running, and not only gassed and shot pellets, rubber bullets, wooden bullets, etc., at the masses in the street, but also at residents. Both these demonstrations linked up tonight and finally decided to march into the restricted zone. (Nobody really leads these demonstrations, and after attempts are made to go this way or that way, they eventually go where the majority wants to go, but usually with some desertions.)

We got about a block into the restricted zone and the police, naturally, blocked us off. But, as every knew, there wasn't much danger of an attack because Schell had indicated he was going to hold the police back. So finally about 150 people decided to sit in the street while another 100-150 trickled away (probably another hundred were afraid to enter the zone at all). I eventually left.

Both these demonstrations were dominated by pacifists and included quite a few new people who had been drawn to them because of the police brutality and martial law dictates.

I received more positive comments on our leaflet from people who had previously read it and again distribution was very easy. I have a hoarse throat so sometimes I can only say that it's a Marxist leaflet when someone asks me what the leaflet is. I find it pretty interesting that a good number of people (like more than a dozen, maybe 20-25) in their late teens or early 20s respond by saying "good", "great", or even "excellent!" and immediately want one. This obviously indicates that these people are searching for an alternative to the world they see and experience, but I don't know where this is really coming from in that these are white youth who often appear to be college students.

More to Mark regarding the trashing and anarchism—

The trashing was on a much larger scale than anything I remember (here) in the early '70s, and it was much more targeted than the stuff that usually occurred in those days in this city. (Among the many places I left off my list last night was Nike.) The bourgeoisie has been railing against the anarchists for this, particularly a group from Eugene. They lie by whining about small merchants when there are almost zero small merchants in the entire area that was trashed (it's the glitziest area of the "new downtown"). And they also carried an article in the press explaining that the IWW was a good anarchist group whereas groups like the one from Eugene were very bad, bad.

After writing last night I remembered that I actually heard a number of condemnations of the anarchists, and trashing, by other protesters: "you're ruining everything!", "stop your violence, you're just like them!", "stop play-acting", and others. Right now I (think a new leaflet would be good) which will (1) hail *all* of the protestors from various angles, (2) defend the ordinary protestors who started trashing after the police attack . . . (3) give some analysis on why there is anarchism (strength of the bourgeoisie, domination of reformism in the occasional mass movements that arise, etc.), explain how it is wrong and

essentially impotent, oppose it. . . .

Frank

P.S. I'm sorry that Phil and I have been having all the fun

and my heart goes out to you. But your day will come, hopefully sooner rather than later. Fresh winds blow beneath the surface. . . . □

Wrong from opposite directions: **The sectarian Sparts and the reformist CPUSA** **on the anti-WTO protest**

The following letter from Pete Brown to Frank, one of the CVO comrades in Seattle, discusses the stand towards the anti-WTO demonstrations of the Spartacists and the CPUSA.

January 14, 2000

Dear Frank:

Congratulations again on your activity in and around the WTO protests. And it looks like your reports and leaflets will be a major part of the next CV.

I noticed you mentioned one of your contacts coming out of the WTO protests was attracted to the Spartacist League. Did you have any discussion with him about the stand of the Sparts on the WTO protests? This should be quite an exposure for him of what kind of organization they are. They repudiated the protests — denounced them and refused to have anything to do with them. Their article on the WTO protests is in *Workers Vanguard* No. 725 dated 10 December 1999, and it's titled "AFL-CIO tops push anti-communism, protectionist poison." Their attitude is summed up in the section under the first subhead, "Orgy of anti-communism and racist protectionism." There they say:

"After three days, the WTO meeting . . . collapsed amid the conflicting demands of the competing imperialist powers and the underdeveloped countries they exploit. Most of the protesters exulted in their 'victory'. But with or without the WTO, masses of working people around the world will continue to work in slave-labor conditions for the superprofits of a handful of greedy capitalists, . . ."

So because the protesters did not overthrow the imperialist system, it was completely worthless activity of them to protest against the system! This is the ultra-sectarian logic of the Spartacist League. They go on to say:

"At bottom, the protests were nothing more than a grotesque nationalist festival which held up 'democratic' American imperialism, the most rapacious exploiter of labor on the planet, as the model for the world. Foreseeing the reactionary

nature of the protests, the Spartacist League/U.S. Political Bureau passed a motion on November 4 not to 'participate in, or sell at, the protests against the World Trade Organization in Seattle on November 30 which are a circus — including ecology types, those battling "genetically modified" food, the Reform Party and others — all dominated by national chauvinism, racist protectionism and counterrevolutionary attacks on the Chinese deformed workers state.' "

So they not only denounced certain leaderships or trends in the protests, but every single person and group in the protests as irredeemably reactionary. Far be it from them to go and try to educate activists — oh no, they wouldn't want to dirty their hands with actual political work in an active, rebellious atmosphere. One would think that the determined display of militancy by protesters would have made them rethink their position. But no; they go on:

"What transpired validated our political opposition. From the AFL-CIO tops in the forefront of organizing the demonstrations to their reformist left tails and motley liberals, the Seattle protests were overwhelmingly a mobilization of the Democratic Party. . . ."

I would think any ordinary activist would be quite offended by such remarks. In a report from Seattle printed in a local Detroit newspaper, one such activist concludes his report by saying:

"Seattle was only a beginning. We have before us the task of building a global movement to overthrow corporate control and create a new economy based on fairness and justice, on a sound ecology and a healthy environment, one that protects human rights and serves freedom. . . ."

Some of the formulas here may sound trite, vague or like "code words" to a Marxist. But none of it sounds like national chauvinism, racist protectionism, or Democratic Party imperialism.

The Sparts are particularly angry about any criticism of China. They take "human rights" as a code word to mean "anti-

communism" because it sometimes gets directed at China. So not only do they defend all of the present Chinese leadership's policies on human rights (or rather, lack of human rights), they also identify these policies with communism. With "communists" like these, we don't need enemies!

The Sparts point out that the AFL-CIO bureaucrats formulate criticism of China in such a way that's probably just a cover for chauvinism and protectionism. But they don't distinguish that position from other people who have criticisms of Chinese policies; they simply assert that "of course" these latter activists are nothing but pawns in the hands of the AFL-CIO. They also don't even try to explain why protectionism would be such a bad policy. Protectionism is supposedly bad and racist; then is free trade good and anti-racist?

The other left paper I've looked at is the CP's *People's*

Weekly World. They're just the opposite of the Sparts. Their attitude is that everything about the protests was great, absolutely great. I was particularly interested in their report on the AFL-CIO's march, after reading your report on it. You pointed out that many trade unionists broke through the marshals' lines to join the protests being carried on by other activists. The CP, in their report on the same incident, first of all praises the marshals to the skies. They say it was great for the AFL-CIO to have these marshals, which was a wonderful contrast to the anarchists' actions of breaking windows, etc. But they also think it was nice for the trade unionists to link up with the other activists. So they also praise that. They just "overlook" the fact that the marchers had to fight against the marshalls.

So much for now. —

Pete

□

How Marx opposed both free traders and protectionists

A look back on Marx's speech 'On the question of free trade'

by Mark, Detroit

The fiery anti-WTO protests in Seattle targeted a number of the outrages that have been carried out by the capitalists in their neo-liberal onslaught against the working masses and the environment. Marx's 1848 speech "On the question of free trade" is a reply to the neo-liberals of his day. At that time, the industrial capitalists of England, then the most powerful capitalists in the world, were demanding an end to protective tariffs that hindered the importation of cheaper foreign grain into England, the so-called Corn Laws. The English landlords wanted to keep the Corn Laws since they derived income from renting out land for agricultural production.

Marx did not support the Corn Laws or the English landlords. But neither did he kowtow to the capitalist "free-traders. Rather he put forward a stinging exposure of what their "free-trade" credo really meant for the workers at home and abroad. Though this speech is over 150 years old, the theories of the bourgeois apologists Marx demolishes are basically the same lies we are fed by the exploiters and the neo-liberal economists today.

The value of examining Marx's speech is not merely that it points out the atrocities carried out by the capitalists. What is most important is that it shows how these horrors are an inevitable by-product of capitalist production itself. Marx shows this by revealing the inner-workings of the laws governing the capitalist economy. And he notes that free trade policy merely means allowing the fullest flowering of these laws. This Marxist approach not only exposes the real nature of capitalism, but reveals the fallacy behind a number of trends in the anti-WTO movement who preach that the capitalism can be reformed.

Along the same lines, these excerpts from Marx's speech provide valuable arguments against the idea that protectionism will save the workers. This is another issue of controversy in the present movement against neo-liberalism. Protectionism is pushed heavily by the AFL-CIO labor traitors as a means to save jobs. And imperialist "isolationists" like Hitler apologist Pat Buchanan have latched on to protectionism, too.

Finally, a bit more needs to be said about Marx's stand against the Corn Laws. Marx wanted the Corn Laws abolished and was well aware this is what the English capitalists wanted and that this would mean further development of capitalism. Marxism stands for the abolition of capitalism, but it also recognizes that efforts to prevent capitalism from taking hold can only result in prolonging the life of previous systems of exploitation and was also generally hopeless. Marx said he voted for free trade as opposed to protectionism because in most cases this would be the quickest path to capitalist development and thereby

the revolutionary class struggle to overthrow capitalism. But Marx also pointed to examples of where the bourgeoisie cleared away barriers to its development by utilizing protectionism. So Marxism hardly obligates one to declare for any free trade measure nor any protectionist measure. In fact, the whole issue of whether capitalist development would go faster under this or that policy is always a big issue for the bourgeoisie, but not the proletariat. What the proletariat must always do is maintain its independence from both the free-trade and protectionist wings of capitalism.

Below we carry some quotes from Marx's free-trade speech preceded by a subheads indicating the issue at hand and our own brief comments on the ensuing quote.

Capitalists promote 'free trade' as a boon to workers while squeezing the workers at every turn

Today, the neo-liberal orthodoxy of the world bourgeoisie holds that "free trade" is the key to universal prosperity. Sure, the business tycoons admit, we may fatten our profits if we can do away with any limitations on what we are allowed to do. But, they assure the workers, such a policy is the surest path to raising their own living standards. (Never mind that actually the gap between rich and poor classes within each country continues to grow as does the gap between rich and poor countries.) Yet, isn't it odd that as the capitalists promise to improve the conditions of the masses through neo-liberalism, they are seeking every means possible to squeeze the workers through productivity drives, wage and job-cutting, repression of strikes, etc. In Marx's time, similar high motives were proclaimed by the English bourgeoisie during the push for free-trade policies. Marx ridiculed this hypocrisy, exposing that while the employers proclaimed their free-trade measures would help the workers, they were fighting against limiting the work day to 10 hours and trying to bleed the workers dry.

Marx:

"Besides, how could the workingman understand the sudden philanthropy of the manufacturers, the very men still busy fighting against the Ten Hour's Bill, which was to reduce the working day of the mill hands from twelve hours to ten?

"To give you an idea of the philanthropy of these manufacturers I would remind you, gentlemen, of the factory regulations in force in all the mills.

"Every manufacturer has for his own private

use a regular penal code in which fines are laid down for every voluntary or involuntary offense. For instance, the worker pays so much if he has the misfortune to sit down on a chair; if he whispers, or speaks, or laughs; if he arrives a few moments too late; if any part of the machine breaks, or he does not turn out work of the quality desired, etc., etc. The fines are always greater than the damage really done by the worker. And to give the worker every opportunity for incurring fines, the factory clock is set forward, and he is given bad raw material to make into good pieces of stuff. An overseer not sufficiently skillful in multiplying cases of infraction of rules is discharged.

"You see, gentlemen, this private legislation is enacted for the especial purpose of creating such infractions, and infractions are manufactured for the purpose of making money. Thus the manufacturer uses every means of reducing the nominal wage, and of profiting even by accidents over which the worker has no control.

"These manufacturers are the same philanthropists who have tried to make the workers believe that they were capable of going to immense expense for the sole purpose of ameliorating their lot. Thus, on the one hand, they nibble at the wages of the worker in the pettiest way, by means of factory regulations, and, on the other, they are undertaking the greatest sacrifices to raise those wages again by means of the Anti-Corn Law League.

"They build great palaces at immense expense, in which the League takes up, in some respects, its official residence; they send an army of missionaries to all corners of England to preach the gospel of free trade; they have printed and distributed gratis thousands of pamphlets to enlighten the worker upon his own interests, they spend enormous sums to make the press favorable to their cause; they organize a vast administrative system for the conduct of the free trade movement, and they display all their wealth of eloquence at public meetings. It was at one of these meetings that a worker cried out:

"If the landlords were to sell our bones, you manufacturers would be the first to buy them in order to put them through a steam-mill and make flour of them."

If commodities are cheaper, so will be the commodity "labor-power"

One of the standard arguments of the capitalists and many bourgeois economists "proving" that free-trade will bring great benefits for the workers is that it will allow for the importation of certain goods at a cheaper price. Here Marx shows the Eng-

lish capitalists of his time wanted to import cheaper grain so as to drive down the wages of the English workers. He exposes the fallacy of the "common sense" notion that if goods are cheaper, workers can purchase more. He notes that under capitalism, the worker's labor-power is also a commodity, and that if the commodities that go to maintain the worker become cheaper, this tends to keep down the value of labor-power. This, he notes, was pointed out even by the bourgeois economic theorist, David Ricardo.

Marx:

"The English workers have very well understood the significance of the struggle between the landlords and the industrial capitalists. They know very well that the price of bread was to be reduced in order to reduce wages, and that industrial profit would rise by as much as rent fell.

"Ricardo, the apostle of the English free-traders, the most eminent economist of our century, entirely agrees with the workers upon this point. In his celebrated work on political economy, he says:

'If instead of growing our own corn . . . we discover a new market from which we can supply ourselves . . . at a cheaper price, wages will fall and profits rise. The fall in the price of agricultural produce reduces the wages, not only of the laborer employed in cultivating the soil, but also of all those employed in commerce or manufacture.'

"And do not believe, gentlemen, that it is a matter of indifference to the worker whether he receives only four francs on account of corn being cheaper, when he had been receiving five francs before.

"Have not his wages always fallen in comparison with profit, and is it not clear that his social position has grown worse as compared with that of the capitalist? Besides which he loses more as a matter of fact.

"So long as the price of corn was higher and wages were also higher, a small saving in the consumption of bread sufficed to procure him other enjoyments. But as soon as bread is very cheap, and wages are therefore very cheap, he can save almost nothing on bread for the purchase of other articles.

"The English workers have made the English free-traders realize that they are not the dupes of their illusions or of their lies; and if, in spite of this, the workers made common cause with them against the landlords, it was for the purpose of destroying the last remnants of feudalism and in order to have only one enemy left to deal with. The workers have not miscalculated, for the landlords, in order to revenge themselves upon the manufacturers, made common cause with the

workers to carry the Ten Hours' Bill, which the latter had been vainly demanding for thirty years, and which was passed immediately after the repeal of the Corn Laws.

"Doubtless, if the price of all commodities falls—and this is the necessary consequence of free trade—I can buy far more for a franc than before. And the worker's franc is as good as any other man's. Therefore, free trade will be very advantageous to the worker. There is only one little difficulty in this, namely, that the worker, before he exchanges his franc for other commodities, has first exchanged his labor with the capitalist. If in this exchange he always received the said franc for the same labor and the price of all other commodities fell, he would always be the gainer by such a bargain. The difficult point does not lie in proving that, if the price of all commodities falls, I will get more commodities for the same money.

"Economists always take the price of labor at the moment of its exchange with other commodities. But they altogether ignore the moment at which labor accomplishes its own exchange with capital.

"When less expense is required to set in motion the machine which produces commodities, the things necessary for the maintenance of this machine, called a worker, will also cost less. If all commodities are cheaper, labor, which is a commodity too, will also fall in price, and, as we shall see later, this commodity, labor, will fall far lower in proportion than the other commodities. If the worker still pins his faith to the arguments of the economists, he will find that the franc has melted away in his pocket, and that he has only five sous left."

The capitalist "boom" won't save the workers

Continuing his exposure of the capitalist propaganda, Marx deals with the "free-traders" claim that if the price of commodities decreases, this will lead to higher consumption and therefore a demand for more workers which will drive wages up. Marx here explains why even in a period of increased production, eventually the workers "will go to the wall just the same." The undermining of the workers position even during "booms" is confirmed today in industry after industry where high profits are accompanied by downsizing, longer and harder work for the employed, and a fall in real wages.

Marx:

"Thereupon the economists will tell you: 'Well, we admit that competition among the workers, which will certainly not have diminished under free trade, will very soon bring wages into harmony with the low price of commodities. But, on the other hand, the low price of commodities

will increase consumption, the larger consumption will require increased production, which will be followed by a larger demand for hands, and this larger demand for hands will be followed by a rise in wages.'

"The whole line of argument amounts to this: Free trade increases productive forces. If industry keeps growing, if wealth, if the productive power, if, in a word, productive capital increases, the demand for labor, the price of labor, and consequently the rate of wages, rise also.

"The most favorable condition for the worker is the growth of capital. This must be admitted. If capital remains stationary, industry will not merely remain stationary but will decline, and in this case the worker will be the first victim. He goes to the wall before the capitalist. And in the case where capital keeps growing, in the circumstances which we have said are the best for the worker, what will be his lot? He will go to the wall just the same. The growth of productive capital implies the accumulation and the concentration of capital. The centralization of capital involves a greater division of labor and a greater use of machinery. The greater division of labor destroys the especial skill of the laborer; and by putting in the place of this skilled work labor which any one can perform, it increases competition among the workers.

"This competition becomes fiercer as the division of labor enables a single worker to do the work of three. Machinery accomplishes the same result on a much larger scale. The growth of productive capital, which forces the industrial capitalists to work with constantly increasing means, ruins the small industrialists and throws them into the proletariat. Then, the rate of interest falling in proportion as capital accumulates, the small rentiers, who can no longer live on their dividends, are forced to go into industry and thus swell the number of proletarians.

"Finally, the more productive capital increases, the more it is compelled to produce for a market whose requirements it does not know, the more production precedes consumption, the more supply tries to force demand, and consequently crises increase in frequency and in intensity. But every crisis in turn hastens the centralization of capital and adds to the proletariat.

"Thus, as productive capital grows, competition among the workers grows in a far greater proportion. The reward of labor diminishes for all, and the burden of labor increases for some.

"In 1829, there were in Manchester 1,088 cotton spinners employed in 36 factories. In 1841, there were no more than 448, and they tended

53,353 more spindles than the 1,088 spinners did in 1829. If manual labor had increased in the same proportion as the productive power, the number of spinners ought to have reached the figure of 1,848; improved machinery had, therefore, deprived 1,100 workers of employment."

Capitalists prettify chronic unemployment as "temporary suffering"

In Marx's time as now, the apologists of capitalism could not deny the devastation of whole sections of workers displaced because of the higher productive powers due to technological advances. But allegedly the creation of mass unemployment was simply a temporary phenomenon, merely a matter of the displaced workers finding another job. Here Marx ridicules the callous attitude of the capitalists toward the unemployed and shows that the displacement of workers is not confined to this or that sector, but is inherent in capitalist production in all fields. As evidence, Marx cites the testimony of the pro-free-trade ideologues themselves who describe the ruin of the weavers not only in London, but in the British colony of India.

Marx:

"We know beforehand the reply of the economists. The men thus deprived of work, they say, will find other kinds of employment. Dr. Bowring did not fail to reproduce this argument at the Congress of Economists, but neither did he fail to supply his own refutation.

"In 1835, Dr. Bowring made a speech in the House of Commons upon the 50,000 hand-loom weavers of London who for a very long time had been starving without being able to find that new kind of employment which the free-traders hold out to them in the distance.

"We will give the most striking passages of this speech of Dr. Bowring:

"This distress of the weavers . . . is an inevitable condition of a species of labor easily learned—and constantly intruded on and superseded by cheaper means of production. A very short cessation of demand, where the competition for work is so great . . . produces a crisis. The hand-loom weavers are on the verge of that state beyond which human existence can hardly be sustained, and a very trifling check hurls them into the regions of starvation. . . . The improvements of machinery, . . . by superseding manual labor more and more, infallibly bring with them in the transition much of temporary suffering. . . . The national good cannot be purchased but at the expense of some individual evil. No advance was ever made in manufactures but at some cost to

those who are in the rear; and of all discoveries, the power-loom is that which most directly bears on the condition of the hand-loom weaver. He is already beaten out of the field in many articles; he will infallibly be compelled to surrender many more.'

"Further on he says:

'I hold in my hand the correspondence which has taken place between the Governor-General of India and the East India Company, on the subject of the Dacca hand-loom weavers. . . . Some years ago the East-India Company annually received of the produce of the looms of India to the amount of from 6,000,000 to 8,000,000 of pieces of cotton goods. The demand gradually fell to somewhat more than 1,000,000, and has now nearly ceased altogether. In 1800, the United States took from India nearly 800,000 pieces of cottons; in 1830, not 4,000. In 1800, 1,000,000 pieces were shipped to Portugal; in 1830, only 20,000. Terrible are the accounts of the wretchedness of the poor Indian weavers, reduced to absolute starvation. And what was the sole cause? The presence of the cheaper English manufacture. . . . Numbers of them died of hunger, the remainder were, for the most part, transferred to other occupations, principally agricultural. Not to have changed their trade was inevitable starvation. And at this moment that Dacca district is supplied with yarn and cotton cloth from the power-looms of England.... The Dacca muslins, celebrated over the whole world for their beauty and fineness, are also annihilated from the same cause. And the present suffering, to numerous classes in India, is scarcely to be paralleled in the history of commerce.'

"Dr. Bowring's speech is the more remarkable because the facts quoted by him are exact, and the phrases with which he seeks to palliate them are wholly characterized by the hypocrisy common to all free trade sermons. He represents the workers as means of production which must be superseded by less expensive means of production. He pretends to see in the labor of which he speaks a wholly exceptional kind of labor, and in the machine which has crushed out the weavers an equally exceptional machine. He forgets that there is no kind of manual labor which may not any day be subjected to the fate of the hand-loom weavers.

'It is, in fact, the constant aim and

tendency of every improvement in machinery to supersede human labor altogether, or to diminish its cost by substituting the industry of women and children for that of men; or that of ordinary laborers for trained artisans. In most of the water-twist, or throstle cotton-mills, the spinning is entirely managed by females of sixteen years and upwards. The effect of substituting the self-acting mule for the common mule, is to discharge the greater part of the men spinners, and to retain adolescents and children.'

