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CLASS STRUGGLE IN THE 80'S

THESES ON GORBACHEV

FAREWELL TO MUNIS

"MOUVEMENT COMMUNISTE": THE NOTION OF CENTRISM, A DISEASE PLAQUING THE
REVOLUTIONARY MILIEU

CORRESPONDENCE: ON INTERVENTION

PCI-BATTAGLIA COMUNISTA: INTERNATIONALIST, OF COURSE ... BUT NOT TOO
MUCH

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ORDER REIGNS IN BEIJING



Once again, a capitalist state has restored "order" by unchaining a wave of terror against society. No cruelty was deemed excessive in order to erase the memory of the force of the mass movement in May and of the weakness of the state which it had exposed. "Order" reigns in Beijing, the ruling class has scored another victory. But if the working class' ultimate victory can only be prepared by a string of defeats, it is with "victories" such as the massacre in Tiananmen Square that capitalism is digging its own grave.

At first sight, it is hard to understand why the Chinese state felt compelled to use repression on such a mass scale. The events of April and May did not pose any immediate threat to the state's survival, nor did they give birth to autonomous class struggle. And precisely because of this the protests were dwindling by themselves and were fading before the state lashed out. To restore "normalcy", nothing extraordinary was needed. The size of the protest had become such that the state could have repressed it in the comparatively mild way it repressed the student demonstrations of 1987. Or, it could have launched some glasnost-style reforms now that its eastern bloc neighbors have shown that even the stalinist state can accommodate some degree of "democratization" to its own benefit. But instead of this, it opted for mass terror. Why?

The bourgeois media try to explain it by delving into the psyche of the chief butcher Deng, who was supposedly so traumatized by the cruel treatment he received from student mobs during the so-called cultural revolution that the poor man loses control when he sees student demonstrations. Bullshit! State terror is not simply some irrational outburst, caused by the peculiarities of the Chinese leadership. If the men at the helm were scared, it was because they realized that the May movement harbored a promise, a potential, which, if fulfilled,

would destroy them and their entire exploitative system. It was against that potential that the state felt it had to protect itself with terror.

THE STUDENT PROTEST

The spontaneous movement that unfolded in April and May was many things at the same time. Its framework was vague and unstructured enough to give room for the expression of different and inherently contradictory class interests. And it withered before these contradictions could become overt.

As everyone knows, it all started in mid-April with student demonstrations for more "democracy". It is interesting to note that these protests were led by students of the Party History Department at Beijing's People's University, a Party cadre school. Many of the prominent student leaders were themselves sons and daughters of the party elite, of the capitalist class in China. They have a stake in the existing order and did not want to destroy it, just push it to reform.

Their desire for reform was understandable. The concentrated power structure of stalinism strictly limits their access to command posts in the state and the economy which are often decided on the basis of favoritism and other arbitrary rules. It was well known that China's capitalist class, as in Russia, was deeply divided over the need for reforms and the speed of their introduction. Against those who favored such reforms because "democracy" is such a powerful mystification to derail unrest and discontent, and because it is clearly a more flexible and efficient way to rule than stalinism with its stifling immobility, are those who have a vested interest in the status quo and who feared that the stalinist system, especially in imperial, multi-national and backward countries like China, cannot accommodate reforms without unleashing powerful centrifugal forces which could threaten the cohesion of the state.

The working class has no stake in this debate. The overall context of capitalism's decadence and open crisis guarantees that whichever faction wins, it will try, "democratically" or not, to impose austerity, increased exploitation, misery and war preparations. For the students it is a different matter. Their personal careers are at stake so they had reason to force the outcome of this debate.

In the past, student demonstrations for more "democracy" were easily crushed when this suited the needs of the faction in power. But this time it was another matter because the student protest sparked the explosion of a much broader discontent. It became a magnet for the expression of an anger felt by broad masses of the working class against inflation, austerity, against the privileges, the corruption and the arrogance of the ruling class.

THE ERUPTION OF WORKERS' ANGER

In the bourgeois press we read again and again that the situation was "ironic" because China "never had it so good", thanks to the economic reforms of Deng Xiao Ping. And they pointed to the fact that, since 1979, China's Gross National Product has been growing at 9% per year, the same rate as its neighbors South Korea, Taiwan and Hong Kong. But they conveniently forget to add that one of the main reasons for the foreign capital investment which was such an important factor in the recent temporary economic boom of South Asia is the extremely low wage levels, to which foreign capital has added more efficient exploitation techniques, speed-ups, etc. Deng's economic "liberalization" has increased market access & thus economic opportunities for farmers and small capitalist enterprises. This gave these layers a considerable increase in their buying power. But this "liberalization" also brought steep price increases, especially for basic necessities like foodstuffs; it also brought unemployment. (Now, of course, Chinese "marxist" scholars write that socialism needs inflation and a reserve army of labor.)

Increasing shortages of basic products such as grain, sugar and salt, mounting taxes, repression of wage demands, sharply rising government debts and rampant corruption were other symptoms showing that the world crisis of capitalism is hitting China hard and that, there too, the capitalist class is trying to make the workers bear the brunt of its crisis. The inflation rate reached 27.5% in the first quarter of this year, the highest since the stalinists took power in 1949. In industrial centers like Shanghai, hundreds of thousands of young workers are unemployed or underemployed. In the countryside there is widespread hunger. The better living conditions that Deng's reforms brought for some, only emphasized the intrinsically unequal, capitalist nature of Chinese society.

So if the eruption of workers' anger was unexpected, it was certainly not "ironic" or hard to understand. Once the workers began to

participate massively, the movement underwent a qualitative change. On May 17th and 18th, millions poured out of the factories and office buildings to demonstrate. Subway and train workers provided free transportation. The sight of those great masses filling the squares and major arteries of the big cities ignoring threats and intimidation, shouting their anger at the party bosses, denouncing inflation and corruption, discussing intensely and just hugely enjoying the intoxicating feeling of collective strength, was surely breathtaking. But for the Party heads, it must have been a frightening sight. It strengthened the hand of the "hardliners" who had argued that the protests should have been nipped in the bud. Martial law was declared and troops were sent to sweep the capital and restore "order". But the masses went to meet the conscript soldiers, not with obedience but not with hate either. They shouted, "You are ordinary people just like us!" "Don't shoot, join us!" Army trucks & armored cars were stopped, soldiers got involved in heated discussions, buses and trucks were commandeered to block the roads to the capital and roving bands of workers, sometimes calling themselves "kamikases", manned the barricades day and night.

With the failure of martial law, the movement had reached its provisional zenith. Already it had taught the watching world some

immensely important lessons:

- that underneath the surface of apparent calm, underneath the seemingly unchallengeable existing order, the forces of change work like a mole, and can suddenly erupt with the power of a volcano;
- that the seemingly all-powerful state is in fact a giant with feet of clay. Despite its colossal bureaucratic machine, its enormous armies and police force, its power depends, even in openly dictatorial regimes, on its control over the mind, especially the minds of workers, through intimidation and mystification (dressed-up lies). Once this control starts to unravel, the feet of clay are revealed and the state's ability to govern starts slipping away. Then the self-confidence of the workers can grow even more & further erode the foundations of the state's power, provided the workers understand where their strength lies and where they should go in the next stage of the movement.

That condition was clearly not yet ready in China. What we saw was the beginning of the dynamic of the mass strike but never more than the beginning. The workers, whose massive input gave the movement its strength, did not really ever find their own voice. As far as we know, they did not start to organize themselves independently, on a class basis. And although some specific workers demands and perspectives were put forward (there were even banners with the slogan: "workers of the world unite"), they remained the exception. The helm of the movement largely remained in the hands of the newly-formed student union whose perspectives were capitalist not proletarian, and who used a vast array of democratic, legalistic and pa-

cifist illusions to contain the movement. Their message was that the state is on our side, that only some old men at the top are the enemy.

Given the relative weakness of the working class in China, its lack of struggle experience, it is not surprising that no clear proletarian perspectives emerged from the struggle. But their absence prevented the dynamic that had been unleashed from continuing its expansion. In their absence, & under the leadership of the students, the nowhere to go, had no other future but to support one faction of the capitalist class against the other.

And yet the very force of the dynamic that was unleashed strengthened the hand of the faction which the students opposed. Once it was clear that the imposition of martial law had failed, that ultimatum after ultimatum could not be enforced, the movement became a direct challenge to the state. "Moderates" in high levels of the Party and the army who had supported the more reformist wing led by Zhao or who straddled the fence, now lined up behind Deng and Li Peng. This wildcat movement which had spontaneously gone beyond the plans of the student leaders had to be repressed. The surge of power that had been so palpable had to be proven ineffectual. The state had to show that it could not be made to retreat under the pressure of a mass movement. Demoralization was the goal not compromise, so the students were not even granted some face-saving concessions.

STATE TERROR

The government calculated that the more crushing the defeat it would inflict, the more effectively it would eliminate the memory of the mass movement from the minds of the workers. But it moved very cautiously, clearly afraid that wrong timing for a repression would not scatter the ashes of the movement but rekindle the flame of workers' anger to an uncontrollable conflagration. According to the N.Y. Times (May 27), the fear of a mass strike, particularly in the country's industrial core, the region of Shanghai, was the main reason for the state's reluctance to call in the troops. So the state waited patiently until the movement, through the lack of an inner dynamic on a class basis, began to die a natural death and became a manageable victim.

At the beginning of June, life in Beijing was returning to normal. Only a handful of students remained in Tiananmen Square and some of their leaders had begun to urge an end to the occupation. Now the state judged that the time was right to strike back.

On June 4th, it lashed out, in particular, using an army unit brought from inner Mongolia, which had been carefully isolated from news reports and thoroughly indoctrinated to immunize it against calls for fraternization. Soldiers fired their sub-machine guns at random among crowds of protesters and bystanders alike, shooting at everyone in sight, bayoneting and beating passing

shoppers, burning the corpses of their victims.

This continued for at least 2 days. Later came the mass arrests, the methodical spreading of fear by encouraging people to inform on their neighbors, to turn each other in, in order to kill the feelings of solidarity and unity that had developed in the struggle in May. The state used massive paranoia and mutual distrust to make people too frightened to talk or discuss with each other. The operation was crowned with a massive propaganda campaign, absurdly trying to create the delusion that the mass demonstrations never happened ("...only a handful of ruffians...") and that the massacre never happened ("only some 300 soldiers died"; all killed undoubtedly by this "handful of ruffians" whose aim was to turn China into a capitalist state -- as though it were anything else!). Its distance from real events was so great that this propaganda probably convinced only the most isolated peasants & those who wanted to be convinced because it suited them. With this campaign, the state confessed that its inhumanity, its ferocity was so great that it cannot be covered up with some ideological justification. So it must be denied. But the goal of that denial was not to convince the masses that the massacres never took place. On the contrary, the very aim of the massacre was to be spectacular, to show the masses what they get when they oppose the state. The propaganda campaign itself was an integral part of the terror: the state wanted to show that it could not only suppress action but also thought and speech.

THE RUMORS OF CIVIL WAR

The state terror had undoubtedly many negative side effects for the capitalist class itself. Politically it wiped out any remainder of credibility of the system and fanned the hate of millions of workers against the exploiting class. Economically, the loss of production due to strikes and general chaos, the inevitable brain-drain it will encourage, the scaring away of foreign investors and tourist money, the inertia and sabotage, add up to a very heavy toll indeed. It was, therefore, no surprise that there were many reports of mounting opposition within the ruling class, in the Party as well as the army-- opposition to the tactics of the hardliners. In the days following the massacre, the western media announced that China was on the brink of civil war, that armies were turning against each other.

There is no question that the divisions within the ruling class were real. But with hindsight, it is also clear that Deng had secured a majority for his terror campaign before unleashing it and that the faction opposing it was unwilling to pay the price of civil war to decide their differences. The fact that the terror campaign was not followed by massive purges within the Party and the state apparatus is another indication that an understanding had been reached by the two factions.

The rumors of impending civil war, like those of the death of Deng and the attack on Li Peng and many other rumors about the state leadership being paralyzed by internal divisions, served another purpose. It is significant that the hardline faction which was in firm control of the media from the first day of the terror, made no attempt to deny these rumors which were eagerly spread by the western media despite the fact that "no reporter had personally witnessed any of the reported clashes" (between army units), according to the N.Y. Times, June 9th.

"We continue to be able to broadcast and it is astonishing that they have allowed that to go on", said the Vice President of the American Cable News Network. In fact, it is not so astonishing because these rumors were useful. In the first days after June 4th, there was a lot of talk about a general strike and, indeed, production was at a standstill in Beijing and a strike had started in Shanghai. What better way to get people off the street (who wants to be in the streets when rival armies are firing on each other), and to talk them out of the idea of striking (why go on strike when the "good" army is on the march to defeat the "bad" one for us)! Only when the threat of a mass strike had passed, did the Chinese state media start to show the leaders denying these rumors, emphasizing Party and army loyalty and unity. Reports of civil war faded.

THE LESSONS OF TIANANMEN SQUARE

Many students and workers showed extraordinary bravery confronting the state's terror with their bare hands. Many threw their pacifist illusions out the window and fought back, disabling army tanks, burning armored cars, etc. A number of soldiers burned their own vehicles and disobeyed orders. But they were clearly no match for the state's terror machine. Theirs was a hopeless fight. That was the lesson the state wanted to instill on June 4th: that it is hopeless to fight back, futile to resist the state's power. No matter how large the movement, the state will always win.

