

## Chapter 6

### The Generation of Seattle

The international financial crisis of 1997-98 became a political and psychological watershed. After the collapse of the ruble, which was followed by a wave of devaluations in Latin America, the political elites and the leaders of world business were in confusion. Within a few months things stabilised, and it seemed to the ruling classes that the situation was returning to “normal”. Their habitual self-confidence returned. From this time on, however, their arguments along the lines of “there is not and cannot be an alternative”, maintaining that “the free market economy” was to the advantage of everyone, lost their former conviction even for people who not long before had believed such fables. The promises of brilliant success in the near future began to be seen as helpless incantations. Neoliberalism had lost its hypnotic force. The magic had disappeared. The system was encountering growing difficulties, and throughout the entire world disillusionment and anger with the new order were increasing. A little more time was required for this dissatisfaction to be transformed into political protest. The protest burst into the open in the autumn of 1999 during the meeting of the World Trade Organisation in Seattle.

### Chiapas: The Magical Revolution

The revolt in Seattle was not the first act of protest against neoliberal globalisation. It lent impetus to the global movement. But the success in Seattle would have been inconceivable without the victorious strikes in France in 1995, and without the uprising of the Zapatistas in Mexico.

On 1 January 1994 the agreement on the North American Free Trade Association (NAFTA), uniting the US, Canada and Mexico, entered into force. On this day political and business leaders went to Mexico to mark the event. And on the same day, Indians in the southern Mexican state of Chiapas rose in revolt, seized the city of San Cristobal, and announced to the world the founding of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN). Somehow, the political and business leaders no longer seemed so interesting. Attention was concentrated on the events in Chiapas and on the Indians, who had declared that they were continuing the struggles of the hero of the Mexican Revolution Emilio Zapata.

The Indians were wearing masks. Many did not have weapons, for which they substituted wooden prop rifles. The insurgent army was strange. It did not threaten to seize power in the capital, and did not promise a general popular uprising. It avoided armed actions where possible. Its slogan was for “armed struggle without gunfire and bloodshed”. In essence, the people had taken up arms not in order to shoot, but to force the authorities to take notice of them and of their problems.

One of the leaders of the uprising was a man who was not only faceless but nameless. He was known as Subcomandante Marcos, but the only thing we know about him for certain is that this was not his real name. Nor was Marcos a movement leader of the type of Castro or Che Guevara. Rather, he was its ideologue, and at the same time a propagandist and press-secretary for the Indians, allowing their problems and concerns to be understood by New York youth and Parisian intellectuals. It was thanks to this international attention that the revolt of the Zapatistas was not drowned in blood like hundreds of other Indian uprisings in Mexico. The army was rushed into Chiapas, and the village dwellers fled into the mountains, but the troops were not permitted to destroy everything forthwith; news from Chiapas was

appearing instantly on the internet, and was being discussed in the Western press. Meanwhile, the Mexican government was scared of frightening off investors.

This was the first guerrilla war in Latin America that saw the struggle waged more actively in the virtual space than on the field of battle. The masked Indians, many of whom were armed with unloaded rifles or with wooden imitation guns, seized not only the population centres of the province of Chiapas, but also the imagination of radical youth on both sides of the Atlantic. In Europe, the image of the Mexican insurgent became the object of a peculiar cult. The Zapatista became a model even for people living and struggling in conditions totally opposite to those of Chiapas.

Six years into the struggle, the one-party regime that had ruled Mexico for decades fell. The Zapatistas entered the capital, not as an army of conquerors, but as guests of the newly elected parliament. They were greeted by massive crowds. Nevertheless, talks with the new authorities finished up in a dead end. It turned out that the “democrats” who had come to power on a wave of popular discontent were little better than the old regime. President Vicente Fox, who had won office on a slogan of democratisation, pressed ahead with the same “only possible” neoliberal policies. This meant that the democratic promises ceased to have any point. The people of Chiapas rejected a peaceful accord that left them without rights. The result of the talks was a situation of “neither peace nor war”, of armed resistance that avoided military actions.

The struggle of the Chiapas peasants awakened the political consciousness of hundreds of thousands of young people not just in Mexico, but throughout the entire world. It showed that resistance to neoliberal capitalism could arise and could achieve successes under the most unfavourable conditions. The Zapatistas provided an example to the urban radicals of Western Europe and North America.

## The Uprising Begins

In 1999 Seattle, which was supposed to become the symbol of “free trade” and of the new global capitalism, was transformed into a symbol of anticapitalist resistance. People began to speak of the “spirit of Seattle”, and of the “Seattle generation”. The fact that the organisers of the meeting had chosen Seattle as the place where the new round of talks on the liberalisation of world trade would begin was by no means accidental. When Seattle was chosen for the meeting of World Trade Organisation, transnational bureaucrats had been convinced that in this city, the neoliberal order would find massive support. Unlike the old industrial centres of America, where deregulation and cuts to social programs had destroyed the accustomed way of life, leaving thousands of people without jobs, Seattle had the air of a thoroughly prosperous city. This was the model city of the new middle class. It was here that Microsoft had located its enterprises; here one could find the staff of numerous head offices of companies conducting business with the countries of Asia. In Detroit, Asian imports were taking the jobs of car workers, but in the port of Seattle employment was growing. Here, too, were the engineering and administrative personnel of Boeing. Nevertheless it was in Seattle, in the city of the “new middle class”, that the protest found massive support.

