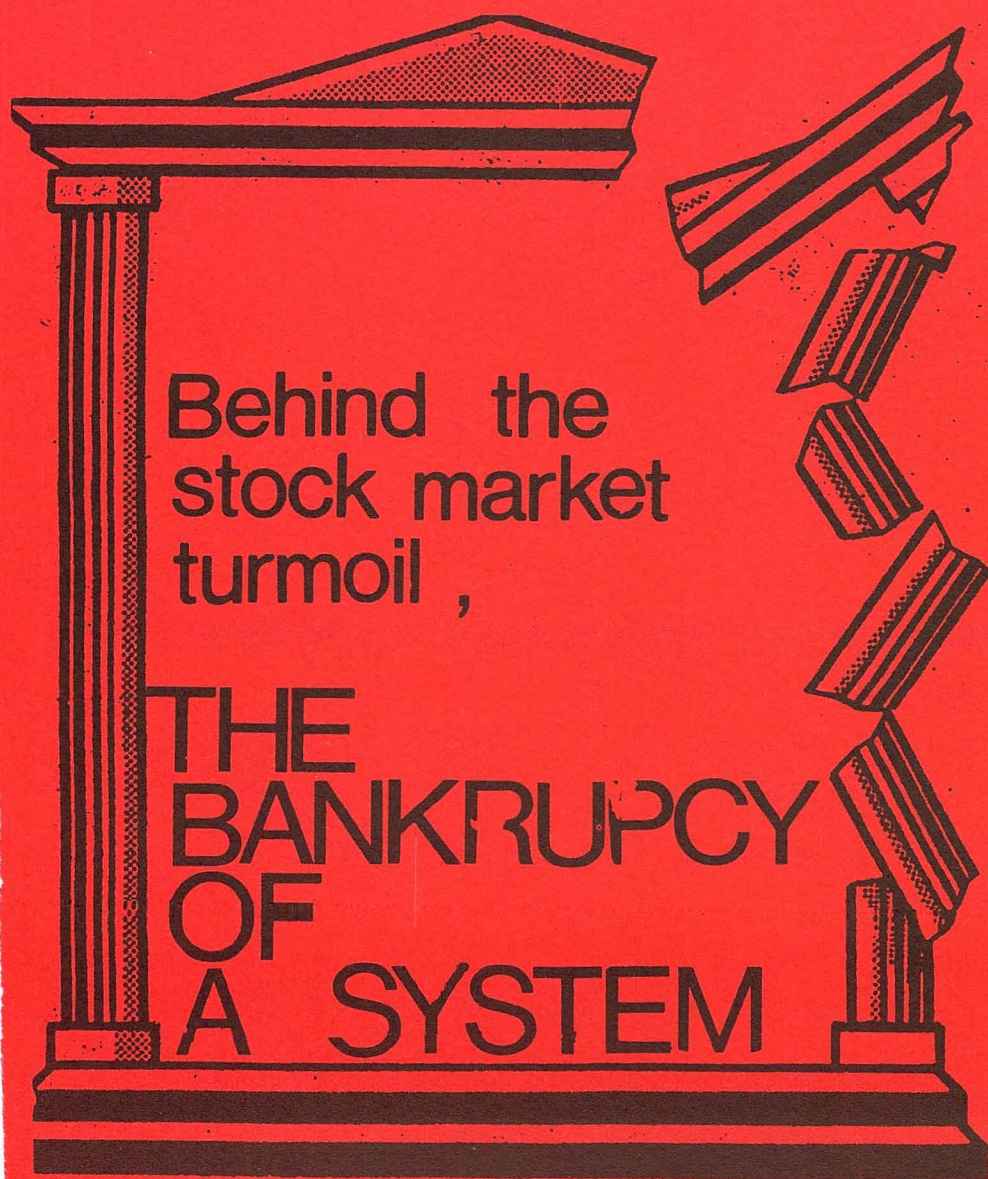


**EXTERNAL
FRACTION OF THE
INTERNATIONAL
COMMUNIST
CURRENT**

INTERNATIONALIST PERSPECTIVE



Behind the
stock market
turmoil ,

**THE
BANKRUPTCY
OF
A SYSTEM**

IN THIS ISSUE:

class struggle

Roumania

Gulf war

**The decline
of the ICC**

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INTERNATIONALIST PERSPECTIVE CONTENTS

INTERNATIONALIST PERSPECTIVE # 9

CONTENTS

<u>STOCK MARKET TURMOIL, RECESSION, UNEMPLOYMENT :</u> <u>ONE MORE STEP TOWARDS COLLAPSE.....</u>	P 1
<u>WORKERS STRUGGLES INTERNATIONALLY :</u> <u>THE RESPONSE TO THE CRISIS.....</u>	P 4
<u>RUMANIA : THE SAME FIGHT AGAINST CAPITAL.....</u>	P 11
<u>MANOEUVRES IN THE GULF : TO DISCIPLINE IRAN</u> <u>AND COUNTER RUSSIAN ADVANCES.....</u>	P 13
<u>DISCUSSION : ACCIDENT AND NECESSITY IN A</u> <u>MARXIST ANALYSIS.....</u>	P 15
<u>THE DECLINE OF THE I.C.C. : THE ROOTS</u> <u>OF DEGENERATION.....</u>	P 20
<u>WHAT'S AT STAKE IN THE I.C.C.'S</u> <u>PLATFORM CHANGE.....</u>	P 27

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Stock market turmoil, recession, unemployment

One more step towards collapse

"In the same way the stockmarket is feverishly rising, it can suddenly crash down", we wrote in IP#6. On October 19 this analysis was confirmed: the "Dow Jones" plunged 508 points, and the crash in New York was quickly echoed on all major stock exchanges elsewhere in the world. Reactions to this "black monday" varied widely: some heard in it the opening shot of a new depression, a repeat of the events of 1929. Others simply shrugged it off as a "correction in mid-course" for an expanding economy. Both reflect a lack of understanding of what has happened.

It's a mistake to equate the state of the economy with the state of the stockmarket. Today, a crash of the stock exchange is not a crash of the economy, just as its preceeding boom did not constitute an economic boom. A stock exchange crash in itself can no longer trigger a depression as it did in 1929, not only because stockmarkets are much more controlled and regulated by the state, but even more so because today only a minor fraction of the financing of the economy occurs through the stockmarket. Bank loans, direct reinvestment, state subsidies and direct state spending play a much larger role.

At times, the recent stockmarket boom was in such spectacular contrast to the stagnation in the real economy that they seemed to have virtually no connection at all. Of course they did. But rather than explain the state of the economy through events on the stockmarket, the state of the stock exchange must be explained by seeing what is happening in the real economy.

A BUBBLE OF FICTITIOUS CAPITAL

Since the outbreak of the open crisis at the end of the '60's, the world economy has gone through several phases of acceleration of the contraction of the world market and decline in the rate of profit. The capitalist system, in its efforts to fight this market contraction by stimulating artificial demand, succeeded only in further eroding its profit rate: by injecting more money into the economy, the state gave the illusion that it created wealth, but very quickly the fictitious nature of this capital affirmed itself through devaluation, inflation. At the end of the '70's, this policy brought the world so close to the danger of hyperinflation(1) that the most severe recession since the '30's was needed to keep it at bay.

The sharp contraction in the world market during this recession left most countries exhausted; only the strongest economy in the

world could brake this contraction by stimulating artificial demand once again. That's what the US did, with an orgy of deficit spending, more than doubling its government debt to 2.2 trillion dollars. It kept the world economy afloat, providing vital export markets for the rest of the world which couldn't have survived without them, as the near default of the third world and the stagnation in Western Europe (now in its eighth straight year of growth below 3%) testify. But the rest of the world did finance the US recovery, as capital from all over the world, in an ever larger stream of hundreds of billions of dollars fled to the last outpost of capitalist "expansion" and profitability.(2)

However, both the expansion of the US market and the profitability of its industry only existed in appearance. The US recovery masked a shrinkage of the productive basis of its economy. Its expanding sectors (services, armaments, etc.) do not produce any additional value but have to be paid for by the rest of the economy. (see IP#6, p.14) During this recovery, the US lost more and more of its export markets, not only because the over valued dollar hurt America's competitive position, but also because the rest of the world market was shrinking: the Western European countries reduced their combined imports by more than \$100 billion in the period since 1980, Latin America reduced its imports by more than \$85 billion over the last five years, etc. Finally, while its true that corporate profits in the US have been rising since 1983, after a fifteen year decline, it is also true that these profits are crushed by debt obligations: in 1986, American companies, for the first time, paid out more in net interest payments than they earned (by comparison, in 1980, interest costs were only 48% of their net income).

The fact that in spite of this context, stockmarkets were booming, not only in the US but elsewhere in the world too, can be understood as a simple result of the law of supply and demand, as well as the first way in which the fictitious nature of the capital created in this recovery revealed itself -- not unlike inflation.

In a more "classic" recovery, more money is printed, and circulates through the economy, stimulating a greater demand for all sorts of commodities. But the amount of value produced and realized in the economy remains the same or even declines. The fictitious nature of this additional money will then be revealed through inflation, a general rise in prices. What is characteristic of this recovery, however, is that, more than in any other,

the bulk of the fictitious capital created was channeled into a very few hands: the hands of US corporations getting billions of dollars in tax cuts, of Japanese investors amassing enormous profits thanks to their huge trade surplus with the US, of arms producers, and so on; in the meantime, everywhere the working class suffered a decline in its wages and austerity programs further reduced the spending of the non-possessing classes. So, the creation of fictitious capital during this recovery did not lead to a general rise in prices (for other factors which kept inflation low, see IP#6, P.12-14). This fictitious capital was not used to increase general consumption; nor was it used, as the architects of Reagan's recovery plan said they hoped, for increased capital investment. Throughout the "recovery", the rate of capital investment (i.e. in new plant and machinery) has stagnated in the US and elsewhere. That's no surprise, since such investments only make sense if there is a perspective of future expansion, a perspective which is disappearing even in the eyes of the capitalists. So, with huge amounts of money going neither into consumption nor capital investment, it could only be channelled into speculative investment. In a situation of low inflation (making gold, etc. less attractive) and relatively low interest rates (making bonds and other interest bearing investments less attractive) this speculative investment would in the first place be in the stockmarket, which more than any other investment provides the possibility of enormous short term profits, particularly once the boom gets going and take-over battles drive prices up. As more and more investors got into the game, the demand for shares shot up and so did their price, which lost any direct connection with the future yield of these shares. Stocks were not bought to own a part of a company, to provide it with capital so it could expand operations; they were only bought to sell at a profit. That way, with fictitious capital revealed in the rise of share prices rather than in a general price rise (because of the specific features of this "recovery"), the bubble grew and grew. The question was not if, but when it would burst.

THE BUBBLE BURSTS

The moment at which that occurred would be determined by events in the real economy, where the mechanism of the recovery was reaching the point where it could no longer operate, inasmuch as the debt burden that was was its by-product was growing at too alarming a rate and the imbalances it created were becoming insupportable. Again, the fictitious character of the capital fueling the recovery would have to assert itself, this time through the rapid devaluation of the dollar. The crushing weight of corporate debt in the US, mentioned above, the US government debt whose service already cost close to \$200 billion a year, the trade deficit which had grown by 40% over the preceding three years, all made such a devaluation inevitable. In a few years, the US had gone from being the world's largest creditor to the world's largest debtor. At its

current rate of growth, America's external debt would have reached \$1 trillion by 1990, almost equal to the current foreign debt of all other countries combined. As the risk grew that this huge mountain of debt would collapse, the policy of the US had to change. What had to be done was obvious: cut the budget deficit (which had itself fueled the recovery); reduce the trade deficit (at the expense of other countries), in the first place by devaluing the dollar (which if nothing was done would have fallen in an uncontrolled way). But its equally obvious that both these policies contained grave risks. By cutting its deficit spending and increasing taxes, the US would contract its domestic market and thus bring on a return of recession in the US, and thereby the world. Furthermore, cuts in military spending would force a temporary slow down in war preparations (3). Finally, cuts in social spending could fan the flames of social unrest. By letting the dollar fall, the US risked inducing a recession in the rest of the world, whose competitive position and therefore market share would deteriorate in proportion to the dollar's decline. It also risked accelerating inflation in the US (by raising prices on imported goods), and elsewhere (as other countries, to prevent their own currencies from rising too fast against the dollar, would be forced to take inflationary measures, i.e. increasing their money supply by lowering interest rates, etc.). Moreover, if the dollar fell too rapidly, foreign investors would lose interest in dollar denominated assets; as the US can't finance its deficits without the influx of foreign capital, it would then be forced to push up interest rates, which would trigger recession. Ultimately, the more the dollar fell, the more other countries would be tempted to defend themselves with protectionist and other narrowly nationalist measures, which would further accelerate the contraction of the world market. How these enormous risks were to be avoided no one could say. With their (secret) "Louvre agreement" of last February, the leaders of the main Western economies tried to create the impression that they had the situation firmly in hand: they would stabilize the currency markets and imbalances would be reduced by the US cutting its deficits and by Japan and West Germany compensating for this by stimulating internal demand. No wonder they kept the content of the agreement secret: it was the only way to keep the illusion intact. Soon enough, however, it became clear that things would not go as smoothly as promised. Given the dire prospects, the strange thing was not that the stockmarket panicked, but that that reaction came so late. The only explanation for this is the lack of alternative investments -- van Gogh notwithstanding. What finally punctured the bubble were clear signs that the policy agreed upon in the Louvre accord wasn't working. Germany and Japan, fearing a flare up of inflation, resisted US pressure to stimulate their economies, cutting their interest rates much less than Washington wanted. Meanwhile, Reagan and the US Congress seemed unable to agree on substantial

measures to cut the budget deficit. At the same time, the rate of inflation in the US doubled in the first half of 1987 (to a 5.2% annual rate) and interest rates rose 3% between January and October 1987. Most of all the decline in the value of the dollar seemingly did nothing to reduce the US trade deficit, which broke new records over last Summer. It dawned on investors that the huge profits made in the stockmarket were only fictitious, and would vanish when the dollar fell further and recession loomed. The scramble for the exit began. On "black monday", one trillion dollars in stock values "disappeared". Where did this money go? Nowhere. It had never really existed, except on paper. It's not that one trillion dollars worth of real capital was destroyed on black monday, but rather that one trillion in fictitious capital lost any pretenses and was revealed for what it was: fictitious.

In itself, the wiping out of fictitious capital is beneficial for capitalism. As this capital was mainly speculative in nature, its disappearance created little disruption in the economy as a whole: despite the fragility of the banking system and the already high bankruptcy rate (4), no bank collapses or sudden increases of bankruptcy as a result of the stock exchange crash were reported. Furthermore, the crash was a potent factor in forcing European and Japanese governments to comply with American demands, and to impose budget cutting austerity measures in the US itself.

COMPETITIVE DEVALUATION

As we said before, the US could face its problems in basically two ways: either slow down the creation of fictitious capital and the debt load that went with it, by cutting the budget deficit and raising interest rates; or let the dollar fall, shifting the burden onto the backs of its allies, diminishing their share of the market and forcing them to take over more of the responsibility for creating fictitious capital by lowering their own interest rates and thus increasing their money supply so as to slow the dollar's fall.

A third choice did not exist. Clearly, a mix of the two was tried. But since the October stockmarket crash, the emphasis has been on the second. Indeed, a sharp increase of the money supply was the main way in which the US reacted to the crash. As that drove down interest rates and accelerated the decline of the dollar, its main competitors were soon forced to cut their own interest rates, to cheapen their currencies and make them more competitive with the dollar. On last December 3, the Bundesbank lowered its lending rates to 2.5%, the lowest ever, with other European currencies following suit.

The dollar would have fallen even without the US favoring such an outcome. Its devaluation expresses something about the distribution of fictitious capital in the world: since the bulk of fictitious capital was created in the US, the value of its currency has to go down in relation to that of other currencies, representing economies less burdened by fictitious capital (and just as with the value of shares, the subjective, "psychological", element plays a

decisive role in the timing of declines on the currency markets, since these can be just as speculative as stockmarkets).

