

Freezing the Movement

The existence of the bomb paralyzes us. Our only motion a gigantic leap backwards in what we take to be the minimal conditions of our existence where by all desires, demands and struggles vanish, only our biological survival appears a valid cause. DON'T KILL US, EXTERMINATE US, BURN US ALIVE, MAKE US WITNESS THE MOST HORRID SPECTACLE THE MIND CAN IMAGINE (????), lived thousands of times in our fears watching the 7 o'clock news, reading the "scientific medical reports." PLEASE LET US LIVE, that's all we ask, forget what this life will be like, forget about our now seemingly utopian dreams...

But isn't this declaring we're dead already? Isn't this admitting the explosion has already worked, that we've already been blown to pieces hundreds of times when, of all our needs and struggle, only the will to survive remains? Worse yet. Isn't this declaration a most dangerous path? For when only people on their knees confront the powers that be, these powers feel godlike and justified, not restrained by the fear that should they dare so much, whoever of us will be left will make life impossible for them as well.

Why a freeze then? Freezing what? Just our brain it seems, in the false assumption that the status quo may hold at this moment any guarantee for us. Freeze is accepting to live with the blackmail of the bomb. Accepting to bring children into a world threatened by a nuclear explosion. Freeze is to allow THEM to periodically toy with the threat of blowing us up. Are we so mad that we can watch on TV a discussion of our future disposal...as if the Jews had been let to witness the plans for the construction of the gas chambers. Are we to bargain -- ask for 10 instead of 100 or 1000 crematory ovens -- debating on their size, expediency and efficiency? Shall we ask how many people will they put to work or out of work? Or do we harbor the secret hope that they are readied for somebody else -- perhaps Europe, more likely the Middle East...



A Summer of Peace

The summer of 1982 was a summer of extraordinary peace. In the midst of the deepest period of unemployment, cutbacks and bankruptcy rates since the Great Depression, the only movement in the streets was the Peace Movement.

The summer began on June 12 with the largest demonstration in memory gathered in NY City before the disarmament session at the UN. The demonstration took months to plan in Washington and New York, and many throughout the country made it the focus of their political and creative efforts. Almost one million people from all over the US (with other marches on the West Coast) converged on the City. Writes an observant marcher:

The spectacular aspects of the march were the most powerful and even now, a month later, they are still vivid in my mind's eye. I suppose you have seen some of the floats: a blue whale a hundred feet long with a slogan on its side: SAVE THE HUMANS. A white dove actually fabricated from huge bolts of white cotton that was elevated by poles and which the afternoon breeze animated into a floating life high above the people along Fifth Avenue. The puppets I think were seen by millions -- earthy, peasant and fantasy-life figures of women and children that glided fifteen and twenty feet into the air. Banners of all kinds. Absence of uniformity of slogan, poster or placard -- a big difference with the Solidarity Day march in Washington.

The contrast with the other events of the summer was remarkable. From the trade-unionized working class a grave-like silence, with only few desperate exceptions, like the Iowa Beef strike -- a long, bitter strike that led to the calling of the National Guard with guns drawn and weapons carriers in the streets, assisting scabs into the plant. The strike was bitter because, being held in the midst of the lowest level of strike activity since WW II, it was totally isolated and, characteristically, it was not over wage increases but over the size of the "give backs". Only the professional baseball players could strike and win that summer.

With the unwaged part of the working class there was the same peace. It was the beginning of the "riot summer" in the US ghettos and not a riot was to be found in the face of the most devastating attacks on the wages of Blacks and Hispanics. The silence was so noticeable that the New York Times at the end of the summer could editorialize about the silence with a sigh, and the Wall Street Journal sent an investigative report team to find out why Nothing had happened.

The only noticeable movement activity was the Peace-Freeze Movement, which to this day represents the major form of organized protest in the Reagan period.

What is the Freeze Movement and who are the crowds that poured into the streets of New York that summer?

As a mobilization against nuclear war and an appeal for an alternative use of social funds, the Freeze Movement is in many ways a generalization of the post-war Peace Movement and the anti-nuclear energy movement of the 1970s -- not accidentally, the previous largest demonstration in New York was an anti-nuclear energy demo in 1979, that drew a quarter million people. The Freeze Movement is also a regrouping point for many activists, drawn from different quarters, who in the absence of an alternative join the Freeze as a way of re-establishing-contacts and test the possibilities of political activity in the 1980s. It would be a mistake, however, to see the Freeze Movement as simply a caldron for different strands of social protest which in the appeal to survival find the only possibility to move at the present. The heavy institutional back-up that has accompanied the Freeze from its beginning, its strategy as well as the fact that the debate concerning its objectives occurs at the highest levels of the State, all indicate that much more is at stake than a spontaneous movement against the perils of nuclear disaster.

To what extent the Freeze Movement represents a novelty with respect to the politics of the 1970s can be seen by comparing its grass root organization, leadership and tactics with those of the anti-nuclear energy movement.

