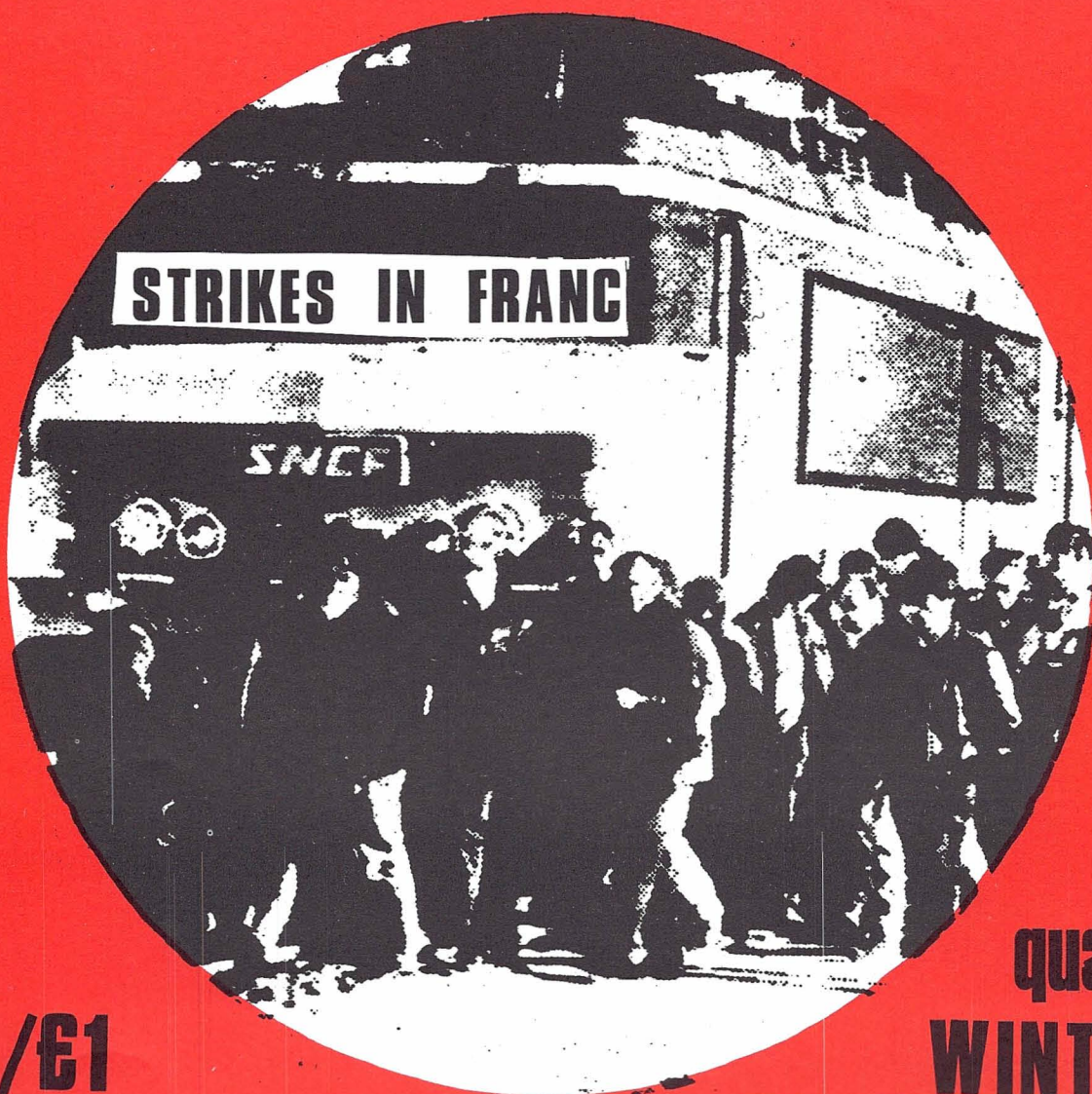


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EVERYWHERE AGAINST THE SAME MISERY



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YES, STRUGGLE OUTSIDE THE UNIONS IS POSSIBLE !

the french railmen show the way to self-organization

At the end of November, the bourgeoisie was afraid that the student movement would spark a reaction among the workers, that the combativity of the workers would awaken and they, too, like the students, would develop self-organization in their struggle. When the ruling class saw the student movement getting stronger and stronger, they were afraid a workers' movement would join in and so they retreated. The Devaquet-Monory Bill and a whole series of other projects for educational "reform" were withdrawn. The bourgeoisie could afford to backtrack more easily on student issues which have a relatively limited economic impact -- although with strong ideological connotations -- than on more general economic measures against the workers. The state of the crisis being what it is, the ruling class cannot hold off imposing these austerity measures unless it wants to face economic collapse. The International Monetary Fund and other financial bodies will make sure these measures are taken.

If the bourgeoisie retreated on education, it certainly didn't do it to please the students. It was because of the general context of these struggles. Workers' discontent was growing and a spark could lead to a general outburst. Workers had already shown signs of unrest in isolated struggles in the shipyards (St Nazaire), the docks (Dunkirk) and in movements against government decisions at the EDF (Electricity Board) and the SNCF (the nationalized railroads). The government's new measures were not going to calm the situation.

And indeed, as the government feared, the storm broke soon after the student movement peaked. When the French railway men went out on strike in mid-December, they were determined to carry on until their demands were met. "We're fed up with union actions that go nowhere. This time, we're going to win".

That was the general feeling. This suspicion of unions among the workers didn't happen overnight. Most of the important workers' struggles in recent years have been marked by this suspicion, generally expressing itself in spontaneous and massive walkouts (like in Belgium in 83 and 86), in tendencies towards going beyond the unions, that 5th column of the State among the workers. But workers had a lot of trouble taking their struggle into their own hands, organizing themselves into autonomous bodies to direct and control their movement themselves. This difficulty was the essential weakness of previous struggles because it left the unions free to manoeuvre, to wear out the workers' militancy with their systematic sabotage of struggles (see our Resolution on the Class Struggle).

But you can't get away with this indefinitely. The unions, those institutions of the capitalist State responsible for neutralizing the proletariat and preventing it from leading a coherent class struggle, cannot fool the working class forever -- not in today's situation where militancy is building up. The reputations of the unions have taken a big blow all over, but it's in France today that their discredit is the greatest in the eyes of the workers. The workers are really starting to have confidence in themselves. They're learning to count only on their own forces and not to rely on the "professionals" (of sabotage) to organize actions for them.

For the past 2 weeks the railroad workers have shown remarkable determination. The struggle is still growing with each day, just the opposite of the wearing down that the bourgeoisie hoped for. This consciousness, this will to win, was reinforced and radicalized by the high degree of autonomous organization attained in the strike. Never before, since the mass strike in Poland in

1980, have workers developed such autonomous struggle in the heat of action. The need for such self-organization of the workers has always been defended by genuine revolutionaries. This disproves all the nonsense of those cynics who claim that the workers are just a herd of sheep manipulated by the unions or that "it's not yet time for self-organization". In Poland in 1980 the tidal wave of self-organization carried all before it so quickly and so massively basically because of the weakness of the State structures set up to control the working class. Workers in Poland never had any illusions about the possibility of using the "official" unions. But in the "democratic" West, these structures to control the workers are omnipresent, capable of adapting much more easily to the advances of the class struggle in order to recuperate it. They play on the illusions that the workers still have on the nature and role of unions even though since the open class collaboration of unions with the State in World War I, these structures are no longer proletarian. Self-organization when it appears in the West expresses a deeper and more promising maturation of class consciousness.

By their unprecedented movement, French railwaymen are showing workers all over the world that there are other perspectives than those of the daily humiliations, attacks and powerlessness of the struggles sabotaged by the unions. They are showing that there is a way to establish a favorable balance of forces to struggle against the growing attacks of the bourgeoisie against workers' living conditions.

The working class has been the victim of ferocious exploitation; it is on the receiving end of the greatest alienation ever known to man. It is also the only class that can threaten and eventually destroy the bourgeois State providing the workers fight on a class terrain with their own autonomous organization, to defend their own survival. By creating organizational forms that express a real class autonomy and a general mobilization of railroad workers, by demonstrating a maturation of consciousness as yet latent in the rest of the class; by giving us their example, this hope for the future, the French workers have taken class struggle a great step forward.

The fact that France was where class struggle took such a radical form is not surprising. Today French workers, like workers everywhere, are facing the head-on assaults of austerity. The Chirac government is defending an inflexible wage policy to hold down inflation. There are massive lay-offs at the Renault car factories, in the naval shipyards, in the steel industry. Workers' living standards are attacked with reductions in pensions, family allowances and health care. Impoverishment is no longer a distant possibility.

Workers' combativity had been at a low ebb since 1981 in France. It had not burst out as massively as elsewhere in Europe. May 1981 saw the left come to government power in France. Illusions in the supposed advantages coming to the workers from such a left government seemed to have weighed heavily enough in the balance to cut off large-scale expressions of combativity. But as the years went on, illusions and lies could no longer hide reality. The anti-working class measures of the left were as strict and harsh as those taken by right-wing governments in other countries. It's not surprising that railroad workers showed such bitterness towards the CGT (the Communist Party union) as well as the other unions because the CP member Fitterman was Minister of Transport in the left government and did nothing to stop the deterioration of working conditions on the railroads. Workers don't want to hear any more about the left and its big promises of a new and more humane, more equal world. The left-wing of the bourgeoisie has been greatly discredited in France. But this is not the only factor explaining why there was such a radical reaction of the French proletariat. For many years workers all over the world have been accumulating a lot of experience about how unions orchestrate defeats. Today the workers can begin to put into practice the lessons learned from their struggles. Although it may sometimes seem that the working class keeps going through the same experiences over and over again, coming up against the same obstacles time after time without finding a way to overcome them, the events in France show that class struggle does advance but often through sudden leaps forward.

THE STUDENT PROTESTS

The students were the first to express the general discontent. Two weeks after a French public opinion poll reported that "young people have definitively turned their back on the spirit of May 68 and have gone over to the right-wing", one million high school and college students went into the streets in France to show their dissatisfaction with the society they live in. The spark was the Devaquet-Monory Bill on educational and university reforms, a Bill that continued the Savary Law passed by the left. The students didn't confine themselves to the Devaquet plan; in fact, their discontent went much deeper. They knew that so many students will simply end up swelling the unemployment figures, that society offers them no future. During the weeks of the strike, students shouted in the assemblies, "We are not fixated on the Devaquet plan alone...the whole system has to be redone." This student discontent has been seen elsewhere, in Spain

where a million students mobilized against government measures, in Belgium, Russia and in China.

When the movement in France spread and gathered strength, the government initially responded by using violent repression whose effects it could not control. These kinds of strong-arm tactics are not usually used by the State while movements are still on the upswing. At first, the violence strengthened the students' resolve but then it led to a deviation of the struggle toward the "defense of democracy". At the end of the movement, after demonstrations leading to death and injury, the unions and the leftists joined hands to make people swallow the idea of the defense of democracy. They organized a minute of silence everywhere in France for the death of a student and transformed his death by the police into a civics course for democracy. We couldn't care less about defending democracy but for the bourgeoisie it was a way to detour the movement away from its real objective : questioning society today. The bourgeoisie wasn't afraid of the "solidarity" of the unions with the students but of the real solidarity of the workers. As one union leader said, "We can't leave the young people to themselves like that. After all, 850,00 unemployed young people are a potentially explosive mass."



The bourgeoisie and its media "philosophers" are trying to show that today's struggles of students are apolitical, unlike those in May 1968; that young people today want to integrate into society and not revolutionize it like in 68 : "They aren't fighting for a new world or another society (like communism or a society without classes, the State or the police), but for certain values. In a word, they aren't fighting for an ideal, a program or a utopia like in 68 but for some moral values." If these great thinkers would deign to refresh their memories, they would remember that the media hacks said the same thing in May 68, that at the beginning the movement

in 68 was not more politicized than today, that politicization occurred as a result of the experience of the struggle and didn't fall from on high nor was it inborn. When the students formed general assemblies meeting every day with elected and revocable delegates, with an awareness of the need for extension; when they said they'd learned more in two weeks of struggle than in twenty years in the schoolroom -- what is this if not the growth of politicization?

As for the content of the struggle, although the students did not manage to escape from a corporatist framework, because of their perspective of being tomorrow's unemployed, they implicitly raised important issues related to the demands workers raise : no to unemployment; no to an increase in exploitation; no to the growing control of the State over everything; no to repression.

GOING BEYOND THE UNIONS

The fact that the government backtracked on education, far from calming things down, only stoked the flames. Taking advantage of this relative weakness of the bourgeoisie and disgusted by more than 15 union job actions this year alone all of which led to absolutely nothing (because of constantly postponed negotiations on working conditions, because of union disinformation and division), the railroad workers went out on strike. They had been preparing this for quite a time. Without any union involvement, a few dozen engineers at the Paris North Station met together and put out a leaflet with the following demands :

- a rejection of the new wage scales linking wages with individual "merit" and not seniority or overtime etc....a humiliation for the workers that the government sought to impose on all State employees;
- an improvement in working conditions;
- various questions relating to wages.

The strike movement was launched and within a few days, without giving the unions time to say anything, all engineers were on strike, organizing more and more independently every day, structuring their movement in a completely democratic way, presenting the bourgeoisie and the unions with a fait accompli. This spark led to other movements : other workers of the French national railroads joined the engineers. Strikes broke out in other State-run sectors, in the subways and the post office, and continued on the docks. Although these movements were more controlled by the unions, they expressed the real potential for extension of the movement and the discontent brewing among the workers.

Although the unions were completely bypassed by the railroad men, they did not explicitly denounce them and still asked for their support and considered them valid tools

of negotiations ("They are the specialists of the bargaining table".) But the workers no longer trusted them to organize the strike, or to mobilize the workers.

French unions are really having a rough time these days. As one of their leaders put it, it's not just the CGT (particularly well represented in the railroads) that is being challenged but all of French unionism. Even a union like Force Ouvriere that always plays at being level-headed and more "responsible" than the others, was booed by their own members who joined the rest of the workers on strike. When the leaders of FO signed some kind of agreement with the management during the first week of the strike, they had to go back on their signatures because their own members were so disgusted they threatened to do without them permanently. As elsewhere, the years of sabotaging struggles have eroded the unions' ability to control the workers who are increasingly doing without them and taking charge of their own affairs. It's understandable that the union bosses, the CGT's leader Krasuki in the forefront, are down on their knees begging the management to enter into negotiations as fast as possible. They're not concerned about the workers' interests. They're just trying to save their own skins because they know that a possible generalization along the lines of the self-organization of the railroad workers would cut the ground out from under their feet in their manipulations of the workers.

THE AUTONOMOUS ORGANIZATION OF THE STRUGGLE

The working class is getting back its self-confidence. The experience of the French rail workers even up to now has shown this. After the initiative of Paris engineers, the strike spontaneously spread throughout the entire country. The demands of the workers at the Paris North Station are a reference point for all the engineers. In all cities, daily assemblies grew up in the stations, assemblies where the possible actions were discussed and decisions taken. The sense that a real workers' democracy must be created so that the movement can really grow and develop is very much present in the workers' minds. All strikers must participate in the organization of the struggle and be part of the decisions taken. In the Northern region of France, for example, the assemblies met every morning in the seven depots of the SNCF grouping 1200 engineers. The assemblies vote for revocable delegates every day. In the afternoon, there's a meeting of the central "coordination" to evaluate the day's struggle and decide on the future course. It is this self-organization that is spreading all over, leaving nothing to chance. The strikers want to maintain total control of their movement and organize themselves to accomplish

this. As they say themselves, "The union representatives and delegates are here as railroad engineers. When they happen to be chosen to be our spokesmen, it's because they have experience negotiating. But they leave their union badges in the locker room. Here we are together as engineers."

How to react to the unions is a burning question: their role and nature are at the heart of the workers' debates. At Lyons, for instance, strikers passed their Christmas together discussing this very problem. Class consciousness is growing; it has to because workers have to face hundreds of problems every day as a result of their actions. The workers want to remain in control of the situation. But to keep the strikers united, many unfortunately prefer not to push the debate on the unions too far. It's true that we have to remain united and together in action but the working class never has anything to gain by leaving such crucial questions in abeyance. The whole struggle is at stake. Someday, the anti-working class role of the unions will have to be fully faced, head on.

As time went on, the movement grew. Aware of their strength, the strikers were more determined than ever and have hardened their position towards provocations and the half-hearted overtures of the management. The strikers are improving their coordination all the time with a scrupulous concern to respect internal democracy. To maximize communication, the circulation of information and decision-making, the internal message system of the SNCF itself is used!

After several days, two coordinating committees appeared in Paris. They are the national centralization of the assemblies and strike committees that continue to emerge from the struggle. But there is no uniform understanding of what role these coordinating committees should play. The very fact that there are two separate ones is proof of that.



- The coordination of the Paris North Station sees itself as the emanation of engineers alone. They do not want to mix their

coordination with other types of railroad workers. They have called on these other categories to join in the struggle and to organize themselves -- but separately. They are afraid to weaken their demands and dilute their strength with other categories of workers who seem more susceptible to union manipulation. Paradoxically, the fear of union recuperation has pushed the workers into corporatism! Their actions have encouraged other workers to join the strike - more and more workers of the SNCF are mobilizing and organizing on the model of the engineers with the same will to develop workers' democracy. But their representatives are admitted to the coordinating committee only as spectators. We shall see that such ideas are a terrible weakness for the working class.

