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The Attack on the Twin Towers

(Posting to the “Organise!” Anarchist Discussion
Listserve, September 14, 2001)

Wayne Price

September 14, 2001

The U.S. has done evil deeds abroad and now an evil deed was done to the U.S.

As a New Yorker I am deeply affected by the attacks on the World Trade Towers (I am more ambivalent about the Pentagon attack, although opposing it). Like most people, I feel deep sympathy for the thousands dead, most of them working class, “white collar” and “blue collar,” many of them poor workers, often people of color. And I fear the right-wing turn which the attackers have facilitated, the spread of super-patriotism and anti-Arab, anti-Muslim, sentiments.

The mighty technology of capitalist industrialism was used against us. Gigantic buildings, made in an effort to create the “world’s tallest buildings,” were turned into death traps for thousands. Supersonic jet planes, with their enormous power and fuel tanks, were turned into missiles of death by kamikaze fanatics. The over-centralized technology, which has been

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destroying the balance of nature, has shown another aspect of its deadly vulnerability.

The attackers do not realize the damage they have done to the cause of anti-imperialism. The U.S. population is enormously ignorant of world politics. They believe that the U.S. ("we") only does good to other nations. They are completely puzzled by the hostility of foreigners. They know nothing about the U.S. role in the Middle East. To them, it was a bolt out of the blue, and they react by fury and increased chauvinism.

In their hatred of U.S. imperialism, I agree with the attackers (I am assuming for now that they are probably Muslim nationalists). But I disagree with the program they have adopted to fight imperialism, a program which includes this mass murder of workers, theocratic dictatorship or secular statism, and often the extreme oppression of women. They think in terms of national blocs: because they have a (real) grievance against the U.S. rulers, they feel justified in killing any U.S. people at all, even workers who have no control over U.S. world policy. And much of the U.S. population responds in a mirror image, national-bloc, way: because supposedly some Arabs/Muslims attacked them, they blame all Arabs and Muslims, and are prepared to kill all of them. This nationalist form of thinking is a curse, both for the oppressed and for the oppressor peoples.

We Leftists and revolutionaries can put this monstrous evil in the context of worldwide suffering. But we must not harden our hearts to the suffering and pain of so many right now in New York. We must not let abstractions of "class" and "imperialism" get in the way of a human response. We are right, but should not fall into self-righteousness. The desire of working people to help each other and support each other in a time of crisis has been wonderful, and we should be part of that. Meanwhile we must do all we can to oppose the tide of nationalist hatred and especially to defend Arabs and Muslims

in the U.S. from attacks. We must be prepared to oppose the coming U.S. war.