"These words of the most enthusiastic free-trader, Dr. Ure, serve to complement the confessions of Dr. Bowring.

"Dr. Bowring speaks of certain individual evils, and, at the same time, says that these individual evils destroy whole classes; he speaks of the temporary sufferings during the transition period, and at the very time of speaking of them, he does not deny that these temporary evils have implied for the majority the transition from life to death, and for the rest a transition from a better to a worse condition. If he asserts, farther on, that the sufferings of these workers are inseparable from the progress of industry, and are necessary to the prosperity of the nation, he simply says that the prosperity of the bourgeois class presupposes as necessary the suffering of the laboring class.

"All the consolation which Dr. Bowring offers the workers who perish, and, indeed, the whole doctrine of compensation which the free-traders propound, amounts to this:

"You thousands of workers who are perishing, do not despair! You can die with an easy conscience. Your class will not perish. It will always be numerous enough for the capitalist class to decimate it without fear of annihilating it. Besides, how could capital be usefully applied if it did not take care always to keep up its exploitable material, i.e., the workers, to exploit them over and over again?"

Capitalist competition does not lead to international harmony

The proponents of modern neo-liberalism portray the ending of trade barriers as the key to harmonious relations between countries. In exposing this, Marx shows the fallacy of the bourgeois theory today often called "comparative advantage" whereby capitalism allegedly assigns to each nation the fields of economic enterprise of nations in line with its natural destiny.

Marx:

"We have shown what sort of brotherhood free trade begets between the different classes of one and the same nation. The brotherhood which

free trade would establish between the nations of the earth would hardly be more fraternal. To call cosmopolitan exploitation universal brotherhood is an idea that could only be engendered in the brain of the bourgeoisie. All the destructive phenomena which unlimited competition gives rise to within one country are reproduced in more gigantic proportions on the world market. We need not dwell any longer upon free trade sophisms on this subject, which are worth just as much as the arguments of our prize-winners Messrs. Hope, Morse and Greg.

"For instance, we are told that free trade would create an international division of labor, and thereby give to each country the production which is most in harmony with its natural advantages.

"You believe perhaps, gentlemen, that the production of coffee and sugar is the natural destiny of the West Indies.

"Two centuries ago, nature, which does not trouble herself about commerce, had planted neither sugar-cane nor coffee trees there.

"And it may be that in less than half a century you will find there neither coffee nor sugar, for the East Indies, by means of cheaper production, have already successfully combated this alleged natural destiny of the West Indies. And the West Indies, with their natural wealth, are already as heavy a burden for England as the weavers of Dacca, who also were destined from the beginning of time to weave by hand.

"One other thing must never be forgotten, namely, that, just as everything has become a monopoly, there are also nowadays some branches of industry which dominate all the others, and secure to the nations which most largely cultivate them the command of the world market. Thus in international commerce cotton alone has much greater commercial importance than all the other raw materials used in the manufacture of clothing put together. It is truly ridiculous to see the free-traders stress the few specialities in each branch of industry, throwing them into the balance against the products used in everyday consumption and produced most cheaply in those countries in which manufacture is most highly developed.

"If the free-traders cannot understand how one nation can grow rich at the expense of another, we need not wonder, since these same gentlemen also refuse to understand how within one country one class can enrich itself at the expense of another."

Protectionism also fosters capitalist exploitation

Protectionism is often said to be the antidote to free trade. For instance, such views are long the stock-in-trade of the sellout AFL-CIO officials. But it is not just among forces that are supposed to be on the workers side that protectionism is being touted. Even in the U.S., the world capital of free-market ideology, certain capitalist sectors continue to enjoy protectionist measures while others, like the steel industry, clamor for more protection. Meanwhile, demagogues like Pat Buchanan have in recent years been clamoring for protectionism, attempting to put a "pro-worker" cover on their ultra-right wing crusade to revive American capitalism. The fact that the class collaborationist AFL-CIO leaders, various capitalist businesses, and right-wing politicians like Buchanan all back protectionism is strong evidence that protectionism, like free-trade, is not going to relieve the workers and poor from the onslaught of the capitalists.

In the passage below, Marx shows that in fact free-trade and protectionist policies are both aimed at furthering capitalist development, not combating exploitation. But it is just for this reason, that if protectionist policies are successful, they wind up furthering the destruction of barriers to capital within the country and on a world scale. In other words, protectionism winds up furthering free-trade.

Marx ends his speech by saying that given the choice between free-trade and protectionism, he chooses free-trade. This may sound odd given that his whole speech is an exposure of free trade. What Marx is driving at though is that capitalism cannot be overcome by trying to prevent it from destroying the restrictions on it left over from pre-capitalist forms of exploitation. Rather, liberation of the workers can only take place through the modern class struggle engendered by capitalism itself. Marx educated the workers as to the real meaning of free trade so as to develop their class independence from the bourgeoisie while recognizing that the protectionist policy that at that time the English landlords benefitted from, also hindered the development of the workers' consciousness and struggle. Marx was not giving a call for the workers to sit on their hands while capitalism developed, but was for sharpening the class

struggle. Nor should Marx be interpreted as saying that in every instance, protectionist measures were of no use to capitalist development. As we will see, he notes how the developing bourgeoisie in certain countries used protectionism to build itself up.

Marx:

"Do not imagine, gentlemen, that in criticizing freedom of trade we have the least intention of defending the system of protection.

"One may declare oneself an enemy of the constitutional regime without declaring oneself a friend of the ancient regime.

"Moreover, the protectionist system is nothing but a means of establishing large-scale industry in any given country, that is to say, of making it dependent upon the world market, and from the moment that dependence upon the world market is established, there is already more or less dependence upon free trade. Besides this, the protective system helps to develop free competition within a country. Hence we see that in countries where the bourgeoisie is beginning to make itself felt as a class, in Germany for example, it makes great efforts to obtain protective duties. They serve the bourgeoisie as weapons against feudalism and absolute government, as a means for the concentration of its own powers and for the realization of free trade within the same country.

"But, in general, the protective system of our day is conservative, while the free trade system is destructive. It breaks up old nationalities and pushes the antagonism of the proletariat and the bourgeoisie to the extreme point. In a word, the free trade system hastens the social revolution. It is in this revolutionary sense alone, gentlemen, that I vote in favor of free trade."

□

Reply to an anarchist about the activities of the 'black bloc' at the anti-WTO demonstration

by Joseph Green

An anarcho-communist who has been forwarding many anarchist documents to people over the Internet also wrote directly to *Communist Voice*. As part of the ensuing friendly exchange of views, I sent him the Seattle CVO leaflets that are reprinted in this issue of *CV*. In response, he claimed that the Seattle leaflet "uphold the 'battle of Seattle'" misrepresented the anarchist position. Below is my reply. I also wanted to print excerpts from his letters, but he refused permission for this. However, following my reply are two relevant statements from the material he has been circulating: a 'black bloc' communique about the Seattle events from the ACME Collective, and a solidarity statement to the 'black bloc' from anarchist-communists.

Dear Jeff,

Thank you for your reply to the leaflet of the CVO comrades in Seattle that summed up the "battle of Seattle", and for the various anarchist materials you have sent me. Although it has taken me a week to get time to reply, I think that this dialogue is useful. I have shown it to comrades here who have also appreciated it. If we have the space for it, we would like to publish extracts from this dialogue in the next issue of *Communist Voice*. [Jeff refused permission for the use of his letters.—JG] . . . Moreover, the summation of the anti-WTO demonstrations in Seattle has raised the question of anarchism to wide circles, and it would be intolerably secretive and elitist to keep useful materials away from them.

Now on to the issues you raised with respect to the CVO leaflet on the events in Seattle. You concerned yourselves exclusively with the part of it that was directed towards anarchism. It condemned the hypocrisy of the bourgeois authorities, expressed solidarity with youth who wanted to rebel against the system, including those currently involved in anarchist circles, and it pointed to the necessity of active resistance. But at the same time, it criticized the dead-nature of anarchist practice. It examined the ideology and actions especially of the anarchist circles involved in trashing for trashing's sake. There were many other anarchists at Seattle, but the trashers were not only were very prominent, but influenced a section of alienated youth whom our comrades wished to address. The anarchists who trashed for the sake of trashing would, I believe, be such circles as the Black Bloc and the ACME Collective. Among the materials you sent me (and many other people) was the ACME Collective's "N30 Black Bloc Communique", and a "Solidarity statement to the anti-WTO anarchist black bloc" by the "Initiative for a Northeastern Federation of Anarchist-Communists (NEFAC)", a statement which fervently backs the ACME Collective and its

Communique

Indeed, judging the actions of the ACME communique and the Black Bloc at the Seattle is important for the summing up of the demonstration. You write me that "the misrepresentation of anarchism here [in the CVO leaflet] is pretty weird". Yet what the leaflet says about anarchism is fully in line with the practice of the ACME Collective in Seattle, and is verified further by the NEFAC solidarity statement. Let's take a look.

You write that it is absurd to present "anarchists abandoning class-based revolution". There is nothing about "class-based revolution" in the ACME communique; there is neither talk about revolution nor about the need for a class-based movement. At most, it expresses opposition to "Capital and State" and talks about the necessity of "an attack on private property". But this cannot be taken as a synonym for revolution, because the ACME Collective discusses what it means by attacking private property. It enthuses, not over revolution, but over the great importance of smashing windows. After a statement of its anarchist goals, and the need to create a non-hierarchical society, it says: "When we smash a window, we aim to destroy the thin veneer of legitimacy that surrounds private property rights." It doesn't say that this is to prepare a revolution. Instead it goes on to say that window smashing itself "exorcizes" capitalism. Its exact words: "At the same time, we exorcize that set of violent and destructive social relationships which has been imbued in almost everything around us. By 'destroying' private property, we convert its limited exchange value into an expanded useful value. A storefront window becomes a vent to let some fresh air into the oppressive atmosphere of a retail outlet . . ." And it continues rhapsodizing in this vein. It's perspective is that "After N30, many people will never see a shop window or a hammer the same way again." And that's it.

Where's the class-based revolution, Jeff? And was the NEFAC solidarity statement any better? It cites the ACME statement and says that "our comrades . . . took it upon themselves to strike capitalism where it hurts". Shop windows? That's where it hurts? That's revolution? Windows get broken in revolutions, but it makes a mockery of revolution to regard the breaking of shop windows as itself revolution and as the hitting of capitalism where it hurts. This is the type politics which the CVO leaflet characterizes as the dead-end "politics of 'inflicting material damage on the bourgeoisie'."

I think that you yourself realize the emptiness of these statements. That's one of the reasons why you also sent out the "Leaflet distributed at N30 London, UK", signed by "Some unknown proletarians". This leaflet talks in the name of "proletarians", which the ACME Collective doesn't. But what is notable is that neither you nor the NEFAC try to help the ACME Collective overcome its standpoint.

Mind you, it's not that the London anarchist leaflet itself has any perspective besides the utopian hope that autonomous action

in and of itself will bring about a "world community". True, unlike the ACME Collective, it says that destroying capitalism "will require a sustained social movement of millions of people". And I can only sympathize the appeal to "break the anti-strike laws", the view that state ownership does not in itself eliminate capitalist ownership, and the goal of eliminating capitalism, stands which appear repeatedly in CVO literature. But the London leaflet has little idea of what has to be done to achieve the necessary social movement of millions of people, of how it will be organized, or of what its goals will be. The alternative to private capitalism and state capitalism is given simply as "a world human community", which is supposed to be the opposite of "a single global economy". And all that is needed to obtain this world community without a corresponding world economy is to take "action without following the rules" and "organising and controlling our own struggles autonomously from all those who would seek to represent us". This is to magically eliminate capital, eliminate wage labor, etc.

What happens when a movement with such vague ideas as that of the London leaflet manages to find itself in a position of influence? During the Spanish Civil War, the anarchists tried out their economic prescriptions in workplaces in Barcelona and some other areas of Spain for a time. And they met fiasco. Here I am not referring to the military crushing of the anarchists, but to the economic failures of the anarchist experiment while it ran its course. The Spanish anarchists could shout with the best of them against hierarchy, wage labor, capital, money, government, etc., and they could issue declarations that they had abolished money and government, but money and government continued in the anarchist-controlled areas. Worse yet, the anarcho-syndicalist CNT itself had to admit that the anarchist forms of economic organizations were not working, and were fostering a petty-bourgeois spirit. (See "Anarchist fiasco in the Spanish Civil War shows that autonomous collectives cannot overcome the marketplace" in the Oct. 1996 issue of *CV*—it is also posted on our web site, as I pointed out in an earlier letter.)

You are upset that the CVO leaflet refers to the petty-bourgeois nature of anarchist ideas. You seek to refute this by referring to the fact that some anarchists have been proletarians. True enough, but this hardly proves that anarchism organizes them with a proletarian perspective. Indeed, from the point of view of the anarchist program, it is notable that anarchism stretches the very idea of "proletarian" to cover just about anyone except the big exploiters. For example, you have objected to the distinction Marxism makes between the class stand of the working class and that of the peasantry, and the copy of the ACME Communique you sent me ends with the slogan "Peasant Revolt!" (I am not sure whether this was added by you or was part of the ACME statement). And in your current letter you write that "the greatest weakness of (most forms of) marxism has historically been that it only understands class in the economic sense". This removing of the content from the concept of "class" fits in with the ACME Collective, which defines the "privileged" activists not on the basis of those who are economically privileged, but on the basis of those who disagree with it. If you disagree with the anarchists, the ACME Collective holds that you are guilty of "the racism of privileged

activists", but if you agree with the anarchists, your privileges are forgiven you. Even one of the council communist documents you sent me ridicules the idea that one can "magically label" all the followers of this or that anarchist organization as "workers". But this type of labeling is the content of the idea that class isn't restricted to "the economic sense".

Indeed, rather than analyzing what NEFAC and ACME said, you sent me statements of decades past by various anarcho-communists of the "councilist" persuasion. These will no doubt be useful in examining that trend, and I appreciate your sending them. They can serve as one of the subjects for future discussion between us. But right now we face the task of analyzing what happened in Seattle and what the Black Bloc did there. What they did can't be ignored on the grounds that other people in past decades did, or talked about, something else. If, for example, some "council communists" in 1960s spoke about class-based organizing or revolution, it doesn't prove that the Black Bloc or the ACME Collective or NEFAC is involved in "class-based revolution". We must look at the tasks of today in rebuilding an independent proletarian movement, and see whether the ACME Collective really dealt with this. Thus I will refrain at this time from dealing with the problems in the councilist literature you sent me, other than to point out some relations it has to present-day anarchism and to point out that it doesn't deal in the slightest with the fiasco of the economic strategy of anarchism.

For example, you send me a document from 1966 that says that "... the only purpose of a revolutionary organization is the abolition of all existing classes in a way that does not bring about a new division of society..." This sounds a theme that I think you are fond of—that the very form of activity of activists today must already have the form of the new society within it. It is a common anarchist theme, and I think the Black Bloc probably would agree with this. Fine. Let's see what they made of this in practice. The ACME statement talks about trashing property and says that, by this method, "we exorcize that set of violent and destructive social relationships which has been imbued in almost everything around us." So I ask you, Jeff, does smashing glass windows necessarily achieve the exorcism of destructive social relationships "in a way that does not bring about" new destructive social relationship? Hasn't the smashing of windows occurred in just about all revolutions and counter-revolutions in history? Revolutionaries have smashed windows, but fascists too have smashed windows; high-minded people have smashed windows, but looters too have smashed windows; people seeking the abolition of capitalism have smashed windows, but so have people seeking only national liberation. Or, if you like, you could substitute "trashing private property" for "smashing windows" in the previous sentence.

You write that the CVO leaflet "contains a contradiction..." at one point it talks about the possibility of fighting the police (and one would think, trashing stuff) as a means of undermining capitalist authority, but then attacks anarchists for consciously doing just this to undermine capitalist authority". You raise an important point, indeed a key point, but you stumble in discussing it and you obscure the actual practice of the Black Bloc. There is no contradiction in the leaflet. The issue is that the ACME collective regards trashing stuff as an end in itself;

indeed, contrary to what you and the NEFAC solidarity statement imply about the "militant resistance" waged by the Black Bloc, the ACME Collective didn't even believe in resisting the police in defense of the mass demonstration. It regarded the trashing itself as supposedly the "exorcism" of the "destructive social relations" of "Capital and State". The CVO leaflet vigorously defended those who resisted the police attacks and stressed the vital role of fostering a mass spirit of active resistance, but it did not hold that even such active resistance (disdained by the ACME Collective) creates the nucleus of the new society, or exorcizes capitalist social relations: active resistance is not a substitute for the organizational and political tasks of the movement, but a necessary means of defending the movement to accomplish these tasks.

The CVO leaflet points out, concerning those anarchists who trashed for the sake of trashing, that "It never enters such people's heads that the shutting down of the WTO was a significant political victory . . ." Indeed, there is nothing in the ACME Communique that indicates any enthusiasm for the anti-WTO protest in itself—it is simply the trashing that is significant. Nor did the ACME Collective seek to defend the mass of demonstrators against the police. Instead, the ACME Collective boasted of how it avoided this struggle and let others bear the brunt of the police attacks. It wrote that "Unlike the vast majority of activists who were pepper-sprayed, tear-gassed and shot at with rubber bullets on several occasions, most of our section of the black bloc escaped serious injury by remaining constantly in motion and avoiding engagement with the police." The ACME communique actually makes a big point of sneering that those who would engage in active resistance must be "privileged" people, while allegedly the mass of ordinary people would never do such a thing.

The CVO leaflet points to such things as the South Korean workers' and students' strikes and demonstrations. Can one imagine that such major struggles could have been built up with the ACME spirit of denouncing engagements with the police as the act of "privileged activists"? Can one imagine the contempt for the masses that is involved in sneering at the demonstrators for standing their ground in the face of the police? Thus, when the ACME Collective smashed windows, it was not promoting active resistance to police repression. It itself writes that "Of all the groups engaging in direct action, the black bloc was perhaps the least interested in engaging the authorities". On the contrary, it was promoting what, in its mind, is an alternative to active resistance.

That's the difference, Jeff. The CVO leaflet praises active resistance, and isn't deterred from this by the fact that some glass gets smashed. The ACME Collective and the Black Bloc thought that the smashing of glass was hitting capitalism where it hurt. It is the flip side of the worshipful bourgeois attitude to private property to regard these two positions as the same, on the grounds that some glass gets broken either way. All the bourgeois law-and-order fanatics can see is that glass is broken (which they denounce), and all the anarchist trashers can see is that glass is broken (which they love). Marxist revolutionaries think that the world doesn't revolve around shards of glass, but around class organization and class struggle.

You write that "At any rate: the accusation that anarchists don't patiently get down to long term political work is bullocks." The perspective put forward by the ACME Collective was: smash the glass now, and immediately exorcize the present social relationships. Where does long-term political work fit into this? Indeed, according to our comrades, the Black Bloc did not even leaflet the demonstrators.

How does one deal with the movement when it is still under the influence of mistaken ideas? The ACME Communique puts forward no perspective on how to do this. The idea is simply to sharply denounce ordinary people who disagree with the anarchists, calling them "racist" and "privileged" people, and to inspire them to change by the sight of broken glass. The Black Bloc, as the ACME Communique points out, actually ended up in sharper contradiction with the mass of demonstrators than with the police.

We in the CVO stem from the late Marxist-Leninist Party, and we have a good deal of experience with demonstrations where the mass of demonstrators have different ideas than we do, and where the reformist leaders of the demonstration desperately wanted to drive us out. We generally were able to hold up our banner in these demonstrations, distribute our leaflets and encourage militant stands by the most active section of the demonstrators, not just because we were resolute but because the mass of demonstrators accepted our right to be there and because we treasured every step, however small, that the demonstrators took beyond the confines being imposed on them by the reformist leaders. Even today, although the CVO is tiny and thus has much less activity in the mass movement, we have been able to work in various demonstrations led by hostile political forces. This is because, unlike the Black Bloc, we don't have contempt for the mass of demonstrators; we don't regard them as "privileged" brats; and we work hard to find ways to politically influence the masses. As a result, while only some demonstrators agree with our full views, the mass of demonstrators generally accept that MLP and CVO views and actions are a legitimate part of the mass struggle. As a result, we have repeatedly been able to appeal to the mass of demonstrators against the censorship intended by reformist leaders.

Why have we been able to appeal to the mass of demonstrators, while the Black Bloc had more trouble with other demonstrators than with the police? It has a lot to do with the attitude towards long-term political work: our acceptance of it and the Black Bloc's negation of it.

In my opinion, your rejection of unions also shows a rejection of the tasks of long-term work among the working masses. Instead of working hard to find a way to influence the workers in the unions, you substitute the denunciation of unions in general. You do this in the name of emancipating the workers from "parties, states, unions, etc.". Indeed, the leaflet from London you sent me, while having a more class-based rhetoric than the ACME Communique, goes further in "utopian anti-organizational" views in another way—it isn't even signed by a group, just "some unknown proletarians". Like you, it believes that the proper appeal is simply to organize "our struggles autonomously from all those who would seek to represent us". You may believe that this is a powerful justification of your

position and repudiation of all hierarchy, but it is just an evasion of the long-term tasks of organizing a movement and it reflects the hope that a spontaneous rebellion would eliminate the need to worry about difficult organizational and theoretical questions. Moreover, it is based on the notoriously false idea that anarchist "autonomous" organizing really doesn't involve seeking to exercise influence over others. If an organization is "informal" or secret or "autonomous", it has supposedly eliminated the evils of hierarchy. This claim sometimes reaches such extremes that it is mocked by the council communists you support, who point out that it covers up high-handed forms of organizing, with leaders who are free from the supervision of the mass of followers and contemptuous of theory. In the councilist literature you sent me, one document states that

"Some present-day organizations cunningly pretend not to exist. [Hence the London leaflet is signed simply by "some unknown proletarians". Note also that the complaint about organizations that pretend not to exist verifies the polemic against Bakunin given by Pete Brown in the CV.—JG] This enables them to avoid bothering with the slightest clarification of the bases on which they assemble any assortment of people (while magically labeling them all 'workers'); to avoid giving their semimembers any account of the informal leadership that holds the controls; and to thoughtlessly denounce any theoretical expression and any other form of organization as automatically evil and harmful."