- The Ivory coordination is filled with base unionist conceptions, the ideology through which unions today try to win back the control they have lost. Daniel Vitry, a militant of the leftist group Lutte Ouvriere, is playing his little Walesa in this committee. But in addition to the presence of unionism, there are clearer ideas here about the need to break out of corporatism. This committee has even called for an organization of all strikers in France, over and above any category divisions.

The strikers are unanimous : unions should be allowed no power to organize, no decision-making power, on pain of destroying the movement. The strikers may think they can use the union infrastructure but the autonomous general assembly must remain sovereign. The strikers have refused any idea that the coordinating committees are new unions and they defend the idea that these committees must disappear after the strike is over. But this implicit denunciation of the unions is not enough and is a danger to the workers :

- Even in their first leaflet, the engineers of Paris North called on the unions to declare their support of the movement;
- These appeals were repeated all through the strike. The strikers don't want to destroy the unions but only to pressure them so that they "assume their responsibilities". What an unexpected gift for the CGT, the CFDT (Socialist Party union), etc! They can now take advantage of these appeals to proclaim their support for the strikers and thereby manage to save their reputations;
- The coordinating committees themselves delegated the power to negotiate with the management to "the more official representatives of the workers" -- the unions. Of course the strikers themselves decide the content of the negotiations and whether or not the strike continues and they do not hesitate to go to demonstrate all together at the place where the negotiations are taking

place. But, for them, the unions still have a role to play.

AVOIDING THE TRAP OF RANK AND FILE UNIONISM

The ideology of rank and file unionism goes something like this : the reason the unions are such sell-outs is because of the gap between the more or less rotten leaders who practice class collaboration, and the rank and file who can't express their real combativity within the union structure. So, the workers must reconquer the unions by putting so much pressure on them that they once again become the expression of the workers' will.

Many, if not most, struggles of recent years have been led astray by this ideology. (See the article on class struggle in this issue.) Just as the State cannot be conquered or used by the working class because it is the embodiment of the ruling class' need to keep the workers in check and crush them if they revolt, so the unions which have become no more than institutions of the State structure, must be destroyed. The working class must avoid the union trap, now and in the future when the unions will undoubtedly wage an offensive to close their ranks, to recuperate the most combative elements among the workers in order to give their moribund image a semblance of new life. In Poland too the self-organization of the workers in 1980 got entangled in the web of unionism. This, together with the international isolation of the struggle in Poland made the ferocious state repression possible. The goal of the workers' struggle cannot be to keep alive organizations serving the defense of the national economy. It must be to put an end, once and for all, to any form of exploitation, scarcity and human misery.

Today the working class has not fully realized the true nature of the unions. The problem of understanding their function will remain at the core of all coming confrontations. It will only be resolved through a process of long and difficult struggle. But the working class is already taking great strides by creating organizational forms that make open discussion among workers possible, so that they are confronted with ideas that allow for the development and generalization of class consciousness.

Gaining this understanding of the unions is all the more difficult because the unions do not just let themselves be swept onto the scrap heap of history - they react. In France for instance, they are doing what they can to regain some credibility and take control of the movement :

- After being swept aside by the strikers, they jumped on the bandwagon, recognized

the struggle and were careful not to openly denounce the autonomous organizations of the workers. Some union people went so far as to say that such actions could only benefit unions by forcing them to question themselves. All the efforts of rank and file unionism are (and will be) aimed at diverting the rage of the workers back into a "frank but responsible" new look at the unions.

- In several places the unions have taken control of things, even joining in the call for workers' assemblies and strike committees so as to take the initiative out of the workers' hands.

The ease with which the unions adapt themselves and recuperate things makes the union obstacle so much more difficult to overcome. But the current struggles show that class consciousness is indeed maturing.

THE DANGER OF CORPORATISM

Contrary to what the railroad workers think, the proletariat has nothing to gain by waging sectoral struggles that remain cut off from the rest of the class, no matter how militant they are or how radical their organization against the bourgeoisie. Corporatism is one of the most pernicious aspects of unionism, inherited from a time when it still made sense to fight sector by sector against a bourgeoisie that was dominated by individual private property. But today, now that economic policy is centralized in the hands of the State, and the State determines the attacks against the workers, purely sectoral struggles have become a dead-end. What the bourgeoisie fears most of all, as in the situation created by the railroad workers, is that massive numbers of workers will decide to join the struggle and its self-organization. It is a serious error to think that the inevitable confrontation with the State (which constantly strengthens its pressure, exploitation and terror) can be won with isolated strikes, each on its own terms, each with its own organization, its own sector, its own particular demands.

The fact that this illusion persists in one form or another among the railway workers shows that they still suffer from the weight of union ideology despite the fact that they have rejected unions on the level of organization. Let us not forget how the British bourgeoisie totally exhausted the miners in a long, union controlled, sectoral, isolated strike. True, the context was different since the unions had a much tighter control among the miners than in the French situation today. But it was the corporatist logic that entrapped the miners and as a result has demoralized miners in Britain for quite a while.

Austerity and the deterioration of living and working conditions imposed by the bour-

geoisie are problems for all workers regardless of "their" nation, sector or region. Discontent is growing everywhere.

When engineers went on strike in France & defended the need for unity in their ranks, other workers in public sector jobs decided to follow them, as we have seen. But militancy had also been growing in the private sector, in the mines, the shipyards and the auto factories. The main weakness of these struggles was precisely their isolation. The possibility of a conscious extension of the strike, organizing a greater and greater unity, was potentially there. Contrary to what the rail workers think, the working class is not less combative elsewhere. And even if it's true that illusions about the unions and the legal system are more ingrained in some parts of the class rather than others, the class struggle cannot advance by rejecting other workers and taking refuge in isolation. Only the bourgeoisie benefits from this division; the bosses always want to divide and conquer.

Corporatism and not organizing the extension of the struggle come from a dangerous illusion: that every sector of the working class has its own specific interests to defend, that survival depends on the defense of one's own sector, region, country! But let's look at things carefully. The only reality the bourgeoisie can offer us is one of growing misery ending in the slaughter of imperialist war. When workers fight for better working conditions, they will have to see that only a classless society without exploitation can really bring this about. And workers can have the power to do this only if they unify all their demands and organize themselves massively without sectoral divisions, in a centralized way and entirely controlled by them.

THE STRUGGLE OF THE PROLETARIAT EVERYWHERE IN THE WORLD

Workers' combativity is growing everywhere in the world. In the countries around France, in Belgium in May-June 1986, in Holland in October 86 or in Britain in September 86, the workers have hit back against massive lay-offs and the sudden deterioration of their living conditions. Further away, the same kind of measures provoked riots against the left government in Brazil. The working class there attacked the State directly, pillaging banks and department stores and destroying government offices (Nov/Dec 1986). There were large-scale mobilizations in South Africa where 300,000 miners fought to better their working conditions (Oct 86). Also, there were riots in Zambia's mining region where workers who lost their jobs, threatened with famine as a result of the fall in copper prices, attacked the State (Dec 86). Other mobilizations took place in

the Philippines where half a million demonstrated in the streets, expressing their anger at the continuation of exploitation and misery despite the "change of regime". Big riots took place in Algeria where a student-led revolt spread to the entire working class which attacked the State : stores, banks, cars and offices of the police were destroyed, policemen lynched (Oct 86). And in Bolivia, the miners' strike continues.



Austerity and the enormous combativity of the workers is not confined to the West; it also exists in the Eastern bloc. The mystification spread by leftists among the workers in the West that there is a so-called communism in these countries no longer fools very many people. In Rumania, a recent strike wave paralyzed a large part of the country's

industry, expressing widespread discontent with low wages that barely allow workers to survive. In China, too, social tension is very much present. Hidden behind the student protests that got front page coverage in the West, there are workers' reactions all over the country against new price increases announced for January, which make the already spartan living conditions there even more precarious. It is the fear of any extension of workers' revolt that pushes the Chinese State to show its real face : forbidding all demonstrations, arrests of many demonstrators, in short, repression just like everywhere else! And this is what the leftists, the maoists, ask us to support!

Everywhere the bosses have proven to be inflexible against these explosions of the working class, in the East and in the West. But the determination of the French railroad workers has forced the French government and railway management to backtrack, to rescind their new wage scales. But even if these concessions were maintained, it would only make a temporary difference. Workers should have no illusions about this. Driven by its economic crisis, the bourgeoisie will attack at every opportunity. It will not hesitate to send its armed police against the workers as today it sends the riot police against the French railroad workers. Step by step the workers will have to build their unity, to break out of corporatism and all other divisions, by seeing through the manoeuvres of the unions. The working class will have to organize all its forces to destroy capitalism.

Alma and M.I.
December 31, 1986

leaflet

SELF-ORGANIZATION & EXTENSION

Since mid-December France has been shaken by strikes in public services, particularly in the railroads. The movement began and spread spontaneously without union directives or control. The railroad workers are showing their radical opposition to the deterioration of their living and working conditions.

This is not an isolated reaction. For many years, workers everywhere have been trying to resist the austerity measures imposed by the bourgeois State : in the general strike of public service employees in Belgium in 1983, in the miners' strike in Britain in 1984, in the massive strike movements in Denmark and Belgium in 1986, in the many struggles in South Africa or recently in China or Romania. Young students have also raised their voices particularly in the recent massive and self-

organized movement of students in France to protest against a future of unemployment and growing impoverishment that the social order increasingly reserves for young people.

By taking the struggle resolutely into their own hands, the French railroad workers are showing the way to go for the entire working class.

WORKERS MUST HAVE CONFIDENCE IN THEMSELVES

The French engineers showed how fed up they are by going out on strike spontaneously without any union involvement. They organized themselves outside of any stifling union structure. They organized daily general assemblies of all

the workers, places for discussion and decision-making, which showed that the workers realized how important it was that everyone participate. The strikers used the railroad's own communication network to break out of their isolation. They elected revocable delegates in the assemblies, grouping local committees all the way to national coordination committees. Their motto was to keep control of the movement in the hands of the workers at all costs. No more letting the initiative pass to the "professionals" of the unions and the leftist groups. No more feeling powerless without them.

This determination to organize the struggle autonomously expresses a sentiment that is growing among all workers as most of the struggles in recent years show. It is not worth it to wait for something from the unions, from their sterile "days of action" or strikes, from their crocodile tears masquerading as "solidarity" or their orchestrations of defeat. The unions are part of the State apparatus whose function is to keep struggles in a framework acceptable to the social order -- that is, to empty struggles of their real power and perspective.

That's the first thing the French workers have shown us : that the working class can and must have confidence in its own strength, in its own ability to organize and that this is the only road to victory.

AVOIDING THE TRAP OF CORPORATISM

The self-organization the railroad workers put into place is surely a step forward in the way struggles are carried out. But this self-organization by itself, isolated, is nothing! An autonomous struggle that is limited to just one category of workers is doomed to failure, to union recuperation. Several thousand workers alone cannot stop the capitalist State. Didn't the British miners tragically prove this two years ago?

That's the trap the railroad workers fell into. By remaining isolated in the railroads alone (when all the workers of the public sector and other sectors also wanted to oppose the austerity measures of the government); by thinking that the train engineers' demands should be kept specific to them (even though the entire working class is affected by the struggle against arbitrary wage criteria and the deterioration of working conditions), the railroad workers have not used all the means at their disposal to develop their struggle, to really threaten the whole bourgeoisie.

What the bourgeoisie was afraid of in this conflict was precisely a generalization of the movement to the whole working class. That's why the unions, and especially the CGT, are falling all over themselves now, launching strikes and "actions" in other sectors. They are afraid of contagion from the example of the rail workers. So they hope to drown out the clarity expressed by the train engineers

by isolating them and their demands and getting back the control over all the workers!

Such is the second lesson that we should get from the railroad workers struggle. Every strike, every organization of struggle must try to spread the movement to other workers, to other sectors. Not so as to get diluted by apathy or union manipulation but in order to push their class brothers to go forward, to transform the struggle into a generalized movement that can shake up the whole bourgeois State.

THE PERSPECTIVE : GENERALIZE THE SELF-ORGANIZATION OF THE STRUGGLE

The struggle of the French railroad workers shows us the way to go : workers taking the struggle into their own hands, counting only on themselves. But it also shows us the need to avoid getting isolated. If the vital forces of a movement are not to slowly dry up, the conflict has to be generalized to all workers. Workers' struggles can no longer stay bottled up, separated by purely specific demands. Workers in all sectors have something to gain by joining their particular demands to a general combat against all the attacks on the workers' living conditions. Only by uniting in the struggle, while keeping control over their organization can the workers go forward on the road to their emancipation.

GENERALIZE THE EXAMPLE OF THE RAILROAD WORKERS GENERALIZE THE SELF-ORGANIZATION OF STRUGGLES!

Internationalist Perspective
Jan. 4, 1987

PUBLIC MEETING

BRUSSELS (BELGIUM): Friday May 22, 1987, 8p
Cafe de la Regence
Place Fernand Cocq
1050 Brussels

resolution on the class struggle everywhere the same misery

Although 1985 was characterized by a relative decline in the number of strikes in the industrialized countries (despite large-scale workers' struggles in South Africa, Bolivia), the beginning of 1986 saw the explosion of an important series of conflicts in Scandinavia and Belgium and the intensification of struggles on the periphery of the metropolises. The third wave of workers' struggles which began in 1983 with simultaneous struggles in Belgium and the U.S. and which rapidly spread to the entire industrialized world, is continuing right up to the present time. Recent struggles, each with its own specificities, express the workers' refusal to accept the intensification of their exploitation. The recent strikes in Belgium best epitomize the lessons of previous strike waves. They represent an important step forward for the international proletariat, highlighting all the potential of the mass strike.

2. The economic crisis had forced the Belgian bourgeoisie to envisage drastic measures to try to protect the profitability of its economy. But in the early years of the 80s, the ruling class limited itself to partial measures affecting only certain industrial sectors. Even so, they were met with resistance from the workers. The later austerity plans affected more and more people through unemployment, reductions in social security and education. Austerity increased and generalized but still the bourgeoisie hoped to avoid taking the working class head on. It spaced out its different attacks : first, the mines, then the public service sector, then what was left of the steel industry.

From the very announcement of the closing of several mines, the Limburg miners launched into a massive mobilization showing a strong combativity in the first months of 1986. Although they were not immediately followed by other workers, this struggle was a spark, a sign that the end of the relative calm of 1985 was at hand. Workers were once again violently resisting the attacks of the ruling class. The workers did not wait for the union to organize its "information campaign"

on the austerity measures the Belgian government was planning. They reacted immediately at the beginning of May and the strike spread like wildfire, paralyzing the whole country. In this formidable movement, elements of the mass strike appeared although not in fully developed form : thousands of workers stopped work spontaneously, actively seeking to spread the strike by taking initiatives outside of the official structures of the unions. They attempted self-organization, trying to generalize the movement to all sectors, and kept it up for weeks. In this sense, these struggles express an important maturation of consciousness as compared to the previous strike wave where these different characteristics appeared only occasionally and in a much more limited way.

3. Class struggle does not develop in a straight line ever upwards. It is the result of a whole dynamic including all the past & present experiences of workers' struggles, their successes and (today especially) also their failures. In open struggle, the working class can assert itself as a class, with its class solidarity, and strengthen its understanding of the historical battle it is waging against capitalism. But with the end of the conflict and the return to work, atomization takes over. This atomization is all the worse because permanent organizations regrouping the whole working class no longer exist in this period of capitalist decadence. But this does not mean that the consciousness gained simply ceases to exist. With the decline of a struggle, the activity of the working class does not altogether disappear. With the loss of illusions comes a whole process of thinking things through allowing for maturation and the assimilation of the lessons drawn from past experience. Since 1968 there have been several waves of class struggle followed each time by retreats.

The events in Belgium in 1986 cannot be understood in and of themselves but only as part of the successive strike waves of the working class since 1968. Only by showing how these struggles have contributed to ad-

vancing the cause of the international proletariat as a whole can they be fully appreciated.

4. At the end of the reconstruction period following World War II, with the reversal of the trade balance of the U.S. in favor of its allies, a new phase of open struggle began. Released from the crushing weight of the counter-revolutionary period which had lasted for so many years, the workers of western Europe reacted with powerful struggles at the end of the 60s. May 68 in France, the summer of 69 in Italy were to open the way to increasingly generalized confrontation with the capitalist state. The spontaneous nature of this first strike wave was particularly characteristic. The working class everywhere in the world rediscovered the meaning of its historic combat and threw itself into struggles even though it still suffered from many illusions about the nature of the left and the unions and the belief that the crisis could be "cured".

At first, the bourgeoisie was disoriented, not so much by the violence of the student protests but by the scope of the spontaneous reactions of the workers. It didn't have a political response ready. In Latin America, in Asia, a ferocious repression came down on the workers. In Europe, the left "alternative" with destalinized overtones began operation to recuperate the illusions of the workers and canalize them into the defense of the "self-management of society". The arrival of left teams at the head of the State apparatus in many countries, talking a "participationist" line, temporarily disoriented the proletariat and put an end to this first wave of class struggle.

5. It became clear, however, that this left management was not able to eliminate a new bout of open economic crisis. The ruling class was forced to adopt austerity measures to assure the survival of its system of exploitation. New struggles broke out in the four corners of Europe at the end of the 70s, in Italy, France, Belgium, Holland, Britain, and the left was unable to head off these strikes.

The workers' struggles contained many partial characteristics of the mass strike but these characteristics still appeared separately in the various experiences of struggle: self-organization appeared in the dockers' strike in Rotterdam, active spreading of the strike in the steel strike in Great Britain, violent battles with the State in the steel strikes at Longwy-Denain in France. But despite the force of the working-class reactions and the often radical combativity, the workers were not able to go beyond the sectoral framework of specific industrial

branches, in part because the bourgeoisie concentrated its attacks sector by sector and not all across the board at the same time.

