

CYCLING UNDER THE RADAR— ASSERTIVE DESERTION

BY CHRIS CARLSSON

“An unusually loose netwar design—one that is eminently leaderless yet manages to organize a large crowd for a rather chaotic, linear kind of swarming—is found in the pro-bicycle, anti-car protest movement known as Critical Mass (CM) in the San Francisco Bay Area.”¹

—David Ronfeldt and John Arquilla
Networks and Netwars: The Future of Terror, Crime, and Militancy
Rand Institute

“Anarchist spontaneity, anonymity, leaderlessness, and ubiquity are a mischievous mirror of the fluidity and omnipresence of capital in its most advanced post-industrial form. . . a counterpower whose morphing, mobile affinities speak back against a financial command that is vaporous, nomadic, and strikes across all points on the social horizon.”²

— Nick Dyer-Witherford
“Global Body, Global Brain/Global Factory, Global War:
Revolt of the Value-Subjects” www.thecommoner.org

Bicycling is a particularly solitary activity. Not everyone rides a bike; in fact, it's a rather small minority. And of people who do choose to bicycle, an even smaller minority choose to participate in Critical Mass. At first glance bicycling seems an unlikely place to find a political movement of people animated by a passion to change how we live. But the fiercely individualistic folks who choose to bicycle AND ride in the monthly Critical Mass are among those at the forefront of today's social revolts.

Even though bicycling in modern cities is extremely isolated and dangerous, every day thousands of people choose to embrace the bicycle as their means of personal transportation. Why? What does it mean that so many people are willing to choose something so discouraged by the structure of society—both its physical layout and its psychological assumptions? What is the meaning of this limited and largely invisible form of social opposition, this growing desertion from the hyper-exploitation of the car/oil nexus? And how does Critical Mass take this expression and deepen its meaning and power?

Famously, the motivations of Critical Massers are as numerous as the number of riders. Ask anyone why they are on a Critical Mass and you'll get a response from a long list of possible answers. But what people think they're doing is less interesting than what it means that a specific fraction of the population has found a form of political and social expression in the Critical Mass phenomenon.

In Critical Mass we discover partial and beginning answers to questions most



of us haven't even begun to ask. Some have called our times the "end of history," others a "New World Order," still others the emergence of something beyond any nation-state called "Empire," or "globalization." Whatever one might call it, the assumptions and dynamics of society are undergoing dramatic change, a change that the popular press has done little to explore or explain beyond clichés and platitudes derived from looking in the rearview mirror. Critical Mass has grown alongside the emergence of a new global system as one manifestation of its flipside, a new form of social opposition.

Nobody asks for your ID, your money, your soul or your brain at Critical Mass. It is a living, collective affirmation of the human drive for authentic, unmediated community. People arrive, excited to join a temporary, mobile occupying army of noisy rolling revelers, relishing the sounds of people laughing and talking, hooting and whistling, tinkling bells and spinning gears. You are invited to talk to strangers and they usually answer with sincere enthusiasm. The Critical Mass experience is contrary to "normal" life thanks to the absence of buying and selling, and the equally important lack of a hierarchical structure.

People who seek personal autonomy find each other on bicycle at Critical Mass. It is a breeding ground for people who are ready to start living in a world shaped to facilitate cooperation, generalized prosperity, and ecological sanity as opposed to cutthroat competition, war and the barbarism of worldwide famine and environmental devastation. Critical Mass is a place to taste the imaginary (but suddenly and briefly real) power of collective spirit, to feel you are alive and aware as you help create a true and uncorrupted sliver of autonomous, self-directed public space. You taste a radically public and directly democratic potential in the euphoric sharing of a freely created convivial space predicated on individual engagement.

The New Shape of Class Conflict

Critical Mass participants are largely members of what has been termed the "Cognitariat," the human "know-how"—technical, cultural, linguistic, and ethical—that supports the operation of the high-tech economy³. This includes programmers and secretaries, office managers and account executives, but also waiters, bike messengers, students, gardeners and musicians. Most San Francisco riders work in the cubicular world of corporate America, shuffling information and maintaining software and hardware for the globe-spanning corporations that most benefit from the new shape of the world, or the ubiquitous nonprofit corporations that have sprung up to address the yawning chasms left behind by capitalist development.