You write to me that "utopian anti-organizationalist anarchists . . . are the vast minority of anarchists". That's debatable, because you attribute the most general features of anarchism to only a section of anarchists. However, it is true that the Black Bloc was only one section of the anarchists at Seattle. But the crucial point is that you are unable to separate

yourselves from the mistakes of the Black Bloc. You may hint to me that they are the "utopian anti-organizationalist anarchists", not like the good anarcho-communists and council communists, but you support solidarity statements that cheer on the actions and conceptions of these "utopian anti-organizationalist" anarchists. You have failed to show that the anarchist movement can deal with even the grossest errors of any of its sections. Instead, you have inadvertently shown that anarchist rhetoric can be used to cover over the concrete actions taken by fellow anarchists, no matter how misguided they are.

The Black Bloc created a bad situation between itself and the mass of demonstrators in Seattle. If you want to pooh-pooh this because the ACME Collective is only a minority of anarchists, then you had better see to it that the anarchist movement cleans house in its own ranks (i.e. rectifies its practice). The CVO leaflet opposed the ideas of the ACME Collective because it sympathized with the alienated youth and sought to help it find a path forward. If you wish to help the disaffected youth get organized, you will have to help criticize the ACME Collective in front of the youth. You will have to circulate not just solidarity statements, but militant criticism of the Black Bloc. So far, however, it seems that anarcho-communists like you and NEFAC are rallying around the Black Bloc. This seems to illustrate that the ACME Collective isn't an aberration of anarchism; its actions and communique were based on the fundamental ideas of anarchism.

No doubt there is far more to discuss. I hope you do get the time to examine the issue of the historical experience of what happened to the autonomous anarchist collectives in Spain. This raises profound economic issues about the viability of anarchism, and I am quite interested to see how you analyze such issues. In the meantime I wish you, Jeff, a happy new year, and hope to hear from you again.

Friendly regards,
Joseph ☐

Black bloc communique by ACME Collective

The following communique, from that section of anarchists who believed that trashing was the main thing to do in Seattle, is criticized in "Reply to an anarchist" starting on page 27.

A communique from one section of the black bloc of N30 in Seattle

On November 30, several groups of individuals in black bloc attacked various corporate targets in downtown Seattle. Among them were (to name just a few):

Fidelity Investment (major investor in Occidental Petroleum, the bane of the U'wa tribe in Columbia) Bank of America, US Bancorp, Key Bank and Washington Mutual Bank (financial institutions key in the expansion of corporate repression) Old Navy, Banana Republic and the GAP (as Fisher family businesses, rapers of Northwest forest lands and sweatshop laborers) NikeTown and Levi's (whose overpriced products are made in sweatshops) McDonald's (slave-wage fast-food peddlers responsible for destruction of tropical rainforests for grazing land and slaughter of animals) Starbucks (peddlers of an addictive substance whose products are harvested at below-poverty wages by farmers who are forced to destroy their own forests in the process) Warner Bros. (media monopolists) Planet Hollywood (for being Planet Hollywood)

This activity lasted for over 5 hours and involved the breaking of storefront windows and doors and defacing of facades. Slingshots, newspaper boxes, sledge hammers, mallets, crowbars and nail-pullers were used to strategically destroy corporate property and gain access (one of the three targeted Starbucks and Niketown were looted). Eggs filled with glass etching solution, paint-balls and spray-paint were also used.

The black bloc was a loosely organized cluster of affinity groups and individuals who roamed around downtown, pulled this way by a vulnerable and significant storefront and that way by the sight of a police formation. Unlike the vast majority of activists who were pepper-sprayed, tear-gassed and shot at with rubber bullets on several occasions, most of our section of the black bloc escaped serious injury by remaining constantly in motion and avoiding engagement with the police. We buddied up, kept tight and watched each others' backs. Those attacked by federal thugs were un-arrested by quick-thinking and organized members of the black bloc. The sense of solidarity was awe-inspiring.

THE PEACE POLICE

Unfortunately, the presence and persistence of "peace police" was quite disturbing. On at least 6 separate occasions, so-called "non-violent" activists physically attacked individuals who targeted corporate property. Some even went so far as to stand in front of the Niketown super store and tackle and shove the black bloc away. Indeed, such self-described "peace-keepers" posed a much greater threat to individuals in the black bloc than

the notoriously violent uniformed "peace-keepers" sanctioned by the state (undercover officers have even used the cover of the activist peace-keepers to ambush those who engage in corporate property destruction).

RESPONSE TO THE BLACK BLOC

Response to the black bloc has highlighted some of the contradictions and internal oppressions of the "nonviolent activist" community. Aside from the obvious hypocrisy of those who engaged in violence against black-clad and masked people (many of whom were harassed despite the fact that they never engaged in property destruction), there is the racism of privileged activists who can afford to ignore the violence perpetrated against the bulk of society and the natural world in the name of private property rights. Window-smashing has engaged and inspired many of the most oppressed members of Seattle's community more than any giant puppets or sea turtle costumes ever could (not to disparage the effectiveness of those tools in other communities).

TEN MYTHS ABOUT THE BLACK BLOC

Here's a little something to dispel the myths that have been circulating about the N30 black bloc:

1. "They are all a bunch of Eugene anarchists." While a few may be anarchists from Eugene, we hail from all over the United States, including Seattle. In any case, most of us are familiar with local issues in Seattle (for instance, the recent occupation of downtown by some of the most nefarious of multinational retailers).

2. "They are all followers of John Zerzan." A lot of rumors have been circulating that we are followers of John Zerzan, an anarcho-primitivist author from Eugene who advocates property destruction. While some of us may appreciate his writings and analyses, he is in no sense our leader, directly, indirectly, philosophically or otherwise.

3. "The mass public squat is the headquarters of the anarchists who destroyed property on November 30th." In reality, most of the people in the "Autonomous Zone" squat are residents of Seattle who have spent most of their time since its opening on the 28th in the squat. While they may know of one-another, the two groups are not co-extensive and in no case could the squat be considered the headquarters of people who destroyed property.

4. "They escalated situations on the 30th, leading to the tear-gassing of passive, non-violent protesters." Note that tear-gassing, pepper-spraying and the shooting of rubber bullets all began before the black blocs (as far as we know) started engaging in property destruction. In addition, we must resist the tendency to establish a causal relationship between police repression and protest in any form, whether it involved property destruction or not. The police are charged with protecting the

interests of the wealthy few and the blame for the violence cannot be placed upon those who protest those interests.

5. Conversely: "They acted in response to the police repression." While this might be a more positive representation of the black bloc, it is nevertheless false. We refuse to be misconstrued as a purely reactionary force. While the logic of the black bloc may not make sense to some, it is in any case a pro-active logic.

6. "They are a bunch of angry adolescent boys." Aside from the fact that it belies a disturbing ageism and sexism, it is false. Property destruction is not merely macho rabble-rousing or testosterone-laden angst release. Nor is it displaced and reactionary anger. It is strategically and specifically targeted direct action against corporate interests.

7. "They just want to fight." This is pretty absurd, and it conveniently ignores the eagerness of "peace police" to fight us. Of all the groups engaging in direct action, the black bloc was perhaps the least interested in engaging the authorities and we certainly had no interest in fighting with other anti-WTO activists (despite some rather strong disagreements over tactics).

8. "They are a chaotic, disorganized and opportunistic mob." While many of us could surely spend days arguing over what "chaotic" means, we were certainly not disorganized. The organization may have been fluid and dynamic, but it was tight. As for the charge of opportunism, it would be hard to imagine who of the thousands in attendance didn't take advantage of the opportunity created in Seattle to advance their agenda. The question becomes, then, whether or not we helped create that opportunity and most of us certainly did (which leads us to the next myth):

9. "They don't know the issues" or "they aren't activists who've been working on this." While we may not be professional activists, we've all been working on this convergence in Seattle for months. Some of us did work in our home-towns and others came to Seattle months in advance to work on it. To be sure, we were responsible for many hundreds of people who came out on the streets on the 30th, only a very small minority of which had anything to do with the black bloc. Most of us have been studying the effects of the global economy, genetic engineering, resource extraction, transportation, labor practices, elimination of indigenous autonomy, animal rights and human rights and we've been doing activism on these issues for many years. We are neither ill-informed nor unexperienced.

10. "Masked anarchists are anti-democratic and secretive because they hide their identities." Let's face it (with or without a mask)—we aren't living in a democracy right now. If this week has not made it plain enough, let us remind you—we are living in a police state. People tell us that if we really think that we're right, we wouldn't be hiding behind masks. "The truth will prevail" is the assertion. While this is a fine and noble goal, it does not jive with the present reality. Those who pose the greatest threat to the interests of Capital and State will be persecuted. Some pacifists would have us accept this persecution gleefully. Others would tell us that it is a worthy sacrifice. We are not so morose. Nor do we feel we have the privilege to accept persecution as a sacrifice: persecution to us is a daily

inevitability and we treasure our few freedoms. To accept incarceration as a form of flattery betrays a large amount of "first world" privilege. We feel that an attack on private property is necessary if we are to rebuild a world which is useful, healthful and joyful for everyone. And this despite the fact that hypertrophied private property rights in this country translate into felony charges for any property destruction over \$250.

MOTIVATIONS OF THE BLACK BLOC

The primary purpose of this communique is to diffuse some of the aura of mystery that surrounds the black bloc and make some of its motivations more transparent, since our masks cannot be.

ON THE VIOLENCE OF PROPERTY

We contend that property destruction is not a violent activity unless it destroys lives or causes pain in the process. By this definition, private property—especially corporate private property—is itself infinitely more violent than any action taken against it. Private property should be distinguished from personal property. The latter is based upon use while the former is based upon trade. The premise of personal property is that each of us has what s/he needs. The premise of private property is that each of us has something that someone else needs or wants.

In a society based on private property rights, those who are able to accrue more of what others need or want have greater power. By extension, they wield greater control over what others perceive as needs and desires, usually in the interest of increasing profit to themselves. Advocates of "free trade" would like to see this process to its logical conclusion: a network of a few industry monopolists with ultimate control over the lives of the everyone else. Advocates of "fair trade" would like to see this process mitigated by government regulations meant to superficially impose basic humanitarian standards.

As anarchists, we despise both positions. Private property—and capitalism, by extension—is intrinsically violent and repressive and cannot be reformed or mitigated. Whether the power of everyone is concentrated into the hands of a few corporate heads or diverted into a regulatory apparatus charged with mitigating the disasters of the latter, no one can be as free or as powerful as they could be in a non-hierarchical society. When we smash a window, we aim to destroy the thin veneer of legitimacy that surrounds private property rights. At the same time, we exorcise that set of violent and destructive social relationships which has been imbued in almost everything around us.

By "destroying" private property, we convert its limited exchange value into an expanded use value. A storefront window becomes a vent to let some fresh air into the oppressive atmosphere of a retail outlet (at least until the police decide to tear-gas a nearby road blockade). A newspaper box becomes a tool for creating such vents or a small blockade for the reclamation of public space or an object to improve one's vantage point by standing on it. A dumpster becomes an

obstruction to a phalanx of rioting cops and a source of heat and light. A building facade becomes a message board to record brainstorm ideas for a better world. After N30, many people will never see a shop window or a hammer the same way again. The potential uses of an entire cityscape have increased a thousand-fold. The number of broken windows pales in comparison to the number broken spells—spells cast by a corporate hegemony to lull us into forgetfulness of all the violence committed in the name of private property rights and of all the potential of a society without them. Broken windows can be boarded up (with

yet more waste of our forests) and eventually replaced, but the shattering of assumptions will hopefully persist for some time to come.

Against Capital and State,
the ACME Collective
"Peasant Revolt!"

Disclaimer: these observations and analyses represent only those of the ACME Collective and should not be construed to be representative of the rest of the black bloc on N30 or anyone else who engaged in riot or property destruction that day. □

Initiative for a Northeastern Federation of Anarchist-Communists (NEFAC) Solidarity statement to the anti-WTO anarchist black bloc

The following statement is criticized in "Reply to an anarchist" starting on page 27.

The World Trade Organization (WTO), an international decision-making body and enforcement agency for unrestricted globalized capitalism, met recently in Seattle, Washington, for its Third Ministerial Conference. The WTO is a 133-nation governmental organization which favors multinational corporations, exploits farmers, supports child slavery, denies workers' rights, and destroys environments around the globe. On November 30th, as delegates were scheduled to begin the opening ceremonies of the week-long conference, they were met by tens of thousands of protesters who not only prevented the WTO's opening ceremonies from taking place, but also managed to shut down the entire downtown shopping district of Seattle for the better part of the day. This was achieved by the use of large-scale festive resistance, innovative protest tactics and solidarity amongst the varying constituencies of demonstrators.

As activists built effective blockades and successfully occupied street after street throughout the day, the police responded with the unprovoked use of tear gas, pepper spray, rubber bullets, concussion grenades, pain-compliance holds, and clubbings, thus forcing a volatile situation into a series of riotous street battles. As part of the more militant forms of protest, a loosely organized cluster of individuals and affinity groups known as the anarchist black bloc, engaged in various forms of economic disruption by destroying specifically targeted corporate property. The corporations targeted included: NikeTown and Levi's (whose overpriced products are made in sweatshops), Fidelity Investment (major investor in Occidental Petroleum, the bane of the U'wa tribe in Columbia), the Bank of America, U.S. Bancorp, Key Bank, and Washington Mutual Bank (financial institutions key in the expansion of corporate repression), among others.

The ACME Collective, in their communique on the black bloc, said it best by stating:

"As anarchists, we contend that property destruction is not a violent activity unless it destroys lives or causes pain in the process. By this definition, private property—especially corporate private property—is itself infinitely more violent than

any action taken against it.

Private property should be distinguished from personal property. The latter is based upon use, while the former is based upon trade. The premise of personal property is that each of us has what s/he needs. The premise of private property is that each of us has something that someone else needs or wants. In a society based on private property rights, those who are able to accrue more of what others need or want have greater power. By extension, they wield greater control over what others perceive as needs and desires, usually in the interest of increasing profit to themselves.

Advocates of "free trade" would like to see this process to its logical conclusion: a network of a few industry monopolists with ultimate control over the lives of everyone else. Advocates of "fair trade" would like to see this process mitigated by government regulations meant to superficially impose basic humanitarian standards. As anarchists, we despise both positions. Private property—and capitalism, by extension—is intrinsic violent and repressive and cannot be reformed or mitigated. Whether the power of everyone is concentrated into the hands of a few corporate heads or diverted into a regulatory apparatus charged with mitigating the disasters of the latter, no one can be as free or as powerful as they could be in a non-hierarchical society."

We, the Initiative for a Northeastern Federation of Anarchist-Communists, express our deepest solidarity with our comrades who took it upon themselves to strike capitalism where it hurts and demonstrating to the world the important role militant resistance will play in the struggles yet to come.

Do not let the blows against this capitalist system cease! From Athens, Greece to the streets of Seattle . . . Our anarchist resistance is, and will continue to be, as transnational as capital!

Solidarity and Revolution,

The Initiative for a Northeastern Federation of Anarchist-Communists

signed; Groupe Anarchiste Emile-Henry (Quebec), Nosotros Group (Baltimore), Prole Revolt (Morgantown, WV), We Dare Be Free (Boston), Sabate (Boston), and a number of individual revolutionary anarchist-communists from New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Connecticut, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Ohio, New York and Illinois. □

Blacks imprisoned in 'Bastilles for the poor'

By Tim Hall

Below is the editorial from the current issue of *Struggle*, an anti-establishment literary journal oriented to the working-class struggle. A brief description of *Struggle* can be found on page 61.

Regular readers of *Struggle* will remember that I used to write editorials commenting on letters that came to the magazine. I only stopped because for a while there were no letters that seemed to be of general interest. Now a few have arrived, so here I am with another such editorial.

But before I get into the letters, a word about politics and literature. Readers are aware that *Struggle* upholds a revolutionary political outlook and that we select literature for the magazine with, in part, a political criterion. Literature for *Struggle* has to have some literary charm or power but it also must be critical in some significant way of the capitalist establishment. I hope that I make the kind of selections that are eye-opening as well as lively and entertaining or emotionally powerful. But the letters we get usually focus on the politics of various pieces in the magazine, not on their style. Sometimes we get comments that certain poems are crude and dogmatic; in those cases, the reader is usually right, but I printed those poems because I thought that they expressed some kind of insight and had some kind of emotional strength, in spite of their crudeness.

The fact that the letters are so political confirms one of the main points that this magazine has been making over the years: that literature is unavoidably political. Literature cannot help but express a viewpoint about the world and society; it cannot help being either critical or supportive of the status quo. And if it is critical, it will inevitably imply or state one degree of criticism or another, right up to calling for a revolutionary overthrow of the ruling class. While that is my point of view, I don't restrict *Struggle* to literature with that viewpoint, but open it to various forms of opposition to the powers that be, with special emphasis on works which revolve around the struggles of the working masses against oppression. (Someone wrote calling for a variety of anti-establishment viewpoints in *Struggle*. Hell, it's already there! Few of the writers fully agree with me politically.) Consequently, I think that it is entirely fitting to reprint parts of some of these letters and engage in political discussion in this literary magazine.

A controversy over black prisoners

It seems that the last issue (Summer 1999) has raised some questions in the minds of some readers. One of these letters is from Billie Louise Jones, a frequent contributor of fiction to the magazine. Billie has been a strong supporter of the magazine and has contributed four short stories, which were notable for their understanding of the problems facing southern working-

class people. One, "New Orleans International Airport," was a sensitive and subtle portrait of the relationship between an older, black, southern blues musician and the white rocker whose career was inspired by him. Another described the struggle of a single mother to escape welfare and make it back into the workforce. Billie is a little upset by our Summer issue due to the prominence it gives to the voices of African-American prisoners. Let me quote from her letter:

"I feel I must tell you that I do not believe that burglars, rapists, muggers, armed robbers, and killers are political prisoners. If these particular prisoners are mostly black, that is another question. It does them no good to play along with their attitude; it does the cause of social justice no good. . . . These political prisoners are preying on the black community first and foremost. . . . The question *Struggle* should raise is not, why are these black men in jail? It is, why are these black people who are their victims being denied protection of the law?"

Struggle has never based its sympathy for black (or other) prisoners on the idea that they are all political prisoners in the strict sense of the word. Only a few of them are in jail directly because of their political activities. One prominent black prisoner, Mumia Abu-Jamal, the Philadelphia anti-racist journalist and former Black Panther who is on Death Row, was arrested following a deadly altercation with the police; it is the blatant injustice of his trial process which has led him to be considered a political prisoner. But before anyone brags that America is free of repression and political prisoners, let us remember that in the '60's prominent black leaders were assassinated, some of them (like Black Panther Fred Hampton of Chicago) openly murdered by the police. More recently there have been numerous atrocious police beatings, killings and rapes — yes, rapes — of black folk. Even indefinite detentions occur here. A number of Arab immigrants have been held for as long as three and a half years on the basis of evidence which they were not allowed to see. (Anthony Lewis column, *Detroit Free Press*, October 29, 1999.) The U.S. government, therefore, is not above taking political prisoners; repression so extreme is just not necessary to preserve the capitalist system at present, when mass protest and rebellion is at a low level. In those tyrannies like Guatemala, where revolutionary movements existed, the rich capitalists needed their CIA-trained police to round up and "disappear" thousands. Political imprisonment is not alien to the American-dominated world order.

But apart from the question of political prisoners per se, is it right to warehouse tens of thousands of blacks (mostly men) in prison? Billie seems to think so (and she even hints at arresting more).

Victims to the street

Let me tell you the story of someone I will rename Raymond but who is a real person, a black man in his 40's, related to a very dear friend of mine. When Raymond was very young he was involved in a terrible traffic accident. His family was en route to Alabama with his older brother driving. The accident threw Raymond and his younger brother from the station wagon. The younger brother was decapitated and Raymond was in a coma with severe lacerations. This accident (and the pain-killers he was given) may have been a pivotal experience in his life. Raymond's brothers and sisters, like his parents, are very hard-working but Raymond continually got into trouble. By his 40's he had a long record but it was of relatively minor offenses, at worst breaking and entering a vehicle. There is no violence in his history. Recently he seemed to be getting his life in order — working steadily and going to therapy. Some weeks ago police arrested him, claiming he possessed a stolen CD, though there was no evidence that the CD Raymond had was actually the stolen one. The prosecutor called for classifying Raymond as a "habitual offender" and sending him up for 25 years. The court-appointed lawyer urged him to plead guilty, but his family was able to raise enough money to get a competent lawyer. In court it was revealed that Raymond was arrested because he fit the description of "a black man in white tennis shoes." The judge mocked the prosecutor and dismissed the case, but Raymond was still not freed. Raymond was on parole at the time of the arrest, so the arrest became a parole violation. Even though the court case was dismissed, his case must go before the parole board. And in spite of the dismissal of charges the parole officer is calling for a "habitual" classification and a long sentence, perhaps 25 years (an outcome thought unlikely by the lawyer, but I suspect that such travesties of justice have occurred). So I would ask Billie: if it is this easy to get a 25-year sentence, how many of those black prisoners you automatically label "burglars," etc., are over-sentenced to a criminal degree, and how many of them actually did not do what they are serving time for?

So is it any surprise that the United States has the highest per capita imprisonment rate in the world, exceeding apartheid South Africa and the former Soviet Union? Blacks form a percentage of the prison population far in excess of the percentage of blacks in the overall population. The black prisoners are overwhelmingly of poor and working-class origin and the same can be said of the prisoners of other minorities and the white prisoners as well. In fact, these prisons are, in the apt words of English revolutionary workers of the last century, "bastilles for the poor." (The Bastille was the prison in which dissidents and the poor were entombed before the French Revolution of 1789; one of the first acts of the Revolution was the storming of the Bastille and the freeing of the prisoners.) Increasingly American prisons today resemble early English workhouses as more and more production for profit takes place within their walls, using the convicts as slave labor. None of the capitalists who looted the national budget to get repaid for their S&L swindle of the 1980's are rotting there, only poor folk. The prison system only partly functions in the way Billie believes —

to protect society from criminals. In major ways it also functions as an organ of class and racial repression and as a slave-labor system to generate profits for the capitalists.

Why are black prisoners warehoused?