Confronted with its discredited left parties and traditional unions and facing the need to accelerate austerity measures, the bourgeoisie realized it had to create a new political shift. The 80s would therefore see the gradual return of the left into opposition and this ideological shift undercut the second wave of class struggle at the end of the 70s.

6. The highest point reached by this wave of class struggle at the end of the 70s was in Poland in July 1980 when the workers rose up against the austerity measures that the Giersek government tried to impose. All the partial characteristics that were expressed in previous struggles were concentrated in a mass strike dynamic whose like had not been seen since the revolutionary wave in the 20s. For several weeks, the entire country was shaken by a movement of permanent struggle. Having no confidence in the official unions, the workers created their own combat organizations, the MKS, strike committees elected by general assemblies where workers met every day to decide the orientation of the struggle. In this combat, the workers gained experience with the dynamic of a mass mobilization, with the kind of self-organization that forced all discussion with the State to be made public. But they were not able to rid themselves of the democratic illusions cultivated by the left. The bourgeoisie did not simply throw in the towel when faced with working class self-activity. Neo-unionism weighed heavily on the movement, pushing it towards self-management type demands, emptying the MKS of their meaning. The union Solidarnosc took over from the workers' coordinating committees, gradually substituting itself for the workers' initiatives. Coming at the end of an international wave of class struggle, the workers' struggles in Poland were all the more isolated because the bourgeoisie understood the great danger that the Polish events potentially represented. The bourgeoisie demonstrated once again its ability to unify across national boundaries as it did during the revolutionary wave after World War I when it united internationally against the threat of the proletariat. It strengthened its mystification campaigns presenting the workers' struggles in Poland as a fight for democracy against Russian totalitarianism, as a profession of faith towards the Polish Pope, etc. It is not every day that an American President expresses his solidarity with workers or that the Church sanctifies a union leader. Thus, Solidarnosc, using the funds and advice of unions in the West, grew into a major force in the

country. After leading many workers with good intentions into an impasse, it was the first "rank and file" union to go into clandestinity.

In the West, Solidarnosc was used to refurbish unionism in general, and in particular, to justify the ouvrierist turn taken by many leftist groups who abandoned any union criticism to take up the defense of "fighting unions".

7. For several years, the left in opposition was able to develop this theme and act as a front for the "humanitarian" campaigns launched by the bourgeoisie to justify the "spirit of sacrifice" needed to fight the crisis. But soon such talk began to fall on deaf ears. In 1983 struggles broke out in Belgium, the U.S., Italy, Morocco, Tunisia -- not only in the heartlands of capitalism but also in the peripheral countries. By the end of 1983, other countries took up the gauntlet: Holland, Britain, Scandinavia.

The movements of 1983-4 showed certain characteristics that were even more radical than those seen in previous struggles. First of all the struggles took place simultaneously on an international level. They seemed to show a greater maturity in understanding the overall situation than the isolated events in Poland. Also, these struggles began spontaneously without any union plans or directives. They opposed the bourgeois logic of austerity and in many cases, struggles took on a really massive character reflecting the fact that more general demands were being put forward by the workers. There was a greater awareness of the need to fight when the bourgeoisie attacks. Capitalism's future for the working class, ie unemployment, increasing impoverishment, became more and more apparent. The left in opposition verbiage was wearing thin as shown by the inability of the left to paralyse the proletariat and prevent it from fighting against austerity in mass mobilizations. But despite this historic erosion of the power of the left to cloud the issues for the workers, it still had enough residual strength, if not to prevent struggles from breaking out, at least to recuperate the workers' initiatives through rank and file unionism.

The 1983-4 struggles confirm the fact that the main weapon of the bourgeoisie against the working class (aside from the systematic development of ideological campaigns like those on pacifism, anti-terrorism, etc to disorient the workers), is the so-called "unionism at the base, not at the top". The bourgeoisie learned from previous class confrontations and it now left the "base unionists" freer to operate. Right from the beginning of the strikes, these elements put themselves forward playing on a certain number of illusions among the workers. For example, the

idea that everyone in the same branch must be convinced to go out on strike before the struggle can be spread to "others" or the idea that if we could just get rid of the right-wing, things would be better.

Base unionists strengthen these illusions by presenting themselves as determined defenders of the union logic: the defense of industry branch by branch, the defense of democracy, of the State.

In Belgium and in Denmark in 1984, the tactic was the same. Base unionists cut off attempts at self-organization; they systematically misinformed workers about what other workers were doing elsewhere and thus sabotaged efforts to extend the struggle. With base unionism, the bourgeoisie has developed an effective weapon against the working class and this division of labor between the different factions of the bourgeoisie increased as the struggles weakened: the right imposed austerity, the left defended the honor of democracy and the base unionists controlled the movement from within, pushing it towards showy but meaningless actions, promenade-demonstrations empty of all class content and posing no threat to the ruling class.

8. But the pressure from austerity budgets did not weaken. If the bourgeoisie was frustrated in some of its objectives, obliged to put off the date when measures would come into effect, it did not let up its pressure. In 1985 the bourgeoisie continued its attacks but managed to disperse the effects by getting at different sectors at different times rather than attacking frontally and directly. Even if the struggle did not die out, 1985 saw a certain calm in the social situation in the western countries. This is one of the constant problems of the present period: the difficulty of carrying on long-term struggles in the face of the impossibility of obtaining any satisfaction in partial struggles sector by sector.

Although the bourgeoisie made a big fuss about the fall in oil prices supposedly producing an improvement in the economic situation, the big noise eventually petered out leaving only the reality of the attacks against the workers' standard of living. These continued unabated and the workers were not fooled. With even greater explosive energy, they threw themselves into the storming of the capitalist citadel in May-June 1986.

In Belgium the movement reached unprecedented heights. Just the announcement of the next austerity budget made all the public service sector workers mobilize by the thousands, from the teachers to the railroad workers, to paralyse the country for more than six weeks. The miners of the Limburg district gave the signal in February 1986 by refusing to accept both the closing of the mines and the union's tactic of trying to get them to defend "their"

mines. Right from the beginning of their movement, they tried to spread the strike by sending massive delegations to other sectors but they didn't give themselves the means to control the way the movement was organized. The base unionists stepped in and appointed themselves the organizers of the strike committee. Unlike what happened in Rotterdam in 1979, where daily assemblies of all workers took place to decide what to do, the Limburg miners unfortunately held only sporadic general assemblies, leaving a vacuum for the base unionists to step in.

But the experience of the miners was not lost. In May-June 1986 the workers put forward a general demand from the very beginning of the strike, a demand that could unite workers across all categories : the struggle against austerity which affected the entire population. Also, there were several efforts to keep the organization of the strike in the hands of the workers themselves, like the "Malibran" coordination among teachers and the general assemblies of the railroad workers at Charleroi. The strike was thus, much more active and dynamic than the one in 1983.

Having learned a lesson from the strikes in 1983, the bourgeoisie strengthened the role of base unionism. In 1983, the disorganization orchestrated by the unions had been enough to crush the timid germs of self-activity and extension from the workers themselves. But in 1986, the determination and real concretization of extension and self-activity reflected the maturation of subversive conditions and the bourgeoisie was forced to adapt its tactics by organizing phoney general assemblies when it looked like the workers would do it anyway by themselves and by participating in extension when this couldn't be avoided.

9. Thus, the third wave of workers' struggles which began in 1983, after spreading through the industrial heartlands of capitalism, continued into 1986 after a brief pause in 1985. The recent strikes show an accentuation of certain characteristics acquired in previous struggles. In the countries of the periphery of capitalism, tens of thousands of people have had to confront the might of the capitalist State : in South Africa, Brazil and Bolivia. The struggles in western Europe at the beginning of 1986, in Scandinavia but especially in Belgium, led to a generalized strike of all public sector workers which paralyzed the country for more than six weeks. We saw the active mobilization of thousands of workers and the development of effective solidarity. The struggles in Belgium in the spring of 1986 best demonstrate this tendency to a maturation of consciousness which appeared to one degree or another in all the different battles worldwide that the proletariat fought during the

year. This tendency towards the mass strike is not fully realized in any immediate sense but it is nevertheless present and developing today. It can be seen in the dynamic towards spontaneous action, towards the organization of struggles by the workers themselves with massive numbers of workers involved, extending the struggle by going beyond work categories and branches to put forward general demands leading to massive upheavals.

10. The present situation contains enormous potential. With the deterioration of the economic situation, with increasing pressures on the working class because of austerity, the workers will undoubtedly continue to resist. Pauses, local advances and retreats come right on top of one another in a wave which is international in scope and which historically tends to more and more massive confrontations between the classes. There is no respite in sight for the bourgeoisie on an international level as this third wave of struggle has already shown.

The exacerbation of the crisis has made it all the more impossible for capital to grant any improvement in the lives of the exploited class. Struggle has come up against a capitalist State determined to make no concessions. Even when the bourgeoisie is forced by the pressure of class struggle to retreat temporarily in its attacks against the working class, the workers should have no illusions on the economic level because these attacks will return in force. The only thing the working class can really gain from its struggle today is the capacity to develop its struggle onto a higher level, finally working to destroy the capitalist system itself. In this sense, any attempt to promise economic gains in the immediate struggles can only lead to an impasse, sidetracking workers from the full meaning of their combat. Future struggles will still be struggles to resist the attacks of the bourgeoisie. It is this resistance to austerity as it gets worse and worse that will spur workers on to greater unity, leading the struggle onto a higher level.

In so many of the struggles in 1986, the need to spread the strike, the need to unite and not remain isolated was posited from the outset. But this has not been enough. The working class cannot extend its struggles until it has also developed tendencies towards self-organization. Unfortunately, the left in opposition has so far succeeded in limiting these attempts. Extension and self-organization are linked and will continue to be linked wherever struggle lives and develops. Each time the bourgeoisie cannot prevent this dynamic from emerging, it tries to recuperate it through base unionism. Thus, the reality of struggle will increasingly force the workers to develop their combat as effectively as possible by defending their self-activity

through sovereign general assemblies of all the workers, by controlling all aspects of the organization of the extension of the struggle themselves. Although the experience gained so far is important, it is not enough. The bourgeoisie has not given up, far from it, and it continues its work of ideological demoralization, perverting the workers' good intentions so that in the end, they serve only to perpetuate the system. This base unionism is an obstacle that will have to be confronted, denounced and destroyed before class struggle can achieve its full dynamic.

Although we have emphasized the advances, the gains of the present struggles in relation to previous strike waves, we certainly do not wish to imply that class consciousness is an arithmetical accumulation process. Many failures and hesitations still await the working class in its historic battle.

11. The pressure of the crisis does not simply mean that the workers' standard of living will continue to decline : an increase in exploitation, austerity and unemployment. At

a certain point, it threatens the workers' very existence. If the working class fails in its coming massive confrontations with the bourgeoisie and its combativity is crushed, there will be a third World War between the imperialist blocs whose consequences will be so catastrophic that mankind could very well not survive at all.

Because all its efforts are pushing society towards this abyss, the bourgeoisie will be less and less able to hide the fact that it is engaged in a process of dismantling the industrial base of the world (apart from what is needed for the war economy). It will become clearer and clearer that the only perspective for the working class in this society is its own eventual destruction. In its coming to consciousness, the workers will have to confront the question of their own future and this, in turn, will raise the question of taking power into their own hands.

revolutionary intervention in the belgian strikes

Just as the capacity of the proletariat to assimilate the lessons of its past experience, to develop its consciousness, is explicitly manifested in its moments of open struggle against capital, the adequacy of its revolutionary factions to fulfill their task within the proletarian movement is put in sharp relief by the contribution that they are capable of making to these moments of open struggle. It is then that problems are posed in a concrete and acute manner, that the correct responses to these problems -and the errors- reveal their practical consequences. It is in this framework that we want to look back at the revolutionary intervention which occurred in the spring '86 movements in Belgium. As we have already pointed out in this publication, these movements represented a particularly important and significant moment of class struggle; in fact, the highest point so far reached in the third wave of class struggle which has spread over the globe during the past three years. In a country at the very heart of the greatest industrial concentration in the world, whose bourgeoisie is particularly well experienced in the face of class struggle, these workers struggles expressed - in an embryonic form- all the tendencies towards the mass strike: the thrust towards active extension, the thrust towards self-organization, the

tendency to permanent struggles. We have already provided a first, summary, overview of the intervention of revolutionaries in this movement (c.f. I.P. # 3). It is important, however, to make a more exhaustive balance-sheet- with hindsight- of a significant example of the intervention of the revolutionary milieu in the present struggles.

WHAT ARE THE NEEDS OF THE CURRENT STRUGGLES ?

To judge revolutionary intervention in the present struggles, it is first necessary to understand to what imperatives it must respond in these struggles. It is most certainly the general, constant, needs of the class struggle, the essential point of which is to link this struggle to its revolutionary perspective. A revolutionary intervention only makes sense of it clearly maintains this perspective of the communist revolution. But these general needs make themselves felt in an immediate way through specific needs which depend on the concrete situation, according to the experience accumulated by the working class in its struggle and on the physical and ideological obstacles that the bourgeoisie places in its path. Today, the working class has already accumulated a considerable experience concerning the nature of the capitalist crisis and the

role of the left and the unions, which have profoundly eroded its confidence in the capacity of capitalism to resolve its crisis, as well as in the capacity of the left and the unions to defend its interests against the effects of the crisis. This disillusion vis a vis capitalist relations and institutions (not to mention "official" institutions e.g. government, parliament, police, "justice", etc.) is marked in practice by the tendency of workers to spontaneously unleash struggles, to be extremely distrustful vis a vis the "moderating" talk of those who seek to administer the crisis, whether it be with "justice and equality" or not; to attempt to take into their own hands the extension and organization of the struggles. When combativity explodes on a large scale, this tendency concretely becomes a tendency towards the mass strike, as was the case last year in Belgium.

Nonetheless, the burden of the counter-revolution, like the condition created by the decadence of capitalism, still weighs heavily on the proletariat. On the economic plane, the impossibility for the proletariat to win victories from the bourgeoisie in a period of crisis drives it into a defensive struggle which no longer provides it with a realistic, immediate, goal to be attained. More than that, these conditions continually worsen, particularly under the form of unemployment into which ever greater masses of workers are thrown without any hope of going back. With each new movement of struggles which breaks out, the stakes are greater and the task to be confronted more prodigious. On the political plane, the totalitarian stranglehold of the state over social life in the present period has destroyed every form of permanent, general, consciousness and organization of the class. Still more, it has integrated the past workers' organizations (socialist and communist parties, unions) into the state apparatus every where, and the stalinist counter-revolution has denatured the first goal of the class struggle- communism- to such a point that it has generated disgust amongst many workers. In these conditions, the proletariat is still cruelly disarmed, in its understanding of the meaning of its struggle, of the perspectives which are open to it, and of the goal towards which it tends.

It is precisely this which makes it possible for the bourgeoisie to arm itself against the proletariat. In as much as the proletariat does not find its own path, in one way or another it is swept onto the path marked out by the bourgeoisie, through the intermediary of its apparatus with a "working class" face- the left parties and above all the unions. It is true, that these latter are no longer able- as in the period of counter-revolution- to impose an iron grip on the proletariat. That is the reason why in general the left parties and their unions have been relieved of their explicit governmental responsibilities and find themselves in the "opposition". Their possibility of control must be accommodated to the ever stronger tendency of the proletariat to take its struggle into its own hands; it proceeds, therefore, primarily

through "rank and file" unionism and leftism, whose essential function consists in keeping the tendency towards extension and organization of the struggle under union control. We have already seen important examples of this tactic in the steel strike in Great Britain in 1980, where roving pickets responded to a largely spontaneous initiative of the workers but were controlled by the local union structures. Similarly, in the mass strike in Poland that same year, where autonomous committees were quickly denatured into a new "fighting" union, Solidarnosc. We had another clear example in the movement of Spring '86 in Belgium, where the thrust towards extension and organization of the struggles remained largely under the control of rank and file unionism, as in the case of the Limburg mines with their strike committees arising outside the official structure of the unions, but completely controlled by the delegates of the Maoist Labor Party.

We can, therefore, see that the principal obstacle today that fetters the proletariat in the development of its struggle is not resignation, passivity, submission to capitalist institutions (even if this reappears in periods when the struggle ebbs), but the lack of comprehension of its own class perspectives and the control of rank and file unionism over its initiatives. Thus, it is in the sense of the overcoming of this obstacle that revolutionary intervention can concretely contribute to the development of class struggle today.

HOW HAVE REVOLUTIONARIES RESPONDED TO THESE NEEDS ?

Revolutionaries in common possess a series of fundamental positions which distinguish them from the leftists and from the whole political apparatus of capital, in particular, internationalism and the recognition that every state in the world is capitalist (against all the variants of the "socialist model" defended by the left). In the actual practice of the immediate struggle, the point that distinguishes revolutionaries is above all their defense of an intransigent class struggle, independent from the apparatus of capitalist control, i.e. the union. On the level of general statements, this point has been defended by all the revolutionary organizations which intervened in the Spring '86 movement in Belgium.

However, when we look a little more closely at the specific content of the interventions of the several organizations, we can only be struck by the terrible disperion and confusion of this intervention. This disperion and confusion is put in particularly sharp relief by the fact that the four organizations present in the struggle -the International Communist Current (ICC), the Internationalist Communist Group (GCI), the Internationalist Communist Fraction (FCI), and our Fraction- all have their origin in the self-same organization. But similar disperion and confusion are apparent in other countries where the origin of the different groups is more diverse. A number of important examples, doubtless extracted from their context

but as we will see further on in no way accidental, will allow us to better judge the situation.

