OPINION PIECE

Unprofessional Women? Activism Against the Pursuit of Capital, Uranium Mining and 'Depleted' Uranium

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I. ABSTRACT

This paper looks at how Native American lands were plundered for uranium by the United States and how this uranium was used to develop not only nuclear bombs, but also radioactive weapons. The so-called “depleted uranium” (DU) weapons (with a half life of four and a half billion years) are harder than steel and gave the U.S. its technological edge to win the war against Iraq in 1991. The extraction and deployment of uranium have resulted in a cancer and birth epidemic which has traumatized the indigenous communities of the North American Southwest, where Navajo (Dineh,) Acoma Pueblo, and other peoples were forced to sell their labor power and dig up uranium from their land. In the south of Iraq, DU has been linked to a cancer and birth defect epidemic, which occurred in Iraq after the Gulf War. DU has also been the one of the reasons for one-third of the Gulf War veterans collecting disability pay. I analyze the war on these communities and their environments from the perspective of the pursuit of capital, using the theory of feminist materialism. I describe how four women (a Navajo, an Egyptian, an American, and an English woman) and a Hispanic-Anglo man initiated a documentary, medical tests, and the process at the United Nations that has presented a profound challenge to the use of militarized uranium. I conclude that this type of network linking
indigenous peoples could be a prototype of networks to challenge the adverse consequences of the pursuit of capital in the future.

II. WAR AND PURSUIT OF CAPITAL: ALEXANDRA KOLLONTAI AND FEMINISM MATERIALISM

The pursuit of capital, the accumulation of wealth over and above what is necessary for comfortably meeting basic needs, is often expressed in mainstream political theory as the “expansion in worldwide demand.” 1 In this explanation, the impetus for the extraction of raw materials to make commodities to sell at profit comes from the buyer and not the supplier. It is argued, therefore, that it is in the national interest of buyers to extend military power in order to protect the raw resources used to produce commodities.

To understand the true nature of capital, war, and the connection with gender, this paper uses as its theoretical framework the work of Alexandra Kollontai (1872-1952), the Russian Marxist revolutionary leader who ascended to power with the Bolsheviks in 1917. She explained the link between national security, war and access to resources as the “struggle of national capital on the world market. . . .Capital clashes with capital, fights with capital, each seeking to expel each other. Each desires mastery for itself, to retain its ‘monopoly,’ fleece the worker during the production of goods, and the customer during the sale of goods.” 2 Therefore, it is not the buyer but the supplier whose interests are at stake. A North American analyst wrote recently, “American strategy now focuses on oil-field protection, the defense of maritime trade routes and

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other aspects of resource security.” Resource security, in layman’s terms can be translated to mean the plundering of resources.

The need for capital to obtain a monopoly over a resource is the underlying reason why nations go to war, according to Kollontai. Therefore, the violation of other countries’ sovereign rights is built into the pursuit of national capital. “Wars will only end when the power of the capitalists has been smashed, when the owner-exploiters are no longer able to harm the people and push them into bloody conflicts.”

A. Imperial Wars and Nationalism

Today, the war on terrorism and the 1991 Gulf War bear remarkable similarities to World War I, which Kollontai deconstructed in “The War and Our Immediate Tasks”, a pamphlet published in 1914. In it, Kollontai spoke of World War I as a war of imperialist aggression:

to eliminate their rivals on the world market. . . as the capitalist economy develops in each state, capital begins to feel cramped in its own country. In order to increase profits and interest, capital requires that the market expand, requires new places, countries, colonies into which it can invest its accumulated capitals and from which the manufacturers and industrialists can obtain raw materials such as metal, ore and cotton, to produce goods. Colonies and domination of the world market are the causes of the disputes that flare up among the major modern powers. Each wishes to monopolize the market, each wishes to take all the profit for itself alone.

World War I was fought over the spoils of the colonies: gold, diamonds, and minerals. The 1991 Gulf war was over oil and the goal was to defeat Saddam Hussein’s government, a rival would-be hegemon that was threatening to take over half of the world’s oil reserves. Today’s War on Terrorism is also war largely about oil. Since 1997, U.S. troops have been in direct military cooperation with the newly independent states of the Caspian Sea region. According to the U.S. Department of Energy, the Caspian Sea basin harbors as much as 270

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3 Ibid, p. 6
billion barrels of oil, or about one-fifth of the world’s proven reserves. Only the Persian Gulf, with 665 billion barrels, holds more.\(^5\) Until 1992, these oil and gas deposits were the exclusive property of the Soviet State. A plan has been existence since then for a permanent U.S. military presence in order to ensure Western capital benefit from these resources.\(^6\) The terrorist attack on New York provided the causa belli.

World War I was also declared after a terrorist attack on a minor archduke. As Kollontai describes it in “Who Needs the War?” (1915), “[n]ational feelings [were] artificially stimulated by the capitalists and junkers of every country in the world with the help of the church and the press . . . The imperialist-capitalist world skillfully manipulates people’s national sentiments in order to drive its own national population into the ready-prepared lethal trap of war.” Russian and German soldiers were “fighting in the dark” and she outlined the propaganda myths that Russian soldiers were told that they were going to war to help the German people achieve liberty from the Russian Czar; the French were told that they were taking back Alsace Lorraine from the Germans, and they were going to ‘liberate’ the German people. Similarly, we are told that we are fighting to liberate Kuwait, or for Afghanistsans to achieve liberty from the Taliban. While that may appear to be true on the surface of things, as Kollontai says, the same leaders had been working together previously “to set up factories and trading companies, together robbed the colonies in Asia and Africa, [and then] profited from the production of cannon and armored vehicles.” Similarly, the U.S. has been trading with Saddam Hussein, enabling him to buy weapons, before the Gulf War during the eighties, and the U.S. had helped to set up the Taliban as a military hedge against the Soviet Union in the early nineties.

