

*postmodern desertions*

## CAPITALISM AND ANTI-CAPITALISM

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**anti-capitalism**

**anti-  
globalization**

**direct action**

**environmentalism**

**indigenism**

**Marxism**

*Amongst the world leaders faith in the capitalist system is threadbare. With a declining base of popular legitimacy, contemporary elites lack the confidence to steer the world in any direction of their own. In many ways the protestors simply reflect the inner loss of certainty suffered by elites – giving it an external manifestation. The criticisms of the anti-capitalist movement have been indulged to a surprising extent. At the World Bank, at the G8, and amongst the media, the anti-globalization protests have had an easy ride, as a nervous older generation looks on benignly at the idealism of youth. Again and again the protestors have been invited inside to share their insights with world leaders.*

*The success – and élan – of the anti-capitalist movement in recent times seems to contrast with the defeats of organized labour and Third World movements in the 1980s and early 1990s. But in many ways the end of those mass movements is the precondition for the emergence of today's anti-globalization protestors. Anti-capitalists today draw upon conservative ideologies of austerity, the priority of the law of conscience over the majority and a patrician need to protect aboriginal peoples from modernity. These elitist preoccupations assume a more radical form as environmentalism, direct action, and advocacy for the Third World. But still the anti-capitalist movement remains the preserve of a relatively select group of well-educated, well-heeled, and even well-bred people.*

*The ambitions of the protestors contrast pointedly with previous anti-capitalist movements, in that they identify industrial progress exclusively*

*with the market. They advocate a return to more modest living standards, rather than a transcendence of capitalism's narrow base of social advance.*

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At international summits capitalist leaders find themselves pilloried by a vocal minority of anti-capitalists. The two sides seem at loggerheads. One stands for globalization, the market, and liberalization. The other wants to arrest globalization, limit the market, and prevent the sell-off of the global commons. The success of the critics is much greater than their social weight suggests it should be. For, though the critics are at loggerheads with the capitalists, they have seized hold of capitalism's own inner self-doubt, which they represent as an external assault. The calls for regulation of the market coming from the protestors outside echo the feelings of at least some of the industry leaders inside.

The character of the protests itself is revealing. The strong suits of the protests are the activism and guiding conscience of the protestors. By acting, they succeed in realizing the underlying anxieties over capitalist triumphalism. In sociological terms the protests are not a continuation of but an alternative to the mass movements of the post-war period, whether based upon organized labour or radical national movements. The anti-globalization lobby draws upon middle-class protest and non-governmental organizations for its social base. Anti-growth and implicitly anti-mass sentiments are its alternative to capitalism – quite distinct from the socialist critique of capitalism of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

### **The end of capitalist triumphalism**

Just a decade ago all possibilities of a movement against capitalism seemed to be closed. It was, in the words of the Rand Corporation's Francis Fukuyama, 'the end of history'. British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher was credited with the proposition that 'there is no alternative' to the free market economy.

There was no shortage of evidence for the view that all contestation of the free market was finished. Most dramatically, the new leaders of Russia and the eastern European states – the very nations that represented the boundary of capital's rule – now fêted Thatcher and Reagan as the apostles of a new faith of free markets. Radical nationalist movements that had challenged western imperialism up to the 1980s, in Nicaragua, Palestine, and Northern Ireland, were now appealing to the West to act as a broker for peace. Radical nationalist regimes in Libya, Zimbabwe, and Vietnam were opening up their markets to American and European business. And at home European and American labour movements that had mounted sustained opposition to capitalism's writ were humiliated, boxed in, and tamed.

The contrast between the climax of the 1980s and the previous decade was marked: during the latter western governments were rocked by social upheaval and industrial unrest, and the international scene was marked by the Vietnamese victory over the United States (1975), revolution in Portugal (1974) and throughout that country's African empire, war in the Middle East (1973) and the north of Ireland (1972 onwards). But just as the moment of capitalist triumphalism contrasts with what went before, so it also contrasts pointedly with what came after. In a few short years the principal architects of the cold war victory – Thatcher and Reagan's vice-president George Bush – had been unceremoniously kicked out of office (Bush failed to win a second term as president).

In the 1970s ruling elites grappled with what the *Financial Times* called 'a revolt of rising expectations' (cited in Brown 1975: 7), as an overload of social demands upon the state led to a crisis of legitimacy (Offe 1984). In the 1980s those elites fought to 'roll back' oppositional movements, domestically and internationally. But they were so successful in demobilizing mass opposition to their order that they faced a quite different problem in the 1990s, the problem of the disengagement of peoples from the national political process. The victory of the 1980s was so thoroughgoing that the elites had almost succeeded in dismantling the connections between people and government. Not just the popular organizations of the left were affected, but those of the right, too. Trade union membership, concentration and activism declined, as did votes for social democratic parties in Europe. But soon after, as if in tandem, the parties of the right suffered a similar collapse in membership, vote, and support. In the 1990s voting allegiances appeared to collapse as third parties, from Ross Perot's in the US to those of the far right and the greens, emerged. Governments were beset by a new crisis of legitimacy marked less by rising expectations than by falling expectations. The popular perception of politicians as liars and thieves was no longer offset by any ideological identification. Governments in Italy, Britain, America, Belgium,

**A crisis of legitimacy**

Italy, April 1992: Magistrates launched '*Tangentopoli*' investigations, bringing corruption charges against leaders Craxi, Andreotti, and Berlusconi.

