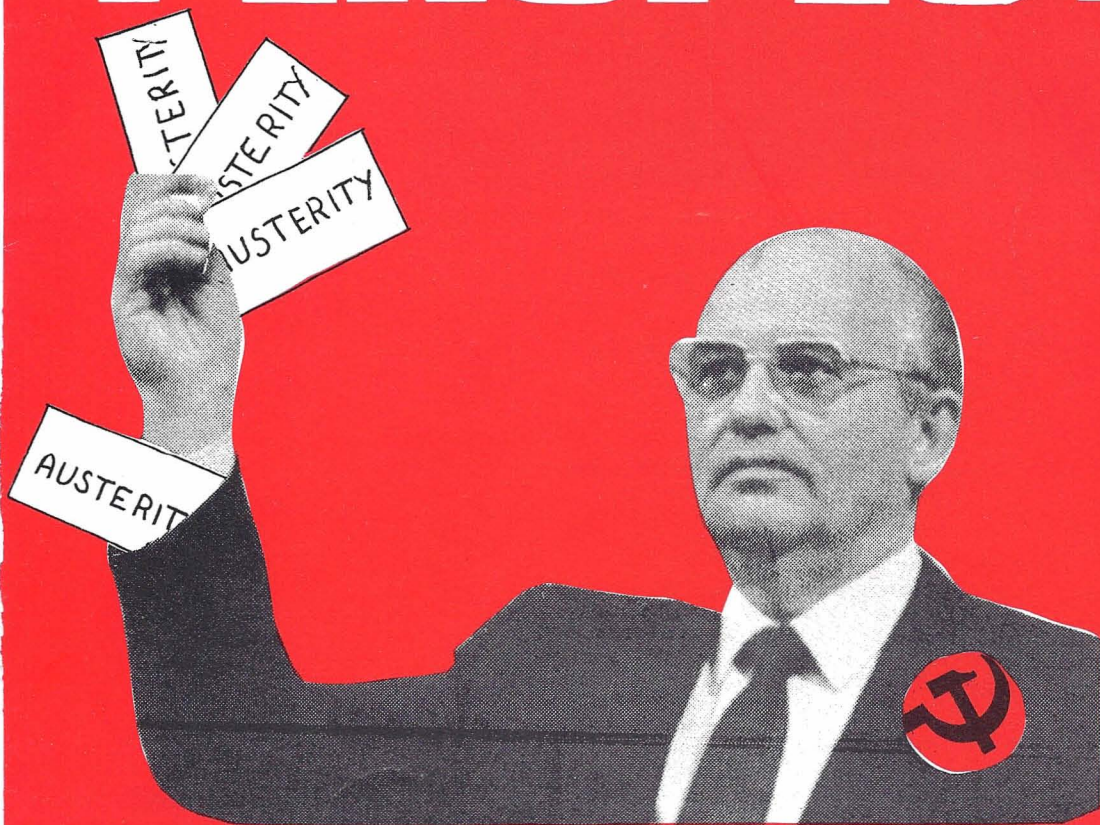


**EXTERNAL  
FRACTION OF THE  
INTERNATIONAL  
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CURRENT**

# **INTERNATIONALIST PERSPECTIVE**



**Islamic  
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**Reconstitution  
of the classes**

**the eastern bloc democratizes  
to impose more austerity**

**3th quarter 89**

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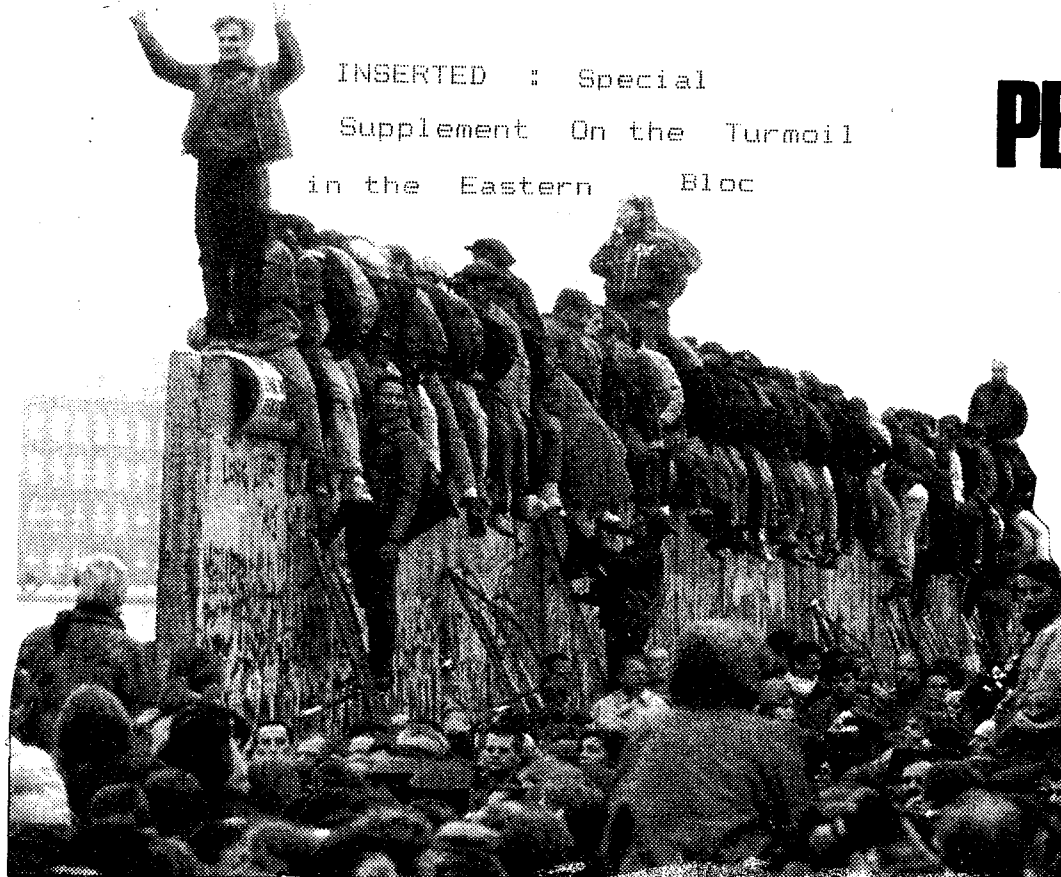
**'ORDER' REIGNS IN BEIJING**



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NO. 15  
Winter 89-90



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## **SPECIAL SUPPLEMENT**

# **The Upheaval in Central Europe**

1. Today the world is witness to the greatest upheavals in Eastern Europe since the second World War. In just a few months, in Hungary, Poland, East Germany, Czechoslovakia, and Bulgaria, forty years of stalinist one-party rule in governments under Russian control since the incorporation of Eastern Europe into the Russian bloc after the war, have simultaneously given way to nominally multiparty representative democracies where the Communist Party retains only a minority role. Along with these political "reforms", the ruling classes of these countries have also begun economic "reforms". They want to take these rigidly centralized economies, with almost total nationalization of the means of production, previously integrated into a separate trade bloc based in Moscow, and transform them into "market" economies that are to be more flexible and open to massive Western investment. The Berlin Wall, the symbol of a world divided into two rival imperialist blocs, has fallen and Russia has stated its willingness to withdraw all its armed forces stationed in Europe. All of the Western media are ecstatically proclaiming the death of communism and the victory of capitalism, the triumph of democracy brought by popular pressure, the end of the Eastern bloc, and the perspective of a peaceful world of little Western-style democracies where imperialist conflict is gone forever.

In reality, these upheavals are the result of the world economic crisis that has been eroding capitalism for the past twenty years and of the inter-imperialist tensions that this crisis has exacerbated between Russia and the U.S. Today's events are the harbingers of new tensions that risk upsetting the balance of power between the blocs in the heart of Europe itself.

2. As spectacular as they are, the changes in Eastern Europe do not change the capitalist class nature of these regimes or the fundamental mode of capital's domination in the world today, i.e., state capitalism. Nor do they change the imperialist nature of these countries and of the bloc they belong to. All that is changing is the particular form capitalist domination has taken. These regimes were always based on wage labor, on the separation of the workers and the means of production, on the operation of the capitalist law of value and the accumulation of capital. State totalitarianism in our time is no less complete in the lives of its citizens if it takes a democratic or a dictatorial form.

It was not under popular pressure that these regimes were democratized but under pressure from Russia, the head of the Eastern bloc. The vast process of reforms undertaken in Hungary with the fall of Janos Kadar would have been impossible without the go-ahead from Gorbachev. Hungary was a laboratory test of reforms for the entire Eastern bloc. The spectacular changes in Poland, where the Communist Party, Solidarnosc and the hierarchy of the Catholic Church formed a coalition government, required the prior approval of Moscow. Last winter, when General Jaruzelski faced the choice of unilaterally imposing drastic austerity on the Polish proletariat (in which case the authority of the regime could well have had to rely on Russian tanks) or opening negotiations with Solidarnosc for

power sharing as the price of getting an austerity program through, the final choice was made in the Kremlin. This summer when the "conservatism" of the East German leadership threatened to unleash a massive exodus of skilled labor from East Germany and Honnecker had decided on a "Chinese-style" solution (which would have been possible only with help from Russian tanks), it was Moscow that decided the outcome by disavowing Honnecker and supporting a program of reforms, thereby assuring the success of the mini-coup in East Berlin. In Czechoslovakia this autumn, only a week was needed for the appearance of "popular protest" and the end of the resistance of "conservatives" after assurances from Gorbachev that the events of 1968 would not be repeated. In Bulgaria, the reformist evolution is slowly taking place under the benevolent eye of Moscow.

3. The events of Eastern Europe are part of the "perestroika" begun in Russia four years ago when Gorbachev took power. The Russian imperialist bloc has always been economically backward in relation to its Western rival. After the post-war reconstruction period ended, the Russian bloc felt the effects of the world economic crisis more bitterly than the Western bloc. Russia was only able to maintain its claim to hegemony during the reconstruction period by building a bloated war economy which absorbed a considerable share of the economic resources of the bloc. When the world capitalist order sank into an open economic crisis once again at the end of the 60's, Russia and its satellites were so much behind, economically and technologically, that they were forced to give in to pressure from competition with Western countries, first economically and then, militarily. The 70's and 80's saw a generalized offensive of the American bloc to take from the USSR its major zones of influence in the world and force it to retreat behind its iron curtain. This twofold economic and military pressure forced the Russian ruling class to make a painful choice in the 80's. It could either continue with Breznev's policies and almost certainly, in the long term, have to capitulate to Western pressure, or it could make some radical changes, with all the risks this entails, in order to spark a counter-offensive on the international scene. The second choice was worth a try and this was what was adopted after the hesitations of the Andropov/Chernenko period. Gorbachev came to power and instituted the "perestroika" program despite the reservations and even open hostility of large sections of the ruling class. The objectives of perestroika are:

- Economically, to make state capitalism more flexible so that the unproductive weight of an increasingly draining State bureaucracy can be reduced; to make State control more real and less formalistic just as "privatizations" in the West try, less drastically, to do; to permit the flow of Western capital and increase the exploitation rate of the working class.

- Politically and socially, to give some credibility to the State and its organs of working class containment by creating forms of "democratization", so as to avoid uncontrollable outbursts of class struggle.

- Militarily, on an imperialist level, to stop the Western offensive with an ideologi-

cal counter-offensive whose aim is to divide the Western bloc and make it reduce arms spending, while trying to gain the technological and economic mastery needed to eventually compete with the West militarily.

4. To a greater or lesser extent, these aims are also those behind the changes in the satellite countries of Eastern Europe. The devastating economic crisis and the threat of class struggle could not be allowed to bring these countries and the entire bloc to the edge of collapse, as the Polish example threatened to demonstrate. They must be allowed to benefit as much as possible from any capital coming from the West. In the imperialist sphere, Russia had no choice but to try to destabilize Europe in the hopes of gaining some benefit. Europe has always been the ultimate theatre of world imperialist conflicts and it remains so, more than ever, for Russia. For Russia, which has always sought to divide Europe, the perspective of the consolidation of the European Economic Community into one market in 1992 represents a formidable threat since the European Community is becoming an economic and, eventually military, bastion of the Western bloc. By accelerating the reforms in the Eastern European countries, Russia is trying to modify the ground rules of the European problem, and open the EEC to the East in order to divide and neutralize it. The destruction of the Berlin Wall, far from a sign of peace, is a time bomb planted in the heart of Europe. Gorbachev did not miss the chance to evoke the possibility of a reunification of Germany, while proclaiming it impossible in the next breath, thereby unleashing all the old demons everyone thought forever banished.

5. By driving forward the present upheavals in Eastern Europe, Gorbachev is, in the long run, playing a dangerous game. The U.S. has the economic and financial means to control the countries in its imperialist orbit without necessarily turning to military occupation. But historically, Russia has only been able to keep control of countries in its orbit by imposing a stalinist one-party regime and direct military control. Initiating a dynamic is one thing; maintaining control over it is another, especially when the social and imperialist situation is a potentially explosive one. The sharing of power with fractions of the national bourgeoisie who are pro-Western but who do not necessarily question the fact that their country belongs to the Russian bloc (Solidarnosc in Poland, the Free Democrats in Hungary, the Civic Forum in Czechoslovakia, the Catholic Church in different countries), already represents concessions imposed on Russia by events, a weakening of its control over these countries. In the long run, the strengthening of economic and financial links between these countries and the West will have a tendency to strengthen the pro-Western factions and open the possibility of a change of blocs for these countries into the Western orbit. Although a reimposition of Russian military control over these countries is always a possibility against the threat of a change in blocs, such a course would exact an exorbitant price from Russia economically, politically, ideologically and militarily.

6. The dissolution of stalinism in Eastern Europe as a form of the domination of capital is an eventual possibility which cannot be excluded because of the history of these countries and the possibility of their being pulled into the Western orbit. But it is a different matter for Russia itself. Whatever the degree of economic and political transformations brought about under perestroika, they will not endanger the dominant role of the military and security apparatus forged by

the stalinist Party-State. The imperialist role of the USSR depends on this and so does the power of Gorbachev himself. In the same way, perestroika cannot lead to the pure and simple incorporation of Russia into the economic and financial network through which the American bloc dominates the world. The economic backwardness of Russian capital, the absence of a complex network of social institutions such as those that have been absorbed by the State in the West, the history of the formation of the Russian State in the stalinist counter-revolution, make stalinism the only viable basis of the existence of Russian capital as an independent pole of world capital.

7. Thus, the situation created by the upheavals in Eastern Europe is highly unstable and risks leading to major changes in the balance of forces between the two imperialist blocs whose consequences are difficult to evaluate. But these upheavals also affect the balance of forces between the classes, between capital and the proletariat. In the short run, they will strengthen the power of democratic mystifications over the working class in the East as well as the West. In the East, democracy is brandished as the alternative to forty years of stalinist rule. The working class is mobilized behind democracy to accept sacrifices that no stalinist regime could ever hope to make them accept. In the West, the workers are subjected to a veritable democratic orgy orchestrated by the media, tying them ideologically to the democratic State. In the long run, however, the drastic austerity that will have to be imposed by these new regimes will soon have the workers of these countries realize that their deplorable conditions and lack of perspectives are not the result of stalinism but of the very nature of the capitalist mode of production in its phase of permanent crisis. The workers in the West will see that the democratization of the ruling class brings no solution to the worsening living conditions in the East. In fact, the creation of similar political conditions in the East and the West holds the promise of an internationalization of class struggle in the future.