\(^4\) Ibid, “What Is To Be Done” p 89
\(^5\) Klare, T Michael, Resource Wars, p 2.
\(^6\) Defense Planning Guidance, 1992
Kollontai explains how these resource wars prevent the poor from uniting against their exploiters. She stated: “the capitalists set the workers of one country against the workers of another country in order to strengthen their hold on workers throughout the world. The capitalists wage war in order to share the spoils and weaken the workers by division.”

Again, this description has remarkable similarities to what is happening today. The poor are sent to fight against the poor in wars that bring wealth to the rich. Around the equator is where the greatest deposits of the world’s minerals reside, in addition to oil, the most important river systems, diamonds, timber, copper and iron are found here. The world’s ruling classes declare wars with each other over resources, but most often against self-determination movements that wish to hold onto its resources. According to the analyst Michael T. Klare, “[t]here is a high correlation between areas of conflict and concentrations of critical materials within this broad equatorial band. Even wars that are generally blamed on other factors -- such as the fighting in Columbia, Timor or Sudan- often possess, on closer inspection, a hidden resource-related element.”

B. Gender, War, and Capital

In the early 20th century, women theorists and revolutionary leaders used Marx’s theory of historical materialism to move the “woman question” front and center into the conflict between capital and labor. Alexandra Kollontai, Rosa Luxembourg, Clara Zetkin, and many other European feminist revolutionaries published a theory that was widely praised among Western European feminists up until the 1920s, but which since has fallen out of favor in feminist mainstream circles in the West. Kollontai’s work was also marginalized by the Soviet patriarchy, as a result of her critique of the Bolshevik government for removing workers’ control

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over industry, and because of her views on free love that were inimical to the conservatism that had set in after the 1917 Revolution.

Alexandra Kollontai (1872-1952)

What special role do women play in the exploitation of labor, the pursuit of capital and the execution of wars, whose aim is only to secure capital? In The Social Basis of the Woman Question (1908), Kollontai wrote that the original oppression of women was the historical moment in time when men took control over women’s bodies, a theory first proposed by Friedrich Engels. But she discounts theories of separatism—that women are essentially different (superior) from men. She was critical of the women’s right to work movement in the 19th and early 20th centuries, because it was not to emancipate working women from the drudgery of physical labor but to bring bourgeois women the opportunity to participate in mental labor and to obtain an equal share to the profits that capitalists generate from surplus labor derived from labor power of their “younger sisters,” who were already in the workforce. She explains that bourgeois women were able to make their class-based demands for the right to participate in mental labor as a result of the working women’s physical labor power:
Is it really possible to talk of the [bourgeois] feminists pioneering the road to women’s work, when in every country hundreds of thousands of proletarian women had flooded the factories and workshops, taking over one branch of industry over another, before the bourgeois women’s movement was ever born? Only thanks to the fact that the labor of women workers had received recognition on the world market were the bourgeois women able to occupy the independent position in society in which the feminists take so much pride.\(^8\)

Kollontai summarized bourgeois feminism as a question of rights and justice, and the activism of women workers, as a question of political rights over social and economic rights “a piece of bread.” \(^9\)

According to Kollontai and other Marxist feminist activists of her time, women-specific reforms were to be gained only within the context of the struggle between capital and labor. Their strategy was largely successful: women in the early 20th century gained the vote first in countries that had socialist governments at the time: Russia, Finland, Australia and New Zealand. Women’s suffrage was gained only later by countries such as the U.S. and the U.K. When the Bolshevik Party came to power in Russia in 1917, and the economy changed from capitalism to state-run socialism, women won unprecedented reforms in legal rights, material conditions, and sexual roles. Kollontai herself was appointed by Lenin to head the Commissariat for Social Welfare, where she reformed marriage laws, maternity care, and created state-run day care, all reforms ahead of their time compared to Western capitalist countries. The Soviet government was the first government in the world to officially and legally recognize maternity as one of the social functions of women. Kollontai was the world’s first woman ambassador, representing the Soviet Union for 25 years (although she would have preferred to concentrate on her writings on free love and gender.) Kollontai, along with Clara Zetkin, of the Social Democratic Party in Germany argued for female autonomy to pursue women’s rights within the

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8 Ibid p 259
working class movement, and to liberate women through socialism. “Socialists believed that women would be liberated only when all people were free, and that the means to the end was the abolition of private property through revolution.”

Before the Soviet Revolution, Kollontai clashed with Lenin and the Bolshevik Party in her desire to move women’s issues front and center, but Lenin saw the advantages of Kollontai’s work to build a woman’s workers movement. After the Bolsheviks gained power, she noted that there was no need for women workers to have separate organizations, since “in Soviet Russia, the proletariat of both sexes are indissolubly united in their struggle to establish and consolidate the dictatorship [of the proletariat.]” But she again clashed with the Party leadership on questions of sexual freedom and workers’ control over industry. Fiercely committed to the integrity of the Revolution, she led the first theoretical attack on Lenin and Trotsky from within the Bolshevik Party, by founding The Workers’ Opposition, an effort to democratize early Soviet society throughout the industrial proletariat. Kollontai and the Workers’ Opposition were unsuccessful. The Soviet Union went onto to compete with the capitalist countries on their terms. The country’s economy was militarized in order to follow a policy of deterrence during the Cold War; this included the mining of uranium to make bombs. This paper does not equate the political economy of the Soviet Union with Socialism as envisioned by Kollontai.

