

**EXTERNAL  
FRACTION OF THE  
INTERNATIONAL  
COMMUNIST  
CURRENT**

# **INTERNA TIONALIST PERSPECTIVE**

**CLASS CONSCIOUSNESS**

**IN THE**

**REVOLUTION**

**FRANCE**

**UNEMPLOYMENT**



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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.

# PERSPECTIVES



## FOR THE CLASS STRUGGLE

The future of humanity rests on the shoulders of the proletariat. Many a time since the end of the 1960's (the end of the post-war reconstruction), the proletariat has expressed its combativity against an economic system in complete decadence, which has nothing to offer humanity but misery and war.

In the spring of this year, massive struggles broke out in Scandinavia and Belgium. The struggles in Belgium constituted the highest point of class struggle since the movements in Poland in 1980. Even if the proletariat in struggle has not succeeded in breaking the yoke of the trade unions, in imposing self-organization, it has demonstrated its tendency to make use of the mass strike. The spontaneous spurt of struggles, their extension in large part also spontaneous- to other sectors, the search for active solidarity, the thrust towards an organization of the struggle outside of the unions- all these typical aspects of the mass strike strongly manifested themselves in the strike movement in Belgium. The duration of the movement was also important: for several weeks the struggles developed in all parts of the country, extinguished in one place only to immediately explode in another, even affecting sectors where workers had temporarily gone back to work, and who then went out again.

The obstacles against which the movement in Belgium came up bear witness to the present difficulties of the class struggle in the industrialized countries. The bourgeoisie succeeded in preventing the autonomous activity-which the workers in struggle demonstrated- from reaching the stage of real self-organization. Its trade-union and leftist apparatus succeeded in controlling the strike commit-

tees and delegations sent to other enterprises seeking solidarity, which sprang up in several places outside of the "official" union framework.\*

### THE STATE STRENGTHENS ITSELF AGAINST THE CRISIS AND ABOVE ALL AGAINST THE WORKING CLASS

These struggles broke out at a time when the bourgeoisie was intensifying its austerity measures. Every country, be it Belgium, Norway or the United States, has an enormous budget deficit. All the means which reduce the standard of living of the workers - and not only those in the public sector - so as to reduce these deficits are being utilized by the ruling class.

Although the ruling class cannot halt the irremediable crisis of the system, it can still prevent a sharp fall into the abyss. Until now, the major capitalist countries (Western Europe and the US) have thrust many of their problems onto the countries of the periphery. Today, these peripheral countries have a knife at their throat. For years, their governments have been so hard pressed by the great powers to intensify austerity against populations that are already destitute, that increasingly massive reactions have been provoked (food riots in the countries of North Africa, strikes in the mines of Latin America, like those of August-September 1986 in Bolivia). However, there is no mechanical link between the intensification of austeri-

\* For a more detailed analysis see "The future belongs to the working class: The example of struggles in Belgium" in IP #3.

ty and the level of class struggle. Nevertheless, it's a well-known fact that many governments are often extremely arrogant when they present these measures to their people. Governments orchestrate campaigns to occupy the mind of the proletariat, to terrorize it. Any occasion is taken advantage of to strengthen the control and repression of the workers. One of the means recently utilized has been the struggle against terrorism, which attempts to show -beyond the mere arrest of "dangerous terrorists"- that nothing is more important than the defense of capitalism, and for that it is necessary to militarize society, to get people used to seeing the cops and armed soldiers in the street.

The ruling class counts heavily on its left in opposition, on its rank and file unionists and other leftists to divert the proletariat from its path towards the revolution. To meet the threat posed by the struggle of the proletariat, the ruling class continually creates structures which are better adapted to the task of controlling the ever greater combativity of the workers (rank and file unionism, unemployed unions, etc). It is precisely this network of traps that the proletariat must unmask if it is to achieve its ends.

#### TOWARDS THE UNIFICATION AND SELF\_ORGANIZATION OF THE STRUGGLES

Whatever the level of the economic crisis, inter-imperialist conflicts or the class struggle at any given moment, it is apparent that there is less and less "dead" time between upheavals. Even as the tendencies to protectionism, budget deficits, bank failures, the strengthening of military preparations and the growth of wars assert themselves, so too do the tendencies to the multiplication, the simultaneity and the generalization of workers struggles.

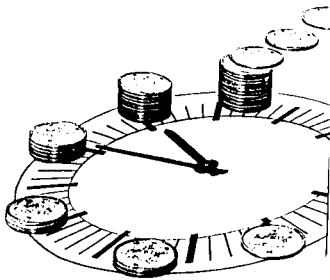
Today, it is more and more difficult to make a separation between clearly marked waves of struggles, as was the case in the past. After the triumph of the counter-

revolution from the preparations for the second World War till the end of the post-war reconstruction, the proletariat mustered its strength in a first wave of struggles (from 1968-1979) and confirmed it in a second wave, culminating in the experience of Poland (from 1978-1980). Then, from the end of 1983, the third wave of struggles has never really ended (see I.P. # 2). The present wave of struggles, which began with the September 1983 strikes in the public sector in Belgium, went through a certain lull in the industrialized countries during 1985, but the struggles since the beginning of 1986 have shown that this was only temporary. There are no longer clearly defined limits, on a world scale, between periods of general advance and general retreat of the struggle. The scale of the ruling class's attacks and the combative potential of the proletariat have so developed over the past few years that there can no longer be a lengthy pause between the different moments of this struggle. At the same time, the increased political and ideological preparation of the bourgeoisie creates obstacles which make impossible any linear progression of workers' struggles. Put another way, if the class struggle has always been characterized by its jaggedness, this is becoming more and more accentuated now.

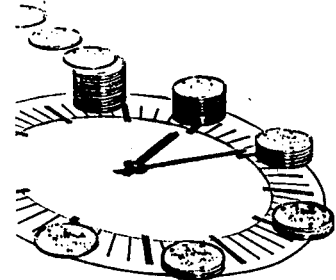
The simultaneity of struggles in both the countries on the periphery and in the center expresses the link between all these struggles against a decadent world capitalism. The struggle of the proletariat is world-wide because the enemy to be overthrown is present everywhere. That is why it is so important to distinguish strikes and demonstrations for the defense of living conditions from inter-classist movements like the struggle against Apartheid, which specifically try to hide and to destroy the link which exists between all the parts of the world proletariat.

There is no straight-line which leads to revolution; the path towards revolution is still filled with numerous traps and snares. But the proletariat has more and more confidence in its own strength. And that is what we are counting on.





## International Situation



# AFTER A LIMITED RECOVERY, A GENERALIZED RECESSION LOOMS

The report of November 1985 published in IPI aimed "to refute the claims by the apologists for capitalism that a durable economic recovery is taking place and that the inflationary danger has been successfully removed." Almost one year on, it is clear from the unfolding of the actual situation that the main axes of that report are still valid.

The bourgeoisie's trumpeting about its so-called economic 'recovery' has reduced to a scarcely-audible whimpering. If in the 1960s the pundits would talk about the health of the world economy the years have narrowed their horizons. In the '70s they confined their claims to the advanced industrialised nations. More recently, they have confined their attention to the US, West Germany and Japan - the only countries which might produce 'evidence' for their mystifications. Today, in the third quarter of 1986 even this limited arena gives the bourgeoisie nothing to hang on to.

### Two Decades of Open Crisis

After almost 20 years of open crisis, of a series of recessions followed by ever-weaker recoveries, the situation has come to this. The world market is glutted and the bourgeoisie is finding it impossible to expand it - even in the smallest way - without unleashing the forces which threaten hyper-inflation and a collapse of the world financial system. The war economy, the basic organisation of capitalism in decadence, has developed to the point where it no longer provides a stimulus to the economy as a whole. Such stimulus as is given to associated sectors serves to mask its parasitical draining of the productive resources of the capitalist system, deforming in the most absolute way any residual ability within the social system to provide for its population. The war economy is sucking the life out of the productive forces.

Today, the world economy is dominated by the major industrial nations of the Western bloc - primarily by the US, West Germany and Japan. Through these countries the bases of world trade and the financial system to run

it is controlled. Consequently, they are pivotal to the way in which the world economic crisis (about whose causes they can do nothing) is phased in. The 'recovery' so lauded in the US has been confined to three sectors only - armaments production, high-tech industries related to military and financial sectors, and speculative commercial and office building. The massive injections of capital into the first two sectors - largely funded directly and indirectly by the state - has been paid for from the flight of capital from all over the world to the US in its search for some sort of haven. The Japanese and German share of the recovery was based on the relative strength of the dollar (obtained in large measure through the high interest rates prevailing in the US, in part in order to attract capital) which made their commodities highly competitive on the US domestic market. In the remainder of the advanced industrialised countries of Europe there has been a shrinkage of the manufacturing base on which the creation of the national wealth of these countries ultimately depends. In the third world, the countries of concern to the West (because of their strategic or political importance, or because of their sheer level of debt) are given a modicum of 'support' while the remainder are allowed to sink into a morass of barbarism. In the Eastern bloc, the Russian economy is in an even worse state than the West: with its room for manoeuvre constrained for the past decades by its chronic scarcity of capital, its anachronistic production methods in many sectors of the economy, and its backward agriculture, it has suffered even more from the greater relative weight of its military expenditures than the West. Its allies are even worse off because of the way in which they are milked by the Russian economy.

The ultimate consequences of this economic situation fall on the mass of humanity in the non-exploiting classes who are made to live in a near-indescribable hell that is, almost unbelievably, worsening each day. More and more of the world's population are forced to suffer utter destitution; murderous 'local' wars lasting for decades; famines (for the most part man-made); drought; refugee popula-

tions counted in millions in many parts of the world: such are the facts of life for an enormous proportion of the inhabitants of the planet. For the working class a plunge into utter impoverishment as every year millions more are thrown into unemployment while those remaining at work have to suffer more and more exploitation.

### The Oil Price Collapse

As the 'recovery' showed signs of petering out towards the end of 1985, the US bourgeoisie embarked on a desperate manoeuvre to delay the onset of a further recession. Using Saudi Arabia, whose rapidly growing current account deficit demanded urgent action to break its OPEC oil pricing agreements, as a willing partner it was possible because of the world's massive over-capacity in the oil-producing industry to force the price down: it dropped from \$30 a barrel in the autumn of 1985 to under \$10 in the spring of 1986. This massive price drop aimed to stimulate industrial production by reducing the cost of imports in the industrialised countries.

The actual consequences of the price drop have affected countries in a variety of ways. Most oil importers felt an immediate benefit in their current accounts - and these included Germany and Japan. However, the major oil producers have felt the consequences in different ways. After some months of eyeball confrontations in the OPEC discussion chambers agreements on price and production levels were made which fell in line with Saudi Arabia's plans. The world's major oil producer - Russia - has been hit hardest since nearly 80% of its hard currency earnings come from fuel exports priced in dollars. For the US, the effect has had both immediate and longer-term effects. The immediate consequence was to damage its higher cost fields especially in Alaska, Texas and Oklahoma. Since then the bourgeoisie has been waiting for stimulating effects on the economy from the lower input costs.

### Growth and The US Trade Deficit

With its economic system based on expanded reproduction, the bourgeoisie is always concerned about 'growth'. But not only has the bourgeoisie had to watch the shrinking of the world manufacturing base, it now has to start to come to terms with low or no growth in the GNP of even the major economies. Since GNP also encompasses payments for other services rendered as well as interest, its growth rate generally masks a weaker growth in industrial production. By the middle of 1986 it became clear that despite all the efforts - and the hype - over the past months (of this, more below) the gigantic US economy now aspires to an annual growth rate in 1986 of a princely ... 0.6%.

The sickness of even the major economies is glaringly apparent.

In the US, 31 of the 50 states are in an outright slump - including the whole area from the Canadian border to the Gulf of Mexico, bordered by the Rocky Mountains in the west and the Mississippi in the east. This

region takes in the industrial mid-west which has had an epidemic of bankruptcies in its traditional industries. Agriculture, too, has been hard-hit - falling land values, loss of markets, drought and bank failures have symtomised the crisis in this once robust industry whose Great Plains were until recently regarded as the granary of the world. For the first time in 27 years the US is importing more farm produce than it exports. The most revealing evidence about the state of the economy lies in the trade statistics. The US trade deficits which have been accelerating for some years reached a record \$18 billion in July; the generally accepted forecast for 1986 as a whole is a staggering \$175 billion. The trade deficit is now so bad that the Federal Reserve Board now regards it as the major threat to the US economy.

In Japan, recession is now openly indicated. Real GNP fell in the first quarter of 1986 for the first time in 11 years; industrial production rose only 0.2% in the year to June 1986; growth in GNP to the year ending March 1987 is forecast to be no more than 2%; furthermore, Japanese industrialists expect that capital spending this year will fall by 4.5% from last year's level. Although the Japanese economy got a boost from the fall in oil prices, as the biggest exporter to OPEC countries it has suffered from the consequent slump in those producers imports.

Only in Germany does the bourgeoisie still see positive signs in current economic activity. In the second quarter of 1986, GNP grew at an annual rate of 7% - largely based on expansion of domestic demand. (However, the short-term nature of this is shown by the fact that in the first quarter GNP had actually fallen by 1%.) Nonetheless its net trading position is good - being a projected \$60 billion surplus for 1986.

The bourgeoisie's current efforts to boost this flagging economic activity are concentrated on juggling key parameters in the economic relationship between the big three: especially bilateral trade deals, exchange rates and interest rates. For the US bourgeoisie there is of course the additional objective of reducing its massive trade deficit. The US wants Germany and Japan to reflate their economies, to stimulate demand by making borrowing cheaper, and therefore to increase US exports while decreasing Japanese and German imports - a process which can be encouraged by letting the dollar fall 'gently', very gently if the US is to avoid a flight of capital out of its economy. The American bilateral trade deficits with each of these countries are enormous - already in July it was over \$34 billion with Japan, compared to just under \$50 billion for the whole of 1985.

However, the German and Japanese bourgeoisies do not want simply to fall in line when the US snaps its fingers - they are both cautious of any coarse modification of these parameters - and Bonn especially has been resisting the extent of interest rate cuts demanded by Washington. So to encourage its allies, the US is putting them under considerable politi-

cal pressure. Given this situation it is not surprising that large sectors of the American bourgeoisie are calling for protectionist measures to the degree that, in early September, US Secretary of State George Schultz was moved to say in an address to Harvard University that: "Not since the days of Smoot-Hawley (1) have the forces of protectionism been as powerful as they are today in the US Congress." This is no empty warning: already this year, congressional pressures all but managed to set up strong barriers against textile imports from the Far East; hard measures were taken in August to curtail imports of Japanese computer chips. The situation is delicate and these three countries know it. For example, the Germans are worried about trying to stimulate their economy too much with cheaper borrowing: monetary growth is already well above target levels and they are concerned that easier borrowings would be used to fund financial speculation rather than capital investment. The Bank of Japan has the same reservation - there, money supply is currently 8% a year above target levels. All know that a slip-up could trigger another inflationary spiral.