June 4th was not the only "Bloody Sunday" in history. On a Sunday in 1905, the Russian state wanted to teach the same lesson when it ordered troops to mow down a peaceful mass demonstration. Like the Chinese students, the leaders of that movement did not seek to overthrow the state; they only wanted some reforms. Like the Chinese students, they believed in patriotism, they rejected violent struggle and told the masses that they should obey the law.

On that first Bloody Sunday too, state terror was used to demonstrate the futility of opposing the state. Yet twelve years later, that same state was overthrown by a proletarian revolution. And even if this revolution was ultimately unsuccessful -- in the first place because proletarian revolution must spread internationally to succeed -- it made abundantly clear that the working class had learned quite another lesson than the one

the state had intended.

In the next decisive confrontation, Chinese workers will not shout: "The People's Army will not kill the people". They will not naively follow the slogans of student leaders or beg for reforms. They have seen that road leads to a dead end and they will follow another one, a road opened by self-organization on a class basis like the working class in Poland during the mass strike in 1980. Through their collective strength, workers have the power to paralyze the economic machinery; they can disrupt the state by stopping its communication and transportation system, by silencing its media, by using all these means to serve their own struggle. The workers experience and solidarity will enable them to organize their self-defense in preparation for state terror. They will replace the students' concept of fraternization with the army -- which was based on a respect for its function and its hierarchy, based on the illusion that the army is "the friend of the people" -- with calls from workers to soldiers to refuse the orders of their superiors, to break away from the army, to join the workers struggle.

PERSPECTIVES FOR TOMORROW

Will we see such confrontations in the future? Chances are that we will. It may take years before the working class in China digests the events of this spring -- years of surface calm during which the rumbling of the volcano may seem a faraway memory. But class consciousness will continue to mature underground, fed by the outrage which the terror has inspired together with the fear. During this period, the material conditions which push the working class to struggle will further deteriorate because of the general deepening of the world economic crisis but also because of the steep economic price the Chinese state will pay for its terror. One third of China's state enterprises are already in trouble today and the government confesses it has no cash to pay farmers for the coming harvest.

When, in the future, the danger of proletarian self-organization arises, the capitalist class in China will undoubtedly use its own internal divisions as a weapon against the workers. The ruling class will try to draw the workers away from their own class interests by mobilizing them behind one capitalist faction fighting the other. It may try to give its rule a face lift by restoring someone like Zhao to power, hoping that his current victimization will give him some credibility as it did to Deng in the past. (The fact that he received only a very light punishment might indicate that this future is being taken into account). But how many face lifts can a system undergo before its face becomes a ghastly death mask? The working class has nothing to gain by choosing from two sides of the same coin.

The events in China also eloquently demonstrated that no country today can be totally isolated from the outside world. People in

China take notice of what goes on elsewhere and workers in the rest of the world will learn from what happened in China. While workers in China must recuperate from the terror, the struggles of workers in other countries will show that democratic states impose austerity and fall into barbarism too. Everywhere it is the same struggle and revolutionaries will try to forge the doubts and feelings of the masses into clear thoughts and perspectives.

Here in the West, the bourgeois media are having a field day, using the events in China to declare the "bankruptcy of communism" and exalting how lucky we are to live in a democracy. How shameful this propaganda is just months after hundreds of demonstrators were "democratically" killed by the army in Venezuela and Argentina.

The truth is that the situation in the economically backward countries, the so-called democratic ones as well as the communist ones, shows what is coming in the future of the more advanced countries. Because they are weaker, they are hit earlier and harder by what is a crisis of a worldwide system which has outlived its historic usefulness. Not their high ideals, but their economic strength and the more sophisticated state apparatus that evolved with it, more finely attuned to absorb shocks and derail opposition, gives them the ability to postpone massive confrontations such as the one in China.

It is this strength which is eroding as the capitalist economy continues its descent. Just as the deepening of this crisis triggered the eruption of the volcano in China, it will do so in the West where the

working class is more concentrated and has more experience in fighting for its own class interests. What goals will emerge from the coming turmoil? In China, the anger caused by spiraling inflation, shortages and unemployment was canalized behind the goal of democracy. The struggles in the West will further clarify that capitalist "democracy" and "freedom" are really neither, just as capitalist versions of "socialism" and "communism" have been shown to be nothing of the kind. They will also clarify that the working class can organize itself, that it grows stronger as solidarity and unity increase. The step from organizing itself as a class to organizing society, from being exploited by producing for profit (and suffering from misery and austerity into the bargain) to producing for human needs, will increasingly shorten. What now still seems utopian will become an obvious necessity.

But it will be a hard learning process in which the working class will have to learn from its defeats, with the crucial help of its revolutionary minorities. The baby-kissing politicians of the West who are today so eloquently outraged over the Beijing massacre will fight for their "order" just as ruthlessly as their Chinese counterparts did. They will have their "victories" just as Deng has his now. But, to quote again Rosa Luxemburg's article "Order Reigns in Berlin", "The jubilant victors don't notice that the 'order', which periodically must be maintained with bloody slaughters, inevitably moves towards its historic fate, its hour of reckoning."

Sander
June 13, 1989



CLASS STRUGGLE IN THE 80'S

What does the future hold in store for a world capitalism undermined by a crisis of overproduction, and torn by inter-imperialist rivalries? What future is there for a system that condemns ever larger numbers of workers to unemployment, condemns ever vaster regions of the globe to underdevelopment, and more and more overtly represses any movement of the exploited opposing this evolution towards barbarism?

To these questions, Marxism provides a clear answer: the working class, organized into workers councils, independently of, and against, all the forces of the bourgeoisie, is capable of overthrowing the existing economic and political order, and of establishing a new society based on the satisfaction of human needs and not on profit.

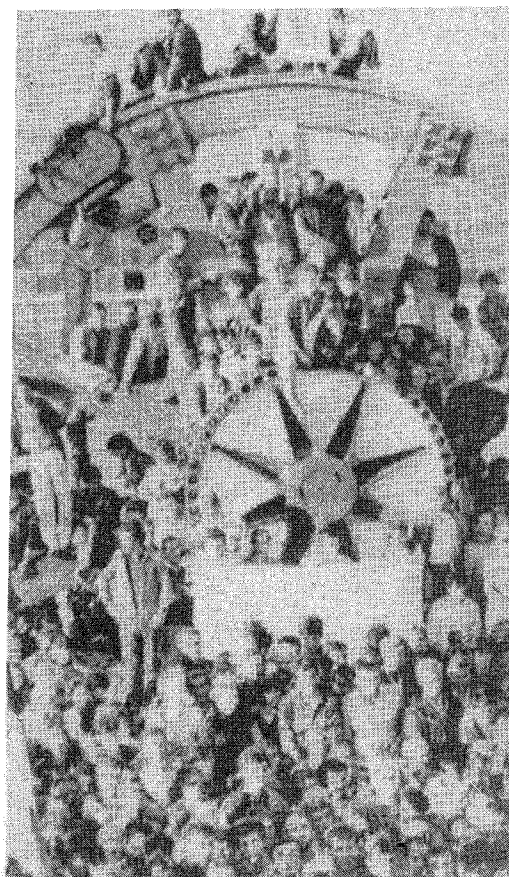
One fundamental idea, advanced by the ICC and which we share, is that of the historic course. After the reconstruction following World War Two, the 1960's saw the opening of a new period, marked by the reappearance of the crisis of overproduction and by the emergence of struggles by the working class against the effects of this crisis: austerity, layoffs, rising prices, unemployment. This period, characterized by a course towards class confrontations, would see the worsening of economic contradictions, and a growth of class struggle, inscribed in the perspective of proletarian revolution.

Several episodes of international class struggle (or waves of struggle) have occurred since the mid-sixties. From 1968 - 1974, massive movements, involving different sectors, broke out almost everywhere in the world; from 1978 - 1980, there were radical movements though generally limited to one sector, except in Poland where for several months the working class unleashed a mass strike; from 1983 'till now, there have been massive movements sometimes involving workers from several sectors in almost all the countries of the world, including those of Western Europe.

If, in judging the evolution of class struggle one based oneself only on what the working class has been able to accomplish in its struggle (length of movements, number of workers involved, extension to other sectors, independent organizations vis a vis the left and leftists) independently of any other consideration, it would be difficult to see progress over the past 20 years. And certain revolutionaries would be right to be more impressed by 1968 or by the movement in Poland in 1980 than by more recent struggles. Such a perspective, however, would be mistaken, because it forgets that the class struggle is first of all a struggle between two classes, each of which is trying to crush its adversary. If the working class has accumulated a fund of experience over the past two decades, the bourgeoisie has also developed its capacity to quickly react to the danger of workers struggle.

The first wave of struggle exhausted itself thanks to the illusion of "the left in power", though this only came to pass many years after the unleashing of the movement in 1968. The movements at the end of the '70's forced the bourgeoisie to change its tactics and place the left in opposition, though it is important to point out that this change only occurred after the first movements took place. The situation since the beginning of the '80's is different still: in the course of recent years, the working class has been confronted by a more thoroughgoing preparation on the part of the bourgeoisie, and this can account both for the fact that

1988: Striking workers demonstrating at a steel mill in Niksic, Yugoslavia.



this wave of struggle is much less well defined in time than its two predecessors, and that as a result of the difficulties encountered by the workers, their struggle has broadened.

The balance sheet of struggles over the past decade also tempts us to discuss the thesis of "the years of truth", advanced by the ICC (of which we were then still a part) at the beginning of the '80's. The ICC wanted to distinguish the new decade from the '70's, characterized by the illusions on the possibility of overcoming the economic crisis and on the different policies which could be carried out by left governments, all of which could still mystify the proletariat. The '80's would make the real stakes clear: war or revolution. There would be an unprecedented aggravation of the economic crisis, that would shatter the mystificatory nature of the illusions sowed by the bourgeoisie, and a significant development of the class struggle: "the '80's usher in the decisive confrontation between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie". (Revolution Internationale, #69 bis, Jan. 1980)

It is important to evaluate this perspective after the fact, not so much to point out its errors (it is apparent to everyone that we have not seen the "decisive confrontations" that the ICC predicted) as to try to understand why the ICC was so mistaken. The failure to get at the root of errors can lead to mistaken conclusions which ultimately leads revolutionaries to forfeit their very capacity to play an active role now and in the future. Thus, certain comrades of the CWO recognizing the difficulties with which the working class has been confronted since the beginning of the '80's (defeats of struggles, massive decomposition of the class, absolute impoverishment of certain strata, like the young, the old, the sick, etc.) concluded that not only hadn't these years seen the expected development of the struggle, but that this evolution had put in question the very idea of an historic course.

For us, the predictions of the aggravation of the economic crisis and the using up of traditional mystifications were correct. Another aspect, that the idea of "the years of truth" did not take account of, is the fact that the bourgeoisie could, during the '80's, retain a relative control over the way the system plunged into crisis and thus effectively prepare its own reaction to the growing working class discontent. Taking into consideration the economic and political realities with which the working class has been confronted is necessary in order to be able to evaluate the real dynamic of its struggle. That is why in the second part of this text we will treat the conditions in which the class struggle has developed since the beginning of the decade, so that in a third part we can discuss the real dynamic of the struggle. The method utilized leads us to believe that the struggles that have unfolded

in this decade have represented certain advances and that they confirm the validity of the perspective of a course towards class confrontations, while invalidating the more immediate perspective of "decisive confrontations" in the 1980's predicted by the ICC.

CONDITIONS OF THE CLASS STRUGGLE SINCE THE BEGINNING OF THE 1980'S

On the economic plane, the '80's have been marked by an unprecedented deepening and internationalization of the crisis. No country can any longer escape the crisis, and economic phenomena like the Wall Street crash of October '87 have immediate repercussions on a world scale. This has been accompanied by a significant worsening in the standard of living of the working class. However, during these same years, the bourgeoisie has developed a series of economic artifices allowing it to postpone a recession: a fall in the price of raw materials, including oil; massive indebtedness of the advanced countries. It has also succeeded in imposing a certain heterogeneity in the decline of living conditions for the working class.

If capital has succeeded in preserving a certain "stability" for the economy in the advanced countries, at the cost of a headlong rush into the abyss of indebtedness, it has been at the expense of an unprecedented worsening of the situation in the peripheral countries, which have born the first costs of the world-wide breakdown of capitalism. Reeling under the weight of indebtedness and suffering from reductions in the price of raw materials, these countries have plunged into an impoverishment never known before. The '80's have seen the collapse of nations considered "miracles" of economic development in the '70's: nations which are today forced to live at the behest of the IMF. Everywhere, the renegotiation of debts and the contraction of new loans has as its price a draconian austerity. The deterioration of the standard of living has consequently been sharper in the peripheral countries than in the advanced ones.

