

1917

“To face reality squarely; not to seek the line of least resistance; to call things by their right names; to speak the truth to the masses, no matter how bitter it may be; not to fear obstacles; to be true in little things as in big ones; to base one’s program on the logic of the class struggle; to be bold when the hour of action arrives—these are the rules of the Fourth International”

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Down With IMF/World Bank New World Order: **Expropriate the Expropriators!**

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank are two of the central mechanisms for organising capitalist plunder internationally. As such, they are appropriate targets for protest by everyone who recognises that something is profoundly wrong with a world in which half the population—over three billion people—is forced to try to survive on two Euros (81 koruna) a day. The November 1998 issue of *Le Monde Diplomatique* reported: “Thirty million people a year die of hunger. And 800 million suffer from chronic malnutrition.” The author, Ignacio Ramonet, asked: “Is this the way it has to be? The answer is no. The UN calculates that the whole of the world population’s basic needs for food, drinking water, education and medical care could be covered by a levy of less than 4% on the accumulated wealth of the 225 largest fortunes.”

But nothing fundamental will change as long as the world economy is run on a capitalist basis, i.e., maximising profits for a tiny elite at the expense of the vast majority.

“Globalisation” is a new term for an old phenomenon. Capitalism has operated as a world system, dominated by international finance capital, for over a century. But during the last 25 years, the world’s major corporations have accelerated their drive for large-scale international integration of manufacturing. This process, driven by a thirst for higher profits, has dislocated the lives of millions around the world. It has been facilitated by developments in industrial technologies, transport and, particularly, communications. A socialist economy would harness these advances to eliminate (not expand) unemployment, poverty and inequality.

One obvious feature of today’s “globalised” economy is the brazenness with which the exploiters celebrate their ruthless pursuit of profit. Prior to the counter-revolution that swept East Europe and the USSR a decade ago, international capital’s expansion was partially restrained by the existence of the bureaucratically deformed, centrally planned, economies of the Soviet bloc which provided a global counterweight, both economically and militarily, to Western imperialism. The very existence of the ‘communist’ states compelled the ruling elites of West Europe, Japan and the USA to divert a portion of aggregate profits into funding for education, healthcare, pensions, benefits and other social services. It also forced them to make occasional diplomatic or economic concessions to the interests

of the ‘non-aligned’ neo-colonial states. Despite the Soviet bureaucracy’s futile pursuit of ‘peaceful coexistence’ with imperialism, the USSR provided important material support for the successful insurrectionary movements in China, Cuba and Vietnam which produced deformed workers’ states modelled on the Stalinised Soviet Union.

While crippled by bureaucratic economic irrationality and political repression of the working class, the economies of the Warsaw Pact countries were not governed by pursuit of profit. The victory of imperialism in the Cold War, capped by the triumph of counter-revolution in the USSR in August 1991, emboldened capitalists around the globe and produced a series of increasingly aggressive attacks on working people.

In a recent article on the Prague protests, the British Socialist Workers Party (sister organisation of the Czech group *Socialistická Solidarita*), which long claimed that the USSR and its East European satellites were “state capitalist” and that their reintegration into the capitalist world market would be inconsequential for working people, was forced to admit:

“In the Czech Republic, where the meeting will be held, these market ‘reforms’ have been disastrous for ordinary people. The Structural Adjustment Programme imposed in 1990 has seen workers’ real incomes fall by 13 percent, benefits slashed almost in half, and big cuts in health and education.”

—*Socialist Worker* [London], 10 June 2000

The situation for workers in the USSR and other former Soviet bloc countries is even worse. This was anticipated by Leon Trotsky, Lenin’s partner in the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917, who in the 1930s first raised the call for a *political revolution* to kick out the Stalinist oligarchy and reopen the road toward genuine socialism based on workers’ democracy. Today we raise the same call for the remaining deformed workers’ states (China, Cuba, Vietnam and North Korea), while adamantly defending them against imperialist aggression from abroad and internal agents of counter-revolution like Lech Walesa and Boris Yeltsin.

Repression & Resistance

The scale of capitalist repression aimed at the protests in Seattle, Washington and now Prague, underlines the im-

portance of revolutionaries intervening in events like the trade-union demonstration on September 23rd in addition to the September 26th mass mobilisation. Ultimately only the workers' movement, on an international level, has the social weight to turn back the tide of capitalist reaction.