For the underdeveloped countries, the collapse of commodity prices continues - to the point where the average price of non-oil commodities in 1985 was, in real terms, down more than 50% from that of the late '70s. "Commodity markets now resemble those of the 1930s more than those of any recent period", according to the Commodities Research Unit. This has hit the income of the world's poorest countries very hard, wiping out for many of them any benefits gained by the collapse in oil prices.

#### The Russian Bloc

As a capitalist economy, Russia suffers from all the underlying contradictions which afflict those of the West. In addition, however, Russia has suffered from a chronic shortage of capital which means it has had far less manoeuvrability than the industrialised countries of the West in confronting its economic problems.

According to Russian economists at the Academy of Sciences at Novosibirsk, growth of capital investment has fallen from 44% in the first half of the '70s to 23% in the second half of that decade, to 17% in the first half of the '80s. Over the same periods, the increase in output of the extractive industries - which, as well as their domestic importance, accounts for 90% of Russia's export earnings - has fallen from 26% to 10% to 5%. Further falls are predicted for the second half of the '80s.

Just as the new Gorbachev regime was gearing itself up to tackle the enormous problem of streamlining its economy, of making it more productive so as to accelerate the strengthening of its whole war machine, it has been struck by several hard blows: the collapse in oil prices (and those of other commodities), the fall of the dollar, and the Chernobyl disaster.

The fall in oil prices has hit the Russian economic programme particularly hard. The Institute of Comparative Economic Studies (based in Vienna) has estimated that Russia could lose about \$7 billion, or one-third of its potential hard currency earnings, in 1986. These earnings are crucial to Russia's purchases of essential technology and equipment from the West; their plans for opening up new reserves to replace the presently depleting fields needs expensive oil-extraction equipment which they can only buy in the West.

The Chernobyl disaster will hurt its energy programme. Russia gets 11% of its power from nuclear reactors, of which 60% comes from 18 RBMKs, the Chernobyl type. Half of these are now closed down for costly alterations - and this when the current plan calls for a doubling of output from nuclear reactors by 1990.

In short, the Russian economy is heading for even worse trouble. The Russian bourgeoisie recognises that some of its problems are worsened (if not created) by manoeuvres of the bourgeoisie of the West, as the oil price issue shows. Consequently, they have decided to intervene more strongly in the determination of the framework for world trade - and this summer applied to join the trade negotiations held under the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT). Although the first Western reactions to this move have been hostile, it is too early to predict how this is going to turn out; nonetheless, it is clear that the organisation of world trade is going to be a further arena in which the Gorbachev regime intends to confront the US.

#### The Perspective

The bourgeoisie is becoming more and more desperate in the search for tricks to stave off the inevitable. It's like a juggler on a tightrope, losing his balance and trying to do more and more tricks at the same time.

Whatever reluctance the Japanese and German bourgeoisies have to reflate at the speed the American bourgeoisie wants, they know that in the end they'll have to go along with it - they are all obliged to work in concert. For the period ahead, their attention will be focussed on the American trade deficit, round which protectionist forces will continue to build. Deals will be struck to reduce European imports, to modify interest rates so as to stimulate their own economies and help bring the dollar down gently, making German and Japanese exports less competitive, and thereby reducing the US trade deficit. That's the plan and to a certain degree it is working. But to see just how limited a scope it can have, it is only necessary to point out that Germany and Japan only account for 25% of American imports; on the other hand around 50% come from Canada, Taiwan and South Korea whose currencies are holding up against the dollar. Thus, the major economies are channelling their efforts to tackle only a small fraction of one symptom of the problem! Canute had a better chance of turning back the tide.

Nonetheless, after the expected lag of several months, some benefits of the oil price fall are beginning to come through and may provide some short-term relief for the Western bourgeoisie, although even the bourgeoisie can no longer expect a stimulus to the economy, only a prolongation of the present situation. Thereafter, the way will open again for further recession - and the threat of hyper-inflation which is the ultimate recourse of this bankrupt system to try to buy its way out of its crisis with worthless currency.

The movement of the strongest countries of the West into recession will be seen on a greater scale in the Eastern bloc, whose

weaker economies are in a far worse state. In the underdeveloped countries, the consequences are unthinkable.

The two broad results will be, as ever in this decadent phase of the capitalist system: a further intensification of inter-imperialist rivalries, and the most brutal assault on the living and working conditions of the proletariat.

Marlowe

#### Note

(1) Protectionist measures in 1930s.

# THE GROWTH OF INTER-IMPERIALIST CONFLICTS

Antagonisms between the US and Russian blocs have been a permanent feature of capitalism since their construction during and after the Second World War. The post-war reconstruction led to a certain attenuation of these antagonisms - though the fact that they never disappeared even in times of 'boom' was shown by both the Korean War in the 1950s and the Vietnam War in the 1960s. But since the end of the post-war reconstruction and the opening of today's conjunctural crisis, the rivalry between the two blocs has become more and more intense. Only stopped from precipitating society into a third global holocaust by the strength of the world working class struggling against increasing exploitation, the bourgeoisies of the two blocs have manoeuvred (in preparation for this war) for the best military advantages across the planet. After decades of this deadly chess game, the enormous economic and military superiority of the US bloc has pushed Russian influence out of Latin America, left it with only a few footholds in Africa, and reduced its influence in the Middle and Far East.

#### The American Offensive and Russian Reaction

The period as a whole remains characterised by the US offensive; but, as we have pointed out in previous issues of IP, the Russian bourgeoisie is not letting itself be pushed back without a struggle.

The 'offensive' of the US does not mean simply overt conflict between military forces of the two imperialist blocs. The offensive is far wider than this; it covers - accelerated military preparations, reinforcement of blocs, internal disciplining, manoeuvring for allies, manipulation of local conflicts, and wheeling and dealing on arms negotiations. It also includes the use of US economic power to worsen Russia's overall economic position, so

as to weaken the industrial basis from which Russian military power comes. And when Russia is being pushed more and more onto the defensive, this does not mean a steady, timorous retreat. In fact, the past year or so (especially since Gorbachev's coming to power) has brought several developments which we shall go into later. Thus, the actual rapport de forces between the two blocs is very complex. Consequently the interpretation of the unfolding of the current situation has to be undertaken with great care.

In terms of straightforward military reinforcement, both blocs continue to build up their forces and refurbish their weapons systems. In the US bloc, modernisation of nuclear forces - both strategic weapons and in the tactical weaponry to be used in the European theatre. The re-integration of France back into the NATO military command structure is also a priority, as is that of the new member, Spain.

A third world war would leave no corner of the globe untouched. Nonetheless, Europe would be the crucible of the conflict. Cynically, it is in this arena that the Western bourgeoisie tries to persuade the population that it is threatened by overwhelming odds from its Eastern foe. Yet the reality is that the Western military capability in the theatre (not necessarily measured in simple numerical comparisons) is more than a match for the Russian forces available. Even the 'defensive' posture the West adopts in Europe puts enormous economic/military pressure on Russia: the emphasis on high mobility in the Western forces aims, among other things, to make the generally-accepted three-to-one advantage that an attacker must have to break through the central front an impossible goal for Russian economic and military resources to attain. In addition to which, the West has



devoted considerable energy to the strengthening of a second front to weaken the effort Russia can commit to Europe - in the East.

In the Far East, the US has over the past few years been reinforcing the ties between its allies, mainly on the economic and political levels as important steps towards their military consolidation. It is clear from the speed with which this work has progressed recently that the US regards this task as being particularly urgent.

The agreement for Britain to hand over Hong Kong to China is strengthening the economic and financial links between China and the Western bloc by facilitating access. Hong Kong will also provide China with a local source of high-tech skills and production capability. The deal has also revealed a process of reconciling the two Chinas - mainland and Taiwan - which could rechannel their respective military forces towards the common enemy, Russia. The rapprochement between South Korea and Japan also opens up similar possibilities.

One of the major tasks for the Western bloc is to build up Japan's military forces. The US is pressing for far greater military expenditures, particularly so that Japan's naval capabilities can be considerably strengthened. Japan's primary military role for the West will be to contain the Russian Pacific fleet in the Sea of Japan and seal the straits of the Japanese archipelago, and to keep the sea lanes open all the way beyond the Philippines. There are considerable political obstacles in Japan standing against heavy increases in military expenditures, but the increased majority gained by Nakasone's Liberal Democratic government in the July election will undoubtedly be used to break them down and to prepare the military for the role assigned to it.

However, Russia has also been highly active in preparing its defenses against the threat to its eastern flank building up for some years. Its forces in the Far East which will have to contend with China and Japan have been considerably strengthened over the past 10 years: Japanese estimates are an increase in army divisions by over 30% (to 41), in combat aircraft by 20% (to 2400), in ships by 10% (to 840 including two aircraft carriers) as well as deploying 160 SS-20 medium range nuclear missiles and 85 Backfire bombers. On the diplomatic front Gorbachev is trying to draw China and Japan into various deals so as to reduce Western pressure. Among the points he made in his Vladivostok speech in July, he offered to settle the long-standing Russia/China border disputes along the Amur and Ussuri rivers in China's favour. To Japan he is hinting at possible negotiations over Russia's occupation (since 1945) of some of the islands off its north coast; he is also keen to get Japan more involved in the economic development of Siberia. In such ways, Gorbachev intends to try to undermine to whatever degree it can the American pressure on these countries to escalate their military preparations against Russia.

Southern and South East Asia have continued to be a major zone of overt conflict between the two blocs, as it has been since the end of the Second World War. The massive US support of Afghan rebels (through their bases and supply routes in Pakistan) has made the occupation of Afghanistan a costly one for the Russian army. As well as building up its forces in Afghanistan the Russian army has replied in kind to the Western tactics and has armed anti-Pakistani forces (largely based on the Pathan tribesmen taking refuge in Afghanistan) to fight against Pakistan and Afghan forces based in Pakistan.

The US-backed forces in Thailand - both the regular Thai army and Pol Pot's Khmer Rouge - have also felt a vigorous response from Russia's allies. The Vietnamese army and air force have struck against the bases and refugee camps in Thailand itself. SE Asia will continue to be a major hot-spot between the two blocs as long as Vietnam stays inside Kampuchea and remains allied to the Russian bloc.

In Africa, the US continues to increase the pressure to exclude Russia from its few remaining footholds. Ethiopia is the focus for the many wars going on in the countries of the crescent round the Horn of Africa, and Angola in the southern part of the continent. For the past several years it has been the US bloc which has supported the so-called 'national liberation' organisations - especially in Eritrea - fighting against the Russian-backed Mengistu regime in Addis Ababa. In retaliation, Ethiopia arms and provides bases for the Sudan Peoples' Liberation Army which is active against the Khartoum regime in the southern Equatoria province. Since this province borders on the Central African Republic, Zaire, Uganda and Kenya there is scope for warfare to extend and escalate into more Western-backed countries.

To put more pressure on Russia's allies in southern Africa the West has stepped up its military support of Savimbi's UNITA forces which are now in the 13th year of their post-'independence' war against the MPLA and the Cuban army. The US aims to have UNITA and the South African forces put enough pressure on the MPLA - and their SWAPO allies in Namibia - so that they will sever links with their Russian backers. Russia shows every sign of resisting.

In the Middle East, the US is also trying to reduce Russian influence although the inherent instability of the area, its strategic importance and its geographical position practically precludes Russia's complete expulsion. The latter's main holds are in Syria, where the West is investing great efforts to wean the Assad regime away from Russian influence, and in South Yemen which has been (relatively) secure in the Russian orbit for some years and which occupies an important strategic position at the foot of the Arabian peninsula and at the entrance to the Red Sea. However, the cockpit of the inter-imperialist conflict in the Middle East is the Lebanon and this is where the battle for Syria's allegiance is being fought.

To reinforce the Western bloc's military forces in the region, the US is aiming to enable them to function together. In particular this means for the Israeli and Egyptian forces to have more contact and to fit into some coherent division of labour. US forces already work with each of them individually. In turn, this concern is leading the US again to try to make Israel a more 'acceptable' ally. The visit of Israeli prime minister Peres to Morocco, at the invitation of King Hassan was a step in this. So too is the resolution of the Taba dispute between Egypt and Israel opening the way for a visit of Mubarak to Jerusalem, the first for five years. Nonetheless, the importance of anti-Zionism as an ideological weapon used by most of the Arab states to mystify their populations makes the complete discarding of this ideology high-impossible - whatever the desires of their rulers. Clearly, however, any movement towards such a conclusion would be important to the US.

### Russia's Strategy

Surrounded by an enemy of far greater economic and military power, Russia has had to devise some strategy to carve out the best position for itself in a highly constrained situation. It is bordered by enemies for almost the entirety of its land frontiers from west to east; across the polar regions lies its most powerful rival; its economy is in far worse shape than that of the West not least because of the enormous weight of arms production which consumes about 12 - 14% of GNP. Hence it is constantly searching for ways to make more cost-effective use of its military, economic and diplomatic potential. It is therefore more and more vigilant to any opening in the world situation of which it can take advantage.

One of the key elements of Russian policy is to make some deal with the US on strategic armaments. These negotiations do not reflect any concern whatsoever on the part of either side to limit armaments production, far less try to establish 'peace'. On the contrary, both sides are still hell-bent on material preparations for war. The two antagonists thus have to prepare their offensive and defensive forces and systems across the whole range of weaponry. By entering into negotiations, the US and Russia can offer to trade off some non-development, or non-deployment, or limitations on deployments of systems on one side against some on the other. The precise goal of each side is complex: it may be to reduce effort in some areas, to use it in others; or to disadvantage the opponent where one side feels stronger; or to compensate for a weakness in a certain area. The issue is further complicated by any linking that takes place between the military factors and goals in other economic and political areas. The value of such deals can be considerable to both sides - tens of billions of dollars each to be used for other military purposes. However, since neither side reveals its detailed objectives publicly, a detailed analysis of the current negotiations - which in any case, we have no space to go into here - could only be, for the most part, speculative. However,

we can be categorical that the public pronouncements about 'peace' which the two sides make ad nauseam have a propaganda content only.

Everywhere Russia has had an uphill struggle. The war in Afghanistan has been particularly costly. Its aim in 1979 to establish a military bridgehead for a future move towards the warm waters of the Indian Ocean has floundered in a most expensive way. The Russian forces have become bogged down. Although it has to be noted that the war has given a considerable battle-hardening experience to its army. The experience of Afghanistan shows how expensive it is for Russia to conduct an offensive struggle against the US. And even where its influence is strong, its hold is not secure as the civil war in South Yemen last January shows. Russia had benefitted from the foreign policy of Nasser Mohammed who had opened up links to other nearby Arab states; although he was pro-Moscow, Russia thought it necessary to have the exiled Ismail return to discourage any pro-Western drift resulting from Nasser Mohammed's policies. The ensuing bloodbath between the two pro-Russian factions was exactly the opposite of what Russia wanted: a dangerous destabilisation in the country which hosts its massive Socotra naval base, the major Russian base in the region.

