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**corporatism, obstacle  
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**DEBATE ON THE PERIOD OF TRANSITION**

**critical notes  
on mitchells text**

**WHY THE RUSSIAN  
REVOLUTION IS NO  
MODEL FOR TOMORROW**

**NATIONALISM,  
CRIME AGAINST HUMANITY**



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# NATIONALISM

## CRIME AGAINST HUMANITY

The national question and all patriotic ideology are just traps to disarm the working class. The slogans about the right of self-determination of nations, about the liberation of oppressed peoples, are part of a powerful barrage against class struggle. Nationalism in all its forms derails class struggle and recuperates all the movements of social revolt that emerge as a result of the contradictions of capitalist social organization.

### MARXISM AND THE NATIONAL QUESTION

Nationalist ideology is even more dangerous today because it is often presented in the name of a supposed "marxism" defended by leftists. In the 19th century, Marx and Engels supported the national movements in Poland and Hungary. But they were opposed to a certain number of Slavic and Rumanian national movements because the Habsburg Empire and the Russian Czar used these reactionary movements against the progressive struggles in central Europe. Marx and Engels only supported a national movement if it met certain criteria: if it struck a blow against feudalism, if it would further the development of the world market, if it would lead to the formation of a viable, capitalist nation state. National struggles that did not, in their opinion, respond to these conditions were denounced without hesitation, in Europe and in the colonies.

The concept used by Marx and Engels was not the struggle of "oppressed peoples" against their oppressors as the left and leftists claim today. Marx knew that the Slovaks and Croats and Rumanians were oppressed but he also knew that their movement had no future, would not lead to any viable state and would represent no advance for the world market. On the contrary, these movements were not necessary for the overthrow of feudalism -- in fact, these movements were allies of feudalism and used by the reactionary powers. Thus, Marx and Engels urged socialists to oppose these movements dominated by pre-capitalist class-

es.

This position changed in the period of the Second International when marxism was twisted and diluted. During the long evolution of reformism in the Second International, the relative clarity of Marx and Engels was lost and it became a dogma that all national liberation struggles were progressive.

But even 100 years ago a voice emerged in the Second International to oppose this regression and demand not that socialists return to the clarity of Marx and Engels but that they use the method of Marx and Engels to go further and understand the changes that capitalism had undergone from 1840 to 1890. This voice was that of Rosa Luxemburg who made her position clear in the 1890s when Polish nationalism was on the agenda of the Party Congress. Despite the fact that Marx and Engels supported Polish nationalism, Luxemburg opposed it saying that it was no longer progressive. Polish nationalism could only be reactionary because Russia had become a capitalist State; the struggle against feudalism had to give way to a struggle against capitalism both in Russia and in Poland. This was to be the basis for the class unity of the proletariat in Poland and in Russia and these two parts of the working class should not be divided and isolated by Polish separatism. For Luxemburg, times had changed and focusing on anti-feudal tasks which had already been accomplished in reality could only detract from the struggle against capitalism. With the outbreak of the first World War, Luxemburg extended this analysis to the whole of the capitalist world considering that nationalism was reactionary everywhere in the world.

This position found supporters in the Bolshevik Party. Piatakov, Bosch and Bukarin strongly opposed Lenin in 1915. Radek, too, at that time close to Pannekoek and the German left, wrote polemics against



Lenin and, in practice, condemned the Irish Easter rebellion in 1916. But in the end, Lenin's position won out in the Bolshevik Party with disastrous consequences. In the Third International, National liberation movements were considered "progressive" if they were undertaken by oppressed peoples. This was a very significant regression of the revolutionary movement in relation to the clarity of Luxemburg. It was a capitulation to bourgeois ideology and, as was shown in later events, a mortal blow to the proletarian cause. It gave a lasting "marxist" cover for nationalism throughout the 20th century.

But even Lenin in 1921 did not defend the same positions as the stalinists, maoists and trotskyists of a later day. For Lenin, it was a question of "critical support" to national liberation movements if they took place in the context of a world proletarian revolution and if there was a distinct and separate party of the proletariat that could exert a decisive influence on the struggle. Lenin's position was wrong and cost the working class dearly. It represented a capitulation on a class frontier and must be rejected in all circumstances. Only Luxemburg's position is compatible with a revolutionary marxist intervention in the class struggle today. But Lenin's position is far from that of the left and leftists today who claim that the working class, as an article of faith, must support any and all national liberation movements.

Even during the Russian revolution itself, we can see the disastrous effects of this criminal position. One week after the October revolution, the Bolshevik government proclaimed a "Declaration of the rights of the peoples of Russia to self-determination, including the right to separate and constitute independent states". On December 18, 1917, the independence of Finland and the autonomy of the Baltic provinces was declared to the great satisfaction of the ruling classes in these regions. But the Bolsheviks refused this right to the Ukraine because the Soviets and the clandestine worker-peasant government led by Piatakov was at war with the "Rada" of Skoropadsky, in Azerbaijan, Armenia and Menshevik Georgia which Russia needed for bread and fuel.

The Finish example shows in letters of blood what the ruling class did with the right of self-determination: when the Finish proletariat tried to take power and rose up in Vyborg, Tammefors and Helsinki at the beginning of 1918, the capitalist class killed more than 14,000 workers and tortured to death in prison 15,000 others. The supposed perspective of a Soviet Socialist Republic in Finland allied to other soviet republics was destroyed.

After the failure of the revolution in western Europe, the Bolsheviks sought out support from various bourgeois formations and nationalist movements. Still motivated by their desire to weaken imperialism, they gave their support to the Turkish committee of "Union and Progress" of General Enver Pacha, to the Afghan emir Aman Allah, to Attaturk and Chiang Kai Chek, the great leader of the Kuomintang who massacred millions of workers in Canton in 1927.

From the time of the Baku Congress of the Peoples of the Orient in 1920, the Communist International encouraged the communists of Asia to collaborate with any nationalist elements as long as they actively participated in the struggle for "democracy", the next step necessary for Persia, India and China. After Lenin's death, the CI expanded even further the "anti-imperialist" doctrine of Lenin by proclaiming that since the colonies and semi-colonies were supposedly the basis of the power of European and American capitalism and the main source of "super-profits", the proletarian revolutionary struggle was dependent on the outcome of the anti-colonial struggle.

The results of this position are clear for those who have eyes to see. All the movements of "national liberation" have considerably weakened and darkened the consciousness of proletarian unity. Far from detaching the exploited classes from the bourgeoisie and fueling the proletarian struggle, far from weakening the metropolises and thereby bringing us closer to the final collapse of the ruling class, these national liberation movements have strengthened the domination of the counter-revolution, nourished with the blood of millions.

Trying to use nationalist demands for communist purposes has gravely hindered the cause of revolution. Lenin and Trotsky, who led the Third International to support "bourgeois revolutionary movements", were entirely mistaken. Those who tried to tell them that in today's era when imperialism dominates the life and destiny of all states, any independence or autonomy would be impossible, were right.

In contrast to the 19th century, national movements today no longer have a basis in necessity and the future of humanity. All of them paralyse society's efforts to move ahead through socialist revolution. All of them are part of the rivalry of the super-powers who divided the world at Yalta in 1945. Under the guise of nationalist demands is only the passage of a region from the domination of one bloc to the domination of the other rival imperialist bloc. There is a strengthening or weakening of one bloc in relation to the other but never a weakening of imperialism as such.

Unless you want to serve the counter-revolution and a particular group of the capitalist class against another, only class struggle can lead to communism.

There is no "national struggle" that is not a blow against the proletariat, a crime against humanity. Colonies or metropolises, Russia or the USA, the exploited must fight not for any nation State, not for a "socialist Europe" as opposed to the Common Market, but against all states, nationalist ones or supra-nationalist ones, centralized or federal States.

#### REVOLUTIONARIES AND THE NATIONAL QUESTION TODAY

During the second World War, the fascists were the most extreme defenders of nationalism and as such, they are no longer able to mobilize a working class anxious to avoid repeating such an experience today. In our period, the task of fomenting nationalism among the workers is done by the left and the leftists. They play the same role as the fascists of the previous generation : to prepare the terrain in the class for isolation, division, racism and war. And they must be denounced by revolutionaries everywhere.

But is the class line against nationalism so clear in the revolutionary milieu, among the small groups who try to keep alive the flame of revolutionary marxism? No; in recent years, a crisis has sapped the political development of the revolutionary milieu. The crisis has weakened the milieu on the national question at precisely the time when, more than ever, clarity on this point is essential.

The fatal weakness of the traditional Bordigist milieu on the national question is well known. The official heirs of the Italian left, the party of "Programme Communiste" created a fatal distinction between nationalism in the advanced countries which it condemned, and nationalism in the rest of the world where it must be supported. Because bordigism does not recognize the decadence of the capitalist system in the 20th century, it believes that capitalism is as healthy today as it always was and therefore that new, viable nation States can and must be created in the "Third World". Against all evidence to the contrary, Programme Communiste supported nationalism (except in Europe) as the task of the hour and it succumbed to dislocation and destruction under pressure from the Arab nationalism it fomented.

But there are, unfortunately, other examples : the flagrant capitulation of "Wildcat" in Great Britain to South African nationalism. "All power to the black work-

ers of South Africa" : this headline appeared a few months before the dissolution of the group. There was also the capitulation of the "Groupe Communiste Internationaliste" (GCI) in Belgium when they gave support to the maoist fascists of Sendero Luminoso in Peru.

Even the "Communist Workers' Organization" (CWO) in the UK, in a recent issue of their publication "Workers' Voice", celebrated the palestinian insurrection in the occupied territories as "an authentic popular movement", from the beginning right up to the present a "spontaneous movement" according to them instead of, as is the case, a movement now orchestrated by the bourgeoisie. The position of the CWO makes things delicately vague and it represents a potential disaster for the class positions of the proletariat. Nationalism of any sort dirties the proletarian banner. Socialism means the beginning of a human community and inter-national unity. There can be no support for nationalism anywhere, at any time.

#### WHAT IS TO BE DONE?

Is the answer to call on revolutionaries to return to the writings of Marx and Engels, to the "invariable program"? No - there is no fossilized program waiting to be discovered as though marxism were a religion. As clear as Marx's understanding of capitalism was in his time, it is no longer enough for clear-sighted revolutionary action today when capitalism has further evolved.

First, as we have seen, Marx lived at a time when the anti-feudal struggle was on the agenda, a time when capitalism was still a progressive historical force. This is no longer the case today. In addition, Marx underestimated the obstacle that nationalism would present for the proletarian struggle. In the Communist Manifesto he wrote, "National differences and antagonisms are daily more and more vanishing owing to the development of the bourgeoisie, to freedom of commerce, to the world market, to uniformity in the mode of production and in the conditions of life corresponding thereto"

But the bourgeoisie has not eliminated nationalism. The tendencies in 19th century capitalism that seemed to go beyond national boundaries are not the ones that came through when capitalism evolved. In the period of decadence, we have seen the full development of state capitalism, the creation of the nation-state fortress. The bourgeoisie has not become an international class and has not created a system where capital circulates freely beyond national frontiers. To a certain extent, state capi-

talism has changed the terms of the equation that Marx predicted.

In the same way, in regard to the working class itself, even though there is a growing uniformity in the conditions the proletariat faces, Marx seems to have under-estimated the weight of nationalism. In certain conditions, as we have seen in the 20th century, capitalism is able to use nationalism to mobilize (or demobilize) the working class. The history of this century has shown that the working class is not impervious to nationalism and that the bourgeoisie is capable of using this to orchestrate untold carnage.

At the present time, the state dominates economic life and controls the mechanisms of accumulation whether it be in the form of complete nationalization as in the East, or the "mixed economies" of the West. In this era of state capitalism, the role of nationalism is :

- in certain circumstances to divide the workers, demobilize them and derail their struggles and discontent by taking it off the class terrain by playing on fears and resentments in the absence of a clear socialist perspective;
- to really mobilize workers for sacrifice, austerity, reconstruction and war. That's what state capitalism means : war. And nationalism is the only ideology which can create the total mass mobilization necessary for the outbreak of world war.