C. **Kollontai’s Theoretical Contribution: Childbearing and Childcare as Unpaid Labor**

Toward the end of his life, Engels appeared to have acknowledged that Marx’s historical materialist theory overemphasized the role of economics as the fundamental determinant factor of exploitation. Engels alluded briefly to this oversight:

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10 Clements, Barbara Evans, Bolshevik Feminist, the Life of Aleksandra Kollontai, Bloomington and New York: Indiana University Press, 1979, p 43.
According to the materialist conception of history, the determining factor in history is, in the final instance, the production and reproduction of real life . . . if after Marx anyone so deforms this proposition as to make it say that the economic factor is the sole determinant, he will have transformed it into an empty, abstract, and absurd catch-phrase. The economic situation is the base, but the diverse elements of the superstructure, political forms of the class struggle, and its results – the constitutions established once a class emerges victorious from the battle, and so forth – the juridical forms, and also the reflections of these real struggles upon the minds of the participants…and their later development into dogmatic forms [here Engels seems to predict the rigidification of the socialist revolution in Russia] – all equally exert an effect on the course of historical struggles.

In the same letter, Engels regretted that he and Marx failed “to render justice to the other factors that participated” in exploitation, other than the economic factors.11

This statement by Engels leaves future generations plenty of scope to analyze what might constitute the “production and reproduction of real life.” But where should we begin to look for clues, other than in economic relations?

Kollontai, as a feminist, looked for clues about the nature of exploitation in the real lives of women. Her contribution was to conceptualize childbearing and caring as labor paid for by the laboring class out of its subsistence wages, thus contributing to surplus value appropriated by the capitalist class. Her thesis is very relevant today:

The family as it has been handed down to us was based on specific economic principles. It rested on production relations. . . the family was an economic unit. . . in order to flourish (both economically and socially) the family required new members, a constant inflow of fresh labor . . . [N]ow the constant inflow of fresh labor, necessary to ensure the further development of the productive forces, is no longer needed by the family, but by the whole of the social collective . . . the care of young children and the mothers who gave birth to them should be the responsibility of the community . . . . Present state authorities on the other hand who serve only the interests of the monopolists seek to make use of the ready made labor force while freeing themselves of all responsibility for the life of the children, and mothers, preferring to impose on the individual private family those obligations which it once bore at another, earlier stage in human economic development.

Such an inappropriate and contradictory state of affairs could only arise historically, but history is called upon to correct.

D. **Kollontai Links Exploitation to Low Birth Rate**

Kollontai was the first to point out a key connection between exploitation of labor and the low birth rate of the children of the laboring class. Because the workers’ families pay for the reproduction of their class, this has led to “the deliberate lowering of the birth rate and increases infant mortality. . . . children [in the most deprived section of the population] then become the most intolerable burden.”

As the pursuit of capital led to the hunt for cheap labor markets across the world, ethnic and racialized communities became easy targets for industrial exploitation. The lowering of the birth rate associated with exploitation of the labor power of a targeted community carries genocidal implications.

In the 1970s, there was a resurgence of interest in feminist materialism by writers such as Michele Barrett, Christine Delphy, and Juliet Mitchell. Feminist writers today have also conceptualized such labor as "reproductive labor," so-named because “it reproduces all the labor which produces commodities for the world capitalist system, i.e., it produces the human beings themselves and all the labor it takes to bring the raise the new labor market”. It is generally forgotten that Kollontai had reached this conclusion much earlier on and had advocated the socialization of the family through the state as a way of collectivization the burden of bearing and raising a labor market.

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Despite strong reservations about Marx’s predictions and fears that the strong workers’
state control he advocated (as did Kollontai, Luxembourg and Zetkin) would be patriarchal,
contemporary feminist theorists ultimately do not stray much beyond the analytical tools of
feminist materialism. Taking as their starting point the accumulation of capital, as opposed to
masculine control over women’s bodies, they conceptualize gender, class, and race as
constitutive elements of oppression and exploitation. Despite glaring omissions by Marx for
leaving out the “bottom layer of society” as a class category and not predicting post-Fordism in
factories that precludes class-consciousness, “this cannot mean jettisoning the concept of class
formation as a descriptive and analytical category”.

According to theorist Mies, an influential argument countering feminist materialism
explains that bourgeois women in the West and “third world” women have a common enemy –
patriarchy – and thus have common ground to transcend divisions. Kollontai would not have
argued with Mies’ claim that capital had been accumulated from women’s labor, but she would
have been concerned about Mies’ conflation of “men” with “patriarchy.” Were she alive today,
she might have argued that patriarchy operates as the institutionalized rule by a minority of men
who have gained economic and military ascendancy over a majority of men, as well as women,
through, among other methods, the appropriation of men’s bodies for use in military campaigns
and hard physical labor. Kollontai would certainly have questioned Mies’ claim that modern
capitalist industrialized countries are patriarchies, given the inroads into bastions of male power
made by women in the West.

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Today, Black feminism echoes Kollontai’s plea for unity among the oppressed and her critique of separatism as a bourgeois concept, while emphasizing the connection between class, race and gender: “Although we are feminists and lesbians, we feel solidarity with progressive Black men and do not advocate the factionalism that white women who are separatists demand. Our situation as Black people necessitates that we have solidarity around the fact of race, which white women of course do not need to have with white men.”  