Whatever the overall military/economic dominance of the US bloc, the power of the USSR remains awesome, and it is determined to fight the American onslaught tooth and nail. As well as using the systematic means outlined above, the Russian bourgeoisie will be alert to the possibilities of taking advantage of any opportunities presented to it. In particular, this will mean to use as cover, the incidence of mass social unrest, a more and more frequent phenomenon. Because its global reach encompasses much of the underdeveloped world, the occurrence of such unrest tends therefore to affect the US bloc detrimentally, to the potential advantage of Russia. This has been a major lesson from the aftermath of the fall of the Shah of Iran.

Such benefit can take a number of forms: the weakening of regional military capability; the destabilisation of an ally's position; a costly programme to try to palliate the unrest; the threat to the stability of neighbouring regimes, etc. The major examples today are:

- Egypt. The appalling state of the Egyptian economy, worsened by the drop in oil prices which bring in a large proportion of its foreign currency earnings. Not only is there a considerable explosive potential among the population at large, but the police riots this year show that conditions in the state's own forces render parts of them unreliable. The US needs the Egyptian military able to fight in the Middle East and is having to subsidise it considerably to maintain any stability at all.

- South Africa. Internal unrest tends to undermine the capacity of the state to dominate southern Africa and specifically in its

efforts against the Cuban forces in Angola.

- Philippines. The fall of Marcos and the bringing of Aquino to power shows how alert the US has become to this danger. Its speedy response to the deteriorating situation enabled it to avert further immediate problems. All the same, the inability of the bourgeoisie to effect any real reforms means that the problem has not gone away. Moreover, after a brief 'honeymoon' period, the guerrilla forces have intensified their conflict with the regular Phillipine army.

- Pakistan. Again, the regime of Zia al-Haq faces considerable domestic unrest which diverts the capacity of the military away from the tasks concerning Afghanistan. Whatever her own objectives, Benazir Bhutto is defusing the anti-Zia sentiments into safe pro-'democracy' channels, thereby giving the US time to work on the situation - its major concern being to stabilise what is now a 'front-line' country in the Afghanistan war.

Russia does not create this instability and unrest which comes from the open crisis of capitalism, globally. All the same, each of these situations affords opportunities for Russia at the very least gaining some advantage from the costs to be borne by the US in trying to stabilise them.

#### Other Conflicts

Not all the conflicts in the world today are direct expressions of the antagonisms between the two blocs. In fact, three other major conflicts show up different though related issues: the Iran/Iraq war, Nicaragua and Libya.

The Iran/Iraq war is to all intents a conflict within the Western bloc. If neither is an entirely willing ally of the US, they both recognise that their future does not lie with the Russian bloc. Both sides are armed primarily (though not entirely) by the West; their economies depend on trade with the West. Although the war began as a continuation of their long-standing territorial disputes, its value to the West (which has often kept it going) has been to put pressure on both regimes to become more dependent on links with the West since only these determine their capacity to defend themselves against each other. In addition to which, the war has been a means of controlling their oil production and effectively keeping production down during a period of enormous glut. (It has to be noted that while troops of both armies were being butchered on the battlefield this summer they could come to an accommodation over oil production to enable OPEC to agree on quotas and prices.)

Nicaragua and Libya have one important thing in common: they are used by the US as key elements in the bourgeoisie's propaganda campaigns against the populations of the Western bloc. Nicaragua is supposedly the enemy at America's back door, a conduit for Cuban (read Russian) attempts to destabilise the close neighbours of the continental US.

Libya (and more particularly Qaddafi) is the personification of 'international terrorism' striking at American and European innocents all over the world. Both of these are used to strengthen the sense of paranoia of the populations of the West, the idea of the state as the defender of the nations' peoples, and to justify the use of ruthless and indiscriminate murder in their defence. As such, the Western bourgeoisie has created perfect pariahs whose populations can be butchered wholesale on the altars of democracy and freedom. The West will continue to use such cynical methods to try to get the working class to worship at these altars as long as the struggle of the working class does not rise to stop it. No matter that most of the European bourgeoisies claim to disagree with Reagan and Thatcher who conspire to send F-111s to bomb Tripoli indiscriminately, the important thing is to get the working class to believe that the problems of the world can only be discussed and resolved in these terms. At the same time, the raids on Tripoli in April were also a statement to Russia and to the Arab regimes in the Middle East of the willingness and capacity of the US to act punitively as it sees fit against whoever stands against it.

#### The Perspective of Capitalism

The US Bloc has overwhelming superiority over its adversary and will continue to apply every pressure to worsen Russia's position economically and militarily, with the longer-term goal of pushing Russia behind its own frontiers. Russia intends to resist tooth and nail, and can be expected to use every opportunity to make the offensive as expensive as possible for the US. The evolution of this antagonism will push more and more of the world deeper into a barbaric hell: particularly in Africa, the Middle East and South East Asia. Such is the only perspective of capitalism today.

Marlowe

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To fall into leninist ideology it is not necessary to share its most caricatural aspects such as consciousness being brought from outside the class. Others have fallen into leninist ideology while recognizing the origin of consciousness within the class struggle, including Lukacs whom we have cited several times for his theoretical clarity on certain points. To fall into leninist ideology it is sufficient to reproduce within the class the mechanism and the relations of ideology.

M.Lazare

In a second part of this text in our next issue, we will take up the concrete process of the development of class consciousness in capitalist society, specifying the role of communists in this process.



## DEBATE

# FRANCE : AN EXPERIENCE IN LEFT GOVERNMENT

One of the lessons our Fraction has learned from its experience in the International Communist Current (ICC) as a tendency is the need to reject the monolithism that little by little took over the ICC as it suffered a political degeneration. It is because we understand the need to break with this way of functioning that we are publishing in our magazine, in full view of everyone, contradictory arguments on certain questions under discussion in our Fraction. They are an expression of the heterogeneous development of consciousness. We can only encourage our readers and other organizations to contribute actively to the debate.

The discussion we are presenting deals with the strategy of the Bourgeoisie in France. Like other political groups, the return of the right to government in the recent elections in France led us to evaluate the meaning of this change and the lessons to draw from it. It was the discussion on this situation and its context that led us to go back over the left victory in 1981. At that time, the victory of Mitterrand produced a great deal of discussion in revolutionary groups. The ICC itself debated this issue but was incapable of pushing the discussion far enough to

really clarify the issue and was unwilling to air the differences.

The ICC made a fundamental contribution in that it was the only group to expose the general strategy of the bourgeoisie : the tendency to put the left in the opposition. But using this framework, the ICC explained this victory of the left in France in 1981 as an "accident" within the general tendency.

And it is precisely on this point that the discussion has taken place in our Fraction : all comrades agree on the general framework of the left in opposition and on the possibility of recognizing the existence of accidents in history. The disagreement is over the "accidental" nature of the Mitterrand election; see below the article defending the fact that the situation can best be explained in terms of the specificity of the French bourgeoisie and the answer "In Defense of the Accident Thesis".

We look forward to a positive response from the proletarian political milieu and interested readers. It is obviously important that revolutionaries be as clear as possible about the events that take place around them.



The reawakening of class struggle since 1968 gave rise to successive waves of struggle showing a maturing of the consciousness of the proletariat and the growth of its ability to move towards its own perspectives. The class struggle has made it imperative for the bourgeoisie to adapt and modify its system of control over the workers -- a system designed to contain and neutralize all working-class reactions.

One crucial aspect of this adaptation was the emergence of a tendency of the left parties to go into the opposition. This status in the opposition allowed them to adopt a "radical stance" and more effectively camouflage their fundamentally anti-working class nature. Taking advantage of the sabotage work of the unions and playing on their working-class "roots", these parties can effectively sidetrack workers' attempts to fight back and recuperate their efforts to raise the fundamental question of how and why to struggle.

The left in the "opposition" is one of

the most dangerous obstacles to workers' struggles today. The International Communist Current (ICC) was the first to grasp this general tendency of the left in opposition (see the International Review #18 "In the Opposition as in the Government, the 'Left' Against the Working Class"). Other groups in the revolutionary milieu have unfortunately rejected this analysis out of hand, thereby seriously compromising their ability to unmask the hidden intricacies of class relations today.

The five years of a "left" government in France, followed by the return of the right in the elections of this year, are important to analyse. This period has shown several things :

- It revealed the bourgeois nature of the left factions of capital; the left parties implemented France's worst austerity measures to date, the strengthening of exploitation and repression;



- it also showed the continued ideological impact of the left parties and the trouble the proletariat had in developing its struggles;

- it demonstrated that the political mechanisms of a national bourgeoisie often encounter great difficulty in adapting to the necessities of the overall international situation.

The French experience has been very rich in lessons for workers everywhere. But understanding general tendencies does not mean that revolutionaries have to pretend to be crystal-ball gazers like the ICC did when, in its territorial press in France, it "predicted" a victory for the right in the 1981 elections in France because of its general analysis of the passage of the left parties into the opposition. Understanding a general necessity doesn't mean falling into schematism, applying the analysis abstractly without understanding that counter-tendencies can exist due to certain national specificities. Above all, we have to understand the strategy of the bourgeoisie and its limited consciousness of this strategy. Despite the existence of the general tendency on an international level, left factions remained in government or came to power in a certain number of countries. This corresponded to national needs of the moment or to the inability of certain national bourgeoisies to carry out the general, overall strategy. We mustn't forget that even if the capitalist class can develop strategies and plan ahead, it is still a victim of fragmented, hierarchical activity which has to take national specificities into account.

The schematism of the ICC discouraged other groups from seeing the truth of the analysis of the left in opposition. More specifically, this schematism prevented the ICC from grasping all the subtleties of the situation in France. The false election prediction for France in 1981 was "explained" as an "accident" that happened to the French bourgeoisie. The ICC ignored the real reasons for this situation, especially the crucial element for understanding the weaknesses of the workers' struggles in France: the ideological impact of the left. What else can explain the sort of torpor the working class in France fell into in this period? If one doesn't see the strength of the bourgeoisie, then one looks for weaknesses in the proletariat -- like the famous ICC accusation that the workers and the revolutionaries are riddled with "centrism vis a vis councilism". This is an "explanation" the ICC invented after the 1981 period but it is not unrelated to that group's inability to grasp the situation in France.

#### WHAT WAS THE MEANING OF MITTERAND'S VICTORY IN THE 1981 ELECTIONS?

The 1981 victory of the Socialist Party was certainly not an "accident", a surprise that found the bourgeoisie open-mouthed to see that the left had won. There is a dangerous concept contained in this notion of a national accident.

It is clear that new, unexpected elements appear in the functioning of all societies. Our aim is not to deny the idea of accident as such. But an accident as the sole explanation for the whole situation of a national bourgeoisie of a highly industrialized country facing the need to control the working class, becomes absurd and very difficult to defend. This idea can mean either that :

- the bourgeoisie was in such a terrible mess and prey to such total disorganization that its entire electoral mechanism was allowed to spin its wheels and create an "accidental" result to the elections. But we know that, far from being the reflection of a so-called "freedom of opinion of the people", elections are only a democratic charade covering over the reality of sordid calculations and ideological pressure;

- or the accident thesis can mean the opposite : a vision of the bourgeoisie as omniscient, clear at all times about the choices to be made and capable of immediately concretizing these needs in political mechanisms; seeing it as a class that is united at all times over and above any clan interests. With such a vision, whatever does not correspond to general needs cannot be explained and will therefore be "accidental". But this ignores the reality of the bourgeoisie as a class and the "consciousness" it has of the strategies it needs.

In a whole series of countries, and for different reasons, we have seen the difficulty the bourgeoisie experienced when trying to adapt its political mechanisms to the interests of the moment : in Greece, in Spain where left factions are still in the government; in Belgium where it finds it so hard to get the Socialists back in the opposition, etc.

It is from this angle that we should examine the situation in France in 1981. The rigid political structure inherited from Gaullism and the abnormally heavy weight of the agricultural sector in this highly industrialized country compounded the anachronisms of certain sectors of the political apparatus. These are some elements to explain the French bourgeoisie's difficulty in adapting quickly to general necessities. In a more immediate sense, other elements played a part : the too blatant dissension within the right which made it an unattractive electoral commodity. The left hadn't directly participated in government since the end of the 50's and so was able to keep its ideological impact intact.

The election of the Socialist Party and the Communist Party in March 1981, far from creating a comfortable situation for the bourgeoisie, was, in fact, the reflection of a specific national situation and the difficulty of the French bourgeoisie to react to the need for political reorganization with the necessary cohesion. This did not allow for a clear choice or for adequate electoral preparation.

The passage of the Communist Party into the opposition was the first step towards correcting this situation which was to be "resolved" by the right-wing parties' re-

turn to the government in this year's elections. This time the right silenced its dissension and carried on a tough, determined campaign. The French bourgeoisie learned the lessons of the Mitterand experience and overcame its anachronisms, just as the Belgian bourgeoisie had to do in its time by going beyond the cultural and linguistic blocks between the French and Flemish-speaking communities.

#### THE IDEOLOGICAL IMPACT OF THE LEFT

If we look only at the "awkwardness" of having the left in government in France, along with the austerity measures it took, we could conclude that France was going to be the scene of great social turmoil, poorly controlled by the left's forces, weakened by being in the government. Mitterand certainly took economic measures that led to an increase in unemployment and the exploitation of workers in all branches of industry. But although we often did see very important reactions of anger among the workers these past 5 years, the social situation was characterized more by an offensive of the bourgeoisie than by the unfolding of strikes. The number of strike days was particularly low even though there was a resurgence of class struggle on an international level. Although the workers' movements we saw contained all the rich potential characteristic of this period, they were unable to break out of union control and union isolation branch by branch, region by region, factory by factory. This meant that despite all the rage and latent combativity among the workers, all the potential was not expressed in a positive way.

The explanation for this lies in the ideological power of the left. Even if this power has been significantly eroded historically, the left still has the capacity to contain, isolate and paralyze workers' struggles. Although the best place for the left is in the opposition, the French left's long "cure" in the opposition before 1981 made its election to government in that year considerably less uncomfortable for the bourgeoisie. Right after the elections, the bourgeoisie tried to make the situation as "safe" as possible. The first year (when the Mitterand government passed a series of "social measures" such as

an increase in the minimum wage and additional paid holidays) was cynically referred to as a "honeymoon period" by the bourgeoisie itself. Meanwhile, the unions were not wasting the time given to them; they were busy refining and adjusting their methods of control on the shop floor. Even though no one really believed that Mitterand's new measures would solve the crisis or bring a new social order, that year of "grace" kept the working class in France in a state of expectation and demobilization which certainly didn't lead it to confront the government head on. Creating this state of "great expectations" was a major element in the strategy of the bourgeoisie.