Today in the "Third World", the bourgeoisie is increasingly able to actively mobilize the workers for war, as in the Iran-Iraq war which lasted 6 or 7 years. After years of massacres, the control of the masses shows some cracks but during all that time, the bourgeoisie was able to achieve its goals. But even in the "Third World", nationalism is mainly used to demobilize the workers from their class struggle and not yet to actively mobilize them. In the advanced countries, there is no mobilization at all. In the East as in the West, nationalism is used to demobilize the workers and derail their class struggle.

Nevertheless, the kinds of nationalist movements we have seen, either with the recent electoral campaigns in the U.S. and Canada or in the nationalist movements that are shaking up the Eastern bloc, show the potential horrors that the bourgeoisie is capable of encouraging. Revolutionaries must renew their efforts to denounce this scourge of nationalism which, much more than any AIDS, is capable of destroying mankind.

We could continue by dealing with any of the many nationalist movements that the me-

dia has played up in recent months. In this article, we will limit ourselves to the movements that have shaken Yugoslavia and the Russian empire.

#### NATIONALIST FEVER IN YUGOSLAVIA

Some anarchists, even Pabloist Trotskyists and others used to try to pass off Yugoslavia as a socialist model of the peaceful coexistence of many different nationalities in one federation. The nationalist fever that has taken hold in the six "republics" and two "autonomous regions" of Yugoslavia, stoked by the economic crisis, is proof to the contrary. Today, no one can deny that the results of self-managed "socialism" Yugoslavia style are a catastrophe. The country has a foreign debt of \$22 billion and an inflation rate of 200%. Three-quarters of the self-managed firms are running in the red and more than a million are unemployed. This year alone, people will lose 20% of their purchasing power.

In the autonomous region of Voivodina, on the border between Hungary and Rumania, where Serbs and 12 other nationalities live, 100,000 people gathered from miles around in Novi-Sad at the beginning of October. The demonstrators demanded the resignation of the political leadership which they accused of opposing the Communist League of Serbia. The demonstrators won; an immediate purge eliminated Boske Krunic and his whole machine who were all implicated in various economic scandals. They were replaced by Stipe Suvar and his machine, riotously celebrating their victory.

The internal situation is so bad in Kosovo that it can be called a modern-day powder keg. It is one of the poorest regions of Europe, the hardest-hit by unemployment and inflation, the region paying the biggest price for the many economic "reforms" that have swept Yugoslavia in recent years. The population which is 90% Albanian in origin no longer wants to be treated with contempt by the Serbians who supposedly see them as inferior simpletons. But anger has taken on a distinctly nationalist coloration. At Pristina, the Albanians mobilized several times in November, each time in very great numbers. One of the latest demonstrations was called in solidarity with the Albanian Party leaders who had been dismissed. Mme Kacusa Jasari, the head of the Party, and Azem Vlasi, another member of the local leadership, were accused of nationalist deviations because since 1981 they have forced more than 35,000 Serbs and Montenegrins to leave the region. To avoid any new confrontations, the Minister of the Interior forbid all further demonstrations.

The Montenegrins, a small Slavic people Engels considered a direct enemy of progress in the 19th century, just as czarism, demonstrated as massively as their "enemies", the Albanians, whom they accuse of violence against Montenegrins in Kosovo. In Titograd, rallies demanded the resignation of local leaders who showed cowardice in supporting Albanian nationalism.

In Ljubljana, the capital of Slovenia, the most industrialized republic of Yugoslavia, the population feels more akin to Vienna, Prague and Budapest, the other capital cities of the Hapsburg Empire. Called out by a non-Communist committee for the defense of the Rights of Man, 30,000 people marched on November 21st against the "dominating and centralizing designs" of the Serbians. Communists without a party, Slovenians above all, believers and atheists together all joined the "Socialist Alliance" which seeks to counter-balance the monopoly of the Communist League. The 1000,000 members of this Alliance -- as large as the Slovenian Communist Party -- want to maintain Slovenia in its role as the industrial locomotive of the Federation, preserve its high per capita income that is twice that of Montenegro, for example, and insure a maximum of investments in the region.

In front of the Greek Consulate in Skopje, the capital of Yugoslavian Macedonia, students mobilized on November 23rd to protest the discriminatory policy of the Athenian government against Macedonians. They accuse the Greek Socialists of banishing the Macedonian language in 1982 by downgrading it to a "Bulgarian dialect". With this "spontaneous" demonstration, the students are supporting Belgrade in its effort to make Athens allow Macedonian refugees who fled to Yugoslavia during the bloody Greek Civil War in 1947-1948, return to Greece.

Almost one and a half million Serbs and Montenegrins attended a Belgrade rally in "solidarity, unity and fraternity" with the Serbian minority of Kosovo on November 19th. This rally was prepared months in advance by the State leadership which controlled the rally from start to finish. From a specially built platform, S. Milosevic, President of the Serbian CP harangued the crowd with: "The time for lamentations is over. Now is the time to fight back. We will win the battle of Kosovo." In the University dorms, thousands of students protested the "nationalist policy" of the Albanian leadership in Kosovo.

Recent events have propelled Milosevic into a limelight that no other politician since the death of Tito (1980) has enjoyed. He is the one credited with trying to neutralize the many centrifugal tendencies in Yugoslavia and he appears as the great

unifier of peoples whether they are Orthodox Serbs, Protestant Slovenes, Catholic Rumanians or Muslim Croats.

Although previous nationalist movements (1968; 1981-2) were more the province of students trying to get high management positions and elite strata trying to preserve their privileges, today's movement includes workers who have been drawn into nationalism despite their class movement.

Each Republic wants "its" refinery, "its" airline, "its own" railroad, highways, investment funds, TV, "its own" police. Nationalism against nationalism, chauvinism against chauvinism, bureaucrat against bureaucrat, xenophobia against xenophobia, elite against elite -- there is the smell of vendetta and gang warfare in the air.

It's always poverty and hardship that makes the masses go into the streets. Buying power is collapsing and unemployment grows; the desire to protest, to "do something" is overwhelming, but the old nationalist devils have finally co-opted this protest energy. Strengthened by political leaders pouring oil on the fires, nationalism took over from social demands.

The ruling class and its rival political factions have momentarily succeeded in making the working class lose sight of its fundamental class autonomy. The coal and bauxite miners of Labin, the iron workers of Koljevo, the construction workers of Titograd and the nurses of Belgrade no longer join forces to confront capitalism. They no longer plan strike movements. Instead of wildcat strikes against the austerity program of the left, there is the atmosphere of the "Union sacree". In the spring of 1987, workers used work stoppages and absenteeism to fight against the sacrifices demanded of them, without fear of the lay-offs they suffered after 5 days of "non presence". Today they are grossly manipulated by the State and all the rival clans of competing nationalisms.

The capitalist class in the East is just fulfilling its mission: protecting itself against the proletarian threat by dividing the workers by nationality. Divide and conquer. In the spring, the situation was so bad, there were so many strikes, that the Serbian government feared losing control. So, they launched an attack against the Albanians. Because this campaign found an echo in the working class, it ended the strike wave. The Serbian CP got things back under control. How much longer will it be before workers in the East learn the lessons of today's experiences? Following the bourgeoisie in its nationalist movements, following the siren song of the hatreds of time immemorial, will only condemn the workers' living conditions and their class interests

to bloody massacre.

#### IN THE USSR

In Russia, with the economic crisis and governmental shifting, from the Baltic countries to the Caucasian republics, there has been a massive upsurge in nationalist movements and separatist demands. Coinciding with this situation and claiming to resolve its difficulties, is the rewriting of the Soviet Constitution, a document that sets forth the exact relations between the center and the periphery. In November, the draft was submitted to the Supreme Soviets (the parliaments) of the different Republics of the Union.

A little history may be called for here. With the Hitler-Stalin Pact signed in 1939 at the Kremlin, the era of the new Russian expansionism flourished. The secret protocol declared that Finland, Estonia and Latvia belonged to the Soviet Union's sphere of influence. Lithuania soon followed. These countries were soon "sovietized" by Stalin who presented this as a security measure to insure world peace.

Today, the acceleration of the crisis has propelled onto center stage a nationalism of bureaucrats on the periphery against Russian centralism. Political parties like the democratic parties of the West organize legally and openly. They are recruiting many people and make the working class their favorite stomping ground.

This Popular Front exists only because the stalinists let it exist. In New York and Paris these movements are presented as signs of "liberalization" and "intellectual renewal" but, in reality, they are nationalism pure and simple.

Many Slavs and Russians have emigrated to Estonia in the last 40 years, drawn by better working conditions and a better standard of living. The proportion of Slavs in the working class has attained almost 50%. It is clear that the Estonian nationalist movement represents an effort to divide the proletariat in Estonia. The Estonians say, "Russians are treated better, they get better jobs and wages, better apartments; Russian teenagers go around in gangs, etc." The Russians say the same thing about the Estonians and are afraid of them. With some minor variations, this is the same sort of thing that can be heard in multi-racial neighborhoods in New York or any large city in today's capitalism. It's always the same thing: divide and conquer. The counterweight to the Estonian nationalist movement among the Russians is Interfront (International Front - sic!), an extreme expression of Russian nationalism which under other circumstances would simply be called fascist:

religious, anti-semitic, ultra-nationalist. This kind of movement, in recruiting workers, turns them away from any possibility of class unity with Estonian workers. Revolutionary marxists can only be disturbed by such developments and must see the need to denounce this tactic of the bourgeoisie.

Defying the Kremlin, the Estonian parliament declared the sovereignty of the Estonian Republic. This extraordinary session was followed by the whole population on TV. The "Popular Front" in Estonia was formed in 1988; it now has several hundred thousand members in a country of only 1.5 million people. Its objective is to change the relations that link Estonia to Moscow and to reform economic management. Here too, "communists" show that they are indeed a national force, a party of the defense of national capital. A Mme Lauristin and other "communists" of repute are at the head of this "Popular Front".

Soviet Lithuania, on the other hand, has opted for more cautious behavior as local "communists" led by A. Brazauskas want. But their attitude is criticized by the Sajudis, a movement for autonomy, legally formed in October to support perestroika. They want to block the Lithuanian conservatives. The entire social and intellectual elite of the country wants to push forward a process leading to autonomy. They have reason to be satisfied: the recent adoption of Lithuanian as the official language and the acceptance of the Lithuanian national flag used between the wars.

The government of Lithuania, eager to keep up with its sister republics, published a decree limiting the immigration of "foreign" workers from other regions of the USSR. Another decree prohibited the sale of homes to individuals from other Soviet republics.

Their programs for a "Charter of the People", religious freedom, recognition of a multi-party system, free unions, economic autonomy, their own currencies convertible into Western money as well as Russian rubles, self-management in the factories, etc. say more about the nationalist content of these movements than a long elaboration could.

Further south in Armenia, the nationalist movement is hardening. The nationalists there seek to obtain the reannexation of the autonomous region of Karabakh, an Armenian enclave in Azerbaidzhan, by organizing massive strikes paralyzing almost all economic activity for weeks. A new general strike broke out with a high participation rate to protest against a curfew imposed after anti-Armenian violence in Azerbaidzhan on November 24th. In Karabakh, strikes and demonstrations grew despite a curfew imposed on September 21st. Soldiers



were used no longer just for maintaining order, but to directly take over economic activities and transportation. Soldiers helped peasants with the harvest, guarded water reservoirs and replaced strikers in Stepanakert. At the same time, Azerbaidzhans living in Karabakh and Armenia began to flee fearing reprisals.

Hundreds of thousands joined the demonstrations in Azerbaidzhan on November 24th. It was a general mobilization of an entire people, irate over the death penalty given to one of the participants in the massacre at Sumgait where 32 people were killed, 26 of them Armenians. In Kirovabad, the anti-Armenian pogrom was even worse than in Sumgait. Women were raped, men attacked, houses plundered and burned. Dozens were killed despite the fact that Russian tanks surround the city. By its "absence", the Army facilitated the massacre; this is part of the laissez-faire policy of the central government. Only later did Army helicopters and cars pose as impartial referees, separating the antagonists in this ethnic conflict.