Working-class activists who today may see the struggle in reformist terms (pressuring corporations to behave "responsibly," "democratising" the IMF, establishing "fair" trade rules, etc.) can only come to understand that imperialism cannot be reformed, and must be smashed, through the political intervention of revolutionaries to expose and discredit all the protectionist, social-democratic illusions pushed by the union bureaucrats. Young militants who hate imperialism but turn their backs on the workers' or-

Several events during the past year have highlighted a mood of rising popular resistance among young people to the capitalist world order. On June 18 last year in London, thousands of demonstrators caught authorities by surprise when they staged a day-long "carnival against capitalism" in the financial district to coincide with a G-7 summit in Cologne. The media wrote this off as the work of anarchist fringe elements, but the 50,000 protesters at the World Trade Organization (WTO) meeting last November in Seattle were not so easily dismissed. Today in Washington, the "sometimes scattershot anti-corporate youth movement" (as the *New York Times* describes it) confronts the twin pillars of the global imperialist financial order: the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank.

These demonstrations have involved a range of politically disparate elements, many with sharply conflicting programs. But most of the protesters share a concern about the social consequences of the pursuit of short-term profit. Youth today see working people thrown out of jobs and peasants driven off their land; they watch the social gains won by past generations being shredded as the biosphere is degraded by the toxic emissions of transnational corporations. They live in a world where hundreds of millions of human lives are destroyed by hopeless poverty and disease. At the same time, obscene aggregations of wealth are piled up by a tiny elite: it is estimated that today the income of the world's 500 richest individuals exceeds the combined income of half of humanity—three billion people.

Bill Gates, one of the privileged 500, and an official co-host of the Seattle WTO confab, unctuously intoned:

"The greater the success of this meeting at establishing fair and predictable conditions for expanded world trade, the better the future prospects not only for our own economy but for global prosperity."

—*New York Times*, 29 November 1999

But "success" never materialized as 20,000 protesters blockaded the meeting hall and turned the conference into a debacle. One corporate consultancy firm, "Black, Kelly, Scruggs & Healy," described events in Seattle as "an alarming window on the future," and produced a "Compendium of Activists at the WTO Ministerial" listing 49 of the organizations involved. It was quite a melange: trade unionists, feminist "witches," Christians, anarchists and eco-activists concerned about turtles, butterflies and rain forests.

The AFL-CIO rally that drew 30,000 unionists was a dull and rigidly-controlled affair in which the pro-capitalist labor tops reiterated their usual litany of reformist and chauvinist nostrums. The main objective of the labor bureaucrats was to get a seat at the table, and so they were immensely pleased to be invited to participate in a WTO "working group."

Far more significant was the action of the International

organisations only help ensure the continued political domination of the pro-capitalist misleaders.

Developing a mass political movement capable of uprooting the global system of organised piracy represented by the IMF and World Bank depends on the creation of a disciplined revolutionary organisation (a "combat party") armed with a programme linking the interests of workers and the oppressed in the "developed" world to those in the neo-colonies.

As a contribution toward the necessary political struggle to elaborate such a programme, we reprint the leaflet our comrades distributed at the mass demonstration in Washington DC last April.

Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU) which closed all West Coast ports for the first day of the WTO meeting. This is the second time in less than a year that the dockers' union has shut down the coast in a political protest action (the first time was in April 1999 in solidarity with black political prisoner Mumia Abu-Jamal). The ILWU leadership is ultimately as pro-capitalist as the rest of the American labor establishment, but they sit atop a union with a militant tradition and a relatively combative membership. The ILWU's demonstration of union muscle was considered too dangerous for the *New York Times* to report. It preferred to concentrate on denunciations of the "violence" by a handful of youthful window-breakers.

Perhaps the most significant thing about the Seattle demonstration was that the union bureaucrats, environmental lobbyists, consumer advocates and NGO staffers did not call the shots. The direct action of thousands of protesters made the impact. Opinion polls after the event confirmed that for every demonstrator on the streets in Seattle, there were thousands of people back home cheering them on. Sizable anti-WTO demonstrations also took place in Manila, London and New Delhi along with smaller ones in Prague, Paris, Berlin, Geneva and across North America.

Setback for 'Globalizers'

Bill Clinton cynically attempted to co-opt the dissidents by meeting with a few union bureaucrats and promising to push for trade sanctions to enforce "core" labor standards. As police beat protesters outside, Clinton told the assembled delegates:

"What they are telling us in the streets is that this is an issue we've been silent on...and we won't be silent anymore."

