

Symbolic Protest & The Nuclear State

Two articles

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1. The Rebel in Religious Guise by N. Bates
2. God and the Nuclear State by George Bradford

The articles appearing on this page were written by two people who took part in the Williams protests. The first article is signed by N. Bates, the pseudonym of a person who was arrested at Williams for civil disobedience, and who now faces multiple charges stemming from the action.

1. The Rebel in Religious Guise

by N. Bates

“The logic of the rebel is to want to serve justice so as not to add to the injustices of the human condition, to insist on plain language so as not to increase universal falsehood, and to wager, in spite of human misery, for happiness.”

—Albert Camus, *The Rebel*

I am outside of prison as of now; yet, there are other prisons of which I am a part. I am a victim of the criminal justice system; yet, there are other systems in which I am the potential executioner. I believe in justice; yet, everywhere justice is denied. I can make my own future; yet, the future is forever beyond my reach. I am part of a movement of millions; yet, the movement is not in control of history. I am a historical being; yet, as Joyce’s Stephen Daedalus laments, “history is a nightmare from which I am trying to escape.”

These paradoxes are part of the dilemma that one faces when confronting the nuclear state. If there is a way out of these paradoxes, it is not self-evident.



While pacifists engage in symbolic acts of protest against militarism, the militarists engage in a bit of symbolism of their own. Top: moral witness at Williams

International, where cruise missile engines are manufactured. Bottom: U.S. troops practice mass burial techniques during NATO maneuvers in West Germany last autumn. The articles appearing on this page were written by two people who took part in the Williams

Neither God nor History offers a way out since both concepts are part of the logos of the Western mind with its imperatives of domination and exploitation. Yet, god and history, as reflective of the desire for moral autonomy and social transformation, are part of the human project of liberation. The path to challenging the limitations of the human condition cannot forswear an encounter with the religious or spiritual quest to transcend those limitations. While the paradoxes of our condition may result in a feeling of hopelessness, we are still left with our desires for affirmation and transcendence. If “there is only hope for the hopeless,” as Kafka said, then we can neither completely deny hope nor completely embrace despair.

It was out of a sense of despair that I found myself as a nonbeliever among believers. My despair was directly related to the nightmare of history that Reagan’s America was producing. Responses to the nuclear madness and the politics of control and punishment generated by the ruling circles seemed incapable of facilitating life-affirming direct action. The nuclear freeze was limited by its fetish of electoral politics and frustrated by congressional passage of bills for all the nuclear and military hardware the freeze had opposed. In the aftermath of “The Day After” (ABC’s programming blockbuster that tried to synthesize 60 Minutes and General Hospital), there were psychotherapeutic attempts to provide alternatives to hopelessness. However, offering the healing power of secular love in the shadow of Dr. Strangelove translated too quickly into a narcissistic version of “How I Stopped Worrying About the Bomb.” Neither politics-as-usual nor the politics of subjectivity presented a vital option for meaningful action against the nuclear state.

Politics An Extension Of Morality

On the other hand, I knew that Covenant for Peace, the Christian conversion project protesting the production of cruise missile engines at Williams International in Michigan, had embarked on a journey that would lead them to direct action. I shared their commitment to non-violence in this struggle and their sense of the exemplary nature of their moral witness. However, I rejected their masochistic longing for taking on the guilt and suffering of the world, a longing present in their statements and actions and central to the religious non-violence of Gandhi and

King. While I prepared myself for moral witnessing by remembering the words of Camus that politics should be an extension of our morality, I had questions about the paradoxes and contradictions of the religious halo surrounding such moral witnessing. Nevertheless, given the barren political terrain and the need for spiritual renewal, I cast my lot with the religious pietists.