This is echoed by Native American theorist, Jaimes, who in 1992 claimed that first and foremost they are Native Americans resisting colonialism.

E. Uranium, Exploitation of Labor and War: Southern Iraq and the Southwest of North America

At different points in history, the two regions, Mesopotamia and the southwest of North America, became victims of the same pursuit of wealth and resources, largely but not solely, engaged in by white males. The crusaders of the Middle Ages, Italian merchants of the Renaissance and colonizer-merchants of the 18th century had plundered booty from the Levant, while in the early 20th century, prompted by the discovery of oil, the merchants and soldiers of Britain and France divided the Gulf region between them. Building on the same pile of capital accumulated from conquered territory abroad, but mostly from land capital plundered from peasants in their own countries, the offsprings of the ruling European elites set about conquering the territories of the Native American.

A woman living in rural Iraq comes from a very different culture than her Navajo counterpart, yet both are linked because they have been marginalized and targeted in the pursuit

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of capital and profit. In the Middle East, oil is the raw material pursued by both Iraq and the U.S. In Iraq, under Baath National Socialism, oil wealth was nationalized and helped to develop an advanced welfare state, with a public health system that was the envy of the Middle East. The oil wealth was not used to build a sustainable, self-sufficient economy; however, much of it went to buttress the power of the ruling military elite led by President Saddam Hussein, and the development of military technology. On the eve of the 1991 Gulf War, Iraq’s food supplies were 70 per cent dependent on imports. This policy was to have catastrophic consequences when the U.S.-led embargo against Iraq took effect in 1990.

In the case of the U.S., the pursuit of oil in the Gulf is linked first, to create capital in the U.S. itself through U.S. corporate deals with oil monarchies, and second, as a potential instrument to control the European and Japanese economies, which are dependent on Gulf oil. U.S. military might is needed in this endeavor, to militarize those regions, which contain the most oil reserves: the Middle East, the Caspian Sea, the South China Sea, and Africa. While the U.S. cannot station large numbers of troops in those areas, it relies instead on a rapid deployment strategy, in which troops can be sent rapidly when a crisis erupts. In addition, the U.S. strengthens the military capabilities of regional allies, such as Kuwait and Saudi Arabia-creating a bonanza for U.S. arms suppliers.

Uranium is useful in these wars, because it is the raw material used to develop nuclear bombs, and whoever has the biggest and most lethal weapons wins the war over resources. The technology of war tells us much about the pursuit of capital. Marx tells us “technology bares man’s modes of actions vis a vis nature, the process of the production of his material life, and

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consequence the origin of social relations and the ideas and intellectual conceptions that spring from them.”\textsuperscript{17} Uranium is a metal and metal is perhaps something that nature had not intended for human use, since it is buried in the ground. Metals have historically developed for two purposes: for technology useful for survival (housing, transportation, tools) and for technology useful for destruction (swords, battleships, tanks). Interestingly, there may be a connection between the use of metal for destructive purposes and the original oppression of women. “The archeological evidence. . .supports the conclusion that it was not metals, per se, but rather their use in developing ever more effective technologies of destruction, that played a critical part in what Engels terms ‘the historical defeat of the female sex.’”\textsuperscript{18}

In the 18th century, the labor power of impoverished Bavarian men was used to dig up coal. That is when the first uranium was found. This is also where it was first noted that contact with uranium produced a disease identified as cancer of the lung. The link between uranium and cancer was thus established, but remained secret knowledge held by the male ruling classes.

By the 1920s, uranium had been discovered by explorers in the southwest portion of North America. In the 1940s, impoverished male Navajos were employed to dig it up for the production of nuclear bombs for the U.S. government in its quest for military global superiority.

The Navajo miners were not told of the cancer-uranium connection. In a classic capital-labor relationship of exploitation, capitalist corporations brought the means of production, set up sites in Arizona and elsewhere, and hired a local laboring class of people to dig up the uranium. The miners, Navajos, Acoma Pueblos and others, sold their labor power which gave the uranium its value in two ways: 1) by digging it up and giving it use-value it did not have under the

\textsuperscript{17} Ibid, p. 66.
ground, and 2) providing a half day of labor free to the corporations-hours that exceeded those they were paid for at subsistence wages. Without the labor power of the Navajos, the corporations would not have been able to sell the uranium to the U.S. government, which needed the uranium for the nuclear weapons they were stockpiling during the Cold War. Corporations kept wages low so that they did not encroach on the surplus value of the labor, and; therefore did not cut into their profits. Keeping labor costs down was easy to do since the Navajos lived on a reservation where there were no other industrial laboring jobs available, only subsistence sheep farming. Desperate to feed their families, the Navajos had no choice. Navajo families bore the child rearing costs, which had to be paid out of subsistence wages.

The capitalist-laborer relationship was further complicated by the colonised-coloniser relationship that existed between the U.S. and the Navajo communities. The resources and land had been plundered already in the 19th century. Although, the relationship was similar to that which had existed between the German miners and their employers in the 18th century, and a similar fate befell them, it had genocidal consequences for the Navajo. A cancer epidemic emerged in the 1970s after the miners took home yellow dust and the miners and their families contracted cancer. By 1967, 20,000 Navajos miners were working. It is estimated that approximately 4,000 have contracted cancer from mining, and there has been a dramatic increase in anomalous birth defects and neurological diseases in the Navajo community, the extent of which has not yet been tabulated. In this way, the genetic integrity of the Navajos has been compromised for generations to come.