To this geographical disparity must be added the fact that workers have born different types of attack on their conditions of existence. The tendency to the shutdown of industries has increased, and has now reached the so-called communist countries (China, Russia, Eastern Europe). But the layoffs have specifically affected the workers of certain sectors: mines, steel, textiles, shipbuilding. It's important to note that it is often the most combative and experienced core of the working class that has been struck from the rolls (c.f. the threat to close the Gdansk shipyards in Poland). Workers who have kept their jobs have born the burden of wage cuts and speedup. Wage cuts have particularly affected certain categories of workers

(teachers, nurses, clerks working for the state).

The worsening of conditions is also characterized by a diversification in the conditions of labor. The number of unemployed and those never employed has increased (except in Britain and the US). The increase in unemployment has in part been slowed by the creation of new jobs, essentially in the service sector (restaurants, insurance, etc.). However, it's important to note that these "new jobs" are in general less well paid than industrial jobs. Short-time and occasional work has spread. All these factors contribute to a general impoverishment of the working class. The mass of the population living below the official poverty line has considerably increased in the advanced countries (one in seven in Britain, one in five in the US). Moreover, it is not only the young, sick and old who are jobless and therefore destitute, but also many workers in their prime.

The idea according to which the crisis, henceforth affecting all sectors and countries, would homogenize the conditions of existence of the proletariat and thereby facilitate the generalization of struggles during the '80's, can now be seen as too simplistic to grasp the real evolution of the situation.

On the plane of ideology and the political structures used by the bourgeoisie to control the working class, the '80's have been marked by two important phenomena: the using up of the classical mystifications (trade unionism and the left in opposition in the advanced countries, "communism" in the Russian bloc and China, national liberation struggles) and by the use of new ideological weapons such as rank and file unionism, "democracy", religion and nationalism.

In the advanced countries, the loss of credibility of the principal tool for the control of the working class, the unions, has become evident. Loss in membership, lack of control by the unions in the calling of strikes, the appearance in certain struggles of a clear will to reject the traditional union organizations, are its principal manifestations. In the "communist" countries, the reform policies carried out by Gorbachev, Deng Xiao Ping and others have shattered the last illusions on the nature of these economies: the language of profitability, accompanied by the closure of factories, of layoffs and unemployment, have made a mockery of the pretensions to socialism. Elsewhere, the bloody revolt in Algeria, for example, demonstrated that the myth of "national liberation" was no longer sufficient to keep the lid on the working class and the mass of the population.

However, the '80's have also shown that the bourgeoisie has not been complacent with respect to the using up of the means by which it has traditionally controlled the working



Brazilian metalworkers 1984

class. It has been able to adapt so as to prevent the discontent generated by the accentuation of austerity from being directed in a too radical a fashion against the state. In the Third World and in the East, where social buffers have been historically weak, the bourgeoisie, to complete the work that the police and army can no longer do alone, has created or legalized "democratic" organs: unions, political parties, parliaments. These organs (which in the advanced countries in the last century played an important role in the political direction of society) are thus created out of whole cloth to fulfil the same function that they today play in the advanced countries: to mystify the exploited, to make them accept austerity. The function played by democratization appears clearly in Poland, where the government faced the necessity of a drastic economic restructuring and hoped to make this more acceptable to the exploited with the aid of Solidarnosc, whose union and political activity was legalized. The "democratization" of regimes formerly wearing an explicit totalitarian face sharply increased during the '80's, and where it has been late in coming, pressure in this direction is being exercised by the international bourgeoisie (South Africa, Palestine). In the advanced countries, the bourgeoisie has reacted to the loss of credibility of the unions by orchestrating an unprecedented development of rank and file unionism. Everywhere, to divert the discontent caused by the crisis, it has stirred up nationalist, racist and religious mystifications.

In conclusion, we can say that the working class has been confronted by numerous changes in the '80's, both on the economic level and in the way its class enemy confronts it. These changes in no way correspond to a simplistic schema according to which the deepening of the crisis would have as its

corollary an homogenization of the living conditions of the working class and a weakening of the weight of bourgeois ideology, that would lead to a linear development of workers struggle. While it becomes more and more necessary to struggle, that also becomes increasingly difficult. We must take into consideration this whole complex of factors in order to analyze the dynamic of the struggle over these past years.

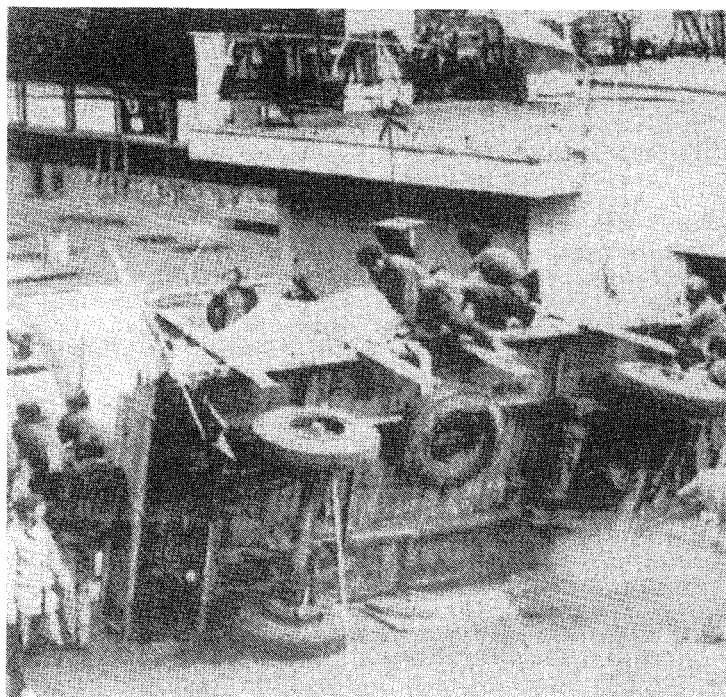
THE DYNAMIC OF THE CLASS STRUGGLE SINCE THE BEGINNING OF THE '80'S

The decade of the '80's opened in a spectacular way with a formidable strike movement in Poland. This latter expressed in a clear way the essential features of workers struggle in the phase of decadence: massive involvement of the workers in the struggle; self-organization concretized by the holding of daily or frequent general assemblies; by the election of strike committees with the possibility of revoking delegates; by the centralization of these strike committees; by the quest for and development of solidarity within the working class; the determined and organized extension of struggles; and by the permanent character of the movement, which advances, and retreats, in order to better deploy itself. This movement, therefore, belonged to what Rosa Luxemburg had meant by the mass strike.

How has international workers struggle evolved since then? The internationalization of the crisis meant that more countries would be struck by this wave of strikes. During the '80's, we have seen the first massive struggles in West Germany and social explosions in a number of countries that had not previously known social upheavals of massive proportions (notably Algeria and Venezuela). But there has not been a conscious, organized internationalization of the struggle.

Globally, the contrast between struggles in the peripheral countries, characterized by riots and violent strikes, and the movements in the advanced countries, generally more limited in their duration and extent, remains marked. This geographical disparity, as well as the limited amplitude of movements in the metropolises, results from the different effects of the crisis, discussed above. The social situation of quasi-permanent open struggle in Yugoslavia last year and in Poland now, where the working class must bear the costs of economic decay, perhaps indicates the future of the industrialized countries.

Another remarkable feature of the social situation is the tendency for workers to return to the fray, to take up the fight in spite of the failure of earlier struggles. This tendency was clear in Poland in the recent past. After, and despite the bitter defeat of 1980-1981, the workers returned to



Striking Polish coal miners as they overturned a truck to form a barricade 1988

battle in 1988. This same phenomenon can be seen in other countries, for example in Belgium where large-scale strike movements took place in 1983, 1986 and 1989.

Nevertheless, both in the peripheral and advanced countries, the workers have had difficulty in self-organization, extension and the clarification of perspectives which occurred in the mass strike in Poland. So clear an expression of these tendencies had been made possible in Poland in 1980 by virtue of the general unpreparedness of the international bourgeoisie on top of the local weakness of the social buffers resulting from the archaic economic and political nature of Polish capital. Since that time, the bourgeoisie has rearmed itself on the ideological plane in all countries, and the working class, as a result, has had to confront greater difficulties than in the past. Naturally, it is necessary to take account of this phenomenon in order to appreciate the evolution of the situation.

In the Eastern bloc and in the peripheral countries, workers struggles have mainly come up against the illusion of the evolution of the regime to "democracy". Even if democratic organs has no historical basis in these countries, they have a certain efficacy in controlling struggles. Their effect can, therefore, explain certain downturns in the struggle. The situation in Poland, once again illustrates this process. The fact that recent struggles have never attained the force or amplitude of 1980 can be attributed to the constant presence of Solidarnosc, whose activity, even when it was still illegal, was largely tolerated by the powers that be, because it allowed them to foresee, divert

and control social discontent. It is also significant that Solidarnosc succeeded in ending the struggles of 1988 on the basis of a simple promise of the government to hold a round-table in which the perspective of a legalization of the union would be discussed. Finally, the electoral landslide for members of the opposition, in contrast to the defeat of official candidates, also shows what democratic illusions remain in the Polish working class. The diversion of social discontent towards elections, constitutional changes, the establishment of new unions, have also occurred in other countries (South Korea, Russia, Algeria, among others).

The bourgeoisie has also used nationalism to neutralize working class discontent, in -- among other places -- Yugoslavia and Russia. It is interesting that in Yugoslavia, nationalist agitation has erupted in the very same places that have seen important class struggles. The obstacle that nationalism represents for the working class can be seen in the fact that chauvinist agitation has almost completely supplanted the movement for social demands in that country. In Russia too, it appears that nationalist agitation is favored by the powers that be, notably because it constitutes an effective means to smother the discontent provoked by unemployment, scarcity and the deteriorating conditions of life.

In the metropolises, recent struggles have also displayed contradictory tendencies. Although they express an advance from the point of view of self-organization and the quest for unity, they seem, at the same time, as well -- if not better -- controlled by the bourgeoisie than previous movements.

The tendency to self-organization is expressed by a striking rejection of the unions in recent struggles. The time when the workers left it to the unions to organize all aspects of the struggle, and were content to

stay at home, is over. Important struggles are spontaneously unleashed without waiting for union authorization; there is a massive participation of strikers through general assemblies; the unions and their perspectives are challenged and there is a real will to organize independently of the unions. This aspect of the struggles marks a clear evolution with respect to the '70's.

The bourgeoisie has not remained passive in the face of this situation. To counteract this tendency, it has tried to take control of the structures created by strikers, the strike committees and coordinations, the centralizing organs of struggle. The bourgeoisie's power of recuperating the initiatives of the working class appears even when we look at the three movements where the rejection of the traditional union organizations and the will to organize differently was most clearly expressed: the railworkers strike in France in 1986-1987; the public sector strike in Italy in 1987-1988; the public sector strike in France in 1989. The will of the railworkers to organize independently of the unions caught the bourgeoisie by surprise, and the organizations created at the beginning of the movement were not entirely controlled by the bourgeoisie, even if the leftists already exercised considerable influence within them. In Italy, this tendency manifested itself in different sectors in the COBAS, which at the outset of their existence could also be considered as the expressions of proletarian self-organization. Since then, the bourgeoisie has prepared the means to control such a will to self-organization, and the coordinations that have arisen (sometimes even before the unleashing of struggles!) in the nurses strike in France, and then in the whole of the public sector, were not -- even at the outset -- controlled by the strikers, but rather by the unionists and leftists. They served not to develop the struggle, but rather to bury it.

The tendency for the working class to express its unity is also manifested more strongly than in the past: solidarity movements with another sector in struggle (for example, the dockers at the time of the nurses strike in Britain); the tendency for the will to struggle of one segment of the class to be communicated to other segments, and for common demands to be put forward, as happened in the strikes by public sector workers in France, Holland and Belgium in 1989. It's important to note that in this last case, the will to struggle seemed to leap over capitalist frontiers: the struggles erupted in the public sector in France, and then spread to Belgium and Holland (which in the past, 1983 for example, had already been the scene of quasi-simultaneous movements of struggle).

Despite this, one can only be struck by the lack of conscious, willful attempts to struggle and to organize together. The absence of unity is due in part to the uneven effects of the crisis on different parts of



Police holding back striking seamen at docks in Dover, England. 1989



Virginia, US, 1989: Police officers confronting striking coal miners.

the working class. Industrial workers have waged important struggles over closures (the struggle of steel workers in several countries, of miners in Belgium and Britain), while sectors such as teachers and nurses have fought against wage cuts which have slowly engulfed them for several years. The multiplication of different statuses of late (unemployed, short-time worker, full-time worker) has also made the unification of workers more difficult.

These divisions are amplified by the unions and leftists, who propagate the illusion that each part of the working class has its own specific interests to defend. Corporatism is a disastrous illusion, the germs of which are found more or less developed in almost every workers struggle today. It was particularly clear, and therefore very harmful, to the development of the struggle in the movement of hospital workers in France.

CONCLUSION

The workers struggles of the period 1980-1989 have seen real obstacles that have put the proletariat to the test in developing its struggle. It is clear that the present level of struggle will not suffice for the working

class to open the way to revolution. In this sense, the '80's are most certainly not comparable to the years of "decisive confrontations" in the historic memory of the proletariat. Important steps must still be taken on the level of self-organization, in the development of class unity and in the clarification of perspectives. However, simply on this basis, it would be a mistake to conclude that we are not in a period where social confrontations are intensifying or worse still, that the counter-revolution still rages over the proletariat just as it did at the time of the crushing of the first revolutionary wave.