Instead of dismissing this piety as the “soul of a soul-less world,” (a la Marx) or the simpering cries of the meek (a la Nietzsche), one should try to apprehend the subversive core of moral witness in the nuclear state. If one understands the development of the nuclear state as a multilayered assault on the ethical solidarity of the human species, then one can better grasp how moral witnessing can serve the restoration or construction of the ethical community. Prior to the coming of the ancient state, human relationships were rooted in reciprocal and intersubjective codes. The state disrupted these reciprocal codes through the institutionalization of domination and exploitation. In turn, the coming of the modern world reduced the human being to an instrument or object. The nuclear state pushed this reification to the nth degree by threatening the species with extinction. Reasserting the rights of the ethical community requires reaffirming intersubjectivity. While religious folk, like those in Covenant for Peace, see that intersubjectivity as a reflection of a supernatural being, a transcendent Thou, they are prepared, nonetheless, to act out their commitment to intersubjectivity in this world.

The problem for the nonbeliever is translating this faith in a transcendent Thou into a social and fully libertarian ethic. Recasting the I-Thou philosophy of Martin Buber, the Jewish theologian and libertarian socialist, into a social ethic can convert religious doctrine and open up the possibility of cultural revitalization. Recognition of the thou-ness of others is contingent on the understanding of the thou-ness we wish others to recognize in ourselves. This intersubjectivity is not a return to the religious and sentimental idea of “love thy neighbor as thyself.” Such selfless love is not rooted in the psychological or social realities of the shattered selves of our twentieth century existence. On the other hand, the increasing interdependence of the contemporary world, particularly around issues such as nuclear war and environmental destruction, compels us to understand our global social connectiveness. The tragedies of the past should make us even more cognizant of the fact that defining others as less than

ourselves only leads to destruction, and ultimately self-destruction. But those very same tragedies also suggest that the religious faith in universal salvation and redemption is nothing more than faith. While faith may comfort some and impel others towards action, the nonbeliever must discover the social imagination and individual courage to seize the moment without the illusions of any faith.

Where Solidarity Can Flourish

On the other hand, it is important to acknowledge that some of the most courageous and imaginative actions around the nuclear issue have been undertaken by people of faith, particularly Catholic priests and nuns. It would be a mistake to focus only on the ideological underpinnings of their faith, especially since that ideology is racked by the contradictions of religious dogma. The real strength behind this religious witnessing is the support network that the formal and informal church offers. The community and communion found in these support networks is the closest thing we have to primordial solidarity in our world. Such support networks allow for the development of a culture of intimacy that can withstand the onslaughts of narcissism and nuclearism. Granted, there are problems with an intimacy built on religious faith; nevertheless, this intimacy allows for the necessary elements of contemplation and action, rest and resistance, dedication and growth, which is so absent in the profane world we inhabit. If we are serious about social transformation, we would do well to abandon the romantic longing for the “primitive” world and seek out those places in our world where a form of primordial solidarity can flourish.

It was not surprising to find that becoming a part of the action around Williams International meant that one would become involved in an attempt to develop support networks and communities of resistance before one engaged in any direct action. Training sessions in non-violence stressed being open and helpful to all concerned. Discussions centered on how those not directly participating in the actions could be most supportive to those planning to participate in the actions at Williams International during the week. People were divided into affinity groups, most having met before, where discussions of relevant tactics took place. Throughout the training session one got the sense that no one would be isolated and

everyone would be an integral part of the demonstrations. In particular, there was never any sense that an individual or a group had to prove themselves through militant rhetoric or radical posturing. An organic link between body and mind, participant and supporter prevented the act of moral witness from turning into a self-righteous exercise of false dichotomies.

On the other hand, no one believed that Williams would be forced to stop production of the cruise missile engines on the basis of the week's activities. It was understood that the act of moral witnessing inhabits a symbolic world. Those of us who were prepared to risk arrest by our actions realized that the meaning of the action was two-fold: 1) an affirmation of the word/deed continuum and intersubjectivity; and 2) an example of commitment to which others might subscribe. Yet, the symbolic content of demanding an end to nuclear madness was linked to nonviolence, and that nonviolent aspect represented in itself a concrete manifestation of an alternative life-plan. Rejecting the instruments of death requires resisting being made into an instrument of death. Thus, the politics of moral witness embody not an act of sacrifice (notwithstanding the individual's psychological drive or religious prescription to become a sacrificial lamb), but a testimony to the capacity and will of an ethical community to realize itself.

