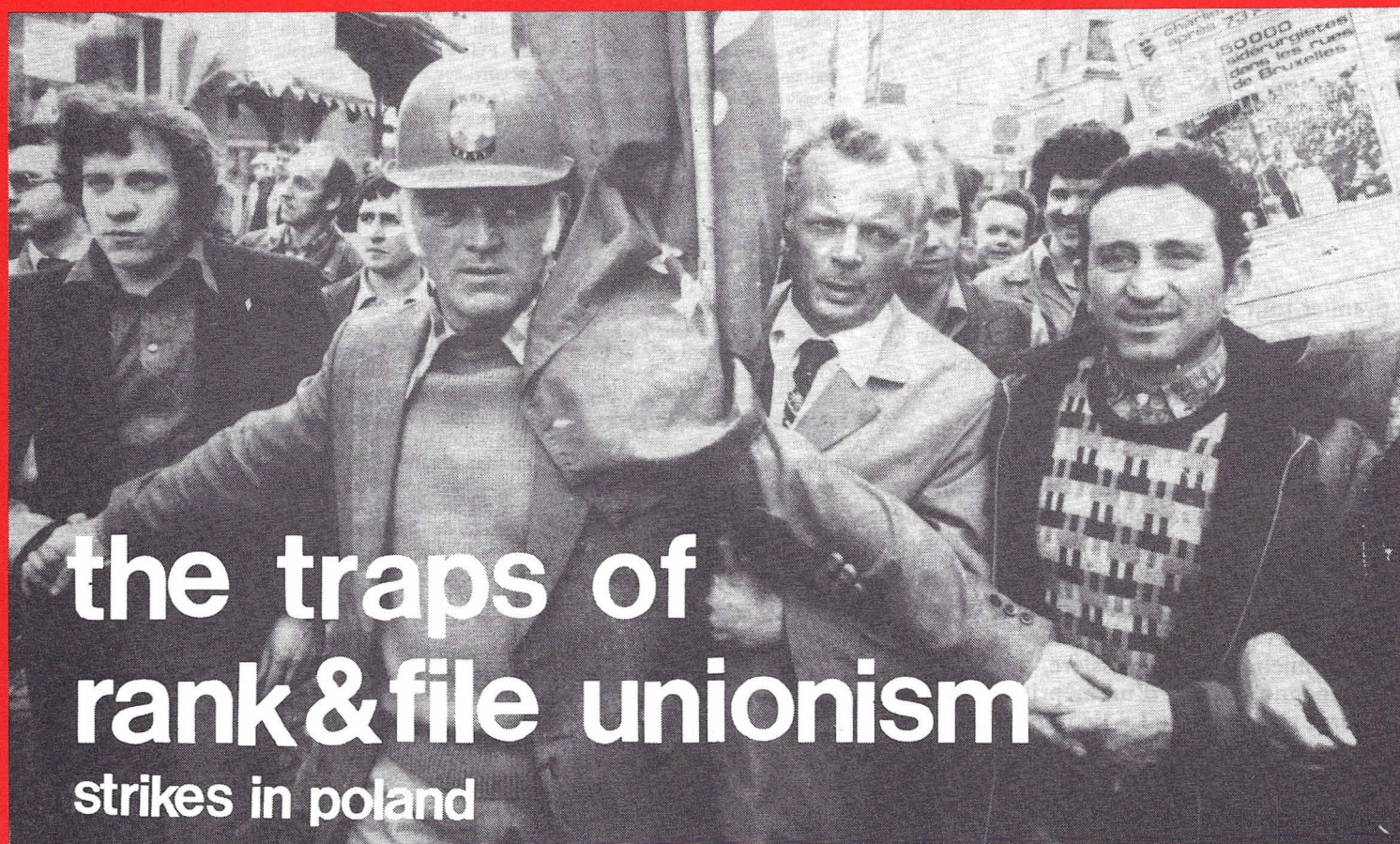


**EXTERNAL
FRACTION OF THE
INTERNATIONAL
COMMUNIST
CURRENT**

INTERNATIONALIST PERSPECTIVE



**the traps of
rank & file unionism**
strikes in poland

PALESTINE: "MARTYRS" FOR A NATIONALIST ORGY

"BILAN" ON THE PERIOD OF TRANSITION

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WORKERS STRUGGLES INTERNATIONALLY

POLAND ONCE AGAIN



INTRODUCTION

Since the following article was written, a new strike wave has reached Poland. These recent events have confirmed the analysis in the article: the economic situation has continued to deteriorate, sparking a new outburst of combativity in the class, drawing in sectors which had stayed on the sidelines in the spring, such as the Silesian miners and the dockers and transportworkers of Szczecin. But above all, they further clarified the role of the catholic church and Solidarnosc as part of the state, as barriers against the development of the workers' struggle and consciousness.

As the article explains, Solidarnosc fulfills this task best in semi-illegality. It needs this status to derail the struggle towards the innocuous goal of its own legalisation. Once again, it has been able to do so. But the cracks in its mystificatory hold over the workers are widening. Wałęsa's call to get back to work provoked hooting and jeering among the workers. These scenes stand in sharp contrast to the end of the strike in August 1980, when the promise of Solidarnosc's legalization was greeted with euphoria.

The recent strikes created a dilemma for the Polish state.

To halt their development it could either resort to massive repression or give some semblance of a 'concession' to the workers. What it worried about, in both cases, was the impact on the consciousness of the workers. It finally opted for the second

choice as the lesser of 2 evils. It did so with great reluctance, because by giving Solidarnosc a more 'legal' role in the state's affairs, it also makes it more openly a partner in the imposition of austerity, and thereby undermines its ideological hold over the workers in the future struggles, which are bound to erupt.

In this way, the recent events further amplified the analysis in the following article of the situation of Poland as an expression of the balance of forces between the classes on an international scale.

The capitalist world economy is doomed. No defensive workers' struggle, no matter how large or combative, can prevent it from dragging the workers' living conditions down with it. Because the source of its crisis is not a lack of efficiency in production but the system of production itself - the fact that the productive forces can no longer be developed within the constraints of a world economic system based on production for profit - no reform, no change of government, no restructuring plans, no wage gains or wage concessions can stop it from creating ever more misery. As reality makes this point incessantly clearer and it slowly starts to sink in to the workers' consciousness, the question of the goal of the struggle, what perspective it offers, comes more and more to the forefront. Nowhere could this be seen more clearly recently than in the strike wave that rocked Poland this Spring.

It says something about the present period that the workers in Poland, less than seven years after suffering a military crackdown of their struggles and a barrage of repression, are once again in the forefront of the class struggle. In this period, defeats are bitter lessons for the workers but lessons nevertheless. The workers learn something while they recover. It doesn't break their spirits, it doesn't even open the gates to ever more demoralisation, as long as the context is one of the whole class resisting, in all parts of the world. In such a context, younger workers join the ranks and learn something from

their elders, while rekindling their will to stand up and fight.

Of course, the recent movement in Poland did not reach the strength, the extension and unity of the summer of 1980. But neither did it have so many illusions as eight years ago. In 1980, there was an atmosphere of euphoria, not only because of the joy of solidarity, of a proletariat flexing its muscle and discovering the force of its unity, but also because of illusions about the immediate results that the strike would have in improving its living standards, illusions about the difference Solidarnosc would make.

Today, there is a much more sober look at reality. Workers in Poland did not want to go through a repeat of the events of 1980-81. They have learned lessons such as the 'victory' of the Gdansk accord not being a victory at all: the attack on their living conditions continued and even intensified and, in the struggle against it, Solidarnosc often proved to be the first obstacle. The workers in Poland knew from firsthand experience that it is not enough to spread the struggle, nor even to have massive self-organisation: all this cannot prevent a worsening of conditions. But the step from realising this, to realising that therefore the struggle must abolish the existing system, that workers must not only take their struggle into their own hands, but also society as a whole; that step is an enormous one. Even more so because it is clearer than ever - and espec-

ally in a country like Poland - that this is impossible on a national scale, that such a task can only be accomplished by a massive, international movement.

The very size of this task is intimidating, makes workers recoil and look to pillars of the existing order for support and protection. (As they did in Poland, protecting the fences of occupied plants against the riot police with pictures of the Pope and the Black Madonna, welcoming support of church leaders and unions who are eager to give it in exchange for acceptance of their leadership.) It makes many workers hesitant to jump into a struggle which they would have eagerly joined a few years earlier. Not because they are paralysed by fear, but because they are confused on the purpose, on where the struggle can lead. Even though it would have been better to have actively participated in the struggle despite this confusion (since the working class's own perspective needs the self-confidence, the climate of collective participation and discussion of a massive struggle, to come out of the fog) still this attitude is not one of demoralisation. In the West, we see the same, seemingly contradictory phenomenon: an erosion of illusions in the economic recovery, in the 'alternatives' of the left and the unions, can go hand in hand with a reticence to fight. It's the same confusion on what to fight for that holds workers back. And yet, it is in the struggle itself that the workers must grope for a positive answer.

Does the realisation that a defensive struggle cannot prevent a worsening of conditions lead to an abandonment of the struggle? If that were the case, the revolutionary struggle would be hopeless. It would mean that the working class had an innate incapacity to take its fate into its hands when history called upon it to do so. The working class cannot be 'tricked' into making its revolution - neither by the right leadership, as Bordighists dream, nor by the blind mechanics of history, as councilists hope. It has to undertake this task with eyes wide open, conscious of its possibility - its own capacity for unity and self-organisation - and its necessity - the impossibility to defend itself in any other way. The ICC, which claims to be neither Bordighist nor councilist (but in fact increasingly borrows from both) might very well agree with the above thought. Yet in practice, its intervention prevents the realisation of the necessity of revolution by hiding the incapacity of a defensive struggle to halt the worsening of conditions with its propaganda around the slogan "The struggle pays!" (in an immediate sense). (See, for example, World Revolution 100, p 1: "Workers! Mobilise to defend jobs and living standards! It's possible!") The ICC is afraid that, when the workers realise it is not possible, they will not mobilise at all. But what's behind this is the ICC's own lack of confidence that the revolution is possible, that it can become the workers' conscious goal and so they offer the false perspective of immediate gains and thereby strengthen illusions instead of destroying them. (And, an integral part of that logic,

is their Bordighist seeking of 'direction' and 'immediate impact' on the struggle.)

Fortunately, reality doesn't confirm this view, which is both pessimistic and utopian. Even when they become aware of the fruitlessness of the struggle in terms of immediate material gains and are still without a clear perspective for the struggle that draws the consequences of this, workers do not necessarily simply give up. As a striker in Nowa Huta answered to a New York Times reporter: "Yes, we know inflation will eat our wage gains away, but we are not cattle that can be led by the nose."

This self-awareness, this self-respect - as workers and as humans - is very real (even if in the bourgeois media workers are often portrayed as cattle, or as greedy pigs). In the coming period, as more and more illusions fall away, and before the clear emergence of the working class' own perspective for society, it will provide an important basis for the development of the struggle, in which that perspective can take form.

The capitalist class must constantly try to breathe new life into the workers' illusions with tales of recovery, of lights twinkling at the end of the tunnel, of new prosperity through privatisation, new technology or perestroika. But in Poland, it has become next to impossible for the capitalist class to hide its utter bankruptcy. The hope that eight years ago still existed has now completely evaporated. But that doesn't mean that the Polish state was without an ideological line of defence against the workers' struggle. Precisely the loss of illusions made the role of the ideologues, of the organs of mystification, even more crucial. Seven years ago, the workers' struggle was crushed by military means, but the success of this operation was due to its ideological preparation. It took a long time before the strength and unity of the workers' movement was sufficiently dissolved to guarantee the outcome of the crackdown. For more than a year, Walesa and his men had to run around the country, extinguishing fires of struggle, limiting strike demands to local issues, focussing anger on easily replaceable individuals, derailing the workers' aspirations for a broader goal through demands for 'self-management', bourgeois democracy and other political changes on the terrain of the enemy class, smothering the first timid calls for internationalisation of the struggle (c.f. the strikers' slogan: Hunger of the world, unite!) with a deluge of nationalism.

That it took so long had a lot to do not only with the tremendous initial strength of the movement, but also with the lack of development of the ideological buffers, a weakness intrinsic to the limitations of the political apparatus of Eastern bloc capitalism.