On May 6, the GCI, which we have not often encountered intervening publically, distributed a leaflet to "high school students, unemployed, comrades in struggle", and which concluded by the exhortation: "High school students, to the attack!!!" At a moment when the strike movement was in full swing, it is difficult to imagine an intervention more inadequate with respect to the needs of the workers struggle. Later, in its publication, "Communist Action" # 12, the GCI succeeded in developing a globally correct analysis of the situation, notably with respect to the rank and file unionist maneuvers in the Limburg mines. But the perspectives that they put forward did not go beyond the level of exhortation to struggle and to direct action. Its new slogan: "If you keep your mouth shut, you'll just get your teeth shoved down your throat". What the working class needs today is not to be told not "to keep its mouth shut", but how to do it without "getting its teeth shoved down its throat." In other words, how its struggle can develop and be organized. But on this point, the GCI is basically incapable of making a positive contribution, because of its critique of general forms of workers' organization (general assemblies, Workers' Councils) and its exaltation of violent and minority actions.

The FCI was actively present in the Malibran assemblies, regrouping teachers outside of the unions (see IP #3), but not as an organization. That revolutionary militants are individually engaged in a struggle goes without saying, but that they keep silent about the general political positions that they defend can only lead, at best, to an intervention which is sterile in the long run and, at worst, to a practice of "infiltration", of control of proletarian organs which goes against their development, in the manner of the leftists. Moreover, the FCI distributed a leaflet, presenting the organization of the strike in the Limburg mines as an example for the whole working class to follow, thereby falling head over heels into the trap of rank and file unionism.

With respect to the ICC, its intervention essentially consisted in mingling certain formally correct revolutionary perspectives (extension and organization of the struggle) with immediate slogans going in a completely opposite sense. Even before the movement, the ICC called on workers to "leave the factories, houses, neighbourhoods (!) to go into the streets", to "impose (on whom?) the demand for a really united and massive demonstration of all the workers" (Internationalisme #107), as if the fact of finding oneself on the street would mean that workers wouldn't need the experience of struggle at the workplace or unemployment office to become unified. Throughout the whole movement, the ICC did not cease calling for the national demonstration on May 31, which was planned long in advance by

the unions and which would serve to put an end to the movement (see, for example, the supplement to Internationalisme # 108). At the moment when the movement drew to a close, it headlined: "After May 31? The struggle continues!"; and it drew from its intervention in the May 31 demonstration the following triumphalist balance-sheet: "Even if the call for the immediate transformation of the demo could not be followed (what a surprise!), this intervention, heard and discussed during almost three hours by tens of thousands of workers, has been of real importance for the continuation of the movement". (Internationalisme #110). But, from the very next day, the unions succeeded in progressively imposing a return to work! Thus, instead of aiding the working class in putting forward its own perspectives, the ICC sadly ended up as a "revolutionary" cover for the union demobilization, and continues to do so. Moreover, it is not by chance if the ICC has also been relatively blind to rank and file unionism's hold over the movement (it only occasionally speaks of this phenomenon in the balance-sheet it has made; it sees in the strike committees in the Limburg mines a proletarian expression, etc). The discrepancy between the real needs of the present struggles and the intervention of these revolutionary organizations is painfully apparent.

THE INTERVENTION OF OUR FRACTION AND ITS CRITICISM

Faced with this confusion, we think that the intervention of our Fraction had the merit of being politically correct. Throughout the movement, we were present at the important points of struggle (demonstrations, Limburg mines, etc), where we distributed, besides our magazine, thousands of copies of a leaflet in French and Dutch clearly denouncing the maneuvers of the unions and defending the necessity of developing and organizing the struggle in an autonomous way (a reprint of this leaflet is included in this issue). We also participated on a daily basis in the "Malibran assemblies", defending the active extension of the struggle to other sectors, as well as self-organization, against the efforts at union recuperation. However, we make no pretention to having avoided all weaknesses. The limited strength and the recent constitution of our Fraction prevented this intervention from taking on a greater amplitude and from being translated into the taking of more concrete and immediate political positions (through more numerous leaflets). At least we tried to be present and meet the real needs of the struggle and nothing the ICC says has convinced us that we were wrong. In its article "Revolutionaries in the test of struggle" (Internationalisme # 111), an article reprinted in several languages in its territorial publications, the ICC, in effect, is reduced to fabrication to criticize our Fraction. According to the ICC, "it is the formal independence of Malibran vis a vis the

unions which led groups like the FCI and the EFICC not only to fixate their intervention in the movement on this sector, but in the very content of this intervention to base themselves on this question of 'independence from the unions' in itself, as a pre-requisite for everything" (Internationalisme # 111). When you know that the ICC only cast so much as a glance at a Malibran assembly the next to the last week of its existence, you can measure the pretention -as arrogant as it is empty- that this group increasingly exhibits. If the ICC had been present at the outset of the movement, perhaps it would have acknowledged that the comrades of our Fraction, like those of the FCI, actively defended the necessity for extension to other sectors; perhaps it would even have understood a little better the dynamic of that assembly and the fact that the question of independence vis a vis the unions was posed in practice against the concrete attempts at recuperation by the unions. With respect to the accusations of "fixating the intervention on this sector", we can only suppose that it means that, for the ICC, revolutionary militants working in a given sector must above all abstain from actively participating in the struggles that unfold there-that being the reason for the particular involvement of some of our comrades in the assembly. Unless the supposed ignorance of our other interventions can constitute a sufficient reason to pretend that these interventions did not take place. In fact, the logic underlying these empty criticisms of the ICC was made explicit by it at our public meeting in October '86, in Brussels-and far better than in its article. The ICC delegation present there justified its criticisms by asserting that our Fraction conceived of self-organization as a pre-requisite for the extension of struggles, because it did not understand that, in reality, it is extension which is a necessary condition for the organization of the struggles. A wonderful dialectic! Just as the ICC itself establishes a hierarchy in the different aspects of the class struggle, a mechanical succession of steps, of which one is the pre-requisite of the other, so it attributes to others the same conception, only applied in the opposite direction. For us, self-organization supposes extension just as much as extension supposes self-organization; these two aspects of the struggle are inseparable, and must be defended as such by revolutionaries. This is in no sense a play on words: the ICC delegation demonstrated its "coherence" by asserting that the defense of the perspective of self-organization in the present struggles was a sign of "idealism" because of the conditions created by the left in opposition. You would think that you were hearing the degenerating Communist International against the left communists when they refused to accept the so-called 21 conditions introduced by the CI and which opened the door to its final demise. Such assertions come down to a capitulation on the question of the role of revolutionary organiza-

tions, whose essential function consists in defending the general perspectives of the class struggle against all those who seek to limit it to a narrow aspect, and therefore keep it within the framework of the capitalist system. The obsessive calls of the ICC to "go into the streets", "to join together" in union demonstrations, are a concrete manifestation of this capitulation. What is important for the ICC is no longer the defense of the perspectives of the class struggle, but the physical-coming together of workers at any price. Its intervention in the famous "Malibran assemblies" is a specific example, though in a caricatural form: after having disdained these assemblies when they represented a real proletarian life, the ICC intervened in them just before their death (at the end of May) to...call for support for the union demonstration on May 31; then it again intervened in September in a abortive effort to revive these assemblies to...call for joining the union co-ordination which was substituted for the assemblies at their death!

LONG LIVE REVOLUTIONARY CLARITY

The Spring '86 movement in Belgium once again revealed the terrible weaknesses of the revolutionary milieu in the face of the needs of proletarian struggle. The difficulties confronting the working class do not yet compel revolutionaries to correct their errors. On the contrary, they lead some of them, like the ICC, to sink further into their process of regression. The dispersion of the revolutionary milieu could stimulate in some a nostalgia for unity despite the differences which divide the existing organizations. But this road is a dead-end. The unification of the proletariat and of its vanguard minorities will only take place through a greater revolutionary clarity. The incapacity of many organizations to respond to the needs of the present struggles has its roots in their programmatic failings on the question of the conditions of class struggle in decadent capitalism and the function of revolutionaries in these conditions. It is its evolution towards a rejection of any periodization of capitalism and towards the reduction of the revolutionary organization organization to a primary role of a detonator that has led the GCI to intervene by blindly exhorting anything that moves, rather than a real clarification of the perspectives of the proletarian movement. It is the maintenance of the Leninist conception of the relation between party and class which leads the FCI to glorify the supposed "elementary" expressions of the class struggle (like the miners strike) and to neglect anew the work of political classification within the whole of the class, inasmuch as this problem in practice comes down to the problem of who will provide the "leadership". It is its regression in its understanding of the totalitarian stranglehold of the state over social life in the period of the decadence of capitalism, and of the func-

tion of revolutionary organizations in the development of the class consciousness of the proletariat, which has increasingly led the ICC to conceive of the proletariat as ready to unify itself at every moment, and to conceive of itself no longer as a factor of clarity but as the detonator of this unification.

Programmatic clarity on the conditions of class struggle and the function of revolutionary organizations in decadent capitalism is more and more decisive to a revolutionary intervention in the class struggle which is developing today. This clarity implies the recognition of a number of fundamental characteristics. First, the impossibility for capitalism in the present period to concede real improvements in the standard of living of the working class or to tolerate permanent, general, struggles or organizations of the proletariat. Second, the spontaneous tendency for the working class, in these conditions, to develop its struggles towards the mass strike, in which all facts of the struggle (extension, organization, consciousness) are indissolubly

linked. Third, the totalitarian stranglehold of the state over society, which implies a constant effort of the state to atomize the proletariat outside of periods of struggle, and to attempt to keep control of it even through "radical" forms (rank and file unionism, leftism) in periods of struggle. Fourth, the reduction of revolutionary organizations to small minorities whose function can no longer be to seek to incite or organize the class struggle, but rather to develop the class consciousness of the proletariat through the defense of the perspectives of its struggle and the exposure of the obstacles raised against it.

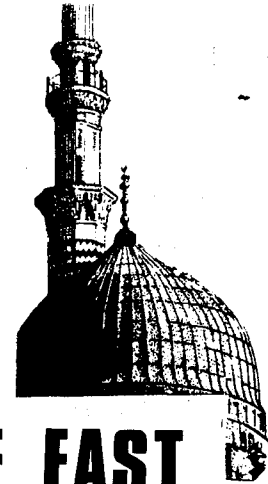
However necessary the recognition of these characteristics is, it must not be limited to an abstract recognition, formally required once and for all. The constant development, both theoretical and practical, of clarity on these points is the challenge posed to revolutionaries by the current period.

M. Lazare

USA  **IRAN**

THE IMPERIALIST STAKES

IN THE MIDDLE EAST



The furore being stirred up in the bourgeois media about Reagan's so-called 'arms for hostages' operation is an ideological smoke-screen. Far from these arms sales being an aberration of this administration, they have been a central feature of the policy of the whole Western ruling class towards Iran. And far from expressing any concern for the American hostages held in Lebanon, these deals are part of a grander design. In fact the main Western powers have been working in concert for years to ensure Western domination of the entire region, to weave the local forces into a web of relationships for the benefit of the West and to minimise any Russian influence. So, more than anything, the presentation of these arms shipments as some sort of fiasco well hides the fact that behind them lies an enormous offensive by the Western bloc, not the least element of which has been its active promotion of the six-year long carnage of the Iran/Iraq war by systematically arming both sides.

Nonetheless, the US state bureaucracy is being obliged to distance itself from actions which run counter to its propaganda of the past few years of 'no negotiation with international terrorism' or else undermine the credibility of its policy in the eyes of the American and Western European working class who are the main targets of this propaganda. In Europe too, politicians of every hue have fallen over themselves to denounce Reagan's sales of arms to Iran and his hypocrisy in telling the European allies not to help Iran's military efforts. Hypocrites all, across the West the same old refrain can be heard: 'We didn't know'.

But there's a lot more to this than a simple exposure of the hypocrisy of the most barbaric class in history as can be seen in the change in the character of the propaganda campaign since its beginnings in the middle of November. The 'scandal' began in the pages of a small Beirut newspaper, it was then

fuelled by a statement in the Iranian parliament by the Speaker, Rafsanjani, after which Reagan was obliged to address the matter publicly. In the US, after first focussing on Reagan, attention moved to the 'cowboys' in the White House basement, and then on to the most senior bureaucrats in the state machine. The issues have expanded from Iranian arms to third party involvements to covert funding of Nicaraguan Contras. On top of it all, an epidemic of investigative committees has now been unleashed to help the the 'search for the truth'.

What's behind all this? Despite the US state's capacity to engineer charades (such as Watergate, the Falklands War and the invasion of Grenada of which the infamous Colonel North has been made the official 'hero'), the US did not start this one off. On the contrary, the Iran affair has been a considerable embarrassment to the US government. However, once started, the 'scandal' has provided a focus for many other concerns inside the American state machine.

The way in which the Reagan arms deals came to light says a lot about the situation in the Middle East and about current American foreign policy problems. But present events have to be put into perspective, and in this article we aim to do this by looking at certain developments in Washington's policy towards Iran over the past years. We shall then consider the significance of the present circus the ruling class is putting on for us.

US/Russian Rivalry in the Middle East

As the Second World War was drawing to a close the emerging super-powers were carving out their spheres of influence, the Middle East included. The old colonial powers, Britain and France, tried to retain their previous positions by supporting their traditional Arab allies; the rising powers tried to get footholds into the region by supporting the formation of the new state of Israel. After the first Arab/Israeli war in the forties the broad alliances began to take shape: the US took Israel into its orbit, Russia moved to seek greater influence with the Arab states, the British and French power waned to be definitively eclipsed after the Suez affair in 1956. Russian advances in the region were considerable. While the oil-producing states' economic ties were always closely linked with the countries of the Western bloc, the post-war reconstruction and the Russian drive for influence allowed countries in the region to some extent to play off one bloc against the other.

By the end of the 1960s, Russian influence had reached what was to turn out to be its greatest extension. In particular, Egypt, Syria and Iraq were well within its orbit and

military bases were established in South Yemen after the latter's independence. At the same time Russia made further advances on the other side of the Red Sea and became the imperialist backer of many of the nationalist factions around the Arabian peninsula.

However, during the '70s the greater economic, military and political weight of the US was applied more strongly and to great effect, the first dramatic achievement being the abrupt detachment of Egypt from Russian influence in 1973. Further successes followed, especially with the signing of the Camp David Accords in 1978 which brought Israel and Egypt, the countries with the most powerful military capacities in the Near East, together under the US umbrella.

Ever since, by using a combination of economic and political carrots, and military actions and threats, the US has continued its advance in the region to Russia's considerable disadvantage. All the Middle Eastern states have felt the American pressure and, with the deepening global economic crisis underlining the enormous difference between the economic capabilities of the two major imperialisms, they have seen clearly that ultimately their interests lie, economically and militarily, with the Western and not with the Russian bloc. During the second half of the '70s countries such as Saudi Arabia, Iraq and Jordan all became more pliant to Western plans. The Carter administration aimed to bring the Middle Eastern countries into an overt set of alliances under the American aegis. However, any chances of success Carter may have had were blown away with the fall of the Shah in 1979 as a result of the outbreak of massive class struggle and widespread social upheaval in Iran. In an entirely unexpected manner a lynchpin of the US's whole Middle Eastern strategy (based on a Cairo-Jerusalem-Tehran axis) simply collapsed.

The US and Iran

The repercussions of the turmoil in Iran were profound for the US. In particular, the Iranian military machine was no longer able to be the bulwark the US wanted against Russian adventures in the area. So the door for the Russian invasion of Afghanistan was opened and ever since, the US has been trying to recover from this enormous setback.

Because of the Iranian population's experiences under the Shah - the brutal repression, torture and grinding exploitation and poverty, all imposed by a ruling class which ostentatiously flaunted its wealth and pro-Americanism - it was inevitable that the only part of the state apparatus which could bring order to Iran had to do so in opposition to everything the Shah had been seen to stand for. In other words, order was imposed in the

name of Islam and anti-Americanism, and was personified in the fundamentalist clerics who had been a longstanding channel of opposition to the Shah. They were the faction which broke the social force of the working class and sub-proletariat and drowned it in blood, of course with Allah's blessing.

Although this part of the state and its ideology was well-suited to the task of dealing with social unrest, it also brought enormous problems for the Iranian state as a whole which needed to shore up the national economy and reinforce its military capability. Both these tasks really needed a reintegration into the Western bloc - yet this was blocked by the anti-Americanist ideology of the clerics and the central role this ideology played in their rampant faction-fighting.

Since the Second World War the US has been acutely aware of the importance of Iran in any Middle East strategy. And so, even before the Shah had left his palace the US was trying to establish links with potential allies in the emerging ruling factions of the Iranian state. To put it mildly, the American ruling class has found this to be problematic.

From the moment of coming to power after the Shah's departure, the new ruling factions have been strife-ridden: over domestic policy, over the relations to have with the two blocs and with the Arab world. They have also had to deal with three main secessionist movements - the Kurds, Turkomans and Baluchi. And they also been faced with the perennial problems with the peasantry over land reform, and with the unrest of the bazaari classes. And in this cauldron of factional antagonisms, the question of the attitude to the US has been crucial. All factions are obliged to pronounce themselves as anti-American, even those who want to create a rapprochement, and to date every faction which has tried has failed: Ghotbzadeh, a Foreign Minister, who maintained contact with Carter during the 1979-81 'hostage crisis' was executed; Bazar-ghan, a Prime Minister, tried to pull Iran towards the US again - and had to flee into exile for his troubles. The Iranian military has been purged of many of its pro-Western officers. Yet, the Iranian state cannot turn away from the question of how to open up again to the US - just as the US cannot leave the Iranian question unresolved.