Basically, recent struggles have shown real advances, which we have tried to register by taking into account the capacity of the bourgeoisie to impose a heterogeneity in the economic conditions faced by the proletariat

and to rearm itself ideologically against the working class. At the same time these struggles bear witness to the enormous reserves of combativity of the proletariat: these struggles are not exhausted by partial defeats, but seem to grow with the intensification of the economic attacks of capitalism and of the sophistication of its means of control.

It is clear that these economic pressures will increase in the future. The capacity of the bourgeoisie to maintain a certain heterogeneity in the attack on the working class of the metropolises has been facilitated by the absence of an open economic recession. It is obvious that the outbreak of an economic recession on an international scale would raise the attack on the proletariat to a still higher level, in particular in the advanced countries. Meanwhile, in the course of recent years the proletariat has been confronted by a series of ideological mystifications with which it has had little experience. The accumulation of such experience will permit it in the future to break with mystifications such as democracy, nationalism, and rank and file unionism.

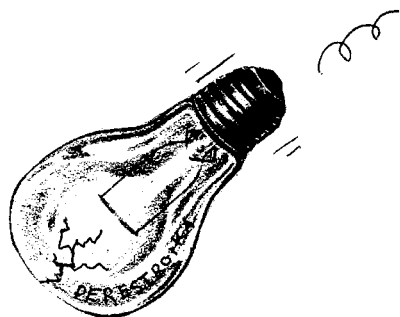
The balance sheet for the '80's must also make revolutionaries understand that, if they want to play an active role in the development of the class struggle, it is time to abandon any vision of a linear, gradual evolution of the class struggle. From now on, it is necessary to refuse to fall into the trap of simplistic ideas according to which everything's fine or everything's rotten. If we have tried to understand and to analyze the dynamic of the workers struggle during the past decade, it is primarily because the characteristics of struggle in the '80's will reappear in future struggles: a permanent and bitter struggle between the attempts of the working class to take its struggle forward on its own class terrain, and that of the bourgeoisie to control, and to denature, that movement through ever more "radical" and sophisticated means.

Adele

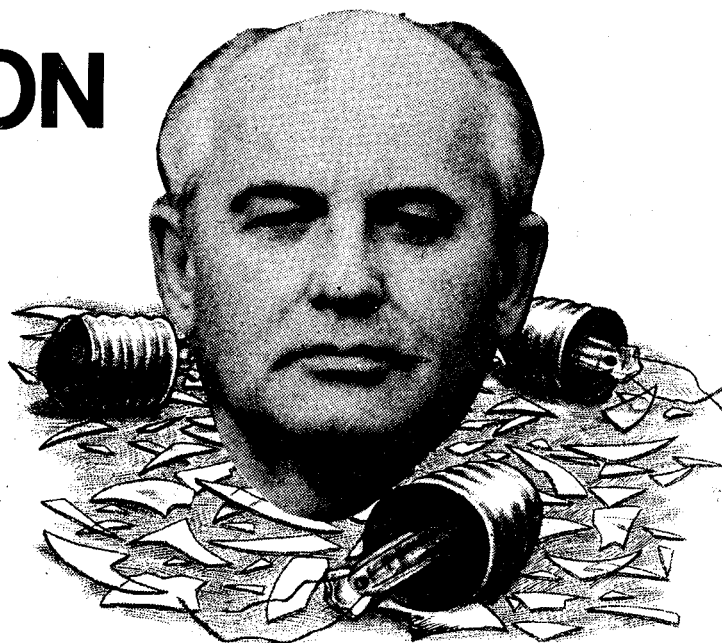


Workers demonstrating during wave of strikes in South Korea.

THESES ON



GORBACHEV



1. When Mikhail Gorbachev assumed power in 1985, and initiated his twin policies of Perestroika and Glasnost, the Marxist revolutionary milieu (our Fraction included) saw in these initiatives little more than ideological mystifications. Perestroika and Glasnost were seen by the revolutionary milieu as mystificatory devices directed at Western Europe (with the aim of dividing the American bloc and strengthening popular pressure for disarmament) and/or the working class and mass of the population of Russia itself (with the aim of legitimating the regime and winning acceptance for a policy of austerity). While the mystificatory element is clearly present in the policies of Perestroika and Glasnost, the Gorbachevian initiative cannot be reduced to a pure and simple mystification. The indispensable starting point for a Marxist understanding of Perestroika and Glasnost, and of the limits to these policies, is the recognition of the fact that, beyond the mystificatory element, these policies constitute a new politico-economic program for Russian state capitalism.

2. The Russian social regime, like that of the West, is based on the operation of the capitalist law of value (the extraction of surplus-value from a wage-working class, and the accumulation of capital). Russian capital not only exemplifies the universal tendency of capitalism in its decadent phase to state capitalism, in the specific form of Stalinism, but finds itself caught in the grip of a unique historical contradiction: An economically backward capitalist power (dwarfed not only by the US, but by West Germany and Japan as well) which is engaged in an imperialist bid for world hegemony. Indeed, the weaker Russia becomes relative to its rivals on the economic front, the more apparent it becomes that Russia cannot match its rivals in the accumulation process, the more imperative it is for Russian capital to resort to power-politics and militarism to

compensate for its backwardness and to ward off economic extinction and/or absorption at the hands of the American bloc.

3. The historical context within which the Stalinist regime finds itself (the quasi-total nationalization of the means of

production through which the bureaucracy and party, as the personification of capital, direct the accumulation process, industrial, financial and technological backwardness vis-à-vis the American bloc, and a military challenge to the hegemony of the US on the imperialist chessboard) shapes the economico-political policy of Russian capital. The extreme centralization and bureaucratic "planning" typical of the accumulation process carried out by a Stalinist regime is, in fact, characterized by incredible waste, inefficiency and irrationality in purely capitalist terms; the "expertise" and "rationality" of the bureaucracy is an ideological sham, behind which lies endemic corruption and inertia which is a major contributory factor to the stagnation which is a hallmark of bureaucratic "centralization". In fact, the hyper-bureaucratization characteristic of this form of state capitalism, with its rigidity and ossification is a barrier to the very economic dynamism which a real and effective centralization of capital is supposed to embody. One alternative to the inertia of the bureaucracy is the periodic and spectacular attempts of a charismatic and/or terroristic Leader to break through the bureaucratic impasse by violent and brutal mass mobilizations, with their bloody train of purges, forced labor, and concentration camps which are the other side of the coin to the vast programs of "public works" (Stalin's Five Year Plans of the 1930's, Mao's "Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution", etc.). The other alternative to bureaucratic ossification is the policies of "reform" and

"liberalization" which are based on recourse to market mechanisms, decentralization and the autonomy of the enterprise as a way to accelerate the rate of capital accumulation, by a brutal assault on the value of labor - power, and the standard of living of the working class (speedup, higher prices for consumer goods, unemployment, etc.). These are the policies exemplified, for example, by the dramatic initiatives of Khrushchev following the Twentieth Congress or Chou En Lai after the death of Mao.

4. The several economic - political policies pursued by Stalinist regimes, which are enumerated above in the form of ideal types, are always shaped by specific historical conjunctures and conditions, and rarely occur in a "pure" form. While there is a tendency for Stalinist regimes to oscillate between policies as the contradictions unleashed by each type threaten the very existence of the social regime (even as the countries of the American bloc oscillate between inflationary and deflationary policies, to take but one example), this in no way implies a cyclical schema. The processual character of history prohibits such a cyclical vision. Thus, for example, Khrushchevism was an historically specific form of "liberalization", to which Gorbachevism absolutely cannot be reduced, even as the rule of Stalin was an historically specific form of terroristic mass mobilization, displaying unique features which the mass mobilizations orchestrated by Mao in China in the 1950's and '60's or that of Pol Pot in Cambodia in the 1970's did not duplicate.

5. The roots of the Gorbachevian policy of Perestroika and Glasnost must be sought in the nearly twenty years of bureaucratic stagnation (Brezhnev, Andropov, Chernenko) which followed the failure of "liberalization" and "de-Stalinization" under Khrushchev and the coup which overthrew him in 1964. By the mid 1980's the Russian social regime was beset by three interrelated crises, which together constituted a mortal threat to Russian capital. First, the economic stagnation of the Brezhnev era had given way to the open economic crisis which began under Andropov, and worsened under the short reign of Chernenko. Second, this open economic crisis for the first time directly threatened the strategic - military posture of Russian imperialism on a global scale: Russian capital under Andropov and Chernenko could not match the huge military buildup launched by Ronald Reagan (the widening technological gap between the blocs presaged a strategico - military catastrophe for Moscow); the Russian occupation of Afghanistan was threatened by US backed and armed guerrillas (the first time since the 1940's that a Russian military occupation of a contiguous territory was endangered by the rival bloc, and a harbinger of things to come). Third, the open economic crisis had destroyed the last tattered shreds of ideological mystification on which the regime depended, ushering in a full scale legitimization crisis (by the mid 1980's no

one, absolutely no one -- barring a handful of leftists in the West -- still believed in the dogmas of "Marxism - Leninism" -- not in the mass of the population (certainly not in the working class), not even in the bureaucracy or Nomenklatura itself. This tripartite crisis which was the form in which the global crisis of capitalism manifested itself in Brezhnevite Russia provoked a move towards a terroristic mass mobilization (though without a charismatic leader) in the form of Andropov's anti - corruption campaign, which was directed against the inefficiency and corruption of the Nomenklatura (and first and foremost the Brezhnev clan itself). This incipient policy which pointed to a new wave of purges within the party and state bureaucracy, was also directed at the "dissidents", and indicated a turn towards a new round of ideological and labor discipline imposed directly by the "security" apparatus. Andropov's death aborted the moves towards any type of "re - Stalinization", which in a new historical context and in the teeth of the opposition of an entrenched bureaucracy would probably have failed, and led to the Chernenko interregnum during which the crises of the regime were greatly exacerbated and no clear policy initiatives emerged. It was at that historical conjuncture that Gorbachev came to power.

6. Perestroika and Glasnost are the Gorbachevian responses to the tripartite crisis of the Russian social regime. The goals of Perestroika and Glasnost are shaped by the nature of the crisis by which Russian capital is beset: to overcome the economic backwardness and stagnation of capital the ruling class must significantly raise the rate of accumulation; this latter is aimed at restoring the technological foundation on which Russia's imperialist ambitions rest; a higher rate of capital accumulation is seen as the basis for overcoming the legitimization crisis and achieving the necessary ideological control over the mass of the population. Abel Aganbegyan, Gorbachev's chief economic advisor, and the figure widely regarded as the "architect of Perestroika", has formulated the goal of the policy as nothing less than the transition from the phase of "extensive" economic development to

that of "intensive" economic development; this latter being the veritable key to overcoming the legacy of economic backwardness that -- after more than 60 years of "socialism in one country" -- pivotal sectors of the Nomenklatura is prepared to openly acknowledge. In terms of the basic Marxian categories, that can alone permit us to grasp the essential features of the Russian social regime, Aganbegyan is really proposing a transition from an economy based primarily on the extraction of absolute surplus - value to one based largely on the extraction of relative surplus - value -- a transition long ago completed by Russia's Western competitors. 7. While the goal of Perestroika is clear, the economic obstacles which Gorbachev faces are formidable. To significantly raise the productivity of

labor, which is the basis for the extraction of relative surplus - value from the working class requires a massive infusion of capital and technology -- precisely what the Russian economy most lacks. In the short run, then, the path to such a goal can only proceed through a massive infusion of foreign capital and/or a considerable intensification of labor, a renewed emphasis on the extraction of absolute surplus - value from the working class. The former appears to underlie Gorbachev's dramatic initiatives on the disarmament front, one of the main aims of which seems to be to foment a split between West Germany and the US, in the hope of laying the foundations for a new Rapallo; this would involve a reorientation of Germany away from Western Europe and the American bloc in which, in exchange for German financial and technological backing for the ambitious aims of Perestroika, Russia would guarantee the reunification of Germany (2). Such a dramatic rearrangement of the imperialist chessboard seems extremely unlikely, and, moreover, is a long - term project at best, on the outcome of which the policy of Perestroika absolutely cannot wait. At the present time, then, economic reform can only mean the intensification of labor for the working class, a brutal speedup at the point of production, a reduction of the labor force through unemployment and the closing of "inefficient" enterprises, the imposition of more rigorous "norms", so as to achieve a much greater rate of exploitation. This is the real meaning and thrust of the reliance on market mechanisms, autonomy of the enterprise and profitability, which Aganbegyan and the other Gorbachevian technocrats are seeking to introduce. Behind the rhetoric of reform lies a draconian austerity and sharp reduction in the already abysmal living standards of the Russian proletariat and mass of the population. In class terms this is the most immediate and palpable meaning of Perestroika!

