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# **INTERNATIONALIST PERSPECTIVE**



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**"privatisations" and state capitalism**

**MISTAKES ON THE MASS STRIKE IN POLAND**

**centrism & opportunism in the workers movement**

**CLASS STRUGGLE IN BRITAIN**

**n° 10**

**SUMMER 88**

**quarterly**

**£1/ \$1.50**

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Single issues:  
1,50 dollar or 1 pound (UK)

Subscriptions:  
one year - four issues  
5 dollar, 3.50 pound or  
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## addresses

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PO Box 1748  
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U.S.A.

BM BOX 8154  
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### Centrism..

(continued  
from p.18)

class nature of Social Democracy the ICC will begin, perhaps gradually, to implement the outmoded tactics inherited from Social Democratic conceptions of organization. Indeed, there are already signs of this.

The change in its platform does not represent the complete shipwreck of the ICC but it has clearly lifted its rudder from the water. It may well be incapable of guiding its way through the turbulent times that lay ahead for all revolutionaries.

B. York

5/20/87

## ***Class Struggle in Britain***

# **THE TRUCE IS OVER**

With the seamen's strike in Dover, the nurses' strikes, discontent in the mines, protests in public transportation, work stoppages in the auto industry, early 1988 was a difficult time for the British bourgeoisie.

After the painful defeat of the miners' strike, the number of strikes in Britain fell dramatically. In 1986 it reached the lowest level in 40 years. The balance sheet of the Thatcher era seemed enormously positive for the bourgeoisie; part of its industry even recovered its profitability. But the heating up of the social climate over the past winter reminds us all that the working class in Britain remains as unwilling as workers anywhere else to bear the brunt of the sacrifices demanded by the bourgeoisie in its attempts to control the crisis.

The lethargy that oftens follows a defeat and the difficulties of understanding all the implications of experience can obscure the growth of a determination among the workers to reject the pressure of the class enemy. The history of the workers' struggles in Britain in the past decade confirms this general tendency of the class struggle: just when the capitalist class seems to have succeeded in forcing the working class to accept worsening living conditions, just when any open resistance of the workers seems to have dwindled, thousands of workers suddenly, often unpredictably, break into struggles which spread to other sectors before stopping just as suddenly as they began.

In Britain, the ruling class was able to impose the most drastic anti-social measures seemingly without any reaction from a relatively passive working class. But later it had to confront massive explosions of anger among the workers.

The history of the last decade shows how the growth of class struggle and the development of class consciousness is a difficult process, an uneven and rocky one. A look to the recent past will help to clarify the importance of recent struggles but also to avoid any triumphalism.

In the beginning of the seventies, the left went into the opposition in Britain, leaving the control of parliament and government in Conservative hands. This was the prelude to a reorganization of the ideological forces of mystification in the entire western bloc towards the left in opposition.

The inevitable deepening of the economic crisis was forcing the capitalist class to apply severe austerity measures which were bound to be unpopular. This task fell to right-wing factions of the ruling class. In the name of economic realism, they would

have to try to reduce the working class to silence. It was preferable, therefore, that the left leave the tricky terrain of trying to manage capitalism and switch to a more "critical" mode of operation where it could more quickly tail-end any movement of resistance to deflect and recuperate it. The Tory government of Thatcher inaugurated an era of rigorous austerity for the working class in an effort to restore the British economy staggering under the blows of the world crisis. At one time, Britain was referred to as the "sick man of Europe". As for the Labour Party, the appearance of the "Militant" tendency marked a leftward turn. The British bourgeoisie, like its American counterparts, prepared to confront the effects of its policies.

As elsewhere in the world, workers reacted to the brutal assaults of the logic of austerity-- sometimes with massive struggles, sometimes with periods of lethargy.

During the winter of 1978-79 for instance, workers' discontent was so widespread that it shattered a period of 5 years of social peace with a massive outburst of class struggle. This explosion was broken with the defeat of the steel workers in 1980.

After that, there was a period of relative calm until the miners' strike in 1984-85. Although the miners seemed to have drawn the lessons of previous struggles and tried to extend their movement rapidly by using a direct mobilization of strike pickets, they nevertheless remained imprisoned in the goal of defending their own sector or even their region. This reflected the general difficulties of the working class in seeing its struggle in a historical perspective, as a generalized battle involving the entire class.

Since then, the number of struggles in Britain has fallen, in 1986, to the lowest level since the second World War. In 1987 the number was scarcely higher despite some very combative movements, like the one at Wapping and British Telecom.

During this period, under the direction of the "Iron Lady", the British bourgeoisie did all it could to get out of the economic swamp. Antiquated industry was rationalized, non-profitable sectors were eliminated, new technologies were introduced. Productivity rose spectacularly as did the much less publicized misery of the working class.

Three examples illustrate this situation:

- the auto industry invested in robotics and other high tech schemes and introduced drastic changes in the manufacturing process resulting in lay-offs of thousands of workers in the early 80's;



- in its new plants in Scotland, IBM managed to achieve the lowest production costs anywhere;

- the antiquated steel industry was restructured to create a greater productivity in steel which now ranks among the highest in the world.

Thus, with the Thatcher government coming to power, a whole series of measures were passed to try to limit the possibility of any workers' resistance. First, restrictive legislation on collective bargaining was imposed by a vote in the Commons. Then, by reducing social spending (unemployment benefits, Social Security) before attacking wages directly, the government created the climate for austerity, intensifying the exploitation of the working class. The bourgeoisie was obviously looking to strengthen the legalistic chains on the workers: forbidding workers' resistance in the name of bourgeois law. Through a series of new legal measures, the British bourgeoisie tried to force the workers back into the arms of the unions, back to conditions where strikes could only be called in a limited, well-defined framework. This allowed the unions to demand an immediate end to certain struggles because they risked making the unions liable under law.

Thus, the recent improvement in the British economy is the result of considerable investments favoring an increase in productivity and a brutal exploitation of labor. Just recently, and only in a few sectors, have workers won any substantial wage increases.

The significance of the struggles during the winter must be understood in this context. In a way, the nurses lit the fuse. They have been bitter about their working conditions for some time. Beginning in January, the job action of nurses in Manchester spread to Edinburgh, Glasgow, Leeds, Leicester, Birmingham, Sheffield, Oxford, Southampton and London. The movement grew with the solidarity of medical aids. And, even more important, the strike pickets and demonstrations were joined by workers of other sectors supporting the struggle. In London for instance, firemen, postal workers and bus drivers joined the picket lines. Another picket line was walked by miners and longshoremen.

The torch then passed to the workers at Ford who, after 10 years of social peace, took up the struggle again. At the beginning of February, the workers stopped work for more than two weeks to protest against the terms of their new contract. Their struggle forced the unions to re-negotiate. The workers refused to accept a new "rationalization" plan despite promises of higher wages. This struggle was important not only because so many workers spontaneously walked out at Fords itself, but because of the repercussions this will have on other industrial branches.

This winter's movement was no marginal phenomenon of a few isolated strikes. The

British bourgeoisie faced a broad wave of struggle including many demonstrations of solidarity with striking workers. The workers in Britain showed that they could overcome the vestiges of the previous period of social peace and mobilize against the Thatcher government.

The seamen of the North Sea also came out to protest lay-offs and the elimination of bonuses and other benefits. Postmen, teachers and bus drivers went out one after another and railroads were paralyzed in eastern Britain.

All these actions show that the feeling is growing in the working class that all workers are part of the same class fighting for the same goals -- despite differences in local demands -- against the same enemies. Of course in and of themselves, these feelings are not enough to make a real difference in favor of the workers in the balance of forces in class society. These events are important not because they are a model to follow but because they contain the promise of a real extension of struggles, of miners and dockers and other workers joining the same strike with their own demands. Unfortunately, because of the lack of clear perspectives, the leftists and rank and file unionists are able to transform such solidarity gestures into caricatures or mere sympathy.

Breaking with a certain particularism, the nurses strike was not seen as an isolated action of one sector alone. The nurses' demands were seen as a signal for greater activity in the working class in Britain. Also, in the struggles this winter there were increasing signs of distrust towards union bureaucracies. This can be seen in the more independent-minded mobilizations of strikers, even though quite often workers limited themselves to simply asking for control over the negotiations run by the unions without seeing to it that their will was really imposed. But in several cases, such as the seamen's action, even "rank and file" union leaders had to keep a low profile because of workers' hostility.

But despite the militancy and the great numbers of workers on strike, at no time did we see any effort to create genuine organs to lead and coordinate the struggle without union control.

At Ford, in spite of the fact that the unions presented their contract as a "historic agreement", in spite of the usual union undermining by isolating shops and shifts, a majority of workers rejected the contract and its higher wages in favor of a call for better working conditions. This intransigence pushed Land Rover and Renault factories into struggle despite union opposition. Suspicions about the motives of the union apparatus has gotten much stronger.

British seamen blocked North Sea ports and were joined by French seamen at Dunkirk. But the movement couldn't stand up to all the union manoeuvring to divide it. The formidable dynamic of unity at the be-

ginning of the movement was pummeled by a barrage of localistic demands from every local union and the most combative workers, the seamen from Dover, were finally isolated. The strike lasted three months.

Rank and file unionism, which in Britain is represented by the shop stewards, developed these man oeuvres and created the slogan of "union unity". Despite the spontaneity with which these struggles broke through Thatcherite smugness about social peace, they were not really able to lay the groundwork for a generalization uniting all sectors. Although solidarity was expressed in the struggle, and this is a very vital point, the different struggles maintained their specificities and this opened the door to recuperation, especially with the help of the leftists. Thus, the nurses' struggle was turned into a fight for the National Health Service to "better serve the people". Although the simultaneity of the various struggles gave the lie to those who would have given up on the working class long ago, and even though the workers obviously seem to have realized the danger of remaining isolated (like the miners), they were not really able to create real links

to unite the different struggles. Thus, despite its strength and the workers' determination, this movement remained dispersed.

But all these weaknesses cannot obscure the fact that these strikes in Britain are part of the working class' effort to reapropriate the fundamental lessons of its

historic combat : to break out of isolation, to understand where the potential unity of the struggle lies, to affirm solidarity with the struggles of fellow workers which means actively joining the struggle to make extension possible. These are the high points that emerge from these conflicts.

By its swift outbreak, but also by its rapid spread to different sectors, the explosion of struggles in Britain this winter points up the characteristics of the international wave of class struggle since 1983 and shows, even if as yet imperfectly, the real maturation of the class and the need to understand the nature of the inevitable class confrontations yet to come.

Daxa

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## ***Critique of the ICC's Intervention***

# **What Kind Of «Struggle Groups»?**

### **INTRODUCTION**

In the previous issue of Internationalist Perspective, we printed an article on the struggles in Rumania written by a comrade who was engaged in a process of discussion with our Fraction. Since then, the process has continued and this comrade has become a member of our Fraction. The article which follows is thus an integral part of the work of the Fraction.

During the past ten months, discussions with this comrade revolved around class consciousness, the role of the party, the state in the period of transition after the revolution and the class struggle today. Our discussions led to a clarification and agreement on the points which had originally been the source of divergences. These particular questions were chosen in relation to the political positions defended by the publication Jalons (France) whose final issue explains in detail how this dynamic -- first of questioning, then intense discussion, and finally joining our Fraction -- came about. We therefore refer our readers to this number 16 of Jalons.

We have published articles on the process of degeneration of the ICC fairly regularly in the pages of IP. In IP # 4 there was a critique of the weaknesses of the ICC's intervention in the unemployed committees in France in 1985.

Since then the ICC has sunk a little deeper into organizational confusion and its weaknesses have become very dangerous political errors. An organization that used to stand out clearly against the pervasive activism of the rest of the revolutionary milieu is now waving the banner of its own "workers' groups", "discussion circles" and "committees" which are either totally creatures of the ICC or supported unconditionally by the ICC without clear political criteria.

Our critique of the way the "new style" ICC thinks and acts has only sharpened, not because of "anti - ICC obsessions, but because it is essential for us to speak out on revolutionary principles.

### **YESTERDAY**

Ten years ago, the ICC gravely warned a group, Pour une Intervention Communiste (PIC)

against undirected activism. This group claimed to want to continue the tradition of the AAUD in Germany in the 1920's by mobilizing itself to create autonomous workers cells. Ten years ago the ICC denounced the bluff of the group Combat pour l'autonomie ouvriere (CPAO), which was a mixture of ouvrierism and activism. Held in check by a fossilized resistance to any talk of program, this group fell into the greatest possible ambiguity on questions of revolutionary principle. A little less than ten years ago the ICC roundly criticized the Groupe Communiste Internationaliste (GCI) for inventing their own "unemployed committees" and "squatters committees".

At the same time, the ICC polemicized with both Battaglia Comunista of Italy, partisans of "communist cells" in the factories which were, in fact, mere transmission belts of the party, and Programme Communiste (official Bordigism), great enemies of "indifference to workers bread and butter struggles" who theorized the need to encourage "workers associations". For these heirs of the tradition of the Italian left, BC and the PCI (Programma Comunista), union activity was and is both possible and desirable for communists. Without this activity, workers will never, according to them, break out of the stranglehold the unions -- as an arm of the state and not a weapon in the struggle for reforms -- have imposed on the working class.

