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THE FUTURE BELONGS TO THE WORKING CLASS

**STRUGGLES
IN BELGIUM**

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OILPRICES
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N° 3

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Does "centrism", a political phenomenon of the 19th and early 20th century denounced by revolutionaries in the past, still exist today? Is there a "middle course" between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat? This text was written while we were still a tendency within the International Communist Current, to oppose the danger of this concept of "centrism" in our time.

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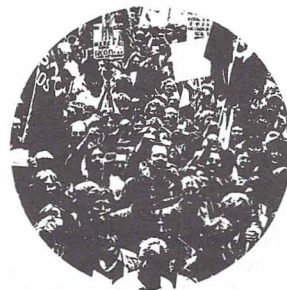
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THE FUTURE BELONGS TO THE WORKING CLASS

the example of — struggles in belgium



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The wave of struggles which began in 1983 with the strikes in the Belgian public sector has continued to develop since then, touching sector after sector, country after country (see JP # 1). In this context, it was foreseeable that the diminishing in the number of social conflicts in several countries during the second half of 1985 would be a passing phenomenon (see JP #2). Today, less than 3 years after the beginning of this wave of struggles, the working class in Belgium has launched another assault against its class enemy, the capitalist state. The following article treats this experience in detail rather than elaborating on other struggles that took place in the same period because it is a good illustration of the dynamic of the class struggle today, of the exacerbation of the contradictions between the working class and the bourgeoisie.

On the 31st of May, 200 000 workers demonstrated in the streets of Brussels at the call of the FGTB, the 'socialist' trade union in Belgium. "The largest union-demonstration since the second world war", proclaimed the bourgeois left. And the traditional leftist chorus echoed: "200 000 in the streets: general strike!" We revolutionaries have no applause for this gigantic funeral of the workers' combativity that the union-apparatus organised. It's really no exaggeration to describe it that way: in the 2 days that followed this grand ceremony, union-bosses called everywhere for the return to work... to make room for the sense of responsibility and the negotiations with the government which was the target of all the actions they had launched! And since then, social tension has decreased considerably in Belgium. The will to struggle of the working class, intense as it was, could no longer express itself, couldn't find any real perspective. But the fact that the bourgeoisie got the situation back under control shouldn't hide a reality that is more encouraging, more promising: the splendid combativity shown by Belgian workers in their most important struggles

in 25 years, proving an undiminished will to refuse the orders of the bourgeois state, to confront this state; their many attempts to break through the obstacles and the system of control raised by the unions; these are examples to be followed by workers everywhere, landmarks on the road which can lead to the real destruction of the bourgeois state. This shows that, in the current period, the bourgeoisie remains fundamentally incapable of chaining the working class to its logic of destruction. The poison of its ideology ("tighten your belts" to save the capitalist interest, "make sacrifices" to assure a better future while things are getting worse every day...) even if it can dampen workers' combativity for a while, remains incapable of defusing the social time-bomb once and for all. The struggles in Belgium were not the only recent expression of the vitality of the proletariat. In Norway, a so called exemplary paradise of social peace, the largest strikes in 50 years took place in April. In this case, for as much as we know in the bourgeois press there was a total blackout on these events—the unions themselves kept the initiative, organising

the strikes themselves to prevent losing control over the workers, as happened elsewhere often in the last years. In France for instance, the unions have launched multiple actions in the public sector since they are comfortably in the opposition. They must, of course, repair their image to avoid uncontrollable movements, after being so openly and for so long unmasked in the pure and simple management of the bourgeois state! If the unions try to mobilize parts of the working class on a terrain which has nothing to do with class struggle, they do it in the first place to abort spontaneous initiatives of the workers, which, as loyal servants of the bourgeois order, they fear

as the plague. But while their union-"mobilizations" are going on, these spontaneous initiatives sprout up elsewhere: in mid-june a wildcat-strike broke out in the French railroad company, against sanctions taken against a conductor.

The Belgian bourgeoisie had clearly announced its intentions. The austerity-measures were more brutal than ever and the government kept repeating that it would remain inflexible, that nothing could be rescinded...on other words, that any struggle would be useless, that the strike-weapon could only turn itself against those who would use it. We heard it all before. It is the attitude of the bourgeoisie in the whole world: governments,

AN ATTEMPT AT SELF-ORGANIZATION:

The struggle against the austerity program adopted by the Martens government involved the whole working class in Belgium. Teachers, generally a relatively marginalized sector, prey to individualism and competition among themselves, joined the general movement against the effects of austerity. By their actions, they showed that there was profound dissatisfaction in broad layers of the population. Their actions expressed the general potential contained in the May/June events: a general refusal to make the sacrifices demanded by the bourgeoisie and a desire to go beyond sectoralism and traditional union structures. These general characteristics of the movement were also, to a lesser degree, part of the teachers' struggle.

From the moment the first new austerity measures were announced, the teachers came up against union sabotage. But far from agreeing to wait for union orders, many teachers spontaneously tried to organize resistance to government measures and to take the organization of the struggle into their own hands. The teachers remained mobilized for many weeks, avoiding the "passive strike" of the 1983 events. Among the many initiatives taken by the teachers themselves was the "Malibran assembly" (an action committee that met daily throughout the struggle). The group of teachers who began these assemblies called, right from the outset, for the organization and coordination of actions outside the unions. The daily meetings of the assembly became, for Brussels, a meeting point, a place to exchange information on the struggle, a place of political con-

frontation. The meetings discussed the need to spread the movement to all parts of the working class and tried to break out of the corporatist straight-jacket by seeking contacts with the post office workers, transport workers, the Volkswagen factories -- all of whom were also on strike. This desire to break out of their separateness was expressed in the leaflets the meetings produced. That such an effort corresponded to fundamental needs of the struggle was proven by the continued high attendance at the meetings (50 or more each evening with new faces coming in). There were attempts at autonomous organization: a tendency to centralize the actions agreed upon by the people present at the assembly; the joining together of the schools of Brussels and Walloon Brabant for the organization of these actions and the writing of leaflets; the sending of pickets to various schools and finally, the effort to organize actions committees in different schools -- all of this outside of union control.

It was very important to encourage and develop these attempts at self-organization. That is what the intervention of our fraction tried to do, insisting on the need:

- to resist getting closed in by the corporatist, "professional" ideology so dear to the unions but to go out and actively join with other workers in struggle;
- to extend the scope of the struggle to try to massively bring in other teachers and all of the workers;
- to strengthen, theoretically and practically, self-organization outside of and against the unions.

The "Malibran assembly", as a momentary or-

often of the right, no longer hesitate to speak "the language of truth". It shows the real face of capitalism: a social and economic system based on forced exploitation of the proletariat, a system of terror, even when it wears a democratic mask. You're not only squeezed to the marrow, chained more and more, but they also let you know politely that any attempt at revolt is doomed to failure. The time of open slavery isn't that long gone! But unfortunately for you, mr. bourgeois, you need much more today to paralyze and terrorize the proletariat. This "much more" is done by your unions, your chosen pawns to control and derail the workers. But their credibility is crumbling too, as

was shown in the recent strikes in Belgium. It won't be denied by Mr. Vandenbrouck, president of the FGTB, who had to break off his funeral speech at the demo of May 31, his face dripping with coke, thrown at him by disgusted demonstrators after he had asked the people to return peacefully after being led aimlessly around Brussels.

The working class in Belgium had already waged many struggles recently, all ending with defeat. Nevertheless it was again in this country that, after a few months of relative calm, important struggles broke out. This highlights what's currently at stake: on the one hand, the

the "malibran" assembly

ganizing point of the struggle, brought together teachers from very different political horizons, including rank and file, base unionists who critically supported the policies of the union headquarters as well as genuine anti-union elements. The intervention of I.P. emphasized the need for the assemblies to develop further the very thing that made them emerge in the first place, that is, to develop the spontaneous and independent initiatives of the workers and resist all the union's heavy-handed efforts to recuperate and control things. The capitalist class could hardly afford to remain passive for very long and soon the unions went on the offensive, working via the rank and file unionists present at the assembly meetings. These people tried to empty the meetings of their potential for wider political thought and turn them into simple exchanges of information only concerned with actions in progress at the moment. They reinforced any latent corporatism by refusing the suggestion, made by revolutionaries, to go out towards other sectors. In fact, they even tried to discredit the revolutionaries with all kinds of lies. The police finished off this draining of energies by demanding the identity cards of all the participants in the assemblies trying to get their names and addresses on file and intimidate them. This accelerated the process of recuperation launched by the unions who used any weaknesses of the assembly to get themselves in control.

Despite the great potential of the movement it was not able to develop self-organization very far. The calls that the "Malibran assembly"

issued to encourage the creation of assemblies and action committees in the schools were not actually implemented in practice even though they met with a lot of agreement.

Just as with the Limburg miners, the fighting spirit of the teachers did not lead to entirely taking the struggle into their own hands. This is absolutely necessary if combativity is to become a motor force for the extension of the struggle and a way of getting growing numbers of strikers to join. Union control over the movement ended up by dispersing it and sowing the seeds of discouragement and passivity. Because the larger movement was unable to go any farther this time, the small "Malibran assembly" was eventually smothered by union control.

"Malibran", a way-station along the road to self-organization, was a victim of the key weakness of struggles today: a tendency to fall back into defending the particularities of one sector (in this case, education). It was also a casualty of the movement's slowness in organizing itself at the grass-roots level. Even though the need to extend out to other sectors was seen as vital for the continuation of the struggle, the assembly did not do very much concretely to further this goal. The experience of the "Malibran assembly" shows how important the self-organization of the working class is and the fact that it is really possible. But it also shows the difficulty this process encounters.

FD and Rose

re's the absolute necessity for the bourgeoisie everywhere to try to mitigate the effects of capitalism's crisis by more and more attacking the living conditions of the working class; on the other hand, it cannot extinguish the enormous combativity of the working class which now, for several years, bursts out regularly in the 4 corners of the world. When this combativity is exhausted in one place, worn out by the tactics of the left in opposition to sabotage the struggle better (see IP #2 on this subject), one can be sure that the torch of struggle will be taken up soon enough by workers elsewhere! Yet as far as the economic demands of the workers, most of these struggles have led to nothing. Worse, the bourgeoisie, as if nothing could intimidate it, is pushing through more and more draconian austerity-measures. In Belgium, the 200 billion francs (4,5 billion \$) budget cuts decided by the government are historically unprecedented. Of course, every time it's supposedly the last time. Everything will go better. But already the capitalist state lets us know that if the debt load grows (as it undoubtedly will) another "effort of generosity", of "national solidarity" will be needed. What a shameless comedy! In France too, the moment of truth has come once again for the workers. The 5 years of statemanagement by the left (the same left which, when it is in the opposition, pretends to fight austerity) had hardly spared the workers, but the Chirac government sings the same tune as Reagan, Thatcher and co. Arrogance is on the agenda: governments must hit hard and the IMF will praise them. Yet what's remarkable is the consciousness that continues to mature in the proletariat that the only realistic option is the class struggle, that there is no alternative, despite the cynicism of the bourgeoisie, despite the dead ends in which many struggles ended these last years. The experiences of workers in Belgium illustrate this: 3 years ago, in september '83, the long strike in the public sector began. It would become the starting point of a wave of struggle on the international level and expressed already the characteristics of this wave: the massiveness of the fight, the questioning of union-control. The strike ended with a terrible defeat for the workers. The unions, manoeuvring divisions amongst the workers, had succeeded in getting them back to work. As workers said themselves during the recent movement, the pill had been hard to swallow, but they didn't know how to take the bull by the horns, they felt disoriented. But, like elsewhere, the bourgeoisie had only succeeded in imposing a partial temporary defeat: it's with 10 times more anger in their gut that the workers took up their struggle again in may this year.

The bourgeoisie can't destroy the conviction that we must fight, even if large parts of the working class are regulari-

ly going through periods of hesitation and doubt. It is on the question of how and why to struggle, which perspectives to give to this combativity, that the bourgeoisie still has a lot of room to manoeuvre. It is because these questions are not clear yet for the workers that the unions, exploiting their illusions, can systematically prevent their struggle from becoming a real force against the capitalist state. Even when they no longer have a blind trust in the unions, most workers continue to see them as a weapon for the defense of their living conditions. Even when they think they "work badly" or have failures, they see them as "the only weapon we have". This weakness was once more sharply expressed in the struggles in Belgium: rarely has the working class confronted the union-obstacle so fiercely, rarely has combativity searched so intensely for a real expression. During the several weeks of high social tension, we saw how the workers more and more posed openly the real questions which must be confronted by the struggle: the necessity to wage massive struggles, to spread the struggle, to create class solidarity, the need for all workers to participate directly in the organisation of the struggle, to keep control over it collectively, the necessity to ask what are the political stakes in the struggle. And the capitalist state has finally succeeded in extinguishing the social fire because its unions have systematically recuperated on their own, bourgeois terrain, all the rich questions that the workers themselves asked. Their answer was to demand an equal sharing of the misery, a better management of the state, more investment by the bosses, etc... As if the management of the national economy were the concern of the workers! It was not so much the union-leaders themselves, who are seen by many workers as loyal to the bosses, who could derail the workers. More important were the rank & file unionists, who are in permanent contact with the working class, to "take its temperature", as they say themselves, to prevent it from rising too high. It's this rank & file unionism, the warhorse of the leftist parties, which deserves a medal from the Belgian bourgeoisie for having served to so well. Without their frenetic activity in the struggle itself, to prevent the development of class consciousness, to give false perspectives to the workers, who knows where the Belgian bourgeoisie would be now!

The bourgeoisie everywhere knows very well that the austerity which it must impose makes bitter social conflicts unavoidable. The successive waves of workers' struggles since the end of the sixties show that clearly enough. It has drawn its own lessons from this reality and constantly tries to adapt its structures for controlling the proletariat-all its left fractions- to the radicalisation of the workers. In Belgium for instance, the un-

ions were relatively surprised and unprepared for the strikes in the public sector in 1983, but they drew the lessons afterwards and prepared themselves as much as possible so that it wouldn't happen again. They knew that their image had suffered quite a blow because of their sabotage of the strikes in 1983, that the workers wouldn't again fall into the same trap, so they "radicalised" their language. This adaptation of the bourgeoisie demands each time a greater development of the workers' consciousness in order to break the unionist obstacle and develop its perspectives.