Still, the policy of the US government and Federal Reserve could either slow it down or let it happen; and in the wake of black monday, clearly it was the latter that happened. By preferring this over a policy emphasizing budget cuts and tighter money (5), the US is making a choice for a return of recession later rather than sooner, and for such a recession to start in Western Europe rather than in the US. The importance of the Presidential elections this year, which the capitalist class would prefer to be won by the Republicans so that the Democrats can offer a phoney alternative of opposition when unrest and class struggle grow, sparked by the coming recession, probably played a role in that decision.

However, the devaluation of the dollar could not fail to provoke a reaction from other countries. We see yet another similarity with the 1930's develop: the phenomenon of competitive devaluations.

In the late 1920's, countries on the periphery like Argentina and Australia began to devalue their currencies so as to improve their competitive position. Other countries followed suit and the phenomenon spread to the very center of the system, with Britain, in 1931, severing its link between Sterling and gold in order to let the pound fall, a move which was quickly followed by devaluations in most other countries. The result was a precipitous worldwide drop in prices (particularly raw materials), profits and production.

Today, a series of competitive devaluations has again taken place on the periphery, with scores of third world countries letting their currencies fall in order to increase their exports. This has already led to a fall in the price of many raw materials and has been an important factor in checking inflation. Now with the decline of the dollar, this phenomenon has again spread to the very center of the world economy. To defend their competitive position, countries like Hong Kong, South Korea, Taiwan and Singapore have already reacted to the dollar's fall by pushing down their own currencies. If the low interest rates now being adopted by Western Europe lead to a significant increase in the money supply, the same thing could happen there too. What effect would that have?

Suppose only the dollar was devalued. The US economy would have a lower rate of profit (as each devalued dollar earned is obviously worth less than before), but would be more than compensated by grabbing a bigger share of the market, its own domestic market as well as those abroad. For the rest of the world economy, therefore, the market would contract (6). But if every country devalued, each would experience a lower profit rate, together with a contraction of the world market.

In many ways, competitive devaluation is similar to protectionism, which is also on the rise (7), though still far from the paralyzing levels of the '20's and '30's. What we are seeing unfold today is the last stage of the "recovery", its transition to recession, which depending on what is or is

not done against competitive devaluations and to reduce the burden of debt, could easily be transformed into a full scale worldwide depression.

SANDER

Notes

(1) Hyperinflation: the value of money falling so rapidly that it no longer can fulfill its primary function: to express the exchange-value of commodities, thereby making their circulation possible. The very unpredictability as to the expression of exchange-value inevitably paralyzes commerce and makes investment virtually impossible, thereby triggering depression.

(2) For a more detailed analysis of the mechanisms of the "recovery" and its effects, see "Plunging into the Crisis", IP#6

(3) Which is only possible if the rival bloc agrees to slow down its own military buildup. The recent "thaw" in East-West relations, the sudden progress in arms talks, etc., can, therefore, only be understood in light of the economic pressure on both blocs.

(4) In the US, 138 banks failed in 1986, the highest number since the 1930's. In 1985 (the

last year for which data are available) the business failure rate was 114 out of 10,000, the highest since 1931.

(5) True, the White House and Congressional committees finally agreed on a plan that would cut the US deficit by \$76 billion over two years (including a \$9 billion tax increase), but alot of these cuts are "smoke" and done with mirrors. Furthermore, these cuts do not mean that the budget deficits are shrinking, only that their rate of increase has slowed.

(6) Obviously reality is a bit more complicated than that, as many American companies will prefer a higher profit rate (keeping their prices unchanged despite the decline of the dollar) over a bigger market share. Similarly, many non-US companies will prefer a lower profit rate over a market loss and so will keep their prices in the US market unchanged too. However, this does not change the problem.

(7) Last November, the US adopted \$105 million in punitive tariffs against Brazil and \$100 million against the EEC (which threatened retaliation). The US government probably took these measures to "cool down" Congress, where a massive protectionist trade bill is pending.

WORKERS STRUGGLES INTERNATIONALLY



the response to the crisis

Now that the stockmarket crash shows that the speculative leap into the void offers no way out for capitalism; now that the Western bloc is going ahead with joint military actions in the powderkeg of the Persian gulf, it's important to evaluate how class struggle is developing. The situation in 1929 was different from today's situation not only in relation to the real meaning of the crash (see our article in this issue) but in terms of social struggles. In the years following the 1929 crash, the working class gradually gave up defending its class interests and let itself be caught up in nationalist ideologies (fascism / anti-fascism). This allowed the bourgeoisie to find in the second World War a way out of its generalized crisis of overproduction. Today's situation is different: More austerity and the threat of war encounters opposition from the working class. Our class continues to develop its own answer to the contradictions of world capitalism, its movement towards revolution. Since 1983, a continuous series of workers struggles have erupted, first in one part of the world, then in another. On an international scale, these movements, taken together, can be seen as a third wave of class struggle since capitalism re-entered its phase of open crisis in 1968 (1). In this text, we want to show that this wave of struggles has continued and developed in 1987. A growing number of countries have been shaken by struggles and within these

struggles there has been a pronounced tendency to combat bourgeois ideology. At the same time, these struggles showed the difficulties which the working class encounters in breaking with all the bourgeois illusions which weigh on its consciousness and action and impede the real development of its revolutionary movement.

HOW THE CLASS STRUGGLE DEVELOPED: A PROBLEM OF METHOD

It's not easy to evaluate class struggle precisely; and this for several reasons. The most obvious is the lack of information: the capitalist class prefers to deafen us with all the details of "Irangate", terrorist plots and crime stories rather than give information on the resistance of the working class. Our class enemy knows all too well that an awareness of the existence of workers struggles can only strengthen the determination of workers everywhere in the world to resist the attacks on their living and working conditions.

In order to grasp the real dynamic of the class struggle in the current period, two pitfalls, prevalent in the analyses made by the revolutionary milieu, must be avoided. Some (like the ICC) content with a survey of struggles in the world, do not really admit that struggles end in defeat or that the working class suffers from the backlash of these defeats and, therefore, they implicitly defend the idea that class struggle is always

going forward, always advancing nationally and internationally. Other groups see only the weakness of the struggles (especially corporatism) and assert that movements have simply been repeating themselves in different countries since 1983 and that the working class still remains for long months at a time without any reaction to the attacks on its living conditions. This leads them to question whether there is any development at all in the movement of the working class (see the editorial in "Le Communiste" #25, the publication of the GCI)

Both approaches are symmetrical in their superficiality, taking into account only a part of reality; moreover, they tend to reinforce each other. Both views reflect a lack of understanding of how class consciousness and the struggle of the workers develops in the current period (2). The struggle and the consciousness of the working class, an exploited class under capitalism, cannot progress in a linear fashion, because it has to confront a series of contradictions. During struggles a positive development of its consciousness can take place. But its forward motion is impeded by a number of bourgeois illusions which it has not yet fully broken with. These weaknesses, fully exploited by the left of capital, lead struggles to defeat and provide temporary support to the ideological grip of the capitalist class over the disoriented workers. But in an historic period of rising class struggle, such as the one we have experienced since 1968, working class consciousness continues to develop in a subterranean way during moments of retreat. "Because the class then no longer has a collective and active life, the subterranean maturation of consciousness in the class as a whole cannot be a continuous and positive process of coherent theory. It is basically negative in that it is the destruction of certain illusions that workers have kept and which they have to confront in their practice. It is this wearing away of mystifications, more than a constructive building up of a positive vision, that characterizes the subterranean maturation of consciousness. It is only in a new phase of struggle when the class itself rediscovers a kind of positive existence in collective action, that the elements of negative understanding accumulated during a phase of retreat, can be translated into a positive consciousness, practical as well as theoretical." ("Class Consciousness in the Proletarian Revolution", IP#6, p. 29)

This analysis makes it possible to grasp the real dynamic of the class struggle. In this period of generally -- but slowly -- rising struggle against the economic crisis, the working class sometimes submits to the pressure of austerity for months or even years without reacting. But this moment of apparent calm, which some mistakenly see as an absence of the will to fight, is then suddenly followed by the explosion of a movement which contains the specific characteristics of struggle in the period of capitalist decadence: a massive struggle tending to challenge the ideological control of the bourgeoisie in a more insistent way than before (3). The strike movements in

Italy since the beginning of '87 and the French rail strike of January 1987 illustrate this clearly. The open struggles show an advance in certain respects (for instance, in self-organization), while at the same time making it painfully clear that the working class is still under the influence of a number of illusions (for example, on the possibility of "saving" a plant in a given region or on the possibility of gaining concessions in a struggle that remains isolated in one branch of industry, or the idea that new unions would make for a more successful struggle). The left forces of capital reinforce these weaknesses, leading workers into a deadend. And so the open struggle is followed by a reflux, a period of apparent "social peace", during which the working class submits to the heavy pressure of bourgeois ideology.

One also has to take into account the fact that the non-linear development of the struggle is heightened by the characteristics of the current period. Since the beginning of the third wave of struggles, the working class has confronted a number of factors which though existing before are even sharper today. On the one hand, the economic crisis is so much deeper and in many cases a strike can provoke a worsening of conditions, in the form of lay offs. On the other hand, the working class is increasingly turning its back on official trade unions (the decline in union membership is a fact of life in all the industrialized countries). But this is not enough. The workers have to break with unionism completely if their struggle is to fully develop. This is impeded by the radicalization of the left factions of capital, especially by rank and file unionism. The sharpening of economic and political pressures tend to make the struggles, when they do break out, ever more massive and hardfought. The current development of the struggle, even if it is slower than one would have imagined after the explosion of 1968, goes together with a profound maturation of consciousness. An overview of movements which took place in 1987, and the difficulties those movements encountered, will illustrate this perfectly.

THE MOVEMENTS IN WESTERN EUROPE

Since 1983, workers struggles have taken place in the context of the pseudo-recovery of the economy in 1984 and 1985. The capitalist class could prolong the superficial appearances of recovery until very recently. We emphasize that this recovery was in reality limited mainly to the US, Japan and West Germany; that the other European countries remained in a situation of stagnation; that the economic situation in Eastern Europe worsened considerably; that in the third world the economic situation daily became more catastrophic, with its few economic miracles foundering, inasmuch as the global recovery was in part based on the collapse of the price of raw materials, including oil. The pseudo-recovery was in reality only a continuation of the crisis in a different form. During the past few years, the capitalist class has constantly reduced

industrial capacity in the central countries, "rationalizing" its economy to maintain competitiveness, fighting inflation. For the working class of these central countries (Europe, the US), the "recovery" meant considerable lay offs, elimination of entire sectors of an industry, e.g. steel, leading to both unemployment and a deterioration in living and working conditions (decrease in the "social wage", intensification of labor, decreases in real wages).

In Western Europe, after the public sector strikes in Belgium (1983 and 1986) and the rail strike in France, it was mainly in Italy and Spain that the working class has fought its most significant battles.

In Italy, the working class suffered the burden of capitalism's crises for many years, but hadn't undertaken any massive and generalized struggle since the "hot autumn" of 1969. It had experienced how the unions sabotaged its struggles and how opposition parties, mainly the PCI (Italian Communist Party), had derailed discontent onto the electoral terrain. In recent years, the PCI and the unions had made great efforts to impose austerity on the workers and to prevent the outbreak of strikes. Consequently, distrust and hostility towards the unions grew and burst out into the open during the struggles of the spring of 1987.

In the past year strikes have broken out in many industries, mainly in the public sector: schools, railways, ports, banks, TV, the auto industry, airlines and local municipalities. These strikes began after the workers rejected the collective bargaining agreements proposed by the unions, which contained numerous provisions detrimental to the workers.

Apart from its extension, this movement was remarkable for the fact that in many sectors the workers rejected the unions and took the organization of the struggle into their own hands. In the education sector, rank and file committees were organized first in the 120 schools in Rome, then on a national scale. In a few months, these committees put the unions into the minority and organized three national assemblies (in Rome, Florence and Naples) with delegates elected by provincial coordination committees (this according to the ICC's "International Review" #50). In September, the three union federations asked for a suspension of all social agitation, but new wildcat strikes broke out in the transportation sector (railways and airlines). These workers also formed rank and file committees. In the railways, the struggle was launched by an assembly in Naples, which gave birth to a regional coordination. Later on similar organs were formed in other regions and a national coordination was established at an assembly in Florence.

Were the organizations that emerged during this movement the expression of the proletariat's tendency towards self-organization or were they an effort by the capitalist class to recuperate the disgust of the workers for the official unions, by dragooning them into new organizations of a trade union type? We are not privy to all the details of the forms of organization which appeared at specific moments in a particular

sector, but certain general tendencies can be sorted out.

The constitution of assemblies bringing together all the strikers, the rapid spread of this form of organization from workplace to workplace, city to city, region to region, and their centralization, all illustrate the impressive capacity of the working class for self-organization -- which is an indispensable condition for its unification and the development of its consciousness. This capacity was also present in the rail strike in France. The struggles in Italy confirm that this tendency toward self-organization is a general trait of the present period. They also show that this tendency is currently developing (and that it's bound to further develop in coming struggles). The dynamic of self-organization in several of its aspects went further in Italy than it did in France. On the one hand, the autonomous organs of the working class survived for a longer time than they did in France; on the other hand, they existed simultaneously in different sectors. But the process of self-organization is still at its inception, and is far from being sufficiently developed. That became clear in the struggles in Italy mainly in two ways.

First, the autonomous organizations were concerned only with the struggle of their own sector and never joined together the struggles in different sectors. This shows that corporatist illusions are still strong in the working class: the idea that it's enough for all the workers of one sector to go on strike to force the capitalist class to make concessions; that workers in one sector have their own specific demands to make in the face of the attacks by capitalism in crisis, etc. These illusions show how difficult it is to break with the habits of past struggles and to respond fully to the demands of the present period. In the 19th century, a general strike in one sector was enough to make the bourgeoisie retreat, and this warranted the organization of workers on a corporate basis in trade unions. Today, this is no longer the case. The capitalist class can no longer make durable concessions to the workers, and is well enough organized -- nationally and internationally -- to overcome any temporary problems due to a strike in any one sector, even communications. In the present period, it's an absolute necessity for workers to spread their struggle and to organize it beyond one sector, in order to try to establish a favorable balance of forces and to bring about their unification as a class. Efforts in that direction were made in Italy, but they were extremely few (just as in Belgium in 1986). Teachers, for instance, gave out leaflets calling for joining the struggle at a national demonstration of railway workers in Rome. But such initiatives so far haven't succeeded in creating a real extension of the struggle. The corporate illusions of the working class have been exploited by the unions of all stripes, which deliberately timed the strikes of different sectors in a dispersed way and put the emphasis on the specificity of each sector's demands and traditions of struggle.

Corporatism still weighs heavily on the

working class. Not just in Italy. It was at the root of the defeat of most recent struggles, like that of the French rail workers and the British miners and printers. Corporatism is a major obstacle to self-organization and to the potential that it contains. In France, for instance, the coordination committees were only open to railway workers, and sometimes only to certain categories of them, which only heightened their isolation. For a real unification of the class struggle, to make possible the development of the proletariat's strength and consciousness, corporatism must be overcome. This means that general assemblies of workers must be open to all workers. Another point which shows the immaturity of the process of self-organization today, is the tendency to transform the general assemblies of workers in struggle into permanent organizations, that is, into new unions. This tendency, clearly visible in Italy, shows the difficulty of going from a stage of rejecting the existing trade unions to a full rejection of the union form of organization itself. The illusion that the working class can create new unions for the defence of its interests, on a daily basis, against the onslaughts of the capitalists still subsists. Again, we can see the leftists doing all they can to reinforce such illusions. In Italy, as in earlier movements (Belgium, France), leftist groups like "Democrazia Proletaria" took over the idea of rank and file committees and coordinating committees as if they invented them, but gave them the task of "putting pressure on the unions to force them to recognize the struggle" or to transform these committees into permanent organs, a sort of new union, which would have the power to negotiate and decide to postpone strikes. It seems, however, that in Italy the working class has begun to pose the question of the future of the general assemblies in a concrete way, by debating whether or not they should be transformed into new unions: "Within the movement [of the teachers] the main confrontation was between the tendency to stabilize the committees into a new union (Unione Comitati di Base, COBAS, which had a majority in Rome) and the 'assemblyist' tendency, which had a majority in the national assemblies" (International Review #50).

