

## **Articles about the anti-WTO demonstration of Nov. 1999 in Seattle:**

(from Communist Voice #23, February 4, 2000)

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# **The importance of the 'battle of Seattle'**

by Frank, Seattle

(from Communist Voice #23, February 4, 2000)

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.

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

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 and had many discussions with other protesters -- before, during, and after WTO meeting. We also produced a second leaflet of December 6 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 neo-liberalism 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 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 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.

Notes:

(1) The Communist Voice has discussed this issue several times.

See, for example, the article "Imperialism in Papua New Guinea", Volume 2, Number 2. (Return to text)

(2) Besides 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. (Text)



**Struggle against the WTO calls for conscious struggle against monopoly capitalism---**

## **THE PATH FORWARD**

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" à 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-econ-

omy 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 endeav-

ors 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 agricul-



tural 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 "aboli-

tion 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 coun-

try 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**

by Seattle members of the Communist Voice Organization

The lying has started. Officer Smith of the SPD: "Whenever we used tear gas or bullets with pepper gas, we warned people. We gave them five minutes to leave." The P.I. 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! Sssh . . . 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 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 Tues. 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, sweat-shop 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 its problem. Its problem is its 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 its 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 Nov. 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 Dec. 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 clamp-down 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 by Frank about his work and what he saw at the WTO demonstration, written 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 MLP(1) 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 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 Challengedealing 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 lead 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 lead 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 that 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 coali-

tion. 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. . . .

Notes:

(1) The 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. (Return to text)

# **Wrong from opposite directions:**

## **The sectarian Sparts and the reformist CPUSA**

### **on the anti-WTO protest**

by Pete Brown

*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 marshals.

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 English 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 anar-

chist circles, and it pointed to the necessity of active resistance. But at the same time, it criticized the dead-end 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. Its 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 with 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 corre-

sponding 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 destruc-



tive 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 'work-

ers'); 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" elsewhere in this issue of Communist Voice.*

## **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

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" elsewhere in this issue of Communist Voice.*

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 unpro-

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

voked 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,

*Communist Voice* is a journal of revolutionary theory. It exposes the capitalist system, and also tackles controversies facing activists. It upholds real Marxism-Leninism, which has nothing in common with the false "communist" regimes like the former Soviet Union, or China and Cuba, or with Trotskyism, Stalinism or Maoism. For subscription info and to see other articles visit: [www.communistvoice.org](http://www.communistvoice.org). Email: [mail@communistvoice.org](mailto:mail@communistvoice.org).