After the 1979-81 hostage crisis the US no longer aimed overtly to build bridges to Iran - that route was effectively blocked because of the intrinsic contradictions in the situation. The US has thus been obliged to find other means to pressurise the Iranian regime. With characteristic ruthlessness, it has done it through engineering one of the bloodiest set-piece massacres since 1945: the Iran/Iraq

war. The escalation of the longstanding tensions along the Iran/Iraq frontier into a major conflict which has consumed hundreds of thousands of lives, horribly maimed many more, is yet another demonstration of the barbaric cynicism and contempt for humanity that is endemic to the ruling class of this decadent social system. For this war has been used as a major axis of the US strategy to bring, finally, the whole of the Middle East into its orbit.

The Iran/Iraq War - A Western Ploy

The Iraqi offensive against Iran in September 1980 was launched with the connivance of the Western bloc, particularly the US and Israel. For example, it was the US which arranged for the Israelis (who were particularly hostile to Iraq) not to impede the arrangements made for the Saddam Hussein regime to use Jordanian airfields for its military aircraft as they were being deployed against Iran in the preparations at the start of the war. And ever since, Iran as well as Iraq has been well supplied by the Western bloc to keep its forces going. In the early stages its ability to keep its F4 Phantoms airborne - crucial to the repulsion of Iraqi forces - was largely due to Israeli supplies. And as time has passed so other countries have joined in directly and indirectly - including countries as far removed as Spain, Portugal and Brazil. Even China has been involved for some years to the point where estimates of its contribution to Iran's total military requirements run as high as 45%. All of these countries are well-entrenched in the Western bloc and would only be involved in this conflict to such a degree with the approval of their American overlord. In fact the West - especially the US and France - have been arming both sides for most of the war to keep it going and to keep it under control. (It has also been a means of keeping oil production levels down so, for some years, easing the pressures which were tending to drive prices down.)

And it all fits together. For six years the Western bloc has been carefully using this war to put enormous pressure on both sides to embed them more deeply into American control. The US has also had to be cautious. It has had to avoid pushing either side towards the Russians, yet press hard enough to concentrate minds in Baghdad and Tehran to face the reality that their interests ultimately demand acceptance of the US grand design. This message has of course also been aimed at all the other regimes in the region - and over the past six years that message has only become clearer.

The rulers of the Arab countries in the Middle East, particularly round the Persian Gulf, were horrified by the working class struggle

in Iran which led to the deposing of the Shah. Nothing so puts the fear of God into the world's exploiters. But their relief at the clerics' success in crushing the struggle was tempered by the threat to the precarious stability of the Gulf area posed by the regime itself. The Islamic fundamentalism and anti-Americanism of the Iranian rhetoric echoed among opposition factions in many countries in the Middle East. To help reinforce its position the new regime in Tehran set up an 'Office for Spreading the Revolution' to extend its influence through support for fundamentalist factions, many being threats to the Arab regimes, and thereby get a certain amount of leverage in the process. As a result, there was throughout the Middle East a general fear of the consequences of an outright Iranian victory. Only Assad's Syria has wanted a clear Iranian victory over Iraq which they saw as a means of bringing down the rival Ba'ath government.

But, for the most part the Middle Eastern regimes did not want an outright Iraqi victory either. Rivalries in the Gulf area were such that no-one wanted to see Saddam Hussein's regime simply replace that of the Shah as America's Gulf gendarme. So the Middle East rulers on the whole were willing to see the war drag on without there being an overwhelming winner.

For the West, however, there were more strategic considerations and it became necessary to modify the pressures being put on the Tehran regime. After the Iranian army crossed the Tigris in its spring 1985 offensive, the US saw that Tehran was only going to be pressured to a limited extent by the war, and that it was not going to weaken the Khomeini regime's hold on the internal situation in Iran. And, with time passing, the question of the Khomeini succession and its consequences became a burning issue. Since then more emphasis has again been put on bridge-building. (Not that this has led to any let-up in the murderous war.) It was probably at this point - summer of 1985 - that the divisions in the Reagan administration over how to deal concretely with Iran began to widen. For this was the period when the policy of getting direct US involvement in arms supplies to Iran first began to be argued over in the White House - with Weinberger and Schultz against it.

Despite superficial appearances, the US and its allies developed closer links with Iran - directly and indirectly. For example, the Reagan administration has held secret talks with Iran to unlock funds worth \$750 million still held in the US. France has agreed to repay a \$1 billion loan made by Iran at the time of the Shah, and has expelled Iranian opposition leaders. Since 1985, Iran has been

working towards a rapprochement with Saudi Arabia, hitherto Iraq's primary funder. And in September a watershed was passed with the deal struck over oil prices. Iran's economy - and therefore military capability - had been hit hard by the sharp reduction in foreign earnings which resulted from the oil price collapse in 1985-86 (which Iran claimed, not altogether inaccurately, was a conspiracy against its war effort). Saudi Arabia (which engineered the collapse) has been able to use its position as the most powerful oil producer in the Middle East to encourage Iran to behave more 'reasonably'. It was through OPEC (in which the Saudis are pivotal) that Iran and Iraq agreed production levels and at a meeting in Riyadh between King Fahd and the Iranian oil minister it was agreed that Saudi Arabia should help push the price of oil back up. This is why Sheik Yamani, the Saudi oil minister for 25 years, was fired - he was the architect of the oil price collapse. Overall, there has been an improvement in Iran's situation along with the development of such relationships. Together these examples demonstrate a practical convergence of interests of Iran and the West, whatever the rhetoric they try to push down the throats of their respective populations.

Another American Target - Syria

The redevelopment of Iran's relationship with the West is also helping to pull Syria more tightly into the Western bloc, ironically, by weakening Assad's bargaining position. As Iran developed a whole network of contacts with major arms sources in Israel, Europe and the US, so Syria's early role as prime arms supply organiser has diminished and with this its usefulness to the West as a channel to the Iranian regime. Syria's position in Lebanon, too, has become weaker in contrast to the strengthening of Iran's influence. The importance of the Iranian-backed Hizbollah militia has grown considerably while the main (but not the only) Syrian militia - the Shia Amal - is finding itself more vulnerable particularly in face of cooperation between Hizbollah and Arafat's PLO forces which are being rebuilt in Lebanon and are already thought to number more than 50% of those ousted after the Israeli invasion in 1982. Syria's ability to impose its will in Lebanon has been substantially eroded.

That's not all that's troubling the Syrian regime. The economy is in profound crisis: the annual rate of inflation is about 25%; the currency was devalued in August; shortages of materials and spares are widespread; remittances from abroad are sharply down and revenues have been hit by the fall in oil prices. There is also widespread discontent among lower ranking army officers. Britain and the US are imposing political pressures

in the aftermath of the Hindawi affair, resulting in economic sanctions against Syria. The responsibility for bombings in France and Germany is being placed on Syria. (As an aside, it is worth noting that Assad would have little to gain from such acts; it is much more likely that they were carried out, for example, by Syrian anti-Assad factions trying to undermine his position.)

All in all, Syria's ability to maintain any independence in the face of Western pressure is being profoundly undermined.

The Volatility of the Middle East Situation

So, after the massive setback for the US and opportunity for Russia represented by the fall of the Shah, the Western bloc has recouped the situation to the point where the region as a whole is now under tighter American domination than ever before and where the two major countries that have retained some significant measure of independence - Syria and Iran - are clearly being ensnared in the American web. Against all the US gains pointed to above, Russian gains have been small - restricted to the opening up of diplomatic relations with Oman and the United Arab Emirates.

Given current Middle Eastern appearances, it might be difficult to appreciate just how far this American advance has gone. However, this reality is borne out by a couple of recent incidents. First, when the news was broken by a London newspaper that Israel's nuclear weapon production capacity was far greater than had previously been suspected, to the degree that it now ranks sixth in the world league table - there was only a muted response from most of the Arab world; Al Akhram, the major Egyptian daily only commented on it four days later. Only ten years ago such news would have set off a furore, today hardly a whimper. Similarly, the news that the Reagan administration has been arming the Iranians (which every regime in the Middle East already knew) brought only quiet sounds of embarrassment around the Gulf. The reason in both cases is that the domination of American imperialism is now so great that Israel and Iran are not now perceived as 'the enemies' in the way they were, say, ten and five years ago respectively.

This is not to say that Russia is inactive; in fact Russia has been trying hard to maintain some influence in the area. It is still a major arms supplier (and also sells arms to both Iran and Iraq, as does the West) but its unreliability in the face of American manoeuvres and its inability to provide sufficient economic inducements keep it in second place to the West. Nonetheless, it is still fighting and its considerable arms sales to Iran (direct and via North Korea and Czecho-

slovakia) are aimed to discourage Iran from being used as a base for guerrilla attacks against its hard-pressed army in Afghanistan.

In view of all these developments in the Middle East, why then did the recent 'scandal' about American arms shipments to Iran break out? The news about the McFarlane visit to Iran was published in a Beirut newspaper, Al-Shiraa, by the pro-Iranian faction backed by Mehdi Hashemi. Hashemi is closely allied to Montazeri who runs Tehran's Office for Spreading the Revolution and has the most vigorous anti-American position among the Iran regime's leading factions. His faction has been foremost in resisting the Rafsanjani faction's efforts (which have Khomeini's support) towards rapprochement with the US. Matters came to a head when Mehdi was arrested in Tehran in October and charged with treason - which crime seems to have been his resisting the Rafsanjani faction's demand that he arrange the release of hostages held by the Lebanese militias which he part-finances. The revelations about the McFarlane visit were made in retaliation, since the exposure of Rafsanjani's activity would weaken his position in the Iranian faction-fighting. Since Al-Shiraa is also closely linked to Syria, it is likely that these exposures were also seen as benefitting the Assad regime which is worried about the weakening of its position in the Lebanon and in regard to the changes in Iranian policies. Rafsanjani thus found the same old problem as did other factions before him which tried to deal with the US. Immediately after the Al-Shiraa story was published he had to cover his tracks by ridiculing and denouncing the American approaches. Khomeini was subsequently bound publicly to criticise those who had thought they could deal with the Americans. But his sternest warnings were given to those who tried to make political capital out of the affair. Thus the balance was struck in favour of the road to rapprochement.

The episode underlines again the volatility of the region and the labyrinthine political manoeuvring which goes on incessantly. It shows how even though the American offensive has met with considerable success, its plans can be upset under certain circumstances by the manipulations of relatively minor factions owing to the precarious balancing of the region's political forces. But the episode also underlines the importance of seeing the broader canvass so that such incidents can be viewed in perspective and not with the myopic vision the Western propaganda machine would like us to have.

The Western bourgeoisie as a whole has been considerably alarmed at the Reagan administration's activities. But the reason for the alarm has not been simply because of a temporary setback in developing relations with

Iran. The real reason lies much closer to home.

The Washington Witch Hunts

It's clear that the exposure of the McFarlane visit to Iran by Al-Shiraa and subsequently by Rafsanjani was not engineered by the US. The Reagan administration could not avoid admitting that this covert activity had been sanctioned by the White House. Reagan's first television statements on 13th November tried to minimise the amount of arms involved ("These modest deliveries, taken together, could easily fit into a single cargo plane"), and the implication was made that the concern of the US was to send positive signals to Iran which would be reciprocated by the freeing of hostages held in the Lebanon (but 'no exchange' remember). As the revelations oozed out, quickly to become a flood, so it became clear that some propulsion to the campaign for 'the truth' was being generated from inside the US state machine itself. It has also become clear that the target was not Reagan himself; as the campaign mounted, attention moved to the 'cowboys' in the White House basement and their covert operations which (of course) Reagan knew nothing about. Further, attention moved upstairs to find those who were really running the 'cowboys'. The campaign has moved on to the roles played by the most senior members of the state.

What is emerging from this is that there is a major struggle going on inside the American bureaucracy, with the Iranian revelations being used as a pivot. There are two main issues.

First is the issue of control over foreign policy. For some time the lines of responsibility for foreign policy in the Reagan administration have become blurred. From testimony to Senate Committees it appears that the Defense Department and the State Department have been losing authority to the National Security Council and the CIA. The disagreements are not so much about the fundamental content of foreign policy but about priorities and execution. For example, there is general agreement about the need to build bridges to the regime in Tehran, and especially to prepare for the Khomeini succession; but, on the other hand, there has been disagreement over aspects such as the covert arms deals originating directly from Washington itself after the summer of 1985. These tensions have been building up for some time - with Donald Regan (the White House Chief of Staff), Casey (the Director of the CIA) and Poindexter (the National Security Adviser) having growing influence over policy at the expense of Weinberger (Secretary of Defense), Schultz (Secretary of State) and Crowe (Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff).

Matters were brought to a head over the conduct of the Reagan/Gorbachev summit at Reykjavik in October. The announced 'failure'; then the volte-face by the US administration which proclaimed great successes, followed by admissions - provoked by Gorbachev's PR campaign - of Reagan's near-agreement to concede massive arms reductions, particularly concerning the European-based INF weapons: these were only the obvious signs of Reagan's incoherent performance at this summit which rang alarm bells about the conduct of US foreign policy at the highest levels of the American bureaucracy and throughout the NATO alliance (particularly among the Europeans who had been pointedly excluded from consultations). The most enormous PR operation was put into motion to cover over what was generally being regarded as a shambles. Reagan is not a Roosevelt or a Wilson; he is a puppet and is therefore easily pushed around by the strongest prevailing factional winds. The seriousness of the issues at Reykjavik and the obvious ineptitude of the advice Reagan was working from gave the impetus to a major faction fight by the traditional agencies for the reassertion of their control over foreign policy. At the time of writing this article, the political winds in Washington look to be blowing in favour of the traditional agencies - the State and Defense Departments particularly - and against the CIA and certain previously key members of the NSC. Schultz and Weinberger are winning out at the expense of Poindexter (and his predecessor, McFarlane), Casey and Regan.

The second issue concerns the 1988 presidential election. As we have often pointed out, the ruling class in the Western 'democracies' today has to employ the strategy of the 'left in opposition', the placing of its left political factions into an oppositional role, to speak in the name of the working class while derailing its struggle, against a right wing in government whose tasks are to impose massive austerity and oppressive measures. This strategy, which has been adhered to with few contingent exceptions right across the Western bloc, has to have at its apex in the US a right-wing regime. Yet after years of increasing austerity, enormous growth in unemployment and increasing exploitation, the Reagan administration (which in any case came to power on one of the lowest polls ever) has not left much of a basis on which to campaign for a new Republican presidency. This situation has only been emphasised by the outcome of the autumn mid-term election which has put both Houses of Congress, and the domination of many key Congressional committees, in the hands of the Democrats. With the next presidential campaign effectively beginning at the end of the present winter, it is important for the American ruling class to get its act together in dealing with the 'scandal'

over Iran. It has to be seen to 'cleanse' the present administration - so heads will roll. Like so many members of the other mafia, Poindexter and North are already pleading the Fifth Amendment. Given the present rivalries in the administration there will be no problem in arranging more departures - and Regan and Casey look set to follow. Reagan himself is unlikely to be a target - the problem posed here for the bourgeoisie is how to prepare an appropriate successor. What has to be arranged carefully is the theatre - and this will be based on the Congressional and other investigations to uncover 'the truth' about the Iran arms shipments and the funds sent to the Nicaraguan Contras. In this theatre the whole American propaganda machine will be geared up to praise the democratic process.

Additionally, the bourgeoisie will have to revitalise one of its key ideological attacks against the working class in the West and especially in the US - anti-terrorism. In the propaganda of the Western self-proclaimed 'democracies, the supposed fight against 'international state-sponsored terrorism' this issue has had several purposes:

- to rally the working class and the rest of the population to defend the nation from such attacks;
- to legitimise the use of force against opponents in foreign adventures;
- to accustom the proletariat to the use of massive state force to defend 'democracy' inside the state as well as outside.

The 'local' target in the anti-terrorism campaigns in different Western countries has varied - ETA in Spain, CCC in Belgium, AD in France, etc - but the underlying concerns has been the same. At a more general international level, however, there are targets for the bloc as a whole - and these have been primarily Libya, Syria and Iran. In regard to

these, most attention is given in the UK, Germany, France and - most of all - the US where the American bourgeoisie screams like atheistic ayatollahs at the working class to support them against 'international state-sponsored terrorism'. There is no doubt that the US ruling class has been embarrassed by the revelations from Al-Shiraa which have led to the exposure of some of their machinations with Iran. No sooner revealed, however, than shrouded in more mystification: did Reagan send the arms in exchange for hostages or not? ;who knew about the deals?; was the US duped by the Israelis?; what exactly was the Nicaraguan connection?; etc. The bourgeoisie can, however, deal with its embarrassment so as to strengthen 'real anti-terrorism', so the exposure of Western hypocrisy will not mean an end to the use of this ideology.

Whatever happens, it is important that the working class sees through this barrage of propaganda. If the American state apparatus is embarrassed, it is not because of any international outcry (from the Europeans or the Middle East) but because it has blunted the edge of an ideological weapon. If its Middle Eastern policy looks like a fiasco its offensive against Russia in the area nonetheless continues to advance. And if it takes up again the propaganda offensive against 'international terrorism' it is only trying to disguise the fact that with its class brethren all over the world, it is the personification of state terror against the working class and the non-exploiting classes of the world.

