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**THE TIMELINESS OF THE RUSSIAN
REVOLUTION**



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INTERNATIONALIST PERSPECTIVE CONTENTS

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War in the Gulf

Against the whole logic of war, CLASS STRUGGLE

Over the summer, news of the U.S. naval intervention "to protect the free flow of oil through the Persian gulf" has received extensive coverage in the mass media. As organs of the ruling class, it's their function to maintain a constant ideological pressure. In this case, the media used the events to instill fear of war and passive acceptance of brutal military intervention. But revolutionaries must be able to see what's really at stake and what are the real causes of these events.

The belligerent attitude of the U.S. didn't appear as a bolt out of the blue. For several months, the American capitalist class has put increased pressure on this key region of the Middle East, as well as Iran, which it is trying to isolate, and also on its own Arab allies who are judged to be too lukewarm. The meaning of the present "war in the gulf" is, therefore, more a question of disciplining allied pawns, for whom the U.S. navy is putting on a show of strength, than a settlement of the conflict between Iran and Iraq through resolution 598 of a puppet United Nations.

In fact, the "gulf war" is in the first place a conflict within the U.S. bloc. After the fall of the Shah in 1979, the capitalist class thought that Iran would be quickly stabilized and that Iraq -- armed to the teeth -- would quickly triumph. But that's not what happened. Since the Persian gulf is a crucial region, strategically as well as economically, the capitalist class in the West must try at any price to stabilize the region and reintegrate Iran into the American bloc. The U.S. had lost face somewhat because of the Irangate scandal (see the article elsewhere in this issue). This forced the U.S. to accelerate its intervention to isolate Iran as much as possible and to force the Arab countries to take up a clear position as its ally.

If Iran has held out against a better armed Iraq, it's because it uses the war to maintain "national union". As *Le Monde Diplomatique* (Sept. '87) pointed out, if the war were to end, "with it the mobilizing theme of sacrifice, of martyrdom and the justification for social and economic austerity would disappear". The Western capitalist class could now see its interest in stopping the war. The Khomeini regime and its influence in the Arab countries constitutes a grave danger of destabilization

for these countries. To counter this danger, the Western bloc also increased political pressure. In July, after the Iranian inspired demonstrations in Mecca ended in a bloodbath, the Western bourgeoisie used the occasion to force the Arab countries to take a stand against Iran. After Iran bombarded Kuwait, even Syria seems to be distancing itself from Iran: "In Damascus, it is said that if Iran attacks another Arab country besides Iraq, Syria will come down on the side of the Arab camp" (*Liberation*, 9/25/87).

The deployment of U.S. forces is not only aimed at reinforcing discipline within the bloc, but also at warning Moscow. The situation in the Middle East had become sufficiently complicated to open a breach for the Russians. Recent diplomatic contacts between Moscow and Teheran, and the Russian proposals for aid to the Arab countries point in that direction. Any momentary difficulty for the U.S. is bound to be exploited by its imperialist rival. But, by showing their capacity to mobilize their European allies (who have sent military contingents to the gulf), the Americans have said no trespassing to Mr. Gorbachev.

While NATO deploys its forces in the gulf, The capitalist class plays out a charade of negotiations and U.N. resolutions leading to nothing but phantom sanctions. Even though the conflict in the gulf is nothing exceptional against the back drop of imperialist conflicts in the world, the working class must be vigilant: the Persian gulf is not that far, and the maneuvers taking place there are linked to the class war in the West. In this way, the bourgeoisie is trying to habituate the proletariat to this type of mobilization. As the commander of the Belgian minesweepers in the Persian gulf remarked: "There aren't that many mines in the region, except for some 1914 vintage ones, but what counts is to be prepared for this kind of situation."

When the bourgeoisie has nothing to offer but barbarism -- even as it plays out its charade around the dismantling of intermediate range missiles -- the only road that the proletariat can take is to intensify its struggle against its own capitalist state and reject all national flags. Communism has something better to offer than a mausoleum for the martyrs of imperialist butchery.

H.E.

workers struggles internationally

Korea, South Africa : the same struggle

For two decades now, the capitalist class has been grappling with the deadly contradictions which feed and deepen the crisis of its economic system. Everywhere, poverty, unemployment and the worsening of living and working conditions is on the increase. As the crisis becomes more and more blatant and insurmountable, the capitalist class finds it increasingly difficult to prettify reality: promises of recovery, of "light at the end of the tunnel", are ripped apart as veils of illusion by the furious violence of the economic storm. The only perspective capital can propose is to share the misery more equally, to accept more austerity.

Workers are more and more conscious of this: the daily reality gives them concrete experience of this worsening of working conditions and the constant shrinking of their means of existence.

To limit as far as possible the development of this consciousness, the ruling class exercises a constant ideological pressure on the workers: fear of war, the threat of terrorism, the defense of democracy as the last rampart against every barbarism, the improvement of living conditions through elections, the idea that problems stem from all sorts of differences, ethnic, linguistic, racial, etc.; all well packaged lies thrown at an increasingly exploited population to hide the real cause of their misery.

The ways in which the capitalist media have "reported" recent events in South Africa and South Korea are good examples of these ideological deformations.

For about a year, the media has given extensive coverage to the often violent incidents in the slums and workplaces of South Africa, in which schoolkids and workers have angrily taken to the streets. Until now only the racial aspect has been reported in the international press. It's true that in South Africa exploitation wears a white/black mask, but it is still a revolt against misery and exploitation that has given rise to the many incidents, strikes and demonstrations in recent months. By emphasizing only "the struggle against Apartheid", the ruling class has tried to hide a more profound and threatening reality. But in August '87 that reality was crystal clear: the strike that erupted over wage demands clearly was nothing other than the bitter struggle that the working class of the entire world must wage

to assure its survival against the exploiting class.

The movement broke out at the beginning of August, and was marked by unbelievable determination and violence. 250,000 to 350,000 workers took part, depending on the different sources. The workers put forward several demands, the main one being a wage increase of 30%, and a raise in the premium paid to the families of workers who die in the mines (rising from the current 2 years of wages to 4). With respect to these demands, it's important to note that the working conditions in the mines are horrendous. In terms of real wages, salaries have fallen since 1982, and are today at their 1976 level. In 1986 alone, 800 miners died on the job. No more is needed to understand the rage of the workers.

The bourgeoisie did not find it easy to smother this explosion. Its final recourse was to violently repress the movement (in these confrontations 10 workers were killed and 350 wounded), and to threaten mass layoffs (which in fact totalled 40,000). But the real power of the capitalist class does not reside in its guns, so much as in its capacity to derail a movement from its initial goals. The tool that capital utilized in this strike was the miners union, the NUM, which would contain the movement by its "radical" tone and by taking over the demands of the workers; this latter made it possible for the workers demands to be swept under the green carpet of the negotiating table at which the union sat, where they could be emptied of their very content and thrust. Indeed, any demand which is separated from the movement which gave rise to it and pushes it forward ceases to be a threat to the ruling class. The NUM utilized this system to perfection, linking its negotiating work with the bosses with appeals for calm. It is this progressive separation of the demands from the movement which explains why the workers obtained nothing, despite the violence, the determination and the length of the conflict.

So, the lessons drawn are different for each side. The capitalist class points to the "useless sacrifices" of the workers since they obtained nothing more than the bosses proposed a week before the end of the strike. It also emphasizes the role of the NUM. Typical is this comment by the French daily Le Monde of September 1: the NUM "has proven that it has an audience (350,000 strikers)

and a capacity to organize and control a movement which it only rarely lost in violent confrontations. The union has been able to impose itself as a force to be reckoned with in the future." As for the workers, it's this last lesson that they must ponder: the weight of the union on a struggle, the importance of never relinquishing responsibility for the organization of the struggle and its demands to a body which is not the direct emanation of that struggle, and under the direct and permanent control of it. The bitter experience of the South African miners shows that workers can only count on themselves, and that the pressure of their movement alone is capable of threatening the bourgeoisie.

We have seen a similar situation develop in South Korea. At the beginning of June, the press reported violent incidents between students and the forces of repression. The demand put forward was for the democratization of the regime, constitutional reforms. This demand was made by certain factions of the bourgeoisie which saw the necessity to give the regime more flexible forms, to soften its rough edges, given the growing social unrest. This process is similar to what we've seen elsewhere: Haiti, the Philippines, South and Central America. But after the regime made its promises of democracy, at the end of June, social confrontations continued to grow. What was hidden behind the demand for reforms? The aspirations of a clique of intellectuals for "bourgeois democracy" or the general discontent of a population crushed by mounting exploitation? In South Korea too, wages are extremely low and working conditions grim. Therefore, since July, tens of thousands of workers have taken to the streets, fighting off the forces of bourgeois order to demand better wages. In the course of July and August, strikes for higher wages broke out spontaneously in more than 3000 companies. Thousands of strikers at the Daewoo shipyards in Koje attacked the police force after a worker was killed. In the beginning of September, strikers destroyed municipal offices in the city of Ulsan. And after negotiations led nowhere, 30,000 Hyundai workers descended onto city streets with their bulldozers, forcing the police to retreat. "These bulldozers are worse than automatic weapons", a Hyundai manager was quoted as saying.

However, in spite of its difficulties in halting the force and violence of the movement, here too, the capitalist class disposed of efficient weapons in the form of new unions and the "democratic" opposition. The opposition leaders, Kim Yung Sam and Kim Dae Jung appealed at Hyundai for calm and more modest demands, fearing a paralysis of the economy.

So, the defenders of democracy and the unions really showed themselves to be the defenders of the class which exploits the workers. If the workers confide the defense of their interests in their hands, ever greater misery will be the only outcome.

The conflicts in South Africa and South Korea are important not because they are the only ones around, but because they so clearly reveal the rage that all workers have in opposing their oppressors. The way they are reported also demonstrates how the ruling class deforms reality so as to hide what is really at stake. Whether under the "democratic" regime of Cory Aquino or in "socialist" Yugoslavia, the crisis -- despite its many facets -- brings on more misery and more exploitation. And trade unionists everywhere react to it with the same language: appeals to calm, negotiations, the lesser evil.



Striking miners and their families blocking railroad line outside the east coast mining town of Sabuk.

Workers everywhere see on a daily basis that their only strength lies in a violent rejection of the conditions of exploitation imposed on them. Despite and through its defeats, the international working class becomes conscious little by little of the fundamental contradictions between its needs and the system which exploits it. Every lost battle, and even the rare concessions won (and recuperated within 6 months by the employer), makes it clearer that the present economic system can only generate more misery.

The demands put forward by the working class contain within them the perspective of the abolition of the capitalist system of exploitation. The very survival of humanity, the overcoming of wars, hunger, unemployment, etc., all depends on the capacity of the working class to construct a society based on the satisfaction of human needs.

Rose

Irangate

What was really at stake



Irangate has dominated the headlines in the US since November 1986. Given the importance that the capitalist class and its mass media (the apparatus of mass manipulation) attaches to this affair, it is important for Marxist revolutionaries to determine whether Irangate is basically another campaign of the ruling class aimed at mystifying the proletariat (and the population at large), and derailing the class struggle, as an integral part of the strategy of the left in opposition, or is an expression of real divisions within the capitalist state apparatus. In *Internationalist Perspective* #5, we said in our article on the Middle East, written at the very outset of the Irangate affair, that "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." (p22) Subsequent events have amply confirmed this analysis and clarified the nature of the issues at stake between rival factions within the state apparatus -- issues which necessitated an "affair" or "scandal" as a means to their resolution.

Though ostensibly a representative of the extreme right-wing of the Republican party, Ronald Reagan functioned throughout his first term in office as a perfect screen behind which the factions of the capitalist class which have shaped foreign and domestic policy since the Roosevelt administration could address the urgent tasks which faced them. The basic tasks which capital has accomplished under the Reagan administration are a vast development of American military might that has significantly shifted the inter-imperialist balance in Washington's favor, and the imposition of a draconian austerity on the working class without unleashing a massive wave of class struggle. While the administration's policies were formulated by that faction of American capital that has determined policy under both Democrat and Republican Presidents for more than half a century, the Republican right-wing which constituted Reagan's original electoral base and circle of political advisors was virtually denied access to

power. What made it possible for policy to be smoothly shaped by the traditional political

elite (figures like Haig, Schultz or Weinberger), the representatives of that fusion of the bourgeoisie and the state bureaucracy which constitutes the capitalist class in the epoch of state capitalism, was the control of the White House and the President exercised by Chief of Staff Jim Baker. Baker, the quintessential state capitalist bureaucrat, reduced the right-wing to virtual political impotence for four years, despite that faction's claim to Reagan's real political sympathies. The job shift which sent Baker to the Treasury Department and brought Donald Regan from Treasury to become White House Chief of Staff at the beginning of Reagan's second term, innocuous as it then seemed, provided the right-wing, and in particular Reagan's oldest political advisor, CIA chief William Casey, with the opportunity to make a bid for real political power within the administration. The important question is not why Don Regan, whose policy orientations were no less "orthodox" than Baker's, failed to keep the right-wing at bay, so much as to recognize the fact that under Casey's initiative the National Security Council staff under John Poindexter (and his operative Oliver North), which had previously toed the line set by the White House staff, the State Department and the Pentagon, now began to take policy initiatives of its own. The degree to which, even in a small way, policy initiatives which bypassed the State Department and the Pentagon could potentially compromise the overall goals of American capital, can be seen not only in the Iran arms deal or the obsession with the Nicaraguan contras (the impetus for both of which came from Casey and the Republican extreme right-wing), but also in the botched summit at Reykjavik, where the President's performance so alarmed the political establishment on both sides of the Atlantic. These policy initiatives, emanating from the Republican rightwing, were symptomatic of a lack of concern for the overall cohesion of the American bloc and its

longterm strategy, which has traditionally animated the foreign policy establishment of the American state. Given the failure of the White House staff to exercise the necessary control, and to the extent that a camarilla of right-wingers outside the orbit of the dominant faction of American capital was using its influence with the President to take policy initiatives, it became necessary for the political establishment to act and reassert its control. Given Don Regan's own unwillingness or inability to fulfill his assigned task, the President's resistance to disciplining his oldest friend and advisor (Bill Casey), and the unfortunate fact that elements in Iran itself had already made the arms deal public, a campaign orchestrated by the media was the most efficient and least damaging way to lance this particular political boil. The Irangate scandal has made it possible to eliminate the Republican right-wing from the toehold on power which it had won in Reagan's second term and whose potentially damaging effects had galvanized the establishment into action.