Thirsting for the blood of their "hereditary enemies", Azerbaidzhans slit the throats of Armenians shouting, "Karabakh is Azerbaidzhan". Armenians are fleeing this hell in record numbers. Animated by their patriotic "ideals", Azerbaidzhans directed their anger against the exploited of another ethnic group instead of uniting against the common exploiter.

Today, tanks patrol the streets of this region making it look like another Northern Ireland. The authorities say that dozens were killed in the pogroms but in reality, the victims probably number in the hundreds. The pogroms reached the same proportions as under Stalin, the only difference being that then the Army was the direct perpetrator of the pogroms.

The oil industry has seriously declined in this region. The ruling class is trying to divert the anger of the workers of the region where unemployment has reached a high level. An example of the kind of violent incidents taking place : Armenia decided to build a factory in nearby Azerbaidzhan. The rumor went around that only Armenians would be allowed to work there. This provokes a pogrom where many Armenians were killed. A few days later came the violent reaction of the Armenians.

Maybe Gorbachev did not wish this violence. But given the widespread discontent in the region, which could explode into a confrontation with the State at any time, it is certainly more convenient for the capitalist class that this anger find an outlet in attacks of workers against other workers rather than class struggle. The essence of nationalism is that

it is a poison to divide the working class. The growth of nationalist movements at this time is condoned or even encouraged as a weapon against the class struggle.

On November 23rd, Tbilisi, the capital of Georgia was the scene of a massive demonstration called by the nationalist group, "Ilia Tchat-chavatze" against amendments to the Constitution that would limit the autonomy of Georgia. The demonstrations began with prayers read by an Orthodox priest. 100,000 Georgians marched against the "Russification" of the country. They demanded that the Saingulo region, now part of Azerbaidzhan, be returned to Georgia. The Georgian nationalists, like all other nationalists, show imperialist tendencies, dreaming of the old independent Georgia.

Big demonstrations also took place in Batumi, capital of the autonomous republic of Adzhar where a Christian minority wants to escape Muslim domination.

In proposing reforms of the USSR Constitution, Gorbachev does not mean to loosen the grip of Moscow on the different Republics. The USSR consists of a supra-national centralization in Russian hands, on the one hand, and many subordinated republics, on the other. It is a rigorously centralized, unitary, one-party State. The right of the republics to secede and become independent is purely fictitious. As long as these ethnic conflicts take place on the periphery, Gorbachev tries to dodge them. When the situation is ripe and workers are at each others throats, he steps in to try to mediate as "father of all the peoples". When Russian supremacy is called into question in republics which are economically and militarily more important, such as the Baltic states, Moscow can raise its voice more firmly.

In Baku, there is fear for Armenians; in Erivan, there is fear for Azerbaidzhans. Blood has been spilled for nationalism and thus for murderous capitalism. The spectacle of these numerous confrontations is even more horrible because of the presence of workers who along with peasants and others, participate in these slaughters. Their role in these bloodbaths, their diversion from class struggle, shows the frightening grip of nationalist ideology.

In no way can Yugoslavia or Russia be seen as successful in their resolution of the nationalities question, if by "resolution" we mean the elimination of the causes of conflict, the hate and ethnic aggressions which are all fed and exacerbated by capitalism of all varieties. Today, in both countries, the situation is more critical and inextricable than ever. Gorbachev's Russia is still the "prison of nationalities" as much as czarist Russia was...minus the Bolshevik threat.

Baku, Erivan, Tbilisi, Vilna, Riga, Bel-

grade, Ljubjana and Pristina are covered by national flags proudly held by the crowds. The popularity of the leaders of these patriotic fronts continues to grow. The nationalist poison continues to corrode the minds of men, to gangrene a large part of society, proletarians included. This rot, caused by the delay of real communism, spreads with alarming ease.

The workers struggles face the same obstacles all over the world. They are the nationalist, "anti-imperialist", "third world" ideologies of left and right parties, unions and leftists who shore up the structures of this decadent world. Anti-imperialism, solidarity with enslaved peoples, the quest for national identity and dignity, are all just empty slogans, lies to maintain the illusion that somewhere in the world, the class struggle has a common interest in bourgeois nationalism. The notion of "the right of peoples" belongs only to bourgeois ideology. It is not a revolutionary concept but a theme to mobilize workers around the interests of the bourgeoisie. The slogan, "self-determination of peoples" means giving the bourgeoisie complete freedom to exploit, pillage and dominate for its own interests. Against this principle which means that people find self-determination by electing Stalinists, Social Democrats and fascist Populists, real communism opposes the political self-determination of the working class through workers' councils.

The State is the geographical, economic, political and cultural framework in which class exploitation is organized. It is the territorial unit where capitalists feed off living labor. The professionals of power are protected by a permanent Army and police against the exploited, the oppressed and the hungry. The only nationality of the worker is his wage labor, the sale of himself; his government is capital. Workers have no interest in the nation as such : "Proletarians have no country." (Marx-Engels)

Nationalism and internationalism, bourgeoisie and proletariat, capitalism and communism occupy antagonistic diametrically opposed positions. Nationalism has shown itself to be the worst enemy of the revolution.

In the imperialist scuffle which risks

degenerating into collective suicide, siding with the Christian Armenians means being against the Muslim Azerbaidzhans. To take up the cause of Albanians in Kosovo means rejecting the Serbians. Such is the logic of this garbage choking a humanity fragmented into states, cut up into nations, chained to the bloody gods of the "fatherland".

The proletariat's mission is to destroy all states, national or supra-national. They are all antiquated political formations which, from the point of view of history, suffocate the further development of mankind. Whether they are republics or monarchies, liberal democracies or military dictatorships, the proletariat will have to topple them all. The workers' only flag is the worldwide freedom of all workers. Their only perspective is the communist struggle for the total abolition of all borders imposed on the world by those who profited from capitalist war; for the disappearance of property in all its forms : money, wages, permanent armies and police.

The working class must fight against capitalism, the state, nationalism, bourgeois parties and the unions. Any other perspective means division, diversion, mystification to prevent humanity from taking control over its own productive forces and to organize them, no longer on the narrow scale of the state, but worldwide.

When States, territories defined against an outside world by force of arms, will have disappeared, only the administration of things will remain, a conscious and collective organization of the production and distribution of social riches. In their place will be a communist world, creative and liberated from the antagonism of races and peoples and the causes for this antagonism. A communist, world education, the product of conscious activity, will include and go beyond all national cultures. It will create the foundations of a social regeneration of mankind, incompatible with nationalism, war and exploitation. Then in the crucible of a new life, men will create a really human culture, a truly universal one.

RC & JA

# corporatism

## obstacle for workers struggle

### PUBLIC SECTOR STRIKES

The last months of 1988 saw a proliferation of strikes in the public sector in France, Belgium and Holland. Nurse, state employees, unemployment agency workers, post office workers, railroadmen, subway drivers, Air France mechanics - some tens of thousands of workers in three countries demonstrated the bankruptcy of the Welfare State and the need to confront the state in an effort to hold back the deterioration of living standards.

We are highlighting these conflicts because we feel they contain lessons that can aid and enrich future proletarian struggles both in terms of their intrinsic nature and the overall context of the period.

#### Private and Public: Two Faces of Capitalist Austerity

With capitalism's decline into decadence, a major reorganisation of the system took place with the growth of state capitalism. The First World War marked the major onset of this tendency with the concentration of heavy industry in the hands of the state, organised on a national level directly serving the interests of the war effort. The Second World War marked a new development of this tendency but it was in the period of reconstruction after this holocaust that the mammoth expansion of state capitalism to the whole of society took place. Not only war industries and the state bureaucracy were enmeshed in the workings of the state capitalist tendency, but the whole management of the economy, the entire fabric of social organisation including transportation, health care, education, the containment of social problems (welfare) and so on.

In the majority of industrialised countries, the state became the manager, the 'boss', of hundreds of thousands of state employees; it became the haven of 'stable' employment, the guardian of the myth of the welfare state.

But this Welfare State was responsible for another myth just as dangerous for the class consciousness of workers and the unity of their demands: the idea that those who worked for the state were not like 'other workers', that they were a category apart, state employees, responsible for guaranteeing and administering the social resources of the nation. Thus, many public sector workers were portrayed not as simple workers selling their labour power like all the others, but as a specific category of employees providing a 'service' to the population to assure the people's security. This is a completely mistaken notion for the workers directly involved in this notion of services rendered, but it is just as negative for the beneficiaries who imagine that these organs of state control really give financial support and meaningful services. The myth of this 'public service' was the perfect wedge for sectorialism and parochial concerns to creep in and eventually swamp the movements during this past year.

Although the myth of the Welfare State still sings its siren song, the 1980s have shaken up all the certitudes about the ability of the different capitalist states to provide goods and services to the needy among the working poor. The bourgeoisie can no longer hide the depths of the contradictions sapping the strength of the economic system. The idea that we can ever really hope to see 'the light at the end of the tunnel' has gradually faded to an illusion. Reality has repeatedly shown that all the bourgeoisie can offer as a perspective is widespread austerity to try to slow down the slide to economic chaos and the spectre of economic collapse, massive unemployment and hunger.

Drastic measures have affected whole sectors of 'private' industry but state capitalism, too, has undertaken extensive restructuring. Workers in public services were hard hit:

wage freezes, budget cuts, no new hiring (so there are fewer workers to do the same if not more tasks); 'solidarity' payments for the unemployed paid not out of profits but out of the meagre salaries of other workers. All these measures have reduced the standard of living of the workers and led to intolerable workloads.

But the public service workers have not just submitted without a peep. There were massive railroad strikes in Belgium in 1983,

Belgian public service workers as a whole in May/June 1986, French rail workers in 1986 who broke a long period of social peace; English nurses and postal workers in 1988. In fact, 1989 was a year of major strikes in most of the public services of the principal nations of Europe. Movements also occurred in Sweden, Denmark and Italy and the 700,000 public service employees in Peru, the rail strikes in Greece and the various teachers' movements in France must not be forgotten.

### Recent Events

The official press has given most of its attention to two movements: the police in Belgium and the nurses in France. By putting the spotlight on these two conflicts the bourgeoisie effectively removed attention to one of the most important characteristics of recent events: the multiplicity of strikes and the existence of discontent in other sectors of the public services in the three neighbouring countries of Holland, France and Belgium.

Strikes began in May/June 1988. 30,000 Dutch public service workers were threatened with a loss of hundreds of jobs because of a 'privatisation' plan due to come into effect in 1991. Several big demonstrations took place in May/June but this discontent was subtly diverted by the unions towards demands foreign to working class interest and tightly controlled by them to avoid any extension to other sectors. The need for active and meaningful solidarity and the trend towards extension, are elements naturally a part of any strike movement. That is why the bourgeoisie's constant worry is to find some way to divide the workers: sectoral mystifications, the defence of a particular statute, isolation by profession, by job category, by specificity. These are divisions imposed by the bourgeoisie on the natural tendency to extension which we find as a fundamental feature of the class struggle in recent months.

The movement of nurses in France is particularly characteristic of this tendency. The pressure of rank and file unionism and the weight of sectoralism were responsible for the defeat of this very significant movement. On 29 September, nurses protested against

their difficult working conditions and absurdly low salaries by demonstrating against the Socialist government of Mitterand. For three weeks the movement spread and won over all hospital employees.

The anger and determination of the hospital workers were obvious in the massive demonstrations they organised in front of workers of other sectors and also in the general assemblies and coordinating committees that were set up. Their demands for wage increases could easily have found an echo among other public sector workers since at practically the same time postal workers were out on strike too.