—*New York Times*, 2 December 1999

Clinton's immediate objective was to enhance Al Gore's presidential prospects, but the Indian, Brazilian and other "third-world" delegates immediately recognized that WTO-imposed labor and environmental standards would be used by the U.S. and other imperialist powers as a protectionist instrument. Working people in the semi-colonies will get no support from the imperialist overlords in their struggles. What they need in their battles with their domestic rulers and the transnationals is active internationalist labor solidarity.

Clinton's talk of mandated labor standards helped derail the attempt to extend the WTO's mandate over agriculture and "services" (i.e., education, healthcare, housing, transport, libraries and other public-sector activities.) WTO Secretary-General Mike Moore, a former prime minister of New Zealand, complained that:

"he was shafted by the Americans. He won't say it publicly, but once President Bill Clinton decided to use Seattle

to back Al Gore's presidential run, there was no way to get the thing back on track."

—*Sunday Star Times*, Auckland, 26 March

Business Week, the *Economist* and every other major business publication internationally acknowledged that the protestors had come out on top in Seattle.

Life Doesn't Have to Be This Way

The young protesters who stood side by side in the streets for the first time discovered both the efficacy of mass action and the extreme brutality with which capitalist "order" is maintained. Seattle cops repeatedly attacked peaceful protesters with billy clubs, pepper spray, concussion grenades, tear gas and rubber bullets. Buying, selling or carrying gas masks was prohibited within city limits. Many demonstrators were injured and over 500 were arrested, although most charges have since been dropped.

The confrontation at the WTO confab represented the highest point of broad-based mass resistance to the effects of capitalism in the U.S. since the 1970s. It was a novel event for a generation whose experience has been shaped by a string of defeats and retreats for the left: from the fall of the Soviet Union to the collapse of leftist insurrectionary movements from Latin America to South Africa. The neo-liberal insistence on the omnipotence of the market that has so permeated the world's mass social-democratic labor parties has also had its effects in the extra-parliamentary left. The events in Seattle resonated with rebellious youth around the world because they revealed, on a small scale, that popular resistance to the elites is not necessarily futile and that a different kind of future is at least a tangible possibility.

Lessons from the 1960s

It is hardly surprising that the forces gathered for mass action against symbols of imperial power are today a very mixed bag. For earlier generations there was an assumption that if you didn't like capitalism you could always support one or another brand of "Communism." But the demise of the bureaucratized "actually existing socialism" of the former Soviet bloc has been widely interpreted as proof that a modern industrial economy can only be organized on the basis of a competitive market system. Consequently most youth who hate the IMF, the World Bank, the WTO and the rest of the international agencies of imperial rule, do not identify themselves as socialists.

Despite this difference, the social and political character of many of the forces gathered in Seattle last year was not so very different from the forces that in 1968 shook the established order from Paris to Chicago. Then, as now, insurgent youth mixed anti-authoritarianism, utopianism and idealist third-worldism with liberal, single-issue reformism. Then, as now, the denominator sufficiently common to allow fleeting unity was a vague "anti-capitalism," subject to a wide variety of interpretations. For some capitalism was an eternal evil to be kept in check through trust-busting and regulation. Others were prepared to strike more rhetorically radical postures but usually lacked clear conceptions about how the existing social system could be uprooted or what should replace it.

The rebel youth of the 1960s were shaped by the ultimately successful military struggle, led by the Vietnamese Communist Party, to drive U.S. imperialism out of South East Asia. Today Stalinism in all its variants has lost its allure, and the default political identification for dissident

youth is "anarchism," which can mean anything from vegetarian lifestyle to syndicalist trade unionism.

The turn of the 1960s New Left toward Stalinism was marked by a rash of political exclusions and physical attacks on adherents of rival groupings. Those who practiced such "hard" tactics imagined that they were demonstrating revolutionary firmness, but in reality the attempt to suppress other points of view within the radical left blocked the process of political development toward a genuinely revolutionary praxis.

Regrettably some of the same tendencies are evident today among elements of the "anti-authoritarian" left. In Britain, the anarchist movers behind last year's June 18 demonstrations are currently planning a major "Mayday 2000" celebration where Marxists are not going to be permitted to run workshops or sell literature. The organizers' rationale is that "unless you are non-hierarchical, non-authoritarian and anti-state you are not anti-capitalist." There is something downright Pythonesque about one group of leftists excluding others for being insufficiently "anti-authoritarian." Such behavior ensures that the necessary process of thinking through "what is to be done" will be short-circuited.