Our era is characterized by a rapid enclosure of human life within the boundaries of buying and selling, i.e. the world of commodification. Commodification has expanded into new realms and more and more of life: from childcare and psychotherapy to personal trainers and dogwalkers, the markets never close anymore with supermarkets open 24/7 and financial markets trading at all hours across the planet. The side of this that we are usually aware of, at least in part, is shopping, where we get the goods we need to live by exchanging money for them. But shopping is also an arena in which our choices can define our identity and sense of self,



where we make our individual mark on the world. We seem oblivious to the side of commodification in which we are the commodity, wherein our ability to work is the only real product we have for sale and where our creative contribution to making the world is sold to purposes beyond our choice or control.

What this omnipresent Economy also represents is a radical expansion of the terrain of exploitation. Classical revolutionary analysis focused on work, especially factory work, as the site of maximum exploitation—hence the point at which revolutionary opposition (by workers) was most likely to erupt and where it would find the most power to counter the power of capital and its owners. While it is still true that profits are derived from the coercive relations of wage-labor in workplaces across the planet—and it is still a crucial area of social and political conflict—our era is better understood as one in which a general level of profitability is maintained through a system of “social labor”—a real enclosure of all living activity into the logic of buying and selling. As I write this in mid-March 2002, the U.S. press trumpets the end of the economic downturn that followed the dotcom bust and Sept. 11 attacks. Enron, Global Crossing, Arthur Andersen—individual businesses teeter and collapse, but the incessant participation of U.S. consumers, endlessly expanding their debt load, blindly trusting the fundamental reliability of the modern Economy, keeps the system from falling into an historically familiar abyss.

“This is a new proletariat and not a new industrial working class. . . ‘proletariat’ is the general concept that defines all those whose labor is exploited by capital, the entire cooperating multitude . . . In the . . . context of Empire, however, the production of capital converges ever more with the production and reproduction of social life itself; it thus becomes ever more difficult to maintain distinctions among productive, reproductive, and unproductive labor. Labor—material or immaterial, intellectual or corporeal—produces and reproduces social life, and in the process is exploited by capital. . . Th[is] progressive indistinction between production and reproduction . . . also highlights once again the immeasurability of time and value. As labor moves outside the factory walls, it is increasingly difficult to maintain the fiction of any measure of the working day and thus separate the time of production from the time of reproduction, or work time from leisure time. . . the proletariat produces in all its generality everywhere all day long.”⁴

—*Empire* by Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri

People working in corporate America often change jobs. These days, dissatisfaction or oppression does not lead people to get organized and fight back. Instead, people quit and look for a new job. The dramatic transience in workplaces and neighborhoods has eroded a sense of community, and undercut the belief that we all share similar predicaments and experiences. Efforts by companies to ameliorate a modern life drained of genuine sociability with the fake life of the “corporate family” don’t fill the void. Flight from the inequities of work life leave Americans more isolated, confused and ignorant of class dynamics than ever.

Incongruously, as the totality of life has become increasingly absorbed in social-



ized economic activity, our personal experience (at least in the modern metropolis) is one of increased isolation. We are far less likely to know our neighbors or have lasting connections with co-workers than was common in previous eras. We feel alone in an ever more integrated system of making our world together. We are driven by the accelerated pace of daily life to a state in which we have no time—no time to socialize, no time for our kids or our lovers, no time to stop and think. Between working and shopping, and expanding periods of transit between every economic activity, we hardly have time for anything beyond sleeping.

Our atomization as individuals leaves us helpless in the face of a system that incessantly proclaims itself as the best of all possible worlds. If we are not satisfied, something must be wrong with us, because everyone else agrees, or so the absence of visible dissent seems to indicate. But this hollow consensus is extremely shallow. It is undercut by real life experiences every day. As long as those experiences are understood as personal failures rather than systemic necessities, we continue to participate “willingly”—lacking any alternative, trapped by bills, debts and fear of falling.