In our article in IP#5 we indicated that a secondary factor in Irangate was the 1988 Presidential elections and the strategy of the left in opposition. What was not explicit in that article was whether we were saying that the ruling class must tread carefully lest an affair which had its origins in divisions internal to the capitalist class upset its strategy of the left in opposition, or that one of the factors in the very launching of this affair was the strategy of the left in opposition and the need to elect a Republican President in 1988. It is important to make this distinction and to insist that the only connection between Irangate and the left in opposition is the first of the above two, and in no way the second. This is all the more important because the ICC insisted on the fact that Irangate was first and foremost a campaign aimed at mystifying the working class so as to divert it from the path of class struggle and assure the election of a Republican President in 1988. Such an interpretation seems to us to reveal a complete incapacity on the part of the ICC to grasp what is happening in social reality, an abject surrender to the crudest schematism.

This schematism consists in the first place in abstracting one element or factor from the complex totality of social reality and insisting that it alone is operative; in this case, the ICC is saying that the only factor in determining the actions of the capitalist class is the class struggle and the need to mystify the workers. Thus, by definition, any action undertaken by the ruling class must have as its sole aim the mystification of the proletariat. The ICC thereby eliminates divergences within the capitalist class or inter-imperialist antagonisms as possible elements in determining the actions of the ruling class in this period. In addition, this schematism shows itself in the unwillingness to recognize the fact that the danger of class struggle -- which is what leads capital to adopt the strategy of the left in opposition as a means to control the

proletariat -- is not uniform in either time or space, even in a determinate historical period; in short the ICC fails to acknowledge the fact that while the level of class struggle in western Europe today makes the strategy of the left in opposition a priority for capital, the lower level of class struggle in the US over the past several years gives capital a greater margin for maneuver and the possibility of more easily taking an action which momentarily compromises the strategy of the left in opposition when other factors necessitate it. Moreover, even the ICC's conception of what constitutes the left of capital in the US is indicative of a schematism which mechanically transposes the mass-based capitalist party of workers (Stalinist or Social-Democratic) typical of western Europe across the Atlantic in the form of the Democratic party. Now, while it is true that the Democratic party has for more than half a century been the instrument by which capital has electorally mobilized and controlled the working class, it is not only that. To a far greater extent than the capitalist parties of workers in Europe, the Democrats in the US have always appealed to other classes and strata of the population when elections have been held; this has necessitated the existence of a strong center-right wing in the Democratic party -- one closer in ideology and electoral appeal to say the mainstram of the Tory party in Britain than to any faction of the Labour party. Indeed, unlike the left parties of western Europe, the Democrats in the US have been the "natural" party of government for over fifty years. This is not only a question of their frequent occupation of the White House, but perhaps more importantly their almost continuous control of Congress (and thereby the congressional committees which have become an integral part of the executive branch of the government) for almost this whole period. (Since 1932, the Republican party has controlled both Houses of Congress for only four years, 1947-1949, 1953-1955, while the Democrats have controlled both houses of Congress for all but 10 years, the exceptions being 1947-1949, 1953-1955, and 1981-1987 when the Republicans controlled the US Senate.) In that sense, even a possible Democrat capture of the White House in 1988 does not mean the left in power.

It is now abundantly clear that one byproduct of Irangate -- however necessary this "affair" was for the ruling class -- is to make a Republican victory in 1988 problematic. If the Republicans do retain the White House next year, it will be despite, not because of Irangate.

In the light of a sharp decline in public support for Reagan and the Republican party as a result of Irangate, it is necessary to ascertain the impact of this affair on capital's strategy of the left in opposition.

Because of the ever-deepening economic crisis and the explosive character of the class struggle in the present period, it is more than ever necessary for American capital to prepare an effective left in opposition with

which to contain and control any proletarian upsurge. In the context of the political system of American capitalism, this invariably means utilizing the Democratic party and the trade union movement which has traditionally been linked to it. The best way to use the left in opposition also implies that the Republican party occupy the White House. There's no doubt that the capitalist class in the US wants to keep it that way. Its efforts to postpone the outbreak of the recession until after the elections, the timing of the INF agreement with the Russians and the media assassination of the Democrat's most electable candidates (Hart, Biden) testify to this. However, the wearing out of Reagan's popularity, the damage of Irangate, the discontent about austerity and impoverishment, etc., make the outcome far from certain. A Democratic victory in 1988 cannot be discounted. However, given the fact that whichever party occupies the White House after 1988 the Democrats will inevitably have governmental responsibility through their control of Congress (and the key congressional committees which constitute almost a parallel bureaucracy to that of the executive departments), that means a division of labor within the Democratic party itself! One wing of the Democrats will have the responsibility of at least sharing governmental power (and quite possibly in the aftermath of Irangate controlling not only the Congress but the White House as well), while another, left wing, will be charged with the vital task of containing any outbreaks of class struggle, seeking to divert it into channels which are harmless to capital.

The contours of such a division of labor within the Democratic party are already clearly visible. The efforts of Richard Gebhardt, Paul Simon and Jesse Jackson to win the Democratic nomination in 1988 are as clearly part of an attempt to constitute a viable and credible left wing as they are probably doomed to electoral failure; a point underscored by the very fact that three candidates will split and divide the left vote in the Democratic primaries, when purely in terms of winning the nomination a united effort would make more sense. Each of these three left candidates appeals to distinct strata of the population: Gebhardt, with his sponsorship of protectionist legislation in the Congress, appeals to the blue collar working class and the industrial unions; Simon is the candidate of the traditional liberal wing of the party; Jackson, while seeking to broaden his base to rank and file trade union activists, has his real base of support among the poor, the unemployed and racial minorities. No matter which party occupies the White House after 1988, these left factions of the Democratic party will constitute the core of a left in opposition with which capital will respond to the class struggle.

Meanwhile as a party with governmental responsibilities, in a social situation which doesn't yet require that the Democratic party become an unequivocally left party in opposition, and indeed in a specific

conjuncture where as an unintended but unavoidable result of Irangate it may regain the White House in 1988, the mainstream of the Democratic party is moving resolutely to the center-right. The leading candidates for the Democratic nomination are positioning themselves as moderates on economic and foreign policy issues. Michael Dukakis, for example, is an exponent of balanced budgets and business induced growth, in which new investment is dependant on efficiency and profitability. Albert Gore has made himself a champion of a tough American presence in the Persian Gulf. Meanwhile, Sam Nunn, despite his decision not to seek the Presidential nomination, remains a possible candidate in case no clear front runner emerges during the primaries; and Nunn, who as the ranking Democrat on the Senate armed services committee during the Reagan years helped shape the massive American military buildup, is emblematic of the type of Democrat who will assure the continuity of American policy in the event that the Republicans lose the Presidency in 1988.

Whatever inconvenience Irangate may have cost the American capitalist class in terms of the most desirable configuration of a left in opposition, was compensated by the success of the traditional foreign policy establishment in reasserting its complete control of the policy making process (and vindicating the "democratic" process at the same time). The reduction of the Republican right wing to near political nullity (as a policy making force), will help reshape the party for governmental responsibility in the 1990's, whatever the short term effects of Irangate may be on the Republicans in 1988. In that short term the center right of the Democratic party is no less able than the Republican mainstream of assuring the continuity of American economic and military policy, and of consolidating the bloc. At the same time the real emergence of a left wing able to electorally organize the discontent of the working class is also taking place within the ranks of the Democratic party around Jackson and Gebhardt. It is there that capital is preparing its left in opposition to meet the dangers of the class struggle of the coming period.

MAC INTOSH

APPEAL TO READERS

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



The timeliness of the Russian Revolution

The celebration of the seventieth anniversary of the Russian revolution was, of course, the occasion for the capitalist class of all countries to try to recuperate the real meaning of this proletarian revolution. There is certainly nothing new in this kind of propaganda. In 1917, everywhere in the world, the ruling classes outdid themselves with insults and sarcastic howls against the workers who dared attack their privileges and demand a better life. In their mouths at that time, 'Bolshevik' was the same as vampire, child-killer, vermin. And these classes didn't stop at words. They did everything they could to stifle the proletarian revolution.

Today the western countries, where the bourgeoisie constantly sings the praises of its 'democracy', the bourgeoisie takes advantage of this anniversary to step up its efforts at demoralising and demobilising the working class as it is rediscovering the need for struggle. "You see what 'workers' power' is, what communism and too much radicalism leads to: the Gulag, psychiatric hospitals, empty stores, the dark glasses of Jaruzelski. Is that what you want?" In other words, workers stay put, you'll only regret it if you try to change things.

In the Eastern Bloc, where the anniversary will be celebrated with military parades showing the most sophisticated weapons, the sound of boots and guns. From the tribune in between the snoring, the fossils of the party, up to their necks in medals will present this masquerade as the living image of the workers' paradise! One of the biggest scams of the 20th century has been to have identified the revolution with its rapid degeneration; identified the worst exploitation which came out of this degeneration with communism; identified the October revolution with Stalinism, the Stalinism that marked the end of the revolution and had not one glimmer of a proletarian character despite all the grimaces of a Gorbachev today. (See IP 7)

These mystifications must be denounced. We too want to speak of October 1917, not as a museum piece that we take out every once in a while to admire but because this very important moment in the history of the workers' movement must always be kept alive so that we can remember all the lessons it has to teach

us. The working class must be able to reappropriate its own experience by understanding as deeply as possible all the implications of this experience so that the working class today can strengthen its attacks against the bourgeois state.

For decades the revolutionary movement has studied the significance of the events of 1917. Today, many groups have published contributions on this revolution in their press. But it seems that certain confusions persist, essentially on the role of the Bolshevik Party in this revolution. Behind the specific problem of the role of the proletarian party is in fact the whole question of how class consciousness develops in the working class. We have already tried to contribute to this question in our magazine. In this article on the Russian revolution we would like to deal with it in a more concrete way, through the historic experience of the working class.

THE ERA OF PROLETARIAN REVOLUTIONS

In 1859 Marx wrote: "At a certain stage of their development, the material productive forces of society come into conflict with the existing relations of production. ... From forms of development of the productive forces these relations turn into their fetters. Then begins an epoch of social revolutions." Marx's analysis of the internal contradictions of the capitalist mode of production found full confirmation in the barbarous outbreak of the First World War in 1914 and then later in the many revolutionary movements which emerged in most of the belligerent countries. To convince millions of proletarians to slaughter each other, to go against proletarian internationalism which is the very essence of the workers' combat since its beginnings, the bourgeoisie had to fill their heads with patriotic ideology by brandishing the slogans of 'Save democracy' and 'Struggle against despotism'. In reality these great ideals were only pretexts. The world war, with its unprecedented violence, came as a consequence of the insurmountable economic contradictions of the capitalist system. In this social system ruled by blind economic laws, by merciless competition for the conquest of markets, the inadequacy of these markets, their limits as compared to the productive capacities of the different na-



tional capitals created this bloody rivalry among nations, a rivalry which would use the worst massacres to try and get a better share of the markets. The relations of production had thus become too narrow for the development of the productive forces. But the patriotic orgy, the hopes for a fast victory, were short-lived. That's when the era of social revolution began. In its manifesto to the world proletarians the Communist International wrote: "During the war the contradictions of the capitalist regime were exposed for all mankind to see in the form of physical suffering: hunger, cold, epidemic diseases and the re-emergence of barbarism. ... For dozens of years, the statisticians and pontiffs of the theory of rounding out the angles looked in all corners of the globe for real or imaginary facts showing that certain groups or categories of the working class had progressed and enjoyed better conditions. The theory of the pauperisation of the masses was thought to be buried under the contemptuous hissing and booing of the university eunuchs of the bourgeoisie and the mandarins of socialist opportunism. But now we see not only social pauperisation but psychological and biological impoverishment in all its hideous aspects. The catastrophe of the imperialist war has swept away all the gains of union and parliamentary struggles. ... Cut short this epoch of crisis that we are going through. It can only be done through the method of the dictatorship of the proletariat. Workers of all countries, unite."

After two years of horrible butchery where workers sacrificed their lives for capitalist interests, the proletariat, revolted and disgusted by patriotic litanies began to try to unite over and above frontiers against the divisions erected by the bourgeoisie. There were desertions, acts of rebellion and above all fraternisation on all fronts, while in the cities there were strike movements against the increasing exploitation of labour. Fraternisation was the clearest expression of this irreducible antagonism between the logic of a class like the bourgeoisie and a class like the proletariat, an antagonism which can only lead to social revolution. The bourgeoisie maintains itself through competition, rivalry, mutual destruction. The proletariat on the other hand, to ensure its survival in such a system must break through these barriers and create a REAL CLASS SOLIDARITY, it has to try to eliminate the objective and subjective conditions that stand in the way of this solidarity. By holding out a hand to the 'enemy' soldier, by refusing to fight in the war, the working class shook the very foundations of bourgeois society. The true enemy was not the class brother, the brother in misery, but the capitalist state. The world communist revolution was on the

agenda.

Therefore, unlike some revolutionaries, we do not see the major social movements which began in Russia in 1917 as just the product of local specific conditions in Russia (even if these local conditions existed and explain some aspects of the movement). Essentially, at the time, these movements were the clearest and most open expressions of a SOCIAL CRISIS OF INTERNATIONAL DIMENSIONS, of a new period being born, the era of the proletarian revolution. Russia wasn't the only crisis appeared. Elsewhere too the working class began to say no to the war, to enter into open struggle with the bourgeois state. In Germany, strikes broke out everywhere against rationing, against sending new battalions to the front, against the so-called solidarity with the front that the bourgeoisie used to increase exploitation in the factories.



Lenin always insisted on the fact that the Russian revolution must be seen in the light of the international situation of world capitalism. The struggles of the Russian working class were only a prologue, a phase, a moment of the international workers' revolution which would emerge against the deterioration of living conditions. How impatient he was throughout the whole of 1917 waiting for news of proletarian struggles in other countries especially in Germany which seemed, and rightly so, to be a key to the world process. When, as we will see further on, Lenin defended the need for all power to the soviets it was in this perspective of support which would surely come soon from struggles of workers in other countries. For him, the proletarian revolution was brewing everywhere in the bowels of the old world.

In the same way the degeneration of the Russian Revolution, its rapid end, must also be explained in this international context. The GENERAL IMMATURITY of the working class,



unprepared for the new tasks thrust upon it, quickly isolated the Russian Revolution and led to its corruption and decline. The failure of the German Revolution, among others, was decisive in this process of degeneration.