On the eve of the WTO meeting, a march of many thousands of trade unionists passed through the city streets. There had already been a good many similar demonstrations. The authorities and transnational capital simply ignored such actions, especially since the trade union leaders rarely decided to back up their criticism of neoliberalism with calls for strikes. In Seattle the unexpected happened. It was not just that there were more demonstrators than usual, but that their mood was more decisive. Acting in parallel with the trade unionists were thousands of young activists employing unusual and innovative methods to try to break up the

meeting. Hotels were blockaded by crowds of people, and central streets were blocked off by masses of protesters. The participants in the meeting were thus unable to gather. Despite harsh repression, the police were unable to restore control over the city centre.

Nevertheless, the most unpleasant surprise for the ideologues and strategists of neoliberalism was the fact that young members of the middle class were proving more radical than the trade union leaders. The moderation of the leaders of the “old left” and the trade unions was the result of many years of defeats. By contrast, the young middle class had grown up with neoliberalism, and was its product. These young people were angered and affronted by the system, but were not weighed down by constant defeats. The radicalism of the movement reflected the spirit of a rising social layer. The new anticorporate movement united precisely those people and social types that the liberal political elite had in the past counted on mechanically as being among its most enthusiastic supporters, declaring them its “best” and “most progressive”. For twenty years, the propagandists had been promising that a new generation that had grown up under the conditions of the “free market” would make its appearance. Here, finally, this generation was making its presence felt – coming out onto the streets in struggle against the capitalist order. This was an ideological catastrophe for the system’s apologists. They were confused and demoralised. The neoliberal elite, that had shown its total indifference to protests by miners and steelworkers, was unprepared for mass demonstrations by computer specialists and by students from privileged colleges. Still more of a shock for the elites was the fact that these two currents had merged into one; the young representatives of the “new economy” were marching in a single column with the “traditional” working class, having recognised a common interest in the struggle against corporate capital.

The form of the movement was also unexpected. The Seattle police complained that the young protesters had better technical equipment, using mobile telephones and portable computers with access to the internet. The new social layers and the new generations were developing their own culture of protest. They were capable of acting in a way that was decentralised, but at the same time coordinated and effective. The coercion of the state was being confronted with network solidarity.

The antiglobalist actions that gripped the Western world following the “battle in Seattle” seemed to many people like a second edition of the youth revolt of the late 1960s. Both feature a massive and largely spontaneous youth movement. In both cases, rebel youth have risen up not only against the bourgeois order, but also against the official left parties integrated into this order. In both cases, a movement that has rested on a Marxist analysis of society has come under the powerful influence of anarchist tradition. Nevertheless, the social base of the radical movement of the turn of the twenty-first century is significantly broader than that of the new left. This is apparent in the geography of the movement, that has become truly global. In the 1960s the world was divided into two systems. Even if the revolt of the new left had echoes in Eastern Europe, the East had its own life and its own problems. In the countries of the Third World, the radicals believed in national liberation.

As a global system, neoliberal capitalism ensured that the resistance to it would also be global. Similar social problems appear throughout the entire planet, and everywhere we see the same conflicts. It is not surprising that the ideology of protest is also spreading like wildfire. If the revolt of the 1960s was prepared on the social level by an overproduction of the intelligentsia, the rebellion of the late 1990s was set off to a significant degree by the inability of the system to provide for the future of the middle class. This does not mean that all the participants in the movement came from the middle class, just as the rebels of the 1960s were by no means all intellectuals. The growing discontent of the middle class, however, created an emotional “nutrient medium” for young activists.

## The Lessons of Prague

After Seattle, the movement started sweeping across the world. From the facile hands of journalists, it received the name “antiglobalist”. The term is an absurd one, and deliberately lacking in political meaning. It pleased the elites to depict the protesting youth as a backward mob, resisting “natural” processes and not understanding where their own advantage lay – as modern-day Luddites out to stop world trade. The movement, however, quickly acquired its own voice. Consequently, it was impossible to conceal the fact that what was involved was global anti-corporate protest, the rise of a new internationalism. Practically all large international gatherings called by governments and the financial elites came to be accompanied by demonstrations.

In September 2000, when ten thousand demonstrators who had gathered from throughout Europe blocked a meeting of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank in Prague, the movement entered a new phase. It was in Prague that the movement against corporate globalisation became genuinely international and global. In Seattle it was above all a manifestation of protest by the new generation of American youth, to a significant degree retracing the course of the radicalisation of the 1960s, though in new historical conditions. Thanks to Prague the movement took shape in Europe. For the first time since the International Brigades in Spain from 1937 to 1939, people from different countries joined in confronting a common enemy, and in confronting it physically. Solidarity was transformed from a slogan and an idea into practical action, into a way of life. In Prague Turks and Kurds came together, Greeks and Turks, Germans and Poles, Spaniards and Basques. Meanwhile, it was necessary to confront not only the police, but also the local neo-nazis.

The antiglobalist movement showed that it was simultaneously internationalist. In turn, the defenders of globalisation resorted to the power of the national state, not only when they used the Czech police against the demonstrators, but also when they illegally stopped people on the borders of the republic, and banished “undesirable foreigners” from the country’s territory. After the IMF and the World Bank had fled, the police took their revenge on the Czech activists, subjecting them to massive repression. The point was graphically demonstrated that globalisation does not signify the “powerlessness of the state”, but the renouncing by the state of its social functions in favour of its repressive ones; the irresponsibility of governments; and the abolition of democratic freedoms.