Britain, July 1994–May 1997: 'Cash for questions' scandal.

Ireland: Beef scandal rocked Haughey's successor Albert Reynolds.

France, 1998: Ministerial flats scandal damaged Jacques Chirac.

United States, 1998: Monica Lewinsky and the Whitewater affair.

Belgium, 1998: Ministerial cover-up in child torture case shook Jean-Luc Deheane's government.

Switzerland, 1998–2000: Sustained campaign over Jewish bank deposits.

Germany, 2000: CDU funding scandal.

and France were rocked by sex and corruption scandals as the demand to ‘kick the bums out’ gained ground.

In this new and uncharted terrain ruling elites found themselves unexpectedly on the defensive. Their central preoccupation was to re-engage with the public. Having dismantled the ‘tripartite’ system of consultation between government, employers, and labour, there were successive attempts to artificially create regimes of public consultation – though for the most part these remained stillborn. At the heart of the capitalist elite itself there was a growing disquiet about the efficacy of their system.

In 1991, Kevin Phillips recognized that there was a new mood, quite distinctive from the happy celebration of the free market in America under Ronald Reagan. ‘Many conservatives’, he wrote, ‘including President George Bush himself, were becoming defensive about great wealth, wanton money-making and greed’ (Phillips 1991: xviii). International currency speculator George Soros also attacked the international financial system in his book *The Crisis of Global Capitalism: Open Society Endangered*. ‘I was struck by the irresponsibility of foreign investors’, he wrote. ‘The robber capitalist system was unsound and unsustainable’ (Soros 1998: 167). Soros warned that ‘profit-maximising behaviour follows the demands of expediency and ignores the demands of morality’ (ibid.: 208).

In 1996 the British Schools Curriculum and Assessment Authority’s National Forum on Values met to decide on a consensus of what values should be taught. Interestingly the core values cited in the document were ‘society’ and ‘environment’. However, ‘there are omissions’, according to educationalist John Beck: ‘there is nothing explicit on the values of enterprise, competition, wealth creation, self-sufficiency’ (1998: 93). That is not surprising since the business class itself was so apologetic about such values. Regulatory frameworks that were trashed in the eighties came back into fashion. The Greenbury and Cadbury commissions (1992, 1995) on top people’s pay were a response to public disquiet about ‘fat cats’. Congressional hearings, and investigations by both the Securities Exchange Commission and the Justice Department came in the wake of the Enron scandal.

Much of the emerging anxiety about the future of capitalism was focused upon those very regions in which the market had succeeded in extending its influence. The embrace of market values in eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union did not bring unalloyed joy in the West. On the contrary, Russia and eastern Europe were seen as lawless states, where capitalism could be characterized as ‘gangster capitalism’. East Asia, too, where market-oriented reforms won out over radical nationalist alternatives, troubled western commentators more than it calmed them. The East Asian challenge was a source of great anxiety, as in time was the recession in Japan. Rather than welcome China’s market reforms, western commentators have wrung their hands over the inhumanity of capitalism in China.

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The combination of self-doubt and a perceived need to reach out to the public are the context in which the anti-capitalist movement developed. In effect, anti-capitalists repeated back to the capitalists their own inner anxieties in an openly confrontational form. The reaction from the elites was mixed, or even confused. Elites patronized the environmental and anti-globalization movements, flattering the activists for their youthful idealism, and sought to incorporate them into quasi-governmental organizations. But these overtures only emboldened the activists, making conflict with the law inevitable.

### **Where did the anti-capitalist revolt come from?**

The sudden wave of anti-capitalist protest is easily mythologized, apparently arising from nowhere after years of declining protest and resistance. For those who prefer their history cyclical, it seems straightforward that this was the 'return of the repressed' – the fight-back of those who had been the targets

#### **The anti-capitalist revolt**

19 June 1999: The Carnival Against Capitalism, City of London.

21 June 1999: G8 summit in Cologne: demonstrators held hands to form a ring around the city.

28 November 1999: Protests against the World Trade Organization meeting in Seattle.

15 June 2000: Italian riot police fired tear gas and used batons against an estimated 1,500 protesters outside an Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development summit in Bologna.

22 July 2000: Pressure groups 'direct their anger at the sumptuous scale of the G8 summit' on the Japanese island of Okinawa.

12 September 2000: 2,000 anti-globalization protesters blockaded the opening of the World Economic Forum, Melbourne, chanting 'Power to the people' and 'WEF kills'.