THE OUTBREAK OF THE REVOLUTION

In 1917 Rosa Luxemburg said, "Today Russia confirms once again this old adage of historical experience: there is nothing more incredible, more absurd than a revolution one hour before it happens; there is nothing simpler, more natural and obvious than a revolution when it has fought and won its first victory." It's true that everything seems very simple at the outbreak of the February revolution. It seems like a fruit so ripe it simply needed a shake to fall. In a context of great combativity with many strike movements in Petrograd, International Women's Day on February 23rd very rapidly in three days led to a general strike in the city. Demands were as ELEMENTARY as can be: the workers wanted bread. This simple demand quickly generalised and drew in greater and greater numbers of workers. This dynamic of extension in turn led to a radicalisation of slogans. In such a mass strike simple economic demands are quickly transformed into more general political ones. One thing leads to another, they combine and unify, attracting more and more workers. Down with war, down with the autocracy! In a few hours the shadow of insurrection spread over Russia and on February 27th a decisive event occurred: the troops mutinied in Petrograd. The Czarist regime which relied on the military as its fundamental prop was now naked and alone. Corrupt and hated, it fell like a house of cards. All the strategic places fell one after the other to the insurgents, putting up very little resistance. On February 27th the insurrection in Petrograd was over, leaving 2000 dead. The other cities in the country recognised the insurrection. A regime which had endured for hundreds of years was now thrown into the dustbin of history.

The ease and rapidity with which this movement took place was far from accidental. It teaches us some important lessons about the way that class consciousness develops in the working class. First of all, it shows how decisive and essential workers struggles are for any change in social relations. It's true that in February 1917 the mutinies of the garrison and the fact that the immense majority of the population rallied to the insurrectional movement were crucial. Without this the movement could not have succeeded. But the true motive force of this dynamic was the WORKERS' STRUGGLE itself. Only this struggle is a real threat to the powers that be, only

this struggle can be a rallying point for all the other non-exploiting strata in society. There were some 25 million peasants in Russia as compared with 8 million proletarians. But when the very combative and concentrated proletariat of Petrograd raised its fist the Czar himself trembled on his throne. When it created the proletariat, capitalism created the only revolutionary class capable of threatening the system.

This revolutionary eruption was a tributary of all the past experience of the proletariat in Russia. In 1905 it led a gigantic mass strike which ended with bloody repression and a very long period of demobilisation for the working class. But afterwards, the old mole did his work. The movements of February 1917 are like an explosion produced by the accumulation of all these experiences, the tangible expression of the lessons which had been learned. Consciousness had ripened despite major backsliding, ten years of demobilisation and the world war. This consciousness was achieved in a diffuse way. Although it was not immediately identifiable, it was taking place within the ENTIRE CLASS. This explains why in the general context of war and famine, the unification of all the workers was so rapid and effective.

By itself therefore the working class draws out the lessons of its struggles, its disillusionments, its failures. This maturation of consciousness which takes place through thousands of subterranean channels produces a DECISIVE CONFIDENCE in the working class in its own strength, in its ability to take its destiny in its own hands, against the ravages of the capitalist system of exploitation. The workers BELIEVED they would win not with an abstract faith but because in practical terms they gave themselves the means to achieve this victory. They drew the lessons of their experience: constant efforts to convince each other, to organise a united struggle; permanent overtures towards the army and the rest of the population to prevent them from becoming the allies of the reaction; organisation of struggles, etc. In this whole dynamic the most combative and radical fringes of the working class played a decisive role. The city of Petrograd was at the heart of the movement: "If, in a revolution, a capital city plays such an important role and at certain moments concentrates the will of the entire nation in itself it is precisely because it most vividly expresses the basic tendencies of the new society and pushes them to their highest expression. The provinces consider what the capital does as an expression of their own intentions but already transformed into action. The initiative of the centres is not an attack on democracy but its dynamic realisation." (Trotsky (1)) But



this is true even within Petrograd itself where certain particularly combative sectors of the working class (the workers of Vyborg) constantly push the struggles forward. Of course, such a situation will not recur in the same way or in the same form in the present conditions of the capitalist world. But it is an example to illustrate the idea that class consciousness is not a homogeneous thing. This homogeneity can only mature and develop through a real process of struggle, through the very practice of class struggle.

The complete SPONTANEITY of all these struggles is striking. In February the Russian workers had practically no pre-established organisational apparatus, no association, no unions, because of the authoritarian character of the Czarist regime. Unlike the proletariat in the western countries they did not have the sad experience of seeing the mass parties of the Second International being progressively integrated into the bourgeois state up to their definitive betrayal in 1914. Nor did they have the experience of the pernicious 'reformist' ideology that these organisations injected into the class. This profoundly spontaneous character of the movement is all the more significant when we examine more closely the state of some workers' organisations which managed to maintain themselves in the context of repression. This examination will show how totally wrong those people are who defend the idea that without a party the working class is nothing; that it is the party alone which condenses class consciousness; that only the party must decide when and where revolutionary confrontations must take place. In other words it is the party which must pull the strings of class struggle. Very often these people claim to be following the 'Bolshevik example' to prop up their fables about the party. How ironic! "It is a fact that the February revolution was begun by rank-and-file workers who overcame the opposition of their own revolutionary organisations; it is a fact that the initiative was spontaneously taken by a contingent of proletarians more exploited than the others, textile workers, who must have included many soldiers' wives." (Trotsky) The Bolshevik Party whose major forces were in exile in any case was more than surprised by the movement. They even counselled against strikes, judging the situation was not propitious and that their own forces were too weak. But this situation was not going to be resolved by the February revolution, on the contrary.

As we shall see, we shall have to wait for April 1917 for the Bolsheviks to really understand the situation created by the insurrection and the perspectives it opened for the working class. But already we can shed some

light on a fundamental lesson which was confirmed all through the year 1917: the working class can and must act without any official permission from the party. It is this vitality, this constant taking of initiatives, this permanent mobilisation and radicalisation that can exercise an enormous pressure and even change a party that is too often inclined to hold back the movement and temporise. It forced the party to overcome its weaknesses and to become a real instrument for the proletarian revolution. The extraordinary thing about the Russian Revolution is this inexhaustible capacity of the proletariat to keep pushing forward. Through this practice of the whole of the working class, the revolutionary party itself was led to correct its own mistakes. It was created as a result of this interaction; it developed and enriched the communist programme this way. What is true for the revolutionary party is also true for this other organised expression of the proletariat, the workers' councils, unitary structures where the working class organises itself massively for the revolution.



Any conception which identifies the class party with class consciousness (and such conceptions are so common today in the revolutionary milieu), any conception which explains the process of how this class consciousness develops only in simplistic terms of 'assimilation of the programme', is indeed incapable of explaining the real life of the working class, of which the Russian Revolution is an illustration. First of all, as we have seen, the working class is capable by itself of raising demands which succeed in pushing the movement forward towards a maturation of consciousness. The working class is capable of judging whether or not the balance of forces is in its favour or not, of taking the initiative not only to move into action



but also to resolve the hundreds of practical questions which arise in the heat of struggle. The February revolution, like that of October soon afterwards, was a product of the consciousness of masses of workers, a consciousness that had attained a high level of development. And this consciousness in its turn was the product of a multitude of factors: obviously the general objective conditions as we have already mentioned but also the product of the collective thought of the class, its decisiveness, its combativity, the expression of the propaganda of revolutionary organisations which nourished the class for years and years before the events.

THE MATURING OF THE STRUGGLE

But class struggle still had a long way to go. As we have said, the high level of consciousness expressed in the February revolution was not accompanied by a REAL ORGANISATIONAL STRENGTH in the working class. The insurrection itself was done without a party but also without any workers' councils. There is therefore no AUTOMATIC link between consciousness and organisation and that the process of organisation in the proletariat is itself slow, difficult, with ups and downs, and represents a constant effort. We shall see also to what extent the workers' councils themselves were often only a pale reflection of the real strengths of the working class and that they could constitute a weight for the working class which has to exercise vigilance and permanent control so that its own structures can 'follow the movement'.

The entire period which goes from February to October 1917 witnessed the strengthening of two basic tendencies:

- * the discrediting of bourgeois forces and organisations who, while claiming to be a part of the working class, draw ever closer to the bourgeoisie (like the Mensheviks);

- * the general organisational strengthening of the working class (and non-exploiting strata in general) in its party and its workers' councils until the taking of power in October. "Without organisation the working class cannot maintain its capacity for action very long. Like ten years ago, the first act of the revolutionary Russian proletariat will be to make up for the lack of organisation. And this organisation born in the heat of struggle will constitute an authentic strengthening of its power and not the prison of its powerlessness." (Rosa Luxemburg) Soon thousands of base committees, of workers' councils on all levels, of militias, a whole very tight network of workers' organisations developed all through Russia.

In February, however, the working class saw itself rapidly dispossessed of the revolution it had begun. A government of the liberal bourgeoisie was rapidly put into power. This situation is all the more absurd because we know the total impotence of the Russian bourgeoisie, its fear of the working class and paralysis in relation to Czarism, its total absence from the February movement, its attempts to stifle the revolution and its refusal to take power in the first few days. Bourgeois revolutions were certainly a thing of the past. But the working class itself was not yet mature enough to understand the full significance of its struggles; enormous illusions remained among the working class about the need to go through a phase of 'bourgeois revolution' which supposedly would establish democracy in a country which had never known

it and which would supposedly resolve the famous 'peasant question' and develop capitalist relations. In other words the workers were still far from any dictatorship of the proletariat! This whole conception was expressed essentially in parties like the Social-Revolutionary Party (with a large peasant base) or the Menshevik Party which was still a strong majority within the working class and whose slogans rejected for the moment any possibility of proletarian revolution in Russia and defended the need for the workers to give over power to the bourgeoisie. There is nothing astonishing then in the fact that the 'Provisional Executive Committee of the Soviet', rapidly put into place essentially by the Mensheviks after the insurrection in February, immediately 'offered' power to the liberal bourgeoisie. Even the Bolsheviks participated in this confusion and the party saw its role as essentially that of a 'loyal opposition'. "At the session of the Executive Committee on 1st March, the discussion centred on how to transmit power: there was not one vote against the formation of a bourgeois government even though of the 39 members in the Executive Committee 11 were Bolsheviks and sympathisers." (Trotsky)

The liberal bourgeoisie found itself therefore holding the reins of power; and in giving them this power, the Executive Committee had only one demand - that the bourgeoisie give freedom of propaganda to the left parties! Nothing about the eight-hour day, nothing about an end to the war, about land or about any of the demands which captured the combativity of the masses and for which the workers had made an insurrection! This whole period up to October is marked by the bourgeoisie's complete inability to resolve the many contradictions created by the new situation. In fact the bourgeoisie had only one policy - behind the 'conciliation', the 'opening' to the people, they did everything they could to crush the workers' revolution.



First, they relaunched an offensive in the imperialist war hoping to deviate the workers' struggles towards the 'patriotic defence of the revolution', hoping to bleed the proletariat dry and prevent it from continuing its movement. This same bourgeoisie, so liberal, so 'democratic' did not hesitate to stir up a military coup d'état behind the scenes in August. This military coup was meant to crush the workers and restore law and order. It failed because of the mobilisation of the masses against it.

The Menshevik and Social-Revolutionary organisations compromised themselves more and more. Little by little their ministers became a majority in the different governments formed up to October. The Mensheviks had decreed that the bourgeoisie should remain in power; even though the working class loudly proclaimed that it now wanted the power for its own workers' councils this decree remained unshakeable. That's why the workers increasingly turned their backs on these organisations (Mensheviks and Social-Revolutionaries) even though they were at the beginning a majority in the soviets. As the months passed the workers rallied round the Bolshevik Party which had been such a minority at the beginning of the movement. The struggle of the working class was maturing and confronting new questions. In April, under pressure from Lenin who was always attentive to the real movement of the class, the position of the Bolshevik Party changed radically. Against the relative support for the bourgeois government in power since February, Lenin, in his famous April Theses, developed an analysis which would profoundly change the Bolshevik position and galvanise them for action. "The theses expressed simple ideas in simple terms, accessible to all. The republic which has emerged from the February revolution is not our republic and the war it is carrying on is not our war. The task of the Bolsheviks is to overthrow the imperialist government. But this government is maintaining itself because it can count on the confidence of the masses. We are in a minority. In these conditions, it is not a question of an act of violence on our part. We must teach the masses not to trust the conciliators and partisans of national defence. 'We must patiently explain things.' The success of such a policy imposed on us by circumstances is guaranteed and it will lead us to the dictatorship of the proletariat. We call on the workers of the whole world to break with the bourgeoisie to end the war. We will begin the international revolution." (Trotsky)

In reality, these theses were only an extension of the principles defended by Lenin and his supporters at the Zimmerwald conference

during the war: the transformation of the imperialist war into a civil war and the break with the social democratic organisations that had betrayed. In the era of generalised imperialist war only the dictatorship of the proletariat can give the framework for the real satisfaction of workers' demands. The real situation, the adoption of these radical slogans, brought a serious crisis to the Bolshevik organisation. Many of its members in the name of the economic and political backwardness of Russia, thought that the workers still had to complete the democratic revolution. And even the most lucid Bolsheviks like Lenin continued to give the proletarian revolution certain 'democratic' tasks. Because the bourgeoisie was in such a state of decomposition, the proletariat was supposed to assume certain of its tasks: "Lenin saw that the democratic revolution had not been completed or more to the point, that it had stopped almost as soon as it had started. This was precisely the reason why the democratic revolution could only be carried out under the domination of a new class. This could only be achieved if the masses were won away from the influence of the Mensheviks and the Social-Revolutionaries, that is away from the indirect influence of the liberal bourgeoisie." (Trotsky)

Of course, the objective conditions in Russia (the need to rally the enormous peasant masses to the revolution in order to make victory possible) were such that it was inevitable that the proletarian organisation would defend the slogan 'Land to the Peasants' even if such a slogan had nothing to do with the content of communism. But the real error of the Bolsheviks was to ASSIMILATE workers' dictatorship with peasants' dictatorship, deforming with such a slogan the proletarian programme, and crippling the autonomy of the working class.

But the working class was not intimidated by the repression of the bourgeois state nor by the state of confusion of its revolutionary organisations. Even before the April Theses, in the beginning of March, workers meeting in Vyborg in Petrograd demanded all power to the soviets. This would not be the first time that workers were 'a hundred times more to the left than the party'. As Trotsky said, "Each step forward of the revolution was provoked, was compelled by a DIRECT INTERVENTION of the masses, completely unexpected in the majority of cases by the soviet parties." For those who doubt the profoundly revolutionary nature of the proletariat these feverish advances came with astonishing regularity right up to the October insurrection.