For all the possible critiques one may have had about the anti-nukers, one thing must be singled out as important: it created new configurations on a microscopic social level that brought together people from radically different layers of the division of labor inhabited by the non-industrial worker (though excluding the black and hispanic ghetto dweller). The "affinity group" filled the need for a new social "mix-master" the Party and the Unions could longer provide for in the 70s. We had the "Shads," the "Hard Rains," the "Tomatoes," the "Clams," and the "Abalones." On the contrary, the Freeze Movement is organized along occupational, party and church lines; consider the typical group names of the Freeze Movement:

Lawyers Alliance for Nuclear Disarmament,
Artists for Nuclear Disarmament,
Writers for Nuclear Disarmament,
Communicators for Nuclear Disarmament,
Computer Programmers for Nuclear Disarmament,
Educators for Social Responsibility,

Psychologists for Social Responsibility,
Physicians for Social Responsibility,
Architects for Social Responsibility,
Nurses for Social Responsibility,
United Campuses to Prevent Nuclear War...

And let us not forget Business Alert to Nuclear War; the church groupings, from the Quakers to the Catholics; the Democratic Party fronts and the C.P. fronts too.

Secondly, the leadership of the Freeze Movement is quite different from the relatively diffuse leadership of the anti-nuclear energy movement (though its "no leaders" mythology was delusive). The leaders of the Freeze Movement are sited in Washington, D.C.: in the "neo-liberal" think tanks and the Halls of Congress. Though the rank and file attempt to do more than the dirty work, the real initiatives for the movement come from the Capitol.

Thirdly, while the "median tactic", i.e., the kind of action that typifies a movement, of the anti-nuclear energy movement was "civil disobedience", the median tactic of the Freeze Movement is the vote and the tribute. That is, the Freeze Movement defines itself in a purely representational way, in terms of referenda, congressional seats and legislation and it relates to its base accordingly. Like CISPFS, from which it has learned much, it asks for a tribute or tax from its base in order to do the movement work. There is the assumption that the "average person" is too busy for direct political participation and therefore he/she should pay a "tax" to have this work done for them. This is levied both as bodies in a week-end demo or as funds for the organizers.

Finally, the politics of the Freeze. Ostensibly its central objective is to freeze armaments build-ups, in view, presumably, of a future reduction and/or elimination of all nuclear weapons (on this point the jargon of the leadership and of the base often differ in terms of where the accent falls). At the same time, the movement has made it clear that (a) they are not in support of unilateral disarmament on the side of the U.S.A. and (b) they are not ready to support any call for non-interventionist policies. The call is for an alternative type of war and an alternative type of armament, rather than for the abolition of wars and weapons of all types and the end of military intervention by the US. This stand, which represents the official position of the Freeze Movement, has not gone unchallenged, as witnessed by the deep splits and conflicts that have surrounded the preparations for the June 12 demonstration.

Centering around the attempt of the largely white leadership to exclude a black grass roots organization, the cen-

Penitents dance and pray during the Black Death



tral split undoubtedly had racial overtones. The real issue, however, was whether the campaign literature would link the arms race with US interventionism in the Third World and racism at home.

Initially this was agreed upon at a meeting of the National Coordinating Committee on Jan. 29, 1982. It was also agreed that at least one-third of the members of each leadership body in the campaign would be Third World, and that a caucus of Third World Organizations would choose who would represent them on the leadership bodies. By March 8, however, the "mainstream" groups sent a letter to the "centrist" groups arguing for a new approach that would make these agreements null and void, viz., to form a corporation to produce the June 12 event. The groups that signed the letter included: Riverside Church Disarmament Program, American Friends Service Comm., The National Nuclear Freeze Campaign and SANE. The groups that received it were: Mobilization for Survival, War Resisters League, US Peace Council, Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, and the NY Public Interest Research Group (NYPiRG). The object of the exclusionary effort was the Black United Front and a variety of white left-wing party formations. As the spring progressed, the splits between the mainstream, the mediating, white "centrist" and the black and left organizations festered, until the threat of having a separate demonstration forced the mainstream to opt for "harmony" and allow Third World leadership in the June 12 Rally Committee. The tension, however, was so intense that there were rumors of fist-fights behind the stage, while Bruce Springsteen played for the gathered million, between black speakers and rally organizers, who were arguing for a few more minutes for the "Boss".

Possibly the lesson of that summer's experience is the reason why nothing has since happened on Freeze "mass front": no local initiatives, no recruitment drives. The Freeze Movement seems to have frozen itself, while its institutional character has become increasingly predominant. Nowadays the discussion about the Freeze is largely a Congressional matter, while at a typical Freeze or Ground Zero meeting one is impressed by the jackets and ties,



The Knight



The Sailor

and the evidence of official backing. Even William Colby, former director of the CIA has come out in support of it, thus making a sham of Reagan's claim that the movement is backed and "ran" by the KGB.