F. **Resistance and Self Determination**

Where there is exploitation, there is resistance. Lenin pointed out that the concept of national self-determination was critical for the liberation of colonies from their imperialist
masters. Iraq, a former British protectorate, gained its national independence in 1932, and in 1972 nationalized both the production and distribution of its oil resources. The economic and social position of Iraqi women greatly improved after that point. But the United States has consistently opposed any sign of Arab nationalism and independence. Consequently, Arabs have been dehumanized. “They are seen as violent irrational terrorists always on the lookout for murder and bombing outrages.”19 The Shia who live in the South of Iraq have similarly led revolts against Saddam Hussein. The most recent revolt took place after the Gulf War.

Native Americans who fight for independence have also been targeted as terrorists or cop-killers. For example, the political prisoner Leonard Peltier languishes in prison today for his role in the struggle for self-determination at Wounded Knee in 1973. Resistance was initiated largely by women, not surprisingly, because before European contact, Native American societies were mostly matrilineal and decision-making was done by women as well as men.

Resistance to the plundering of land by the colonialists and neocolonialists has come from women such as Janet McCloud (Tulalip) and Ramona Bennett (Puyallup), who led the “fish-ins” in Washington D.C., a campaign to preserve the treaty right to fish. Initially nonviolent actions, they were met with violent police reprisals. An elder Nisqually woman urged the campaign to adopt armed self-defense, which ultimately proved more successful.20 The militancy shown by these women became the prototype for the American Indian Movement. In the early 1970s, women such as elder Oglala Lakota, Ellen Moves Camp, and Gladys Bissonette advocated armed defense when they led the siege of Wounded Knee. At Big Mountain, the former Navajo-Hopi Joint Use Area in Arizona, the federal government is attempting forcibly to

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relocate more than 10,000 Dineh (Navajo) in order to exploit the land for coal. Leading the resistance again are the elder women, such as Katherine Smith, Roberta Blackgoat, and Pauline Whitesinger.

Many of these women have lost relatives in reprisals from the Federal government. Explaining why they take such risks, Maria Sanchez the leading member of the Northern Cheyenne resistance to corporate development for their reservation says, “I am the mother of nine children. My concern is for their future, for their children, and for future generations. As a woman, I draw strength from traditional spiritual people. . .from my nation. The oil and gas companies are building a huge gas chamber for the Northern Cheyennes.”

It is often not understood that in international law, women and men who defend their lands and persons by taking up arms, as Native Americans are doing and continue to do, possess the right to use force. Working with the Special Rapporteur at the UN Commission on Human Rights, attorney Karen Parker defines self determination as “an individual and collective right of a people to determine their political status and to pursue their economic, social and cultural development in the context of a history of self-rule or independence in an identifiable territory, a distinct culture and a will and capability to retain self-governance.”

The right of self determination “includes the right to use all available legitimate means, including the use of force” which should be against “lawful military targets” such as “combatants, military bases, warehouses, petroleum storage depots, ports, airfields, military aircrafts, weapons etc.” Of course it is always preferable to not use force. Karen Parker and other international law experts

21 Ibid p 313.
advocate the use of plebiscites to indicate the true wishes of the people. The United Nations has mandated a number of plebiscites, including recent ones held in Namibia and East Timor.

Today, regarding uranium mining, resistance is coming from the dependants and widows of uranium miners. There have been no public health studies of the miners and their families; one is about to start as of this writing as a result of the campaigning work of a grassroots organization called The Navajo Uranium Miners’ Dependents Committee, composed mainly of women. Since the attack on New York in September 2001, Congress has signed a law to fund new uranium mines in the Southwest. This plan and the current plan to dump nuclear waste in Yucca Mountain in New Mexico is being resisted by indigenous groups on whose lands these uranium sites will desecrate.

G. **Depleted Uranium – U238**

From the ore dug up by the Navajos, only 1 per cent is fissionable. This is U235. In the seventies, the U.S. Army came up with an idea to ‘recycle’ the 99 per cent of uranium that remained, called U238. Misnamed ‘depleted uranium’ (DU) U238 has a half-life of four and one half billion years and was used to coat bullets and tanks because it is stronger than steel and very explosive on contact.

In 1990, Iraq invaded Kuwait, a hegemonic move that threatened U.S. interests in the Gulf-above all U.S. access to oil and control by U.S. corporations over the distribution of Gulf oil. The U.S. told its citizenry that it wished to liberate Kuwait (a feudal oil monarchy that discriminated fiercely against women) and even liberate the Iraqi population from the dictatorship of Saddam Hussein, with whom it had previously been trading, as had the rest of the world, including the Soviet Union and China. The U.S. Government sent its soldiers on a war of liberation, but it was clear to many that this was a war over oil. Shipped along with 500,000 U.S.
troops came depleted uranium weapons and tanks, providing a technological superiority over the Iraqi troops that helped the U.S.-led coalition to win that war. It is estimated that 300 tons of DU were left behind in the south of Iraq after the war, but by far the worst impacts would have been from aerosolized DU contaminating the air and penetrating lungs. Since the Gulf War, cancer rates have increased exponentially as have birth defect rates. The World Health Organization is planning to visit the south of Iraq to study the link between DU and the health catastrophe that has devastated these communities. In the U.S., a third of the U.S. Gulf War veterans are on disability, suffering from a variety of ailments called Gulf War Syndrome, including a high rate of Lou Gehrig’s disease as well as birth defects in their families.23

The U.S. insists that DU cannot travel above ten feet from the ground, and therefore is not responsible for cancer deaths in Iraq. The U.S. has, however, admitted that Navajo miners contracted cancer from the uranium they dug up from the earth, and limited amounts of compensation have been granted to miners, although none has been granted to families.