The contagious pleasure of a movement like Critical Mass threatens the precariousness of today’s world, which depends on cooperative participation by the majority of people as workers and consumers. Critical Mass is an unparalleled practical experiment in public, collective self-expression, reclaiming our diminishing connectedness, interdependency and mutual responsibility. CM provides encouragement and reinforcement for desertion from the rat wheel of car ownership and its attendant investments. But even more subversively, it does it by gaining active participation in an event of unmediated human creation, outside of economic logic, and offering an exhilarating taste of a life practically forgotten—free, convivial, cooperative, connected, collective.

In the social factory, resistance can erupt in arenas outside the traditional sphere of the workplace. When old-style leftists despair over falling rates of unionization and strikes, they are failing to appreciate the wider terrain of class conflict taking shape in this new period of history. Critical Mass underscores the primacy of transit as an arena of contestation. Bicyclists have withdrawn from the exploitative relations of car ownership and the degrading second-class citizenship (and waste of time) imposed by public transit. But this revolt is personal and invisible—until the creative eruption of Critical Mass proclaims these myriad isolated acts to the world as a shared act. It is a public declaration that suddenly reveals individual choices as social, political and collective responses to the insanity that passes as inevitable and normal. In creating a moving event, celebrating and being a real alternative, Critical Mass simultaneously opens up the field of transit to new political contestation, and pushes it to another level by pioneering swarming mobility as a new tactic.

When someone becomes a daily bicyclist s/he makes an emphatic break with one of the basic assumptions and “truths” of the dominant society: that you must have a car to get around. The actual experience of urban cycling refreshes the cyclist mentally and physically. That experience in turn inoculates the bicyclist



against the disdain heaped on cyclists by “normal” people, often while they’re driving. In addition, it begins to undermine all sorts of received truths, packaged and delivered by entertainment conglomerates with a vested interest in maintaining our dependence on steadily consuming their products in pursuit of an elusive happiness, or at least a satisfaction that we can’t seem to get.

Bicyclists remove themselves, at least while riding, from the overwhelming saturation of the media. Instead of being told about traffic and weather, celebrity traumas, spectacular crimes, government proclamations, the latest scores and the whole seamless web of marketing and entertainment that calls itself ‘news’, the cyclist sees the dark clouds gathering, speaks to the neighborhood grocer, chats with the local kids on the corner. The bicyclist is experiencing life directly, avoiding the calculated mediation foisted on citizens by the ever-present babble of TV and radio. Short-circuiting the self-referential presentation of an edited and finally false “reality,” the cyclist’s critical attitude, already strong enough to get her on a bicycle, begins to reinforce itself.

Bicyclists reject “simulatory conditioning. Revulsion against the power of a commercially driven media to saturate consciousness, structure social interactivity and standardize creativity has become a major theme of the new dissidence, for which culture jamming, ad-busting, and subvertisements are familiar forms.”⁵

The Empire Strikes Back

“Whether such movements will remain only a spectral, haunting, deconstructive discomfort to capital, or develop the substantial capacity to make ‘an exit to the future’ is uncertain. The more vital they become, the more reality their projects assume, the more hollow and wraith-like will the market values they oppose appear, and the more lethal the force it will bring against them.”⁶

—Nick Dyer-Witherford

It’s not surprising that in cities and towns across the world, but especially in the U.S., whenever a group of ten to fifty bicyclists (or more!) have appeared on the streets, riding in a leisurely social atmosphere, the police have responded with a predictable and disproportionate fury. The mighty forces kneading our lump of earth into a shape that assures their wealth and power cannot ignore Critical Mass. Wherever it erupts, with few exceptions among the 250-odd cities and towns across every continent where groups have ridden as “Critical Mass,” local and state police have responded quickly and punitively. Many individual cops are personally offended by cheerful bicyclists thumbing their noses at the automotive debt ball-and-chain they themselves have embraced so ardently. But the visceral hatred of a few zealous police is just the local manifestation of a much larger systemic fear of rebellion.