The radical infection from the West had begun to penetrate Central and Eastern Europe. Throughout the 1990s the ideologues of neoliberalism had constantly repeated the story about Moses, who for forty years led the Hebrews about the wilderness until all those who had grown up in slavery had died out. The generation that had taken shape following the collapse of the communist regime was called upon to become the embodiment of bourgeois values and market efficiency. Meanwhile, it was precisely among young people that the anticapitalist moods were starting to spread. Forgetting its own theories, liberal sociology with hindsight has begun to think up all sorts of explanations for this unpleasant phenomenon. Some writers have said that young people do not value market “freedom” because they have not known the “horrors of totalitarianism” (in other words, the “wandering in the wilderness” has yielded results strictly contrary to those that were planned). Other writers have explained in all seriousness that while the older generation was out earning money and trying to participate in the new market relationships, the children were left with Stalinist grandmothers who raised the youth in a spirit of class hatred. Meanwhile, no-one even entertained the thought that the experience of living under capitalism might in itself induce people to join socialist organisations.

When the movement spread to Europe, it changed in many ways. Having reached Europe, the movement took on a still more massive and politically tougher character than in America. Criticism of corporations was replaced by anticapitalist slogans, and appeals for a more democratic organisation of economic life, with references to socialism and to revolution. If an anticapitalist spirit and mood had prevailed in Seattle, in Prague it was possible to speak of a far more distinctly formulated anticapitalist message. Here, the difference in political cultures was making its effects felt; Europe possesses a far stronger socialist tradition.

To be truthful, it should be said that the red flags and revolutionary rhetoric frightened off not only the ordinary citizens of Prague, but at times also the more moderate participants in the movement. The ultraleft groups unexpectedly showed that they were capable of uniting and of collaborating on a European scale, overcoming their sectarian habits. They also showed that masses of young people were now once again pouring into their ranks. At the same time, they revealed infantilism, political light-mindedness, and an unpreparedness for serious discussion. People who for many years had called themselves a historical vanguard found that such a role demanded not so much regular self-praise, as constant work on oneself. By no means all of these people were ready for such a thing.

When the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund planned their annual meeting in the Czech republic, they hoped for a peaceful meeting in the only Eastern European state where hatred for neoliberalism had not yet become a mass phenomenon. In the event, the situation encountered in Seattle was seen once again: a city chosen as a symbol of the success of the system came to symbolise its defeat. The international bankers had to flee the Czech capital, on whose streets battles unfolded between police and thousands of demonstrators who had gathered from all of Europe. The bankers did not even hold a concluding press conference.

In Prague, the police expected the demonstrators to try to repeat the “Seattle Scenario”: blockading the hotels, and closing off the streets at the approaches to the meeting venues. Instead, the demonstrators allowed the participants in the meeting to gather in the Congress Centre, and blockaded the exits. The “Battle in Prague” showed the surprising tactical skill of the protesters. The columns of activists manoeuvred, reserves were switched from one sector to another, and different groups backed one another up. For two hours the representatives of the world banking community were unable to return to their hotels. They were forced to travel there by public transport, which as the bankers themselves admitted, was a real shock for them. The tear gas with which the police drove the protesters away from the Congress Centre in Visegrad seeped through into the building, and poisoned the participants of the meeting. The discussions were wound up. Without even adopting a final document, the international bankers made haste to abandon the now-inhospitable Czech capital.

## The Generation of Protest

Mass protests took place in Nice in December 2000 during the consultation of leading organs of the European Union, and then in Switzerland during the World Economic Forum in Davos. For the international financial institutions, Prague was a severe defeat, in a certain sense even more severe than the “Seattle uprising”. For precisely this reason, however, the “executive committee of the ruling class” drew conclusions from what had happened, and began devising a strategy for counter-attack. The growth of the movement was paralleled by an escalation of police violence. In Prague, demonstrators had been hunted down with dogs, and beaten. In Switzerland, the police blockaded the entire region of Davos, throwing transport out of kilter and arousing indignation in the respectable burgers. Demonstrators were drenched with cold water in frosty weather. Army detachments with armoured personnel

carriers were used to “defend” Davos (this technology was actively employed in Prague, where one such vehicle was even set on fire by anarchists). Later, in Quebec and Genoa, the city districts where the international meetings were taking place were fenced off with special defensive walls, along which battles unfolded between youth and police. In Quebec such a structure was termed the “wall of shame”. In June 2001, police in Goteborg for the first time used firearms against demonstrators. Several people were wounded. Mass arrests took place (also in Goteborg, those arrested included for the first time a citizen of Russia).