Within those limits, however, the ideological buffers in Poland have become more sophisticated than they were eight and seven years ago. The collaboration between the different, complementary players in the capitalist class game has become a lot smoother.

The workers were facing the government with its repressive forces, the politburo with its 'bad cop' hardliners and its 'good cop' reformers; the Church, seemingly outside the state and yet more than ever consulted and respected by it, always ready to 'understand' the workers and to urge them to moderate and calm down; the refurbished official union, which has incorporated a large part of Solidarnosc's apparatus and which is given considerably more leeway to act 'independently' from the state in order to keep a control over the workers. To that must be added the giant shadow of the Kremlin, not only with its tanks at the border but now also with its vast propaganda campaign that something is changing for the better, that Gorbachev offers new hope (and that the strikes in Poland were 'provoked by hardliners' to cause trouble for Gorbachev); and the chorus of western media, in particular the no longer jammed 'Voice of America' and 'Radio Liberty' whose message was summed up in a New York Times editorial (4 May): "The party needs to acknowledge the legitimacy of the workers' movement (i.e. Solidarnosc); in turn workers need to moderate their economic demands and accept material sacrifice".

But the 'jewel in the crown' of capitalism's line of defense in Poland was once again the 'illegal' union Solidarnosc. after it had laid the groundwork for the military crackdown, Solidarnosc was officially disbanded. Its *raison d'être*, like that of any other union, had been to protect the nationaleconomy, i.e., national capital, from the workers' anger. Therefore, the only perspective it could offer the workers was one of political change within the framework of the Polish capitalist state. And when there was no urgent threat from the class struggle to be derailed by such a perspective, there was no need for the Polish state to give it official recognition. the more so because that could be very difficult and destabilizing, given the rigid political structure of the Eastern bloc, whose cohesion -- because of its economic inferiority vis a vis the western bloc -- from its inception was based on naked military domination, which left no room for the niceties of bourgeois democratic pluralism. But Solidarnosc was not destroyed. Its leaders were all soon released, its meetings and press conferences *de facto* condoned. In other words, it was kept in reserve in a semi-legal status, waiting for the need to arise -- as it did this Spring.

As soon as the worker's unrest spread, Solidarnosc was allowed to act without restraints: "The work stoppages appear to be spontaneous ... however the central Solidarity leadership, which has operated remarkably openly in recent months, is increasingly seeking to influence events". (N.Y. Times, April 30) It is not difficult to see why the Polish state would welcome Solidarnosc's influence. It invariably appealed to the workers for calm, proclaiming that the time was not ripe to strike; and when a strike was inevitable, it worked feverishly to limit its demands and duration. When a full fledged strike occurred despite

its appeals, and the needs of the struggle cried out for extension, for strikers to go massively to other plants to increase their power and unity, Solidarnosc manoeuvred to keep workers locked up in the plants in a sitdown action, isolated and surrounded by riot police. As we have seen unions doing in Western Europe several times, Solidarnosc appealed for solidarity strikes "of limited duration" only on 9 May, after the movement had peaked, when such an appeal could have little other affect than to bolster the union's 'radical image'.

One of the ways in which Solidarnosc tried to hold back the workers was by creating false hopes that "the system is changing" as a result of Gorbachev's policies of Perestroika and Glasnost, policies which are aimed at intensifying workers' exploitation while at the same time hiding it better (see the article on 'reforms' in the Eastern bloc in IP7). As Walesa cried out to the strikers in Gdansk: "Our tragedy was that Brezhnev lived two years too long" and his adviser Geremek added: "Anarchy in Poland could be the coup de grace for Gorbachev".

But Solidarnosc's main weapon to derail the struggle was its own 'illegal' status. It's difficult to see what perspective it could have used for that purpose if it had been officially legal to start with. It has nothing to offer to the workers. Its programme, in essence, is the same as the government's. As Adam Michnick said in an interview with 'Liberation' (2 May): "The project of economic reform [of the government] contains numerous elements of Solidarnosc's programme. But one important element is missing: society's identity. The Poles will not support any reform which does not guarantee their identity. And their identity is Solidarnosc."

Solidarnosc was very much aware that the workers' struggle is in search of its own perspective, a perspective that addresses the totality of their condition. Walesa, while reassuring the government that his aim is "to avoid a bloody revolution", declared to the workers: "We need a new system. Not a capitalist system, a Polish system!" This is sheer emptiness, drenched in nationalism. Solidarnosc needs no lessons on the value of the nationalist poison, when workers are starting to realise the impossibility of solutions in a Polish context.

How effective was this line of defence against the development of the struggle? It's easy enough to answer this question in a general, obvious way: the repressive forces instilled fear, the ideological forces confusion, and the mixture was potent enough to slam the brakes on the development of the movement.

But it's more difficult to give a more precise answer, to spot the cracks in the capitalist class' ideological armour. We are dependent on bourgeois media for information and that information is sometimes sketchy at best. From experiencing strike movements from within or nearby, we know how limited and often deforming are these media reports.

on the workers' struggle. In regard to the struggle in Poland, they put all focus on the words and deeds of the Solidarnosc and its leaders, especially in Gdansk. Where Solidarnosc had less influence, the news was so sparse that it came close to a total blackout.

Still, some things could be seen. A lessening of the Church's direct impact, for instance. Its role was much less visible than in 1980. We can't simply wish away its still sizeable pernicious influence. But it seemed to work best in combination with the riot police: it was when the workers feared repression, as when they were leaving the occupied shipyard in Gdansk, that they carried the religious symbols most visibly as if to seek protection from one part of the existing order against another. It makes you wonder how much impact the Church will still retain when fear is overcome in massive class action.

As for the 'new and improved' official union, its influence seemed to have been very limited. Except for the strike in Bydgoszcz, where it gained control over the spontaneous action, it largely stood on the sidelines. The strike committee of Nowa Huta correctly denounced it as an "instrument of division".

Workers were less clear in seeing through the role of Solidarnosc. Sometimes the most combative workers, aware of the emptiness of promises of wage rises, identified most with the 'illegal' union. This was illustrated in a tragic-comical way in Gdansk where Solidarnosc pleaded to the workers to stop the strike, while workers insisted on continuing for the legalisation of Solidarnosc!

Yet there were also many signs that Solidarnosc was less than effective in making its perspective accepted by the movement. Even the New York Times, a great fan of Solidarnosc, had to acknowledge that "the political demands raised by solidarity, in the first place for its own reinstatement, have met with relatively little popular response". (10 May) There was a lot of tension between Solidarnosc's attempts to limit the demands and the workers' attempts to extend them, as in Nova Huta where workers broadened the goal to wage rises for all wage-earners, of all sectors. Yet, as far as we could see, there were no signs of open confrontation with the basic mystifications of capitalism, nationalism in particular. The struggle did not develop enough for that and, even more important, the struggle outside Poland, in the stronger countries, did not develop enough. Only the dynamic of the international class struggle will clarify the workers' own perspective.

The potential for development of this struggle is real, despite the pessimistic evaluations of the class struggle which organisations like the CWO and the FOR make, staring themselves blind at statistics showing a diminution in number of strikes or even ephemeral events like the electoral success of the 'Front National' in France

(see the article on the revolutionary milieu elsewhere in this issue).

There are struggles in different parts of the world which show a tendency towards growing solidarity in the class. This past winter, for instance, we saw the broadest class movement for many decades in West Germany, with strikes of tens of thousands of steelworkers and miners against impending mass layoffs. The strikers sent mass delegations to other plants calling on them to join the struggle and even going beyond sectoral divisions. The scores of solidarity actions and demonstrations were joined by transportation workers, postal workers and many others. The capitalist line of defence was strikingly similar to that in Poland, with the Church giving its blessing to the workers while preaching 'moderation' and the unions seeking control of the spontaneous action of the workers, dispersing them with pseudo-radical actions like road blocks, derailing the struggle towards "the defence of the region" (just as Solidarnosc uses "the defence of the nation") and, above all, using all possible means to divide them (like telling the miners that solidarity with the steelworkers would undercut their own demands).

Since then, there have been large strike movements in Britain (February - April, when in particular, the health workers strike showed the tendency to active solidarity; see IP 10), in Greece (January), India (January), Portugal (February - March) and South Korea (May - June) amongst others. Even in war-torn Nicaragua the striking construction and car repair workers showed the capacity to act on their own class terrain, despite the courting by the opposition and the Sandinista government's brutal repression.

The reservoir of combativity is there, in the central countries as well as in the periphery. But before the working class' own per-

spective can clarify itself, it may take the onslaught of the rapidly approaching recession to destroy for workers in the West, to the same degree as for workers in Poland, the illusions in the future offered by the existing world order.

In the meantime, the recent struggles in Poland have clarified both the necessity for revolutionary intervention as its content, in Poland as elsewhere. There are those in the revolutionary milieu, especially the Bordighist current, who think it is their task to cry out to the workers, like Walesa: 'if you have an army, I'm at your disposal as a general'. Events in Poland have shown the need for the class to get rid of all generals, to get rid of the bourgeois concept that reduces the workers to followers, to be directed by 'experts'. It is a major obstacle for workers in developing the self-confidence that allows their own perspective to emerge. If they can't take their own struggle fully into their own collective hands they will never develop the capacity - nor see the possibility - of taking the world in their hands.

There are those who, like the ICC, think it is best to avoid the question of the perspective of the struggle, who prefer to hide the enormity of the task by fostering illusions in the immediate economic rewards of the struggle, who talk about the need to extend the struggle and self-organise without saying what for.

The struggle in Poland points to exactly the

opposite need. Revolutionaries must focus their intervention on the need to articulate, on the base of the concrete experience of the workers themselves, the total bankruptcy of the world capitalist system and the capacity of the proletariat, as an international class, to take society's destiny into its hands.

Sander

CHRONOLOGY OF A STRIKE

February: As part of its 'economic reform plan', the Polish government introduces a round of price rises, from 40 to 200% for basic items, increasing the cost of living in the first quarter of '88 by 45%. The measures provoke widespread anger; despite the promise that workers will receive bonuses to offset the price increases.

Early March: Workers hold meetings, make strike threats and hold short work stoppages in various parts of the country to protest against the small size of the bonuses. Solidarnosc leaders are very visible and allowed to operate openly. They caution against striking.

March 4: A bus repair yard in Wroclaw is occupied by strikers. Management promises faster payment of bonuses.

March 9: The CP newsletter Trybuna Ludu denounces "management caving in" to workers' demands around the country, "awarding big wage increases and then raising prices to pay them".

April: Despite a government warning, the trend continues for local management to promise advance bonuses and wage increases to avoid strikes.

April 22: 5,000 steelworkers at Stalowa Wola hold a large protest rally, threatening a strike unless their wage demands are met.

April 25: Workers of municipal transport of city of Bydgoszcz state a wildcat strike, after the transport director calls them "lazy" in local newspaper. They demand a wage increase of 63%. Transport workers in the neighbouring city of Inowroclaw strike in support of the Bydgoszcz workers. The official union recognises the action and negotiates with management which promises to grant the increase demanded.

April 26: Workers at the giant Nowa Huta steelmill strike for a 50% pay raise, double bonuses and the reinstatement of workers laid off after martial law was imposed in 1981. They want the wage raises to be applied for all "industrial workers, health workers, teachers and pensioners. The official union supports the action but is rejected by the strike committee as an "instrument of division".

April 29: The strike spreads to Stalowa Wola, a large machinery and arms plant, and to the steel mill of Bochnia. An attempted lockout at Stalowa Wola fails and the workers occupy the plant which is immediately surrounded by police and para-military forces. The strikers are threatened with layoffs by management and on television. Meanwhile, talks at Nowa Huta collapse, the strike is declared 'illegal', and the plant is surrounded by riot police.

April 30: In Stalowa Wola, management agrees to the wage demands of the strike committees and reinstates dismissed workers. The recognition of the local Solidarnosc chapter and reinstatement of Solidarnosc activists is refused. The strike ends.

May 1: Demonstrations in 15 cities in support of the workers' demands. Fights break out, many are wounded on both sides. Hundreds are arrested in Warschau alone. In Gdansk, Walesa appeals for a 'Day of Action' in solidarity with the strikers, hastening to add that he doesn't mean strikes.