No one (or, I should say, no anarchist or libertarian) should be surprised that the realization of the ethical community must constantly contend with the state, its oppressive and repressive institutions, and internalized structures of exploitation and alienation. Without properly gauging the geometry of the limitations imposed by the state and understanding the microphysics of power in any society, the politics of moral witnessing can become an absolutistic injunction to suicide. (For example, what would the act of moral witnessing mean in El Salvador?) In the situation we confronted everyone understood the possibility of police and legal repression even though most prepared for the direct action with certain illusions about the human kindness of the police and legal authorities.

In fact, everyone was caught off guard by the conspiracy charges. On a certain level, the Prosecutor's office transformed an act of moral witnessing into a more profound political statement by denying the right even to conceive the statement. Such entrapment in the criminal justice system is both a sign of the vindictiveness of the system and its incapacity to deal

with those who place ethics above the laws of power and privilege.

Our challenge of that power and privilege puts us up against the front line of the state's protection—the police. Obviously, the police perform a repressive role because of their position in the physics of state power. However, not all cops have so internalized that role that they are without human sentiments. On the one hand, to view the police as fellow innocents reflects a political naiveté or religious mythology that obscures the near impermeability of the character armor demanded by the state and individual psychology of the police. On the other hand, to see all cops in knee-jerk militant fashion as dumb and vicious tools of the state too readily accepts a one-dimensional view of institutionalized roles. The fact is that a number of cops were responsive to the message of the moral witnessing including a deputy sheriff who quit in disgust over the handling of the issue and the protesters. While the state can find its minions to carry out mindless repression, it cannot guarantee that its own instruments of repression won't reassert their human qualities of thinking and feeling.

Coming into contact with the bureaucratic and punitive mentality of the criminal justice system suggests that thinking and feeling are antithetical to the functioning of the system. Such psychic numbing, however, seems to pervade the nuclear state. In particular, the prison serves as a portal to the ultimate depersonalization and humiliation of the system. If “the degree of civilization in a society can be judged by entering its prisons,” as Dostoevski contended, then the civilization spawned by the nuclear state has, in turn, spawned its own idiosyncratic punitive and absurd codes. Since the criminal justice system has become the vehicle that defines who is normal in the nuclear state, anyone entering jail is immediately considered deviant. Anyone who does not accept the mad and repressive conventionality of the nuclear state must contend with the dungeons of the criminal justice system.

After my arrest and upon entering prison, I was given a medical exam which consisted of a number of questions meant to test one's deviance. In addition to direct questions concerning when one last partook of drugs or alcohol, I was asked in the same breath whether I had any suicidal or homosexual tendencies. My query whether they were considered the same met with a look of astonishment. A few other questions made clear to the examiner that I was a “medical” risk

who required separation and isolation. After a suitable period of isolation and cursory check by the prison doctor, I was returned to the holding pen where I was to spend most of the rest of my time.

Prison: Analogue to the Militarism of the Nuclear State

Jammed into a 12 by 20 foot cell with upwards of 20 men at a certain point, the absurdity of the nuclear state seemed to be reflected in whole gestalt. From the presence of the young, poor, and the minorities most marginalized by the nuclear state to the disgusting slop that passed for food, the signs of a degenerate power wreaking vengeance abounded. The only consolation for us was our acceptance by the inmates, not as much because of our protest of nuclear weapons as our contesting the power of the corporate state. In effect, there was an implicit recognition of George Bernard Shaw's statement that "imprisonment...is a worse crime than any of those committed by its victims; for no single criminal can be as powerful for evil, or as unrestrained in its exercise, as an organized nation."

While the nation state thrives on such violence, prison becomes an analogue to the militarism of the nuclear state. A militaristic economy, like jail, is based on a political economy of shit. Everything and everybody is regarded as a waste. The waste economy engenders a "toilet assumption" that people and problems can be flushed away while prisoners and weapons proliferate. Deterrence becomes a key concept in the arms race and in imprisonment. Nuclear arms and prison are seen as deterrents to those who would threaten the power politics driving the state to its own self-destruction. People and weapons are warehoused behind concrete walls or in concrete silos. Meanwhile, all around outside decays. Death lurks everywhere. Nothing is deterred; everything is wasted.