18–26 September 2000: Prague became armed camp for IMF talks. There were fears of widespread violence as 50,000 radical protesters tried to disrupt the meeting.

10 December 2000: Young people rioted in Nice outside the European Union summit.

6 May 2001: Across the world groups of demonstrators took to the streets on May Day to protest against globalization, Third World debt, and pollution.

17 June 2001: Swedish authorities had agreed to a peaceful protest against the visiting US President George Bush but ended up firing live rounds on demonstrators when they lost control.

22 July 2001: Carlo Giuliani's parents hoped that his 'absurd death would not be in vain' – the 23-year-old Italian anarchist was shot by carabinieri who then proceeded to run over his dead body during protests outside the summit of the Group of Eight world leaders in Genoa, Italy.

of the neoliberal rollback of the eighties. But in important respects the anti-capitalist movement was quite different in character from the oppositional movements that it supplanted. Indeed, it is improbable that the activists who became the anti-globalization protestors could have risen to prominence except by virtue of the defeat of organized labour in the developed world, and of radical nationalist movements in the Third. For though they reacted against the triumphalism of the free market in the eighties, the anti-capitalists shared many of the criticisms of social democratic corporatism that were first made by the neoliberals.

It was the declining influence of organized labour in the developed world, and of popular nationalism in the developing world that created the vacuum into which the environmental movement expanded, changing itself into an ‘anti-capitalist movement’ on the way. Falling trade union density is one indication of the lesser importance that organized labour has as an oppositional movement (see table). The declining rolls of the unions are the statistical reflection of a harsher series of humiliating defeats suffered by labour (the US airline strike in 1981, the reduction of the *scala mobile* in Italy in 1984, and the British miners’ strike of 1984–5). It is pointed too that nominally social democratic parties regained office in Europe in the 1990s by downgrading their ties with official labour. In the developing world a parallel process of military defeats inflicted upon radical nationalist movements saw the emergence of a more supplicant style of leadership. The demobilization of these mass opposition movements was the context in which the anti-globalization movement took hold. The traditional left’s nadir, 1989, coincides with the apex of environmental concerns, when 8 per cent of Europeans voted for green parties (Macnaghten and Urry 1998: 79).

Trade union density (proportion of workforce), 1975–1995

Country	1975	1985	1990	1995
Austria	59%	61%	56%	52%
Belgium	52%	51%	48%	53%
Finland	74%	80%	80%	79%
France	23%	17%	15%	9%
Germany	37%	36%	35%	32%
Greece		17%	15%	11%
Ireland	60%	61%	57%	53%
Italy	49%	42%	39%	38%
Netherlands	37%	28%	26%	26%
Norway	52%	56%	56%	55%
Spain	19%	14%	17%	17%
Sweden	74%	83%	81%	83%
UK	52%	49%	38%	32%

(Bentley *et al.* 2000)

Symbolically, on 1 May 2000, the Carnival against Capitalism displaced the traditional labour movement processions, with ‘guerrilla gardeners’ digging up Parliament Square, to the embarrassment of a small gaggle of trade union officials from the Rover car plant present.

The precursors of the anti-globalization movement were to be found in a variety of campaigns and movements that enjoyed a largely peripheral relationship to mainstream opposition movements in the seventies and eighties.

### Elite environmentalism

From the perspective of today’s environmental movement it is difficult to recall the extent to which the emerging consciousness of natural limits was originally associated with the mainstream of elite thinking. And yet it is undeniably the case that the conservationist policies and movements were once the preserve of the right.

Founded in 1968, the Club of Rome was a ‘non-partisan’ think tank under Fiat CEO Aurelio Peccei and OECD scientific advisor Alexander King. It believed that ‘the chief problems of the world today are not essentially problems of party politics and, being relevant to the survival of man, they even transcend current ideologies’ (Peccei and King 1975: 204). These former industrialists hoped to leap over the depressing ideological clashes of the 1960s and 1970s by appealing to a larger ‘problématique humaine’. For the club, MIT professor Jay Forrester created a computer model of the global economy, ‘World 2’, and, with Dennis and Donella Meadows, predicted that in the year 2100 ‘collapse occurs because of non-renewable resource depletion’ (Meadows *et al.* 1972: 125).

Edward Goldsmith, brother to the financier Sir James and a key figure in the ecological movement, clarified the substance of the anxiety over growth. Urbanization, he told the Alternatives to Growth Conference in 1975, ‘is a particularly frightening prospect, since it is in the existing conurbations that the ills from which industrialized society is suffering are to be found in the most concentrated forms’ (Meadows 1977: 331). The misanthropic impulse of ecology was expressed in Republican senator Paul Ehrlich’s overpopulation thesis: ‘Too many cars, too many factories, too much pesticide . . . too little water, too much carbon dioxide – all can easily be traced to too many people’ (1971: 36). In 1978 British diplomat Crispin Tickell wrote a pioneering work, *Climate Change in World Affairs*, which sought to remotivate western domination of the Third World as a response to impending environmental disaster. The Malthusian sentiments of the ecological movement of the 1970s found their realization in National State Security Memo 200, the US State Department policy document that outlined the presumed danger of the burgeoning population of the Third World (Mumford 1996: 455).