The illusions of corporatism and of the possibility of creating new permanent organizations show the inadequate break with union ideology at the point at which workers rejected the classic union organizations. The future progress the working class will make is linked to its capacity to overcome these obstacles concretely, that is, by extending its struggles and organizing them autonomously on a larger scale than just one sector and by fully realizing the temporary character of the organizational forms that are generated by the struggle and which cannot outlast it.

In Spain too, the working class has reacted to the austerity attacks with a massive, long-lasting movement. The strikes that took place, at one or another time, in all sectors (every week there were new outbreaks) were mainly aimed at making the government retract

its 5% ceiling on wage increases. Despite the massive character of the movement (in the Spring of '87 about one million workers were on strike) and despite its length (continuing throughout the year), the government did not give in. Therefore, it's important to draw the lessons of this movement.

The struggles in Spain were a powerful factor in unmasking the real nature of the "Socialist Workers Party of Spain" (PSOE) and, by extension, "Socialist" and "Communist" parties in general. The fact the strikes broke out against the austerity policies of the state shows that the left governments don't care any more for the workers interests than those of the right (something which workers in Greece are learning too these days). A second lesson which will remain engraved in the consciousness of the working class is that left governments don't hesitate to use the most ferocious repression against angry workers. At several locations (like the Puerto Real shipyards at Cadiz, and in Remosa, a city with a Socialist mayor) the Guardia Civil confronted the workers with a violence no different than that of fascist repression under the Franco dictatorship.

The struggles in Spain show the strength and the weaknesses of the workers struggle today. The strength of the class lies essentially in its enormous combativity and tenacity (workers in a given sector on strike several times). The large number of struggles in all sectors showed that workers confront the same problems, whether they are miners in Asturias, steelworkers in Santander or drivers in public transportation. However, these struggles also showed the difficulty the working class has in unifying itself on an inter- and intra- sectoral level. It appears that workers still have the illusion of being able to oppose the state simply by being out on strike in a massive way, to the point of achieving a "general" strike for which the leftists and the unions will give the order. The situation in Spain showed that things are not so simple. The government wouldn't budge, not even when hundreds of thousands of workers were on strike, because the strikes were divided between cities, sectors and workplaces and did not develop a collective force. There were attempts to unify the struggles, but they were few in terms of the movement as a whole. The divisions were shrewdly maintained by the unions. Playing upon the opposition between the UGT (linked to the Socialist party) and the CCOO (linked to the Communist party), they utilized all their diversionary tactics (organizing "days of struggle", 24 hour strikes, planning strikes in different sectors so that they would never coincide in time or place). For those who still doubt that the unions use a deliberate policy of sabotage in collaboration with the other forces of the capitalist class, the view of the powerful Spanish newspaper, *Cambio 16*, should be enlightening: "The government is just waiting until the trade union strategy of dispersion dissipates the poisoned social climate".

The lack of unification of the struggles in Spain is undoubtedly linked to the fact that the workers allowed the unions to keep

control of their movement. Efforts at self-organization did occur, but they remained limited. In that sense, the working class in Spain has shown far less maturity than its class brothers in Italy, France or Belgium, even if its weaknesses are those of the working class as a whole at the present time. The fact that the unions still have so much control over the workers is probably due to their relatively recent existence, really only since the death of Franco. The workers have less experience with how the unions undermine the struggle. But the movements of 1987 will certainly add to that experience. In several places, like the Puerto Real shipyards, the unemployed joined the struggle of the employed workers and that too is a sign of the development of the workers struggle today (this also occurred in other struggles too, especially in Britain). The participation of the unemployed is a clear sign that the tendency towards unification of the working class is progressing.

Elsewhere in Western Europe, workers struggles have continued, but in a more dispersed fashion, in both time and place; there were no broad movements such as those in Italy and Spain.

During 1987, important changes occurred in the social situation in West Germany. That country, which has a concentrated working class with a history of important struggles, up till now has had only a few strikes, of no great intensity. Today, German capitalism too is being forced to restructure entire sectors of industry, especially steel and coal, and to restructure the state itself by attacking the workers of the public sector. At the beginning of last October, the bosses in steel, the unions and the state signed an agreement that meant the elimination of 35,000 jobs (out of a total of 140,000) and at the end of November it was announced that more job losses would be necessary. Coalmining capacity will also be reduced, so that 30,000 of the 157,000 jobs will be eliminated.

The threat of lay offs provoked explosions of working class anger in the region of the Ruhr. Three waves of protest took place: last March-April, in July and last December, when 200,000 metal workers demonstrated in Duisberg, Essen and Bochum. The violence of the confrontations that occurred during these demonstrations testifies to the degree of discontent amongst the workers. Workers from other sectors participated in some of these demonstrations in solidarity with the metal workers. But the unions kept a solid control over the situation and succeeded in diverting the anger towards deadends. The main problem weighing on these movements is the idea of the "defense of the region". The fact that steel is the dominant industry in some regions strengthened the illusion that the defensive struggle against lay offs can be linked to a struggle to save the economic infrastructure of a given region. This is certainly a bourgeois mystification: the interests of the working class cannot be confused with the defense of the place (factory, city, region or country) where it happens to be exploited. During recent demonstrations in Duisberg, the schools organized a demo of 12,000 children

protesting "so that we won't be unemployed when we grow up". The bakers made rolls in the shape of little kids which were given out free; the Bishop addressed a letter of solidarity to all the priests of the region; the mayors (Social-Democrats) expressed their solidarity with the workers. Splendid unanimity indeed! The working class shouldn't have any illusions in the kind of solidarity in "defending the region", which even before it begins already has the taste of defeat, as workers saw in the Longwy-Denain mining district in France and in Remosa in Spain. To conclude, 1987 in Western Europe was characterized by the outbreak of important struggles in countries which hadn't had many struggles of late, Spain and Italy, and by the entrance of the proletariat in Germany into the arena of social confrontations. Everywhere, the working class remains combative, but also imprisoned by an inadequate break from unionism.

THE STRUGGLES IN EASTERN EUROPE

In Eastern Europe, the rulers have reacted to the deepening of the economic crisis with "economic reforms" aimed at bringing about a "rationalization" similar to that of the developed countries of the West. This policy involves massive lay offs, a more strict linkage of wages to the productivity of labor, which means a significant reduction in the living standards of the workers and steep price hikes.

In Russia, for instance, tens of millions of jobs would be lost between now and the year 2,000, out of an active population of 140 million workers, according to official estimates. 8 million bureaucrats out of a total of 18 million would lose their jobs; 25 million workers would be transferred to other jobs. Since last July 1, the introduction of new manpower regulations has led to the elimination of 3 million jobs, 280,000 on the railroads and 70,000 in oil. In Yugoslavia too, the new economic policy laws passed last July prescribe the closure of any unprofitable plants.

Price rises have eroded living standards. In Russia, the economic reforms are supposed to lead to a better supply of consumer goods for the population. Supplies have indeed increased, but prices of goods from cooperatives are 3 to 4 times higher than those in state stores (where for the moment, prices remain unchanged). In Poland and Yugoslavia, prices of many products, necessities included, have risen sharply. In Poland, consumer goods have gone up in price more than 50%, while the supply has shrunk. In Yugoslavia, a price freeze came after sharp increases: from 30 - 69% in the price of bread, sugar, cooking oil and milk, in addition to price rises in electricity, gas, post, transportation, and rent and tax hikes. This was accompanied by a relative "liberalization" of wages in some sectors, though in others wages have been frozen.

Despite the fact that information concerning working class reactions is blacked out even more effectively in the Russian bloc, some news has broken through the wall of silence. In Russia, an official newspaper has leaked news of two strikes: one 24 hour strike of bus drivers in Tchekov, near Moscow; the

other a three day strike in a plant where buses are made in Likino in the Urals. In both cases workers were protesting wage decreases due to the linking of wages to work quality, when the existing means of production (old buses and machines) made it impossible to achieve the productivity demanded.

In Rumania too, there were important movements (see the article in this issue). In Yugoslavia, struggles which exploded at the beginning of 1987 continued: in mid-November, more than 3,000 workers at the steel mill in Skopje went on strike to protest the fact that their wages were lower than those of other steelworkers. One hour after their demonstration began, the authorities announced that their wages would be brought up to the same level as those in the rest of the industry.

These few examples illustrate the combativity of the workers of the Stalinist world against capitalist exploitation. Like earlier struggles, these help to destroy the myths about "self-management" in Yugoslavia and "socialism" in the Russian bloc. They also show that wage cuts due to the linking of wages with productivity are generating social tensions. These tensions will grow when it will no longer be possible to hide lay offs under "reclassification". That doesn't mean that there are no obstacles to the development of workers struggles in the East. The main ones will be the divisions between workers, which could be increased by the reforms (linking productivity and wages will increase the wage differentials within the working class) and democratic mystifications ("free" unions, pluralism of political parties and "free" elections).

THE STRUGGLES IN THE THIRD WORLD

The economic situation of the third world countries has worsened for several reasons. The fall in the price of raw materials has reduced their income and makes them unable to continue to carry the burden of debt accumulated during the '70's; the saturation of markets makes the export of manufactured goods ever more difficult; and inter-imperialist conflicts destroy their economies while forcing them to turn to more and more sophisticated weapons and use their populations as cannon fodder. The working class is increasingly speaking in its own name, but great difficulties impede its struggle.

In Latin America, inflation and new austerity plans have provoked important reactions, notably in Brazil and Mexico. In Brazil, the brutal deterioration in living conditions brought on by galloping inflation caused massive strikes for wage increases in the merchant marine and in oil in March 1987. In both cases, the workers were confronted with a combination of "democratic", open, repression and repression by the unions. The army intervened and occupied the workplaces; the sailors strike was declared illegal, and the unions pushed the workers to respect the law and return to work. This shows that democratization (of which Brazil is a shining example) means nothing for the workers except new stratagems to hinder its struggle.

In Mexico, the degeneration in living conditions over the past several years and the government's tough wage policy provoked a huge strike by electrical workers in March 1987. Different repression tactics by the state forced them back to work 5 days later, without obtaining anything. As in Brazil, the state requisitioned the workplaces which were occupied by the army and police, and brought in other workers to do the jobs. The strike was declared illegal; the unions took away the initiative from the workers, immobilized them and made them "respect the law". The unions tried to avoid strikes for higher wages because when they broke out they evoked great solidarity. The march on Mexico City which the 33,000 strikers organized did attract "many workers from the public sector (metro, foreign trade bank, telephone, tramways, currency exchange, universities) and from industry (textiles) as well as groups of workers from small firms.... Also, groups of people from the poorer districts and high school kids joined the march". (communiqué from "Comunismo" to revolutionary groups)

1987 also saw two important struggles in South Africa: in March, the railway workers strike and in August the miners. Both movements show that the problem of workers in South Africa is not a race problem, but as elsewhere a problem of the exploitation of the workers. The workers showed an exemplary combativity, tenacity and solidarity. They had the bitter experience of seeing that the NUM, the newly created black union (founded in 1982), opposed -- like every union -- the workers movement and made them go back without gaining a thing.

The events of last August in South Korea unmasked the myth of docile Asian workers, eager to be over-exploited. After student revolts which ended with promises of democratization, the working class started a broad movement for wage demands, despite the ban on strikes. The struggles were marked by solidarity and violent confrontations with the police and army. The movement ended under the combined effect of a partial wage increase in certain places (which the unions succeeded in imposing on the workers), brutal state repression and promises to democratize the unions (which till then were openly controlled by the military regime). The struggles in Korea announce future struggles of another important faction of the world proletariat: the Japanese. They also mark some progress in the autonomy of the working class from the rest of the population. In 1980, the resistance against the effects of the crisis took the form of popular riots in Kwangju, during which the workers were mixed in and submerged amongst the rest of the population. Today, this resistance takes the form of real workers struggle with all its features: massiveness, solidarity, etc. Since last August, the workers of Korea have been inundated with electoral campaigns: first, a referendum on a new constitution (which grants the "right to strike"), then Presidential elections. But the democratization of the regime will give nothing more to the workers of Korea than it did to those of Brazil.

Finally, in this survey we must mention the workers struggle which erupted in Lebanon to protest the nightmarish conditions there. Last October 15, 10,000 workers, Muslim as well as Christian, demonstrated together against the deterioration of living conditions, shouting: "We are hungry!", "Stop the war!"

CONCLUSIONS

This survey of struggles in 1987 brings us to the question: what point has been reached by the wave of struggles that started in 1983? From a geographical viewpoint, the wave has continued to rise. It has mobilized factions of the working class which had so far known little struggle, e.g. Germany. This has several potentially important implications. It becomes increasingly clear that the struggle of the working class, the self-organization of which it is capable, the unification which it tries to bring about, is the only worldwide alternative for a humanity faced with the decomposition of the capitalist system and its tendency towards war. Furthermore, the spontaneity of struggles in Western and Eastern Europe and in the third world is a necessary precondition (though not sufficient) for the future unification of the proletariat on a world level. Finally, the progressive overcoming of different mystifications in the struggle will favor the development of class consciousness. The questioning of the unions, for instance, which will become more and more pronounced in Western Europe, will help the workers of the underdeveloped countries to avoid being fooled by the illusion of democratic unions. The struggles against war will push the workers of the industrialized countries to understand that the movement must be directed against the totality of the capitalist system, which is the cause of crisis, austerity and war. From the viewpoint of time, the struggles of 1987 confirm that the development of the movement towards revolution, against a

background of economic crisis, is slow, difficult and uneven. The workers are everywhere confronted with the necessity of more profoundly putting into question the illusions that they still have in capitalist society, and in the organizations that purport to defend their interests, e.g. the unions. This questioning passes through a slow but profound maturation of class consciousness. The current struggles show, in certain of their aspects, progress in relation to previous struggles (for example, the problem of self-organization is posed more clearly in Italy than it was in France or Belgium). But they essentially show an accumulation of similar experiences in different countries. From an international point of view, the proletariat today isn't yet capable of fully drawing the lessons of a struggle that has taken place in another country and to go beyond it from the beginning of the next struggle. It is still forced to repeat similar experiences a number of times before it can make a qualitative leap forward. A break with corporatism, a conscious and self-organized extension of the struggle, will be clear indicators of the future development of the class struggle.

ADELE

Notes

- (1) For an analysis of the successive waves of class struggle since 1968, see "Resolution on Class Struggle" in IP#5
- (2) We have tried to clarify the question of class consciousness and its development in two articles: "Class Consciousness in the Proletarian Revolution 1. The Nature of Consciousness and its Ideological Deformations" in IP#4 and "2. The Process of the Development of Class Consciousness" in IP#6.
- (3) For a development of this point, see the text "The Struggle of the Proletariat in the Period of Decadence" in the International Review of the ICC #23.

ROUMANIA

the same

fight against capital



The social struggles that took place recently in Rumania deserve a close look and have, therefore, served as the basis for the following general article. These struggles are a sign of the proletarian re-awakening in Eastern Europe and another nail in the coffin of the myth of the "socialist" bloc supposedly free of unemployment, poverty, corruption, economic crisis and strikes.

The article is written by a comrade of the magazine "Jalons" in France, who has been discussing with our fraction for months, growing close to the positions I.P. defends.

At the beginning of a long and cold winter, reduced to famine rations of 300 grams of bread a day, no meat or poultry, and milk, oil, sugar and coffee only when it can be found, with electricity and heat shut off for several hours a day, the growing revolt of the Rumanian workers finally broke out into the open.

On Sunday, November 15th, in Brasov in the heart of the Carpathian Mountains, the workers of the Red Flag truck and tractor factory violently boycotted city elections. The elections had appeared at just the right moment to try to distract the workers from their real worries and their true class terrain: the struggle against capitalism in all its forms. Instead of going like good little citizens into the isolation of the bourgeois polling booth (the very antithesis of class struggle), they took action. They decided their problems were about food and wages and not some participation in an electoral circus to decide how best to be exploited.

Pushed to the limit by wage cuts due to failures to meet the objectives of the latest Plan, the demonstrators spit on the police and stoned them with whatever came to hand. Food depots were looted and public buildings taken by force. Forty thousand demonstrators destroyed Communist Party headquarters and the offices of the "People's Militia". Portraits of President Ceausescu and "administrative files" (secret police dossiers) were burned while demonstrators shouted

"we want bread".