6 months before the new austerity-measures were taken in Belgium, the FGTB had already worked out an "action program", to shore up its image of "combativity", of a union devoted to struggle. At the same time, the other main union in the country, the CSC, had affirmed its confidence in the social-christian parties in the government, creating that way a classic trap to divide the workers, which the bourgeoisie would use later on. The FGTB didn't lose its time, organising mobilizations around demands that had nothing in common with the workers' interests, while in the meantime the government was meeting to decide on the austerity-measures. The goal of these mobilisations was to exhaust the workers' combativity, by organising intersectorial days of action, one-day strikes on the national, regional or sectorial level, meetings everywhere, almost daily manifestations in all the cities of any importance, all this before the austerity-measures were known. The grand finale of this strategy to keep the workers busy in phony actions was supposed to be the demo of May 31, that would supposedly frighten the government to death. While all these actions were planned at the top, the union-bosses were smart enough to leave the initiative as much as possible to "the rank and file", the "combative shop stewards" and declared they were prepared to recognize the many unplanned actions that might occur here and there. The goal was to reinforce the

idea that the union equals "the workers themselves", that the union has an ear for the real concerns of the workers, that it can be combative. It is this idea which made it possible for rank and file unionism to wear out the workers' combativity.

RANK AND FILE UNIONISM AT WORK

From the beginning of October, spontaneous strike broke out in the coalmines of Belgian Limburg, where there are still about 20 000 miners, who for several years have been threatened with lay offs. These miners have a reputation for combativity. Already in the 60's and 70's they waged exemplary fights. At the same time, and not coincidentally, these mines are a privileged bastion of rank & file unionism, propagated essentially by a Maoist leftist group, the "Labour

Party". Since the beginning of this year this organization had given out more than 20 leaflets at the pits, working doggedly to obtain control over the movement. This way it systematically recuperated for their pernicious ideology the concerns of the miners who were well aware that they could expect nothing from the union-bosses. In Limburg, the unions participation in the management of capitalism's misery is indeed crystal clear. That's why the miners understood they had to count on themselves to launch the action. But the combative shop stewards who had learned from the Labour party how to sabotage the struggles, succeeded once more in transforming a struggle which in the beginning was opposed to the unions and tried to develop autonomously, in one which was locked up in the unionist ideology. After sticking to the correct concern of the miners to ignore the orders coming from the uniontop, after having "defended" the necessity of the spontaneous struggle, they simply proposed as a perspective for the workers "to make the union recognize their movement", to make the union combative. A couple of days later, the unionleaders indeed supported the strike, so in their logic, everything became fine. The fact that this rank & file unionist strategy led the miners into a deadend became clear afterwards. At the end of April, after the government had promised that it wouldn't be "too hard" on the miners the unions called for a return to work. Of course, the rank & file unionists and leftists cried "betrayal!" with indignation and said the struggle would continue till victory... while at the same time violently attacking revolutionaries whose leaflets called for struggle outside and against the unions. But the end of the movement was near. Having been constantly told that the only perspective is to struggle within the unions, the workers had their hands tied, were led like sheep to the butcher. The strike-committee, which was formed by rank & file unionists at the beginning of the movement to prevent a real self-organization of the class, called for a return to work at the very day on which the workers of the public sector went on strike. This is a more general tactic of the bourgeoisie: to launch actions in those sectors where the combativity is the highest, but carefully separated in time, doing everything to make them wear out by lack of perspectives, to break the objective and subjective conditions for a real generalization of the workers' struggle. But the opposite tactic exists too, as we have seen in Belgium: after the strike of the miners, throughout the month of May, the unions launched all sorts of actions in the public sector till their phony character broke down the workers' resistance. And after the conditions for spread-

ding the struggle little by little died out, the rank&file unionists cried out in places like the province of Hainaut, where the combativity had been gigantic, that it was necessary to hold out whatever the cost, even if "we have to perish in isolation"! The rank&file unionists ideology, which had shown its worth in the mines, proved to be equally pernicious for the development of the struggle in the public sector. Whatever their intentions, the combative shopstewards worked tirelessly to canalise the workers' resistance, which threatened to escape them, towards the inside of the unions' structures. That would finally paralyze the workers' energies.

The way in which the left of the bourgeoisie recuperated the more and more pronounced concern of the workers to organize the struggle themselves is certainly the most telling sign of its capacity to radicalize its language and actions when the pressure of the workers becomes too strong. In the mines as well as in the public sector (in Charleroi, in Antwerp) the unions defended the necessity to create action-committees, strike-committees, supposedly to express a real workers' democracy and a taking in charge by the workers of their own struggle. In reality this was but a caricature, a denaturation of the real autonomous activity of the class, as the example of the strike-committee in the mines shows. For several months this committee was planned by the shop stewards and their maoist advisers. During the strikes they simply named themselves the strike-committee of every pit and later "the central strike committee". This structure had to control the whole movement: decide what the demands were, what actions to take, decide to demand the support of the unions, decide to return to work...

The real self-organization of the struggle has nothing to do with such a caricature which can only disgust the workers. Real self-organization can only express itself and develop when there is a massive involvement by the workers in and for the struggle, with real general assemblies which are not outgrowths of the unions-strategies but a place where the workers themselves direct at all levels their movement. It's the development of this self-confidence which must be encouraged by combative minorities and revolutionary organizations. It's the most difficult road, because there are no short cuts, but it's the only road which can lead to the revolution.

This ideologic influence of rank&file unionism, its control over the organization of the struggle, could only go hand in hand with a denaturation of the real meaning of the extension of the struggle, of its political dimension. The whole movement was marked by the idea that the unity of the workers could only be achieved inside the framework

of the unions (despite the divisions between the unions); that this is the "political" goal of the working class; to fight for common fronts between the unions, from the bottom to the top, which would be the springboard to the formation of a "workers" government, that is, one of the parties of the left. We have seen in France to what this leads!

Concretely this meant actions like: union-delegations visiting unionist strike-pickets with unionist collections of money, delegations of workers sent to unionist meetings to show they were combative and to say that the unions had to be likewise, manifestations in the streets, where the workers supposedly united themselves, where different sectors found each other...under the supervision of unionist goonsquads; meetings where unionists of different colours congratulated each other for finally having round each other; symbolic strikes in plants where workers were not always convinced that it was time for action; and finally, when the illusion of unity was complete, they could call them to demonstrate massively on May 31, supposedly to frighten the government...and the first of June, order could be reestablished. Didn't we still have the joyfull perspective of evenings watching the world cup on TV!

When we see that even a revolutionary group like the ICC participated in this masquerade, we realize how potent the unionist ideology is, that it can even gangrene the revolutionary milieu itself (see box).

THE MATURATION OF CLASS CONSCIOUSNESS

As we have shown, the combativity of the working class has remained enormous during the last years, despite periods of relative calmth. But the main weapon of the proletariat is not combativity in itself, however great. Only the development of class consciousness can prevent that this combativity time and again exhausts itself in the same deadends, only it can open real perspectives. In the recent class movements in Belgium we have seen real signs of a maturation of this consciousness: and it's this maturation which we, still tiny revolutionary organizations, must accelerate, homogenise throughout the class. Only when class consciousness comes to fruition, the road to the revolution, to another society is open.

This maturation was mainly seen in a clear reinforcement of these positive tendencies of the workers struggles in '83:

-Despite the carefull preparation of the unions to avoid losing control over the movement, spontaneous struggles broke out during the last months, for instance in Limburg and in the railroads in Charleroi, where the workers in May ignored union-orders and continued to struggle. Their decisiveness spurred the combati-

ty of workers elsewhere. That's how class consciousness develops: parts of the working class express in a clearer, firmer way the necessity to confront the bourgeois-state. In Belgium the existence of hotbeds, more combative than others, which played a role as detonator, was very clear. But that's not all. When at certain moments it seemed as if the workers were completely lulled asleep by the unions' lullabies, soon enough, the volcano woke up again: it was right after a completely passive and interclassist demonstration in Hasselt, Limburg, that spontaneous struggles broke out in the same region. It was when it seemed that the traditionally combative workers of Liege were completely anesthetized by the speeches of the local union-leaders, that the steelworkers went spontaneously on strike. Some examples amongst many others which show how the working class more and more gains confidence in its own force, how the consciousness that we should expect nothing from the unions gains slowly ground, despite everything, even if the confrontation with the bourgeois structures of control is hard and takes time. The main strength of the bourgeoisie has always been its ability to divide the workers. In Britain they succeeded in demoralizing the workers, exhausting the miners in a long isolated struggle which led to a smashing defeat... In Belgium, the stakes of the struggle were posed more clearly :

the strikers had no illusions about their power to win each in his own little plant, his little sector, for his own specific demands... The consciousness that it is necessary to spread the struggle as fast as possible, that it is necessary to convince the less decisive parts of the proletariat to join the struggle, because the capitalist state attacks the entire working class; that this is real class solidarity (in contrast to the charity preached by the leftist parsons); this consciousness has grown, even if the unions succeeded in recuperating its pre-occupations. That's one lesson drawn by the workers of the failure of their movements in 1983: the only perspective is spreading the struggle. To the calls of workers in the public sector to develop a real class solidarity, making clear that their struggle had nothing specific, steelworkers of Liege responded in a way by striking for their own demands, not particularly linked to the austerity-plan. It's this kind of solidarity which the proletariat must generalize in the mass strike. Today it is still extremely embryonic. But it is this seed which must ripen. If the rank&file unionists in this movement had to emphasize the question of extension to such a degree, this means that this concern is growing in the working class. The fact that the rank&file unionists insisted so much on the necessity to create "new structures" in and for the struggle

"to fulfill the tasks of organization not carried out by the union" shows a radicalization of the tactics of control of the bourgeoisie, but this in response to a growing understanding in the working class, even if still in a latent form, of the necessity to organize the struggle autonomously in order to really develop the workers struggle.

This tendency towards the self-organization of the class outside the union is not yet expressed openly. We couldn't yet participate in real assemblies through which the workers controlled all aspects of the struggle. But we have seen attempts in that direction, like the teachers-assemblies in which we participated daily (see elsewhere in this issue). To extinguish temporarily the workers' combativity, the unions have refined as much as possible their techniques of control and division. But this new experience of union-sabotage has also further eroded the credibility of the unions in the eyes of the workers:

- in several places in Belgium (in Limburg, in Wallonia) the offices of the unions have been rampaged by angry workers;
- several unions-officials had to pay a price for their open loyalty to the bourgeoisie and were physically attacked by the workers;

After the unions ordered a return to work and defended these orders in assemblies, many workers, in the mines as well as in the railroads in Wallonia and in public transportation in Brussels, have shredded their union-cards. The pieces were of course immediately recollected by leftists who begged these angry workers to work for the "only perspective possible: the construction of a fighting unionism". Let's hope that in the next struggle, it will be the leftist leaflets that will be shredded by the workers. It won't be us who will pick up the pieces...

The working class must draw the lessons of these experiences, to avoid the trap of rank&file unionism, which will remain the essential brake on their struggle. That this obstacle will be overcome by the maturation of class consciousness, that is the real hope for mankind.

Alma

errata

In the article on Terrorism in IP#2 several lines on p.17 were scrambled. The text (on the right hand column) should read: The theory of 'workerterrorism' limits the intervention of revolutionaries to simple voluntarism, reducing the workers struggle to a matter of strategy. This conception is totally alien to the marxist understanding of the struggle of the proletariat.

Strengths And Weaknesses Of The Intervention Of Revolutionaries

The social movements which jolted Belgium in May and June 1986, also provoked a response by the revolutionary groups present in that country: the ICC, the GCI, the FCI and ourselves.* All these groups intervened in the struggle (especially by means of leaflets) and in so doing they took up in practice the role that revolutionary organizations must play in this period of the renewal of struggles. It is important to note that this intervention had a real impact, unlike what happened a few years ago when the intervention of revolutionaries seemed to make no dent; one sign of this, is the fact that today the bourgeoisie itself recognizes our impact, acknowledges our presence in numerous ways, and tries to frighten us (for example, members of the "Labour Party" tried to beat up militants of revolutionary groups in front of hundreds of workers in Limburg).

That said, if these four groups now intervene in the struggle, they don't all recognize that we're in the third wave of struggles. Our fraction and the ICC defined such an analysis, while the GCI and the FCI reject this. If the necessity to intervene is shared by all of us, different analyses of the situation of the class struggle result in interventions having a very different content.

A PITIFUL CRITIQUE OF TRADE UNIONISM...

All of the revolutionary groups are opposed to the unions. This opposition was the focal point of our intervention. But other groups' criticisms of the unions were of-

ten superficial. Thus, the critique of base unionism is confused in the ICC and non-existent in the FCI (we will come back to this when we discuss the intervention of revolutionaries in Limburg). The question of trade unionism is crucial for the future of our struggle. The errors of revolutionary groups on this question cannot be overlooked.

While in the course of its struggle, the working class shows that it is distrustful of the unions (for example in numerous spontaneous actions, in the teachers assemblies), while the unions "organized" the response to the Belgian governments' austerity plan with numerous actions including the big national demonstration on May 31 (which fully justified the proletariat's suspicions), the ICC took up the very chant of the unions by saying "the struggle has only begun" (leaflet of the ICC, 5/31/86). Worse, the ICC merely used its bull horn (which no one noticed anyway because the unions' music was deafening as usual) to call on the workers to transform this demonstration, whose sole purpose was to cap the burial of the struggle, into fighting meetings! "It is necessary to use today's march to strengthen the struggle, to unify it, by taking control of it ourselves!" (ibid). In short, the workers who were raising questions about self-organisation, about the real extension of the struggle, about the nature of the unions, were called by the ICC to massively participate...in a trade union demo.

The GCI, radical in its opposition to base unionism, and the FCI, less clear on this point (see below), were more discreet than the ICC on May 31, in as much as they, at least, did not bark the call for this burial demonstration, as did the ICC.

...APPLIED TO THE STRIKE IN LIMBURG

*ICC, International Communist Current
GCI, Group Communiste Internationaliste, a split from the ICC in 1979, which publishes "Le Communiste" and "Action Communiste"
FCI, Fraction Communiste Internationaliste, a split from the GCI in 1983, which publishes "La Revolution Communiste"





"Say no to the strike of 'each one on his own', that the unions always propose! Massively go into the streets, employed and unemployed, workers of different sectors, so as to bring about unity in the struggle, so as to decide together on the prosecution of the struggles and the means to extend them!" (leaflet of the ICC, 5/16/86). This quotation shows that the ICC is still preparing for the last war because the unions themselves no longer rest content with organizing strikes of "each one on his own", but are forced to regularly organize assemblies- so great is the will to struggle on the part of the workers.