H. Cross-Cultural, Cross-Disciplinary Activist Project

In 1996, my partner Daniel Robicheau and I formed a small organization to produce a film entitled "From Radioactive Mines to Radioactive Weapons" (1999). We collaborated with Egyptian activist Dr. Beatrice Boctor, activist Anna Rondon (Dineh) of the Southwest Indigenous Uranium Forum, and with Welsh activists Marguerite and Rob Minninnick of Sustainable Wales. From the video’s website:

The film chronicled how three large communities of people have been effected by uranium's cycle of destruction: 1) the Navajo uranium miners of the American Southwest, 2) 1991 Gulf War Veterans affected by uranium's by-product depleted

23 “Of the 690,000 troops sent to the Gulf in 1990-91, the great majority is now separated from service and thus eligible to apply for disability compensation. More than 200,000 have done so.” From “Gulf War Syndrome: From Cockpit to Wheelchair” 28th December, 2002, Miami Herald, http://www.miami.com/herald/content/opinion/opcol/digdocs/012500.htm
uranium in the UK and USA, and 3) the Iraqi people and environment against whom Depleted Uranium bullets and shells were used in an experimental manner. Depleted Uranium--U238- is not depleted of its uranium-the U-235 portion is merely reduced to be used for nuclear power stations and bombs.24

We commissioned Dr. Hari Sharma, a university radio chemist from Ontario Canada to use a new radiometric method to show continued presence of U-238. Eight to nine years after the war, Dr. Sharma found DU in the urine of war veterans from the U.S., Canada, the U.K., and Iraq. The scientific findings are extremely important; important enough for Dr. Sharma to have been questioned by Defense Department heads from the U.S., U.K., New Zealand, Australia, and Canada at one meeting. Dr Sharma’s findings were publicized widely around the world, although not in the U.S.

In 1996, we went to Geneva where we met with Women for Mutual Security and Karen Parker, the human rights attorney based in San Francisco. Karen began a process at the Sub-Commission for the Protection and Promotion of Human Rights to condemn the use of DU.

The documentary “From Radioactive Mines to Radioactive Weapons” has been shown around the world, and currently is being shown at Navajo Chapter Houses by the aforementioned Navajo grassroots committee, composed mainly of women who are dependents of uranium miners and who have mounted a campaign to gain federal compensation for the family illnesses caused by uranium. The legal initiative continues to be carried out, by Karen Parker. We included in this legal initiative a process to condemn the horrific impacts of sanctions against Iraq, which have caused the deaths of a million people according to a 1999 UNICEF report. Iraqi women have borne the brunt of the sanctions. The U.S. and U.K. have bombed Iraq periodically since 1998.

24 www.spidel.net/frmtw
Since our efforts began, the continued use of DU (against Yugoslavia and Afghanistan) has alarmed the European Community sufficiently so they have declared a ban on the use of DU, and there are signs of a shift by the U.S. military to the use of tungsten instead of DU to strengthen bullets and tanks.

Karen Parker has taken on the responsibility of pursuing the legal initiative at the UN Commission on Human Rights and its subsidiary body, the UN Sub Commission for the Protection and Promotion of Human Rights. Although both funding and organizational support were requested, Karen’s effort was undertaken without either. Two women Sub Commission members who advanced the critique of DU have been targeted. In 1996, when a woman lawyer from the UK and member of the Sub Commission introduced the first resolution condemning DU as a weapon of mass destruction, she was told she was “unprofessional” for doing so by the U.S.-appointed member of the Sub Commission—a man. This is the classic method used by men to devalue women’s opinions in a professional setting. The UK lawyer, however, was not deterred. The UN Secretary General passed an introductory resolution and commissioned a report, written with Karen’s input. The following year, a woman lawyer from Columbia, also a member of the Sub Commission, was appointed to carry out a study of DU by the Sub Commission. However, this woman was an ally of the Columbian government and due to rumors of pressure by the U.S. she did not attend the Sub Commission the following year nor has she reappeared since that year. Hence, the study was delayed considerably, a de facto victory for the U.S. Nevertheless, Karen Parker continues her lobbying efforts at the Sub Commission and last March obtained the support of another member, and the task of a DU study was once again approved by the Sub Commission. Since then, whenever we have sent out emails asking for data for the study on DU, Karen has received emails sent anonymously that threaten her person. It would be hard to say
where these emails are coming from, of course. Karen and I feel that we are isolated and have put ourselves at personal risk in this endeavor. Both of us are mothers, which makes us doubly concerned about safety issues but, being mothers, we also identify with the mothers of Iraq and the Southwest, who are helplessly watching their babies suffer and die from cancers and birth defects.

A crucial stage has been reached in the legal process at the Sub Commission since it began in 1996. If the study on DU is accepted by the Sub Commission this March, 2004, then a resolution condemning the use of DU will automatically go to the Commission next year and to the General Assembly in the following years. Karen’s legal strategy is to show that the use of DU is illegal per se and that there is no need for a legal treaty or ban on DU. In this argument, any past use of DU is considered illegal. This implies massive clean-ups and the potential for lawsuits by those with DU still in their bodies. The cost to the U.S. and the U.K. will be astronomical. In this way, our small effort challenges the legal foundations of the United State’s use of depleted uranium. Thus, the profound ripple effect will no doubt incite the U.S. to further resistance to our efforts.