The reason *Struggle* has emphasized the voices of black prisoners is because they speak out against this great wrong. Their poems have drawn attention to the causes of crime and to the injustice of the "criminal justice" system. Poverty and exploitation create the social climate and the need in many cases for the "lower-class" forms of crime. This is the crime that Billie is concerned about affecting the black (and other) communities. It cannot be excused, but it also cannot be dealt with by over-sentencing and by conviction of innocent people. Crime rates have dropped in the present growing economy, suggesting the dependence of crime on economics, but when economic growth inevitably slows or stops, crime will increase once again. Mass struggles for increased living standards and a healthier cultural life for working people plus rehabilitation for criminals can reduce crime under capitalism, while only the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism, with all its ills, can lead to the elimination of crime altogether. But today, while society is dominated and strangled by the rich, once a criminal (or innocent person) is charged, if he or she is working-class the burden of prosecution and imprisonment falls infinitely more heavily upon them. The poorest workers, whatever their color, especially lack the finances to mount an effective defense. As Raymond's case shows, the court-appointed lawyers are a joke; without \$7500 for a competent lawyer Raymond would already be rotting for life. Consequently, white-collar and country-club crime goes ignored or unpunished while the blue-collar and street (and trailer park) people fill the prisons. And once the criminal (or non-criminal) arrives in prison, he or she is given little help to rehabilitate. Instead, the prisoner often meets with harsh deprivations of rights such as the denial of personal property, solitary confinement, physical violence, sexual abuse, etc.

But why does the burden of prison fall more heavily on black and other dark-skinned minorities? For one, the history of racial oppression beginning with slavery and continuing today with racism and police atrocities has intensified poverty, social tensions and crime in the black working-class communities in comparison with communities of white workers. I saw this first-hand: as an inner-city cab driver in Detroit from 1977 to 1988, I watched as the black working-class community was decimated by the closing of half the auto plants, eliminating jobs which blacks had only just gotten in large numbers since the '60's. Neither the Republicans nor the Democrats (including those sold-out lackeys of big money, the union bureaucrats) lifted a finger to help the black and worker masses. They helped the auto bosses like Lee Iacocca grab millions while solid black worker families and neighborhoods were torn apart by job loss, violence and drugs. Large numbers of white workers lost out too, but much of black Detroit was turned into a wasteland. And in the years since, both the Republican and the Democratic parties have waged a vicious law-and-order campaign, begun under

Reagan but continued under Bush and Clinton, which has targeted the black communities under the slogan "war on drugs." This "war," with its "three strikes and out" programs and extreme militarization of police departments, has led to the imprisonment and over-sentencing of thousands of black men guilty of, at most, low-level participation in the drug trade. Few of the drug kingpins have been jailed. And this "war" has been carried out in a racist manner: no cops have been busting down the doors of big shots in Grosse Pointe or Shaker Heights or Westchester County. Even the sentencing for parallel crimes has been biased: a much larger sentence has been imposed for possession of crack cocaine (the drug of choice in the black ghettos) than for the same amount of powdered cocaine (more commonly used by whites), though the chemical is the same.

Therefore, I believe that very large numbers of black prisoners are the victims of over-sentencing and even false convictions. Certainly many white prisoners have suffered similar injustices and *Struggle* will fight for them all, but it is only realistic and fair to stress the blatant racism expressed in massive over-imprisonment of people of color. When some black prisoners become politically conscious and describe themselves as political prisoners, though they were not originally arrested for political issues, I can't become upset, for the racism and class oppression when often led to their imprisonment or increased their sentences was itself political.

The origin of the problem of black prisoner warehousing

Underlying the imprisonment issue is not only the oppression of all working people, of all colors, by the government of the rich, but also the special national oppression of African-Americans and the related oppression of other colored national minorities. Sure, chattel slavery is in the past (though prison slavery is coming in), and, sure, the civil rights movement and black rebellions won some important gains. But racism — institutional and personal — still rages on. And the powerful mass struggles of African-Americans in the '60's marked their communities as a priority to suppress. With all due respect to Billie, who has written sensitively about black characters in her fiction, white working people — indeed, all fair-minded whites — have the moral duty to join with blacks, Latinos and Native Americans in the fight against racial and national oppression, including the warehousing of black males in prisons. These conditions are an absolute outrage. Not to take such a position is to abandon one's stand on the side of the oppressed of the earth. For a writer, such a failure endangers the truth and humanity of one's fiction or poetry.

But the duty to resist racial oppression is not just based on morality; it is also in the self-interest of white working people to do so. This brings us to another letter, from a white prisoner, James Hansen, locked up in Wisconsin. He writes:

"I just received your Summer 1999 issue of *Struggle* and I've got to tell you I wasn't too pleased. I'm sorry but I can't stand this 'white-guilt' any more. I don't believe in superiority or separation of race. I do have pride for my people

and history. . . . The fact that when I asked for your zine I was hoping it was about our struggle against the capitalists How can I respect people who automatically place me as a white racist?"

Mr. Hansen goes on to say that he was formerly involved in racist movements but he has rejected racism and is looking towards class struggle and Marxism, and he asks for revolutionary literature. Well, I do not believe that *Struggle* has published anything that straight-out calls all whites racists. If this is implied somewhere, I published that piece because its central point focused sharply on some form of racist brutality. Mr. Hansen does not mention any specific writings which bothered him but he does list several from the last issue that he did like. I think it is understandable that he would see condemnations of racism by black writers and read into them a condemnation of all whites. The voices speaking out today for black-and-white working-class unity against the capitalists are weak, and few stress or explain the need for such unity against racism. Instead of working-class unity against racism, the dominant trend in the black community today is the call for unity of all blacks — workers with businessmen, politicians and professionals — to build up black businesses. This call originates from the black capitalists and politicians (the bourgeoisie) who suck up to the rich whites to fund enterprises that will enrich themselves and their masters off the labor of black workers. The white CEO's are at the top of the pyramid; they are the principal benefactors of racism and the last thing they want is a united working class cutting their profits or overthrowing them. So the black bourgeoisie will talk a blue streak against racism but will not lead a serious mass fight against their rich white sugar daddies. Thus bourgeois nationalism leaves the black workers isolated, to fight racism alone, all the more so because its rhetoric tends to blame all whites for racism, not to call for the unity of all workers against it. The path of working-class unity, advocated by communists like myself, is the only way to make the anti-racist struggle truly powerful. Mr. Hansen may hear a certain echo of nationalist thinking in some of the poetry in *Struggle* and if so, he is right. But the problems these poems point to are real, and if I waited for pure Marxist poetry I would have no magazine. The answer is to listen to the voices which identify racist conditions and work for a common struggle of all working people against racism and its mother, capitalism.

As for the matter of "white pride" which Mr. Hansen raises, a closer look is necessary. The white capitalists dominate U.S. politics, economics and culture and this had led to slightly better conditions for the white working masses compared to blacks, although ultimately all working people are exploited and ground under the heel of big money. But to call for pride in "whiteness" is to praise and support the war-making, racist white bourgeoisie. These dogs will always resort to appeals to "whiteness" to fool white workers into helping them oppress the darker peoples. Pride should be reserved for whites who join with the multicolored masses to fight the ruling powers; and it is not their whiteness but their fighting stand that should be supported.

"Labor in the white skin cannot be emancipated where in the black it is branded" — Karl Marx

Mr. Hansen is disappointed that *Struggle's* featuring of these poetic outcries does not seem to meet his definition of class struggle and Marxism. It is admirable that he has left the racist skinheads and renounced racism and is approaching Marxism with the unity of the workers in mind. This man has come a long way on his own and I applaud him. But the very unity that he wants — and Marxism calls for — cannot be achieved without white working people embracing the anti-racist struggle. This does not mean supporting everything the black businessmen call for; it primarily means aiding the black working masses. This, in turn, will help the black workers break away from the leadership of the businessmen and build the working-class movement.

Only a united, vigorous fight against racism and all injustice can construct this multicolored working-class unity. And such unity is indispensable if the working class as a whole is ever to get rid of the rule of the capitalist bloodsuckers and develop a society of political and economic and cultural freedom. The workers cannot focus solely on getting rid of the bosses and

ignore political and cultural issues such as racism. For the working class to fully unite and overthrow class domination, it must consistently struggle against all forms of oppression, not only the outright class rule of the rich but against racism, anti-immigrant reaction, sexism and homophobia as well as the domination of poor countries by richer countries. If even one of these citadels of oppression is left standing, it will lead to a split in the working class, the rich will come to power again in one form or another and the revolution will have to be fought all over again. Karl Marx's statement above rings as true today as it was when he wrote it during the American Civil War against Slavery 140 years ago. The fundamental war of the 20th and 21st centuries — the war of the workers against the bosses, leading to the Marxist revolution — is not a single skirmish line with all the workers lining up one day on one side and all the bosses on the other. Instead, it is a complex effort to marshal all the oppressed sections of the population into unity against the capitalist oppressors, under the leadership of the class-conscious workers of all colors and nationalities. To reach that goal, which is ours and we hope is Mr. Hansen's, the struggle against racism must be a major ingredient. □

Down with the Russian war against the Chechen people!

Continued from the front page

Yeltsin and now acting President Putin, the Russia which is hailed by President Clinton and the European Union—is showing itself to be an imperialist predator, just like the other big powers.

This war is not in the interest of the Russian workers. For the last decade of free-market experiments, the Russian workers and those of neighboring countries have suffered a calamitous decline in their living standards. A minority of Russians have grown super-rich, while unemployment has zoomed, health care and education has broken down, pensions and wages frequently aren't paid, and industrial production has plummeted. But the Russian government and the newly-rich tell the workers that they have a common interest in subjugating neighboring countries like Chechnya. In reality, Russian workers have an important interest in opposing this war. Not only are Russian conscripts cannonfodder, but Russian workers must unite with the workers of neighboring countries in order to wage an effective class struggle against the bourgeoisie which is profiting from their misery.

This war also shows the mercenary nature of the Western powers, despite their hypocritical show of concern about the devastation of civilians. Clinton and the other leaders of Western imperialism have repeatedly stated their agreement with Russia's declared aims in invading Chechnya: they object only to the excessive savagery of Russia's methods, fearing that it might inflame the region. The Cold War is over, and the free-market government in Russia is now an ally of the other imperialist powers, even if the alliance is partial and shaky. So long as this relationship lasts, Russia will be granted the prerogatives of a fellow-imperialist power, such as denying the national rights of various unfortunate small peoples. That's why the Western powers have allowed Russia, when concentrating troops in Chechnya, to exceed the limitations on troop strength set down in the Conventional Forces in Europe Treaty, and why they helped finance Russia during the first Chechen war. The Western powers are interested in making profits off the Caucasus, not in upholding people's rights.

The only just solution to the present war in Chechnya is for the Russian military to get out and for Chechen independence to be recognized. The ending of the first Chechen war without recognition of the right to self-determination of Chechnya is what has paved the way for the second Chechen war. Moreover, the only way that workers and socialist activists around the world can encourage the building of international bonds with the Chechen working masses is by defending the right of Chechens to decide for themselves whether Chechnya should be part of Russia, independent, or part of some other state. So long as Russia continues to strangle Chechnya, whether by harassment or by invasion, the economic and political situation in Chechnya will continue to deteriorate and Islamic extremism will gain further influence. Meanwhile, whether competing with Russia for influence or working together with the Russian government, the Western imperialist powers will only be concerned with their

own strategic and economic interests, not with the welfare of the Chechen people.

A war for oil and political advantage

The Russia government presents its war on Chechnya as simply an operation against some terrorists who invaded Dagestan. It thus seeks to put itself in the best possible light, since the incursion of Islamic extremists from Chechnya into Dagestan was not particularly popular there. But the defeat of the raids on Dagestan didn't require invading Chechnya: that was just a pretext. The Russian government's real reasons for starting the second Chechen war quite different:

* The immediate cause of the war was the desire of the Yeltsin government (and then its successor, the Putin government) to drown its domestic opposition in a wave of chauvinism by means of a little war. The Chechen people were to be sacrificed for the sake of a political maneuver: war was to be waged, towns devastated, thousands of people killed, refugees sent running across the countryside, all so former President Yeltsin could install Vladimir Putin as his successor and have him win an election.

Yeltsin's government was quite unpopular due to the economic miseries suffered by the Russian people. He appointed Putin Prime Minister in the middle of last year, and Putin became the spokesperson for a policy of revenge against the Chechens. Putin's popularity soared on the strength of Russian victories in bombarding villages and plundering towns. As a result, the Yeltsin government won a resounding victory in the parliamentary elections of December 19, 1999, with a new party supporting Putin coming in just behind the largest opposition party, Zyuganov's so-called "Communist" Party of the Russian Federation, which is actually a state-capitalist and Stalinist party and itself is no friend of the Chechen people. Then, as the new millennium began, Yeltsin resigned as President, thus making Putin the Acting President. This means that presidential elections will be moved forward to March 26, at which time Putin hopes to surf a river of Chechen blood to victory. One reason that the Russian government was so anxious to take Grozny is to allow Putin to boast of his Chechen victories in the upcoming presidential campaign. But Chechen resistance and rising Russian casualties may put a spoke in Putin's plans.

* Aside from the immediate political calculations, this is also a Russian war for oil. Chechnya's own oil fields have been in decline for decades, but they're still useful for North Caucasian supplies. Even more significant is that Chechnya has important refining facilities and also has a key oil pipeline across it. If Russia wants to offer Western oil companies a ready-made route for Caspian sea oil to Europe through Russian territory, Chechnya is important for it, although Russia also has plans to build a new pipeline that skirts Chechnya. Actually, the agreement that ended the first Chechen war included cooperation with respect to the oil pipeline. Indeed, the Chechen government has always been interested in making deals with Russia over oil, since this would be highly profitable for it. With respect to oil, and other economic issues, there would in all likelihood remain close connections between Russia and an independent Chechnya. But

the Russian bourgeoisie is not satisfied with this; it has the imperialist itch for total control. It controlled Chechen resources by fiat in the past, and it wishes to do so in the future.

* The Russian bourgeoisie also supports the subjugation of Chechnya as an important sign of Russian power in the Caucasus overall. It fears that losing control of Chechnya erodes its ability to bully the now-independent Transcaucasian republics of Georgia, Azerbaijan, and Armenia, which were formerly part of the Soviet Union. And it wants to demonstrate to the North Caucasian regions in the present Russian Federation that it won't allow any of them to leave, on pain of suffering the fate of their neighbor Chechnya. This is not simply a question of oil, but a question of seeking to dominate a strategic region, and a question of the old Russian rivalry with Turkey over the Caucasus.

* The present war is also revenge for the loss of the first Chechen war. The peace settlement of 1996 (Khasavyurt accords) did not settle the status of Chechnya: it left the issue of independence to be settled by the end of 2001. In practice, Chechen authorities were completely independent of Moscow, but Chechnya was still economically and politically strangled by Russia and not legally recognized by Russia or any other country in the world. So the Russian government simply waited for another opportunity to deal with Chechnya. And the Russian military, in particular, wanted an opportunity to erase the memory of an ignominious defeat. Just as many American conservatives and militarists believe that the U.S. could have defeated Vietnam, if only the politicians hadn't interfered, so too do powerful forces in the Russian military believe that they could have defeated Chechnya. They regard the Khasavyurt accords that ended the first Chechen war as treachery. For that matter, they are also nursing other wounds: thus they blame the loss of the war in Afghanistan on Gorbachev. After more than a decade of what, in their eyes, amounts to treason, they want a chance to show what the Russian military can do. This is not just a matter of regretting the past, but of seeking to show that Russia is still a military power to be reckoned with. This attitude is also manifested in the Russian bourgeoisie's desire that Russia should be included in military arrangements around the world. And it can also be seen in Yeltsin's repeatedly responding to criticism of Russian atrocities in Chechnya by reminding the world in December that "Russia has a full arsenal of nuclear weapons" (*New York Times*, December 9) and by Putin abandoning, in early January, Russia's no-first-use policy about nuclear weapons.

Carving out a sphere of influence

While the Chechen wars are among the worst things that the new, free-market Russia has done in the Caucasus, they are consistent with the overall way in which the Russian bourgeoisie has sought to maintain its influence there in the last decade. The Russians had been dominant in the Soviet ruling class, but the Soviet Union had dissolved in December 1991, as the old Stalinist system of state-capitalism collapsed. This accelerated centrifugal tendencies which the Russian bourgeoisie has been striving to combat.

The Soviet Union had been composed of "union republics"

that were supposed to have the right to self-determination according to the old Soviet constitution: with the collapse of the Soviet Union, they all became independent (some having become independent a few months earlier). Moreover, there are about 89 autonomous republics and regions inside the Russian federation. These areas did not have the right to self-determination according to the old Soviet Constitution, and indeed didn't necessarily have non-Russian majorities, but they did demand additional rights. Indeed, Yeltsin himself, in the period leading up to the dissolution of the USSR, had sought support from these areas with the appeal to "take all the sovereignty that you can swallow". "Sovereignty" was quite a popular slogan at the time, and it was undoubtedly given different meanings by different people.

With the dissolution of the old bonds of Soviet days, Russia sought to build up new bonds. It began negotiations on a new "union treaty" with its autonomous areas, while it spearheaded the formation of the "Commonwealth of Independent States" (CIS), with which it sought to unite with a number of the former Soviet republics. Well, it is perfectly natural that new forms of association should arise between various of the countries which previously were in the Soviet Union. Indeed, the form of the Soviet Union, which was supposed to unite nations while preserving their national rights, was not the problem: this form was supposed to implement the Leninist view concerning the importance of the right to self-determination, even under socialism. The problem was that the Soviet revolution degenerated into Stalinist state-capitalism and, among other things, made a mockery of the promises of national rights. It was the decades of Russian domination that destroyed the Soviet Union. In the future, new attempts at association will undoubtedly be made. This would certainly take place after new proletarian revolutions, but a tendency in this direction may also manifest itself under capitalism. There are economic and social ties between various of these areas, so that, everything else being equal, such association might be economically advantageous. It might take a number of different attempts at association before something stable arises, and the regions won't necessarily be grouped together in the same combinations as occurred in Soviet days (e.g. some might group with Russia and some with other neighboring countries). And of course, the bourgeoisie ruling these countries will associate them only for the sake of greater exploitation. Nevertheless, from the point of view of the working class, such association might help promote unity of action in the class struggle over a wider area.

But the Russian bourgeoisie has not been satisfied with promoting a union based on the economic and social gravitation of different regions towards each other. It has sought to coerce various countries into the CIS, and to make the CIS into another tool of Russian domination. For example, it has sought to carve out a sphere of influence in the Caucasus.

The more southern part of the Caucasus is the Transcaucasus, composed of three former republics of the Soviet Union: Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan. While the Armenian government was enthusiastic about the CIS, Russia has resorted to arm-twisting with respect to Georgia and Azerbaijan. Russia backed a coup against Georgian president Gamsakhurdia,

overthrowing him at the start of 1992, although fighting continued for several years. The next Georgian president, Shevardnadze, still might not have led Georgia into CIS, so Russian sponsored a secessionist revolt in the Abkhazia region of Georgia in 1992. Weakened by this in-fighting, Georgia decided to accept Russian troops on its territory and join the CIS. Meanwhile, Russia's backing of the Abkhaz revolt had some unintended consequences: for one thing, Russia supported and trained various Islamic militants and Chechens to fight in Abkhazia, including Shamil Basayev, thus helping to create a nucleus for the armed forces that later defeated Russia in the first Chechen war as well as training the man who led the recent incursions into Dagestan. Russia has also used similar dirty methods in Azerbaijan, where Russia strongly backed the overthrow of President Abulfaz Elchibey.

The Russian bourgeoisie has used such methods not just with respect to the independent republics in the CIS, but in order to pressure various of the autonomous regions of the Russian republic in the North Caucasus. The Chechen wars are the most blatant example, of course. But the first Chechen war only took place after various other methods of pressure had failed, such as an economic blockade of Chechnya, the so-called "half-force option" of arming opposition groups with heavy weapons and tanks so they could attempt a coup in Grozny, and attempts to assassinate Chechen President Dudayev (the Russians finally succeeded in this in 1996, near the end of the first Chechen war). All in all, the Russian methods in the Caucasus resemble many of the methods that the American bourgeoisie has used to keep Central America in line, from "low-intensity conflict" against recalcitrant governments to blockade to direct invasion; indeed, the Russian government has shown a good deal of interest in the American doctrine of "low-intensity conflict".

By this means, the Russian bourgeoisie is seeking to consolidate a sphere of influence in the Caucasus. No spheres are guaranteed to be permanent. But although the Western powers are seeking ties and influence with the Transcaucasus and profits from commercial deals, they currently—to a certain extent—recognize the existence of such a Russian sphere. Chechnya is recognized as Russian, no matter what the opinion of the local population. And the outside powers have relatively few complaints about the "low-intensity conflicts" generated by Moscow in the region.

However, the problem with carving out a sphere of influence with such methods, is that it generates opposition and hatred among the local populations. It doesn't unite the peoples of the region with Russia; it pushes them further away, just as Russian domination during the days of state-capitalism did. It may only be "fair"—as bourgeois world politics go—that the Russian bourgeoisie tries to build up its own sphere, as the other great powers do, and that it be allowed the same dirty methods as the Western bourgeoisie. But it would follow that it is only "fair"—from the point of view of the anti-imperialist-minded working people—that Russian imperialism meet the same condemnation as American, French, British and German imperialism.

The oppression of the Chechens

We have seen the motives and some of the methods of the Russian bourgeoisie. But what has led the Chechen people to their fierce and protracted resistance against overwhelming Russian military force? It is not love of the ineffectual Chechen governments and lack of social services which have followed their breakaway from Russia in 1991, and still less is it love of the local power brokers who have flourished in the absence of governmental authority. It was their desire to break down the old system under which they had lived.

Chechnya had not always been part of Russia. It wasn't until the second half of the 19th century, after the fierce series of wars and uprisings of 1817-1864 called the Caucasian¹⁸⁰ war, that Russian control was consolidated over the Chechen clans and all the Caucasus. Many of the small nationalities of the Caucasian mountains lost a good part of their population by death and forced relocations. The Chechens, having been one of the major forces in the Caucasian War, suffered heavily. An indelible mark was left even on the land itself, as what the Americans tried to do to Vietnam with the herbicide "Agent Orange" the Tsarist Russian army did to Chechnya with the ax. The forests of the Chechen lowlands had to go, as they provided cover for the guerrilla war of the Chechens. Even so, there was another rebellion in Chechnya in 1877-8.