8. A policy of austerity and reduced living standards cannot be imposed on the working class without an ideological carrot to accompany the capitalist stick. Glasnost, with its panoply of "democratic" reforms, cultural pluralism, open elections to parliamentary style bodies, ideological debate, "decentralization" and autonomy for national minorities, constitutes the coating through which the Nomenklatura seeks to make the working class swallow the bitter pill of austerity and rationalization, which is the core of the Gorbachevian reform. No component of Glasnost is more insidious in terms of its potential to divide the working class or more fraught with danger for Russian capital if it is not tightly controlled than nationalism. The utilization of nationalism to divide workers and to prevent a class response to austerity can be clearly seen in the highly industrialized Baltic states, where the process of capitalist rationalization has been unleashed with a vengeance. In a region in which the working class is composed of both native Balts and Slavic immigrants (predominantly Russian), the bureaucracy has

shrewdly exploited national differences to divide the proletariat. Native Baltic workers have been dissolved into their respective Lithuanian, Latvian and Estonian nationalities, and mobilized behind the local intelligentsia and bureaucracy in National Fronts to agitate for cultural autonomy and political - economic decentralization. The Slavs, who make up a large part of the industrial proletariat in the region (In the Latvian industrial center of Daugavpils, for instance, only 12% of the population speaks Latvian), have just as deliberately been mobilized behind Internationalist Fronts (sic.), which are based on Russian chauvinism. The frustrations, resentments and discontent of each section of the working class is blamed on the threat presented by

the other nationality, and the class question is displaced by the national question, which is the terrain par excellence of capital. In this way the national antagonisms which decades of "really existing socialism" have only exacerbated as a legacy of Tsarist Russia as a prison house of nationalities, can be utilized by the Nomenklatura as a weapon against the working class. However, the nationalism which the Russian capitalist class seeks to use as a mystification to divide the workers is also a potential danger to the bureaucracy if it is not tightly controlled. The very integrity of the Russian social regime is threatened by the real centrifugal tendencies endemic to a regime whose capitalist ruling class has never succeeded in forging it into a nation - state comparable to the achievement of its imperialist rivals. Beyond the Baltic states where such centrifugal tendencies can be clearly seen, even as they have been thus far successfully contained, the violent upsurge of xenophobic nationalism in the Caucasus (Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan) has the potential to escape the control of the ruling class in Moscow. If such national antagonisms can divide the working class in a polyglot industrial center such as Baku, and hence facilitate the imposition of austerity, a reign of massacres in which Azeris and Armenians slaughter one another, the unleashing of Muslim fundamentalism or demands for national independence such as arose in Georgia, while having nothing whatsoever to do with the struggle against capitalism, can nonetheless be a real threat to the stability of the entity ruled by the Nomenklatura in Moscow, and thwart the aims of the policy of Perestroika through which Gorbachev seeks to reinvigorate Russian capital. Thus, even as nationalism constitutes an indispensable weapon in the program of capitalist rationalization, it is also a potential threat to the Kremlin.

9. As with every other capitalist class the Russian bureaucracy is divided over the question of what specific policies to pursue in the "management" of the national capital. In understanding the policies of Perestroika and Glasnost, it is important to ascertain which factions of the Nomenklatura constitute the base of support for Gorbachev and which oppose him. It seems clear that Gorbachev

enjoys the support of that part of the economic bureaucracy which manages the potentially most profitable sectors of Russian capital, and which seeks the dynamism that market mechanisms seem to promise. The same is true of the technocratic wing of Russian economists and planners, who have embraced neo - Friedmanite economic nostrums as an alternative to decades of stagnation. The party and economic bureaucracy of the non - Russian republics, autonomous republics, etc. also constitutes a base of support for Glasnost, whose promise of "decentralization" and national "autonomy" will assure the privileges and power of these strata. A considerable part of the intelligentsia, both within the party (for example, the rapidly growing Socialist Civic Clubs) and former dissidents released from the Gulag, such as Andre Sakharov, have also been mobilized behind Gorbachev, whose promises of cultural pluralism will greatly enhance the intelligentsia's role as a mediation between the highest echelons of the party and state bureaucracy, and the mass of the population over whom ideological control will be the key to resolving the legitimization crisis. Perhaps the most important component of the power bloc forged by Mikhail Gorbachev is the military and "security" apparatus. The role played by this faction of the ruling class has considerably increased since the Stalin years, and this phenomenon is probably irreversible within the framework of the Russian social regime. One need only compare the powerlessness of the Russian officer corps in the face of Stalin's purges, or even the inability of this faction of the ruling class to play an important role in choosing Stalin's successor in 1953, with the decisive role of the military in the coup which overthrew Khrushchev in 1964, to appreciate the extent to which the military has become a critical component of the power bloc at the summit of the Russian capitalist class. It seems indisputable that without a green light from the military, Perestroika and Glasnost could never have become state policy. The support of the Generals is based on their perception (correct, in our opinion) that the stagnation of the Brezhnev - Andropov - Chernenko years had reached the point where the imperialist balance of power risked turning decisively against Russia, and where only a dramatic attempt to break out of the

bureaucratic logjam provided a possibility of reversing the long term decline of Russian capital.

Against the above mentioned power bloc are ranged those factions of the Nomenklatura which oppose Gorbachev. These include representatives of the clans that have reigned at the summit of the state apparatus for the last 25 years, a considerable part of the party and state apparatus which sees their privileges and power threatened by more technocratic factions of the Nomenklatura, and the managers of weak and inefficient enterprises for whom the introduction of market mechanisms may mean economic extinction. In addition, an important sector of the intelligentsia grouped around Pamyat

("Memory"), the extreme nationalist faction of this stratum, with its program of Russian chauvinism and anti - Semitism and claiming the sympathy of broad sectors of the party bureaucracy and the elements of the military and security apparatus alert to the dangers of centrifugal tendencies, constitutes a core from which opposition to Gorbachev can be expected to grow if Perestroika fails to live up to its promise of economic "modernization" and ideological legitimization.

10. No evaluation of Perestroika and Glasnost can fail to make some comments, tentative though they may be, on the prospects of the Gorbachevian reforms as a response to the tripartite crisis through which Russian capitalism is now living. The project of economic modernization, military - technological development and ideological legitimization which are the goals of Perestroika and Glasnost are almost certainly beyond the reach of the Russian social regime. The capital and technology necessary to dramatically raise the productivity of labor, and reverse Moscow's military decline seems beyond the reach of Gorbachev, and the hope of a new Rapallo which is the probable objective of the Gorbachevian policy in Europe is almost certain to be frustrated. Yet in the absence of success on these fronts it is impossible to see how the Nomenklatura can raise the living standards of the working class, without which the legitimization crisis can probably not be resolved. Indeed, the economic situation will likely require an increasingly harsh austerity and reduction in the standard of living of the proletariat and mass of the population, even as the "circus" of democratization and cultural pluralism with which the bureaucracy seeks to divert the working class wears increasingly thin. In such a context, the centrifugal tendencies already apparent may grow, providing additional challenges to the ruling class in Moscow even as they constitute a formidable obstacle to the unity of the working class. Despite the obstacles which Gorbachev faces, at the present time it is difficult to see an alternative to his rule within the Russian capitalist class itself. A return to the stagnation of the Brezhnevite era is inconceivable; no matter how comforting such a return may appear to certain factions of the Nomenklatura, the military would probably not allow it. A re - Stalinization based on a terroristic mass mobilization is precluded by a confluence of factors: there is no charismatic leader on the scene; such a mass mobilization, however suited it was (in capitalist terms) to an earlier phase in the development of the Russian social regime, is ill suited to the task of increasing the productivity of labor so as to be able to economically and militarily challenge Russia's imperialist competitors; any such effort would encounter the opposition of the bulk of the Nomenklatura, which does not want its power and privileges sacrificed in an orgy of purges and show trials which are the inevitable accompaniment of terroristic mass mobilizations. Short of an explosion of

nationalist challenges which threaten the disintegration of the regime, it is difficult to now see a successful challenge to the present line from within the ruling class itself. If such a challenge is to be mounted, however, it seems clear that it would be because the military had lost its confidence in Perestroika, and it would almost certainly involve a much more direct military role in the management of Russian capital (one probably tied to an increasing reliance on Russian chauvinism as an ideology of the social regime).

The crisis of the Russian capitalist regime does raise the real spectre of a challenge to Perestroika from outside the ruling class: the spectre of communism and the emergence of a working class challenge to the regime of wage - labor. The austerity which is the first fruit of the Gorbachevian reform, the inability of the regime to relieve the acute shortages of consumer goods which is the daily lot of the mass of the population, and the intensification of the exploitation of the proletariat, portend new outbreaks of class struggle which will escape the democratic and nationalist traps within which the intelligentsia seeks to incorporate them.

The outbreak of a rash of wildcat strikes this past Spring by bus drivers and auto workers to protest the tying of pay to output, and by coal miners in the Donbass region because of deteriorating safety conditions, have already led the regime to propose giving the unions the right to strike, as a way of heading off labor unrest which threatens to escape government control. It is against this threat represented by the working class that the whole of the Nomenklatura, from Sakharov and the "democrats" to Pamyat and the crypto - fascists, with the whole panoply of Stalinism in between, is mobilizing its last reserves.

(1) For an inciteful analysis of this Rapallo option (though one marred by an unpardonable "critical support" for the West, and an exaggeration of the prospects for Russian success), see F. Feher / A. Heller, "Eastern Europe Under The Shadow Of A New Rapallo", New German Critique # 37

MAC INTOSH

Farewell to Munis

It is with deep regret that we learned of the death of Munis on February 4, 1989. He was one of the last survivors of the final years of the first revolutionary wave, and like a bridge across the generations, he continued to defend revolutionary principles in the present wave of class struggle begun in 1968. In Munis, the revolutionary milieu has lost someone who never gave up trying to make communism a reality.

He put his whole heart and soul into the proletarian struggle, into the effort to create the conditions for a universal human community. This revolutionary ideal was his passion in a battle against all the ideological claptrap that infects our world today.

In Spain against the Stalinists and the anarchist Ministers of the Frente Popular, in Mexico threatened by the assassins of the GPU, in Paris -- Munis never wavered in his desire to fight for the international socialist revolution. His political commitment lasted a lifetime.

We see it at every stage in his life. In 1933 when he was in the Spanish "Izquierda Comunista", along with Lacroix and Tofi, he organized a heated factional struggle against A. Nin, defending the need to create a new class party and denouncing any moves to join the Spanish C.P. which was little more than a sect with no influence in the working class. We can see his commitment in 1937

when he participated in the "Bloody Days" of May to block the Stalinists attack against the workers of Barcelona when, sick of the illusion of anti-fascism, these workers wanted to make a genuine revolution. Munis' perspective was to try to transform this heroic defense into a veritable insurrection giving all power to the workers' committees. Throwing all their strength into the battle, the group of Munis and Calini offered a political orientation in the struggle. The "Friends of Durruti" were at their side on the barricades.

In Mexico, as leader of the Spanish section in exile of the IVth International, Munis began to move away from Trotskyist ideology. In his denunciation of the politics of the International Secretariat of the IVth International, Munis was supported by N. Sedova, Trotsky's widow. Breaking with

official Trotskyism, they considered the IVth International a gravely compromised political force because of its position supporting Allied imperialism during the 1939-45 war. Sedova, Munis and their comrades were violently attacked by the high priests of official Trotskyism: P. Franck, Maitan, Germain (Mandel).

Returning to Europe, Munis founded the Grupo de Combate Revolucionario, which in August 1950 published a document called "The Proletariat Against Both Blocs" that

fiercely denounced the imperialist slaughter. In 1959, Munis formed the group "Fomento Obrero Revolucionario" on the basis of the ideas contained in the text For a Second Communist Manifesto.

In spite of limited resources, Munis intervened in the events of Mai-Juin 1968 in France to try to trace a clear political perspective. In the period following Mai, the "FOR" strengthened its ties with "Battaglia Comunista" of Damen and was one of the participants in the 1st Conference of the Groups of the Communist Left in Milan in 1977. In the aftermath of this Conference, the FOR developed internationally with territorial groups in Spain, France, Greece, Italy and the USA.

Clear about the state capitalist nature of the Soviet Union, Munis concluded that the system which the Stalinists present as a "workers' system" that must be preserved at all costs, must be destroyed by a proletarian revolution. Munis denounced Russia's extraction of surplus value and its role as an imperialist power. Munis was against all national liberation struggles and called for revolutionary defeatism in the international proletariat which has no country to create or defend in such wars. He was against any tactic of "revolutionary parliamentarism", knowing full well how electoralism turns the workers away from their class terrain of struggle. His anti-parliamentarism made him condemn all united fronts and other electoral mystifications. Against any kind of unions, obstacles to the revolutionary struggle of the workers, Munis supported "factory committees" and workers' councils, the only representatives of the whole working class able to consciously destroy capitalism. Munis developed a full view of the decadence of the capitalist system and not just the economic aspects. He tried to grasp reality in all its

dimensions so as to speak all the more eloquently of the need for the social revolution which, by destroying capitalist economic and social relations as well as political ones, would pave the way for the abolition of wage labor. With deep conviction Munis wrote of a new, free society with no God or Master.

Now that Munis has died, we certainly do not want to glorify him or make him out to be some guru. He would have been the first to hate that sort of thing.