The elite environmentalism of the 1970s provided some of the preoccupations of the later anti-globalization movement, but it was not *anti*-capitalist; in fact it was widely assumed to be a *pro*-capitalist apologetic for the limited nature of capitalist production. Marxist István Mészáros said in the Isaac Deutscher memorial lecture of 1971 that “the God that failed” in the image of technological omnipotence is now shown around again under the umbrella of universal “ecological concern”. And all of this with the ‘additional bonus of making people at large pay, under the pretext of “human survival”, for the survival of a social economic system’, namely capitalism (Mészáros 1971: 19). In this elite form environmentalism could not have become a part of anti-capitalist protest. But on the other hand, during the 1980s ecological arguments ceased to play an important role for a new generation of political leaders determined to restate the case for free market capitalism.

### Radical environmentalism

Environmentalism had broken through to be a mainstream concern, but was still marginal to the spectrum of political affiliation. Only where the ‘left versus right’ model of political contestation had broken down did environmentalists succeed in transforming the political agenda.

In California, between 1971 and 1973, environmentalists won control of twenty of the fifty-eight counties. Slogans included: ‘Not one more house in Santa Barbara’, and ‘We must control growth before it controls us’. (Behind the rhetoric, ‘no growth’ was often a cover for keeping poor and black populations away from the suburbs (Danielson 1976: 47–8, 65).) The opening for the environmentalists’ success came from the diminished appeal of the democratic coalition for third-generation immigrants, especially as they moved out of the cities (Schnall 1975: 151). Though many of these Californians were on a journey that would leave them ‘Reagan Democrats’, they left behind them an anti-trust activism in which activists like Ralph Nader, who would go on to be the Green Party candidate in the 2000 elections, played a key role.

In West Germany, the Green Party’s electoral breakthrough came in 1983. They won 6.9 per cent of the vote, taking them over the threshold into parliament, just as the Social Democratic Party dropped 4.7 per cent after facing down a wave of industrial militancy. Unlike other European social democratic parties, the SPD was unable to contain its ‘middle class anti-capitalist left’, which broke off to form the Green Party (Pulzer 2001: 140). In 1986 ecological theorist Ulrich Beck reflected on the break-up of the left–right political spectrum that ‘the notion of a class society remains useful only as an image of the past . . . It only stays alive because there is not yet a suitable alternative’ (Beck 1992: 91). For Beck the idea of a ‘political subject’ belongs to the old class society, but today’s society is not characterized by



class struggle, but by a generalized, ecological danger (ibid.: 48). He envisages a transition ‘from the solidarity of need to solidarity motivated by anxiety’ in which ‘self-limitation is the goal which emerges’ (ibid.: 49). Beck’s theory is a compelling expression of the combination of radical activism yoked to conservative goals that marked the green movement.

In Britain, millionaire Sir James Goldsmith founded the *Ecologist* magazine, edited by his brother Edward, in 1970, and the organization Friends of the Earth was founded in the same year. Three years later the Ecology Party – later the Green Party – was formed. These groups had supported the government’s 1974 ‘Save It’ campaign, popularizing austerity measures, but in the late seventies they clashed with the establishment over the public inquiry into the Windscale nuclear plant. Conservation had made the transition from ‘a fairly close and “gentlemanly” dialogue with the state’ to a countercultural lifestyle ‘comprising vegetarian diets, concern for animals, wholefood shops, open-air festivals, cycling, hiking and rallies’ (Macnaghten and Urry 1998: 51, 56). Much of the anti-capitalist movement’s style is evident in the radicalized environmental movement, but its militancy drew on other sources.

### The ‘direct action’ movement

‘Direct action’ encompassed a variety of radical movements in the West in the post-war years – in some cases those of non-violent civil disobedience, such as the British Committee of One Hundred anti-nuclear protestors, and in others those of political terrorism, such as the Red Army Faction in Germany and Italy. Direct action drew its moral resources from anarchist movements, or from non-conformist religious sects, like the Quakers. Direct action was almost by definition against the establishment; but it was also hostile to the organized opposition, often expressing a violent frustration both with constitutional means and the presumed conservatism of the masses. Direct action implied that the activists substituted their own dramatic intervention for mass mobilization and, correspondingly, that the actors took their own conscience as a higher law than that which derived from popular mandate.