The present wave of class struggle shows signs of maturing class consciousness and enormous potential for self-organization, extension of struggles and disillusionment with the union's and the left's claim to represent working-class interests. But one of its characteristics is a difficulty in concretizing this potential by directly asserting a working-class perspective. The situation in France has led to a profound discrediting of the left: the angry steelworkers who burned not only the police stations but certain local Socialist Party headquarters. But these reactions were few and limited in scope. Although this anger was at certain moments directed against its real cause, it didn't lead to any class-wide, large-scale denunciations of the left and struggles against it as such. The anger was isolated in certain branches of industry, certain factories, contained by the efforts of the unions.

The return of the CP to the opposition in 1984 allowed the bourgeoisie the benefit of a radical faction outside the government. At the same time, it freed the hands of the CP union, the CGT, to launch a series of commando actions aimed at shoring up the reputation of the union and making a show of decisiveness to sidetrack the workers' latent militancy.

Thus, believing that Mitterand's election was an accident, leaving the French bourgeoisie completely unarmed against a proletariat which had clearly identified the left as its class enemy, is tantamount to ignoring the nature of a specific national situation and above all, ignoring the crucial impact of the left on the working class' efforts to assert its class perspectives.

Rose

## IN DEFENSE OF THE ACCIDENT THESIS

The lessons of the left government in France, as drawn in the preceding article, are clearly of crucial importance for a working class understanding of its class enemy.

But in addition to this major point, the article raises a secondary issue: why did Mitterand come to power in the first place in 1981? The preceding article claims this was not an accident but rather a deliberate (or unconscious?) move by the French capitalist class in line with its interests. We do not agree and will try to explain.

The significance of this disagreement lies not in the details of the situation in France as such, but in the light this discussion can shed on the general tendency of the 'left in opposition' in Western Europe and the US today. The election in France in 1981 was clearly 'an exception to the rule' but understanding why this was an exception reveals, in the last analysis, how one understands the rule. Was the French situation in 1981 outside the framework of the left in opposition, an example of a counter-tendency, or was the election result an accident, not without

causes of course, but an unexpected event not in the interests of the French capitalist class? Unfortunately, by defending the idea of an accident with superficial and dogmatic arguments both inside and outside the organisation the ICC has done a disservice to the whole theory of the left in opposition among revolutionary organisations. It is a tribute to our comrades that they stand out against unconvincing argumentation and lack of debate.

\* \* \* \* \*

In evaluating the view of comrade Rose that the electoral victory of the left in France in 1981 cannot be seen as an 'accident', it is necessary to begin not with the specific events themselves, but rather with the broader issue of the role played by necessity and chance in both natural and social reality. Here we must start with the treatment of this question by Engels in his Dialectics of Nature. There, Engels savagely, and quite correctly, criticises the then prevailing view in natural science that sees "necessity and chance as determinations that exclude each other", as well as the no less mistaken determinism "which tries to dispose of chance by denying it altogether". (This mechanistic determinism, of course, became the very bedrock of the so-called marxism of the orthodox leadership of the Second International, persisted within the Third International and triumphed with stalinism.) In contrast to these conceptions, Engels (basing himself on Hegel) asserts that necessity and chance are inseparable moments of a dialectical reality, indeed, that "the accident is necessary".

This irreducible element of chance can be seen in the very laws of motion of the capitalist mode of production in the circulation of commodities where (to take but one example) it manifests itself in the disjunction between price and value. In fact, chance is inherent in all social praxis (for which the labour process is the original model) in the ever more complex mediations between the intent of the social actor (the producer) and the outcome of his actions (the product of his labouring activity). In this sense, laws fulfil themselves in society as tendencies and necessity manifests itself only through a web of opposing forces that takes place by way of innumerable accidents. Marx's own Eighteenth Brumaire is one of the clearest illustrations of this complex dialectic on the political level.

The rise of state capitalism in the 20th Century, and with it the totalitarian state which swallows civil society itself, not only doesn't eliminate the antagonistic character of social relations (but raises it to the nth degree); it also doesn't eliminate the multifarious divisions within the capitalist class itself (though it transforms its character). Notwithstanding the very sophisticated division of labour between right and left factions of capital, these antagonistic social relations and divisions within the ruling class constitute the ineradicable basis for accidents even at the level of the choice of the most appropriate governmental team. To

deny this factor of chance - implicitly or explicitly - is to fall into the very determinism against which marxism has always fought. Of course the actual role that chance played in a specific conjuncture (eg the French elections of 1981) can only be ascertained by an analysis of these events themselves - though such an analysis must be animated by a recognition of the dialectic of necessity and chance that we have just outlined.

To turn to the events themselves. The bourgeoisie in France in 1981 did not need the left-wing parties to impose austerity on the workers. It was far better to leave that official, governmental task to the right-wing parties from whom the workers expect nothing. It was better to use the ideological impact of the left as 'unofficial' protection for the state - keeping the left in an oppositional stance, free to neutralise and control the inevitable working class reactions to austerity through a sham militancy unencumbered by government responsibilities. There is no reason why the bourgeoisie in France should have deliberately chosen to depart from this workable division of labour. On the contrary, it had everything to lose by prematurely tarnishing the ideological image of the Socialist Party by bringing it to power in 1981. The election of Mitterand was an accident, unexpected by the capitalist class as a whole.

Elections do not, of course, express the 'will of the people'; they are orchestrated by the bourgeoisie. But this orchestration can go wrong. The capitalist class is not omnipotent even within its own system. The 1981 election was lost to the right by several thousand votes that were not manipulated well enough because the right wing parties were too caught up in their internecine warfare and clan divisions. It was just enough to tip the scales in a way the French capitalist class as a whole neither wanted nor expected.

The article pays lip service to accidents, accidents in the abstract, but not concretely in history and society. Its thesis is that if the left won, it was because the ruling class consciously decided that it needed the left in power. There are broadly three situations where the ruling class would need to have the left in power - none of which existed in France in 1981:

- 1) where imperialist realignments, the needs of the bloc leader etc, require a left in power;
- 2) where the structural transformation, modernisation, of capital, the extension of the state capitalist tendencies, etc require the left in power;
- 3) where the danger of proletarian class struggle, the threat of social revolution, etc require the left in power.

Clearly, imperialist realignments were not a real factor in the choice between Mitterand and Giscard. There was no wave of class struggle which would have necessitated a left

government. Moreover, despite the wave of nationalisations after 1981, this represented no real structural transformation or extension of state capitalist tendencies (as in the '30s or late '40s) but only a shift from de facto to de jure nationalisation (and now back again). Even the notion that the ruling class had been 'unconsciously' obeying its class interests by giving Mitterand the victory can be disproved with a minimum of hindsight. No dramatic shift in economic or any other policy was facilitated by the coming of the left to power. In fact, Delors, who served as Finance Minister for Mitterand, carried out economic policies that could just as well have been done by any Chirac government.

Moreover, although there are counter-tendencies working against the left in opposition, these are concrete, identifiable factors not abstract hypotheses. For example, in present-day Spain (or Greece, or Portugal), where a long-standing right-wing dictatorship (under Franco) had been dismantled and eliminated from power, a new 'modern' right wing had to be given time to develop and thus the left wing was used in the interim to govern austerity. There are also tendencies that accelerate or slow down the pace of the changes to the left in opposition. But in France in 1981 none of the factors which would lead the capitalist class to need the left in power was operative.

But, in a situation where imperialist alignments and economic policy were relatively stable; where the class struggle was at a

relatively low level, disputes and intrigues within the right (which in a more 'dramatic', dangerous situation would not have been allowed to flourish) could - temporarily - become decisive. This is the objective situation in which an 'accident' could take place. A phenomenon not without causes, of course, but an accident because it was not a result deliberately willed by the ruling class or corresponding to its vital needs.

Realising that the election of Mitterand in 1981 was an accident, unlooked for and unplanned for by the French bourgeoisie, does not mean that the capitalist class did not do its best to protect itself and adapt to the situation. Nor need it lead us to hysterically overestimate the vulnerability of the French capitalist class to class struggle when the entire left was in official government service. Nevertheless, in this regard, it is worth remembering that soon after the resurgence of international class struggle became a reality, the Communist Party left the government in 1984 to strengthen union control and ideological control over key industrial sectors slated for major lay-offs.

In conclusion, far from denying the ideological impact of the left and "gravely obscuring the lessons of the French experience", the 'accident' thesis is not merely the only one consistent with the facts of the situation in France but also with the ideological specificity of the left.

MacIntosh/JA

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that is denying this task for itself as well as for the other militant minorities arising in the class struggle. This denial of its role as a political vanguard has found its clearest expression in the role of "water carrier" that the ICC has actually played in the committees of unemployed. Just a few years ago it criticised this view of the task of political minorities being to "act in the place of the class" or to "accomplish what the class fails to do by itself." Today it's the ICC in person which is foundering into this role. Its militants have disparaged any insistence on discussion within the committees, and in fact they have taken upon themselves all practical tasks in them. Of course this kind of fusion between the political minority and the class might give some immediate impact to the former, but it has never really helped the class struggle forward. The ICC is thus incapable of developing a correct view of the function of the unemployed committees or the tasks of revolutionaries within them. Its confusion becomes caricatural when its militants write in "Notedop", the bulletin of a group of unemployed in Belgium: "Does an association of the unemployed have to organize courses and workshops? Let me say first that it's not my intention to demolish people who take such

courses or who organize them, nor to criticize this activity. The only question I want to pose is whether the group "Notedop" must take up this responsibility(...) It's important that we establish the right priorities (...) Today, the unemployed's living conditions are more and more under attack (...) If we want to do something about this we must concentrate our energies on activities that inform and sensitize both the unemployed and active workers as much as possible, to look for solutions and possible actions. When a group of unemployed on top of all that organizes scores of courses, these take up all the indispensable energy(...) it's necessary that others organize these courses..." It sounds like a bad dream. Is this still the political intervention of a revolutionary organization that wants to be the vanguard of the class struggle or the speech of some unionist who wants to demobilize the class struggle, sending the workers back to school? Given the fact that the focus of the activity of all the "unemployed-unions" is precisely to do what they can to keep the unemployed busy as much as they can, the above question is to the point. It is the state, and its unions, who want to treat the unemployed like children, sending them back to school: as long as they are there,

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# CLASS CONSCIOUSNESS IN THE PROLETARIAN REVOLUTION

## I. the nature of class consciousness and its ideological deformations

As long as it has existed and as long as it will exist, the proletariat has been and will be engaged in a violent conflict with the existing order to affirm its own existence, its social project and therefore its consciousness. When the proletariat -- in its practice -- proclaims its opposition to bourgeois society, whether in its first violent reactions to proletarianization in the last century, in the constitution of workers' councils in the course of the revolution, at the beginning of this century, or in its present struggles, it begins to act as a class, to discover its own existence as a class through its solidarity and community of interests. In this way, the proletariat discovers the meaning of its struggle, the goal towards which it historically tends; in short, it begins to exist for itself, consciously. When its struggle ebbs, physically repressed by force of arms or ideologically repressed by calls for "moderation" on the part of the trade unions and left parties, when bourgeois society recovers its power, the proletariat's unity and active existence dissolve into the atomization of capitalism. The workers then tend to again become competing individuals, losing confidence in their strength and perspectives as a class, subject to the dominant ideology which impregnates the whole of society. At that point, there only remain small revolutionary organizations as visible manifestations of the consciousness that the class itself had developed.

These incessant movements of advance and retreat in the action and consciousness of the working class, this permanent tension between its own movement towards its autonomous and conscious existence and the gigantic pressure of the reigning order towards the destruction of this movement, render the maintenance of a correct understanding of the nature of the proletariat and its consciousness extremely difficult, even among the clearest revolutionary elements. Although the pressure of bourgeois ideology continually tends to undermine all the revolutionary positions of the proletariat, the conception of class con-

sciousness is by far the most vulnerable. It is less difficult for a revolutionary organization to maintain a position like the rejection of parliamentarism for example (which a simple look at the reality of parliaments supports) than to maintain a correct conception of class consciousness which affects the very essence of its own subjective activity as a part of the proletariat. It is not an accident that the problem of class consciousness and the role of the party in its development has always been a crucial point at the heart of divergences between revolutionary tendencies in the workers' movement, whether it was between Lenin and Luxembourg, between bordigism and councilism or today among the existing revolutionary groups.

The awakening of the proletariat at the end of the 60's, following the long night of the counter-revolution, meant the resurgence of class consciousness and gave a powerful thrust to the rise of new revolutionary forces and to their theoretical clarification. The historic importance of the International Communist Current (ICC) was its crystallization, its organization of this new revolutionary life, which manifested itself by theoretical clarification on class consciousness, the clearest expressions of which are found in the article "Class Consciousness and the Role of Revolutionaries" in International Review #7 and in the ICC's pamphlet "Communist Organizations and Class Consciousness". Since then, this thrust has exhausted itself -- and -- though the class struggle has continued -- the ever more intense political and economic pressures that the proletariat must be under, the effect of the crisis and the preparations of the bourgeoisie have sorely affected the revolutionary milieu which today finds itself in a pitiful state, notably on the question of class consciousness. The organized "councilist" current has virtually disappeared and its living fossil, Daad en Gedachte (D&G) denies any possibility and necessity for a qualitative development of consciousness in the class struggle. A group like the Communist Workers' Organization

(CWO) has melted into the remnants of the Italian left (the Internationalist Communist Party) to constitute the International Bureau for the Revolutionary Party (IBRP) and has returned to Lenin's "What Is To Be Done" as a reference on class consciousness. Finally, the ICC itself is foundering in its quest for the two "dimensions" of class consciousness, of which one is only ... "class consciousness", that is to say, itself, and the other ... "the consciousness of the class", that is to say, once again, itself. Behind these truly grotesque formulations is hidden a serious regression towards Leninism, with its identification of consciousness and the communist program which the class must "assimilate".

In the face of such a situation, it would be easy to scoff at the revolutionary milieu, to abandon D&G to its contemplation of economic strikes, the IBRP to its Leninist bible, and the ICC to its tape measure for measuring chimerical dimensions, and to get on with more concrete things, as none of them are doing. But the overcoming of the present state of the revolutionary milieu is only possible through the greatest clarity. Any regression on the part of a proletarian organization means that weak points existed through which bourgeois ideology could take hold in order to invade and subdue it. In particular, the new situation of slow and uneven development of the class struggle and class consciousness in the face of an economic crisis in the present period, necessitates a much clearer understanding of the nature of consciousness and the process of its development as a pre-requisite to an adequate revolutionary intervention. It is with this goal in mind that we turn to the problem of class consciousness. Our goal is not to make an exhaustive or academic study of the problem but to reaffirm the bases of a proletarian conception of class consciousness against the errors of the present revolutionary milieu, and to deepen certain points which have been unclear and have contributed to the regression of the ICC. For a more complete treatment of this question we can only encourage the reader to turn to the article in I.R.#7 and the ICC pamphlet which moreover already constitute an antidote to that organization's present incoherences. We must also say that we have already made a first critique of these incoherences when we formed a tendency in the ICC (see Internationalisme #100).