The Bolshevik revolution of 1917 changed matters in the Caucasus. For the first time, a Russian government paid attention to the national rights of the various nationalities. It also attempted to foster social progress in Chechnya, established a written alphabet for the Chechen language in order to encourage literacy, and sought to bring Chechens into governmental, political and economic organizations. Relations between the Chechens and the new Soviet government went through some difficult periods, as different social groupings among the Chechens reacted differently to the prospect of social change, and as various issues concerning national rights and how to deal with pre-capitalist economy (such as prevailed among Chechens at that time) were a matter of controversy among the Soviet forces themselves. But, overall, this was a period of progress.

Unfortunately, the Soviet revolution died, and instead a Stalinist, state-capitalist society was consolidated in the Soviet Union. The Stalinist party was still called the "communist" party, but there was no longer anything Marxist or communist about it. The Chechens suffered particularly heavily from the forced manner in which the Stalinists implemented collectivization; from the purges of the 1930s, which decimated the Chechen activists who had joined the Soviet Communist Party or were otherwise part of the secular intelligentsia which was starting to develop; and from the attempt to stamp out Islam by coercion. And then, in 1944, the Stalinist government deported the entire Chechen population to Soviet Central Asia, mainly Kazakhstan. Chechnya was cleared of Chechens, with Russians, Cossacks, and others brought in to take over Chechen homes and towns, and the exiled Chechens were defined as suspicious people, subject to police supervision and restricted to lower-paying jobs. (See the chronology for further description of the brutal reality of the Chechen exile, and also a discussion of the fraudulent

pretext used to justify the exile.) It wasn't until Stalin's death in 1953 that conditions began to improve for the Chechens, and not until 1957 that they were allowed to return to Chechnya.

The Chechen exile is not some event of ancient history. Just about all of the older Chechens who played a role in the tumultuous events of the 1990s were exiled or born in the exile. Jokhar Dudayev, the first president of Chechnya, was a baby, less than a month old, when he, his parents, and his siblings were deported to Kazakhstan. Aslan Maskhadov, the current president of Chechnya, was born in exile in Kazakhstan. Ruslan Kasbulatov, the Chechen who was at one time the leader of the Russian parliamentary opposition, was also deported to Kazakhstan as an infant. And the list goes on.

When the Chechens returned to Chechnya, they still faced obstacles. Not only did the mass of Chechens receive little education and training in the exile, but they also faced discrimination in their own homeland. As a result, Russians and other nationalities had most of the higher and professional positions, while Chechens suffered massive unemployment, with 40% rural unemployment even in good times. Chechnya appears to be among the poorest and most backward regions of the Soviet Union or perhaps even the Caucasus, although many of the available figures concerning Chechen conditions have limited value: they usually aren't broken down according to how different sections of the population were affected (skilled urban workers, mostly non-Chechens, had different living conditions from rural, unskilled workers), and they generally don't take into account the underground economy which helped sustain many Chechens. Moreover, aside from the economic problems, the Chechens were subjected to an insulting propaganda from the Soviet state authorities in Chechnya, such as the notorious celebration of the 200th anniversary of the supposed voluntary union of Chechnya and Tsarist Russia.

But throughout the 60s through the 80s, the Chechens regained a number of positions. Their high birth rate helped them become the majority in their homeland once again, and they gradually began to fill various positions. But as the Soviet Union fell deeper and deeper into economic stagnation, the majority of Chechens found their economic position worsening. In a pattern familiar around the world, including in Chiapas where the Zapatista rebellion brought out, oil wealth and other riches can coexist with an indigenous population in great poverty. Larger and larger numbers of Chechen youth become migrant workers in the summer, looking for work elsewhere in the Soviet Union, and their families in Chechnya depended on the money sent back home.

The "Chechen revolution" and its aftermath

Things came to a head in Chechnya as a general ferment against the old state-capitalist system (falsely called "communism" by both the Western bourgeoisie and the Stalinists) spread throughout the Soviet Union at the end of the 80s and very beginning of the 90s. As unrest swept the Soviet Union, demonstrations took place in Chechnya on a variety of issues, from the language question to environmental ones. The attempted coup against Gorbachev in August 1991 by party

hard-liners gave rise to mass indignation in Chechnya as well as Russia: the resulting mass upsurge led to the victory of the "Chechen revolution". It differed from the outcome in some other Soviet republics in that the old party apparatus was completely thrown aside.

Due to the calumny which the Yeltsin showered on Chechen President Dudayev for years, refusing even to negotiate directly with him, one might imagine that they were always bitter political enemies. Actually, many Chechens were backers of Yeltsin during this early period, seeing in him the best hope to break up the old Soviet system. And Russian President Yeltsin, so long as he wasn't sure of the outcome of his power struggle with the old party apparatus, bid for support among the autonomous regions and republics of Russia; as we have seen, he encouraged them to "take all the sovereignty that you can swallow". As part of this, he allied with Chechen radicals such as Jokhar Dudayev. But as soon as Yeltsin felt that his power was secure, he then sought to stamp out the expectations of sovereignty that he himself had helped create, and he broke with Dudayev and the Chechen movement.

Moreover, the expectations of people throughout the Soviet Union in the breakup of the old system were soon to be disappointed. They wanted a better life, but all they got was a shift from state-capitalism to private capitalism. In Chechnya, there was de facto independence, not recognized by Russia.

But what was the social character of the new Chechen regime? No doubt it had a general bourgeois nationalist character, but it is hard to find much additional information about it. It appears that the Chechen President Dudayev attempted to maintain some of the social supports from Soviet times; thus, a bread subsidy keeping the price of this staple low was maintained until July 1993. According to one source, he speculated about "true socialism untainted by bureaucrats and petty greedy scoundrels". But meanwhile the economy appears to have been privatized, and it can be recalled that the leaders of the "Chechen revolution" had been supporters of that champion of free-market reforms, Yeltsin. Moreover, as Russia cut off most economic ties with Chechnya as punishment for its declaration of independence, the Chechen economy collapsed. In many ways, the economic disorganization in the period from the "Chechen revolution" until the start of the first Chechen war in November 1994 resembles the effects on Russia of the radical free-market reforms of Yeltsin. In Russia, millions of workers weren't paid wages, pensions were also in danger, and health and education declined, while in Chechnya the same things happened, but much more completely. In Russia, the number of state bureaucrats grew, although state services declined, and the same thing could be seen in Chechnya. In Russia, Yeltsin bombed parliament in October 1993, while Chechen President Dudayev had declared the dissolution of the once-supportive Chechen parliament earlier that same year. And neither in Russia nor Chechnya did the government do much to help the masses cope with the economic disaster.

The Chechen government was not a working class government. Although there had been some strikes during the "Chechen revolution", working class organization did not seem to play much of a role in Chechen politics. While there was a

noticeable proletarianization of much of the Chechen population during the exile and afterwards, Chechen politics was dominated by businessmen, Chechens who had made it into the former Soviet elite, traditional leaders, smugglers and people grown rich on the underground economy, etc. Many Chechen youth had experience as migrant workers, but this didn't translate into any form of class organization back in Chechnya. And the devastation of the Chechen economy, in wiping out jobs, wiped out workplace organization.

Discontent spread in Chechnya, and the Chechen elite was split into various factions. A Chechen opposition to the Dudayev government arose, but what it stood for is another question. Indeed, the Yeltsin government covertly manipulated much of this opposition, making it into a plaything for Russian subversion of Chechnya. But one thing the Chechen masses still wanted was to stay independent of Russia. So when the Russia invaded at the end of 1994, most of the Chechen population rallied around the Dudayev government, leading to Russian defeat in the first Chechen war.

The first Chechen war not only further devastated the Chechen economy, but it intensified the influence of Islamic militancy. A radical form of Islam spread especially, or perhaps mainly, among the fighters. After the war, despite the great victory against Russian aggression, the economy continued on the way down. The government was almost totally ineffectual, unable even to prevent the rampant kidnappings that scared away aid workers, engineers, doctors and all foreigners and further isolated Chechnya. There was nothing in the civilian economy to offer the militants who had fought the first Chechen war: most young men were unemployed. Nor was any there any revolutionary trend with an analysis of what the problem in Chechnya was and what Chechens should do about it. In this situation, supported by a number of leaders of the first Chechen war, such as Shamil Basayev, an Islamic opposition to the government grew, and the government itself took on more and more Islamic features. The second Chechen war has forced an amalgamation of the government and the Islamic extremists in order to fight the Russian invader. This amalgamation has presumably let the influence of Islamic radicalism reach even higher levels, although there are also some reports of discontent with the religious extremists.

The right to self-determination

Thus Chechnya's government is not working-class, revolutionary or socialist, nor are the local power brokers in Chechnya, who may exercise more authority than the government. Indeed, the political evolution of the Chechen government since independence is tragic. But support for the right to self-determination of Chechnya does not mean supporting the ideological and political ideas of the current Chechen leadership. It does not prevent one from encouraging the formation of an alternate Chechen political trend, based on class-conscious workers, although it says something about the permissible methods for outside influence on Chechnya. It means, simply, recognition that it is up to the Chechens to settle their affairs, and that the outside oppression will only bring calamity to

Chechnya and the entire region. The last decade of Russian strangulation of Chechnya has not only killed many Chechens and devastated the country, but created dangerous social conditions.

Recognition of the right to self-determination is especially important for the world working class movement. It doesn't mean dividing the working class into hermetically-sealed, self-contained national units, who lack concern for each other. On the contrary, it is the only way the working class can forge unity across national lines. Thus Russian workers who oppose the war on Chechnya are working for unity across national lines, while the Russian bourgeoisie, waging war on Chechnya in the name of "territorial integrity", is dividing the Chechen and Russian peoples. Indeed, the Russian government is consciously seeking to divide the working people of Russia and Chechnya, as the first prerequisite for this war, as seen in its promotion throughout Russia of chauvinist hysteria against Chechens living in Russia.

There are, of course, different types of "unity" across national lines. The only durable unity is a fraternal unity. This must be a voluntary unity: it cannot be created by a bayonet. The workers in one country will naturally seek to influence the internal situation in other countries and, in particular, can and must support the development of the class struggle in other countries, but this is done through encouraging the class-consciousness and organization of the local working masses of other countries.

Today many small nations are breaking away and forming their own countries. There is an explosion of new countries around the globe. Does this mean that the right to self-determination is harmful and will result simply in hundreds and hundreds of mini-states? But history doesn't proceed in a straight line. The recognition of the right to self-determination will, in the long run, help lead to the voluntary amalgamation of countries and, finally, the tearing down of the border posts which are now proliferating so widely. Chechnya, for example, is a very small country. It is likely that, if left alone, it would gravitate towards various forms of association with other countries and, eventually, towards amalgamation with some grouping of its neighbors. Indeed, even during the "Chechen revolution", as it fiercely insisted on its independence, it still wanted certain forms of association with its neighbors. Thus, from the start, the first president of independent Chechnya, Jokhar Dudayev, insisted that he wanted to join the CIS and have relations with Russia, but on the basis of equality. But the Russian bourgeoisie is not seeking to attract Chechnya through providing advantageous economic and social conditions: it simply wants to subjugate and exploit Chechnya by fiat. And this oppression is precisely what keeps driving Chechnya away from Russia. The path towards unity across national lines leads through the elimination of national oppression. This is why a truly socialist working class movement, advocating global unity of all workers, will defend the right to self-determination (as well as defending the right of national minorities).

A plot against Russia?

There are some opportunist trends on the left that, however, deny that the basic issue in the Chechen wars is the national oppression of the Chechens, and instead hold that what is going on is a plot against Russia. Some imply that the Chechens are fighting some sort of contra war against Russia or that what is going on is a "U.S./NATO war against Russia". Some, like the CPUSA, are silent over the rape of Chechnya; they write articles like "U.S. strategy: Middle East vs. Middle Asia"¹ about the commercial rivalry over who will profit from the extraction and shipping of Caspian sea oil, and they do so in such a way that the implication is that all the events in the Caucasus are simply a consequence of U.S. strategy. This is promoted as an "anti-imperialist" view of these events. In fact, it just echoes the stand of Russian nationalists, who deny that the class relations in Russia have anything to do with the problems of Russia—instead, everything is a foreign plot. If the Soviet Union dissolved and many of the resulting countries are wary of Russian intentions, this supposedly doesn't have anything to do with the way the Russian bourgeoisie has bullied these countries, but is only a Western plot. If the Chechens want independence from Russia, this supposedly doesn't have anything to do with the fact that the entire Chechen nation was sent to Central Asia in cattle cars in 1944, and that they were second-class citizens in Chechnya after their return, but is only a plot of Western oil companies. And if Russia today is jealous over oil revenues going to Azerbaijan and Georgia, even though they are among its CIS partners, this supposedly doesn't say something about whether Russia views the CIS as a new tool of Russian domination, it is only Russia asserting itself against Western aggression.

Thus there is a lot of talk about the question of what pipeline will be used to get oil from the Caspian Sea onto the world market. One possibility is a pipeline through Russia to the Black Sea; another is a Baku-Ceyhan pipeline that passes from Azerbaijan through Turkey to the Mediterranean port of Ceyhan; there is an Iranian proposal; etc. The Russian government prefers a pipeline through Russia, which would allow it to profit from every barrel of Caspian sea oil, although little of that oil is Russian. (At the same time, a Russian oil company, LUKoil, has a 10% share in the Baku-Ceyhan consortium put together by Azerbaijan.)

No doubt the stakes are high over which pipeline to build or maintain. There is indeed a rivalry over who will develop and profit from Caspian sea oil. Caspian Sea countries are involved. American, British and other Western oil companies and governments are involved, and will probably supply the most resources and have a disproportionate influence over these decisions. Russian oil companies don't have the resources to supplant Western oil companies, and are thus at a disadvantage in these commercial rivalries. Indeed, Russian oil companies are calling in Chevron and other Western firms to help develop even domestic Russian oil fields, and certainly can only take a

secondary role in the huge international deals involved in Caspian Sea oil. Thus Russia supplants its commercial strength, which is limited, with its military power in the Caucasus. From the point of view of the dividing the world among the great powers, this might only be "fair". From the point of view of the struggle for liberation of the working class, this is a bloody crime of an imperialist power.

Thus, as pointed out earlier in this article, the Chechen war is indeed a Russian war for oil. But the "Chechen revolution" was not an invention of the oil companies or the U.S. government. The U.S. and other Western powers are guilty of fighting their own bloody wars for oil, such as the Persian Gulf war, but the Chechen wars are Russia's responsibility. Indeed, the Western powers have steadfastly declared that Chechnya is part of Russia. Clinton, in April 1996 during the latter part of the first Chechen war, compared the Russian effort to Abraham Lincoln's struggle against secession in the American Civil War.² And at the recent summit conference of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe in mid-November last year, as Russia trampled across the Chechen lowlands and laid siege to Grozny, Clinton asked for a political solution in Chechnya but emphasized that he "deplore(d) Chechen violence and terrorism and extremism and support(ed) the objectives of Russia to preserve its territorial integrity and to put down the violence and the terrorism."

Nevertheless, the implication from certain left trends is that the U.S. created and fostered the Chechen struggle. The history of Russian-Chechen relations is supposedly irrelevant in explaining why this struggle broke out. For the sake of argument, let's ignore for a moment the historical facts about how the "Chechen revolution" really broke out, and what's happened to Chechnya since then. Let's ask, what would be the supposed objective of the implied U.S. backing of the Chechen independence forces? Is it to seize territory for a pipeline needed by the Western oil companies? But Russia's complaint is that the West is interested in building an oil pipeline that doesn't go through Chechnya or Russia at all, such as the Baku-Ceyhan line.

Is it to block the use of Russian pipelines that go through Chechnya? But the Chechens are willing, even eager, to see the use of these pipelines, since it would provide much needed revenue to Chechnya. It is Russian intransigence, as well as the instability in Chechnya created by a decade of Russian pressure, that has sabotaged this line. Moreover, the trans-Balkan pipeline, which the West has recently displayed new interest in, would be of use in conjunction with the Russian pipeline, and would close the door on building the Baku-Ceyhan pipeline.³

²Carlotta Gall and Thomas de Waal, *Chechnya: Calamity in the Caucasus*, p. 316.

³The present proposal for a Trans-Balkan pipeline would route it through Bulgaria, Macedonia, and Albania (but not through Kosovo, Serbia or Montenegro). It links the Black Sea with the Mediterranean. The Russian pipeline ends up with oil (continued...)

¹*People's Weekly World*, December 11, 1999.

Is the West simply acting to create a state of disorder, so that Chechnya becomes economically unusable despite Russian or Chechen intentions? But this disorder has reached the point of an Islamic extremist incursion into Dagestan. Such things not only go against the interests of all the oil companies, the Western ones included, who don't want to see the rise of an Islamic insurrection in the Caspian Sea area, but contradict the

³(...continued)

taken to the Black Sea, and from there it has to be taken by tanker to the Mediterranean, and this involves passing through the Bosphorus straits. This brings up environmental problems. The Baku-Ceyhan pipeline through Turkey, on the other hand, avoids the Black Sea and ends up directly on the Mediterranean. Since Turkey wants the Baku-Ceyhan pipeline built, it might use the environmental issue to limit the movement of oil through the Bosphorus. The Trans-Balkan pipeline, by taking oil overland from the Black Sea to the Mediterranean, avoids the Bosphorus and would complete the route for oil passing through the Russian pipeline. Such oil would only have to be taken by tanker from the end of the Russian pipeline at Novorossisk on the Black Sea to a Bulgarian port on the Black Sea. So if the Trans-Balkan pipeline is built, there would be little need to build the Baku-Ceyhan line. The West's interest, albeit lukewarm, in the Trans-Balkan pipeline shows that the commercial rivalries over Caspian Sea oil are not what is presented by the Russian nationalists or by various opportunist groups on the left.

U.S. strategy of opposing the Islamic radical movement.

Moreover, during the last decade, U.S. policy has been, not to destabilize the Russian government or wage a war against it, but to back the Yeltsin government to the hilt. Mind you, its shaky alliance with the Russian bourgeoisie is no more a virtue of U.S. bourgeois policy than was its war against Russian state-capitalism. The U.S. bourgeoisie has backed the free-market bourgeoisie in Russia, as one exploiter dealing with another. It has reveled in the Yeltsin's government free-market reforms as the condition of the majority of the population has worsened, and it hopes that Putin will follow in Yeltsin's footsteps. The Western powers have definitely shown themselves enemies of Russian workers, as well as of the workers in their own countries. But they have done this by backing their class brothers—the Russian bourgeois government. The relations between Russia and the Western powers may break down: wars between the imperialist powers were a fact of life in the last century. But the last century also saw many examples of imperialist powers facing fierce resistance from small, exploited countries. And that is what has been happening in Chechnya.

If Russia was really waging an anti-imperialist struggle for the use of Caspian sea oil revenues for the sake of the people, it would not be invading Chechnya. Nor would it be seeking to strip oil revenues from its CIS partners. So long as the Russian bourgeoisie continues such methods of dealing with its neighbors, it will generate its own opposition far more surely than any Western intrigue could.

—by Joseph Green □

The historical origins of the Chechen revolt

Important dates in Russian-Chechen relations

by Joseph Green

Some historical dates:

Several thousand years ago:

The ancestors of the Chechens arrive in the North Caucasus.

1550s to 1604:

The Russian state begins serious attempts to enter the North Caucasus, which however had to be given up until 1722

1722:

There is the first major battle between Chechens and the encroaching Russian state. Russian cavalry sent by Tsar Peter the Great to occupy a village in eastern Chechnya is defeated. Peter the Great dies in 1725, and tsarist expansionism in the region slows until the latter part of the century.

1783:

The treaty of Georgievsk puts mainly Christian Georgia under Russian protection: the Georgian monarchy had appealed to Russia as protection against Persia, the Ottoman Empire and the Islamic peoples in the Caucasus. However, Russia was for some time incapable of providing military help to Georgia.

1785-1791:

Chechens, and also Dagestanis and some other Caucasian groups, fight Russian expansionism. They were led by a Chechen Imam, Sheikh Mansur, who also sought to impose a much stricter allegiance to Islam among the Chechens than they had previously practiced. The Russian empire emerged victorious.

1801:

Georgia is annexed by Russia, and the monarchy is deposed. There are several revolts against Russian rule later in the century.

1816-27:

Russian General Alexei Yermolov is given command over tsarist troops in the Caucasus. He undertakes a savage policy of massacres, leveling of villages, destruction of crops, and forcible removal of Chechens from the fertile Chechen lowlands (thus blocking the previous migration of Chechens from the mountains to the lowlands). His policies provoke new resistance, and to this day his name is still an object of hatred among Chechens. Sometime after the mass deportation of the Chechens from Chechnya in 1944, the Soviet state-capitalists under Stalin honored this tsarist criminal with a statue in Grozny, which the Chechens attempted to blow up in 1969 and finally tore down in 1991.

1817-64:

These are the years of the fierce series of rebellions and conflicts called the Caucasian War, in which the Chechens play a major role. Ultimately Russia subjugates the Caucasus through devastating many of its peoples. A substantial part of the Chechen population are killed, while many Chechens and other Caucasian mountaineers are deported from their regions to elsewhere in the Caucasus, or forced to leave the Caucasus entirely and settle in the Ottoman Empire (Turkey). The tsarist forces could not achieve victory over the Chechens so long as the forests provided cover for ambushes and guerrilla tactics, so the Russian army systematically cuts down the main Chechen forests. The Chechen landscape is permanently altered.

Some of the classic Russian authors of this time picture the brutality of this war. The most fervent example is Leo Tolstoy's novel *Hadji Murat*, which is a fictionalized account of one of the most daring commanders of the Caucasian rebels. Its spirit is illustrated by the following passage from a preliminary draft:

"Russian military commanders, seeking to win distinction for themselves and appropriate the spoils of war, invaded peaceful lands, ravaged villages, killed hundreds of people, raped women, rustled thousands of cattle and then blamed the tribesmen for their attacks on Russian possessions." (Cited in Susan Layton, *Russian Literature and Empire: Conquest of the Caucasus from Pushkin to Tolstoy*, p. 285)

The most successful leader of the Chechen and Dagestani forces is the legendary Imam Shamil. He is an Avar, which is one of the peoples in Dagestan; indeed, the three main leaders of the Caucasian revolt are all Avars from Dagestan (and so is Hadji Murat). He also seeks to impose a strict Islamic law, with less success among the Chechens than in Dagestan. One historical account of the Caucasian war points out that: "the religious revival in Daghestan coincided with the Russian conquest; the infidel neighbour became the foreign oppressor, and to the desire for spiritual reformation was added the yet stronger desire for temporal liberty." (John F. Baddeley, *The Russian Conquest of the Caucasus*, p.237)

Shamil also seeks to build up state or governmental institutions among the Chechens, something which the Chechen tribes had not previously had. Contrary to romanticized pictures of such revolts, he doesn't shrink from harsh, dictatorial measures to enforce his decrees and preserve unity against the Russians.