Political terrorism in Europe was in its nature conspiratorial, and at odds with mass political mobilization. Though terror groups appealed to Marxist idioms of struggle, they tended towards disdain for the mass of working-class people, blaming them for their failure to rise up against capitalism. The communiqués of the Baader-Meinhof Group express this disdain in pointed terms:

The system has managed to drag the masses so deeply into their own crap, they seem to have lost any feeling of their position as exploited and oppressed, so that

they dream of nothing more than a car, a holiday and a tiled bathroom. (Cited in *Generation Terror*, BBC4, broadcast 18 November 2002)

Amongst German radical theorists the perception that the working class had been ‘bought off’ by capitalism was well-entrenched by the 1970s, as it had featured extensively in the analyses of the Frankfurt School thinkers. The Baader-Meinhof Group, however, drew the practical conclusion that their own violence could substitute for a quiescent working class, putting themselves on a collision course with the West German authorities. It was a measure of the limited legitimacy of the Federal Republic that Baader-Meinhof enjoyed a degree of support amongst younger, more educated West Germans. Many of these went on to become the *Ausserparlamentarische Opposition* (APO), or ‘extra-parliamentary opposition’, and eventually ended up in the Green Party – like Joseph Fischer, an activist in Revolutionary Struggle in 1975, and Germany’s foreign minister today.

The APO and their equivalents across Europe were also known as ‘Autonomes’ or ‘Spontis’, from ‘spontaneous’, since, like anarchists, they elevated the role of spontaneity in struggle. In large part this emphasis upon spontaneity expressed a frustration with the left-wing organizations that were dominated by Moscow-oriented communist parties. The demonstrations of May 1968 were a model of spontaneous uprisings that would, it was hoped, short-circuit the heavily bureaucratic organizations of the communist and reformist left. In particular, the Spontis were hostile to the Leninist argument that spontaneously the working class could never achieve more than trade union consciousness, but that class consciousness would come to them from outside – that is, from the revolutionary party. But the ideal of spontaneity could also disappoint, when the imagined workers’ uprising failed to come together.

Antonio Negri, co-author today of one of the key texts of the anti-capitalist movement, *Empire*, was in the seventies associated with the autonomist movement, until he was framed on terrorism charges and imprisoned on 17 April 1979. Negri’s interpretation of the Marxist theory of the working class was worked out in his 1978 lectures on the *Grundrisse* – rough draft of the later work *Capital* – given in Paris at the invitation of Louis Althusser. In these lectures Negri stressed the inevitability of the emergence of a collective worker in opposition to capital. ‘The eternal and boring discussions to discover if it is possible or not are closed’, Negri asserted. ‘Here there is no decision to take: in the revolution one is or is not’ (1991: 185). The business of organizing the ‘collective worker’ is superfluous in Negri’s theory, since he/she is already organized by capital itself.

Another influential thinker committed to the theory of spontaneously arising class consciousness was Jean-François Lyotard, originally a member of the Socialism or Barbarism group formed by Cornelius Castoriadis in

France. Lyotard was the group's representative in Algiers and wrote a fascinating account of the Algerian war. But the chasm between the attitudes of the French working class and the Algerian masses tested Lyotard's commitment to the theory. 'French working class has not in all honesty fought against the war in Algeria', wrote Lyotard, concluding that 'the solidarity between the proletariat and the colonised remains [a] sacred cow' (Lyotard 1993: 198). Waiting for a spontaneous uprising, though, Lyotard and his comrades had avoided their own responsibility to build solidarity, and saw the fault as that of the proletariat, not its leaders. The Sponti approach flattered the masses with magical powers, and then later damned them for failing to realize that ideal.

In Britain, direct action was often associated with religious non-conformism, largely through the actions of the Committee of One Hundred, a radical offshoot of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, led by Bertrand Russell. The committee's model of non-violent direct action inspired the burgeoning peace movement of the 1980s, in particular the encampments at US military sites in Greenham Common and Menworth Hill. In the early 1980s British anarchists organized the first Stop the City demonstrations (which later became the Carnival Against Capitalism), where small bands of conspirators disrupted the financial district with street theatre acts, like littering the ground with tampons. Stop the City took its moral force from the joint sentiment that the unemployed were disenfranchised under Margaret Thatcher's government, and that the official labour movement was too hide-bound by tradition and legality to mount a defence. It was as imaginative as it was despairing: gallows humour.

## Indigenism

The other important strand of the anti-globalization movement was the resurgence of indigenism. Towards the end of the nineteenth century European philanthropists formed the Aborigine Protection Society, on the theory that aboriginal societies were bound to die out when they came into contact with more advanced nations. A patrician admiration for primitive cultures was shared by those such as Laurens van der Post, who championed the cause of the Zulu leader Gatsha Buthelezi (see Jones 2002), and Rhodesian Prime Minister Ian Smith, who similarly supported his own Council of Chiefs (see Smith 1997). For the most part, though, such romantic notions of tribal authenticity were isolated in recent times by the rise of Third World nationalism, which put a higher premium on independence than on patronage, and on civil government than on traditional authority.