The April events were a prelude to the July Days. These experiences, expressing class



consciousness and permitting it to grow and develop, gradually led the proletariat to the taking of power. In the weeks after February, workers' struggles were pushed forward by the demand for the eight-hour day. Refused by the bourgeoisie because it would interfere with the war effort, the eight-hour day was IMPOSED by the workers. And in April the situation became critical. In a context of deteriorating living conditions, a minister of foreign affairs announced a new programme of annexations. The bourgeois press, the 'left', everyone applauded. But then, spontaneously, without any directives, masses of workers and soldiers went into the streets shouting 'Down with the Provisional Government'. Once again, the question of power appeared on the horizon. But the soviets (which still were under the control of a Menshevik majority) refused this power, did everything they could to temporise, to put out the fire. Disoriented, the workers went home and the movement gave way as spontaneously as it had arisen.

Tensions continued to accumulate up to the month of July when the storm broke out again among the workers on a higher level. After four ministers had resigned an assembly of several thousand soldiers decided to hold an armed demonstration to express how fed up they were with the situation. They went around to all the regiments and factories to talk about the struggle and judge the state of their forces.

On 4th July there was a general strike in Petrograd. The city became one giant mass meeting of workers. Five hundred thousand soldiers and workers were in the streets and there were many confrontations. Once again, the workers demanded all power to the councils but the councils still didn't want it. The next day there was once again a reflux of the movement and relative calm came to the capital city. Several weeks of disorientation followed for the proletariat; these weeks were put to good use by the bourgeoisie which carried out a widespread witchhunt. Combative workers and also Bolshevik militants were the victims of this ferocious repression. But by September, this phase of demoralisation began to recede and the working class once again had enough confidence in itself to take back the initiative and go straight towards the victorious insurrection of October.

THE GROWTH OF WORKERS' COUNCILS

Just as the year 1917 was characterised by an enormous activity of the working class (and on another level by larger and larger peasant movements which, against the hesitations of their own organisations, simply took the land for themselves) there was also a process of development and strengthening of the workers'

councils. During the mass strike in Russia in 1905 a workers' council emerged in Petrograd; it was greeted as the workers' organ par excellence where the dynamic of the mass strike could truly express itself. Spontaneously created in the struggle and for the struggle, only these sorts of structures can express the revolutionary aspirations of the working class and bring them to fruition. But things are not as simple as that. Even though they are essential, even though they are the only organisms which can enable the proletariat keep the control of its own movements and its own demands to spread them and generalise them, the councils cannot guarantee by the simple fact of their existence the success of a revolution. A very intense struggle continues after they emerge in the factories as well as in these assemblies of delegates that are the councils to transform them into truly revolutionary organs capable of taking charge of the dictatorship of the proletariat. "The soviet form contains in itself no mystical force. It is in no way exempt from the vices inherent in any form of representation and this is inevitable as long as this remains necessary. But the force of the soviets resides in the fact that it reduces these vices to the minimum. We can say with certainty, and the experience of the revolution confirms this, that any other representation atomising the masses would have expressed in the revolution the real will of the proletariat with much greater difficulty and with much more delay. Of all the forms of revolutionary representation the soviet is the most flexible, the most direct and transparent but it is still only a form. It cannot give more than the masses are capable of putting into it. It can facilitate the understanding of the masses of their own mistakes and how to fix them. And this is in fact one of the most important factors in the development of the revolution." (Trotsky)

In Russia the transformation of the workers' councils into real revolutionary organs would make them capable of taking power in October 1917. The enormous contribution of the Bolsheviks to this transformation is not the least of their merits. In Germany some time later the councils would fail in this task.

This process of transformation was extremely contradictory in Russia. As we have seen after the February revolution a 'Central Executive Committee' was set up whose members were in fact not at all representative of the working class base. However, it was this CEC which gradually became a point of reference for the entire working class and little by little real workers' councils emerged. Everywhere workers in struggle elected delegates, made them responsible for defending their demands, until the formation of a central soviet in Petrograd. In practice these coun-



cils increasingly held the reins of real power. "They intervened in the army, in economic conflicts, in questions of supplies and transport and in judicial matters. They took authority away from reactionary administrators, carried out arrests and searches, forbade certain newspapers." But already the shadow of certain aspects of state capitalism emerged through these tasks which would take on a much greater dimension during the degeneration of the revolution. "The economic sector of the Executive Committee elaborated a whole programme for the economic life of the state: in many domains of industry the time is right for a state monopoly on commerce; in other domains the conditions are ripe enough for the formation of trusts regulated by the state (coal, oil, metals, sugar, paper) and finally for almost all branches of production the present conditions demand a regulatory participation of the state in the division of raw materials, in the elaboration of products and in the fixing of prices. At the same time a control on all credit must be established." (Trotsky)

Despite this real power of the soviets and despite the real maturation of the working class, it would take months for the workers' councils to be really capable of taking power:

- * as we have seen the CEC itself gave power back to the bourgeoisie and called on the workers to go back to work after the February insurrection;

- * decisions were made in small sub-committees without taking into account the assembly of delegates: "the most important decisions were made in the Executive, or more precisely in its leadership core in pre-arranged agreement with the government." The soviet remained outside of all this and was treated like a simple meeting place: "It is not in these general assemblies that policy is made and all these plenary sessions have no practical importance", as Trotsky reports;

- * at each open struggle of the working class in Petrograd demanding that the soviets take power the soviets did everything they could to avoid this to hold back the activity of the workers. The presence in the soviets of a Menshevik majority expresses the enormous gap that existed between workers' combativity and its organised political expression;

- * on the central demands of the working class the soviet remained extremely vague: no clear position on the war. But the worst thing was when the First Pan-Russian Congress of Soviets met in June and rejected the decree on the eight-hour day!

- * since the beginning of the movement there was no clear distinction made between wor-

kers' soviets and territorial soviets, the working class found itself therefore 'drowned' in other non-exploiting strata;

- * in a general way the representative systems were extremely variable from one soviet to another leading to over- or under-representation;

- * very often the local or provincial soviets were content to simply agree with the decisions or discussions of the assembly in Petrograd without seeing themselves as full participants in the process. There was a great deal of difficulty in getting rid of a 'parliamentary' vision of workers' councils. Very often the councils were seen by the different political parties as simply arenas where they could manoeuvre to affirm their own power. As we shall see the Bolsheviks themselves certainly were not exempt from such confusions;

- * the organs expressing working class combativity most clearly were very often the base committees, the factory committees: the workers took a much greater interest in these factory committees than in the soviets; they very often underestimated the real importance of these soviets. That is why after July the Bolsheviks even defended the idea that power should be taken by the factory committees instead of by the soviets which were seen to be too sluggish.



The enumeration of all these weaknesses is not an attempt to discredit the workers' councils. On the contrary it wishes to show that workers' councils never emerged in a perfect form, as a completed product once and for all, that they are victims of the same contradictory pressures which the working class itself feels and that they like the class must transform themselves during the revolutionary process. It is only the constant mobilisation of the working class in the defence of its class interests that can push forward this transformation. "The contradiction between the powerful offensive of the



masses and the hesitation of their political representation is not accidental. The oppressed masses in a revolutionary epoch are led to direct action more easily and more rapidly than they are able to give their desires and their demands a correct expression through their own representation. The contradiction in the soviet representation itself is that, on the one hand, it is necessary for the action of the masses and, on the other hand, it can very easily become a conservative hindrance to this action. This contradiction is resolved in practice by renewing the representation but this operation which is not so simple especially in revolution only increases the gap between the representation and direct action." (Trotsky)

In October, the working class regrouped and organised in its councils (where since September revolutionary ideas had become the majority against those defended by the Mensheviks and Social-Revolutionaries) will be strong enough and mature enough to organise a new insurrection and to take power. The soviets were able to condense and express a revolutionary character of the proletariat. But with the failure of the world revolution where such a maturation never came to fruition, certain confusions (which we have mentioned) on the real function of councils worked AGAINST the proletariat to contribute, along with many other factors, to the creation of those regimes we know today in the Eastern Bloc countries.

THE ROLE OF THE BOLSHEVIK PARTY

In all these struggles, in all these expressions of the self-organisation of the working class militants of the Bolshevik Party were actively trying to spread revolutionary ideas. They were an extreme minority in February with very confused positions but as these positions became clearer they gradually won the majority of the working class, of the soldiers and even of the poor peasants greedy for this land the Bolsheviks promised them. But this was not as simple as it sounds either. This process included many deviations and difficulties. The Bolshevik Party was very often put back on its feet by pressure from the working class. It was in the practice of class struggle and also because it was capable of listening to what the workers were saying and paying attention to what they were doing that the Bolshevik organisation was strengthened around the programme which was enriched by all this working class activity: "The strength of the Bolshevik Party was shown not in the absence of dissent or hesitation or even crises but in the fact that in very difficult circumstances it came out of these crises and assured the possibility of a decisive intervention in the events. This meant also that the party as a whole was an

adequate instrument for the revolution. The reformist party considers the foundations of the regime that it wishes to reform practically unshakeable and so inevitably subordinates itself to the ideas and morals of the ruling class. The socialist democratic party has become a second-class bourgeois party. Bolshevism has created the true type of revolutionary party which has historical aims incompatible with contemporary society." (Trotsky)

Against any idea of a 'deus ex machina' party, we have already mentioned the extreme weakness of the party in February, confusion of its perspectives after the insurrection and the internal crisis it suffered on the occasion of the April Theses which put the party and the proletariat face to face with their historic responsibilities. But this was not the only time the Bolshevik Party had difficulties: during the July Days the Party had trouble giving an adequate response to the working class struggle. There were many hesitations: at first the strikes were disapproved of, then the Party went to the head of the demonstrations and later on they in fact sent the workers home after several days. Through all this many militants were angry about the attitude they adjudged too 'attentiste' and they tore up their membership cards. Even in October, up to the last minute, the fact that the Party put the taking of power by the working class on its agenda frightened many militants who refused to defend such a perspective. Throughout the year 1917 the process of strengthening the Party occurred through crises, struggles of ideas and confrontations of positions which were sometimes very sharp. The working class, in developing its struggle, demanded of the Party clear perspectives and decisive action. It is not easy to live up to these expectations and to act effectively as the clearest and most decisive avant-garde always defending the point of view of the general interests of the proletariat.

The Bolshevik Party nevertheless succeeded in fulfilling the vital role of avant-garde. Despite its crises and weaknesses which are inevitable to some extent in any living organism, it was able to transform itself into a crucial force for the revolution. In the last analysis, by learning from past and present experiences of the proletariat, by drawing out their general lessons, the Bolsheviks were able to most clearly express the revolutionary aspirations of the workers. This contribution of the party to the development of class consciousness was fundamental because it emphasised the vital importance of the autonomous self-organisation of the working class, the primordial role of the soviets and the need to give these organs an authentically revolutionary content.



After April, Bolshevik militants consistently defended the need to create and strengthen workers' councils as mass organs so they would be capable of taking power and exercising the proletarian dictatorship. All the activity of the Bolshevik Party, based on firm revolutionary principles, rejecting any compromise with bourgeois forces, clearly denouncing all the 'false friends' of the working class, aimed at making the workers more conscious of their revolutionary perspectives and making this consciousness more homogeneous in the class. That's why, as the months went by, combative workers, face to face with poverty and hardship, and understanding the need for revolution, joined the Bolshevik avant-garde en masse, to strengthen the force of revolutionary ideas by strengthening the party.

Looking at the situation from the point of view of the class as a whole, the Bolsheviks were correct in their judgement that in July the situation was not ready for an immediate taking of power. Of course, the idea of advising against strikes was wrong (especially since it was done because the party was not strong enough). But the warning against a premature seizure of power was based on a fundamentally correct analysis of an insufficiently developed and generalised class consciousness. In the councils, Mensheviks and SRs continued to hold the reins. Outside Petrograd the situation was not yet ready. The time for the seizure of power had not yet come and there was no point in giving away any margin for a bourgeois massacre.

The Bolsheviks rightly saw their avant-garde activity as pushing towards a homogenisation of revolutionary consciousness and the growth of mass organs. But the Bolshevik Party itself was a victim of substitutionist confusions about the role of the party. These confusions weighed heavily on the entire workers' movement at the time and was not specific to the Bolsheviks. The whole history of class societies where minorities have ruled, the whole history of the workers movement itself which in the 19th century envisioned proletarian power as just a question of the power of the proletarian party, made the whole class in this period unable to see that the party had any other role than that of 'taking power in the name of the class'. That's why, for the Bolshevik Party, class consciousness existed and developed only to make it possible for the party to take power. There was a constant assimilation of the two processes. By the same token, the Bolsheviks identified the seizure of power by the soviets with a seizure of power by the party which had eventually become a majority in the soviets. The entire working class saw its revolutionary movement in this general way and wasn't able to distinguish the specific

functions of its different organisational forms.

But these confusions were not the determining factor in the evolution of the situation in 1917. For example, in October, contrary to the assertions of those who say the party made the insurrection by 'manipulating' the Military Revolutionary Committee, it was in fact masses of workers who carried out the practical process of insurrection with the party among them, participating in all the decisive moments of action but far from being the only instigator of events. Of course, the party saw its actions with different eyes and the idea that it would take power was never far from its plans. The substitutionist confusions began to determine the course of events when the world revolution was defeated and Russia was isolated. Even though the first Soviet Constitution reaffirmed the sovereignty of the councils, in fact the party quickly transformed itself into a state apparatus, assuming responsibility for managing the capitalist relations that persisted in Russia as everywhere else, becoming the Kafkaesque machine we now know. But in the revolutionary process, despite these enormous confusions, the Bolshevik party armed with its revolutionary principles, defending the perspectives that emerged from the working class struggle itself, played an essential role in the revolutionary process.

CONCLUSION

Against all the efforts to deny the proletarian character of the Russian revolution (presenting it as a bourgeois revolution or as a coup d'état of a small Bolshevik minority, etc), against all the efforts to pit the councils against the party and vice versa, we have tried to show the revolutionary process as a living whole, in other words a contradictory one. Beginning with simple 'economic' demands, the working class created both councils and a party, expressing its enormous combativity. It asserted its own political power. Neither the bourgeoisie nor anyone else could end the war and the suffering and improve the lot of the vast majority of workers. The working class therefore had to take its fate into its own hands. In October, organised into councils and won over to revolutionary ideas, the workers destroyed the bourgeois state. The October insurrection shows the gigantic revolutionary potential the proletariat possesses. All its weaknesses and even the degeneration of the revolution must not prevent us from recognising in the proletariat the only revolutionary class created by capitalism which can end the contradictions engendered by the capitalist system.