8. For the upheavals in Eastern Europe to contribute to a resurgence of class struggle, great clarity is needed on the part of marxist revolutionaries. To the extent that capitalist domination depends on ideological mystification, the intervention of revolutionaries is an essential contribution to the crucial process of demystifying ruling class ideology. Revolutionary intervention depends on a clear analysis of today's events and the capacity to withstand the barrage of democratism and pacifist propaganda directed against the proletariat today. More than ever before, the development of marxist theory represents a critical moment of intervention in class struggle.

The External Fraction of the I.C.C.  
Internationalist Perspective Dec. 16, 1989

## Turmoil in the Eastern Bloc: A Minority View

The following text reflects discussions in the Fraction as events evolved in late November. It expresses a minority view, although substantial parts were incorporated into the majority text. The minority text develops a different position on the significance of the upheaval for the inter-imperialist balance between the blocs.

**SECRET**

While Gorbachev has made the decision in favor of the ongoing process of political and economic change in Central Europe, this is NOT to say that this transformation is in the long term interests of Russian imperialism, that it strengthens the Russian bloc in its political, economic and military competition with its American rival. Far from expressing an offensive of the Russian bloc, the politico - economic changes in Central Europe are one more expression of the particularly devastating form in which the global economic crisis of the capitalist mode of production is now shaking the Russian bloc. The process of "reform" in Central Europe is the ransom

While the present course of reform may

relieve the immediate economic pressure on the countries of Central Europe, permitting the imposition of the austerity that a Stalinist regime can no longer assure, this involves the sharing of power with factions of the ruling class for whom "really existing socialism" and Russian control are anathema (e.g. Solidarnosc in Poland, the Free Democrats in Hungary, the Civic Forum in Czechoslovakia, the hierarchy of the Catholic church in each country). At the very least the sharing of power between pro - Russian and pro - Western factions of the capitalist class in the countries of Central Europe (which events have imposed on the Kremlin) weakens Russian control. To this danger for Moscow must be added the prospect that closer financial and economic ties with the American bloc (direct Western investment in and even control of key sectors of the economy, formal links of some kind with the EEC, etc.) will further strengthen those factions of the ruling class which are anti - Russian. In such a situation one cannot rule out a development where one of the limits provisionally imposed by Gorbachev is put in question: continued membership in the Warsaw pact, participation of the Stalinist party in the government, separation of the two Germanies. While it is true that as long as Russian troops remain on the soil of Central Europe a reimposition of Russian control is always possible, such a course would impose a high price on Russian capital, economically, politically and militarily.

For the moment, Gorbachev can take comfort in the fact that the situation in Central Europe may be provisionally stabilized without the need for Russian military intervention. In the medium and long term, however, the direction of events can only work in favor of the American bloc. Either the Kremlin will be forced to militarily intervene (while it still can) to prevent the process of de - Stalinization in Central Europe from changing the balance of power between the two imperialist blocs that was enshrined at Yalta, or the transformation now underway will slowly, but inexorably, tie the countries of Central Europe to the American bloc first economically and then politically. In the first case, the Gorbachevian project to restructure Russian capital will be doomed, and in addition Moscow will have to bear the enormous economic, political and military costs of direct and armed control by the Kremlin. In the second case, the powerful attraction of the economically dominant American bloc over the ruling classes of the Central European countries will tend to erode, if not eliminate, Russian control of that vital region. Either way, Russian imperialism cannot fail to be alarmed at the direction of events. If the upheavals in Central Europe raise the prospect of the dissolution of Stalinism as the basis of capitalist class rule in that region, the same CANNOT be said of Russia itself. However far reaching the Gorbachevian project of Perestroika and Glasnost may be, it does not in any way involve the end of the Stalinist single party state, the dominant role of the military - security apparatus at the pinnacle of state power (indeed, it is this very military - security apparatus which is the foundation of Gorbachev's power), the adoption of formal democracy of the Western type, or Russia's incorporation into the web of financial and economic institutions by which American imperialism dominates the world market. The very backwardness of Russian capital, the almost total absence of the complex network of social shock - absorbers through which capital in the West consolidates its class rule, the absence of the intricate web of institutions constituting civil society which

have been swallowed by the STATE apparatus in the West and which constitute the basis of State capitalism in the American bloc, means that the only way in which Russian capital can constitute itself as an independent pole of world capital and rule its working class is through the mailed fist of Stalinism. Whereas in the West the organic development of civil society and its gradual incorporation into the state apparatus in the phase of decadence constitutes the basis for a state totalitarianism compatible with the institutions of formal democracy, the absence of these conditions in Russia have meant that state totalitarianism and the struggle to compete with the American bloc for world dominion can only take the form of a single party state. In the event that the Gorbachevian project of reform instituted and controlled by the Stalinist party fails, the likely alternative is some kind of direct rule by the military - security apparatus. In either case, the material conditions of Russian capitalism as an independent imperialist bloc means that Stalinism cannot be eliminated by a process of internal reform, from above; the only thing that will finally destroy Stalinism in Russia is a proletarian revolution!

Just as the changes sweeping over Central Europe portend shifts in the balance of power between the two blocs, so too do they affect the rapports de forces between the working class and capital. In the short term, these changes will consolidate the grip of democratic mystifications over the working class, East and West. In the East, the prospect of democracy is held out as a solution to forty years of Stalinist barbarism; beneath its banners the working class is being mobilized to make the sacrifices that no Stalinist regime could now impose. In the West, the workers are being subjected to a veritable democratic orgy by the media, the object of which is to ideologically bind them to the democratic state. In the long run, however, the very harsh austerity imposed by the newly democratized regimes in Central Europe will make it clear to workers in those countries that their low standard of living and lack of perspectives is not the result of Stalinism, but of the very nature of the capitalist mode of production in its epoch of permanent crisis. Moreover, workers in the West will see that democratization, however much it changes the configuration of the ruling class, is no solution to the degradation to which the working class is subject. The "equalization" of political conditions in Western and Central Europe holds out the prospect for internationalization of the class struggle in the future.

If the ongoing transformations in Central Europe are to contribute to a resurgence of class struggle, a much greater clarity on the part of revolutionary Marxists is imperative. To the extent that capitalist class rule depends on ideological mystification, the intervention of revolutionaries so as to contribute to the vital process of demystification is essential. The character of that intervention depends on the clarity of the Marxist analysis of the process of change that is now taking place, on the ability of Marxists to recognize the possibility of the dissolution of Stalinism in Central Europe and its impossibility in Russia, on the ability of Marxists to recognize the dangers to Russian imperialism attendant on these changes and the enhanced possibilities of capitalist mystification, particularly in the short run. Now more than ever the development and elaboration of Marxist theory is a vital intervention in the class struggle!

# the eastern bloc democratizes to impose more austerity

## Poland SOLIDARNOSC DROPS ITS MASK

Just as Dabrowski, the Finance Minister was briefing the new Solidarnosc parliamentarians on the austerity plans of the new Polish government, Lech Walesa made a speech asking the government to speed up reforms and asking the workers to "roll up their sleeves" and get to work.

There's no doubt about it. Walesa, touted as the voice of the Polish working class, the defender of freedom, is now spouting austerity and demanding that the workers joyfully accept, for the "good of the nation", the sacrifices imposed by the ruling class.

What else could be expected from this holy-water fanatic, rubbing shoulders with the powerful for quite a while now. At the first opportunity he shamelessly accepted his share of power right alongside those who only yesterday had massacred the workers in Poland.

Our denunciation of Walesa doesn't just date from yesterday. From the moment that Solidarnosc was formed at the end of August 1980, we said that this new "free" union represented the voice of bourgeois recuperation of the movement, the gravedigger of the powerful workers' struggles 1980. Time and again we have shown the real role played by this "free" union against the combativity of the workers in the 1980's, how it used the democratic mystification to obscure the real stakes of the workers' struggle. In 1981, we denounced the role played by Solidarnosc in the physical repression of the working class by Jaruzelski's army. While mass arrests eliminated the hard core of workers' resistance, the move of the Solidarnosc leadership into clandestinity was merely a media operation aimed at reviving its credibility.

Since then, Solidarnosc's function as an anti-working class rampart has become increasingly clear. Many workers in Poland have gone out on wildcat strikes, not only against

the state but against the advice of Walesa, like the wildcats in August 1988. For those in the internationalist milieu who still have trouble understanding the nature of unionism today, (like the bordigist ICP), Walesa has provided the demonstration of what we have been saying all these years. In the period of capitalist decadence, the workers cannot expect anything from an organization preaching "improvement" in the system of exploitation. Since 1914, unionism is part and parcel of the capitalist system of exploitation and defends the perpetuation of the capitalist national State.

But beyond the predictable, open and rapid integration of the new union into the State structure, a more important question arises. What is the meaning of the phenomenon in Poland and elsewhere in the Eastern bloc which the bourgeois press calls the "democratization" of the political scene?

For many years, the structure of the eastern bloc countries, following the Stalinist blueprint, was characterized by a radical rejection of Western forms of parliamentary democracy. Stalinist ideology was based on the single party openly exercising authoritarian control. Any form of opposition was either brutally repressed or given a limited outlet when this suited the State (such as the religious or national opposition). As far as manifestation of the working class were concerned, however, the only sound that reached us was the rumblings of armored cars and tanks.

Today an opposition is visible everywhere in the Eastern bloc. What is going on?

Before we can answer this question, we have to turn to the differences between the forms capitalism takes in the East as opposed to the West. In the East, as in the West, the State is, of course, the product of capitalist relations of production. But two elements of the State appear to be different in the two areas: on the one hand, the form of the





The 3 guardians of Polish capital: the Stalinist party, the catholic church and "Solidarity"

economic centralization the State institutes to benefit capitalism, and, on the other hand, the political structure justifying the development of the State apparatus. Of course, a third factor intervenes because it is irrevocably linked to the process of production. It is the working class which does not always act in accordance with the plans of capital.

During the ascendant period of capitalism, capital developed more intensively in the more industrialized countries of the West than in the East. The bourgeoisie of the East was still embryonic and, even until the dawn of the 20th century, politically dominated by an aristocracy closed to the idea of industrial progress. Unlike the bourgeoisies in the West, it had not yet created all the necessary cogs in the machinery of the accumulation of capital : the economic cogs via the creation of a dynamic and vital industrial network and the political cogs through its participation in the decision-making organs of the State.

With the change in the historic period occurring in the early 20th century, the saturation of the world market and the subsequent exacerbation of international competition, capitalism was forced into ever more ruthless economic war. In the East, capitalism dug itself in behind the rampart of state protectionism. Because in this zone capital moved more slowly from the extraction of absolute surplus value to the extraction of relative surplus value, the state had to develop not only a relatively external apparatus to centralize the productive process, but it had to develop, above all, an ever-present apparatus to control the management of capital and the working class.

Thus, in the East, the basis of capitalist exploitation was directly identified with the State apparatus. In the Stalinist period, the State had to speed up efforts to proletarianize large populations so as to assure capital accumulation. In the West, however, the separation between the spheres of economic management and repression, justified by democratic ideology, allowed the State to masquerade as a "neutral force", the arbiter of conflicts between the bourgeoisie and the

proletariat...in the interests of capital, of course. In the East, this pseudo-neutrality of the State was not be credible enough to serve as a basis for a democratic-style ideology. On the contrary, it was the image of the inflexible, all-encompassing State that came to the fore despite all the real inadequacies of the State in the East.

With the effects of the crisis and all the changes that took place in world capitalism, the State became aware of its social liabilities and its difficulty in manipulating the sort of practical mystifications that could buy it time. This was especially true in the East where capitalism was forced to accelerate the generalization of the extraction of relative surplus value in order to deal with ruthless world competition and move towards draconian austerity despite the dangers of a radical reaction from the working class.

Poland in 1980 showed the abyss that existed between a militant, unafraid working class and a State that could "carry on a dialogue" only with tanks. A way had to be found to avoid both further violent confrontation and any further unmasking of the meaning of the State.

Gorbachev has learned a lesson from this uncomfortable experience for the State. During the last miners' strike, he did everything possible to insure that the central government would not be directly attacked, so that it could appear to be the defender of the strikers! Perestroika seeks to establish an economic structure that only accentuates exploitation and the concentration of capital, but with better structures to contain and control the working class.

On the political side, the Eastern reformers have taken measures to heighten the theatrical aspects of the democratic game plan allowed in state structures. Election after election was called in Hungary and Poland to assuage the population's sensitivity to the propaganda of the West and to distract the workers from class struggle against the austerity measures affecting their lives. In Poland, the opposition won a victory which was well-prepared by the regime



and, contrary to the claims of the ICC, surprised no one there. It is clear that nothing has really changed for the workers except that they no longer have a Stalinist austerity but now a Solidarnosc austerity. The introduction of the electoral circus is unlikely to change the empty shopping bags of the Polish workers.

The historic tendency of capitalism has been towards a centralizing fusion of the three traditional spheres of government typical of the bourgeois democracies of the ascendent period of capitalism in centuries past: the legislative, judicial and executive branches. The legislative and judicial branches have ceded all autonomy to the overriding power of the executive. This tendency has taken different forms according to the democratic traditions of the various national bourgeoisies but it has shown the compulsory strengthening of the executive in state capitalism.

In most of the Western democracies, the different Parliaments and Congresses play the role of watch-dog over the morality of public officials in order to maintain enough credibility in democratic mystification to control the population and especially the working class. And while all the huffing and puffing is played out in the parliamentary arena without any real influence over substantive issues (except for deciding which forms of packaging and mystification will be the most successful for constituents), the real decisions are taken elsewhere, where the ups and downs of parliamentary life can't interfere: in the executive branch, with major industrial and banking representation.



A Solidarity poster on the side of a streetcar in Warsaw proclaiming, "We understand everybody."

In the East, the State was not able to develop such structures and it suffers from being seen in the nakedness of its repressive function as the overseer of economic exploitation. The reformers are trying to remedy this situation by looking for some scraps of ideology that can serve as the basis for "great expectations" and gaining people's

support to some degree, and if this means using a form of democracy and oppositional representation, then, so be it.

Today's Solidarnosc Parliament in Poland illustrates this. The Stalinist bureaus of power have been obscured but not eliminated. Although the people at the head of the government have changed, the logic of Stalinism has not and these new leaders will become as adept as the old ones in imposing austerity and maintaining the imperialist bloc Poland belongs to while spouting all kinds of high-minded moral lessons.

The stakes for the new Polish government are high: taking over a politically discredited and economically paralyzed State, it has got to try for a recovery. This means austerity measures against the workers. It

must try to put the Polish economy back together again not by dismantling state capitalism but by finding ways to strengthen it. The measures it is trying to take are like those favored by the International Monetary Fund in the West: lowering the social wage by eliminating social services supported by the State, thus reducing the debt; decentralizing economic decision-making through local structures (that contrary to the West have not yet been created), etc. Lightening the burden that the State bureaucracy represents will undoubtedly provoke further reactions from the State apparatus, but it constitutes the only basis, however small, for the success of the democratic experience to immobilize the working class.

But the hoped-for changes in the efficiency of economic management imply a greater economic exploitation. It is unlikely that the new managers, concerned with efficiency and immediate results will have much time or taste for parliamentary to and fro. The logic of capitalism is the same everywhere and the weakness of the economies in the East cannot sustain any long-term protests of a radical working class without resorting to the old tried and true methods again.