May 2: Despite Walesa's appeal, the Lenin shipyard in Gdansk joins the strike. The yard is occupied, a strike committee is formed. The workers demand a 50 - 60% pay rise, no reprisals, recognition of Solidarnosc, the return of sacked Solidarnosc activists, and freedom for political prisoners. A strike also breaks out at the Dolmel plant near Wroclaw. It ends when management promises to grant all wage demands.

May 4: More strikes break out, in the coalmines of Lubin and coppermines in Polkowice (Silesia). Both the Politburo and the catholic bishops issue statements proclaiming they understand the workers. The bishops name five mediators. Walesa appeals to strikers in shipyards to limit their demands to Gdansk alone.

May 5: At 2 a.m., just a few hours after promises for new negotiations had been made to the strike committee, riot police storm the Nowa Huta mill and drive out the strikers. 32 strikers are injured, 32 are arrested. Upon hearing of the crackdown, bus and streetcar workers in Szczecin and Police and shipyard workers in Gdynia stage protests and work stoppages.

May 6: Despite the crackdown, about 10,000 workers at Nova Huta (of a workforce of 32,000) continue to strike, demanding the release of all workers arrested. The riot police tighten the blockade around the shipyard in Gdansk, telephone lines are cut, no food is allowed to pass through.

May 7: Negotiations start at Gdansk. Management offers 40% raise, no reprisals, but refuses the so-called political demands.

May 8: Solidarnosc leaders accept the compromise but strikers reject it, despite plea by Walesa.

May 9: Solidarnosc appeals for 'strikes of limited duration' in solidarity with Gdansk. A brief strike erupts in the Ursus tractor plant near Warschau, but elsewhere all seems quiet.

May 10: After a day of intense negotiations mediated by church leaders and an emotional appeal by Walesa, the strikers leave the shipyard hungry and exhausted.

RIOTS IN PALESTINE

«martyrs» for a nationalist orgy

The Israeli state and society have been convulsed by the uprising in the occupied territories on the West Bank and the Gaza Strip that began last December. The uprising and the bloody repression unleashed by the Israeli state have mounted in intensity, accelerating a subtle, but important, reorientation in the policy of American imperialism in the Middle East -- one that will have important consequences for the imperialist balance of power in that vital region.

The uprising on the West Bank and the Gaza Strip began spontaneously, and was clearly a response of the Arab population to the incredible harshness, brutality, and unprecedented length of the Israeli occupation. However, the uprising has been no less clearly -- and this from its very inception -- a nationalist uprising, a partisan war (though one fought largely with stones and molotov cocktails rather than bullets and shells, and more with a view to affecting US policy than killing Israeli soldiers). The aim of this uprising from the moment that coherent political objectives arose has been the creation of a Palestinian national entity. It is only on the basis of this indisputable fact that revolutionary Marxists can adopt a principled position on this latest eruption in the Middle East. Inasmuch as the nation-state is irretrievably wedded to capitalism as a social formation, any struggle that is national can only serve the interests of capital and is reactionary in nature in the decadent phase of the capitalist mode of production.

While the PLO did not initiate the uprising, which, in fact, seems to have taken it completely by surprise, it did very quickly seize control and direction of it. This can be seen in the order -- emanating from the late Abdul Jihad's headquarters in Tunis -- not to use firearms or kill Israeli's lest the Arabs lose the struggle for public opinion and support in the West which the brutality of the Israeli's and a large number of youthful Arab martyrs was yielding. The PLO has, therefore, fastened itself onto what began as a spontaneous nationalist uprising, and assumed the leadership of it. Such an outcome can hardly be surprising. When a popular resistance to military occupation assumes the form of a national struggle, it objectively situates itself irrevocably on the political terrain of capitalism; such a struggle, however popular it is and however spontaneously it began, can only be fought under the leadership and control of a faction of capital or a capitalist proto-state. In that sense, one or another faction of the PLO is, under the prevailing conditions, the only conceivable General Staff for this Palestinian national struggle.

To the nationalist character of this uprising, which is basic to its very structure, and to the political direction of the PLO, which now dominates it, must be added the tragedy of the increasingly xenophobic and racist passions inflamed in both the Jewish and Arab communities, xenophobic passions from which the working class -- Arab and Jewish -- has unfortunately not been immune. In the occupied territories, the chant of Arab demonstrators is more and more frequently "the Jews are our dogs", while the attitude of Jews -- not merely settlers in the West Bank, but masses of workers in Israel, particularly those whose families were originally forced out of Arab lands, the victims of earlier national struggles, not unlike the Palestinian victims of the Jewish national struggle -- is increasingly one of calling for mass expulsions of Arabs from the territories and the shooting of demonstrators, i.e. unrestrained state terror. This ideological polarization and its harvest of ethno-religious hatred constitutes a real victory for both the Israeli state and the Palestinian proto-state, an unmistakable triumph for capitalism. The other side of the coin of this veritable orgy of nationalism in the ranks of both the Jewish and Arab populations is the temporary extinction of any realistic perspective for proletarian class struggle and the unity of Arab and Jewish workers which is its key. Capitalism has thrust Arab and Jew together in the same enterprise, often putting Arabic speaking "Oriental" Jewish worker on the same job as Arab worker from the occupied territories. Nationalist ideology is absolutely essential if the reign of capital is to be perpetuated under such conditions. And just as surely, the capacity of the various factions of the capitalist class to thrive is strictly dependent on their success in stoking the fires of ethno-religious hate. In that sense, it is vital that Marxist revolutionaries recognize, and stress in their interventions, the tragic dimension of the events unfolding in the geographical entity called Palestine, the barbarism to which the masses -- Arab and Jewish -- are being delivered by the local capitalist classes as they struggle for power and the fruits of exploitation using the proletariat as their cannon fodder.

The uprising in the occupied territories has made evident and quickened a shift in the policy of American imperialism in the Middle East. While American imperialism has for some time rejected the policy of a Greater Israel (involving the outright annexation of "Judea and Samaria", i.e. the West Bank) favored by the regime in Jerusalem, as an obstacle to a Pax Americana in the region, one which depends on close relations with both Israel and the Arab world, this opposition has scarcely affected relations between

Washington and Jerusalem -- until now. The uprising has speeded the process whereby American imperialism has determined to, for the first time, put real pressure on Israel to abandon the dream of a Greater Israel (which given its cost to the aim of a durable Pax Americana has become a nightmare for the US), and to accept the inevitability of some kind of Palestinian national entity; one that can be firmly tied to Washington via the moderate Arab states and the Arafat wing of the PLO. This in no way involves an abandonment of Israel by American imperialism (for whom the Israeli state and its military power remains indispensable in the region); merely an effort to consolidate Washington's own long-term project of a Pax Americana in the Middle East, which depends on lancing the Palestinian boil, which is a constant invitation to Russian imperialism in the region and an obstacle to a solid alignment of the Arab world with American imperialism. At a time when the Palestinian uprising risks upsetting Washington's delicate plans, at a moment when Iraq's reintegration into the American bloc (the payoff of which can be seen in Iraq's recent victory on the Fao peninsula) and Syria's turn towards Washington (whose blessing it needs to consolidate its shaky hold over Lebanon) could be jeopardized by an Arab-Israeli blowup, American imperialism has little choice but to bring pressure to bear on its recalcitrant Israeli ally.

The extent to which Washington is now prepared to put real pressure on Israel can be seen in the dramatic reorientation in the propaganda dished up by the mass media in the US (which presents the Palestinians as the victims of a callous and brutal oppressor), in the unity displayed within the ruling class, whose representatives from Nixon through Shultz to Jesse Jackson have publically insisted on the necessity for Israel to accept the existence of a Palestinian national entity. Even elected officials, typically lined up behind the powerful Israel lobby in the US, have begun to make it known that their support for Jerusalem has its limits and that Israel cannot count on a blank check from the US. The time-frame in which Washington will prevail on Jerusalem and succeed in bringing about a change in Israeli policy cannot be predicted; indeed, in the short-run it is likely that Israeli policy will stiffen and reject the Diktat of Washington. What is clear, however, is that in the end Jerusalem will have to bow to Washington, whose interests take precedence over those of its weaker ally. In this sense, the Palestinian uprising, by hastening the process whereby the US is reorienting its policy towards Israel, is incorporated in the very project through which Washington seeks to ensure its imperialist hegemony in the Middle East.

The complete support of the left and leftists for the Palestinian national struggle is no surprise (even if the fact that they are objectively serving the interests not only of capitalism in general, but of American imperialism in particular -- another example of the ruse of reason -- might shock them).

What is, if not exactly surprising, then extremely upsetting, is the fact that within the revolutionary milieu itself there is support for and blatant concessions to the Palestinian national struggle. The Bordigist International Communist party (Le Proletaire #395), the CWO (Workers Voice #39) and the Internationalist Communist Party (Battaglia Comunista #1, Jan. 1988), have all trumpeted the Palestinian uprising. The CWO and BC proclaimed "Palestinians Revolt: But Without The PLO", acknowledging the extent of PLO control as the struggle developed only at the very end of the article, and drawing virtually no political conclusions from that fact; moreover, their articles strongly imply that without the PLO, a Palestinian national struggle can be progressive in this epoch. The Bordigists assert that the uprising is one of the "Arab and Palestinian proletarians" against "Zionist capital", virtually portraying it as a struggle against the PLO (in blatant disregard for the facts) and simply denying its exclusively national character, or rather running national and class struggle together. This confusion, this blurring of basic class lines, this unprincipled capitulation to leftism, is one more manifestation of the deep seated crisis in the ranks of the proletarian revolutionary milieu. That in this instance it should occur around the national question is not surprising given the inability of Bordigism and all those groups tracing their ideological patrimony to the Italian Left (Bordigist or Damenist) to unequivocally repudiate national struggles in the decadent phase of capitalism. We have already seen the bitter fruits of this political bankruptcy in the long-standing romance between the Bordigist ICP and Third Worldism (and in particular Arab nationalism) culminating in the split orchestrated by El Oumani, whose xenophobic positions -- though the logical outcome of Bordigism's view of the national question -- were too much for the ICP, and which almost destroyed its organization several years ago. In the case of BC and the CWO, their flirtation with Kurdish nationalism and Komala in the early 1980's is notorious. The ongoing Palestinian national uprising, now firmly in the hands of the PLO, is only the latest occasion for the programmatic bankruptcy of these groups on the national question to be made manifest. That it should take the form of a political intervention on behalf of a struggle that is so blatantly directed against the interests of the working class and so clearly serves the interests of capitalism is one more indication of the real depths of the crisis in the milieu. To the tragedy of rampant nationalism and ethno-religious hatred inculcated into the ranks of the Arab and Jewish masses, must now be added the tragedy of a revolutionary milieu which, instead of raising the voice of Marxist outrage against this ideological-political victory of capitalism, is in part its unwitting accomplice.

MAC INTOSH

RANK & FILE UNIONISM

new sirens to sink the class struggle



To deal with the upsurge in workers' combativity all over the world since 1983, the ruling class has been trying to perfect its system of control over the working class. This means improving repressive control through a more judicious use of the police as we saw during the Spanish steelworkers' strike, as well as improving ideological control through a readjustment of the language of the left more in line with the contemporary realities of the crisis and working class reactions to it since the early 1980's. It is surely no accident that the organ of direct control over workers -- the unions -- have tried the hardest to adapt to the needs created by the situation these past few years. This phenomenon is not the result of any positive regeneration of the unions. On the contrary, it is just the continuation of the policy of containing working class anger by putting rank and file unionists in the limelight. To fully grasp this phenomenon -- and it is not really anything very new -- the basic antagonism between the unions and the working class has to be understood, otherwise the illusions fostered by rank and file unionism cannot be seen in their true light. In other words, rank and file unionism is not a category in itself; it is an integral part of unionism as a whole and that is the way we are going to treat it.

Rank and file unionism, the unionism of the humble "base" as opposed to the greedy union "top" leaders, is intimately linked to the decadence of capitalism as a system. It comes to the fore every time the workers decide to fight back and organize themselves outside of the union structures acceptable to the State. Rank and file unionism is not a secretion of class struggle; it is a desperate attempt of the union apparatus itself to limit the dangers. It gives the green light to the most radical factions in the unions to try to recuperate the struggle as it is taking off and contain working class activity before passing on to overt repression. That is why rank and file unionism must be condemned. It is a radical social practice...of the bourgeoisie!

Rank and file unionism is a veritable Trojan horse among the workers, sapping their energies and turning the struggle away from the perspective of class confrontation into conciliation with the existing social order.