Against those who based themselves on the historic experience of the AAUD which sought to put an end to the old Social - Democratic dichotomy between the "political" and the "economic", the ICC answered that because of the specificities of the period of decadence, there could be no permanent unitary organs of the working class outside of a period of proletarian revolution. This very spontaneist sort of crowd of neo - AAUDers tried to revive the idea of half - class wide unitary / half - political organizations under present conditions on the model of the AAUD -- but in vain. They refused to recognize reality, to see that it was impossible to regroup a significant part of the working class for any period of time around an activity unless it brought tangible short - term results.

But this current wasn't homogeneous; different tendencies within it evolved differently. The "Frazione comunista" of Naples began to discuss the texts of the ICC and most of its members joined it in 1976. Two years later, a small handful of militants from the CPAO joined the ICC, while others in the CPAO, under the influence of "Union ouvriere", denied the reality of capitalist crisis and had only contempt for the few revolutionary groups organized internationally and in a centralized way.

In 1977, in France, at the Sochaux factories, at Peugeot, in Paris in the banking sector, in Rouen and Lille, and at Michelin at Clermont - Ferrand, there were workers groups which tried to coordinate their efforts in a revolutionary network they believed would be "flexible enough" to avoid reproducing the "leader/led" dilemma. The "groupe autonome ouvrier" of Clermont - Ferrand crystallized

some communist positions and defended a "minimum platform" based on a vision of capitalist decadence (see Jeune Taupe, # 15, the publication of the PIC). This group went ahead very quickly in understanding the issues. They energetically denounced the electoralism of the Socialist - Stalinist Programme commun and its appeal via the unions for greater productivity. This new group rejected the myth of self - management and all the many modernist ideologies. But, with the reflux of struggles, doubt and then total discouragement took over from the earlier enthusiasm. These comrades then gave up all political activity.

In Belgium, workers groups formed in or around a wildcat dockers strike: "Onafhankelijk Havenarbeiders komitee" and "Arbeidersmacht antwerpse haven". these groups never managed to escape their own prejudices about the party being a bourgeois form of organization par excellence, where hierarchical relations necessarily arise. Fixated on a priori anti-centralist and anti-intellectualist positions, they contented themselves with "autonomy" and ouvrierism as antidotes to the leadership dilemma. Just as anti-intellectualism stems from down in the mouth intellectuals, the total rejection of any centralized form of organization is just a mirror image of organizational bureaucratism. These groups were influenced by many diverse currents: Socialisme ou Barbarie from the 1950's, ICO from the 1960's and early '70's, Union ouvriere, the ICC and the PIC. They became agitated little sects closer to the "factoryism" of the IWW and German councilism than to Marxism. They considered themselves to be the representatives of the aspirations of a large part of the working class and thought that they were destined to function as a laboratory for the preparation of future struggles. On the whole, alongside some positive elements of understanding, they also disseminated in the class their own confusions and their theoretical immaturity. The tendency to self - organization of the working class, the ability of strikers to defend their movement against the unions and to keep control of it, can be judged by examining the different struggles that have broken out in Western Europe. The working class is beginning to realize its need to organize in general assemblies, struggle committees and coordinating committees where it can develop, spread and radicalize its confrontation with capitalism. The workers have to be vigilant not only to prevent the unions from taking over the organizations the workers themselves formed, but also to prevent these workers organizations from getting turned into another variety of "rank and file unionism", the veritable Trojan horse in the revolutionary movement. The more these workers organizations remain under the constant control of the strikers, the more they will be living bodies where class consciousness and class solidarity and unity can be forged. Once the open struggle, involving thousands of workers, ends, the general assemblies and other committees stop meeting or functioning in a regular way. After a certain hiatus, between the struggle

and the return to work, they die because the movement itself has ended, usually without obtaining anything.

But all is not lost or crushed under the "return to order". To avoid falling prey to demoralization and the passivity that all the ideological forces of capitalism take advantage of, some workers want -- at whatever the cost -- to maintain a place where proletarian life can flourish during the time on the job and in a cafe or whatever, after work. At the head of small minorities of militant workers are found those who were the heart and soul of the struggle just ending. Their way of conceiving things is usually healthy and dynamic. They don't want the valuable lessons of the struggle to be lost in atomization. They want to keep the lessons alive to help in future struggles that they are just itching to join. They want to shake up the workers who have fallen into routine again; they want to push their comrades to take up the struggle, to desert the unions. When workers from different factories in the same district had been on strike together, workers from different industries, "blue collar" and "white collar", get together to continue to discuss "autonomy" and what workers democracy can mean. They deal with so many issues, not necessarily limited strictly to work; they expand their vision of things and deepen their antagonism to the way capitalism operates. They formulate other perspectives. At this stage, these are really discussion circles, even though a preoccupation with immediate intervention may be present to one degree or another. This is what happened after May '68 in France.

This need to think things through and to clarify issues raised by the struggle is an inherent part of a class that refuses the weight of austerity measures, that cannot accept its economic exploitation and social oppression. A class that is beaten down, brutalized by ideological poison, does not engage in such activities; nor does it have such concerns. These discussion circles express an enormous step forward for the consciousness of a class on the difficult path of its historic emancipation, an important step in organization for the working class. But they also demonstrate how great are the difficulties and hesitations the class is experiencing, as it tries to find its way after so many years of counter-revolution, when Stalinism held the class in thrall.

Today, when the unions operate in favor of capital and when workers' councils do not yet exist, to win political power and to exercise the dictatorship of the proletariat, the void is filled by these workers groups -- though beset by a great many limitations and enormous misunderstandings even as to their own role. Although their appearance shows the maturation of class consciousness, it is also a sign of the weakness in the political development of the proletariat.

It goes without saying that we wholeheartedly salute and support all circles, groups and committees that participate in the worker's search for programmatic clarity, that participate in the raising of the level of class consciousness. But to us, they are

not an end in themselves. They are valuable in that they lead to joining a political organization. The characteristics of the struggle and of organization in the period of capitalist decadence is such that only three outcomes are possible for these groups: 1) the committees and circles evolve until they constitute new minority political organs in countries where there had been no revolutionary presence; 2) the committees, circles, pose their adherence to an already existing revolutionary pole; 3) these committees or circles become para-unions, which is the most likely outcome. Discussion circles, workers' circles, constitute neither the permanent unitary organization of the class, which can arise only out of a powerful wave of struggle, nor a minority, political, organization of the class. They can never be the structures prefiguring the future unitary organs of the class, workers' councils. In no case could these hybrid and immature regroupments eliminate the need for "the class party, whose political role is indispensable to assure the triumph of the social revolution and its final goal" (Marx).

#### TODAY

What has happened to the old positions of the ICC on the question of committees and circles?

All the time, in the course of the many strikes and trade union demonstrations that they have called on workers to join, the ICC has filled their ears with its neo-unionist slogan "the struggle pays", which leaves the impression that workers can protect and improve their working conditions and standard of living in decadent capitalism. But at the present time, the ICC lacks the instrument to spread these sorts of mystificatory demands. Are they in the process of constructing such a tool? In any case, The ICC is heavily engaged in setting up struggle committees consisting of certain of its own militants (either worker or unemployed) specially designated to organize a handful of sympathizers.

The ICC no longer remembers -- or it does so insufficiently -- that outside of periods of real social agitation, of the massive mobilization of workers thrown into the all encompassing flames of action, committees which try to make themselves permanent end up as para-union instruments which base themselves on a certain type of demand: the right to work for all, job flexibility, paid courses for retraining, maintenance of social benefits, and to make themselves more "radical", open the firm's books, workers control of bankrupt enterprises, etc. In its turn, the ICC propagates the illusion that a struggle committee, maintained despite a reflux in the struggle, can and must continue to play a dynamic role. These pseudo-committees not being themselves a product of the struggle, of a struggle already engaged, are suspended in thin air. Instead of being the bearer of the tendency towards the conscious unity of the class, they are trapped by the danger of becoming the carrier of a transitional program. Besides, the ICC has no shame in finding itself inside trade union or leftist committees. In Lyon

(France), the quest for influence led the militants of the section to distribute a leaflet signed "some workers". In New York, their intervention was no less heroic. This "apoliticism" feeds the distrust of workers for revolutionary organizations instead of openly confronting it. Most sad, most distressing, is the fact that the militants of the ICC no longer even see what they are in the process of doing: in their own small way, they are engaged in entryism and infiltration which, in fact, limits the perspectives for struggle to narrow economic objectives.

The basic axis of the strategy of intervention of the ICC is these struggle committees which "have as their primary task to prepare -- through discussion and propaganda -- the struggles to come, their self-organization and their unification" (International Review # 51). In our opinion, the ICC is putting in jeopardy the advances that it had itself once made. It is forgetting its past, its mother tongue.

As the ICC could not draw the lessons of its recent errors, it is now on a zig zag course. In promoting the constitution of struggle committees, this organization is caught in the grip of the ouvrierist, base unionist logic which consumes it. Even when it wants to fight the dangers which are denaturing them, and turning them into a prey for leftists and base unionists, it cannot: it is doing the work of base unionism without even knowing it. If these committees must become the basis for the structure of the future unitary organs and if they are called upon to play an important role in the coming period, then it is necessary to have a permanent intervention within them. The ICC which thinks so, is evolving as if the struggle was permanent. Now, today workers struggles are not permanent, massive struggles and still undergo important refluxes. In this sense, they don't fit the linear schema of the ICC. According to the ICC, the congenital weakness of the working class is to be found in its "centrism" and most particularly in its "councilist reflexes". We do not accept a word of this feeble tale propagated by militants who, through voluntarism, want to make up for the weaknesses of the class whose subjective condition trails behind the worsening of the capitalist crisis. Like the groups mentioned in the first part of this article, it is the impatience, the panic, produced by the intensification of inter-

imperialist conflicts which leads the militants of the ICC to try to compensate for the lack of political influence of revolutionaries by an activist reaction, by organizing recipes, basing themselves on a vision of the party as the General Staff of the proletarian army that must be led to the assault on the tottering capitalist fortress. The ICC imagines that it can shorten the road to revolution by promoting the constitution of these committees, henceforth invested with a potential in view of future confrontations; it believes itself capable -- through its political intervention -- of moving every confrontation to extension and generalization.

It is necessary to recognize that the ICC has

joined the choir of Leninists for whom an "implantation in the working class" is a political criterion, as if such an "implantation" were going to accelerate and facilitate the revolutionary course. Communist fractions without great influence in the factories, few in numbers, have played a fundamental role in the various revolutionary assaults of the working class. And that, because they defended "unsweetened" programmatic principles, advanced clear political perspectives and made the basis of their intervention an indomitable, burning enthusiasm.

Against the underhanded substitutionism and disguised hierarchicalism, we reaffirm that the intangible principle of the self-emancipation of the proletariat requires its own thought, action and determination. Self-organization, understood as the result of a spontaneous movement, is the only revolutionary possibility. It is a process in which the enormous majority of the workers must be engaged. When this conscious will is lacking, the class perceives and receives revolutionaries as foreign bodies, coming from outside to give them lessons and to place them under its political tutelage.

Our Fraction is not opposed to committees, to those which are part of a real struggle, just as it is not opposed to the circles which engage in political discussion on a basis of class struggle. But, our Fraction is opposed to the artificial fabrication of committees and circles, against the voluntarists who think they are accelerating the march of revolution that they "plan" and "structure" like so many chief executives of the class.

Against those who increasingly address themselves to a minority fringe, and less and less to the class as a whole, our role is to understand how to homogenize and accelerate the process by which class consciousness develops. We must not lose sight of the fact that for a long time this influence will still be small and that its spread will result essentially from the content of our political practice and not from the regularity of a physical presence at fixed points of intervention. We must actively disseminate our positions in the struggles as a political minority whose goal is not to enlist the class behind our particular banner. Moreover, it is not the function of a communist fraction to come up with the slogans for the daily struggle.

Can the ICC enlighten us as to what concrete events, what fundamental changes, what precise facts, have led them to repudiate the thesis which they once affirmed: the general, energetic, mobilization of the class forms the basis for the constitution of struggle committees, and not the frantic agitation of a handful of revolutionaries. It is not the old positions which have become obsolete, but the ICC, which in the daily struggle behaves more and more clearly like base unionists. As the result of a false conception of class consciousness, the ICC is being propelled into the death trap of activism. The "third wave of class struggle", which is very real indeed, has become the so-called basis for its new found pragmatism. The false



conception that the ICC has about the level of class struggle could not fail to influence its view of struggle committees. For the ICC, things are as simple as could be: to a permanent struggle, there must now correspond permanent struggle committees.

For us it is evident that the present adventure of the ICC must lead to an impasse, to the disgust of those workers who will be left high and dry, and to the discouragement of a part of the militants of the ICC itself.  
RC

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## POLEMIC

# «Privatisations » and State Capitalism

State capitalism has been a question for the proletarian political milieu for decades; yet it is still very poorly understood. This state of affairs is all the more concerning since the need to understand it is ever-more pressing. State capitalism is the organisation of capitalism in decadence. It is the primary determinant of the socio-economic structure of society within which the proletariat struggles and comes to consciousness. By and large, for the last 30 years and more the milieu has given over little effort to taking an understanding of this question onto deeper levels. It was to renew this effort that we published MacIntosh's discussion text in IP7 ('Understanding State Capitalism'); and we want to continue to take the debate further, addressing not only the general theoretical issues the question poses but also the ramifications flowing from it onto all aspects of social life, in particular the effect state capitalism has on the struggle of the proletariat and its coming to consciousness.