This operation to "modernize" the organic composition of capital in the East can only advance on the backs of the workers by intensifying the process of the extraction of surplus value. Behind the carrot brandished by the unions and the clergy is the stick, the State, which far from disarming by announcing the dissolution of the "Zomos", has in fact, strengthened its ability to intervene.

Economic "privatization" and political "democratization" are merely moments (and always reversible moments) in the same process of the State trying to deal with the exacerbation of world competition. These changes in the internal structure of capitalism do not alter the fundamental nature of the relations of production. On the contrary, capitalism must seek greater efficiency to deal with this period of its mortal crisis as a world-wide system. It is up to the workers to answer this agony of the system.

F.D.

## STRIKES IN THE USSR

# a blow for perestroika

The brutal intensification of the economic crisis striking Russian capitalism is hurling the working class into absolute impoverishment. With "Perestroika", the capitalist class is desperately trying to reanimate an economy at the brink of collapse. Its entire method of rationalization and modernization is aimed at increasing profitability through reducing the wage bill. Indeed, by the end of the century, 17 to 20 million layoffs of workers are planned. A new widespread poverty appears to be the first "fruit" of Gorbachev's reforms. A second is the renewal of worker's struggle in all corners of the Russian empire. As the multiplication of strikes attests, economic bankruptcy has fanned social tensions.

Last summer, the eruption of the miners strike constituted a powerful protest against exploitation, the threat of unemployment, destitution and shortages. The opposition of the working class was no longer silent. This explosion was a warning of social upheavals to come. With its impressive scope, its determination, its powerful dynamic towards extension and self-organization, the strike was the first assault of the exploited against the crumbling edifice of Russian capitalism. Moreover, coming at a time of emerging workers struggle on an international scale, this movement gave struggles in other countries a push forward. Whereas the mass strike in Poland in 1980 came at the end of an international wave of class struggle, the miners strike in Russia came at a time of workers protests in Poland and Hungary, where struggles were breaking out against steep price hikes. The arrival of the Russian proletariat on the social scene means a powerful reinforcement of the international character of the class struggle.

This movement was living proof of the maturation of consciousness, invisibly progressing and suddenly taking concrete form. But it also demonstrated how vulnerable the working class in Russia still is to democratic and nationalist illusions. It's important to recognize that the workers, after having made efforts to fight autonomously, did not succeed in assuring that their own class organs kept control of the strike. The workers didn't succeed in warding off the efforts of their exploiters to regain control, and swallowed the demand for "democratic", self-management style reform.

The sharp conflict opposing the mass of miners against the central mining

administration began on July 10 and rapidly spread to the main coalmining centers. This passage to arms didn't end at a single blow: even after July 25, many pockets of resistance remained.

At first, the strike only affected the mining district of Mejdanschensk in Western Siberia, where 13 thousand miners are employed. They had filed their intention to strike 10 days in advance as the law requires, but management had ignored it, thereby fueling the worker's anger. The worker's many demands focused on improving living and working conditions: the opening of dining halls on the weekends (inasmuch as the food stores are empty), the inclusion of meat on the menu, clean towels and rations of 800 grams of soap per month, and higher wages for night shift workers. In all, there were 42 demands, which showed the frustration of a category of workers falsely portrayed as "privileged". As a result of the strike, we now know that in the last 9 years 10, 000 miners died on the job, and that last year 152 perished in accidents in the Ouzbass basin alone! Figures which tell, better than anyone could, what a horrendous price in blood is payed by this human "herd" as a result of capitalist exploitation.

Immediately after the outbreak of the strike, the coal Minister, Chitshadov, and his Vice-Minister, caught a plane to Siberia to "negotiate" with the strikers; that is, to drown the movement. But their presence did nothing to calm the situation. The angry miners refused to go back to work during negotiations, asserting that if they didn't keep up the pressure they would obtain nothing

The constant mobilization of the strikers sped up the negotiations: 36 demands were quickly accepted. After such a "success" one might think that the strike would have ended. But, while the "comrade" Minister and the local strike committee agreed on a compromise on July 13, the strike was about to harden and spread. While on July 15, the press reported that the strike was over, it had actually spread to thousands of mechanics, electricians and maintenance workers. The whole Ouzbass basin was paralyzed. In several mining centers, the strikers decided to ignore the advice of the leaders of their strike committee and to stay out until all their demands were met. Several local strike committees announced that they had no intention of halting their action. In Kemerov and Prokoplevsk banners proudly proclaimed: "strike until victory".

Besides the initial 42 "economic" demands, there now appeared what the press called the "politicization of the movement". While the bourgeoisie proclaimed this as a step forward, the desire of the strikers to win a "public" discussion of impending changes in the constitution of the USSR (sic.) was actually a fall into the democratic trap. The workers found themselves on a dead - end street, where no proletarian perspective is possible.

A week after it started, the strike involved 80, 000 workers eager to extend their movement as much as possible. And indeed, the miners of Vorkuta, in the Petchora basin, and in the Donbass in the Ukraine, the biggest coalmining center in the country, joined the fray. Those of Makejvka, Novochoerkask, Gorlovka and Pavlograd followed. They put forward demands similar to those of their comrades in Siberia.

The Kremlin dispatched a high - level delegation to bring the conflict to an end. But Sliunkov of the Politbureau, flanked by the trade union boss, Chalaiev, got nowhere by pandering to what they hoped was the corporate pride of the miners, proclaiming that "coal is the lifeblood of industry". The strike continued. Its scale was so gigantic that Moscow was now confronted by the biggest upheaval since the beginning of Perestroika. Prime Minister Rijkov had to confess to the Supreme Soviet (sic.) that "110,000 miners were out". In fact, there were many more. "Sovietskaia Rossia" talked about 150,000, but the actual figure was 200,000. A state that calls itself "socialist" cannot acknowledge the existence of workers struggle; lying is erected into a principle. Strengthened by their numbers and unity, the

strikers demanded an end to the privileges of local managers when they themselves lacked even decent food and clothing. They held angry demonstrations in front of the luxurious homes of their bosses. But the revolt was directed against the personifications of the regime, its frontmen, not against the regime itself. It spent its energy in an action directed against the existing hierarchy, without also calling into question the social relations of production themselves.

The miners were aware of their capacity to draw other categories of workers into struggle. And yet, despite the scope and dynamic of the strike, it remained enclosed in a single sector, mining.

It was in Prokopiesk and Kissikosk in the Ouzbass basin that the strike movement began to end, when 24,000 miners returned to their potentially lethal jobs. In the Ukraine, they held out the longest. At first scattered, the return to work became general after the government commission presided over by Sliunkov struck a global accord with the regional strike committees. Even then, some local strike committees refused to end the strike. After some confusion, all the mines were functioning normally from July 29.

## THE ORGANIZATION OF THE STRIKERS

Near the mines and in public places, the miners gathered in frequent meetings, packed with people. Such worker's assemblies, where the struggle was discussed, where recallable delegates were elected, where mass delegations were sent to other mines, were the basis of the strike. Anyone who wanted could speak. But the strike committees increasingly came to grief at the negotiating table. The repeated demands for talks with the big shots shows the impact of democratic illusions. To a considerable extent, the workers fell into the trap of seeing the solution in management of the mines by and for the personnel. This only masks the reality of the system, and thus the absolute necessity to destroy it.

To the satisfaction of the ruling class, the calls for "civic responsibility" and the safeguarding of plant and equipment, found an echo with the strikers. The demand for the complete autonomy of the mines, the "bright idea" of raising the sales price of coal to offset the cost of modernizing antiquated machinery, were added to the original demands. They watered down the class character of the movement. The official union organized the food supply for the strikers and gave them free legal advice. In that way, they sought to weaken the worker's tendency to autonomy, and reinforce their ideological and material dependence on the state.

Pseudo - worker's militia were set up by the union in some places, and by the strike committees in others, so as to avoid "provocations". But in reality, they guaranteed respect for an order that assures the power of the bourgeoisie and the dictatorship of wage labor. They delivered coal needed by factories which would be harmed by a cut off of supplies. In this fashion, the latent violence of the workers was contained and derailed towards the false target of "incompetent" bureaucrats.

As usual, the whole panoply of direct and indirect agents of capital did what they could to rein in and divide the workers, to keep them in thrall to the false hope of a reform of the economy, to make the struggle into a conflict with the bureaucracy and not an attack on the global policy that the crisis imposes on the Nomenklatura.

As long as the ruling class has its state apparatus as a means of exploitation and repression, as long as the workers councils do not exercise the dictatorship of the proletariat after having destroyed the armed power of the bourgeoisie, all talk about "workers power", about "the rights of workers over the plant and its output", is sheer mystification. During the mass strike in Poland in 1980, Walesa talked constantly about the need to protect the national economy against the anger of the workers. "Realist" slogans, "responsible", "constructive", demands, flourish so as to keep the workers chained to the state.

## THE ATTITUDE OF THE BOURGEOISIE

To deal with the workers discontent, which is on the brink of exploding, the Russian state bourgeoisie had to find new and more reliable forms of control, so as to mystify the proletariat. In February 1989, a new union called "Solidarnosc" was formed in Vorkuta (Northern Siberia), which only became involved in the strike from July 20 on. Just before the strike, a constitutive meeting of "Sotsprof", an association of "socialist" unions, was held in Moscow. These alternative unions say that they want to defend the wages and "social conquests" of the "workers state", in a democratic way. Here is a taste of the language by which they seek to provide a face lift for the decrepit Stalinist hag:

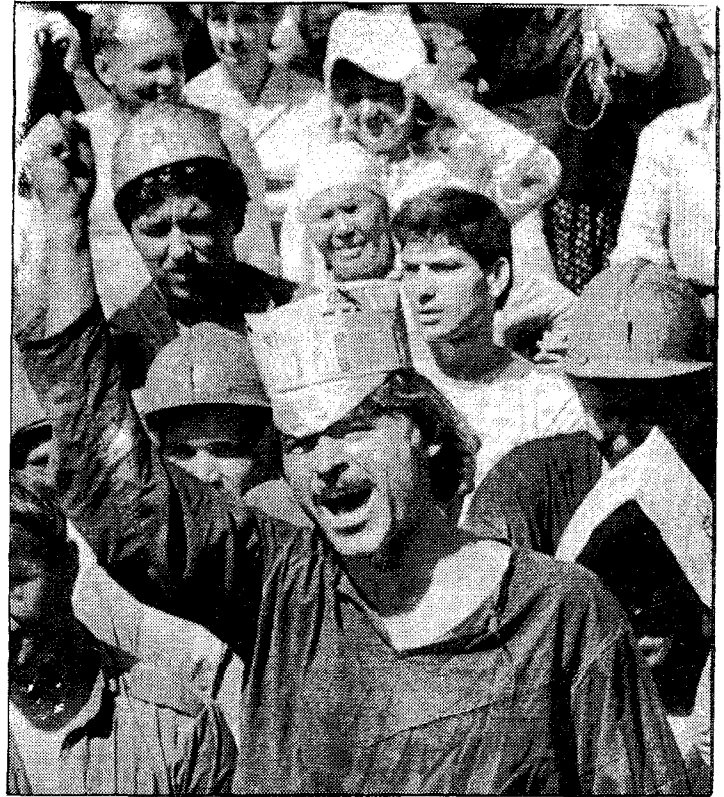
There are certainly many blemishes on the activities of the unions. But when a pimple appears on your face, that's no reason to cut your head off. (Moscow News, 7/ 29/ 89)

And then there were the flunkys of the non-conformist intelligentsia around the academic-opposition leader Andre Sakharov, critical of the slow pace of reforms, electing itself the enlightene spokesmen for the primitive, uncultured, workers. These vultures came to support the strike the way a rope supports a hanging man.

Gorbachev himself went out of his way to flatter the strikers, declaring his sympathy with "work stoppages that are not aimed against Perestroika, but support it". And he declared the local managers responsible for conditions, castigating these "second rate apparachiks unable to inform their superiors of the aspirations of the workers". He called upon party cells and unions to renew themselves, lest they be swept aside by history, and ordered an expenditure of 10 billion convertible roubles to buy basic necessities in the West. Finally, Gorbachev had Boris Yeltsin, the outspoken opposition deputy from Moscow, call upon the strikers to be responsible and to go back to work.

After being challenged by the miners, Gorbachev turned them around, appearing as their sincere friend, the bearer of an unprecedented progressive transformation of Russian society. With an intelligent round of realpolitik, Gorbachev temporarily banished the spectre of a generalized strike. After having the cold sweats in mid-summer, he landed nicely on his feet.

For the first time since the aftermath of the revolution, a strike in Russia was not crushed by violence. And in sharp contrast to earlier times, the local media gave it plenty of coverage. The struggle wasn't met by a bloody slaughter as in 1962 under Khrushchev; it was not met with a wave of arrests or layoffs, nor were the strikers forced back to work with guns in their backs. Today, the ruling class in the East has understood that its strength can't come from the barrel of a gun, but rather from its capacity to divert a workers threat from its own class terrain, to harmlessly detonate its explosive force.



Striking coal miners at a rally in the Siberian city of Prokopyevsk.

At a time when the real confrontation between the classes is heating up, Russian capitalism is preparing its defense by creating organs for the purpose of mystification, social shock absorbers, and other control structures, such as exist in the West. With such an arsenal, the ruling class in Russia would increase its room for maneuver. Gorbachev is trying to create the means to control the spontaneous reactions of the working class. With Perestroika and Glasnost, the bureaucratic dinosaur is secreting its own antibodies. As its cunning strategy of the July days shows, the Russian bourgeoisie is better prepared than was the Jaruzelski team in Poland in 1980.

## CONCLUSION

What revolutionaries have long predicted is now becoming a reality in Russia. In a country in which the party-state concentrates all the levers of power in its hands so as to extract surplus-value, a large part of the working class has begun to move. It fought in the front lines of the class struggle until the illusion that Perestroika would resolve the economic problems made it possible to restore order. But Stalinism with a democratic face -- which remains a form of modern totalitarianism -- has by no means obliterated the workers movement and its traditions of organized struggle in Russia. The workers had come together like the fingers forged into a fist, despite the legacy of a police state that for more than 60 years had tried to erase from



the life of the class any idea of autonomous struggle. Nonetheless, there were also abundant signs of the weakness of the working class on the political terrain, an evident lack of clarity concerning the goal of the struggle.

When the stinging blows of the economic crisis shatter all illusions, when the lies of the reformers become clear, when Perestroika is seen as so much gobbledygook to divert discontent, the class consciousness of the proletariat will rapidly develop into a powerful weapon in the struggle against "socialist" austerity and exploitation!

R. C.

#### POSTSCRIPT

After the strike, Gorbachev showed what "democracy" is really good for, and how much his "sympathy" for the workers was really worth. The government proposed to the new, democratically elected, Supreme Soviet a law banning strikes in dozens of key industries, including mining. After some democratic haggling and a few modifications, the law was

adopted -- with the support of the Yeltsin - Sakharov opposition group.

But at the end of October, 1989, Siberian miners again struck, because the government had failed to deliver on the promises made to end the summer strikes. When the regime threatened to use the new law to repress them, the miners returned to work. However, on November 2, they struck once more. This illegal, wildcat, action spread to 12 of the 13 Vorkuta mines, employing 26,000 workers. In the country's two largest coalfields in the Ukraine, the workers did not join the strike but they did stage several 2 hour protests to express their solidarity. Such limited actions are too weak to generalize the struggle, but they may have stopped the regime from smashing Vorkuta. There, the strikers were again threatened but no action was taken lest repression spread the strike.