How is this done? How is it that a group of workers who have committed them-

selves to the subversive act of stopping work and refusing the logic of capitalism if only for a moment, then come to accept the corporatist mumbo-jumbo trumpeted by the rank and file unionists and the leftists?

This is a complex question involving :

- the nature of the strike movements; their internal dynamic and objectives;
- the tactics and manoeuvres used by rank and file unionism to co-opt the movement and drag it onto the terrain of capitalism's logic.

THE NATURE OF WORKERS' STRUGGLES TODAY

Both those who thought they saw the revolution in 1968 and those who thought they saw nothing at all find it easy to turn up their noses at recent proletarian struggles. The workers today are still demanding improvements in their conditions without explicitly raising the problem of a revolution. This is discouraging to those revolutionary militants who can't seem to see the overall dynamic of the situation.

The long, slow development of the economic crisis has put struggle back on the agenda. Overt resistance to austerity pushes workers to demand not directly a shorter work week and higher wages (even though this remains the necessary mainstay of workers' demands for better conditions), but a more general way to respond to the bourgeoisie's efforts to impose the logic of capital. In short, the working class is faced with a frontal attack and it is trying to defend itself.

Marxism teaches us that the law of wages has tended to be less elastic in the 20th century than it had been in the 19th under the merely formal domination of capital. Ever deeper crises have disorganized the productive apparatus and the world market canceling out all the hard-won gains in workers' living conditions. But any denial of the need for such struggles around living conditions ultimately leads to renouncing the materialist dialectic of class struggle. Class struggle must include the economic motives of immediate interest for the workers but by integrating them into the whole, go beyond them to the final goal -- the abolition of all wage labor. That is why we maintain that the real significance of workers' demands lies not in the fact that they can be immediately satisfied or not but rather in the struggles and experiences they lead to, the unity and organization of workers' power. For us, it

is out of the question to glorify any immediate outcome of the struggle as the ICC does with its new slogan, "struggle pays". This kind of self-serving slogan ignores the fundamental teachings of revolutionaries such as Rosa Luxemburg about the way the working class comes to consciousness even through defeats and setbacks. This brings us to the question of the relation between the working class and unionism, rank and file unionism in particular, as seen in historical perspective.

THE REVOLUTIONARY NATURE OF THE WORKING CLASS

Even when capitalism was enjoying its heyday of wealth and expansion in the 19th century, even when it could afford to grant reforms and improvements to the workers under pressure from class struggle, without endangering its economic system, proletarian struggles in the 19th century often had a revolutionary thrust, revealing the true nature of the working class.

The working class is an exploited and a revolutionary class. Its whole history shows that it cannot ever forget this complex and contradictory nature. The proletariat, through a consciousness of its own exploitation, must try to express itself as a "class for itself", tending towards the practical realization of the communist revolution. The proletariat is revolutionary from its birth; its profound nature can never be understood outside of this historical dimension. The fundamental specificity of the working class is to be the first class in history that is both a revolutionary class and an exploited class. As an exploited class suffering from alienation and the illusions spread by the giant ideological apparatus serving the ruling class in capitalism, was still in spite of everything able to organize against this exploitation and ideological pressure right from its beginnings as a class in capitalism. This was the expression of a political act of the working class asserting its autonomy from the system. Despite the most brutal exploitation, the working class can never be reduced to a class for capital. From its first appearance, the proletariat created workers' associations to resist capital. This was a political expression of proletarian consciousness. These first workers' groups were constituted on the basis of an understanding of the need to resist exploitation collectively and to organize a fight against the system. Thus, for the proletariat, the goal -- communism -- and the means to achieve this goal -- class struggle -- are inextricably bound throughout its history.

Marx described unions in the 19th century as regulators of wages and labor time, fighting against the arbitrariness of capi-

tal with the "law of wages", that is to say, the selling price of labor power at its market value. He also pointed out, however, that the buying price of labor power is never more than or even equal to its cost of production except when the working class unites in an organized, long-term way. Only in this way can it resist the pressure on wages that capitalism tends to reduce to its lowest value by reducing the price of labor power with the "industrial reserve army" of the unemployed.

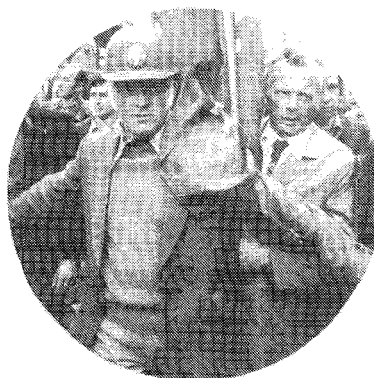
This attempt of workers to join together is never neutral; it is a political act of opposition. Even in the smallest strike of resistance there is the potential for a political struggle against capitalism. This is why the need to organize politically was felt quite rapidly in the workers movement, a need to unify the struggle and homogenize its combat. Marx waged a struggle in the First International so that it would take political positions and fulfill its destiny going beyond the corporatism of its day to unify the working class in its struggle to transcend the barriers of capitalism.

SOCIAL DEMOCRACY AT WORK

But after the defeat of the Paris Commune (a revolutionary expression of the proletariat's resistance to exploitation), and the death of the International, the new workers' organizations had a difficult time unifying their approach. They tended to separate more and more the economic aspects of struggle from the political ones.

In the 19th century, there was still the possibility of carrying on struggles for reforms within capitalism and of creating permanent organizations of defense in the working class. Throughout this period, the workers were able to assert themselves through the unions, seen as schools of socialism, without immediately having to confront the State. But by the dawn of the 20th century, these conditions were already being undermined. The unions were gradually becoming the controlling directors of the labor force and the political party of the working class carried political action onto the terrain of parliamentary reformism, institutionalizing the separation between economic and political demands.

With the beginning of the period of the real domination of capital and then the system's entry into decadence which accelerated the process, unions were gradually de facto but often quite explicitly integrated into the State apparatus as an economic factor of the accumulation of capital, controlling the work force for the benefit of capitalism. Unions increasingly saw their specific interests as managers of labor power coinciding with the development of state capitalism. But there had to be some protective covering between the unions, on the one hand, whose



apparatus became part of the logic of state capitalism, and the revolutionary dynamic of the working class, on the other hand. This protective covering was all the more important because the working class was reacting against what it saw as the sell outs of the unions. Workers opposed the official policies of the unions and the unions' subservience to the interests of the State.

This need for a buffer produced the "revolutionary unionism" movement at the beginning of the century. Revolutionary unionism was of libertarian inspiration, opposing the bureaucratism of reformist methods and defended the idea of a unionism free of political influences. This approach unfortunately turned its back on the evolution of capitalist society and ignored the progressive domination of the State on the terrain of negotiating the value of labor power. This approach, typical of anarchist idealism, merely denounced the opposition between the leaders and the led but could not hope to hold back the tide of the real integration of the unions into the State in the pre-World War I era. Although the call to form new unions in opposition to the reformism of the existing ones was a healthy reaction in the early years of the 20th century, the I.W.W. in the U.S., the shop stewards in Britain and the stillidmanen despite their will to create and maintain direct links with the masses in these organizations through working class democracy, could not avoid playing the role of negotiators once they became permanent organizations.

THE REVOLUTIONARY PHASE

The new form of workers' struggle -- workers' councils -- emerged during the revolutionary period itself, when the antagonism between the classes was at its highest point, during and after World War I. Workers' councils are not some static "form". They are the expression of an organizational process which unites and informs all the activity of the working class. These new organs of proletarian dictatorship can only survive as long as the class is wholly engaged in making decisions itself and carrying them out in complete freedom. Historical experience has made it quite clear that in Russia, substituting the power of the State for the original workers' councils meant eliminating workers' power and paving the way for the triumph of the counter-revolution. The councils, because they are organs of struggle, can only live in and for the open struggle, taking the initiative in directing the struggle in a revolutionary perspective. In that sense they are political organs expressing the multi-faceted life of the class and not some mere "forms".

The revolutionary explosion of January 1919 in Germany did not succeed in forging a real proletarian power. The "raten" (councils)

that were formed were quickly emptied of revolutionary potential and limited to questions of economic management. The Social Democracy in power, after defeating the revolution, fought for official recognition of what was left of the councils by the State. This process created tremendous confusion in the industrial heartlands of Europe. The capitalist class had managed to overcome its fears and succeeded in using sophisticated methods of mystification to defeat the struggle of the workers in Germany.

In the first years of the century, the German workers as elsewhere in Europe, had reacted against the increasing bureaucratization of the unions and their progressive integration into the State apparatus. They elected "men of confidence" like the shop stewards in England. Social Democracy's votes for the war credits in 1914 showed how powerless the German working class had become facing the constant obarrage of opportunist campaigns from the reformist majority of the SPD. After a brief moment of hesitation, the "men of confidence" fell in line and defended the union structure, calling for the constitution of a so-called left opposition within the SPD. In contrast to the millions of workers who deserted the "socialist" trade unions and tried to form new organizations like the AAU, the "men of confidence" became the most ardent defenders of the old unions. A new situation was created by the war, crying out for the right response. But the "men of confidence" brought only confusion, hesitation and division to the workers' ranks. In this way, they ushered in the practice of mystification, using illusions couched in radical-sounding words to draw the most radical workers back into the traditional structures.

This kind of unionism, characterized by a great outward show of militancy and verbal radicalism, would later reappear in more recent capitalist history each time that social tensions heat up. It is not a reaction of the working class but a reaction of the ruling class to forestall the workers striking out on their own. It reappears every time the ruling class feels the need to make its grip more subtle, to avoid direct confrontations that could tear the veil of illusions covering traditional union rhetoric. It is used to bar the road of autonomous self-organization of the workers. In this way, rank and file unionism carries out a fundamental political task in the service of the status quo : to protect the unions, the organs of state control over the working class, and to lead the workers back to the union straight-jacket one way or another.

TODAY

Since the resurgence of class struggle on a general scale, workers are wondering more and more about what the future holds in store. The real nature of the unions risks



becoming obvious because of the demands they are putting forward. They take over running the wage demands of the workers and pretend that substantial and durable wage gains are still possible. The union demands differ from the workers' demands not in their form but in their real content and the perspectives they contain. Making believe that capitalism's crisis is something accidental and reversible, the unions offer their services as more efficient handlers of the crisis. They are trying to save capitalism and to restore their own power. Unions promise the moon and deliver crumbs if anything. In fact, they are just aspiring managers of capitalism and the leftists are their critical supporters.

Unionism tries to empty the workers' demands of their political and revolutionary potential. As we have seen, these demands can go to the heart of capitalism's contradictions but the unions try to reduce them to mere social begging which does not threaten the existing economic order. In this way, trade unionism denatures the workers' struggle. It always tries to convince the workers that the issue is how capitalism should be managed while carefully avoiding the real issue -- the struggle against exploitation which can only be resolved by a revolutionary overthrow of capitalist society.

Spreading confusion with workerist rhetoric about defending wage levels, trade unionism hides the entire problem of the real value of labor power. That is how rank and file unionism can develop its illusions. Rank and file unionism can play a front-line role in the defense of the capitalist management of labor power, with radical slogans about "the defense of our jobs" but in reality all this only means subjugating workers even more to the logic of capitalism. Decadent capitalism has, of course, been able to increase some wages with crumbs, thanks to increases in productivity and the intensification of labor. This has given trade unionists some leeway for agitation but at the same time, the increase in the rate of exploitation has driven down relative wages.

Even this leeway is shrinking as a result of the deepening of the crisis and the intensification of competition. Union slogans are increasingly discredited. But the unions' "social begging" is not yet over and it continues to impede the development of the potential of workers' demands by drawing workers onto the terrain of how to pretend to manage capital : begging for the right to work which is a utopia, asking for the creation of jobs for some or a defense against plant closures. These are some of the ways that trade unionism twists workers' real aspirations and pretends that workers' demands can be met outside of the radical context of a revolution. Once the crisis of capitalism has begun, any real and lasting satisfaction of workers' demands

is impossible until the overthrow of capitalism. The fundamental antagonism is between the workers' demands which are the product of the contradictions of capital, and trade unionist demands which seek to credit the myth of "realism", asking capitalism for better "management" to reach prosperity around the corner. This is the real function of rank and file unionism and its implantation in the factories facilitates its co-optation of workers' demands. It is clear that in many struggles, workers come up against rank and file unionism. Its pragmatism combined with radical-sounding language make it a real threat especially when it goes so far as to criticize traditional unions. In such a situation, if we just denounced traditional unionism, it would not be enough.