The reason for the impressive backing the Freeze movement is receiving from many politicians as well as the media is quite simple. Behind the Freeze is a new military-industrial complex, representing that part of US capital which is sceptical about the future of Reagan's "development model" and is consequently in search of more stable options for the US economic and war machine. Two major concerns shape the programs of the Freeze supporters: (1) the conviction that nuclear weapons are militarily obsolete, for the threat to capital's control does not reside in mass territorial war, but in diffuse, molecular crises that cannot possibly be resolved by nuclear means. Could, e.g., nuclear bombs be used to restore control in El Salvador or Nicaragua? Could the P.L.O. have been dislodged by a nuclear bomb on Lebanon? While certainly not insensitive to the ideological value of Reagan's cold war, anti-Russian campaign, the Freezers represent a call to "facing reality", which means facing the fact that the real danger for capital at present is in each country -- internal subversion -- and therefore pinning all hopes on "the Bomb" is a suicidal route.

As Admiral Bobby Inman (the real head of the CIA in the early Reagan years) declared in explaining his resignation from the CIA in April 1982: "I reject out of hand the likelihood that we could be surprised with a Pearl Harbor kind of attack. And the same pretty well holds true for the eastern front, central part of Europe." The problem is rather "following political and economic trends abroad...dealing with instability in many areas of the world, trying to cope with the fervor of religious movements" (NYT, April 28, 1982).

(2) Not only is the bomb ineffectual from a military point of view, its economics as well worry many politicians. To put it flatly, the Bomb does not create jobs or at least, not enough jobs and not for the type of workers who have traditionally represented the backbone of the American working class. There is a widespread fear,

particularly in Democratic quarters that the dismantling of mass production the Reagan-nuclear model is already causing may in the long run produce irreconcilable social contradictions. They fear social upheavals, as hundreds of thousands of blue collar workers are thrown out of their jobs and forced to either disappear in the cracks of the system or to accept the minimum-wage type jobs that so far have been reserved for women and immigrants but the crisis of the mass industry sector is leaving as the only option for white male workers as well. There is also a fear that being based on astronomically high procurements for a few selected companies, the nuclear war economy may lead to a wasteful/unproductive use of capital's resources. A typical example of this type of reasoning is the appeal, recently launched, by the New York City Council calling for a Jobs with Peace Week:

"The Reagan administration's military build up has not only increased the threat of war, but deepened this country's social and economic crisis. With a proposed military budget of \$234 billion, it's easy to see why the nation's unemployment rolls continue to swell. Military spending creates fewer jobs than virtually any other economic expenditure. (italics ours) And as working people suffer so does our economy in general. Military spending robs us of vital talent, capital and natural resources, lessening our ability to produce high quality goods and services."

Such considerations have caused many politicians to become outspokenly critical of Reagan's Cold War bi-polarism and to embrace the Freeze Movement, whose success would undoubtedly lead to a redirection in military spending priorities, away from few high-tech and costly weapons towards the relaunching of more, lighter, cheaper conventional arms. Economic and military considerations perfectly match in the program behind the Freeze, as it allows both for more "flexibility" and efficiency in dealing with insurgency at home and abroad, and for the possibility of a new "Keynesian plan" based on state intervention in the economy for the re-industrialization of the U.S.A. On the basis of this platform, different forces are today joining in the call for a Freeze: unionists a la Winpisinger, who are presently seeing their base vanishing under the impact of mass industry lay-offs, state planners like Feliz Rohatyn, Keynesian Democrats like Kennedy and Tsongas, church and community leaders, the social democratic left. All come together in the belief that a different social contract is possible from that proposed by the Reagan administration -- one, presumably, in which national security, economic profitability, and social peace can be harmoniously integrated and planned.

Small, Cheap, Many

The main publicist for a new military strategic thinking is undoubtedly James Fallow. His book, National Defense, published in the first year of the Reagan administration, laid out the main arguments for the new approach, nicely capturing the tone of a former Vietnam war resister who has come back to the fold but demands "humanity" and "reasonability" from the system as the price. His strategy in military spending is to build cheap and many -- small is beautiful in military weapons as long as they are bountiful. Consider the procurement list recommended by Washington Monthly, Fallow's and the "neo-liberal" house organ:

Weapons the Military Could Use

1. A light, maneuverable long-range bomber to replace the B-52.
2. Increased procurement of A-7 attack plane now used only by the national guard.
3. Increased procurement of A-10 close support plane.
4. Renewed procurement of F-4 and F-5 fighters.
- 5 Small, diesel-powered submarines, both for attack and missile-launching capability.
6. Cheap, small "fast boats" that avoid radar.
7. 106mm recoilless (cannon) rifle for use as anti-tank weapon.
8. GAU-8 30mm cannon for use as an anti-tank weapon.
9. Increased procurement of sidewinder missiles.
10. Battalions of motorcycles to improve maneuver warfare capability.
11. Increased procurement of Remote Piloted vehicles (unmanned target locators and distractions for enemy anti-aircraft).
12. Small, light tank for the marines.