Moreover, in simply saying "miners, don't let yourselves be cooped-up in your sector!" (ibid), the ICC is only increasing confusions about the unions because it doesn't distinguish between the will of the workers to extend the struggle and the work of the base unionists which calls for a false extension, which was precisely the case in the miners strike in Limburg.

The FCI is in another way even more confused. While the miners strike was increasingly sabotaged by a committee thoroughly infiltrated by the maoist Labour Party and

the base unionists the FCI said this in a leaflet: "The strike, which began outside the unions, is now continuing without them, after a short interlude when these organizations tried -in vain- to take things over." The real control exercised by the unions which led this strike to defeat, is thus conjured away. Worse, the committee was, in the eyes of the FCI, a panacea: "the miners created their own organization of struggle"; this latter "allowed the involvement of all the strikers", which is a lie since mass assemblies were only called by the committee when the fire was extinguished, at the moment of the return to work without having won a damn thing.

It is important to welcome the fact that the revolutionary groups intervened in the struggles of the class. That is their role. But it is just as important to be clear on the lessons to be drawn from these struggles, or else, we will end up doing the work of the unions, that is to say, of the bourgeoisie. The class must count on the political organizations that it generates to clarify the goals and the means of its fight: the communist revolution through an autonomous struggle.

Johan

THE FALL IN OIL PRICES

a further decline in the standard of living on the horizon

In the aftermath of the Yom Kippur War in October 1973, oil prices rose dramatically. According to the bourgeoisie at the time, this 'oil crisis' was engineered by OPEC and was the prime cause of the inflation which infected the entire world. So today, the bourgeoisie greets the equally dramatic fall in oil prices as the stimulus to a stronger recovery in the economies of the advanced industrial countries.

No chance. In fact this price fall only underlines the bourgeoisie's complete loss of any long-term economic perspectives and the desperation of its short-term efforts to keep any buoyancy at all in the economy. In the

recent past, the prices of many of the world's raw materials have been dropping as a result of the economic recession, oil prices among them. Although the world's overproduction has for the present driven prices downwards, the collapse in oil prices since the end of 1985 has been brought about as a matter of policy. In a world of chronic overproduction, of glutted markets, this piece of global economic engineering constitutes only a massive shift of capital from one set of countries to another. Yet again, capitalism tries to hide its terminal crisis behind a thinner and thinner veneer of economic confidence.

The background to this desperate manoeuvre of

the bourgeoisie is the exhausted spluttering of its previous efforts to pull the world economy out of the recession of 1981-82. The 'recovery' of 1983/4 was driven by the US, financed through the massive capital movements to the US attracted by the high interest rates and was localised in its effects primarily to the US, with Germany and Japan reaping some of the side benefits as a result of their increased competitiveness brought about by the strong dollar. However, even in the US this 'recovery' was confined to three main areas: industries involved directly or indirectly in military goods and armaments production, high-tech industries and speculative building. Of course, while the bourgeoisie was crowing about the 'recovery', the vast majority of the world's national economies were exploring new depths of crisis and the bulk of the world's population were plunged into an impoverishment on an unprecedented scale, the contrast between the enormity of humanity's material deficiencies and the gargantuan size of the planet's war machines only highlighting the stark contradiction between the interests of the vast majority of the world's population and those of the capitalist system and its ruling class.(1)

Last year, this recovery in the US began to falter; the weakening of the dollar against most other currencies being only one sign. The subsequent search for a means of stimulating the world economy has centred on oil. As one of the world's most important strategic commodities - essential to the functioning of every economy - it lends itself to the western bourgeoisie as a means of global economic manipulation.

The oil-producing industry has been suffering acutely for some years from the effects of over-capacity. At \$30 a barrel, the producers outside the Eastern Bloc have a capacity of 60 million barrels a day (approximately half coming from OPEC) while demand is only 45 million barrels a day. But even this aggregate global surfeit hides the scale of the problems faced by specific countries: for example, in autumn 1985 Saudi Arabia's sales were 2 million barrels a day from facilities capable of producing 11 million barrels a day! Because of the Saudi's importance in the determination of OPEC policies (oil prices particularly) and because of their role as a key instrument of US economic and political strategy in the volatile Middle East, the Saudi's response to its predicament could be completely harmonised with the objectives of the US which was searching for any device which could shore up its faltering 'recovery'.

For Saudi Arabia, which along with Kuwait was the main loser of OPEC's previous pricing policies, the goal was to force the price of oil down so that it could undercut its OPEC rivals with its own cheaper oil, and thereby increase its share of the market at their expense. Desperate? Yes, but with its oil revenues having plummeted from \$113 billion

in 1981 to a likely \$16-\$18 billion this year, and with its present \$25 billion current account deficit the second largest in the world, it had to do something drastic. However, since such an action has enormous global ramifications, it could not have been undertaken without the express blessing of the US.

Because of the complexity of the global economy, the precise effects of the oil price collapse are difficult to foresee until the actual capital movements can be tracked. Nonetheless, the broad effects can be laid out.

Amidst a world of chronic overproduction, the oil price falls will not lead to a stimulus of the world economy, but only to the delay of further recession in a part of it - mainly in the US and Western Europe. When the effects of the lower oil price are worked through, the net result will be, according to the IMF annual report published in April, a cut in the net imports bill of the industrialised countries by almost 0.75% of their aggregate GNP. With an average oil price forecast of \$15 a barrel for the next two years it expects the lower price to contribute to an increase of between 0.5% and 1.0% in the GNP of each of these countries. Those who will gain most will be Japan, Germany, Italy and France - and oil producers like the US and Britain will gain proportionately less.

Overall, if oil prices were to average \$15 a barrel there would be an overall annual transfer of around \$180 billion from oil-producers to oil-consumers. After the advanced industrialised countries have devoured their cut, the remainder will be shared among the poorest countries of Africa, India and, probably getting proportionately the best deal, Brazil. Not that the crumbs will do their populations much good anyway since most of the gains will no doubt be ploughed into debt repayments - and go right back to the West. On the other hand, among allies of the Western Bloc some countries will have their economic and political problems amplified enormously in the short term. Two examples show the diversity of these effects: Mexico's massive foreign debt can only increase as the value of its oil production plummets; the drop in its oil revenues will exacerbate further Egypt's potentially unstable internal situation.

If the West gets some short-term boost from these oil price machinations, the effects in the camp of its military adversary - the Russian Bloc - will be extraordinarily punitive. Russia is the world's largest oil producer; in 1985 it produced three times more than Saudi Arabia. Nearly 80% of Russian exports and 25% of Eastern Europe's are accounted for by fuel and, prior to the latest oil price collapse, the Economic Commission for Europe reckoned that "if oil prices stabilised at \$15 - \$20 a barrel, Soviet hard currency exports from oil and gas would fall

by between \$5 billion and \$7 billion in a year." (The Economist, 5.4.86) This hard currency is essential for the purchase of western technology crucial for the modernisation plans for Russian industry.

But its problems don't end there. To make matters worse, since the currency in which oil is traded on the international spot market is the US dollar, they have also been hit by the fall in the dollar; and since they make many purchases in Germany and Japan they have also been hit by the strengthening of the Deutschmark and the Yen. Moreover, known Siberian reserves are acknowledged to be running out: in other words, the winning of new reserves will require even more costly development, and Russia's 1986 budget adopted in November 1985 had already called for a 31% increase in capital investment in the oil industry. (In fact the energy industry already soaks up approximately 20% of Russian capital investment.) Matters will be even worse in Eastern Europe. The COMECON countries pay Russia for their oil according to a weighted average of market prices over the past five years, and so will be paying well over the current world market rate - and in turn making their manufactured goods even less competitive. (2)

These effects in the Eastern Bloc have not escaped the notice of the bourgeoisies of the two blocs. Not only did the Russian bourgeoisie accuse the Americans of deliberately encouraging the oil price fall, but the Washington Post went so far as to say against George Bush's concerns that the American oil industry had been hurt by these events, "But here he ignores another vital national security interest, one having to do with the Soviet Union. In this dimension, the collapse cannot go far and long enough. ... The rule of thumb is that it loses half a billion dollars for every dollar's drop in the price of a barrel of oil. That's not rubles, mind you, but in real money." (4.5.86)

Coupled with the economic ramifications of the Chernobyl disaster, this will tighten the screws on Russia and weaken their bargaining position in the wheeling and dealing on their strategic arms negotiations with the US. This is not to say that these negotiations are conducted in order to hold back the preparations for confrontation in a third world war. But, on the way, the two adversaries can offer to trade concessions in specific military areas, each aiming to end up with some improvement in a part of its armoury relative to the other than it otherwise would have had. Overall, of course, the relative military strength of the adversaries is still determined primarily by their relative economic strengths. Thus, the Russian Bloc's efforts to reduce the massive superiority of the US Bloc have been hit hard by the further weakening of its economic position as a result of the collapse of world oil prices.

In the advanced countries, the short-term benefits of the oil price fall will not be without a cost. Already the increased compet-

itiveness of Middle East oil is hitting the more expensive producers - in parts of Texas, Alaska and in the North Sea. The coal industry is also suffering. In the UK, the industry is under threat of mass closures. A study by the London Business School (published in April) concluded that if coal prices were to go to realistically competitive levels, the industry could be cut from its present 140,000 workers (down from 180,000 at the end of the last miners' strike) to 30,000.

This only underlines a truth for the working class today. Recession during these 'years of truth' of the capitalist crisis means unemployment. And even the measures the bourgeoisie takes to try to keep its 'recovery' going accelerate unemployment.

Whatever the net short-term benefits to the economy of the Western Bloc - and there are already signs of lower inflation rates in several countries - this desperate action will not indefinitely stay the underlying tendencies to hyper-inflation in the world capitalist system, the only realistic economic outlook for the bourgeoisie. And whatever good it does to the figures on the balance sheet, that's only for the bourgeoisie; the social costs are horrendous. For a mass of the world's population, further impoverishment; for the workers, more exploitation, more unemployment, more austerity. Whatever ruses the bourgeoisie gets up to in its efforts to hold back the inevitable, the logic of capitalism is deadly. Only class struggle points to the real solution to the capitalist crisis for the world proletariat: the destruction of the system itself.

Marlowe

Notes

1. See IP1 for a report on the world economic crisis.
2. See IP2 for an article on Russia's economic problems and its war preparations.

APPEAL TO READERS

We intend to make this magazine an instrument of political clarification and understanding of the situation today. We also need to have the tools necessary for direct intervention in the class struggle (leaflets, posters, newspapers). Our limited material resources and our small number makes this task very difficult. We appeal to our readers to help circulate Internationalist Perspective and to carry on political discussion with us. We ask you to subscribe to our magazine and to show a practical support for our efforts by giving a contribution if you can.

CHERNOBYL: TECHNOLOGY IN THE SERVICE OF THE WAR ECONOMY

The bourgeoisie never haggles over the means to ideologically poison the proletariat. Chernobyl is one example, among so many others, that the ruling class has utilized to try to make the working class forget the crisis and austerity -- all the while trying to yoke the working class to the needs of decadent capitalism, imperialist world war. The function of such a campaign is all too clear. The reality of capitalism must be hidden from the class which is the bearer of the liberation of humanity. All kinds of lies are therefore permitted. Indeed, that is what constitutes the very essence of bourgeois ideology.

CHERNOBYL : A SOCIAL QUESTION

The bourgeoisie would like the proletariat to believe that what happened at Chernobyl was a simple mishap in the "forward march of technology in the twentieth century". Thus, it would supposedly be enough to replace some outdated power plants by more modern ones. But that is not the real issue. The bourgeois media insinuates that technology is neutral. It's just that evil-minded people can make use of it. Western propaganda seeks to demonstrate that the Russians are evil-minded, while the Russians retort that it is the West which is bloodthirsty. In each case, it is the evil "other" which guides this innocent technology to demonic ends. This is all a war of words used by inter-imperialist adversaries to hide reality from the working class.

It has been 40 years since the building of nuclear power plants began. These power plants have a dual purpose. First, to supply the armaments industry, because with the advent of the atomic bomb, derivations of uranium were needed. Second, to assure energy independence, particularly at a time of inter-imperialist conflict. The primary objective of these power plants, therefore, is not to furnish electricity to the population, but rather the satisfaction of the imperialist appetites of the great powers. The U.S. was the initiator of this move and was quickly followed by the other great powers (Russia, Britain, France,

China). Today, atomic bombs, nuclear warheads of all sorts, nuclear submarines, the objects of pride of our governments, are too numerous to count. The world bourgeoisie, which has no "solution" to the crisis other than an eventual third World War, cannot do without these power plants.

The ruling class of a society determines technological developments just as it shapes the contours of culture, morality and science. When technology will belong to all of humanity, it will be developed differently, with a view to the satisfaction of the needs of the whole of humanity. Then there will be a real understanding of the dangers that any particular process can represent. Nuclear fission in the present power plants has never been safely controlled by the bourgeoisie, but what counts is that it can win or destroy territory in a world war.

Communism will develop technologies as a function of the satisfaction of human needs and no longer as a function of the economic and military needs of the bourgeoisie. This is a social question which can only be resolved through a social revolution.

THE LACK OF CONTROL OVER NUCLEAR POWER IS NOT ONLY RUSSIAN -- IT IS UNIVERSAL

The total lack of consideration for humanity from the moment that these nuclear power plants provided economic and military advantages, led to frantic construction in most of the industrialized countries, even though none of the world's engineers has ever been capable of completely controlling this form of energy. With respect to Chernobyl, the Western press has spoken ad nauseum of the sacrosanct second containment wall which "makes all the difference" between the Western plants and the Russian ones. The problem is that although this second wall greatly reduces the danger of the leakage of radioactive substances outside the plant under normal conditions, it can do nothing in the face of an explosion like the one at Chernobyl. We can cite innumerable examples of nuclear "incidents" in both Russia and

the West which illustrate this lack of control over nuclear power : Three Mile Island in 1979 is the best known. For three days the technicians didn't know what to do. In addition, there was the nuclear runaway at Sellafield in Great Britain; La Hague in France illustrates the fact that the bourgeoisie does not know where to put its radioactive waste . This issue can never be resolved. We must recognize that the bourgeoisie can disdainfully ignore this problem since it is already responsible for more than 100 million deaths in wars alone during the twentieth century, to which must be added the millions of other deaths from hunger, work accidents, cataclysms of all sorts about which it is supposedly impossible to do anything. All this is part of the price that must be paid so that capitalism can continue to exist.