RANK AND FILE UNIONISM IN THE CURRENT WAVE OF STRUGGLES

When we look at the bourgeoisie's reactions to workers' struggles in recent years, we see that in the first decade after 1968 surprise made it difficult to control all the spontaneous outbreaks of struggle. With the mass strike in Poland, this phase was over. Even the bureaucratic dinosaur of the East had learned to adapt to the situation by creating, with the help of the West, an antidote to annihilate the MKS, the organs of the Polish mass strike : "new" unionism under the likes of Solidarnosc.

Since then, this strategy has been used with great effectiveness, be it in Belgium, Britain or Italy. In recent years, increasingly radical forms of rank and file unionism have appeared, veritable parasites on the development of workers' struggles. Working through action committees and even elected strike committees, rank and file unionism often appears to function very "democratically". But the union terrain, democratic or not, is not the terrain of the working class. It can often be used to turn workers' attention away from the need to unify and generalize their demands.

Despite any radical language, unionism has fostered sectoralism, corporatism and the isolation of workers in a prison of partial, particularistic demands. In recent struggles rank and file unionism has fostered the corporatist reaction of defending factories against closures, going so far as to call for the self-management of firms in trouble, or the demand for better management of education in this decaying society or the health services of a decadent social order. This corporatist weapon, this tactic of making workers pretend to put themselves in the bosses' shoes was used recently during the hospital workers' strike in Britain and in teachers' strikes in Spain and Italy to prevent the movement from posing its demands in poli-



tical, class terms. This goes directly counter to the needs of the present period. Workers' militancy demands direct confrontations and not "advice to the government". It requires the capacity to assume the political tasks of the class and thus to go beyond specific demands in order to pose the problem in a general way that all workers can identify with.

Revolutionaries have an important role to play in this process. Not by making believe that the struggle can lead to economic improvement, as the famous leftist slogan of the ICC "the struggle pays" implies, but by pushing the workers' demands towards a generalization, towards posing the question of confronting the State. This development of class consciousness implies on the one hand the question of how the struggle should

be organized and also, what perspectives to adopt.

It is crucial that the real perspective of workers' struggle be defended by revolutionary organizations with all the strength they have. That is why their intervention cannot be limited to denouncing the outrageous manoeuvres of the unions. It must first and foremost attack all attempts to bring the struggle onto a bourgeois terrain through appeals to corporatism, democratism or making better management of capitalism in crisis the issue. It must take into account the forms of organization but also the content of the demands put forward in order to be able to denounce the unions' co-opting in a way all workers can understand.

F.D.

DOCUMENTS

problems of the period of transition (Bilan 1936-37)

INTRODUCTION

In trying to extricate himself from the stranglehold of the laws of nature over the whole of his existence, man subjects himself to new laws, engendered by his own social activity: the laws of the economy. These laws, pertaining to the relations of production and distribution of material goods amongst men, have until now dominated the history of humanity because the weakness of the productive forces has precluded the full satisfaction of the needs of all. The historical task of the proletariat is fundamentally to put an end to this subjugation of man to economic laws, and to bring about a society making possible the full development of the faculties of each person. However, the proletariat cannot accomplish this historic task overnight. As a class engendered by capitalism, it must first wage a long and painful struggle to free itself from the ideological and political stranglehold of capitalism; a struggle in the midst of which we still find ourselves today. Once the proletariat has smashed the political power of the bourgeoisie and established its own, it must then apply itself to completely overturning the economic relations inherited from capitalism. Of such a period of the overturning of capitalist economic relations we have only a very limited experience -- the Russian revolution, confined to a few short years, and to a single country in the throes of isolation and

economic backwardness -- and the vaguest of guidelines.

Until now, the revolutionary milieu has basically concerned itself with the political problems of the seizure of power by the proletariat and the period of transition from capitalism to communism. On that level, particularly concerning the nature of the state in the period of transition, substantial theoretical progress has been made on the basis of the Russian experience. This can be seen in the ICC's pamphlet, "The Period Of Transition From Capitalism To Communism: The Withering Away Of The State", which we recommend to our readers. This preoccupation is based on the fact that the political aspect of the proletarian revolution is the principal factor which conditions all the others. Basically, the proletariat disposes of no economic power under capitalism, and it is its political power which will permit it to intervene in the economic realm. However, as we indicated, the historic task of the proletariat is fundamentally to put an end to the reign of the economy over human life, by overthrowing the narrow economic bases on which class society rests. Therefore, it is equally important that the proletariat clarify the general principles concerning the economic problems which it will face in the course of its revolutionary undertaking.

Although the revolutionary milieu presently

confronts immediate problems which are certainly more burning, the examination of the economic problems of the period of transition cannot be simply put aside. In fact, the inability to raise such general questions is in itself one of the pressing problems facing the revolutionary milieu. It was in the dark years of the counter-revolution that the groups of the communist left made the most important contributions in this area. That's why we are reopening the debate on the economic policy of the proletariat in the period of transition by republishing one of the most important contributions of the communist left on this subject: Mitchell's study which appeared in the pages of "Bilan" (the theoretical publication of the Italian communist left in exile during the 1930's) in 1936-1937. We are republishing this text not because we think that it contains all the answers to the questions posed, but because it represents one of the last coherent programmatic efforts on this point. The communist program is not a pot-pourri of brilliant inventions, but is elaborated on the basis of the acquisitions of the past -- though it is important to begin from a critique of these acquisitions in order to go forward. An added reason for beginning with this text is the fact that it has remained largely unknown within the present revolutionary milieu.

Mitchell's text extends over fifty pages and six issues of "Bilan" (No. 28, 31, 34, 35, 37, and 38). We lack the space in our publication to print it in its entirety. Therefore, we will print -- in two issues -- large sections which deal most directly with the economic problems of the period of transition. We have thus removed the parts which deal with the more general conditions of the proletarian revolution (the international nature of the revolution, the critique of "socialism in one country", the law of unequal development and the notion of countries "not ripe" for revolution) and with the transitional state, that is to say, those aspects of the revolution which have already been addressed by the existing revolutionary milieu. We have also eliminated some sections dealing more specifically with the Russian experience (the nature of "war communism", the NEP, the nature of the Russian state). We can only urge our readers to study the original article in "Bilan" for a complete treatment of all these issues.

Mitchell's contribution was important at the time for several reasons. First, it clearly put the emphasis on the political and international character of the tasks of the proletariat after the seizure of power, while not neglecting the economic questions. Second, it developed the conception of the transitional state as a scourge, an institution which is necessary, but with which the proletariat cannot be completely identified. Third, it demonstrated the inevitable continuation of the law of value in the period of transition, by way of a critique of the ideas developed by the GIK (the Dutch internationalist communists) on the mechanism of distribution by way of "labor vouchers". This last point, developed

at length in the sections that we are publishing, is particularly crucial since the bulk of the revolutionary milieu (councilists and Bordigists) continues to support the system of "labor vouchers" for the simple reason that it was suggested by Marx; however, this is in the absence of a thorough critical examination based on the general problems posed by the period of transition.

This text of Mitchell also contains serious weaknesses -- weaknesses common to the Italian communist left as a whole. First, it identifies the dictatorship of the proletariat with the dictatorship of the party, overlooking the fundamental role of the workers councils as "the form -- finally found -- of the dictatorship of the proletariat" (Lenin). Second, The understanding of state capitalism as the general tendency of capitalism in its decadent phase is totally lacking, which leads Mitchell to fail to understand the state as the bastion of counter-revolution in Russia and to mistakenly designate the Russian state of the 1930's as "proletarian" and Stalinism as "centrism". This same inability to understand the phenomenon of state capitalism, together with a too great dependence on the Russian experience of a seizure of power, leads him to raise a state capitalist type measure -- the "monopolization of foreign trade by the state" -- to the rank of a "fundamental point of the economic program of the proletariat", or to see the NEP as a "normal" mode for the evolution of the transitional economy. It is clear that the proletarian power isolated in Russia had only an extremely limited marge de manoeuvre with respect to the destruction of capitalist economic relations, but we must not turn a tragic situation into a program for the future.

Finally, the world has changed over the last half century. An issue like the agrarian question, which was so important in the Russian revolution, will play a more limited role in the revolution to come, by virtue of the destruction of so much of the small scale production -- particularly that of the peasantry -- by decadent capitalism. Conversely, other problems, such as the integration of the unemployed, will assume a much more important place. Therefore, it must be clear that we are presenting Mitchell's text, not as a model for tomorrow's revolution, but as a contribution which can serve as a basis for the critical analysis of all of the questions raised by the economic policy of the proletariat in the period of transition.

The title of this study should not lead one to conclude that our investigation will take us into the misty future or even that we are going to provide solutions to the many and complex tasks faced by the proletariat once it makes itself into the ruling class. The very framework and spirit of "Bilan" prohibit any such designs. We leave to others, to the "technicians" and the recipe makers, or to

the "orthodox" amongst Marxists, the pleasure of indulging in anticipations, of strolling down the lane of utopianism, or rubbing the worker's faces in formulae devoid of any class substance. For us there can be no question of constructing schemas or panaceas which are true for all time, and which can be mechanically adapted to all historical situations. Marxism is an experimental method and not a game of riddles and prognostication. It is rooted in a changing and contradictory historical reality; it feeds on past experience, tempered and corrected in the present so as to be enriched in the fire of later experience.

It is by making a synthesis of historical events, that Marxism extricates the meaning of the state from idealist confusion; that it forges the theory of the dictatorship of the proletariat and affirms the necessity for the transitional proletarian state. With respect to this latter, if Marxism can define its class content, it must limit itself to a sketch of its social forms. It is still impossible to establish the principles for the administration of the proletarian state on solid bases, just as one cannot precisely trace the line of demarcation between Party and State. This immaturity of revolutionary positions must inevitably weigh heavily on the existence and evolution of the soviet state.

It is precisely the task of Marxists, shipwrecked from the debacle of the worker's movement, to forge the theoretical arms that will make of the future proletarian state the instrument of the world revolution and not the prey of world capitalism. This contribution to such a theoretical effort will treat in turn: a) the historical conditions within which the proletarian revolution occurs; b) the necessity for a transitional state; c) the economic and social categories which necessarily persist into the transitional phase; d) finally some examples concerning a proletarian control of the transitional state.

THE PROLETARIAN REVOLUTION AND ITS HISTORICAL MILIEU

It has become axiomatic to say that capitalist society, overwhelmed by the productive forces that it can no longer fully utilize, submerged under a heap of commodities that it cannot dispose of, has become an historical anachronism. From this, one concludes that its disappearance must open the reign of abundance, which is just around the corner. In reality, capitalist accumulation has reached the end point of its progression and the capitalist mode of production has become a fetter on historical evolution. That in no way means that capitalism is like a ripe fruit that the proletariat need only pluck to inaugurate the reign of happiness, but rather that the material conditions exist for constructing the foundation (only the foundation) of socialism, on which communist society will rise.

Marx pointed out "that at the very moment at

which civilization appeared, production began to be based on ranks, estates and classes, and finally on the antagonism between accumulated labor and immediate labor. No antagonism, no progress. This is the law that civilization has followed to the present day. Until now, the productive forces have developed thanks to this regime of class antagonisms" (The Poverty Of Philosophy). In Anti-Duhring, Engels states that the existence of a class divided society is merely "the necessary consequence of the weak development of the productive forces in the past", from which he concludes that "if the division into classes had a certain historical legitimacy, this was only the case for a given period, under determinate social conditions. It was based on an insufficiency of production, it will be swept away by the full development of the modern productive forces."

It is clear that the final development of capitalism corresponds not to a "full development of the productive forces" in the sense that they would be capable of providing for all human needs, but to a situation in which the survival of class antagonisms not only halts any social development but leads to its regression. That is Engels' meaning when he says that the abolition of classes "presupposes, therefore, the development of production carried out to a degree at which appropriation of the means of production and of the products, and, with this, of political domination, of the monopoly of culture, and of intellectual leadership by a particular class of society, has become not only superfluous but economically, politically, intellectually a hindrance to development". And he adds that capitalist society has achieved such an evolution and that "The possibility of securing for every member of society, by means of socialized production, an existence not only fully sufficient materially, and becoming day by day more full, but an existence guaranteeing to all the free development and exercise of their physical and mental faculties -- this possibility is now for the first time here, but it is here". However, there can be no doubt that Engels sees only the possibility of embarking on a full satisfaction of man's needs, and not the material means to accomplish it immediately. Indeed, Engels insists that the bonds that the capitalist mode of production imposed on the productive forces must be first shattered. "Their deliverance from these bonds is the one precondition for an unbroken, constantly-accelerated development of the productive forces, and therewith for a practically unlimited increase of production itself".