First, the post office drivers struck (against the same threat which mobilised public sector workers) against the 'privatisation' of part of the postal transport system. This 'decentralisation' meant in practice a loss of jobs for 4125 truck drivers. Sorting centres also went out on strike, mostly in Paris, demanding mainly better wages and the creation of new jobs. There too, 'co-ordinating committees' were to be formed. At the same time (beginning in November) urban transport workers in Paris, Lyons and Valenciennes struck for better wages and working conditions and so did the mechanics of Air France and the employees of the Social Security administration. Workers of the nuclear generators expressed their discontent by shutting off the power or lowering voltage. Anger also rocked the national railway company (SNCF) and the government unemployment administration.

Everywhere there was the same combativity, the same demands for better wages and working conditions; everywhere there was the same tendency towards the creation of 'coordinating committees'. But everywhere there was also the same inability to unify these similar demands in a joint struggle against that basic bullwark of the capitalist class: the state.

### The Coordinating Committees as Instruments of Rank and File Unionism

The capitalist class in France was well aware of the tension mounting in the working class and specifically in the public sector. It found itself facing a double problem. First, there was the presence of its left in the government. While that was the best solution for a coherent management of the state, since the right remained unable to overcome its internal factional divisions, it prevented the left from playing its role of 'critical opposition' and phony defender of the workers' interests. The left factions of the capitalist class play that role very well, as long as they themselves don't have to directly carry out the austerity measures which the defence of their class interests

demands. Secondly, the low levels of unionisation - which in France, as elsewhere, have decreased even further in recent years - made union control over the struggles more difficult to achieve.

But pointing out the difficulties of the capitalist class does not mean that it is 'weak' and necessarily on the defensive; the function of analysis is to warn our class against the traps that its class enemy is preparing.

With hindsight, it is clear that the 'coordination' of the nurses showed all the signs of great combativity and a will to organise outside of the unions and to keep control over the movement by regularly meeting in general assemblies and electing delegates. These are indeed indispensable tools for any self-organisation. But they don't guarantee such success. Self-organisation is not just a matter of organisational forms but also of class content and political clarity. Trade unionism is not simply a question of the presence of unionist structures; it is also the pernicious infiltration of bourgeois ideology which, little by little, can drain the class content out of self-organisation and workers demands.

So it seems clear that the capitalist class, through its left factions, has found an answer to the combativity and the tendency to self-organisation of the struggle: coordinating committees. They were not the place where the life of the class was centralised, nor were they levers for the expansion and political clarification of the movement. They were a structure to enclose the strike. It was no coincidence that the nurses coordinations were quickly built into a permanent organisation. And the other coordinating committees - like those in the postal sector - have never done anything but isolate all the conflicts from each other. Even though these struggles started out with similar demands they were isolated into the particularities of each sector, of each category. By erecting barriers between movements which in fact took place simultaneously and which were clearly linked, coordinating committees were the instruments with which the capitalist class buried the struggle in sectoralism. In the health sector, illusions based on the desire to give better health care contributed to this sectoralism, by separating health workers' demands for better wages and working conditions from those of other sectors, changing it into a question of recognition of their particular 'statute' going so far as to demand the exclusion of workers without a degree. And, if any doubt remains about the class nature of the coordinating committees in France, one needs only to read this cynical remark in the Belgian Trotskyist paper 'La

Gauche' (No 21, 29 November 1988, p12):

"In contrast to the union organisations which have become minoritarian, in some sectors even marginal, this formula [the coordinating committees] will allow combative unionists active in it, to combine working to build coordinating committees with the struggle within the union organisations."

So the main lesson from the movements in France is this: while the struggles started almost at the same time, extended to several parts of the country, expressed a similar refusal of increased exploitation, while they were rich in combativity and potential, they did not succeed in overcoming the controls put into place by the 'radical' factions of the capitalist class. Despite their force and their importance, these struggles never really made the ruling class nervous. They all ended the same way: each group of workers locked up in its own sector.

#### The Same Combativity in Belgium

While on one side of the border, workers were fighting against the conditions of their exploitation, on the other side of this artificial barrier, workers of the same public sector were fighting the same conditions of exploitation from a different nation state.

It was interesting to see that the part of the state which serves to protect the bourgeois order - we're talking about the police - was also in conflict with the state. Yet we don't confuse the protests of these repressive forces with the movements which brought nurses, para-medical workers, workers of the unemployment administration, taxes, customs, tramways, busses of several of the main cities, postal centres and the dockworkers of Antwerp into the streets. All these actions must be seen in the framework of the crisis of the capitalist system, which pushes the capitalist class to take ever harsher measures. Between 1981 and 1987, all wages of Belgian public sector workers were frozen and a 'solidarity tax' was withheld from their wages. During the same time, the number of employees was reduced by about 60,000. The struggles in Belgium touched the same sectors as in France, occurred at the same time and produced similar demands. The lessons to be drawn from it are unfortunately also the same: isolation means defeat.

#### With or Without Coordinations, The Issue is the Same Unionist Control

It is amusing to note that the protests in Belgium, as in France, were directed against a 'socialist' government. Despite the slogans which the socialists spouted during the last elections about "a return to the heart",



under their management the state machine as boss imposes the same austerity upon the workers as the most rightist governments do! Faced with the crisis of its system, there's only one capitalist class, and it is with the same iron hand that the different governmental teams organised the decline of wages and working conditions which led to the struggles in the public sector in Belgium.

In contrast to the particularly low level of unionisation among nurses in France (only 5%), the workers in Belgium are much more attached to the unions, even though they also increasingly distrust these organs of capitalist control. But the problem of a 'replacement' for unions like the coordinating committees in France was not posed in quite the same way. Here the entire trade union apparatus, from its bureaucratic top to its radical shop stewards, was fully used to accomplish its work of recuperating and controlling the struggles. Despite the real combativity, the unions never lost that control. As the Belgian daily 'Le Soir' noted (19 November 1988): "While the thrust of demands is extending in all directions, the unions are galloping behind or alongside their troops, trying to canalise the outpourings of anger."

The usual tactics of stalling and confusion were used to erode the discontent of the workers, to prevent workers from seeing that all their demands were basically the same. And yet this unity was expressed during a demonstration in Brussels, where some 6500 workers of different branches all took up the same slogan: "a 10% across the board increase". But the organisation of separate demonstrations, each province in turn, the stalling of several actions (like the advance notice given for the strike in the public health sector, weeks beforehand) allowed the unions to pressure the movement with the weapon of divide and conquer. In Belgium too, sectoralism proved to be the most effective extinguisher of the struggle. Sector by sector, deals were signed. The workers were given some imaginary crumbs: a 3% rise for state employees, a lump payment of 1000 Belgian francs (about US\$25) before tax, for public health workers ... and each sector separately was manoeuvred back to work.

### Conclusion

Quite regularly, and in all parts of the world, the working class rattles the heavy chains that bind it to capitalism's system of exploitation. Workers do not meekly accept the yoke of the class enemy. Our class reacts, sometimes violently, against capitalism's perspective of increasing austerity.

The recent struggles in the French, Belgian and Dutch public sectors must be seen in that context. But they also have something more to show us. They show us not only the

strengths and weaknesses of the proletariat, but the strengths and weaknesses of the capitalist class, the class enemy.

Its weakness, because the state the foundation of capitalist society, is increasingly being stripped of its pretensions of being the provider and guarantor of employment and welfare (part of the illusions of the reconstruction - years after world War II) and appears as a tyrant with empty pockets. Its strength, because it appears that the capitalist class, in its struggle for survival, relentlessly sharpens its weapons. Only rarely is it surprised by the working class and it even penetrates the workers' attempts to organise themselves autonomously, turning these structures into obstacles for the development of the workers' struggle and political consciousness.

We saw this in France and Belgium where, despite the handicap of having its 'socialist' factions in government, the capitalist class had a capacity to react and adapt that should not be underestimated. The French coordinating committees were part of that reaction. They expressed a real push towards workers' self-organisation but were recuperated and used to counter-balance the relative weakness of the traditional unions today. They were used as weapons against the struggles. Emptied of the dynamic towards self-organisation, they became conduits for the sectoralism which divided and shattered the struggle.

More than ever, these struggles show us that class struggle is a fight without mercy, without respite; a struggle whose ultimate stakes - life or death, socialism or barbarism, revolution or war - are becoming increasingly clear.

In this battle, the proletariat cannot score any partial victory: any crumb capitalism might concede today will be gone tomorrow. The workers will find victory only in the revolution which overthrows the order of capitalist exploitation.

Rose  
February 1989

## ROUMANIA

# Ceausescu/Gorbachev: 2 sides of the same coin

Lately, the democratic press of the Western countries has been deeply touched by the situation in Romania. At first, it condemned the demolition by bulldozer of the old quarter of Bucharest as a crime against "human culture". Now, it sheds its tears over the "plan for the systematization of villages" which will bring about the destruction of seven thousand of the thirteen thousand rural villages counted in 1987 in this essentially agricultural country. It attributed these acts to the megalomania of an individual smitten with grandiosity, living in Pharoanic excess. And the press contrasted this visibly growing pathological state of Nicolae Ceausescu to the "enlightened" attitude, "open to the future" of a Gorbachev freeing himself from "Marxist - Leninist" ideology, the author of a courageous Perestroika, with its promise of beautiful tomorrows. The "wise and good" Mikhail wanted the happiness of "his people", while the "evil Nicolae" worked for the unhappiness of "his fatherland" groaning in chains. Whereas the Russian leader has succeeded for over two years in laying it on thick with a series of projects for the improvement of the "Soviet" system, by contrast the Romanian chief has forged unanimity against his "retrograde and Stalinist policy".

This Manichean vision of things is typically bourgeois. Refusing to see in capitalism the fundamental cause of social dramas and wars, this ideology has always sought and pretended to explain the state of the world, its functioning, by the altruism of some and the evil of others.

In fact, it is impossible to comprehend the bases, perspectives and limits of both Gorbachev's Perestroika and Ceausescu's terroristic mass mobilization unless it is clear that both policies proceed from the necessity to try to stabilize and consolidate a crisis - ridden Stalinist regime. The Stalinist regimes are characterized by an industrial, technological and financial backwardness relative to the techno - industrial behemoths of the West, by their economic, political and military independence of the dominant American bloc which they seek to challenge on the imperialist chessboard, and by a quasi - total nationalization of the means of production through which the bureaucracy and the Stalinist party, as the personification of capital, direct the accumulation process. Whatever the specific policies and program pursued at a given historical conjuncture, "liberal" or "hard -

line", the real goal of these regimes is the extraction of surplus - value from the working class, the intensification of the exploitation of labor, and the accumulation of capital. In the frantic pursuit of this goal, the Stalinist regimes which are "normally" based on extreme bureaucratic centralization and "planning", oscillate between the introduction of market mechanisms on the one hand, and the terroristic mass mobilization orchestrated by the Leader who incarnates state power and personifies society on the other.

The bureaucratic centralization and "planning" (real planning is impossible in a society based on class antagonisms and regulated by the capitalist law of value) characteristic of the Stalinist regimes is plagued by chaos, irrationality and (in purely capitalist terms) incredible waste. The vaunted "expertise" of the bureaucracy is an ideological sham, behind which lies careerism, inertia and corruption which attains epidemic proportions, and sabotages the very plans drawn up by the bureaucrats themselves. For the working class, bureaucratic centralization and "planning" means chronic shortages of the basic necessities, and low productivity and endemic absenteeism as they seek to resist the demands of their exploiters.

The crisis situation provoked by bureaucratic centralization is what launches the Stalinist regimes on their periodic bouts of "liberalization" and "democratization". From the Khrushchevian policy of "de - Stalinization" announced at the famous Twentieth Congress to the Gorbachevian policy of Perestroika, the Stalinist regimes have had recourse to market mechanisms to compensate for the unsatisfactory rate of capital accumulation provided by bureaucratic "planning". From the point of view of the working class, such "liberalization" always means an intensification of the rate of exploitation through speed - up, higher prices through inflation, and unemployment.