The new radicalism took the trade union leaderships and the traditional left parties by surprise. Sometimes they supported the movement, but all the same they were unsure of themselves. Politicians were happy to play the role of friends of the radical youth, but at the same time could not hide their fear of them. The trade union leaders tried to shield their rank and file members from the ideological influence of the young activists, and to avoid direct clashes with the police. The trade union and youth demonstrations took place “in parallel, but not together”. Nevertheless, the influence of the radicals had an impact on the trade union marches as well. The aesthetic changed, as did the style of the street actions. The “Seattle generation” brought with it a new understanding of direct action, turning it into a celebration, a carnival, theatricalising the protest. If Pekka Himanen and Linus Torvalds had written of a new culture combining work and pleasure, from now on protest would similarly be combined with celebration. And moreover, with spontaneous celebration. This “playful” style began to penetrate the trade union actions as well. Protesting in Quebec against the efforts to create an all-American free trade zone, trade unions in the spring of 2001 came onto the streets not just with their accustomed flags and banners. Everywhere there were puppets, jugglers, clowns, dancers, and people playing music. Only a small group of activists, however, joined in with the young people who were waging battle next to the “wall of shame” erected by the police. The workers’ demonstration headed off in the opposite direction. It is not surprising that a wave of criticism later engulfed the trade union leaders. With hindsight, large numbers of people suddenly “remembered” how they had heroically stormed the “wall of shame”. If even half of those who recalled their feats in retrospect had actually been there, the police would hardly have managed to hold back the onrush of the crowd. During the Prague demonstrations, many of the organisers and participants had already spoken of how a weariness with street protests might sooner or later set in among the activists. But in 2001 the protests kept growing. Prague and Davos were followed by Quebec and Goteborg.

The European actions in 2000 and 2001 culminated with the events in Genoa. Between two hundred and three hundred thousand demonstrators were drawn there by the summit meeting of the “big eight” leaders of the largest industrial countries. Preparations for the Genoa summit had been under way even when a left-centrist government held power in Rome. By the time when the heads of seven leading states arrived in Genoa, the left-centrist coalition in Italy had suffered a crushing defeat, and the right-wing government of Silvio Berlusconi had come to power. A new political situation had arisen. The left-centrist forces, united in the “Olive Tree” bloc and the Party of Left Democrats, were demoralised. On the other hand, the trade union leaders and heads of mass organisations who had traditionally looked to the interests of “their” government found themselves freed up. However disgracefully the left-centre government might have behaved, so long as it remained in power it could claim to be a “lesser evil”, arguing that mass protests would rock the boat and aid the right. “Restraint” on the part of trade unions, however, has never in any country saved social-democratic cabinets that have dug their own graves by pursuing right-wing policies with the enthusiasm of newly converted worshippers of the market deity. The electoral catastrophe suffered by the social democracy acted as the signal for a radicalisation of the mass movement – first in Italy, and then throughout Europe.

The savagery of the police during the demonstrations in Salzburg and Goteborg earlier in the same summer had left radical youth wanting to “trade blow for blow”. The majority of the activists who arrived in Genoa in the summer of 2001 were Italians, but contingents of many thousands came from France, Greece, Great Britain, Spain and Germany. Groups from Eastern Europe, including from Russia, were also represented. The Australian journalist Sean Healy wrote that the state used a “classical counter-insurgency strategy” against the protesters in Genoa<sup>1</sup>. Provoking violent clashes, the police sought to carry out two tasks simultaneously. The press and the authorities used the street battles, the broken shop windows and the pictures of violence to portray the opponents of the system as an aggressive crowd of vandals. On one side, the possibility had emerged of politically dividing the movement, counterposing the radicals to moderates who condemned the violence. Meanwhile, a sweeping military-police operation was being conducted, no longer fettered by legal norms. In practice, the police acted according to wartime rather than peacetime laws. They had been given firearms, and used them without hesitation. Long before the clashes in the cities where demonstrators were on the march, a de facto state of emergency had been introduced. Certain regions of the cities had been declared prohibited “red zones”. The proclaiming by the police of these “red zones” had become a new cause for confrontations, since the demonstrators considered such decisions illegal and in violation of constitutional norms (guaranteeing freedom of movement, freedom of assembly, and so forth).

The summit in Genoa turned out to be unprecedented, by European standards, for its violence. For the following two weeks, Italy could not regain its composure. In Prague the participants in the demonstrations had spoken of “carnival violence”. Somehow, the battles with the Czech police mixed in naturally with the theatrical spectacle, with the pink balloons soaring above the clouds of tear gas. In Quebec in the spring of 2001 catapults pelted the police with velvet teddy bears, and smiles had been drawn on the banderas with which the young people storming the police barricades had covered their faces. The local press ran pictures of shields, gas-masks and motorcycle helmets in its fashion section. But in Genoa, the time for jokes was past. On both sides, people were becoming more ruthless. Armoured vehicles rammed the crowd. Young people looted shop windows, set fire to cars, and built barricades. Here, unlike the situation in Prague, there were no safe zones; the entire city had been turned into a huge battlefield. Not only did the police savagely beat demonstrators, but young people threw themselves furiously on carabinieri who had become separated from the police ranks, kicking them and beating them with sticks. On 20 July 2001, the young activist Carlo Giuliani was killed by carabinieri on Kennedy Square [Piazza Kennedy?]. He was the movement’s first martyr. The Piazza Kennedy, where the young man had died, was spontaneously renamed the Piazza Carlo Giuliani. On the night of 21-22 July, police invaded the building where the Genoa Social Forum was being held, beating and arresting dozens of people. The number of injured ran into the hundreds.

The “counter-insurgency strategy” was a failure, since the ruthlessness of the police finished up rebounding on them. The Italian press united in condemning the repression, while a parliamentary investigation revealed the extent to which the police actions had been planned in advance. To a degree this process was aided by Berlusconi himself, seeking to lay the blame for what had happened on the previous left-centre government. A storm of criticism descended on the Italian authorities, and the parliament was forced to begin its inquiry.