The threats remained verbal and the strike isolated. It was a defeat for the workers but also a valuable lesson that may spur unity in the next wave of strikes -- which can't be too far away.

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## ISLAMIC FUNDAMENTALISM

# religious fanaticism to reinforce the state

The past decade has seen a wave of "Islamic fundamentalism" roll over the Muslim world. The Shia world has seen the consolidation of an "Islamic republic" in Iran, under the charismatic leadership of the Ayatollah Khomeini. In the suburbs of West Beirut, the Party of God or Hizbollah has become a powerful military and political force, as hostile to the Baathist regime in Syria as to the Zionist state of Israel, and a major factor in the Lebanese imbroglio. In the Sunni world, the "fundamentalist" Muslim Brotherhood is an increasingly potent political force in a string of Arab states, and a particular thorn in the side of Assad in Syria and Mubarak in Egypt, whose regimes it is determined to overthrow. In Libya, Colonel Khaddafi has made himself into the avatar of "Islamic fundamentalism", which he is determined to spread across North Africa. Islamic fundamentalism has also become a decisive factor in the politics of South Asia, from Afghanistan, Pakistan and India to Malaysia, Indonesia and the Philippines.

Both academics and politicians in the West, and mullahs and partisans of "fundamentalism" in the Muslim world present this phenomenon as a revival of religion, a rebirth of the faith of the Prophet, which in the West can be portrayed as a recrudescence of

superstition and obscurantism, and which in the East is portrayed as an ethico - utopian revival directed against the evils of modernity and capitalism. Both views of Islamic fundamentalism, each serving the ideological interests of those who articulate them, are wrong. Unfortunately, revolutionary Marxists, mesmerized by the religious trappings and symbols of this phenomenon, have accepted its claims to constitute a religious revival, against which it is sufficient to respond with Marx's famous phrase -- itself most often ripped out of context -- about the "opium of the people". While there can be no doubt that Islamic fundamentalism is a mystification, its political potency, its capacity for mass mobilization and the constitution or consolidation of a state apparatus, and its real thrust as a bulwark against socialism and proletarian revolution in the Muslim world, will be completely missed if it is seen as a religious phenomenon.

A real de - mystification of Islamic fundamentalism rests on two basic insights, which will be elaborated in this article. First, the very term "Islamic fundamentalism", with its theological overtones, is a misnomer. Despite its religious trappings and symbolism, Islamic

fundamentalism is not a religious phenomenon at all. Indeed, far from representing a revival of the doctrines and traditions of Islam, this movement is based on a rejection of much of the doctrinal core and traditional institutional bases of Islam. Second, the real character of Islamic fundamentalism is that of a political ideology generated by the imperative of state capitalism. It is the social conditions peculiar to the Muslim world in the era of capitalist decadence, the necessity for an ideological response adequate to the needs of capitalism, that have generated the phenomenon designated as "Islamic fundamentalism".

The extent to which Islamic fundamentalism has repudiated the very traditions of Islam which it claims to defend can be seen in its cultural and political monolithism. Classical Islam was doctrinally and theologically pluralistic. The absence within Islam of any supreme doctrinal authority, such as Western Christianity historically possessed in the form of the Councils and the Papacy, both encouraged and reflected its pluralism. Whereas in the Christian world outside of doctrinal orthodoxy there was only heresy, in the classical Muslim world widely divergent schools of thought and a multitude of sects and movements flourished -- all within the ambit of what was generally accepted as Islam. The ruthless monolithism and intolerance characteristic of Islamic fundamentalism and its political regimes stands in stark contrast to the pluralism of the classical Islamic world. Indeed, these features of Islamic fundamentalism are shared with fascism and Stalinism, and constitute the very embodiment of the most barbarous tendencies of twentieth century state capitalism. This can perhaps best be seen in the Salman Rushdie affair, where the death sentence handed down by the Ayatollah Khomeini not merely violates both the spirit of traditional Islam and the letter of its law, but corresponds solely to the

totalitarian requirements of the modern capitalist state for a mass mobilization and xenophobic reaction so as to insure ideological control over the population.

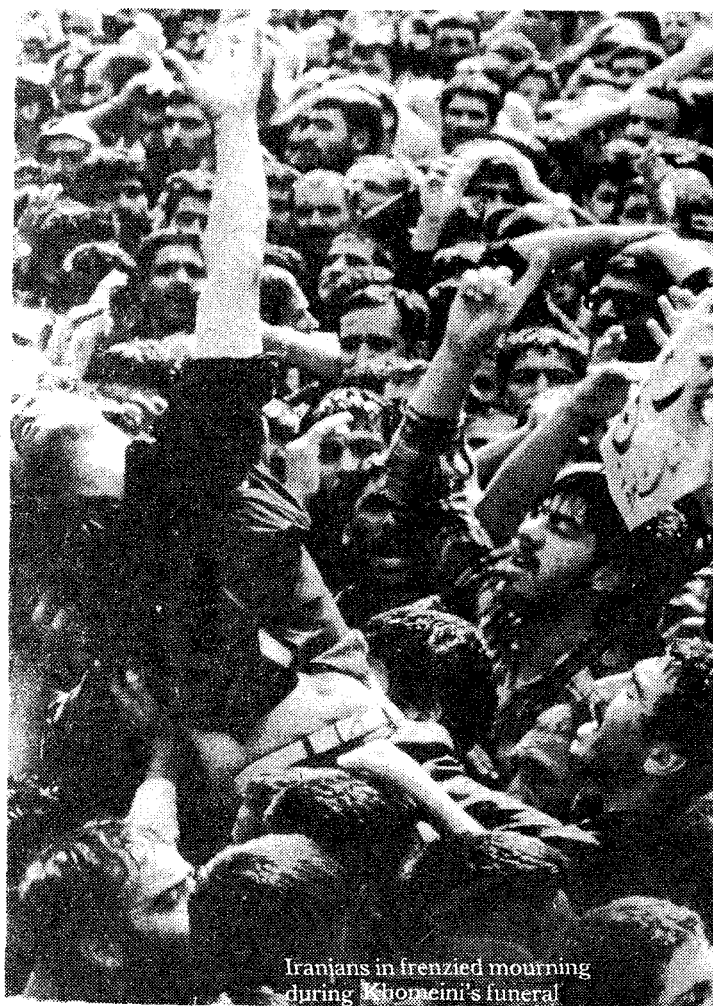
The relationship between civil society and the state provides a further indication of the degree to which fundamentalism violates the traditional framework of the Islamic world. In classical Islam, there is no basis for an assimilation of religion to the state, nothing comparable to the tradition of Caesaropapism in both occidental and oriental Christianity with its merger of church and state. Furthermore, classical Islam permits no reduction of civil society to the state. In fact, Muslim law, the Shari'at, as the codification of an ideal ethical system, was a check on the unrestrained political power of the despotic state. The 'ulama, the specialists in doctrine and the interpretation of the law, was traditionally a formidable counterweight to, and opponent of, the state apparatus. Indeed, following the depredations of the Abbasids (8th century), the 'ulama and the Shari'at became the expression of the autonomy of society at large against the absolute monarchy."

(Marshall G S Hodgson, "Islam and image", History of Religions, vol.3, 1964, p.234) This pattern is not confined to the Sunni world. In Shi'ism distrust of worldly power and the state is historically ubiquitous.

By contrast, Islamic fundamentalism is committed to the ruthless suppression of civil society and the subordination of religion to the needs of the totalitarian state. The very social fabric of traditional Muslim society, already in tatters under the impact of capitalism, receives its coup de grace from the state apparatus constructed by those who claim to preserve it: the Islamic republic under its Khomeinist or Kaddafist forms is the totalitarian state form which uproots the last remnants of traditional social and cultural forms ill suited to the requirements of capitalism in the Muslim world. This is but one more example of the ruse of history!

Even looked at sociologically, Islamic fundamentalism is not an expression of traditional Islam. The social roots and class bases of Islamic fundamentalism are not the "clerics" ('alim and mullahs) of the traditional Sunni and Shia worlds, the remnants of which still exist, but rather are by and large to be sought in the modern, capitalist, sectors of society: the urban centers, the universities, school teachers, academics, engineers, etc. Even in Khomeini's "Islamic republic" where mullahs play a decisive role, this stratum was, in fact, deeply divided. Many mullahs objected to the role allotted the state, which so clashed with traditional patterns, and many of the Ayatollahs opposed Khomeini's assumption of dictatorial powers and pretensions to be the Imman as contrary to the doctrines of Shia Islam (one thinks, for example, of the ill-fated Ayatollah Shariat Madari). In many cases these clerics who opposed Khomeini's project acted in defence of traditional landed interests. Nonetheless, this only points up the incompatibility of traditional Islam and the fundamentalism enshrined in the "Islamic republic". Those mullahs in the forefront of the Khomeinist regime are closely linked to the urban strata which constitutes the decisive social base of fundamentalism throughout the Muslim world today. Their goal is to absorb civil society into a totalitarian state which they will direct and administer -- a state which of necessity is the embodiment of the capitalist law of value.

Under the ideological guise of reconstituting the political structure of the earliest Muslim community, and by directing their mass appeal to the peasant and traditional petty-bourgeois masses seething with discontent, these urban strata which direct the fundamentalist movements seek to become the functionaries of a statified capital. Whereas traditional Islam was indifferent if not outright hostile towards the state, Islamic fundamentalism is an ideology dedicated to the formation of an omnipotent state. The fanaticism of Islamic fundamentalism is not a religious fanaticism, a throwback to the



Iranians in frenzied mourning during Khomeini's funeral

Middle Ages as it is portrayed in the West, but rather a state fanaticism typical of decadent capitalism everywhere, however much the particular forms may vary from one sector of the world market to another.

There remains the question of what specific configuration of forces has generated fundamentalism in the Muslim world as a movement and ideology which can respond to the imperatives of state capitalism. State capitalism is not a phenomenon confined to the backward capitalist societies or the result of a failed proletarian revolution as some have claimed. It is the universal tendency of capitalism in its phase of permanent crisis, and as such its classic embodiment is in the most advanced capitalist societies of Western Europe and North America. In these societies, state capitalism has been built so to speak from the bottom up. The capitalist law of value, originally confined to the actual process of immediate production (formal domination of capital), spread to the process of circulation and consumption, ultimately invading every facet of social and personal life and subjecting the whole of civil society to its sway (real domination of capital). This coincided with the permanent crisis of capitalism, and ended in the state becoming the crystallization of the law of value and swallowing civil society itself. In the backward societies, where the process of capitalization itself largely coincided with

the onset of capitalist decadence, the imperative of state capitalism made itself felt well before such an organic process could run its course (in some cases when it had scarcely begun). As a result, in large parts of the world state capitalism emerged in the absence of the socio-economic and political foundations which existed in the West; to a considerable degree it had to be constructed from the top down. To compensate for the weakness of its foundations, state capitalism in these societies took on more violent forms, the totalitarian state operating less with the enormous power of surveillance and control represented by a well articulated civil society now thoroughly incorporated within it, than through the more direct application of force and violence which its weak articulation necessitated.

To compensate for its weaknesses, the capitalist state in these societies has typically had recourse to the most racist and xenophobic forms of nationalism as the only ideological glue capable of consolidating its rule. In the Muslim world, however, even nationalism, in the absence of well articulated nation-states, has often proven inadequate to the task of providing an ideological basis for the capitalist state. Throughout North Africa, for example, the existence of different ethnic groups (Arab, Berber), and the persistence of tribalism, makes an "Islamic" ideology a far more effective basis for mass mobilization than nationalistic appeals. Much the same is true in Afghanistan and Pakistan, where there is no such thing as an Afghan or Pakistani "nation", and where only an Islamic ideology promises to provide a basis for the construction of a stable entity. In Iran and Indonesia, the existence of rival ethnic groups within the frontiers of the same state (e.g. Azeris, Baluchis, Arabs as well as Farsi speakers in Iran) has made recourse to an Islamic ideology an alternative to possible civil wars and disintegration of the politico-economic entity. In each of these cases, Islamic ideology functions not as a religion, but as an ersatz nationalism, a means by which the functionaries of capital can seek to forge a mass base and try to legitimate their rule.

The spread of Islamic fundamentalism across the Muslim world can only be understood and resisted if it is clear that we are facing a phenomenon that is modern, not medieval, and capitalist, not traditional. The capacity of the Islamic ideology to mobilize the impoverished masses of the Muslim world is certainly enhanced by its anti-capitalist rhetoric, its crass appeal to a traditional world destroyed by the "Satanic" forces of modernity and Westernization. Nonetheless, behind this ideological cloak lurks the imperative of state capitalism and the law of value itself. In that sense, the Islamic ideology cannot satisfy the hopes which the masses who have rallied to its cause have invested in it. Moreover, Islamic fundamentalism cannot assure the construction of a stable socio-political entity as a necessary framework for the operation of the capitalist law of value. This effort to

construct a durable state capitalist entity from the top down is doomed to fail. The existence of a permanent crisis of capitalism as a mode of production, the existence of an open economic crisis, which is most devastating in the Third World, and the absence of the necessary framework in the form of a well articulated civil society shaped by the law of value, means that the state apparatus forged in the name of the Islamic ideology will simply preside over a process of increasing capitalist

barbarization.

The world of traditional Islam is dead, and the Islamic ideology which promises to preserve it, in reality is its gravedigger. However, what it brings in its place is not historical progress, which in this epoch can only take the form of international proletarian revolution, but rather the dark night of totalitarian state capitalism.

MAC INTOSH

## CORRESPONDENCE

# THE RECONSTITUTION OF THE CLASSES UNDER STATE CAPITALISM

In the course of this century, the conditions in which the proletariat must struggle have undergone -- and continue to undergo -- profound and rapid changes. That is why one of the essential tasks of revolutionaries is to work out a Marxist understanding of these changes. In this publication, we have already treated the organization of capitalism in the present period ("State Capitalism", I.P. #7). We now continue this effort by raising the question of the changes undergone by the working class.

The two texts published below treat this question, which is why we have chosen to publish them together. The first is a letter sent to us by comrade G.S. (France). In our opinion, its interest lies in the fact that it raises important questions, although we do not always share the answers formulated by its author. The article by our Fraction which follows ("The Recomposition Of Classes Under State Capitalism") must be viewed not as a specific answer to this letter, but as a larger contribution on this subject.

Through these texts, we intend to stimulate a debate in the revolutionary milieu. We can only encourage militants and groups in this milieu to commit themselves to such a discussion.

EFICC

[...]

To begin with, I would like to "reassure" you by saying that a communist revolution is only possible with an historical subject; that is to say, with a social class that is able to accomplish the project through a total break with the capitalist system. I, therefore,

still base myself on the perspective of a mass revolutionary act, which -- by its radical character -- would establish a human community on a global scale.