Consequently, the period of transition (which can only have a world-wide configuration, not one limited to a particular state) is a political and economic phase which is still characterized by a deficiency of production relative to all individual needs even taking into account the prodigious level already attained by the productivity of labor. The suppression of capitalist relations of production and of their antagonistic expression provides the immediate possibility

of attending to the essential needs of man (the necessities of the class struggle apart, which could temporarily lower production). To go beyond that point necessitates the incessant development of the productive forces. With respect to the realization of the formula "to each according to his needs", it is situated at the end of a long process, unfolding not in a straight line but by twists and turns filled with contradictions and conflicts; a process superimposed on the process of world wide class struggle.

The historical mission of the proletariat consists -- as Engels has said -- in making humanity leap "from the reign of necessity to the reign of freedom". But this will happen only to the extent that the proletariat analyses the historic conditions in which this act of liberation is situated, an analysis which will make it possible to fully grasp the nature and limits of this moment, and which must impregnate the whole of its political and economic activity. The proletariat cannot abstractly oppose capitalism and socialism, as if it were a question of two epochs which were completely independent; as if socialism was not the historical heir of capitalism, fatally bearing its refuse, but something born uniquely from the womb of the proletarian revolution.

It is neither through indifference nor negligence that Marx and Engels never investigated the problems of the period of transition in any great detail. Marx and Engels were the opposites of the utopians; their living negation. They were not interested in abstract constructions, in imaging what could only be resolved by science. Even in 1918, Rosa Luxemburg, who made an enormous theoretical contribution to Marxism, would say that: "Far from being a sum of ready-made prescriptions which have only to be applied, the practical realization of socialism as an economic, social and juridical system is something which lies completely hidden in the mists of the future.... It has as its prerequisite a number of measures of force -- against property, etc. The negative, the tearing down can be decreed; the building up, the positive cannot." (The Russian Revolution)

Marx had already indicated in his preface to Capital that: "Even when a society has begun to track down the natural laws of its movement -- and it is the ultimate aim of this work to reveal the economic laws of motion of modern society -- it can neither leap over the natural phases of its development nor remove them by decree. But it can shorten and lessen the birth-pangs."

A policy of proletarian rule, therefore, must be essentially based on the direction and tendencies rooted in the evolution of the economy, while historical experiences (and the Russian revolution, though incomplete, is one of the most important) will constitute the reservoir from which the proletariat will draw the social forms suited to such a policy. This policy will have a socialist

content only if the economic course is characterized by an orientation diametrically opposed to that of capitalism. For that, it must be directed towards a progressive and constant improvement in the living conditions of the masses, as opposed to their lowering.

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THE STIGMATA OF THE PROLETARIAN ECONOMY

Marxism always bases its analysis and perspectives on dialectical materialism and not on idealist aspirations. Marx said that "even when a society has discovered the natural laws of its own evolution, it cannot avoid a partisan point of view, nor can it eliminate the natural stages of its development by a mere effort of will. All it can do is soften the birth pains." (Preface to Capital) After forcing society to take a giant "leap" forward with a political revolution, the proletariat can only submit to the law of natural evolution while doing everything it can to accelerate the rhythm of the social transformation. If the workers want to achieve their historic goals, they must lead the "hybrid" intermediary social forms that emerge during the transition from capitalism to communism on the road to withering away. But they cannot just eliminate these forms by decree. Even radically eliminating private property does not ipso facto eliminate capitalist ideology or bourgeois law. "The traditions of all the dead generations weigh like a nightmare on the minds of the living." (Karl Marx)

In this part of our study we will be dealing at some length with certain economic categories that the proletariat will inherit from capitalism such as labor value, money and wages. This is important because the Dutch Internationalists (whose arguments we will be examining here), foremost among many, have tried to make these categories the reasons for the degeneration of the Russian revolution while, in our opinion, this degeneration was political and not economic.

First of all, what is an economic category?

Marx answers that "economic categories are only abstractions, the theoretical expressions of the social relations of production.... The same men who created these social relations corresponding to their material production also produced the principles, the ideas and categories that correspond to these social relations. These ideas, these categories, are not eternal, any more than the relations they express are eternal. They are transitory historical products." (Misery of Philosophy)

We could be tempted to conclude from this definition that a new mode of production -- or the creation of its foundations -- automatically brings with it the corresponding social relations and categories. In this way, the collective appropriation of the productive forces

would in itself eliminate capitalist relations of production and the categories expressing these relations. From a social point of view, this would mean the immediate disappearance of classes. But Marx made it very clear that within society, "there is a continuous movement increasing the productive forces, destroying social relations, forming new ideas." In other words, there is an inter-penetration of two social processes: one relating to the decline in the relations and categories belonging to the productive system in decay; the other having to do with the growth of relations and categories that will produce a new system. The dialectical movement imprinted in the evolution of society is eternal (even if it will take different forms in a fully communist society).

This dialectical movement will be all the more powerful and jolting in the period of transition between two societies.

Thus, certain economic categories which survived the revolutionary "cataclysm" will only disappear when the class relations that gave rise to them disappear, in other words, with the disappearance of classes themselves in the communist phase of proletarian society. In the transitional phase, the strength of these categories will be in inverse proportion to the strength of the "socialized" sector of the proletarian economy. Above all, the existence of these categories will depend on the development of the world revolution.

The fundamental category is labor value because it is the basis for all the other capitalist categories.

We do not have much in marxist literature dealing with the future of economic categories in the period of transition. On this subject we have only scattered writings of Engels in Anti-Duhring and Marx in Capital. From Marx we also have The Critique of the Gotha Program but because there are so few texts on the subject, each word in this work takes on such significance that its true meaning can only be seen in relation to the theory of value itself.

Value has a peculiar characteristic: although its source lies in the activity of a physical force, labor, it has in itself no material reality. In the Preface to Capital, before analyzing the substance of value, Marx takes great pains to warn us about this peculiarity. "The value form which finds its full expression in the money form, is very simple because it is so insubstantial. Why has the human spirit tried in vain for 2000 years to penetrate the secret of its nature when it has succeeded, at least approximately, in understanding much more complex forms? Because the whole body is easier to study than the cell. Also, let us not forget that in the analysis of economic forms, we cannot rely on microscopes or chemical reactions. Abstraction has to take the place of everything."

In the course of this discussion of value, Marx adds that, "In contrast to

the physical, material nature of commodities, not an atom of natural material enters into the reality of their value. Turn a commodity in all directions, you will never discover its character as an object of value. The value of a commodity is purely social."

In terms of the content of value, human labor, Marx always implied that the value of a product always reflected a certain quantity of simple labor. Complex labor is constantly being reduced to simple labor. "Complex labor is only meaningful as a power of simple labor or as a multiple of simple labor. A lesser amount of complex labor is equal to a greater amount of simple labor....Whether or not a given commodity is the result of the most complex labor is not important. In terms of its value, it is always calculated as the product of simple labor and therefore only represents a given sum of simple labor." How does this reduction process operate? Marx as a man of science merely answers.

"The ways that different sorts of labor are reduced to simple labor as a unit of measurement (our emphasis) are determined by a social process hidden from the producers and for this reason it seems to them as established by common custom."

This is a phenomenon that Marx described but could not explain because of the limits of his knowledge of value. All we know is that in commodity production, the market is the crucible where all individual labor, all the different qualities of labor, are melted down; where average labor reduced to simple labor is crystallized. "Society does not give value to the fortuitous awkwardness of an individual. It recognizes as general human labor only labor of a certain average and normal skill....Only to the extent that individual labor is socially necessary does it contain general human labor." (Engels Anti-Duhring)

At all levels of social development in history, mankind had to know approximately how much labor it had to expend to produce the productive forces and consumer goods. Up to now, this evaluation was very empirical and anarchic. With capitalist production, and under the impulse of the contradictions of the system, this anarchic form reached its apogee. But what we want to emphasize is that the measurement of social labor time is not derived directly in an absolute, mathematical way. It is arrived at relatively, in relation to the market via money. The amount of social labor an object contains is not, in reality, expressed by labor time, but by some other commodity on the market that seems, empirically, to contain the same amount of social labor. The average number of hours of social labor and simple labor to produce an object remains unknown. Engels remarked that "the economic science of commodity production is not the only science that has to deal with factors known only in a relative way." He compared it to natural sciences which in physics uses mole-

cular calculations and in chemistry, atomic calculations. "Commodity production and the economic science of this production find a relative expression for the unknown amounts of labor contained in each commodity by comparing commodities in terms of the relative amounts of labor they contain. In the same way, chemistry also creates a relative expression for unknown atomic weights by comparing different elements in terms of their relative atomic weight, by expressing the atomic weight of one in terms of a multiplication or fraction of another (sulphur, oxygen, hydrogen). Just as commodity production raises gold to the level of an absolute commodity the general equivalent of all other commodities, the measure of all value, chemistry raises hydrogen to the ranks of chemical money by using the atomic weight of hydrogen as equal to 1, by reducing the atomic weight of all other elements to hydrogen, by expressing them as multiples of the atomic weight of hydrogen." (Anti-Duhring)

The essential characteristic of the period of transition is that it will still suffer from economic deficiencies. This will demand an increase in the productivity of labor and we can easily see that the calculation of labor time will continue to be necessary not only because of the need to divide up the work rationally, a need felt in all societies, but in order to regulate social relations and activities.

The basic question is therefore : in what form will labor time be measured? Will value still exist?

The answer to these questions is all the more difficult because Marx and Engels did not fully develop their thoughts on this subject and these thoughts can even seem contradictory.

In Anti-Duhring, Engels begins by saying, "As soon as society takes over the means of production and uses them for socialized production without any intermediaries, everyone's labor, however different its specific utility, immediately and directly becomes social labor. The amount of social labor contained in a product does not have to be arrived at only through a detour. Daily experience will show how much the average should be. Society will merely calculate (our emphasis) how many hours of labor are contained in a steam engine, a liter of grain, a meter of cloth of whatever quality. No one will even think of expressing the amount of labor contained in a product which is known in a direct and absolute way (our emphasis) in the relative, vague, inadequate way it used to have to employ by comparing it to another product. There will be a natural, adequate and absolute measurement : time." Engels adds as support for his assertion about the possibility of direct and absolute measurement : "Just as chemistry will no longer have to use a relative expression for atomic weights arrived at through the detour of the

hydrogen atom once it can express atomic weight in an absolute way (our emphasis), in other words, in real weight like a billionth of a gram or whatever, society in the conditions indicated above will have no need to assign values to products. But the problem is precisely whether or not the political act of collectivization -- even if it is a radical measure -- brings the proletariat the knowledge of a new, absolute calculation of labor time that can directly replace the law of value. No evidence supports such a hypothesis. It is not possible because the phenomenon of the reduction of complex labor to simple labor (the real unit of measurement) remains unexplained. It will therefore be impossible to scientifically calculate labor time which is a function of this reduction. The conditions for the emergence of such a law would probably only appear when the law itself was no longer needed : in other words, when production can meet all human needs and society will have no further need for calculations about labor. The administration of things will only need a simple record of materials. At that point, a process will be taking place in the economic sphere that is parallel and analagous to what will be happening in the political sphere where democracy will become superfluous just as it is fully achieved.

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In a footnote to his previous statement, Engels implicitly accepts value when he says, "The evaluation of socially useful effort and of the expenditure of labor in products is all that will subsist of the concept of value from political economy once we are in communist society." This correction from Engels is complemented by what Marx said in Capital (Volume 14) : "After the elimination of the capitalist mode of production, the determination of value, if we are to maintain social production, will be primordial because more than ever we must regulate labor time and the division of social labor among the different groups in production and keep an account of all this."

The conclusion we must draw from a knowledge of the reality facing the proletariat when it will overthrow capitalism is that the law of value will continue to exist in the period of transition, even though it will be profoundly modified so as to make it progressively disappear.

