

The Weakness of a Politics of Protest

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June 2000

Expanded slightly November 2000 and January 2001

"Unfortunately, with the growing popularity of these struggles [against the WTO, IMF, and WB] amongst broad sections of the left, we can already begin to see this developing movement shifting further in the direction of polite reform rather than open resistance. Even among many anarchists, we can see an abandonment of explicitly radical opposition in favor of embracing a predominantly reformist agenda put forward by the left-liberals and NGO-types. With this in mind, we feel that revolutionary anarchists have a major role to play within this social movement... For us, these institutions are beyond reform, since they play key roles within a global capitalist system that must be abolished outright. Not only must we reject and resist this system at every possible level, we must also put forward a clear anarchist alternative that has the ability to capture the imagination of the oppressed on a large-scale and point towards the direction of true social liberation."

Statement from a contemporary militant anarchist.

This 'major role' that anarchists are expected to play in the movement, to 'radicalize' it, will be a disappointing one, because it will not succeed. In a Politics of Protest, with its invariable split between reformists and revolutionaries, the reformists almost always win, because the ruling class sides with them, in order to take the steam out of the movement and neutralize it, knowing that they can always renege on the reforms later after all the commotion has died down. This defeat is rooted in the Politics of Protest itself, and does not simply indicate that revolutionaries didn't try hard enough to 'radicalize' the movement. As long as we are merely fighting against what we *don't* want, instead of fighting for what we *do* want, we will always lose.

Fighting for what we want involves a lot more than putting forward "a clear anarchist alternative", especially if such a 'putting forward' is limited to verbal descriptions. The only way that we could really put forward an anarchist alternative would be to try to bring it into being in the real social world, to try to actually create, the new social arrangements which we think should replace those of capitalism. And to do this we would have to shift the focus of our attention, from protesting what they are doing to us to defending what we are doing to them. We would have to go on the offensive. We would have to pick new battlefields, new strategic sites upon which to wage our struggle. I believe that there are three such strategic sites – neighborhood assemblies, workplace assemblies, and household assemblies. If we were trying to set up these new social arrangements, and then fighting to defend our

creations, we would be building the world we want while simultaneously undermining and defeating capitalists.

What does it really mean to "reject and resist this system at every possible level"? Doesn't real rejection mean putting something else in its place? This is the real rejection – to gut and abandon what we don't want by instead putting our energies into creating what we do want. Is bulldozing a Macdonald's enough? Does stopping a meeting or two of the world trade ministers do the trick? Do spring and fall demonstrations in the nation's capital accomplish much? Will disrupting the democratic and republican conventions change anything?

A Politics of Protest is a doomed strategy. It does not lead anywhere. It will exhaust itself in arguments over non-violence, civil disobedience, reform (and in getting the protesters out of jail). And all this while, the ruling class will be using the time thus gained to update, retool, regroup, devise new counter tactics, and refurbish its ideology. Plus it now has the windfall of having pictures of all the protesters, the names and addresses of all the organizations that planned the protest, and copies of all the speeches delivered to be analyzed and studied with an eye to rebutting and discrediting them. Even if there are 30,000 or 100,000 such protesters, and 1000 or 10,000 such organizations, they can easily be identified, investigated, targeted, infiltrated, disrupted, studied, neutralized, intimidated, co-opted, or destroyed, by the vast bureaucracy, military, and secret police of the world's ruling classes.

The left's usual response to this point is to say that therefore we have to have 'massive' protests, and then they wouldn't be able to stop us. Wrong! They could, and have, like with the destruction of Vietnam, the mass murder of several hundred thousand people in Indonesia in 1965, the thoroughgoing destruction of the New Left, the death squads in Central America in the eighties, the extermination of a quarter of the population of East Timor, the invasions of Grenada and Panama, the seventy-eight days of bombings in Yugoslavia in 1999, the ongoing sanctions and bombings in Iraq, the assassinations and massacres taking place right now in Colombia.