For six hours the demonstrators and the police clashed. There seems to be no doubt

that the police, who lost two of their men, opened fire on the crowds with live ammunition. The police finally had to call in the army to control the situation. Army armored trucks fired on positions held by the workers. These were the worst disorders in Rumania since the beginning of the "People's Republic".

Other similar protests against drastic wage cuts and against forced work on Sundays so as to meet the Five Year Plan, show the gravity of the situation in Rumania and the workers' determination to resist. They make a mockery of the "socialism Rumanian-style" lauded by the stalinists and their ideological associates, the trotskyists. Let us not be mistaken here: this reaction was against capitalism as a system of exploitation and not against simple "abuses" of the Ceausescu "cult of personality". The workers fought against wage labor and the incredible sacrifices demanded by a war economy which has led the country to catastrophic decline and widespread poverty.

Rumania could no more escape the world crisis of capitalism than Poland or any other country in Eastern Europe. Here the crisis takes the form of an absolute impoverishment of the working class. An archaic heavy industry financed by foreign debt has led to a fall in production. To repay this debt and to try to catch up to the Plan, the State tried to get away with paying the workers what no one else has dared to do in Western Europe.

The crisis in Rumania, like the crisis in the Third World or in the Western countries or in the Eastern bloc, is part of a world crisis of capitalism. Like everywhere else, the workers fighting back in Rumania are part of an international wave of class struggle.

How do the stalinists and their friends explain this situation? Just the same old lies. In their police state conception of history, they claim that this is all the result of "anti-socialist activity", of elements who have lost faith in building socialism -- just "hooligans" and wreckers.

This system that extorts surplus value from workers and peasants sweating in the State factories and farms, exploiting them so viciously, is state capitalism. This State, spying on every gesture of its ci-

tizens, searching and imprisoning as it sees fit, is the State of the bourgeoisie. This State relies essentially on the political police, its "security forces" and the army to maintain national coherence. Workers have no rights at all, certainly not the right to stop working or to receive a "decent" wage for their productive efforts. The workers can kill themselves working to enrich the State -- this State that teaches young people the sacred duty of "patriotism" and keeps the national minorities under its heel (Hungarians in Transylvania and Tartars in Bessarabia), maintaining its imperialist interests as firmly as any great power.

In Rumania, as everywhere else in this world, the proletariat's task is clear: to destroy this entire apparatus for the exploitation of man by man from top to bottom. Its task and objective is the dictatorship of the Workers' Councils.

But the illusions and the weaknesses of the movement must be clearly criticized. During the attack on the police station, red flags were trampled underfoot to the tune of an old patriotic song of resistance to Turkish rule. Like in Poland, "democratic" forces play on religious feeling and "anti-communism". The more "radical" factions of the democrats exploit the weaknesses and illusions that necessarily still exist. Because they dream of a more "humanitarian" management of capitalism, they call on the Rumanian proletariat to fight the Russians in the name of "human rights".

Ceausescu, who calls himself the genius of the Carpathian Mountains, is only an agent of despotic capital. The simplistic belief that all the misery is just the result of bad management really represents a handicap for the maturation of class consciousness and a danger for the development of the struggle. Getting rid of some big bureaucrats and other flunkies who can be blamed for the "abuses" and replaced by new men, will change nothing. No switches of people in government can end the devastating effects of the crisis of capitalism.

The uprising in Brasov, the second-largest city in Rumania, did not spread to other towns. In Bucharest and elsewhere the workers did not join in the movement. Only the very rapid generalization of the movement and the organization of solidarity could hope to paralyse the hand of repression. But in the absence of this generalization, the repression took place right away and very brutally, all the more so because there were no acts of solidarity from the army even though it is made up of work-

ers and peasants.

There are probably many more dead and wounded than are reported in either the right-wing or left-wing press. The movement has been stopped and the presence of police in the factories seals its defeat. But when the ruling class viciously represses the movement, it is really because it is afraid that combativity will break out again and generalize to the entire working class this time, like in Poland.

This defeat is a bad one but it will not discourage the workers. Ten years after the struggle of their class brothers in the lignite mines of the Jui bassin, the workers in Rumania today again confront the State, regardless of the risks, of guns, prison and deportation.

Those who think they have crushed the workers by mobilizing all the violence and terror of the State against them, are wrong. They cannot put the spectre of communism to rest by throwing workers into prison or into "socialist work camps". The State bureaucracy wanted to wipe out the outrage committed against their Supreme Leader. At the recent Party Conference, the head of state reaffirmed his "determination to carry on with (his) economic and political orientations" despite what he called the "deviationist tendencies of some leaders".

The recent confrontations were a totally spontaneous movement and they will not be in vain. They show that the proletariat, despite all the traps of bourgeois ideology, has taken a step forward in class struggle.

At a time when the world crisis of capitalism calls for a revolution, the recent defeat in Rumania is a link in the chain of combats leading in that direction. The future lies not with these types of revolts that are always put down but with movements that challenge the bourgeoisie more fundamentally. The only historical subject capable of overthrowing the bourgeoisie is the proletariat, the only hope of victory. In Rumania as elsewhere in the world, the proletariat will seize power as a revolutionary arm to begin to change social relations from top to bottom.

R.C.

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 26

on class consciousness in IP#2,4 & 6 and state capitalism in IP#7). But this task cannot be fulfilled by any one group; it must be the preoccupation of the entire milieu. For this reason so large a part of IP is devoted to debate, correspondence and polemic. We call upon the rest of the milieu to explore the burning questions with us, to abandon mutual grudges and exclusions and to open itself to the most open and thorough debate possible. It is only out of such activity that a new, vigorous, revolutionary milieu can emerge.

THE EXTERNAL FRACTION OF THE ICC



MANOEUVERS IN THE GULF

to discipline Iran and counter Russian advances

The vast naval armada that American imperialism -- with the active participation of military units from five NATO countries -- has assembled in the Persian Gulf indicates not only a new determination on Washington's part to "discipline" a recalcitrant Iran, but also a real heightening of tensions between the two imperialist blocs. To understand how a localized imperialist conflict between two countries within the American bloc, Iran and Iraq, could lead to a sharpening of tensions between the American and Russian blocs, it is necessary to review not merely the course of the Iran-Iraq war but also the role of the Middle East on the inter-imperialist chessboard in the period since World War II.

When the Iran-Iraq war began in 1980, it was not basically a struggle -- even a proxy struggle -- between Russian and American imperialism. Economically, both Iran & Iraq were within the orbit of American imperialism. Though Iraq had important military ties with Moscow (which provided much of Baghdad's sophisticated weaponry), and though Moscow was probably aware of and approved the decision to attack Iran, the Iraqi invasion was greeted with the greatest jubilation in the firmly pro-American Arab states of the Gulf region (Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, the UAE), ever fearful of a powerful Iran. At the time, Iran received the wholehearted -- though covert -- backing of two of America's closest allies: Israel and China (the former determined at all costs to prevent the growth of Iraqi influence in the Arab world, which would certainly follow any military triumph over Iran, not to mention the economic strengthening attendant on the conquest of Iran's oil fields).

The reversal of fortunes of the two belligerents over the past six years has had a dramatic effect on Washington's policy in the region. The original fear of an Iranian defeat (and the possible opening this would give to Russian imperialism in a weak and fragmented Iran) which led the U.S. to sanction huge covert arms shipments to Teheran (via Israel and China) has now given way to fears of an Iranian victory over Iraq. The spectre of an expansionist Iran as the local hegemonic power in the Gulf region, threatening the "moderate"

Arab regimes which are loyal to Washington, has made the prevention of an Iranian victory into a foundation of American policy in the region. Moreover, as the tide of battle has shifted against Iraq, Baghdad has begun to sever its links with Moscow and increase its economic and military dependence on the moderate Arab states, in short to firmly integrate itself into the American bloc. The result, as we suggested in our article on Irangate in I.P.#8 has been a reorientation of American policy towards Iran, based on a determination to confront and discipline the Teheran regime. The naval armada in the Gulf, the military build-up of the Arab states in the region and Egypt's commitment to use military force to prevent an Iranian breakthrough in the Gulf, all indicate Washington's resolve to block Iranian expansion in the region.

The unfolding of this localized imperialist struggle between Iran and Iraq, though it began as a conflict within the American bloc, could not fail to have a significant impact on the inter-imperialist balance between Washington and Moscow. This is the case because since World War II the Middle East has been the global flashpoint for inter-imperialist antagonisms. In our period, the Middle East plays the role as a point of confrontation between the rival imperialist blocs that the Balkans played in the decade before 1914, or that central Europe played in the mid and late thirties. Any difficulty for one of the blocs in such a vital area immediately provokes efforts by its rival to improve its own position and to bring about a reversal of alliances.

It is not difficult to see why the Middle East has played this role in the present period. Russia's imperialist ambition to challenge the U.S. for world hegemony is unrealizable without the industrial-technological resources of Western Europe and Japan the conquest of which would make the Russian bloc more than the equal of the U.S. However, a direct attack on either Western Europe or Japan would immediately provoke a world war and the probable destruction of much of the industrial base of Europe and Japan even if Russia achieved a speedy military success. Moreover,

under the prevailing politico-economic conditions in Europe and Japan, continued integration within the American bloc is the orientation favored by virtually all of the local factions of capital. Events in the Middle East, though, have the real potential to transform the politico-economic landscape of Europe and Japan. Control of the oil lanes of the Middle East and of the oil fields themselves by Russian imperialism would exert enormous pressure on the ruling classes in Western Europe and Japan whose economies would then be hostage to Moscow. The stability and possibly the very commitment of these countries to the American bloc would then be at risk. Important factions of the local capitalist classes would begin to question the wisdom of their pro-American orientation, and the U.S. would be put on the defensive. Such are the real stakes in the Middle East today.

While Russian imperialism has generally been in retreat in the Middle East for more than a decade, the loss of Iran as a dependable outpost of American imperialism, the capacity of the Khomeini regime to survive (and even consolidate itself) in the midst of war with Iraq and the expansionism of Teheran which threatens all the pro-American Arab regimes of the Persian Gulf as well as Lebanon, have provided Moscow with new opportunities in this vital region.

In this way, what began as a localized conflict within the American bloc has been transformed into the scene of new and ominous tensions between American and Russian imperialism. The recent draft treaty between Moscow and Teheran, which allows Russia to build pipelines and railroads in Iran, together with the proximity of Russian tanks to Iran, point to a course which can only fill Washington with consternation. Yet the fact that the U.S. is determined to actively oppose the expansionism of the Khomeini regime cannot fail to provide an impetus to a Russo-Iranian rapprochement. Even the fact that the regime of Shiite fundamentalists in Teheran will probably not outlast Khomeini does not automatically mean that Iran will resume its "normal" role of seeing Russia as its natural enemy and thereby realign with the U.S. A pro-Russian regime based on the Tudeh party could emerge, one which Moscow could unleash or restrain as its imperialist interests (and the behavior of the Arab countries of the Gulf region) dictated. Such an outcome would provide Russian imperialism with the prospect of re-entering the Mid-East cockpit with a vengeance.

Meanwhile, the outcome of the Irangate affair in the U.S. has been the triumph of the policy represented by Secretary of State Schultz: there are presently no "moderate" factions in the Teheran government with whom the U.S. can strike a deal; the only hope for a pro-American regime in Iran lies in the overthrow of Khomeini; American military power must be utilized to prevent Iranian expansionism in the Gulf even at the risk of a direct con-

frontation with Teheran.

This view, which has provisionally triumphed in Washington, is by no means shared by all factions of the American capitalist class (not to speak of its European compatriots). Even Defense Secretary Weinberger objected to the Schultz policy of a massive military build-up in the Gulf, with its very real risk of drawing the U.S. directly into the Iran-Iraq war. Weinberger's resignation, however, has removed the last important voice within the Reagan administration against the Schultz policy. Nonetheless, significant opposition to aspects of the present American policy in the Gulf has surfaced within the powerful Washington think tanks and sectors of the Democratic Party. The view of this segment of the ruling class is that the present American military posture in the Gulf is an over-reaction to the inane policies of Casey/Poindexter and risks driving Iran into the arms of the Russians no matter what results it could achieve in purely military terms. In short, the Schultz policy may bring about precisely what it is intended to prevent: a growing Russian presence in the region.

Meanwhile, Russia's lurch towards Iran has already proved costly within the Arab world. Not only has Iraq virtually completed its integration into the American bloc on the political and military terrain, but Syria (one of the last Russian bastions in the Arab world and originally a partisan of Iran because of Damascus' own bitter rivalry with Iraq) is edging away from both Moscow and Teheran. This is in no small part because the Khomeini-backed Shiite militia in Lebanon are now the most formidable obstacle to firm Syrian control over that country. Indeed, Damascus increasingly depends on the support of the moderate Arab states (and Washington) for its pacification of Lebanon and for the stabilization of its own crisis-ridden economy.

However unpredictable the result of the American bloc's massive military build-up in the Persian Gulf, one thing is certain: the localized conflict between Iran and Iraq has already been transformed into one more lethal moment in the inter-imperialist struggle between the U.S. and Russia, and it is increasingly decisions made in Washington and Moscow that will decide its outcome.

MAC INTOSH

Discussion

ACCIDENT AND NECESSITY

The debate on the analysis of the "accidental" character of Mitterrand's election in France in 1981, which has been reopened in the pages of IP#4, after having been aborted in the ICC following the crisis that it was going through at the time, is not first of all about Mitterrand's election. At the time, the divergences were quickly polarized around the general framework of the analysis of the left in opposition. Today, this aspect of the question is no longer at the center of the debate, since the Fraction as a whole defends the general framework of the analysis of the left in opposition elaborated by the ICC. In taking up the defense of the ICC's "accident thesis", MacIntosh and JA have been naturally led to raise another question: the role of chance and necessity in social reality. This question goes to the methodological foundation of the analysis of social reality and, therefore, has implications for all domains of this analysis: empiricism and schematism are directly linked to misunderstandings on this point. The theoretical apparatus elaborated by Marxism on this question is basically insufficient. The contribution of MacIntosh and JA has been to raise the issue and to reaffirm the dialectical interpenetration of chance and necessity, against the mechanistic, determinist vision which for so long has prevailed in bourgeois science and which prevails still in many currents claiming the mantle of Marxism. However, in their attempt to insert their thesis in this framework, MacIntosh and JA are led into impasses and manifest contradictions, which, though, seemed to have escaped them. Thus, after some correct, albeit abstract considerations inspired by Engels (himself inspired by Hegel), MacIntosh and JA's text, in its concrete analysis of events, ends up reproducing the vulgar concept of contingency and necessity as mutually exclusive, that Engels had criticized. In effect, the same event (formal designation, through elections, of members of the state apparatus charged with "public" administration of the affairs of state) is seen either as an case of pure necessity (where the right wins) or as an "accident", that is, a case of pure contingency (where the left wins), at least in the case of France. In other words, the dialectical view of such an event as at the same time contingent and necessary has been expunged from the reasoning process, to give way to a mechanistic view of an event as being either contingent or necessary depending on its outcome. This view is itself tributary to the "common sense" view of an accident as an unforeseen and unpleasant event, one contrary to what was willed. In MacIntosh and JA's text, accident is indeed

defined in that way: "a phenomenon not without causes, of course, but an accident because it was not a result deliberately willed by the ruling class or corresponding to its vital needs" (IP#4, p. 14). Accident is here defined in opposition to conscious will or vital need, that is to say, not in an objective and general way, but in a subjective and restricted way (applicable to man or at the outside to the living world). The preeminence of the element of conscious will in this conception leads the text to combat -- in Rose's text -- a thesis which as such it does not contain, and which MacIntosh and JA have themselves introduced: "Its [Rose's article] thesis is that if the left won, it was because the ruling class consciously decided that it needed the left in power." (Ibid., p.13) Now, that is not asserted in Rose's text, which can be understood -- although it is not clear on this point -- in another way.

To get beyond the contradictory terms of the debate such as it has been carried on until now, it is necessary to first look at the general question of contingency and necessity, and then at the issue of necessity and consciousness for the bourgeoisie, all before returning to the particular problem of the elections in France in 1981.