We can perhaps understand the individual motorist who quickly turns his everyday road rage against these visible rebels on bicycles, trapped as he is in a vehicle that symbolizes his freedom while actually imprisoning him—in debt and anxiety, but at that moment, in a metal box in a traffic jam. He has traded a great deal of his life to “own” this car—and now a contingent of revelers, by their simple pres-



ence, shatters the untenable illusion of his freedom. It is an illusion that he is already struggling to maintain against all evidence even before the bicyclists started shouting about the emperor's obvious nakedness. Needless to say, the motorist is outraged.

In a contrasting scenario, the motorist sympathizes with the passing bicyclists but as she waits through one, two, maybe three traffic light cycles, her time is slipping away. Her tension soars as impending appointments with family or job are delayed. Trapped in gridlock, exasperated by free-spirited bicyclists who don't seem to care about her situation, her mood darkens. She, too, resents the visible cause of her delay, and joins the more belligerent motorist in wanting to at least reprimand the cyclists—who they see as childlike, unrealistic, irresponsible—that There Is No Alternative!

So the local police dispatcher gets a barrage of complaints by cellphone from angry motorists—people who have come upon a disruption, an unauthorized procession of people who are filling the always congested thoroughfares with bicycles—what's more, they're having fun! The offended motorists are in a hurry—as always—but for once there is an identifiable culprit behind their daily humiliation. As if the pressure of work, bills and family weren't enough, now they're stopped in traffic by a boisterous bicycling traffic jam.

The police, facing another routine Friday of fender benders and flat tires, spring into action. Highways hold more cars than they were meant to, the daily traffic jams being a public version of the thickening arteries and slowing blood flow of the obese commuter/consumer who keeps the body politic wheezing along, dependent on cars and malls, wars and work. But the police, like the citizens trapped in their cars in another routine traffic jam, know that something more dangerous is happening than just a few dozen bicyclists riding home together.

The police recognize their duty to raise the personal cost of participating in such an affront to social consensus. Tickets, arrests, harassment, even police violence, have all been applied to Critical Mass participants from Austin, Texas to Portland, Oregon to Minneapolis, San Francisco, Los Angeles and New York. In city after city, authorities do their utmost to contain and quarantine the contagion. This includes a range of responses from police repression to attempts to create CM leadership structures through negotiation, even up to official permission and sponsorship. But so far, Critical Mass has eluded these familiar techniques, still rolling free in dozens of locales.

In many places, including San Francisco, police have gone through periods of ignoring Critical Mass, assuming it will either peter out on its own without the antagonistic energy provided by police repression, or just become so routine that boredom drives away the personalities who originally cracked open the social space for Critical Mass to flourish. Periods of benign tolerance have left the event room to grow and expand, but have also absorbed the event into the "normal" fabric of life, a once-a-month predictable ritual that changes nothing. If the participants fail to make the experience a dynamic, rejuvenating, visionary happening, slowly and inexorably the power of Critical Mass diminishes. But in many places, San Francisco especially, when Critical Mass is left alone it con-



tinues to inspire new and old participants, providing an incomparable lesson in practical anarchy. It is a leaderless, amorphous reinhabitation of the urban landscape in a temporary community outside of economic logic.

Critical Mass: An Exit to the Future?

“...the classic formulation that sees action on the streets as more real than its symbolic forms is wrong: in this case, it is the street action that is symbolic. But to recognize this is not to say such movements are insignificant: on the contrary, they are the constituent moments of new identities and agents, the big bubbling cauldrons out of whose mists emerging subjects defect from capital’s value schemes in scores of directions, transformed by their confrontation with capital’s security forces, by their combination with other[s].”