But the real limit to such a policy is that it ultimately threatens the rule of the bureaucracy and the single party regime on the one hand, and the capacity to pursue a policy of imperialist challenge to the dominant American bloc on the other. If the market mechanism is allowed to proceed unchecked, the stability of the regime itself will be compromised. It is precisely this danger that sets rigid limits to the

utilization of market mechanisms and the whole panoply of measures of "liberalization" in the Stalinist world.

The other alternative to the bureaucratic inertia of the Stalinist regimes is the periodic and dramatic initiative of the Leader to overcome bureaucratic impassess through mass mobilizations. Through a combination of ideology (Leader cult, xenophobia, nationalism, etc.) and terror (forced labor, the Gulag, the "killing fields", etc.) it is possible to -- in the short run -- achieve a mass mobilization and direct the process of capital accumulation into vast infrastructural projects and the military sector. It is this fact, independent of the particular psychic makeup of the individual Leader or the specific historico-political conjuncture that provides him with power, that underlies the monstrous careers of Stalin, Mao, Kim Il Sung and Pol Pot. Within the dialectic of the Stalinist regimes, it is in this last alternative that the current policies of Nicolae Ceausescu must be situated.

The modernization of Bucharest and the "Plan" mark a further step in the breakdown of the "socialist" system and an ensuing step in the strengthening of the exploitation of the working class, and of social misery.

Removed from the land, certain categories of peasants have had to re-establish themselves in "proletarian - cities", the pearls of Romanian socialism (sic.). In these cities, they have been assured that they will henceforth live in vast, modern habitations, conceived for their maximum ease, with electricity, running water, bathrooms, indoor toilets, and "Western" style gadgetry. Big is the lie, because these habitations which have sprouted from the land are like the huge public housing projects in America's inner cities, poorly constructed and using cheap materials. They are veritable civilian barracks, placed under the constant surveillance of the paid helots of the bashibazouk Ceausescu.

The hundreds of thousands of affected peasants will be transformed into agricultural workers, imprisoned in agro-industrial combines with sufficient land, and factories for preparation and transformation. Whatever the harvest, they will have to fulfill the obligatory deliveries to the boss-state which will centrally fix all the inputs and outputs, including wages. There will be a sales network following the average cost of production so as not to make a liar out of the law of value, capitalist profitability and the profits of the enterprise.

The brutal suppression of a large part of the "free" peasantry cruelly illustrates the tragic Marxist recognition of the fact that decadent capitalism can only lavish devastation. A mass of producers, who had preserved their means of subsistence, has been expropriated. It is clear that this transformation of the agrarian economy and of juridical relations in the countryside has

accelerated the state capitalist character of Romania. In the framework of capitalist collectivism, where the state is the sole employer of labor - power, the totalitarian tyranny of the Leviathan, incarnated by the agents of the local administration and the brigade chiefs giving orders and counter orders in the new agro-industrial complexes, will emerge strengthened.

Ceausescu has not delivered his first blow. As Vice-Minister of Agriculture, he undertook the "collectivization" of 1949, which basically affected the "chiabur", a local sort of middle Kulak. At that time, either these peasants "spontaneously" adhered to the "agricultural collective" or they were starved thin as a rail, stripped of their last shirt and robbed of their last chicken. Then they were sent to work on the huge construction project for a canal to link the Black Sea to the Baltic.

Forty years later, under conditions of a world capitalist crisis, the Romanian regime raises a hue and cry to generalize the proletarian condition to other social strata, so as to bring about the homogenization of the whole society, while extending the tentacles of state capitalism. What is occurring in Romania is the extension of the stranglehold of state capitalism to the whole of social being, the realization of the community of capital. Women and men, old and young, will only exist to assure the valorization of capital.

All of the state propaganda presents the project for the "systematization of land" as an accomplishment of the Romanian people. Worked up by a pernicious nationalist fever, the hierarchs repeat, "One people, one nation, one leader". Exactly what a certain Adolf Hitler said to the German proletarians mobilized in the fascist "Community of Labor". Like every ruling class, the one led by Ceausescu presents itself as the "defender of the general interest", the "interests of the whole people", while class antagonisms reach a paroxysm and have brought a curse on the proletariat and poor peasants for the benefit of their rulers.

Those with the boldness to resist, so as to escape the horrendous labor conditions to which they are subjected, are accused of knowingly sabotaging the task of socializing the countryside, and reduced to the condition of forced laborers by the system of Romanian justice. Their labor-power will be acquired by the state, not for a wage, but as a result of arrest, and will therefore cost nothing. When the workers give out, the state will carry out a new wave of police round ups. In this peoples democracy, established by Russian military power, there are sufficient prisons and concentration camps to dampen the taste for revolt. Any act which questions the bases of the social order in Romania is punishable by forced labor in industry, agriculture, or any other enterprise in the name of the supreme interest of the state. For those who can be rehabilitated, the doors of a specialized re-education center, where proof of one's loyalty can be demonstrated by

continuing to work as a slave, will be open.

One does not have to belong to the so-called dregs of society to be shipped to a labor camp. Presently, jobless youth, after their high school or college diploma, must serve the state. They are put to work on construction projects to "build the future of Romania" or simply sent to the coal mines. Ceausescu's barbarism bears comparison with the abominations of the great landed proprietors of old, under Cantacuzenes and Marshal Antonescu.

In the "labor communes", the agricultural worker is a domesticated appendage of capital, a slave of the "worker's state". He will pay for the "agrarian revolution" by an infernal super-exploitation. He will work, he will sow, he will harvest, and at each stage he will be expected to over-fulfill his productive quotas.

The cities will not benefit from any improvement in foodstuffs, any fall in prices for necessities. Urban and rural dwellers will continue to tighten their belts. For many years, they have lived with shortages of the most essential goods: no milk, no more butter or cheese, no sugar or coffee, cooking oil rationed, eggs sold as if they were gold. Alone among the population, the members of the Nomenklatura, the bureaucracy, feel no pinch. For them, the state provides a life of plenty. For the bulk of the population, however, socialist Romania must impose severe restrictions on consumption, with the result that the people -- if they are to avoid starvation -- must ruin themselves by buying on the black market.

A country with extremely fertile land, which could produce rice, wheat and a profusion of grains, and a multitude of citrus and other fruits, is incapable of satisfying the basic food requirements of its laboring population. That is why, when questioned by Western journalists about its standard of living, the people could respond: "Meat? Don't make us laugh".

The establishment of industrial installations in agricultural regions obeys a purely capitalist logic. In this case, it has nothing whatsoever to do with the communist pre-occupation with ending the antagonism between city and country. The abolition of the social and professional division of labor had already been put forward by the utopians, and with particular vigor by Owen. Marxism added that this would be possible only with the elimination of classes. Capitalism cannot exist without a division between city and country, and this latter cannot be abolished without communism.

What communism is based on, is the abolition of the proletariat and not its generalization. Indeed, there can be no proletariat without its antithesis, capital. Under communism, there will be neither industrial nor agricultural proletarians. Moreover, society itself will not be the owner of the land; there will be only those

who use it.

A proletarian revolution will not take brutal measures of spoliation against the peasants. Faced with the backward psychology of the mass of peasants, and confronted with revolts against the dictatorship of the proletariat, it will oppose the idea of associated labor, bringing together the whole of society in a reorganization of the world from which abundance -- the essential solution to the problem of the satisfaction of needs -- will emerge. From the very beginning, a post-insurrectional society will do exactly the opposite of what Stalin and his clone Ceausescu did. It will attack the commodity character of agriculture so that society as a whole will decide on the distribution of the available products. It will transform farm equipment into the patrimony of society and not into state property. It will not utilize agronomic science and technology to extort a little more labor out of those who furnish society with its foodstuffs. It will act so that the abundance made possible by gains in productivity permit an allocation that will satisfy the hunger of all.

As a priority, the new society will orient agriculture towards a socialized production and unitary administration, without any elements of constraint: material, physical or financial. Only such a type of agriculture will be able to respond to the needs of the human species. That can happen only on a truly global scale, when the ancestral rivalries and divisions between city and country, engendered and fed over the course of centuries by successive regimes of exploitation of man by man, will be abolished.

R. C.

# WHY THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTION IS NO MODEL FOR TOMORROW

If we have decided to again take up the question of the Russian revolution in our publication and in our public meetings, it is not to compete with the processions on Red Square commemorating the 70 anniversary of the October revolution, but to recall to the working class the fact that October 1917 was opposed to what was being commemorated on Red Square. The October revolution was not a movement for the creation of a statified, bureaucratized, police and militarized society, next to which the Tsarism that it replaced pales by comparison, but the highest point of a movement for the revolutionary transformation of the world capitalist system; a movement opposed to the relations of exploitation, of oppression, which characterize that system, and therefore a movement also opposed to the states, bureaucracies, police and armies, which are its expression on the political and military plane. To that end, the Russian revolution is not for us an object of contemplation, of commemoration, but a moment in the general and historic movement of the proletariat for its own emancipation; a moment that is only of interest for the historical lessons that it can make live in the present and future struggles of the proletariat.

Our goal, therefore, is not to glorify a particularly important movement, but rather to draw from it as many elements as possible that can contribute to the development of the class consciousness of the proletariat today and tomorrow. The best homage that we can pay to the Russian workers who died for a new society is to make a critique of their strengths and weaknesses, so as to fuel the present struggles (and those to come) for that same new society. Those who do not conceive their role in this way, only perpetuate a dead, ideological, image, an object of passive admiration or aversion, that can only negate the efforts made by the proletariat to take its historical fate into its own hands.

Unfortunately, most of the existing revolutionary milieu do not fundamentally distinguish themselves from such an ideological position. For those who defend "Leninism" (explicitly or implicitly), Lenin and the Russian revolution still constitute a model for revolutionaries and for the revolutionary movement of the proletariat today. Even among those who demarcate themselves from such a position, like the ICC, the same tendency exists. At the time of our expulsion from the ICC, that organization also found in the Bolsheviks a "model" to

inspire them. At the other extreme, for the classical Councilists (increasingly rare today), Lenin and the Russian revolution also constitute a model -- but a model of a bourgeois revolution, a model to reject. What these two currents have in common is their ideologization of the Russian revolution. But that revolution was a living experience for the proletariat, and as such there can be no question of either copying it or rejecting it. The Russian revolution was, first of all, in Trotsky's words, "the violent irruption of the masses into the domain in which their own fate would be determined". This is impossible to see with the caricatural schema of the classical Councilists or Leninists, with their revolution carried out by a party -- be it bourgeois or proletarian -- at the head of a working class reduced to a mere *masse de manoeuvre*.

The immense revolutionary spontaneity demonstrated by the proletariat, the movement beyond such spontaneity represented by the general organization of the proletariat into Worker's Councils and of the vanguard into a party, the difficulties and contradictions encountered in that process, have all been amply treated in the article that appeared in IP #8. The lessons drawn on that plane are essentially "positive", in that they concern the ascendant march of the revolution, showing how the class in Russia overcame its weaknesses so as to make possible the seizure of power, and how that came about. But, if the revolution temporarily triumphed in Russia, the most striking feature of the revolutionary wave of that epoch, in Russia as in the whole world, was its defeat. It is just as important, indeed more important, to draw the "negative" lessons of that defeat so as to arm the proletariat today. It is this point that we want to raise -- all too briefly -- in the present article, with the goal of continuing the analysis made in IP #8.

It is on this plane, still more than in the "positive" lessons, that we can clearly see the absolute bankruptcy of any conception which presents the Russian revolution and the bolshevik party as "models". This is so because, as the Bolsheviks themselves said in July 1917, it is not enough to take power, you have to be able to hold it. Even more: it is necessary to extend power and consolidate it on a global scale. It is precisely in this respect that the Bolsheviks failed.