How will this law operate and in what forms? Again, we are forced to begin with what exists in the bourgeois economy where the reality of value materialized in commodities only appears through exchange. We know that value is purely social, that it is only expressed in the relations between commodities. It is only in exchange that the products of labor manifest their social existence as value even though different from their material existence as use values. A commodity expresses its value by the fact that it can be exchanged for another commodity, because it has an

exchange value. This is the only way it expresses its value. But, although value is expressed in exchange relations, it is not exchange that creates value. Value exists independently of exchange.

In the transitional period, we are dealing with exchange value and not any absolute, "natural" value which Engels made such fun of in his polemics with Duhring.

"Wanting to abolish the capitalist form of production in order to establish 'true value', is like wanting to abolish catholicism in order to establish the 'true' pope. It is wanting to create a society where the producers will finally control what they produce by taking the economic category that is the expression of the most total subjection of the producer to their own product and pushing it to its extreme logical consequences."

In the proletarian economy, exchange on the basis of value is an inevitable fact for a certain period of time. But it is also true that this exchange must be eaten away until it disappears to the extent that proletarian power manages not to subject producers to their own production, as in capitalism, but to make production subservient to social needs. Obviously, "no society in the long run can remain in control of its own products or keep control over the social effects of its system of production unless it first gets rid of exchange between individuals." (Engels, Origin of the Family). But exchange cannot be eliminated by will alone; it can only be done in the course of a whole dialectical process. That is the way Marx saw things when he wrote in the Critique of the Gotha Program, "In a communist social order, based on the collective ownership of the means of production, producers will not exchange their products. In the same way, the labor incorporated in products will not appear as the value of these products, as one of their real qualities, because unlike what happens in capitalist society, the work of an individual will become an integral part of the work of the community directly and not through a detour." Marx, of course, places this evolution within a fully developed communist society and not a society "as it emerges from capitalism, a society which in all its relations, economic, moral and intellectual, still bears the stigmata of the old society from which it has just emerged."

Collective appropriation on a greater or lesser scale allows for a transformation of economic relations corresponding to the weight of the collective sector as opposed to the capitalist sector. But the bourgeois form of these relations still exists because the proletariat has no other forms to replace it with and because it cannot escape from the world economy which continues to evolve on a capitalist basis.

Lenin wrote that the food tax established by the N.E.P. was "one of the forms taken by our passage from a peculiar sort

of communism, "military communism" brought on by the war, ruin and famine, to an exchange of products which would be the normal regime of socialism. In its turn, this exchange is only one form of the passage from socialism (with the peculiarities resulting from the predominance of the small-scale peasantry in our population) to communism." And Trotsky, in his report on the N.E.P. to the 4th Congress of the Communist International, said that economic relations must be regulated through the market and money.

The practice of the Russian Revolution confirms theory in this respect. The survival of value and the market only expresses the fact that the proletarian State cannot immediately coordinate all aspects of production and social life, nor can it eliminate "bourgeois rights". But the evolution of the economy towards socialism is only possible if the dictatorship of the proletariat controls more and more of the market until it can make it completely subject to socialist planning; in other words, until it can effectively abolish the market. The law of value must not be allowed to develop from simple commodity production to capitalist production. It must follow the opposite process of regression, from a "mixed" economy to full communism.

We do not have to go very deeply into the category of money or currency because it is only a developed form of value. If we admit the existence of value, then we have to admit the existence of money which, however, loses its character of "abstract wealth", its power of being a general equivalent capable of appropriating all wealth. The proletariat destroys this bourgeois power of money by collectivizing land and fundamental riches, making them inalienable, and by using its class politics of rationing, price fixing, etc. Money also, de facto if not de jure, loses its function as a measure of value because of the progressive alteration of the law of value. In reality, money only retains its function as an instrument of circulation and payment.

In their essay on the development of communist society, (1) the Dutch Internationalists have taken their inspiration more from idealist thought than from historical materialism. Their analysis of the transitional phase, which they do not distinguish clearly from the communist phase, proceeds from an anti-dialectical appreciation of the social content of this period.

Certainly the Dutch comrades start from a correct premise when they clarify the marxist distinction between the period of transition and full communism. For them, too, it is only in the first phase that the measurement of labor time is valid.

(1) The Fundamental Principles of Communist Production and Distribution. Bilan has published a summary of this text by comrade Hennaut. (Bilan #19, 20, 22)

But where they leave the solid ground of historical reality is in proposing an abstract, accountant's solution of calculating labor time. Basically, they do not answer the essential question as marxists: in the period of transition, how and by what social mechanism will the costs of production be determined on the basis of labor time? They just avoid the question with their fairly simplistic arithmetical demonstrations. They would say that the unit of measurement of the quantity of labor needed to produce an object is an hour of average social labor. But with this, they solve nothing. They are only describing what constitutes the basis of the law of value by transposing the marxist formula, socially necessary labor time. They propose a solution, "each factory will calculate how much labor time is incorporated in its production..." (p.56) but without saying by what mathematical process the individual labor of each producer becomes social labor; how skilled or complex labor becomes simple labor, which as we have seen, is the common measure of human labor. Marx described by what economic and social process this reduction takes place in capitalist commodity production. For the Dutch comrades, the Revolution and the collectivization of the means of production are enough to posit the existence of an "accounting" law coming from who knows where and leaving us ignorant of its functioning. For them, however, such a thing is very easily explained. Since the Revolution abolishes private social relations of production, it also abolishes exchange, which is a function of private property. (p 52)

"In the marxist sense, the elimination of the market is nothing other than the result of new social relations." (p 109) They admit, however, that "the elimination of the market must be interpreted in the sense that the market apparently continues in communism but the social content of circulation is completely different. The circulation of products on the basis of labor time is the expression of new social relations." (p 110) But if the market persists (even if the form and content of exchange has been modified), it can only do so on the basis of the law of value. This the Dutch Internationalists do not see because they are so much under the spell of their formulation of "labor time" which is basically nothing but the law of value itself. For them, it is possible that in communism, we will still speak of "value" but they do not see the significance of this in terms of the mechanisms of social relations which result from maintaining labor time. They simply conclude that since the content of value will be changed, we should replace the expression "value" by "production time" which, of course, does not change the economic realities at all. In the same way, they claim that there will no longer be any exchange of products, just a passage of products. (p. 53-54) They also write, "Instead of the function of money, we will have a record of the movement of

products, social accounting on the basis of average social labor time." (p. 55)

We will see that their lack of knowledge of historical reality leads the Dutch Internationalists to other false conclusions when they examine the problem of the remuneration of labor.

Much has been said about "the product of social labor" and its "complete" and "equitable" distribution. These are confused formulations, which easily fall into demagoguery. The crucial problem of what happens to the social product, the sum of all the work of society, boils down to two basic questions: how is the total product divided? and how is the part of production destined for immediate individual consumption allocated.

We know, of course, that there is no one answer valid for all societies, and that systems of distribution are determined by systems of production. But we also know that there are certain fundamental rules which any social organization must respect if it wants to survive. Societies, like their component human beings, must obey the laws of conservation which dictate not merely simple reproduction but enlarged reproduction. That's a truism worth remembering.

As soon as the economy breaks through the natural, domestic, framework and becomes a market economy, it acquires a social nature, which under capitalism becomes immensely important because of the conflict which inevitably pits it against the private nature of the appropriation of wealth. With the "socialized" production of capitalism, we are no longer dealing with the products of isolated individuals, but with social products. They no longer respond simply to the immediate of the producers, but are the common products of their labor. "The yarn, the textiles, the metal objects, which leave the factories are from then on the common products of many workers through whose hands they must successively pass before being finished. No individual can say: I made this, this is my product". (Engels, Anti-Duhring) In other words, social production represents the synthesis of individual activities and not their juxtaposition. Therefore, "in society, the relation of the producer to the product after its completion is extrinsic, and the return of the product to the subject depends on his relation to other individuals. The product does not immediately come into his possession. Its immediate appropriation, moreover, is not his aim, if he produces within society. Distribution, which on the basis of social laws determines the individual's share in the world of products, intervenes between the producer and the products, i.e., between production and consumption." (Marx, introduction to A Contribution To A Critique Of Political Economy)

This remains true for a socialist society as well. When we say that the producers must reestablish their domination over production, which capitalism has robbed them of, we don't

envisage a revolution in the natural course of social life, but in the relations of production and distribution. In his "Critique of the Gotha Program", Marx denounces the reactionary utopianism of Lassalle's concept of "the product of labor", and poses the question in the following terms: "What is this 'product of labor'? The object created by labor or its value? And in the latter case, the total value of the product or just the portion of value which labor has added to the value of the means of production put to work?" (our emphasis) Marx shows how in social production -- where not the individual producer but the social producer dominates -- the concept of the "product of labor" is essentially different from the concept of the product of an independent worker: "If we first take the term 'product of labor' in the sense of an object created by work, then the product of the labor of the community is the 'totality of the social product'. From this social product, all the factors necessary for enlarged reproduction must be first deducted, as well as reserve funds and those absorbed by unproductive costs and collective needs. This already transforms the "integral product of labor" into a "partial product", that is, the portion of objects for consumption which are individually distributed amongst the producers of the collectivity." In sum, this "partial product" does not contain the materialized portion of previous labor provided in earlier productive cycles and absorbed by the replacement of used up means of production; nor does it represent the totality of the new labor added to the social capital, because the deductions enumerated above must be made. This means that the "partial product" is the equivalent of the net revenue of society, or the portion of that gross revenue which should return to the individual producer for consumption, but which bourgeois society does not integrally distribute to him.

Here then, is the answer to the first question: "how is the total product distributed?" It simply leads us to this conclusion: surplus labor, that portion of living or new labor required by the totality of collective needs, will not be abolished by any social system. But, whereas under capitalism it is an obstacle to the development of the individual, under communism it will be the condition for his full flowering. "In the capitalist world, as in the slave system, surplus labor merely affects the form of an antagonism, since it has as its complement the absolute idleness of a part of society". (Capital)

What really determines the rate of capitalist surplus labor is the necessity of the production of surplus value, the motor force of social production. The domination of exchange value over use value renders the needs of enlarged reproduction and consumption subservient to those of the accumulation of capital. The development of the productivity of labor sets in motion an increase in the rate and mass of surplus labor.

Socialist surplus labor by contrast, must be reduced to the minimum compatible with the needs of the proletarian economy and the class struggle as it continues nationally and internationally. In reality, the problem of how to determine the rate of accumulation and the administrative and other unproductive costs (swallowed by the bureaucracy) will be at the heart of the proletariat's concerns. This issue will be more fully dealt with in another section.

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We must now answer the second question: "how is the partial product in its turn to be divided up?" In short, how is that part of the social product which is set aside for individual consumption to be distributed, that is, the wage fund, inasmuch as the capitalist form for the remuneration of labor will still exist during the period of transition.

Let's begin by noting that there is a view -- all too easily accepted by some revolutionaries -- according to which for collective appropriation to be genuine, it must ipso facto bring about the disappearance of wages and establish equal remuneration for all. The corollary to this proposition is that any inequality of wages presupposes the exploitation of labor power. This view, which is articulated by the Dutch Internationalists, on the one hand is based (and we must emphasize this again) on the negation of the contradictory movement fundamental to historical materialism, and on the other hand rests on a confusion between two different categories: labor power and labor. It represents a confusion between the value of labor power, that is to say, the quantity of work needed for the reproduction of this labor power, and the total quantity of work which this same labor furnishes in a given time.

It is correct to say that the political content of the proletarian dictatorship corresponds to a new social content in the remuneration of labor, which can no longer simply be the equivalent of the products necessary for the reproduction of labor power. In other words, what constitutes the foundation of capitalist exploitation -- the opposition between the use value and the exchange value of this particular commodity termed labor power -- disappears because of the elimination of private property in the means of production; this also means the elimination of the private utilization of labor power.

Of course, the new utilization of labor, and the quantum of surplus labor resulting from it, can be easily diverted from its proletarian objectives (as the Russian experience demonstrates). And so, a system of exploitation with a specific nature, which is -- strictly speaking -- not capitalist, can emerge. However, that's another issue, to which we will return later. For the moment, we must analyze the following point: the fact that the basic motor force in a proletarian economy is no longer the incessant increase

in the production of surplus value and of capital, but rather the unlimited production of use values, does not mean that the conditions are ripe for making all wages the same, that is, equality in consumption. Furthermore, such equality not only does not exist at the outset of the period of transition, it is not realized in the phase of communism, with its opposite formula of "to each according to his needs". In fact, formal equality can never exist; whereas communism finally establishes real equality by recognizing natural inequalities.