If in the midst of this death machine a spark of human spirit and solidarity can persevere, there may be a ray of hope for the species. The possibility that the will can transcend even the worst dungeons of humiliation and repression suggests that the nuclear state has not yet obliterated that which it tries to debase. During their imprisonment, a number of the women protesters would sing out, connecting their spirits and challenging the jail with the voices of moral witness. The walls couldn't hold in such a

spirit. Perhaps such spirit is only a reflection of the forced intimacy of prison life or the false intimacy of religious faith. On the other hand, this transcendence of the passivity and depersonalization in the punitive environment of the prison (and in the nuclear state) may illuminate our own attempts to find a way out of the charnel houses of nuclear insanity, or we may all be whistling in the dark.

2. God and the Nuclear State

by George Bradford (David Watson)

I.

I can understand the desperation which leads a person to demonstrate at a place like Williams and get arrested to the tune of christian hymns. In the absence of a mass movement prepared to take the kinds of risks that are probably necessary to actually stop the war drive of the state, such personalist, ethical, symbolic acts as these peaceful, at times rehearsed protests seem the only way to meaningfully oppose what appears to be almost inevitable catastrophe. (By mass movement, by the way, I do not mean an organization with offices, spokesmen and propaganda, but simply millions of people in motion, working independently and autonomously to undermine this civilization and create a humane culture in its place.)

I also went out to the protests at Williams International, though their religious nature, their prayerful worship of the Dead Christ—that demon and motor of western civilization's History—was enough to keep me from getting myself arrested, at least for the time being.

But one cannot help but be drawn to people more for their deeds than their words. After all, while many wiser souls recite their own eloquent liturgies of revolt from more comfortable corners of leviathan, these folks are getting arrested for hindering (even if admittedly in an extremely limited, at times domesticated way), the nuclear state. Notwithstanding the tame character of their opposition (for example, "nonviolence training" loudly advertised, one suspects at times, to reassure the authorities that nothing truly threatening will occur; also that pathetic masquerade of martyrdom exhibited like stigmata by so many christians, sort of an appropriation of the assault

perpetrated on us all, for use as a personal cross to bear), it is undeniable that they are doing something on a continuing basis to oppose the widening war. And something is infinitely more than nothing, the response of most of the enraged masses for whom it remains to overturn this culture of death—nothing which in practice translates into an affirmation of this monotonous, daily homicide, an intimate participation within it.

For these reasons it was moving to take part in the protest despite my differences with the people who had called it. We arrived at about 6:30 a.m., and there was already a crowd in front of the plant gates, perhaps fifty people, the majority women. New arrivals continued to swell the ranks until our number was some two hundred. There were a lot of cops in the driveway, also plainclothes detectives taking pictures, and even mounted police inside the fences. A company employee in a good buddy baseball cap continued to announce the terms of the injunction through a bullhorn every five minutes; the protesters would reply with their own bullhorn that there was an injunction against Williams on the part of humanity for making apocalyptic weapons.

People would sit down in the driveway, linking arms, and momentarily stop the traffic which flowed into the plant parking lot from Maple Road. They would be almost as quickly hustled off by the Oakland County sheriff's deputies and put on a bus to be taken to jail. The crowd would cheer and sing their support, there in the dark, on the snow near the entranceway to the "satanic mill." Workers and administrators continued to arrive, showing their plant ID to the cops as they drove through, impassively ignoring the Christians trying to change their hearts.

But no one seemed to be having a change of heart here. The workers continued to enter the factory, the mostly christian crowd sang and prayed. The cops, arrogant and contemptuous of the protesters (yet whom they treat with civility), in their yellow overcoats and helmets, their guns and clubs at their sides stamping the ground against the cold and joking among themselves, reminded me of Roman centurions. But they were not about to be won over by those they are now persecuting for resisting the ceasars. How could these people expect twentieth century armored men to respond to the songs of an old mystery cult turned on its head for reasons of state seventeen or more centuries ago? These songs are little more than nostalgia. But what twentieth century songs, what

spiritual circle dance could move them? Or is all song silenced by noise, the heart reduced to a dried pulp, only the armor remaining?