But what if we changed direction entirely, and stopped spending all our time trying to stop the crimes of capitalists, and started fighting instead for what we really want? What if the 15,000 towns in the United States with 2,500 inhabitants or less started switching to direct democracy, through neighborhood assemblies, scuttling their hierarchical mayoral governments, something they could easily do if they wanted to? What if peasant villages started converting to cooperative labor? What if workers in stores, offices, and factories forgot about unions and started setting up workplace assemblies to get control over their lives there? What if neighbors on a block started combining resources to create households of 100 to 200 persons? This could become a large movement, but not a mass movement, that is, not one made up of isolated individuals (even if they are in temporary affinity groups) coalescing for a few hours in the streets of the capitals of the world. Rather, it would be a movement made up of communities of people, and thus would be a cooperative movement, at its very roots. A new social order cannot be built in the streets, but only in our neighborhoods, workplaces, and households. Capitalism cannot be defeated in the streets, but only in our neighborhoods, workplaces, and households.

The trouble is, "we" do not know what "we" want. That is, there is no objective, given, fixed definition of what 'radical' means. There is no consensus of opinion even about what it means. There are as many versions (vague ones) of what we want as there are tendencies in the movement. Every group participating in a demonstration probably hopes to further its own version of 'radical', and thus 'radicalize' the movement. The question always is: Radicalized to what? The Living Wage campaign? The Fair Trade campaign? The Leninist vanguard party? The overthrow of capitalism? Social Democracy? Anarchism? Market socialism? Or what?

Moreover, the deeply entrenched ban on utopian thinking, on figuring out concretely what we want to replace capitalism with, continues in effect, hardly being challenged at all from any quarter. Thus instead of powerfully concentrating our mental and physical energies on solving this problem, to eliminate this obstacle to defeating capitalism, we are "taking to the streets" once again, merely protesting, merely engaging in what is basically 'mindless activism'. It's true that the level of analysis this time is considerably higher than in the sixties, and that the targets – sweatshops, the wto/wb/imf, genetically modified organisms, and so forth – are better (as opposed to the civil rights, anti-war, and identity movements of the sixties), and lead almost immediately to the questioning of property and trade and hence to a critique of capitalism. But it is still just protesting, essentially just petitioning the ruling class to change its policies. Even though the protesters say that "we're going there to arrest those criminals" everyone knows that it's just a joke, and that they can't. Even though they tell the cops that they're "not welcome in our streets", it's quite clear that in the end the streets belong to the cops. When they shout that "this is what democracy sounds like" I suppose they mean that in a democracy people can assemble where they will and express their opinions, and also perhaps that democracy is noisy and chaotic. But shouting in the streets by powerless people is not democracy; deliberating in assemblies and having the power to make real decisions is democracy.

We are running out of time. As capitalism continues to disintegrate over the next half century, we will lose the opportunity to replace it with a new egalitarian, democratic social order, unless we can figure out what we want, in down-to-earth concrete terms, and get down to setting it up. We have to know how we want to arrange things and how our new social order will work. In the absence of such a concrete vision, and a strategy to achieve it, the capitalist ruling classes will use the next half century to invent a new social order that enables them to stay in power and stay rich, even if not as capitalists. After all, the ruling classes of feudalism, by transforming themselves into capitalists, did just that.

Imagining anarchism, in very concrete terms, is thus not something secondary, something that can be put off until capitalism is defeated, something that will evolve automatically out of protesting and street activism, something that no one can really know much about now. Rather it is something that is absolutely central to defeating capitalism in the first place, and something that should be given top priority by all oppositionists. It cannot be put off until later. It must be dealt with right now, or else we will lose our chance for liberation.

It's easy to agree on what to protest against. The list of things that need to be stopped under capitalism is long, so long in fact that we don't even need to agree; there is plenty to choose from, so just pick something that suits you. Perhaps this is why so many activists get involved in protesting. It's not so easy though to figure out what we want to replace capitalism with, to work out convincing arguments about how it will plausibly work, and to set about creating such a social world, especially since so little energy is being devoted to the task. The general principles of a free society are known in outline of course, but not in concrete detail (but there are still plenty of disagreements even about principles, for example, whether to keep or abolish the state, the market, jobs). Perhaps this is why so few people get involved in building a new world, but content themselves with protesting against the old.