THE CYNICISM OF THE BOURGEOISIE

Not only doesn't the world bourgeoisie care about human life in general, but each local bourgeoisie has the gall to make this very accusation about its rivals. Russia hid the nuclear accident at Chernobyl from its own people until Sweden detected an abnormal rise in the level of radiation on its own territory. But the Russians accuse the U.S. of only grudgingly making public the information about Three Mile Island. The U.S. which -- through its spy satellites -- knew everything that was happening on Russian soil during the explosion at Chernobyl, said nothing so as to be able to use the accusation of deceit in their propaganda against the rival bloc. The EEC did not hesitate to display its outrage at the lack of information concerning Chernobyl, but the 1957 accident at the nuclear center in Windscale, Great Britain, which led to deaths due to thyroid cancer, has remained cloaked in secrecy. Indeed, the EEC is a classic example in the domain of cynicism : this "community" which cannot dispose of its agricultural surplus, has found in Chernobyl the longed for pretext to limit the import of agricultural products from the East, while certain countries in Western Europe did not hesitate to dump their radioactive vegetables on the market on the pretext that if they didn't, "it would hurt their exports". (Le Soir 5/13/86). Different European countries use standards which deviate by more than 300% concerning the acceptable level of radiation, solely in terms of commercial considerations just as these same governments are making use of Chernobyl in terms of their war-like objectives.

At a time when the tension between the blocs increases under the pressure of the crisis, it is crucial for the Western governments to ideologically prepare the working class for an eventual third World War. Russia is accused of not separating the military and civilian aspects of its nuclear power plants, which fits perfectly into the general campaign of the West seeking to expose the aggression of Russia throughout the world.

The working class has no interest in letting itself get confused by such campaigns. The enemy of the proletariat is all the States in the world, in short, both blocs

which are preparing the holocaust. One thing is certain : the cynicism of the bourgeoisie cannot be in doubt when it presents its "fictional" films on the prospect of nuclear apocalypse, because all its actions are really directed towards this very perspective.

CAPITALISM, SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

In the aftermath of the nuclear "accident" at Chernobyl, two responses -- each decked out in radical garb -- have been prominent. The first, represented by the ecology movement, the "Greens", argues that Chernobyl is the fault of technological development itself, the ransom paid to the Frankenstein's monster of technology and science that dominates our epoch. The second, manifesting itself in the position of some revolutionary organizations implicitly or explicitly, argues that Chernobyl is solely the result of the inevitable capitalist misuse of technology; that technology and science itself is neutral, the same technology serving the interests of profit production and war under capitalism and the satisfaction of human needs under socialism. In fact, both the effort to blame technology and science, rather than capitalism, for ecological disaster on the one hand, and the insistence on the ultimate neutrality of technology and science, their veritable independence from the economic substructure of a given mode of production on the other, share the same underlying premise : that technology and science are separate from the socio-economic framework in which they develop. Each of these positions is not only mistaken, but ultimately can be recuperated by capitalism itself.

The ecology movement, with its "stop" to technological development, its program of "zero growth" and "small is beautiful", is organically linked to a reactionary romantic attachment to the supposed arcadia of pre-capitalist society or petty commodity production, based on small towns and peasant villages in the epoch before "technology's rape of the environment". In fact, the ecology movement is a direct expression of the angst, fear and despair which is rapidly spreading through broad strata of the population in the phase of decadent capitalism. This angst and despair is no longer -- as in the first part of this century -- largely confined to the ranks of the declining independent petty bourgeoisie (peasants, artisans, shopkeepers), condemned to destruction at the hands of capitalism in its monopoly and state forms. Today the spectre of nuclear annihilation in a third inter-imperialist world war and of ecological disaster (of which Chernobyl is a grim foretaste) provides the objective soil in which these negative and debilitating emotions sprout in all strata of the population. Because despair leads to passivity or at best to the urge to go backwards, to block change, it can quickly be recuperated by the capitalist state and its mass media as a powerful weapon against the working class. (Under capitalism, the proletariat is the only class which is objectively the bearer of hope, the class which in commu-

nism has the only project which is a real alternative to the destruction of the human species that capitalism will bring about.) In this sense, the mass media's encouragement to the ecology movement is no accident. Whatever the subjective aims of its participants, whatever fear or despair motivates them, objectively, this movement which blames technology and science for the hell-hole our planet is becoming, is an obstacle to the proletariat's struggle and a bulwark of capitalism in its phase of permanent crisis.

In some ways the position of those who argue that it is simply the capitalist misuse of technology for profit and war that is ultimately responsible for a Chernobyl is even more insidious than the position of the ecologists. This is so because such a view often makes an explicit appeal to Marxism as its basis and presents itself as an ideological weapon of the proletariat, while in reality (as we shall see) defending crucial aspects of the capitalist system. In fact, the argument for the so-called neutrality of technology and science, its independence from the ends to which it is put, is the classical position of the bourgeoisie. Not only is such a position the one prevailing in the West, but it is also orthodoxy in the East, where its explicit basis is to be found in Stalin's dictum that formal logic, mathematics, natural science and technology are independent of any particular economic base. This view, put forward in his work on linguistics, obviously contradicts Stalin's denunciation of Einstein's relativity theory as "bourgeois physics". Stalin's scientific (sic) pronouncements were determined largely by tactical considerations. Thus, with respect to the historical process, Stalin could by turns take up a super-voluntarist and a rigid determinist position. Clearly all of these positions are completely alien to Marxism.

No more than any other component of human culture can science, and the technology to which it gives birth, exist independently of the economic substructure of a mode of production.* This is true not in some vulgar economic determinist sense which denies any autonomy to politics, ideology, culture, etc, but because society is a totality in which economy and culture are organically linked by a complex series of dialectical interactions. In this regard, the direction taken by science and the very methods it uses and the technology it produces, are strongly conditioned and shaped by the socio-economic situation. For instance, Galileo's scientific achievement, so decisive for the development of modern science as a whole, was integrally linked to practical and theoretical work on ballistics, as well as being organically connected to the process of commodification and

the reduction of people to things**-- all of which was inseparable from the development of capitalism.

This in no way reduces Galileo's work (or that of Descartes, Newton, etc) to some kind of subjective reflection of his class position, to a pure manifestation of the false consciousness of the bourgeoisie. Such a crude view has nothing in common with Marxism. However, while representing in one sense a great advance in man's understanding of nature and while valid within certain limits, this science -- by its purely quantitative methods and its general theoretical presuppositions -- ignored whole areas of the natural landscape of the universe and was a block to the full unlocking of the secrets of nature. A full grasp of nature as process, and the real technological breakthrough that this could make possible, a qualitative technology, depends on a completely new and different development of science. Relativity theory and quantum mechanics (which provided a decisive refutation of Galileo-Newton as a complete science) by their overturning of the conception of a closed universe and mechanical nature represents a pre-figuration, though no more, of such a development. It will only be under communism, where commodification and the reduction of both men and nature to "things" to be dominated and exploited will finally be abolished, that such an integral science can become a reality. And this only provided that the concept of the neutrality of science is also finally overthrown. Otherwise, the persistence of a purely quantitative science conditioned by capitalism will both reflect the continuation of exploitive social relations and ensure that the real bases of the capitalist system of class oppression remain intact.

For the question of energy produced by nuclear fission, which specifically concerns us here, not only is its necessary link with the production of nuclear weapons critical, but so too is the threat of a nuclear runaway or meltdown and the insoluble problem of the storage of lethal waste products which is integral to nuclear fission. Indeed, this technology is organically linked to the conception of nature as an alien force to be subjugated which underlies all purely quantitative science. The danger of ecological disaster which is part and parcel of nuclear fission cannot be separated from this technology which has developed as an integral part of the capitalist mode of production.

The outlines of a different, an ecologically safe solution to the needs of a hungry planet for energy can already be dimly perceived on the edges of contemporary science -- though it will await a triumphant proletarian revolution to be actualized. We are speaking of

*This is not the place to pursue the fact that science itself is one of man's productive forces. This points up the fact that Marxism is based not on a mechanistic concept of base and superstructure but on the conception of social reality as a totality.

**Alfred Sohn-Rethel in his Intellectual and Manual Labor shows that Galileo's principle of inertial motion "derives from the pattern of motion contained in the real abstraction of commodity exchange".

the possibilities (still largely unexplored even theoretically) of fusion technology, which is based on the fusion of hydrogen particles, which replicates the energy production of the universe itself. On the basis of known technology, fusion eliminates the danger of runaway or meltdown and fusion reactors minimize the risk of radioactivity or waste storage problems. A full discussion of the potential (and conceivable drawbacks) of fusion energy is not possible here and in any case our purpose is not to harness our future to any one potential technological development. Rather, what is necessary is to insist that the fate of humanity absolutely

depends on a massive new development of man's productive forces to assure a worthy life to all on this planet. It is equally true that humanity's fate also hinges on breaking its dependence on science and technology conditioned by and integrally linked to capitalism and its destructive cycle. Such an outcome can only be brought about by the proletarian revolution which will both unleash technology and radically transform its very basis and direction. In that way alone will man finally unlock the secrets of nature and overcome his alienation.

Johan / MacIntosh

centrism

CONTINUED FROM P.29

two methods are incompatible. When the ICC began to abandon the former method in favour of the latter, the debate was a very serious matter. But now, when it intends to formalise this by a change in the platform, it is much more serious. These methods have implications on all levels and the direct influence of the second method is already to be seen on a general theoretical level (the doctrine of 'councilism, the greatest danger', councilism being assimilated to hesitation in relation to intervention) and on the level of method in analysing the present situation (the doctrine of the impossibility of overestimating the immediate situation) or on the level of activity (the reduction of the weaknesses of the organisation to 'a lack of conviction', the doctrine of the impossibility of activism). The ravages it has produced in the ICC up to now have been hidden by its stimulating effect on the activity of intervention in class struggle. But although this intervention is a historical necessity, its quantitative

increase is by no means a guarantee of its political content.

In a difficult and demanding situation, such as the one we face today, it's obviously easier to grasp at straws, at the recipes that the ICC's theory of centrism offers ('fighting' hesitation, lack of conviction, etc) than to hold onto Marxism which offers no convenient recipes. It offers only a rigorous method. Only with this method can the crisis in the revolutionary milieu be overcome. This supposes a profound, critical examination of the weaknesses of the present revolutionary milieu and a development of revolutionary theory, particularly on class consciousness and the role of the party. On the other hand, the implications of the theory of centrism in the past show what can be its only future: bankruptcy.

ML
June 1985

PUBLIC MEETING

Internationalist Perspective will regularly hold public meetings as an integral part of its determination to actively stimulate a real debate and discussion around the vital issues that face revolutionaries and the working class today. For information about our public meetings in the autumn, please write to our local address.

CORRESPONDENCE

We hope our readers will send us their comments on the positions and analyses expressed in our magazine. The growth of an international proletarian milieu depends on the widest possible discussion and the confrontation of ideas.



discussion



THE REVOLUTIONARY MILIEU & "INTERNATIONALIST PERSPECTIVE"

As could be expected, the reactions of the proletarian political milieu to the appearance of a new group in its midst are as varied as the many organisations and politically active elements that are part of it. Some have commented on IP in their publications, some have written to us, some have spoken at our public meetings. Some were encouraging, others ice cold, but many were far from clear on what the actual differences between us and the ICC are, why we had to leave the organisation and why we chose to form an 'external fraction' and not a 'new' group with a 'new name'. In the article that follows this one, these questions are answered in depth. But it would be overly optimistic to expect that this will clarify the seriousness of the issues at stake for the entire milieu.

On the one hand, the lack of understanding in the milieu of the political issues behind the split is no surprise since the ICC has kept the milieu largely in the dark on the debates that raged for two years inside it. As FK from Holland writes: "One can guess what it means when an organisation, which brings its internal debates to the outside only when it judges them 'sufficiently ripe', puts a revision of its platform on the agenda of its international congress and does not even publish the proposals afterwards. This way, it's impossible for an outsider to take a position ..."

But on the other hand, it affirms our view that the problems we encountered in the ICC are not something specific to that organisation but a reflection of the general weakness of the proletarian milieu. Indeed:

- if we see the ICC abandoning its own concept of class consciousness as a process of the class as a whole recognising itself and its revolutionary task; if we see it losing its conviction that the vast majority of the world proletariat can and must become conscious; if we see it develop an intervention in accordance with its new semi-Bordigist orientations, fudging the union question, angling for immediate influence, trying to become the "centre of direction and coordination of the workers' struggle" (World Revolution 92); we see also that the same type of bourgeois influence is present in the majority of the proletarian milieu;

- if the ICC is losing its capacity to apply its own historical framework (the change in period from ascendant to decadent capitalism,

the universal tendency to state capitalism in decadence and its absorption of most of the forms of struggle and political currents that were proletarian in ascendant capitalism, like centrism and opportunism); if it's losing the capacity to distinguish between the radicalised bourgeoisie and the working class to the point of calling Stalinists in the '30s and rank-and-file unionist committees in the '80s proletarian in nature, the same is true for most of the rest of the milieu which sometimes does not even recognise the reality of the change in period;

- if the ICC has chosen to meet internal divergences with a regime of discipline instead of healthy discussion and if its external attitude has become one of arrogant sectarianism instead of real debate, the sad truth is that in doing so, it only followed the example set by most proletarian groups. The fact that many of these - like the CWO, ICP or GCI - not even deigned to take notice of the appearance of a new group in the milieu shows that for them this milieu does not even exist other than as a field for recruitment. If you take the milieu seriously a new group means something, be it negative or positive.

Our awareness of these similarities makes us all the more convinced that our Fraction has a vital role to play towards the milieu, by fighting against its confusions as well as fighting for real discussion within it. For without this, without the breakdown of sectarianism and the honest confrontation of positions, revolutionary regroupment will remain a chimera.

THE MESSAGE OF THE ICC

To understand better why we had to leave the ICC, we recommend to our readers the article the ICC devoted to the split in International Review 45. We shall not expand on the many lies, gratuitous insults and demagogic lawyer-tricks this article contains. The ICC makes the same accusation towards us and in the end it will remain impossible for outsiders to disentangle truth from falsity in the internal events in the ICC. But what's clear for everyone to see is the utter political emptiness that breathes through this text and illustrates perfectly what we've been saying about the organisation.

The ICC article summarises its 'message' in its last sentence: "The best thing that we could hope for is that the External

Fraction disappears as quickly as possible." Sounds familiar, this message:

- When the ICC's central organ introduced its new orientations on class consciousness, dissenters were declared 'centrists to councilism', councilism was declared the 'greatest danger', centrism the source of all problems in the ICC now and in the past, and a campaign to eradicate it was launched. In other words, disappear!

- When that didn't settle the matter and minoritarians began to meet in order to defend their positions more effectively these meetings were simply prohibited. In other words, disappear!