However, the declining influence of radical nationalism over the 1980s brought a resurgence in the idea of aborigine protection, culminating in the

United Nations' Decade of the World's Indigenous Peoples (1995–2005), which followed the UN Year of the Indigenous Peoples in 1993. The strategy adopted by the UN was to elevate the rights of 'first peoples' at the expense of national rights. In the conflict with the radical Sandinista government in the 1980s, the US raised the rights of Miskito Indians as a counterweight to the national rights of the Nicaraguans. They repeated the manoeuvre in 1991, adopting the cause of the Marsh Arabs to undermine Iraqi national claims. In Guatemala, a rightist military regime had opened peace talks with an insurgent guerrilla army in 1996. The United Nations general secretary named Nobel Prize winner Rigoberta Menchu, a Mayan native of Guatemala, as envoy. Menchu was made a Nobel laureate for raising awareness of indigenous suffering in her harrowing book, *I, Rigoberta Menchu*, which was edited by French radical Elizabeth Burgos-Debray. Menchu's story of the repression of Mayan people won an impassioned hearing in the West, but the UN reforms that she fronted in Guatemala – which would have entrenched the special rights of indigenous people in the constitution – were rejected in a referendum in May 1999. The voters of Guatemala City, who were more likely to be of European descent, in particular saw the reforms as threatening a Balkanization of their country (Anzueto 1999). David Stoll, an American academic who challenged the veracity of Menchu's account, took issue with the romanticization of indigenous resistance: 'Such works provide rebels in far-off places, into whom careerists can project their fantasies of rebellion' (Stoll 1999: 247).

The emotional weight of pro-indigenist campaigns added a new dimension to the anti-globalization movement. Environmental organizations which were active against large-scale development projects had been open to the charge that they were the voice of the developed world, withholding further development from the less developed. But now, by taking up the cause of indigenous peoples, they substituted a romantic alternative to development-oriented Third World nationalism. The indigenous peoples themselves, as largely ill-organized populations who were unlikely to benefit from economic growth, were the ideal foil for the environmentalists. With this added dimension the environmental movement was becoming an anti-globalization movement.

### **The role of the non-governmental organizations**

Though Guatemalan voters were unimpressed by the indigenist agenda that the United Nations sought to impose upon them, the strategy of recruiting aboriginal peoples to champion became something of a model for western environmental campaigners opposed to development projects in the Third World. The Washington-based Environmental Defence Fund took up the

cause of the people whose homes were threatened by flooding with the building of the Narmada Valley Project – a great complex of dams being constructed by the Gujarat government in India. Initially the local people campaigned for resettlement and recreation (R&R) packages. One campaigner, Dr Anil Patel, from Action Research in Community Health and Development (ARCH-Vahini), explained that, when they succeeded in winning advantageous terms, ‘environmentalist groups like Environment Defence Fund and others who were supporting us in our struggle for just R&R did not lose much time in turning against the project itself’ (Patel 1993: 9). The EDF set out to split the campaigners, sidelining ARCH-Vahini in favour of Narmada Bachao Andolan (NBA), which was more militantly opposed to the dam. Through the NBA, the Environmental Defence Fund succeeded in undermining support for the dam at the World Bank, but not with the Gujarat government.

Non-governmental organizations – that is, mostly charities and aid organizations, citizens’ advocacy groups and health campaigners – were starting to play a much greater part in the dialogue between North and South. These quasi-independent organizations were often funded largely by western governments, or through charitable donations. Their chosen role as advocates for peoples in the Third World, however, created some competition with nationalist movements and states as to who had the right to represent Third World peoples. In Palestine the National Authority established after the Oslo accords found that its functions as a state were often in competition with mostly European aid organizations – organizations whose budgets were greater than that of the PNA itself – leading to some heated arguments. Palestinian human rights lawyer Ghaith Al-Omari was moved to protest that ‘opposition is the role of political parties, while service provision is the duty of government’. He went on: ‘If NGOs continue to play these roles they would be doing a great disservice to Palestinian development’ (Al-Omari 1999: 32). NGOs have moved to a new level of respectability in the formation of western policy. In 1993, the World Development Movement succeeded in persuading the British courts to grant it the status of an interested party in the dispute over British funding for a Turkish dam.

### **Overtures from above, rumbling from below**

The impulses behind the emerging anti-globalization movement have arisen largely as a consequence of the decline of the organized opposition to capitalism, represented by the labour and trade union movement in the West and by radical nationalist regimes in the developing world. It is unlikely that these disparate activisms would have coagulated into one identifiable movement

without a degree of top-down recognition. The ideological confusion at the end of the cold war made environmentalism a more appealing motivation for national and international policy than it had been before.

In 1988 Sir Crispin Tickell persuaded Margaret Thatcher to address the issue of environment and climate change in a speech to the Royal Society. Thatcher joined other world leaders at the World Climate Conferences in Montreal in 1987 and Geneva in 1991, while her successor John Major took part in the Rio Earth Summit in 1992. Following Rio, Major established a high-ranking governmental advisory panel under Sir Crispin, and a ‘Going for Green’ citizens’ initiative (Macnaghten and Urry 1998: 61, 62).