#### HOW TO POSE THE PROBLEM

It is a very general phenomenon that the root of errors, of the unresolved contradictions in human thought and that of revolutionaries in particular, resides in the very way of posing the question at the outset; and this latter is only the expression of the primitive social mode of existence which has generated it. This is certainly the case with the question of consciousness. When the real life of the working class does not clarify the nature of its activity and its consciousness in a sharp enough way, communists unconsciously tend to pose the problem of class conscious-

ness according to the canon of bourgeois ideology, because it is the one that corresponds to the mode of existence of the capitalist society in which they live. From that moment, the answer to the question can only be false. The councilism of D&G, for example, conceives of class consciousness as a reflection of the immediate situation in the heads of the workers, thereby reproducing the schema of the strictest vulgar materialism. The IBRP, which represents the Leninist wing and which has recently devoted a long text to the question of class consciousness (in response to the ICC pamphlet) in Revolutionary Perspectives #21 ("Class Consciousness in the Marxist Perspective"), significantly enough begins its study by defining consciousness "in general" before applying it to the proletariat. And inasmuch as consciousness until now only existed in the alienated form of ideology, this "consciousness in general" is only a pastiche of the ideological vision:

"Whereas bourgeois materialists saw individual man as passively receiving sensory imprints, which were then physiologically translated into consciousness, Marx argued that the raw material of experience was actively restructured by its recipients by thought (since thought has a historical dimension, no one comes into the world a tabula rasa in historical materialism), and transformed into consciousness, which in turn reacted back on experience." (p15)

Any contemporary psychologist would be in agreement with such a mechanistic description, and as we shall see further on, the IBRP is completely mistaken when it tries to base its theory of consciousness on Marx.

With respect to the ICC, here is how it today defines class consciousness:

"For the proletariat, consciousness means self-knowledge, not only of its immediate existence as a class exploited by capital, but above all of its historic existence as the class which is the bearer of communism. That is why class consciousness is not the simple understanding of what the proletariat is, but at the same time a comprehension of its general situation, past, present and above all future." (Internationalisme #95 p4)

In defiance of its previous positions, the ICC more and more conceives of class consciousness as an ensemble of knowledge, of ideas, concerning the past, present and above all future of the proletariat, thereby regressing towards an ideological vision that all the later precisions on the active, historical, political and collective character of consciousness cannot make up for.

In different forms and to different degrees, often against the explicit will of their authors, what is hidden behind all of these visions is the acceptance a priori of an abstract notion of "consciousness in general" -- to use the terms of the IBRP -- as an immanent property of mankind, which indeed can undergo a development, but which still retains the same essential nature. The point of departure for a Marxist, proletarian understanding of consciousness, on

the contrary, must be to fully conceive this latter as a material product of the historical development of society, just like any other, which must be analysed as such, as a material reality in transformation. This is the method that Marx follows :

"The production of ideas, of conceptions, of consciousness, is at first directly interwoven with the material activity and the material intercourse of men -- the language of real life.... Consciousness can never be anything else than conscious being, and the being of men is their actual life-process." (German Ideology, Marx and Engels Collected Works, Vol 5 p 36)

Man was not created conscious, as in the religious conception. Like man himself, consciousness asserts itself, develops and differentiates itself from animality only in the course of a whole historical process of development, of socialization and of control of the productive forces of society. As Marx has shown, in this process man is still in his pre-history, communism marking the leap into history, the leap from the "reign of necessity" to the "reign of liberty" :

"...then the liberation of each single individual will be accomplished in the measure in which history becomes transformed into world history.... All-round dependence, this primary natural form of the world-historical co-operation of individuals, will be transformed by this communist revolution into the control and conscious mastery of these powers, which, born of the actions of men on one another, have till now overawed and ruled men as powers completely alien to them." (Ibid, p51-52)

Consequently, historical materialism can envisage human consciousness and relations such as they have existed up until now, only as pre-historic consciousness and relations which will fully bloom only in the passage to communism, through a total, qualitative transformation. If communists want to fulfill their role in this passage to communism, they must adopt the point of view of the higher stage of consciousness that their class -- the proletariat -- bears within it, and not the point of view of existing consciousness, profoundly rooted in the millennia of class society which must be overturned.

#### THE NATURE AND ROOTS OF IDEOLOGY

To turn aside from ideology, and to grasp the antagonism between ideology and the consciousness of the proletariat, it is not enough to change a word, and to modify this or that feature (its active, historical character, etc.). Rather it is necessary to grasp the nature and the roots of ideology which is nothing other than the nature and the roots of class society itself.\* Class society arose from the dislocation of the primitive community as a result of the elementary development of the productive forces, making possible the production of a surplus of the means of

existence -- but without the surplus being sufficient to satisfy the needs of the whole of society. In this framework of relative scarcity, only a minority is capable of satisfying its needs by taking advantage of the surplus of production. This minority imposes itself on the rest of society at first on the basis of natural disposition, then more and more on the basis of its previously acquired social position, in order to finally wind up in the formation of a class. The division of labor is the essential characteristic of class society and its formation, on which is grounded the division into antagonistic classes according to their relation to the means of production :

"The division of labor as we already saw above as one of the chief forces of history up till now, manifests itself also in the ruling class as the division of mental and manual labor, so that inside this class one part appears as the thinkers of the class (its active, conceptive ideologists, who make the illusions of the class about itself its chief source of livelihood), while the others' attitude to these ideas and illusions is more passive & receptive because they are in reality the active members of the class and have less time to make up ideas and illusions about themselves." (Ibid, p59-60)

The production of consciousness is only one aspect of the material production of society and -- in class society -- this production is the property of a minority imposing itself on the rest of society. This mode of the production of consciousness does not only determine the object, the destination and the form of activity of consciousness, but also its essential nature. That is to say, not only "are the ideas of the ruling class the dominant ideas in every epoch" (Ibid p59), but in addition, consciousness tends to reduce itself to ideas and thereby take on its nature as ideology. Because the conscious being of society is divided between those who produce and those who own the production, between those who act and those who think, consciousness is broken into thought and action, theory and practice; and because it is produced precisely by those who do the thinking, it is identified with the first aspect of the dichotomy -- with thought, with theory, with knowledge; "From this moment onwards, consciousness

\*We are not going to discuss the forms of consciousness prior to class society because it falls outside the scope of this text. But it is evident that, just as class society arose from the scarcity which reigned in the primitive communities, ideology arose from the "purely animal consciousness of nature" (Marx), from the fetishizing consciousness which existed in these communities as an expression of the primitive relation of man to nature. Ideology took shape with the division of labor even before the completion of the division of society into classes.

can really flatter itself that it is something other than consciousness of existing practice, that it really represents something without representing something real; from now on consciousness is in a position to emancipate itself from the world and to proceed to the formation of "pure" theory, theology, philosophy, morality, etc.... Out of all this we get only one inference that these three moments, the productive forces, the state of society and consciousness, can and must come into contradiction with one another because the division of labor implies the possibility, nay the fact, that intellectual and material activity, that enjoyment and labor, production and consumption, devolve on different individuals, and that the only possibility of their not coming into contradiction lies in negating in its turn the division of labor." (Ibid, p45)

The separation of being and consciousness, of the "material world" and the "world of ideas" that ideological thought brings about is only a reflection of its own existence separated from practical activity. From this point of view, pre-capitalist idealism and bourgeois materialism do not differ; their opposition resides in the meaning of the relation that they establish between the two "worlds", the former raising consciousness, the latter being, to the rank of causal agent. It is this nature of ideology as consciousness separated from its concrete practical essence, which determines all of its characteristics, in particular the fact that it is always -- in the last instance -- a reflection of the existing order because its separation from practical activity condemns it to contemplation of the real world, whatever may be its pretensions to play the active and causal role in history.

#### THE CONSCIOUSNESS OF THE PROLETARIAT : NEGATION OF IDEOLOGY

Just as the proletariat is the living negation of the bourgeoisie and announces the advent of a real human community, its consciousness is the negation of ideology and announces the advent of a real human consciousness. Unlike all the ruling classes of the past, the proletariat does not bring about merely a different distribution of the surplus of production and administration of scarcity, but avails itself of the development of the productive forces bequeathed by capitalism to bring about abundance for all. The proletariat doesn't maintain the domination by one class but abolishes classes; it doesn't perfect the division of labor, it abolishes it. The direct and fundamental implication of this is that the society the proletariat bears within itself must be fully conscious as a totality, because only the conscious control of the whole of social activity can replace all the blind mechanisms based on the division of labor and competition which have insured the regulation of social activity up to the present time. Up till now, consciousness has only played a secondary role in history, because the division of labor subjected the

individual to economic relations over which he had no control, and his consciousness could not transcend his individual act of production to encompass the whole of social reality. Fundamentally, communism is the passage of society to consciousness. That is why when revolutionaries (and we are here speaking of the majority of groups in the milieu) accuse us of overemphasizing the aspect of consciousness in the class struggle, they are only manifesting their ignorance of the very nature of the communism the proletariat bears. This historic task is not given to the proletariat by divine decree, but by its very conditions of existence. In this sense, when the IBRP finds no other argument with which to criticize the ICC's pamphlet on class consciousness than "Hegelian teleology", that is to say, seeing the final goal as determining the movement and not the reverse, it only uncovers its own idealist vision of communism, because :

"Communism is for us not a state of affairs which is to be established, an ideal to which reality (will) have to adjust itself. We call communism the real movement which abolishes the present state of things." (ibid, p49)

The communist goal is nothing other than the movement of the proletariat such as it unfolds before our very eyes. When the proletariat struggles and affirms itself as a class, its first need is that of solidarity and the unification of its struggles, because as an exploited class, it has no other strength than its numbers against bourgeois domination -- and this solidarity, this unity, is the foretaste of the unity of the future communist society. When the proletariat succeeds in organizing itself in struggle, transforming its numbers into a superior force, its organization is based on the activity of all and shatters the brutalizing separation of the division of intellectual and practical labor : everyone participates in making decisions as in all the practical tasks of the struggle, and this organization is again the foretaste of the organization of the future communist society. The foretaste only, because communism supposes a gigantic qualitative transformation with respect to these expressions of class struggle (in the first place, the disappearance of the proletariat itself as a class), but the foretaste nonetheless, which shows that communism is not an ideal outside the class struggle, contrary to the leninist conception.

If the proletariat bears within it the abolition of the division of labor and class divisions, then it also bears within it the abolition of the conflict between "the productive forces, the state of society and consciousness", to use Marx's terms, the abolition of the separation of theory and practice, and a consciousness which is really "conscious being" in the full sense of the term. With the proletariat, consciousness ceases to be ideology, an ensemble of ideas elaborated outside of the sphere of practical activity, and acquires the capacity to take in hand the transformation of the world, of the proletariat's own conditions of existence



and therefore of itself :

"...the unity of theory and practice is only the reverse side of the social and historical position of the proletariat. From its own point of view, self-knowledge coincides with knowledge of the whole so that the proletariat is at one and the same time the subject and the object of its own knowledge."  
(Georg Lukacs, History and Class Consciousness p20)

"...since consciousness here is not the knowledge of an opposed object but is the self-consciousness of the object, the act of consciousness overthrows the objective form of its object." (ibid, p178)

This conception of consciousness coinciding with being can appear incomprehensible, ungraspable, when for millennia man has borne the weight of ideology, when each individual has been educated since childhood with the notion of theoretical consciousness which is inculcated from without so as to repress his most profound desires. Nonetheless, this conception will certainly appear as natural in communism, as it today appears natural for us to conceive of life as the mode of existence of matter at a certain degree of complexity (which was not at all the case just a few centuries ago). Moreover, this is not a question of some philosophical profession of faith, but of the theoretical expression of the historical tendency of the real proletarian movement. Because the proletariat is an exploited class which disposes of no economic power or institutions in capitalist society, it is incapable of developing its consciousness according to the processes of ideology, of establishing knowledge independent of its practical activity. The workers begin their struggles with all the trappings of bourgeois ideology in their heads, only developing their consciousness in their collective action; and when the collective consciousness manifests itself, it is in, and for, action. When we establish the difference between bourgeois ideology and the consciousness of the proletarian class :

"These distinctions are by no means academic. Quite apart from problems of culture where such fissures and dissonances are crucial, in all practical matters too the fate of a class depends on its ability to elucidate and solve the problems with which history confronts it. And here it becomes transparently obvious that class consciousness is concerned neither with the thoughts of individuals, however advanced, nor with the state of scientific knowledge." (Ibid, p53)

#### CLASS CONSCIOUSNESS AS A TOTALITY

Another characteristic of the consciousness of the proletariat immediately flows from what we just said. For the proletariat, consciousness is a class consciousness in the full sense of the term, and not an individual consciousness :

"Action, praxis -- which Marx demanded before all else in his Theses on Feuer-

bach -- is in essence, the penetration and transformation of reality. But reality can only be understood and penetrated as a totality and only a subject that is itself a totality is capable of this penetration." (ibid, p39)

This subject is the class :

"only the class can actively penetrate the reality of society and transform it in its entirety. For this reason, "criticism" advanced from the standpoint of class is criticism from a total point of view and hence it provides the dialectical unity of theory and practice."  
(ibid)

The class nature of consciousness is already clearly present in the bourgeoisie as in all the classes which have preceded it. Bourgeois ideology is a process which unfolds independently of the will of this or that individual and which transcends the consciousness of the individual. However, because the bourgeoisie only exists in the divided form of competing individuals, capitals, nations, imperialist blocs, its consciousness necessarily presents itself in this divided form, appearing as individual consciousness. By contrast, for the proletariat, which only affirms itself as a class collectively, in unifying itself beyond all the divisions of bourgeois society and which bears within it the world human community, consciousness manifests itself directly as a totality. Moreover, we are not speaking of an abstract possibility or of a moral imperative, but of an unavoidable constraint inscribed in the proletariat's very conditions of existence. Because the proletariat is an exploited class, as long as it remains in its initial state as a mass of competing individuals, submitting to the mode of existence of capitalism, these individuals remain subject to the dominant bourgeois ideology. The proletariat does not then have a "false consciousness" contrary to the conception advanced by Lukacs and developed by the modernists; it does not yet have consciousness. The proletariat's consciousness only begins to develop when it affirms itself as an autonomous being, as a collective class engaged in struggle and, at that moment, it develops in opposition to all the ideological prejudices which subsist in the heads of individual workers. In every workers' struggle which succeeds in being organized, the consciousness expressed at the level of the struggle as a whole is qualitatively higher than that of the individual workers who are often surprised by what they are capable of doing together and yet who retain a whole gamut of prejudices which will resurface when the struggle ebbs and capitalism resumes its "normal" course. Therefore, it is its condition as an exploited class which produces the consciousness of the proletariat directly as a totality. As Lukacs emphasizes :

"...class consciousness is identical with neither the psychological consciousness of individual members of the proletariat nor with the (mass-psychological) consciousness of the proletariat as a whole."  
...(ibid, p73)

"This consciousness is, therefore, neither

the sum nor the average of what is thought or felt by the single individuals who make up the class." (ibid p51)

#### CLASS CONSCIOUSNESS DENATURED : COUNCILISM AND LENINISM

Both councilism and leninism reproduce an ideological conception of class consciousness which is seen as a collection of knowledge that the proletariat must acquire. For councilism, this consciousness is only a reflection of the immediate situation of the workers; for leninism, it is produced outside the sphere of immediate experience, in the sphere of intellectual reflection, which in its turn is given the leading role. In both cases, the separation between the "material world" and the "world of ideas" of bourgeois materialism is preserved, councilism taking up bourgeois materialism in its strictly determinist, vulgar form and leninism taking up bourgeois materialism in its voluntarist form, which adds to it idealism in the "world of ideas" by proclaiming the pre-eminence of spirit over matter in human practice. Leninism indeed defends the dialectic because it recognizes interaction between the sphere of experience and the sphere of thought, between class and party, between practice and theory; but these interactions remain relations between separated spheres and leninism's dialectic does not go beyond the bourgeois dialectic of the natural sciences.