The Politics of Protest is a weak politics, the politics of weakness, the politics of weak people, with weak imaginations – powerless people. Powerless persons must use whatever tactics they can of course. But that is the point. Why remain powerless, when by adopting a different strategy – building strategic associations – we could become powerful and not be reduced to impotent acts like civil disobedience and demonstrations in the streets against policies we had no say in making?

I have spelled all this out in greater detail in my short book, *Getting Free: A Sketch of an Association of Democratic, Autonomous Neighborhoods and How to Create It*. (a) A short sketch of the new social arrangements which I want is included there. I hope within a year or two or three to post or publish a longer study, *Imagining Anarchism*, which will compare in detail the few schemes that have been put forward to date.

Further Discussion

A. I got a letter of response, and disagreement mostly, from a friend about the above essay. Relevant parts (edited) of my answer follow:

When I first read Jack's response, I thought, "Well, of course he's right." But after mulling it over for a day or two I came to my senses. His letter actually illustrates some of the points I was trying to make. For example, Jack writes: "Do you think that it is sheer coincidence that after Seattle countless anarchist publications, book fairs, collectives, infoshops and activities have sprung up throughout the country?" My point is this: publications, book fairs, collectives, and infoshops cannot defeat capitalism or establish anarchism. How come the people who went to Seattle to protest came away with a desire to do those things, and not to start setting up neighborhood, workplace, and household assemblies? Because book fairs and infoshops are in the air, while assemblies are not. Very few radicals are agitating that this other direction is the way we ought to be going. Is this what radicalization means in practical terms – publications, book fairs, collectives, and infoshops?

Jack also argued that most of these protesters are already involved in "grassroots initiatives, collective endeavors, institutional alternatives, workplace organizations, neighborhood associations, etc." but claimed that there is nothing "implicitly revolutionary" about these efforts.

The assumed meaning of "revolutionary" here, I feel sure, is "anti-capitalist, anti-statist, anarchist," and on this we agree. I also agree that most of the organizing now going on around neighborhoods, workplaces, and households is reformist (i.e., not necessarily anti-capitalist, and certainly not necessarily anarchist), and I said as much in the pamphlet (*Getting Free*). So the struggle against reformism is present in my projected strategy too, but at least there, if it is overcome, you've got something, whereas overcoming reformism in protest movements still leaves to be settled what to do next, that is, what does anti-capitalism really look like, and what does anarchism really mean in concrete terms. In fact I would argue that you can't overcome reformism in the abstract, but only in the concrete, in concrete programs. Maybe overcoming reformism means to actually try to set up functioning neighborhood assemblies, with real power to make decisions that will stick, and the same for workplaces, and households, and thereby to establish the core social arrangements for an anarchist society, the successful defense of which will also destroy capitalism.

Jack then writes the following two very interesting sentences: "Most people become radicalized through struggle, whether it is protesting, labor strikes, or full fledged uprisings. I fail to see how anything that you put forward as a viable alternative to "protest politics" could possibly take place without this radicalization process." Here we see this treacherous abstraction – radicalization – at work again, together with an auxiliary abstraction – struggle. To say that people are "radicalized through struggle" is a meaningless claim. Most of the millions of people who "struggled" for ten years against the Vietnam war never became anti-capitalist. Most of the millions of blacks who "struggled" for civil rights in the sixties never became anti-capitalist, let alone anarchist. Most of the millions of people who "struggled" for women's rights, gay and lesbian rights, old people's rights, children's rights, native american rights, young people's rights, latino rights, welfare mother rights, student rights, GI rights – never became anti-capitalist, let alone anarchist. Toward the end of the sixties, there was a tiny fringe of people in the "movement" who became radical, in the sense of wanting to

destroy capitalism and change the whole system, but by far the majority of these "revolutionaries" became Leninists, or in a few cases, even Stalinists! There was also a minority who were traditional socialists of one kind or another, but there was only a tiny, tiny, tiny minority of New Leftists who became anarchists, or anarcho-syndicalists (or anti-bolshevik communists, or Third Road Radicals, as I used to say), although I believe anarchist themes were a prominent part of the New Left experience.