Revolution vs. Reformism

In participating in struggles against the symptoms of capitalist rule (e.g., poverty, racism, sexism, unemployment or environmental degradation) revolutionaries seek to explain the necessity to overturn the social system which produces them. Important victories can be won through struggles around particular issues, but any concessions gained can later be reversed as long as social priorities are determined by the pursuit of private profit rather than human need.

"Globalization" has always been a feature of capitalism, as Karl Marx and Frederick Engels observed a century and a half ago in the *Communist Manifesto*:

"The need of a constantly expanding market for its products chases the bourgeoisie over the whole surface of the globe. It must nestle everywhere, settle everywhere, establish connections everywhere.

"The bourgeoisie has through its exploitation of the world-market given a cosmopolitan character to production and consumption in every country....In place of the old wants, satisfied by the productions of the country, we find new wants, requiring for their satisfaction the products of distant lands and climes. In place of the old local and national seclusion and self-sufficiency, we have intercourse in every direction, universal inter-dependence of nations. And as in material, so also in intellectual production."

Revolutionaries oppose the WTO, the IMF and the World Bank as imperialist agencies, but we do not imagine that if they were to disappear tomorrow, the market system could somehow be made to "serve the people." However capitalism is organized, it will always be characterized by oppression, poverty and war.

The starting point for building effective resistance to imperialism is the recognition that our main enemy is at home, i.e., our own ruling class. The AFL-CIO leadership, which for generations has acted as a tool of American corporations in undermining militant workers' movements around the world, today pushes the poison of trade protectionism and national economic retrenchment as the answer

to capitalist "globalization." In particular, the union bureaucrats are trying to direct popular protests away from resistance to U.S. corporate power and toward a focus on China bashing. Their campaign, which combines a noxious mixture of "yellow-peril" racism, anti-communism and chauvinist "human rights" hypocrisy, plays right into the hands of Pat Buchanan and other reactionary "Fortress America" demagogues.

Half a century ago the Chinese masses, led by Mao Tse Tung's Communist Party, carried out a social revolution that expropriated the foreign capitalists. Owing to the absence of revolutionary working-class leadership, the result was a deformed workers' state, qualitatively similar to the USSR under Stalin. The U.S. and its allies, stung by the "loss" of China, have never given up their ambition to reassert control over this strategically important country. Washington sees China's integration into the WTO as a means of promoting this objective. Revolutionary Marxists adamantly oppose the restoration of capitalism in China, while advocating a working-class political revolution against the venal and repressive Chinese bureaucracy whose policies are paving the way for that restoration. At the same time, we oppose any imperialist trade sanctions against China.

Despite rhetorical commitments to "free trade," questions of trade and flag are as intertwined as ever. All the major capitalist powers engage in one or another form of protectionism. The U.S. uses "anti-dumping" duties, while Japan relies on complex regulatory requirements. In the European Union agricultural producers get an annual \$44 billion subsidy.

Contemporary capitalism is characterized by an increasing drive to move money and goods internationally in pursuit of maximum profit. Even so, capital retains a national identity to the extent that, politically and militarily, the profiteers remain organized on a national basis. Global capitalism is administered by a patchwork of national states.

As the interests of the major powers diverge, the contradiction between the international extension of capital and its national roots will strain the framework of the IMF, WTO, World Bank and other institutions designed to ameliorate inter-imperialist antagonisms. This will lead to overt trade wars between competing imperialist blocs. Economic conflict between the major powers has twice in the past century led to world wars. If that were to occur again, it could very well mean a thermonuclear World War III, an event which would threaten the very existence of human civilization.

But it is also possible for humanity to transcend the irrationality of global capitalist disorder through a social revolution that expropriates the transnational corporations and establishes a rational, planned economy. The chief obstacle that a mass revolutionary movement would face is the armed force of the state. A decisive victory against the capitalist social order requires that the coercive state apparatus wielded by the elites be broken up and replaced by a social power based on the exploited and oppressed. This requires the active participation of an aroused working class, championing the interests of all the oppressed, and committed to establishing a new and egalitarian world order.

Such class-consciousness and unity of purpose may seem unattainable today, and indeed it will be impossible to achieve without the creation of a revolutionary organization that can win the confidence of millions of those oppressed and exploited by capitalism. It is through the struggle to create such a political instrument that the revolutionary consciousness and unity of purpose necessary to vanquish world capitalism can and will be forged.

***Neither Free Trade nor Protectionism—
Expropriate the Transnationals!
No to AFL-CIA's China-Bashing!
Workers of the World Unite!***

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