Standing among these hopeful people with whom I can feel a human but no spiritual bond, I ask myself such questions. I cannot answer them, so I am thankful for this handful of souls standing in the early morning cold at these portals. The act of singing alone confers upon them more of a connection with their own humanity and life force than is experienced by most automata hooking itself onto the assembly lines of daily life, or decomposing in front of video screens elsewhere in this necropolis. They know a few hopeful, spirited songs—amazing! For who is singing today? This fragile pocket of life pressed up against this iron fence along a sterile road which is itself a despoliation, this is the only life I see. Along the road, the cars go by, carrying their drivers to work, citizens relieved to be working, thankful to be granted the opportunity to manufacture anything at all, thankful for their wages, suppressing the last fragments of life in them which cry out against the machinery in which they are being mangled. (It doesn't matter, either, which of the many squat factories they are headed toward; all of them are churning out mischief, all of them produce death, be it catastrophic or slow and methodical. All of them work to ensure that "life as we know it" won't even be worth living in a few more years. Blockading any one of them would be of service to us all.) These Christians are not passing through these gates to produce, they are in some small way impeding the reproduction of capital. Their songs may be feeble anachronisms, but the fact remains that they are stopping the "flow of traffic" with what few resources they have. So I am grateful for these Christians, these ironic throwbacks so unconscious of the irony they represent.

II.

But this feeling passes when I see the monitors so willingly and even eagerly cooperating with the cops to push back beyond the Williams property line those of us who have wandered into that limbo between law-abiding "vigiling" and law-abiding "civil disobedience." One of them even remarks to a state trooper, "We're glad you're here; you're real professionals." Rendering unto Caesar, I suppose, but where did he get this excessive and idolatrous deference to authority? Could it be the inherent bootlicking in their authoritarian Lord worship, or is it some poison picked up along the way from the modern world?

It brings to mind my problems with this notion of “moral witness.” Now, I recognize that the person I quoted was only speaking for himself, but what does his admiration for the (dubious) professionalism of the police say about the clarity of his motives for his resistance to nuclearism? Another example of this confusion is to be found in a flyer the Covenant for Peace people distributed containing scripture and other texts, including an “Examination of Conscience for Peacemakers,” with questions to be followed by the response, “Source of Light, grant us the vision to see and the courage to do your will.” One of the questions reads, “Do I render respect to all people whether poor or rich, intelligent or illiterate?” Leaving aside the sincerity and good will with which this question is asked, it is patently clear that it is saturated with social, historical and cultural implications. There is more meaning here than the simple desire to “be good”; each word comes with a history and a social connection which is intimately related to the entire development and trajectory of this civilization whose culmination is nuclear annihilation.

By mixing in two fallacious opposites, intelligence and illiteracy, they affirm a fundamental ideological support for modern, bureaucratic capitalist society. This is not a subtle, but a glaring oversight. (I am taking for granted that they would not defend such a comparison if challenged.) But more importantly, what is the meaning of this “respect” for poor and rich alike but an oblique recognition that wealth and poverty are “natural,” existential rather than socially imposed relationships? And how could such respect be expressed socially, in practice? Does this “respect” for the poor respect the “right” of the poor to stay at the bottom of a dungheap maintained by privilege and by violence? Does respect for the wealthy (who are generally also the powerful) include respect for their property—the iron fence around Mr. Williams’ factory, say, or his pretty lawn, or the windows of his office, or his Cadillacs, or the summer home he maintains in some far off leafy glen with the profits he’s made from the sale of his cruise missile engines to Caesar? Even their hero, the Dead One, was astute enough to show no respect for these parasites; his followers, unfortunately, where they are not disseminating hatred and lies in the service of the State, have softened his class message into a universal, indiscriminating “love” which threatens to become little more than mush.

