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Twyford Down and the State

Anarchist Communist Federation

1993

Twyford Down is a beautiful area of high ground lying SE of Winchester in Hampshire. It is rich in historical features such as the site of an Iron Age village, pre-Roman field systems, and ancient trackways known as the Dongas, which a group of protesters have named themselves after. They have been camped on the site to defend it since at least last summer and constant actions have been going on with locals, Friends of the Earth supporters (who soon dropped out) and above all Earth Firsters who have been consistently in action against the proposed M3 eight-lane motorway beside the already existing four-lane bypass near Winchester College. Their tactics include sabotage against the main construction company slowing down work and a national Day of Action last November in which they stopped some destruction of landscape. Then on 9 December Winchester College got an eviction order from their land which they had sold to the Department of Transport. Group 4 Security guards were hired and physically fought with the protesters and brought in bulldozers. There was considerable violence on this day, including some alleged sexual assaults on women protesters. Now the earthmovers have moved in as of 23 February to start the destruction of the Down. The fight to save the Down

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lasted a week, with the protesters finally being evicted with great brutality. In one opinion poll only five per cent of Winchester's population wanted the Twyford Down cutting. 'Green celebrities' like Porritt and Bellamy as well as the Friends of the Earth lent their support to the campaign and direct action to save the Down was even mooted by the thoroughly respectable Residents' Association and Twyford Down Association. But this was all rhetoric and was, unsurprisingly, never put into practice when the DOT with the hired security men ruthlessly evicted the Dongas protesters.

To many, Twyford Down may seem like another Not in My Backyard (NIMBY) of little relevance to class struggle activists. But the Twyford Down affair, like the planned destruction of Oxleas Wood for similar reasons, is part of an international attack on the countryside and the environment for the needs of capitalism. The British State will tolerate no opposition to its plans, and will use State violence if it feels it to be necessary. The government has the powerful backing of the road lobby, and has need of a road infrastructure geared to compete with the high-speed rail link to the Channel Tunnel. Besides Twyford Down, there are over 15 new road schemes in preparation or under construction. Government expenditure on road schemes has gone up phenomenally since 1979. A vast number of historic and environmental sites are under threat. And this is just in Britain. The road scheme here is part of an international plan to provide Europe with a modernised road system geared to the free trade principles of the Single Market. France plans to double its road system by the year 2000, including driving a road through the Massif Central mountains. The European Commission plans a 50% growth of the road infrastructure. This is not all. The European Community is providing funds for several environmentally damaging hydro-electric projects. These include the diversion of the Aeheloos River in Greece, which will threaten many species of bird and ruin the livelihood of hundreds of fishing families; the funding of 250 dams in Spain, which will destroy more than 100 ecological sites; the funding of a large bridge over

the Tagus in Portugal, where the most environmentally damaging of three routes was chosen. The fight against the Twyford Down cutting has relevance to the fight back against roads in the rest of Britain. A nation-wide fight back against roads would include mobilisations against the Oxleas Wood development and the M11 link road through Hackney Marshes. It would need to link up with the developing opposition to road schemes and other forms of ecological damage throughout Europe. The fight at Twyford Down was bogged down in legalistic appeals to the European Court, and a letter-writing campaign to the Government and the Queen! The Dongas Tribe, to their credit did attempt to use direct action to stop the development. What was lacking however, was a mass mobilisation, so that the cutting could be physically stopped due to weight of numbers. There is an urgent need to link up the fight against road schemes to the fight of rail workers and bus workers. The car economy promoted by capitalism has to be directly related to the attacks on public transport, and the vision of a new society which would be geared to environmental harmony and the expansion of a free public transport system. The fight in the countryside has to go in tandem with inner-city actions against road schemes, such as Carmageddon mass blockages of roads that are beginning to develop.