The key words are "light," "small," "cheap," and "maneuverable." Fallow and friends, however, are not only critical of the Pentagon's excessive reliance on high-tech, "magical" solutions to the problem of defense. One of their main targets is also the "culture of procurement," which in their eyes is guilty of a total disregard for the question of economic and military productivity:

(There) is corruption, but not in the sense most often assumed. The bribes, the trips to the Caribbean in corporate aircraft, do occur, but they distort the essence, as Abscam distorts the essence of congressional irresponsibility, and payoffs in the General Services Administration distort the pathology of the civil service. The real damage is not spectacular but routine: it is the loss of purpose in the daily operation of the military machine, the substitution of procurement for defense. This is the true corruption, and it affects all the relevant groups: soldiers, who are converted into sales agents,

rewarded for skills that count in real estate; contractors, whose productive core is corroded by contact with the nonperformance culture, and finally the rationality and civility of public discussion about defense, which are sabotaged by the hidden purpose of continuing to spend money. Here we have the voice of reason, who is only asking that the job be done right.

Now compare Fallow's earnest prose with the nervous complement of a Business Week team that in 1980 set out to study the possibilities of re-industrialization in the US:

Too often chief executives send mixed signals to their staffs. On the one hand they demand creativity and on the other they regard numbers...the easiest way for executives to feel comfortable with alien technological or marketing concepts is to devise a technique for measuring them. Not only had internal rate of return and discounted cash flow replaced educated instincts for deciding on new projects, but quantitative approaches -- or at best, formularized ones -- have even pervaded human resource management. The old days of motivating employees by example and by general day-to-day closeness to the field have given way to consultants' techniques such as behavior modification climate and attitude control and the like. It is little wonder that top management has become isolated from its employees.

The rhetoric of "loss of traditional values," "mistaking means for ends," and the theme of "domination of technique" permeate both these efforts aimed at finding out what has gone wrong with the capitalist totality.

But the relation between Fallow's thinking and that of the re-industrializers is by no means rhetorical. Not only are both in support of "jobs with Freeze" and convinced that true national security cannot be achieved unless US industry is re-modernized and "useful work" is provided for millions of unemployed Americans. They are equally convinced that once waste and inefficiency -- in the Pentagon as well as Detroit -- are eliminated, once a "path of sanity" is pursued in economic and military spending and the money saved from nuclear bombs and Trident submarines is redirected to "socially productive purposes", the US can be made a safe place for investments and American capital can "come back home" again.

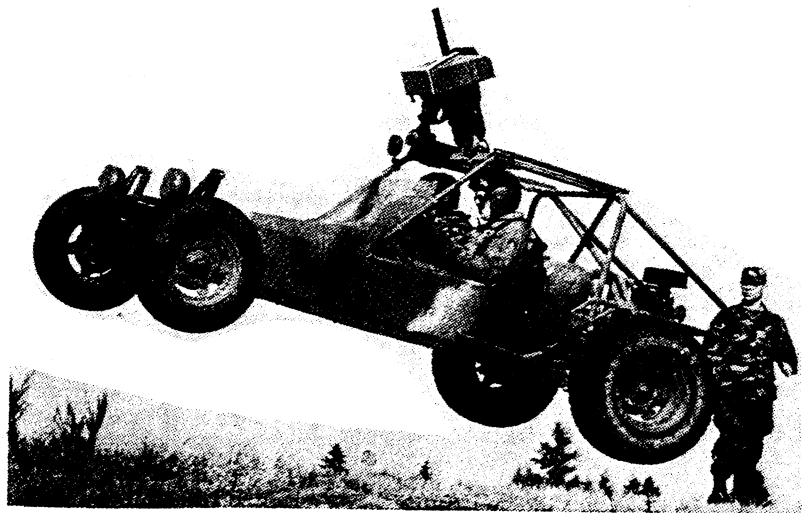
The repatriation of US capital and the end of the US role as cop of the world is another important goal inspiring the politics of the freeze. Capital investments abroad, in fact, have long ceased to be attractive, in view of the 'lack of stability' in many Third World countries and

the acceleration of European wages through the 1970s past US wage rates. It is also complained that the US bears a disproportionate share of the cost of 'defending the world,' thus giving a 'free ride' to Japan and the NATO allies, who in the meantime spend their money making better TV sets, computers and automobiles. As a consequence, there is a renewed interest in the US proletariat, whose demands appear substantially curbed by the combined attack on social-welfare spending and employment levels. In the perspective of the freezers the US should get out of Europe and many of its advance posts in the Third World, concentrate its domination in selected spheres of influence (Central and South America being the likely candidates), and reconstruct its productive basis at home making it once again competitive on the world market. As a Business Week re-industrialization 'team' put it, in a section of their report entitled "Export or Die":

the United States, unlike its major competitors, has a rapidly growing labor force, much of it unskilled, and US wages will be declining re-

lative to those abroad. The economy will have therefore the resources to staff mass-production industries, such as autos and textiles, that the other advanced countries will begin to de-emphasise because of incipient labor shortages and rising wages. But the United States will have to make these industries much more efficient, since it will be coming into increased competition with the newly industrialized countries of Asia and Latin America, where labor costs will be much lower.