We therefore welcome the fact that the Communist Workers' Organisation has taken up certain issues related to developments in state capitalism in their 'Theses on Thatcherism' published in Workers' Voice 35 in June/July 1987; and especially that it has opened internal debate to the milieu by publishing an individual, dissenting, and unsigned contribution by a member in WV 37, September 1987. We also welcome the fact that the International Communist Current has responded in an article entitled 'Privatisation myth hides the trend to state capitalism' in World Revolution 106 of July/August 1987. In trying to deal with the problems presented by 'privatisation' and 'Thatcherism', the two main articles show the respective organisations' positions today in relation to state capitalism.

Sadly, these two articles simply expose the weaknesses in the milieu on this issue, and underline the flimsy foundations on which their understandings are built. The CWO only highlights the weakness of its framework by abandoning it as soon as it sees something problematic - 'Thatcherism'. For the CWO goes

back on the understanding it reached in its platform where it discusses "the universal tendency to state control of the economy under decadent capitalism." Their central statement in this article is that "It is now clear that the economic policies of the Thatcher governments have been to reverse the trend towards state capitalism." On the other hand, while correctly pointing to several of the CWO's weaknesses, the ICC ignores any possibility that there might be anything problematic here, and limits its argument to the reproduction of some sentences from its platform; in so doing it continues its emasculation of a basically correct orientation on the issue by the tedious repetition of old truths in the face of a changing situation.

In this article we want first to highlight the weaknesses in the approaches of these two organisations, and then go on to show how the problems posed can only be adequately addressed by deepening our understanding of historical developments.

### THE APPROACHES OF THE CWO AND THE ICC

In the CWO's article we find the view that state capitalism is fundamentally the defence by the state of the weaker sectors of national capital: "Thatcherism has shown that the assumption that the state would take over and defend those sections of the national economy which were unprofitable, but supposedly essential - heavy industry, etc - is flawed." In other words, where 'private' capital fails the state has to take over. Thus, the drive towards state capitalism comes out of weakness, and is obviously related to the view that, on a global scale, the development of state capitalism is associated with backwardness. This view is shared by much of that part of the proletarian milieu which holds to some analysis of state capitalism whereby it is in the third world that the statification of the economy is at its most extensive. A further argument of the CWO is that, in the case of Britain at least, the state is no longer going to defend the weaker sectors. For them, the phenomenon of 'privatisation' represents "the abandonment of the British bourgeoisie of any attempt to maintain its

position on the world market as a specific national capital". Thus the CWO sees state capitalism as if it were merely a policy option of the ruling class.

The ICC is correct to criticise this, and points out that "In fact state control and centralisation continue to tighten. ... The war machine, the military, the police not only remain central to the state's concerns but are being continually strengthened." By way of elaboration on the power of the state over the economy, they say that "As for the 'privatisation' of British Telecom, British Airways, the Trustee Savings Bank etc, are the CWO seriously suggesting that they are no longer under the overall control of the state? No, the juridical form that the concentration of capital takes should not deceive workers into a misunderstanding of the forces that the bourgeoisie has at its disposal. In many respects, for example, the co-ordination of state capitalism is more advanced in the US than it is with the economy of the USSR." Unfortunately, in regard to the development of state capitalism today, that's all the ICC has to say in reply to the CWO.

The ICC does, however, explain what it thinks the 'privatisation' policy has been about: "The campaign around 'privatisation' is aimed at giving the working class the false impression that their struggles do not come up against the capitalist state - when in fact state control and centralisation continue to tighten."

But we have to go back to an earlier issue of WR to find supporting argumentation. According to WR 99, in an article 'adapted' from Revolution Internationale 148, the bourgeoisie is "developing the strategy of 'privatisation' with the aim of being able to sack workers more easily and massively, encouraging the dispersion of the workers' response to redundancy in advance, trying to prevent the unification of struggles. This strategy is not specific to Britain but can be seen in most industrialised countries: the US, France, Canada, even Spain ... " Asking itself the question, "What is the aim of privatisation?", the ICC answers: "It is to prepare for the massive redundancies to come. It prepares the means to lay off massive numbers of workers and encourage the dispersion of of the struggles which will break out against this. The state in each industrialised country wants to make its economy as competitive as possible, which means trying to cut the enormous deficit and eliminate unprofitable sectors, the lame ducks. It means massive redundancies and for workers who do remain in work demands for higher productivity and 'flexibility' in adapting to management plans for running the enterprise."

After some further description of how 'privatisation' will permit the state to disclaim responsibility for redundancies, the article re-emphasises its basic point:

- "as the workers more and more consciously try to find the means to unite their struggles, so the state organises privatisation";

- "what privatisation aims to threaten is the unification of struggles against redundancies";
- "privatisation is a strategy to try to disperse the movements of struggle that will break out against the massive redundancies in the important concentrations of workers";
- "their only aim is to confront the workers' reactions in an attempt to weaken them"; etc.

The CWO also sees Thatcherism as having certain policies towards the working class, "which must be seen as an attempts to defuse and control the class struggle in a period of economic transition. ... Thatcherism represents the attempt to divide the working class into differentiated and manageable sectors, whose political and social threat has become neutered. In essence it aims to return Britain to the class structure of the nineteenth century, which was comprised of an aristocracy of labour, sympathetic to capitalism, a middle strata of shifting, underemployed and disorganised workers, and a vast reserve army of unemployed."

Because the present article is focussing on the tendency to state capitalism, we are not going to reply here to all the points made by these groups in their articles. However, we are obliged to say, if only in passing, that it is appalling to see the CWO again regurgitate the pernicious, devisive and theoretically bankrupt theory of the aristocracy of labour.

The ICC gives no indication that there are any developments in state capitalism which have to be addressed; at the same time their persistent repetition of their platform takes on an abstract, timeless air and hence becomes talmudic recitation rather than marxist argument. Yet again, we see how everything is reduced to immediacies of the class struggle. One point has to be given to the CWO - they are responding, however, inadequately, and even dangerously, to some real changes taking place in the actual situation. However, that's the only plus. Their analysis of state capitalism demands a massive suspension of disbelief if anyone is to accept their view that capitalism can just slip back into the 19th Century, or that the Thatcher government represents "the abandonment of the British bourgeoisie of any attempt to maintain its position on the world market as a specific national capital, the surrendering of its economic independence. Its vision is of the UK as a parasitic, rentier economy, existing courtesy of the rest of the international bourgeoisie in a neo-comprador fashion."

(However, not all the members of the CWO agree with this analysis. In the third text mentioned, the CWO 'dissident' points out that the CWO analysis of state capitalism is being called into question, and he affirms the British ruling class' determination to defend the national capital. His countertheses argue against many of the points made in the original theses. He sees 'privatisation' as part of a drive towards 'rationalis-

ation' and increased exploitation to restore profitability, the selling-off of state assets as a means of paying for total state spending thus avoiding borrowing or printing money. He envisages that the policies of Thatcherism will be reversed, as they are short-term only, and sees this task being delegated to a future Labour government. While this contribution certainly aims to correct the original theses - within the CWO's framework - it does not clarify in what way the original theses are thought to have called into question their framework on state capitalism.)

In different ways, the actual situation is exposing fundamental theoretical weaknesses in the frameworks held by both organisations.

### THE BROADER PERSPECTIVE

The superficiality of these two articles arises from three key omissions made by both organisations. They leave out:

- the global nature of the capitalist system;
- the extent of the penetration of the state into all aspects of life;
- the fact that state capitalism, the epoch of decadence of the social system, itself has a history.

A marxist analysis of state capitalism demands that these aspects are kept at the heart of the question; otherwise the necessary totality is lost and we are left with only a fragment of reality to be dealt with in an episodic way - the very trap the CWO and the ICC have created for themselves. Therefore, to understand the significance of the 'privatisation' phenomenon, we have first to pose the question - what is happening to state capitalism today? We'd like to make an initial response to this question in the remainder of this article.

First of all, we must insist on one key point - the irreversibility of state capitalism as the fundamental organisational structure of capitalism in decadence. In IP7, MacIntosh points out "that state capitalism is not the result of a single causal chain - a view which is characteristic of reductionism and schematism - but rather the outcome of a meshing of several causal chains. In this connection, it is absolutely essential to recognise the no less decisive role played by the epochal change from the formal to the real domination of capital in the development of state capitalism." This issue is singled out here to emphasise that, irrespective of the other forces at work reinforcing the need for the state's increasing domination of society today, this factor alone - the consequences of the transition of capitalism from a form based on the extraction of absolute surplus value to one based on the extraction of relative surplus value from the working class - demands it. And this transition - which began in capitalism's ascendant epoch and is utterly entrenched in today's world - is historically irreversible. Not only is the state required to organise society in the

most effective way to enable the national economy to compete against its rivals, to discipline and control the producer of value (the working class), to mobilise for imperialist war but it is also the means by which capitalism keeps going between its decadent imperialist world wars in this epoch. As MacIntosh says, "The extent to which the state through its indebtedness is the source of the fictitious demand which alone permits decadent capitalism to survive between orgies of destruction, is patently clear."

We refer readers to that article for a fuller explanation of this issue. We raise it here because it underlines the fact that state capitalism is not a policy option for the bourgeoisie today - as the CWO thinks - but is an integral part of the structure of capitalism. No government today - under Thatcher or anyone else - can abandon state capitalism. 'Privatisation', in the sense the term implies, is a myth. The fact that the CWO accepts this myth as reality only shows how superficial was its erstwhile position on state capitalism, as expressed in its own platform. The real question is - what is happening in state capitalism today that warrants such major campaigns about so-called 'privatisation'? The fact that the ICC, as we have shown, has not been taken in by this campaign has not helped it contribute anything to an understanding of the question because it does not see that there is any question to ask. As well as its fixation on the momentary aspects of the class struggle, the ICC - though in a different way from the CWO - displays a lack of appreciation of the need for a historical look at such questions.

Decadence - and state capitalism, its predominant organisational tendency - has a history. Although the tendency was built up as the transition was being made from the formal to the real domination of capital the strongest developments took place in four quite specific periods:

1. During the First World War. The first phase of extensive strengthening of this tendency within the period of decadence was based on the organisation of the industrial and military machines, and of the working class for both - on a nation-by-nation basis - to meet the needs of the war. The countries where state capitalism developed most strongly were Britain and Germany, the most advanced capitalist economies of the time. This fact alone is an empirical demonstration that tendencies towards state capitalism were stronger in the more developed capitals, and that they did not wait for Stalinism to find their first expression.

The strengthening of the state apparatus during WWI - although considerable - was not seen generally in the ruling class as a permanent necessity; witness the efforts to dismantle much of this machinery after the war. This dismantling was not just a question of awareness of the ruling class. The relative weight of the 'private' bourgeoisie compared to the state bureaucracy was still great enough to enable it to hold off the

encroachment of the latter from areas where the private bourgeoisie saw its interests lay in keeping them to itself.

2. In the period up to the Second World War. During the depression years, the growth of the state accelerated again. This encompassed rebuilding the economic infrastructure under state control (eg public works, New Deal, Stalin's programmes) and preparing the economic and military machine for a further world war. Again the working class was dragged into these endeavours.

3. During WWII. The pre-war build-up of heavy industry and armaments manufacture increased to an unprecedented scale. In addition, the development of state capitalism took on an international dimension with the growing relative power of the US and the laying of the foundations of its imperialist bloc - not only with the economic arrangements being made (Bretton Woods, IMF, World Bank, etc) but very importantly with the beginnings of an integrated international military power.

4. During the post-war reconstruction (1945 - 1967). In contrast to the period after 1918 there was no significant effort to dismantle what had been absorbed into state control. On the contrary, the institutions of the state continued to strengthen at the expense of the private bourgeoisie, whether by fusion or by appropriation. This period witnessed a further acceleration of state expansion within each national capital and on a global level with the construction of the international (US-dominated) agencies which aimed to steer the world economy. The wartime military alliances (in the West) were formalised and turned into a permanent military machine - one which was mimicked in the East. In this process were constructed the two imperialist blocs, whose existence has been the dominant feature of the world situation ever since the 1940s. There followed an unprecedented growth of world capital, albeit on the most decadent basis: an initial period of reconstruction followed by a 'boom' which lasted until 1967, when the sterling devaluation marked the dawning of the new period of open crisis.

Thus, the structure of state capitalism has tended to reflect the major aspects and the needs of the periods in which its greatest developments took place. Let's consider - in very broad outline only - where the development of the state had reached by the onset of this open crisis.

The growth of permanent military forces was unparalleled in history. The antagonisms between the old colonial powers had diminished to be replaced by an even deeper antagonism at a higher level between two major imperialist blocs formed during and after the Second World War. Standing forces added up to hundreds of millions of men world-wide and the destructive capacities developed had become capable of destroying humanity. This global antagonism dominated not only the relationships between all the capitalist nations of the world, but had become the major focus for capitalism's forces of prod-

uction: the war economy was the basis for capital's production in decadence. The needs of the military thus became paramount, and the consequences of these needs percolated throughout society.