— Nick Dyer-Witherford

*“Autonomous movement is what defines the place proper to the multitude. . . . Through circulation the multitude reappropriates space and constitutes itself as an active subject. . .”*⁸

—Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri

Critical Mass since its beginning has identified itself as a celebration more than a protest, and is for many of its participants a prefigurative experience, both calling attention to and actually creating a taste of a different way of life. The vibrant grassroots culture is the best proof of this. Costumes, flyers, posters, art shows, concerts and parties all have promoted and extended Critical Mass into areas of life beyond mere bicycling, and have given creative voice to hundreds of riders. The wildly popular Halloween ride has brought out a profusion of clever costumes every year in many cities. Critical Mass participants often bring art to the streets outside of the social ritual of Halloween. Dinosaurs have popped up in a number of cities, especially along the west coast of North America (from Vancouver to LA), making the obsolescent car/oil system the butt of a sharp visual pun.

Critical Mass is also a practical lesson in direct action for all its participants, focused on the moment and the immediate experience rather than towards representatives, government, politicians or demands. Critical Mass has often provided participants a breathtaking experience of

*“inherent risk. [The] excitement and danger of the action creates a magically focused moment, a peak experience, where real time suddenly stands still and a certain shift in consciousness can occur. Many of us have felt incredibly empowered and have had our lives fundamentally radicalized and transformed by these feelings. Direct action is praxis, catharsis and image rolled into one.”*⁹

—John Jordon

Critical Mass is an experience that goes beyond symbolic action, in spite of its enormous symbolic importance. It is a public demonstration of a better way of moving through cities. But during the time it is underway, it is more than a demonstra-



tion. It is a moment of a real alternative, already alive, animated by the bodies and minds of thousands of participants, who are not waiting for the world to be changed... They are changing it. The world CM'ers live in is already different because we participate in Critical Mass. We have harnessed a mysterious but simple and direct social power to invent our own reality. At this moment, our choice to bicycle leaves the realm of mere refusal and becomes a creative act, a mobilization of what we might call "collective invention power." Tellingly, collective invention escapes the rules and limits of the market entirely.

Bicyclists refuse the nonsensical "necessity" of driving as a first step in a series of personal choices that taken as a whole, represent a new type of political contestation, not only oppositional, but visionary. It is an act of desertion from an entire web of exploitative and demeaning activities, behaviors that impoverish the human experience and degrade planetary ecology itself. Bicycling is simultaneously a withdrawal from an important sector of economic activity. Time spent making money to pay for a car is now freed up for other parts of life. Though miniscule, each individual's active disengagement with the expectations of economic self-enslavement is a material and psychological blow for human freedom.

Apart from the individual psychological explanations, clearly as a new form of leaderless, mobile temporary occupation, Critical Mass strikes deep fear into the system. It represents a desertion from one piece of a coercive order that keeps us working for them AND trapped in an individualistic worldview. It also manifests a positive reinhabiting of an ever-more degraded urban landscape. And most threatening to the system, CM is tangibly fun, nourishing a human capacity for sharing pleasure unmediated by buying and selling, and as such it is a dangerously exciting precedent.

Footnotes

1. Ronfeldt, David and Arquilla, John. "What Next for Networks and Netwars?" pp. 336-337 in *Networks and Netwars: The Future of Terror, Crime, and Militancy*. Rand Institute: 2001
2. Dyer-Witherford, Nick. "Global Body, Global Brain/Global Factory, Global War: Revolt of the Value-Subjects," p. 14. www.thecommoner.org: January 2002.
3. Dyer-Witherford, *op. cit.*, p. 17. See also Dyer-Witherford's footnotes to Virno and Hardt, and Franco Berardi, "Bifo/Berardi, interview on "The Factory of Unhappiness," <http://www.nettime.org>. Posted 11 June 2001. Also, Jean-Marie Vincent, "Les automatismes sociaux et le 'general intellect.'" *Futur Antérieur* 16 (1993): 121.
4. Hardt, Michael and Negri, Antonio. *Empire*, p. 402-403. Harvard University Press: 2000
5. Dyer-Witherford, *op. cit.*, p. 18.
6. Dyer-Witherford, *op. cit.*, p. 30.
7. Dyer-Witherford, *op. cit.*, p. 29.
8. Hardt and Negri, *op. cit.*, p. 397.
9. Jordon, John. "The art of necessity: The subversive imagination of anti-road protest and Reclaim the Streets" in *DIY Culture: Party & Protest in Nineties Britain*, ed. George McKay, Verso: 1998, p. 133