The protesters of the sixties, the New Left, kept at it for quite a long time, nearly ten years, from the early sixties to the early seventies. But they failed utterly to put forward a coherent program, a believable vision of what they wanted, and consequently could never generate a strategy to achieve that. Instead they focused mainly on reforms, and were considerably successful on that front. Unfortunately, most of those reforms started to be reversed already under Reagan in the eighties, until by now only a few of them remain.

Wallerstein may be correct in claiming that the revolts of the sixties were one of only two systemic, world revolutions against capitalism, the other being in 1848, both of which went down to defeat. (b) And that is the point: the revolts of the sixties failed, although they scared the hell out of capitalists and forced them to make adjustments, and to retool, which of course they did, having vast manpower and financial resources to do so. "Lockdown America" (c) was only one of their responses. The draconian anti-terrorist bill of 1996 was another (they're still retooling after 25 years). They started retooling immediately after Seattle, exhibiting what has got to be a rapid learning curve for police. Already by April 16 in Washington DC they had learned to cordon off the area surrounding the targeted building. And then on to Windsor, and Calgary. In Calgary they simply erected high fences, sealing off blocks around the meeting place of the world's oil ministers, preventing protesters from getting anywhere near it.

It's all too possible that the same thing could happen again now that happened in the sixties. Contemporary anarchist collectives could spend the next ten years protesting, and at the end of that time be no closer to destroying capitalism and establishing anarchism than we "revolutionaries" were at the end of the "movements" of the sixties (it was all pretty much all over by 1972).

In truth, there is no such thing as a "radicalization process". There are only concrete persons struggling for some program or other, lobbying with others, trying to drum up support, trying to achieve the program and turn it into reality. If they are not struggling for a concrete program, but only for a vague program, for some philosophical principles, or if they are only struggling against something they don't like, rather than for something they do like, then their cause is pretty hopeless, and there is not much chance that they will accomplish any significant changes at all.

A few months ago I heard a riveting speech by Kevin Danaher on Alternative Radio. He was a dynamite speaker, and very radical (or so I thought), and delivered a blistering attack on corporations. The other day I bought a book he has recently edited (with coeditor Roger Burbach), published by Common Courage Press, called *Globalize This: The Battle Against the World Trade Organization and Corporate Rule*. The last section of this book, eight articles, is devoted to what to do about it all, and is called "Ways to Restructure the Global Economy". There I find that naive reformist, William Greider, presenting his wish list of national legislation that "we" should push through Congress, many arguments for "fair trade, not free trade", a proposal to tax foreign exchange transactions as a remedy for out-of-control international financial speculation, proposals to make corporations socially responsible, and a whole bunch of other reformist programs. There is certainly nothing here about destroying capitalism, let alone creating anarchism. (Actually, I had been alerted to this situation, about Danaher, by an anarchist e-mail dispatch, probably from Chuck O, in which he mentioned a lively exchange that had taken place between Danaher and a black block anarchist – I wish I had a copy of it, if it

was recorded or written up. I surely could have been informed about this anyway if I had examined Global Exchange's web site more carefully).

I suppose this is what was meant in the quote reproduced at the start of this essay. It argued: "We can already begin to see this developing movement shifting further in the direction of polite reform rather than open resistance." But of course Global Exchange is not shifting. It has always been reformist. Jim Hightower and Ralph Nader are not shifting. Lori Wallach and Medea Benjamin are not shifting. They have always been populists who merely want to restore American democracy to what they think it once was. They may rail against large corporations, but they have no problem with capitalism itself, or with small corporations, or with American democracy as traditionally defined. What is evidently happening then is that Danaher, Nader, Hightower, Wallach, and Benjamin are winning more of the new activists over to their side than the anarchists are. This is not surprising since that kind of populism is closer to what most people in America believe anyway and therefore doesn't require as big a break with their pasts.

The opening quote contrasts 'open resistance' to 'polite reform' as if 'open resistance' is somehow automatically going to 'radicalize' activists. There was massive 'open resistance' ten years ago in Eastern Europe which only resulted in the installation of a really barbarous, mafia capitalism (although I recently acquired a book (*d*) which argues that the collapse of the Soviet Union was a top down thing, that it was engineered by the Soviet ruling class itself, and was not the outcome of a disintegrating economy combined with massive uprisings).