A capital-investment-based imperialism is thus to be substituted with an export-based imperialism, whose success, however, would depend on the willingness of the US labor force to accept wages competitive with those of the Third World, the termination of confrontational politics with the Soviet Union, and the ability to "find more suitable, cost-effective means, ranging from foreign aid to military intervention in specific situations abroad" (Business Week) in case of eventual disruptions of the international capitalist trade.



Quick firepower: This modified dune buggy, equipped with a grenade launcher, can hit speeds of 85 mph.

The Freeze and the Draft

"Is there anywhere where our theory that the organization of labor is determined by the means of production is more brilliantly confirmed than in the human slaughter industry?" (Marx to Engels--1866)

Inevitably the freezers/re-industrializers, through their whole spectrum, have radically different views from those of the Reagan administration concerning the draft. As its cautious, temporizing way of handling resisters to registration showed, the Reagan administration favors the present, post-Vietnam, volunteer army, which is a mirror, functional image of the class composition Reaganomics is fostering. On the bottom Reagan's army is a "free

enterprise zone" of labor, conscripted by wages that are made appealing by the starkness of the labor market. On the top are the well-paid professionals and consultants required by a high-tech war machine. When the liberals of today rehearse what used to be an old conservative cry: "Money is not enough! You cannot build an army on money alone," Reagan, with Milton Friedman behind him, can answer, "Why not? We run the rest of the damn system on it." By contrast, it is the liberal freezers who are presently campaigning for a return to the draft:

Before anything else, we must recognize that a functioning military requires bonds of trust, sacrifice, respect within its ranks, and similar

bonds of support and respect between the Army and the nation it represents ...I believe that will not happen unless we reinstate the draft. (Fallow)

On a more prosaic note the editors of the Washington Monthly who, after complaining that with the AVF (All Volunteer Force) "most Americans need never have direct contact with military life," point out that the draft would also save money. They too, however, recognise that "the most important benefit can't be measured in dollars and cents." Indeed. For how can the re-industrializers hope to fight their trade wars in Africa and Latin America when their troops are almost all black and hispanic? Not to mention that the mixture, on which the AVF is based, of highly paid technicians (engineers, intelligence consultants, etc.), mercenaries (select counter-insurgency forces) and a mass of poorly paid troopers is a very volatile one. Finally, should the promise of a full employment economy materialize, why would the white youth join a volunteer army, unless the wages were prohibitively high? In the words of the Washington Monthly:

Pentagon planners like to point out that last year they met their recruiting goals with enlistees of improved quality. What they don't like to mention is the major reason for these gains: the worst economic recession since the 1930s. If the economy revives, the recruiting problems will return, particularly since the national recruiting pool of 15-21 year olds will decline by 15% by 1990.

What the liberals and freezers do not consider is that if the Reagan model prevails in the long run, there will be no revival of full employment to undermine "American Patriotism." What they also underestimate, in their disgusting ejaculations about the "O1' Army," is the resistance of 15-21 year olds to the "Officer and Gentleman" routine.

Their stance to the draft, then, makes it clear that the re-industrializers need the support of the "new military" thinkers as much as the latter need them. No one expects to sell the draft to white youth, much less to their parents, unless it is part of a package deal, offering them a "real future," i.e., a guarantee of secure employment in exchange for their readiness to "sacrifice." For, aside from mass jailings, the only credible weapon against draft evasion would be employment discrimination; but if the average white youth did not have the possibility of a "good job", why would he register for the draft and show up when called? Why die to defend the country if life in it does not pay? Without re-industrialization, the hope of a largely white, mass army is an impossible reality.

Thus, to the white youth the re-industrializers offer the old jobs back, undoubtedly at lower wages (backed up by the whip of international competition) but with the promise of lower levels of exploitation (labor participation in management decisions being a usual feature of their new "social contract"). Also, they add the promise of a deal with the Russians to safeguard them, their families and their laboriously gained houses from the only possible threat to their physical existence: nuclear war. They promise a more rational, poly-valent world: no more titanic struggles between the forces of Good and Evil, fought with MXs and lasers; just a few trade wars plus a limited dose of social democracy in selected areas of the Third World, plenty of jobs and some charity for the basket cases.