Such human values as love, respect, courage and vision are necessarily refracted through the evolution

and transmission of these values socially. Yet the christian takes them as unambiguous elements making up a philosophical and ethical perspective. How can one assume their neutrality? Such an assumption, rather than being an “examination of conscience,” suggests a vision which is entirely unexamined. Its final incoherence leaves each christian to decide what exactly is the will of this phantom, this omnipotent absence. While it could be an argument for the role of individual conscience within christianity, it renders the position of this creator of chaos, this exhausted god, null. Moral witness becomes no more and no less a form of worship than evangelical snake handling or blessing bombs as an army chaplain—no more and no less coherent. Christianity, that is to say, the totality of this christian civilization, has some small space within its leviathanic body for them all; it is a confusion which is ultimately absurd. (And ultimately deadly. The pacifist Christians rate only a footnote in the long and murderous trajectory of christian civilization. The same “holy spirit” which fuels their righteousness fuels that of the pilots who strafe and bomb the “infidels” in the mountains of Lebanon. Their god is the same malevolent god stamped on the coins of Mammon. In the name of this god, the goggled, uniformed horsemen of the apocalypse will unleash the Death of Death on a green and sacred planet.)

III.

If christians were to examine the development of this civilization along with their consciences, they would discover that christianity has played a central role. As E. M. Cioran noted in *The New Gods*, “monotheism contains the germ of every form of tyranny.” The monotheism of the early christians began with a declaration of war against the pagan gods and nature spirits, transforming fervor and ecstasy into an aggression. When evangelical politicians demand the “defense of christian civilization” either from the hordes of the East or from the looming anarchy which is suggested wherever people transgress the laws and begin to act for themselves, they are making a statement about christianity which much more accurately portrays the nature of the religion and its identity with the Western monolith than any prayer meeting in front of a weapons plant. The production of weapons for profits, the struggle for power, the subjugation and obliteration of the Other all stem from the frenetic desire of the early christians to war

on the wilderness, including the wildness in human beings.

Frederick Turner has described this process luminously in his book *Beyond Geography: The Western Spirit Against the Wilderness*. “In the same way that civilized men had cleared the earth, pruned back the forests, planted villages, towns, and cities, so had Christianity stripped its world of magic and mystery, and of the possibility of spiritual renewal through itself. In cutting down the sacred trees in the mystic groves, in building its sanctuaries on the rubble of chthonic shrines, and in branding all vestiges of ancient mythic practices vain, impious superstition, the Church had effectively removed divinity from its world. But its victory here was Pyrrhic, for it had rendered its people alienated sojourners in a spiritually barren world where the only outlet for the urge to life was the restless drive onward, what Norman O. Brown has called the desire to become. Eventually, this drive would leave the religion itself behind.”

Native American writer John Mohawk has said, “Christianity is an ideology of technology because the Christian message is that the pagan gods and spirits of the forests, mountains, streams and so forth are false gods and that streams and rivers aren’t really sacred. Christianity paved the way for the philosophy that there is nothing wrong with taking an axe and a plough to the forest and reducing it to so much charcoal and so many acres of cropland.” It is not an accident that a native American would make such an observation; those “alienated sojourners” with the restless drive to vanquish the wilderness and nature both within and without were not only the monastics in Europe who organized commerce, the regimentation of labor, and time-keeping, but the pioneers and refugees who unleashed the same violence on the conquered peoples and places of the lands they colonized.

This historical digression may seem like yesterday’s newspapers to the devout, but I can’t help but feel an irony bordering on fury when I see people presenting as a resolution to the ferocity of the state the very religion which brought the beast into being. The fact is that either christianity, as the motor of capitalism, contains the seed of this civilization and will always impede the possibilities of liberation with its inherently authoritarian and life-denying essence; or as Turner has suggested, it has been left behind by its own drive for conquest: the newer and more terrible gods of technology are now replacing it, and as Cioran writes, “Like a venom which has lost its virtues,

it can no longer save or damn anyone.” Either way, it serves to bind us to the civilization which denies us or to its shadow.

I am not attacking the sincerity of the christians who get themselves jailed for expressing their opposition to leviathan. In all fairness, it must be obvious that they feel kinship more with the primitive, though distorted, message of their spiritual movement than with the historical reality which it became. Nor am I attacking them for a lack of efficacy, for efficacy is politics, the “realm of the possible”; and within leviathan, nothing is possible but the hegemony of the state and the state of war.

But their moralism, their guilt, their fetishism (or definition) of nonviolence excludes and contains the rest of us. If you cross their line without the benefits of their nonviolence training, you’ve transgressed the moral code which allows them to see the nuclear machine as a simple dichotomy of good versus evil.