Karen Parker points out that Humanitarian Law is clear on the issue of depleted uranium because its use does not just injure combatants. It also harms the unborn and generations to come. Legal experts from the International Indian Treaty Council demonstrate that uranium mining is illegal per se because it poisons local environments and peoples, and because the use of uranium bombs in wartime is against international law. Uranium mining is on the upswing again, and it is primarily being done in indigenous regions around the world, desecrating sacred sites and polluting the environment.
III. CONCLUSIONS

A. Killing Humans To Create Capital

Alexandra Kollontai’s two key contributions were to point out first, that the laboring class family provides the raw human energy needed for material production with women bearing the costs in the form of unpaid labor and second, that a low birth rate is intrinsically linked to exploitation of labor. Building on this last observation, the link between death and labor, I would like to advance the theoretical supposition, perhaps not new, that the death of people as well as the destruction of living resources is necessary in order to produce surplus value.

For the capitalist, material life is a finite resource. The whole of material life can be likened, in this view, to a pie that is divided up into pieces. Kollontai defines capitalism as “the name given to an economic system in which capital, factories, and land are divided up among a comparatively small group of people in the country.”25 There is only so much pie, only the strongest have the ability to grab most of the pieces of the pie, the weakest must make do with the crumbs and therefore may die in this scenario. This idea is encapsulated by the dominant twin ideologies of ‘might is right’ and the ‘ends justify the means.’ The same concept applies to culling raw materials from nature to make cash or commodities. For example, to produce construction materials for a house, loggers cut down trees but do not replace them. This is because, in the mind of the capitalist, a raw material is ultimately in existence only to make cash, which is an unloving thing, a dead object. The tree is not a tree, it is a substitute for cash and therefore an unloving thing. The primary aim of the capitalist is not to ensure that living things

go on living or reproducing themselves, but to make cash. This is the belief system underlying the dominant concept of material production today.

In this scarcity “pie” scenario, he who appropriates the most has the most power over his competitors. He has the most machinery and factories at his disposal (the means of production.) Those with the most power choose what living resources and which human being is sacrificed to enable them to get the most profit from each commodity. The scarcity concept is used to justify paying the laborer just enough to sustain him or herself, this obviously is important to ensure she/he comes to work the next day, but with nothing left over. Capitalists say, “[w]e can’t afford pay raises.” The reality is labor costs must not eat into profit. This is the reason why wages do not keep pace with inflation, but capitalist salaries far exceed inflation. As the laborer continues to give up her/his physical life force in the unsustainable extraction process, the body of the laborer wears down, and she/he dies a slow death, if not in body then in spirit, because the mental power of the laborer withers away. Often conditions are dangerous, as in the uranium mining, and premature death is inevitable.

Out of the laborer’s wages, she or he must pay for the rearing of his or her children. When Navajo families lost their male providers to cancer, this increased the Navajo women’s childrearing burden. Without compensation, the Navajo uranium widows today bear the additional costs of bringing up their children without their partners’ salaries. The children become a burden and cannot be enjoyed. Their lives are also sacrificed and in addition, many of these children suffer from illnesses and birth defects resulting from contact with uranium dust. Many have consumed water in pits leftover from the mines and suffer neuropathy, which is the gradual atrophying of nerves in the hands and feet.
In addition, armed soldiers (also expendable lives) and weapons are needed in this violent pursuit of the pieces of the pie. This is how the poor of the U.S. were pressed into service, having no other economic opportunities and then were disabled, not in battle, but afterwards. This is how the people of southern Iraq became victims of U.S. imperialist aggression in competition with Iraq over oil profits. Iraq was attacked in 1991, primarily as a result of the threat to Western domination of oil posed by the government of Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait.\textsuperscript{26} This was followed by the UN blockade, which restricted food, medicine, and the sale of oil by the Iraqi state. The blockade against the sale of oil has crippled the economy and dramatically increased unemployment. The Iraqi government stepped in with a ration system to provide basic calories per diem, but it was not sufficient. In this way, the families of the south of Iraq bore the brunt of the war over oil, suffering under the impacts of DU and sanctions. Their children, instead of being a joy, have become a burden.

B. \textbf{Artificial Enemies}

Capitalists seek the most cost effective, inexpensive methods of production so as to maximize profits. Similarly, cost effective methods are necessary in the military plundering of raw resources. DU is highly cost effective because it goes on producing death and genetic weaknesses long after the initial weapon is placed inside the targeted setting. The U.S. has used depleted uranium weapons not only to contain Saddam Hussein’s militarily, but also as a cost-effective measure of weakening an entire population. The U.S. did this to ensure that Iraq, as a collection of people, would not regain sufficient strength to threaten U.S. access to Middle East

\textsuperscript{26} Saddam Hussein was demonized by the U.S. to justify the Gulf War and the ongoing sanctions war. But, according to France Agence Presse, Saddam Hussein has offered to step down rather than have his country bombarded again. Farouk Choukri, \textit{Saddam Hussein met au defi George W. Bush de renverser son regime}, Agence France Presse, Feb 23, 2002.
Another cost effective method was to use the most powerless, impoverished populations to fight wars and to produce the material and weapons needed for wars. In this way, indirect, undeclared and hidden wars are manipulated between peoples. In the case of the Gulf War the hidden, undeclared war was between the Navajos and Iraqis, in a sense, they became artificial enemies, although similarities in their relationship to capital override their differences.