- Faced with this unprecedented totalitarian action, minoritarians used their statutory right to form a tendency. The initial reaction of most members of the central organ was to prohibit that too, but they had a little problem - the statutes didn't allow this. So they prevented the publication of the tendency's foundation text and proposed to the congress to change the statutes in order to prohibit the formation of tendencies without the majority's permission. In other words, disappear!

- At the Congress itself, they asked us to take an oath of allegiance they knew very well we could never take: to remain loyal, not to the programme but to the organisation itself, regardless of the positions it would adopt or in what manner the debate would be conducted. When we refused we were forced to leave.

Disappear! Disappear! Disappear! The message hasn't changed. But here we are, more convinced than ever.

THE ARGUMENTS OF IMPOTENCE

There's no attempt by the ICC to discuss, no effort to defend its new positions. Not in this article, nor in any other: the debate has stopped for the ICC, no traces can be found any more in its external press. To defend its differences, the ICC would have to recognise its slidings and take responsibility for them, which is more than can be asked from a degenerating organisation.

Instead of political explanations, the ICC offers us some morsels of bourgeois sociology and psychology (a field in which it feels much at home, as its psycho-analysis of 'centrism' shows). The Fraction, so we learn, is "formed by comrades who had known each other for a long time and who had established between them an artificial solidarity based essentially on their old ties of friendship" They are "teachers, academics and higher functionaries" and therefore "more susceptible to vanity of various kinds, since in their daily life they are much more accustomed than are workers to being listened to in a respectful manner." So now you know it. It's all a question of friendship, social background and the vanity that results from

it! Apart from the fact that this explanation is so shaky it falls apart at the first touch (where was the "artificial solidarity" when we were on different sides in previous debates? are unemployed people also 'higher functionaries accustomed to respectful treatment?' etc, etc) it is now most striking that the ICC is forced to use the kind of argument that in the workers' movement has always been used as a substitute for political argument by those who found themselves politically empty-handed. It was used against Marx, Engels, Korsch, Pannekoek, Gorter, to name but a few we do not mind the company.

THE NEW BOLSHEVIKS

And what better way to cover this political nakedness than the mantle of authority of the Bolsheviks? The ICC actually compares the split with us with the events at the Second Congress of the Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party in 1903 which led to the split between Bolsheviks and Mensheviks. We don't have to say which role they choose for themselves.

The fact that the ICC compares itself to the Bolsheviks tells a lot about its megalomania and its attitude to the rest of the proletarian milieu, which simply hasn't found its way yet to the latter-day Bolshevik party. But it also shows its confidence that its members won't know what really happened at that congress, will simply be impressed by the quotes from Lenin and won't bother to research the question, like they won't bother to check its distortions about the Italian Left (see the following article).

According to the ICC:

- the split was engineered by the Mensheviks who, like the Fraction, acted out of vanity;
- there were no real issues that warranted a split (it's no coincidence that in the several pages it devotes to the events in 1903, the ICC never mentions on what issues the congress was divided).

What a contempt for history!

On the first point, quite the contrary was true. It was Lenin who had the initiative, who was convinced of the necessity to obtain a majority for his proposals at all costs (openly stating to his collaborators that, if necessary, a split ("raskol") had to be created (1)). Finally, the job was done by provoking the departure of the Jewish Bund and the group Rabocheye Dyelo on unrelated issues. Scheming and plotting was going on, on both sides, but the real question is what divided them. That brings us to the second point. The issues that divided the congress were very real: the entire concept of organisation was at stake. While Lenin's proposals were tainted with bourgeois influence (mainly by their conspiratorialism) - and were correctly criticised by people like Trotsky and Luxemburg for that - on the main issue, Lenin was right. Lenin defended a minority party, based on the active participation by all members in the defence of a clear programme;

and therefore a restrictive membership criterion. The Mensheviks envisaged the classic Social Democratic mass party that could put its pressure of numbers on the bourgeoisie with which it wanted to collaborate against Tsarism, and therefore a much looser membership criterion.

With hindsight, we can only conclude that the split was a reflection of the division between revolutionaries and reformists that occurred worldwide. It led to greater clarity and was therefore healthy for the development of class consciousness. If the ICC today thinks that the split was disastrous for the workers' movement because it undermined "the confidence that the workers could have in the party", it only shows that it doesn't care very much for clarity, that its only concern is how to capture "the confidence" of the, oh so easily, confused workers.

WHO IS SECTARIAN?

The ICC accuses us of sectarianism because we refused to disappear. It's a charge that shouldn't surprise us, but coming from them it has a definite Orwellian ring. Indeed, the ICC's own attitude to the rest of the milieu is marked by increasing sectarianism (an ICC resolution on its press states that polemics must be based on ridiculing the others' position). Since we left the organisation, we have had the opportunity to experience this ugly symptom of degeneration more than once:

- After the separation, IP asked the ICC section in the US for permission to use its duplicator to produce leaflets for intervention, at times when the ICC would not be using the machine itself. The section's initial reaction was: you can use it only if you submit your leaflets for our prior approval. But soon word came from the ICC central organ that the answer had to be a flat no.

- At the time of the split, we had in our possession large stocks of old ICC publications. We asked to keep some of these that contained important articles which must be made available to new elements in the revolutionary milieu. But the ICC refused, preferring to throw away bundles of its old publications on a garbage dump.

- Although the central organ of the ICC has communicated to us officially that no decision to boycott us has been taken, several members of the ICC have stated unequivocally that this central organ has decreed that the members should not buy copies of IP. With this 'economic warfare' it wants to reduce IP's financial means. As the financial impact is negligible, one can only assume that the real purpose is to insulate the members from our views and critiques.

The mindset behind this is not a revolutionary spirit seeking clarification of the problems confronting the class, but the petty concerns of a shopkeeper calculating how to wipe out 'the competition'.

WHAT LESSONS?

Enough of this. There are others in the milieu who agree with our analysis that the ICC is degenerating. For them of course, the question is to draw the right lessons from that experience and they assert that the Fraction has so far failed to do so. The Communist Bulletin Group thinks the Fraction "not only jumped overboard without first learning to swim", they "still have the anchor chain wrapped around their necks" (Communist Bulletin 10), that chain being the concept of internal functioning of the ICC. And LLM from Hong Kong writes: "note that throughout the entire event the majority never acted in contravention to the ICC's rules of organisational practice in other words, the problem lies in these rules themselves, which form the source of the ICC's monolithism, whose victims you are." The CBG stresses that our split with the ICC "to an uncanny degree" duplicates the split that occurred in the ICC in 1981 and which led to the formation of groups like the CBG and Wildcat, an assertion which is logical from their point of view, since the rules of the ICC were basically the same in 1981 as in 1985. But we reject that analysis. Certainly, the sectarian and monolithic tendencies in the ICC did not fall from the sky in 1985. They played a role in 1981, they probably were present in the organisation from its very beginning. But the bulk of the blame for the events in 1981 is on the minority:

- While the members of the Fraction fought for their positions in the ICC for two years, writing numerous texts, attending congresses, using every possibility for discussion that was still available, no such efforts were made by the splitters of 1981 and certainly not by those who would form the CBG.

- Many aspects of the ICC's programmatic degeneration in 1985 (the search for immediate influence, the tendency to substitutionism, the blurring of the class nature of rank-and-file unionism, etc) were precisely points that were defended by Chenier and other splitters in 1981.

- The minority of 1981 was not met with the barrage of disciplinary measures like the prohibition of minority meetings that we faced in 1984-85.

- While we fully prepared for the ICC Congress in order to convince our ICC comrades of our positions or at least of the necessity of real debate, the comrades who split in 1981 simply refused to come to the extraordinary conference that was called to thrash out the issues. They left without even attempting to clarify what the dividing issues were.

- While we left in a responsible manner, returning all money, stocks, etc to the ICC those who left in 1981 used deceit to appropriate ICC material. Some of those who later formed the CBG made matters even worse by threatening to call the police against ICC (2) members that recuperated the stolen material.

Despite what the ICC and the CBG say, the splits in 1981 and 1985 were not similar, even if the rules were the same.

If the rules were the only problem, why was real debate still possible in the ICC in 1980 to a degree unimaginable today, why was the ICC in the 1970s, with the same rules, a vibrant pole of regroupment and clarification?

We do not contend that the ICC's rules were perfect, that its internal functioning was not part of the problem. But it is impossible to draw the lessons of our experience by fixating on this part in isolation. In our attempts to understand the dynamic behind the ICC's degeneration, we saw how the changes in the historical background - the acceleration in the deepening of the crisis, in the bourgeoisie's austerity attacks and war preparations, the slow development of the class

struggle after Poland '80 - have affected the thinking of revolutionaries on how class consciousness would develop and what their role in it had to be; how this brought theoretical weaknesses to the surface and induced a flight into positions of the past; how this went hand in hand with a deterioration of the climate of discussion and a growing tendency to monolithism.

We intend to take an in-depth look at the ICC ways of internal functioning to see what remains sound and what contributed to the degeneration. But in doing so, it is vital that we never lose sight of the close inter-linking between the functioning of an organisation, its theoretical tools and development and the questions that are posed by the period. It is a subject we shall return to in forthcoming issues of International Perspective.

Sander

Notes

(1) Quoted in Protocol of the Second Congress of the RSDP, Lenin Archives, v16, p57.

(2) In the pages of the Bulletin 5, the CBG has condemned such threats as "behaviour totally alien to revolutionary practice". It also states that "splitters should return hardware belonging to the group and any funds of the organisation." This self-critique is, however, at best half-hearted. So far as we are aware, the CBG still has funds that it held in escrow for the ICC when it was part of that organisation. Furthermore, isn't it hypocritical to state that splitters have the obligation to return all material to the

organisation but to deny at the same time the right of the organisation to recuperate that material when they don't?

Thus, even if it is not bourgeois, and if not all of its present membership involved themselves in the deceits and thefts at the time (and some did behave in an open way, returned material, etc), in practice the CBG has not unequivocally repudiated gangsterist behaviour in the milieu; and the fact that so few groups in the milieu condemn this only underlines the weakness of the milieu. Until the CBG clears up the mess it left behind in 1981, it precludes fraternal relations with us (such as common meetings, leaflets, etc).



WHY DO WE CALL OURSELVES A FRACTION?

Three issues recur in the revolutionary milieu's response to the formation of our Fraction. They concern: first, the political bases or criteria for splits in a revolutionary organisation; second, the causes which prevented the divergences between our Tendency and the majority of the ICC from being fully clarified - particularly in front of the revolutionary milieu - prior to a split; third, why we constituted ourselves as an 'External Fraction of the ICC', an outcome which, on the surface at least, is seemingly filled with ambiguity.

The question of the political criteria for a split in a revolutionary organisation cannot be addressed without first distinguishing between two types of proletarian political organisations, which correspond to very different objective situations and which have - despite considerable overlap - different tasks and functions in the class struggle. It is a matter of distinguishing between a political party of the proletariat, on the one

hand, and a fraction or organisation of revolutionaries, on the other. In the conception of the Italian Left, to which we adhere on this point, the formation of a party is not a voluntaristic act, based simply on the level of consciousness or programmatic clarity of revolutionaries, but rather is directly conditioned by the objective situation of class struggle in a given historical period, by the development of class consciousness within the proletariat. To the very high level of class struggle and development of class consciousness which provide the objective conditions for the constitution of a party, must be added the fact that, for a party to exist, it must be able to have a significant and systematic influence on the actual course of events, and this necessarily includes a considerable weight within the broad ranks of the proletariat itself. (1) By contrast, in counter-revolutionary periods or those in which the class struggle and intervention of revolutionaries, though on the rise, have yet to generate the conditions where revolution-

aries can have the decisive impact on the course of events that correspond to the function of a party, the activity of revolutionaries is no less vital. In such periods, the programmatic elaboration and theoretical and practical tasks of revolutionary regroupment - without which the subsequent formation of a party, when objective conditions demand it, will be impossible - are primordial. It is the fraction or organisation of revolutionaries that corresponds to these tasks.

In saying that it is the task of programmatic elaboration and revolutionary regroupment that is primordial in the case of a fraction or organisation of revolutionaries, it is necessary to point out that direct intervention in the class struggle - in strikes, demonstrations, etc - is also vital. This is the case even in periods of rampant counter-revolution, when the fraction or organisation swims against the current. It is particularly important in a period - like today - when the class struggle is on the rise, and revolutionaries can have a real impact on the course of certain struggles. However, unless this activity is based on real programmatic clarity and a clear defence of revolutionary principles, unless it unequivocally rejects any blurring whatsoever of the class lines, it will degenerate into a sterile activism which completely negates it as revolutionary intervention.

Just as the objective conditions for and basic functions of these two types of proletarian revolutionary organisations differ, so the criteria for splits in each of them also differ. In the case of a political party of the proletariat, such as the Social Democratic parties before 1914 or the Third International during the late 1920s, the task of revolutionaries in the face of a process of degeneration is to struggle to reverse the course, only leaving the organisation when it has definitively crossed the class line into the camp of the capitalist class enemy. Such a point was constituted by the votes for war credits on the part of the major Social Democratic parties in 1914 and by the definitive adoption of the programme and practice of 'Socialism in one country' (sic) by the Third International in the late 1920s, both of which actions meant the betrayal of proletarian internationalism, the only basis for revolutionary activity in the decadent phase of capitalism. To abandon the party before it has definitively crossed the class line, however, means not only prematurely scrapping an instrument which the proletariat has painstakingly constructed, but also handing over the party to the capitalist tendencies within it, and abandoning the segement of the class over which the party exerts a decisive influence to the ideological and political control of capitalism. A premature split in a proletarian party, thereby furthers the preconditions for imperialist world war, which absolutely requires the mobilisation of the working class by the ideological/political representatives of the capitalist state.

The political criteria for a split are diff-

erent in the case of a fraction or organisation of revolutionaries. Here there can be no question of waiting for the organisation to definitively cross the class line. Inasmuch as an organisation of revolutionaries is characterised not by its decisive influence on the course of the class struggle and its base in the working class (as is a party), but by its capacity to serve as a laboratory for the elaboration of Marxist theory, to be a pole of regroupment for a scattered revolutionary milieu and by its militant will to intervene, its existence is justified solely by its level of programmatic clarity and its capacity to advance Marxist theory/praxis in the face of the decadence of capitalism and the necessary renaissance of Marxism which this requires. Given the fact that only the constant development of Marxist theory/praxis can make possible the regroupment of revolutionaries and the formation of a political party of the proletariat tomorrow, to remain in an organisation which can no longer fulfil these primordial tasks is nothing less than to abandon the real class struggle.