All this appears clearly in the text of the IBRP which we have already cited, which develops its leninist position on class consciousness. From the first page of this text, when the IBRP defines "consciousness in general", it shows that this latter is only the "consciousness in general" such as it has existed until now, that is to say, ideological consciousness :

"The basic assumption of bourgeois materialism was that there existed a material universe independent of ourselves, and that contact with this universe is the source of our consciousness. This much historical materialism shares with bourgeois materialism." (R.P. #21, p 15)

Nothing is more false. The IBRP directly copies the errors of Lenin more than 80 years later as though nothing had changed, as though Pannekoek, for example, had not brilliantly refuted this whole conception in his Lenin as Philosopher (independently of the fact that his conclusions on the nature of the party in Lenin and on the Russian Revolution are completely wrong). In reality, the postulate of bourgeois materialism that the IBRP makes its own, is only "the highest point attained by intuitive materialism", that is to say, "the intuition of isolated individuals in civil society" as Marx says in his Theses on Feuerbach, which the IBRP also cites, but without understanding the first thing about them. From the point of view of the isolated individual, the world necessarily appears as a world independent of himself:

"The individual can never become the measure of all things. For when the individual confronts objective reality he

is faced by a complex of ready-made and unalterable objects which allow him only the subjective responses of recognition or rejection. Only the class can relate to the whole of reality in a practical revolutionary way. (The 'species' cannot do this as it is no more than an individual that has been mythologized and stylized in a spirit of contemplation.) And the class, too, can only manage it when it can see through the reified objectivity of the given world to the process that is also its own fate." (Lukacs History and Class Consciousness, p193).

From the point of view of the class or of society, the world is in no way independent, inasmuch as it is the world such as it has been transformed by society :

"The relation of the scientist to the world, despite his experiments, remains observational. To him, the world is an external thing to look at. But in reality, man deals with nature in his practical life by acting upon it and making it a part of his existence. Man does not stand against nature as to an external, alien world. By the toil of his hands, man transforms the world to such an extent that the original natural substance is hardly discernable and in this process transforms himself too. Thus man himself builds his new world : human society embedded in nature transformed into a technical apparatus." (Anton Pannekoek, Lenin as Philosopher, p18).

This is exactly the thesis of Marx cited by the IBRP, which, however, seeks to make it demonstrate the opposite :

"The chief defect of all hitherto existing materialism -- that of Feuerbach included -- is that the thing, reality, sensuousness, is conceived only in the form of the object or of contemplation, but not as human sense activity, practice, not subjectively...."

It must be clear that this in no way implies the idealist postulate of the absence of any form of existence of nature independent of man. Even if the IBRP considers man's relation to external nature (nature not transformed by man), it will see that this is not "contact with this universe" which is the "source of our consciousness", without which consciousness would be a property of all matter, since all matter is in contact with nature. No! The source of consciousness is the social activity of the transformation of nature by man.

It is not a question here of a philosophical dispute, because this postulate of the IBRP constitutes the basis of its whole conception of class consciousness and of its own relation to the class. Because, from the outset, it defines the relation of consciousness to the world as that of a scientific observer, as that of an ideologue, to external nature, it conceives the production of consciousness according to the mechanism of ideology. As we have already quoted at the beginning of this text, the secret of this production is that "the raw material of experience was actively restructured by

its recipients by thought...and transformed into consciousness, which in turn reacted back on experience." (RP#21, p15). It is this purely mechanistic, psychological description which the IBRP presents as the foundation of the dialectic and the principal contribution of Marx in his Theses on Feuerbach. All the rest follows logically. It is evident that from the moment class consciousness is no longer the living process through which the proletariat transforms the world, it is frozen into a collection of scientific knowledge, into an ideology, elaborated outside the "raw material of experience", that is to say, outside of the class struggle, by the individuals best equipped to accomplish this task; in short, by the intellectuals; that the revolutionary party -- the "brain" of the proletariat -- is where this occurs and that its function is to lead the working class.

#### THE ICC ON THE SAME ROAD

For its part, the ICC has a past characterized by clarity on the question of class consciousness which did not allow it to share the extreme positions of Leninism. But its recent turnaround has, slowly but surely, led it along the same road. It is significant that in its polemic with the CWO over the very article that we have been criticizing (the one that bears the imprimatur of the IBRP), the ICC has nothing to add to the general conception of the CWO on consciousness; on the contrary:

"In a long article...the CWO makes a perfectly correct critique of the councilist ideology which reduces class consciousness (and therefore the revolutionary organization which expresses it most clearly) to an automatic and mechanical product of the immediate struggles of the class. It points out that Marx's Theses on Feuerbach...first of all constitutes a rejection of this "automatic" vision, which deprives consciousness of its active, dynamic aspect and which is characteristic of the vulgar materialism of the bourgeoisie." (International Review #43)

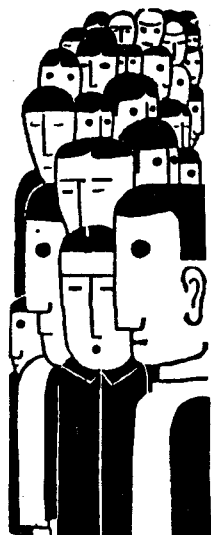
We have already seen the real nature of this "active, dynamic aspect" that the IBRP speaks of, and how it is distinguished from bourgeois materialism:

Although the ICC continues to defend a number of correct statements on class consciousness, these cannot hide the regressions into which it has plunged. The fact that both coexist in an eclectic amalgam in the service of purely polemical ends making any debate practically impossible, only makes it even more necessary to shed some light on these regressions and their implications. The quotation from the ICC given at the beginning of this text, together with innumerable formulations advanced in external and internal texts in the course of the "debate" which ended with our exclusion from the ICC, shows that more and more the ICC conceives of "class consciousness" as a collection of knowledge, as an equivalent to the communist program and to the political positions of the pro-

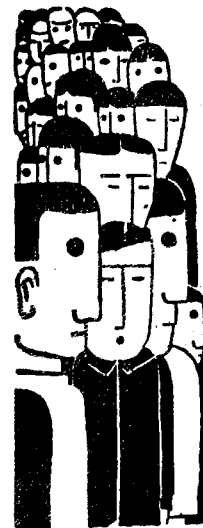
letariat which the class must assimilate, the "extent" of this "assimilation" being the "consciousness of the class". (I.R.#42) The International Review #40, for example, specifies that "class consciousness necessarily has a form and a content", like any fixed thing, and that this "content" is the "program and theory". In one of the texts which marked the opening of the hunt for "centrism" in the ICC, the present was characterized as "fleeting and in this sense the most ephemeral, the least stable moment of reality by definition" and as such, associated with "centrism", while the future, the goal to be attained, was characterized as "fundamentally the conscious element of action", "the compass in the process of the development of class consciousness", "the yardstick used to measure the path already traveled", the "reference point", and as such, associated with Marxism. All these elements reveal the process of ideologization under way in the ICC, which faced with its incapacity to understand and dynamize the present, seeks to freeze consciousness into a theoretical knowledge of the future, a compass for the sailor lost in the storm. The dualism of consciousness expressed in the distinction between "class consciousness" and "consciousness of the class" is the reflection of this process of ideologization. This is so because the separation of an abstract class consciousness from the consciousness of the concrete class is in essence that of ideology which abstracts itself from concrete activity. This dualism is established by classical Leninism in the most consequent way in its separation between "socialist consciousness" contained in the party and the "spontaneously trade-unionist consciousness" of the class -- a conception which reduces the class to a mass of individuals and its consciousness to a psychological average of individuals, while its revolutionary essence is alienated from it under the form of an ideal historical consciousness incarnated in the party. It is, therefore, quite logical when we find similar formulations today in the ICC. In an internal text, the idea that the "consciousness of the class" is not revolutionary, not even "implicitly or embryonically", was itself explicitly defended. But if it is not revolutionary, what is it then, if not "trade-unionist" or rather, in its modern version, "councilist", "centrist", "hesitant"? With respect to the assignment of class consciousness to the party, it is implicit, and even explicit in several texts: "Communists have as their specific responsibility the permanent elaboration of consciousness". (Internationalisme #95, p7) In practice, this relation of communists to their class is translated into the classic relation of "direction", that one finds in World Revolution #92, where the ICC bemoans the fact of not having been capable of acting "as the pole of regroupment for the workers, as a center for coordination and direction", in its intervention in Great Britain.

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# Discussion



## WHAT KIND OF INTERVENTION IN THE UNEMPLOYED COMMITTEES?

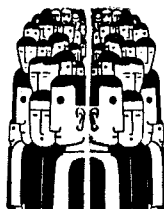


### A Critique Of The ICC

As the following article points out, the issue of the struggle of the unemployed is a burning question today. So it is essential that the revolutionary milieu discuss it, and that it take a position on the questions that this struggle raises, in order to intervene in the best possible way. It is with this in mind that we here publish a first text on this issue. This contribution, from a comrade of the Fraction, is focused on the critique of the intervention of the ICC in the autonomous unemployed-committees that emerged in France last year. Disagreement on intervention was one of the main reasons for our formation of a Tendancy in the ICC and later for the constitution of the Frac-

tion. This first contribution summarizes our critiques. But despite these critiques, the Fraction continued to agree with the general concepts of the ICC concerning the struggle of the unemployed. This is no longer the case for the author : she tries to go further to find the real roots of the weakness of the ICC's intervention. According to her, these roots lie in the development of the concept that for the unemployed, a permanent struggle and organization is possible, in contrast to the rest of the working class.

With the publication of this text, we want to open a debate on all these questions. We invite our readers to contribute to it.



Last year, unemployed-committees emerged in France. They expressed the fact that in the small minorities of unemployed that were regrouped in these committees, there was a real consciousness of the necessity to struggle, even when we are no longer in the work place. A consciousness that we must not let ourselves be isolated or demoralized by the capitalist state while at the same time many employed workers are starting to fight against the deterioration of their living conditions. These committees, which were not the first of their kind to emerge in the class struggle, were an important effort of organization for the working class. Indeed, these attempts at self-organization were born while the capitalist state, in France as elsewhere, made great efforts to control the unemployed

as efficiently as possible, out of fear that their revolt would get out of hand. That's why we have seen arising, almost from one day to the next, "unemployed unions" (like the Pagat union in France). They're often offspring of the classical union structure and they fulfill the same task : supposedly to "organize the working class" and to "defend its interest"; to in fact do the utmost to prevent any real struggle from developing and threatening the bourgeoisie : (see our articles on the class struggle in IP # 2 and #3). The committees this article talks about have nothing to do with these state structures, which they denounced more or less clearly: on the contrary, they tried to break with the defeatist, demoralizing "social work" promoted by the unemployed



unions. They were an expression of the development of consciousness in our class. They voice questions not specific to them, reflecting concerns that arise in the working class in general. That's why we want to discuss this experience: what role in the class struggle is assigned to these committees regrouping militant workers or unemployed disgusted with the union shams, how they can help move the struggle forward, what traps are they to avoid... These are not simple questions allowing for simplistic answers. Most revolutionary organisations, in their intervention, prove unable to really help these minority groupings to understand what they exist for. A group like the ICC e.g. through its own confusions has only pushed the committees of unemployed to acitivism, the political void, leftism, trailing after the unions, discouragement leading to nothing but confusion, and very often, dissolution of such groupings. This is very depressing, in view of the enormous difficulties that confront our class in its attempts at self-organization and indeed these same revolutionary minorities never fail to complain about this problem. For our part, we want to contribute, through the critique of the ICC, to a clarification of these committees' function in the class struggle.

Class struggle, in its development, is marked by the overall state of society which is not invariable throughout capitalism's history. As for today, the context in which the working class is pushed to struggle to defend its living conditions is one of a deep crisis of the economy in which solutions of the bourgeoisie all over the world prove more and more ineffectual. This economic crisis throws ever-increasing numbers of workers outside the production cycle and makes for another division in their ranks, between the "employed" and the "unemployed". That's why the problem of "how the unemployed take part in the class struggle", of "how to break through this division", is a very keen one. The ICC, for one, has often been led to false answers and theories on this question; and in this way it heightens the confusions that our class has to cope with at large. Ten years ago some ICC comrades launched the idea that the unemployed did not form part of the working class any longer, because they were not directly involved in production. This view implied that the unemployed could not fight the state along with the employed. For sure, this idea is still widespread in our class and it should be forcefully rejected, as was done by the ICC at that time. The text on "unemployment and class struggle" in the International Review # 14, correctly reaffirmed that "the state of unemployment necessarily forms part of the living conditions of the working class(...), that unemployed workers form as much a part of the class as employed workers do, that unemployed workers should be associated with the struggle of their class". So the unemployed can and should take part

in the class struggle by raising their own demands. But these correct ideas, which mainly stress the profound unity of the unemployed and employed workers' struggle, did not guard against other confusions turning up later on. So, in spite of this correct framework, the ICC more and more stressed the "specific" characteristics of the unemployed which we'll subsequently analyse in detail and which weren't anything but theoretical regressions, an integral part of the whole of the ICC's regression in the past 2 years (on class consciousness, centrism, the role of revolutionaries, the analysis of the class struggle... for these questions we refer to the previous issues of our review) to produce the ICC's mistaken intervention in the unemployed committees. We will go into detail about this in the course of this article. So we will criticize:

- the theoretical mistakes of the ICC on the struggles of the unemployed
- the links between these mistakes and the present intervention of the ICC in the unemployed committees.