The organisation of this war economy, and its associated elements, has been directed through the expansion of the agencies of the state. Its methods have varied: by overt nationalisation of industries; by discriminating for or against particular industries; by tax incentives, by investment grants; by government orders. It has defined rules for everything it thought necessary so as to organise the economy for the best defence of the national capital.

In addition, the organisation of the capitalist economy developed on a global scale with the setting up of many institutions to facilitate the operation of international trade (such as the EEC, COMECON, and GATT) and finance, for example by attenuating the destructive forces which would otherwise be released by, say, unbridled protectionist tendencies.

At the same time the institutions of the state specifically oriented towards social control, particularly of the working class, were developed to an unprecedented extent. This is far more than just the police forces and agencies dealing with the 'security of the state'. The unions had already been integrated into the state - by 1914 - but particularly during and after the Second World War the entire union machine was welded much more tightly to the rest of the state apparatus. The control of the national wage bill became far more effective, new economic policies could be implemented on the basis of wider social powers than ever before. As an increasing proportion of the wages of the working class came in the form of a social wage, so state bodies expanded to deal with its dispensation - all to the end of better controlling the rate of exploitation, and maintaining a social discipline over what was then a fragmented working class.

The administration of all these integrated tasks of military, economic and social control brought about the most enormous growth of the state bureaucracy. As already mentioned, this period saw a phenomenal decline in the power of the private bourgeoisie in relation to the state bureaucracy.

The greater the strength of the national capital, the greater has been the strengthening of the state apparatus controlling it; the effective penetration of the state into all aspects of economic and social life has been at its greatest. Here the centralisation of the financial system, the effectiveness of tax and fiscal controls have been the greatest. Thus when the ICC says that "in many respects ... the coordination of state capitalism is more advanced in the US than it is with the economy of the USSR", it misplaces the emphasis: the ICC would be hard put to find an area in which effective state control was not greater in the US than in Russia!



To summarise, we can point out that the stimulus towards the greatest development of state capitalism was during the greatest crises of the system in this century - the two world wars - but that the most considerable development of the powers of the state took place during the reconstruction period after WWII. These factors have had an important bearing on subsequent developments in state capitalism, ie during the present crisis.

#### THE BROADER PERSPECTIVE - THE PRESENT CRISIS

With the structure developed under the circumstances described above, the state phased in the crisis which opened up in 1967. To begin with, the bourgeoisie was deluded by the idea that there was a 'solution' to the crisis. During the period (roughly) up to the end of the 1970s the world capitalist class used every means developed during the war and the post-war period to deal with it - in essence, the Keynesian mechanisms. All to no avail.

By the '80s, capitalism had to face the prospect of no solution to the economic crisis, with only war at the end of the road. Capitalism as a whole was at a turning point in its development. The crisis had become so deep that it could no longer continue in the same old way. The pressure for changes in the organisation of capital arose because:

- \* the world markets were so glutted, the problem of over-production so chronic, that there was no global expansion of markets possible to permit a way out;
- \* in the absence of the necessary markets, the creation of debt had assumed proportions so massive that the servicing of debt itself became an unbearable burden on the productive sectors of the world economy;
- \* the massive military expenditures necessitated today by the heightened antagonism between the blocs act as a massive unproductive drain on the world economy, without being accompanied by even the most temporary 'recovery' as in the 1930s.

It is evident that these factors have had profound consequences on the capitalist system as a whole and these we have addressed in other articles in Internationalist Perspective. Not least is the phenomenon we see all over the world where capitalism is, in a sense, turning in on itself, indeed cannibalising itself, as it finds itself enmeshed in deeper and deeper contradictions. What has not been so evident until recently is that there are ramifications for the organisation of state capitalism itself.

The turning point we mentioned essentially comes to this: capitalism has reached certain limits in recent years; it can not continue into its period of decay, into deeper and deeper open crisis, with the same old apparatus of statification which was appropriate to the period of post-war reconstruction. The experience of more than a decade of the current open crisis showed to the ruling class that the era of Keynesianism had come

to an end. And just as state organisation developed on the basis of Keynesian control of the economy had been a response to the final failure of private capital, so the failure of Keynesianism in its turn is bringing with it a new organisational response whose outlines have only in the past few years been taking shape.

There is no one word which has come into common parlance to summarise this organisational restructuring. On the side of the proletariat, marxist organisations barely recognise that any such process is taking place. On the side of the bourgeoisie, the process is obscured by layers of ideological mystifications generated to hide what is actually going on; 'privatisation', 'perestroika', 'deregulation' are among the labels attached to elements of this process in the campaigns of the bourgeoisie.

The process represents a response within state capitalism which aims to reorganise itself to meet the needs of a different period from that in which the bulk of its institutions were mainly developed. Primarily, the difference is that the post-war period was one in which the general, global thrust of capitalism was expansive whereas in today's situation it is one of contraction - giving rise even to de-industrialisation tendencies within major national capitals. This change has run its consequences through every part of the state apparatus threatening everything associated with the Keynesian-based structures - from economic policy to the control of industry, to the management of the social wage, to the education system, and beyond.

The net effect is to render obsolete many of the past objectives of several arms of the state apparatus, such as: full employment, the manipulation of the social wage as a mechanism to palliate the working class and thereby reduce the class struggle, the day-to-day control of the policies of many of the most important industries, etc. In their place are increased emphases given to, or outright replacement by, other goals: to oversee the massive reduction in social wage; to replace day-to-day intervention in certain economies with more strategic directives, leaving the industries' management far more accountable to the senior apparatchniks for their performance.

State capitalism has another, internal, problem. Its own state apparatus, its bureaucracy, is itself wracked with contradictions not least of which is the burden it places on each national capital. The state is faced with ever-more objectives and consequently tends to expand, increasing the load on the economy. In addition to which, the bureaucracy is also the source of many inefficiencies introduced into the productive process itself, making the national economy less competitive. This situation has only increased the pressure on the state to restructure and is having a profound effect on the state bureaucracy - the ruling apparatchniks are trying to trim the apparatus down and streamline it for efficiency and to reduce its weight on the

economy.

There is much evidence of this restructuring and some of its consequences; some of the more obvious aspects are:

\* In many countries - particularly, but not only, the most advanced - programmes to streamline state control of the economy are being implemented with almost indecent haste. One of the tasks being undertaken is to divest the state of control of sectors of the economy through direct nationalisations. Obviously, the Thatcher government's 'privatisation' campaign in Britain has been given a great deal of publicity in the press of the bourgeoisie - and its rationalisation echoed even in the press of the revolutionary milieu as we saw in 'Workers' Voice'. But this policy is not confined to the UK. Under different names, and to different degrees, programmes of denationalisation are underway in many countries. In Japan, the largest company in the world, Nippon Telegraph and Telephone, is in the process of 'privatisation'; Japan Air Lines has already been floated. In France, the Paribas investment banking group has been privatised. In Australia an extensive programme is being drawn up. The list is long, and not just in the Western Bloc. Several of Gorbachev's measures under the perestroika umbrella. (See IP7 on 'Reforms' in the eastern bloc really means more austerity'.) Many similar programmes are being adopted in China in line with Deng Xiaoping's policies.

\* In place of the direct 'hands-on' control of an economic sector through the emplacement of bureaucrats and agencies in the industry itself - as with nationalised industries - state control is being shifted to put greater emphasis on 'indirect' methods: tax and fiscal mechanisms, financial incentives, overall target setting, etc. 'Market forces' are in many instances used to steer restructuring - a mechanism especially in favour in the US, witness the 'deregulation' of the air transport industry, and of communications (breakup of Bell Telephones). Gorbachev (perhaps the Thatcher of the East) and Deng Xiaoping are particularly in favour of the 'market forces' instrument to determine prices and the allocation of resources in many sectors.

\* These changes have had and are continuing to have significant effects on the ideology being generated by the state. We can give two examples from the British situation. First, we can see that putting state companies into the 'private sector' and allowing them to implement their own austerity policies (in response to 'market forces') reduces the state's culpability as the party responsible for the amiserisation of the workers. (As we have seen, the ICC is correct to point this out - they are wrong

to make it the sole explanation for what is going on.) Secondly, in the democratic dance of government and opposition, we can see that the opposition Labour Party is being hard put to find an alternative ideology to the government. The process of 'privatisation' has gone far too far to propose a simple renationalisation of the privatised industries and indeed the Labour Party is coming to terms with this. But this very fact reinforces the argument that the 'privatisation' is not simply the policy of the moment of the party in power, but a necessity for the national capital.

\* The management of exploitation has been given a different orientation over the past decade. The period of social contracts (1970s) is certainly over. The state no longer aims to share the misery throughout the working class as a whole. The economic situation throughout the entire world shows that there is no possibility for the proletariat to earn its own livelihood within the capitalist system. On the contrary, the incapacity of the world economy to continue to expand adequately means that an increasing number of proletarians are being permanently ejected from the means of subsistence. In line with the other policies of the capitalist class, a major effect on the workers can be discerned. For most governments (in Russia and Britain, for example) the wages of the employed can rise, provided the rate of exploitation can rise also. Meanwhile, that proportion controlled by the state through taxes, etc - the social wage - is continually eroded. One can therefore see the opening of a gulf in the working class - between the employed and unemployed. (It is this breach that the CWO, as we have already pointed out, has chosen to try to widen by manufacturing a labour aristocracy.)

What has to be underlined is that these phenomena do not represent any weakening of state capitalism but its relative strengthening over other sectors of capitalist society - it is because statification is so developed that its domination can be furthered through these mechanisms.

#### THE STRENGTHENING OF STATE CAPITALISM

The capitalist system today is more crisis-ridden than ever. It is only the very considerable development of its economic and financial organisations - at national and international levels - which give it the capacity still to stave off the very worst ravages of the consequences of its historic contradictions. What we have tried to illustrate in this article is that over the last decade, the seventh of its epoch of decadence which opened up in 1914, the very organisation of state capitalism is changing as a result of the sharpness of those contradictions.

Thus, although the grip of the state over all aspects of the capitalist system is being widened and strengthened, state capitalism is

by no means gearing itself up for a new lease of life. The fact that so many of the 'traditional' mechanisms used for decades are being changed so quickly only underlines the desperation of the ruling class, the state bureaucracy, to face up to the pressures of the present situation.

In coming to an understanding of the processes at work it is necessary to look behind appearances. The CWO's attitude to the question of 'privatisation' in the UK shows the consequences of failing to do so. True, there can be a short-term benefit to the British Treasury in selling industrial shares on the world's stock markets, but the CWO is wrong to fixate on this aspect, considering it to be nothing but a short-term bailout by a country fast entering third world status. As we have shown, similar processes are underway in stronger countries - including Japan, France and Russia. 'Privatisation' is not what its name says it is. Today, in 'privatising' an industry or company the state relinquishes no control or authority over it, but exercises that control in a modified way; in this regard, it could legitimately be regarded as the state adopting a different management style. (The confidence of the state in directing 'private' industry is shown, for example, in the fact that almost all of the West's military development and production is carried out by private companies. And of course, those integral arms of the state - the trade unions - have for the most part always been 'privatised' and not 'nationalised' in the West.) It is revealing of the CWO's weakness in grasping these issues that they see in Thatcher, the personification of a lack of resolve in the British ruling class while in fact she is the most intransigent defender of the power of the state. Under her government, state power in the UK has become wider than ever, with even the smaller companies becoming better integrated into the state's economic plan.

'Privatisation', therefore, should not be considered as an opposite to 'nationalisation'. The CWO is therefore wrong to fixate on whether nationalisation is some sort of antidote - the main theses say 'privatisation' is irreversible, the 'dissident' says Labour will simply renationalise when it comes to power. (There appears to be some further confusion being generated here by the fact that the right wing faction has been given the task of strengthening state capitalism - a frequent occurrence, even if frequently overlooked in the milieu.) This is the late 1980s, not the 1940s or '50s. We do not have the same situation as with the British steel industry, for example, which was nationalised by the first post-war Labour government, de-nationalised by the subsequent Conservative government and renationalised by the subsequent Labour government. That period was one of a lower level of state capitalist development (compared to today) in which sectors of the private bourgeoisie still had enough power to challenge the economic arms of the state machine when their interests were threatened; it was also a time when there were - as a result of the post-war 'boom' - residual illusions in broad sectors

of the ruling class concerning the degree to which the state had to dominate economic life. Those days are over. The drive for 'privatisation' today is coming from the very core of the state apparatus itself (often against the wishes of the bureaucrats in charge of the specific industry) in an effort to increase its control and to rationalise the economy; we are therefore not witnessing just another swing of a pendulum between nationalisation and denationalisation.