Nuclear Strategies

The political economy behind the freeze is largely a return to the Keynesian state, based on mass assembly production, impelled by the restoration of US primacy in international export-trade and a revived mass army. Whether this economic set-up is envisioned as a "final solution" or as a temporary provision to ease the pain of the transition to a computer-run economy is difficult to assess. Democrats like Jerry Brown do not hide their preference for a Silicon Valley-type of economic development, while others, on the socialist side of the re-industrialization spectrum, seem to believe that the assembly line has long-term therapeutic qualities and will be with us for many years to

come. What is certain, however, is that the Freezers-re-industrializers are in a position as untenable as Reagan's, since they repropose a model of class relations the working class has already considered unacceptable. They go back, in fact, to square one of the crisis, hoping that workers in this country have been tamed after the last bout with Depression. Despite the differences, one common assumption shared by all re-industrializers is the need to lower American wages and convince the US proletariat to accept a reduced standard of living for the future. This feat will be presumably achieved by the establish-

ment of a triple alliance between business, government and unions, who, forfeiting their alleged traditional opposition, will jointly decide what is best for the "public good." On this point the programs of the social-democratic left are in total conformity with those of the right, as witnessed by a proposal for a "Rational Re-industrialization Strategy" recently published by Socialist Review (n. 63-64) put forward by Dan Luria and Jack Russel.

Taking for granted that "the power and needs of private capital will continue to dominate the national and regional economy for the rest of the century," the authors claim that a center-left corporatism is on the agenda:

Corporatist, as we use the term, calls for voluntary cooperation between capital, labor and the state beyond the normal institutions of bourgeois democracy (e.g., elections, union contracts), it asserts the need for economic planning from above as the basis of this tripartite integration, and seeks common ground on which to contain conflict and organize growth. (Italics ours)

The only difference in this leftist proposal from others coming from the business press and the corporate planners is a projected "distant possibility" that the factory will become an immense university, where workers will be educated in the complexities of production and the bargaining process. They too insist, however, that we shed any "liberal, populist, communitarian, infantile-militant illusion" beginning with the "illusion that the sixties re-distributive programs can be replayed in the 80s."

It is difficult to predict the future; yet, for all the beaming reports about their ability to "put America back to work," it is impossible to imagine that the re-industrialization model can have much success. Certainly, today workers are lining up to get "any job." But should full-employment materialize would they peacefully return to the five-day-a-week routine on the line at reduced wages, after years of "blue collar blues" and the increasing awareness of the fantastic possibilities that exist to robotize most of the work in this country? And how far will wages be reduced if American workers are expected to be competitive with workers all over the world? If it is true, e.g., that a textile worker in India earns 38¢ an hour (whatever that means), how can any worker in this country even bargain for the minimum wage? Finally, is fighting for a promised utopia of "more work and less pay" the only alternative to Reagan's "nuclear madness"?

We cannot decode time future, but we can look at the past, and this tells us that a collective plunge to the bottom cannot save us a Reaganite apocalypse. Only the lifting of the bottom, with the explosion of the Black Movement,



The Rich Man

put an end to cold war politics and the threat of atomic war in the late 1950s and the early 1960s. It was Watts and the "hot summers" in the US cities that shifted the war on the Russians to a "war on poverty" at home. It is only because of the apparent lack of any genuine resistance to its plans that the Reagan administration can at present play its war-games and terrorize us with the absurd threat of a Russian take over of the world, a threat whose only purpose is to justify the cuts in our standard of living and keep us busy struggling just for the right to live no matter how.

For why should the "U.S.A." wage a nuclear war with the "U.S.S.R."? First of all there is no U.S. and U.S.S.R., but a class system in both countries, i.e., a Soviet and American capitalist structure and a Soviet and American working class. On the workers' side, are we to believe that Russian men and women are interested in taking over N.Y.C. or Detroit or engage in nuclear disaster any more than American women and men want to conquer Moscow or Siberia and risk millions of deaths in the process? On the capitalist side, why should the US or the Soviet government want to destroy each other when they have drawn for decades immense benefits from their cold-war and iron-curtain politics, keeping their workers in line with the threat of "the other side"? Granted that Absolute nuclear war is out of the question since it would wipe out the winners as well as the losers, a partial nuclear warfare would be possible only if both Russia and the US government decided to launch it in their mutual interest to prevent the masses in both countries

to gain too much power. It would only be possible if such a crisis opened in both countries at the same time to make a swap -- Kiev for Detroit -- desirable; and most important, if the guarantee existed that a massive destruction of a targeted sector of the Soviet and US working class did not lead to such a revulsion as to cause the collapse of both systems. Who would get up and go to work, lunch box and all, and who would plan to have a kid or save to buy a house after seeing millions of his/her fellow beings destroyed in a controlled/partial holocaust???