Marlowe

14 December 1986

DEBATES IN THE REVOLUTIONARY MILIEU

letter to the argentines

After a meeting in February 1986 in Uruguay, a group of militants from Argentina and Uruguay wrote an "International Proposal" to the international revolutionary milieu. They want to establish closer collaboration among existing revolutionary groups. According to these comrades, we have to work together to change the present state of weakness, dispersion and isolation of revolutionary forces, by fight-

ing the sectarianism and nationalism implicit in certain conceptions of international work. We are very sensitive to such appeals. The text only came to our attention via the International Review #46 of the I.C.C. and the Communiste #25 of the G.C.I. (Gauche Communiste Internationaliste). What follows is the answer we sent to the comrades of Argentina and Uruguay in November 1986.

12 November 1986

To Emancipation Obrera
and
Militancia Clasista Revolucionaria

Dear comrades,

We have received your 'International Proposal' of February 1986. We were very encouraged to read about the appearance of your groups, fighting to establish a proletarian political presence in Argentina and Uruguay. Despite the repression and isolation you describe, your groups emerged during the Falklands War to make a proletarian internationalist intervention. Your efforts to break with leftism, to re-examine the lessons of the workers' movement, to intervene in today's struggles, show the vitality of the international working class in our time. We are looking forward to reading your publications very much. (We can read Spanish but we cannot write it.) We hope that you will be able to read the four issues of our press that we sent in English and in French via the ICC address under separate cover. We hope that this will be the beginning of a correspondence and we are very anxious to hear about the evolution of your political positions and also about the workers' struggles in Argentina and Uruguay since, as you point out, news of workers' struggles is more often than not 'blacked out' in the capitalist press.

We agree with your 'International Proposal' on the need for regroupment among revolutionary forces, on the desire to see "a movement towards concretising proletarian internationalism rather than leaving it as a pompous, empty phrase". When some of our members began the group 'Internationalism' in New York in 1970, we also felt the need to reach out to revolutionaries in the rest of the world (particularly in Europe at that time) by proposing an International Correspondence Network. Later, when we were part of the ICC delegation to the International Conferences with Battaglia Comunista, the Communist Workers' Organisation and others, we fought as hard as we could for fraternal confrontation of political positions, in favour of making joint political statements on major issues where there was agreement (which was not implemented because other groups did not agree) and for keeping the Conference alive as a place where communication and political evolution could take place, not only for the direct participants but for other groups which would emerge.

The International Conferences broke down in the early '80s. Last year, we ourselves were hounded out of the ICC and expelled at their Sixth Congress. You can just imagine how strongly we feel about sectarianism, how much

cant we have heard about regroupment in public while seeing debates stifled inside the organisation. We agree on the weaknesses of the present revolutionary milieu and we have seen these weaknesses perpetuate and exacerbate 'rivalries' even in relation to newly emerging groups where some organisations seem to consider the establishment of fiefdoms as working towards regroupment. We have also had to deal with the impact of these weaknesses on our own group.

Thus, against the backdrop of these past twenty years of rising class struggle there has been, along with the positive evolution of the revolutionary milieu following the impact of the struggles in the late '60s and '70s, a crisis of the existing revolutionary organisations in the '80s. The breakdown of the International Conferences, the disintegration of the International Communist Party (Programme Communiste) and the political degeneration of the International Communist Current are symptoms of this crisis.

What can be done about this crisis? Some comrades simply refuse to talk about or acknowledge the crisis in the milieu and talk only about the upsurge in class struggle. In effect, they deny reality because their grasp of the period is so simplistic that anything difficult or contradictory has to be denied in favour of voluntarism and activism. Others conclude that all is pessimistically black because they see the crisis in the milieu as a static, eternal curse which they can do nothing about. They deny the upsurge in class struggle and denigrate the proletariat's efforts.

In fact, the historic upsurge in class struggle is a reality and these new generations of workers are hitting back against the effects of the crisis of the capitalist system and taking the long and difficult road towards class conscious, revolutionary activity. But just as the working class encounters great problems in confronting the capitalist class enemy so, too, the revolutionary milieu suffers from the weight of the past, the defeats of the counter-revolutionary period, the isolation from the working class that the decadence of capitalism has created (with, among other things, the passage of the permanent organs of the class such as the unions into the capitalist camp). The state capitalist period has posed new questions that demand a development of marxism in our time.

Today's programmatic divergences among revolutionary groups and the sectarianism that masks the inability to deal fruitfully with the need for political confrontation on these issues as well as the need to go further and enrich marxist theory, are a crystallisation of the difficulties the proletariat encoun-

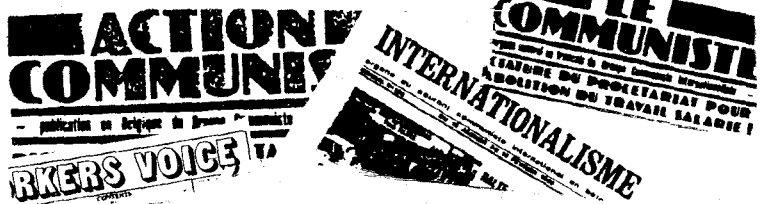
ters and the need for theory and practice to evolve.

In the face of these difficulties, we can be tempted to try to find short-cuts: to go 'directly to practice' and to think that any discussion of programmatic positions is just a cover-up for sectarianism. In fact, there can be no separation of theory and practice and it is impossible to place oneself 'above' political divergences. Ignoring the impact of these divergences can compromise any working together of revolutionary forces. After all, today all the groups in the revolutionary milieu are part of the class combats and intervene in them. But this intervention is different, sometimes a lot different, depending on the analysis of each group (for example, the support or rejection of 'Komala' in the Iran/Iraq war; some groups like the International Bureau for the Revolutionary Party - Battaglia and the CWO - were giving support to this Kurdish nationalist proto-state gang thereby compromising their position on the war). The content of intervention can even go in opposite directions according to how organisations understand the role of revolutionaries.

So, where does this leave us? Something must be done. And indeed there have been some recent efforts: in Britain during the miners' strike, in Italy among some revolutionary groups there have been attempts to hold joint public meetings together to clarify the main points of revolutionary intervention and this means not just supporting workers' struggles but confronting our weaknesses and differences. Some groups hold regular public meetings and send delegations to meetings of others, polemicise in their publications, etc. This is not enough, to be sure, but until there is a significant event in class struggle that can catalyse the revolutionary milieu as it exists today, or until there is an influx of new blood into the revolutionary movement, it is difficult to see the Conferences being renewed.

We agree with your proposals for exchange of publications, correspondence and exchange of information. We also agree with your desire to find criteria to delimit the revolutionary camp so that the common work you propose does not become unprincipled amalgams. But within this framework, before regroupment can take place, there has to be international discussion leading to convergent perspectives and programmes. Before there can be common work together (such as leaflets on major events which has taken place in the past), there has to be contact and communication among groups and knowledge of each others' positions. For example: what is the perspective for the working class in South Africa? What is the meaning of the mass strike in our period as opposed to sectoral struggles? Before we have got to know our respective

positions, our political evolution and the nature of our intervention, a joint magazine would be politically premature and technically difficult if not impossible.



What do you think of the criteria for defining the political milieu used at the International Conferences in the late '70s? Have you received copies of the joint publications of that time? We found your criteria more detailed on certain points. But as you can see from reading the revolutionary press today, some other issues have to be addressed:

- Terrorism: can 'proletarian violence' be interpreted as support for certain terrorist activities? Terrorism in our view was originally an expression of petty-bourgeois revolt but which has become more and more a weapon of the capitalist states or proto-states and the answer to this question is no.

- Elections: when some of us first wrote a platform, we did not include a position on this question because we thought it was 'obvious' that parliamentarism was no longer a fruitful terrain for working class struggle in the era of state capitalism. When we later learned that the ICP (Programma), who claim to be the heirs of the Abstentionist Faction in the Third International, participated in elections after World War II and in referenda in recent years, for 'tactical' reasons, we understood the need to explicitly state this position.

- Workers' Councils: although you reject the 'cadre building', etc from leftism, how do you see the working class struggle for power? We feel that marxist theory must go beyond the errors of the past to define a new role for the revolutionary party within the workers' councils, with the councils acting as the dictatorship of the proletariat. How do you situate your efforts in the context of the history of the workers' movement: particularly in relation to the Russian revolution, the proletarian nature of the Bolshevik Party but also the degeneration of this revolution and this party?

We look forward to hearing from you soon and we will certainly do our best to maintain contact, discussion and exchanges.

With communist greetings,

Internationalist Perspective

J.A.

kamunist kranti and the decadence of capitalism

We welcome the appearance of a new revolutionary group in India - Kamunist Kranti whose first issue was published in July 1986.

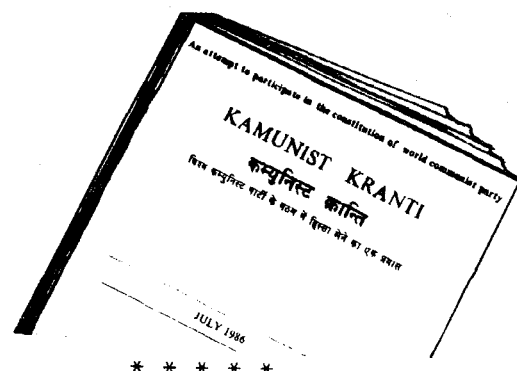
Because the international revolutionary movement today remains very weak and is all too fragmented - not only politically and organisationally, but even at the level of having regular contact - this only makes the widest possible discussion and clarification across the whole milieu an even more urgent necessity. Contacts between the milieu in India and in Western countries have been growing, albeit slowly, over the past few years, but the fruit of this contact has not been opened up particularly well to the milieu as a whole since discussion has been largely confined to correspondence and has not really developed in the revolutionary press. We hope that the development of discussion in the press will be given a far higher priority by the revolutionary milieu as a whole in future.

This situation makes the first issue of Kamunist Kranti especially welcome because the comrades have printed the contents in both Hindi and English, thus making their positions accessible to a high proportion of the international milieu. We hope the comrades can continue this effort and help provide a bridge across the linguistic divides which are so problematic for the milieu.

The first issue contains two texts: 'Theses' and 'Background'. In these the present positions of the group and its evolution are described, including how contact with the ICC helped them break with their maoist past through being forced to confront the bourgeois nature of their framework and positions on trade unions, parliament and national liberation, etc.

A key concern of this group has been to get to grips with the whole issue of capitalist decadence which provides the theoretical framework for grasping the evolution of capitalism during this century. Below, we publish an extract on this issue from their 'Background' text followed by our reply.

Kamunist Kranti's address is given at the end of this article.



FROM KAMUNIST KRANTI'S 'BACKGROUND' TEXT

We made attempts to open up debate on these questions in India and for clarification we raised these critical questions on the Decadence pamphlet etc in our letter of 31.3.85 to the ICC:-

"4(a) How will reconstruction of a destroyed country on a capitalist basis help the realization of surplus value for capitalisation? Since the problem of outlets is fundamentally the problem of non-capitalist outlets, trade on inter-capitalist basis does not help

(b) How does armaments economy provide an outlet for the capitalization of surplus value? I could not understand this point in (Rosa Luxemburg's) 'Accumulation' also

(c) Corroding remaining non-capitalist markets and destroying ever larger amounts of surplus value, 'capitalism continues to survive and grow'. The non-capitalist sectors also provide larger outlets by using newer techniques and so are 'sufficient' at times when a number of contestants for them are eliminated through war.

Hence, economic expansion is not on the basis of reconstruction and armaments. They are no 'temporary' outlets, no 'palliatives'. Economic expansion that takes place is on the basis of eating up of non-capitalist sectors which also increase their capacity using new technology - e.g. changes in peasant economy. World Bank is taking special interest in increasing production in the non-capitalist sectors through use of new technology in countries like India.

.....
6. Decadence from 1914? Why not from around 1900? Crisis-war-reconstruction cycle: beginning of decadence around 1900. 1914 is not the beginning of decadence but the culmination of the first great crisis of the decadent phase.

7. Regarding 'End of the Percentage Growth of Working Class in Society' the argumentation looks dubious.
1850 - 10%, 1914 - 30%, Today - ?

'Effective' integration of Asia-Africa-Latin America's population has taken place well inside twentieth century. The growing speed of destruction of pre-capitalist formations is greatly increasing working class population.

Take the case of China. Hasn't the % of working class in the population there increased after 1950? And increased substantially.

Or say, in Russia after 1917?
And in India after 1947?

.... overall in the population the % of the working class is certainly increasing.

8. Colonial/semi-colonial/third world/-neo-colonial/non-capitalist markets' importance as outlets after WWII has grown although in percentage terms in world trade it declined. This contradictory behaviour follows from the development of capital's organic composition inter-capitalist exchange increases in size/proportion but the importance of exchange between capitalist and non-capitalist sectors also increases The insufficiency of third world market does not decrease its importance but increases it.

.....
10. The question is not whether national liberation can be successful or not. For communists the prime consideration was and is whether these movements help or hinder the development of proletarian revolution. All national liberation struggles bring to the forefront the question of national development. In capitalism's decadent phase, socialist revolution is on history's agenda. Thus today the destruction of nations is on the proletariat's agenda, whereas all national liberation movements are means to national development. So they all hinder the development of socialist revolution. Relatively rapid developments of successful national liberation's state capitalist factions add strength to the national development mystification.

If we look at these developments through 'Russian', 'Chinese' or 'Indian' eyes (as

Lenin sometimes did) we certainly find state capitalism/national liberation a step forward in social development in the concerned area. But from the viewpoint of the working class today, the reactionary character of national liberation/national development is obvious. The working class is the sacrificial goat for national development."

The ICC replied in May '85 to our above quoted letter. But instead of clarifying the questions, the answer gave rise to more critical questions. We looked forward to face to face discussions with an ICC representative who was to visit India. The ICC representative expressed his inability to discuss the basic propositions of the ICC's analyses, and discussions with him worried us about the ICC. In the context of this early-July meeting and ICC's May-reply, we wrote to the ICC on 15th July '85 -

"I. Rosa's analysis is not just some analysis. It constitutes the point of departure for communist practice today.

Marx was able to analyse WHAT IS CAPITALISM at its basic fundamentals only partially. His works will always constitute great milestones in the history of proletarian consciousness. But his works also contain wrong formulations which became the basis for the development of the main trend in the Second International: Anarchy/disproportions in the two departments is the basis of crises in capitalism which were hence, taken as periodic crises. The Social Democratic spectrum from Bernstein to Bukharin with all their quarrels have this in common. State capitalism is the goal of Bernstein-Kautsky-Lenin-Bukharin conception of what capitalism is.

Rosa Luxemburg's analysis of WHAT IS CAPITALISM is partly based on the analysis of Marx and partly critical of him. It is surprising when one finds the ICC trying to justify Rosa in the WORDS of Marx. This religious attitude is foreign to the proletarian/marxist method. Rosa's critics were right to call her 'Anti-Marx' but she was not anti-marxist if marxism is to be the name given to the expressions of proletarian consciousness. Her opponents were 'Pro-Marx' but anti-marxists.

Dear comrades, Rosa's analysis is a 'new theory'. It constitutes the other leg of proletarian ideology. One leg, which was given concrete shape by Marx, while very-very important, still left the proletariat lame and this weakness in proletarian ideology was to lead to its succumbing to the state-capitalist ideology of capital. What Lenin and others thought of themselves is not important.

Lenin and Luxemburg are now part of history but we have to struggle in the present with

an orientation to the future. And it is here that, in my opinion, the analysis of Rosa constitutes the basis for revolutionary/communist practice today

I am aware of the deadweight of Social Democracy on her. Most of her other writings can be used against the proletariat by the extreme left of the bourgeois spectrum today. But, despite all the shortcomings that were displayed by Rosa, her analysis in 'The Accumulation of Capital' constitutes a point of departure for communist practice today. And despite all his strong points, Lenin's analysis in 'Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism' constitutes the basis for the practice of bourgeois left and hence cannot constitute a point of departure for communist practice today. Discussions of details of the past are necessary but only in the light of this fundamental difference....

In my opinion comrades, as Marx's Capital constituted the essential basis for revolutionary organisations of the past century, The Accumulation of Capital has the same role today. Without Capital AND The Accumulation of Capital no basis can be constituted for revolutionary work today and hence, organisations which do not base themselves on both of them can be anything but communist/revolutionary today

II. And now your letter of 14th May

1 (a and b) You say: "thus 'third world' or 'colonial' and 'semi-colonial' does not necessarily mean the same as 'third buyers', since the capitalist relationship is now the dominant one in these areas as well".

There is generalised commodity production in these areas as well. That is good as far as it goes BUT generalised commodity production on capitalist basis is not the overwhelming system of production in these areas as it is in, say Europe. [It would be interesting to know the weightage of commodities produced by personal/family labour, i.e. on non-capitalistic basis in countries like France and Italy.] A substantial part of the commodities produced in the so-called third world is produced on a non-capitalistic basis. And it is this part of the commodities that constitutes the outlet for the realization of surplus-value which is capitalised. To provoke you, I would say that there is generalised commodity production in India and of the total commodities produced, around 40% are produced on non-capitalistic basis. [Most of the foodgrains, milk, vegetables, 1/3 of cloth]

.... since you agree that reconstruction and armaments do not constitute an outlet for surplus-value realization for capital accumu-

lation [you have taken contrary position to the Decadence pamphlet with regard to reconstruction. As to armaments, there is duality in that pamphlet: initially it takes armaments as an outlet and in the last portion demolishes this position], then the question is: how is accumulation taking place? If I have not misunderstood you, to get out of this difficulty you seem to have taken the position that accumulation is not taking place!

Credit system, fictitious capital etc are of course there but that is not the basic point. The basic thing is that capital has not stopped growing, accumulation is taking place. the question is HOW?