The overall characteristics of workers' struggles in the decadent phase of capitalism.

In order to understand what the ICC sees as specific in the struggles of the unemployed, we should first start by briefly retracing the essential features of workers' struggles ever since the capitalist system entered its phase of decadence, i.e. since the beginning of this century.

-In the 19th century, when capitalism was in full expansion, the working class could fight for lasting improvements in its living conditions without necessarily calling in question the capitalist system of exploitation. But decadent capitalism does not allow for any real development in the forces of production and drags out its life in a repetitive cycle of crisis-war-reconstruction. It provides no room for such permanent struggle of the workers. Of course, all through the century and so much the more today, demands remain the basis of the struggle, which is always directed against the continuous worsening of conditions of life. But this struggle for demands should make for a dynamic of generalization and face the necessity of destroying the bourgeois state, for the construction of communist society.

-Because this permanent struggle has become impossible the proletariat in decadent capitalism no longer has permanent unitary organizations as it had in the past century. The unions have become part of the capitalist state since the beginning of this century. They defend the state's interests against those of the working class. General assemblies, workers' councils, can only arise and develop when the workers, in the context of capitalism's crisis engage in a massive struggle and in the generalization of their fights: such organs are then a living expression of the working class' determination to fight and to mobilize massively as expressions

the development of its consciousness.

-As this intense workers' activity dies away because of the power of bourgeois ideology and repression, and when the workers' militancy and consciousness recede and sometimes disappear, their unitary organizations disappear too, and the immense majority of the class is atomised.

-In such a context of absence of massive struggles and unitary organs of the workers there may arise workers' groups, workers' circles or committees, which have the specific function of regrouping small minorities of more militant workers; they express the development -which is not homogeneous- of class consciousness.

-They answer a real need of the working class: for drawing the lessons of the past struggles and preparing the future ones, and a moment in the overall dynamic of self-organization of the working class. They are "ephemeral, immature forms which, respond to a real need in the class for regroupment and discussion as long as the proletariat is not yet in a position to create its fully-formed unitary organs, the councils" (International Review no 23). Whatever their illusions may be, they don't have the power to artificially create a massive movement in the working class. So they are not the prefiguration of the future unitary organisation of the class, which will arise from these massive movements. We believe that the implications of the general characteristics of the workers struggle in the period of decadence, both the impossibility of waging permanent mass struggle, and the tasks of minority groupings which emerge, apply to the class in its entirety, active workers and unemployed. But the ICC has always had trouble applying this framework to the struggle of the unemployed. This has led it to make it more difficult for these committees to avoid the traps we discussed above.

#### The ICC and the "specificities" of the unemployed

While, as seen before, the context of capitalist decadence makes permanent struggles for economic demands, and unitary organs of the proletariat, impossible, the ICC developed the idea that the unemployed escaped this general rule. What were the arguments it used?

1) The unemployed undergo an attack and a deterioration of their living conditions that is much more intense than the rest of the working class;

2) Their unification is easier because of that;

3) The unemployed can get together more easily because they have more 'free time'. Of course, this does not deny the fact that the condition of the unemployed condenses all the misery that the productive class under capitalism undergoes. Nor that, as the crisis deepens, the myth of the welfare-state that assures the survival of those who lose their jobs as a result of the overproduction of the labour force, crumbles. It's true also that the unemployed have more time at their disposal.

But all that doesn't mean that a permanent struggle becomes possible for the unemployed. The dramatic situation of the unemployed and the fact that they have more "free time" can explain why they are at certain moments the spearhead of the more general struggle of the working class, but nothing more. The reason why the unemployed workers cannot keep alive a permanent struggle nor a permanent unitary organization is neither that they aren't attacked enough nor that they lack the time... As we have seen, the reason for that is more general, not linked to the specific conditions of this or that part of the working class, but to the objective conditions of capitalist decadence, which, for some reason, would not determine the struggle of the unemployed. How to explain this? The arguments of the ICC don't hold water. First of all, the unemployed are not the only ones to undergo a permanent attack on their living conditions. The entire working class knows the effects of a generalizing and ever increasing austerity. That's plain to all today. Furthermore, if the fact that the attack on their living conditions is more intense, would open the door to a permanent struggle for the unemployed, the same would be true for workers in sectors of the class which are more under attack than others, like the workers in the underdeveloped countries and once you believe that, why not push for the formation of trade unions to concretise this potential? If you continue this line of reasoning, you end up thinking that the real reason that there could exist permanent struggles in the ascendant period of capitalism would have to be that the working class underwent a more intense attack. Obviously that doesn't make sense and so, neither does the ICC's first argument. The same is true for its argument that the unemployed have more 'free time'. If it were correct, it would be true also for others, like the unemployed masses of the underdeveloped countries, like the parttime workers... For all these sectors permanent struggle and permanent organization would be possible! So, neither by themselves nor together can these arguments explain what they want to explain. By not seeing the implications of the objective conditions of capitalist decadence for the entire working class, by claiming that this or that specificity would give this or that sector of the proletariat a margin to maneuver in which these implications would not exist, the door is wide open to all kinds of trade unionist ideas that can only make the development of class consciousness more difficult. The unemployed, just like the rest of the working class, cannot keep alive unitary organs to defend their living conditions when there isn't any real mass mobilisation. The nonexistence of such organs today proves this. Today's reality shows that other factors, which make the development of a massive struggle of the unemployed more difficult, also play a role. Because of the fact that they are more atomised, no longer united in the workplace

certain aspects of bourgeois ideology weigh more heavily on the unemployed: individualism, the search for 'personal' solutions, demoralization, the feeling of not belonging to any social class. Once again, it's not a question a bending the stick too far in the other direction so as to see only these factors. But they too must be taken into account. Despite the increase of combativity amongst employed workers in recent years, despite their important battles, it has remained very difficult for the unemployed to participate in this wave of struggles. The class struggle can't be explained with simplifications, with mechanistic or automatic reactions. No matter how miserable the living conditions of the unemployed, they don't make a permanent and radical struggle possible. And to express itself, the potential combativity of the unemployed depends, just like that of any other sector of the class, on the general situation in the class struggle, on the combativity, the consciousness, the advances and retreats of the rest of the working class. But apart from these theoretical errors, the ICC has more recently developed an incorrect view about the current level of the class struggle: This also has had its impact on its erroneous appreciation of the unemployed-committees.

In fact the ICC is right in recognizing the importance of the renewal of workers' combativity from 1983 onwards, but this organization -often implicitly- tends to see the present period as one of massive,, permanent workers' struggle, which is a gross overestimation of the state of class struggle. This wrong analysis is the starting point for the ICC to reorient its intervention in the working class in a way that leads in fact to a dead-end: for the committees of unemployed among others, as we will subsequently show. Whatever revolutionaries may wish, the present level of class struggle has its limits:

-We are in a period of a general upsurge of workers' struggle, but the combativity and the struggles far from being permanent, are still subject to major refluxes.

-Class consciousness is still uneven, some parts of the proletariat being temporarily more combative than the others

-As yet the overall subjective pre-conditions for the creation of unitary organs, are not generalized. Similarly, as we have seen, the struggle of the unemployed is still far from being massive and generalized. Only tiny minorities among the unemployed are displaying a clear, overt determination to fight, which shows the heterogeneity of consciousness. Without understanding this, one cannot assess the meaning of the committees of unemployed that have arisen lately. Why do they exist, what can they do? Such committees arise because, as we explained, there is an upsurge of workers' combativity, but they also bear

witness to the lack of generalized massive struggles : it's this content which explains their role in regrouping small sets of combative elements, that want to distance themselves from bourgeois ideology and especially the unions whose control and whose bogus activism these groupings tend to reject. These autonomous groupings are created for participation in the struggle of the other workers and for the defense of their own demands. In distancing themselves more or less clearly from the straitjacket organizations of the bourgeoisie, they are part of the immense effort of the workers to organize themselves, which is a vital necessity for our class. So we can only welcome these groupings, encourage them, because they break through the atomisation that weighs so heavily on the unemployed. However the essential thing to understand is the dynamic they are part of: if a massive mobilization of the unemployed arose along with them, we could expect these meeting-places of minorities to transform themselves, by the struggle into general assemblies of the unemployed, where all aspects of the struggle would be discussed, decided on and organized. As the unemployed lack the workplace as a natural meeting-place, such committees could fulfill this function in the context of a struggle, and evolve in this way into autonomous assemblies for the struggle. The committees we talk about haven't arisen in such a context and they have not been able to become the organized expression of a real massive struggle of the unemployed. So their essential function is that of any militant minority that arises when there is no massive struggle: political clarification in order to really enable themselves to help forward the future workers' struggles. This essential function does not exclude intervention, action oriented towards the rest of the class which is not yet mobilized and does not yet see the necessity or the possibility to fight. But there is always an enormous rush for its intervention to turn action into an end in itself, prevailing over the rest of the work of minorities, which in this way loses the understanding of why they exist, fostering illusions on their possibilities and on their immediate impact. This may lead either to frantic activism and wishfull thinking, or a gradual corruption by trade union ideology, turning them into officious union organs or even branches of the official union apparatus, which inevitably implies the defense of the interests of the capitalist state against the working class. Unfortunately none of the committees has avoided these dangers:

-Sometimes they believed themselves able to wage an uncompromising struggle for the improvement of their conditions of life as minorities. But any struggle that remains isolated and fails to become part of a broader movement, is doomed to break down. It is absolutely necessary to develop a massive struggle, among the unemployed as well as in the rest of the class

-Sometimes they fall into illusions about the ability of a tiny minority to spark off a massive movement, the essential thing would be, in this logic, to organize actions serving as "examples", to "wake up" the apathetic masses of the unemployed. But no minority whatsoever has the magical power to provoke massive struggles by itself, even if it can help stimulate them. This is another simplistic way of seeing the class struggle, for its unleashing and its very conduct depend on far more general factors.

-Or else these committees fostered the illusion that they were the organized expressions of a real general struggle of the unemployed: that they themselves were "embryos of the general assemblies", whereas, as we explained, they only represent themselves. What has happened is exactly the opposite: instead of the general assemblies they pretend to be, we see that the unemployed tend to desert the meeting-places provided by the committees which thus become even more minority in nature. When such an overestimation of what they are develops in the committees, it can only lead to substitutionist ideas, that is, that they, a minority of workers, pretend to "represent" the self-activity of the masses of workers.

#### The intervention of the ICC and our critique

Because all these false concepts could not be really discussed in these unemployed-committees, given the growing emphasis on action by itself and for itself, they found themselves in a deadend, without possibility of any constructive activity, without perspective... except for disbandment. But the saddest thing is that their own confusions have been reinforced by the no less serious confusions of the revolutionary groups that pretended to intervene in them to make them flourish. The ICC for instance has been an active factor in the sliding of these minorities of unemployed towards leftism and the political void. For a group which pretends to possess "class consciousness" it would have to raise questions about its own lack of responsibility. As explained before, the ICC has recently invented a new theory about the working class being innately "councilist", that is, incapable by itself, because of its congenital lack of combativity and consciousness, to give a general dimension to its struggle. In this view, the intervention of revolutionaries can be compared to the Holy spirit hovering over the sleeping masses: its goal is to bring to the working class the combativity and consciousness that it lacks. Consequently, revolutionaries must be everywhere "where the class is", to inject into it what it lacks. Any gathering of workers, even if it is organized by the state's structures like the unions, can then be transformed into a place where

real proletarian life becomes possible. This "logic" gave countenance to the gradual spread, in the ICC, of the idea that we should not expect "pure" committees of unemployed to arise, that this expectation would be naive, that we should accept the committees as they actually were even if they slid towards leftism. It is true that workers' organizations will always be threatened by the penetration of bourgeois elements. But the ICC today puts up with this idea with an astonishing ease, a sort of fatalism that puts the brake on any tendency among combative people to distance themselves from bourgeois ideology. Whereas, at the start of its existence, the ICC denounced leftist committees without any compromise, overtly calling for "real" committees, today it's exactly the opposite attitude that prevails: in order to "keep in touch with the class, not cutting itself off", we're supposed to put up with "what exists". The regressions of the ICC over the nature of the working class and the analysis of the development of the struggle have turned the ICC's intervention into the denial of the questionings that arise in our class. Its present intervention does not constitute a real response, in a class perspective, to the correct questions raised by some unemployed workers in the committees, i.e. "as there is no massive mobilization of the unemployed, we are just a few individuals, so what can we do?" The ICC's answer was:

-You are "general assemblies of the struggle of the unemployed". But in fact, as we have seen, this is nonsense as these committees only consist of a few individuals who realise themselves that they are unable to wage a real struggle now. Once again, the ICC denied any danger of substitutionism in this situation. This confusion has always been the toll of the desire to see major massive struggles in spite of the real state of class struggle.

-Your task is to get the unemployed masses out of their passivity, because our class, is threatened by councilism. It is true that these committees can intervene towards workers that aren't yet engaged in the struggle, they should do so: but to see just that, is to drive them to vain activism. In this way the ICC has exercised a negative influence on the committees, strengthening their tendency to become centers for the planning of any sort of action without political clarifications, perpetuating the idea that action counts above all things, but debate and political clarification are a reprehensible luxury. In this way the committees could not but hurl themselves into the void, into the idea that their existence was useless, into demoralization and scepticism. Whereas it was the ICC who, some years ago, forcefully criticized this kind of activist intervention of the GCI, today it's the ICC itself that is abandoning its task as a political vanguard,

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# The ICC And Centrism

## CHASE THE DEBATES OUT THE DOOR BUT THEY'LL COME BACK THROUGH THE WINDOW

The following document is a discussion text on the class nature of centrism. It was written by a comrade of the Fraction when we were still inside the International Communist Current trying to push forward the debate on these issues.

We have already developed our position on centrism in the pages of Internationalist Perspective (see I.P.#1 and #3). But this text emphasizes two major points :

1. Our tendency, and then our Fraction, has "invented" nothing on the question of centrism. The text shows, with references to prove it, that the present position of the ICC represents a complete turn-around from the original position of the organization, which we still agree with. Moreover, the analysis of the bourgeois nature of centrism

is closely linked to the understanding of such fundamental questions as decadence, the degeneration process of the Communist International after its first Congress and the need to break with the Socialist Parties after 1914.

2. The position of the Fraction is entirely in line with the struggle of the Communist Left against centrism and against accepting centrist factions in the C.I. The position of the I.C.C., however, is the same position as the degenerating C.I. against the Left.

Because of a lack of space in this issue, we will be printing the second part of this text in the next issue of Internationalist Perspective.

"There is no doubt that the proletariat of every country would already be in power if there were not between it and the masses, between the revolutionary masses and the advanced groups of the revolutionary masses, still a big, strong, sophisticated machine, the parties of the Second International and the trade unions of the world who, in the epoch of the decay, of the death of the bourgeoisie, have placed their apparatus in the service of that bourgeoisie." (Trotsky's speech, The Second Congress of the Communist International, vol 2, p 214.)