A QUIET STATEMENT AGAINST OIL WARS

BY CHRIS CARLSSON, FROM A FLYER DISTRIBUTED AT SAN FRANCISCO CM, OCT. 2001

Critical Mass has not seen a lot of xerocracy (opinionated flyering) lately. And yet, just by its persistence, it continues to define and keep open an important social and political space. Now that we are once again faced with open war, hot and murderous, our mass bike-in automatically takes on a greater political meaning.

Over the past nine years, Critical Mass has been a steady, important rejoinder to the madness of the car/war society that depends on oil and other fossil fuels. Uprisings in Mexico, Nigeria, Venezuela, and the ongoing conflicts in the Middle East all underscore the permanence of war in our era. Critical Mass is our way of gathering publicly to repudiate the insanity of the Orwellian world we live in, where War is Peace.

We all feel some kind of pressure to “do something” either along with the patriotic campaign, or against it. But part of bicycling together is the calming and contemplative experience it inherently provides. As fear and panic have been exacerbated by the crescendo of militaristic posturing, what better response can we make than to calmly ride our bicycles through town, discussing world events and our part in them? We must stand our ground, clear our minds of the fear that is being intensively marketed to us, and resist the social control the authorities try to maintain with it.

We have to think creatively, not just about the distorted “facts” we’re being fed, but also about the uses governments make of war. One of the crucial functions of a war hysteria is to drive all other thoughts out of our minds. No longer are we to concern ourselves with ecology, alternative transportation, alternative sources of energy. War is a direct assault on the painstaking effort to create new cultural norms, new ways of being together, new social values that transcend the banal barbarism of life reduced to commodities for sale.



Now more than ever we need to talk to each other, to share what we know, what we believe, and what we can imagine. Riding in Critical Mass we are already taking a small, simple step towards a better world, a place of abundance, security and camaraderie. In the months ahead—of ongoing war against mysterious “internal enemies”—we may find that bicycling will become an even more important tool in preserving and extending our abilities to resist a blindly repressive state. During the last open war, the Persian Gulf War of 1991, local bicyclists played an important role as highly mobile scouts for the huge anti-war demonstrations that crisscrossed the city for several months.

While we can still ride openly together, let’s renew our friendships and our trust, knowing that our social bonds are under assault and will need the strength to bend so they won’t break. Wars destroy humans and the physical infrastructure of human societies. They also disrupt and destroy human communities, not just elsewhere, but here. In those disruptions are also openings and opportunities. Amidst the hysteria of the past six weeks have also been extraordinary openings to revisit assumptions, explanations, and our sense of how life came to be this way.

Many people are understandably concerned about our safety in the wake of the developments since mid-September. Much to the horror of anyone not predisposed to a simplistic, patriarchal authoritarianism, the U.S. government has taken the bait and is following precisely the worst course of action it could have possibly chosen in the wake of the attacks.

We have to step back from the frenzied hysteria that has been cultivated to gain popular support to “do something” with our expensive and brutal military machine. When we take a deeper look at the context of current events, we can see that the government’s strategy is only rhetorically interested in combatting terrorism. The effort to subdue Afghanistan (a mission fraught with disastrous historical precedents) has more to do with central Asian oil and narcotics than terrorism, which is only a convenient excuse for a military campaign that the Bushies came into office determined to pursue.

If it was terrorism that the Bush gang wanted to uproot, a much different policy would be on the agenda, one that included a transformation of our material relationship to oil and our political relationship with Middle Eastern countries. Counting on the political and historical ignorance of Americans, the men propping up Dubya arrogantly assume they can militarily defeat any opposition to U.S. efforts to control world oil and narcotics supplies. They even dare to use the pretext of a national emergency to force through restrictions on civil liberties, to railroad new trade legislation, and open Alaska’s National Wildlife Refuge to oil drilling. (The sad fact that there is a de facto one-party state in the U.S. is another topic altogether.)