However, we must explain why a differentiation of wages still exists in the period of transition despite the fact that wages -- while preserving their bourgeois shell -- have lost their antagonistic content. The question which is immediately posed is: what are the juridical norms for distribution in this period? Marx, in his "Critique of the Gotha Program", answers: "Right can never rise above the economic structure of a society and its contingent cultural development". When he states that the mode of distribution of consumer goods is merely the reflection of the mode of distribution of the means of production, and of the mode of production itself, for him this is a schema that can only be gradually realized. Capitalism didn't establish its relations of distribution in one fell swoop; it did it in stages, on the ruins of the feudal system. Similarly, the proletariat cannot immediately arrange distribution according to socialist norms. It must do so on the basis of norms which are those of a society which "[i]n every respect, economically, morally, intellectually, ... is thus still stamped with the birth-marks of the old society from whose womb it has emerged." Moreover, besides this, there is a fundamental difference between the development of capitalism and that of socialism. While the bourgeoisie developed its economic position within feudalism, at the same time, it established the bases for the future juridical superstructure of its system of production. Its political revolution merely consecrated these economic and juridical achievements. The proletariat does not develop on the basis of a similar evolution; it cannot base itself on even the slightest economic privileges or the least kernel of "socialist right" within capitalism. (Nor can a Marxist in any way see the "social gains" of reformism as the embryo of such a socialist right.) Therefore, for some time, the proletariat will have to apply bourgeois right -- though in a restricted fashion -- to the mechanism of distribution. That is what Marx means when, in his "Critique of the Gotha Program", he speaks about equal right, and what Lenin in his turn means when in State And Revolution he realistically notes that "in the first phase of communism there is the curious phenomenon of the survival of the 'narrow horizon of bourgeois right' with respect to the distribution of consumer goods. Bourgeois right inevitably supposes a bourgeois state, inasmuch as right means nothing without the apparatus that can compel obedience to its

norms. Therefore, under communism, not only bourgeois right but the bourgeois state -- though without the bourgeoisie -- will subsist for a certain period of time."

Marx, again in the "Critique" analyzes how and according to what principles bourgeois equal right is applied: "[t]he right of the producers is proportional to the labor they do; the equality consists in the fact that measurement is by the same standard, labor." The remuneration of labor is effected as follows: "... the individual producer gets back from society -- after deductions -- exactly what he has given it. What he has given it is his individual quantum of labor. For instance, the social working day consists of the sum of the individual hours of work. The individual labor time of the individual producer thus constitutes his contribution to the social working day, his share of it. Society gives him a certificate stating that he has done such and such an amount of work (after the labor done for the communal fund has been deducted), and with this certificate he can withdraw from the social supply of means of consumption as much as costs an equivalent amount of labor. (1) The same amount of labor he has given to society in one form, he receives back in another." Clearly, we have here the same principle as the one which regulates the exchange of commodities, inasmuch as its a matter of the exchange of equal value. The substance and the form, however, differ, because -- with the difference in the politico-economic framework -- nobody can provide anything except labor, and nothing except individual consumer goods can become the property of the individual. But with respect to the distribution of these goods amongst producers taken individually, the guiding principle is the same as for the exchange of equivalent commodities: the same quantity of labor under one form is exchanged for an identical quantity under another form.

When Marx talks about an analogous principle to that regulating the exchange of commodities and the individual quantum of labor, he clearly assumes simple labor, the substance of value, which means that all individual labor must be reduced to a common measure in order to be comparable, evaluable and consequently remunerated by applying "that right which is proportional to the labor they do". We have already noted that there is still no scientific method by which to reduce work to simple labor, and that, consequently, the law of value subsists in this function, albeit with certain limits determined by the new economic and political conditions. Besides, Marx takes care to remove any doubts on this score when he analyzes the measure of labor: "[o]ne person,

(1) Marx understands here by the "value of labor", the quantum of social labor furnished by the producer, since it goes without saying that, because labor creates value, it is its substance, and itself has "no value. Otherwise, as Engels remarked, it would be a value of value, and that would be like giving a weight to gravity or a temperature to heat.

however, may be physically and intellectually superior to another and thus be able to do more labor in the same space of time or work for a longer period. To serve as a measure labor must therefore be determined by duration or intensity, otherwise it ceases to be a standard. This equal right is an unequal right for unequal labor. It does not acknowledge any class distinction, because everyone is just a worker like everyone else, but it gives tacit recognition to a worker's individual endowment and hence productive capacity as natural privileges. This right is thus in its content one of inequality, just like any other right. A right can by its nature only in the application of an equal standard, but unequal individuals (and they would not be different individuals if they were not unequal) can only be measured by the same standard if they are looked at from the same aspect, if they are grasped from one particular side, e.g., if in the present case they are regarded only as workers and nothing else is seen in them, everything else is ignored. Further: one worker is married, another is not; one has more children than another, etc., etc. Thus, with the same work performance and hence the same share of the social consumption fund, one will in fact be receiving more than another, one will be richer than another, etc. If all these defects were to be avoided rights would have to be unequal rather than equal. Such defects, however, are inevitable in the first phase of communist society, given the specific form in which it has emerged after prolonged birth-pangs from capitalist society."

This analysis clearly shows, first, that the existence of bourgeois equal right is indissolubly linked to that of value. Second, that the mode of distribution contains a double inequality: one which is the expression of the diversity of "individual talents", "productive capacities", "natural endowments"; another which in spite of the equality of output arises from differences in social conditions (size of family, etc.). Marx continues: "In a higher phase of communism, after the enslaving subordination of the individual to the division of labor, and with it also the antithesis between mental and physical labor, has vanished, after labor has become not only a livelihood but life's prime want, after the productive forces have increased the all-round development of the individual, and all the springs of cooperative wealth flow more abundantly -- only then can the narrow horizon of bourgeois right be left behind in its entirety and society inscribe on its banners: from each according to his ability, to each according to his needs!" But in the transitional phase, bourgeois right consecrates a factual inequality which is inevitable because the proletariat "cannot yet provide justice and equality: differences, and unjust differences, in wealth will still persist, but the exploitation will have become impossible Marx shows the course of development of communist society, which is compelled to abolish at first only the "injustice" of the means of production seized

by individuals, and which is unable at once to eliminate the other injustice, which consists in the distribution of consumer goods 'according to the amount of labor performed' (and not according to needs)." (Lenin, The State And Revolution)

The exchange of equal quantities of labor in no way implies exploitation, even if it results in inequality in distribution, as long as the form and content of exchange are transformed, and the political conditions which have brought about this change -- the dictatorship of the proletariat -- are maintained. Therefore, it would be absurd to invoke the Marxist theses to justify any form of exploitation whatsoever resulting in fact from the degeneration of this dictatorship. On the other hand, the thesis which tries to show that wage differentials, the distinction between skilled and unskilled labor, simple and complex labor, are all sure signs of a degeneration of the proletarian state, and demonstrate the existence of an exploiting class, must also be categorically rejected. And this for two reasons: first, because it effectively means the inevitability of such a degeneration; second, because it contributes nothing to an understanding of the evolution of the Russian revolution.

* * * * *

We have already indicated that the Dutch Internationalists, in their attempt to analyze the problems of the period of transition, have been more inspired by their own desires than by historical reality. Their abstract schema where, in perfect accord with their principles, they exclude the law of value, the market and money, logically leads them to establish an "ideal" distribution of goods. For them, because "the proletarian revolution collectivizes the means of production and thereby opens the way to communist life, the laws regulating the dynamics of individual consumption must absolutely and necessarily be consonant with it, since they are indissolubly linked to the laws of production; a link that functions of its own accord through the passage to communist production." (op. cit., p.72) So the Dutch comrades think that the new relations of production will, through collectivization, automatically determine a new system of right with respect to products. "This right would be expressed in equal conditions for individual consumption based on an equal measure for consumption. Just as the individual hour of labor is the measure for individual labor, it is at the same time the measure for individual consumption. Through it, consumption is socially regulated and operates on a just basis. The passage to the social revolution is nothing other than the application of the measure of average social labor time to the whole of economic life. It serves as a measure for production as well as for the right of producers to the social product" (p.25)

However, this affirmation can only be translated into fact inasmuch as its concrete meaning is grasped, that is, insofar as it is

recognized that when one talks about labor time as a measure for labor, in practice this means value. This, the Dutch comrades failed to do, and it has led them to an incorrect view of the Russian revolution and, especially, to restrict the scope of their investigation into the fundamental causes of the reactionary evolution of the USSR. They are not looking for the explanation in the subsoil of the national and international class struggle (one of the negative features of their study is that it almost totally ignores political issues), but in the economic mechanism. They write: "When the Russians went so far as to reestablish production based on value, they proclaimed by this fact the expropriation of the workers from the means of production, and that there would be no direct link between the increase in the mass of goods and the share of the workers." (p.19) For them, to retain value is to continue to exploit the labor power of the worker, whereas we believe that we have shown -- on the basis of Marxism -- that value can remain without its antagonistic content, that is to say, without compensation being based on the value of labor power.

That apart, the Dutch comrades falsify the meaning of Marx's words concerning the distribution of goods. In the assertion that the worker draws from the distribution fund in proportion to the quantity of labor that he has contributed, they see only one aspect of the double inequality to which we have pointed -- the one resulting from the social situation of the worker (p.81). But they don't see the other aspect, which derives from the fact that the workers in the same labor time provide different quantities of simple labor (simple labor being the common measure operating through the law of value), which results in an unequal distribution. They prefer to stick to their demand for an end to wage inequalities, which remains suspended in air, because the suppression of the capitalist wage cannot immediately result in the elimination of differentiations in the remuneration of labor.

Comrade Hennault provides a similar solution to the problem of distribution in the period of transition, a solution which he too bases on an incomplete and, therefore, mistaken interpretation of Marx's "Critique of the Gotha Program". In "Bilan", page 747, he says: "The inequality which remains in the first phase of socialism does not result from an unequal remuneration applied to different types of labor: the simple labor of the unskilled worker or the complex labor of the engineer, and all the gradations in between. No, all these types of work are equal, only their "duration" and "intensity" must be measured. The inequality results from an application of uniform tasks and resources to people with different capacities and needs". Hennault turns Marx's thinking on its head when he discovers inequality in the fact that "the share that every individual receives from the social fund remains equal -- assuming of course that the labor provided is the same -- while their needs and the effort made to provide the labor are different". But

Marx, as we have shown, sees inequality in the fact that individuals receive unequal shares because they provide unequal quantities of labor, and it is therein that the application of bourgeois equal right resides.

A policy of the equalization of wages cannot be applied in the period of transition, not only because it would be impossible but also because it would inevitably lead to a collapse in the productivity of labor. The system of equal rations, independent of skill and output, which the Bolsheviks applied during "war communism" was not an economic measure capable of assuring a systematic development of the economy. It was the measure of a regime of a people besieged, devoting all their energies to the civil war. Starting from the general proposition that variations and differences in the skills of labor (and its remuneration) are in inverse proportion to the degree of technical development of the productive apparatus, we can understand why in the USSR, after the NEP, the very great variations in the wages of skilled and unskilled workers -- we evidently don't mean "Stakhanovism", a monstrous product of Centrism -- were the result of the greater importance that skilled labor had there, by comparison to the more highly developed capitalist countries. After the revolution, wage categories in these more developed countries would be characterized by fewer differentiations than in Russia, because the development of the productivity of labor leads to a levelling in qualifications. But Marxists cannot forget that the "enslaving subjugation of individuals to the division of labor", and with it, "bourgeois right" can only disappear under the irresistible pressure of a prodigious technology put at the disposal of the producers.

(to be continued)

MITCHELL

APPEAL TO READERS

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

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- Tasks of the Fraction
- Decline of the I.C.C.
- The International Situation
- Documents : Why Our Tendency Was Expelled From the I.C.C.

OUR PRESS

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- The Revolutionary Milieu and Internationalist Perspective
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INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVE regularly holds Public Meetings as an integral part of its determination to actively stimulate a real debate around the vital issues that face revolutionaries and the working class. For information on topics and dates write to our local address.

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.