The Bolshevik party was itself denatured and transfigured into a totalitarian state



capitalist apparatus such as we know it today. The classic response of the unconditional defenders of the "Russian model" is that it was the incapacity of the rest of the world proletariat to make the revolution that led to the isolation of the Russian revolution. That is true, but it in no way resolves the issue. It is still necessary to explain why the revolution failed in the other countries, and why the Bolsheviks so easily allowed themselves to be drawn into the cogs of a new capitalist state apparatus. The reasons for the defeat of the revolution in other countries, and of the transfiguration of the Bolshevik party and of the degeneration of proletarian power in Russia, are fundamentally the same: the lack of historical experience and the failings of the program of the proletariat (and of the revolutionaries in particular) at that time. On that level, the Bolsheviks were most certainly not adequate to the task. In fact, we can say that the Bolsheviks themselves were an active factor in the defeat of the revolution in other countries by virtue of the "model" that they represented at the time. When the Bolsheviks controlled the Communist International after 1919, they proved no more capable than the German revolutionaries of providing an answer to the problems posed in Germany; indeed, they increasingly gave wrong answers to these problems.

The question that must be posed is not why did the revolutions in other countries fail while the Russian revolution succeeded, so much as how come the Russian revolution succeeded while the revolution in other countries failed. To present Lenin as some kind of genius and the German and other revolutionaries as a bunch of imbeciles is pointless, and will only serve to hide the real depth of the problems posed and the lessons to be drawn.

The revolutionary movements in Russia and in the other countries were intimately linked: in all cases, it was a question of the same violent reaction of the proletariat against the terrible privations of the war. If the revolutionary movement went further than elsewhere in Russia, if it went all the way to the seizure of power, that was because of exceptional historical circumstances, circumstances which do not exist today, and on which we cannot count tomorrow. In that period, Russia was characterized by an incomplete capitalist development under the aegis of the Tsarist state, without having undergone a bourgeois revolution. This situation condemned the bourgeoisie to a general state of weakness, both political and economic. The bourgeoisie did not represent a ruling political force, able to mobilize the population behind its social project, and there was a dearth of powerful bourgeois ideologies; there was no developed apparatus of state capitalism, and, in particular, no influential trade unions or mass parties capable of mobilizing the working class. As a result, the working class was more combative, and less controlled by ideologies and structures able to stifle its struggle, while its capitalist adversary was correspondingly

weaker. The temporary victory of the proletarian revolution in Russia owed less to the greater clarity of the proletariat and of the Bolsheviks in that country, than to an intrinsically more favorable situation.

The defeat of the revolutionary wave of 1917 - 1921 resulted from the general immaturity of the proletariat at that time. This was a proletariat brutally confronted by the passage of capitalism into its phase of decadence in the form of the world war and by the new, immediately revolutionary, tasks thrust on it after a long period of struggles for reforms within the capitalist system. The reformism and opportunism which had progressively corrupted the proletariat's permanent organizations (mass parties, unions) and their definitive betrayal at the moment when imperialist war broke out, left the proletariat unprepared for the practical realization of its historic tasks -- tasks that the Social Democracy had increasingly reduced to a distant and vague ideal. The only concrete experience of a movement and organization preparing the class for the realization of its revolutionary tasks was that of the Russian proletariat in 1905. From that point of view, the conditions offered by the world war were not favorable to an overcoming of the lack of preparedness of the proletariat. If the horror of the war could incite revolutionary movements, it could not in and of itself arm the proletariat by a prior accumulation of experience of struggle and by an in depth maturation of its consciousness of the new conditions of capitalist decadence.

This situation was accompanied by important programmatic weaknesses on the part of the proletariat, weaknesses found amongst the Bolsheviks -- as in the majority of revolutionary currents -- at the beginning of the revolution. We will only mention the most flagrant.

On the famous organization question, so often at the heart of divergences between revolutionary currents, it is true that the Bolsheviks had a clearer understanding of the necessity for an independent and centralized party than others -- such as the German Spartacists -- at the outbreak of the revolution. But the Bolsheviks bore the heavy burden of the substitutionist conception dear to Social Democracy -- itself an inheritance from the bourgeois revolution -- according to which it is the party which takes power in the name of the class and of its councils. This conception was shared -- under different forms -- by the whole of the working class and by the revolutionaries of the time, and had disastrous consequences because it led to a weakening of the councils and, therefore, of the activity and of the general strength of the class. Thus, in Russia, a "parliamentary" conception of Soviets predominated, a conception marked, for example, by the election of delegates on the basis of their belonging to a particular party. This view, present from the outset, brought about a very rapid submission of the councils to the Party - State in the aftermath of the seizure of power, thereby

accelerating the breakdown of the revolutionary vitality of the proletariat, and as a result, the degeneration of the revolution and its structures. In other countries, such as Germany, the weight of substitutionism was marked by the ease with which the Social Democracy succeeded in diverting power in the name of the class and in preventing any seizure of power by the proletariat.

Substitutionism is not a burden that only weighs on the proletariat after its seizure of power. It constitutes a fetter on the whole of the revolutionary process. In this sense, when we asserted in our article on the Russian revolution in IP #8 that substitutionism had not been "the determinant factor in the whole evolution of the situation in 1917", we were merely pointing to the simple fact that substitutionism had not been a sufficiently powerful burden in Russia to prevent the revolutionary strength of the proletariat from continuing to express itself in spite of this burden, and from manifesting itself in the seizure of power; nor did it prevent the Bolshevik party from playing a vanguard role in that process. By their persistent call for "All power to the Soviets", the Bolsheviks substantially contributed to the emergence of Worker's Councils as the organs of the revolutionary power of the proletariat. But this positive contribution cannot mask the pernicious influence that at the same time was exercised by the prevailing substitutionism ensconced in the Bolshevik party right from the beginning of the revolution. Because of this substitutionism, the Bolshevik party could not work for the full and complete development of the power of the councils, and conceived of its own role as being that of a general - staff whose orders went so far as deciding whether or not it was tactically wise to struggle at a given moment (for example, before and during the July Days in 1917).

More generally, it was on the very nature of the tasks and of the period that significant weaknesses existed within the proletariat and its revolutionary minorities, including the Bolsheviks. The brutality of the passage of capitalism into its phase of decadence did not allow a fully developed understanding of the new tasks at hand, in particular with respect to the form assumed by capitalism in this phase: state capitalism. At the time, state capitalism was seen on the economic plane more as a step forward in the socialization of the economy, imposed on the bourgeoisie by the contradictions of its system, than as a normal mode of existence, perfectly acceptable, and even indispensable, to capitalism in this phase. This erroneous conception was accompanied by a tendency to identify socialism and statification, a monumental programmatic error which has been the basis for the defense of the working class character of the Russian economy. Now, if capitalism could not be eliminated from one day to the next, and still less in Russia alone, it was absolutely necessary NOT to see in state capitalism any kind of progress towards socialism. Failure on this point

would have disastrous consequences on the political plane, by leading the Bolsheviks to increasingly concentrate on the "stabilization" of power and of the economy in Russia, when the generalization of the world revolution should have been the sole priority.

The consequences of these general weaknesses were apparent on a whole series of political questions. The decadence of capitalism and its evolution towards state capitalism was accompanied by a reduction of parliaments to the condition of a democratic facade, destined to deceive the workers and the population in general. If the Bolsheviks certainly adopted a revolutionary position in boycotting the pre - Parliament in Russia in September 1917, this was not the outcome of the determination of a clear position of principle on this point, but on the basis of an analysis of the immediate balance of forces. If their "tactical" position did not have disastrous consequences in Russia because of the weakness of the bourgeoisie and of the parliamentary arena, it was not the same in other countries where the democratic mystification was much stronger. The defense of parliamentarism under a new form by the Bolsheviks in the Communist International constituted a major negative factor in the revolutionary movements of other countries.

Similarly, the decadence of the capitalist system and its evolution towards state capitalism henceforth meant the impossibility for the proletariat to carry on a permanent struggle within capitalism for improvements in its living conditions. This was the other side of the coin of the integration of the organs previously secreted just for such a struggle, the unions, into the apparatus of the capitalist state. Once again, on this point, the Bolsheviks most certainly did not develop a clear, principled position. While this failure did not have catastrophic results in Russia because of the relative weakness of unions in that country, by contrast, the Bolsheviks defense of the trade union "tactic" within the C.I. had extremely disastrous consequences in other countries, such as Germany where the unions played a major counter - revolutionary role.

The same general conditions prevailing under decadent capitalism meant that the political and parliamentary equivalent of the union, the mass Social - Democratic party, could no longer subsist on the proletarian terrain. These parties were also integrated into the capitalist political apparatus, and played a significant counter - revolutionary role in the revolutionary movements in Europe. That role was much less decisive in Russia, where the Mensheviks had less influence and a lesser implantation in the working class, and had not succeeded in preventing the revolutionary movement from taking the reins of government in the course of the year 1917. Once again, the Bolsheviks were firmly opposed to Menshevism, without, however, adopting a clear, principled position on this issue. As a result, the Bolsheviks would later reopen the doors of the C.I. to whole

sections of the Social - Democracy in other countries under the cover of the label "centrism", thereby accelerating, in a dramatic fashion, the degeneration of the Communist International.

Finally, inasmuch as the era of world war and world revolution had begun, the defense by the Bolsheviks of support for national liberation movements promoted the abandonment of whole sections of the proletariat to the ferocious counter - revolution of their national bourgeoisies.

On all these points, present day revolutionary organizations which defend the "Russian model" are cruelly lacking and are not up to the demands required of a revolutionary program today. Even if the assertion of an antagonism between socialism and state capitalism today constitutes an absolute criterion for a delimitation of the revolutionary movement, several of these organizations do not see state capitalism as a universal tendency of capitalism in its phase of decadence and continue to see the state as a simple instrument in the hands of the class in power, with which the proletariat can identify itself after the seizure of power, thus leaving the door open to dangerous confusions on the tasks of the proletariat in the post - insurrectional period.

All the "Leninist" organizations share the substitutionism of the Bolsheviks, often making of it a caricature by simply pretending that the phenomenon does not even exist. Even the ICC, previously clear on this point, today proclaims that substitutionism does not represent a danger before the seizure of power.

Consequently, most Leninist organizations have conceptions or practices impregnated with unionism. When they do not explicitly defend trade union work, whether traditional or of a new type, they often slide into unionism by creating factory groups and diverse committees, the practical effect of which is always a form for the control of the workers by sowing the illusion that they can still obtain economic gains within the framework of the system, etc.

An organization like the ICC today justifies the opening of the doors of the C.I. to the Social - Democracy and even takes a step forward in this direction by changing its platform on this point, believing that it thereby corrected its excesses of youth, but in reality confirming its excess of senility.

Several organizations still defend -- after decades of repeated massacres -- the possibility of "national liberation".

In their time, Lenin and the Bolsheviks were prisoners of the "model" that they had become for the world proletariat. Having succeeded in Russia, they thought that they could succeed everywhere else. In fact, they ended up by failing everywhere, with the world



The storming of the Winter Palace

proletariat. Revolutionaries who today pretend to make the revolution on the model of the Russian revolution, or who reproduce the model of the Bolshevik party, are condemned to a certain defeat. The left communists in the '20's and '30's drew the essential lessons putting in question the programmatic framework of the Bolsheviks and the revolutionaries of that period. But no one can pretend that the lessons of the Russian revolution and of the revolutionary wave of 1917 - 1921 have been definitively and completely drawn, so that all that was needed was to eternally repeat them. History advances, and in advancing, it unceasingly throws a fresh light on the past. If revolutionaries today want to take up the torch of October 1917, they can only do so by developing the lessons -- both positive and negative -- of the movements of that epoch so as to be prepared for the challenge of history in the class struggle today and tomorrow.

H. LAZARE

## „INTERNATIONAL REVIEW OF THE COMMUNIST MOVEMENT„

# the limits of an initiative

The revolutionary milieu has been enriched with a new publication: the 'International Review of the Communist Movement' (ICM) whose first issue appeared at the end of 1988. It is the fruit of a process of rapprochement among several groups - 'Communisme ou Civilisation', 'Union Proletarienne' (France), 'Kommunist Kranti' (India) and 'Communismo' (Mexico). In 1987, a joint proposal was made by 'Communisme ou Civilisation', 'Germano', 'Revue Communiste' and 'Jalons' to all revolutionary groups including our Fraction. This text wanted to do something about the extreme weakness of the proletarian milieu which, quite rightly, it stressed. However, it put forward a series of essentially practical proposals: to maintain the total autonomy of all groups but to publish a joint magazine (this was the main proposal) and to strengthen solidarity in the milieu, which was seen as sadly lacking, and so on. The goal was to overcome sectarianism and the general poverty of the political debate.