Programmatic degeneration, the blurring of basic class lines, is not the only mortal danger to the capacity of the organisation of revolutionaries to fulfil its tasks. The capacity of an organisation of revolutionaries to be a laboratory for the development of Marxist theory/praxis is absolutely conditioned by its internal life and mode of functioning. Where a regime of discipline replaces the open discussion which is the veritable oxygen which sustains revolutionary activity; where dogmatism reigns as an obstacle to the constant elaboration of Marxist theory, which is the correlate of a dialectical world process; where the 'brilliant leader' (or Central Committee) enshrines himself over a passive rank and file; in such a framework, the development of Marxist theory/praxis and the steps necessary to regroupment are impossible, and the very condition for such activity is a split.

Indeed, in some ways the process of organisational degeneration is more swiftly fatal to an organisation of revolutionaries than even programmatic/ideological degeneration. Provided the internal, organisational life of the group still allows a real discussion and open debate (both internally, in front of the milieu and class as a whole), a course of programmatic degeneration may still be reversed and the organisation put right. Where discipline replaces discussion, however, any such possibility is gone.

Where such a process of ideological/organisational degeneration begins, only two outcomes are possible: either the divergences will be overcome, reabsorbed, through a process of debate, a real confrontation of positions, or the divergences will sharpen, broaden and become fully clarified. In the first case, the organisation will be politically reinvigorated; in the second, a split will be necessary.

Therefore, in the case of a fraction or organisation of revolutionaries - and it is such an organisation and not a party, that the ICC is and has always considered itself - the criteria for a split are: first, the existence of divergences of principle, fundamental (not secondary or unclear) disagreements, irreconcilable programmatic differences, incurable corruption of the internal life of the organisation; second, the achievement of clarity regarding these fundamental divergences, both within the organisation and in the revolutionary milieu as a whole. It is our contention - amply documented in International Perspective numbers 1 and 2 - that just such fundamental divergences developed between the minority and majority in the ICC between January 1984 and November 1985: divergences over the nature of class consciousness and its development, the class nature of substitutionism, revolutionary intervention, the existence of centrism in the decadent phase of capitalism. The thread that linked all of the positions adopted by the majority on these issues, was the headlong retreat to the positions of the past, to the positions of the Third International in the mid- and late 1920s (ie in its phase of rapid degeneration). The positions adopted by the ICC in 1986 were already mistaken in 1926! That these positions could be taken up (opposed only by a small minority) is the clearest demonstration that the ICC had not only ceased to be a laboratory for the development of Marxist theory/praxis (the sine qua non for an organisation of revolutionaries), but that it was even incapable of maintaining the theoretical acquisitions on which it was founded. Moreover, this whole process was accompanied by a corresponding organisational degeneration in which a regime of discipline established itself.

If the fundamental divergences which warrant a split in an organisation of revolutionaries were present (and developing with an amazing rapidity), the same cannot be said for the second criterion for a split, the clarification of principled disagreements, particularly vis a vis the milieu. However, this very situation, far from putting off a split could only precipitate it. And this because what was at issue was the actions of the majority to make such a clarification impossible (despite their protestations to the contrary) by replacing discussion with discipline. Where the regime of discipline prevails, where the process of thrashing out disagreements is blocked by organisational/administrative manoeuvres, the clarification of principled divergences becomes impossible within the framework of the organisation - and a split, instead of becoming the result of such a process of clarification, becomes the very condition for such a process to really occur.

In the case of the ICC, the recourse to discipline manifested its ugly countenance in several forms. First, the decision of the central organ to prohibit meetings between comrades with minority positions. Such meetings had as their aim to enable the minority to ascertain if there was a real coherence to their disagreements, and to elaborate their

positions so as to assure a real clarification of divergences and the development of an authentic political debate within the organisation. The prohibition of any meetings/discussions between comrades holding minority positions could only have the effect of politically atomising the minority and preventing the very clarification that the majority cynically claimed to be its goal. Second, there was the decision of the central organ not to permit comrades with minority positions to participate as delegates to Congresses of territorial sections or to be elected to the praesidium of a Congress/Conference by their own sections (decisions subsequently acknowledged by the same central organ to be in contradiction with the letter and spirit of the organisation's own statutes - though this reversal was never acknowledged by the members of the organisation and remained without practical effect). Third, the insistence of the central organ that comrades of the minority could not speak as representatives of the organisation (when members of its central organ) even on questions where there were no disagreements between majority and minority. These latter decisions could have no other effect than to present the minority as a dangerous and alien element in the organisation, thus throwing up one more obstacle to the process of clarification of divergences which is the obligation of a revolutionary organisation. Fourth, despite the very large number of texts which the minority produced in over a year and a half of struggle against the degeneration of the ICC (of which IP has been able to present only a very small part in its first two issues), the revolutionary milieu and the class as a whole remained in almost complete ignorance of the debate in the ICC, and the issues over which there were profound divergences, because the central organ refused to open up the debate to the exterior and print the texts of the minority in its territorial press. During the whole period of our struggle within the ICC only one of our texts was allowed to appear in the territorial press (in a truncated form in World Revolution, without so much as an introduction written by the minority to give the cut-up text some coherence; the subject of a reprimand by the central organ because the section in Belgium had printed it in Internationalisme in such a way as to give it too much prominence). This policy could scarcely be compensated for by the belated appearance of three of our texts in the International Review, especially as the central organ had refused to print the constitutive and programmatic text of our Tendency in any of its publications unless it was altered in content. This recourse to censorship is the actual reason why the milieu did not see the unfolding of the debate which occurred in the ICC during 1984 and 1985. Finally, the Sixth Congress of the ICC at its very outset adopted a resolution demanding that the comrades of the minority pledge in advance to remain in the organisation no matter what decisions the Congress made, as a pre-requisite to their participating in it. Unwilling to sign such a loyalty oath, determined to decide on our future course depending on the unfolding

of the Congress itself (and in particular the possibilities for real and open discussion), we were instructed to withdraw from the Congress. When we subsequently refused to comply with the original ultimatum, we were suspended from the organisation. By then, however, the issue had been decided, and it was obvious that the clarification of divergences (as well as the other tasks of revolutionary activity could only proceed by constituting an organisational form separate from the ICC).

This brings us to the final issue: why did we constitute ourselves as an 'External Fraction of the ICC'? Put another way, what is the meaning of a group which is organisationally separate from the ICC, not having its task putting the ICC right, calling itself a 'fraction of the ICC'? On this question, we are basing ourselves on the concept of fraction articulated by the Italian Left in the late 1920s and early 1930s (albeit modified by the fact that the ICC, unlike the Communist Party of Italy, was an organisation of revolutionaries and not a political party of the proletariat).

The Italian fraction from its constitution at Pantin in 1928 was organisationally completely separate from the Communist Party of Italy. Moreover, the Italian fraction did not have as its goal (unlike Trotsky's Left Opposition of that time) putting the Communist Parties right. Rather it sought to constitute itself as the bridge to the formation of a future party of the proletariat which would arise when the objective conditions warranted it (much as our fraction seeks to be a pole of regroupment today). The sole link of the Italian fraction to the CP of Italy was the fact that its programmatic point of departure

was the Rome Theses which had served as the original platform of that party (a platform which the Stalinised CP of Italy had repudiated at its Lyons Congress of 1926). Similarly, our sole link with the ICC is the fact that the original platform and statutes of that organisation (now in the process of being altered) constitutes the programmatic foundation for our fraction's elaboration and development of Marxist theory/praxis, the point of departure (as the clearest summation of the basic class lines and lessons of the first revolutionary wave) for the future regroupment of revolutionaries. It is this fact and this fact alone, not any effort to put the ICC right, that is the basis for our decision to constitute ourselves as an 'External Fraction of the ICC'.

It is in the new conditions of the beginnings of an ascendant course of class struggle which absolutely requires a genuine renaissance of Marxism, and in which the ICC is resolutely marching backwards to the discredited positions of the late 1920s, that our Fraction makes its appearance in today's scattered revolutionary milieu.

MAC INTOSH

Notes

(1) This in no way qualifies our complete rejection of the Social Democratic and Stalinist conceptions of a 'mass party', as opposed to the revolutionary conception of the party as regrouping only a minority of the most class conscious proletarians.

document

CENTRISM & THE ICC

Under this heading, we plan to regularly publish texts of the revolutionary movement which we hope can contribute to grappling with the problems facing the class struggle today.

In these first few issues, however, we will continue what we began in I.P.#1 and #2: publishing texts written while we were fighting inside the ICC against its degeneration. In this issue, we print a text criticizing the position of the ICC on the question of the existence of centrism in the period of capitalist decadence.

To place this article in its original context, we will try to sum up the nature of the

question as it was debated in the ICC (for a more detailed analysis, see I.P.#1, "The Decline of the ICC"). While seeing the need to deepen its positions on the development of class consciousness, the role of the party and the perspective for its eventual formation, the ICC reacted to the difficulties involved in the debate by retreating back to positions which have already shown their bankruptcy, years ago, in the workers' movement. These positions include the distinction (of Leninist derivation) between "class consciousness" and "consciousness of the class", the idea that centrism and opportunism are important elements of the workers' movement in the



period of decadence and the idea that the working class today has to fight against councilism as its greatest danger. The way the concept of centrism was introduced into the ICC illustrates the dynamic of regression as well as the crucial importance of having a clear position on this question. Centrism was defined as a whole series of "behavior patterns": hesitation, vacillation, etc, reflecting the pressure of bourgeois ideology. This is just the opposite of a genuine Marxist approach where centrism would be defined historically in terms of its program and political practice (see our text in the International Review #43, "Centrism, the Road to the Abandoning of Class Positions"). But the "behavioristic" definition had a more prosaic and immediate purpose: to label those who refused to go along with the new ICC doctrine on class consciousness. Things never remain static for long: the majority of the ICC rapidly used this notion to describe the programmatic weaknesses of the revolutionary milieu today (IR#43), then the weaknesses in the process of proletarian class consciousness (IR#44) and finally came to see the Social Democracy and the German USPD, butchers of the workers' movement between 1914 and 1921, as part of the proletarian camp (in flagrant contradiction to its own platform). The extent of the damage to the ICC itself, caused by this introduction of the idea of centrism, is itself a proof of the importance of this question. It is not a byzantine quarrel over words but a matter of principle: whether there can be a "third path" in the period of decadence -- that is, whether political currents and positions aside from those of revolutionary Marxism and not those of the bourgeoisie can exist within the workers' movement. This theory of centrism has repercussions on the way we evaluate organizations of the past like Social Democracy and the USPD, as the text that follows demonstrates. But it will, even more, influence the position taken on organizations that arise in the course of class struggle today and in the future. This is one reason pushing us to keep raising this question hoping that a real debate can take place on this in the revolutionary milieu.

We have already received two letters on centrism: one from LLM (who publishes International Correspondence) and the other from FK (who publishes Cosmopolis). The contributions from these two comrades prove that this question should indeed be openly debated by the proletarian milieu because there is a considerable heterogeneity on this subject. Both comrades say they disagree with our position that opportunism and centrism can no longer exist as a political current in the proletariat in the period of decadence. But the argumentation developed by these two contributions shows once again that coming to the same conclusion can cover diametrically different reasoning. LLM more or less adopts Lenin's position considering centrists as "loyal to Marxism in words" but "subordinate to opportunism (social chauvinism) in fact" which "means, in reality, a desertion to the bourgeois camp". This seems to indicate that for LLM, centrism, even in the ascendent period of capitalism, had a bourgeois nature but he doesn't expand enough on the issue in this letter for us to get a really clear idea of his position as a whole.

FK, on the other hand, also considering that opportunism/centrism exists both in ascendancy and decadence, places it, however, as a part of the workers' movement. He defines opportunism as "the separation between means and ends". This definition seems more political than that of the ICC but it is hardly very precise. It is undeniable that this is one of the most frequent errors in the workers' movement in the 19th as well as the 20th centuries. Nevertheless, it is not enough to justify putting in the same category Kautsky, on the one hand, and the errors on intervention of a revolutionary organization today on the other hand, as FK does in his contribution.

Both contributions we've received have, in our opinion, the same drawback: they don't analyse the question of centrism/opportunism in all its aspects. Because they forget one or another of the fundamental factors, they arrive at incorrect conclusions. We hope that the following text will serve to help make the method of discussion on this question more precise in the revolutionary milieu.

The ICC's more than a year-long discussion on centrism was ended by the central organ as it was begun - in confusion. It is significant that the central organ closed the debate just when divergences had deepened to the point of giving rise to a tendency (the decision to close the debate was made after learning of the formation of the Tendency at the meeting of the central organ in January 1985) and when the concrete historical implications of the theory of centrism had begun to emerge clearly, when the questioning of the lessons of the first revolutionary wave had reached the point of putting the ICC platform in question on the passage of workers' parties into the bourgeoisie (the class nature of social democracy, the causes of the failure of the revolution, the formation and degener-

ation of the CI, etc.). Since then, the majority has been remarkably silent on all these issues, despite the fact that under pressure from the criticism of the Tendency, it has finally been forced to admit that its present position does not correspond to the one in the platform. It now proposes changing the platform. Up to now, the majority has succeeded in justifying this serious situation by pointing to the 'incoherence' of the minority comrades and then the Tendency. (....)

It's true that for nearly a year, the comrades of the minority were not completely coherent on certain points - and they said so at the time. But using this fact to end the debate and using it even today is just a way

of hiding the gravity of the problems raised by the debate.

First of all, its infinitely better to be momentarily incoherent on a revolutionary position than perfectly coherent right from the start on a bourgeois position. The process of the development of class consciousness means that coherence generally emerges only after a decantation of the lessons of historical experience. (....) Second, the 'majority' itself has never stopped being incoherent on a whole series of points without ever admitting it - some incidental examples will be given in this text. Third, the relative incoherence of the comrades of the minority was overcome when the tendency was formed on the basis of a coherent text (the resolution proposed at the meeting of the central organ in January 1985). This text concisely spells out the positions of the Tendency but up to now its content has not been criticised in any serious way.

In this text I want to show that the tendency's position on centrism is coherent and, above all, coherent with historical reality, while the arguments of the 'majority' retreat farther and farther from this historical reality. (....) It has become increasingly clear that the stakes of this question involve a delimitation of principle. Either the ICC will continue the critical examination of revolutionary experience carried on by the left communists and the ICC, or it will regress towards the positions of the degenerating CI and of Trotsky in the 1930s. I shall not repeat the points developed in other texts, particularly the text of MacIntosh (see International Review 43: 'The Concept of 'Centrism': The Road to the Abandonment of Class positions') which I agree with. I shall simply try to develop some complementary aspects in answer to the arguments put forward by the 'majority' (....).