Jack says that he believes strongly in a culture of resistance. I believe equally strongly that a culture of resistance is not enough, although naturally I'm very glad that one seems to be emerging once again. A culture of resistance though is only *against* something, oppression, not *for* something, liberation. I believe that we have to start with what we want, with what anarchism is, defined in very concrete terms, and then devise a strategy for achieving it. I am well aware that this goes against the anti-utopian grain of much revolutionary thinking, but it's true nevertheless. It's simply not enough to attack capitalism. Attacking capitalism, through a culture of resistance, does not necessarily lead anywhere.

The organization of my pamphlet, *Getting Free*, reflects these beliefs. I begin with a brief condemnation of capitalism, by describing what I hate most about it. Then I sketch out briefly, but in concrete detail, the kind of social arrangements which I would like and which I believe constitute anarchism (true communism). Next I consider some of the obstacles in the way of achieving such social arrangements, and some of the strategies that have already been tried but have failed. Then I map out, both in the abstract and in concrete detail, a strategy which I believe would succeed in destroying capitalism and establishing anarchism. This strategy is intimately linked to, and flows out of, the goal, the program, that is, the concrete description of the social arrangements which I believe would make up an anarchistic society.

The strategy which prevailed throughout most of this century, Leninism, was also linked to a particular definition of communism, one involving nationalization of resources, for example, and so it focused on capturing the state. Sometimes I feel that all the marches on Washington DC are in reality vestiges of leninism, because the protesters go to the capital, and focus on the centers of power, and the rulers residing there, rather than fighting their battles in small towns, neighborhoods, or local communities. Some radicals have been arguing recently that if we don't have the political forces to stop ruling class projects on the local level we probably can't muster them anywhere else.

If Wallerstein is correct in claiming that capitalism can only last at most another fifty years, because of structural limitations to its expansion (which expansion is essential for the system to keep operating

as a means of capital accumulation for the ruling class) (e), then the foundations of a new social order have to be laid now, in the next twenty-five years – in other words by the present generation of activists – a challenge unprecedented in the long history of anti-capitalist struggle. The ruling class will be working all this time to transplant themselves into a new social order of their own making. If we wait, if another twenty-five years goes by without significant progress and clarification on the kind of society we want, then it will be all that much harder, perhaps even impossible, to counter the plans of the ruling class.

The fact that I am having to talk like this now, about "clarification on the kind of society we want", points up a glaring failure on the part of my generation. I should be able to point to a whole shelf full of books by now, detailed studies which spell things out and examine concretely the many problems. We didn't do the work however, except now we do have a few books coming out (e.g., Takis Fotopoulos, *Towards an Inclusive Democracy*). Instead, and for the most part, and tragically, my generation's energies went into Identity Politics.

Perhaps I should throw the issue back in the laps my critics. If they are not happy with the strategy I have outlined for getting out of capitalism and into anarchism, can they come up with a better one? How are they going to defeat capitalists? What will anarchism look like, in concrete social terms, and how do they expect to set it up? And if they give me the pat reply that it is too early to say in concrete terms what anarchism will be and that that is something that will have to be decided when the time comes by those actually making the revolution, then I have another question for them? Aren't they actually making the revolution now? If they can't picture anarchism concretely now, what makes them think they will be able to do so ten or twenty years down the road? After all, my generation hid behind this excuse thirty years ago, but now, a generation later, we have no clearer idea of what we want than we did then. Many militants are busy protesting. How are they going to get from protesting to what they really want? Some are busy setting up anarchist organizations of various kinds. In other words, they are organizing other radicals, instead of setting up anarchist social arrangements directly. How do they expect to get from these organizations, which are one step removed from anarchism, to anarchism itself?