The British government’s overtures to environmentalism were reproduced throughout the developed world – and not just by governments, but by the big business targets of environmental pressure too. A bemused Ron Arnold of the American Enterprise Institute recorded some of the business donors to their own green critics; they included Chevron, Exxon, Philip Morris, Mobil, Morgan Guaranty, Arco, Du Pont, Ciba Geigy, Bank of Boston, Ford Foundation, General Electric, HJ Heinz Co., Monsanto, *New York Times*, Proctor and Gamble (Arnold and Gottlieb 1994). To environmentalists, it appeared that business donations were a case of ‘green-washing’ on the part of companies – but, whatever the reason, it certainly indicated the mainstreaming of green thinking.

Phil Macnaghten and John Urry suggest that the adoption of the green agenda by governments at Rio led local green groups to direct action protests in the mid-nineties, to take the issue back from the politicians (1998: 64). In the UK anti-road protestors at Twyford Down, Oxleas Wood, the M11 link road, and the Newbury bypass occupied the sites, making camps in the tree-tops and underground to prevent developers working on site. These protests were led by ad hoc groups like the self-styled Donga Tribe and Earth First! A new style of activism, which was largely outside the official channels of protest and constitutional opposition, was emerging.

But just as the activists assumed ever more militant oppositional stands, the mainstream bent over backwards to accommodate them. With a vampiric taste for new blood the media fell over themselves to identify spokespeople for the new movement, like road protestors ‘Swampy’ (Daniel Hooper), ‘Animal’, ‘Muppet Dave’, or 14-year-old Christina Tugwell, ‘the female Swampy’ (see Merrick 1997). When these interlocutors proved too tongue-tied, the government, the academy, the church, and media sought to inculcate a leadership they could talk to. Television researchers hunted down the Exodus Collective and Camilla Behrens of Jubilee 2000 to beef up their studio debates. Crispin Tickell used his wardenship of Green College, Oxford, to provide a base for one rising star of the movement, George Monbiot. Educated at Stowe School, and Brasenose College, Oxford, Monbiot was headed for a career at the BBC until he threw in his lot with the Donga Tribe at Twyford Down, and, despite

some suspicions about this ‘careerist’ and ‘media tart’, succeeded in making himself an accepted spokesman (Monbiot 1998).

Indeed most of the emerging leaders of this anti-capitalist movement seemed to be surprisingly well-heeled. Mark Brown (Radley School), heir to the Vestey fortune, was acquitted of leading the Carnival Against Capitalism of June 1999; Lord Peter Melchett (Eton), former cabinet minister and grandson to Imperial Chemicals Industries’ Lord Alfred Mond, was head of Greenpeace UK as well as standing trial for wrecking genetically modified crops; and Zac Goldsmith (Eton), son of Sir James, is the current editor of the *Ecologist*. Charles Secrett (Cranleigh), executive director of Friends of the Earth, explains the appeal of environmentalism amongst the upper classes: ‘Among the aristocrats there is a sense of noblesse oblige . . . feeling of stewardship towards the land’ (*Guardian*, 5 May 2000). This approach is one that Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels identified as ‘feudal socialism’: ‘The aristocracy, in order to rally the people to them, waved the alms-bag in front for a banner’ (Marx and Engels 1977: 52). But then it appears that those involved in direct action are, for the most part, the better off. According to the British Social Attitudes Survey, ‘those in the professional and managerial class and those with O-level or equivalent qualifications or above, are much more likely than working class people or those with lower qualifications to have engaged in some form of activism’. Furthermore, they added, ‘we find that young people are less likely than older ones to undertake direct action, which is somewhat surprising’ (Jowell *et al.* 1997: 132).

In their book *Empire*, which became something of a set text for the anti-capitalist movement (largely by virtue of its cautious non-specificity), Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri look at the conditions that allow the ‘multitude’ to become a political subject. Their distinction turns on the differentiation between an industrial working class and a more broadly defined international proletariat, or property-less class (Hardt and Negri 2000: 52, 410). But judging by the actual social composition of the anti-capitalist protestors the one class that is absent is the property-less. It would be truer to say that the condition for the monopolization of the ‘anti-capitalist’ argument by the environmental and NGO movement was the evacuation of the working class from the political arena.

## Protest or lobby?

The cycle of anti-capitalist protests in the period 1999–2001 took as its focus the diary of international summits organized by the G8 group of nations, the World Bank and the United Nations. The outward face of the protests was now more than *anti-globalization*; it was *anti-capitalist*. And yet the reaction of the powers-that-be was indulgent rather than dismissive. When protestors



demanded the cancellation of Third World debt at the June 1999 Cologne summit, British Prime Minister Tony Blair claimed credit for a debt-easing package (*Guardian*, 19 June 1999). After the rioting in Seattle outside the World Trade Organization, President Clinton was careful to say that negotiators had to listen to the ‘legitimate concerns of legitimate protesters’ (*Guardian*, 2 December 1999). When protests were organized against US President Bush, the ‘Toxic Texan’, at a summit at Gothenburg, the Swedish authorities gave every indication of supporting at least peaceful protest. On the eve of the summit, Prime Minister Goran Persson opened what he hoped would be a ‘pre-emptive dialogue with the protestors suggesting that the EU was well placed to help tame the forces of global capitalism’ (*Guardian*, 16 June 2001). In the event, the more indignant of the demonstrators were simply emboldened to challenge the authorities more directly, until the police snapped and shot two protestors in the process of restoring order.