We will not hide that we had some serious disagreements with comrade Munis. He overestimated the revolutionary potential in the 30's and he took the events in Spain to be the summit of revolutionary activity. For him, what happened in Spain represented a deeper and more significant social revolution than the 1917 revolution in Russia, because of the great participation and the economic and cultural measures taken. We have always argued against this position. Also, we have always criticized his refusal to apply "revolutionary defeatism" to the situation in Spain in 1936/37 in the course of an imperialist confrontation when two

capitalist entities tried out their weapons to prepare the world proletariat to participate in the second slaughter. We considered this attitude irresponsible in an epoch when revolutionary responsibility consisted in calling workers from both camps to turn the imperialist war into a class war.

Munis always insisted on the fact that the proletarian revolution was not simply a political or military affair. It must take into account the vital question of the organization of production and distribution of goods (see our contributions also on the period of transition in previous issues of IP). But the different immediate social measures suggested to the class in For a Second Manifesto seem to be marked by profound traces of the "Transitional Program" of Trotsky, made over with a slightly more radical touch. Although it is certainly true that the revolution must socialize the means of production and smother the State, it is a mistake to think that the proletariat will be able to achieve either of these goals, right away from the first day.

Munis stubbornly denied the existence of a crisis of overproduction in today's capitalism. He expected no new opening of a revolutionary period. Whether the crisis was cyclical or permanent, it would never be the motor to galvanize the working class, according to Munis. In support of this position, he cited the example of the 1929 crash which led to a world war and not to the revolution. For Munis, the objective conditions for class consciousness were to be found only in the permanent contradiction between the capitalist system of exploitation and the existence of the proletariat, the creators of surplus value. Up to the end, Munis continued to see the proletariat as a potentially revolutionary force that has been stopped by an enormous number of obstacles. The difficulties of the working class in its recent struggles merely confirmed him in believing that, mainly because of the counter-revolution, the working class had done nothing but retreat & regress politically.

Munis tended to emphasize the proletariat's weaknesses over and above its revolutionary potential. Thus, he wrote extensively exhorting the proletariat about its mission and, at the same time, criticizing it unmercifully so that it would recover its freedom of thought and autonomy of action to throw itself into the battle to break its chains. Munis was not interested in the question of the subterranean maturation of consciousness; he preferred to talk about the will power the class needed, its will and combativity.

The fact that he came from trotskyism did not prevent Munis from evolving in a positive direction. It led him to adopt a whole series of political positions that the Communist Left had elaborated in the past. But Munis was always silent about what he owed to the German-Dutch Left and to the Italian Left. Munis' sectarian attitude must also

be criticized; it led the FOR to boycott the Conferences of the groups of the left communist tradition and led Munis to apply disciplinary measures against a minority in the FOR that split in 1988.

Munis was aware of the weakness of the marxist method prevailing in the revolutionary milieu today. Far from adding to and going beyond the insights of the past, today's milieu has scarcely brought any serious elements to the fore in response to the major problems of our time raised by the existence of state capitalism and society's orientation towards totalitarianism, an expression of decadence.

All of the theoretical and political positions of Munis were expressed in a series of texts, some prepared in collaboration with his friend the revolutionary surrealist poet, B Peret. In all the important moments, Munis took a clear class position: on the colonial problem (Algeria, Vietnam), the attitude towards the imperialist world wars, Mai 1958 (Gaullism), Mai 1968, against the unions, against the ideologies of anti-fas-

cism and anti-racism, etc. Munis wrote hundreds of articles and more elaborate texts, leaflets, pamphlets and polemics with all the different groups and positions in the revolutionary milieu.

The future will even more clearly recognize the importance of Munis' contribution. As with all of us, it has its limits but it should be seen as a way station to a fuller, more meaningful vision of communism and all that is positive in the many expressions of the real movement.

Munis, with his emotional style, felt very deeply the need for communism. Commitment without giving in, will power, courage, the honesty to face facts, that was Munis.

His death will be felt as a great loss to the revolutionary milieu. We hope that our comrades in the FOR will find here a fraternal political salute and an encouragement to continue the struggle for the world revolution now that Munis has passed them the torch.

R.C.
April 5, 1989

"MOUVEMENT COMMUNISTE"

the notion of centrism, a disease plaguing the revolutionary milieu

At the beginning of the year 1989, the working class received the first issue, number zero, of the review "Mouvement Communiste" for the creation of the world communist party, a fusion of "A Contre Courant" and "Cahiers Communistes". With the deepening of the crisis, New Year's gifts are getting smaller and smaller and it's the same for the contribution this new magazine makes to the cause of the proletariat. We are always happy to see that revolutionary militants make the effort to publish their contributions but we still try to look into the content of their efforts. Are they trying to add to the understanding and deepening of the issues facing the working class in the process of coming to consciousness, by joining an open debate in the revolutionary milieu? Or are they moving towards the repetition of some invariable program, excluding any debate or questioning, in a closed-in environment?

Evaluating the political content of re-

views is all the more important because there are so many that appear and disappear, the products of the different splits in revolutionary groups, the products of the crisis in the revolutionary milieu.

That is the way we propose to consider this new magazine: its positive -or negative- contribution to overcoming the crisis in the milieu and its contribution to the working class struggle. In this current period so rich in possibilities but so difficult for the proletariat in the affirmation of its class perspectives, one of the primary tasks of revolutionaries is to point out all the new questions facing the class and to work at understanding the theoretical roots of the crisis in the milieu. Revolutionaries cannot be content to simply mouth the catechism of the invariant program.

This number 0 of "Mouvement Communiste" shows two contradictory methods. We can

only see as positive the approach behind the writing of the "programmatic points" which makes it easier to follow the political positions of this new group and seems inspired by a desire to discuss with other groups. But then, how can we place the editorial in the same issue that rejects all of the revolutionary milieu as part of the bourgeois camp? It is a caricature of sectarianism and sclerosis, a rejection of all debate using the pretext of the invariant program.

Two points seem to be at the basis of this group's perspective and we want to argue against these points : (1) their position on the revolutionary milieu seen through the angle of "centrism-opportunism" and (2) their position on "invariance".

THE REVOLUTIONARY MILIEU AND "CENTRISM"

"Mouvement Communiste", in one part of its articles, claims to recognize the crisis in the revolutionary milieu and the need to combat sectarianism. It talks about a will to work towards regroupment through political clarification. But the big question is : who could they ever regroup with? Because along with this heart-warming claim, we find another which is much less so : the will to make "all these centrist sects disappear". Here we find a concept that has already been widely used by the ICC and taken up by other political groups : centrism-opportunism.

When the ICC in 1985 dug up the old centrist theories of degenerate Trotskyism, it marked its own degeneration. The difficulties the working class was encountering in its process of gaining class consciousness did not correspond to the high road traced by the ICC in 1980. Also, the political crisis draining the revolutionary milieu was not getting better through clarification and regroupment; it was getting worse through sectarianism, and an acceleration of splits. Affected by these political problems that it could not explain, the ICC took refuge in calling the working class and other groups "centrists" which it "defined" as having an attitude of hesitation and oscillation.

Lenin fought against centrist and opportunist political currents that had a real existence in a particular historical period (before and during the first world war). But the ICC preferred to leave all this aside and turn to apolitical psychological games to close the debates that had begun within the organization on significant political questions. Introducing the concept of centrism made it easier for the ICC to eject those who opposed its new theories and programmatic regressions. (See on this subject our articles in I. P. #1,3, 4,5,9 and 10). That is why this marvelous concept of centrism that supposedly clarified and explained so much, has never been used, explained or developed by the ICC since it expelled our Tendency!

At the time, we denounced the mistaken

and apolitical use of this concept seeing it, among other things, as a convenient way to close off debate and close the ICC in on itself. Today, "Mouvement Communiste" gives us a caricature of this danger :

by using this concept of centrism -- which it never defines -- it prevents all debate and avoids all discussion on the reasons for the crisis in the milieu because it rejects the whole milieu into the camp of the bourgeoisie. It seems that for "M.C.", all groups that don't recognize the invariance of the program (in their version!) are "centrist sects" belonging to the enemy's camp.

We can define opportunism in a general way as the search for immediate successes to the detriment of principles. This ideology was concretized at the beginning of the 20th century in political tendencies that favored the organizational development of the mass party in the framework of capitalist society, over and above the needs of the final goals of socialism.

The appearance of these tendencies was made possible by the fact that capitalism in its economically expansionist phase was still able to allow a genuine struggle for reforms, a battle for improvements in the conditions of the proletariat, which did not directly call into question the system itself. But, for us, it is clear that these centrist and opportunist currents became reactionary with the beginning of the first world war. That is why the policies of the Third International must be condemned when, at the Second Congress, these counter-revolutionary currents were allowed into the International.

Thus, by introducing into the revolutionary milieu of the 80's a concept corresponding to the historical conditions of the beginning of the century, "M.C." empties these concepts of any materialist and historical context and meaning. It flies in the face of the meaning of historical materialism despite all its pious statements on marxism. Perhaps this is simply an example of "the invariance of the relations of production" throughout history. We'll return to this point in a minute.

"M.C." uses apolitical, undefined, concepts like centrism-opportunism not to help resolve the crisis in the milieu but to reject everyone else into the arms of the bourgeoisie. For us, what defines being part of one class camp or the other is a question of the programmatic positions defended by a group.

Class frontiers are based on fundamental issues such as the nature of the capitalist state and its appendages (parties and unions) and mystifications (democracy, "communism" in the Russian or Chinese varieties); the position on war, etc. What, then, are the programmatic positions that define the class.

frontiers for "M.C." and determine the rejection into the bourgeois camp? The comrades provide only some rather sketchy notions : non-recognition of the invariance of the program, activism and modernism; the "reformism"(!) characteristic of the "extreme-left"; "centrism which directs the class' energies towards goals that do not challenge relations of exploitation"... a disease of the "ultra-left" according to "M.C." Is this what they base themselves on to launch such sweeping political condemnations of the entire milieu?

The comrades of "M.C." seem to defend concepts that we consider very dangerous :

- because they call for the pure and simple disappearance of revolutionary groups;
- because they use this concept of centrism that they never bother to define; in fact, by using this concept at all they deny the objective and historical conditions that gave rise to the real centrist movement;
- because they hide behind this use of "centrism" to avoid the issue of the crisis in the revolutionary milieu today; this way, they don't have to deal with the causes of the crisis or with any efforts to overcome it;
- because they have rejected the meaning of class frontiers that permit a political judgment about what camp a group belongs to. This question has always been a crucial one for revolutionaries : the lack of clarity towards an organization like the USPD during the German revolution led to the degeneration of the Communist International.

INVARIANCE

"Invariance" seems to be a very important concept for the comrades of "M.C." They

write :

"A theoretical struggle not in the bookish and linear sense of the program but by accepting the invariable nature of relations of production and the critique of these relations based on invariant theory. Typical of opportunism is the discovery of new eras, mechanisms or paths of the means of production and the class struggle." ("M.C." p 7)

But "M.C." emphasizes the profound change capitalism underwent from the formal to the real domination of capital. Isn't this, too, an example of the so-called opportunism denounced here?

For us, the notion of an invariant program contains the idea that everything has already been settled once and for all in the past, that all the answers are already contained in a completed programmatic whole. Although we are firmly committed to the need to adhere to a programmatic coherence, this can never be complete and finished. It is constantly being put to the proof by the experiences of the

proletariat in its class struggle. For us, a revolutionary organization must see its program as something to be continually worked on, criticized, developed. There is no separation between theory and practice and because the working class undergoes a process of coming to consciousness by drawing the lessons of past and present struggles, revolutionary minorities also must commit themselves to this continual work of criticism, learning and development.

As Karl Korsch wrote :

"It is not a theory which like some miracle was and will always be in advance of the development of the workers' movement so that in some strange way the future of the practical movement would always be behind its own theory and could only develop along the lines already traced for it". (Marxism and Philosophy)

Although "M.C." doesn't agree, we think that the notion of invariance creates an unbridgeable gulf between two worlds where the program is no longer enriched by the new questions emerging from struggle and is cut off from the experience of the working class, where the party directs a proletariat who follows "the leader", a proletariat with no communist consciousness which will be brought to make the qualitative leap by the party providing it with the program. Thus, invariance is not just the idea of an already

completed program. It determines a whole way of looking at the role of the party and its links with the working class.

Another consequence of this notion of invariance is the rejection of the theoretical gains of the past. While the proletariat is constantly drawing the lessons of its experiences, while the whole Left Communist movement of the past worked so hard to understand, criticize, enrich, develop marxism, and thus, was able to grasp the changes necessary in the positions on the unions, the period and the party, the notion of invariance is a sterile notion eliminating all this sort of work and all its insights. Even though "M.C." talks about its "affiliations" in the past and especially to the Italian left, it is a simple liturgy, not a living commitment.

CONCLUSION

In this article, we have not tried to make a comprehensive presentation of all the positions of "M.C." In fact, this group defend a variety of "bordigist" analysis that we do not agree with, especially in relation to the role of the party. But to really understand the programmatic differences between us on these points, we encourage our readers to obtain their publications and ours (especially articles on our tasks and the meaning of centrism found in # 1, 3, 4, 5 and 10).

We wanted to emphasize two points that are

not usually dealt with in articles about the program : invariance and centrism. This latter concept is especially dangerous because in recent years we have seen how the ICC uses it to "explain" all the weaknesses of the class and the revolutionary milieu. Four years ago we warned the ICC of the danger of using this concept even just as a club to defeat "unruly" comrades. Four years later, "M.C." goes much farther than the ICC since it uses it to reject the entire revolutionary milieu!