It could be argued that the introduction of market forces as a means of putting pressure on bureaucrats contradicts what has just been said, as it is introducing a mechanism totally outside state control and risks creating havoc in hitherto relatively 'orderly' industries. In answer, we can point out that 'market forces' in this respect today are not those of '60s, nor '30s, far less the 19th century because the market is dominated and shaped by the activities of state capitalism. In regard to a particular industry, it may be that the bosses of any one company have only limited control over the market in which it operates, but the state has a greater control since it dominates the activities of several, or even all, of the participants in the market. This does not mean that the anarchy of the capitalist market has disappeared under state capitalism; the difference is that while this anarchy was rampant in each individual market in the early phases of capitalism, today individual markets tend to be more orderly with the intrinsic anarchy pushed up to higher and more global levels.

The drive for efficiency and 'rationalisation' is also aimed at senior bureaucrats themselves. The state is not a homogenous body. If the battle between the state and private capitalists has been fought and won years ago, there are nonetheless still conflicts which arise between the centre of the state apparatus and the bosses of specific arms of the state or industries. The centre of the state is constantly having to rein in those sectors which challenge its policies - such battles have been made semi-public on many occasions under the Thatcher government. Even more obvious are the conflicts between the Kremlin and Regional party bosses in Russia.

We've concentrated on aspects mainly taken from the British situation. But the restructuring process is global nonetheless, even if it is unfolding in different ways with different appearances, at different rates in various countries.

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What we've tried to do in this text is to draw attention to the current process of restructuring going on within the state capitalist framework and to illuminate some of the forces at work. We have not tried to forecast precise outcomes to any particular issue. For example, one can see in Russia that Gorbachev's reforms are being firmly opposed, substantially blocked in many respects, by powerful rival bureaucrats. Such

reactions may be very strong and lead to ferocious conflicts inside the bureaucracy. The outcomes to these conflicts must not be considered to be merely foregone conclusions.

Neither have we tried to predict a specific external form to which capitalism may be tending as a result of these processes. The concern here has not been to predict whether various national economies will look 'privatised' or 'nationalised', but to consider what is happening inside state capitalism and what is the significance of the changes.

These changes in the structure of the system will have profound ramifications for the working class. Not only is it the case that the proletariat bears the brunt of all increases in exploitation, and that the past ten years have brought impoverishment on the most enormous scale, but all restructuring to 'rationalise' capitalism and make its economies more efficient will bring about even more. Most important for the course towards the proletarian revolution, there will be consequences for the way in which the working

class comes to consciousness, for the process of coming to consciousness takes place in the conflict with the agent of capital - the state - and is affected by the structures through which that agent presents itself.

For the revolutionary milieu to contribute to this process of coming to consciousness, it is imperative that it first acknowledges the fact that there are substantial issues concerning state capitalism to be addressed. Unfortunately, both the CWO and the ICC have shown how to address the issues inadequately: one by theoretical capitulation followed by a retreat into a 19th century vision of capitalism, the other by incantation and a refusal to consider change.

If the revolutionary milieu wishes to be a part of history, it has first to recognise that history did not stop yesterday.

Marlowe

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## ***On the Roots of the ICC's Degeneration***

# **Mistakes on the Mass Strike in Poland**

### **INTRODUCTION**

In Internationalist Perspective # 9, we published a text on "The Roots of the Degeneration of the ICC" in which we analyzed the causes of the profound involution of that organization. Far from limiting ourselves to a superficial check list of the symptoms of that degeneration, we tried to link it to the general difficulties that the present period imposes on the revolutionary milieu as a whole. Our real concern since we began as a Fraction has been to help revitalize the debate within the revolutionary milieu, which continues to pay dearly for its many mistakes and incomprehensions.

In this issue, we are printing a part of this text, which -- as we announced in IP # 9 -- had been left out. It deals specifically with the weaknesses in the ICC's analysis of the mass strike in Poland in 1980. For the author, these weaknesses were closely connected to the more general weaknesses of the ICC, making it possible to put them into sharper focus. Recognizing these weaknesses is, thus, essential to any overall understanding of the degeneration of the ICC. Once again with the publication of this contribution we want to open a debate, hoping that the revolutionary milieu will see its way to intervening on the questions raised in this text, such as the role of unions against

the working class, the function of the political vanguard, etc. In our Fraction itself there is not unanimity on this text, and a thorough discussion is taking place. We think that the possibility of open and fraternal discussion is a life and death issue for the proletarian milieu and for the working class; it is in that fashion that conceive our own activity. That's why we will be following up this discussion in future issues of IP. And we invite our readers to also contribute to this discussion on the lessons of the mass strike in Poland.

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### **POLAND 1980 - 81: A KEY MOMENT IN THE DEGENERATION OF THE ICC**

The events in Poland 1980 - 81 provided the revolutionary milieu with a major occasion to sharpen its understanding of the development of class consciousness and of its own function in this process. In any case, the struggle in Poland forced it to become more concrete, more explicit, on the subject. However, in becoming more explicit as to how the process towards revolution would unfold, the milieu also bared all its confusions on this crucial question.



For the first time, we experienced a mass strike in today's conditions. On the one hand, many of our theoretical concepts were turned into practice by the Polish workers. On the other hand, a lot of "black holes" in our theory, shortcomings and confusions, also came to the fore. The way in which an organization reacted to this confrontation between theory and practice would inevitably be crucial for its further evolution. It could either face up to its tasks and deepen its understanding or it could react to the shortcomings concretized in schematism by remaining blind to reality and merely adding some new recipes, thereby reinforcing its confusions. Another possibility did not exist. The ICC chose the latter path, which led it further into decline.

#### THE UNSOLVED PROBLEMS

The workers struggle that broke out in the Summer of 1980 in Poland, and quickly developed into a mass strike paralyzing the entire country, filled revolutionaries all over the world with enthusiasm. The events confirmed what they had been saying all along about the capitalist nature of the Eastern bloc and the existence of the crisis there; they confirmed their prediction that a mass strike would develop through self-organization, that its strength would depend on this self-organization, the worker's general assemblies and their coordinating committees. The later decline of the movement also confirmed, for all who had eyes to see, what they had been saying about unions, old and new, in containing the struggle and derailing it from its original goals; it also confirmed the impossibility of partial solutions, national or otherwise, and thus pointed to the necessity of international revolution.

But this mass strike also revealed unsolved problems. What, for instance, was one to think about the glaring contrast between the determination and formidable self-organization of the Polish workers and the naive trust which the majority of them displayed in the reactionary Church leaders and in cheap demagogues like Walesa? Between their growing recognition that the struggle was not theirs alone (c.f. their slogan: "Hungry of the world, unite!") and the obvious impact of nationalist ideology? Furthermore, the workers of Poland made an enormous step forward in organizing and extending their struggle without any revolutionary group or party telling them what to do and when to do it. What did that teach us about the role of revolutionaries in this process?

Why didn't the mass strike spill over the borders of Poland? Why wasn't there any reaction, any major act of solidarity in the proletariat elsewhere? What were the perspectives for the struggle in Poland in the absence of such a reaction?

How did the demands of the workers evolve when the extension of their struggle increased their self-confidence and the very size of their movement put them on a collision course with the state, while at the same time capitalist ideology developed new organs of containment with "Solidarnosc"?

What have revolutionaries to say in such a situation?

#### THE IMPLICATIONS OF IMMEDIATISM

All these questions point to the big issue of class consciousness, how it can mature under today's conditions. It's not enough to simply study the events in Poland, nor to remember what the Bolsheviks did in 1917. As explained in the article on the degeneration of the ICC in the last issue of IP, we must understand the objective difficulties and opportunities of our present period and to continue the theoretical efforts of the past. The failure of the current revolutionary milieu to do that became palpably clear during the Polish events.

The CWO, for instance, at first called upon the Polish workers to assault the state, in other words, to launch the revolution. Later on, however, it argued that the Polish events proved, in a negative fashion, the indispensability of the leadership of the party in the revolutionary process. Contradictory as these positions are, they both expressed the idea that class consciousness had sufficiently matured among the broad masses of workers. The only difference is that the second, put forward when the movement was in decline, rather than learn from reality, took refuge in the old substitutionist palliative: "if only the party had been there to lead them ...."

The tendency to see the revolution behind every door was present in the ICC as well. The ICC also believed that class consciousness had sufficiently matured in Poland, but called on the working class "not to launch itself immediately into a decisive military confrontation" as long as the workers of the other Eastern bloc countries did not join the struggle (International Review 24). That was in 1981, after the movement had crested, after its self-organization had been crippled. However, even in the Summer of 1980 it would have been ridiculous to have spoken about decisive military confrontations with the state and revolution in an immediate sense, in Poland or anywhere else. To have done so meant to engage in a caricature of the revolutionary process, to have denied the broad maturation that still had to take place; it meant denying the necessity for the class to recognize itself, its international nature and antagonism to the existing order, and to perceive the implications and potential of its struggle. It meant denying that the proletarian revolution means in the first place the destruction of capitalist society by the working class discovering its capacity to politically take over society at every level through its self-organization and clarity of purpose. The "decisive military confrontations with the state" are contingent on that process, both in timing and importance.

The struggle in Poland made a very important contribution to that very maturation. But it was telling that the ICC confused a contribution with a "decisive confrontation", which cannot just be the fruit of one mass strike, but must grow out of a long and arduous period of developing struggles, defeats and advances, through which the workers of different countries and continents

discover their unity.

Some in the ICC recognized this fact. One article clearly stated: "A whole period of maturation in the internationalization of struggles is necessary before the revolution can be directly on the agenda" (International Review # 23). After all, the ICC had made great strides in understanding the question of class consciousness, primarily through the great debates on this subject in its "ascendant" phase, of which the pamphlet on class consciousness was the crystallization. However, this work had not been continued and the pamphlet had provoked little discussion. It could hardly have been considered a homogeneous acquisition in the ICC, as the growing immediatism in 1980 - 81 made clear. Poland was a turning point, so it's no surprise that the ICC texts contained contradictory views. As cohesion grew, so too did the confusions.

The immediatist expectations of the ICC led it to glorify the struggles in Poland, to see only the positive aspects and to remain largely uncritical towards the weaknesses they contained. Of course, this attitude made it much more difficult to perceive the ideological trappings beneath which the capitalist class acted inside the workers movement, and, therefore, produced serious confusions over politicization on the terrain of the working class vis a vis the terrain of capitalism. Readers familiar with the views of the ICC today will have no difficulty recognizing this phenomenon. While in 1980 - 81 it was only a trend, today it has become the sole way in which the ICC looks at the class struggle.

There was nothing wrong with emphasizing the positive characteristics of the struggle in Poland. Quite the contrary. However, the ICC also transformed the struggle's weaknesses into giant steps forward. In the success which KOR and other capitalist ideologues had in promoting the idea of a "free union", the ICC saw in the first place an advance in the politicization of the struggle (beyond purely economic demands), a recognition by the workers that "the solution to their problems" had to be political. When the MKS of Gdansk organized security - squads "to keep strangers out of the shipyards", the ICC saw an exemplary action against provocations, when in fact it was a move by the unionists in the MKS leadership to control and contain the workers. While these unionists warned against any violence, in a torrent of legalist, pacifist and Christian propaganda, the ICC saw in the absence of violence solely an absence of despair, a sign of how well the workers were organized, and felt no need to denounce this pacifism which drained the workers in advance of the inevitable collisions with the state. After this propaganda bore fruit with the Gdansk accords, a smashing defeat disguised as a victory which gave vague promises about wages and other class demands, while institutionalizing the "free union", so that organs based on the self - organization of the workers could be dissolved, the movement went into a phase of decline. Many in the ICC had a difficult time explaining the sudden death of self - organization, as they had never heard a word of criticism of the MKS

leadership. And many others simply refused to see the decline. In January 1981, the ICC's assesment was: "The movement, far from dying down, has become stronger" (International Review 24). The Reason for this upbeat view was the large number of workers still on strike and the political nature of some of the demands. We can see in this the kind of logic that would make the ICC -- four years later -- call upon workers to go to union meetings: the important thing is that the workers keep busy, stay mobilized; that puts them in the right state of mind to become "politicized"! If the ICC could see progress where the self - organization of the workers was destroyed, it can only mean that even at that time the ICC had developed a separation between "politicization" and the self - activity of the class.

Not that there was no politicization taking place. The workers in Poland were learning political lessons. They learned, for instance, that they had been naively trusting negotiations, when the emptiness of the "victory" at Gdansk forced them to again take up the fight for survival. And in a few months time, they learned more about "free unions" than many workers in the West have in decades, as Walesa and his firemen were running around the country trying to halt strikes, while the more radical wing of Solidarnosc took the complimentary approach of trying to derail struggles towards political demands which became more radical as the anger of the workers rose, but which never challenged the capitalist state (ranging from TV time for the opposition and the Church to "democratic control" over the police). It was those political demands which so impressed the ICC. "The political demands are increasingly radical" according to the International Review 24; they even "amounted to a demand for dual power".(sic.) In fact, the ICC was applauding base unionism!

For the workers, the path to politicization, that is, the maturation of their consciousness of themselves as a class, with a common class perspective and a common class enemy, had to go through a rekindling of their fight for common class interests, confronting their class enemy in its workerist disguise: Solidarnosc. That was the way to a renewed, more conscious self - organization, the way to rekindle the promise of internationalization contained in the strikers original slogan, "Hungry of the world, unite". Even if the short term prospects were not optimistic, this was the perspective that revolutionaries had to defend.