1877-8:

On the occasion of a war between Russia and the Ottoman Empire, there is a new anti-Russian uprising in the North Caucasus, led by Haji Mohammed in Chechnya and Ali-Bek Haji in Dagestan.

1890s:

Oil is discovered in Grozny, Chechnya's main city, which by 1900 becomes second only to Baku (presently the capital of Azerbaijan) as an oil city in the tsarist empire. Later, Chechnya will be important both for oil extraction and refining in the Soviet Union. Still later, oil extraction will decline quite far by 1980, being less than half the output of 1911, but Chechnya will retain its significance for the Soviet Union as a producer of special aviation oils, as a major refining center, and as part of a major network of oil pipelines.

1917:

The Bolshevik revolution overthrows the tsarist empire. The Chechens fight such counter-revolutionary forces as the white armies of General Denikin. But the different social forces among the Chechens take different attitudes to the new regime; there are stormy relations between Chechnya and the Soviet Union; and certain sections of the population revolt at certain times. As well, the revolutionary forces themselves are feeling their way to new policies; there are different views about the relation of the national question to socialism; and this too complicates matters. Two major trends stand out. On one hand, based on Lenin's theories about the importance of the right to national self-determination, not just under capitalism but in a countries that have overthrown the old capitalist regime, for the first time the rights of the Chechen nationality and the Chechen common people receive serious attention from Russia. But on the other hand, as the revolution dies away, and the Soviet Union degenerates into a Stalinist, state-capitalist regime, anti-Chechen chauvinism is revived, and by 1944 Stalin condemns the entire nationality.

1920s:

An alphabet is devised for the Chechen language: previously documents were written in Arabic, and less than 2% of Chechens could read or write. A number of books and magazines appear in the Chechen language, and there is a dramatic spread of literacy. There is a policy of bringing Chechens into the local administration. At the same time, the degeneration of the Russian revolution, which that leads to its death and the establishment of a state-capitalist regime, affects the North Caucasus as elsewhere in the Soviet Union.

1930s:

Stalin's forced collectivization makes a mockery of the Leninist plan of voluntary collectivization. As well, no account was made of the particular social and class conditions in Chechnya. As a result, there was serious unrest in 1929-1930, and army troops are sent in to suppress it. After that, there is some readjustment of Soviet policy, but tension and repression remain, sometimes dying down and sometimes flaring up. The Stalinist purges of the 1930s are reflected in mass arrests of Chechens.

At the same time, the rapid economic development in the Soviet Union presumably draws numbers of Chechens into modern economic life.

1936:

The Ingush and Chechen autonomous regions are merged into a single Autonomous Republic of Chechnya and Ingushetia. The USSR was officially the "Union of Soviet Socialist Republics", with each of the "union republics" supposed to have the right to self-determination. But the Chechen-Ingush Autonomous Republic was not a "union republic" of the Soviet Union, but an autonomous republic inside the Russian "union republic", and thus without the right of self-determination with respect to either the USSR or Russia. This is the legal pretext for Russia's present denial of the right to self-determination to Chechnya, and this pretext is also upheld today by the U.S. government and the European Union. This is somewhat analogous to Kosovo. Kosovo was not one of the six constituent republics of now-dissolved Titoist Yugoslavia, each of which was supposed to have the right to self-determination, but only an autonomous region within the Serbian republic. This is the basis on which the UN to this day refuses to grant the right to self-determination to Kosovo.

1937:

The major Soviet purges of this year eliminate many of the Chechens who work in administrative or leading conditions. This and other purges, by undermining the secular Chechen leadership that was developing, may well have helped pave the way for the later religious revival.

Exile — the mass deportation of the Chechens and Ingush: 1944-1957

February 1944 (in the latter part of World War II):

Essentially all Chechens and Ingush, then about half a million people, are deported to Soviet Central Asia, mainly to Kazakhstan. This includes not just residents of the Chechen-Ingush Autonomous Republic, but Chechens and Ingush no matter where they lived. The autonomous republic is eliminated, and all traces of the Chechen and Ingush peoples are removed from the area. This is a reactionary, criminal act of ethnic cleansing, done on the basis of a secret decree. It is carried out in a savage way, and accompanied with several massacres of Chechens.

The Chechens are arbitrarily resettled into different villages and localities; they are denied freedom of movement among these localities; they are subject to police supervision; and they are basically restricted to laboring jobs. In the first years, they suffer particularly badly from lack of sufficient food and shelter, resulting in the death of many deportees.

Aside from the Chechens and Ingush, there are other mass deportations between October 1943 and June 1944, such as the Karachays, the Balkars, the Kalmyks, and the Crimean Tatars. The Volga Germans had met this fate in August 1941.

June 25, 1946:

A public decree of the Stalinist regime finally mentions the

deportation of the Chechens and Ingush, attempting to justify it as punishment for fighting on the side of the Nazis. Such an attempt to eliminate a nationality altogether as collective punishment is fascistic in any case, but the rationale given is actually a mere pretext. The Nazis had tried to woo various of the peoples in the Caucasus, particularly the Islamic peoples, but they hadn't achieved too much in this regard, especially when considered in light of the considerable unrest in the Caucasus prior to the war. For that matter, the Nazis had also sought to woo the other Soviet nationalities, including the Russians. The Soviet army did have a problem with Chechen desertions, but mainly because it put Chechens into Russian-speaking units where they couldn't understand the language and where they were forced to eat pork. On the other hand, there were 30,000 Chechen and Ingush soldiers in the Soviet army; many had won Soviet decorations for their valor in World War II, and a few had become "Heroes of the Soviet Union"; and Chechen soldiers took part in the famous defense of the Citadel at Brest-Litovsk where a small Soviet unit, surrounded in the German blitzkrieg of the early days of the war, held out for over a month against overwhelming odds. Far from the deportations helping the war against the Nazis, they were a major crime that undermined the moral legitimacy of the Soviet regime, which was why they were originally kept secret. Indeed, such was the savage logic of the deportations that Chechen soldiers had been stripped from the Soviet Army during the war in order to send them as deportees to Central Asia. Meanwhile there had been problems maintaining oil production in the Grozny area because Chechen workers had been deported.

1953:

In the years following Stalin's death in 1953, travel restrictions and police supervision on the Chechens gradually ease, and other conditions of the exile improve. There is eventually a Chechen weekly newspaper, a Chechen-Ingush Art Theater, books published again in the Chechen language, etc. Meanwhile, by 1955, and especially after the 20th CPSU Party Congress in 1956 where Khrushchev denounced Stalin, tens of thousands of Chechens illegally return to Chechnya and demand the return of their old dwellings.

At the same time, the regime tries to have Chechens sign statements that they would not seek "the return of property confiscated at the time of their deportation and that they would not return to those places from which they had been deported."

1957:

A decree removes the charge of fascist collaboration from the Chechens and Ingush and allows their return. (The Balkars, Karachia and Kalmyks also were able to return to their homelands. On the other hand, while the collective condemnation of the Volga Germans, Crimean Tatars and Meskhetian Turks is rescinded, they are not allowed to return to their former areas.) The Chechen return is supposed to take place gradually over four years until 1960, but the Chechens and Ingush rush back to their homelands. A Chechen-Ingush republic is re-established, although Russian-speakers are for some time a majority in this area and dominate the republic. There is

friction over the status and conditions for the returnees, the attitude of the republic towards them, etc.

The exile undoubtedly left strong marks on the Chechen people, providing a strong long-term reinforcement for nationalist and religious feelings. It also spread them throughout Kazakhstan and other areas of the Soviet Union (not all of them returned). It affected the class structure of the Chechen population, no doubt considerably proletarianizing them. This, and their additional contacts around the Soviet Union, no doubt facilitated the later large-scale development of Chechen migrant labor: large numbers of Chechen young men, facing unemployment, became seasonal workers who sought summer work outside Chechnya and returned to their families in winter.

After the return to Chechnya

1960s-80s:

Chechens and Ingush gain greatly in number by comparison to Russians and other ethnic groups in the Chechen-Ingush republic, eventually becoming a majority again, and gradually gain more influence. But their economic situation deteriorates, leading large numbers of Chechen youth to become seasonal workers, searching for work elsewhere in the Soviet Union during the summer.

1982:

The Soviet regime in the Chechen-Ingush republic organizes a celebration of the 200th anniversary of the supposedly voluntary union of Chechnya and Russia. This is a travesty of history, and it is an example of how the state-capitalist regime appealed to tsarist oppression of the subject peoples to justify its own denial of national rights to these peoples.

The period leading to the first Chechen war: late 1980s to 1994

Late 1980s:

There are protests in Chechnya with regard to cultural, religious and language issues and, on environmental grounds, against the plan to build a biochemical plant in the Chechen city of Gudermes. A Popular Front is formed, dominated by old-line party officials who want, however, to replace the Russian First Secretary of the local CP with a Chechen.

June 1989:

Doku Zavgayev becomes the first Chechen since the exile to become First Secretary of the "Communist" (actually, state-capitalist) Party of the Chechen-Ingush Republic. Zavgayev wants to maintain the old state-capitalist system, albeit with top posts staffed with more Chechens, and his supporters sweep the seats from Chechnya in elections to the Supreme Soviet of the USSR that year, except for the election of a Chechen, Ruslan Khasbulatov, who is then a supporter of Boris Yeltsin.

1990:

Protests sweep Chechnya; many ethnic Russians and other unpopular officials resign.

1990-1:

In the bitter fight between Russian leader Yeltsin and Soviet leader Gorbachev, both sides appeal to the various regions in Russia, or even to Russia as a whole, with the promise of more national rights. On April 26, 1990 a Soviet decree from the Gorbachev government declares that all the autonomous republics inside Russia were "subjects of the USSR" (as opposed to simply being "subjects of Russia"), thus bypassing Russia's control. For his part, Yeltsin declares the "sovereignty" of the Russian Federation on June 12, 1990. Moreover, Yeltsin tours various regions of Russia in 1990-91 declaring "take as much sovereignty as you can swallow". And in April 1991 the Russian Federation decrees "The Law on the Rehabilitation of All Repressed Peoples". Meanwhile a draft treaty redefining the basis of the Soviet Union is circulated by the Soviet leadership in November 1990, and it places the autonomous republics in Russia more on a par with the union republics of the Soviet Union. Later, in 1991, Gorbachev would invite such figures as the Chechen Doku Zavgayev to take part in the negotiation of a new treaty defining the basis of the Soviet Union.

November 23-25, 1990:

The National Congress of the Chechen People is formed at a meeting in Grozny with over 1,000 delegates. Only Chechens, not Ingush, are invited. Various political forces are involved, both supporters of Zavgayev and more nationalistic elements. Jokhar Dudayev, the first Chechen general in the Soviet armed forces since the exile and the commander of an air force division of long-range nuclear bombers, is elected the chairman of the Executive Committee set up by the Congress. This may well be due to the desire to find a figurehead leader who is above the factions; after all, Major-General Dudayev is stationed in Estonia, quite far from Chechnya, and hence might be expected to play little role in Chechen politics. But Dudayev leaves the Soviet air force in March 1991 and assumes an active role as head of the Executive Committee in Grozny. He becomes the head of the independence movement in Chechnya until his death in 1996.

November 1990 - July 1991:

The day after the Chechen Congress closes, the official government body, the local Supreme Soviet, imitating the sovereignty declaration of the Russian Federation, declares the Chechen-Ingush Republic a "sovereign state". The declaration doesn't mean that the Soviet is actually seeking to leave Russia or the Soviet Union, but it is trying to coopt the nationalist mass movement. Meanwhile, in 1991, after Dudayev moves to Grozny, he reshapes the Chechen National Congress into a militant independence movement. In June it declares the formation of an Chechen state independent of Russia or the Soviet Union, and a number of the founders of the Chechen National Congress abandon it. The Executive Committee of the Chechen National Congress calls for dissolving the local Supreme Soviet, while the official party and state leadership seek to suppress public opposition from the independence movement.

August 1991:

The old-guard in the CP leadership stages a coup against Gorbachev, seeking to seize power throughout the Soviet Union. This reactionary attempt to restore the old regime by force accelerates secessionist tendencies everywhere in the USSR and sparks *"the Chechen revolution"*. The official party and state officials in Chechnya are irrevocably discredited by their actions. Although some denounce the coup, others support it and try to suppress opposition with military force, while key leaders like Zavgayev wait to see which way the wind is blowing before taking a public stand. Dudayev and the Chechen National Congress denounce the coup immediately, organize demonstrations and a general strike against it, and call again for the dissolution of the official government apparatus, exposed by its stand towards the coup. More and more areas in Chechnya back the Chechen National Congress and send people to Grozny to overthrow the old apparatus.

Yeltsin holds back the armed forces loyal to it from restraining the Chechens. He now opposes Zavgayev due to his stand on the coup, and temporarily backs the Chechen militants, who have been supporting him. Khasbulatov as well, at this point allied closely to Yeltsin, welcomes the pressure on Zavgayev. Later Zavgayev will be back in favor with Yeltsin, and even a Yeltsin advisor, as a Chechen who backs Russian measures against Chechnya.

September 1991:

The struggle between the Chechen National Congress and the official apparatus intensifies and results in the successful storming of the parliament in Grozny. Eventually there is the forced dissolution of the Supreme Soviet, all this to the applause of Khasbulatov, who visits Chechnya and chairs the last meeting of its Supreme Soviet, when it hands over power to a Provisional Supreme Council. But later in September and October, when it appears that Dudayev is pressing for full independence, going beyond what Yeltsin and Khasbulatov want, refusing to recognize the Provisional Supreme Council, and setting up an apparatus independent of Moscow, Moscow begins to turn against Dudayev and the Chechen movement. At the same time, Dudayev always claims—right up to his death—that Chechnya should be independent of Russia, but associated. He holds that Russia and Chechnya should be equal as separate republics inside the Soviet Union, or later, the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS).

September 15, 1991:

An Ingush Congress declares that Ingushetia is separate from Chechnya, and is its own autonomous republic within the Russian Federation.

October 1991:

The Chechen independence movement consolidates its power, despite hostile resolutions of the Russian Duma and harsh threats from Russian President Yeltsin, Vice-president Rutskoi, and Khasbulatov, the latter two later being prominent leaders of the parliamentary opposition to Yeltsin. (Rutskoi, notably, is particularly virulent in his demands for simply

suppressing the Chechens by force.) Despite this, parliamentary and presidential elections are held on October 27 in Chechnya, with Dudayev elected as president.

October 19, 1991:

Yeltsin denounces and threatens the Chechen movement in his first televised statement on Chechnya.

November 2, 1991:

Khasbulatov is confirmed as speaker of the Russian Duma and sponsors a resolution denouncing the Chechen elections. This is the formal resolution accompanying the beginning of protracted Russian efforts to forcibly resubjugate Chechnya.

November 7, 1991:

Yeltsin declares a state of emergency in Chechnya, orders Dudayev's arrest, and prepares to subdue Chechnya by force.

November 9, 1991:

Russian troops from the Interior Ministry fly into Khankala Airport outside Grozny. They are immediately blockaded by a new Chechen national guard, while a huge mass meeting in Freedom Square in Grozny rallies around the Dudayev government. Meanwhile, with the rivalry between Yeltsin and Gorbachev still proceeding, Gorbachev issues orders that Russian and Soviet troops should stay neutral. By evening, the Russian troops surrender their troops to the Chechens and are bused out of the airport and back to Russian positions. Thus ends the first Russian attempt to retake Grozny.

Russian military base are, however, still all over Chechnya. Over the coming months, Chechens surround them, seeking to force the troops out but have them leave their weapons behind. Russia in fact loses most of these weapons, and all Russian troops are forced out by Chechnya by June 8, 1992.

December 1991:

The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) dissolves. Russia, the Ukraine and Belarus join together in a loose *Commonwealth of Independent States*, which quickly grows to include a number of other republics of the former USSR.

January 1992:

The bourgeois nationalist Zviad Gamsakhurdia becomes president of Georgia in May 1991. Russia provides strong backing for a coup, which finally overthrows him seven months later, at the beginning of 1992. The result is several years of warfare. As a result of the unstable situation arising from this coup, and from a Russian-backed insurgency in Abkhazia, Georgian president Shevardnadze has to welcome Russian troop presence. Also notable is that both Gamsakhurdia and then, for a time, Shevardnadze had rejected Georgian membership in the Commonwealth of Independent States, but as part of the price for Russian assistance Shevardnadze takes Georgia into the CIS in December 1993.

The overthrow of Gamsakhurdia helps Russia isolate Chechnya, while Gamsakhurdia is given refuge in 1992-3 by Chechen President Dudayev.

March 31, 1992:

Chechen opposition forces, backed and armed by Russia, attempt an armed coup in Grozny, but are driven out by the evening.

June 1992:

The former Soviet republic of Moldova, located between Ukraine and Romania, isn't part of the Caucasus, but is closer to the Balkans. However, the events here illustrate Russia's manipulation of national conflicts outside its borders in order to preserve its influence. The Russian 14th Army, still present despite Moldovan independence in 1991, helps arm a separatist movement in the small Transdnister region of Moldova, a movement particularly worried by the prospect that Moldova might join Romania. Then, under a new commander, General Alexander Lebed, the 14th Army intervenes in June 1992 to prevent Moldova from defeating the secessionists, but without removing Transdnister from Moldova, and Lebed also stops further Russian arming of the secessionists. (It can be noted that the secessionists are mainly led by old-guard forces from the old CP, friendly to the opposition to Yeltsin, and besides, union with Russia is unlikely as Transdnister doesn't border Russia, and ethnic Russians in Transdnister are outnumbered both by ethnic Ukrainians and ethnic Moldovans.) Since then, the dispute has calmed down, in part because nationalists committed to uniting Moldova to Romania have lost much ground and also because Moldova grants Transdnistria a certain autonomy. But Russian military forces remain, acting for the time being somewhat like UN peacekeeping forces in the former Yugoslavia, and Moldova's fate is tied with the policy of the Russian commander.

Such Russian influence, combined with the pressure of a Russian agricultural tariff imposed to punish Moldova for its parliament refusing to ratify Moldova's membership in the CIS, results in ratification of CIS membership in April 1994.

1992:

This year marks the beginning of the secessionist revolt of Abkhazia against Georgia. Many fighters come from other Islamic mountaineer peoples of the Caucasus to join the fight against mainly Christian Georgia. The Abkhaz nationality suffers greatly from Georgian chauvinism, and perhaps so does some of the non-Abkhaz nationalities in the area. At the same time, large numbers of ethnic non-Abkhaz people, who are a substantial majority in the area, eventually flee Abkhazia. Russia provides strong military backing for the revolt, with the ironic result that it helps supply the war in which many Chechen militants, such as Shamil Basayev, get their military training. Russia's interest is in destabilizing Georgia enough that it will turn to Russia for troops and support, as Georgian President Shevardnadze in fact does.

September 6-7, 1992:

Russian special forces and other armed units enter a Dagestan village bordering Chechnya, preparing to enter Chechnya. They are blocked by the local population, and are forced to retreat.

November 1992:

There is a bloody clash between the Ingush Republic and Ossetia over the Prigorodny district, which had originally belonged to the Chechen-Ingush autonomous republic but had been handed over by the Stalin government of the Soviet Union to North Ossetia after the mass deportations of 1944. Russia basically sides with Ossetia, but the Ingush Republic continues to cherish hopes that Yeltsin may make good on his promises and that Russia may aid it in getting the region back. This is one of the reasons that Ingushetia did not join Chechnya in demanding full independence from Russia.

In connection with these events, Russian troops in Ingushetia move toward a still unsettled border with Chechnya, and Russian and Chechen armored forces confront each other. But an agreement is reached between Russia and Chechnya to end the crisis.

December 1992:

The Yeltsin administration decides to step up its support of forces in Chechnya opposed to the Dudayev government.

April 17, 1993:

Dudayev's one-time friendly relations with the Chechen parliament have vanished. He declares presidential rule and the dissolution of the Chechen parliament and the Town Council of Grozny. On April 18 Parliament, defying Dudayev's order of dissolution, begins impeachment proceedings against Dudayev, and on the 19th the Constitutional Court invalidates the dissolution of Parliament. Grozny becomes the scene of two daily streams of demonstrations, those for and against Dudayev. Dudayev dissolves the Constitutional Court on June 3.

June 4, 1993:

Dudayev suppresses the opposition with armed force, thus consolidating control in Grozny (but not all over Chechnya) and fending off an opposition-organized referendum scheduled for June 5.

June 1993:

The bourgeois nationalist Azerbaijani president Abulfaz Elchibey is overthrown by an armed coup with substantial Russian help. This too helps isolate Chechnya. It also clears the way for Azerbaijan to rejoin the CIS (it had joined in 1991 but left after the Azerbaijani parliament wouldn't ratify CIS membership).

October 1993:

The sad results of the free-market reforms in Russia had led to increasingly conflict between Yeltsin and the Russian parliament ("Duma") led by Khasbulatov. This reaches a climax, and President Yeltsin, backed by the armed forces, defeats the rebellion of the Russian parliament and has the parliament building shelled and occupied. He replaces the Russian constitution by a new one which gives the president sweeping powers (this is later ratified in a referendum). There is an eerie parallel between the struggles between the President and Parliament in Russia and Chechnya.

May 27, 1994:

There is an attempt to assassinate Dudayev with a remote-controlled car bomb. The second car in a procession of official cars—the spot usually used by Dudayev—is blown up, murdering two high Chechen officials, but this time Dudayev was in the third car. The high-tech nature of the attack leads to the belief that it was organized by the Russian secret services.

Summer 1994:

Russia puts more emphasis on the "half-force" option (something like American "low-intensity conflict", which gained notoriety in Central America) to overthrow the Chechen government. This means overthrowing Dudayev through a covert operation with Chechen front-men and Russian personnel disguised as Chechens. The Yeltsin government steps up the military and financial support to the Russian-backed "Provisional Council of the Chechen Republic" which had been founded in December 1993.