CONTINGENCY AND NECESSITY

To begin, it is important to remember that the notions of necessity, contingency and therefore of accident pertain to objective features of every form of reality, and not specifically to the subjective position of man in the face of his natural and social environment. In fact, the dilemma of chance and necessity is at the basis of all tendencies in the natural sciences. This is an insurmountable dilemma for the bourgeoisie and its scientific ideologues, because its historical position prevents it from taking up the dialectic in its totality and of

understanding the transitory nature of its own existence. The bourgeoisie has always sought to reduce reality to ultimate eternal and universal principles, a quest which characterizes the essence of its basic philosophical program: mechanism. In the ascendant phase of its social system, the bourgeoisie had limitless confidence in its new system, which led it to develop a mechanistic determinism, whose model was classical Newtonian mechanics, with its ideally separated bodies determined by strict and simple laws of motion. With the entrance of its social system into its phase of decadence and the convulsions of all sorts which have accompanied it, the bourgeoisie has taken refuge in the inverse -- but in its foundations symmetrical -- doctrine; that is

to say, indeterminist mechanism, inspired by quantum mechanics, which allows us to glimpse a world of indefinite corpuscles uncertain in their behavior. Far from reaching a general synthesis on this question, bourgeois science has only swung from determinism to indeterminism, from necessity to chance as the ultimate determination of matter. However reactionary the ideological evolution of the bourgeoisie -- copying its economic and political evolution -- in the course of this century, the upheavals engendered by the many discoveries of the natural sciences today provide a multitude of elements undreamed of in Engels' time, demonstrating the dialectical interpenetration of necessity and contingency as two essential and inseparable determinations of every form of reality and thereby allowing for a more objective definition. An excellent synthesis of these elements on the basis of a general critique of mechanism, both determinist and indeterminist -- although remaining in a strictly scientific, non-Marxist framework -- can be found in the book Causality and Chance in Modern Physics by the physicist David Bohm (Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984).

The first act of any analysis is to abstract a system, an object, a phenomenon, from the totality of which it is a part, which in the final analysis is the whole universe. This act thus defines a framework, a particular context, in which the objects or phenomena will be considered, but which as a result isolates them from the multiple determinations outside this context. Thus, Marxist analysis is essentially concerned

with the social reality of man, and, although this includes his relation to the whole of nature, it defines a context from which are excluded strictly natural phenomena or those pertaining to the particularity of the individuals who compose society. The ultimate foundation of the determination of everything being the totality of the universe, it is by relation to the defined context that the categories of necessity and contingency simultaneously acquire their meaning. Necessity corresponds to the inherent and essential aspect of things and phenomena considered in this context, while contingency corresponds to the aspects which possess a relative independence from that context, the determination of which is essentially outside that context and which, as a result, may or may not manifest itself. Thus, in the framework of a Marxist analysis, the laws of historical development of society express relations of causal necessity, with respect to which the vicissitudes through which they are realized or the actions of such or such individual represent contingent aspects. By contrast, from the point of view of the fate of such or such individual, these historical laws can very strongly intervene as contingent elements.

Contingency and necessity are therefore no longer seen as absolute and incompatible categories, but rather define themselves relative to a certain context. It is the same for accident, that is to say, a fortuitous event, due to chance. Chance is only an extreme form of contingency, in which the contingent elements have such a weak or

negligible relation with the envisaged context that they can be taken as completely independent. To illustrate the implications and the relativity of the notion of accident, we can take a simple but classical example, a car "accident", drawn from Bohm's book mentioned above:

Now it is evident that just where, when, and how a particular accident takes place depends on an enormous number of factors, a slight change of any one of which could greatly change the character of the accident or even avoid it altogether. For example, in a collision of two cars, if one of the motorists had started out ten seconds earlier or ten seconds later, or if he had stopped to buy cigarettes, or slowed down to avoid a cat that happened to cross the road, or for any one of a number of similar reasons, this particular accident would not even have happened We see, then, that relative to a context in which we consider, for example, the actions and precautions that can be taken by a particular motorist, each accident has an aspect that is fortuitous. By this we mean that what happens is contingent on what are, to a high degree of approximation, independent factors, existing outside the context in question, which have no essential relationship to the characteristic traits that define just what sort of a person this motorist is and how he will behave in a given situation. For this reason, we say that relative to such a context a particular collision is not a necessary or inevitable development, but rather that it is an accident and comes about by chance, from which it also follows that, within this context, the question of just where, when, and how such a collision will take place, as well as that of whether it will take place or not, is unpredictable.

So much for an individual accident. Let us now consider a series of similar accidents. As the number of accidents under consideration becomes larger and larger ... new properties begin to appear; for one finds that individual variations tend to cancel out, and statistical regularities begin to show themselves. Thus, the total number of accidents in a particular region generally does not change very much from year to year. Two things must be said on the basis of this example. First, the character of an accident as an unfortunate event, contrary to one's conscious will, reflects the subjective position of the subject in this event, but its accidental character is a fundamentally objective element, independent of the subjectivity of the individual in question. Secondly, what is an accident, practically pure contingency for the individual, tends to lose this accidental character when you enlarge the context to the social level; when you envisage not just the particular concrete event, but the ensemble of similar events. Chance at one level becomes necessity at another level. That necessity which flows from the uncertain behavior of particular elements and not from causal relations between them can be expressed, just as these latter, in laws -- statistical laws. Such a statistical treatment, moreover, has become the new methodological principle of bourgeois

science in the course of this century, an expression of its indeterminist mechanist philosophy.

In fact, statistical laws are approximately verified even when the elementary events are not of an uncertain nature, on the condition that they are sufficiently independent one from the other. It is thus that the laws of modern capitalist society take on a more and more statistical character, due to the extreme atomization of the individuals who compose it. The law of value, for example, is realized through multiple variations in price which tend to neutralize one another. Specifically with what concerns us here -- the outcome of elections -- the motivations for the particular vote of each individual are obliterated at the level of an entire country, so that the electoral result becomes predictable within limits, notably through the use of appropriate preliminary polling samples. From that point on, while the particular role of the individual in social reality remains minimal, the evolution of the latter follows a largely necessary course, that is to say, one determined in large measure by internal relations analyzable in terms of laws, tendencies and general social factors.

Now, a very general law of natural or social systems regulates the intrusion of contingency, of chance, into the evolution of these systems. While a system is in a stable state, of "normal" functioning, the probability that it will be dislocated by the contingent or uncertain behavior of its constitutive elements, that these latter will play a decisive role in its evolution, is miniscule. But, when this system is brought to a state of instability, relatively minor and contingent events can be the point of departure for concatenations which throw the system into a different state. In the domain of social reality, it is moments of political or revolutionary crisis which provide the possibility for a decisive influence of individuals or small groups over the fate of society. Not in the sense that they will determine the essence of the new social state, which remains governed by general historical laws, but in the sense of serving as catalyzers of a process of transformation (this is one of the roles played by revolutionaries in the proletarian revolution). Outside of these moments, the role of the individual in the fate of society remains rather marginal -- although at this level it certainly depends on one's social position (a head of state has more influence over this fate than a single proletarian!), on the political structure of the regime, etc. The situation in France in 1981 clearly did not correspond to one of important political crisis.

However, contingency can intervene in many ways in the determination of the more particular aspects of the fate of society. Through the electoral mechanism, particularly in a direct Presidential election as in France, certain specific situations can leave a relatively important role to contingency: if the chances of two candidates are almost the same, with anything over 50% determining the election of one, slight fluctuations in

one or another direction will be enough to elect one or the other candidate. The 1981 Presidential elections in France took place more or less in such conditions. In that sense, the election of one or the other candidate had a largely accidental character; and it is in this sense that the election of Mitterrand was accidental, just as the election of Giscard would have been.

However, this is only a statistical vision of things, which in itself is in no way Marxist and does not explain the situation. What must be explained is why the political rapports de forces within the French bourgeoisie was such that the candidates found themselves with practically equal chances; in short, what necessity engendered a situation where contingency could indifferently decide between one or the other outcome. It is that necessity that the ICC denied in its analysis, by proclaiming as "necessity" only what went in the direction of Giscard's election -- the famous tendency of the left in opposition -- and, by contrast calling the election of Mitterrand an "accident". Accident was thereby completely separated from its aspect of necessity, becoming a pure mystery, an "anomaly", a "sort of involuntary light opera coup d'etat" to use the terms of the ICC at the time (Revolution Internationale #86). Not being totally mystical, the ICC indeed advanced factors -- moreover correct -- which were responsible for this situation; but these factors were curiously taken from the domain of necessity in order to be placed in that of contingency. In reality, these contradictions result from its vision of necessity and of consciousness for the bourgeoisie.

NECESSITY AND CONSCIOUSNESS FOR THE BOURGEOISIE

The sliding of the ICC in its perspective on the question of necessity and consciousness such as it is posed for the bourgeoisie began at the time of its definition of the tendency of the left in opposition which characterizes the political evolution of the bourgeoisie in the course of the '80's. This latter rested on the recognition of two striking facts of the present period. First, the class struggle has become the dominant aspect of social reality, which forces the bourgeoisie to place its left factions in opposition so as to better control it. Second, the bourgeoisie is capable of consciously uniting by overcoming its internal divisions so as to face its common enemy, the proletariat, as the experience of Poland in 1980 showed. As was so often the case, the ICC had to assert these points against the majority of the revolutionary milieu, but again as was so often the case, the ICC did it by tending to restrict the framework of its analysis and falling into schematism.

Marxism has as its field the totality of social reality, inasmuch as it represents the coherent theoretical efforts of a class called upon to overturn the totality of social relations. Therefore, contrary to bourgeois scientific analysis, which seeks to describe isolated phenomena with the aid of strict laws, based on the action of simple factors (thus the laws of motion of classical

mechanics reduces itself to the action of the forces of gravitational attraction and inertia), Marxist analysis consciously looks at a complex and changing reality, of which it cannot aspire to an exhaustive description, but from which it tries to extract the crucial tendencies, without restricting its scope to one specific factor and with the critical goal of arming the proletariat with a view to its radical tasks. Therefore, Marxism conceives of the necessity which imposes itself on the bourgeoisie not as a single necessity, but as a multiple and contradictory necessity, resulting from the action of a multitude of factors active in the economic, political and ideological domains.

When a general conjunctural tendency asserts itself, such as the tendency of the left in opposition in the present period, this tendency prevails, not because there is only a single factor at play, but because a powerful general factor pushes in that direction (the class struggle), while other factors push conjointly in the same direction (thus, the right in government is appropriate to the present economic policies of reducing state expenditures) or are neutral in that regard (for example, imperialist realignments in certain countries); finally, the contrary factors are globally less important (for example, the internal political problems of the bourgeoisie). Such a vision includes the fact that, in certain countries and at certain times, the particular weight of specific contrary factors can be more important and lead to an opposed orientation or to a situation of equilibrium "à la Française". By contrast, the ICC has more and more interpreted the tendency of the left in opposition as the expression of a single necessity and practically limited its analytical framework to the factor of class struggle alone. If this last oddity is not present in MacIntosh and JA's text, the notion of a single necessity is. In effect, necessity is there implicitly conceived as the one way road which is imposed on the bourgeoisie in the sense of the best defense of its interests. That there might be several possible roads for the defense of its interests and even that the bourgeoisie might not opt for the "best" of them, seems to be excluded.

Consciousness is situated between necessity and the choice of a strategy. Here too, the ICC has gradually slid -- and MacIntosh and JA's text seems to follow this same path -- towards a conception of the consciousness of the bourgeoisie as a uniform consciousness mechanically reflecting the single necessity which is imposed on the bourgeoisie. If it is true that in times of crisis the bourgeoisie becomes intelligent, as Marx said, if it is true that it can consciously unite against its common class enemy and that this unity is strengthened by its centralization in state capitalism, and if it is true that it is capable of the most cynical Machiavellianism -- all things that the ICC has correctly pointed out -- it is no less true that its consciousness remains fundamentally divided, hierarchical and that it can only globally follow the constraints imposed by the blind

functioning of its system; wherein lies the difference with the consciousness of the proletariat. Unlike the proletariat, whose consciousness is called upon to become a decisive factor in history, the bourgeoisie is first of all the agent of capital, the servant of blind economic laws, whose consciousness must conform after the event to their requirements. The enormous quantity of knowledge accumulated by the bourgeoisie about the functioning of its system makes it possible to understand, forecast and plan in great detail, but it can only understand, forecast and plan what pertains to its prior experience. When the demands of the hour change, when the necessity which imposes itself on it is transformed, the bourgeoisie's consciousness is only slowly adapted to the transformed necessity, by being confronted with concrete events which push it in that direction. This phenomenon is accentuated by the bourgeoisie's mode of existence, which is one of division into competing individuals, for whom unity is realized through internal struggles within an hierarchical apparatus.

To believe that necessity is automatically reflected in the consciousness of the bourgeoisie by a unified consciousness of that necessity and that the notion of accident can be judged relative to the conscious will of the bourgeoisie, is not only a methodological defect, but an error that can end up distorting the real meaning of a situation. The correspondence between necessity and consciousness will be the more rapid and homogeneous the more strongly necessity makes itself felt and the more it coincides with the particular interests of the different factions of the bourgeoisie. The fact that the organization of the political apparatus in almost all the economically dominant countries today conforms to the schema of the left in opposition, that the left and right generally accept this division of labor, and that the bourgeoisie uses all its electoral cunning to maintain it, proves that the bourgeoisie has globally achieved a sufficiently homogeneous consciousness (though still heterogeneous in its essence) of a general necessity and that this consciousness has been translated into a deliberate political strategy. But it has not been and will not always be so.

ACCIDENT AND NECESSITY IN THE FRENCH ELECTIONS OF 1981

We have already shown that to characterize the political situation of the French bourgeoisie as a whole at the time of the elections as an "accident" contrary to necessity, as an "involuntary light opera coup d'état" thrust on the bourgeoisie, is objectively nonsense; that it flows from a truncated and subjectivist conception of accident and necessity. It remains for us to demonstrate the necessity of the accidental character of the elections.

First off, we must say that Mitterand's election was far from being as unexpected and contrary to the will of the bourgeoisie as the ICC and MacIntosh and JA's text have sought to present it. At the time, the ICC had advanced very meager arguments to prove the

"surprise" of the bourgeoisie (see Revolution Internationale #86): the nervousness of Washington and the stock market (which is a given when the left comes to power, even at a time when it corresponds to the strategy of the bourgeoisie) and some statements by Mitterand himself, interpretable in many ways. However, within the ICC itself, several months earlier, the hypothesis of a Mitterand victory had been put forward, without it altering the framework of the general analysis of the left in opposition. In any case, and above all, the accident thesis does not explain the tidal wave for the Socialists at the time of the legislative elections which came on the heels of the Presidential election. If the coming of the left to power was so objectionable to the bourgeoisie, why did it so brusquely change its mind and allow such a tidal wave? Other arrangements were possible, as can be seen in the present policy of "cohabitation" between Mitterand as President and the right controlling the government. That thesis cannot explain why, six years later, Mitterand's popularity is greater than it was in 1981, even amongst certain elements of the right.

Evidently, factors of necessity are responsible for the left's coming to the leadership of the state. These factors pertain to the weight of the past on the political situation. These factors have not been understood as aspects of necessity by the ICC, because of its triple error: seeing only a single necessity, seeing only a unified consciousness of the bourgeoisie and seeing a mechanical reflection of the one in the other; this has led it to restrict necessity to the realm of the immediate tendency which is predominant on an international scale, i.e. the left in opposition. The factors of necessity which explain the victory of the left in France in 1981 are of two sorts. First, the political weakness of the French bourgeoisie, which can be seen in the rigid political structure, the sharp divisions within the right, and, at the time, the fact that the right in power was worn out. This factor is unanimously recognized by the ICC, MacIntosh and JA's text and Rose's text, but as we have shown, the former do not see this factor as necessity. Now, this is a very general feature of the French political system, one just as necessary as any other immediate factor. In the case of Spain, Greece and Portugal, MacIntosh and JA's text have made this into a necessary factor -- but there again, undoubtedly because it corresponds to a conscious political strategy. Second, the lack of experience of a left in government, which had as its compliment a still significant ideological weight of the left not only over the working class, but over factions of the bourgeoisie and petite-bourgeoisie. This factor is only taken into account by Rose's text though it is only the other side of the coin of the first. It is the rigidity of the French political apparatus which prevented the left from coming to power when it did so in other countries, thereby resulting in a gap between the French political situation and that of other lands. It is the divisions on the right

and its worn out nature which in a relative sense improved the image of the left, particularly its moderate faction, the Socialists. For us, it's a question of concrete factors, perfectly identifiable -- contrary to what MacIntosh and JA's text suggests -- acting against the general tendency of the left in opposition.