That said, if, more than ever before, I am interested in changes in the structure of social classes, it is because the transformations wrought by the successive crises of capitalism have impinged on the real -- as opposed to the "philosophical" -- capacity of the working class to assume the "historic role" granted it by a theory now become ideology.\* We must accept the fact that the working class, in the sense of laborers doing mechanical or manual tasks in large - scale industry, is shrinking in sociological and purely numerical terms. The techno - economic movement set in motion in the interests of capital is destroying "working class culture" by dislocating its old productive bastions. Through the elimination of blue collar workers (steel workers, metallurgical workers, etc.), the closure of factories, the dispersion of working class neighborhoods adjacent to them, a class identity is being lost. This transformation, already underway and apparent in the '60's, has been fully confirmed of late. Here is the real "truth" of the '80's !!! Revolutionaries must open their eyes and immerse themselves in reality so as to rid themselves of certain dead ideas. Is not the clearest example the planned closure -- due to lack of profits -- of the place that was the scene of the class confrontations promised at the beginning of the decade now ending: The Gdansk shipyards? You can say that that is only the result of the displacement of industrial zones to the periphery, in the Third World, where wage costs are lower. Undoubtedly, the



international division of labor is the response to a system of exploitation up against the contradictions exacerbated by its general crisis. But the phenomenon of proletarianization is really limited to certain specific regions, e.g. South - East Asia, and does not tend to recreate a modern working class inasmuch as the new wage workers are confined to unskilled jobs and extremely precarious employment linked to sub - contracting.

Perhaps we must speak of the proletariat as meaning that fraction of the population which lives on nothing but the revenues from the sale of their labor power, a notion incorporating all the sectors beyond industry, and all tasks, including those dependent on the rationalization of brain power and subject to the sway of computers. As studies have indicated, the tendency over the past 20 years has been that of a continuous fall in the number of manual workers due to a shrinkage in factory jobs. With the new technology, "the only category of workers to increase in number are those working on computers (+ 23%)" (Le Monde, 1/5/89). Faced with the crisis, companies have answered by the modernization of their constant capital and by the growth of highly skilled positions (engineers, technical cadre). The real domination of capital expresses itself by the ever growing weight of dead labor over living labor.

You can object that my concerns about the structural (socio - economic) changes in the proletariat proceed from a view of the working class as a simple exploited class, a class in itself, "for capital", whereas revolutionaries must avoid sociology by proclaiming -- with Marx -- "the proletariat is revolutionary or it is nothing", and exalting the class for itself. I would answer by saying that in order to achieve its essence, to be able to transcend its existence as a simple economic category of capital, the proletariat must possess certain means. Instead of taking refuge in incantations leading to a sort of metaphysical belief in the permanent revolutionary virtue of a quasi - immutable working class (as do the Trotskyists and the ICC), we must grasp the concrete conditions in which we find ourselves. In this sense, the present crisis is also a crisis of the "representation" of the proletariat, of its forms of identity, and of the practices determined by the class struggle. Of course, this crisis has not eliminated the fundamental antagonism based on the exploitation of wage labor, but it compels us to reflect on the limits of a teleological (subjectivist or objectivist) conception peculiar to Marxism. In order to grasp the stakes involved in the universalization of the antagonism (transcending nation - states and the constitution of the proletariat into different national classes) a structural and cultural historical method (the bases of which are found in Marx) seems to me necessary.

I will also say that Marx, while basing his theory on the revolutionary essence of the

proletariat, never ignored the social appearance of the exploited class on which he based his hopes for "a movement of the immense majority for the benefit of the immense majority". With the development of the productive forces, the industrial working class had to dominate the social scene, becoming the most numerous faction of the active population. The "progressist" vision of the world and its projection into the ideal of a communist society flowed from this. Thus, Marx wrote in the Manifesto:

Of all the classes that stand face to face with the bourgeoisie today, the proletariat alone is a really revolutionary class. The other classes decay and finally disappear in the face of Modern Industry; the proletariat is its special and essential product.

Now, proletarianization is occurring differently in this end point of the twentieth century: by an extension of wage labor that considerably reduces the weight of the industrial working class properly so called; by a movement creating an "anonymous" mass of laborers with precarious employment, fully realizing what Marx had theorized when he characterized proletarians as "dispossessed and "excluded"

If one wants to be up to the contemporary tasks posed by the revolution, it is necessary to take into account the structural changes, and social behavior that they induce, within the proletariat. Failing that, any intervention is condemned in advance to defeat.

"The working class did not expect miracles from the Commune. They have no ready - made utopias to introduce by decree of the people. They know that in order to work out their own emancipation, and along with it that higher form to which present society is irresistibly tending by its own economical agencies, they will have to pass through long struggles, through a series of historic processes, transforming circumstances and men." (Marx, The Civil War In France, 1871, our emphasis)

G.S.

\* With Engels, and German Social - Democracy in particular, Marx's theory was transmuted into official Marxism (by the "experts" as Rosa Luxemburg said). Then with the Bolsheviks and the Third International this ideology was sacralized into a state religion.

## the reconstitution of the classes under state capitalism

Capitalism has obviously undergone profound changes in the course of the twentieth century. Its passage from a progressive historic phase to the phase of decadence, and the profound metamorphosis of capitalism that accompanied this change, transformed the whole economic, political and social order and thus, the conditions under which class struggle developed. These transformations

were so great that the mass organizations of the proletariat -- parties and unions -- could not resist the tide and capitulated to the capitalist state at the first overt manifestation of the epochal change: the first World War. Even though the Third International was founded on a recognition of this change in the system, it was not able to draw all the necessary conclusions and foundered in its turn. Even the small communist groups and fractions that managed to survive the demise of the Internationals or that have appeared since that time have always had trouble understanding the meaning and consequences of these transformations. In our publications, we have often pointed to the weakness of the present revolutionary milieu in relation to the understanding of state capitalism. (1) In this text, we want to deal more precisely with a question that is crucial to the proletariat: the transformation of the classes, and particularly the working class itself, under state capitalism.

Recognizing the existence of state capitalism automatically means recognizing a transformation of the capitalist class because state capitalism reveals itself through a transfer of basic economic and political power from the bourgeoisie to the state apparatus. In this process of the reconstitution of the capitalist class, the "classic" private bourgeoisie, characterized by individual private property, gives way -- either gradually by a progressive fusion, or violently by expropriation -- to a new form of this class: the state bureaucracy, characterized by state property. But even this reconstitution, which is especially obvious in the so-called "socialist countries", is not fully grasped by the revolutionary milieu. (2) Let alone the issue of the reconstitution of the working class itself. Although certain groups (like the ICC) implicitly base their analyses and their intervention in the class struggle today on a vision of a contemporary working class composed differently today than in the time of Marx a century ago, there is no explicit recognition of these changes and no coherent explanation of them and their implications for class struggle. What is even worse is that a large part of the present milieu, especially tendencies coming from the Italian Left, refuse to admit that the working class has changed in any way and continue to identify it today with the industrial proletariat of Marx's time. Such a position is taken by the group "Communisme ou Civilisation" (3), which, in an interesting study on the two phases of capitalist development (formal and real domination of capital), never gets beyond an "orthodox" marxism, never makes marxism into a living method as it was in the time of Marx and completely fails to see the reality of state capitalism today as the outgrowth of the real domination of capital. "Communisme ou Civilisation" throws all unproductive wage laborers (who are the majority of the workers employed by the state) into the "middle strata" and considers them "a major barrier against the communist revolution". As we hope to show, it is, in fact, groups like "Communisme ou Civilisation" that have made themselves into barriers between different categories of the

working class, against the unification of the class and the communist revolution.

The reason why the present revolutionary milieu has been so unable to deal with the changes in social classes is simple. This milieu had to reconstitute itself after the reawakening of class struggle twenty years ago against all the ideological nonsense about the "disappearance" or "integration" of the working class, typical of the previous period of counter-revolution.

One of the principled mainstays of the milieu was and is the recognition of the ruling class as a class and its reactionary role all over the planet, on the one hand, and the identity of the revolutionary class, the proletariat, on the other hand. In the East and the West, the North and the South, the proletariat had to, first of all, be identified as the revolutionary force against the reactionary power of the bourgeoisie. Revolutionaries were constantly up against two types of reactions: either a capitulation to bourgeois ideology which took the form of modernism, or a defensive reaction to this pressure affirming not only the correct revolutionary nature of the proletariat but a so-called "invariance of marxism". These two poles of modernism and invariance are merely two sides of the same coin because they both ignore the dialectical movement of reality which preserves itself through change. The first considers only appearances, concrete change, and the second considers only essence, conservation. The fact that these two poles are once again battling it out among the weak revolutionary forces today is a sure sign of the crisis in the present milieu. If we do not recognize the revolutionary nature of the proletariat over and above all the concrete changes in its conditions of existence, then no revolutionary activity is possible. But, on the other hand, if we do not recognize the existence of these concrete changes, any affirmation of the revolutionary nature of the working class becomes a mere abstraction, producing interventions divorced from the reality of class struggle. In this spirit, we greeted G.S.'s letter as an expression of a much-needed questioning of what is going on in social reality today. But, in our opinion, this letter is based on an anachronistic way of looking at the working class as "industrial workers carrying out manual or mechanical tasks" and does not take into consideration the recent changes in the composition of the working class. To understand these changes, they must be seen in the context of the general changes in the working class during the period of state capitalism.

#### THE REVOLUTIONARY NATURE OF THE PROLETARIAT

In Marxism, a class is, first of all, defined in economic terms according to its place in the relations of production. What defines the proletariat, and at the same time gives it a revolutionary nature in capitalism, is the fact that it produces surplus value. This definition, in itself, implies the existence of capital and wage labor and the exploitation of the latter by the former and their class antagonism. The production of surplus value implies the extraction of surplus labor from the producers and, therefore,

the existence of relations of exploitation and antagonism between the ruling class and the producing class. The specific form this surplus labor takes as surplus value implies that labor is used to produce value (exchange value), that this process of production is a process of valorization and growth of capital, which is precisely what defines capitalism as a system. This presupposes that labor power has a value and that it is exchanged for a wage.

The proletariat has a revolutionary nature not simply because of its antagonism towards the bourgeoisie due to the extraction of surplus labor. This characteristic is shared by all the exploited classes of the past. It is the specific form that this antagonism takes in the relation between capital and labor :

"In the relation of capital to labor, exchange value and use value are linked : on the one hand, capital faces labor as exchange value, and on the other hand, labor faces capital as use value." (4)

"Labor is use value facing capital which is its exchange value. Capital is exchanged; in this form, the exchange can only take place in relation to non-capital, to the negation of capital, which is the only way it can assert itself as capital. The only veritable non-capital is labor." (5)

This antagonism between labor as use value and capital as exchange value is reflected in the objective motivation of the two classes. Workers exchange their labor power to obtain an exchange value in the form of a wage, but this in turn is only a way of getting the use values necessary to satisfy human needs. The capitalist, on the other hand, purchases labor power against its use value, but this in turn consists only of producing exchange values. In other words, workers live for use values, for the satisfaction of human needs, while the capitalists live for exchange values, for the satisfaction of the needs of capital. That is why, behind the conflict between capital and labor, lies the conflict between capitalism, the last mode of production based on exchange values and communism, the mode of production that will follow it based on use values and the satisfaction of human needs. This is also why Lenin could write that "behind each strike lurks the spectre of the revolution", because behind the apparently petty wage demands on the terrain of the exchange value of labor power, objectively but implicitly lurks a whole other social project based on human needs. The role of marxism is to make this perspective explicit, to make those who carry this perspective forward in their activity conscious of it.

#### PRODUCTIVE AND UNPRODUCTIVE LABOR UNDER STATE CAPITALISM

Recognizing the proletariat as the producers of surplus value is, therefore, essential not only for its immediate struggle but for its historic future. In other words, the productive nature of the proletariat is es-

sential. Under capitalism :

"A productive worker is one who does productive work; productive work is that which directly creates surplus value; work that valorizes capital." (6)

From this definition, we could quite wrongly deduce that for Marx, only those workers who were individually productive were part of the proletariat. This is not at all the case. In his theoretical analyses, Marx generally spoke of an abstract, general worker and not of particular, concrete individuals. Immediately after defining productive labor, Marx quickly adds :

"When the real submission of labor to capital grows, that is, a submission to the specifically capitalist mode of production, it is not the individual worker but a socially coordinated labor force that becomes the real agent of the labor process as a whole. The different labor powers that cooperate and constitute the total productive machine participate in different ways in the immediate production of commodities (or products) : the task of some is mainly physical, for others, intellectual; some are engineers, managers, technicians, etc.; some are supervisors; some are manual workers or simple laborers. At that point, the functions of labor power are taken up in the immediate concept of productive labor and its agents, under the concept of productive workers directly exploited by capital and totally subordinate to the capitalist process of production and valorization. If we consider the collective worker, the shop, its coordinated activity is directly materialized in a collective product which is, at the same time, a mass of commodities. It is of little importance whether the function of the individual worker, a cog in the machinery of collective labor, be close to simple manual labor or not." (7)

It is clear, then, that for Marx the definition of the proletariat and of the productive character of labor is a collective definition and not an individual one, and that the collective, social character of labor constantly increases in the course of the development of capital. Marx and marxists have never wasted their time trying to separate, in one enterprise, the worker individually attached to productive activity from a worker individually attached to unproductive labor such as cleaning up or packaging; any more than marxists have separated the worker at the moment he is employed from that same worker when he is thrown on the scrap heap as a result of the crisis. The productive character of the proletariat is determined, not in a particularistic, immediate, individual way, but on a global, historic and collective basis.

In his time, Marx was confronted with a capitalism still in full expansion and at the beginning of the real submission of labor to capital. In addition, his critical analysis of the society and the capitalist mode of production remained incomplete, especially in

relation to the most universal, general aspects on the State and the world market. It is, therefore, impossible to try to find in his work the answer to all the problems facing us today. His analysis of the productive or unproductive character of labor is, for example, limited to the immediate process of production. Although this understanding is vital, it is not enough in the present phase of state capitalism.

State capitalism developed on the basis of the real submission of labor to capital as the ultimate stage in the concentration of capital and the collectivisation of the process of the valorisation of capital. What Marx showed in the immediate process of production with the appearance of the real submission of labor to capital -- the creation of a collective worker -- is expressed today on the scale of the whole nation and the overall process of valorization. State capitalism destroys the barriers between the different spheres of production, circulation and consumption, and unifies them into one huge process of reproduction, valorization and accumulation of national capital. This unity carried out by state capitalism remains contradictory, because the contradictions between the different spheres continue to exist, which presupposes the existence of crises, but the important change lies in the fact that the agent of capital -- the state apparatus -- is now one overall whole with the entire process of the valorization of national capital in its hands.

This unification leads to profound modifications not only in the operation of the law of value but in the composition of the classes. The field of application of the law of value grows considerably under state capitalism to encompass the whole of the national economy. Despite the repeated intervention of the State in the immediate application of the law of value, this law still governs every moment of the process of valorization, including in the "socialist" countries where state capitalism is formally the most extreme:

"Even when a system of prices is used, it is a simple accounting technique which the planning board can dispense with at any time. This is simply an extension of a well established tendency under monopoly capitalism. In trusts and vertical concentrations, products are neither bought nor sold but allocated to different sectors regardless of their value or individual production cost. For example, Bethlehem Steel, which produces its own iron for use in its steel mill's, does not have to make a profit on this iron. It's only with the final product, the steel in this case, that a profit must be made. What was merely a tendency under monopoly capitalism expands considerably under state capitalism. Here, the calculations of the state in search of the highest growth rate possible, are based on the profits of all national production taken as a whole.