August 1, 1994:

The Russian-backed "Provisional Council" declares that it has taken power in Chechnya. This indicates its intention, not the reality, and serves as a request for more Russian aid. On August 25, a secret resolution of the Yeltsin government recognizes the "Provisional Council". On August 30, fighting intensifies between the Russian-backed forced "Provisional Council" and the Dudayev-government of Chechnya.

October 15, 1994:

Armed forces under the command of some elements of the Russian-backed opposition stage a surprise attack on Grozny and, without much fighting, occupy some administrative buildings. They leave Grozny on the same day, apparently due in large part to contradictions among the different factions of the opposition and between the Yeltsin government and Khasbulatov. Khasbulatov, the former leader of the Russian parliament who was a Chechen, had been jailed after Yeltsin's suppression of the parliamentary revolt in 1993. He is released from jail in 1994 and goes to Chechnya, where he has some popularity (no doubt enhanced by his imprisonment by Yeltsin), and intrigues to replace the Dudayev government with his own rule of a Chechnya restored to Russia. The Yeltsin government may well fear that any success on October 15 would rebound of the advantage of their current bitter rival, Khasbulatov, and prefer to overthrow Dudayev on their own. In any case, the fiasco on October 15 shows that the "half-force" option isn't working.

November 24, 1994:

The Russian-backed "Provisional Council" of Chechnya creates a Government of National Rebirth.

November 26, 1994:

A substantial Russian armored force, in the guise of Chechen oppositionists, attempts to install a "Government of National Rebirth" in Grozny. Russian television announces that the Dudayev government has fled the Presidential Palace, but the attack is, in fact, another fiasco. It is not only beaten back, but

21 Russian soldiers are taken prisoner, exposing the real force behind the attack. So much for the "half-force" option.

The first Chechen war: November 1994 - November 1996

December 11, 1994:

A large Russian force, vastly outnumbering the forces at the disposal of the Dudayev government, invades Chechnya from three directions.

December 31, 1994:

The Russian forces bombard Grozny, and push into the city with a strong armored force. The city suffers massive destruction, but the invading forces suffer a bloody defeat. Large numbers of Russian armored vehicles are destroyed; some units face virtual annihilation; and the Russian forces are pushed out of the city center. In the following days, the Russian army begins a systematic destruction of Grozny and resumes a more systematic attack on the city.

March 7, 1995:

Russian forces finally occupy all of Grozny.

April 21, 1996:

Chechen President Dudayev is killed by a Russian rocket, which homes in on the signal from a satellite telephone that Dudayev is using while seeking to arrange negotiations with Russia. In March, Yeltsin had ordered his assassination. Vice-president Zelimkhan Yandarbiyev becomes president.

May 28, 1996:

Yeltsin visits Chechnya and declares that Russia had destroyed all the "bandit groups" and won the war.

August 6, 1996:

The Chechens begin their successful attempt to retake Grozny from the Russian armed forces.

August 12, 1996:

On behalf of the Yeltsin government, General Lebed begins serious negotiations with the Chechens at the border town of Khasavyurt in Dagestan.

August 31, 1996:

All Russian troops have left Grozny, and an agreement is signed by Lebed and Chechen Chief of Staff Maskhadov at Khasavyurt. A final settlement concerning the political independence of Chechnya, however, is left for future determination in five years, by December 31, 2001. A joint Russian-Chechen commission is to run the economy of Chechnya, but in practice it does little and quickly meets its demise. Chechnya continues to insist it is independent, but Russia continues to make economic difficulties for it.

October 17, 1996:

Lebed is fired from the Yeltsin government.

November 23, 1996:

Russian Prime Minister Chernomyrdin and Maskhadov reach agreement on the withdrawal of Russian troops prior to Chechen presidential elections at the end of January 1997. In fact, the troops leave in six weeks. The first Chechen war is over.

From the first Chechen war to the second: December 1996 to the present

1997-1999:

Chechnya, in desperate straits before the war, is left devastated by the war. Cities and villages were ravaged; there are few resources for rebuilding; there is little employment; and there is no stable state authority. As well, Russia continues to harass Chechnya economically. The Chechen government and economy is in a state of disarray. A large number of kidnappings of foreigners, including aid workers, engineers and others, eventually contributes to isolating Chechnya

January 27, 1997:

One of the two main military leaders of the fight against Russia, Chief of Staff Aslan Maskhadov, is elected president of Chechnya, his main opponent being the other key military leader, Shamil Basayev. Maskhadov is supposed to be the guy who Russia is able to make deals with.

Autumn 1998:

President Maskhadov had brought Basayev into his government, but Basayev eventually leaves, takes part in oppositional groupings, and demands the removal of Maskhadov. There are several other commanders from the Chechen war in the same grouping as Basayev, the most prominent being Salman Raduyev, who was a rival to Basayev during the war, and "Khattab", a Jordanian who had been with the Mujahedin in Afghanistan. The opposition presses Maskhadov to abolish the secular state established by the Chechen constitution and instead establish Islamic law in Chechnya, which Maskhadov concedes to in early 1999.

December 1998:

Four telecom engineers from Britain and New Zealand are kidnapped. This is just one of many kidnappings taking place. In this case, Maskhadov's government tries and fails to free them, and they are beheaded. This is alleged to be the act of the Islamic extremist "Wahabi" group. Such groups are spreading in Chechnya and Dagestan.

July-August 1999:

Chechen rebels associated with Shamil Basayev are the main force in raids by Islamic militants on Russian forces in Dagestan in the name of Dagestani independence and creating a greater Islamic state in the North Caucasus. Dagestan is a North Caucasian region which is still part of the Russian federation. There are many different nationalities in Dagestan, and it seems that the Islamic fundamentalist and independence forces do not have much support in Dagestan at this time.

September 1999:

The struggle in Dagestan heats up further. Russian forces retaliate against the rebels, who suffer defeat in Dagestan, but Russian forces go on to stage attacks on Chechnya in the name of attacking rebel bases. By now, there are tens of thousands of Dagestani refugees. Several mysterious terrorist bomb attacks occur in Moscow, killing and injuring hundreds of ordinary Russians. It is not clear who set these bombs; no one takes any credit for them; and the fact that they are politically advantageous to the Yeltsin government does not go without notice. Without any evidence, the Yeltsin government blames them on Chechens, and steps up its attacks on Chechnya. There is also hysteria organized against Chechens and other darker-skinner peoples living in Moscow and elsewhere in Russia.

October 2, 1999:

After over a week of bombing Chechnya, Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin withdraws recognition of the Chechen government and declares that a puppet Chechen parliament set up under Russian occupation of Chechnya in 1996 is the real government (this parliament is now based in Moscow). The Russian government has thus renounced the Khasavyurt accords that ended the first Chechen war.

October 1999 to January 2000:

Russia invades Chechnya with large forces, taking the plains, but suffering repeated setbacks and heavy casualties in its attempt to take Grozny, and also facing heavy fighting in the Chechen highlands. More than 200,000 Chechen refugees flee to neighboring Ingushetia. Russia demands that all civilians leave Grozny, so that it can bomb the city to hell, which it is doing anyway. Meanwhile, in order to resist Russia, the Chechen government led by Aslan Maskhadov and the Islamic rebels led by Shamil Basayev join together.

December 1999:

Russian looting throughout Chechnya is so bad that even Malik Saidullayev, a businessmen who is head of a pro-Russian puppet committee, the so-called "State Council of Chechnya", denounces the Russian looting of his home village, Alkan-Yurt, and the murder of 41 civilians there. He produces videotape to back his claim. Meanwhile Russian forces suffer repeated setbacks in their attempt to take Grozny.

December 19, 1999:

The Yeltsin government rides a wave of chauvinism over the Chechen war into Russian parliamentary elections. The newly-formed political bloc "Unity", backed by Russian Prime Minister Putin, does extremely well, finishing just behind the largest

party, Zyuganov's so-called "Communist Party of the Russian Federation (which is actually a state-capitalist and Stalinist party), which falls to merely a fifth of the parliament. This cuts down the parliamentary opposition to the Yeltsin government, an opposition which had plagued it for years.

January 1, 2000:

Boris Yeltsin having resigned, Vladimir Putin becomes the acting president of Russia, and Russian presidential elections have to be pushed forward to March 26, 2000. Putin is associated with the hard-line policy of military suppression of the Chechens. Yeltsin's hope is that Putin may win the next election for the Russian presidency on the basis of a wave of chauvinism over fighting Chechnya.

Early January, 2000:

Chechen forces attack behind Russian lines, and temporarily occupy several cities and villages supposedly securely under Russian control. The Russian army announces that it will not regard any fleeing Chechen male between 10 and 60 as a refugee, but will intern all of them in "filtration camps" to see if they are rebels. The savagery of the "filtration camps" became known in the first Chechen war. Under criticism, the Russian army claims to modify this order, perhaps by exempting males under the age of 15.

January 18, 2000:

A massive new Russian offensive in Grozny begins. There is heavy Chechen resistance, and over the next days the Russians end up fighting repeatedly over territory they say they have already captured. Originally the Russian command claims that Grozny will fall in three of four days, but at the end of that time, fighting still continues. There are heavy casualties on both sides. Major General Mikhail Malofeyev, deputy commander of the Northern Group of Russian forces in Chechnya and a key commander of the Russian assault on Grozny, is killed on the first day of the new offensive. Meanwhile, while officially only about 800 Russian soldiers have died in the second Chechen war, a Russian group, the Union of Committees of Soldiers' Mothers, claims the real figure is about 3,000. This would mean that the Russian military is well on the way to losing as many soldiers as in the first Chechen war. And the devastation of Chechnya is also just as heavy this time as last time.

March 26, 2000:

Russian presidential elections are scheduled for this day. Acting President Putin wants to ensure that Chechnya is subjugated by then, in order to ensure his election as President. □

Chechnya must have the right to self-determination!

Down with the Russian invasion of Chechnya!

by Joseph Green

The following article first appeared in a *Communist Voice* leaflet issued during the early days of the current Russian war on Chechnya on October 23, 1999.

Russian troops are once again bombarding Grozny, the capital of Chechnya. They have occupied a third of Chechnya, and tens of thousands of refugees have fled Chechnya for neighboring regions. In 1994-96 Russia devastated Grozny and drenched Chechnya in blood. That war ended, but the status of Chechnya was left unsettled. Today the Russian troops are back. The Russian government has, in effect, renounced the peace settlement of the 1994-96 war: it no longer recognizes the Chechen government; and it is seeking to maintain Chechnya in Russia no matter what the Chechen people want.

Russia is using the pretext of fighting rebel bands in Dagestan to justify its invasion of Chechnya. These bands are apparently composed in large part of Chechens (although not sanctioned by the Chechen government) and are under Islamic fundamentalist influence. But it wasn't until the Russians stomped on Chechnya in 1994-96 that fundamentalist influence zoomed. And it is the invasion of Chechnya and the brutal methods of fighting the rebels in Dagestan that may spread both fundamentalism and hatred of Russia throughout the region. At this time, Dagestan—which is quite diverse ethnically—probably doesn't want to leave Russia, and probably doesn't sympathize with the rebel bands. But if the Russian troops continue to leave a bloody trail throughout the region, this could change. Already Russian military activity in Dagestan has instigated ethnic conflicts there.

The Yeltsin government has also used the pretext of several bloody terrorist bomb blasts in Moscow to spread racist hysteria throughout Russia. Chechens, and darker-skinned peoples, are being expelled from Moscow and other areas of Russia. President Yeltsin and Premier Vladimir Putin are trying to increase their popularity by stepping over heaps of Chechen bodies. This is also the fruit of the years of extreme nationalist

agitation by Zyuganov's party (misnamed "communists") and Zhirinovskiy's fascist party (misnamed "liberal democrats"): both Yeltsin and the largest opposition parties are trying to divert Russian workers from fighting the real causes of their extreme poverty and oppression.

Thus the war against Chechnya harms the interests of the working people of both Russia and Chechnya. It promotes chauvinism in Russia while it kills large numbers of Chechens and ruins their country. The Chechens, like the East Timorese, deserve the right to self-determination. Chechnya was annexed to Tsarist Russia by force. If it was to be maintained in Russia despite this history, Russia had to create favorable conditions for Chechen life and development. This might have won over the Chechens to staying with Russia. Instead, both Russian state-capitalist and free-market regimes have continually oppressed Chechnya.

The Bolshevik revolution inaugurated new policies of freedom for the formerly oppressed nationalities in the Russian empire. It reversed the tsarist policies of oppression. But the revolution decayed, and was replaced by a Stalinist state-capitalist order. This regime no longer had anything to do with socialism or Marxism. In 1944, Stalin ordered the deportation of all Chechens from Chechnya (which was then part of the Chechen-Ingush Autonomous Republic—and the Ingush were deported too), and the very name of this nationality was erased from Soviet literature. It was only after Stalin's death that the Chechens were able, eventually, to return to Chechnya. State-capitalism remained in Russia, but the policy towards the national minorities softened. Now state-capitalism has been replaced by the neo-liberal Yeltsin government, and it has stepped up the oppression of Chechnya.

It is in the interests of the Russian working class, and of socialist activists all over the world, to oppose the oppression of Chechnya. This is not because Chechnya has a socialist or revolutionary government: it doesn't. It is because the working class can only build up its world-wide unity by showing that it opposes unity imposed by tanks and artillery. As we approach the new millennium, the Marxist-Leninist principle of the right to self-determination remains crucial for working class unity□

Correspondence

Is state-ownership in a capitalist country a “socialist institution”?

Below is the latest instalment of the correspondence between ZN and *Communist Voice*. ZN begins by responding to Mark's reply to him in the last issue of CV.

15 October 1999

Dear *Communist Voice* —

I do not paint too rosy a picture of various world developments, nor do I underestimate the extent of the crisis facing the revolutionary movement. Quite the contrary. I am aware of the crisis of revolutionary orientation, & the lack of proletarian organization in the West, in the remaining Stalinist states, & in the Third World. I have expressed the idea that *Communist Voice*'s own views demonstrate the crisis of revolutionary orientation. I began by challenging your thoroughly anti-Manifesto view that state ownership = state capitalism ≠ communism, & therefore ≠ socialism. You now seem to be rethinking this idea, & asking instead: when does state ownership = socialism, & when doesn't it? I'm not sure that this poses the question any better. As far as I am concerned, state ownership is socialism. I'm not saying that socialism doesn't include other points — again, the Manifesto lists 9 other points, in the program for the socialist transition to communism, beside state ownership. Nor am I saying that capitalists don't use certain socialist measures themselves, not for the benefit of the workers, but for their own benefit. Public education, nationalized health care, & social security are all socialist crumbs thrown to the workers in order to avoid revolution. Nationalizing of collapsed banks, as in Japan, to avoid either the disappearance of the bank, or the maintenance of the failed bank in incompetent, corrupt private hands at the expense of the taxpayers, either of which would be disastrous for capitalism, is also an example of a socialist measure serving capitalism.

My own view is something like this: the world situation is so bad that every small gain for the working classes is significant. That 2 million peasants were saved in Kosovo is significant, even though it wasn't revolutionary. I believe in revolution. When we as communists must devote so much energy to saving 2 million peasants from fascist genocide, in a non-revolutionary situation (& we must), how can this be seen as rosy to someone devoted to revolution?

Two post-Marx realities must be dealt with by contemporary Marxists, & we cannot quote Marx chapter & verse for the answers. One is the problem of fascism. Marx said that economic crisis must necessarily play into the hands of us leftist revolutionaries, because of the resulting reaction of the masses against the capitalists. But the right found an ideological solution for that: fascism. And now there is a tendency for the masses to

turn toward the right in times of economic crisis.

Secondly there is the Bomb. Marx said that history must inevitably evolve toward communism, with only apparent back-sliding from time to time. But if the Bomb ends the game during a period of back-sliding into fascist nationalistic war, communism will not be reached.

Because of these threats, socialist ideas must be promoted everywhere. Socialist institutions must be encouraged everywhere, in every context, even when they are in the hands of the capitalists, & not likely to lead to a transition to communism in that place any time soon. Because the presence of the leftist Zeitgeist, even in a watered-down form, is all-important, to prevent a slide into the fascist mentality, so typical of the Thatcher-Reagan 80's, when it was impossible for even the L-word to penetrate the Western working class brain, much less communist propaganda. The current post-Gingrich right (Bush, Giuliani, Lott, etc.) is trying to return the US to the 80's mentality. Bush's “compassionate conservatism” — right wing ideology “for the benefit of the working class” — is a new manifestation of the fascist appeal to the masses. Meanwhile in Europe, Schroeder may be said to be trying to pull a Mitterrand — the old 80's style “social democracy” which calls itself social democracy, but isn't even that, but simply conservatism calling itself social democracy. Social democracy is insufficient, but it is necessary to make criticism of conservatives disguised as social democrats, like Schroeder, loud & clear. Otherwise you have Mitterrand-like anti-democratic slaughters of the 10's of thousands in Algeria, while the European working class turns back to the honest right in disgust, losing all sight of what leftism means.

So my belief is that it is necessary to push constantly to the left, everywhere & in every way. The social democrats must be kept on their toes. The momentum world-wide must move toward the left. When the workers are well-educated politically, & confident, they will make ever greater demands. The social democrats are there to make concessions when they must. When the capitalists can allow no more concessions, but the masses have not been re-routed into fascism — that's when revolution can take place. So every push in the direction of state-ownership is good, so long as it is accompanied by education of the masses as to what the desirable long-range goal is for the workers. And this is a part of our role as communist intellectuals/propagandists.

Meanwhile the development throughout the world is uneven. While it is necessary to try to make gains everywhere at every level, while it is necessary to give special attention to the most outrageous atrocities being perpetuated upon working classes, as in Kosovo, it is also necessary — realizing just how un-rosy the picture is — to give special attention to any actual revolutions that are going on. Right now Colombia has the only revolution big enough to make the mainstream TV news. We must support

FARC. The Colombian government is very corrupt & very weak. US intervention cannot save it from a continually growing revolution, nor is a Vietnam-like invasion, which would inevitably fail, likely. FARC is influenced by Cuba, which is not a very successful model. I support Cuban socialism, but it is necessary to encourage FARC to develop a more successful, more inspiring system. If FARC succeeds, there is no doubt that the Shining Path in Peru will be inspired to renew activity, & again become visible in the mainstream TV news. We must encourage both success & political correctness. Why is Mao correct on the one point of the Third World being the current battlefield? Because yes, there is a crisis of orientation & organization, which we must address everywhere, but the greater poverty, & lack of structure amounting to chaos, in Third world capitalism, gives the Third World revolutionary a huge advantage.

I was referring to your mention of *Freedom Socialist* on page 37 — I had been reading their paper myself, & was quite disappointed, because I used to like them for their social liberalism, feminism, & anti-racism.

Sincerely,
ZN □

Mark replies:

A revolutionary trend must oppose social-democracy and state-capitalism

Dear ZN,

Thanks for writing once again. Your letter has the merit of giving a clear presentation of your political outlook, an outlook that in its general form is very popular in the left today. By keeping a focus on various key political issues, you help make clear the difference between many commonly held views in the left and the anti-revisionist stand of the Communist Voice Organization. What then, is the basic picture you paint of how to deal with the world today? You say that you are for revolution. That's good. Yet your basic position is that the workers must place their hopes in the reformist bourgeoisie and social-democracy out of fear of fascism, and state-capitalism out of fear of private capitalism. (You don't mention the Democratic Party in the U.S., but it would be hard to maintain a consistent stand against them either, given your softness towards reformism and social-democracy.) A particular example of your support for what the CVO would consider state-capitalism is your support for the Castro regime. You don't find the system in Cuba to be inspiring, but since its not private capitalism, you support it as "socialist." And presumably, you continue to support such uninspiring socialism even as Castro directs his own piecemeal privatization of the Cuban economy, out of fear of a more rapid privatization. The CVO, on the other hand, believes there can be no serious talk of the workers becoming a revolutionary force if they are not capable of maintaining their own independent class stand, distinct from, and opposed to, *all*

bourgeois trends.

Is opposition to state-capitalism opposition to all state ownership?

In fact, perhaps the key issue in your letter is the evaluation of state ownership. For you, just about anything that is not the purest form of free-market capitalism is socialism. You consider virtually all state ownership to be socialist, not just in countries you (mistakenly) think are socialist due to the dominance of state property, but even the everyday government intervention in the economy in the openly capitalist countries. This has a lot to do with your prettification of social-democracy in Europe as enacting socialist measures, even if such measures are, as you put it, "a socialist measure serving capitalism." Your promotion of state-capitalism as socialism also seems to make it difficult for you to understand our arguments countering these views. Contrary to your letter, it is not my view, nor the view of articles in CVO that you refer to, that state ownership equals state-capitalism. What we have consistently stated is that the existence of state ownership, in and of itself, is not sufficient to prove whether society is moving toward socialism or is a state-capitalist society. It depends on what class is running this state sector.

One of the main themes in this and your previous letters is that if there is extensive state ownership plus some social programs in a society, then that society must be "socialist" in the Marxist sense. In reply, I have pointed out how the revolutions in the so-called socialist countries such as the former Soviet Union, China, and Cuba, while accomplishing various positive things, have long ago faded away. As the revolutions faded, a new type of exploitative system was established. It was not the rule of the old bourgeoisie which had been largely deposed and expropriated. Rather a new ruling class grew up based on the state sector, which included property expropriated from the bourgeoisie. Thus, not socialism, but a new type of state-capitalism was established in these countries.

In support of this view, CV has carried a number of articles showing that the state sector in these countries did not operate on behalf of society as a whole. Anarchy of production manifested itself within the state sector. Social planning by the state remained a polite fiction covering over a mad scramble for resources and profits among competing enterprises and sectors. Marxist socialism begins with the idea that the workers run society. But in these fake "socialist" societies, state enterprises were not run by or for the working class, but by and for competing enterprise managers and the powerful central bureaucrats. The party/state bureaucracy and enterprise managers were not the servants of society, as envisioned by Marx, but the overlords of a new class stratification. Once again the workers became an oppressed class. They became disgruntled, disillusioned and dispossessed of the economy their new masters told them was in their hands.