..... I am not overstating the function of these so-called third world countries for capital. If Rosa's analysis is correct, non-capitalistic production ALONE realizes that part of surplus-value which is to be capitalised and so the importance of non-capitalistic outlets for capital will continue to increase. This, comrades, is the essential.

.....

1 (d). The 'date', comrades is not decided by the moment when revolutionaries become clear about a thing. While 'the subjective consciousness of the proletariat is also a factor in reality itself', in historical materialist analysis, past events are decided by a 'purely retrospective and objectivist view' of the phenomena in the light of material conditions of production Besides, it is not only social consciousness that lags behind social reality, it is also not infrequent for revolutionary consciousness to lag behind social reality. In my opinion, the method you have adopted on such questions will, by its loosening of the materialist determination with admixtures of subjective factors, lead to confusions rather than clarifications

Does workers participation (voluntary) make any movement proletarian? The proletariat pays with its blood for its mistakes and shortcomings

Some comments on the 'vexed question of deciding the point at which former proletarian parties pass once and for all into the enemy camp'. Decisiveness in organisational break with opportunism is life and death question for revolutionaries. The attitude of Lenin should be the guide in this. Rosa's attitude on this question leads to surrendering revolutionary opportunities. This attitude verges on criminality acts like Liebknecht's vote for war credits by bowing to 'majority' decision. Rosa's positions since 1898 loudly demand a series of breaks with Bernstein-

Kautsky et al., the breaks she did not make. Lenin's series of breaks laid the foundation for October

It is only by viewing the past phenomena retrospectively that we can draw lessons for revolutionary practice today. What should have been the revolutionaries' position then is not to denigrate the revolutionaries of the past but to be ruthless towards our own shortcomings, and it is necessary

1 (e) Your comment regarding the asiatic mode is surprising in history decadence is not a phenomena of Ancient Rome and then Late European feudalism alone just as historical materialist development of society is not a European phenomena. What is understandable in Marx due to the enormity of the work and the lack of information will simply not do today. The history of eastern societies is NOT 'cyclical history' as you say in the footsteps of Marx. If I may use the term, it is helical like the history of all societies that had reached the stage of class differentiation. When one looks at the very long (in contrast to European) periods of slave-owning and feudal societies on the Indian subcontinent and the long periods that looked 'cyclical' and Marx, to get over the difficulty, coined the term 'Asiatic Mode', one is struck by the clarity that is brought in this jumbled history by the concept of decadence. It is in this context, in its general application and clarifying role that the concept of decadence is a major development in the expression of proletarian consciousness. Your offhand rejection of the question to me seems that you do not attach the importance to your own conception that it deserves.

On the national question

..... the question for us is not at all of the possibility or impossibility of national liberation. The question rather is whether or not these movements help or hinder the development of proletarian revolution

..... ALL national movements (including those of the type 'Save Poland', 'Save America', etc) are counter-revolutionary because today (i.e. in the decadent phase of capitalism) they ALL hinder the development of proletarian revolution.

REPLY TO KAMUNIST KRANTI

1 December 1986

Dear comrades,

In this letter we want to respond to your comments on the decadence of capitalism contained in Kamunist Kranti 1. Before dealing with your criticisms of the ICC (pp 8 - 12), we want to constitute a clear framework for what we regard as a vital discussion. The issue that pre-occupied Rosa Luxemburg in The Accumulation of Capital and in the Anti-

Critique was the objective limits to the unfettered development of capitalism as a mode of production, the insurmountable contradictions which condemned capitalism to a permanent crisis and which constituted the objective basis for the proletarian revolution. At a somewhat later date, this same issue pre-occupied Fritz Sternberg, Henryk Grossman and Amadeo Bordiga (though Bordiga explicitly rejected a concept of 'decadence', his analysis in fact does lead to a conception of 'senile capitalism'). Whatever one may think of the several responses to the question of the economic bases of the decadence of capitalism - and this is an issue we ought to discuss in future letters - there is another issue which is no less important for Marxists today: how has it been possible for capitalism to survive in a period of decadence, of permanent crisis? It is clear that the onset of the permanent crisis does not result in some sort of automatic collapse of capitalism. In the absence, or defeat, of a proletarian revolution, the capitalist mode of production survives - though at the cost of a structural transformation which involves considerable changes in the operation of the capitalist law of value, and a barbarisation and totalitarianisation of every aspect of life. It is obvious that Luxemburg's writings provide no real account of how capitalism survives in its decadent phase; nor could they, given the historical moment in which she wrote. In that sense, Marxists, just as they must go beyond Marx (though on the basis of Capital) to grasp the economic causes of capitalist decadence, must go beyond Luxemburg to grasp the mode of survival of capitalism in its phase of permanent crisis. The key to understanding this phenomenon is the recognition of state capitalism as the universal tendency of capitalism in its decadent phase. It seems that you too recognise state capitalism as the key "to providing the framework for grasping the dynamics of capital" (KK1, p 13). However, most of the proletarian political milieu today either rejects the very concept of state capitalism (Mattick and the council communists who follow his analysis, Bordiga and the several groups of the Italian left) or see state capitalism as a phenomenon limited to the Stalinist regimes and the 'third world', i.e. as a product of capitalist backwardness or late development (Battaglia Comunista/ The IBRP). Even the few groups which recognise state capitalism as a universal tendency (the FOR, the ICC) have in different ways failed to give a coherent account of this phenomenon and seem uninterested in the theoretical deepening of this position - which, for us, is the indispensable pre-condition for real Marxist theory-practice in this epoch. It is for that reason that our Fraction is now engaged in a thorough discussion of state capitalism, which we shall begin to publish in coming issues of IP. Inasmuch as your own theoretical concerns

as revolutionary Marxists seem to parallel ours on this issue, the basis for a frank and open debate is clearly present. It is precisely such a debate, both within and between revolutionary organisations, that is a critical necessity today.

With this overall framework in mind, we can now turn to the specific points you raise in your correspondence with the ICC.

The question of the role that reconstruction plays in decadent capitalism must be situated on two distinct levels: in terms of individual capital entities (national capitals or imperialist blocs); in terms of global capital. The liquidation of capitalist rivals/-competitors, the conquest of the markets represented by them and their colonies (de jure or de facto colonies), the access to the cheap raw materials and/or cheap labour of the defeated enemy and its colonies, and even plunder, whether on an intra-capitalist basis or involving non-capitalist outlets, can temporarily overcome the problems of saturated markets and/or the fall in the rate of profit for individual capitalist entities (the winners in the inter-imperialist butchery). The destruction of capital values on a massive scale (which is the hallmark of inter-imperialist war in economic terms) can temporarily relieve the problem of over-accumulation, while the redivision of the world market and the very organisation of the war economy itself can facilitate the integration of the remaining non-capitalist sectors and areas into the cycle of capitalist production itself - all this at the level of global capital. It is these phenomena which characterised the periods of reconstruction after the First and Second World Wars.

Having said this, it is important to recognise that the ICC has never provided a coherent or consistent account of reconstruction, its economic bases and the role it has played in the survival of decadent capitalism. Indeed, the GCF in the late 1940s and early 1950s (from which the ICC bases its own programmatic origins) explicitly denied the very possibility of a phase of reconstruction after World War II, insisting rather on the imminent outbreak of a third world war due to the economic impasse of capitalism. Only in the late 1960s did the comrades who later constituted the ICC begin to talk about 'reconstruction', and then only to point to the end of this phase and the reappearance of the open crisis, without ever providing a theoretically clear account of the mechanism which it was claimed had made possible a 20-year 'boom'. The lack of interest in the debate and discussion which the issue of reconstruction demands, is symptomatic of the degeneration of the ICC (and indeed of the crisis of the whole revolutionary milieu).

One of the tasks of our Fraction is to initiate just such a discussion and to follow it through, no matter how many cherished 'theories' are overturned. Only in that way will the obvious theoretical shortcomings of the proletarian milieu be overcome and the bases for Marxist theory-practice firmly established.

On the question of armaments production as a field of accumulation, like you, our Fraction rejects Luxemburg's position. Apart from that portion of armaments production 'paid for' out of the 'wealth' of strata not involved in specifically capitalist production and taxed away by the state, which surely covers only a minuscule part of the armaments bill of decadent capitalism, there can be no question of militarisation as a direct field of accumulation. Rather, armaments production - however necessary for decadent capitalism with a view to inter-imperialist war - constitutes a sterilisation of value, and is unproductive in value terms.

On the famous question of 1914 as the point from which to mark the decadence of capitalism, the issue is certainly not one of a precise date when an economic system passed from its ascendant to its decadent phase: the very nature of the process of history excludes such schemata, and the 'beginnings' of decadence, its first manifestations, were certainly apparent from around 1900. Nonetheless 1914 is the decisive point precisely because POLITICALLY it marks the moment when objectively the class line is unequivocally transformed, however difficult it was for revolutionaries at the time to subjectively grasp this fact. Therefore, if in economic terms 1914 is "the culmination of the first great crisis of the decadent phase", as you say, it nevertheless marks THE moment of capitalism's definitive entrance into decadence by virtue of the fact that with the outbreak of the inter-imperialist carnage the conditions of proletarian class struggle were irrevocably transformed.

The issue of the "percentage growth of the working class in society" is linked to the overall, general conditions of the capitalist accumulation process. To say, as both the ICC and we do, that the exponential growth of the proletariat as a percentage of the active population - which characterised the ascendant phase of capitalism - has come to an end since roughly 1914 does not exclude a considerable increase in the percentage of the working class of many countries, e.g. Brazil, China, India, since that time. However, even in the 'third world' countries where a significant industrial development has taken place since World War II, there has also been a vast increase of the mass of unemployed or underemployed, of the inhabitants of the

shanty towns which surround the great urban complexes. The rapid growth of this mass of unemployed human beings, dispossessed from the land by the inexorable capitalisation of agriculture or condemned to economic ruin by the destruction of village handicraft production, bears witness to the complete inability of capitalism in its decadent phase to profitably exploit a huge pool of potential wage-slaves which the very development of capitalism has created. The phenomenon of de-industrialisation in the heartlands of the advanced capitalist countries (one need only think of the English midlands or the American mid-west) and the shrinking percentage of the working class population in these countries is a further proof that from a condition for the development of man's productive forces capitalism in its decadent phase has become the greatest obstacle to this very development.

It is certainly true that non-capitalist markets have continued to play an important role in the metabolism of capitalism in its decadent phase (and even in the period after World War II). Nonetheless, as you yourselves recognise, these markets are insufficient to allow capital to escape its permanent crisis. The non-capitalist markets which - again, as you yourselves recognise - have continually shrunk as a percentage of world trade, can only realise a fraction of the capitalisable portion of the surplus value which capital extracts from the proletariat. In that sense, the survival of decadent capitalism must not be sought in the continued existence of non-capitalist strata.

In treating the national question, you assert that it is because national liberation struggles "hinder the development of socialist revolution", and not because of their inability to achieve genuine independence or assure real development, that they must be denounced. In short, while acknowledging the possibility of 'national development' in decadent capitalism you condemn it because "today the destruction of nations is on the proletariat's agenda". But why is the destruction of nations on the proletariat's agenda today, whereas in the 18th and 19th cen-

turies it was the formation of nations which was progressive? Surely the reason is that in the ascendant phase of capitalism the nation state was the necessary framework for the development of the productive forces, and therefore of the objective conditions for the proletarian revolution, whereas in the decadent phase of capitalism the nation state is an obstacle to the development of the productive forces. If national development of the kind experienced, for example, by Germany after 1870 was possible today; if the nation state assured the exponential growth of the productive forces as it did in ascendant capitalism, then the destruction of nations would not be on the historical agenda today - however cruelly the capitalist system treated its wage slaves (although the bitter struggle against that treatment would be). The limited development and limited margin of manoeuvre between the two imperialist blocs that a few countries have today is in stark contrast to the dynamic growth and impetuous formation of new imperialist constellations that characterised the period before 1914, and is fully consistent with a conception that is based on the objective impossibility of national liberation/national development in decadent capitalism.

We are aware that a letter such as this can do no more than open a discussion between us. We look forward to your response, which we will try to promptly answer.

Fraternally,

MacIntosh

* * * * *

Note

The contact address for Kamunist Kranti is:

BHUPENDER SINGH
679 JAWAHAR COLONY
NIT FARIDABAD 12100
INDIA

public meetings

NEW YORK (U.S.A.) : "Class Consciousness, the Arm of the Proletariat"
Friday Feb. 27, 1987
7:30 pm
New York Marxist School
151 West 19th St, N.Y.

PARIS (FRANCE) : "Perspectives of Class Struggle and the Tasks of Revolutionaries"
Saturday March 7, 1987
3 pm Couvent St Jacques
20 rue des Tanneries
Paris 13

LONDON (BRITAIN) : For information about our public meeting in London, write to our Post Office Box



The ICC And Centrism

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

We are publishing here the second part of the article that appeared in I.P.#4. In the first part of this contribution, we showed how the International Communist Current (ICC) made an abrupt about-face on its previous position on the question of "centrism" in the proletarian movement. This second part tries to expand the debate onto a historical level. Essentially, it shows how the notion of "centrism" was violently denounced by the clearest revolutionary elements in the Third International. It also shows the unfortunately active role this concept played in the defeat of the first revolutionary wave at the beginning of this century.

Our insistence in printing this text is not fortuitous. It expresses our desire to sensitize the revolutionary milieu and everyone interested in the working class movement to a question that concerns vital aspects of the revolutionary movement, yesterday, today and tomorrow.

In the second part of this text I want to try to synthesise the fundamental basis on which the left communist delegates fought against this policy, fought tooth and nail against it at the price of the worst sort of sarcasms (they shouted back that insults were the weapons of those who had no arguments). The turning point in relation to centrism happened at the Communist International's Second Congress where the left fought against the IDENTICAL ARGUMENTS now used by the majority of the organisation to re-introduce centrism into the proletarian camp. Since Marx, everyone knows that repetitions in history are farces but the least we can say is that our present majority can't even crawl its way up to the level of the passionate debates of the CI. If the majority of the CI made a mistake, they did it at least with a certain intelligence. This unfortunately cannot be said for those who persist in these errors today.

"In the Manifesto of the First, founding Congress of the CI it is said that it was necessary to fight centrism, which was correctly held to be the most dangerous tendency in the socialist movement. This Manifesto demanded a complete break with centrism and

the formation of purely communist groups and parties in every country. It is in my opinion characteristic that the Second Congress of the CI adopts a different standpoint on how to approach the centre. The very fact that the possibility is conceded of accepting certain centrist elements into the CI marks the beginning of negotiations with the reformists and the centrists. In the proposed Theses the right wing of the Italian Socialist Party, whose representative is Turati, is condemned on one hand but on the other a turn is made towards centrist parties such as, for example, the USPD and the French Socialist Party. In this I see a contradiction." (Delegate Guilbeaux, Second Congress, 29th July, sixth session)

To speak of regression on the question of centrism already at the Second Congress is, therefore, hardly a heresy. More than that: the intense fight carried on by many delegates from all countries at the Second Congress AGAINST THIS WHOLE NEW POLICY OF CONCESSIONS (leading to pure and simple fusion) to organisations claiming to be 'centrist but at the same time revolutionary, we swear it'. The proletarian label they cynically gave themselves was written in the blood of the workers they systematically sent to defeat. This combat by the left was not, as the majority of the ICC claims now, the result of a 'misplaced purism' or of 'petty bourgeois sectarianism' but the fruit of the lessons drawn by these revolutionaries from the EXPERIENCE of the working class in its first assault against the capitalist state. Their positions were nourished from practice itself, from 'objective' facts, and particularly on the question of centrism. This is why the left delegates violently opposed all the false analyses and tactics towards centrism developed at this Congress. For them, the 'oaths of allegiance to the proletarian cause' on the lips of the centrists were just so much garbage. Just Judas oaths, cried the delegates of the left. The facts, class struggle, speak for themselves. Even Zinoviev, the biggest supporter of the rapprochement with the centrists, was forced to admit this, but without drawing all the necessary conclusions:

"Remember how it was. The Communist Party of Hungary made it very easy for the Social Democrats to be affiliated. It was done in the turn of a hand The Hungarian Party called itself 'Socialist-Communist'. Our Executive was guilty of weakness and agreed to the fusion of the parties. We told each other it did not matter what they called themselves but it turned out later that it was a question of HISTORICAL IMPORTANCE and the fact that the Communists unfortunately took the greater part of the old social democrats into their own house, and that these gentlemen went over to the bourgeoisie at the decisive hour, perhaps determined fifty percent of the development of the Soviet Republic in Hungary But let us not forget the Hungarian example. This lesson has cost the working class of Hungary and of the whole world enough sacrifice to know that if you give reformism a little finger it will take your whole hand and later your head and in the end it will destroy you completely."
(Second Congress: Zinoviev's report, sixth session)

It was precisely the 'forgetting' of the Hungarian experience which sanctioned the tactics decided on at the Second Congress. And this 'forgetting' made Zinoviev's 'prediction' come true: the rapprochement with the centrists in the context of the extreme immediatism which characterised this Congress opened the road to the rapid degeneration of the young communist organisation (a few years were, unfortunately, enough).