The ICC didn't see it that way. In fact, it chided the CWO for defending the need to struggle against austerity in Poland, saying the struggle had reached a point beyond economic demands, that it was now on a "political" level (Internationalisme # 60). In practice, this false separation of what's economic and what's political meant support for the tactics of base unionism. And it made the ICC incapable of offering any real perspective for the struggling masses in Poland. (The "perspectives" given in International Review 24 were: 1) stay

mobilized (but for what?); 2) preserve solidarity, continue attempts at self-organization (the question was not to "preserve" and "continue", but to start anew, to confront Solidarnosc); 3) not to launch a decisive military confrontation without the workers of other countries; 4) draw the greatest number of political lessons to prepare the struggles of tomorrow.)

#### SUBSTITUTIONISM

As the ICC saw no perspective for the struggles in Poland, despite the confrontations of workers with Solidarnosc and the state, as long as workers in other countries were not moving, it finally called upon the workers in Poland to retreat in an "orderly way". The way in which this call for retreat was formulated was telling for the degeneration of the concept of class consciousness which lay behind it: "the proletariat, like any army in battle, must know when to advance and when to retreat" (ICC - report on the class struggle). How does an army know when to retreat? The General Staff tells it when, of course. A substitutionist view of its function was gradually taking hold in the ICC. But, the proletariat is not an army. Its battle is not primarily a military one. Never was there an army which saw such a continuous process of growth and desertion, all depending on the spread of class consciousness. In this "battle" there is no "orderly retreat". Every halt, every step backwards is forced upon the workers by capitalism regaining ideological control. It cannot be met by a clever tactical retreat, but only by renewed efforts to identify and unmask the ideological obstacles that bar the way to the homogenization of class consciousness.

The Polish workers did not advance like an army, and neither would they retreat like one. It's true that their struggle pointed to the necessity of the party, the political organization of the proletariat, but not to direct the struggle as the CWO, and increasingly the ICC too would have it. The struggle in Poland was stopped by an ideological counter-offensive of the capitalist class, which succeeded in breaking the unity and self-organization of the workers (where the ICC saw only a capitalist class that was "panicked", "bumbling", "incoherent and in disarray"). It did so by making many workers see the meaning of their struggle in capitalist terms (Solidarnosc), by preventing the dynamic of the mass strike from clarifying the proletarian perspective. A revolutionary organization would have had its work cut out for it in Poland: to unmask the capitalist counter-offensive, to clarify the perspectives and implications of the struggle, its international context, etc. Any weakness of the struggle stems from a lack of understanding of what's at stake, leading to a lack of perspective, organization, extension. The continuation of the struggle itself and the revolutionary intervention in it are the only ways to develop that understanding. There is no guarantee of success. If the struggle dies down, if demoralization sets in, no

exhortation of any group or party can reverse the course of events. Then, a revolutionary organization would have to warn workers against putschism, isolated acts of desperation, confrontations that would expose workers to bloody traps, etc. But such warnings would have nothing in common with instructions to retreat. In their content, they are no different than what revolutionaries must clarify in the upswing phase of a struggle: the impossibility of limited victories, partial solutions; the necessity for the struggle to always seek extension until it unifies the world proletariat; the reality that the enemy is not just the Polish state, not just the Russian tanks, but a worldwide system of which democracy, churches and unions are an integral part. As circumstances change, the rapports de forces change, and the practical implications will differ. Revolutionaries may have to point to the necessity imposed by changing conditions. But, they should always point to the insufficiency of the proletarian forces present at a given moment, and never instruct the workers to abandon the struggle until further notice.

The call for retreat issued by the ICC reflected a different view of the role of revolutionaries, one which since that time has become dominant in the ICC's interventions, with its instructions on how the workers should fight and when they should stop fighting (as in the French railway strike in 1987), combined with an extreme poverty in political clarification, to put it mildly. It's a view of the revolutionary organization as the General Staff of the class struggle, or its "center of coordination and direction" to use the words of World Revolution. It's a view of revolutionaries as the instructors and strategists of the class, a view that can only be an obstacle to the maturation of class consciousness.

Indeed, if the class needs instructors to learn what its slogans should be and which practical measures it should take, if it needs strategists in order to learn when to go forward and when to retreat, if it needs security-squads to teach it to be orderly, then how could it ever be capable of administering the world? As the experience of the Russian revolution has shown, even if a revolution in which the workers take orders from party headquarters is victorious, the victory quickly proves to be a hollow one, inasmuch as the workers would not have liberated themselves from the old ways of thinking, of trusting leaders, of delegating authority -- an authority that would quickly assert itself over them.

Revolution can only be victorious if it means the end of the rule of minorities, strategists and other specialists. The maturation of class consciousness means precisely that: The mass of workers throughout the world cease trusting and following, and become conscious of their own unity of interests, their own capacity to organize their struggle, their own capacity to make decisions, to organize society on a new basis. It's this process, of the proletarian masses eliminating divisions within their midst, involving themselves in

political confrontation at all levels, which will shatter the pillars of capitalist power and enable the working class to transform society. However, the "instructors", with their narrow, short term conception of the revolutionary process, don't really believe that the proletariat has this potential.

THE CRITIQUE OF THE THEORY OF THE "WEAK LINK"  
Later, when the defeat of the struggle in Poland had transformed immediatist expectations into demoralization, the ICC tried to digest this defeat with a new theory: its critique of the theory of the "weak link". Whereas earlier it had called upon the workers in Poland not to engage in a decisive confrontation with the state because the workers of other countries were not yet ready, while it had called Poland "a lighted fuse which could lead to an explosion that would engulf the whole of Eastern Europe, including Russia, and set flame to the major European countries ...." (International Review 24), now it stated that such a decisive confrontation could not take place in secondary countries like Poland, and that the revolution would have to start in Western Europe. So, while this new position was in contradiction with the one defended earlier, it was once again identical with respect to its denial of the breadth and depth in the development of class consciousness that is necessary for revolution in today's world. No longer was a whole period of internationalization of struggles needed for the maturation of class consciousness (as the ICC had once said); now the word came down that internationalization would follow the maturation of class consciousness in Western Europe.

This new theory, however right it was in rejecting Lenin's theory of the weak link and in emphasizing the crucial role of the European proletariat, continued to reduce class consciousness to something easier and more immediate than it really can be. What makes Lenin's theory of the weak link doubly inappropriate today is that there are no more "weak links" in the capitalist system's chain of defense. While in 1917, the bourgeoisie was disorganized and divided by war, today, the proletariat is everywhere facing the entire capitalist system. The capitalist class is much more experienced today and closes ranks internationally when faced with the threat of class struggle. It's simply inconceivable that proletarian masses anywhere could understand even the possibility of international proletarian revolution, if the praxis of the international class struggle did not point to the growing will towards that goal and the growing forces to achieve it. The maturation of class consciousness has to be an international process today, as the experiences in different countries and continents in self-organization, extension and radicalization clarify for all what is really possible.

But for the ICC "only in Western Europe ... can there be a full development of the political consciousness indispensable for revolution" and once this has occurred "the chimes will sound for the worldwide generalization of proletarian struggles" 18

(International Review 31). This schematism wrenches apart aspects of one and the same maturation process, aspects which are intrinsically linked together. It reflects the "stagelism", so typical of those who see the revolution as a problem of strategy and tactics. In the totality of the process that brings about a ripening of the conditions for revolution, the question of where the revolutionary outbreak will finally occur is just a detail. Because the revolution is not primarily a military, but a social question, the proletariat can seize power because it has already undermined capitalism's grip on society at all levels. But what is, in fact, a detail, is a veritable obsession for substitutionists, who never really believe in the capacity of the class to act. Inasmuch as for them the revolution is in the first place a military confrontation, they see themselves playing the role of a General Staff, the specialists in strategic thinking. Again, it was no coincidence that military terminology was used in the ICC's critique of the theory of the weak link, with the Western European proletariat being the "strongest battalions", etc.

Not only did the critique of the theory of the weak link foreshadow the further reduction -- two years later -- of the concept of class consciousness to just the "program", to be assimilated by the workers, but the very way in which the question was debated in the organization, the way in which comrades with minority positions were isolated and attacked, was also a foretaste of things to come. In the aftermath of the "weak link" debate, speculations arose in the ICC about a soon expected "qualitative leap" in consciousness in Western Europe. Some said it would be the result of a period of subterranean maturation outside the open struggle; others said this couldn't be inasmuch as consciousness only exists in the open struggle. The ICC leadership then attacked both these erroneous views with its own version of a shriveled form of class consciousness and launched its bitter campaign against all who refused to accept it. The final stage had begun ....

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change of its platform are not minor historical rectifications. The platform of the ICC, prior to its alteration, represents the highest expression of revolutionary clarity in the whole history of the workers' movement. It is the single document that guides the totality of the organization's activities. Any change in this document must be made with eyes wide to implications that will follow.

Under pressure from the recent surge in class struggle the ICC has demonstrated that it has failed to come to terms with the unanswered question regarding the nature of revolutionary intervention. By redefining the

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## **Centrism and Opportunism in the Workers Movement**

# **A Break with the ICC**

### INTRODUCTION

The text which follows was written by a comrade of the ICC just prior to his resignation from that organization. This comrade, though not a member of our tendency before our expulsion from the ICC, has waged a determined -- and lonely battle -- within the ICC ever since that organization's sixth Congress, a battle against the programmatic degeneration so graphically depicted in his text.

We are printing this text not simply because it is a telling critique of the ICC, an accurate account of its degeneration, but more importantly -- inasmuch as our function is not to serve as an anti-ICC -- because it makes a number of points not made in our own critiques of the ICC's attempt to salvage the Social-Democratic parties for the proletariat after they had voted war credits in 1914 and committed themselves to the cause of capitalism and imperialist war. Specifically, the text clearly shows the objective bases for this betrayal in the decades before 1914, making it clear that the voting of war credits was the culmination of a long process of degeneration. In addition, this text addresses the important question of the passage of the Stalinist parties into the camp of capital, showing that, contrary to the new assertions of the ICC, for whom these parties remained proletarian into the mid or late 1930's, the passage of Stalinism into the enemy camp was completed with the acceptance of the theory and practice of "socialism in one country", i.e. at the end of the 1920's.

This text contains certain formulations with which we disagree, specifically on the question of class consciousness (on this point, see the articles which we have published in I.P. 4 and 6). This in no way diminishes the importance of this contribution to an understanding of the questions of centrism and opportunism. It is our hope that this text can help stimulate the theoretical debate which is the lifeblood of a revolutionary Marxist organization, a debate for which the conditions are -- sadly -- no longer present in the ICC.

### External Fraction of the ICC

Platform Change: A Serious Regression for the ICC

It is no accident that the ICC has suddenly seen contradictions in its present orientation and its platform. With the recent acceleration of the class struggle the question of the relationship between the revolutionary organization and the class poses itself in an ever more immediate and concrete way. In the practical application of the ICC's general position, through its

intervention in the class struggle, the smallest contradiction, the slightest misunderstanding or any incompleteness in the ICC's position no longer appears as an insignificant theoretical nuance but emerges as a profound difficulty that must be resolved. It is, after all, in its practical activity that the revolutionary organization defines itself.

It is to the ICC's credit that it has made efforts to purge itself of these contradictions and thrash out the remaining misunderstandings but, effort is not enough if it is not a clear eyed, un-prejudiced effort conducted within a Marxist framework.

The ICC has long recognized the historic problem of the revolutionary organization posed during the First World War and its revolutionary aftermath and has made important contributions to a critical evaluation of past mistakes. "The understanding that the war marked a new period for capitalism as an historical system demanded a political practice which became a class frontier: on the one side the opportunists and centrists, who clearly showed themselves to be agents of capitalism by 'postponing' the revolution with the demand of 'national defence' in an imperialist war; on the other, the revolutionary left- the Bolsheviks, around Lenin, Luxemburg's International group" ...etc. (Introduction to The Decadence of Capitalism ICC)

However, a critical evaluation of past mistakes does not necessarily pose a solution. The problem of the "political practice" demanded by the new period will not find its complete resolution until the revolutionary victory of the proletariat. Today, since the re-awakening of the proletariat after the years of counter-revolution, it is the essential task of revolutionaries to make precise what this new political practice is and define clearly the conditions that demand it; both through its interaction with the proletariat and its vigorous theoretical work. With its recent platform change the ICC has made it clear that it is not up to the task.

Because the ICC is unable to develop any further the theoretical basis of the revolutionary activity demanded by the conditions of decadent capitalism it has instead decided to re-evaluate history in order to justify the use of an obsolete practice. The ICC has simply decided to rewrite the history of opportunism and centrism and bring it back onto the side of the revolution.

It is the singular task of this text to defend two positions that are now considered mistakes by the ICC.