Even though it is the national capital

as a whole that is concerned and not each individual product, the law of value regulates the whole economy. Although the 'price' by which each component of the State economy is exchanged does not represent its value or the cost of producing these products, any sale of a product under its value at one end of the cycle must be compensated for by the buying of a similar product over its value, or else the profits of the national economy will be in danger. Thus, although the law of value does not seem to operate in the economy, behind these phenomenological forms (price as an accounting technique etc.) the categories and the processes of value determine each stage of production." (8)

The unification of the national economy under the aegis of the State affects the criteria of the productivity of capital. From the point of view of the immediate process of production, (which is also the point of view of the individual capitalist), any work creating surplus value is productive, whatever the use of the products of this labor. If these products return to the productive process as means of production or as means of consumption for the working class or, on the contrary, if they are wasted as luxury products or weapons, their content is irrelevant to the determination of productive labor :

"It is perfectly true, and very revealing, that economists can assert that workers in the luxury trades are productive workers while those who consume these luxuries are considered unproductive parasites.... These workers are no more interested in the garbage they produce than their employer is interested in the garbage he sells." (9)

On the other hand, from the point of view of the valorization of capital as a whole (the point of view of the State) the immediate productive character of labor is not enough. The product of this labor has to be consumed in a productive way, has to return to the productive process. The viewpoint of the national capital is the viewpoint of the unity of the production and consumption process. That's why for national capital, a sector is productive only if both the work included and the consumption of the product is productive. From this point of view, sectors like the production of luxury goods and weapons are not productive because their products do not return to the productive process and represent a drain on the accumulation of capital.

Under these conditions, the immediately productive or unproductive character of labor is no longer an essential point. In fact, the immediately productive or unproductive nature of certain types of labor is irrelevant to state capitalism, as long as this labor is part of the overall valorization of the national capital as a whole. This is the case for public services and, in general, for everything that participates in the functioning of the economy and the social reproduction of labor power : education, health,



transportation, housing, leisure, etc. These sectors can be organized as productive labor or public services or even be free of charge without fundamentally changing anything in the overall process of the valorization and accumulation of national capital. In fact, different policies towards this issue are in effect in different countries and the recent wave of "privatisations" in some of these sectors has shown, if this was still needed, that they can function just as well as services or as productive sectors. In either case, what counts is their ability to assure the conditions necessary for the functioning of basic productive sectors, the sectors producing the surplus value necessary to the accumulation of capital. This, of course, does not mean that capital is indifferent to the immediate productive character of labor in general or that it can increase unproductive sectors at will with no negative ramifications. The hypertrophy of unproductive sectors typical of the present period, especially in the State bureaucracy and the armaments sector, is essentially an expression of the decadence of the capitalist system, weighed down by its economic, social and military contradictions historically getting worse and worse. In an overall sense, these sectors are growing at the expense of the productive sectors and hold back the accumulation process instead of stimulating it. Again, the unity realized by state capitalism does not absorb the contradictions of capital but carries them onto a higher level.

Thus, state capitalism generalizes to the whole of the national economy what used to happen in the work places at the beginning of the phase of the real submission of labor to capital : the real agent of the total labor process is no longer the individual worker or even the collective labor power of one enterprise or one sector, but the total social labor power of the entire nation which constitutes the total productive machinery of the national capital.

#### THE PROLETARIAT AND THE MIDDLE STRATA

Under state capitalism, the proletariat is the social labor power that valorizes capital. Therefore, any reference to the productive or unproductive character of the specific labor done by an individual worker ought to be banished from any definition of the proletariat today. One worker, employed today, will be unemployed tomorrow. Another whose labor is today consumed as a form of service will see the same labor consumed tomorrow as productive labor after some privatization or other. Another worker, productive today, will cease to be so tomorrow when the factory he works in is no longer profitable, but still necessary to the national capital and so subsidized by the State.

At the same time as it unites the different phases of the overall process of valorization, state capitalism unifies the different kinds of labor, in particular mental and manual labor. One of the characteristics of the real submission of labor to capital is the application of science to the productive process. Science constantly chan-

ges the conditions of production, increases the productivity of labor and increases the profits for the capital that uses a scientific discovery first. Although science is not immediately productive, it indirectly becomes a more and more powerful factor in the productivity of capital, a tendency that continues to develop under state capitalism. There is the growth of a whole series of branches, linked to science and using intellectual labor, which goes from the production of science (scientific research), to its application to the material process of production (engineers, technicians), and including its transmission (education). These sectors become an increasingly closer part of the overall process of the valorization of capital.

The metamorphosis that took place with state capitalism makes the figure of the worker with callused hands as obsolete as the figure of the capitalist in top hat chomping on a big cigar. Today, we are seeing a recomposition of the classes which makes their boundaries somewhat less clear-cut. Class is no longer determined on an individual basis but on a collective basis. The capitalist class is no longer a class consisting of individual owners of the means of production but a social entity collectively directing the process of the valorization of national capital, and which includes individual owners of the means of production but also bureaucrats who are only indirectly the owners of the means of production in their capacity as representatives of the State. In the same way, the working class can no longer be defined as individuals who supply productive labor but as a social entity whose collective labor valorizes capital. Next to these two fundamental classes there is a whole series of intermediary strata whose social position attaches them neither to the bourgeoisie nor the proletariat (certain middle management of companies and diverse State institutions, professionals, independents, etc.) and especially in underdeveloped countries, a mass of petty producers who are not under the formal submission to capital, in addition to the masses who have no work and are thus excluded from any link to the productive process.

The tendency to generalize wage labor to all classes and strata in state capitalism makes the formal limits between the classes more difficult to discern. Unlike the members of other classes and strata, the worker keeps his fundamental attributes : he faces capital owning only his labor power, separate from the means of production and the products of his labor.

In its movement, capital constantly creates middle strata, but also, constantly rejects them into the proletariat. The vast majority of services provided by middle strata in the past are today provided by proletarians. Take the example of education which is particularly significant because it concerns intellectual work and also because it regularly leads to all kinds of confused debates in the revolutionary milieu. At the outset, professors and other teachers possessed an individual body of knowledge and a

privileged social status (in relation to the proletariat). Today, in the advanced countries, they represent merely an impersonal body of knowledge regulated by the State and their social position has fallen to the point where their wages are less than many factory workers. They are forced to sell their labor power in the same way as any proletarian. Marx noted more than a century ago that teachers could even be productive workers like any other :

"In certain teaching institutions, for example, the teachers are mere wage laborers for those who own the many teaching factories that exist in England today. Although they are not productive workers in relation to their students, they are productive workers in relation to their boss. He exchanges his capital for their labor power and he gets rich er." (10)

Even if the State does not get rich directly because it uses the labor of teachers, it exploits them in the same way as the others to assure the overall process of the valorization of national capital. Education has become an important factor in this process. Capital takes away all special qualifications because it has to increase the mobility of labor power, but it also needs to educate the masses enough to make it possible for capital to use any labor power for all the basic functions of modern society. (There is, of course, in education the crucial ingredient of the ideological molding of the labor force.)

It is obvious that the reality of state capitalism is far from the thoughts of groups like "Communisme ou Civilisation" for whom unproductive workers are to be put en bloc in the category of middle strata. Since unproductive sectors are constantly growing in state capitalism, "Communisme ou Civilisation" is forced to invent an explanation for this proliferation of middle strata :

"In order to hold back the development of the productive forces which would rapidly come into conflict with capitalist relations of production, the need is felt for a class that does not have accumulation as its goal, that can epitomize the passion for consumerism, the passion for spending, so as to limit accumulation, limit the valorization/devalorization contradiction, and give capitalist accumulation a sphere which produces no supplementary accumulation but whose products can be consumed unproductively. This class is the intermediary strata. By creating this class, the bourgeoisie strengthens its power and security." (11)

This justification is wrong on at least three counts. First of all, capital never seeks to limit its own expansion. By its very nature, capital is forced to valorize itself as much as possible. Even if an individual capitalist or a particular State had the aberrant idea of holding back their own accumulation, the competition coming from other capitalists or States would quickly remind

them of the fundamental laws of capitalism. The assertions of "Communisme ou Civilisation" are even more absurd because capitalism has, for a long time, already been in a historic phase where the productive forces have come into conflict with the relations of production. Most national capitals try desperately to realize the accumulation that would assure their competitive position on the world market. Second of all, if the bourgeoisie merely wanted to waste the surplus value produced, it wouldn't need to extract it in the first place. Raising the wages of workers would be just as effective in holding back accumulation and strengthening the power and security of the bourgeoisie. Finally, for the unproductive proletarians that are the majority of what "Communisme ou Civilisation" calls middle strata, this "passion for consumerism" is a myth taken from the bourgeois legend of the "consumer society". In reality, capitalism simply does not give them the means to satisfy the "passion for spending". That's why they fight against capital instead of assuring its security.

#### THE DIFFICULTIES AND THE PROMISE OF THE PROLETARIAT'S COMING TO CLASS CONSCIOUSNESS

The recomposition of the proletariat that is taking place under state capitalism is a constant thing. In the course of its historic evolution, state capitalism has amplified its basic tendencies, especially the relative growth of unproductive sectors over productive sectors. This growth of unproductive sectors is partly the result of the increasing complexity of the economy and the need to centralize a whole series of economic activities into the hands of the State in the form of public services. But, it is also largely linked to capitalism's need to deal with the internal contradictions sapping its strength in the period of decadence - economic, imperialist and class contradictions. In today's open crisis of capitalism, these tendencies only strengthen each other, especially because the productive sector itself is directly hit by the crisis. In the last ten years, the accentuation of the contradictions of capitalism, has produced a double movement. Whole branches of heavy industry have been dismantled (the mines, steel, naval shipyards) producing a real de-industrialization in certain regions. At the same time, unproductive sectors have mushroomed (armaments, insurance, advertising, accounting, information management, etc.), increasingly manned by temporary or part-time workers.

Any change in the composition of the working class is potentially a factor of division within the class, because the State and its organs, especially the unions, will use these changes to build an ideological wedge in the class making class consciousness and the development of class perspectives all that much more difficult. Under state capitalism, the proletarianization of "white-collar" workers, such as teachers, nurses, various kinds of pencil pushers, and so on, whose work is partly intellectual, does not mean that these workers are automatically conscious of belonging to the proletariat. Have

we not recently seen these same teachers and nurses, in struggles in Italy and in France, assert that they were not part of the working class and that their interests were specific to themselves? This difficulty in recognition is not specific to these workers: bourgeois propaganda constantly hammers "blue-collar" workers on the head about how they are the only "true workers" because they do manual labor and have nothing in common with the "white collar" workers. The worst of it is that even revolutionaries believe and perpetuate this sort of fatal division in the class.

In the same way, unemployment and temporary or part-time work have grown considerably creating a basis for divisions between workers who are "lucky" enough to have "normal" work and those who do part-time or underpaid work or who have no work at all. The crisis always begins by aggravating the competition among workers.

The fact that the number of productive, industrial workers in the proletariat and in the population as a whole has steadily fallen as decadent capitalism has continued to exist, does not weaken the historic potential of the proletariat. The examples of united struggles of "white-collar" and "blue-collar" workers are legion in the twenty years since the reawakening of class struggle in the 60's. Only those who are nostalgic for the "pure and simple" stereotyped worker of the past are still lamenting the changes in capitalism. Certainly factory closings in the former industrial heartlands, in the mines and the steel mills, have dislocated militant and experienced sectors of the proletariat who used to be in the forefront of the class struggle. But, in the long run, the mass of unemployed that has been created is also apt to crystallize the workers' revolt against the existing social order in a particularly explosive way, because of the inhuman treatment the unemployed are getting and the fact that they are relatively freer of union control. To a lesser extent, perhaps, the same thing can be said for temporary and underpaid workers.

Although the recomposition of the two fundamental classes under state capitalism has made class struggle more difficult, it has, in fact, forced it onto a higher level. In the phase of the formal submission of labor to capital, workers found themselves in a personalized relationship with the capitalists who exploited them. Class conflict pitted workers directly against the boss of a particular company in a direct way. Class antagonisms were clearly identifiable and the class consciousness necessary to wage these struggles was relatively elementary. With the passage to the real submission of labor to capital, capital became more impersonal, labor power more collective and the stakes of the struggle widened out to encompass a larger social arena. The extraction of relative surplus value from labor power implies a direct interdependence between different sectors of production in the determination of wages and the rate of exploitation. These tendencies are carried to an extreme under

state capitalism. The unification of the different spheres and sectors of the national economy and the impersonal and collective nature of class relations means that the proletariat must develop a consciousness of the social relations of capital as a totality if it is to succeed even in its immediate struggles. What was merely an abstract historical exigence in the phase of the formal submission of labor to capital becomes an immediate necessity under state capitalism, uniting the immediate and the historic programs of the proletariat into one.

There is no doubt that this makes immediate struggles more difficult; partial struggles, for example, are doomed to failure. But, it forces the proletariat to develop a more profound consciousness of capitalist social relations and the nature of communism. At the beginning of the century, in an under-industrialized Russia, Lenin could still believe that socialism equaled electricity plus the soviets. Today, such a belief is unthinkable. The social-democratic concept of class struggle that leninism inherited and which still permeates certain sectors of the revolutionary milieu today, is, in fact, based on the conditions of the formal submission of labor to capital. For socialism to be realized, it used to seem enough to eliminate the formal relation of the submission of labor to capital. In this sense, the historic potential of the class consciousness of the proletariat is greater today than in the past.

#### THE FUNDAMENTAL NATURE OF SOCIAL CLASSES REMAINS

Despite constant changes in their composition and in the conditions of their existence, social classes have changed neither their fundamental nature nor their fundamental relations. As we have seen, state capitalism does not eliminate capital or its complement, wage labor, or the antagonism between them. It brings them onto a higher, more impersonal, more collective level.

In this sense, it seems useless, even dangerous, for us to want to change Marxist terminology to go along with the constant changes in the composition of the classes. This would imply that these changes in the sociological composition of the classes were more important than their historic nature. In the bourgeoisie, the evolution from the individual bourgeois property owner with his ownership of the means of production at the beginning of capitalism, to the state bureaucrat, simple cog in the apparatus of the social domination of capital, was a more or less gradual historical evolution, even though a qualitative leap was taken at the beginning of the twentieth century when capitalism entered its declining phase. The often violent struggles that took place between factions of the private bourgeoisie and representatives of the state bureaucracy in certain countries were only one expression among others of the competition and conflict of interest typical of this class, but it does not make these factions into different and opposing classes. The individual bour-

geois as well as the state bureaucrat have never been anything other than agents of capital reflecting different phases in the development and centralization of capital. In this sense, the distinction made by MacIntosh in his article in I.P.#7 between "the bourgeoisie" and "the capitalist class" is, in our opinion, to be rejected. Although it allows taking into account the changes in the makeup of the capitalist class, it can leave itself open to the possibility of a misunderstanding about the historical continuity of the fundamental nature of the ruling class. State capitalism is only a form of capitalism; state property is only a form of private property. It is, therefore, perfectly consistent to present the state bureaucracy as a form of the bourgeoisie.

In the proletariat, there has been a similar evolution towards the accentuation of its social and collective character. But for the same reasons, the distinction between "proletariat" and "working class" that the letter from G.S. seems to be suggesting, and which used to be the hobby horse of modernism, should also be rejected because it brings confusions about the unity of the proletariat and the historical continuity of its nature and fundamental tasks.

So many things have changed during this century. Capital has changed, the bourgeoisie has changed, and the proletariat has changed. The conditions of class struggle have changed as well as the enormous stakes involved in its outcome. But changes in terminology will scarcely help the proletariat gain the class consciousness necessary for its historic tasks. Today, in both theory and practice, the proletariat has to understand both capital and communism as a totality, as a social relation. The depth of class consciousness needed to accomplish this task, and the enormity of the task itself, explains the slow pace and extreme difficulty of the maturation of class consciousness and class struggle today. The great potential of class struggle today demands that revolutionaries raise their sights both theoretically and practically to face this challenge.