HISTORICAL MATERIALISM

OR POLITICAL PSYCHOLOGY

Historical materialism is the foundation stone of Marxism and up to now the ICC has been one of the very few groups to apply rigorously the concept of the periodisation of capitalism (ascendancy/decadence) and of the workers' movement itself. This was done for reformism, for example.

At first sight, it could seem that reformism remained the same in the 19th and 20th Centuries. It has always proclaimed that capitalism had to be transformed by progressive reforms of the system. This is the reason why almost everyone (including most of today's revolutionary organisations) continues to speak of the existence of 'reformism' today. On the level of pure ideology, it is certain that reformism has not ceased to exist in the period of capitalist decadence because a large faction of the political apparatus of the bourgeoisie continues to claim an attachment to reformism. A historical materialist analysis, however, proceeds from a completely different point of view. It doesn't start

from ideology, what men think of themselves as Marx said, but from the proletarian point of view. From this point of view, it is clear that reformism is no longer an objective reality as a current within the workers' movement in decadence because its material base - the conquest of reforms - no longer exists in the present epoch. Reformism has become a pure bourgeois ideology. Continuing to use this term is simply creating confusion about the two camps facing each other in class struggle. That is why the ICC rejects the term 'reformism' in the present period.

The same method has to be applied to opportunism and it used to be applied in the ICC as can be seen in the introduction to the pamphlet on Trotskyism. In a very general way, opportunism is defined as the search for immediate success at the expense of principles, at the expense of the ultimate goal. That is the dictionary definition and the one used by Pannekoek and the definition used by the majority. Once again, from the standpoint of pure ideology, it is certain that opportunism has not ceased to exist in the period of decadence since a large part of the political apparatus of the bourgeoisie and certain revolutionary charlatans continue to claim that the proletariat can obtain immediate successes without struggling for the revolution. A historical materialist analysis, however, shows that opportunism - and this applies to centrism as well which is just a variation on the theme - no longer has an objective historical reality as a current within the workers' movement in decadence because its material base - the obtaining of immediate results without struggling for the ultimate final success - no longer exists in the present period. There is no fundamental difference between opportunism and reformism except that the former term generally covers a larger field than the latter (its implications in all domains). Both find their common basis in the possibility of distinguishing the final goal from the immediate goal, the maximum programme from the minimum programme, in class struggle in the ascendant period of capitalism.

It is remarkable that in the present debate the 'majority' has made no effort to apply a historical materialist method to the problem of opportunism and its centrist variant. In all the texts we find only a monotonously repeated assertion: "reformism and opportunism should not be confused"; one must know how to differentiate between unity and identity (report of the central organ on the debates, January 1985). Behind this cheap dialectical phraseology there is no effort to show by what miracle the unity between opportunism and reformism was destroyed by decadence, leaving only one of these components without the other. Or rather, there is an effort of sorts but it moves away from historical materialism to take refuge in ideology: "If reformism lost its *raison d'être* in the working class with capitalism's entry into decadence, it is not the same for opportunism and centrism which are part of the domain of ideology and politics." (MC)

This vision where there is a "domain of ideology and politics" completely separate from the 'domain of economy' to the point that it gives rise to political tendencies that have no economic basis, is a vision typical of the bourgeoisie which Marxism has always fought. Furthermore, reformism is no more 'economic' than opportunism is 'political'. Reformism was a political ideology based on, but not identical to, the struggle for reforms. It is therefore undoubtedly to be placed in the famous "domain of ideology and politics". The reforms themselves on which reformism was grounded also touched on the political terrain (universal suffrage, for example). Opportunism was a generalised expression of the penetration of reformist ideology in Social Democracy.

Up to the present, the comrades of the 'majority' have cleverly eluded the question of the material basis of opportunism in decadence by creating a smokescreen around the issue of the 'social' base of centrism as expressed in MacIntosh's text. Whoever has read the text carefully knows that it identifies the general historical conditions of the epoch, that is, in the struggle for reforms and the distinction between the minimum and maximum programmes (see IR 43). What MacIntosh said was that in these conditions, the existence of a permanent intermediary political tendency between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat by its ideology implies both a theoretical basis and a 'social' base, the latter provided by the electoral machine of Social Democracy and the union apparatus. (IR 43) When MC attributes to MacIntosh the idea that centrism can be reduced to a simple question of functionaries and bureaucrats in the parties and unions, he blurs the entire historical framework that made this bureaucracy the real seat of infection of the opportunist disease even if it wasn't the profound cause. It is ironic that MC was the first, in his previous texts, to look for a 'social' base for opportunism in his own way and found it in the petty bourgeoisie. CDW and FM go even further in blurring the historical context because they find the proof (that opportunism did not develop particularly in the union and Social Democratic apparatus) in the fact that this apparatus was not fully developed in Russia even though opportunism was present. We now find ourselves in the middle of a Menshevik reasoning on the purely national determination of the situation in Russia. Are these comrades forgetting that the debates in the Social Democracy and, more generally, the experience of the Russian proletariat, was from the beginning framed in the context of the international debates of Social Democracy and the international experience of the proletariat? That the Mensheviks did not possess their own parliamentary and union apparatus as fully developed as in the West doesn't change the opportunist orientation they fundamentally followed.

The real question the 'majority' is avoiding is simple: where in the period of decadence is there the possibility for the proletariat

to find immediate success outside of the struggle for its historical goal, which would leave the field open for opportunism? Many examples of so-called opportunism and centrism in decadence have been given. Take two of the often rehashed examples: the CI's policy of 'going to the masses' and the position of the minority of Bilan on the war in Spain. With its slogan of 'going to the masses', there is no doubt that the CI had the illusion of being able to arrive at immediate successes, if not in an improvement in the economic condition of the proletariat then at least in terms of its political development through a greater influence of the CI. But what was the reality of these immediate successes? The recrediting of parliamentarism and unionism with a revolutionary phraseology, a capitulation to the bourgeoisie in 'united fronts', the loss of the revolution and the CI itself - a failure all along the line for the proletariat. In the same way the 'immediate success' found by the minority of Bilan was the massacre of Spanish workers under the banner of Republicanism and anti-fascism. These very examples show concretely that opportunism can no longer exist in the period of decadence because the alternative facing the working class is revolution or counter-revolution, socialism or barbarism. Reformism and opportunism could exist at the end of the period of ascendance only because the struggle for workers' demands did not immediately raise the necessity of revolution. These examples also show how the penetration of bourgeois ideology in our epoch is expressed through a direct capitulation to the bourgeoisie and not through the existence of an intermediary ideology such as opportunism and centrism in the previous period. This does not mean that any proletarian organisation that degenerates immediately passes bag and baggage into the bourgeoisie. Outside of the crucial moments of war and revolution, the capitulation to the bourgeoisie can be partial and progressive as the history of Bordigism shows. But this doesn't change the general characteristic of the period, the permanent contradiction between revolution and counter-revolution. There is no possibility of positively contributing to the daily struggle of the working class on those aspects where capitulation to the bourgeoisie has occurred, even if the organisation as a whole is still proletarian.

To explain opportunism and centrism, the 'majority' has replaced historical materialism with political psychology. Before even trying to find the faintest historical roots for its theory (which was begun only at the end of 1984 in answer to MacIntosh's text), the 'majority' had drawn up a detailed list of behaviour characteristic of these tendencies - to such an extent that the report on the debates for the meeting of the central organ in June 1984 was obliged to clarify the fact that these were "characteristics" and not "a definition". The 'majority' further claimed that these behaviour patterns formed the very basis of opportunism and that the political positions merely flowed from them. With such a point of view, the whole theory

'tical construct is twisted right from the beginning. Hesitation, vacillation became the cause rather than the effect, the deep roots rather than the surface. They became 'devils' to be exorcised by 'better' behaviour. This moral condemnation of the hesitant person is completely opposed to Marxism. First of all, with Marx, we must say that doubt is revolutionary, as long as it serves to go forward towards a more radical critique of the world. The hesitation affecting the proletariat in crucial moments of its history is just a surface characteristic of a struggle to develop and affirm its consciousness. When 'hesitation' and 'oscillation' become a systematic pattern of conduct among certain political tendencies, this has to be explained in terms of material social facts. This kind of behaviour among centrists in the ascendant period is explained by its position in class struggle which was to conciliate the struggle for the immediate interests of the proletariat with the survival of the capitalist system. But in a party like the USPD in the period of decadence, it is explained by its social function: to trick and control the revolutionary proletariat in order to avoid the destruction of the bourgeois state. This is a fairly common occurrence in decadence: in periods of rising class struggle, parties and the unions trying to control and disarm the working class make a lot of verbal concessions to the working class while carrying out in secret their work of systematically sabotaging the struggle. This gives them the appearance of 'vacillation' but, in fact, it is simply an expression of their class nature. In a period of counter-revolution, however, language can more closely fit the deed. This often leads to behaviour patterns quite the opposite of 'hesitation', like those of Stalinism. Hesitation is thus in no way an absolute, an ahistorical phenomenon.

To justify its postulate of political psychology, the 'majority' has used different kinds of subterfuges. One of these was developed by RV when he explained that we shouldn't be shocked by recourse to political behaviour patterns because we have, in the past, identified other such behaviour patterns such as immediatism, dilettantism, etc. If RV's aim was to put as many 'isms' as he could into one sentence, he might be interested to know that there are many more left in the dictionary. Why not, for example, Marxism, anarchism or communism? Are these also 'political behaviour'? RV is simply making an amalgam to evade the issue. There are qualitative differences between phenomena such as dilettantism (which refers to a petty bourgeois influence on the behaviour of militants), immediatism (which refers to a general political weakness of an organisation and has nothing to do with particular behaviour) and opportunism (which refers to a definite political tendency in the history of the workers' movement). No one has ever claimed that behaviour doesn't exist. But it's quite another thing to try to explain the general weaknesses of an organisation and/or a historical current as fundamental as opportunism, through behavioural analysis.

Another very popular subterfuge is to pull out an impressive series of quotes from revolutionaries of the past, especially Lenin, who painted the psychological portrait of opportunists several times. This abusive use of revolutionaries of the past is grotesque and scandalous. For Lenin, for example, it was clear that the behaviour of opportunists was the reflection of their position in class struggle, which led them, from the time of the First World War, to become the direct agents of the bourgeoisie in the working class. Just as illustration, to remind comrades, this is what Lenin said in 1920: "Opportunism in the upper layers of the working class is not proletarian socialism but bourgeois socialism. The practical proof is in the fact that the leaders of the opportunist tendency within the workers' movement defend the bourgeoisie better than the bourgeoisie could. Without their support, the bourgeoisie couldn't defend itself against the workers (....) They are our main enemy and we must destroy this enemy This is our main task. Compared to this task, the correction of the mistakes of the 'left' current of communism will be an easy task.... But then the struggle with the faults of the proletarian movement will be a thousand times easier than the struggle against the bourgeoisie which, in the guise of reformists, made its way into the old parties of the Second International and carried out their work not in the proletarian spirit but in the bourgeois spirit." (Presentation of the Theses on the International Situation and the Fundamental Tasks of the CI; Second Congress of the CI)

Just in passing, we can say that this quote is a stinging rebuke to the theory of 'councilism, the greatest danger to the working class' and the identification made today between opportunism and Councilism. Despite his errors on the aristocracy of labour and the failure to draw the practical consequences of the nature of opportunism in decadence, Lenin clearly affirms at this time that the 'reformists' or 'opportunists' (he uses the two terms interchangeably) are the representatives of the bourgeoisie. And it is in this sense that they constitute a danger "greater than the bourgeoisie itself", contrary to what the central organ says when Krespel uses these words of Lenin to insinuate that the greatest danger will come from the proletariat itself. We could also analyse the positions of other revolutionaries of the past and show how today's 'majority' takes only the letter and not the spirit. FM goes so far as to compare the notion of 'consciousness' in Marx to this new 'characterisation' of centrism in terms of 'political behaviour' in order to make fun of the minority's critique of psychologism. FM's ridiculous comparison shows to what extent the psychologist method has permeated the organisation. Marx destroyed the psychologist vision of consciousness by seeing consciousness not as a question of behaviour or attitude, but as a historically determined stage in the material development of mankind. This leads

us straight to the debate on class consciousness but this will have to be developed in a further text.

The last stone in this theoretical edifice of the 'majority' was provided by at last turning to the historical base of opportunism, unfortunately not to reverse its approach by returning to historical materialism, but to justify itself with historical window-dressing. For CDW, "the deepest roots of opportunism" lie in the "contradiction between the need to fight within the existing order and the need to formulate a programme for the destruction of the existing order". Given the level of reasoning we've seen up to now, this is a veritable burst of lucidity - inspired by a passage from Rosa Luxemburg obviously referring to the ascendant period. Unfortunately, for CDW these 'roots' remain an abstraction in the service of his cause, if he really tried to deal with the material conditions in which this contradiction manifested itself in practice, he would have to admit the periodisation developed in the present text.

For MC, however, : "In this titanic struggle, the proletariat presents itself at the beginning in a state of weakness, a state inherent in the existence of any exploited class (....) This march made up of advances and retreats in the struggle of the proletariat which Marx spoke of after the revolutionary events of 1848, is accentuated and accelerated in the period of decadence, because of the very barbarism of the period which raises the question of revolution in more concrete terms to the proletariat, in more practical, more dramatic terms These are the conditions - a reality that sees the maturation of objective conditions and the immaturity of subjective conditions - determining a whirlpool in the class, from which emerges a multitude of various and contradictory political groups, convergent and divergent, evolving and regressing, and particularly the different varieties of centrism."

Such a vision of history is just the theorisation of confusion and, if it doesn't specifically explain the existence of centrism, leaves the field open for anything you want to read into it, including centrism. It is remarkable that although MC keeps repeating that one has to look at the meaning, the direction of the movement, when he describes the conditions for the existence of centrism, he completely forgets the direction of the movement and leaves us with only a 'whirlpool'. If such a vision were correct, the revolution would be utopic because it's impossible to see how class consciousness can emerge from such an amorphous whirlpool.

MC forgets three things:

- (1) the proletariat does not remain eternally immature but undergoes a maturation during its history;
- (2) decadence is not characterised by a disordered succession of advances and retreats of the class struggle; it is divided into clear-cut courses of history; in the

phases of rising class struggle there is a progressive - although non-linear - maturation of class consciousness;

- (3) the proletariat is not the only class present in class struggle; the bourgeoisie acts in a determined and organised way through its omnipresent state.