B. Excerpts from a letter to another friend in November, 2000, continuing the discussion.

I have been intending to revise "The Weakness of a Politics of Protest" to soften or qualify my criticisms somehow. I have felt like a real heel criticizing these new movements, because, as I have expressed several times in letters to friends, they have been fantastic and inspiring, and have accomplished a lot. They took me completely by surprise, although I guess they have been building for half-a-decade at least, and if I had been more in touch or more alert I would have picked up on this. I was even fairly close in the mid-nineties to a group of young militant anarchists, but somehow I missed the scope and strength of their activities.

Nevertheless, it seems that we are deeply wedded to a particular tactic. Whenever we get upset and agitated and want to do something, all we can think of is pouring into the streets, in demonstrations, rallies, and marches. I was reminded recently, in the process of preparing a bibliographical guide to anarchist writings, and in looking up references to anarchist uprisings from the German peasant war of 1525 on down, that this is no new thing. The peasants of early modern times poured into the streets and roads, and marched. Thomas Munzer participated in one such march, on Mulhausen, in 1525, where they took over the town council, and where Munzer was later captured, and beheaded (while Martin Luther sat comfortably with his Princes). There were marches and demonstrations in the English revolution of 1640. The sans-culottes, in the French Revolution, poured into the streets, and set up barricades, to defend their working class neighborhoods, where they had established self-

government. There were demonstrations and marches all over Europe in the insurrections of 1848. And so on down through all the great revolutions of modern times. I saw once the eight hour BBC documentary of the Spanish Revolution, and was simply amazed by the marches they had, involving hundreds of thousands of people at a time. One march they filmed in Madrid toward the end of the war must have had half-a-million people.

In almost all cases, though, in these historical events, it was not just marches and demonstrations, but also the setting up of local assemblies, and agricultural and/or industrial councils. This was true in the peasant wars, in the French Revolution, the American Revolution, the Paris Commune, 1905 in Russia, 1917 in Russia, 1918-19 in Germany, 1936-39 in Spain, 1956 in Hungary, 1980-82 in Poland, and so forth. (This – the setting up of assemblies – does not seem to have happened in the great popular uprisings in Eastern Europe in 1989.)

So the pattern we have seen in our country, say in the 1960s, with the incessant spring and fall marches on Washington, D.C., or during this past year in Seattle, Philadelphia, and Los Angeles, is no new thing, but has deep historical roots. I'm convinced even so that it is a badly flawed strategy, a regretful way of resisting. In the early seventies I wrote a paper against the tactic of mass demonstrations, especially those which focused on capital cities. I argued that they drained energy and resources away from local initiatives. Although they brought 'highs' to the participants, they also brought 'lows', after everyone had returned home. "Taking to the streets" is not a strategy; it is a bad habit.

The first full length history of *The Russian Revolution* I read, in 1971, by Marcel Liebman, impressed me by how much of the action took place in streets. They also set up councils of course. But most of the action, by the great majority, was in the streets. I thought at the time that this showed that they were simply not ready to take power for themselves and keep it. They didn't know how. They could only act as a "mass", not as participants in a direct, deliberative democracy, for which they didn't have the social arrangements, and probably not even, for the most part, the social skills. And so they ended up with Lenin.

The striking thing to note of course is the pattern of defeat evident in this long history of revolt. Nowhere, not once, did the most radical militants win (at least not for very long). Those who were fighting for egalitarian, directly democratic, local, self-rule have always lost. Everywhere they were defeated by ruling classes, with their states and armies. And this of course is where we still are. Shouldn't we be pondering this? Shouldn't we be questioning this, this pattern of insurrection, whereby we pour into the streets in marches and demonstrations, patching together as best we can from the depths of a crisis, sort of spontaneously, institutions of self-governance, only to find ourselves scattered, disbanded, arrested, smashed, or murdered by superior forces? Shouldn't we be rearranging ourselves socially on a permanent basis in order to accumulate the power and resources needed to defeat our oppressors?