1. "...support for 'national defence' immediately places an organization in the camp of the bourgeoisie." (Resolution On Proletarian Political Groups, ICC 1977)

2. "...when they (the communist parties) abandoned internationalism... it marked their definitive passage into the camp of the bourgeoisie." (Platform, Point 13. ICC)

Opportunism has been a determining factor in the workers' movement at two decisive moments in history. The first, of course, was August 1914 when the delegates of the SPD stood before the Reichstag and declared "We are threatened with the horror of enemy invasion. Today we have to decide not whether or not we are for or against war, but what steps must be taken to defend the country... We will not forsake our fatherland in its hour of need." This so called betrayal of social democracy was to create a rupture in the workers' movement that was to demonstrate the absolute bankruptcy of opportunism. It was only to the extent that revolutionaries could separate themselves from the opportunists that they could play their historic role as the proletarian vanguard. It was not that opportunism had changed its nature but rather the objective conditions of capitalism had changed the role that opportunism was henceforth to play.

The second moment in history, while far less dramatic than the Reichstag declaration, was the tragic compromise with opportunism made during the revolutionary upheavals in Europe and in the early years of the Third International. This compromise was to signal the beginnings of a rapid degeneration of the revolutionary movement and was, to a considerable degree, responsible for the defeat of the revolutionary wave itself.

The first moment, in 1914, was to punctuate a long period of degeneration in the Second International: a subterranean degeneration that was not to make itself fully clear, even to the best in the revolutionary movement, until that decisive moment in history.

It could be argued that in the first case, with the "betrayal" of 1914, the role that opportunism was to play could not be known until history had run its course. Revolutionaries made a mistake that they were to pay for in blood. But, in the second case, such mistakes towards opportunism resemble a true betrayal. It was a betrayal because the experience of the class struggle and the war had demonstrated the counter-revolutionary nature of opportunism and its centrist varieties. The Third International groped desperately for a pragmatic policy or tactic to spread its influence among the masses; the most important of which was to invite the opportunists into the heart of the revolutionary movement. The left was expelled or neutralized because of their revolutionary intransigence towards such unprincipled maneuvers.

The ICC has attributed its earlier vision towards the passage of Social Democracy into the camp of the capital to the mistakes characteristic of the "youthful enthusiasm" of the organization. Throughout the debates on this question the majority of the ICC has repeated ad nauseum that the notion of a single day in August 1914 making the difference between a revolutionary and counter-revolutionary organization denies the reality of a long and painful process whereby

a proletarian organization is lost to the bourgeoisie. The word "process" appears to be the triumphant discovery of the "mature" ICC. In reality the ICC has created a phantom from its imagination. Not only had no minority voice within the ICC ever denied this long process but the original position of the ICC is based on a clear understanding of this process. The ICC has decided to turn its back on an important acquisition of the workers' movement in its attempt to explain the "betrayal" of 1914.

It seems that the revolutionary movement began in 1914 for the ICC. It wants to forget a history that it knows all too well. The degeneration of Social Democracy, especially the SPD, is well documented and began its process, not in 1914, but decades before. In fact the seeds of its degeneration were present at its foundation.

It is important to point out that the battles against opportunism within the party were fought against only one aspect of its overall degeneration. There was another factor evolving within the SPD that was not to make itself fully understood until after the definitive betrayal of 1914.

While Luxemburg, Lenin, Pannekoek and many others fought against revisionism in the Second International, against the opportunist attempts to abandon the revolutionary program of Social Democracy, there existed a parallel evolution that was not to be found in the political program: the gradual but relentless absorption of Social Democracy into the state apparatus.

The growth of the SPD and the great bureaucracy that developed as a result was seen, even by the left, as the growth of proletarian power in relation to the bourgeois state. The left did not deny the importance and the necessity to gain influence through the legal channels of the state but viewed it as one of several important tactics to be used by the workers' movement. The left feared that the parliamentary tactic alone would dominate and put pressure on the movement for the abandonment of the revolutionary program. What the left did not clearly understand was that the growth of the SPD and its direct links with the state was paving the way for its own destruction.

This tendency, while more clearly analyzed with historical hindsight, did not go unnoticed by the left years before the "betrayal" of 1914. At the Stuttgart Congress in 1907 a French delegate attacked the SPD in this way: "You have now become an electoral accounting machine, a party of cash registers and parliamentary seats. You want to conquer the world with ballots... The whole of German Social Democracy has now become bourgeois!" While such a statement is perhaps an exaggeration, it recognized the tendency of the SPD to cautiously protect its influence within the German state. As another contemporary observed: through its success at the ballot and its vested interest in the state "...it was shown not that Social Democracy was conquering city and state, but on the contrary, that the state is conquering Social Democracy." (M. Weber 1908)

The left understood quite well that the proletariat could not conquer the state

through the ballot but it did not understand that the ballot would conquer the mass party of the proletariat. For the left the ballot was in itself not in contradiction to the revolutionary program. This growing contradiction was not recognized because the reformist trade union movement and the electoral arena were, during the whole history of the ascendancy of capitalism, a place for the development of class consciousness. It was in the mass organizations of Social Democracy that the proletariat was to recognize itself as a class with specific interest and an historical destiny. But, while the proletariat developed its consciousness during this period, it was a consciousness that was historically circumscribed within a capitalism that had not yet entered its historic crisis. It was thus the immediate task of the proletariat, not to fight for revolution, even if a great many understood its eventual necessity, but to use its new found strength to maneuver within the state apparatus in order to gain influence for its own self interest.

It is important to emphasize that the ability of the proletariat to maneuver was wholly dependent upon its mass organizations. The larger the organization the greater its potential influence and also the greater the need for stability and discipline. The predominance of the organizational demands of Social Democracy over the revolutionary agenda was not simply the short sightedness of the opportunist leaders but rather the result of the objective conditions imposed on the proletarian movement. There were objective limits to the mass consciousness of the proletariat that could only be overcome when capitalism entered its historic crisis but there were no limits to the organizational strength of the proletariat during capitalist ascendancy.

The SPD had the reputation of being managed by a well structured hierarchy of professional politicians. It was a massive apparatus that extended from the party executive on the top to the shop leaders and bloc leaders at the bottom. It was the first party to create a great bureaucratic institution for mass control. It in fact became the model subsequently adopted by the Stalinist parties, the fascist and the national socialist and put to use for their own purposes.

The opportunism that developed during this period within the SPD was analyzed in 1915 by Zinoviev in an article titled "The Social Roots of Opportunism." In this article he identified some of the causes of opportunism which included the "camp followers" or the large strata of the electorate recruited from the petty bourgeoisie. This factor was of such importance that "Social Democracy itself became a camp follower of the camp followers." In addition to the petty bourgeois electorate there was the great labor bureaucracy cited by Zinoviev. It is well known how large the bureaucracy had become. By 1914 there were more than 4000 paid officials in the SPD. "...all power in the party and trade unions accumulated in the hands of this upper 4000. The whole

business depends upon them. They hold in their hands the whole powerful apparatus of the press, of the organization, the mutual-aid societies, the entire electoral apparatus and so on."

"The poisonous weed of labor bureaucracy grew in the soil of the 'peaceful' epoch, not because of, but despite the democratic organization. Only opportunism - a form of expression corresponding to that period - and not the democratic organizational principle, has suffered bankruptcy." Zinoviev concludes his analysis with a clear and unequivocal statement: "The crisis of the world war has proved that the official German Social Democracy is not only not revolutionary but is directly counter-revolutionary."

What was clear to revolutionaries 70 years ago in the heat of the struggle has been forgotten by the ICC today. The ICC of course calls this lapse of memory and re-interpretation a "deepening of the question." This "deepening" is the discovery that "official Social Democracy" no longer means organized Social Democracy but rather the officials of Social Democracy or those 4000 bureaucrats! Without this slight of hand the whole argument of the ICC falls apart. Rather than judge the SPD on the basis of its objective social function the ICC argues that as long as there were revolutionaries within the formal structure of the SPD who believed the SPD could be saved it was de facto still a revolutionary organ.

The ICC makes use of a previous resolution to prove their point, which states, that coherent revolutionary groups - like Spartacus - cannot emerge from bourgeois organizations. This resolution (On Proletarian Political Groups) was intended for organizations that have long since passed into the bourgeois camp like the Stalinists. It was never meant to be applied to the SPD after the betrayal of 1914. The SPD had a well defined left wing defending clear revolutionary positions long before the First World War. The left lost their struggle within the SPD as the war hysteria and the opportunist domination of the Party rolled over them like a tidal wave. Remaining within the Party was more a result of the confusion of the events than a clear program for action.

The ICC seems to be losing its taste for Marxism as it replaces clear historical analysis with formal logic in its search for contradictions among its numerous resolutions.

The real issue here is that the ICC has now "logically" opened the door wide to a redefinition of the class nature of all organizations. If the SPD as an organization can be separated from the "betrayal" of its opportunist leadership and its counter-revolutionary function then why not radical unionist organizations? Will the ICC really be capable of making a clear evaluation of the class nature of emerging organizations in the coming period?

Until now it has always been the position of the ICC that it was the structure of an organization and the objective role played in decadent capitalism that determined its class nature and not the "sellout

leaders" or the sociological status of its membership. Yet, suddenly we hear a howl of horror at the implication that Luxemburg, Liebknecht and thousands of revolutionary workers were counter-revolutionary if they remained in the SPD after 1914. For the ICC either the SPD was revolutionary at this time or its entire membership down to the last individual was an agent of the German state. If this simplistic vision of reality was not so tragic it would be laughable.

The presence of revolutionaries in an organization does not make an organization revolutionary any more than membership in a bourgeois organization makes millions of union members counter-revolutionary. The revolutionaries in the SPD knew that a split was inevitable. The question for them was how best to split with the greatest gain for the revolutionary movement.

In an article written in 1916 by K. Radek titled "Unity or Split" a clear understanding of the revolutionary crisis is put forward. "...the labor aristocracy and the bureaucracy try to reach their goals in alliance with the bourgeoisie. Before the war we already knew that this policy was incompatible with socialism. But, we thought it resulted merely from the illusions of the leaders and that it would fade away under pressure of heightening class contradictions. Experience has shown that we were wrong. First it was not just the policy of the leadership. It was backed by a body of workers who entirely shared their leaders' goals." (my emphasis)

Radek was not accusing the working class of being bourgeois, he was acknowledging that the so called betrayal of the opportunist leaders was more than official treachery. 1914 was made possible by a long period of preparation within the working class as a whole and in the SPD in particular. It was the growth of the organization and its bureaucracy, its investment in the state apparatus and the penetration of the petit-bourgeois elements during the pre-revolutionary period that rendered the whole organization incapable of carrying out its revolutionary task. It was not necessarily the conscious intention of the organization to mobilize the proletariat for imperialist war but any organization must above all else defend its own existence. The existence of the SPD by 1914 was inseparable from its identification with the state and the power it had gained within it. To attack the state in its "hour of need" was to attack itself for what it had primarily become: a powerful organizational force within the state.

The SPD made its Reichstag declaration because it knew it could. It did not betray behind closed doors. It proclaimed before the whole proletariat "we will not desert our fatherland" and the proletariat responded "and neither shall we." As the consciousness of the proletariat began to understand the objective developments of capitalism -the significance of imperialism, the open revolutionary crisis, in short, the meaning of decadence- the centrists within the SPD began to move to the left, not because they knew they could but because they knew they must. Failure to move to the left would mean losing any influence over the masses. For

the ICC this left-ward drift within the SPD and later the USPD is proof that Social Democracy was still proletarian after 1914. It is proof that it was only the leaders that betrayed. It is proof that the party, openly led by opportunists with thousands of party bureaucrats in control of the press and all of the party organizations and in the final instance with the armed force of the state behind it, a state that it had served loyally, still might have been conquered by the revolutionary fraction. It is proof that revolutionaries were correct to remain within the party. But, this left drift within the SPD was not due to the small voice of Spartacus but rather the tide-like movements of mass consciousness to the left. The whole *raison d'etre* of the SPD at this point was to control this consciousness and maintaining a left wing within itself was an essential feature of this control.

1914 put new conditions before the proletariat and at the same time demanded a revolutionary leap in consciousness. This leap in consciousness was not being formulated in the heads of revolutionaries but rather in the streets by the whole class. It was in fact the revolutionaries inability to recognize clearly the changed circumstances that demanded radically new tactics for the class struggle and their unwillingness to break from the old conceptions of struggle that contributed to the defeat of the revolution.

Luxemburg understood the bankruptcy of the SPD "corpse" but did not understand the organizational question that was posing itself in a decisive way at the center of the struggle. She was unable to conceive of revolutionary activity outside of the mass organization of the SPD. She suffered from a kind of fetishism of the formal organization. Her tragic dictum that "even the worst party is always better than no party" was to slow the development of a clear revolutionary pole and cost her her life.

But, in spite of this weakness Luxemburg, Lenin and many others were clear on the class nature of the SPD. Despite the ICC attempt to reread history the revolutionaries of the past did not make a distinction between official Social Democracy and the officials of social democracy. In Lenin's reply to the Junius Pamphlet (1916) he makes this quite clear. "Junius's pamphlet has undoubtedly played and will continue to play an important role in the struggle against the ex-Social-Democratic Party of Germany, which has deserted to the bourgeoisie and the Junkers, and we extend our hearty greeting to the author." Is this not clear to the ICC? "Ex-Social-Democratic" means the whole of organized Social Democracy which is distinct from the social democratic movement. This is the same distinction we make between the Communist parties and the communist movement.