Since our Fraction has maintained for several years that the proletarian milieu suffers from a serious crisis and needs to become conscious of this and reject all fatalistic paralysis, we naturally took part in the discussions that followed this proposal. The real dispersal of revolutionary forces during the 1980s (political degeneration, splits, disappearance of groups), in the context of the objective economic crisis of capitalism and the increasingly challenging class struggle, has shown the importance of the need to support any reaction against these serious regressions. But in our view, this proposal was based upon a much too limited view of the crisis in the proletarian milieu and the discussions of solutions which followed revealed this even more clearly, with the result that our group, little by little, drew away from this initiative.

Because of this, the solutions proposed to overcome the crisis were bound to fall short, to miss the real roots of the problem. They merely avoided the issues by creating purely technical and formal links between the groups who were sorely in need of something else. The crisis of the milieu was reduced to its merely visible symptoms, as if the symptoms by themselves could explain a disease. Sectarianism, lack of solidarity, are all evidence of a crisis but they don't address the causes.

To the extent that this initiative, this cry of alarm was based on a recognition that a

real crisis exists, we wanted to participate in this effort, to help it along. We wanted to voice our disagreements with this narrow view and defend our own perspectives for helping the milieu to overcome its crisis. That's what we did in several joint meetings, without agreeing to the plan for a joint magazine which seemed to us the wrong way to go about finding solutions. In an article on this question, 'Difficulties in Overcoming the Crisis in the Revolutionary Milieu' (IP7), we summarised our view this way: "The rejection of real political confrontation, of a clarification and decantation of positions vis-a-vis the necessities of the period, and its unexplained 'replacement' by 'technical' measures of a joint publication, comes down purely and simply to denying the existence of a political crisis of the milieu (and therefore not posing the question of how to overcome it) and introduces dangerous confusions on the possibility of permanent technical work situated 'above', 'beyond', 'in spite of' programmatic divergences which are sometimes profound, even including opposition on the nature and content of the practical reaction of the several groups to actual events.

"Therefore, there is a fundamental difference in the step of contacting political groups to propose an exchange of information, help in distribution (which we accept!) and that of establishing a formal link without either preliminary discussion or political agreement between the signatory groups; a link involving a commitment to "observe the rules" such as is mentioned in the proposal, and which we rejected.

"A basic fraternal attitude cannot be identified with an agreement in principle on tasks, no matter how minimal they are."

Today, we salute the effort of the comrades who, by publishing the magazine ICM, are trying to topple the walls of isolation and sectarianism. This magazine is their answer to the havoc that has been created in the revolutionary milieu. The real dimensions of the crisis are better reflected in the different articles in the ICM review because the awareness of the extent of the problem has deepened. We are still convinced of the analysis we made in 1987. The ICM magazine rightly emphasises the theoretical poverty and the practical dispersion of the proletarian milieu. And it raises important political issues (as well as mistaken theories such as the one defending the existence of a

'labour aristocracy'). But in our view, the effort is not based on healthy and solid ground and doesn't offer any real perspectives for overcoming the crisis because it doesn't address the real causes of the crisis. This crisis is the result of erroneous positions, insufficient analyses, unfinished thought both on a general historic level and in more immediate terms. This, of course, leads to wrong interventions within the class struggle. These shortcomings were and are, in one way or another, shared by all revolutionary groups. Nobody has escaped them and that's why there is a dramatic absence of any real pole of regroupment. In this regard, the Bordighist tendency within the revolutionary movement hasn't done any better than the others. It is therefore strange that the groups participating in the magazine ICM who come mainly from the Italian left tradition maintain such a silence on these weaknesses of the Italian left and of Bordighism. This makes us wonder about their real understanding of the crisis in the milieu. Isn't this failure to address causes in the final analysis just a way of remaining loyal to a mistaken view which was there at the very beginning of the process of rapprochement among these groups, a completely mistaken view, which holds that this crisis is only a problem of the 'reappropriation' by the milieu of the pre-existing 'Communist Programme'?

Consciously to take responsibility for a critical re-examination of all past weaknesses, to undertake a firm but fraternal confrontation on all the questions posed by the period in which we live and which are far from being 'resolved', this is the only way forward for the milieu whether we like it or not. Yesterday and today, the project concretised in the magazine ICM seems unable to put this into practice. This neutral cohabitation between groups, this simple addition of positions, analyses and practices which don't really confront each other in a living dynamic; this absence of interaction, this lack of concern for finding a higher synthesis seems constitutionally incapable of responding to the real needs of the proletarian milieu. The real problems haven't really been addressed.

We don't aspire to the role of judges or censors. That kind of nonsense has lasted long enough in our milieu. Nevertheless, we see two mistaken positions in the magazine ICM which seem to explain the limits of this initiative:

- The dominant idea in the magazine is that a simple, passive restitution of the Communist Programme, which was supposedly completed a long time ago and needs only to be newly revealed, would resolve the crisis.

This idea, which is far from new as we said turns once again its back on the lessons of the last 20 years. It may seem to be a lifebuoy but in fact it's a rotten log which has already sunk quite a number of groups. Because of the illusions, the blindness, the sclerosis and the closedmindedness which it contains, this conception has itself contrib-

uted to the crisis which has weakened the revolutionary milieu. To continue to make it the principal basis for our current and future praxis means to condemn the milieu to a labour of Sisyphus and to doom even the best will in the world.

Marxism remains the theoretical framework essential for consistent revolutionary activity. But it is not the same as the much vaster and more complex process of the development of class consciousness. Nor can it be identified with the 'assimilation' of the 'Communist Programme'. This view, typical of Bordigism, denies that the activity of revolutionary minorities is a living, dynamic contribution to the process of class consciousness. This static view of marxism has itself contributed to the inadequacy of revolutionary thought which has tied the hands of revolutionary groups throughout the '80s. (See articles on this question in previous issues of IP. (1))

- But this mistake goes along with another illusion which also appears in the magazine ICM: that the decisive struggles of the working class, those of tomorrow, are the only possible lever to overcome the crisis of the political milieu. First, this view denies the political importance of the current workers' struggles which, even if they are not spectacular, allow the accumulation of a number of experiences for the proletariat. These experiences demand a lucid intervention of political minorities. But it also denies that only a clarification, in the present, of the questions and the stakes of these struggles, can prepare a fertile terrain for the future when the inevitable and decisive class confrontations will be decided. History has amply shown how any lack of preparation can compromise the confrontation with the capitalist class for a long time.

The magazine ICM expresses a growing awareness of the weaknesses of the proletarian milieu. But at the same time, it immobilises the situation instead of overcoming it; the mere juxtaposition of texts (even if it is a good thing to make them accessible, which they wouldn't otherwise be) while maintaining the divisions within the proletarian milieu, seen as inevitable, even necessary. The lack of conscious confrontation of disagreements freezes the current situation without helping it to advance.

Our fraternal hope is that the magazine ICM will be able to overcome this state of affairs: that the contradictions which are already evident in comparing the different articles will lead to a real debate. That's the only possible way to go.

Alma

RIMC

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#### Note

(1) 'Class Consciousness, A Weapon of the Proletariat', IP4 and IP6; 'The Revolutionary Milieu: Where We Have Failed', IP12.



## DEBATE ON THE PERIOD OF TRANSITION

# critical notes on mitchells text

With the publication of Mitchell's text on the economic problems of the period of transition in Internationalist Perspective 11 and 12 our fraction opened a debate on the question of the period of transition from capitalism to communism. We saw Mitchell's text -- which was written as a part of the debate within the Italian Left during the 1930's -- not as a finished communist program for the period of transition, but as a point of departure for a real debate within the revolutionary milieu, one which would critically appraise the classic positions of Marxism in the light of the historic experience of the proletariat and the transformations internal to the capitalist mode of production over the last fifty years.

Mitchell's text could serve as an indispensable point of departure for such a discussion precisely because it was based on the lessons of the experience of proletarian dictatorship in Russia and the conditions which brought about the triumph of the Stalinist counter-revolution. Thus, just as Marx's first attempt to deal programatically with the problems of the period of transition arose from the historic experience of the Paris Commune, so the debate in the Italian Left in the 30's summed up the lessons of the great revolutionary wave that began in 1917.

My aim in the present text is threefold. First, to comment on the strengths and weaknesses of Mitchell's text as a programmatic basis for the period of transition and a historical summation of the lessons of the experience of the proletarian dictatorship in Russia -- a task which our fraction began with its introduction to Mitchell's text in IP #11. Second, to comment on Mitchell's specific proposals for the remuneration of the workers in the period of transition, his effort to address the vital question of the distribution of goods and services under the conditions of proletarian dictatorship, a mode of distribution which must be integrally linked to the primordial task of the period of transition: the abolition of the law of value. Third, to outline the ways in which the logic of development in the decadent phase of capitalism, particularly over the past half century, has bequeathed NEW problems and tasks for the proletariat in the period of transition, problems and tasks which could not have been foreseen by Mitchell writing in 1936-37.

In a number of ways Mitchell's text provides the framework from which any discussion of the period of transition must begin, a summation of the most important lessons of the experience of revolution and counter-revolution in Russia. Mitchell insists on the

overriding importance of the political tasks of the proletariat in the period of transition, the necessity to constitute its own class dictatorship and to spread it globally as the indispensable condition for the very survival of proletarian power, even over the short run. Moreover, Mitchell clearly saw that the state in the period of transition, however necessary it is, nonetheless remains a scourge against which the proletariat must defend itself and exercise the greatest vigilance. The state in the period of transition must not be identified with the dictatorship of the proletariat, with the organs of proletarian power, the integrity of which is a vital condition for the transition to communism. These positions Mitchell shared with the other participants in the debate on the period of transition which took place within the Italian Left. Where Mitchell disagreed with his comrades -- correctly in our opinion -- was in his insistence that the vital political tasks of the proletariat in the period of transition do not obviate the importance of fundamental economic tasks; tasks which must be urgently addressed even as the working class struggles to consolidate and globally expand its political power, and tasks whose resolution will be decisive in determining the very possibility of abolishing humankind's enslavement to the law of value. This last point is closely linked to Mitchell's clarity on the fact that the tasks of the period of transition, including the economic ones, begin with the seizure of political power by the proletariat anywhere, and not simply when the global civil war ends in the definitive victory of the working class. The very first steps of proletarian power must be integrally linked to the final goal of communism, if the latter is not to remain an abstract utopia.

However, certain weaknesses, confusions, mistakes and lacunae can be found in Mitchell's text, and it is necessary to identify them as we embark on a full-scale discussion of the period of transition. Mitchell's identification of the dictatorship of the proletariat with the party, and his view that the party is the locus of class consciousness, which are the legacy of Lenin and Bordiga must be unequivocally rejected by Marxists today, precisely on the basis of the historical experience of the proletariat. Despite the Italian Left's clarity on the necessity to distinguish the state from the dictatorship of the proletariat, the comrades of BILAN persisted in designating the state as a "workers state", thereby undercutting their own hard won theoretical clarity and perpetuating a dangerous confusion. Moreover, Mitchell and the Italian Left virtually ignored the role of Workers Councils in their

understanding of the dictatorship of the proletariat, in contrast to their insistence on the role of the party and unions (the latter conceived as defensive organs of the proletariat in the period of transition). This failure to grasp what is perhaps the most important lesson of the revolution in Russia (that the Workers Councils are the veritable form of the proletarian dictatorship) stems from the theoretical influence of Bordiga over the Italian Left in exile.