The “big eight” did not get what they wanted from the summit. All the attention was fastened not on the meeting, but on the street battles. The demonstrators, however, could not celebrate a victory either, and not only for the reason that unlike the case in Seattle and Prague, they had not managed to stop the summit from going ahead. The battle in Genoa

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<sup>1</sup> Green Left Weekly, 1.08.2001, p. 18.

showed the limits of street protest. Susan George notes that in Genoa and Goteborg “direct repression” and electronic surveillance of activists were combined with an “ideological counterattack”<sup>2</sup>. The events in Genoa showed that radical youth were able to seize control of the streets, but that this was not enough to shake the authorities. After many years of arguments from thinkers and commentators about the “powerlessness of the state in the epoch of globalisation”, the state power had again come to the forefront, demonstrating its repressive might and class essence. The carnival was over. In the movement, a serious strategic and ideological discussion had become essential, along with a more exact definition of reference-points and a working out of political priorities.

Protest is not yet revolution. Protest is defensive. It allows the combining of action with a sort of strategic passivity. Its aim is to force the elites to renounce their plans or to correct them. Protest opens the way for social change, testifies to the fact that society or at least a significant part of it wants things done differently, and refuses to reconcile itself to the accustomed rules of the game. Protest, however, cannot replace politics.

One of the most popular ideologues of the movement, Walden Bello, wrote after the demonstrations in Seattle and Prague that a “crisis of legitimacy” had arisen. No-one believes any more in the institutions of the world ruling class, including even the people who run these institutions. This crisis has been aggravated by the growing difficulties in the world economy. In short, something has arisen along the lines of what Lenin would have described as a global revolutionary situation; not only have the lower orders ceased to accept the authority of the world financial institutions, but the people on top have also begun to doubt that these institutions are effective. In Bello’s view, the Asian crisis of 1997-98 was the Stalingrad of the International Monetary Fund. The left now needs to pass over to the offensive, and to fight for a new economic order based on decentralisation, democratic control from beneath, and the development of local markets, using resources and providing work and products for people in the places where they live. In reality, the events in Prague and Seattle are better compared not with Stalingrad, where a fundamental turning-point was reached in the course of the Second World War, but with the battle for Moscow, where German nazism suffered its first defeat, but was not smashed. After its victorious battle on the outskirts of Moscow, the Red Army still had to survive a shameful defeat near Kharkov and a retreat to the Volga.

In identical fashion, it became clear after Goteborg and Genoa that demonstrations would not shake the hegemony of the financial oligarchy and the transnational corporations. Although the political parties seem to the young radicals to be corrupt, and elections a cynical contest between moneybags, street protest cannot replace political action, including participation in elections. Another generation of left activists has now come to the conclusion that political organisation is indispensable.

The activists of the new anticapitalist movements are doomed to enter the same political arena on which the traditional left has operated. But they need to operate in this arena in new fashion. The mass base of the left is changing. The revolt of the new middle class has brought with it new methods of struggle, and new modes of organisation. Nevertheless, the positive and negative experience accumulated by the workers’ movement over a century and a half remains just as valuable as in the past. Network organisation, spontaneous actions and a carnival style cannot replace democratic principles, serious political discussion, and debate over strategy and tactics. Each has to augment the other.

## Terrorism

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<sup>2</sup> Le Monde diplomatique, aout 2001, pp. 1, 6.



On 11 September 2001 reports of aircraft crashing into the buildings of the World Trade Centre and the Pentagon plunged the entire world into a sort of paralysis. The human race was glued to its television sets. Thousands of people perished before our eyes in “real time”. For the “society of the spectacle”, this was the culminating act: a catastrophe was turned into a spectacle, and a spectacle became a catastrophe. The corporate elites, the military-police complex, the bureaucracy and the security services instantly took on a new self-confidence and acquired a moral justification for their activity. The struggle with terrorism went onto the agenda, replacing the discredited “freedom of trade”, while liberal economics itself was transformed into a means of defending “civilised humanity” from “extremism”. For the world system, the “crisis of legitimacy” was replaced by an aggressive confidence in the need for a “new imperialism”.

Everything that was considered morally dubious on the part of the authorities and the corporations was justified as being indispensable. The invading of foreign territory ceased to be regarded as a breach of international law, and came to look like a police operation. As in 1967, the occupation of Palestine by Israeli forces could again be seen as necessary self-defence, while the Russian authorities explained to the amazed public that in Chechnya they were fighting the very same “islamic fundamentalism” that had brought down the World Trade Centre. Every dictator, even the most insignificant, discovered on his territory a small offshoot of the world-wide terrorist network that had to be fought. Leaders who did not find terrorists within their borders found them on the territory of neighbours, and declared that it was necessary to unite the nation in order to fight against them. Once again, they remembered the middle class. Acknowledging that the nutrient medium for terrorism was poverty, the corporate propaganda performed a brilliant leap of the intellect and declared the transnational companies to be the vanguard of the anti-terrorist campaign. With their investments, they were developing backward countries and creating there a middle class – the bulwark of stability and democracy.

On the whole, the terrorists who aimed the Boeings at New York and Washington (if, of course, these were the people whom the official investigation named with suspicious haste) were members of the middle class. Meanwhile, the monetary resources for the development of the terrorist networks had not been provided by the impoverished lower orders of the Third World. The propagandist hysteria that began after 11 September, however, ruled out any possibility not only of analysis, but even of elementary discussion.