M. Lazare

#### Notes :

1. See "State Capitalism" in I.P.#7
2. See "Privatizations and State Capitalism" in I.P.#10.
3. "Communisme ou Civilisation" #5, 7 and 9.
4. Marx, *Grundrisse* 2, "Chapitre du Capital", 10/18, p. 41
5. Marx, *ibid*, p. 49
6. Marx, "Materiaux pour l'economie", La Pleiade, vol 2, p. 387
7. Marx, *ibid*, p. 388
8. "State Capitalism and the Law of Value", *Internationalism* #2, translated in *Revolution Internationale* #4. In comparing this text to the prose appearing today in ICC publications, one can see the full measure of the degeneration of this organization; the gangrene has spread to its understanding of fundamental economic categories. In the *International Review* #54, the ICC criticizes the thesis put forward in I.P. #7 that the field of application of the law of value has expanded under state capitalism. The ICC seems to think we justify this assertion by pointing to "the development of free trade after the Second World War" (sic). And they proceed to cite numerous examples of protectionism, cartels and monopolies to "illustrate the process of the relative restriction of the application of the law of value" (p. 13-14). If the ICC believes that the application of the law of value requires "free trade", it should logically conclude that the law of value no longer applies in the so-called "socialist" countries and throw out the communist program altogether. The ICC today seems to believe that the law of value means the exchange of commodities at their value. But even if trade is free, the law of value assures that no individual commodity (with some exceptions) will be sold at its value. Throughout the history of capitalism, the law of value has always been applied on a larger and larger scale, distorting more and more the relation between the individual value of the commodity and its price on the market. State capitalism only amplifies this process.

9. Marx, *Grundrisse* 2, "Chapitre du Capital" p. 48

10. Marx, "Materiaux pour l'Economie", p. 398

11. *Communisme ou Civilisation* #9, p. 36

## DEBATE IN THE REVOLUTIONARY MILIEU

# report on a meeting with the cbg

We report here a meeting which took place between the EFICC and the Communist Bulletin Group during the past summer. We believe this to be of interest to the revolutionary milieu for a number of reasons. In the first place, the fact that the meeting took place at all shows there has been clarification on matters of principle concerning the conduct of groups in the milieu towards one another; many readers will be aware of differences originating in 1981 over the 'Chenier affair', the thefts of material from the ICC and the aftermath, all of which have until now precluded fraternal relations between the CBG and several other groups, the Fraction among them. Secondly, the drawing up of the agenda of the meeting illuminated the different views of the two groups concerning the bases of organisational differentiation at present. Thirdly, the discussions which took place - on the state of the class struggle, the crisis of the revolutionary milieu and on the tasks of revolutionaries today - highlighted the main areas of agree-



ment and disagreement between us on more general political questions.

In this article, we report on these aspects of our meeting and draw some conclusions which we hope will be discussed by other revolutionary organisations.

#### THE CONDITIONS UNDER WHICH THE MEETING WAS HELD

The Fraction has striven to have the widest possible contact with groups in the political milieu, through polemic in IP, discussions at public meetings, correspondence and one-to-one meetings. The specifics have been determined by many contingent factors such as proximity - geographical and political - and the value of a discussion at a given moment, all subject to resources available at the time. We have encountered the CBG at public meetings, there have been polemics in our two publications and some correspondence. However, the Fraction has always held to the view that no fraternal discussion and relationship was really possible while certain fundamental questions concerning the relations between revolutionary organisations were not resolved, matters which referred back to the circumstances around the splits in the ICC some eight years ago. We have discussed these in previous issues of IP particularly in relation to the degeneration of the ICC (references: 1). In brief, there have been three issues: the thefts of material from the ICC and the events of the recuperation, the import of the warning given by the ICC to the milieu about the activities of the ex-member Chenier, and the behaviour of the CBG concerning the material belonging to the ICC which they still held. Although there were (and remain) serious disagreements about the first two, it was the third matter which had precluded the two groups having any fraternal relations over these years. However, correspondence between us since the autumn of 1988 showed the promise of clarification on the thefts of material and the return of that still held. This encouraged further contact and finally the meeting was arranged. Because of this history between the two groups, we must here dwell on the discussions on these matters, although they were not part of the agenda proper.

Ever since 1981, the old Aberdeen section of World Revolution (section of ICC in Britain) had held onto material (including cash, duplicating materials and internal bulletins). The Fraction has always insisted that this should be returned. For us, it was and remains a principle of behaviour among proletarian organisations that theft - the appropriation of material necessary for organisations to carry out their work of political clarification and intervention in the struggle of the working class - must be rejected as being antithetical to the goals of that struggle. And for us, the point of this is not simply to agree in words but to adhere to it in practice. The fact that the CBG still retained the material to us demonstrated a lack of good faith, and had led us to disbelieve their commitment to this principle. Good intentions, in abstract, are

insufficient. The CBG had said it would return this material - although there was a question over how much there was. However, eight years on the material was still in its possession.

At our insistence, and as a pre-condition of the meeting, the CBG agreed to return the material in their possession to the ICC, and when we met the matter was discussed further. The CBG emphasised that it had never stolen material, it had simply not returned what was in the possession of some of the members at the time of the splits. It was ironic that one militant who played a direct role in the thefts from WR subsequently rejoined the ICC while they, who had criticised the thefts at the time and many times since, had been treated as pariahs. They also emphasised that they had written several times to the ICC to arrange for the return of material but had never even received an acknowledgement. The CBG interpreted this, correctly in our view, as a sign that the ICC has not wanted to resolve the issue. However, by taking no initiative the CBG has enabled the ICC to continue what had become a 'cat and mouse' game. While we appreciated the ironies, we insisted that material had to be returned - even if the recipient was unwilling; it was essential that the milieu could see by the CBG's actions where they stood.

The discussions on this point widened to cover the other matters mentioned above, and although we can only be pleased that they were raised and discussed, it was clear that there remain wide differences between us. On the question of Chenier, in particular, the CBG argued that this was a blatant example of an organisation using character assassination as a means of dealing with political disagreements; they also cited the warning about Albar in Accion Proletaria last year to show that this method is still being used.

In dealing with this the Fraction pointed out that it agreed that character assassination is an unprincipled and unacceptable means of dealing with political and organisational problems. However, we rejected the CBG assertions that in 1981 the ICC was saying that Chenier was a police agent. We pointed out that the fact that the ICC's warning that this militant's behaviour was suspicious ('louche') was not a nod and a wink to encourage any speculation to take place, whatever any individual ICC member may have thought or said. In fact the ICC itself had always held to the position that there was overwhelming and irrefutable evidence of the shadiness and intentionally destructive behaviour, but no clear evidence as to its origin and motive. The fact that the ICC had not been manufacturing a campaign of whispers was evidenced in its efforts to involve other organisations in the commission of enquiry which was set up, and its willingness to show to other revolutionary organisations the evidence gathered. In our view, the ICC could not be blamed for the general complacency of other groups which for the most part showed little concern at the time. On the

other hand, the ICC does not seem to have maintained its standard of conduct with its warning about the militant Albar which appeared only in the territorial press of the organisation in Spain in 1988. Following the publication of the warning in Accion Proletaria, the Fraction contacted the International Secretariat of the ICC for information which we were told would be supplied. However, although two appointments were made, no dossier was produced. Months have passed since the warning which has been neither repeated in the ICC's international press (or, so far as we are aware, in any other territorial publication) nor withdrawn. No basis for the warning has been given, no explanation for its appearance offered; given the ICC's general demeanour, we cannot give it 'the benefit of the doubt' in this case. We did not convince the CBG on Chenier, but our two groups have at least been able to agree that we do not in any way defend 'character assassination', that organisations in the milieu should warn others of suspicious behaviour on the part of militants of the milieu, and that specific cases are open to examination and discussion.

We had some discussion about the state of the ICC in 1981, referring to the debates on political and organisational issues raging inside. The ICC had been riven since 1980 by the debate on whether or not 'hybrid' class organs had existed in the British steel strike in 1980 (i.e. were the strike committees part-union, part working class, or only part of union recuperation). This discussion was never thoroughly clarified during the strike and lingered on in an unsatisfactory way for a long time after. This was an organisational problem - and not only a political debate - because a sizeable proportion of the ICC viewed the events and evaluated the intervention within them in quite a different way from the majority, to the degree that the seeds of suspicion and hostility sown from another quarter had a political conflict in which to be nurtured further and find a legitimacy. In addition, many organisational questions about the conduct of debates, the taking of positions by central organs, the posing of disagreements in the press were current, and by the time of the splits these hostilities were developed.

The political issues beneath the splits were confused and compounded by the thefts, which heightened the levels of distrust between militants of the organisation. In reaction, the central organs demanded to know who really dissociated themselves from this behaviour and who did not. Again, this was seen in different ways - either as a demand for a 'loyalty oath', or as a legitimate request to the entire membership to say where they stood. When this was followed up by the recuperation of much of the stolen equipment, an exercise whose force was blown up out of all proportion by those who had stolen from the ICC and who disliked it being taken back, a further round of resignations followed. When attempts were made by some splitters to have printers stop producing WR and IR, with threats made to call the police, the entire situation degenerated to utter

confusion in which it seemed to the majority of the organisation that a sizeable minority was making every attempt to destroy the ICC, while - as the CBBG put it to us - it seemed to much of the minority that the central organs were "trying to hijack the organisation".

Certainly, some of us in the Fraction now think that one of the crucial factors in the way that the whole situation unfolded was the push inside the ICC for the recuperation prior to the holding of the extraordinary conference at which all these matters - intervention, hybrid organs, Chenier, thefts, etc - were to be discussed. Instead, because of the confusion matters were reduced to a simplistic choice of 'sides', with the result that all the political issues took second place to 'defending the organisation' or not. Understandable, given the emotional content of the moment, but politically damaging in the longer term. One can see that the step was not too large to get to the point where 'decisiveness' would become the antidote to the 'centrism' supposedly infecting the organisation only a few years' later.

The whole organisation was very confused over the plethora of issues. Although the extraordinary conference cemented the organisation temporarily, many underlying political issues remained unresolved. The tendency to use organisation measures to deal with political questions was reinforced. Although we can look back at these events with the benefit of hindsight, and with time having lessened the emotional content, we do not divorce ourselves from responsibility in the events. There were principles we wanted to uphold, and we still believe we were right to do so. Nonetheless, it was informative to discuss with the CBG for it made us appreciate other perceptions on the confusion of the time, and we can see that it is still useful to review the episode as part of our getting to grips with the crisis of the milieu and the degeneration of the ICC in particular.

The CBG then became the personification of theft and gangsterism in the milieu in the eyes of many of us, and we can see the irony in this - since none of their members endorsed the 1981 thievery. However, neither did they do enough to distance themselves in a categorical way from it. The distrust grew to a near-hatred as a result of the threats by the Aberdeen militants to call the police. And although this was subsequently and publicly withdrawn and admitted to have been a grave error, the damage was done.

This only emphasises the importance of action in clearing matters up. Both the CBG and ICC bear responsibilities for the situation that the gulf between them has generated inside the milieu, a situation which clouded many discussions in the milieu for years.

But so too must the rest of the milieu accept responsibility: for at the time the proletarian milieu contributed little beyond apathy to dealing with the convulsions inside the ICC and almost everywhere else. And little has been done since to overcome the problems.

Years have passed with the polarisations widening and increasing the difficulties for groups to discuss.

However, we think that at this meeting - based on the clear statement of the principles involved - it was shown that it is possible to overcome hostility and distrust and face up to the most contentious matters. Neither would pretend that agreement on these issues has been reached.

## THE MAIN DISCUSSIONS

### 1. The Class Struggle

This had as its axis the 'years of truth' and how our expectations at the beginning of the '80s compared with the actual evaluation of the class struggle. There was a substantial level of agreement here.

The CBG and the Fraction were agreed in the appreciation of the historic course moving towards profound class confrontation. There was also an agreement that the immediate class confrontation expected in this decade had not been verified. The capacity of the bourgeoisie to delay the crisis, a capacity that had seemed to be rapidly diminishing at the end of the '70s, had surprised us all with its longevity and the associated blunting of the immediate promise of the class struggle. Thus, the workers' struggles in Poland had not been equalled, far less surpassed, anywhere in the centres of capital. The CBG stressed the increased organisation and preparedness of the bourgeoisie on one hand and the divorce experienced by the working class from its own history. Thus, were the same level of overt struggle to break out today, it would mean that its development had gone much further. In considering the views of other groups, both the Fraction and the CBG rejected the triumphalism of the ICC and the pessimism of the CWO.

What was less clear to the Fraction was the CBG's assessment of the development of class consciousness over the past decade. The CBG tended to argue that this development could not be known because the links between the working class and its proletarian milieu were, to all practical purposes, non-existent. The Fraction, on the other hand, argued that, however indirect, it was possible to see evidence of its development. For example, although it was indeed the case that the bourgeoisie had become more organised and effective in dealing with the class its efforts to maintain its supremacy had become more and more frenetic. No ideological campaign used to derail the class lasted to any degree. Had the bourgeoisie been consolidating a firmer grip on the working class in a longer-term way we would expect to see a process of mobilisation of the class, and a stabilisation of the ideological content. Instead, the content of campaigns has changed from year to year - broadly speaking - and no mobilisations have really been sustained.

This issue will be taken up again between us.

### 2. The Crisis of the Political Milieu

Both the Fraction and the CBG agreed that the crisis of the milieu exists, that it is deep and that most of the groups in the milieu do not or will not recognise it. We both linked it to the lack of significant advance of the class struggle in this decade.

For the Bordighist groups, for example, the issue is that the programme is not being assimilated; they recognise that sectarianism is a weakness - though it does not seem that for them discussion is necessary. Specifically, for the Mouvement Communiste the task is to destroy the milieu which they consider to be bourgeois.

Our two groups recognise the crisis, and its unprecedented nature which manifests itself through sectarianism and regression on class lines. We agreed on the symptoms shown by the CWO, but not by the ICC.

For the CBG, the crisis stems from a failure to appreciate the transition of the capitalist system from its ascendant to decadent epochs, a transition which has produced a profound separation of the milieu from the class as a whole. Broadly, we would agree with this but when the point is taken further differences between us become apparent. The CBG considers that many of the differences between organisations in the milieu are not programmatic and relate to issues of organisational functioning, which could be resolved within the same organisation. For the Fraction, on the other hand, there are much more profound problems: the question of state capitalism, the organised form of capital this century, is barely addressed by most of the milieu; the understanding of how the process of class consciousness develops in the proletariat is dealt with little better; the actual development of the class struggle is trivialised into episodic assessments. What this tells us is that a veritable renaissance of marxism is needed - and only the milieu as a whole can provide it - as a basis for the further development of the milieu both politically and organisationally, and thus for its increasing effectiveness as a weapon of the proletariat.

Thus, for the CBG, the degeneration of the ICC is primarily an organisational issue, of bad fraternal relations and this appreciation is rooted in the issues mentioned in the first part of this article; for the Fraction this degeneration is underpinned by the political weaknesses which can only be overcome by a theoretical development, by a further development of marxism. Thus for the CBG fraternal debate is a pre-requisite for regroupment, of organisation healing; for the Fraction, fraternal debate is necessary not just at that level but as a material foundation for the proletarian milieu and the working class to go forward.