When the proletariat moves into decisive action, its vitality, imagination and questioning are inexhaustible. Many things have changed since October 1917. But the fundamentals of the proletarian struggle remain the same. The past lives again in today's battles. We do not want to make a fetish of anniversaries or funerals. For us, the struggles the proletariat endured in 1917 live again in today's struggles because they showed:

- * that in the era of imperialist world wars, of capitalist decadence, the proletarian revolution is on the agenda as a necessity and possibility. This necessity and possibility is never more deeply felt than today;

- * that this revolution can only be the out-

come of a whole process of mass strikes with advances and retreats in which the working class, faced with a continued deterioration of its conditions, develops its revolutionary consciousness and its unitary organisation;

- * that this unitary organisation has nothing to do with the unions and old mass parties now integrated into the bourgeois state, but is created directly in the heat of struggle to enable the proletariat to take power and put an end to exploitations;

- * that the revolutionary party, where the most resolute elements are regrouped, defending the final goals of the movement, has a role to play in this process to accelerate its maturation by pointing forward towards the communist perspective;

- * that the whole revolutionary process, because it is the emanation of a class becoming conscious of itself, needing to break with decades of alienation, is extremely uneven, difficult and contradictory.

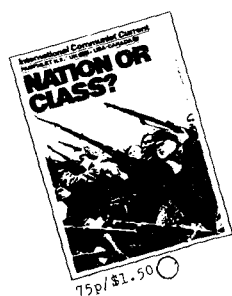
Only the real movement of the class, its constant mobilisation, a real workers' democracy, can guarantee the success of the proletarian revolution!



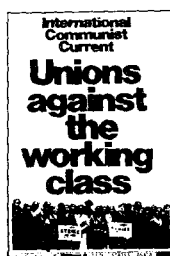
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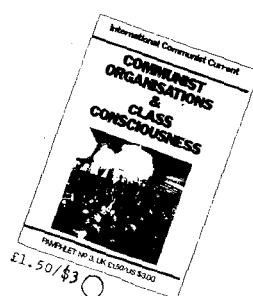
(1) All quotations from Trotsky are taken from his 'History of the Russian Revolution', translated from the French.



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on the nature of the russian revolution

DEBATES IN THE REVOLUTIONARY MILIEU

This new book in English, Two Texts for Defining the Communist Programme by LLMen who publishes the review International Correspondence from Hong Kong, deserves the consideration of serious revolutionaries. It is intended to relaunch debate in the revolutionary milieu on the lessons of the October Revolution. The two texts are "The Capitalist Nature of the 'Socialist' Countries" and "Russia: Revolution and Counter-Revolution 1917-1921". (1)

Why yet another return to the Russian revolution of so long ago? All class conscious workers in the generations since the First World War have rightly devoted enormous efforts to understanding the repercussions of the great working class uprisings of the beginning of the 20th Century. The direct experience of proletarian revolution is of inestimable value to all workers who, as an exploited class under capitalism, are constantly subjected to a barrage of bourgeois ideology and have little chance, outside of periods of open revolt, to grasp the nature of their collective social existence and true power.

In the same way, the failure of the revolutionary wave has indelibly marked our century and if this failure is not fully recognised and learned from, in terms that offer some hope of avoiding a repetition of massacre and betrayal, it is impossible to think that the working class will ever again allow itself to aspire to a revolutionary transformation.

This book goes back to the basics of why the experience (in Russia at least) failed. This is especially important to stress at a time when most of the existing revolutionary milieu is going backwards, not only unable to complete the work begun by the left communist movement of the 1920s, '30s and '40s (unable even to admit that this work needs completion) but increasingly willing to accept the positions of the degenerating Third International which doomed the first revolutionary wave.

Much of what is interesting in this book comes from the fact that it deals with crucial controversial aspects of the Russian revolution in the form of a polemic with various groups and currents of thought today. This is all the more welcome because the

Answer to LLMen

crisis in the milieu today has not only blocked political exchange among groups due to sectarianism, it has made for confrontation of positions being written off with blase cynicism as a 'dialogue of the deaf' which it therefore becomes.

In this book, LLM provides an analysis of the degeneration of the Russian revolution while defending its original proletarian class nature. His rejection of the anarchist position on the revolution can be a valuable antidote for today's flight into 'libertarianism' by those unwilling to go beyond simple-minded reactions. He deals with the internal as well as 'external' causes for the Russian failure and examines the meaning of a socialist programme for the post-insurrectional period. Although LLM is by no means the first to discover these positions, they can always bear development and a fresh look. One point that has not often been developed in the revolutionary milieu, at least not this deeply, is his dissection and denunciation of Chinese CP ideology.

The many other interesting aspects of this book we leave to readers to examine. We would like to comment, however, on key areas in this work that defend what are, in our opinion, grossly inadequate positions with dangerous implications for the communist programme:

- on the working class content of the proletarian dictatorship;
- on non-proletarian strata in the post-insurrectional period;
- on the economic programme of the period of transition.

THE CLASS CONTENT OF THE PROLETARIAN DICTATORSHIP

One of the most obvious ploys of bourgeois ideology invites us to look at the Russian revolution and agree that 'when the workers were on top, they were just as bad as the capitalists'.

In fact, from the day after the seizure of power by the soviets, from the point when a new state power began to be constructed, the power of the working class as a class dictatorship was undermined by a party dictatorship working through a new state machine, isolated

from the rest of the world proletariat by a world rent by war.

How could this power have been undermined so effectively 'from within'? According to LLM, it is a question of a failure to enforce 'the Paris Commune principle'.

"What would the Paris Commune principle be like when put into practice? Both Marx and Engels were decidedly vague on this; aside from stating the basis of the principle as the power to delegate and recall from the bottom up, they went no further." (p 231) "The process of the usurpation of the soviet system by a state machine which was appointed from the top down and divorced from the soviet system ... " (p 238)

And then, "... we come to the second major development which destroyed the Paris Commune principle in the soviet state, namely, the abolition of the elective principle itself in the soviet system." (p 240)

But LLM fails to make clear that it is not an election principle in itself but the existence of workers' councils as the collective expression of a class (and not of individual worker/voters) which is the sine qua non of revolutionary organisation for victory. LLM writes exactly one line on this vital, collective class phenomenon in Russia: "Factory soviets seem to have fallen into disuse very early on and the territorial soviets of deputies constituted the basic building blocks of the soviet system." (p 227)

Territorial soviets were not workers' councils. Territorial soviets were general councils representing all of the pro-revolutionary population of a given geographic area with workers given greater or lesser weight depending on the area and the balance of forces. These territorial soviets were indeed the building blocks of the new state administration in the period of transition but they were not the voice of a class conscious proletariat able to group together, leading the battle for a communist program within any territorial or state organs and if necessary, against them. To blur the distinction between territorial councils and workers' councils is to make the proletariat into individual, atomised workers 'voting' for officials. It is to drown the specific class content of the revolution just as surely as what happened in Russia.

Without specifically workers' councils as the seat of power of the proletarian dictatorship, 'councils' become reduced to the 'bottoms' of some pyramid of government. LLM, for example, seems to find Ossinsky's suggestion to combine Sovnarkom (Council of People's Commissars) and the VTsik (Soviet Central Executive Committee) a positive contribution when, in fact, it is merely a minor point linked to the peculiarities of the elaborate Russian bureaucracy. It does not address the fundamental issue. Nor could it, because at the time of the Russian revolution most revolutionaries who criticised the 'machine' swallowing up the revolution merely saw the need for better elections, less arrogant

executive committees or, at most, a sort of ouvrierist 'workers' control', much as LLM describes.

LLM, who is so clear in his defense of workers' councils in his polemic against the CWO and elsewhere in the book, fails to identify a vital class element of the defeat of the Russian revolution in the blurring of the meaning of territorial and workers' soviets. He does this not simply because he remains too caught up in all the details of the Russian bureaucratic specificities but because the search for a 'Paris Commune principle' is itself quixotic. The insights of Marx and Engels are our most valuable beacons but it is essentially in their method, as LLM would agree, that they left us their legacy. Trying to fit the future revolution into the letter of Marx and Engels' extrapolations from a heroic but doomed rebellion in one city in 1870s capitalism only looks like trying to find an easy way out of theoretical problems, a sort of 'back to the Bible' approach. But it is precisely the absence of workers' councils in 1870, which could arise only in a capitalism ripe for the full content of revolution, that makes any city government 'Commune' principle hopelessly inadequate. No 'Commune' principle could prepare Lenin to face the problems of the period of transition for all his charming hopes of 'cooks leading the government', etc. and it won't help LLM today. The theoretical challenge of the period of capitalist decadence must be faced head on with the need for new breakthroughs.

Revolutionary marxists of the 1914-19 period were severely hampered by the slow decline of marxism under the aegis of the vulgar marxism characteristic of the Second International. Theory struggled to grasp the suddenness of the onset of decadence: the world war and the new tasks of revolutionaries in the world upheaval. Without a clear theoretical understanding, the working class as a whole tried to learn day by day and workers did fight back in Russia against the loss of their power in what was supposed to be their own revolution, against its exploitation and victimisation by a party-state dictatorship. There were the Petrograd strikes in 1920-21 and the Kronstadt revolt. Here again, in practice as in theory, LLM in our view fails to make the fundamental issue clear.

To him, Kronstadt can be understood only if we see beforehand (or only if he has 'proved' beforehand) that the Russian state had degenerated by 1921 into a bourgeois state.(2) Then, and only then, as a reflection of this change, and not because of anything inherently proletarian about the strikes or Kronstadt, can we see these strikes and uprisings as something to be supported (p 263 - 264).

No-one is disputing that events must be seen in a global context in terms of a balance of forces between the classes. But according to LLM, what exactly made the Russian state bourgeois before Kronstadt? The answer seems to be an end to any real elections and the failure to implement another 'Paris Commune principle': the use of labour time vouchers

in the economy.

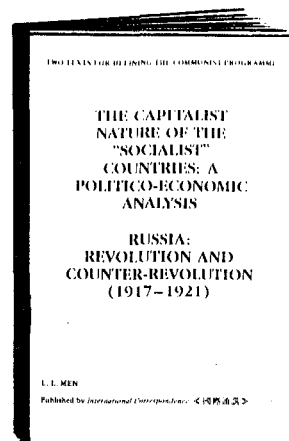
Revolutionaries may hold different positions on these two points but what can be more counter-revolutionary than slaughtering the working class? But no. For LLM, "only the preachers of the ICC sermonise that there should be no violence within the working class." (p 171, footnote) He rejects this principle entirely. In an absurd parallel, the most class conscious workers of the Russian revolution in Petrograd and Kronstadt, the central core of the insurrection who later revolted against the degeneration of the revolution are compared to the bank clerks who went on strike against the soviets in 1917 - all to show that "the consciousness of workers is extremely heterogeneous" and therefore that workers may have to massacre each other for the revolution. What a strange echo of leninism's contempt for the working class to be coming from the pen of LLM. If we did not possess the hindsight to see that the Russian state was already degenerating, or if the state had used labour vouchers for example, or better voting practices, then apparently LLM would agree to settling differences over communist policy by slaughtering each other!

LLM never actually allows that there can be strikes in the period of transition, strikes where workers defend themselves as workers (because classes will still exist even after the capitalist class is expropriated and we are trying to eliminate other classes) against mistaken policy decisions. In other words, strikes within the framework of the revolution and not the "bank clerks against the revolution" all over again. For LLM, workers under capitalism can presumably still strike but as soon as the workers' dictatorship is created, they have to sign a no-strike pledge!

If we all agree that capitalism cannot be eliminated by decree the day after the revolution, then how can we pretend that workers are going to find themselves in a 'paradise' where their immediate and historic interests are realised? On the contrary, there will be a struggle, a class struggle, against the vestiges of the old society. The struggle will be weighted in favour of the working class but it will still have to be fought, politically and economically, to defend the communist programme.

But even if we felt that class struggle would present no difficulties after the revolution, even if the issue of the state posed no problem, even if all you have to do is have good elections and labour vouchers, why should workers kill each other over issues of policy? Wouldn't revolutionaries rather defend the need to conserve the precious forces of the proletariat, defend the inviolability of the workers' councils, defend the idea that the working class must work together towards common goals and not backwards to bourgeois reality and ideology where you just bring your guns and your goons to show who's boss? Bourgeois society is based on power relations. The proletariat is obliged to adopt power relations with other classes

including the non-exploiting ones. But within the proletariat itself, it cannot be a question of power but of consciousness and therefore of convincing, just as in relations between revolutionary groups of the proletariat. This is the major principle of workers' councils and workers' democracy. Without it, the revolution is doomed because there can be no 'consciousness from the barrel of a gun'. This fundamental element of the proletarian dictatorship LLM's long development on the Russian Revolution ignores.



LLM's position is far from the clarity expressed in the Italian Left in exile in the 1930s:

"The problem is posed this way: if, faced with a mutiny produced by famine, the proletariat has recourse to the same methods as a bourgeois state, it transforms itself, it betrays itself, its substance becomes bourgeois.

"That's the way the problem is posed for us. Things happened in a proletarian sector leading to a struggle against the proletarian state (and we are even prepared to concede that they were the unwitting victims of enemy manoeuvres). How should we react to this? BY STARTING FROM THE PRINCIPLE THAT SOCIALISM CANNOT BE IMPOSED ON THE PROLETARIAT BY FORCE AND VIOLENCE. It would have been better to lose Kronstadt than to keep it as a geographic entity when in fact this victory could have only one result: to alter the very basis, the substance of the proletariat's revolutionary action."

(Vercesi in Octobre, March 1938, 'The Question of the State'. Octobre was the successor to the publication Bilan.)

THE NATURE OF POST-REVOLUTIONARY SOCIETY

It is ironic that if LLM does not understand the meaning of revolutionary solidarity within the working class and the need to extirpate relations of force among workers, he does not seem to be able to elucidate rela-

tions between the working class and other non-exploiting social strata any better.