Recognize the crisis in the milieu (other than just by digging up some old label from the past to stick on it); call for trying to overcome this crisis through the confrontation of constantly evolving positions rather than some dead invariance; these are the tasks of revolutionaries today. We hope that the comrades will respond to our questions and agree to the sorely needed open debate in the revolutionary milieu as we know it today.

Rose

CORRESPONDENCE

on intervention

It is no accident that intervention is one of the problems that causes the most controversy and debate among revolutionaries. The reason is simple : intervention, in other words clarifying the goals of the struggle and the means to attain them, is, in the final analysis, THE main aim of revolutionary activity. We are always very interested in receiving correspondence from our readers on this subject. We will try to answer all our mail and we are offering here extracts of correspondence between a contact in Vancouver, Canada and our Fraction.

How to link the goals of the movement with perspectives for everyday struggle today? This is the main concern of our contact in this exchange. In our answer to some of his questions, we try to clarify our position on intervention and refute (if it is still necessary...) the ICC's false accusation against us on this subject.

Extract from letter from ER

Conclusions drawn at the end of the articles on 'rank and file unionism' and 'Poland Once Again' in IP11 seem to imply that revolutionary intervention today ought to focus on clarifying perspectives for future struggles, especially with respect to focusing on the political power of the bourgeoisie and the necessity of directly confronting it. But such interventions relate in no way to the struggles workers are engaged in today - in effect they say: do what you want today, follow the unions or whatever, it doesn't matter, you aren't going to win anyway, but prepare for the future, realise you're part of an international class, and that you can only make your struggle 'pay' by uniting, self-organised, on a world scale against all the unions, cops and states of world capital. Surely such interventions can't be taken all that seriously by militant workers who are directly involved in active struggle today. They will in all likelihood apply the description 'sectarian' to such exhortations. Why can't the emphasis on perspectives for future class eruptions be balanced by emphasis on the necessity to extend the struggles today, while breaking free from union control

wherever possible. Class consciousness isn't advanced only by articulating and attempting to clarify positions on political tasks for the future, but also by clarifying means to push forward today's struggles so that when future struggles arise workers will have matured through direct experience, they will be further ahead than they are today. The struggles they are engaged in may not 'pay', but from the immediatist perspective of the vast majority of struggling workers today learning they they can better defend themselves from ruling class attacks today and tomorrow by extending and unifying their struggles is a significant advance in class consciousness.

E.R.
Vancouver

Extract from our reply:

We agree with your concern that, in revolutionary intervention in the class struggle, "the emphasis on perspectives for future class eruptions (should) be balanced by emphasis on the necessity to extend the struggle today, while breaking free from

union control ... ", and with your view that "class consciousness isn't advanced only by articulating (...) positions on political tasks for the future, but also by clarifying means to push forward today's struggles ..." We think it is not so much a question of 'balancing', of 'putting equal emphasis' on 'the perspectives of the future' and 'the necessity to extend', etc. Rather, revolutionary intervention must clarify the intrinsic link between 'the political tasks of the future' and 'the means to push forward today's struggles'. We agree that an intervention which is limited to talking about 'perspectives for future struggles' would miss its target. We probably also share the view that an intervention which narrowly focuses on the particularities of a given struggle would be a mistake. Even in relation to the choice of the concrete means to fight, global perspectives are crucial. These means depend on the workers' understanding of reality. As long as the workers to whom the intervention is directed believe they have only their particular interests to defend and have nothing in common with other workers, mere calls for extension will fall on deaf ears. As long as they believe the unions are their organs they will not be interested in self-organisation. When they think they face only their boss, that the state, its judges, police, media, politicians and government-arbitrators are 'neutral', they will be rendered powerless by legalism. As long as they still put their trust in the economic system, they will be derailed by bourgeois perspectives, such as a change of management (cf the Eastern Airlines strike).

So, any sensible intervention on the concrete means of struggle must talk about the global reality and the perspectives that this reality imposes. We don't think that any intervention must exclusively focus on future perspectives nor that it's unimportant what

workers do now, as you suggest we do. But we think that workers can advance their struggle only through their understanding of reality. So it is this understanding that we as revolutionaries have to push. We can do so if our intervention is not based on abstract slogans but on what the workers themselves already perceive. The changing reality of capitalism, the deepening of the crisis, the workers' experience with the unions etc, constantly changes this perception. It's precisely because of this, that questions about the perspectives of the workers' struggle, about its direction, are increasingly posed in the class (granted, not everywhere; we don't say that every intervention should have the same focus nor that we should intervene in every strike). This is not only unavoidable but also necessary, if the working class is to become aware of the political dimensions of its struggle. It is part of the breakdown of illusions which exist to protect the capitalist order. Faced with the question 'what are we fighting for?', the truth is revolutionaries' only

weapon. We have to state clearly that the development of a struggle can make the capitalist class temporarily step back but that the workers' only future under capitalism is a further decline of their living standards, etc. We reject both the demoralising propaganda that struggle is futile and the deception that workers can protect their jobs and living standards under capitalism.

Maybe because the articles you criticise are in part polemicising against the latter position, misunderstandings about our view on intervention arose. It's interesting that the ICC, against whose views (amongst others) these polemics were directed, is raising the same objections as you do against those two articles (but in a dishonest way) ('EFICC retreats from active role in class struggle', Internationalism 63). The ICC claims that the Fraction wants only "to educate the workers on the final goal", that we think "the practical struggle will take care of itself", that we "deny the vital role of the revolutionary organisation throughout the struggle of the proletariat", etc. The article is based upon our critique of the ICC slogan 'The Struggle Pays' claiming that our rejection of this slogan implies a rejection of the struggle itself. That's a little too easy. We have often repeated that the development of class consciousness, the development of the class' self-awareness, of the recognition of its strength and perspectives, occurs through the open struggle. What we reproached the ICC for is that it tends "to hide the enormity of the task by fostering illusions in the immediate economic rewards of the struggle" (IP11, p5). The ICC answers this by quoting from an article, which stated, amongst other things, that "the proletariat cannot escape the tendency for its living standard to decline".

That's very good. One would almost think that all this is a phoney polemic. But in its real-life intervention the ICC often speaks with a different voice. It's significant that in the lengthy quote from IP on which they base their attack, only one sentence is omitted: a quote from their own intervention texts stating: "Workers! Mobilise to defend jobs and living standards! It's possible!" Nowhere is this position retracted. On the contrary, their current intervention leaflets go in the same sense. This is a serious mistake. We understand the desire to bridge the gap between revolutionaries and their class. But the road to leftism is paved with concessions to illusions that are still strong within the class.

We wholeheartedly agree with the ICC when it writes that our role is ... "to make a concrete connection between the current struggle and the goal". But the ICC's intervention is not doing this, as a leaflet directed at

the strikers of Eastern Airlines reprinted in the same issue illustrates. When revolutionaries make leaflets that, apart from a few word changes (replace 'unions' by 'union bosses') might as well come from radical rank

and file unionists, the concrete connection isn't made.(...)

Sander

POLEMIC



PCI-BATTAGLIA COMUNISTA

internationalist, of course ... but not too much

What follows is a contribution from one of our sympathizers criticizing the positions of the Internationalist Communist Party (Battaglia Comunista), Italy, on the national question. This text frequently quotes the positions Battaglia defended at the International Conferences of the Communist Left. These meetings, bringing together revolutionary groups coming from the Communist Left, were organized by Battaglia in 1977 with the active collaboration of the ICC. The quotes come from the published Minutes and Reports of the Conferences.

Battaglia is today the clearest group of those who can claim direct descent from the Italian Left. It defends the concept that capitalism is currently in its phase of decadence and it has developed a critique of leninist positions on unions and national liberation struggles. But its break with these positions remains incomplete and limited by its attachment to the leninist logic on the party question. The following text tries to show how the fundamental weaknesses of leninism persist in the positions of Battaglia and influence its work.

This article was written after discussions with our sympathizer and we agree with its content. We remind interested readers that this article is a complement to the article on nationalism which appeared in IP #13.

Ideas rest upon a material foundation in society. If it were simply a matter of believing in "ideas" as such, all forms of exploitation and oppression would have been done away with long ago. People do not necessarily have to "believe" in reactionary ideologies to follow them in practice or to submit to them. Submission is based on a sort of pseudo-strategy where people conclude that "there is no other way" and give in to "realism".

All this plays a big role in the position of the Internationalist Communist Party (Battaglia Comunista) on the national question.

Battaglia doesn't "believe" in nationalism but makes an analysis of the balance of forces in society where nationalism becomes almost a necessity. In Battaglia, the weight of strategic considerations, as opposed to "ideas", is so great that it is not easy to see its concessions to nationalism behind all the talk of tactics and strategy. It is easier to denounce the PCI-Programma Comunista which Battaglia split from in the 50's. The differences between the two groups on this question are not much more than nuances. That is why our anti-nationalist polemics are usually directed

against Programma. But it is Battaglia that today has a greater influence in the revolutionary milieu (see IP #13 on the national question and the CWO, Britain and the GCI, Belgium).

Although Battaglia does not "believe" in nationalism, the way it uses this ideology for tactical reasons is no less dangerous because it is more sophisticated. Battaglia supports nationalist movements :

- for the sake of realism. They exist and, as we shall see, in some ways they are more "real" than a workers' movement;
- because it sees the party as an enlightened general staff which can work miracles and bend any movement, regardless of its class nature, in a proletarian and revolutionary direction;
- because of a leftist conception of imperialism which it associates mainly with the economically stronger capitals of the west, the right-wing variety. The leninist origins of this concept, shared by the entire bordigist milieu, are described in the IP #13 article on nationalism. But this cocktail of ideas, partly derived from the writings of Lenin, has little to do with the revolutionary Lenin of 1917.

"WE MUST BE IN THE MOVEMENT"

The main difference between Programma and Battaglia is that the latter tends to deny, as we do, that there are progressive national revolutions. "From the first world war on, national liberation wars have lost their progressive character. After the second world conflict, these progressive reasons became even rarer. (Battaglia, in Second Conference of the Groups of the Communist Left, Vol 1). "In an epoch dominated by the forces of imperialism, national liberation struggles have completely finished their historic, 'liberating' function." (ibid)

But this loses all practical significance when Battaglia starts seeing in these national movements, a struggle against "oppression" or even against "imperialism":

- "National liberation movements are the result of objective conditions:
- the unbearable pressure of imperialist exploitation directly and clearly exerted by the monopolies, the multi-nationals, etc., by the capitalist states themselves from the West and the East;
 - the enormous misery of the masses in these countries." (Second Conference, vol 2)

First deformation : the impression is given here that the first and most direct exploiters are the foreign imperialists and not the national, patriotic bourgeoisie. In reality, the most direct oppressors of the Palestinians, for example, are not the Israeli Army or even "multi-national" imperialism, but the guard dogs of the Palestinian camps and the People's Committees which organize exploitation and control indoctrination to make the Arab populations they control believe that they are "Palestinians", that is, cannon fodder for the Palestinian State. To

the displeasure of the Intifada leadership, who would greatly prefer to terrorize small farmers who never leave their villages, you can only mobilize masses for war if they are submissive and imprisoned in an isolated world, preferably a rural one.

Second deformation : national movements are presented as having their origins in the resistance against misery and exploitation. The undoubted fact that there is misery doesn't mean anything in itself. If there is a struggle against unemployment, against rising prices, against low wages or other forms of real and concrete misery, it will be explicitly and directly aimed against those responsible, as we have recently seen in Jordan. The Intifada is praised by Battaglia for "the initiative and determination" of the masses (BC, Dec 88) despite the moderation of the leaders (while the same article deplores only that the rituals of stone throwing sacrifice the masses as cannon fodder for imperialism). The Intifada is, in reality, a cowardly patriotism and barbaric racism and when the radicals join in, they call for killing the Jews in Allah's name. All this has nothing to do with a struggle of exploited masses against any aspect of capitalist exploitation. The masses are dragged through the mud by the methods and the goals of this struggle. It is a struggle of the Palestinian occupant, the embryonic state of Palestinian imperialism, against the Israeli occupation.

But Battaglia reassures us :

"In this general climate, there is no possibility for these movements to get anywhere except in terms of imperialist antagonisms....If the national movement does not give itself the goal of communist revolution, it is necessarily and inevitably the victim of imperialist domination....The Party of the international proletariat will work to unite the movement of the indigenous proletariat with the general movement of the class in the metropolises towards the revolution and the construction of communism." (Second Conference, vol 2)

We disagree! Are we supposed to envisage the pure class struggle for the metropolises and the national movement for those stupid "indigenous" darkies of inferior races? That's racism. Any "uniting" with the metropolises means first of all a break with the national movement, whose interests are the opposite of those of the masses.

"This political task cannot be done with mere verbal declarations. It demands a clear knowledge of the reality of these movements....Until we are an international Party, able to accomplish the task of denouncing national struggles as a support for imperialism, we must work inside the movement towards a class break and not remain judging it from the outside. This break, today, means the creation of a pole of reference linked to the movement." (Second Conference, vol 2).