There is not enough room here to develop how concretely AT EVERY MOMENT, EVERYWHERE AND AT ALL LEVELS the confusions of revolutionaries on centrism systematically BROKE the authentic revolutionary elan of the proletariat (the elan that today we also are calling 'centrist' and thus blurring the entire issue). Revolutionaries' misplaced confidence in these organisations expressed an inability to understand that the only way to really ripen a revolutionary wave of the class was to stand firm even at the risk of being a minority for as long as need be. Their insufficient understanding of the principled break with counter-revolutionary organisations all of this confusion paralysed, sterilised, killed the proletarian dynamic of the '20s. This can be summarised by saying: the history of the defeat of the German revolution expresses, among other things, the history of the political inadequacies of revolutionaries in relation to 'centrism', inadequacies which would deprive the proletariat of an authentic revolutionary avant-garde:

- the KP's break with the 'centrist' apparatus of the USPD was too long delayed, in the name of illusions about a possible reconquest

of bourgeois organisations controlling the working classes. This delay was criticised by the German comrades themselves in 1919 only to fall back into the same error, with the CI, of a possible fusion with the USPD at Halle in 1920;

- the systematic tactic of rapprochement between communists and 'centrists', to 'remain with the masses', at every crucial moment of the revolutionary movement and the SYSTEMATIC 'betrayals' of these 'centrists' blocked revolutionary energies. Comrades, there is not one little example in objective reality which shows any genuine working class policy on the part of 'centrist' organisations.

It is this OBJECTIVELY COUNTER-REVOLUTIONARY character, this centrist rot, that the Left denounced to try to save the proletarian camp:

"If I understand the proposal correctly, comrades, the USPD and the French Socialist Party are to be invited to our Commission on affiliation to the Communist International. I must say that I cannot understand this and that on behalf of my party I declare myself against.

"We have already proposed on the Executive that these two parties should not be allowed into the Congress at all because they are not Communist parties. My party is of the opinion that we should not negotiate at all with the USPD, with a party that is now sitting in the Praesidium of the Reichstag, that is to say, with a governing party. In our opinion, one cannot at all negotiate with such a party."
(Wijnkoop, sixth session)

But listen to the delegate Goldenberg who expressed, more clearly than anyone else, the reasons for an opposition in principle to any analysis trying to reintegrate 'centrism' into the ranks of the workers' movement:

"When we supporters of the Communist International are asked why we do not remain in the Socialist Party, we reply: 'The war has split the international proletariat into two opposed camps, into the counter-revolutionary camp on the one hand, which is represented by the labour aristocracy, and into the revolutionary camp on the other. These two factions also existed before the war in the framework of the individual national parties. The war has shown that there is no possibility of bringing about a reconciliation of these two factions. Their struggle is expressed, now, after the war, no longer in factional strife but in a struggle that is waged with weapons in hand. In comrade Lenin's words, the weapon of criticism has made way for criticism by weapons. One of these two opposed factions has

made common cause with the bourgeoisie, the other has shown itself to be the real representative of the revolutionary proletariat. We stand by the latter.

"The Theses proposed by comrade Zinoviev enumerate a series of conditions the fulfilment of which will enable the socialist parties, the so-called 'centrists', to enter the CI. I cannot agree with this procedure.

"For my part, I shall not vote for comrade Zinoviev's Theses because it seems to me that they contain a great error in method. I will try to portray this false method briefly.

"The Communist International, an international organisation of the revolutionary proletariat, which is supposed to consist solely and alone of representatives of the revolutionary proletariat of every country, cannot tolerate in its midst non-communist elements who have proved themselves to be counter-revolutionary elements, the agents of the bourgeoisie

"I declare that this way of proceeding will only increase the confusion that already reigns in these parties. I should like to speak here particularly about the French Socialist Party which I know better than the others. The French Socialist Party more or less as a whole represents that special layer of the labour aristocracy which proved during the war to be completely reactionary. During the war, all the leaders of the French Socialist Party without exception placed themselves on the side of the bourgeoisie against the international working class. They voted for war credits right up to the end of the war and even several months after the armistice. We have here a representative of this parliamentary faction who voted for the war credits. We also have here a French member of parliament who declared last year in the French Chamber that he refused to vote for the tax rate of three-twelfths demanded in the provisional government, but he was prepared to vote for a provisional rate of two-twelfths. Part of these credits were destined for the counter-revolutionary expeditions of Kolchak and Denikin. While the Russian proletariat was fighting desperately against these international robbers, the representatives of the French Socialist party were voting in the Chamber for war credits for the support of counter-revolutionary armies

"Since then the leaders of the French Socialist Party have adopted a revolutionary phraseology in order to deceive the masses. They declared themselves in favour of the dictatorship of the proletariat against the bourgeoisie. They said they were supporters of historical materialism The French Socialist Party is a rotten party of petty bourgeois reformists. Its affiliation to the CI will have the consequence that this rotten-

ness will also be dragged into the CI.

"I simply want to state that people who have shown themselves, despite their revolutionary talk, to be determined counter-revolutionaries cannot have become communists in the course of a few weeks."

But the logic which was to increasingly dominate the CI was completely different from the above stated aim. Along with the enormous confusions on the party taking power, on the form and content of the proletarian dictatorship (which were to be essential factors in the degeneration of the CI), gradually came the idea of the possibility of building mass parties, 'strong and powerful' to rival the others, to unify the class and recreate the old schema of the Second International. The sacrifice of communist principles, the impossibility of discussing vital questions for the development of class struggle (the union question, the national question, the parliamentary question, etc) were the heavy price paid for the inadequate, incomplete break with pre-war social democracy. This is what the KAPD denounced. For the KAPD, its ejection from the ranks of communists was the direct result of the KP's attempt, soon after its foundation, to join with the USPD, a mass party. This is the same implacable logic that led to the destruction of the Amsterdam Bureau. At the time, all this represented the clearest examples of the great danger to the health of revolutionary organisations as a result of any form of alliance with 'centrists', because of their so-called 'proletarian nature'.

The majority of the ICC is using today the exact same arguments used by those who pushed for the tactic of rapprochement with the 'centrists':

- the centrist parties group the masses of workers and we are in a revolutionary dynamic;
- these workers are radicalising and it is this radicalisation that drives 'their organisations';
- the centrist organisations have a proletarian nature and if we ignore this, we will be guilty of indifferentism.

This is what Zinoviev will summarise in his intervention at the Second Congress: '

"We must not forget that thousands of independent workers have been shot by the bourgeoisie and the capitalist scum and we will not forget that in all these struggles the members of the USPD were at the centre of the fight. I say clearly that for the CI the objective revolutionary role of 800,000 workers, badly led as they are, will weigh more

heavily in favour of the proletarian revolution on the scales of history than a couple of thousand Dutch Tribunists together with Christian Socialists Comrade Wijnkoop is laughable, speaking on behalf of a party that has only 1500 members after 15 years of activity, to reject the representatives of a party in whose ranks are organised hundreds of thousands of ordinary workers who always fight shoulder to shoulder with the Communists, honest and revolutionary, as workers always are."

(Vol 1, p104)

By saying this, he only echoed one of the biggest 'independent' scum who sat at this Congress and who had the gall to proclaim:

"My party numbers thousands of casualties who have given their blood, thousands of dead and wounded, thousands in prison and in front of the courts. I oppose the characterisation of our party as a non-revolutionary party."

(Daumig, Vol 1 p103)

To such vampires, the left delegates could answer only one thing: "I think it is shameful that even at this Congress Daumig tries his demogogy." (Wijnkoop, p103) And one can only answer the same thing to the majority of the ICC today when from their mouths we hear the same demogogy to reintroduce the notion of 'centrism' into the proletarian camp.

In fact, as the Left showed, such arguments, such a logic, can only go against the very goal that communist organisations wanted to attain: to influence the masses, to 'win over' the workers to the Communist Programme, to accelerate the revolutionary dynamic. This is what Guilbeaux, among other delegates, expressed:

"We must first organise the cadre of a strong communist party Then we will have the masses on our side as well. We will, however, never be able to bring the French masses over to us if we try to transform the French Socialist Party artificially into a Communist Party. If after a trial period of six months or a year we want to accept parties that have for years betrayed us and gone astray, then I am afraid that in the end, they will perhaps be the majority in the CI and that they will replace the red banner of the CI with another that is very similar to that of the Second International. We cannot carry on negotiations with parties which, despite their statements, offer no guarantees at all for the future."

But it was Wijnkoop who gave the clearest reasons for opposing these tactics:

"I agree with what comrade Radek said. He said that it was a fact that the masses of the USPD are moving towards revolution, that

they are becoming more and more revolutionary. I agree with that. Comrade Meyer has explained very well that it is not true that the left wing leaders of the USPD are leading the revolution or revolutionising the movement, but that they are running after the masses. This raises the question of how the work of revolutionising the masses is to be carried out. And on this I think that the road the Executive is taking is wrong. This way the work of revolutionising the masses that stand behind the USPD in Germany and the masses in other countries is not advanced but pushed back. That is my opinion. And do not come and tell me that I am not taking into consideration the masses that in fact stand behind this party. I am taking them into consideration but I tell you that if the Executive of the CI gives fresh support to the bourgeois leaders of the German Independents and the French Socialists, these masses will be disillusioned once more in what the revolution and the CI has taught them. This is what our opposition is based on."

The 'centrist' parties controlled hundreds of thousands of proletarians during this period. The rank and file of these parties was in a dynamic of radicalisation which no-one at the Congress denied. The importance that the CI gave to this process was not denied by the Left delegates. But they raised the question of how to really influence and accelerate this dynamic. But, for them, it was much more important to understand that this was not the heart of the problem. For the Left, the heart of the problem was the following: can the radicalisation of the working masses, real as it was, be assimilated to the radicalisation of the apparatus which controlled them and which had already shown its counter-revolutionary nature in practice? The clear and unequivocal answer given by the Left is NO. Any confusion on this question, any hand held out by communist organisations to the centrist apparatus will be a factor of confusion, of disorientation of the class trying to find its revolutionary path. Any rapprochement with this apparatus would TIE THE HANDS of revolutionaries and prevent them from playing their role as the avant-garde of the class. Even Zinoviev could not fail to see the danger of these centrist apparatuses:

"Formally speaking Mr Modigliani is now a member of the CI but he is no comrade of ours. Recently he was in Paris and he tried to convince Longuet to join the CI with the following arguments: 'Why not join the CI? It does not place us under any obligation. All that has to be done is to send the Executive a postcard once a fortnight. That is all. Why do we not do this?' (p189)

But the unfortunate point for the proletariat was that Zinoviev did not go to the conclusion of his lucidity for fear of remaining a minority in the class.

As far as we are concerned, members of the Tendency, we are quite prepared to be a minority in the ICC today in opposing any effort on the part of the majority of the organisation to reintroduce into the proletarian camp those who have the blood of the workers on their hands, those who never hesitated in their cynicism and machiavellianism when the proletariat threatened them.

For the moral of this story, obscured by the majority, we leave it to Bilan:

"What strikes us in examining the path followed in the formation of the CP of Italy is that the Bolsheviks fought against a system for the organisation of the Party which they themselves used and defended in the organisation of their party in Russia. In 1903, the Bolshevik Party was founded on a strict delimitation, a split, based not only on political questions but also on organisational questions of a principled nature. In other words, the Bolsheviks when they formed their party pushed their concern for delimitation to the extreme and, in our opinion, it was because of this initial crystallisation that the Bolsheviks were prepared to lead the decisive revolutionary battles of 1917. In Italy, the left wanted to do the same thing for the formation of the Communist Party although - for international and historical reasons that we'll see later on - it could not push this delimitation to such an extreme degree as the Bolsheviks did in 1903. But several years after the constitution of the CP it was from Russia that the directive came for the fusion of the Halle Congress between the Spartacists and the Independents, it was from Russia that the slogan of tolerance came for the Congress of Tours of the French party, even to the point of accepting into its midst social patriots like Froissard and Cachin. It's obvious that this was not due to a sudden conversion of the Bolsheviks to another way of forming a CP but was essentially a question of the historical perspective: they foresaw the possibility of avoiding the difficult path followed by the foundation of the Bolshevik Party. In 1918-19 Lenin counted on the imminent outbreak of the world revolution and the foundation of the CPs as 'so many supports for the Russian state. Experience and the evolution of the CI and the workers' state proved once again that this idea can only GANGRENE QUESTIONS OF PRINCIPLE."

(Bilan no 4 'En Marge d'un Anniversaire')

As a conclusion for this text, here is a resume of the essential points of the Left's critique of the regressions of the CI at the Second Congress:

1. Any reformist policy, any 'centrist' practice (which can be characterised as a political attitude aimed at bringing the proletariat towards the practices of the

Second International) are to be considered as moves of the bourgeoisie to counter the revolutionary threat;

2. The CI must be constituted on the basis of a clear, rigorous, irreversible split with all the organisations - whoever they are - that claim a link to such practices;

3. The requests of the social democratic or centrist parties to join the CI must be seen as the bourgeoisie's attempts to sabotage the new world party and not as the basis for the development of the CI;

4. These requests must be seen for what they really are:
- the sign of a radicalisation of the masses still under the sway of these parties;
- the attempt of counter-revolutionary organisations in this context not to lose their control over the masses moving towards communist positions;

5. The CI must raise the question of the link between itself and the masses but any policy of fusion or common practice with the centrist apparatus still holding sway over thousands of workers can only prevent the communist parties from playing their role as the avant-garde and thus can only prevent the proletariat from definitively breaking with bourgeois ideology;

6. For these reasons, any idea of reconquering openly counter-revolutionary organisations is in the short term a factor of irreversible corruption;

7. The counter-revolutionary nature of the centrist apparatuses is determined by their practice in class struggle, whatever their verbal radicalism. To this extent:
- the illusions workers may still have about these organisations,
- the sacrifices and death in the revolutionary movement of some of their members, can in no way be used to give these organisations a proletarian virginity they have definitively lost;

8. The fact that these apparatuses accept joining the CI is in no way a guarantee of their genuine proletarian policies on their part. Experience and the discourse of these organisations are irrefutable proof of this;

9. A lack of clarity on all these questions can only open the door to the degeneration of revolutionary parties;

10. This lack of clarity is all the more intolerable if we understand the great importance of the factor of consciousness in the communist revolution and the crucial role that the party must play in this context.

Charlotte

On the conception of fraternal debate according to the ICC

At our public meetings in October/November in London and Brussels, our Fraction was confronted with the increasingly outrageous attitude of the International Communist Current towards the political milieu, against anybody who dares to disagree with how it acts or thinks. As we explained in our previous issues ("The Decline of the ICC" IP #1; 'The incomprehensions of the political milieu' IP # 3) the thrust of the ICC's message to us in particular, since we existed as a minority in it, has always been: "disappear, disappear, disappear". The many disciplinary measures taken to destroy us and the transgressions by the ICC of its own statutes and principles, showed already at that time a desire to sabotage, a shameful concept of debate between revolutionaries. But today, these attitudes are worse than ever. As in a nightmare, the ICC has closed itself into a perilous logic that not only threatens itself but the rest of the political milieu with it. The price that the ICC pays for negating its own principles is an even more rapid degeneration.

At the end of our Public Meeting in Brussels, the ICC confirmed to us that its the official policy of the organization to try to asphyxiate us, to make us sink, to prevent us from disposing of the necessary material means for our existence. That's why its militants cannot buy our press, because that would help us to stay alive as a group. With such a spirit, with this conviction that the Fraction should disappear as soon as possible, one could wonder why the ICC still took the trouble to debate us at our public meetings... or would it be motivated by the search for recruitment, an attitude which it denounces in other groups? Yet another step in the same direction was to be made at our Public Meeting in London. Like characters out of Shakespeare, full of arrogance and empty rhetoric, the ICC-comrades declared at the beginning of the meeting that from now on their organization would officially no longer discuss with the Fraction (except in the press and...at the picketline!) because of the frac-

tions "lack of responsibility" and its "lack of a reason for existence". Consequently they fled the meeting place, illustrating in a melodramatic way their incapacity to defend their attitude politically.

All this could lead one to think that the revolutionary milieu has become a circus with the ICC in the role of the sad clown. But despite the grotesqueness of such attitudes, there is real reason for concern about the slippery slope down which the ICC is going. For such attitudes of willful sabotage of other revolutionary organizations- in which the ICC itself, as a self-styled God-the-Father, judges whether or not a group has a reason for existence- bears an increasing resemblance to the methods of Stalinism.

Behind this rush into sectarianism, this flight into a haughty, dictatorial attitude towards the political milieu, there is a growing political emptiness. Clear concessions to bourgeois ideology have been comfortably installed in this organization. (See the article on Intervention in this issue). The arrogance of the ICC is a poor cover for its defensiveness. Behind its intention to eliminate us, for instance, there is the very real fear of the serious criticism which we developed during the last 3 years about its new orientations, and its rejection of parts of its platform. Of course, the ICC doesn't shy away from the ridiculous when it imagines that it threatens our existence by withholding from us a few sales. What frightens us much more is the spirit that is behind this and which flies in the face of all the proclamations made by the ICC on the necessity of discussion and of solidarity in the revolutionary milieu. This spirit pulls the ICC into a logic that tends to destroy that same milieu. To obstruct revolutionary groups, to deny their existence, that plays into the hands of the capitalist class, which can only benefit when such attitudes develop. While the means of repression of its states against the working class and its organized minorities are strengthened everywhere, making the development of solidarity even more vital for the proletariat, it is disheartening to see the ICC making concessions to the bourgeois goal of silencing any revolutionary expression.

Recently, the ICC justified the fact that it had published in its press the number of members of our Fraction by accusing us of having also (!) played into the hands of the State, by implicating, in our article on terrorism in IP # 2, the group CGI in terrorist acts. Anybody who rereads this article will see that it's quite obvious that we have never insinuated any such a thing. It's just a phony argument the ICC uses to cover up its own lack of concern for the security of other organizations.

Any organization which disrespects the principles of revolutionary solidarity to obtain its goals, which grows blind about the means it's using, will make no contributions whatsoever to the revolutionary process.

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.