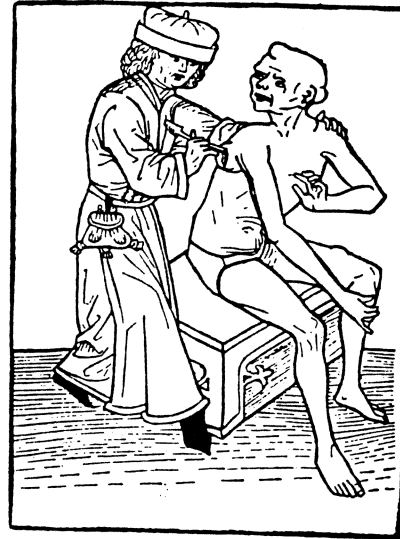
This, in fact, should be our strategy today. Not simply demand that they let us live, but make it clear that any attempt to realise their threats would have catastrophic consequences for them as well. Wars have always been high-risk gambles on capital's side and moments of deep instability for the system -- for any social contract begins to break down when death on a mass scale becomes part of the bargain. This was the case in many countries of Europe after WWI and WWII -- and the lesson has not gone lost, as can be seen from a congressional study prepared for the Joint Committee on Defense Production, published in March 1979, at the beginning of the arms build-up. The study ends with a chapter on "The Social and Political Implications of Nuclear Attacks", in which we find these telling words concerning a post-nuclear environment:

A significant risk of total loss of political legitimacy may develop, accompanied perhaps by real efforts on the part of survivors to change the leadership or the system forcibly or, at a local level, to take matters into their own hands. While a sense of national emergency and solidarity may operate to sustain the support of survivors for some time in the post-attack period, the failure of the government at any level to achieve rapid and meaningful recovery progress, to explain satisfactorily the causes of the attack, or to demonstrate a genuine concern for social needs and pre-attack values could lead to widespread dissatisfaction and perhaps result in serious challenges to the authority of government itself.

This fear is our greatest defense against nuclear war: the unpredictability of working class response can make nuclear war impossible. Yet, it is this very uncertainty that the Freeze attacks, for it commits itself to the same institutional process that would bring about the war in the first place (as the German Social-Democrats voted "reluctantly" for war credits at the start of WWI). In Nuclear War: what's in it for you?, the official book of the Ground Zero group, the description of the post-nuclear scenario has no mention of any insurrectional consequences or possibilities. Rather we are presented

PAGE 10

BLACK DEATH



A plague doctor lancing a boil: 15th-century woodcut

with the picture of a griping, depressed population whose most dangerous form of activity is some occasional food riot and dabbling in the black market. This is no accident. Such an image is the product of how the Freezers want us to be in the pre-nuclear stage: upset, but not so upset as to do anything rash. They are so afraid that their ranks may get out of control that even after their electoral successes in 1981 and 1982 (where the freeze resolution passed in many states and localities) they slowed down their mobilization process, afraid that things were rushing along too fast for other elements of their plan to mature. Thus, while presumably we are on the verge of total annihilation ("we must proceed with all haste" is their slogan) they are postponing the Apocalypse till the election of 1984!!!

The Freeze movement creates the very political conditions for the state to fight a partial nuclear war: a docile, patient mass waiting for the leaders and experts to solve the problem through respectable legislative means. Our best strategy is to preserve and intensify the "surprising autonomous" element of our struggle. It is best for two reasons: (a) it attacks the weak foundation of all "nuclear war-fighting" policies and (b) it has worked before, most recently in the "strange victories" of the anti-nuclear-reactor movement.



It is only with an extensive "civil defense" apparatus that it is even theoretically possible for there to be even a question of nuclear war-fighting. Whatever the technology available, unless the nuke war-fighters can convincingly demonstrate that "the masses" can be "protected" (i.e., controlled) to some extent during an atomic exchange and its aftermath, the very distinction between the policy of Mutually Assured Destruction (MAD) and Nuclear War-Fighting fails. So the Reagan administration has pushed for a leap in funding for civil defense, e.g., in the spring of 1982 it officially requested 4.3 billion dollars for a period of 7 years while, unofficially, the figure is more than 10 billion dollars for 5 years. And the ideological stage-setting from Reagan on down has been on "accentuating the positive" in the face of the nuclear Armageddon. Consider the chorus:

Charles Kupperman (executive director of the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency's General Advisory Committee):

It means that, you know, it would be tough (after a nuclear war). It would be a struggle to reconstitute society that we now have. It certainly wouldn't be the same society as prior to an exchange... But in terms of having an organized nation, and having enough means left after the war to reconstitute itself, I think it entirely possible.

Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA) publication on December 1980:

With reasonable protective measures, the United States could survive nuclear attack and go on to recovery within a relatively few years.

L.O. Giuffrida (head of FEMA under Reagan): (Nuclear war) would be a terrible mess, but it wouldn't be unmanageable.

W. Chipman (Giuffrida's assistant at FEMA): Someone mentioned the Black Death, and I was impressed a few weeks ago in reading about that during the period of the Hundred Year's war. Here was a catastrophe that killed a third of the population of England. And yet these people were able to mount an expeditionary force to France and

fight the Battle of Poitiers six or eight years after the epidemic. I do not know what this says about the ethics of the human race, but it shows there is a certain resilience and toughness of society.

