

# Xerocracy Vox Populi

Critical Mass San Francisco

October 26, 2001

## A Quiet Statement Against Oil Wars

**C**RITICAL MASS has not seen a lot of xerocracy (opinionated flying) 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.

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India, still under British colonial rule, sent \$500 million and thousands of troops to help the allied war effort in WWI, believing it would lead to a loosening of colonial domination after the war. In fact, British control was tightened, and it wasn't until 1948 that India became an independent country. This photo is from *The Bicycle in Wartime* by Jim Fitzpatrick, published by Brassey's Inc., Dulles, Virginia: 1998

*Lest we forget...* September 11, 1973

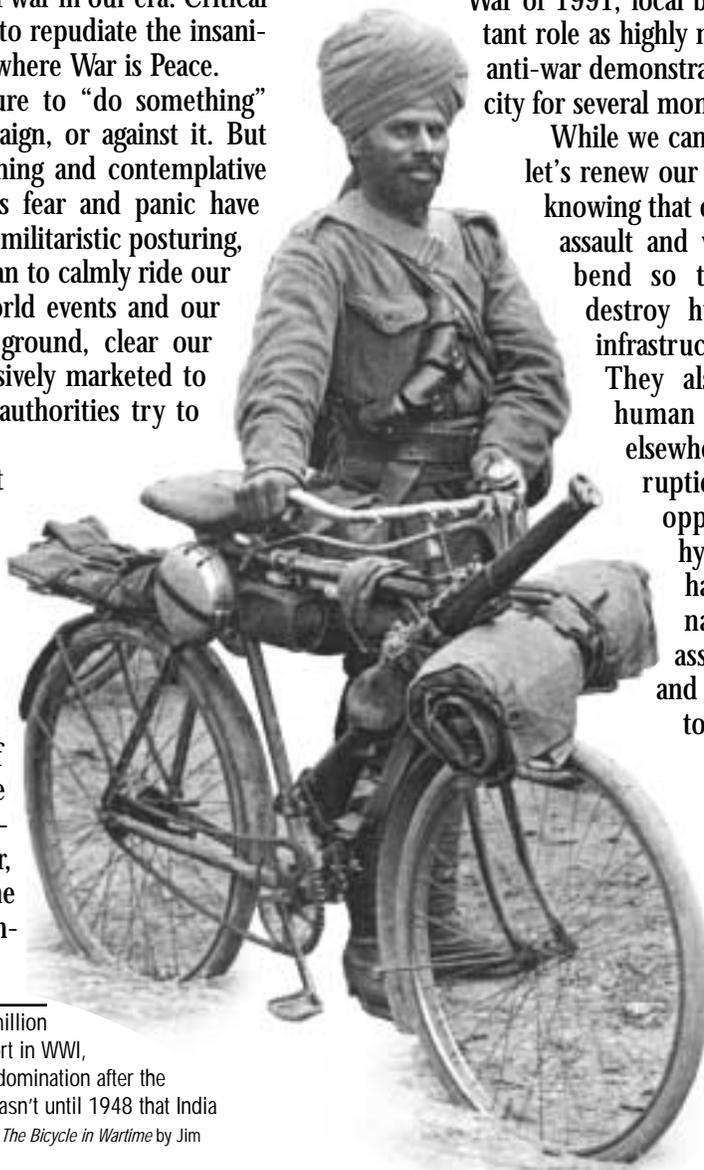
U.S.-backed General Augusto Pinochet violently overthrows the democratically elected government of Chilean President Salvador Allende. Allende is murdered, along with thousands of others in the following weeks of brutal military crackdown. President Nixon, Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, and the CIA deeply involved.

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 fol-



lowing *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.



*It's our pipeline [through Afghanistan] and we'll build it when we want to!*

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

## It's the Free Market, Stupid!



**Famine victims in 1897 in Jubbulpur, India.** British Viceroy Lord Elgin, travelled through the region in early December, a region that had been suffering a 10% death rate since September due to starvation. The government had refused to open relief works or control the price of grain. Lord Elgin commented after passing through, “I can only say that travelling during the last few days... I have been struck by the prosperous appearance of the country even with the small amount of rain that has come lately.”

The famine of 1876, largely induced by British insistence on “free market” distribution of grain, led to the establishment of a Famine Relief and Insurance Fund in 1878. The Fund was depleted in the 1890s by British authorities, who diverted the resources to fighting a fruitless war in Afghanistan, a place where the British military never managed to win in decades of warfare from 1839-1919. photo and information from *Late Victorian Holocausts* by Mike Davis, Verso, London: 2001

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?

—Chris Carlsson,  
October 26, 2001

## GLOBALIZE JUSTICE—NOT WAR!

RESIST THE WTO Global Days of Action Against the WTO meeting in Qatar

Two years after its defeat in Seattle, the World Trade Organization (WTO) will meet again, Nov. 9-12, in Qatar (an isolated Persian Gulf dictatorship) in the hopes of shutting out massive opposition. In response, people across the globe are localizing their resistance to once again stop the WTO’s destructive “free trade” agenda. The U.S. gov’t. is trying to use the Sept. 11 tragedy to push through dangerous new trade agreements. The Saturday demonstration will support the local environmental justice movement’s fight against toxic pollution from Chevron and other industries in Richmond, and for zero dioxin emissions, meaningful local control through an Industrial Safety Ordinance and compensation for damage to residents’ and workers’ health. Petrochemical giants like Chevron epitomize the corporations that benefit from the WTO and its “free trade” policies, devastating local communities and environments across the globe from Richmond and the Bay Area to Nigeria and around the world. Nov 10 is the anniversary of the execution of Nigerian environmentalist and Ogoni leader **Ken Saro Wiwa**. On the agenda for the WTO meeting in November are ways to expand corporate control over energy—including oil.



Ken Saro Wiwa

Fri Nov 9, 12 noon  
Justin Herman Plaza, San Francisco  
foot of Market St. (Embarcadero BART)

Sat Nov 10, 12 noon  
RICHMOND BART, Downtown Richmond—March to Chevron Refinery  
2 pm: Action & Festival, Chevron Refinery, Pt. Richmond

Info: [www.globalizethis.org](http://www.globalizethis.org) OR [www.action4justice@onebox.com](mailto:www.action4justice@onebox.com) OR (510) 343-2139 x 5462