Nevertheless, the ideological counteroffensive of the elites achieved its goals only in part. However paradoxical it might seem, the main victims of the reaction were not the radicals, who remained politically determined to continue the struggle, but “moderate leftists”, “progressive liberals” and “realistic social democrats” of all varieties. Frightening these people was not difficult. Champions of political correctness and minority rights, they proved impotent against a wave of open racism. Some ran for cover, and began justifying themselves. Others made a hurried change of course, and rushed to join the ranks of the victors.

The crisis of Social Democracy in Western Europe had begun long before 11 September, but it was now that the complete hopelessness of its position was revealed. In elections, catastrophic failures followed one after another. The candidate of the French socialists, Lionel Jospin, did not reach the second round of the presidential elections. Then the Dutch Party of Labour suffered a similar catastrophic defeat. In Germany, the coalition of social democrats and Greens began rapidly losing popularity.

Meanwhile, the psychological effect of 11 September proved far more short-term than might have seemed in the first weeks after the tragedy. The shock passed. It was found that the “fighters against world terrorism” had neither new ideas, nor even long-term strategic

plans. The collapse of the social democratic “centre” opened up the political field to more radical forces.

## War and Protest

Immediately after the events of 11 September, the mainstream press declared that the “movement against globalisation” had vanished into the past. It quickly became clear that the authors of such commentaries were trying to pass off their hopes as reality. In the late autumn of 2001, huge anti-war demonstrations were already beginning in Western Europe. When the US and Britain started bombing Afghanistan, demonstrations of many thousands of people came out onto the streets of Western cities. With the “struggle against terrorism” a pretext for attacks on civil rights, the anti-war movement, in the words of Ignacio Ramone, became a form of defence of “our principal freedoms”.

The events during the autumn of 2001 had the effect not only of reshaping the slogans of the movement, but also of changing its geography to a degree. In the US, radical currents faced an undeniable crisis, but in Europe and the countries of the Third World there was no serious crisis whatever; on the contrary, the movement received a fresh impulse. Not only were massive demonstrations continuing in various parts of the world, but they were occurring on a new scale. The forum in Porto Alegre was larger than the forum of “bourgeois solidarity” held in 2002 in New York instead of Davos. Surprising the organisers themselves, a demonstration in Barcelona in the spring of 2002 attracted almost half a million people, while a demonstration in Rome not only exceeded all expectations, but all historical precedents. By the most modest estimates, more than two million people were on the streets. The demonstration was followed by a general strike against the government of Silvio Berlusconi.

The Italian strike was a genuine turning-point, since it showed that the trade unions and the workers’ organisations again enjoyed the support of the middle class. According to the apt remark of Fausto Bertinotti, this was the end of the “loneliness of the worker”.

In reality, the workers’ movement in Western Europe had come out of its isolation a good deal earlier. The strike by public sector workers in France in 1995 became a legend precisely because it showed how much the public mood had changed. Public transport ceased to operate, and people were late for work. The public, however, not only failed to condemn the strikers, but rejoiced and suffered along with them. The same was observed in London during the strike by underground railway workers against attempts at privatisation. The protesting workers appeared as be responsible people concerned for the public interest, and the government as a group of irresponsible demagogues.

A new outburst of radical protest was provoked by the Iraq conflict. Once it had become clear that after dealing with Afghanistan, the US government intended to attack Iraq, anti-war actions took on historically unprecedented dimensions. Nothing similar had occurred even during the period of the Vietnam war. At that time, whole years had been needed for society to be aroused and to start demanding peace. This time, the opposition to the war began even before the military actions themselves. On 15 February 2003 millions of people came onto the streets of cities around the planet.

The administration of George W. Bush did not even try to prove a link between Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein and world terrorism, or the events of 11 September 2001. The US leadership set out openly to conquer the country and seize control of its oil, while at the same time promising to bring freedom to the people of Iraq. How much these promises were worth was evident simply from the list of friends of the US who supported the invasion. Bush was untroubled by the fact that in the camp of his closest allies were dictators with no more care for their subjects than Saddam Hussein (Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Tadjikistan and

“liberated” Afghanistan). These authoritarian rulers were corrupt through and through, and in exchange for financial aid, were prepared to mount a show of “support for world public opinion”.

Meanwhile, the military actions in Iraq that began in March 2003 despite the opposition of the UN Security Council were merely part of the overall politico-military strategy of the new American leaders. In the US itself, attacks on civil rights and freedoms continued. The republic was supposed to turn into an empire, with all the attendant consequences for its internal life. A substantial part of American society, however, understood the danger and took up the challenge. The scale and determination of the anti-war movement of 2003 resulted from the fact that it rested on the existing achievements of the antiglobalists. The radical protests which, it seemed, had died down after 11 September 2001 flared up with new force. The leaders, the organisational structures, and the experience were all in place. This time, however, unprecedented numbers of people who had not taken part in the antiglobalist actions joined in the resistance. These were people who had realised that it was essential to defend democracy and human rights against the extremists in the White House. It was not only the independence of Iraq that was in danger, but American freedom as well.

The largest US cities, San Francisco, New York and Los Angeles – modern, cosmopolitan and multinational – became the centers of opposition. Here, the revolt of the middle class took on the character of massive, stubborn resistance. The America of big modern cities was resisting the authorities, who found support in the sleepy nationalist and at times, racist hinterland, that even now regards Copernicus with suspicion, and that refuses to make peace with Darwin’s theory of evolution. The country had become divided into two camps, not only politically, but also geographically. A fight had begun for the future of America.