Once you cross the line, react in a way other than the prayerful, docile manner which they have provided, you become fair game for the cops.

Because they see the problem in (admittedly, at times convincing) terms of good and evil, they fail to understand the nature of capital, of this series of incremental, everyday acts which leads to missile production, deployment and eventual use. Hence, to work at Williams is a “sin” which provides its thirty pieces of silver, and to quit would be a sacrifice. This hides the fundamental reality that to work for wages, to become a commodity in the slave trade, to become the object of another’s business is in itself a hideous sacrifice, and that only this recognition, always latent in the rage that people feel in this society, will lead them to break the chain of acts and the chain of command which makes nuclear war—and all the little, daily “nuclear” wars against nature and human nature—possible.

This is why their notion of “conversion”—turning swords into ploughshares—is so flawed. The “ploughshares” of technological civilization are as deadly and as life-denying as its swords. Do they expect Mr. Williams to manufacture milk and cookies for the poor by giving “his” workers a “fair deal”? The notion of conversion maintains such illusions, that benevolent capitalists can share power, make a “fair deal” for “fair wages” with the workers they exploit, that capitalism can exist without the ferocious battle for markets, without violence and coercion, that the milk of human kindness will suffice in bringing about a reconciliation between the death squads and

their victims, and that the technological system and the state can be used to “serve human needs” rather than conforming to their necessary consequences of domination, violence and disaster.

IV.

By now it is getting light. People are starting to leave, some perhaps to report to their own jobs somewhere else, in some other chamber of the beast. The traffic entering the plant is now a steady flow; I am reminded of the industrialist Henry Clay Frick’s boast that he could always pay one half of the working class to murder the other. And who can doubt that these so “professional” cops would attack us viciously if we came to represent a real threat to production and they were so ordered in the name of “national security”?

Why am I singling out these christians? you might ask. After all, in their own way they are resisting, they’re not asking me to conform to their ideals, they are simply following their own consciences. Actually, I’m not attacking them; I’m happy that someone is at Williams drawing attention to the war profits made there. I even admire their engagement, their communalism, their concrete practice of mutual aid. More than criticizing them, I’m expressing my own frustration and desperation at the situation we all find ourselves in. It is getting late in the game and decorous prayer won’t suffice. Where, then, are the roots of revolt, how can the machine be halted?

A leaflet distributed recently by radicals in California to anti-nuclear protesters argues a point very similar to what we have written in the FE—that fear of being nuked is not enough, and that “It is not only nukes that menace what is left of life, but the whole structure of modern society, beginning with the obsolescent machinery of work-to-pay-to-work which we call the ‘economy.’ Only a movement which taps into mass rage and desire by challenging this structure can hope to become strong enough to prevent the catastrophe.” (See “Beyond Playing Dead—Playing to Win,” from Shock Troupe, c/o Processed World, 55 Sutter Street no. 829, San Francisco CA 94104.)

While I continue to mostly agree with this formulation, it strikes me as only a “formal truth” with no direct applicability, for neither rage nor fear suffice to create an opposition to the entire spectrum of the exterminist society. The fact is that the “spontaneous combustion” which will initiate conscious, radical

revolt may or may not be imminent, but no “political intervention” or “critical truth” can force it to occur. And if and when it does occur, who can say with assurance that it won’t be the frustrating process of setbacks of the reformist peace movement, the fear of annihilation, or even the example of christians witnessing, which somehow sparks people to move against the war machine and finally the system as a whole?

Someone told me that a young man who had nothing to do with the protest heard about it in the media and came down to throw nails on Williams’ driveway before he was arrested for littering. That could represent a beginning. But somehow we all have to go not only way beyond the symbolic witnessing of christian martyrs, but beyond the cycle of protest—be it “violent” or “non-violent”—which attempts to influence elites into changing the trajectory of a civilization irrevocably heading for its doom.

I don’t know how we can effect such action, but I know that prayer won’t do it. We’ve got to overthrow this civilization and its gods if we are to truly redeem and recreate the world.

Related

See *Anarchy & Christianity: An Exchange* (FE #317, Summer 1984).

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