In that situation, where factors at the same time pushed towards the left in government and the left in opposition, necessity was contradictory and the bourgeoisie itself could not achieve a homogeneous consciousness of that necessity, nor a political strategy, which in its turn strengthened the divisions on the right. (Contrary to what happened in Spain, Greece and Portugal, where the necessity pushing the left into government was sufficiently strong to bring the left to power, an event deliberately willed by the bourgeoisie, from which the aspect of contingency was virtually excluded.) Therefore, the elections took place in a situation of relative equilibrium between the political forces of the bourgeoisie, with the choice of Mitterand imposed by the balance of votes, and that choice being accepted and then confirmed by the legislative elections. Such a situation of indecision of the bourgeoisie in the face of a contradictory necessity is in no way specific to France in 1981. It could be seen, just before in Belgium, where the necessity of the left in opposition made itself felt with all the more force because of the governmental participation of the left, but where political difficulties resulting from "communal" tensions and the lack of will on the part of the bourgeoisie to confront the proletariat, delayed this outcome for several years (until the bourgeoisie acquired a sufficiently homogeneous consciousness of the necessity to frontally attack the proletariat, and to place the left in opposition, the very moment when it succeeded in muting its communal quarrels, though not eliminating them).

We make no pretention here of having exhausted the discussion of the situation in France, which in any case was not the object of this text. Our aim was not to go back to France six years ago, but to show concretely that the Marxist analysis must incorporate the dialectic of necessity and contingency as two simultaneous determinations of reality; that only that conception makes it possible to reach an adequate comprehension of reality from a proletarian point of view, by avoiding the twin perils of empiricism and schematism. Such a conception will, thereby, make it possible to transcend the contradictions of the debate on accident and necessity in the French elections of 1981.

M. LAZARE

THE DECLINE OF THE ICC

the roots of degeneration



In the first issue of this publication, we provided a lengthy account of our struggle inside the International Communist Current against the degeneration of that organization. We reported the facts as we saw and experienced them in the period 1984 - 1985. We explained how, in the context of relative stagnation of the class struggle following the defeat of the workers in Poland in 1981, an increasingly activist, immediatist and substitutionist concept of revolutionary intervention gradually gained the upper hand in the ICC, while impatience and disdain for theoretical work grew accordingly. We showed how the ICC's leadership canonized this approach by introducing a new, more Leninist concept of class consciousness, and how it dug up Trotsky's concept of "centrism" to stigmatize all opposition, to isolate dissenters within the organization. We had to describe in detail what was at stake in those debates and how they were made impossible through disciplinary measures and a witch hunt climate, because the revolutionary milieu had remained largely ignorant about the convulsions that shook the organization for such an extended period, hearing only rumors, not unlike the echos reverberating from debates in the Russian Politburo. Indeed, it was only after a rapport de force was firmly established and the leading circles of the ICC could be absolutely sure of the blind loyalty of the vast majority of the members, that it was decided that a few texts of the minority could be published in its external press.

That was on the eve of the ICC's sixth congress. The leadership of the ICC was then in a position to "settle the debate" in any way it wanted. It could debate the minority or have it thrown out. It could change the platform and statutes to codify its innovations and to prevent future dissent, or not make any changes at all. The surest sign of the ICC's degeneration was that the leadership could do anything and count on the automatic approval of almost the entire membership. Principles, positions, didn't seem to matter. The preservation and expansion of the organization, of its influence over the class, was the only thing that counted. Behind that goal, the ranks were closed.

We explained how the matter was settled by demanding from minority comrades a pledge of allegiance to the organization, regardless of what happened to its principles. When that was refused, we were forced to leave. It was then that our fraction was formed, while the ICC's congress cynically rubber-stamped a resolution branding us as "deserters". It was inevitable that in our first issue we

would devote so much space to those events and their context. In subsequent issues, we further analyzed the different aspects of the theoretical and practical regressions of the ICC, not because we are an "anti-ICC group", obsessed with that organization, but because we are obsessed with the burning question to which those regressions were the wrong answer: how can revolutionary class consciousness mature under present-day conditions, and what is the role of the revolutionary minority in that process.

Those in the revolutionary milieu who did not judge it beneath their dignity to react to our account of the ICC's decline, pointed to the fact that it's not enough to describe this degeneration, that we have to further analyze its causes. They were right, but the reasons some of them gave as the root of the problem, e.g. the ICC's concept of internal functioning, did not satisfy us either. We had to dig deeper, to see the evolution of the ICC in the wider context of the whole period and the specific difficulties it posed for understanding the role of revolutionaries today. The following text is the fruit of our discussions on this subject. We hope that it will help to clarify, not only for ICC members and ex-ICC members (the latter group is now at least as numerous as the former), but for the whole internationalist milieu which has to recognize that there is something rotten within it, that we have to pause and reflect on what is our task vis a vis our class today and how we can fulfill it, lest we run the risk of missing our date with history.

One section, on the ICC's understanding of the struggle in Poland in 1980 and its aftermath, and its relation to the degeneration of the ICC, has been removed from the original text. We are divided amongst ourselves on this issue and we thought that it would be far clearer to present a debate in our midst as a debate, rather than within an analysis which reflects the views of the fraction as a whole. Therefore in our next issue the reader will find an article defending one view on this matter, while an opposing view will appear in the following number.

TO SITUATE THE PROBLEM

"History is accelerating and the working class is gathering its strength. But the revolutionary organizations are not regrouping but dispersing ..." (letter from C., a contact in Seattle)

Indeed, at first sight, the working class and its revolutionary minority would appear to be following different dynamics. While the class as a whole, according to most revolutionary organizations (our fraction included), is

strengthening its struggle, is maturing in consciousness, its political organizations are -- at the quantitative level -- at best stagnating and in most cases losing ground. On the programmatic level, the situation seems worse: we have seen the accelerated degeneration of the Bordigist International Communist Party, and more recently that of the ICC and the International Bureau for the Revolutionary Party (IBRP, see their regressions on the national question and on the understanding of state capitalism). To this must be added the fact that the overall level of sectarianism in the revolutionary milieu is at its worst ever. Regroupment not only seems more difficult than ever, the interest in discussion itself is disquietingly low.

It makes no sense to take the degeneration of the ICC out of context and to try to understand it in isolation. The evolution of the ICC is part and parcel of the evolution of the revolutionary milieu. In many respects the ICC was the last holdout against the degeneration of that milieu. At the same time, its abandonment of previous positions on class consciousness, etc., can be understood as a despairing reaction to this stagnation.

The sorry state of the milieu is an objective fact, so blatant that nobody, not one group, would deny it. Yet, though it obviously must be understood and explained in order to grasp what are the problems and tasks of revolutionaries today, it is a question most groups don't want to touch even with a ten foot pole, presumably for fear of undermining the confidence of their members: by raising questions that they couldn't answer, by shattering the fragile trust that keeps the troops going.

Of course, a crisis in another organization is easily explained away: "it just proves what we have said about them all along". To understand a crisis in one's own ranks is a bit more difficult, but you can always get around it by blaming everything on lax functioning, as the ICC basically did at its extraordinary conference in 1981. When faced with relatively large numbers of resignations in the next few years, the ICC generally explained them as a "weeding out" of weak elements who shrank before their responsibility now that history was accelerating and things were getting serious; who were afraid of intervention, etc. But that, of course, is once again an answer that begs the question. In this period, why should there be so few people who don't "shrink before their responsibility", why so few as compared to the many thousands before the first revolutionary wave?

From discussions with those who have left active politics or who are contemplating such a move, it appears very clear that this is connected to the difficulty in understanding the question of the development of class consciousness in today's conditions and in particular to the failure of organizations to explain the stagnation of the milieu. As we said, the programmatic degeneration of the ICC was itself an attempt to implicitly defuse that problem. Indeed, the idea that consciousness is relentlessly maturing

subterraneously, outside the struggle, but that the specificities of the period make the class particularly vulnerable to "councilism", to the rejection of all political organizations, provided members with a rationalization to keep going -- despite the slow development of the class struggle, despite the lack of an echo in the revolutionary organizations, despite their stagnation. At the same time, it gave them a simple direction, a recipe to follow: the flight into activism, intervention to combat the "councilist attitude" of the class, to win influence in the short term, even at the expense of revolutionary clarity. We correctly fought against this dangerous slide. Our arguments were sound and convincing. But they do not remove the need for us to more thoroughly address the questions to which these false answers were given. Without so doing, we cannot begin to understand the roots of the ICC's specific degeneration.

THE OBJECTIVE DIFFICULTIES OF THE PERIOD

It is astonishing how little conscious effort has been made by present day revolutionary organizations to understand how the conditions for fulfilling the tasks of revolutionary minorities have evolved since the first revolutionary wave. But the lack of thought on this subject is not a coincidence: it reflects the idea that "it's all there", that revolutionary positions come to us ready made from the past, that they must simply be assimilated and complimented with some present day journalism, a concept which itself, as we shall see, is fostered by the difficulties of this period.

In this text, we want to focus on two aspects of this evolution that seem to us the most important: the development of state capitalism and the break with the workers movement of the past (the long period of counter-revolution).

The Development Of State Capitalism

The Manipulation Of The Law Of Value

This is not the place to elaborate on the mechanism (see amongst others, "Understanding State Capitalism", in IP#7), but rather to point to the consequences for the process of development of class consciousness: Through this manipulation, the ruling class has learned to prevent a sudden descent into the abyss, to spread the effects of its global crisis so that a collapse of the weaker units does not set off a chain reaction that rocks the whole system. It has learned to postpone its hour of reckoning, even at the expense of making the economy that much worse. As the descent into the abyss occurs much more gradually than before, so does the attack on the living conditions of the proletariat. Thus the capitalist class is much more able than in the past to postpone massive confrontations, to give illusions in the viability of its economic system more tenacity. In the short run, this ability is certainly an asset to the ruling class, a brake on the development of proletarian

consciousness. The flip side of the coin is that this postponement erodes the reserves of its economic system, the material basis to rekindle -- when an urgent situation demands it -- illusions in its viability; and that, by spreading the effects of its crisis (and by the increasing interdependence of its economies) also spreads the conditions for the generalization of the struggle.

The Solidarity Of The Ruling Class
State capitalism means that the ruling class, while unable to resolve the contradictions of its system, has learned from its experience and has developed its organization accordingly. It has learned to set aside its deadly antagonisms in the face of the danger of class struggle. As a result, today there are no "weak links" which the proletariat could exploit; the conditions for an isolated victory and the constitution of a proletarian "bastion" no longer exist in our period. The class struggle in every country faces the ruling class of the entire world. Therefore, class consciousness has to develop much more broadly and deeply before a revolutionary offensive becomes possible. The enormity of the task today is much more visible than it was before the first revolutionary wave. While this fact initially retards the process of the development of class consciousness, produces hesitation, etc., in the long run it strengthens the conditions for internationalization.

The Omnipresence Of The State And Its Ideology

This difference with the period before 1917 can hardly be overestimated. While the bourgeoisie and the working class in the 19 century to some extent lived in different worlds, each with their own parties and culture, etc., today capitalism's "spectacle" pervades every nook and cranny of society. State propaganda is everywhere, state capitalism recuperates everything, just as its done with the unions, etc. Today, the ideological obstacle which the working class faces is infinitely greater than ever before. Therefore, the class struggle has to mature longer, develop consciousness more deeply, before it can take on massive and offensive characteristics and before its revolutionary organizations can acquire a real echo. It also means that this maturation is an even less linear, more irregular process than in past conditions and that revolutionaries who don't understand this process will fail to grasp the development of the class struggle.

Provisional Conclusion

These differences are in themselves neither reason for pessimism nor overconfidence. It's clear that present conditions make the maturation of class consciousness a slower, more gradual, less linear, but also broader process. The obstacles the class faces in the initial stages of its struggle are much greater, but the fact that more consciousness, more experience, more "defeats" are needed to break through them also improves the conditions for its further development. The point here is the necessity for revolutionaries to understand these differences. Failure to do so will inevitably

lead to wrong priorities, as we will show in the course of this text. Failure to see the process of development of class consciousness as slower and broader than in the past means expecting the revolutionary confrontations much faster and more easily than is possible. It can lead a revolutionary group to focus on organization building as its primary goal (to "be ready") and to neglect its theoretical tasks (as nothing has changed, past theory can be applied). The inevitable impatience with the real world, which this must produce, will push the group to activism (to "wake up" the workers) and/or substitutionism (to compensate with its "leadership" for the weakness of the class). A failure to see the omnipresence of the state and its ideology leads to an inability to recognize the state's ideology in its radical, workerist, forms and thus to an inability to fight these, and even to programmatic concessions to the ruling class (on the union question, etc.).

From the above factors, it also follows that the tiny number of revolutionaries, the gap that still separates them from their class at large, is less a cause for alarm than would appear at first sight. Although revolutionaries themselves share some of the responsibility for this state of affairs, it nevertheless remains true that this is a given at the present moment, that it cannot be reversed voluntaristically, contrary to what the so-called "Chenier" tendency in the ICC in 1980 said, and what the ICC today claims. It is precisely by becoming conscious of this fact and seeing its consequences that revolutionaries can counteract it.

One of the consequences, as the Communist Bulletin Group point out in an article on the organizational functioning of the Bolshevik party (Bulletin #2), is a greater vulnerability to monolithism, sectarianism, etc.: "[the Bolshevik's] tendencies towards monolithism and the substitutionism of their central organs were always countered by their size, their implantation in the class and the relative autonomy (in practice) of the various elements which made up the party" (p. 48).

Indeed, the limitations on testing the correctness of positions in the fire of struggle increases the potential for creating arbitrary dividing lines, for self-inflation. It makes debates more "theoretical", with less potential for interaction and synthesis. The lack of implantation in the class makes revolutionaries vulnerable to the use of a specialized, coded language, used and understood only by themselves, which they don't even realize because they seldom discuss with anyone else. This in turn reinforces this gap. It also breeds "family cliques" which itself becomes a factor that stifles debate and therefore facilitates programmatic degeneration. As one member of the ICC's International Secretariat, who quickly swallowed his "reservations" about the ICC's new orientations on class consciousness, after becoming the object of ferocious condemnation, exclaimed about the Paris section of the organization: "These people are my life!" The implication clearly was: How could I go against them without destroying my own life? Of course, such a

situation can be easily used to discipline members, as was done more than once by members of the ICC's central organs, by personalizing debates. By becoming the object of a personalized attack, a "contestationist" or "reservist", or an otherwise isolated dissenter was also threatened in his personal life. Often enough, if this did not make one shut up, it succeeded in isolating the person from the rest of the organization and in obscuring the issues at stake in the debate; it thereby precluded any possibility of the discussion leading to a synthesis qualitatively higher than either starting position.

The Break With The Past

The Break With The Tradition Of Self-Organization

One reason why so many present day revolutionary organizations have a hard time accepting the Second International as a positive contribution to the proletarian movement is that it's hard to imagine today the tremendous tradition of class self-organization which the constitution of the Second International embodied. Although it's true enough that this self-organization was marred by the bourgeois weight on Social-Democracy, in particular its substitutionism and its degeneration in the final stage of the ascendant period, nevertheless it remains a fact that the class in the period before the first revolutionary wave had a tremendous experience of self-activity which today does not exist, and which makes the step to revolutionary self-organization that much harder. The break with such a tradition weighs on the class today and on its political vanguard as well. In this sense, the evaluation contained in the quote at the beginning of this text is too black and white. The difficulty in finding the path to self-organization and in seeing the real perspective affects both the class as a whole and its revolutionary minority. This is a fact that is often masked by a triumphalist approach to the class struggle, a tendency which itself must be understood in the context of the difficulties of the period. This coin too has a flip side: while the step towards self-organization is greater and thus more difficult today than before the first revolutionary wave, it also becomes a clearer, more conscious break with the ideology of Social-Democracy which is now clearly in the enemy camp and with whose capitalist nature the working class has immeasurably more experience than previously.