## Violence

The revolt in Chiapas was armed, but non-violent. Subcomandante Marcos explained that the ideal of the Zapatistas was to conduct an armed struggle without firing a single shot. The gun was a symbol of struggle, a sign that the Indians, who had risen up to defend their rights and dignity, refused to reconcile themselves to the violence of the state, and were ready to defend themselves. The principle of non-violent resistance was also proclaimed by the activists who broke up the meeting of the World Trade Organisation in Seattle in 1999. They blockaded hotels and closed off roads, preventing participants in the meeting from reaching the venues, but did not start fights with the police. The same slogans were announced on the eve of the mass demonstrations in Prague in 2000, and in Goteborg and Genoa in 2001.

Nevertheless the Zapatistas, despite their obvious reluctance and inability to wage a real war, had to use weapons, and not only the stage-prop variety. The peaceful demonstrations in Prague and Genoa ended in outbursts of violence. The outstanding twentieth-century sociologist Erich Fromm wrote that the daily life of consumer society was accompanied by a hidden accumulation of aggressiveness. Outward well-being was combined with alienation, with people’s inability to direct their own lives, with dependency on external control, starting in the workplace and ending in the armchair by the television, where they were told what they should eat, what they should wear, and what they should be. Ultimately, the accumulating sense of discontent gave rise to diverse kinds of aggression, starting with “motiveless” crimes and suicides, and extending to the irresistible desire to fling a stone at a shop window or at the head of a police officer.

In Prague many activists were shocked by the violence on the streets, and even more, by the united attack directed against the movement by the press. The assault by demonstrators on armour-clad police and the sacking of a McDonalds restaurant, whose owners knew in advance of the coming attack, do not of course bear any comparison with the everyday repressive practice of capitalism, and perhaps represent a natural response to this practice, though not a particularly rational one. Society is permeated with aggression at all levels, and hence both protest and resistance at times take on an aggressive form. In this connection, what is remarkable is not the outbursts of violence, but the fact that throughout the entire “demonstrating season” in Europe and America between 1999 and 2001 these episodes were so few.

The mass media in their turn adore scenes of violence. As was to be expected, the mainstream press in Seattle devoted most of its attention to two or three dozen anarchists who were smashing the windows of chic boutiques in the city centre. Neither the strike by the port workers protesting against the WTO meeting, neither the peaceful demonstrations by many thousands of people were considered newsworthy. But the first glass had only to shatter, and all America, followed by the entire world, noted with amazement the appearance of a new political force....

The same pattern was repeated in Prague, Quebec, Goteborg and Genoa, where efforts were made to depict the protesters as an aggressive mob, something like football hooligans. The attitude of the press to the violence in Prague and Belgrade was typical. Both actions took place in the same month. In both cases radical-minded youth resorted to violence, engaging in clashes with police. In Prague, however, the demonstrators were branded as “hooligans” who did not know what they wanted, while in Belgrade this was termed a popular revolt. It was clear that in Belgrade the Western press was condemning the dictator Slobodan Milosevic, while in Prague it was exalting the democratic president Vaclav Havel. Meanwhile, the behaviour of the police in Prague was identical to that in Belgrade, while from the legal standpoint the actions of the authorities in the Czech Republic were at least doubtful (illegal bans on the entry to the country of foreigners who had the right to entry without visas; the banning of peaceful processions about the city streets; and so forth). From the time of the American Revolution, illegal acts by the authorities have traditionally provided a justification for civil violence. In Belgrade, by contrast, the police in formal terms were acting within the bounds of the law, trying to defend public buildings from being seized by the crowd. It might be added that in Belgrade the number of injured was greater by a whole order of magnitude. Two people in the crowd died, and looting took place, while in Prague there was nothing of this sort.

None of this is pointed out in order to absolve Milosevic of responsibility for the crimes that he and his associates unquestionably committed (just as his opponents in the Balkan crisis also committed crimes, that were in no way better). The issue here is not the Balkan tyrants of the late twentieth century, but the nature of the “enlightened” and “democratic” Western European press. In all of the cases noted, the mainstream press was responding not to the violence as such, but to its own political goals, which predetermined the angle from which the violence would be presented and commented upon.

From the very first day, most of the journalistic teams that arrived in Prague did not conceal the fact that the only show they were interested in was the physical confrontation between demonstrators and police. With hindsight, many newspapers wrote that the street skirmishes “distracted attention” from the weighty discussion on the problems of globalisation. In practice, everything was quite different. The discussion continued throughout a whole week, with neither the Czech nor the international press showing the slightest interest. South African finance minister Trevor Manuel told the press that he did not understand what the protesters wanted. Earlier, in Prague Castle, Walden Bello and other

ideologues of the movement had spent a full hour explaining their positions to him. Unlike Manuel, James Wolfensohn had at least been honest enough to admit that he understood what they were talking about. From 22 to 24 September the Initiative Against Economic Globalisation (IAEG), which had drawn general attention to itself by organising the 26 September protest, held a counter-summit with the participation of leading critics of the International Monetary Fund. Throughout the counter-summit there was only one television camera present; this belonged to a weekly program devoted to... rock music! The more moderate group Bankwatch also held numerous meetings that were totally ignored by the press. As for the street actions of 22-25 September, which were totally peaceful, two-thirds of the reporting on them consisted of discussion of the coming violence. Trying to attract the attention of the press, the IAEG activists attempted to organise street carnivals, made puppets, and mounted theatrical presentations which in themselves could have provided material for good reporting, but all the same the expectation of violence dominated. It is noteworthy that many colourful pictures of the first days went to air or were published in the newspapers only after a delay, and together with commentaries along the lines of: "What began as a carnival finished up as battles in the streets." The same could be said of a number of statements by activists and guests of IAEG that were not quoted until well after they were uttered, and after the press had obtained what it was waiting for so impatiently. During the march, the journalists from the very first minutes discussed only one topic – "Where are the riots?" Sooner or later, what everyone was expecting had inevitably to happen.