The street demonstrations in Eastern Europe in 1989, while toppling governments, did not result in democracy, but only in the coming to power of a mafia capitalism. The tremendous demonstrations last month in Yugoslavia, wherein thousands poured into Belgrade from all over the country, did not bring into being a more direct democracy, but only resulted in the victory of neoliberalism. (Apparently, although the marches were genuine, the actual seizing of the parliament building and the radio station was done by 2000 trained protesters organized and funded by the US.) The seizure of workplaces following the downfall of Milosevic is also complicated. Workers were throwing out their former managers and taking over plants for themselves, but this apparently was done in order to weaken the public, socialist elements (these plants were already worker-managed, but had become bureaucratized

and top down), and to ready the plants for entry into the free market and for sale to foreign capital. Somehow, 'workers control' got transformed into a force for neo-liberalism.

Postscript (January, 2001)

This week (Jan. 25-30) in Davos, Switzerland, radicals are demonstrating against the World Economic Forum. In addition, an anti-Davos counter-conference has been organized in Porto Alegre, Brazil, called the World Social Forum, attended by thousands of activists. I can't deny that I find these events very exciting and encouraging, just as I did the demonstrations and 'shadow conferences' in Seattle, Washington DC, Philadelphia, Los Angeles, Windsor, Melbourne, Prague, and elsewhere. They are throwing light on the heretofore secret, unnoticed meetings of the leaders of the world's ruling classes. They are breaking the intellectual monopoly that the ruling classes have enjoyed on many topics, such as 'development' and 'world organization', and are even advocating 'localism' at times. They are giving notice to these elites that they are not going to be allowed to continue imposing their self-profiting policies on the world, in obscurity, and with impunity. They are raising awareness worldwide about what these elites are up to.

So what's my beef? Well, it's one thing to raise consciousness about something bad, but it's quite another to actually get rid of it. The WTO still exists, doesn't it? It is still working, and planning another meeting (this time in Qatar!). The World Bank still exists, and the World Economic Forum, and G7, NAFTA, GATT, and so forth. And the national governments which support these global organizations still exist too, don't they? What happens after the protesters go home? How will they acquire the power to actually dismantle these national and global ruling institutions? Even if a 'sea change' is achieved in world consciousness, about what's wrong, what will happen then? In the absence of concrete positive programs for local self-rule, what will replace global capitalism, if not some more-or-less equally bad system? Won't reforms most likely lean in the direction of Social Democracy, at best, or at worst, some new world governing elite, even if comprised of NGOs (which would undoubtedly be rapidly co-opted by a reconstituted ruling class)? A few articles have already appeared, by members of the new generation of protesters themselves, questioning the effectiveness of 'summit-hopping' on a world scale. (g)

The kind of organizing and actions we need to be involved in to actually get rid of these oppressive institutions is considerably different than this pattern of mass mobilizations at the centers of power. It's undeniable that it's fantastic that radicals are once again confronting their rulers, and building a culture of resistance. It's equally undeniable that this is not enough. In order to do more than merely confront them, and instead to actually defeat them, we need a rather different strategy, one focused on the creation of strategic free associations (assemblies) in our neighborhoods, workplaces, and households. This would get us involved in creating the world we want, and simultaneously put us in a position to gut capitalism, by draining power, wealth, and meaning out of its institutions, until there is nothing left of them but shells.

Notes

(a) *Getting Free* is available on the web at: http://site.www.umb.edu/faculty/salzman_g/Strategy/GettingFree.

(b) For 1968, see Immanuel Wallerstein, "1968, revolution in the world-system," pp. 65-83, in his *Geopolitics and Geoculture* (Cambridge, 1991).

(c) *Lockdown America: Police and Prisons in the Age of Crisis*, by Christian Parenti, Verso, 1999.

(d) *Revolution from Above: The Demise of the Soviet System*, by David Kotz with Fred Weir, Routledge, 1997.

(e) See Immanuel Wallerstein, "Globalization or the Age of Transition? A Long-Term View of the Trajectory of the World-System", available on the web at <http://fbc.binghamton.edu/iwtrajws.htm>.

(f) The last few pages of ch. 5 in my booklet, *How Do We Get There: A Critique of the Question 'What Do You Do?'*, 1973 (unpublished).

(g) See for example, Chris Dixon (a founding member of Direct Action Network), "Finding Hope After Seattle: Rethinking Radical Activism and Building a Movement". On the web at www.zmag.org/dixonseattle.htm.

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