C. Uranium and Oil Gender Issues

Only the socialist and faith-based organizations in the U.S. have campaigned against DU, sanctions, and uranium mining in general. The silence in Western feminist literature, whether radical, feminist materialist, eco-feminist or liberal, on the interlocking pursuit of oil and uranium, has been deafening. Perhaps oil and uranium are not seen as “gender” issues. Not having conducted a survey of feminist theorists on this question, I can only speculate on the reason for the silence. Maybe it is because appeals to national security made by the U.S. to justify its attack on Iraq and the ongoing sanctions, which have cost at least a million lives, are as powerful as they were to the German, English, French and Russian workers who believed in socialism and yet willingly fought each other in a war over colonies from 1914 to 1918. Maybe it is because contemporary feminist practice has too much “colonialist content. . . .At the present time, Native Americans in general are not comfortable with feminist analysis or action within reservation or urban Indian enclaves. Many Indian women are uncomfortable because they perceive it (correctly) as white-dominated.”

But uranium poisoning does not stop at the borders, it spreads regardless of gender, class or race. Naturally, its initial, perhaps most deleterious effects are felt in the targeted community. However, genocide affects women, men, and children alike. In the south of Iraq, or in the Southwest of North America, if a child dies in-utero, or a few years after she is born, this constitutes a direct attack on both the female and male “unborn.” In those communities, since the unborn are approximately half female and half male and are carrying within them the tools of reproduction, future generations of women and men may be lost.

Air, water and earth do not conveniently stop at regional or national borders. This is as irrational as believing that air, water and earth can be divided up into pieces of pie. Those who reject blind faith in modern science note that radioactive pollution travels on the wind, in groundwater, in the sea, and up through the food chain. Similarly, a materialist feminist analysis understands that no part of human life is free from the resource demands and defense requirements of capital accumulation. The unrelenting search for consumer and labor markets, coupled with the proliferation of U.S. army bases, has resulted in an unprecedented mixing of the gene pool. In addition, the U.S. has exposed its own army personnel to DU. The irradiated gene travels through time and space, through generations and across borders.

One does not have to understand uranium issues from a materialist feminist perspective to grasp the fact that exposed uranium is a public health danger and is illegal under several existing laws. The nongovernmental attorney Karen Parker is not a Marxist. If feminism is defined by values that promote life rather than death, then it is time to call for a global movement by women to pursue the overriding goal of ending the “unjust, inequitable capitalist structure of society.”
E. What Is To Be Done? Recommendations for Strategies

I believe the small project that produced the video *From Radioactive Mines To Radioactive Weapons* and initiated the legal and medical strategies is a perfect example of the type of strategic alliances necessary today. The participation of Dr. Beatrice Boctor from Egypt and Anna Rondon (Dineh) as project coordinators was powerful, as was the presence of Karen Parker, the international lawyer crucial in bringing the issues of DU to the UN forum beyond the restrictions of U.S. domestic law. Also playing key roles were Daniel Robicheau, who edited and narrated the film; Rob Minhinnock, the Welsh poet who helped to set up filming in Iraq and subsequently wrote an award winning poem on the impacts of sanctions; Margaret Minhinnock, a television producer; and Dr. Hari Sharma, the radio chemist from India who did the DU tests. Daniel and I were able to travel from the U.K. to the Southwest and back again, to make these cross-cultural connections happen. Private capital of one of our group and foundation capital financed the projects estimated at a half million dollars.

When the documentary is shown to a Native American audience, there are instinctive connections made with the Iraqi communities suffering from DU, reflecting on the connection that exists between the exploitation of oil and uranium, the exploitation of labor by capital, and the destruction of people and land which stand in the way of those pursuing capital. The documentary made these connections explicit in its message.

I proffer a Marxist analysis of the pursuit of capital, but not a strictly Marxist-Leninist solution; e.g. the Party or intellectual vanguard as the engine that leads the masses to the socialist revolution. I believe that the Native American resistance movement offers the greatest potential
for progressive thought for networks of activists worldwide for two reasons. First, it is the oldest liberation struggle waged by colonized people from inside the empire against the apparatus of Western capitalist patriarchal structures. Second, the Native American society before European contact was the living example of how equal gender relations were an intrinsic part of sustainability and economic justice. To smash that link, the colonialists had to first divide the Native American men from the Native American women. The struggle then ensued that is essentially the struggle of all oppressed peoples; collectivity versus private accumulation, hard technologies used for death and destruction, versus soft technologies use to preserve life, and patriarchy versus matriarchy. Today, there are signs of revitalization of traditional egalitarian ways, particularly of conflict resolution, and we have much to learn from these.

We have an urgent task. How do we stop the resource wars that pit sister against sister, brother against brother? The U.S. diplomat at the Sub commission on Human Rights accused a woman lawyer of being unprofessional for saying that DU was contrary to the Geneva Conventions. If that means standing up for human rights, then let us say we are all unprofessional women. I would like to suggest the following steps for action:

- Identify the culprits: corporate heads and ruling elites, academic propagandists, whatever their race, class and gender might be.
- Combine ranks to defeat not the externalized enemy but the internalized one: the pursuit of profit.
- Adhere to the right to self determination: self-rule, nationalization of resources, the use of plebiscites, diplomacy, negotiations, and the right to use force as a last resort, participatory democracy, the right to recovery of land and resources.
- Fulfillment of all treaty, political, civil, social, economic, cultural and religious rights leading to the emergence of egalitarian political, social and economic relations

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IV. OTHER REFERENCES