In discussing the peasantry in the Russian revolution, LLM asserts that: "When peasants did vote in soviet elections, they voted for 'nominal SRs', i.e. peasant activists identifying themselves with the Socialist Revolutionary Party. At the village and district level, the peasants had no political programme at all. All they were concerned with was the land question." (p 91 - 92) And again: (The peasants resisted grain requisitions when they came from the SRs as much as when they came from other parties.) "This illustrates clearly the non-political (in the sense of having no political programme or at least no independent political programme) nature of the peasants' struggle." (p 92)

It is absurd to accuse the peasants of being 'non-political' when, in fact, obtaining land was their political programme in defense of their class interests. What is 'politics' (and in this sense, the revolutionary movement of the class conscious proletariat will mark the beginning of the end of 'politics') if not the ideological expression of the needs of a society divided into antagonistic class interests. Although the peasantry and other petty bourgeois strata have no viable future as classes, they are not, nor really can they ever be, 'non-political'. It is hard to see what LLM wishes to make of all this until we read: "Not only will this (making every attempt to overthrow the workers' dictatorship) apply to the bourgeoisie; all the other social classes/strata will also resist/sabotage the workers' dictatorship actively or passively." (p 216) He refers to these classes as "reactionary and counter-revolutionary classes." (p 118)

It is absolutely true that Lenin's idea of a 'dictatorship of workers and peasants' was a complete error. The left communists were right in claiming that only the working class could exercise the dictatorship since only they were the bearers of the social relations of communism, only they had a class interest in the elimination of private property. But this does not mean that other non-exploiting strata of the population, impoverished and ground down by the decadence of capitalism, will not have a sincere and active anti-capitalist revulsion against the capitalist class and sympathy for the revolution. With the proletariat a minority everywhere in the world, if this sympathy does not appear in a significant proportion, we are surely headed for disaster.

This active sympathy with the revolution insofar as it eliminates capitalism will have to be taken into account in the representation in the territorial soviets. Why else will these territorial organs exist? LLM has a completely contradictory attitude towards this issue. At certain points in the book he insists that these "reactionary and counter-revolutionary strata" must be stripped of all rights; at other points in the discussion of the Russian revolution, he sees these territorial soviets as the basis for the state.

The justification for excluding these strata from all participation in the period of transition (until such point as they are all proletarianised) on the grounds that they are 'non-political' does not hold water. In many ways, LLM appears to be trapped in a 19th century world that no longer exists. The lessons he draws from the peasantry in Russia are referred to as if capitalism had not effected any changes since then. For LLM the non-socialised sector is mainly the peasantry but he also makes a reference to the "petty-bourgeoisie, the intellectuals, the salariat and the churches" (p 216). While we do not know what he means by the salariat (a French word for the working class) or by the idea of churches constituting 'strata' of the population, the classic shopkeepers and artisans have long since ceased to influence the social structure of capitalism and the 'intellectuals' have disappeared in favour of the bureaucratic elites running state capitalism (drawn from the grandes écoles or Harvard Law School or similar institutions in every country). The third world is full of landless, jobless, poverty-stricken urban masses which capitalism can no longer proletarianise, victims of famine, disease and war. Moreover, the centres of capitalism are full of workers and middle strata doing work that socialism does not want (insurance, banks, etc) on a scale unknown in 19th century capitalism. All of this highlights the new questions facing the working class in its relation to post-revolutionary society, questions that LLM seems unaware of in his rather simplistic view of 'the proletariat versus the reactionary peasantry'.

Moreover, underlying his conception of the balance of forces in the period of transition, is a vulgar marxist view of the state as merely the executive committee of the ruling class, a conception incapable of explaining the development of state capitalism as we know it today and incapable of acting as a guide to the dangers of the future state in the period of transition.

THE ECONOMICS OF THE PERIOD OF TRANSITION

What would be the content of the communist programme to change social relations in the period of transition once the capitalist class has been expropriated by the revolutionary councils? LLM devotes a great deal of space in this book to the defence of labour time vouchers, an idea explored by Marx and Engels in the Critique of the Gotha Programme. LLM's elaboration on this theme is, in fact, the same development as the German left made in the 1920s and '30s. Apparently without knowing it, LLM has basically repeated the conclusions of J. Appel's Fundamental Principles of Communist Production and Distribution.

According to LLM, "the institutionalisation of the labour time voucher system abolishes money at the same time as it abolishes value". (p 139 - 140) It does not. Briefly, according to this scheme (aside from calculations involving resources for production), a worker is paid for every hour he works, less

a certain global deduction for the old, the sick, etc. It is true that surplus value would be eliminated and labour power would no longer be a commodity but value would still exist because consumption is linked to how much labour a worker individually contributes. Value is not abolished until 'to each according to his needs' is established.

LLM does not see this because to him, the real abolition of value - 'to each according to his needs' - is only a "logical possibility" but "obviously no society can be based on such a method of production." (p 22) One wonders what communism is for LLM, what we are all fighting for?

The labour voucher system tends to hide the reality of continued value production and is therefore dangerous. Socialism cannot be established overnight but the working class can never afford to fool itself on pain of losing the struggle entirely. Nor can it afford to forget its true goals, no matter how beautiful the accounting system.

Whatever the uses of direct labour time as a calculation in production, as a remuneration for the working class, its emphasis on the individual worker getting 'a fair share for a fair day's work' sort of mentality, is politically backward enough to disqualify it even as a 'first step' along the road. Labour has already been to some extent collectivised by the state capitalist era. Unlike the early days of the system, it could well be impossible today to calculate each individual's labour time. Is it, in fact, necessary?

In the period of transition, the working class will be forging its dictatorship as a collective entity. Why should we perpetuate the 'individual' in terms of the goods a worker receives being determined by the work he individually furnishes? Individual expression, dissent and development can and must flourish under socialism but not the 'individualism' of a voucher slip for one worker's family as opposed to another's. There are other possibilities. For example, why not, as far as possible, deal within the proletarian sector as equals, dividing up what is produced through distribution at workplaces. After the immediate expropriation of the capitalist class and the socialisation of large-scale industry, what is plentiful can be freely available, transportation, communication, housing socialised and what is scarce will have to be rationed. 'Equality' is not socialism either but it is indeed farther along the line to class solidarity than the voucher system.

LLM ridicules this as mere 'rationing' (see polemic with the ICC, A. Buick, etc) but rationing would be just as necessary with or without labour vouchers unless LLM predicts immediate abundance. He also ridicules the idea of emphasising the purpose of production as an element in the movement towards socialism. This is dangerous. We are going to be forced to consider this issue since capitalism has created vast economic sectors that are of no use to socialism. Also, the commun-

ist programme can never become a reality if the purpose of production does not change to suit the historic but also the immediate interests of the proletariat as expressed by the decisions in the workers' councils.

In sum, labour vouchers will not be socialism even if the entire world uses them, much less an isolated country as LLM seems to envisage.

The voucher system is a subject of debate among revolutionaries and this article merely tries to articulate one possible alternative. But in his treatment of a revolution isolated from the rest of the proletariat, LLM raises issues of grave principle and comes dangerously close to an apology for the possibility of socialism in one country.

According to LLM, the ICC has invented a 'myth' saying there is a link between the revolution not spreading, finding itself isolated and then falling into the theory (and/or practice) of 'socialism in one country'. (p 147) He claims this 'myth' is a product of Luxemburg's analysis of the crisis in capitalism but he completely fails to sustain this allegation in a particularly incoherent passage in an otherwise very clear book. In any case, he concludes: "There is no reason why the law of value cannot be abolished within one country IF it is 1. basically self-sufficient resource-wise and 2. able to maintain total economic isolation from the capitalist world economy (the permissibility of tactical barter has been mentioned already. The reason why socialism cannot be built in a single country or a group of countries independently is because imperialism renders the second 'if' impossible." (p 147)

It is true that LLM corrects some unfortunate formulations in ICC texts, some written by present members of IP, including the fact that the world market is created by the law of value and not vice versa. But the world economy exists and that is why socialism is a possibility and a necessity only on a world scale. The extreme interdependence of the world market and the productive forces makes it impossible for point (1) to exist anywhere in the world today. Even revolutionary Russia was starving although LLM 'solves' that theoretical dilemma of self-sufficiency by stating that the Red Cross economic aid given to Russia against the famine "was not an economic category"! (p 268) As for barter as a tactical solution, no one can engage in barter and still claim to be abolishing the law of value no matter how necessary the barter is. In short, if we understand LLM's reasoning, the capitalist class and the capitalist system is international and worldwide, not tolerating breaks in its sway, but socialism is not. It could exist quite nicely thank you if the imperialists would just stay out.

Because socialism will be international or it will not be anything at all, the spread of the revolutionary victory is a major priority of the programme. To LLM, this seems to be posed as a 'military' question as though he has let himself be imprisoned once again by

the limits of the Russian experience. He seems to use as a model the Bolsheviks' ill-fated plan to send an army to march on Poland to 'raise the workers' by force. In fact, this expedition expressed a complete misreading of the meaning of the need to spread a movement or a revolution; it was a 'short-cut' of disastrous proportions both 'militarily' and in terms of working class consciousness.

Finally, the author fails to see the inevitable link between an isolated revolution and failure (or the counter-revolutionary danger of the theory of socialism in one country) because of his very conception of socialism. "Expropriation of industry and, where possible, agriculture and their nationalisation industry and agriculture." (p 138) In short, if socialism is just nationalisation plus labour vouchers then, indeed, once you have decreed a formal end to money you can pretend to have socialism in one country! 'Nationalisation', even as a shorthand term (for what?), is a strange choice of words for a communist today. Can there be socialisation in one nation, through nationalisation? The real danger of these conceptions is that state capitalism too can so distort the law of value in isolated areas of 'nationalisation' that state capitalism can once again, as in Russia, be mistaken for the socialist programme by those revolutionaries who do not realise that socialism is first and foremost international or it is nothing.

CONCLUSION

One of the reasons for the defects in the argumentation in this book and the positions defended can be traced to the weakness of the revolutionary milieu itself. The debates have advanced little in more than ten years. If anything, the climate of debate has worsened with the crisis in the revolutionary milieu. Instead of clarification or even confrontation of positions, the milieu has too often just gone backwards from the debates of the early '70s to the stale and sterile slogans of Leninism - first the CWO and now the ICC.

Unfortunately, LLM remains locked in the confines of the debates of years ago; in the almost total emphasis on Russia rather than the context of the rest of the revolutionary wave. Also, he seems to suffer from a visceral hatred of the ICC that is very disquieting in the sense that it seems to adversely affect his judgement in favour of point scoring and spite. This is all the more pity because in view of the ICC's degeneration, his jousts with the ICC as it was ten years ago make it seem that he is in a war behind the times.

LLM is correct to note a strain of anti-theory even years ago in the ICC as a backdrop to today's degeneration. But today, the ICC has not only retreated back to the Leninist dichotomy on class consciousness and to the Bolsheviks as 'our models', but has changed its platform position on the first revolutionary wave and the degeneration of the Communist Parties. The ICC has turned its

back on its own heritage and replaced theory by dogma and self-serving mouthings. The ICC is only one example of this crisis in the revolutionary milieu.

In many ways, this book is written from a point of departure in the past. What it lacks is an explicit awareness of the limitations of the Russian experience itself, an awareness of how the decadence of capitalism has evolved since then, and of the limitations of a war period; an awareness of the limits of any Paris Commune principle. Without this, it is no wonder that the author fails to defend the fundamentals of the working class dictatorship or to see the dimensions of the dilemma posed by the state and the economic transformation in the period of transition.

But let's face the situation squarely: these issues raise more questions than they answer. No one current of thought has the 'solution'; the issues are too complex and afford few certainties. There has to be a great deal more work done.

The revolutionary generations were decimated by the counter-revolution and the communist left was handicapped not only by the counter-revolution and war but by the enormity of the theoretical overhaul required to explain the failure of the revolutionary wave. The essentials of this task were undertaken then and our work today would be impossible without this contribution. But these often scattered insights remain to be clarified and developed by our generation. Unfortunately, the post-'68 revolutionary milieu has basically turned away from this work in the past decade in favour of organisation-building and sectarian isolation.

This book only underlines the fact that vital work is still to be done in the confrontation of positions on the meaning of the socialist revolution.

JA

Notes

1. This book is available from International Correspondence, P.O. Box 44007, Shaukeiwan Post Office, Hong Kong. We in IP can mail you a copy for \$5/£4 plus mailing. All proceeds go to Hong Kong.

2. LLM seems to have got caught in the 'date debate' over Kronstadt. This debate arose in the mid-'70s between the CWO and the ICC among others. This debate had one practical outcome: the CWO found in it a reason, at the time, to reject regroupment with the ICC (the ICC being in their opinion 'counter-revolutionary' for saying that the Kronstadt massacre did not yet definitively condemn the entire revolutionary wave and the International). Several years later the CWO joined the PCI (Battaglia Comunista) which has a truly Leninist position on the revolution!

LLM, although he vociferously condemns the ICC position of the time and sides with the then CWO position, he himself seems unable to

really make up his mind.

"The crushing of the Kronstadt uprising marked the end of the degeneration process. If a renewed revolutionary wave had occurred in Europe, the situation in Russia might have been reversed." (p 128, our emphasis)

"By March 1921, the Russian state and the Bolsheviks had become completely bourgeois." (p 203)

"Had the German revolution been victorious, that would certainly have had a positive effect on the Russian revolution's development. But whether or not the degeneration process could have been arrested or even reversed is open to serious doubt." (p 277)

If the degeneration process had definitively 'ended', then it makes no sense to speculate on whether the process could have been reversed (by the bourgeoisie turning into the proletariat?). If the degeneration process

was not completed yet, then the bourgeoisie was not completely in control and the international context LLM ridicules when he talks about others must come into play.

On violence in the working class, LLM justifies his contempt for the position of no violence within the working class by the fact that the ICC used Kronstadt to become aware of this issue. This is hardly unusual as it took much the same form in Vercesi's documents for Octobre in the '30s. But LLM has avoided all this difficulty about Kronstadt; to him, the fight was between the bourgeois Russian state and the workers. Unfortunately, the original protagonists did not have this hindsight. LLM uses this talmudic logic to dismiss the entire issue even for the future saying essentially that if the government is to be labelled 'proletarian' then it's OK if they massacre other workers. If their label is 'bourgeois', then the workers are right to resist. The important thing is to keep the scorecards correct!

CORRESPONDENCE

COLLECTIVE and INDIVIDUAL CONSCIOUSNESS



In IP#4 and 5, we published an article clarifying and developing our conception of class consciousness. As we then explained, the question of class consciousness is a central one for revolutionaries, one which has always generated sharp disagreements, and which is at the heart of the regressions of the current revolutionary milieu. We return to this question with the following excerpt from a letter by a sympathizer, which if it does not pertain to the core of this issue, nonetheless raises a very interesting point which has rarely been discussed: the relation between individual consciousness and class consciousness. The letter is a critique of the first part of our article on class consciousness which appeared in IP#4.