What is the point of waiting for a Party which merely wants to tail-end nationalism? Today the international class struggle is pitted against all the apologists of the nation state, including those in the third world and in the Eastern bloc who represent imperialism with an "anti-imperialist", anti-western face. A party that wants to be inside this movement is no vanguard of the working class. The vanguard means those who show the way forward for class struggle like those in the class struggle in Egypt and Jordan who have no part in nationalist agitation or in other countries, such as Algeria, where class struggle has shown its hostility to nationalist agitation.

In Battaglia, one can always find two contradictory preoccupations :

- on the one hand, to have a strategy to conquer the leadership of the proletarian elements of these struggles (without doing much damage to the struggles);
- on the other hand, to intervene to defend the perspective of the class struggle, which is impossible without actually sabotaging these national movements.

These two concerns are irreconcilable.

"But given the fact that the progressive nature of these movements is finished, the task of revolutionaries is not to take a position on the nature of these wars which is clear, but must be to take a position on the practice this implies for their strategy and the attitude they should take." (Second Conference, vol 2)

No! If the nature is clearly not progressive, the strategy to follow is therefore clear, unless one needs to find reasons to support non-progressive movements.

"The role of revolutionaries is to deepen the trench that divides proletariat from bourgeoisie. It is therefore essential to denounce the imperialist character of the forces at the head of these movements -- their so-called revolutionary leadership. They have no perspective to offer the proletariat. In the period of decadence, there are no wars that are more just than others." (Ibid)

Why, then, should the leadership of the Intifada be any worse than the members or the whole of the movement? The entire Intifada stinks because it is a specific national struggle against Israeli occupation. Whether this struggle is too moderate or not moderate enough does not interest us because in any event, it is a nationalist mobilization of the population. Any possible radicalization, thanks to the little brothers of the Hezbollah, would only, in some ways, be even worse! There are two occupations in actual fact : the second is the embryonic Palestinian state that already controls the population and terrorizes, divides and slaughters the exploited (most-

ly indirectly but directly too when it murders supposed "collaborators").

In its concrete positions, Battaglia seems to wipe its feet with its slogan (oft repeated at the Conferences) of the need to "widen the trench" between the classes. Where the class struggle is temporarily absent, Battaglia is ready to forget it. In an article on the ethnic violence in the Caucasus (BC, Dec. 88), Battaglia tenderly elaborates on these old ethnic entities, going back to Stalin to prove that Karabakh has always been Armenian, swooning over the traditions of struggle against Persian and Turkish domination while in the meantime, these little ethnic entities are killing each other off to the advantage of "Soviet despotism". No problem for Battaglia : they see the possibility of several ethnic entities forging a "Muslim front" which would be a great threat for the Kremlin. Shall we then see a new Khomeini installed as the new Czar of the Kremlin -- unless course the Russian bureaucrats prevent this by building an alliance of "Christian" ethnic groups?

All this would be funny if it weren't so disgusting. Battaglia sheds a tear for the "cultural and secular social traditions" which the Russian bureaucrats tried to eliminate in their Iranian and Turkish subjects. But it gives only one example -- the imposition of the Russian alphabet -- because Battaglia knows that this is low-level sentimentality, not because it appeals to our emotions as such but because in our era, all national traditions are equally barbaric and all serve to imprison people in a closed off world of xenophobia and racism. Even in the past, really living cultures, national or otherwise, were those nourished from contact with the outside. And in our time, there is only one culture left, only one crucible allowing any development for mankind : proletarian internationalism.

While Battaglia gets teary over the alphabet, intellectuals in Europe and the U.S. pay their respects to the "religious traditions" of Muslim ethnic entities. Of course, this homage is only from those who have the luxury of not having to wear the veil or submitting to clitorectomies or other "ethnic" traditions of this kind.

WHAT IS IMPERIALISM

Battaglia is proud of its "realism". It reproaches radical anti-nationalism with not seeing that nationalism and its objective conditions do not disappear overnight. And so what? Does this mean that we should accept it, adapt to it, not fight against it?

For our part, we can see that national traditions persist only to the degree that the big imperialisms allow them to do so. And in a world where everything is capital-

ist domination and competition, all nations are prisons for the oppressed. And all are equally imperialist because they compete and wage war between them, even if it is the big ones who set the tone and direct everything towards world war and the eventual destruction of humanity. What this war and this competition require is the compliance and submission of the oppressed and most of all, of the working class. This cannot be obtained without the elimination of the class struggle. That is why class struggle and imperialist war are diametrically opposed.

Battaglia's concept of imperialism is the source of many of its ambiguities on the national question and other issues. We get the impression that Battaglia thinks it can revolutionize imperialism, like nationalism, from within. What to think, for instance of this :

"The task of revolutionaries is to politically denounce the nature of national liberation struggles but also to give a class leadership to the proletariat of the underdeveloped countries in order to transform the imperialist war into civil war, that is, transform the war of national liberation into a civil war of the proletariat." (Second Conference, vol 2)

This seems very ambiguous, not only because it presupposes that national struggles are natural in underdeveloped countries, not only because immediately following this passage it says we must wait for the party, but mainly because the often abused slogan "transform the imperialist war into a civil war" is ambiguous if it is not explicitly given the meaning it had in the revolutionary praxis of the Bolsheviks. In 1917, to "transform the war" meant to shatter, sabotage the war by aiming the guns in the other direction, against those who order the workers to fire on their class brothers. That is what the Russian and German soldiers did and other soldiers too in a more sporadic way. The fatherland and the national economy are the first, most dangerous enemies of the exploited, much more so than the "evil multi-nationals" of the leftists, because they are the major supports of imperialism and war which represent the prolongation of economic competition between companies and then, between nations. Nations are but super-companies and prisons with a whole police infrastructure that most companies do not have.

And the weakest in this competition are not the "oppressed" nations. They oppress us and pursue their competitive struggle against the others as long as they can make us submit. That is why the imperialist war and the class struggle are mutually exclusive. But for Battaglia, it seems that they converge to some extent!

In the way Battaglia presents the inter-

national situation, you can find a constant opposition between rich countries and poor ones, between "imperialist" superpowers and "oppressed" nations. This precludes any coherent class analysis.

As if by coincidence, this opposition between "oppressor" and "oppressed" nations always coincides with a "left-right" opposition for Battaglia. When Battaglia denounces dictatorships and repressive regimes, the examples it gives are all rightists, the familiar scapegoats of the left. In BC of Jan. 1989 for instance, the list of repressive regimes supported by democracies begins with Chile and ends with Israel. In our opinion, a revolutionary would begin with Nicaragua and China because revolutionaries are outraged by the repression of the left which is combined with propaganda that drags the name of revolution through the mud. The right does not claim any "revolutionary" ideology. Indeed, the most dangerous ideologies are those aimed at fooling the revolutionary proletariat. But for Battaglia, it all makes no real difference since they deny that revolutionary class consciousness can develop outside the party's sphere of influence.

In fact, Battaglia seems much more convinced of the opposition between rich and poor countries (which means the stronger and weaker in capitalist competition) than of the opposition between the classes. For example, in all its complaints about the crushing weight of debts in the Third World there is only pity for these "poor" countries who are desperately seeking a breath of fresh air (BC, Feb. 89). But not a word on the absurd overproduction in these countries which has nothing to do with the needs of the population but everything to do with the laws of capitalist accumulation. Not a word about the enormous budgets for "defense" and police which serve to repress the revolts of the population against hunger & misery. And nothing on the development of an arms industry by those who complain the loudest about the debt burden, notably Argentina and Brazil, the "poor countries" Battaglia regrets to see forced to pay the costs of maintaining the rain forests (ibid).

The crisis is not a matter of "poor" and "rich" countries. Only the exploited classes really suffer from it. The system itself is like a tumor and all capitalists, large or small, are part of it. The bourgeoisie of the "Third World" does not suffer; it deploys state terror against the oppressed and fulfills its role in the worldwide quagmire of imperialist conflicts. Its states, nationalities and cultures are the concentration camps of capitalist misery, responsible for the rotting of the human spirit through idiotic ideologies, racism, xenophobia, cults of the leader and the fragmentation of the oppressed. In the present period, the struggle for national

rights has never been anything but preparations for the next war through the elimination of the class struggle. Any transformation of these conflicts into a class struggle has nothing to do with critical support for these movements or with a sort of war of words to see who can be more radical such as Battaglia engages in when it accuses the PLO and the Arab states of betraying the Palestinian cause by giving up the destruction of Israel (B.C., Dec 88, p 1-2)! The only way is the sabotage of these conflicts by class struggle.

AND THE CLASS STRUGGLE?

In practice, far from "widening the gulf between the classes", Battaglia often limits itself to preaching the radicalization of national struggles. It accuses the PLO of giving in on the destruction of Israel and then tries to conclude the same article by saying that national struggles have no perspective, that pure class struggle is needed...but this remains a purely platonic afterthought. If this is what Battaglia really wanted, it would begin by questioning the phony opposition between Palestinians and Jews. This Battaglia never does. It sees the Palestinians as an "oppressed people" while Israel is the reactionary creation of imperialism (and who, then, is financing the Intifada?) and the working class in Israel is hardly more than a docile prey of zionism: after all, they vote for the right! (B.C., Nov 88). What would Battaglia have said if they had voted massively for the "left"?

Indeed, if they detest zionism more than the Arab front, the only reason there can be is a preference for the left and for the factions of the bourgeoisie whose interests converge more with the Russian bloc than with the West.

Battaglia hastens to reassure us: the Israeli proletariat is not permanently "lost", there are still strikes. And the British proletariat is not lost either when it votes for Thatcher. (ibid). Thanks, but for us, the left is no better than the right and what is only secondary in Battaglia's diatribe (workers' struggles) is for us the fundamental criterion for determining what is reactionary and what is not.

The roots of Battaglia's confusions are clear:

1) The workers' struggle is a long and difficult process and its revolutionary nature is not so obvious because this struggle is aimed at the roots of exploitation (wage labor as the basis for profit) and these roots are mainly underground.

2) It is much easier to pit the poor against the rich than to develop a clear class perspective. But the rich/poor opposition is



recuperated and adapted to the needs of the competition between weak and strong capitalists; hence, the struggle between big imperialisms and "oppressed countries".

3) More generally, Battaglia has the tendency to put mobilizations on the terrain of the bourgeois state on the same footing as the class struggle and writes with total vagueness on the specifically revolutionary character of the workers' struggle. So it writes in an article on democratic rights: "Democratic and libertarian demands have a value only as partial but necessary moments through which the class struggle of the oppressed develops progressively as a movement with a political range and oriented toward the revolutionary overthrow of the political and social relations of domination." (B.C. Feb. 89, p3, our emphasis).

4) Finally, there is the idea that consciousness coincides with the party and that it can revolutionize all movements. We have already shown how Battaglia favors the strategy of trying to conquer the leadership of nationalist movements. The continuation of the preceding quote goes like this: "Only the revolutionary practice of marxism can synthesize and interpret in a coherent way the political consequences of man's aspiration to struggle for his right and the right of others to liberty and happiness...." (ibid) In this whole article there is hardly any reference to workers and none at all to class struggle.

These movements are not reactionary because of the absence of the Party but because of their very nature. If the party doesn't condemn these movements, it risks losing its revolutionary nature. These movements are reactionary because of their goals and their convergence with the interests of capital. They can only be concerned with the ways we are governed, with which race or party the masters belong to, or how their prisons are organized. The only direction to all this is ultimately the submission to the bourgeois state, the elimination of all class solidarity and all struggle, to end up in world war and the destruction of mankind.

We struggle against all aspects of oppression by aiming at the roots of the system. Anything else is just messing with changes in form not substance. Battaglia, of course, claims to see the dialectical relation between the roots and the empirical aspects of the system. But in our opinion, it merely accepts the way the bourgeoisie presents these surface phenomena. When the bourgeoisie presents a form of oppression as "national oppression" or as imperialist oppression by evil multinationals, Battaglia just nods and says Amen.

Class consciousness does not develop through stages from ideological representations to the pure vision of the Party. Already in today's world we can see class struggle against all national bourgeoisies from the left as well as the right, against the "anti-imperialist" camp as well as against the other imperialist camp; against the poor rich of the "Third World" and against the "socialist" paradises.

We must contribute to this climate of struggle against the profit system. This must take place on the terrain of the strug-

gle against the misery of wage labor because only those who suffer this misery hold the key to the future. All the rest -- the struggle for national rights, for leaders and bosses of "one's own" race -- constitute a poisoning of this climate and a division of the workers. And we can only fight against these things by calling them by their right names.

For Battaglia, this is all mere radical verbalism because it is not convinced of the reality of international class struggle. It thinks, despite the struggles in Poland, Nicaragua, Algeria, that the "anti-imperialist" guards of our prisons can advance without resistance so long as the Party is not yet here.

These struggles begin here. Those who break strikes in the West often belong to the same political families (or are the same people) as those who call for solidarity with the zealots of the nationalist left in the "Third World".

J.B.

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OUR POSITIONS

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

In this epoch, the trade unions everywhere are organs of capitalist discipline within the proletariat. Any policy based

on working in the unions, whether to preserve or "transform" them, only serves to

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

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

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

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

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

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

ACTIVITY OF THE FRACTION

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

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

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

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