While the majority of the left presents the fall of state-capitalism in these countries as the product of a Western conspiracy or outside pressure, in fact the main reason for the collapse of these countries was their own internal class evolution. The collapse of the Soviet Union and similar "social-

ist" countries was a product of the very forces created in the corrupt state-capitalism masquerading as socialism. On the one hand, the new private property owners evolved from the state bureaucrats who for decades grew used to treating state property as their own private domain. On the other hand, the masses, who were alienated from these societies, fought for their downfall. The final tragedy was that since these state-capitalist societies masqueraded as "socialist," those revolting against it often fell prey to the propaganda of market capitalism, rather than aiming at re-establishing a genuine communist trend.

Your reply to this analysis is that the CV articles dealing with this subject are opposed to Marx's idea that in order to achieve socialism, the workers' state must step-wise take over the instruments of production. Along the same line, in your letter of October 15, you claim to see some shift in my view whereby I recently have come to recognize that in some cases, state ownership is a step in building socialism. Actually, the articles in question never doubted whether a revolutionary workers' state would have to take over the economic enterprises and explicitly point out that a revolutionary workers' state would step-wise take over the main means of production. And one of my previous letters to you pointed that out. But you ignore this and insist on equating our opposition to an economy under the thumb of fake socialist bureaucrats with rejection of a revolutionary workers' state taking over the economy.

Avoiding how the state-capitalist economy really operates

Misrepresenting our stand in this fashion betrays a lack of concern for the different way the state sector functions depending on which class is in power. Our articles have concentrated on examining *how* the state sectors operated in what we consider to be the state-capitalist countries and how this demonstrates that these were not countries on the way to building socialism. This is what you turn a blind eye to.

In this light what is most interesting is that you have yet to challenge the actual analysis we have developed of how the state sector really operated in the societies in question. Take for example how you dealt with Pete Brown's article in *Communist Voice*, vol.5, #1 (March 28, 1999) entitled "The rise and suppression of the 'ultra-left' in the Chinese cultural revolution". Your original letter to us (April 5, 1999) in part was a reply to this article on China during the Cultural Revolution of the late 1960s. The subject of Brown's article was how Mao, the supposed champion of the workers, actually undercut their efforts to fight the bureaucratic elite that developed there and thereby helped consolidate the state-capitalist order. But you pretty much avoided the whole issue of the rot in the Chinese state sector raised by Brown's article. Instead you argued on behalf of the alleged theoretical importance of Maoism based on various things he did before coming to power. For you, the existence of the state sector was good enough and you never bothered to reply one way or another to the issue of whether China's state-bureaucracy was corrupt or made mention of any of the basic injustices that led sections of the masses to revolt. In so far as you deal with China after the 1949 revolution, you

attributed its problems simply to the desires of some private Chinese capitalists to return to dominance with the help of the U.S. intelligence agencies. Since then, you have written three more letters, but you have still continued to dodge the heart of our analysis, namely, the basic economic and class structure within the state sector economies of China, Cuba, and the former Soviet Union.

Are state measures "socialist" no matter the class nature of the state?

Your inability so far to accurately characterize our position is tied to your worshipful attitude toward state measures, regardless of which class controls the state and in whose interests it operates. Your latest letter spells this out in dramatic terms. For example, previously I pointed out to you that one could not determine the basic class character of a society simply because it had things like public education and some social programs. After all, I argued, if such things were really enough to prove the existence of socialism, how is it that these are commonplaces in modern capitalist society? In your latest letter you spell out that for you, even the common types of state intervention by capitalist governments are "socialist." You go on to proclaim that these state measures are "socialist" despite each being "an example of a socialist measure serving capitalism." Presumably, by dressing up social programs and state economic intervention by capitalist governments as "socialist", you are trying to bolster your view that social programs plus nationalized industry in countries like the Soviet Union, China, and Cuba prove that they really were socialist. But you inadvertently prove the opposite. For if such allegedly "socialist" measures exist in overtly capitalist regimes, then it proves that merely pointing to the existence of social programs and a state economic sector fails to answer the question of the overall class nature of the society.

I would think that if the sort of state intervention you like also exists in modern capitalism, this would give one pause as to whether one can declare the basic nature of a society "socialist" because it has the same type of state intervention as the capitalists, albeit on a lesser scale in "normal" capitalist countries. The class nature of enterprises run by capitalist governments is masked by their state character. Yet you yourself can see they "serve capitalism." How is it then that mere reference to state measures, even if on a grander scale in the countries you consider socialist, refutes our view that these were really state-capitalist countries? Wouldn't one have to examine more carefully how the state sector really operated before deciding its class nature? You are reluctant to do this, and this I believe is what upsets you about the CV articles examining these countries. The CV articles you dismiss as "anti-Marxist" have shown how it is possible for state economic intervention to mask the class interests of an exploiting class, the new bureaucratic bourgeoisie, and the anarchic competition between different state enterprises and sections of the ruling state/party elite.

Meanwhile, how you can claim that a measure "serving capitalism" is really a socialist measure is beyond me. But if we apply such thinking consistently, it would mean that even in the societies you call "socialist" it would not matter whether or not

the economy served the masses or a class of exploiters. Thus, what you call a socialist society could accommodate, by your own conception, a society run by state-capitalist bureaucrats. Once again, your concept that "state ownership is socialism" cuts off any possibility of characterizing a society by analyzing the actual class relations that exist.

Prettifying state measures carried out by the capitalists

You, of course, are not a right-winger politically and would like to see the overthrow of the present capitalist regimes. But your efforts to glamorize common state measures of bourgeois regimes as "socialist," are just as far off the mark as the hysteria against them by the right-wingers. The John Birch society and other right-wing wackos also declare such things as the income tax to be socialistic, using the same passages you cite in Marx and Engels' *Communist Manifesto* as "proof". Yet, somehow, the world of capital has not tumbled though income taxes, public schools, and even national health care systems of various types proliferate within it.

You even consider Japan's recent bank bailout "socialist" since it takes these banks away from "corrupt private hands." And what hands will control these banks now? Corrupt public officials who are the servants of the dominant sections of Japanese capital. In fact, within the last couple of years a huge corruption scandal was exposed in the Japanese Ministry of Finance and the Bank of Japan. According to the *OECD Economic Surveys — Japan, November 1998*, 112 officials of the Ministry of Finance were punished for accepting bribes from private companies along with 98 officials of the Bank of Japan. (p.193) I am not sure which banks you are referring to when you promote some recent bank nationalizations in Japan, but the same *OECD Economic Survey* refers to the fact that "the Long Term Credit Bank is to be temporarily nationalized, and then, once its balance sheet is cleared up, it will be either sold back to the private sector or wound up." (p.133) Even if the Japanese capitalist state continued to run this bank forever, it would hardly be a "socialist" measure. But the example of the Long Term Credit Bank shows that capitalist nationalizations are often aimed at using public resources only to bail out the corrupt private enterprise and return it to private owners. You hail the "socialist" bank nationalizations of Japan as "avoiding either the disappearance of the bank, or the maintenance of the failed bank in incompetent, corrupt private hands at the expense of the taxpayers." But the Long Term Credit Bank example would do the opposite: it eventually would result either in a bailout of the private capitalist bankers or the closing of the bank. Moreover, the corruption that can be found in the Japanese state sector is no exception. If you think that state-capitalist banking is the answer to private corruption, just take a look at Indonesia and South Korea where the scandals in the state banking system have been an important element in bringing on the crisis of "crony capitalism."

Of course, these days privatization is all the rage of the world bourgeoisie. But the pendulum has swung the other way, too. Some of the same international imperialist financial agencies

that now sing the praises of the market have, in previous decades, promoted the virtues of state control of certain economic sectors in the Third World as necessary for their capitalistic development. Nationalization of important parts of the economy was agreeable to various capitalist powers in Europe for decades following WWII. State banks and industrial sectors have played key roles in elevating countries like South Korea into a player in the world economic scene, and before that Japan. And even these days, state economic intervention on behalf of the bourgeoisie has a prominent role to play. In fact, the famous "military-industrial" complex involves vast state subsidization of industry, if not outright state control. And this is something which isn't going away no matter how thick the talk about government getting out of the economy.

The onslaught of neo-liberalism has brought tremendous pressure on the left to seek salvation in any sort of opposition trend. And when a good section of the bourgeois liberals have adopted the neo-liberal stance themselves, it is easy to pretend that the out-of-fashion liberalism of yesteryear is really some radical alternative which challenges the foundations of capitalism. But it does not assist the workers one bit to pretend that liberal reforms and a larger state sector really threaten the existence of the capitalism. I think that calling simple reform measures "socialist" only creates illusions for the workers. True, you add that such "socialist" measures serve capitalism, but if by "socialist" you mean measures that help preserve capitalism, then, whatever your intentions, you are essentially arguing that socialism and capitalism are compatible.

Does this mean the workers should reject public education and national health care because they don't overturn capitalism? Not at all. It is necessary and good for the workers to fight for reforms which improve their immediate situation. For instance, workers often have to wage the bitterest strikes just to keep their living and working conditions from deteriorating. Such struggles help organize the proletariat's ranks. But winning higher wages should never be confused with the ultimate socialist goal of the class struggle. Exaggerating the significance of such things tends to undermine the socialist goal. But it is not only the ultimate goal, but the struggle for the immediate ones that are weakened. Glamorizing such measures as "socialist" creates illusions in the liberal/reformist trends. But not only aren't these trends "socialist", but, as loyal defenders of capitalism, they tend to betray the fight for even the limited measures they claim to champion. Creating illusions in the liberal/reformist swamp means delaying the building of a revolutionary class trend really independent of both the conservative and reformist wings of the bourgeoisie, and thereby helps keep the struggle for various immediate demands confined to the limits acceptable to the liberals.

Marxism and state economic programs

The *Communist Manifesto* which you quote in your defense does not say that any time nationalization takes place or an income tax is implemented this is "socialist" or part of a socialist transformation of society. Rather, Marx and Engels state that the first step in the communist revolution is "to raise the proletariat

to the position of ruling class". This is what precedes the list of measures that you are fond of quoting. Unfortunately you consider which class rules society to be a minor matter, while you think the mere existence of state property of any kind is cause for celebration. In contrast, Marx and Engels did not think, as you put it, that "state ownership is socialism." They saw an essential difference between when the capitalist state takes over economic enterprises and when the proletarian political power undertakes to transform capitalist and state-capitalist enterprises into the property of society as a whole.

One place where the Marxist position on state-capitalism is elaborated is in Engels' famous work, *Anti-Duhring*, (Part III. Socialism, Section II. Theoretical).¹ In this section, Engels points out that the development of capitalist monopolies and state-capitalism prepares the material conditions for socialism, but "does not do away with the capitalistic nature of the productive forces."

Engels writes:

"In the trusts, freedom of competition changes into its very opposite—monopoly; and the production without any definite plan of capitalistic society capitulates to the production upon a definite plan of the invading socialistic society. Certainly this is so far still to the benefit and advantage of the capitalists. But in this case the exploitation is so palpable that it must break down. No nation will put up with production conducted by trusts, with so barefaced an exploitation of the community by a small band of dividend-mongers. . . .

". . . But the transformation, either into joint-stock companies [and trusts], or into state ownership, does not do away with the capitalistic nature of the productive forces. In the joint-stock companies [and trusts] this is obvious. And the modern state, again, is only the organization that bourgeois society takes on in order to support the general external conditions of the capitalist mode of production against the encroachments as well of the workers as of individual capitalists. The modern state, no matter what its form, is essentially a capitalist machine, the state of the capitalists, the ideal personification of the total national capital. The more it proceeds to the taking over of the productive forces, the more does it actually become the national capitalist, the more citizens does it exploit. The workers remain wage-workers—proletarians. The capitalist relation is

not done away with. It is rather brought to a head. But brought to a head, it topples over. State ownership of the productive forces is not the solution of the conflict, but concealed within it are the technical conditions that form the elements of that solution.

"This solution can only consist in the practical recognition of the social nature of the modern forces of production, and therefore in the harmonizing of the modes of production, appropriation, and exchange with the socialized character of the means of production. And this can only come about by society openly and directly taking possession of the productive forces which have outgrown all control except that of society as a whole."

Here, it is true, Engels uses the word "socialistic" in a passage in part describing what the significance of state-capitalism is. But this passage can hardly be taken to mean that this capitalist state-ownership equals socialism. Rather, Engels is talking about how both the private monopoly and state-ownership which eventually grows up under capitalism helps make planning possible and is, therefore, a harbinger of the planning that will exist in the "invading socialistic society." Note well that Engels talks not just about state property providing the material basis for socialism, but private monopoly, too. If you, ZN, want to talk about state-capitalist property as socialist in the sense that Engels uses the term in the above passage, then to be consistent you should also hail private monopoly corporations as socialist. After all, Engels states that not only state property, but private monopoly businesses create conditions that will make economic planning possible in socialist society. But you consider state-capitalist property good and private monopoly corporations as evil, and call only state property "socialist" as if it had a different class character from the bad private capitalism. In contrast, Engels stresses the difference between capitalist monopoly and state ownership, and control of the means of production by society. He emphasizes that state-capital does not resolve capitalism's contradictions, but merely creates the "technical conditions" for its abolition.

Of course, when Engels differentiates between state-capitalism and socialism, this doesn't mean he rejects all nationalization. Likewise, while you interpreted our critique of state-capitalism to mean rejection of state property of any type, it meant nothing of the sort. Further emphasizing the difference between state property in general, and social control, Engels states that the achievement of social control is possible only **after the proletariat vanquishes the bourgeoisie** and takes over the main means of production. Engels writes: *"The proletariat seizes political power and turns the means of production in the first instance into state property."*

Glorifying state-capitalism and illusions in social-democracy

Now if we actually lived in a world where socialist measures were being carried out while the bourgeoisie still reigned, we'd

¹Mark quotes from the English edition of 1969 from Progress Publishers, Moscow. This edition uses the modifications made by Engels when he rewrote certain parts of the book for pamphlet publication as *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific*. It is this pamphlet which has certain expressions—such as the "invading socialistic society" within capitalism—which might, until they are pondered, appear favorable to ZN's views.—CV.

be living in the dream world fantasy promoted by social-democracy. In this light it's interesting that you yourself argue that "socialist institutions must be encouraged everywhere, in every context, even when they are in the hands of the capitalists" and "every push in the direction of state-ownership is good." Such things echo the social-democratic myths of the workers running things without upsetting the capitalist order itself. Of course, you add that this must be accompanied by educating the masses as to what "the desirable long-range" goal is, since social-democracy is "insufficient." But by promoting the idea of socialist institutions developing within capitalism, you are undermining any notion of Marxist socialism.

Because you have a hard time finding fault with the basic notions of social-democracy, your criticism of it is largely confined to examples of some social-democrats acting like conservatives. But you advise the workers to cheer on the social-democrats every time they nationalize, keeping them ignorant of the fact that class contradictions remain there between the management of the state sector enterprises and the workers. If you really want to expose social-democracy, you have to show its capitulations to capital or social-democrats acting like conservatives are not accidents, but the logical consequence of social-democratic dogma that the interests of the capitalists can be defended without jeopardizing the needs of the workers.

You talk about supporting revolution. But while uttering revolutionary phrases, you chafe at the task of developing the political independence of the proletariat from the reformist and social-democratic milieu. Talk of revolution rings hollow if we don't encourage the workers to take up their own position opposed to all strains of bourgeois politics. Revolutionary work is not simply dreaming of the great day when the revolution comes, while for today, we can promote false hopes in the liberals and social-democrats. Nor can lining up the workers behind the liberal/reformist bourgeoisie be justified on the grounds that the workers may otherwise seek salvation in fascism. Unfortunately such stands are implicit in your scenario for revolution. Here's the formula you put forward: 1) the capitalists stop concessions to the masses, but 2) the masses don't follow the fascists, while 3) we tell the masses that every move toward state-capitalism ("socialism" in your terminology) is good, and 4) we should also have a "the desirable long-range goal". Among the notable features of this scheme is that while it presumably is portraying a revolutionary crisis, it doesn't consider rallying the workers for revolution, which is still relegated to the "long-range" future. Meanwhile, in this revolutionary crisis, the activists are instructed to heap praise on the reformist forces seeking to save capitalism from itself. Perhaps you would really be disappointed if revolution did not take place in such circumstances. But if you don't work to build a distinct revolutionary trend today, if you don't clarify the class policy of the reformists for the workers today, if you tail behind the "lesser-evil" reformists out of fear of the fascists, then you will inevitably subvert the revolutionary inclinations of the masses.

Let's look at one example of how your scheme plays out in the real world. In Russia the masses have been hammered by the neo-liberal Yeltsin for the last ten years. Not only that, but a

formidable force exists that says the answer is more state property, Zyuganov's so-called "communists" of the CPRF, who you went to bat for in a previous letter in response to my criticism of them. So there is economic devastation of the masses, and a force that you consider worthy of mass support which has a social program not unlike the Western European social-democrats. But after ten years, there is no mass revolutionary movement. Instead, generally the masses are being tossed back and forth between the remnants of the old state-capitalist rulers they got rid of ten years ago and the naked capitalist plunderers that now rule. Unless the Russian workers are able to establish their own independent revolutionary trend, this will be their sad fate.

You may object that with my incessant talk about the need for an independent class trend today, I neglect that the masses are in need of some immediate relief from the neo-liberal onslaught which Zyuganov's crew will allegedly bring. But you yourself point to examples in Western Europe where the social-democrats in power drive down the masses. If we judge the CPRF by their actions, not their "pro-worker" rhetoric, we find that they have served in a number of governments under Yeltsin, expressed a desire for cooperation with the international financial agencies of imperialism, and worked to contain the masses' anger and limit their demands during demonstrations. In some local areas where CPRF officials are in power, they have directly suppressed worker actions. And far from being an antidote to fascism, the CPRF has united with various fascist and chauvinist dregs, not to mention its own anti-semitism and virulent Russian nationalism. So unless the workers develop their own independent movement from both Yeltsin and the CPRF, they will be hard pressed to achieve even their immediate demands.

If we were to apply your approach towards Western European social-democracy to U.S. politics, we would be lining up the workers behind the Democratic Party, or at least its most liberal wing. After all, while in the U.S. there is no powerful social-democratic or bourgeois "labor" party, a similar politics has been put forward within the Democratic Party. And the Democrats have long had an alliance with the bulk of the rotten AFL-CIO hierarchy. The problem with the Democrats is not simply scoundrels like Clinton, who often steals from the platform of the Republicans, but the more liberal types as well. Jimmy Carter was noted for his liberalism to the point that he became the subject of ridicule by the present neo-liberal establishment. But when the coal miners launched their militant shut-down of the coal fields in 1977, it was Carter who brought in the troops to break the strike.

While there are cases of social-democrats blatantly carrying out the will of capital in the 1980s, the social-democratic betrayal of the workers goes back much longer than this. In your first letter you designate yourself an admirer of Lenin. But it was Lenin who emphasized the need to break from social-democracy. In his works he showed how the social-democrats' failure to uphold truly revolutionary politics among the workers led to their shameful capitulation to "their own" governments during the inter-imperialist bloodbath of WWI. The social-democratic parties did not rally the workers against their own

exploiters during the war, as Lenin's Bolsheviks did, but supported the war efforts of their governments. Thus, they pitted the French and Russian workers against the German, the German against the English, the American against the German, etc. This stand of the social-democrats helped the bourgeoisie send tens of millions of workers to their death.

It was this service to the bourgeoisie which ushered in the period when the bourgeoisie entrusted the social-democrats to be a ruling party. Nor was the bourgeoisie adverse to allowing the social-democrats to make certain concessions to the workers after the war when the proletarian revolution threatened them in several countries. By offering some concessions, but keeping the workers struggle within acceptable bounds, the social-democrats brought time for the capitalists to regroup against the workers. In Germany for instance, the social-democrats, by restraining the workers and allowing the fascists to organize, paved the way for rise of Nazism to power. In the post-WWII period we find the social-democrats of various countries lining up behind the Cold War policy and continuing to cling to their colonial possessions (as you note with the French in Algeria). Is it any surprise then, that at the end of the 20th century, the social-democrats are taking up the conservative mantel? If the social-democrats make a concession one day and club the workers the next, this is not some quirk, but reflects an effort to adjust to the changing needs of the capitalists themselves. Whether they are forced to give something to the masses or are breaking strikes, liberal and social-democratic politics keeps the workers enchained to the bourgeoisie.

For independent class politics distinct from all bourgeois trends

Once again, there is no alternative to working for a distinct revolutionary class trend. One of the major obstacles to the workers coming around to revolutionary positions, however, is the disgusting nature of what has been parading around as "leftism" and "socialism." If the masses think socialism was the corrupt system in the Soviet Union from Stalin to Gorbachev, or that the repressive and class-stratified societies in China and Cuba are socialism they *should be* repulsed by the idea. If the masses are told that the Mexican government's PEMEX oil

monopoly, or the state banks and industry of South Korea, or the U.S. Postal Service are really "socialist" enterprises, socialist consciousness will not advance. If we create the impression that the social-democrats are sort of socialists, too, there is no way we can win the masses to a real revolutionary alternative. Reviving socialist consciousness today cannot be accomplished without opposing state-capitalism masquerading as socialism. In this regard, I note that you "support Cuban socialism" though you also hold it "is not a very successful model" and is not an "inspiring system." I am curious to learn more about your views on Cuba. As for me, I think Marxist socialism is a lot more inspiring than Castro's version.

You say you do not paint too rosy a picture when dealing with the problems facing the revolutionary movement. But in your last letter you were implying that the KLA was a radical left force and had exaggerated hopes in the bourgeois opposition to Milosevic in Serbia. Now you also paint a glowing picture of social-democracy and its "socialist" state measures under capitalism. Everywhere, it seems the only alternative you offer to the forces of fascism and the right, is whatever trend already predominates. If a revolutionary trend is already the main opposition you may welcome it. But this is rarely the situation today, and where such a revolutionary class movement is absent or small you do not see the need for the tasks necessary for working to rebuild a distinct revolutionary trend. In this sense perhaps, you can rightfully claim not to be too optimistic.

Discussion of controversies in the left is important

In closing, while it is clear we have a different political approach, I think that the issues you raise in your correspondence are ones that are on the minds of many activists. Discussing such issues provides a real service in helping sort out questions of orientation for the movement. *Communist Voice* will do its best to continue to raise and discuss matters which are being debated in the left. Thanks once again for showing an interest in developing the debate.

Sincerely,
Mark, for *Communist Voice* □

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