LETTER OF J.B.

This is a good article, well written, in a sober style, with neither verbosity nor pathos. It immediately gets to the heart of the matter, and to a global view; it's theoretical without being philosophically nebulous. It certainly demands reflection. There is one point, however, with which I squarely disagree: the tendency, on p.19 - 20, to oppose individual and class. Appearances notwithstanding, this part of the article does not follow the logic of the preceding parts, and seems to me to be closer to Lukacs' Leninism. It's no

coincidence that the part of the article that I am criticizing quotes mainly Lukacs and not Marx, while previously both were cited.

The individual in contrast to the class is treated as an essentially atomized and alienated being. In Lukacs, the ideological framework for this conception can be clearly seen. For him, it's an extension of the idea that man (the "species") is essentially a myth: "The individual can never be the measure of things, because the individual necessarily faces objective reality, the totality of congealed things which he finds preexisting, completed and unchangeable, with respect to which he can only make a subjective judgement of recognition or refusal. Only the class (not the "species", which is only a contemplative, stylized, individual, transformed into a myth) can relate to the totality of reality in a practical and revolutionary manner."

These concepts are alien to Marxism. The first is a divinization of the collectivity, which fails to take into account the relation between a whole and its parts.

THE INDIVIDUAL AND THE COLLECTIVITY

It's true that the individual's essence is his social character. But it is as an

individual that he is social. The individual - society opposition serves only to remove individual phenomena from their social context. "The individual is a social being. The manifestation of his life -- even if it doesn't appear in the immediate form of a collective manifestation of life, accomplished together and simultaneously with others -- therefore is a manifestation and an affirmation of social life." (Marx, Paris Manuscripts of 1844)

The individual - collectivity opposition does not permit a global view of reality. Quite the contrary! By taking the individual out of his context, it gives up on any explanation. That is the case for all ideologies, which content themselves with qualifying concrete and particular phenomena as specific cases, exceptions to the rule, about which their philosophic systems have nothing to say.

It's true that the individual realizes himself, develops himself, through his social relations, and that consciousness can only be conceived as a social consciousness, of a collectivity. But the very logic of Lukacs consists in identifying the individual with the alienated and atomized being of class society, and to deny that the same problem is posed for collectivities. The dangerous implications of this method appear when the article defines collective consciousness as a qualitative leap made by a collectivity "in opposition to all the ideological prejudices subsisting in the heads of the individual workers". If there was a real opposition between ideology and consciousness, individual consciousness would also be transformed, the individual prejudices encroached upon too. Indeed, during the reflux of a struggle, prejudices reappear in the collectivity and not simply in the individual workers when they go home after work. And then consciousness only subsists in atomized individual workers and in organized minorities, "in opposition" to what the masses do and think.

Without the consciousness of individual workers, collective consciousness becomes a myth -- one which is widespread. Because the transformation of consciousness necessary to bring about a revolution is so enormous, it makes one hesitate, and, faced with the obvious insufficiencies, one is tempted to put one's faith in the greater collectivity which will resolve everything. In the struggle, the consciousness of individual workers must change. And, indeed that happens. Even after a struggle, workers are surprised how they changed from decent law-abiding citizens into rebels. Even the crisis transforms individuals. But it is above all in the struggle that one finds scores of examples of how individual and collective prejudices are left behind. We have only to think of the decisive role played suddenly by women in all great struggles (Russia, 1917, Poland, 1980). Indeed, the article itself points out that in the struggle, the individual workers are often "surprised by what they are capable of together". That is already the overcoming of an essential

prejudice on which all the others are based, and it is only to the degree that the struggle can still go into a reflux, that it can be said that workers maintain (or don't eliminate) all the "rubbish of prejudices" mentioned in the article.

It's often said that the collectivity is not the sum of individuals. But that means, not that the sheer number can compensate for the shortcomings of the individuals, but that the interaction between the individuals in a collectivity produces something qualitatively greater than what the number of atomized and powerless individuals represent. However, the opposite is also true: the collective stupidity is worse than the sum of stupidities of all the atomized individuals.

The illusions of the ICC on trade unions demonstrations are typical of the collectivist ideology, which hides all problems by identifying them with the supposed shortcomings of individuals, while the mass, the sum of atomized individuals, is capable of miracles. The fact that demonstrators generally feel like powerless, atomized, individuals, is not due to their character as particular individuals. The whole crowd is controlled by the unions. They bring together, "unite" all the individual workers, all the sectors, while really isolating them from one another at the same time. But in the crowd, the ICC sees only the coming together: it doesn't see the atomization, because it won't see that it's a tightly controlled coming together. Or rather, it pretends not to see this. Because it does see the ocean of trade union banners, which are the sole public for its speeches, as IP# 6 makes clear. But it clings to its illusion that the mass is always qualitatively superior to the individual everywhere workers are assembled; that it's the particular individual who is isolated, who is only a contingent particular case, and never the mass of individuals, the mass unified in its powerlessness.

On the level of political organization, this linear view of the collectivity which resolves everything can be seen in a slide towards unanimity which gives a false impression of a healthy collectivity. This tendency is very pronounced in the whole evolution of the ICC into degeneration. In its analysis of its own evolution as well as that of society as a whole, it less and less understands that a whole is composed of different parts, that the consciousness of the collectivity can be verified in its parts, and that individuals can raise questions having a general scope. Regarding all the weaknesses of the class, this view consoles itself by seeing them as merely "punctual". All its own weaknesses are "local", and all criticism of its own errors treated as anecdotal or the product of the vanity of the militants who voiced them.

Since 1981, the ICC has justified its indifference to political problems raised by dissident individuals by saying that the organization is not composed of individuals

and does not exist for the personal satisfaction of individuals. Just as the Dutch C.P. did to Gorter, it branded its dissidents as individualists simply because they were alone in making themselves spokespersons for divergences which exist in the whole milieu. Far from putting individualism into question these reactions perpetuate them in the same way as bourgeois ideology in general. They accept as "natural" -- as does economic liberalism -- that when an individual asserts himself this can only be for his personal satisfaction and in competition with other individuals. This is an essential aspect of the dominant ideology, since capitalism is by definition based on competition. What's specific to its decadent phase is that this competition takes place much more between states and that the capitalist identifies himself much more with the state and its military apparatus. This explains the importance in our epoch of what is seemingly opposed to liberalism (individualism): collectivism. It's the cult of the mob, passively controlled by the state, which itself pretends to represent "the community" and to resolve all contradictions and reconcile all the opposing interests of the classes and of competing factions of the ruling class. This collectivism can be red or fascist, it little matters, since it leads in the same direction: the militarization of society in the interest of military competition between states. In any case, it has nothing to do with communism, which sweeps away all false oppositions between collectivity and individual, between the "general interest" and personal preoccupations. Only communism can achieve this, because only communism does not mean "owner", "competitor" when it says "individual", or "a mob mobilized to slaughter the competitors troops" when it says "community".

To this we could add that communism does not think in psychological terms, either about the masses or individuals. Lukacs correctly insists on both aspects: "... class consciousness is identical with neither the psychological consciousness of the individual members of the proletariat nor with the (mass-psychological) consciousness of the proletariat as a whole." (IP#4, p. 19) Psychology is a dissection which separates thinking from its practical implications, from conscious activity. Consciousness is "... neither the sum nor the average of what is thought or felt by the single individuals who make up the class" (ibid., p. 19-20), but neither is it what the masses feel as a totality. It is what the mass as a class thinks and does as it confronts reality. This is neither a sum nor an average, being superior to both, though what the individual worker thinks and does is extremely important. Otherwise there would be no interaction, no cooperation. Class solidarity is a concrete solidarity between concrete, individual workers. Otherwise it's the abstract verbiage of the leaders of disciplined troops who end up slaughtering all "the individuals who make up the class one by one" until no one is left.

SPECIES AND CLASS

In the end, Lukacs says that "the species... is nothing but the contemplative, stylized individual transformed into myth", in contrast to a class. Once again, one wonders why he presents the species as a collective individual. For bourgeois humanism, the myth of "man" corresponds to a type which suits a class need. This type can be represented by an individual, say a Salvador Allende, but then the individual only represents the virtues of the bourgeois state. Nevertheless, the goal of the activity of our class is the realization of man, by putting an end to the domination of economic forces and the class antagonisms resulting from it. Moreover, Lukacs' view is that of man in class society, not in communism; it is that of the essentially isolated and alienated individual.

If the view of man is not linked to the perspective of communism, communism will never exist. The contradiction between human needs and economic laws, between a human community and a society regulated by the law of profit will never be understood.

The bourgeois view of "man" is a prisoner of capital. For the right, competition, commerce and the accumulation of capital are natural human needs. For the psychologists, the individual is an owner, mainly preoccupied with his store, while others only exist as competitors. For Stalinism, as for Lukacs, the individual is essentially isolated and the human essence does not exist. After all, it's because human needs don't exist for them, that the only thing which does exist is leftist-style austerity in the service of the economy, of the state, so as to procure the hard currency necessary to wage war and strengthen repression.

Marx does not deny the human essence. He says that it's something social and political which is formed through history, but he doesn't deny it: "Feuerbach resolves the essence of religion into the essence of man. But the essence of man is no abstraction inherent in each single individual. In its reality it is the ensemble of the social relations. Feuerbach, who does not enter upon a criticism of this real essence, is hence obliged: 1. To abstract from the historical process and to define the religious sentiment regarded by itself, and to presuppose an abstract -- isolated -- human individual. 2. The essence of man, therefore, can with him be regarded only as "species", as an inner, mute, general character which unites the many individuals only in a natural way". (Marx, Theses On Feuerbach, #6)

So, we can see that for Marx, it's in the first place the individuality which is a myth; and that he reproaches Feuerbach for not seeing man as developing through history, through the critique of society.

J.B.

OUR COMMENTS

We wholeheartedly agree with JB's comments on the social character of the individual, on the non-separation of the individual and society, and therefore also on the danger of glorifying the collectivity as opposed to individuals. As JB reminds us, these points were also Marx's and they were implicit in our article on class consciousness.

But we went wrong, so JB asserts, where we started talking about class consciousness as a totality in contrast to the individual consciousness of workers. However, here JB seems to have misunderstood what we wrote and attributes positions to us that we do not defend. To reproach us for separating individual and society, he uses in the first place a quote from Lukacs. In quoting Lukacs repeatedly, we wanted to build on an important theoretical contribution in the workers movement on the question of class consciousness. That does not mean that we subscribe to the whole of Lukacs' position, any more than citing Pannekoek means agreeing with his conclusions on Lenin and the Bolsheviks. Citing a penetrating formulation of a revolutionary should never mean taking all of his sayings or writings as the revealed Word -- a point we explicitly made in regard to Lukacs. One point that Lukacs made particularly clear in his History And Class Consciousness, is the nature of class consciousness as a totality. In so doing, he often uses the opposition between the viewpoint of the totality which is present potentially in the class, and the immediate, false viewpoint of the isolated individual of bourgeois society. True, in the citation denounced by JB, Lukacs seems to be talking about the individual in general, who "can never become the measure of things" and who "necessarily faces an objective reality". But we must remember the context of this quotation, a passage in which Lukacs criticizes the humanist utopianism of revolutionary sects, which take the individual as the starting point of their social critique. It is in this sense that Lukacs' critique is fundamentally correct, inasmuch as it is directed against the individual as "the measure of things", the "free" individual, abstract as an individual separated from the other individuals, as he is produced by the "free competition" of bourgeois society. It is a question here of a fundamental point of Marxism, which has always opposed the classstruggle to all the advocates of "individual revolt" and of the many partial struggles -- not because it accepts the oppression of individuals or social minorities but because this oppression can only be abolished by the revolutionary action of the proletariat as a class. In doing this, Marxism does not oppose individual to class: it situates the individual in another collectivity, in another perspective. The liberation of the proletariat means the liberation of all mankind, of the human individual. Therefore, the coming to consciousness of the

proletariat also means the coming to consciousness of the individual. It's clear that the Lukacs quote could not pertain to communism, because the individual liberated in communism will be actively engaged in the conscious transformation of the world and will no longer be isolated vis a vis the ensemble of social relations whose weight he must bear. If it's true that the citation in question contains some ambiguity, it seems to us gravely mistaken -- given the context -- to attribute to Lukacs the opposite opinion. In any case, we made it clear that we were talking about "individuals isolated in civil society".

Similarly, when Lukacs rejects "the species" as the subject of revolutionary action, he is again criticizing the bourgeois-humanist idea of the species as an abstraction of the average individual, which in bourgeois ideology is nothing but a myth to mask class antagonisms -- just as in the same way, Marx, in the Theses On Feuerbach cited by JB, criticizes the notion of "kind" so dear to humanism. Again, in this sense, Lukacs' critique is correct, without implying -- for us at least (remember the Lukacs quote is ambiguous on this point) -- the negation of the biological and historical reality of the human species. So, when JB says about Lukacs that his vision of man is one "of class society, not of communism", and one of "the individual as essentially isolated and alienated", he is right insofar as these quotes are concerned, because it is precisely against this individual that Lukacs' critique is directed.

We are not trying to say that Lukacs was perfectly clear on this problem. He was not at all, as his Leninist concept of the role of the party testifies. Nevertheless, the root of that conception lies not so much in his view of the individual vis a vis the collectivity as such, but more fundamentally in the influence of idealist philosophy on this approach. In particular, this prevented him from understanding the material, economic foundation of the antagonism between proletariat and capital. At the root of his conception there is the idea that: "... the objective reality of social being is, in its immediate appearance, 'the same' for the proletariat and the bourgeoisie. But that doesn't prevent the specific categories of mediation through which the two classes raise this immediate appearance to consciousness, through which the simply immediate reality becomes for both objective reality, from being necessarily fundamentally different, as a result of the differences of the situation of the two classes in the 'same' economic process." (History And Class Consciousness) To pretend that the immediate reality is "the same" (Lukacs still felt obliged to put that

in quotation marks) for the proletariat and the bourgeoisie is in total contradiction with Marxism, which shows that behind the formal equality of the exchange between capitalists and workers there is an immediate and irreducible antagonism. The capitalists represent the viewpoint of exchange value while the workers represent the viewpoint of use value. On such a mistaken basis, the "mediations" leading to consciousness according to Lukacs can only mean intellectual operations for which the party would be best equipped: the road to Lenin is quickly layed. In the same way, the relation between the individual proletarian and the party, the "bearer of class consciousness", quickly becomes a mystical relation.