Increasingly, the distinction between the protestors outside the summits and the delegates inside has become less clear. International organizations like the World Bank have facilitated the role of NGOs and advocacy groups, inviting them into the lobby. The World Bank’s Development Report argues: ‘Global action can empower poor people and poor countries in national and global forums’ (World Bank 2000). This is in effect an appeal to NGOs to lobby and protest outside the World Bank. The Bank promises ‘open, regular dialogue with civil society organisations, particularly those representing poor people’. The Bank supports ‘ongoing global coalitions of poor people so that they may inform global debates’ (*ibid.*). International conferences have also adapted to the agenda of the lobbyists, as was the case with the United Nations Conference on Racism in 2002, where the floodgates were opened to radical complaint.

The violence of the anti-capitalist protestors’ arguments is, for the most part, a pose. Moral indignation precedes compromise and accommodation. The point of the somewhat histrionic demands is not that they are to be taken literally or acted upon, but that they vouch for the sincerity of their framers. By demonstrating their emotional commitment to the issues, the protestors demand the attention of the authorities, as acceptable interlocutors for the poor and dispossessed.

### **What do the protestors want?**

The criticism of capitalism that is made in these protests is at once adamant and modest. To be ‘anti-capitalist’ is to present one’s claim in an absolute form that in practice could not be acted upon, since it lacks all definitive demands for the future. ‘I know I’ve set myself an impossible task, but I’m not going to be happy until there is complete change in the world,’ says Zac



Goldsmith (*Guardian*, 7 November 2002). It is a form of the ‘great refusal’, whose purpose is less to be realized than to indicate the deeply felt character of the protests. But insofar as the protests do have demands, these are of a quite different character from the socialist critique of capitalism. They are in fact a rejection of modernity and development as such, not a demand that society be developed on a different basis.

Anti-capitalists Naomi Klein and George Monbiot both berate supermarkets for putting small shopkeepers out of business, as if small business were preferable to big (Klein 2000: 134; Monbiot 2001: 207). Zac Goldsmith is ‘not opposed to growth or to business’ but to ‘the marauding, modern global version of capitalism that is taking over the planet’ (*Guardian*, 7 November 2002). From the perspective of the small-businessman, big business is crushing and all economic development is disastrous. In particular, the anti-capitalists deplore the growth of the Third World proletariat: ‘In the large industrializing countries (such as China, India and Brazil) such [population] growth compounds the burden caused by rising consumption’ (Real World Coalition 1996: 27). It was of such critics of capitalism that Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels wrote: ‘their chief accusation against the bourgeoisie amounts to this, that under the bourgeois regime a class is being developed which will cut up root and branch the order of the old society’ (Marx and Engels 1977: 63).

It should be recalled that Marx never made a blanket case against capitalism, but saw it as a combination of progressive trends that tended to economic growth, and reactionary constraints that set limits upon such development. He sought to liberate the former from the latter. By contrast, today’s ‘anti-capitalists’ seek to restrain growth, in favour of constraint. Most pointed is the latter-day anti-capitalists’ constant complaint against *rising* living standards and the expansion of consumer goods. This is far from the Marxist case that capitalism was to be faulted for the restrictions it placed on consumption. Marx allied himself with the working-class movement’s demands for increased living standards, specifically for higher wages. In contrast to today’s anti-capitalists Marx thought that the emerging consumerism was capitalism’s redeeming feature:

he searches for means to spur them on to consumption, to give his wares new charms, to inspire them with new needs by constant chatter etc. It is precisely this side of the relation of capital and labour which is an essential civilising moment, and on which the historic justification, but also the contemporary power of capital rests. (Marx 1973: 287)

Here the Marxist argument could not be further from that of our latter-day anti-capitalists. He welcomes the ‘constant chatter’ of branding that so appals today’s anti-consumerist. He welcomes the creation of ‘new needs’ amongst

the working class consumer as ‘an essential civilizing moment’ and capitalism’s ‘historic justification’. The point of Marx’s criticism, then, is to *surpass* capitalism, not retreat from it; not to restrict consumption, but to expand it, even beyond the limited expansion (limited by the wage) under capitalism. Socialism, to Marx, implies a yet greater expansion of production as well as consumption. For him, the case against capitalism is that it sets arbitrary limitations upon growth. Today’s protestors, by contrast, reduce anti-capitalism to the smallholders’ protest against growth. The anti-globalization lobby merely reproduces the contemporary mood of gloom that besets the capitalists, albeit in a radical form.

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