The Break In The Organic Link With The Revolutionary Movement

It is an empirical fact that no revolutionary organization has been able to survive in the decadent phase of capitalism. The only organic links today's revolutionary groups have with the past are a few individuals and some sad examples of degeneration in its terminal phase. From all the efforts made by revolutionary groups since the loss of the Third International to build organizations, nothing remains. That does not mean that they struggled for nothing. Far from it: their

contribution to programmatic development, to theoretical elaboration, is of vital importance. This confirms a conclusion drawn earlier: in this period, theoretical elaboration (of which clarity in intervention is an integral part) is a much higher priority than organization building (the strengthening of organizational structures, the expansion in the organization's influence, etc.). In the practice of the revolutionary milieu today, we see precisely the opposite.

It is also important to note that the contributions of the revolutionary groups of the past to today's groups lies not only in the positions at which they arrived, but in the means by which they reached them, their debates. This fact should teach today's revolutionaries something about their own responsibility to debate their positions and to do so publicly. But once again in practice it's painfully clear that this lesson has not been learned.

The break in organic links with the revolutionary organizations of the past has also favored the idea in the new revolutionary groups that their theoretical task is limited to the assimilation of the theory and practice of their predecessors and then to intervene on this basis in today's situation; that "the program is already there" and needs only to be assimilated, that there are few, if any, new or open questions. Of course, there is nothing wrong with assimilating the acquisitions of the past. If anything, today's revolutionary milieu has not done it enough. However, there is something very wrong with a concept of assimilation that does not include the will to go beyond the point reached in the past, that does not want to develop further. First, because the acquisitions of the past are not a finished product but a work in progress, even with respect to questions that were settled in their own time, and even more so in regard to developments since. Second, because it will tend to create impatience with, and even intolerance towards, discussion and therefore will favor tendencies towards monolithism, just as we have seen in the ICC.

One conclusion from all this is that the political emptiness that developed in the ICC was not a result of "the lack of formation" of new comrades or the fact that they were too quickly integrated, but of the underestimation by the organization as a whole of its function as a "laboratory of revolutionary theory" as it is sometimes called. It would be difficult to solve the problem of integration in itself: give candidates more texts, more books to read and to report on? No! Their "lack of formation" was not a result of a lack of assimilation, but of the kind of assimilation that was practiced. Only by being immersed in lively debates that are firmly based on the work of the past, but that are developing this work further (it must be clearly stated that this is the only way in which assimilation of the past is really possible) could a lack of formation be overcome. It was the general and increasing paucity of such debate, the lack of interest in debate on the part of the majority of the organization that was to

blame for that emptiness. When a member of our Tendency asserted in 1985 that the revolutionary movement's understanding of class consciousness and the role of the party had to be developed further, heaps of scorn were poured upon him by the ICC majority. He was derisively called "professor" for believing in the necessity of theoretical work, and was advised to follow the example of the Bolsheviks, who had "resolved" such questions once and for all.

The break with the past also means that new elements come to revolutionary organizations via a trajectory through leftism, councilism, etc. The break with this trajectory is rarely total. It will only become so if the organization is fulfilling its task as "theoretical laboratory". The concept of assimilation described above, however, will inevitably leave "blank spots", "vacuums" in which the influence of bourgeois ideology will reassert itself and rot the programmatic clarity of the organization.

As we explained in the text on substitutionism in IP#2, the acceleration of history less and less permits revolutionaries the luxury of such "blank spots"; if these are not filled in through real debate, elaboration of revolutionary theory/praxis, they will be filled in with bourgeois ideology. Thus, the acceleration of history makes the theoretical elaboration of questions like the development of class consciousness not less urgent, as the ICC has claimed, but rather more urgent and vital than ever.

THE CASE OF THE ICC

The Organization's "Ascendant" Period
The ICC was born in the aftermath of the "shock of '68", the sudden wave of class struggle that ripped apart the myths of the reconstruction period about the "integration of the working class", "the eradication of crises", "the perpetual growth of the consumption society", etc. The breakdown of the social values of the bourgeoisie towards the end of the reconstruction period, the relative disarray of the bourgeoisie in relation to the unexpected explosion of workers' anger and the many attempts at workers' self-organization, against and outside of the unions as a result of this, all favored a rapid growth of the new revolutionary milieu, and in particular of its clearest expression, the ICC.

It is important to note the many positive characteristics of the ICC that made it stand out as the pole of regroupment in the emerging milieu. Its conception of theoretical work was not then simply one of assimilation of the dogmas of the past, even if, as we said, the seeds of such a concept were present from the beginning. But precisely because the ICC undertook a critical evaluation of the contributions of the past, it could programmatically advance, forging a higher synthesis out of the contributions of both the Italian and the German/Dutch left. Because of that, its press in the first years was often exceedingly rich in content, in the multiplicity of subjects explored. And, related to that, its attitude towards debate, both internally and

externally, was strikingly different from most of the rest of the milieu. One has only to compare attitudes at the International Conference of groups of the Communist Left in 1979, where the ICC relentlessly pushed for discussion, while groups like the ICP and the PIC refused to participate, the FOR walked out and Battaglia Comunista and the CWO introduced new criteria to exclude participants from the debate.

Moreover, the ICC could still present debates to the outside while they were still going on, even on current events like the situation in Portugal, without using the pretext that "the debate has not reached sufficient maturity" to bring it out into the open, while in fact scores were being settled and the outcome had already been decided. Once again, these characteristics were tempered by counter tendencies; but it is only by appreciating the fact that such counter tendencies had not yet become dominant, that the strength and dynamism of the ICC in its early years can be understood.

What conception did the ICC have about how the class struggle would evolve, about how class consciousness would mature under present conditions? What was its vision of the future? This was something that was left very vague, that was never consciously studied. But it was implicit. Given the fact that this effort was not made, given the historical background in which the ICC was born (the difficulties of the capitalist class in adapting to the new situation, the outburst of combativity and self-activity of the working class), and given its own spectacular expansion in those years, it was inevitable that this vision of the future would be marked by strong illusions. Even if a certain awareness of this grew over the years, these illusions persisted and, as we shall see, would acquire more and more influence over the ICC's evolution. Broadly speaking, the ICC's implicit vision of the future was that the crisis would rapidly deepen, the class struggle would grow accordingly in a more or less linear fashion, together with the numerical strength and influence of the organization itself. This vision did manifest itself in the ICC's understanding of its own tasks. In the most important outbursts of class struggle in that period (the second wave since the onset of the open crisis), its intervention was marked by very strong tendencies towards immediatism and activism, ouvrierism, retreats from the task of combating the influence of bourgeois ideology on the struggle itself to the point of being unable to distinguish the initiatives of state capitalism from those of the class itself (particularly, early rank and file unionist initiatives, like the "action committee" in the Longwy steel strike in France in 1979 and the strike committees in the British lorry strike were embraced as examples of self-organization or as "hybrid" in class nature), or of becoming "water carriers", tailing behind the struggle (as in the Rotterdam dock strike in 1979, where the ICC's primary role was to collect money and disseminate information for the strike committee). As we explained in the above mentioned article in IP#2, these mistakes

were directly related to illusions about how class consciousness develops. It's necessary to recognize that the ICC at that time was still healthy enough to criticize those errors. But it's also important to see that these self-criticisms did not go to the root and did not lead to a qualitative change in the organization's understanding of the process by which class consciousness develops. As a result, these errors would be repeated again, to the point where today these tendencies towards immediatism, activism and ouvrierism have gained the upper hand in the organization, and it is unable to distinguish between what's proletarian and what is the state with a "workerist" mask (its theory of "centrism", by which it transforms counter-revolutionary organizations like the Stalinist parties of the 1930's into proletarian organizations (see IP#3,4,5); its view of union meetings as being on the working class terrain (see IP#2,6)).

Outside the struggle, the ICC's intervention towards the class showed the same immediatism, manifested in its frenetic efforts to establish a regular presence at as many factories as possible. Even at plants where nothing was ever sold or no discussions ever took place, a regular presence had to be maintained so that "the workers would recognize us when the big battles break out." Apart from the fact that this argument was dubious in itself (would workers follow us out of loyalty? If it's the clarity of what we have to say that counts, does it matter whether workers recognize our faces or not?), it also reflected illusions about the development of the class struggle and class consciousness itself. And in practice, it led to increasing routinism, the execution of tasks devoid of any political content, in which the militant was put "on automatic pilot".

The same thing can be seen in the priorities for the press. These were in the first place quantitative: as fast as possible go monthly, change to the newspaper format, be ready for the big battles. What all these efforts obscured was the gradual deterioration in depth of the content of the press, the increase in articles that were superficial and journalistic in nature, with the same boring refrains and schema over and over. Closely related to that vision was the increasing priority given to organization building, to which precisely the most experienced comrades, those who had participated in the discussions and theoretical efforts that had led to the formation of the ICC, devoted their best efforts, so as to prepare the structure for the future party in the upcoming revolution. The effects of favoring that task over the theoretical task would become visible only gradually over the years. In the "ascendant" phase of the ICC, these tendencies were subdued by the positive dynamic of the organization. Routinism, administrativism, "commissionitis", the schematism in the press, were all regularly criticized. But these critiques remained on the level of organizational functioning and didn't go to the political roots of the problems. So, far from disappearing, they became worse. It was

when the historical context shifted, with the acceleration of the crisis, capitalism's war preparations and austerity measures at the turn of the decade, the stagnation of the class struggle in the post-Poland period, and the stagnation and even shrinking of the revolutionary milieu and the ICC itself, that the accumulation of these weaknesses set in motion a process of degeneration.

The Degeneration Of The ICC

Indeed, those three elements together disproved the ICC's (and the milieu's) assumptions about the future, assumptions on which its policies were based. Nevertheless, there was no conscious reexamination, no basic change in the ICC's linear, immediatist expectations. The new decade was heralded as "the years of truth", the decade in which the decisive battles that would determine the historic course would take place. But while there was no real change in its view as to how the future would unfold, the perception grew that something was wrong. The acceleration in the deepening of the crisis (with the steep rise of inflation at the end of the '70's, followed by the deepest recession since the 1930's), which itself was overestimated, understood in an immediatist way (largely due to the ICC's longstanding weakness in deepening its understanding of economics, itself a result of its underestimation of theoretical work); the acceleration of austerity and war preparations, all increased the sense of urgency, a sense that the level of class struggle (which was particularly low in the post-Poland period) was trailing behind the level of the crisis and the offensive of the capitalist class; that the response of the proletariat was alarmingly insufficient. This favored the development of "short cuts" in the ICC's understanding of class consciousness; the growth of tendencies to compensate for the perceived weaknesses by making concessions to substitutionism, the growth of the tendency to immediatism in intervention, to "wake up" the workers from their passivity, to obtain an influence, to cling to the struggle, even at the expense of programmatic concessions. It also had increasing implications for the internal life of the organization: impatience with discussion and theoretical tasks grew, the false dichotomy between intervention and theoretical work, which in reality was more one between theoretical work and organization building, was posed more and more often. The stagnation of the organization itself, which since the beginning of the '80's had become undeniable, favored these tendencies: the increased fragility of the organization instigated a fear of debates, that were increasingly seen as threatening its cohesion. Disinterest in discussion grew accordingly (at the ICC's fourth congress, the International Secretariat itself complained about the tail endism of the membership). The tendency to isolate dissenters grew (minority comrades were branded "permanent contestationists" and new members were warned against them). The emphasis was more and more on functioning, on strengthening the organizational structures,

etc., so as to hold fast; in short, organization building became the overriding priority. As a result, the organization became an end in itself. A distinction between the organization and the principles for which it existed resulted, reaching its apotheosis in the demand of the sixth congress that the minority declare themselves loyal to the organization regardless of how it changed its principles. Once again, it would be wrong to see this evolution as specific to the ICC. The failure of the international conferences ending in 1980, the subsequent total embrace of substitutionism by the CWO, the crisis of the ICP and its turn to leftism, the foundation of the IBRP, etc., all showed that if anything, the tendencies towards sectarianism, fear of debate, organization building as the priority and the search for short cuts in the development of class consciousness, grew even more rapidly in the rest of the milieu.

The Tendency Of 1981

The "Chenier" tendency was at the same time an expression of the degeneration of the ICC and a reaction to it. It reacted against the routinism, the tail endism, the lack of real debate, the shallowness and schematism of the ICC's press, its failure to deepen its understanding of the class struggle, its tendency towards monolithism in practice. At the same time, the Chenier tendency, more than anyone else, was panicking about the stagnation in the size of the membership, the lack of echo in the class, and reacted to this by a flight into immediatism, activism and substitutionism (its concept of factory groups, etc.), much as the ICC does today. The shady maneuvers of this tendency, their secret plots, the theft of ICC hardware which accompanied their split from the organization, were themselves a sign of how deeply the influence of bourgeois ideology had infested the organization. But the organization's reaction -- using this "gangsterism" to totally obscure the political issues behind the dispute, which really did need thorough discussion -- was to focus almost exclusively on the question of organizational functioning. Like the CBG and LLM are now saying to the Fraction, "the roots of the problems lie in functioning, in the statutes", so the ICC reacted to the problems posed at that time, by devoting an extraordinary conference practically exclusively to a revision of the statutes. The fact that this did not pull the organization out of its crisis (quite the contrary!) proves that the roots of the problem lay elsewhere.

AND FINALLY ...

The later episodes in the degeneration of the ICC are discussed elsewhere. The period of Poland and its aftermath will be treated in the next two issues of IP; the period after that was treated in IP#1. It was in those years (1981-1985), while economic crisis and war preparation accelerated and a new wave of class struggle slowly gained strength (1983-), that the scales in the process of

degeneration of the ICC were tipped. The different elements were coming together: the weaknesses in understanding class consciousness and the function of the organization were theorized, the climate for political clarification through debate in the organization was destroyed, and the search for immediate influence over the class led to a caving in to bourgeois ideology. Since then, the ICC has continued on the same downward path. From what we know, internal debates on anything deeper than purely conjunctural issues have all but disappeared. Theoretical work, inasmuch as it still occurs, seems to be the exclusive task of the "specialists" who put out the International Review, while the territorial press seems more shallow and sloganeering than ever. The ICC's attitude towards the milieu is fraternal with those it hopes to win to its sphere of influence, but ultra-sectarian towards those for whom it has no such hopes. Its intervention in the the struggle has become so immediatist, so devoid of any further perspective for the class struggle save the immediate need to seek extension, so confused on where the self-organization of the class begins and where the radical tentacles of the state's ideology take over, that, at times, it risks becoming hardly distinguishable from the voice of rank and file unionism.

The ICC is still a revolutionary organization. We sincerely hope that the impetus of rising class struggle can still rekindle the flame, that the potential for regeneration still exists somewhere. But our purpose here is neither to settle accounts with the ICC nor to set it right. We repeat, what went wrong with the ICC is far from unique to that organization. We want this text to be a stimulus for the entire milieu to reflect on its crisis. All of us who defend internationalist revolutionary positions must have the courage to face this crisis, to recognize its reality and to try to discover its roots. As we have seen in the case of the ICC, the failure to go to the political roots of the problem can only lead to its growth.