### 3. The Tasks for the Political Milieu

In keeping with their views of the evolution of the class struggle and on the nature of the crisis of the milieu, the CBG saw the

main task being the need to set up an international framework for fraternal debate: the priority for the milieu is regroupment now on the basis of class lines. This position is intimately related to the view that sectarianism is a product of isolation from the class only, and that however profound the political differences they can coexist in the same organisation.

The Fraction considers this to be simplistic, as the CBG implies that because the class struggle in these decades is moving forward, regroupment is de facto on the agenda at all times. While it is true that the possibilities for regroupment should always be explored as far as possible whatever the period, it would be wrong to ignore the actual limitations imposed by the situation. Thus the Communist Left in the 1930s attempted to, and did, regroup many militants as the counter-revolution approached its nadir. But these regroupments were to pull together the residues of a once-massive movement hit by a ferocious repression, and did not accompany a new proletarian resurgence. Today, however, despite the clement nature of the period for a process moving towards massive class confrontation there is no widespread appearance and development of revolutionary groups. On the contrary, the milieu has shrunk substantially since the mid-'70s, a phenomenon which is surely beyond dispute. (This is not the place to go into the reasons in any extensive way; it is topic being dealt with in other articles in IP.) All the same, we have participated in a regroupment process already with the Jalons publication ceasing and joining the Fraction - and is probably typical of the generally small-scale movements which take place in the milieu today. The Fraction therefore stands for the regroupment of revolutionary forces at all times; but the priority and effort this task can be given depends primarily on constraints and opportunities determined by general circumstances and not simply by internal resources.

To the EFICC, there is a need for the work of fractions in the milieu today. As we have stressed we see the need for a 'renaissance of marxism' which, far from being an academic pursuit, is absolutely essential for the milieu if it is going to have the theoretical weapons to arm its intervention in the working class. We do not believe it is possible to rely on the belief that 'all questions will be answered in the heat of the class struggle' - for while new waves of struggle can answer some current questions they also throw up new ones. A 'renaissance of marxism' is not an event to be finished before intervention can begin but a process to be embarked on, to recognise the changed and changing circumstances in which the class is coming to consciousness. It does not aim to replace our platform, but enrich and deepen it to maintain its correspondence with the evolution of the actual situation of capitalism in this period.

The CBG was receptive to the spirit of our approach, but we have yet to see what their considered views are.

On the intervention of revolutionary groups there was clear agreement - on its necessity for the working class, that it depended on the forces of the revolutionary organisation, and that intervention had to be towards the milieu as well as the class as a whole. Both organisations recognised the dangers of the triumphalism which has become the hallmark of the ICC and of the pessimism of groups such as the CWO.

## CONCLUSION

This meeting was a positive, though in many respects only a tentative, contact between the two groups. We hope that it has contributed to the breaking down of some barriers and the clarifying of some issues which have festered in the milieu for much too long. We also hope the ICC will make some positive response to the CBG taking action to return their material.

If nothing else, the meeting did show that it is possible for revolutionary organisations to discuss fruitfully even when they have a history of distrust between them. Neither group would want to have any illusions about how far we got, but we did go forward.

Marlowe

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## PUBLIC MEETING

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

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## APPEAL TO READERS

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

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# THE ICC AND CHINA

## what happened to the class struggle?

"... 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." ("Order Reigns In Beijing", I.P.# 14)

In the wake of the "Beijing spring", posters, slogans and "solidarity" meetings for the Chinese people have mushroomed throughout the world. The purpose of all these demonstrations organized by bourgeois humanists (from the banners in Chinese unfurled by Amnesty International to the "clandestine" interviews with refugee students dramatized by the media) has been to turn the two months of bloody struggles in China into a simple contest between rival factions of the bourgeoisie for control of the state: a struggle between democracy and the totalitarian state in its Stalinist form.

But, surprise, surprise, this smokescreen is far from being a monopoly of the Western bourgeoisies: a revolutionary organization like the International Communist Current (ICC) -- ever ready to proclaim its pure and intransigent Marxism -- has come close to engaging in this same sickening undertaking; for the greater good of the proletariat(!), it is busily rewriting history and covering up what was really at stake in China. First, at a public meeting in Brussels at the end of June, the ICC denounced us as fools and dupes because of our assertion that the real key to understanding the situation in China had been the existence of an embryonic mass strike. Then in the pages of "Internationalisme" the ICC asked: "Where was the workers struggle that the EFICC claims to have seen?" Finally, the ICC posed the issue thusly: "Either one believes that last spring the workers had nothing to do with the student democrats and that they were right to save their strength for the important battles to come, or one pretends -- with the Trotskyists, and apparently with the EFICC -- that they should have utilized the 'breach' in the ranks of the bourgeoisie and acted on a terrain that was not their own. In the latter case, it's important to see that -- as in the case of the minority of the Italian Fraction during the civil war in Spain -- you end up in the camp of the counter-revolution"

How simple reality is when it is viewed through the lenses of the ICC. It must be very comforting and secure to live in a world only activated by bourgeois intrigues and by a proletariat waiting in the wings and "saving its strength for the important battles". It's quite true that such a world

is alien to us -- and for good reason! For a truly revolutionary organization, the task is more difficult than the ICC imagines. The real task is to combine in a coherent and dynamic analysis the strengths and weaknesses of the working class; and in spite of its pretensions, the ICC is more and more incapable of doing this. This incapacity is seen in its most caricatural form in the almost pathological refusal of the ICC to see the proletariat in the events in China. Such deafness to the cries of the class -- the global interests of which the ICC claims to defend -- is truly upsetting. More and more over the last few years, because of its wish to see the revolution behind every corner, the ICC has had difficulty analyzing the class struggle. Their position on China is an expression of this weakness. The ICC is characterized by an incessant wavering between overestimation and underestimation of the strength of the proletariat; a growing imperviousness to the real life of the class, its contradictions and its promises. The disastrous result is that the ICC now decrees WHEN, WHERE, and HOW the proletariat CAN and MUST struggle. Last year, for example, in the hospital workers strike in France -- once again reduced to a Machiavellian plot of the bourgeoisie -- the ICC proclaimed that this was no longer the time to fight. Such a discrepancy between the objective situation and the analysis or practice of communist minorities at the end of the '80's can seem of little consequence given the slight impact that revolutionaries now have on the actual unfolding of events. However, as the insurrectional movements in Germany in the 1920's showed, if such a gap persists in a critical and decisive situation the result can be grave indeed for the proletariat. A revolutionary minority that demonstrates its incapacity to take the pulse of its class is at best condemned to being marginal, and at worst to depriving this class of a revolutionary dynamic opening new perspectives for humanity.

For ten years, the ICC has been the first to proclaim that it was virtually the only group to grasp the class struggle. Such clairvoyance has now blinded it. Since 1985, when we were excluded from the ICC because of divergences with its increasingly false conception of class consciousness and its growing activism vis a vis the class struggle (leading it to blur certain principles, such as the nature of unions), the ICC has moved heaven and earth to denounce our "underestimation" of the development of workers struggles, our "desertion", our irresponsibility. But today, the ICC wants to blast us because we see the proletariat at



work in China. We are not the only targets of the ICC: it has also drawn a bead on Battaglia Comunista, which proclaimed "long live the Chinese proletariat" in its headlines -- and that after having criticized Battaglia for its incapacity to see a social upheaval bringing the proletariat onto the scene in the student movements at the end of the 1960's. The political milieu's understanding of the events in Beijing sometimes resemble an endless ping-pong match; so as not to get lost, it is necessary to understand the source of the zig-zags which border on the most total incoherence. In fact, what is at issue, is the very method by which we analyze the class struggle. While our method of analysis of and intervention in the class struggle attempts to base itself on an understanding of the basic historic tendencies at work (taking account of both the strength and weakness of the workers struggle), for many years the ICC has been engaged in imposing its schemas on reality, in exercises in "workerism", and in inventing sophisticated tactics so as to artificially close the gap between workers and revolutionaries. Its understanding of workers struggle has increasingly been reduced to flattering the mere physical presence of workers at the point of struggle. Faced with a more complex situation, the ICC is helpless. Thus, in China, because petit-bourgeois demands were grafted onto the workers struggle, that struggle did not exist for the ICC. This workerism (in which revolutionary minorities can only lose their *raison d'être*) has led the ICC to only recognize as an action of the proletariat one that corresponds to its own arbitrary and shifting framework. If the proletariat does not behave in the way prescribed by the ICC, then it simply is not present. In the past, workerism and activism have always been the other side of the coin of the bankruptcy of revolutionary organizations incapable of formulating a clear and coherent analysis of the prevailing social upheavals. That was the path trod by the Third International; it is a danger today.

In the case of China, it is much easier to assert -- as do the newspapers in Beijing -- that the proletariat was absent as a class, than to try to understand what real possibilities existed, and what prevented them from developing. What is really bizarre is that the ICC, utilizing the errors of the war in Spain in the 30's, charges those who today seek to measure those possibilities with being "counter-revolutionaries".

In our long article in I.R.# 14, "Order Reigns In Beijing", our analysis, and the lessons to be drawn, can be summarized in the following six points.

1) The upheavals which shook China in the spring of '89 had their source and dynamic in the existence of antagonistic class interests. It is both mistaken and dangerous to reduce these upheavals to simple squabbles within the ruling class. The trees must not hide the forest: the bourgeoisie is so divided only when faced by the enormous

threat represented by the irruption of the proletariat.

2) The student movement, which at first occupied center stage with its demands for a more "democratic" administration of the Chinese state, by mid-May was largely overtaken by the massive appearance of the proletariat, demonstrating, striking, threatening the state with a general strike, and -- like the railwaymen -- paralyzing economic activity. The ICC decreed that the student movement alone expressed the social upheavals plaguing China, thus reproducing the schema of the "cultural revolutions" which in the past pit rival factions of the bourgeoisie against one another. Any other analysis could only be petit-bourgeois!

What an about face! In '68, the crowning point of student agitation, hadn't the predecessors of the ICC pointed out (correctly!) the working class potential ripening in the entrails of society -- a potential that announced the beginning of a new historical period? Is the ICC today so exhausted that it cannot see beyond the student movement in itself? We heard the same indignant cries from the ICC in '86: in the midst of the student agitation in France, we pointed to the working class discontent on the horizon. A petit-bourgeois deviation proclaimed the ICC; a few weeks later the railwaymen went out on strike.

3) This working class tidal wave was the product of ten years experience with the economic "liberalization" carried out by Deng Xiaoping (now being replicated in Russia under Gorbachev's *Perestroika*). Inflation, scarcity, unemployment -- this is the "miracle" that was inflicted daily on the workers of China; and this was the objective basis that engendered their combativity in the great industrial centers of China.

4) For the moment, a whole series of factors prevented this combativity from giving birth to a real proletarian perspective. These included as particular factors: the weakness and lack of experience of the Chinese workers; the traumatism of repressions and massacres in the past. To these must be added general factors: the formidable difficulties faced by the international proletariat in sorting out its perspectives as a revolutionary class, the bearer of a social project which will shatter the very foundations of capitalism, from its daily struggles. The sum of these factors, to which must be added the potent factor -- within the Stalinist countries -- of illusions in a possible improvement in living conditions by way of a "political democratization", deprived the Chinese proletariat of a development of its class autonomy. Its struggle could only be concretized by street demonstrations and chaotic confrontations with the forces of order, which rather disarmed it than strengthened it. But this difficulty in finding its way to self-organization is far from being confined to the workers of China.

5) Democratic mystifications engulfing the Chinese proletariat prevented it from developing its own class perspective. In failing to clearly refuse to participate in a "democratic debate" (the bourgeois terrain of which will always lead to a smoother exploitation, repression and mystification of the working class), the Chinese proletariat condemned itself to defeat and left the road clear for the bourgeoisie to mop it up. The ICC's accusations of our Fraction's implicit support for the democratic mystification (besides the fact that they are reduced to nothingness by the actual positions taken in our press) are in fact part of the very funeral choir which has crowned the defeat of the Chinese working class.

6) The blackmail about the danger of civil war, the ferocious repression which followed, and which is not yet over, while indicative of the basic UNITY of the bourgeoisie when it must crush the proletariat, also showed the great anxiety of the Chinese state when faced with the threat of the working class; that state had to inflict such punishment on the workers that they would never forget it, with the goal of preventing future movements. That is why the first victims of the repression were unemployed workers; the publicity about their execution stemmed from the need to make an example of them.

The question remains: why has the ICC become so blind when over the previous decade it has unceasingly vilified the revolutionary milieu for its purported "passivity" vis a vis the class struggle; its failure to recognize the potential of the working class, its "centrism", its lack of responsibility, its academicism, its slackness, laziness and isolation from the proletariat? According to the ICC, the '80's were to have been the "years of truth": at the end of that decade, the ripening of the workers struggle was to have definitively decided the historic course in either a revolutionary sense or one leading to a third inter - imperialist butchery. Basing itself upon its rigid schema, the ICC has everywhere perceived the working class to be stronger than it was, more conscious, more radical on a day to day basis, always on the brink of the decisive struggles. The utter falsity of that analysis -- while pointing up the necessity for revolutionaries to really grasp the general conditions of class struggle in our time -- can escape no one. Except the ICC, which stubbornly refuses to critically re - examine its own perspectives. This absence of a critical balance sheet can only lead to a growing incoherence vis a vis the class struggle. It is sufficient to take account of the eighth congress of the ICC, specifically its perspectives for the class struggle, to see how in the ranks of the ICC the Marxist dialectic has been transformed into the art of self - hypnosis. If they now say more circumpectively that "the wave of class struggle developing since 1983 poses the perspective of the unification of struggles" or even "that the class struggle is not sufficiently developed to make it possible

for the revolutionary perspective to be posed", there are still no signs whatsoever of the beginning of a questioning of the mistaken characterization of the '80's previously advanced. When revolutionaries transform themselves into priests, it is true that they only answer to themselves for their own sins !

The phantasy of a proletariat always growing stronger in the present period on the one hand, and the living and contradictory reality of a class seeking to extricate itself from the snare of capitalist ideology on the other, can only turn into fools those who try to reconcile them. The idiocy of the ICC became fully apparent on the occasion of the Beijing spring. Rather than acknowledge a torturous dynamic involving class demands and illusions in the possibility of "reforming" the bourgeois state, demonstrating how vain it is to think that the revolution is just around the corner, the ICC contented itself with "the absence of the Chinese proletariat". Rather than recognize the weakness and provisional defeat of a part of the world proletariat, the ICC preferred to mystify itself with the idea of an "unscathed" proletariat "saving its strength".

The culminating point of the craziness was reached when the ICC wrote: "In China, at the present time, there was no possibility of the proletariat developing its struggle on its own class terrain". Everywhere else, the proletariat is uniting, getting ready for its decisive struggles, but the Chinese proletariat alone (still in the stone age) is condemned to silence so as to fit into the schema of class struggle prescribed by the ICC. Whereas, by its struggle (the demands put forward and the obstacles encountered) the Chinese proletariat showed that it was an integral part of the international working class, the ICC (perhaps mesmerized by the Great Wall) isolated it and cut it off from its class brothers. An organization that can only prattle about the impossibility of struggle for a proletariat had better declare itself bankrupt and devote itself to gardening.

ALMA



# 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.