The media reaction to violence in turn moved the issue of violence to the forefront inside the movement itself. The radicals accused the media of ideological bias. On the other hand, one can only marvel at the illogic of the moderate leaders of the movement, who in speaking out against the bourgeois order, simultaneously sought the love of the bourgeois press. The problem cannot be reduced to ideology, and to journalists writing to political orders. During the years of neoliberal rule the mass media, and television in particular, had simply lost the ability to think with any depth. Ideas are dull, while violence is spectacular. Television demands action, not discussion. It needs pictures, not words. Ideas are complex, while action is simple. Such are the laws of the genre. A ransacked McDonalds restaurant constitutes a message which can be read on a television screen, while arguments about who is to blame for the ruin of Russia or for the poverty of the countries of the Third World remain as though in parenthesis.

Everything is reduced to the form, the image, the spectacle. This in turn presupposes the hegemony of stereotypes, the triumph of banality and the absence of meaning. The clip-consciousness of television journalists demands neither analysis, nor attempts to gain an understanding of the causes and consequences of events. It is only in hindsight, when it becomes clear that a simple showing of "pictures" is insufficient, that the possibility of discussion arises. It was precisely the spectacle of violence on the streets of Seattle, and later of Prague, that forced a section of the press to devote attention to the growing criticism of globalisation.

It could be said that violence is the PR of the poor. If you have money and power, then in one way or another you are assured the attention of the mass media, even if you are talking about the cut of your jacket or the sort of coffee you drink at breakfast. For those who have neither money nor power, protest is at times the only way of attracting attention to themselves. The Polish and German youth who sacked the McDonalds on Wenceslas Square in Prague simply did not have any other way of expressing themselves.

It does not follow from this that smashing shop windows is good. Regardless of what we think of fast food, civilisation has developed far more considered and meaningful methods of protest. The problem, however, is that the media totally reject any responsibility for developing democratic dialogue. While condemning the excesses of demonstrators and police,

the media refuse to accept any share of the blame, and pretend that the dominant approach to information has no influence on what happens. Unfortunately, this is wrong. Demand gives rise to supply.

The striving of the mass media to show the most “expressive” and “dramatic” items leads to exaggeration of the scale of violence and conflict in the television version of events. For example, the Russian press reported that in September 2000 “not a single shop window remained intact in Prague,” although the only windows to be broken were those of a few McDonalds and Kentucky Fried Chicken restaurants. This too is far from innocent, since the media furnish stereotypes of behaviour. Some might think it possible to repel people in this way from committing acts of violence, but in real life, a negative has a negative effect. Among the participants in protest actions, the feeling is becoming established that “violence is the only thing that works with the media”. Correspondingly, television viewers are forming their own stereotypes, by no means always predictable and inoffensive. Thus, a number of the young people who identify themselves politically with the protest movement are starting to develop a positive stereotype concerning violence. On the evening of 26 September one of the Eastern European anarchists described the clashes that had occurred as “European ritual-carnival violence”, adding that in other parts of the world everything would be far worse. The meaning of this utterance is clear: a great deal was being done for show, especially for the television and press cameras. This is also a real problem for the movement; for it to put its stake on violence, even carnival violence, as its main method of propaganda is just as absurd and dangerous as a dogmatically understood “non-violence”.

Of course, the media in Prague were present at the meeting between James Wolfensohn and representatives of non-government organisations, just as they attended the discussion between critics of corporate globalisation and international financial leaders that was held in Prague Castle under the patronage of President Havel. Journalists also devoted a good deal of attention to the World Social Forums in Porto Alegre in 2001 and 2002. The point, however, is that people took part in these meetings who were influential and famous, even if they were on the side of the protesters. In Prague, ordinary participants in the protests were not allowed entry to such meetings, while the discussion itself recalled a spectacle staged especially for the television cameras. In Porto Alegre the masses were on the streets, shouting radical slogans, but the attention of the journalists was fixed on the VIPs discussing moderate projects. Democracy consists not just in the possibility of expressing different points of view (this was partly the case with the forum in Porto Alegre, which represented an alternative to the World Economic Forum in Davos), but also in everyone having the opportunity to put forward their ideas.

The question is not only one of politics. The root of the problem lies in the indifference of the mass media, and above all of the television, to any attempt at “dull” theorising; in the rule of the banal, and in the refusal to listen to the views of people outside a narrow circle of newsmakers (whether official or alternative is ultimately not important). The broadening of the movement, the involvement in it of representatives of the Third World, the combining of demands aimed at the international financial institutions with protest against the antidemocratic practice of national authorities and against corruption and exploitation in people’s “own” national states – all this leads to a situation in which the total quantity of violence that accompanies mass actions on the global level will not diminish but increase. This is an objective reality that cannot be brushed aside, or evaded with quotations from Lev Tolstoy or Mahatma Gandhi. Herbert Marcuse stated quite correctly that revolution has to be economical with violence. People who want to minimise violence have to learn to control it.