When we turn to the most serious lacunae in Mitchell's discussion of the period of transition, what is most striking is the fact that he had absolutely no conception of state capitalism. However comprehensible that is in a revolutionary writing at the very moment that the state capitalist leviathan was first making its unanticipated historical appearance as a universal tendency of capitalism in its decadent phase, it is a grave weakness as we appraise this text today. Specifically in terms of the period of transition, an understanding of state capitalism is essential to the appreciation of the fact that it is the state apparatus that is the real and permanent source of the counter-revolutionary danger even after the end of the global civil war, even after the overthrow of the last capitalist state internationally; that the real bulwark of capitalism in the period of transition is precisely that necessary scourge, the state.

The other great lacunae in Mitchell's text is the fact that he had no conception of the shift from the formal to the real domination of capital (a shift that had not yet been completed at the time he wrote, and one whose theoretical configurations were not clear inasmuch as the relevant texts of Marx still lay buried in the archives). However, this shift, which is integrally connected to the universal tendency to state capitalism (see our discussion text in IP #7), has brought about a veritable transformation of the capitalist landscape -- and one fraught with consequences for the period of transition. Inasmuch as this last point still remains terra incognita for most of the revolutionary milieu, its implications for a serious discussion of the problems of the period of transition are fundamental, and we shall return to them below.

Mitchell's treatment of the crucial issue of the mode of distribution in the period of transition, of the manner in which the remuneration of the proletariat will be determined, is framed, on the one hand, by the recognition that the proletarian dictatorship must take immediate steps to break the stranglehold of the capitalist law of value, which subordinates the consumption of the working class to the imperatives of capital accumulation, and, on the other hand, by the existence of scarcity and a division of labor which makes it impossible to immediately inscribe on its banner "to each according to his needs". On this question, Mitchell's argument is primarily directed against the Principles of Communist

Production and Distribution published by the GIK (the Dutch Internationalist Communists). The GIK proposed a mode of distribution patterned after Marx's own proposals for the "lower stage of communism" put forward in The Critique of the Gotha Program, according to which the remuneration of the proletariat would be based on labor vouchers which represented the workers' INDIVIDUAL contribution to the totality of social labor (after deductions for the "social fund" i.e. expansion of the productive apparatus, care for those unable to work, etc.). While the GIK's proposals would, indeed, break the stranglehold of the capitalist law of value, on the basis of which the remuneration of the proletariat is strictly limited to the value of the commodity labor-power, i.e. the cost of the reproduction of living labor, they nonetheless suffer from serious defects. The most important among these, to which Mitchell clearly pointed, is the fact that the proposals of the GIK tend to deny the SOCIAL character of the labor process which the very logic of capitalist development had brought about, by measuring the workers' consumption on the basis of his individual labor time. Such a view, as Mitchell points out, has a decidedly federalist cast, one which would have a pronounced tendency to perpetuate the bases for exchange relations and a market between production units as well. Moreover, to measure production and distribution in terms of labor time under any form is to reinforce the bases of value production, the veritable foundation of which is direct labor as the source of wealth and labor time as its sole measure. The self-contradiction of capital is precisely the fact that while the prodigious development of the forces of production that it has brought about has shattered the tie between direct labor and the output of wealth, thereby creating the material bases for communism, the expenditure of direct labor remains the sole source of surplus-value and, thus, the axis of production. In that sense the economic program of the proletariat in the period of transition must be based on this new situation, and not on conditions which have been historically transcended.

However, Mitchell's own proposal for a mode of distribution in the period of transition based on a modified form of the wage seems to suffer from many of the same defects. While it is true that this basis for remuneration would be more a wage in form than in substance, inasmuch as it would be predicated on breaking the link between the wage and the reproduction costs of the worker's labor power, it nonetheless retains the link between the workers' remuneration and the individual contribution of labor which is the hallmark of value production. Moreover, Mitchell's proposal seems to reflect his view of the circumstances of the period of transition bequeathed by the particular experience and conditions of Russia circa 1917: conditions in which the proletariat in power was faced with a mass of petty producers on whose production the proletariat would have to depend, and with whom exchange on a large scale would be necessary, thereby requiring the use of money as a medium of

exchange and basis for remuneration in the socialized sector. The use of money and wages also seemed necessary to Mitchell because of his view that differentials in consumption would be necessary in order to win the support and command the services of specialists whose labor was in short supply. While wage differentials may have been the sole alternative to the use of force (a measure which for both political and economic reasons must be excluded as a policy towards non-exploiting strata) under the conditions prevailing in Russia in 1917, with its vast mass of petty producers on whom the populace was economically dependent (particularly for food) and its thin stratum of specialists, such conditions are not those prevailing under present-day circumstances; and they must not be conceived as a framework for considering the problems of the period of transition.

In light of the above, is there another basis for distribution in the period of transition, one more in keeping both with the actual material conditions prevailing and the goal of abolishing the law of value which must animate the proletarian dictatorship? It seems to me that Mitchell did not explore the possibilities for the immediate SOCIALIZATION OF CONSUMPTION in goods and services whose use is social in nature and which are in adequate supply, such as transportation (buses, trams, subways), which could immediately be available on the basis of need, and the RATIONING of goods in limited supply. This would cut the link between consumption and one's individual contribution to the social labor fund (the perpetuation of bourgeois right, in Marx's terms) retained both by the GIK with its labor vouchers and Mitchell with his modified wage form, thereby more directly breaking the dependence of consumption on the law of value. Why didn't Mitchell explore this alternative? Despite an inevitable speculative element, two factors may account for this fact. First, rationing for Mitchell must have been inextricably linked to its monstrous utilization under "war communism", which for him (correctly in our opinion) was the antithesis of communism and a policy that had nothing whatsoever to do with the transition to communism; a policy solely determined by conditions of starvation and the lack of even the bare necessities. Second, in the absence of Workers Councils, which, as we have explained, played no role in Mitchell's conception of the period of transition, rationing might well have seemed like a policy which would deliver power into the hands of an institution alien to the proletariat, the state, and thereby to a vast and parasitic bureaucracy based on the petty bourgeoisie -- itself conceived as the greatest threat to the proletarian power. In fact, based on the control of the Workers Councils and the power of advanced technology, and in a world where petty production has been largely eliminated by capital itself (in its phase of real domination), these dangers may be far less of a threat than those posed by the attempt to rely on the wage (however modified in form) as the basis for distribution in the period of transition.

This brings us to the question of how the very logic of capitalist development in its decadent phase has bequeathed new problems and tasks for the proletariat. Both the universal tendency to state capitalism and the culmination of the shift from the formal to the real domination of capital, which are integrally linked, have transformed the physiognomy of capitalism with profound implications for the problems to be faced by the proletariat in the period of transition.

The culmination of the real domination of capital, occurring within the framework of state capitalism, in full decadence, has largely removed the weight of petty production and those strata based on it (peasants, artisans, small shopkeepers). It is not that these strata have ceased to exist under the conditions of real domination, or even that their numbers are now infinitesimal (which is certainly not the case); rather it is the fact that the SOCIAL weight of these strata has sharply diminished, their role in the productive process has drastically shrunk. This phenomenon has removed as a DECISIVE factor on the social stage precisely those actors who -- according to Mitchell -- constituted the main threat to the proletariat in the period of transition. Contrary to Mitchell, the existence of a pre-capitalist economic force which is a threat to the proletariat is not the main danger in the period of transition; its removal has already been accomplished by capitalism. As a result, the agrarian question, which until recent decades still plagued mankind in the form of a mass of petty producers on whom the proletariat depended for its foodstuffs, has been thoroughly transformed.

The problem of non-exploiting strata which perhaps constitutes the most formidable obstacle to the transition to communism under present conditions is the existence of a vast -- and rapidly growing -- human mass which produces virtually no use values. This includes a number of strata: the lumpenproletariat, the inhabitants of the shanty towns surrounding the urban centers of the third world, the homeless and the permanently unemployed in the advanced capitalist societies, the army of low level bureaucrats and middle strata engaged in "waste production" (not in capitalist terms necessarily, but rather in terms of use values for humanity). All of these strata must be integrated into the socialized production of real use values during the period of transition. While these strata do not constitute an ECONOMIC threat to the proletariat (in terms of the possibility of withholding vital necessities from the workers, as the Russian peasantry could after 1917), they do constitute a potential POLITICAL threat, a human mass which could be mobilized by the counter-revolution as long as it had not yet been integrated into socialized production. Moreover, as long as these strata continue to exist as such, they will represent an enormous economic burden on the proletariat, which will have to labor to provide them with their means of consumption. Here is a problem of the first magnitude which has arisen as a result of the infernal

logic of decadent capitalism, a dilemma whose very existence could not have been foreseen by Mitchell in 1936.

Another complex of problems on which Mitchell's text is silent, but which constitutes an urgent task for the proletariat in the period of transition is that represented by the very technological development that has rendered the capitalist law of value outmoded. It is now necessary for Marxists to clearly recognize the fact that the rationality, science and technology of the capitalist epoch are not neutral, that they cannot be simply appropriated by the working class in their present form, but rather that they are themselves integrally linked to value production in a fundamental sense, and bear its imprint. Rationality, science and technology in their present form are themselves fetishistic, reified and alienating; their transformation is no less essential than that of the social relations of production to which they are inextricably bound. A fetishistic and reified science and rationality is the outcome of a capitalist world based on the division between manual and mental labor, between theory and practice, a world in which things are only grasped as objects and not as "sensuous human activity", to recall the words of Marx's first thesis on Feuerbach. Nowhere is the urgent necessity of a fundamental transformation of science and technology as a task of the proletariat in the period of transition clearer than in man's relation to nature.

Decadent capitalism, with its combination of the universal tendency to state capitalism and the culminating point of the real domination of capital, has brought humanity not only to the point of annihilation in a nuclear war, but to the brink of ecological catastrophe: the destruction of nature itself. The very metabolism with nature, which is the irreducible basis of human life, is now at risk as a direct result of capitalist technicity. Without in any way capitulating to the capitalist appropriation of the ecology problem (on the basis of which vast programs of austerity can be ideologically wrapped and "sold" to a frightened public) or to the petty bourgeois romanticism which simply condemns technology and desperately seeks to ward off ecological disaster with reactionary calls for a return to the stone age, Marxists must recognize and respond to the gravity of the threat to the eco-system brought on by the lethal dialectic of decadent capitalism. This is one of the most awesome problems that the working class will face in the period of transition. It is also an issue which finds Marxism in a condition of almost total theoretical unpreparedness. However, at least one twentieth century Marxist has provided a basis from which we can begin to grapple with this complex of problems: in a series of articles written in the 1950's, notably "Specie umana e crosta terrestre" ("The human species and the earth's crust"), Amadeo Bordiga linked the spectre of ecological destruction to the capitalist accumulation process itself (though without acknowledging

the fatal link between capital and the technicity it has spawned). Whatever the specific strengths and weaknesses of Bordiga's problematic, this complex of problems demands the attention of Marxists and is an integral part of the problems of the period of transition.

No less important as an issue facing the working class as it will confront the task of the transition to communism is the horrendous effect of capitalism's division between town and country. The concentration of the bulk of the world's population in vast urban agglomerations in the decadent phase of capitalism, in which the threat of ecological disaster is compounded by the wretchedness of capitalist urbanism, constitutes an enormous problem that the working class will have to grapple with in the period of transition. As with the question of ecological disaster, Marxists must theoretically begin to confront a matrix of problems for which the programmatic legacy of the Marxist movement and the communist left provides only the barest of outlines.

In initiating a thorough discussion of the problems of the period of transition -- to which the present text can only constitute a sketchy introduction -- it is necessary that, while acknowledging the theoretical basis provided by Mitchell's text, we confront the issue as it will be posed under the conditions of the contemporary state capitalist world. A theoretical boldness -- with a firm basis in the methodology of Marxism -- can alone match the socio-political boldness with which the task of world historical transformation must be undertaken by the working class as subject of revolution.

MAC INTOSH

## APPEAL TO READERS

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

**INTERNATIONALIST  
PERSPECTIVE**

# 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.