JB believes he has found another indication of the false opposition we supposedly make between individual and class in the sentence stating that "class consciousness develops in opposition to the ideological prejudices surviving in the minds of individual workers". It's true that this formulation presents things in terms of a clear-cut opposition, in order to emphasize the difference between class consciousness as a global process and the contradictions which the consciousness of individual workers undergoes in this process. Every human being acquires a consciousness in the course of his development. But in class society, this consciousness is established within an ideological matrix. Workers are exposed to this pressure just as any other individual. It is in and through the class struggle (seen on an historical scale) that they transform and develop their consciousness. But individually, they remain subject to the pressure of the dominant ideology. The contradictions which continually arise between worker's ideological prejudices and their consciousness as active members of their class can only be resolved in the development of the class struggle.

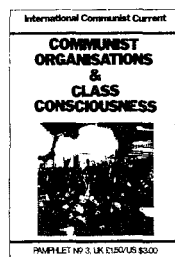
As a class, the proletariat has a given material interest and historical future, and the consciousness of this can only manifest itself in opposition to ideology: the proletariat can be conscious or not, but its consciousness can not be ideological. Otherwise, you end up with the reactionary position of the "modernists", which links up with that of the leftists, according to which the unions and the mass parties of our epoch are expressions of the "false consciousness" of the proletariat, and therefore, in one way or another, expressions of it. It's therefore indeed "in opposition to the ideological prejudices which survive in the minds of individual workers" that class consciousness develops, and consequently also of course the consciousness of individual workers.

an idealization of the collectivity in contrast to the individual, and emphasizes the danger of believing in overcoming the weaknesses of individuals by the virtue of the collectivity alone. That was not our intent and when we stressed that "the consciousness expressed at the level of the struggle in its entirety is qualitatively superior to that of individual workers" we cautioned that we were talking about a process taking place in a context of rising struggle, of a struggle successfully organizing itself. We're talking about a direct consequence of the practical essence of class consciousness, which affirms itself in a collective transformation of the world. It's true that in a period of reflux in the struggle, the "collective stupidity" -- to use JB's term -- of the mass of the workers dragged behind the banners of the unions and the general staff of the party can be "worse than those of all the individual workers together". The fact that the whole is always worse than the sum of its parts doesn't necessarily mean that it's better.

Finally, this brings us to the critique of the ICC contained in this letter. These criticisms of the "collectivist ideology" into which the ICC has fallen with its appeals to participate in trade union demonstrations and of its internal functioning appear correct to us. But as with Lukacs, we think that the "collectivist ideology" that JB denounces is more a result than a cause of the degeneration of that organization. The assertion of the dialectical law according to which the whole is more than the sum of its parts has been a necessary factor in the creation, the structure and the vitality of the ICC at its inception (as it is for any organization); the same assertion today is valid for its degeneration. The roots of this degeneration are to be found in a number of elements of its view of the present period and the tasks of the organization. Lack of space here makes it impossible to elaborate on this question, but we will publish a text on it in our next issue.

M. LAZARE

read:



But JB seems to have taken this sentence as



Mass Struggle and Workers Democracy

Letter of Wildcat

Dear comrades,

We found the reports of the international class struggle in IPS useful. We hope you continue to locate most of the contents of your magazine in reality. It could play a useful role as a source of information, a role the ICC's magazines no longer fulfil.

Your criticisms of the ICC's opportunism in supporting union demonstrations are right. Union demonstrations are generally organised to take the workers away from where they should be going. But support for these detours is nothing new. The ICC supported a union 'demo' which was organised to derail the steelworkers' strike in Paris in 1979, simultaneously claiming it was a victory and a defeat. There was a lot of discussion in and outside the ICC on their interventions in the French steel strike and they never admitted they were wrong to support union sabotage.

In your analysis of the current situation, you put forward the standard councilist position on class struggle in Poland 1980-81 in a phrase which for me sums up the fundamental contradiction in the politics to which you adhere:

"the kind of self-organisation 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." (IPS, p10)

Elsewhere, you define this 'self-organisation' as above all democratic. You can't attack democracy at the same time as praising the democracy of mass assemblies. Throughout the analysis of various struggles in your magazine, you praise democracy and self-organisation as if they were in themselves positive gains for the class struggle. You seem to see the main conflict in the class struggle as between forms - revocable mass

assemblies versus unions. This avoids the content of these struggles, and leads to accepting reactionary aims uncritically, as long as they are pursued democratically. It leads you to uncritically support workers sending union reps to negotiate with the class enemy, so long as they "leave their union badges in the locker room" (IPS, p4). You say they chose union reps because they have experience negotiating. This is quite logical. If you're going to negotiate, you might as well choose experienced negotiators. In the same article, on the recent struggles in France, you mention that unions join in "the call for workers' assemblies and strike committees so as to take the initiative out of the workers' hands" (IPS, p6), and in another article say the Belgian bourgeoisie organised "phoney mass assemblies" (IPS, p12). What is a phoney mass assembly? Is it full of capitalists disguised as workers? The reason the unions and the bourgeoisie can organise assemblies is because they are confident that, based on democratic votes instantly recallable delegates and so on, they will reflect the workers' consciousness: bourgeois trade unionism. In the dockers' strike in Britain which took place during the miners' strike, the strikebreakers organised mass assemblies. Far from being in itself a form which produces class consciousness, as you imply in your articles, workers' democracy can be used to organise scabbing.

The bourgeoisie can use workers' democracy. This is one of the most important lessons of Poland's mass strike, and those who don't learn it will not be able to contribute a great deal to the next wave of massive class struggles. In fact, it's a lesson of the German Revolution of 1918-19, if you think of the social democratic butchers democratically elected through the workers' councils.

You say Solidarnosc in Poland took over from the democratic workers' committees. It would be more accurate to say it emerged out of the MKS, the mass strike committee's central body. The reason a reactionary, reformist, nationalist trade union could emerge out of a

democratic expression of the working class is because the MKS democratically reflected the consciousness of the majority of the workers: reformism, nationalism, and trade unionism. Given that the majority of the strikers wanted to negotiate with the ruling class, the creation of a negotiating body (Solidarity), and the defeat of the mass strike was inevitable. All those who are influenced by councilism welcome the fact that the negotiations with the Stalinist gangsters who run Poland were broadcast on loudspeakers. But if you are going to negotiate, what is so good about workers standing and listening? They should have smashed the negotiations, and driven out both the bosses and their democratically elected representatives. What's more, the minority who see the need to do this should certainly not ask mass assemblies to approve what they're going to do if they think they'll lose. If the majority of the class have reactionary views, their views should be ignored. Revolutionaries should openly declare their contempt for the ideas of the working class under capitalism.

As long as negotiations remain the aim, the content of mass assemblies is trade unionism. It's not surprising that unions can support mass assemblies, or that scabs can organise them, or that Pope's arse-lickers like Solidarnosc can grow out of mass assemblies. Mass assemblies simply express the views of the masses they assemble. "A scrupulous concern to respect internal democracy" which you praise (IP5, p4), would paralyse the actions of minorities where the majority are reactionary.

Revolutionaries must therefore oppose democracy. I could say a lot more about your perspectives in IP5, but I'll leave it at that.

Fraternally,

RB, Wildcat

OUR REPLY

Dear Wildcat

Your letter focusses on questions of self-organisation and workers' democracy, and which you illustrate with examples from the struggles in Poland, Belgium and France - as well as from the German Revolution, taking a critical position towards some of the views we have expressed in IP. Underneath our specific disagreements, we have two quite distinct visions of the evolution of the class struggle, and it is at this level we should like to make our comments. Overall, your remarks reveal two key weaknesses: first, an absence of framework which leads to an ad

hoc, fragmented view of moments in the class struggle and the coming to consciousness of the proletariat; secondly, a tendency to deny the need for the unification of the working class, thus opening the door to the justification of all kinds of adventurism, and even of terrorism.

Concerning the question of framework, you do not acknowledge that there is any process of the development of class struggle and of the coming to consciousness of the proletariat. Nor that the process takes place today within a definite form of organisation of society - state capitalism. This process of struggle exists not least because of the battle which takes place between the tendency of the proletariat to come to consciousness and the weight of bourgeois ideology. This ideology is not a passive, however heavy, weight but an active weapon of the ruling class and the institutions of the state. Bourgeois ideology is always being refined to try to keep the proletariat permanently under seige - whether by insidious attempts to undermine, or by frontal attacks on, anything the workers attempt to do to defend their working and living conditions. One of the key agencies of the state in the onslaught on the working class is the union apparatus which invests such massive resources into the fight to convince the proletariat that it is an expression of the proletariat, and therefore its arms are weapons of the proletariat against its exploiters rather than the other way about. In the broad scheme of things, the left parties 'support' the unions while the right 'fight' them, both wings in their own way reinforcing the ideology of the unions as do the press, employers' federations, etc. Throwing off this mystification has and will take years of bitter struggle.

But the perspective in your letter ignores all such considerations, and so avoids facing up to the complex reality of the class struggle. Take, for example, the question of negotiations. You say that we uncritically support workers sending union representatives to negotiate with the class enemy, so long as they "leave their union badges in the locker room". Those words are those of the French railway workers on strike last winter - and not ours, as you seem to imply. While we don't explicitly criticise this attitude of the workers towards the unions right next to the quotation, we do so at least twice on the same page. But to get to grips with this issue you have first to recognise that negotiations will take place at certain moments in the struggle even if we do not enthuse about it. Negotiations are an expression of an adverse balance of forces for the workers in which the struggle cannot go forward at that moment. Their significance depends on the context of struggle at the time. In the period of dual power, they may provide a breathing space before the struggle goes onto a higher level; in Poland in 1980, they were an

attempt by the workers to defend themselves as the struggle began to recede and in which the workers' assemblies lost control to the emerging union apparatus. We certainly support the efforts of the mass of workers to keep control over any negotiations in their own hands, whatever criticisms we might have of specific points in the negotiations. We're not saying that the working class is aware today of its tasks, but we must not reject its efforts to take matters into its own hands. Take, as another example, the relationship between Solidarnosc and the MKS. Apparently, one emerged from the other and so you conclude that one was a continuation of the other in some sense - so you find evidence yet again that the workers create a body personifying their reactionary ideas. You miss the fact of the creation of the union apparatus strengthening with the weakening of the struggle in Poland, and of the enormous weight of unionism being impressed on the Polish workers by the world's bourgeoisie.

How much easier you find it to blame the victims: the working class is responsible for its own condition, not its exploiters. And why? - because of its stupidity? Instead of seeing the grip of unionism on the workers as a measure of the present strength of the most powerful development of a state ideology in history, you see it as a product of a reactionary consciousness of the proletariat. Sadly, it seems you find it easier to intervene on the basis of contempt for the workers than on the basis of a framework which acknowledges the massive battle taking place globally and historically between class consciousness and bourgeois ideology. It is the same question at issue in the example you give of the German Revolution. This myth that the workers would not let Luxemburg speak in the councils - evidencing their reactionary ideas - has been given a new impetus in recent years by the ICC on the basis of its theory of centrism inside the working class. You would do well to read Leviné's account of this episode for it is abundantly clear that this was not a reflection of the workers but the manoeuvring of capitalist political organisations; at least it is clear so long as one is not setting out to make the working class the villain of the piece, as does the ICC, or yourselves.

Having put the blame on the working class for its situation you then go on to divide it up and judge each part separately. This highlights your second underlying error - a tendency to deny the need for the unification of the proletariat. For you, the working class can be split into revolutionary (we assume) minorities and reactionary majorities - you say you want to support the former and stop them being 'paralysed' by the latter as a result of 'formalities' such as democracy in the class. For you, if the workers are too dumb, tough luck on them. Where do you draw the line with minority action: 49%, 10%, 1% or 0.001%? The point here is not to get you to pick a number but to insist on the necess-

ity of seeing the mass character of the workers' struggle. This mass character needs assemblies and councils in order that the consciousness of the class can be expressed and translated into concerted, collective action. This is not a luxury - good if you can get it, and, if not, a minority can just go its own way - but a necessity in the real development of struggle. The form and content go together; the content of class consciousness demands these forms.

Just because a state agency labels some union controlled meeting an 'assembly' in an effort to confuse the workers, why should we consider it to be anything other than a fake. Yet you take this bourgeois mystification at face value then apply the old leninist technique of separating form and content so as to devise a critique of the effectiveness of assemblies and unions as instruments of the working class. Heterogeneity of consciousness in the proletariat is inevitable; revolutionaries have a role to help homogenise it, and elevate it. On the contrary, you just capitulate to this heterogeneity and despise those you decide to write off as reactionary. In the period after April 1917 Lenin, after he returned to Russia, insisted again and again on the need to intervene towards the class as a whole - to convince the workers, not to despise backward elements. And when it came to the seizure of power in October, this was not carried out by the Bolsheviks 'going it alone' but by the Revolutionary Military Committee (within which the Bolsheviks has a strong presence) which would act only in the name of the St. Petersburg Soviet. The point we are stressing here is that to have a positive impact on the class struggle, revolutionaries could only intervene with a perspective of a mass action emerging from a whole social movement. Certainly there are avant gardes within the working class (and this does not mean only the party), but it is important to see them as part of the mass movement and not separate from it.

Your letter denies any recognition of the necessity of the social character of the process of struggle; instead of seeing this as a historic strength of the proletariat as a class, you interpret it as some tactical inhibition on specific acts of a minority. This attitude, as we said earlier, can only lead to justify adventurism - or, worse, terrorism - which is the very antithesis of mass struggle. Already you have shown the most serious capitulation to the present divisions inside the working class which have been created by the bourgeoisie for its benefit. Thus 'All power to the black South African working class' - your banner headline for Wildcat 9. Yet you set yourself up as the judge of reactionary ideas within the working class. The danger is obvious.

We hope than this debate can continue, particularly in the pages of our respective publications.

Fraternally,

Marlowe for Internationalist Perspective

PUBLIC MEETING

INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVE regularly holds Public Meetings as an integral part of its determination to actively stimulate a real debate around the vital issues that face revolutionaries and the working class. Our next Public Meeting is in New York on friday january 8, 8 pm, at the 'Marxist Workers School'. 151 West 19th street in Manhattan.

Topic:

the Russian Revolution: why it can't be the model

After all the hoorahs for the 70th anniversary of the October revolution, it's a good time to explore the limits of this experience, to see why it yields no recipee that can simply be applied to the future.



The storming of the Winter Palace

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.