For months now, the comrades of the tendency have been the special target of criticisms and sarcasm from the majority comrades in the ICC. This observation will come as a surprise to no-one. But it reveals at least two important things. First, by condemning the minority as 'revisionists', the comrades only succeed in proving that they have very short memories (of course, it's true that history has become an increasingly taboo subject in the organisation) which wouldn't be so bad in itself if at least they tried to refresh their memories by going back to the texts of the past (ours and those of the revolutionary movement in the past). Second, in a general way, the organisation seems only very rarely to grasp the stakes of the discussions today.

The way the organisation has dealt with the tendency and the questions raised by the minority shows a totally unacceptable blindness for a revolutionary organisation in relation to what is really at issue in the debates - which, we may add, have now been closed! The most frequent accusation against the minority, that of 'conservatism', 'academicism', 'historicism', 'running away into theory to escape from being active today in class struggle' ... is just so much hot air masking the real questions under discussion.

For us, these questions are too important to be dealt with in this way. Too important because we are falling into what has ALREADY proven to be an impasse for revolutionary organisations in the past. We are losing sight of the main lesson of the first revolutionary wave: that if, at the beginning of the period of decadence, there had been greater clarity within the international working class on the bourgeois nature of social democracy and its counter-revolutionary role since its IRREVERSIBLE betrayal in 1914; if, despite their chaotic beginnings, the emerging communist parties had at least maintained as a basic principle, the death of the Second International and the need for the world party to be constituted on an entirely new basis answering the needs of the new period; if these organisations had been more

intransigent, firmer, shown more rigorous political thinking (everything that Lenin - and his followers today - call 'infantilism' and 'sectarianism') in their condemnation of social-democratic organisations and their centrist apologists; if this had taken place, as Trotsky said, humanity might have been spared the horrors of decadence. But perhaps this is just a secondary 'detail' to some of our comrades.

The understanding of centrism is not a secondary matter that can be settled in five minutes' worth of shouting. Any serious analysis of the first revolutionary wave (from the first strikes in Germany to the formation of the CI) will show the ESSENTIAL role that this question played in the revolutionary movement at the time and its CRUCIAL significance in the unfolding of events. In fact, it was at the heart of the concerns of the proletariat and of revolutionaries, their debates, illusions and failures.

The ICC cannot bury a second time all the questions that marked this period. But, in fact, that is what it's doing when it closes the debates (because there are 'more important things to discuss') just when the discussion was getting to the root of the matter. This is a very serious decision. A badly-handled debate, not really assimilated, which has not gone back to the roots, can only dangerously disarm the organisation in the coming period just as it disarmed organisations in the past. To treat a question which has already cost the workers a revolution and the blood of thousands of proletarians in such a cavalier and irresponsible way, expresses at best, if one is optimistic, a lack of understanding in the ICC of the implications of these questions in the 1920s and, at worst, an unacceptable disregard for what this lack of understanding has meant for the defeat of the revolution.

The debate absolutely must continue, and without all the pettiness that has characterised discussions up to now:

- first of all because it has revealed that we do not really understand the lessons of the past revolutionary movement;
- second, because we cannot talk about the crucial importance of the question of the party and the development of class consciousness in the present period without understanding at the same time that in the first revolutionary wave this question was almost identical with the question of centrism and that any confusion on this was disastrous for the proletariat;
- third, because there are now plans for what are chastely being called 'modifications' to the platform of the ICC.

This contribution has two intentions:

- a) to go back over the way the ICC dealt with the question of centrism before the recent debates and which seems to be completely forgotten today. All of our efforts to do this up to now have systematically been dismissed by members of the majority under the pretext that these efforts of the minority

only express the 'conservatism' of the tendency that doesn't want to go forward. If trying to advance with METHOD in this discussion is 'conservatism', if reminding the organisation of our general framework is, again, 'conservatism' ... then the majority might as well say that black is white. It's always been the lack of method, the alibi of 'innovation' and 'slight modifications' that have opened the door of the workers' movement to the worst sorts of revisionism, the re-inventors of history, potential allies of the bourgeoisie. Forgive me if I decline to follow Kautsky's lead and prefer to hold firmly to the ICC's clarity in the past;

b) to explain that the 'revisionists' are not the ones the comrades think, that the tendency is only following the coherence of the ICC in the past which was the result of a fierce battle of the left communists in the Congresses of the CI against the regressions of the CI particularly on the question of centrism among others.

#### FIRST POINT:

A quote from Rupture avec Lutte Ouvrière et le Trotskyisme, the 'official' text of the organisation on our denunciation of leftism:

"Opportunism and reformism were deviations which developed within (underlined in the text) the workers' movement at a time when, at the height of capitalist production, the working class could and should struggle for reforms within capitalist society. The prolonged activity of social-democratic parties on this terrain, at a time when the proletarian revolution was not yet objectively possible, gradually led them to oppose a lesser resistance to the pressure of bourgeois ideology. This pressure was concretised by the development of reformist and opportunist illusions, in other words, a policy which sacrificed the final goals of the movement of the working class to immediate success. Entering its phase of decline, capitalism became incapable of granting real reforms to the working class: any organisation which inscribes in its programme the struggle for such impossible reforms can only be an organ of mystification and control of the working class, in the service of capital, and belongs to the camp of capital. In the same way, the opportunism that devoured the reformist organisations of the last century no longer has any meaning today as a deviation within workers' organisations."

Concerning the ideas expressed so clearly in this pamphlet the majority is content to answer today: 'that's not the discussion ... talk about councilism' (but at the same time certain 'modifications' of the platform are being proposed on these questions - maybe we can't explain this away with the 'acceleration of history' I suppose) .. or 'this pamphlet doesn't express the positions of the ICC which as an organisation has never dealt with this question until today's brilliant debates' ... or 'this only reflects the ideas of an individual who no longer thinks such nonsense today' ... If the majority of the organisation is satisfied with such 'explanations'



tions', too bad for the future of the ICC.

It seems then that the texts we publish to the outside in our publications, texts we distribute in the working class are not first and foremost, beyond the question of the individuals that write them, the positions of the organisation that militants defend as such?

But to pursue this debate would take us too far afield here.

In my opinion, this text reflects a coherence that we used to have (not entirely assimilated of course and not deepened enough) and that we have lost a coherence based on the dialectical method:

"The essence of the materialist dialectic is to understand historical phenomena not in an immediate sense but with the help of the widest possible intelligence, starting from the ECONOMIC BASE, of all their concrete mediations as well as this basis itself, in other words, the material relations of production not abstractly in their present form, GIVEN ONCE AND FOR ALL but concretely, in their movement and historical development." (K. Korsch, Anti-Kautsky)

This coherence is the central focus of MacIntosh's text (published in International Review 43) so reviled today: there is no longer an objective basis in decadence allowing for the development of a 'permanent opportunism' generalised in the workers' movement. This phenomenon emerged in a capitalism in full expansion. But decadence makes it impossible for this 'deviation' to exist in proletarian political organisations. This general framework that the tendency gives to fight against the idea of a permanent or congenital 'centrism' or 'opportunism' in the proletariat, this framework HAS NOT BEEN SERIOUSLY CRITICISED BY THE MAJORITY OF THE ICC. Yet this is the real heart of the debate: to go to the logical conclusions of the implications of decadence on the question of the formation and the role of proletarian organisations.

#### SECOND POINT:

Closely linked to this, we have, up to now, analysed the degeneration of the CI (which to date is the richest experience in the life of an international revolutionary organisation in decadence) as ESSENTIALLY due to an incomplete understanding of decadence as a permanent reality, as an irreversible phenomenon, of all social life since 1914. As much as we can salute the First Congress which correctly proclaimed "the opening of an epoch of wars and revolution" and the entire *raison d'être* of the CI in this framework, we must also see that from the Third Congress on, there was a larger and larger gap (whose causes date from before) between this correctly defined framework expressed in the resolutions of the CI and the understanding of its practical implications on reality. Reality was increasingly seen as immediate reality outside of any historical or principled framework.

Quote from the 'Day of Study on the First Four Congresses of the CI':

"The discussion constantly emphasised the period and the lack of understanding of the period which played a preponderant part in the degeneration of the CI. Faced with the renewed political strength of the bourgeoisie, the failure of the revolutionary wave and particularly the failure of the movement in Germany, the CI could no longer hope for the immediate taking of power ... The time is for defensive struggles, 'economic conflicts'. Thus, faced with the reflux in the wave, the CI REINTRODUCES THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE MINIMUM AND MAXIMUM PROGRAMME, BETWEEN ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL STRUGGLES. This led to the famous slogan 'to the masses' and to the united front at the Third Congress." (Day of Study)

This couldn't be any clearer. It is a false idea to think there can be any possible return to the OBJECTIVE CONDITIONS before 1914. This is intimately linked to the idea, as a logical consequence, that a minimum and maximum programme can be reintroduced into proletarian organisations. It was essentially these two parallel and false visions that were to poison the CI. As a consequence of this false logic, the Second International and its centrist acolytes would be allowed to creep into the proletarian camp, to definitively gangrene the young world party and lead it to a rapid end. The justification of the fusion of communist parties with whole parts of bourgeois parties (rebaptised for the occasion 'workers' parties of the right' and 'of the centre') and their incomplete elimination IN PRINCIPLE from the ranks of the workers, is to be found in this inadequate understanding of what the objective basis of decadence means.

#### THIRD POINT:

Up to now we have always agreed that the appeals made at the Second Congress of the CI for a total break with the Second International and everything it stood for were correct (the Second International being defined as a dead organ for the proletariat since 1914 and the best pawn of the bourgeoisie):

"This revolutionary upsurge was characterised by large contingents of workers breaking from the Socialist Party which betrayed in 1914. In Italy, France, everywhere, the majority of these parties tried to push to constitute communist parties, to place them on the terrain of Bolshevism, to break with the 'right' and the 'centre', that is to say, with the whole part of the workers' movement that had gone over to the bourgeois camp." (Day of Study)

This is why we say that the First Congress represented the greatest clarity because:

"The Manifesto completed the break with social-democracy and 'centrist' elements and marked a return to marxist principles: 'We communists, representatives of the revolutionary proletariat, ... feel ourselves to be the heirs of the programme proclaimed 72

years ago. Our task is to generalise the revolutionary experience of the working class to cleanse the movement of the elements of opportunism and social-patriotism, to unite the forces of all truly revolutionary parties and to facilitate and accelerate the victory of the communist revolution in the whole world!" (Day of Study)

At these first Congresses of the International, the will to make an intransigent break with the past workers' movement that had gone over to the camp of the bourgeoisie led to a growing awareness of the tactic systematically used by the bourgeoisie to "infiltrate" this proletarian organisation and the awareness that although CERTAIN PARTIES HAD ASKED TO JOIN THE INTERNATIONAL, they had no place in the proletarian camp because they were in fact bourgeois pawns.

"The Second International is definitively beaten. The intermediary parties and groups of the 'centre', seeing that their situation is entirely desperate, try to use the strengthening CI as a crutch. They still hope to maintain their 'independence' so as to continue their old opportunist and centrist policies. The CI has, to a certain extent, become 'fashionable'. The desire of certain leaders of the 'centre' to join the Third International proves, indirectly, that the CI has won the sympathy of the entire world and has become a power growing every day." (Conditions for Admission to the CI; Second Congress)

All of a sudden the comrades of the majority get angry when we talk about bourgeois factions in the CI: 'it's scandalous', they cry, 'what are you doing to the proletarian character of this organisation?' In fact comrades, you are very bad defenders of the CI. You're trying at all costs, even at the price of absurdity, to defend the 'virginity' of a young girl who would be the first to want to speak out against the rapes and attempted rapes against her. Apparently, that's what's known as playing the devil's advocate.

In the context of an agreement on the positions taken at the very first Congress of the CI condemning all expressions of social democracy, the ICC has always pointed out and criticised in an intransigent way all the regressions that surfaced at the Second Congress, especially on this question of the attitude to take towards social democracy and 'centrist' organisations: "From the First to the Second Congress, this is what we have seen: a regression shown by the positions adopted outside of plenary sessions on the open questions raised at the First Congress. This was expressed on the organisation level by the de facto exclusion of communists in favour of avowed 'centrists'." (Day of Study) And again, "This undeniable deepening of fundamental questions raised in the workers' movement by the opening of the era of capitalist decadence, took place at the expense of a regression ON THE LEVEL OF PRINCIPLES: THE ATTITUDE TOWARDS CENTRISM." (Day of Study)

From the Second Congress on, and as a consequence of the reflux of the revolutionary

wave, dramatic inadequacies appeared in the CI concerning the attitude to 'centrists'. The intransigent condemnation of the First Congress gradually gave way to a lack of firmness and a lack of principles. The theoretical underpinning of this lack of principles was mercilessly condemned by the left communist factions: the party taking power, the party organising the masses, and thus the possible reconquest of workers' organisations that had already gone over to the bourgeoisie, the obsession to remain 'with the masses', etc. These concepts which already found an expression at the Second Congress were to become increasingly fixed features of the CI. This is why we were entirely correct to have written in International Review No 2:

"The internal difficulties of the Russian Revolution arising right at the end of the civil war could find no solution in Russia alone. The defeat of the first phase of the German Revolution (January to March 1919) and the defeat of the Hungarian Council Republic convinced the Russian communists that the perspective of revolution in Europe was retreating. According to them, it was no longer a question of them doing anything else but trying to recuperate the great mass of workers, convincing the social democratic masses of the truth of communist positions, etc ... They tried to recuperate the USPD seeing it as the right wing of the workers' movement and not as a faction of the bourgeoisie, instead of leading a theoretical struggle against social democracy, instead of listening to the most advanced elements of the working class by anchoring the need to attack and unmask the social democracy in their will to struggle expressed by these advanced elements. We can therefore say that although the hesitations of western communists tended to be negative in the whole first phase, IT WAS THE CI ITSELF WHICH BECAME AN OBSTACLE TO THE EXPRESSION, EVEN THE DELAYED EXPRESSION, OF AN AUTHENTIC PROLETARIAN AVANTE-GARDE, when the situation was still revolutionary ... Although the passage from one situation to another happens gradually, we can still identify certain moments that show the change in course: the dissolution of the Amsterdam Bureau by the CI and Lenin's text Left Wing Communism, an Infantile Disorder." (International Review No 2, p 11)

(To be continued)

Alma

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well controlled and bombarded with bourgeois ideology, they won't think about other things, they won't start to fight. As long as the unemployed-committees see themselves as committees "for information" or "for education", they won't advance the struggle one bit. The unionist ideology is the worst poison for the workers' struggle. Any intervention of a political group which does not clearly denounce that ideology can only hinder the development of class consciousness.

Alma