Grassroots opposition can expect to be visited by government surveillance and repression. Meanwhile, intelligent political discussion is only available on alternative radio programs and internet sites far from the one-note mass media that most people rely on for “news.”

In the face of one of the worst propaganda onslaughts in U.S. history, we must demand the truth. Let us ask ourselves, who decides? Who benefits? Who loses? Why this and not that?



Of Oil Wars and Leaked Memos

BY CHRIS CARLSSON, FROM A FLYER DISTRIBUTED AT SAN FRANCISCO CM, SPRING 1997

In 1991, over 100,000 San Franciscans participated in anti-Gulf War demonstrations, often on bicycle. Well, as we ride along in our typical Critical Mass, we are still connected to wars elsewhere. The connections between our symbolic and active protest against the consumer end of the auto/oil industry and the hot wars in Mexico and Nigeria are considerably less immediately visible than the Gulf War, but in many ways, the concealed struggles are more interesting. The Zapatistas are fighting for a new model of social power, based on bottom-up democratic communities and extensive discussion and consultation before decisions are taken. Their struggle, centered in the Mexican state of Chiapas among Mayans uprooted by centuries of colonization and marketization, is adjacent to Mexico's large oil reserves, a fact well known to all who live and work in that part of the country. Meanwhile, in neighboring Tabasco state, over 20 oil facilities were besieged for weeks by angry peasants and oil workers in mid-December 1994, protesting fraudulent elections, a corrupt government, and widespread pollution. Not surprisingly, Chase Manhattan Bank sponsored a report to a group of large investors in mid-January, in which it was openly suggested that the Mexican government had to eliminate the Zapatistas to regain the confidence of investors, and that the ruling party, decades-long dictators in a one-party state, should seriously consider the ramifications of allowing real elections to erode their power. Treasury Secretary Robert Rubin's former firm, Goldman Sachs, has also chimed in with conservative advice for the Mexican government. The walls of San Francisco's Financial District surely obscure banal everyday acts just as horrific as these calls for mass murder emanating from Wall Street.

A Greenpeace letter quoting from a restricted memo authored by the Chairman of Internal Security, Rivers State Nigeria: "Shell (Oil Co.) operations are still impossible unless ruthless military operations are undertaken for smooth economic activities to commence."

Shell has been drilling for oil in the Niger Delta for 36 years. The Ogoni people have been protesting to protect the Earth and their lives. Their non-violent protests have resulted in 1,800 deaths, Greenpeace reports—because money is at stake. Over 80% of Nigeria's revenue comes from oil, and Shell is the big money generator.



1991 Bay Area Bike Action ride against the Gulf War



PETER MEITZLER



Ken Saro-Wiwa Murdered by Nigerian Military Dictatorship

The Nigerian military dictatorship murdered Ken Saro-Wiwa and eight other Ogoni activists in early November 1996. Fake murder charges have failed to disguise their real "crime": organizing the Ogoni people to demand a cleanup of the ecologically devastated Niger River delta (football field-sized pools of waste oil litter the landscape with the consequential cancer and health epidemic in their wake), and to demand that Shell Oil compensate the Ogoni people for the \$30 billion of oil pumped from their lands since 1958.

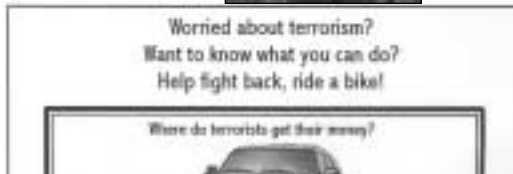
In spring 1994, oil workers, gov't. workers, college students and most of Nigeria went on strike and fought running battles with the military. When European oil companies cut production by 40% in sympathy, San Francisco-based CHEVRON and New York-based MOBIL flew in additional foreign workers to keep the oil flowing from their wells and increased production to 120%. This saved the life of General Abacha's dictatorship.



San Francisco, California



Chapel Hill, North Carolina



Boston, Massachusetts



Madison, Wisconsin