If he really took these elements into account (he will say, of course, that he already knows all this like everyone else), MC would see that the permanent tension between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie, between revolution and counter-revolution, eliminates in the period of decadence the conditions of existence of opportunism and centrism and obliges political currents to situate themselves clearly in one camp or the other. But this would need a radical change in method, a questioning of this political psychologism and a return to the method of historical materialism.

BOURGEOIS ORGANISATIONS AND PROLETARIAN ONES

The interest and the strength of a theory resides in its ability to understand the real world so as to act upon it. In itself, a theory of centrism based on political psychologism wouldn't be a catastrophe if it didn't have a direct effect on all the lessons drawn from the history of the workers' movement. That is why the Tendency was only formed at the beginning of this year because it was only at the end of 1984 that the 'majority' began to concretise its theory of centrism in history and the minority comrades were led to realise the extent and the inner logic of the regressions already appearing in the ICC. An organisation that cannot draw the lessons of the past or that goes back on them is condemning itself to sterility or betrayal. If there is one essential lesson for the proletariat, it is this: the need to know who is part of the proletariat and who isn't; to know why the revolution was defeated by the counter-revolution. But it is this very lesson that is at the heart of the present debate, with the implications in the German revolution (a revolution that occurred in conditions closer to what will be experienced in the future than the Russian revolution), in the formation of the class party at the time, etc. One would have to be completely blind or acting in totally bad faith to see in this only an 'academic question of dates' (1914 or 1921). It's a question of criteria, a question of method, that has crucial practical implications.

There is no doubt that a revolutionary period, with all the powerful changes it causes on all levels of society, creates a complex, moving situation. This was especially true in Germany. But if revolutionaries just limit themselves to such an observation, they will not serve much purpose. Their role is to extract from such a situation clear and well-defined ideas on the meaning of history, the forces involved and the tasks to accomplish. This is where political psychology completely fails. Because it looks at the surface of things, because it asks the question: who thinks what?, who has what attitude at which

moment? - it can see only confusion, oscillation, 'centrism'. It dissipates all class lines in a fog. That is the method followed by the 'majority' which puts in the same 'centrist' bag revolutionary parties and counter-revolutionary ones, the KPD and the USPD, the CI and the parties of the Second International. Their differences become merely varying degrees of 'centrism'. Historical materialism doesn't work like that. It looks to the roots of things and asks questions like: what are the needs of the social classes involved? what is the function assumed by a given organisation in such a context? It results in drawing the distinctions necessary to face the situation. That is the method the ICC used to follow and that our Tendency today follows. It's true that the second method includes the first (subjective factors) but the opposite isn't true and the two methods lead to very different results.

The difference is very clear when we look at the class nature of Social Democracy in the period of decadence, from 1914. I won't go into all the historical developments but I want to show the difference in method and its implications. The ICC position up to now - and ours in the Tendency - is that 1914 marks the final point of the degeneration of the Social Democracy (the International and the vast majority of the national parties) through the abandoning in practice of internationalism, its participation in the imperialist war and later its counter-revolutionary role in the insurrections of the proletariat. This position is contained in the platform and many other texts of the ICC. This clear position comes from a historical materialist approach and shows that the objective function of Social Democracy changed with the change in the period, as shown by:

- (1) the programme - the programme of permanent legal, parliamentary and union struggles in the framework of the system no longer corresponds to the needs of the proletariat;
- (2) practice - the enrolment in the war and the counter-revolution.

This objective analysis is in agreement with the subjective position taken by revolutionaries at the time, because it is the basis of the formation of the CI in 1919: "From the first shot on the battlefield of the imperialist butchery, the main parties of the Second International betrayed the working class and under cover of 'national defence' passed over to the side of 'its' bourgeoisie." (Resolution on the Position towards Socialist Currents and the Berne Conference, First Congress of the CI, 1919)

The same method applies to the USPD, one of the expressions of what was then called 'the Centre' or 'centrism'. Its counter-revolutionary function is seen (just as a reminder to comrades):

- (1) on the level of the programme: its manifesto written by the renegade Kautsky himself proclaimed the need for a return to the pacific functioning of capitalism and the old

practice of the Social Democracy; it corresponded to the needs of big German capital which began to be concerned about pursuing a war effort doomed to defeat; in no way did it correspond to the needs of the revolution of the proletariat;

- (2) practice: it participated in the bourgeois government in 1918 which decapitated the workers' councils, strengthened the power of the General Staff and the military, and prepared the crushing of the proletariat.

This objective analysis is also in agreement with the subjective position of revolutionaries at the time because the KPD broke with the USPD at the time of the revolution, becoming aware of its previous error and the counter-revolutionary role of the USPD in preparing the crushing of the proletariat: "The People's Commissars understand that they have no power, that they really have to rely either on the masses - and therefore on the power of the Central Council, or on the counter-revolution - and therefore on the military General Staff. And Ebert, Scheidemann, Landsberg, with the friendly aid of Haase, Dittman and Barth, preferred to base their power on the force of the bayonets against the working class." (E. Levine, Report on the First National Congress of Councils, 1918)

In the same way, the CI clearly proclaimed at its foundation:

"At the beginning of the war, the general principles of the 'Centre' was for 'unity' with the social-chauvinists The organisational break with the 'Centre' is an absolute historical necessity." (Resolution on the Position Towards Socialist Currents and the Berne Conference, First Congress of the CI, 1919)

But the 'majority' uses a completely different approach. The only criterion guiding it in its analysis is: who was where and when? The presence of revolutionaries in an organisation becomes the determining factor in its class nature. The 'Centre' was proletarian because it participated with the left in Zimmerwald and Kienthal; the USPD was proletarian because at the beginning the left was present in it and because it was later allowed to join the CI, and in the end all the Social Democratic parties were still proletarian. History is turned inside out; historical conditions no longer determine revolutionaries; revolutionaries determine historical conditions. Not only does this approach eliminate objective reality, it also eliminates the subjective, historical position of revolutionaries who, as we've seen, tried to draw the same lessons we do from this reality. The 'majority's' approach is just a day-to-day scorecard, nothing more.

For the 'majority' the materialist method is shocking. What? If Social Democracy was dead in 1914, that means revolutionaries came from the bourgeoisie? It's about time these comrades began to ask themselves this question because for 10 years now they, along with the rest of the ICC, have been defending this

horrible position, that Social Democracy died in 1914. Marxism has no problem explaining this question. Marx wrote that man never abandons a tool until he has proved its uselessness. And also that consciousness lags behind reality when historical conditions change. The presence of revolutionaries in Social Democracy a while after its definitive passage to the bourgeoisie in 1914 corresponds to this law. Revolutionaries had not been able to foresee the brutal change in historical conditions and assure the continuity of the Social Democratic organisation by adapting it to the new period. From 1914, there could be no continuity between Social Democracy and the new party. There had to be a break with an organisation that had gone over to the enemy. This idea of a break was developed by the CI, and the ICC even envisaged the possibility of a break with counter-revolutionary organisations today, a long time after their passage to the bourgeoisie - even if the probability of major, significant breaks greatly diminishes with time as the organisation continues to assume its counter-revolutionary role.

The 'majority' goes even further in its approach. Krespel and FM take the massacre of workers affiliated with the USPD during the repression in 1919 as a proof of the proletarian nature of this party. Using the blood of workers shed because of a party as proof of the working class nature of this party is the worst insult to the working class. It was the argument of the 'comrade' Ministers of the USPD, that the CI unfortunately took up to justify joining with the USPD. With this argument, why weren't Allende and his party proletarian ten years ago in Chile? At that time, the ICC said: the hand that immobilises the victim is just as criminal as the executioner's hand. Today, the hand that immobilises magically disappears under the glove of 'centrism'. With such logic, the class nature of a party can be determined by the presence of sincere workers in it. We have already seen in a previous text how the 'majority's' theory of centrism takes off from the premiss of Trotsky in the 1930s. We can now see that the logical outcome of this method is the Trotskyist position on the criteria for the class nature of a party. The difference between Trotsky and the present 'majority' is that Trotsky didn't stop half-way, he went all the way on this theory of centrism. If the presence of workers or revolutionaries in an organisation is the criterion determining the class nature of the organisation, then we must adopt entrism into the unions and mass parties.

These are the implications of the central organ's proposal for the change in the platform. It is not at all a 'precision', a detail of dates. It is a complete inversion of method, from Marxism to ideology. And although this change will have no effect on the present position of the ICC towards the SPs and CPs whose counter-revolutionary nature is too obvious to be questioned, it will definitely have an effect in a revolutionary period when revolutionaries must face the

radicalisation of the bourgeoisie and adopt an intransigent position towards all efforts to subvert the revolution.

Before changing the platform, the 'majority' has got to at least explain this criterion and the implications of its position on the nature of organisations so that its method emerges clearly into the light of day. It has got to explain what concretely it means by the 'proletarian' nature of the Social Democratic parties between 1914 and 1921, during the war and after the revolution. There are three possibilities:

- (1) either these parties were all proletarian;
- (2) or they had a bourgeois leadership and a proletarian base;
- (3) or they were an amalgamation of bourgeois factions and proletarian factions.

For the moment, the term 'centrist' covers anything and everything and all these three possibilities are implicit in the texts of the 'majority'. The first analysis is implicit in the fact that the 'majority' uses the incorporation of some of these parties in the CI as an argument. It is also implicit in the description of Kautsky as a hesitant centrist even at the time of the USPD and the revolution. The second possibility is implicit in Krespel's text. The third is implicit in CDW's text which this time describes Kautsky as a reactionary element as opposed to other proletarian elements in the USPD.

Whichever of these three equally reactionary possibilities the 'majority' finally chooses, it has got to explain:

- (1) in the first case, how the objective function of these parties was not reactionary and anti-proletarian in the war and the revolution;
- (2) in the second case, how this position differs from leftism;
- (3) in the third case, how an inter-classist party can exist, a party with a dual class nature, and still be proletarian.

In any of these cases, let the 'majority' clearly state what the needs of the revolution were: to stay in the Social Democracy or to break and form a revolutionary party? And when should this have been done? Because, if the presence of revolutionaries maintains the proletarian nature of Social Democracy and, at the same time, "as long as there is still a breath of life, they (revolutionaries) must struggle to save it (the organisation), to keep it for the class", there was never any way to break with this circular reasoning, nor any criteria to determine the moment of a break. One wonders whether the formation of the party was really necessary in the eyes of the 'majority'.

THE ICC FACING AN ALTERNATIVE

This text has shown that the debate on centrism in the ICC is not a minor 'precision', a point of detail. Two methods are face to face: historical materialism on the one hand, and political psychology on the other. These

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OUR POSITIONS

The external Fraction of the International Communist Current claims a continuity with the programmatic framework developed by the ICC before its degeneration. This programmatic framework is itself based on the successive historical contribution of the Communist League, of the I, II and III Internationals and of the Left Fractions which detached themselves from the latter, in particular the German, Dutch and Italian Left Communists. After being de facto excluded from the ICC following the struggle that it waged against the political and organizational degeneration of that Current, the Fraction now continues its work of developing revolutionary consciousness outside the organizational framework of the ICC.

The Fraction defends the following basic principles, fundamental lessons of the class struggle :

Since World War I, capitalism has been a decadent social system which has nothing to offer the working class and humanity as a whole except cycles of crises, war and reconstruction. Its irreversible historical decay poses a single choice for humanity : either socialism or barbarism.

The working class is the only class able to carry out the communist revolution against capitalism.

The revolutionary struggle of the proletariat must lead to a general confrontation with the capitalist state. Its class violence is carried out in the mass action of revolutionary transformation. The practice of terror and terrorism, which expresses the blind violence of the state and of the desperate petty-bourgeoisie respectively, is alien to the proletariat.

In destroying the capitalist state, the working class must establish the dictatorship of the proletariat on a world scale, as a transition to communist society. The form that this dictatorship will take is the international power of the Workers' Councils.

Communism or socialism means neither "self-management" nor "nationalization". It requires the conscious abolition by the proletariat of capitalist social relations and institutions such as wage-labor, commodity production, national frontiers, class divisions and the state apparatus, and is based on a unified world human community.

The so-called "socialist countries" (Russia, the Eastern bloc, China, Cuba, etc.) are a particular expression of the universal tendency to state capitalism, itself an expression of the decay of capitalism. There are no "socialist countries" these are just so many capitalist bastions that the proletariat must destroy like any other capitalist state.

In this epoch, the trade unions everywhere are organs of capitalist discipline within the proletariat. Any policy based on working in the unions, whether to preserve or "transform" them, only serves to

subject the working class to the capitalist state and to divert it from its own necessary self-organization.

In decadent capitalism, parliaments and elections are nothing but sources of bourgeois mystification. Any participation in the electoral circus can only strengthen this mystification in the eyes of the workers.

The so-called "workers" parties, "Socialist" and "Communist", as well as their extreme left appendages, are the left face of the political apparatus of capital.

Today all factions of the bourgeoisie are equally reactionary. Any tactics calling for "Popular Fronts", "Anti-Fascist Fronts" or "United Fronts" between the proletariat and any faction of the bourgeoisie can only serve to derail the struggle of the proletariat and disarm it in the face of the class enemy.

So-called "national liberation struggles" are moments in the deadly struggle between imperialist powers large and small to gain control over the world market. The slogan of "support for people in struggle" amounts, in fact, to defending one imperialist power against another under nationalist or "socialist" verbiage.

The victory of the revolution requires the organization of revolutionaries into a party. The role of a party is neither to "organize the working class" nor to "take power in the name of the workers", but through its active intervention to develop the class consciousness of the proletariat.

ACTIVITY OF THE FRACTION

In the present period characterized by a general rise in the class struggle and at the same time by a weakness on the part of revolutionary organizations and the degeneration of the pole of regroupment represented by the ICC, the Fraction has as its task to conscientiously take on the two functions which are basic to revolutionary organizations:

1) The development of revolutionary theory on the basis of the historic acquisitions and experiences of the proletariat, so as to transcend the contradictions of the Communist Lefts and of the present revolutionary milieu, in particular on the questions of class consciousness, the role of the party and the conditions imposed by state capitalism.

2) Intervention in the class struggle on an international scale, so as to be a catalyst in the process which develops in workers' struggles towards consciousness, organization and the generalized revolutionary action of the proletariat.

The capacity to form a real class party in the future depends on the accomplishment of these tasks by the present revolutionary forces. This requires, on their part, the will to undertake a real clarification and open confrontation of communist positions by rejecting all monolithism and sectarianism.