It was this very Chipman, who when asked if "American institutions" would survive all-out nuclear war with the Soviet Union replied, "I think they would eventually, yeah. As I say, the ants eventually build another anthill."

In the face of these optimistic chants we have groups like the Physicians for Social Responsibility shrilling the "negative" antiphonically. For example, they point out that the very ability to control casualties in the event of an Absolute nuclear war requires a socio-medical fabric that would have been effectively destroyed in the initial seconds of the thermo-nuclear blasts... especially in the form of evaporated doctors. They envision more than 50% of the population destroyed immediately and 70-90% of the fixed capital obliterated; plagues decimating the survivors; lukemias, cancers and mutants sprouting for generations to come... if there are any. They revive an almost fourteenth century rhetoric:

In many areas radiation levels will be so high that corpses will remain untouched for weeks on end. With transportation destroyed, survivors weakened, and a multiplicity of post-shelter reconstruction tasks to be performed, corpse disposal will be remarkably complicated. In order to bury the dead, an area 5.7 times (sic) as large as the city of Seattle would be required for the cemetery.

Thus we are caught between the terror of the "crack-pot" realists of Reagan's limited nuclear war and the terror of the "scientific" Jeremiahs of the Apocalypse.

Our approach would reject both types of terrorism and take up the theme of the Black Death that so inspired Mr. Chipman with that sacred awe of human stupidity. If he had read on in his history book he would have been somewhat dismayed because



The Merchant



"THE FACTORY AND THE
FIGHTING LINE ARE ONE"
THE NAVY THANKS YOU



The Councillor

whatever the military exploits of the English longbowmen at Poitiers, the consequences of the Great Plague led directly to the end of Feudalism and the opening of the "Golden Age of the English Proletariat." For immediately after the Black Death, wages rose dramatically for a generation; then in an attempt to control them the feudal state tried to impose repressive statutes and poll taxes that led to the Peasant's Revolt of 1381. In the ranks of the rebels were "primitive communists" like John Ball who preached: "things cannot go well in England, nor ever will until everything shall be in common...and all distinctions leveled." Though that revolt was defeated, after a successful takeover of London, the pace of collapse of feudal institutions intensified. So that a century later a "counter-revolution" (i.e., capitalism) had to be launched to preserve class rule from the collapse of serfdom and the regime of high wages in England.

Such a history lesson might even make a numbskull like Mr. Chipman revise his notions of the "ant-like" nature of his fellow creatures. For it would show that the root of Reagan's nuclear war-fighting is not to be found in the MXs, the Pershing 2s or the cruise missiles but in the assumption of a fundamental attachment of the working class to capitalist relations and capitalist reproduction whatever they require. Once that premise is shaken, the delicate electronic innards of these machines and the extra-terrestrial powers lodged in their nosecones prove to be silly though dangerous toys.



But we need not go back to the days of "merrie England" to see that the most effective tactic in the struggle against nuclear war is to make the "autonomy" of the working class from capital evident for all to see by making our needs and demands primary. This has been demonstrated over and over again in the struggle against nuclear power plants. For the most troublesome stumbling block to the building of new plants has not been the technological foul-ups but the "social" factor, viz., the inability to be able to come up with "reasonable" evacuation plans in the event of an accident. Our Brooklyn friends write us of the latest such incident, on April 15, 1983 in statements made on the advisability of continuing operation of the Indian Point nuclear plants:

One of the two reasons that the Federal Emergency Management Agency and the Westchester County Executive, Andrew O'Roarke, have given for saying that emergency planning won't work during an accident at the nuclear plant at Indian Point is that the bus drivers might refuse the work of evacuating people during the accident...this has been talked about for a while but has never been stated so forcefully -- O'Roarke says the plants should be shut down until the bus driver "problem" can be "worked" out.

Thus the very FEMA that is so gallantly planning to manage the nuclear war "mess" and bring about the "recovery within a relatively few years" admits defeat in a relatively less serious eventuality, a nuclear power plant accident, at the hands of bus drivers who they suspect will very reasonably violate "regulations" and "first gather their families or whatever and split." Similarly, when we not only as bus drivers but workers in general, put our interests above the interests of capital, then the whole system of terror breaks down. The very presupposition and end of nuclear war: to terrorize and control for the purpose of producing more and more work, cannot survive if we are moving out of the orbit of control.

So the answer to Reagan's nuclear war threat is not the Freeze and re-industrialization, for they merely re-package the presuppositions of nuclear war to freeze and preserve them. No, it is only by refusing to organize on the basis of universal competition in the national-international labor market -- whether our competition is defined as other workers around the world or robots -- and fighting for the reduction of the work week for everybody with an increase of wages and a policy of "full employment" achieved through "full payment for all the work we do already" -- for who is not working in this country except the rich? -- whether in money or wealth (i.e., houses, food, medical care, etc.) or both, that we can not only turn back nuclear war but we would be in a position to want to!