The "betrayal" of 1914 did not mark the beginning of a long period of opportunist degeneration as the ICC now asserts. It was the unmasking of an evolution that had been in progress for decades. It was the logical consequence of the historical passage into decadence for a party that had been absorbed into the state apparatus whose bureaucratic

machinery was wholly dominated by petit-bourgeois influences.

"The War of 1914 killed the Second International, disclosing that the working masses, though welded together, were dominated by parties which had become transformed into subsidiary organs of the bourgeois state! This applies not only to the social patriots who today have gone over openly to the camp of the bourgeoisie, who have become their favorite agents and most reliable hangmen of the working class: it also applies to the amorphous, unstable socialist center..." (Manifesto of the Third International 1919)

The starting point for a Marxist evaluation of the new "political practice" begins with an objective look at the overall role played by the organization in the class struggle. In the case of the SPD one must ask: Is it acting as a pole of clarification for the proletariat in its revolutionary crisis or a source of confusion? Is it acting as a catalyst to mobilize the proletariat in its historic struggle against the war or is it acting as a block to this struggle? In its intervention is it objectively serving to push forward the self-conscious political activity demanded by the opening of the new historic period or is it diverting these struggles onto the terrain of bourgeois forms of struggle? Any serious analysis can only condemn the SPD after 1914 on all counts.

But, the ICC insists that there were still revolutionary voices fighting within the organization and indeed there were. These voices of the revolution were however, not being put forward from the official organs of the SPD. From the pages of "Vorwärts" one was likely to read: "Hats off to the heroes who have fallen for the fatherland!... I wish you all the unshakeable will to hold out until victory!" (Scheidemann 1915) In short, the counter-revolution was in complete control of the whole official apparatus of the SPD. The only revolutionary proclamations to be heard were from the few mavericks in parliament -Leibknecht and Rühle- or the clandestine press of "Die Internationale" and "Sparticusbriefe."

The ICC feels uncomfortable with this objective analysis and has attempted to introduce a new analytical "method." It has devised a kind of revolutionary balance scale. It puts all of the revolutionaries on one pan, the opportunists on the other and watches as the centrists teeter back and forth. This new method, where the intentions of individuals has been elevated to the rank of prime historical force, clearly introduces an anti-Marxist subjectivism.

This new method has led the ICC through some very difficult and confusing discussions on what it means to pass into the counter-revolution as an organization. Since objective political positions alone no longer serve that purpose the ICC has taken a great leap backward.

What then does it mean for a once revolutionary organization to be integrated into the state apparatus? For the ICC there are two criterion which must both be present. On the one hand the organization must join the juridical apparatus of the state itself and on the other there must be no remaining

possibility of revolutionary tendencies emerging from the organization.

This schematic formulation may sound quite plausible at first glance but it presents an insoluble dilemma for revolutionaries who might find themselves within such questionable organizations.

If the organization joins the state revolutionaries must wait until the last expulsions have occurred before they mount an all out attack against the class nature of the organization as in the case of the SPD. If the mass expulsions occur before joining the formal state apparatus, as within the Stalinist parties, revolutionaries must again wait until the organization begins to butcher the proletariat in its war efforts. In either case it is logically impossible to advocate a split from such an organization since one's presence within it maintains its revolutionary character. Such delays in the heat of the class struggle can be nothing less than catastrophic.

"Internationalism", the U.S. section of the ICC, quite unashamedly scoffs at the idea of objectivity in political analysis. "By integration into the state apparatus we mean that the parties in question assumed the role of politically and ideologically controlling the working class in a reliable and conscious manner... to limit the criterion for integration to a consideration of 'objectively' serving the interest of the bourgeoisie, would mean that any proletarian group which made political errors (which objectively serve the bourgeoisie) would be counter-revolutionary which would be absurd. The element of consciously controlling the proletariat for the bourgeoisie must be present." (Resolution On Centrism and the Crossings of the CPs and SPs - Internationalism, ICC)

Ignoring the pointless statement about "any political errors" which demonstrates a complete incomprehension of the historical development of the communist program, if we follow this framework then the ICC must begin to engage in some absurd discussions about when the bourgeoisie is conscious about what it is objectively doing! As interesting as such discussions might be it serves no purpose but to spread confusion. The Marxist method rejects this line of analysis outright.

"And as in private life one differentiates between what a man thinks and says of himself and what he really is and does, so in historical struggles one must distinguish still more the phrases and fancies of parties from their real organism and their real interests, their conception of themselves, from their reality." (The Eighteenth Brumaire, Marx)

But, "Internationalism" continues undaunted. In addition to the self-consciousness of the leadership there is "the dynamic consideration of the potential for the organization in question to continue to secrete revolutionary fractions which struggle to resist the degeneration of the organization and its integration into the state apparatus." (ibid)

Nevermind the almost mystical difficulty of determining the "potential" of an organization to secrete revolutionary

fractions if it is not based on objective political criteria. If this position emerges from the idea that Spartacus or the Italian Left Fraction were these secretions it is wrong. The implication here is that the SPD or the Stalinist CPs secreted revolutionary fractions in the same sense that the proletariat secretes revolutionary minorities. The two processes are the exact opposite. Revolutionaries are not secreted by degenerating organs. They are secreted by the class struggle and may find themselves within degenerating or degenerated organizations as was the case with both Spartacus and the Italian Left.

A debate that began for the ICC with a re-evaluation of the class nature of Social Democracy naturally extended to include the parties of the Third International. The ICC has now discovered that there exists some centrist ground between the revolutionary principle of internationalism and counter-revolutionary nationalism. When the Third International abandoned Internationalism in 1927 to adopt the principle of "socialism in one country" the ICC calls it a victory for "centrism." In the "real world" of the ICC there are no black and white issues for the proletariat but infinite shades of grey between all extremes.

But, internationalism is a black and white issue for the proletariat. There can be no ambiguity on this point. The slaughterhouse of two world wars and hundreds of local wars this century demonstrates this for all with eyes to see. Internationalism is the most basic and important principle that guides the revolutionary movement.

So, how is it that the ICC finds revolutionary potential in the parties of the Third International after 1927-28? Once again they resort to formal logic. They begin with an axiom borrowed from BILAN of the Italian Left in 1933: "the internationals disappear and the parties betray."

If the International disappeared one can only wonder where it went. Did the gentlemen in control stop work and go home? Did it vanish because our idea of it changed? Did the organization sever its connections with the national parties after 1927? Were the national parties now free to pursue an independent "revolutionary" course?

The truth is that the Third International had a real existence after 1927. What the ICC really means but fails to acknowledge is that the class character of the Third International changed. So far Marxist have failed to discover organizations that are suspended in air above class interest.

The ICC makes a false identity between the Second and Third Internationals. The Third International was not the Second International. With the outbreak of the War in 1914 the Second International did in fact cease to exist in any respect except the idea. It conducted no meetings, had no organizational links with the national parties beyond formalities and had virtually no political influence over the national parties for the duration of the War. The same can hardly be said for the Third International.

The Third International was an

organization of a wholly different character than that of the Second. It was organized not as a federation of national parties, as was the Second International, but was a unified international organization with national sections. This new organizational form corresponded to the new epoch opened by the permanent crisis in capitalism, i.e. the internationalization of capital, imperialism and the global nature of the revolutionary struggle.

It was understood by Lenin and the founders of the Third International that the international character of the organization not only was a reflection of the epoch but also a necessary condition to safeguard the revolutionary nature of the national sections.

In fact, it was this idea that was the justification for allowing the opportunist and centrist elements into the International. As long as the International was a unified international organization dominated by a revolutionary proletariat the opportunists could and would be absorbed, neutralized and ultimately destroyed. This tactic proved to be an echo of the similar mistake made by revolutionaries in the Second International who believed the class struggle would sweep away the opportunist influence.

Even if the revolutionary tide did not begin to recede during this period and the opportunist elements were not thrust into an ascendancy, this tactic would still be a mistake. It demonstrates the fact that the leading elements in the Third International, while correct in their assessment of the political degeneration of the Second International, were unable to analyze the deeper causes of its bankruptcy. They were, in short, to reintroduce the same bourgeois conception of organization that dominated the structure of the Second International which was in large part responsible for its eventual betrayal.

It appears that the ICC is in the process of abandoning a whole array of sound positions that precisely address the deeper causes of the collapse of the Second International. The ICC up until now has always defended the correct position that 1914 was the historic watershed where the proletariat had to take up a fundamentally new political practice. The mass organizations of Social Democracy, parliamentarism, unionism, frontism, mutual aid societies etc. were no longer compatible with the immediate needs and possibilities of the class struggle. The old positions of Social Democracy were based on an erroneous understanding of the development of class consciousness that could have no validity in the decadent epoch of capitalism.

The mistaken conception that class consciousness and Marxism develop from an objective scientific analysis of capitalism was put into practice by the Second International and codified by Kautsky and Lenin. For the leaders of Social Democracy it was not possible and thus not necessary that the masses in the party organizations have a more or less homogeneous and revolutionary consciousness. What was important was to have a critical mass of proletarians mobilized with which to counter



the power of the state.

This mistaken view had only an embryonic importance during the ascendancy of capitalism but was to have a primordial importance when the objective conditions opened the possibility and the necessity of revolution.

For Marxist an objective scientific study of capitalism cannot develop class consciousness. Class consciousness presupposes the political praxis of the class in its reproduction of society and itself. The revolutionary organization does not possess a consciousness that is different from the what class has historically achieved. Nor does it possess a consciousness that is more advanced than this historical achievement. The revolutionary organization synthesizes a consciousness that already exists in the class and frames it theoretically. In this sense the political organization and revolutionary theory act as a mediator between the class and its potential consciousness. Put simply it is the task of the revolutionary organization to link the immediate experience of the class to the totality of its social existence and historical goal. The revolutionary organization cannot lead the class to consciousness like a mule to water.

The Third International, after some struggle, particularly with the KAPD, adopted the same "scientism" that dominated the Second International. The implications for the structure of the revolutionary organization were profound. The Third International completely rejected the new political practice -both organizationally and programatically- demanded by the new period. The ICC should not be extending the temporal parameters of its revolutionary character but only be surprised that the Third International, after adopting all of the political positions that the ICC once said were incompatible with the period of decadence, maintained a revolutionary character for as long as it did.

But, let us be perfectly clear on the relationship between the Executive Committee (E.C.) of the Third International and the national parties and the domination of the Bolsheviks over the whole International.

At the Second Congress of the International the Bolsheviks had over 40% of the voting delegates, far out of proportion when compared to other national sections like the Italian who had only three voting delegates. The Bolsheviks never relinquished this domination and if anything were able to constantly strengthen it through their domination of the E.C..

Point 15 of the "Twenty One Conditions" states: "The program of every party that belongs to the Communist International must be ratified by the next congress of the International or by the E.C.."

Point 16 states: "All decisions of the E.C. are binding on all affiliated parties."

While these are necessary measures of an international revolutionary organization they can be used against the revolutionary movement when the organization is making compromises with opportunism and the revolutionary tide is ebbing. The assurance

of Bolshevik domination over the national parties was strengthened still further when the policy after the Third Congress was changed so that all national parties were henceforth to organize their congresses after the international congress, effectively, though perhaps gradually, creating rubber stamps out of the national party congresses.

Even though the International "disappeared" in 1927 its "spirit" was in complete control of all national parties. This phantom was able to expel militants and whole fractions, with little or no opposition. It was able to alter party programs and make its alterations binding on all members or face expulsion. In short, this was some ghost!

The ICC will patiently explain that they do not literally mean "disappear." They mean that it ceased to be an organ of the proletariat. Maybe they will acknowledge that it became an organ of the bourgeoisie? Once again we have the bourgeoisie in control of the revolutionary organization. In the era of state capitalism does this not mean that the state itself is in control of the revolutionary organization?

The ICC can only respond that a national party can only be absorbed into its own national state. The ICC is conspicuously silent on the relationship between this phenomenon and its analysis of state capitalism in the era of decadence. It could only expose the weakness of its analysis. The ICC would have to acknowledge that it is sliding into the vulgar identification of the state apparatus with only its juridical form.

In the ascendant epoch of capitalism the state could in fact be more or less identified with its juridical expression. This is why the proletariat could participate in the functioning of the state through reform struggles and still retain its autonomy. In decadence the state is no longer reflected exclusively through its formal apparatus. The change in the objective conditions in the decadent period of imperialist war and revolutions has posed for the proletariat the possibility and the need for revolution, not in the theoretical sense, but in the practical sense.

Therefore, there has occurred for the whole proletariat a leap in consciousness in its historical development. It has become clear that the proletariat as a social force is no longer a fledgling class that can be overpowered by the organized repression of the state alone. It must be attacked precisely at that point which makes the proletariat actively revolutionary: its consciousness. Organizations need no longer have any direct connection with the state. The criterion must also be its objective role in developing or destroying the consciousness of the proletariat.

This is why we must say that, even though the national CPS after 1927 were not directly representatives of the Russian state apparatus their objective function within every nation was to destroy revolutionary consciousness and thus they had become part of the state capitalist apparatus.

The errors committed by the ICC in the

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# OUR POSITIONS

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## ACTIVITY OF THE FRACTION

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

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

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

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