All in the milieu must halt their obsession with organization building, with recruitment, with the exclusive search for immediate influence. It blinds us to the fact that the core of the milieu's weakness is not its lack of numerical strength, but its lack of political understanding as to how the revolutionary process unfolds today. How class consciousness develops, what the role of revolutionaries is in this development, how the capitalist context has changed in this epoch; what this means for the conditions of class struggle, through what means capitalist ideology undermines class consciousness today, how they can be unmasked -- all this requires our best efforts at clarification, in order to make our perspective for the class clear and convincing, a natural extension of its own praxis. Therefore, political clarification is our main task today. Our fraction consciously emphasizes this, and the content of our publication reflects this (see, for example, our articles

CONTINUED ON PAGE 12

the ICC

What 's at stake in a platform change

In November 1985, our Fraction was expelled from the 6th Congress of the I.C.C. without being able to defend our positions before the organization at that Congress. At the time, we were a minority Tendency within the I.C.C. but we soon were obliged to create the "External Fraction of the I.C.C." We are not a group with a new political coherence to defend. In fact, we defend the platform that the I.C.C. used to call its own before it changed to its present dangerous positions on class consciousness, "centrism-opportunism", councilism as "the greatest danger" and its increasingly immediatist and activist practice leading to flirtations with trade union ideology. Our break with the I.C.C., which seemed incomprehensible to some in the political milieu, a mere quarrel over "details", came as a result of a clear choice : either continuing to defend the programmatic positions the I.C.C. began with or start turning our backs on one position after the other as the I.C.C. is now doing. The latter alternative really means undermining the entire notion of the decadence of capitalism and the perspectives it implies for proletarian organizations. It means eliminating the criteria of war and revolution in determining class frontiers. In short, it means giving up the basic coherence of the I.C.C. platform. I.P. has decided to take the first choice but the I.C.C. has taken the second one, a sign of the degeneration process that is crippling that organization. The "modification of the platform" which the I.C.C. is now presenting to the public is yet another step towards the abyss of political confusion.

In principle, there is, of course, nothing wrong with changing a platform. Many proletarian organizations have seen the need to do this in the past including the I.C.C. But such changes must be the fruit of a whole period of theoretical work and debate in the organization which is then explained and published openly. The I.C.C.'s present "method" is a caricature of this process. Instead of facing up to the seriousness of changing a platform, the I.C.C. brushes it off as a "rectification of classic youthful errors" due to "feelings of euphoria" (see the International Review #57, p. 17). Aside from this, the I.C.C. offers no arguments for or against the changes preferring to dwell exclusively in the domain of cheap psychologizing that it has made its trademark in recent years.

At no time does the I.C.C. explain from a political point of view :

- why the old platform positions were wrong;
- the thought processes that led to the

present positions;

- the implications of these new positions.

This way of dealing with things shows only political irresponsibility and dishonesty towards the rest of the revolutionary milieu and the working class as a whole.

The platform changes that the I.C.C. seems to want to pass off as simple "corrections" concern real programmatic issues which mark the difference between our Fraction and the I.C.C. They even acknowledge this in a back-handed way in their article on our Fraction's public meeting in Paris (Revolution Internationale #164) where they once again publicly call for our Fraction to "disappear". In fact, what they would like is that all need for political arguments and debate would "disappear" from their horizon.

Our programmatic disagreements revolve around two fundamental questions :

- the undermining of the concept of decadence;
- the abandoning of the use of the criteria of war and revolution to determine the class nature of organizations.

I. UNDERMINING THE CONCEPT OF DECADENCE

The I.C.C. has introduced the idea of "centrism-opportunism" into its platform as a supposed explanation of the process of degeneration of political organizations. But this concept will only destroy the whole theory of decadence, that is, the understanding of the different periods in the capitalist system and the working class perspectives appropriate to them. For example, in the ascendent phase of capitalism it was still possible for the proletariat to win concessions and improvements from the system through parliamentary or union action. But when the system fell into its decadent phase, this became a material impossibility. The perspective of decadence had to be the destruction of the entire system of exploitation and the recognition that the old forms of struggle were useless. Because of the change in the period, these old forms of struggle were transformed into the very opposite of a revolutionary perspective. The change in the period also meant the denunciation of currents like centrism and opportunism which by their very nature represented a betrayal of the proletariat in this new phase of capitalism. The material basis which allowed these currents to exist in the proletarian camp in the ascendent phase -- the possibility of obtaining immediate material successes -- ceased to exist in decadence. To deny this, as the I.C.C. now

does, is to call into question the whole idea of different periods in capitalism's evolution. The I.C.C. gives no political or materialist definition to this opportunist current (unlike the way revolutionaries at the time analysed them). It merely paints a little impressionistic picture of vague assertions and behavior patterns amounting to a description of this current as a "multiform" image without any precise political content, adaptable to any and all historical periods and incompatible with a materialist conception of history.

This is the kind of argument the ICC thinks is enough : they make a distinction between "opportunism, with well-defined political positions, etc..." (although they never say which political positions) and "centrism, constantly changing, evolving according to circumstances and the vicissitudes of the proletarian struggle" (I.R.#51 p.20). Where does this logic lead? When they tell us that centrism is a swamp whose evolution depends on the proletarian struggle, they are no longer examining currents according to any criteria of political positions and function in class struggle. They are simply looking for which way the wind is blowing. Thus, they tell us : "At the moment when the opportunist current is openly betraying, when there is a reawakening and upsurge in class struggle, centrism at the beginning can constitute a temporary position of the working class moving toward revolutionary positions". (p 20) They use the centrist party, the USPD in post-world war I Germany, as an example of this. In fact, this party was clearly an organ of the ruling class apparatus to control and defeat the workers during the German revolutionary movement.

It's fairly plain that when you abandon an understanding of the periodization of capitalist society; when you abandon a materialist conception in favor of descriptive, subjective elements; when you replace a political definition of a political current with concepts like "a swamp", you are inevitably going to get the class nature of organizations all wrong -- in the past and in the present and future.

We maintain that centrism and opportunism as political tendencies are determined by the development of capitalism as a system -- currents whose essence is reformist. As Bordiga declared at the 2nd Congress of the Communist International : "There can no longer be any reformists in the proletariat because the bourgeois crisis excludes any work towards reforms." By making an analogy between the centrism of the past and the supposed "centrism" of the present, the ICC denies the economic and social basis of these currents and negates the concept of decadence as an understanding of the economic and political evolution of the capitalist system with, therefore, different conclusions on perspectives for the working class.

Reintroducing the idea of centrist parties in decadence has led the ICC to put back into the proletarian camp parties that have clearly betrayed it, parties

that have functioned so as to deflect class struggle and lead it into the counter-revolution like all the parties of the left apparatus of capital. Thus, in 1919-1921 the revolutionary crisis made centrism adapt a more "radical" language. To prevent the proletariat from forming a really revolutionary party (as events were pushing it), the centrist currents derailed this energy towards objectives compatible with capitalism such as union or electoral activity. The entire history of a party like the USPD is a model of this type of deviation of class struggle. Instead of denouncing the USPD for betraying the working class movement, here the ICC is putting them back, whitewashed, into the proletarian camp!

II ABANDONING THE CRITERIA OF WAR AND REVOLUTION

Our position on "criteria" (for determining the class nature of organizations) is still the same one that was originally in the Platform and Manifesto of the ICC. In point 14, on the "counter-revolutionary nature of the so-called workers' parties," agents of capital and in particular the "Socialist" and "Communist" parties : "The Socialist Parties lost any proletarian substance by organizing the national defense during World War I and after the war, by becoming the executioners of the revolutionary proletariat. The Communist Parties passed into the camp of capital by denying the internationalism that inspired their original break with the Socialist Parties. With "socialism in one country", which marked their passage to the class enemy, and then with their participation in the armament of their bourgeoisie, the "Popular Front" and the "Resistance" during World War II and the post-war "national reconstruction", these parties confirmed their role as loyal servants of national capital and as the purest incarnation of the counter-revolution." (p 19-20).

These two criteria are fundamental for us. The position an organization takes on the war (when the bourgeoisie calls on the working class to defend its imperialist interests) determines whether or not it is part of the proletarian camp. Belonging to the proletarian camp means denouncing all mystifications of "patriotic defense" and calling for the transformation of the imperialist war into a civil war of classes. But an organization shows its passage into the bourgeois camp when it defends bourgeois interests and mobilizes the proletariat into bourgeois traps.

Similarly, denying proletarian internationalism means taking away from the working class its fundamental nature, united across national boundaries and bourgeois divisions, in the affirmation of a revolutionary perspective.

The ICC is shamefully turning its back on what were tragic events for the proletariat and its organizations after World War I. It is trying, with the most tortuous logic imaginable, to make history fit into their new schema by redefining :

- how the Communist International degenerated;
- the implications of this for how organizations evolve today.

A. THE COMMUNIST INTERNATIONAL

In its introduction to the Resolution on "The Change in the Platform", the ICC (I.R.#51) says the following : "The death of an International is an expression of a crisis within the workers' movement. It's an event that takes place on the scale of the proletariat itself, the world scale, and not of any one particular country.... But the passage to the bourgeoisie of the disintegrating International's constituent parties is neither a mechanical or immediate result of this disintegration. On the one hand, some parties of the International may maintain clearly internationalist and revolutionary positions after the death of the International. On the other hand, this integration into the bourgeoisie of a one-time workers' party does not depend solely on a world phenomenon (a crisis in the workers' movement) but also on circumstances on the national level (since this integration takes place within each national capital because the bourgeoisie has no worldwide unity)." (p 19)

The ICC introduces some strange new concepts here to justify its latest zig-zag: on the one hand, a puzzling distinction between the International as a whole and its parties; on the other, introducing specific "national" criteria to judge the class nature of these parties -- "national" criteria that are left undefined.

Let's go back to a few basic points. The work of the first International was characterized by a struggle against the ideas of the petty bourgeoisie, in particular against the ideas of anarchism. The Second International showed that the proletariat could create its own mass organizations although circumscribed within the capitalist system and on a largely national basis. But the Third International was an organization that was internationally centralized. This step forward of the Communist International in relation to previous Internationals is apparently not recognized by the ICC in its new "degeneration theory". Instead, by separating the Communist International from its constituent parties, it reintroduces the old Trotskyist theory that there is no class nature of an organization as such but a class nature of the leadership (the C.I.) and another for the rank and file (the different parties). This is nonsense. When the C.I. adopted the position of "socialism in one country" it was not some abstract organ that took this view, but all of the parties constituting this centralized organ that rejected internationalism. The majority of the leaders of the national parties were members of the Executive Committee of the Communist International. The International was not a mere abstraction but a centralized organization that took very concrete decisions binding on the member parties. By decreeing the possibility of socialism in one country, the

C.I., as a centralized organization of all its component parts, betrayed the world revolution. It didn't just die. To use political criteria for understanding the evolution of the International and only narrow national criteria for the component parts of this International is to make a mockery of proletarian internationalism.

In trying to differentiate the process of betrayal of the C.I. and the Communist Parties, the ICC borrows arguments from Bilan, a magazine of the thirties put out by the Italian left communists in exile. Bilan said the following : "The Party does not cease to exist even after the death of the International. The Party doesn't die, it betrays." But what is behind this sentence from the first issue of Bilan in 1933? The Italian Fraction that produced Bilan was completely unclear about the class nature of Russia. In the thirties, Bilan thought that the regime there was still proletarian, albeit dominated by "centrism". In that context of confusion, it is clear why Bilan saw the need to differentiate between the International and the Parties. Even the ICC's quotes from Bilan show the lack of clarity of the Italian Fraction on this question. On the one hand, Bilan sees the death of the Third International as a separate thing from the evolution of its Parties but on the other hand, when it refers to the class nature of the Second International (Social Democracy), it uses overall political criteria for the whole. In the same article Bilan states : "In our view, the war and the Russian Revolution have created a definitive break in history. Before 1914, the Socialist Parties were within the working class. After that time, their place was on the other side, with capitalism." Why aren't the CPs examined with the same criteria? Why is Social Democracy judged as one bloc regardless of particular national situations?

To conclude this point we will quote from the ICC's Platform and Manifesto which correctly stated : "1924-26 : appearance of the theory of the 'construction of socialism in one country' : the abandonment of internationalism means the death of the Communist International and the passage of its parties into the camp of the bourgeoisie."

B. THE ORGANIZATIONS OF TODAY

Once again, as a justification for abandoning its past principles, the ICC discovers a contradiction which no one noticed before between the Platform and a resolution on proletarian groups passed in 1977. This resolution made a distinction between two types of splits. There are splits by fractions which represent a continuity of the revolutionary program against the degeneration of the old organization and there are splits breaking with the counter-revolution and therefore not necessarily possessing a revolutionary coherence. The ICC sees only the latter of the resolution and loses its meaning entirely when it says : "how could revolutionary communist organizations come out of a dead Social Democracy? If the

resolution of 1977 is correct, then Social Democracy must not have been dead". And so it concludes that there is a contradiction between the point of the platform placing the passage of Social Democracy to the bourgeoisie in 1914 and the fact that revolutionary organs came out of Social Democracy after that date. To get out of what the ICC calls "this contradiction", it draws the conclusion that it was not the whole of Social Democracy that passed into the enemy camp but only its "right wing"! One could ask the ICC about where it is putting its political coherence: if the fact that some revolutionary factions and individuals were still in Social Democracy is enough to make the organization still in the proletarian camp, then why not apply the same "revision" of historical analysis to the trade unions? These organs, in which revolutionaries continued to work, in the thirties at least, would be returned to the proletarian camp? And what about after that?

This simplistic, purely formalistic logic is a dangerous denial of fundamental elements in the understanding of the class nature of political organizations and of the process of their degeneration. Indeed, Social Democracy did not all of a sudden become bourgeois one fine day in 1914. But its support to the inter-imperialist war meant the definitive completion of a process of degeneration begun years before. That is at least the view which the ICC used to firmly defend up until its recent political zig-zags.

When we speak of the political affiliation of an organization, we are referring to its program and not its organizational affiliation. The betrayal of Social Democracy left a political void for the proletariat which had to be filled by creating a new organization in continuity with the program of the old organization but organizationally breaking with the body that had passed into the enemy camp. And revolutionaries at that time understood this, far better than the ICC today with all its claims to "reappropriate their acquisitions". The Second Congress of the Communist International discussed conditions of admission for different groups coming from the Second International. The fight to have these political conditions and to make them as strong as possible showed that it was understood that there was no "organizational bridge" between Social Democracy and the organizations that had broken from it. The ICC is, of course, free to ignore this today.

CONCLUSION

What the ICC shamefully presents today as a "correction of youthful errors" is, in reality, the formalization of its errors on the understanding of the period, the process of the development of class consciousness and the role of revolutionaries -- it has given in to unbridled activism, supported by leninist-type concepts of the working class seen as an army, in the grip of "centrism", and revolutionaries as the general staff giving the class its marching orders. That is why (in Revolution Interna-

tionale # 164) the ICC feels the need to say that our Fraction reduces its role to a mere propagandist one for the final goal. Does defending the revolutionary perspective with tenacity mean for the ICC reducing the role of the avant-garde to a secondary one? Others before it have proclaimed "The movement is everything, the goal is nothing" (Bernstein). It's a chorus of all sorts of leftists to empty the struggles of the working class of their political content, shouting: "enough of this discussion, let's have something concrete!"

The changes in the ICC platform is a way the organization is adapting to its own degeneration and leads it to abandon programmatic tenets as fundamental as the criteria of war and revolution to determine the class nature of organizations and the understanding of the different periods in the historical analysis of capitalism. If nothing stands in the way of this process, undoubtedly the ICC will abandon whole chunks of the programmatic coherence which made it the clearest pole of regroupment in the revolutionary milieu (see the article on the degeneration of the ICC in this issue).

The method used by the ICC to minimize these changes reveals a shameful dishonesty and political irresponsibility. To take refuge behind the arguments of Bilan is just one more example of an organization that has become incapable of real debate on theoretical questions or on their practical implications.

These platform changes, placing the betrayal of the Social Democratic and Communist Parties much later than they really happened, introducing a distinction in Social Democracy between a "right-wing" that betrayed in 1914 and a "center" and "left-wing", have direct consequences on the lessons drawn from history and the way to struggle today. The ICC which loves to go on and on about the role of revolutionaries and intervention and boasts about its "impact" on the struggles, is, in fact, turning its back on the real function of revolutionaries. Instead of bringing clarification, it has become a factor of confusion for the working class.

Rose

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PUBLIC MEETING

Internationalist Perspective holds regular public meetings in London, Paris, Brussels and New York. They are part of our effort to contribute to real discussion and debate around vital questions facing revolutionaries and the whole working class today. For information on coming public meetings, please write to our local addresses.

CORRESPONDENCE

We invite our readers to send us comments and criticisms of the positions expressed in our publications. The development of a proletarian political milieu on an international level depends on the widest possible discussion and confrontation of ideas.

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.