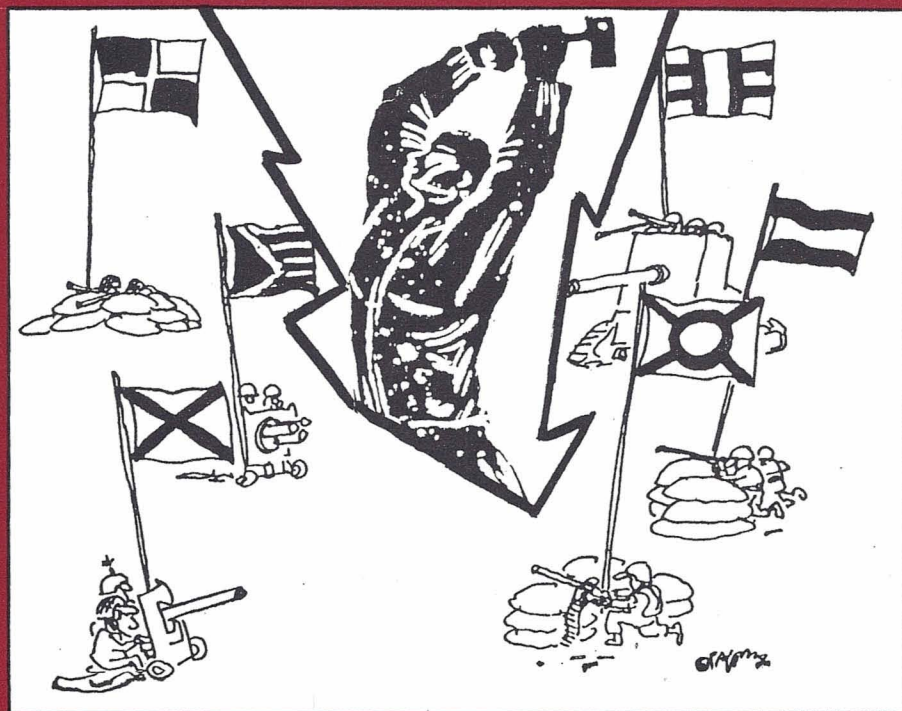


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INTERNATIONALIST PERSPECTIVE

**against the false communities
of nation, race and religion:**



CLASS SOLIDARITY

INTERNATIONALIST PERSPECTIVE

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no. 21

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AGAINST THE FALSE COMMUNITIES OF NATION, RACE AND RELIGION: CLASS SOLIDARITY

It looks as if the ideological dustbin of history has been tipped over the last quarter of the twentieth century. Upsurges of nationalism in the breakup of the old Soviet Union, in Yugoslavia, and elsewhere (with ferocious fighting among various groups); the widespread appearance of racism -- as in the support for David Duke in the Louisiana gubernatorial election in the US, in support for the neo-fascist right in Belgium and Germany, in the racist attacks on Asians in the UK; widespread development of fundamentalism within several religions, including Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Hinduism and Shinto.

This ideological garbage, fuelled by the sterile and inhumane conditions under which most of society lives, is part of the filth that the proletariat has to throw off to fit itself to build society anew. But more immediately, what does their prominence tell us about the conditions for struggle of the working class.

These ideologies and the movements which embody them are part and parcel of the unfolding of barbarism: the historic period of decay of the world capitalist system. Nationalism, racism and religious fundamentalism are all reflections of prevalent needs within the framework of a social system -- taken as a whole -- to maintain ideological control over society. None are new, but it is striking that their use has become so widespread and forceful in recent years.

Together, these ideologies are fuelled by the conditions of world capitalism now almost a quarter-century into the open crisis that emerged after the post-war reconstruction, as the condition of more and more of the human species is dragged further down into that of a living hell.



Some Facets Of Today's Crisis

Manifestly, the world capitalist class, as revolutionary Marxism has always insisted, has been unable to overcome the historic contradictions within its own socio-economic system. However, society in the twentieth century has been shaped in large measure by the bourgeoisie's responses to the manifestations of those contradictions.

The profile of today's open crisis is not the same as in past cycles of crisis, war and reconstruction. Prior to World War I, the crisis lasted less than a decade; the post-war reconstruction was little more than five years, with World War II beginning only ten years after the 1929 Wall Street crash. By contrast, the reconstruction after 1945 lasted more than twenty years before the crisis again opened up, this time for an unprecedented duration. The drawn-out nature of the crisis is an important factor in understanding today's ideological trends. The way in which the capitalist class has confronted the crisis is also novel: it has been able to phase in the crisis, and for some time has -- in a sense -- been able to live with it without having to resort to another world conflagration. At least not yet!

The development of state capitalism -- becoming stronger since the 1920's -- was brought about in large part by the setting up of many new institutions for the internal management of each nation's economy, and this tendency accelerated after 1945. There have been major changes in the way that state institutions have been used to manage the present crisis. Originally, the tendency was to strengthen and expand existing state institutions, and after these became less effective -- towards the end of the 1970's -- each state has tried to overhaul its mechanisms of economic management, whether by "deregulation", "privatization" or Perestroika. In the case of the Soviet Union, this led to major convulsions in its socio-economic life which have had a global impact.

During and after World War II, institutions were established largely under the hegemony of the US to manage the financing of the world economy and to create a framework for world trade. Over the past quarter-century, these institutions have enabled the stronger countries to deflect the crisis onto the weaker, the effects of which can be seen in the devastation across Latin America, Africa and Asia.

As the crisis worsened, there was a change and shift in the handling of it,

first on a country by country basis, then on a bloc-wide basis, and now globally.

Another major international development has been the effort to facilitate the global movement of capital. The technical development of the capital markets in the last decade has brought about an extraordinary globalization of the system -- so that not only has the notion of a WORLD market taken on a new concreteness, but so too have those of global capital and a global production process.

The Effect On The Proletariat

Notwithstanding all the organizational and technical means developed to phase in the crisis, the final objective is always to make the non-exploiting sectors of society to pay for it -- in particular, the working class.

Over the past 25 years, the condition of the working class has worsened considerably. Rates of exploitation have have substantially risen, wages have been hard hit by inflation and by explicit cuts in many parts of the world. In addition, there has been a massive growth of the long-term unemployed as well as the creation of a whole sub-proletarian underclass; while this phenomenon has long been apparent in the underdeveloped countries, the appearance of this "fourth world" has now become a prominent factor in all the advanced capitalist countries.

This ejection from the process of social reproduction, still only affecting a relatively small proportion of society in the advanced countries, is pandemic in the Third World where the mass is swollen by those who have lost their livelihoods because of the ravages of drought, war or the collapse of markets. This can be seen in the shanty towns around the major cities, and in the tidal wave of refugees sweeping across much of the world.

In short, the living conditions of more and more of humanity are not only dreadful, but are without any conceivable hope of improvement within the framework of capitalist society.

All over the world, governments and opposition parties have less and less credibility. No longer are worker en masse being mobilized behind programs of austerity with a view to "getting economies back on their feet again" as was the case with the social pacts of the 1970's. No longer are peasants in the underdeveloped world being mobilized to build countries anew "after the colonialists have departed". However, while present conditions raise the possibility of unrest and revolt no perspective beyond that is offered. Social life then becomes increasingly stripped of meaning and opens up an ideological void which the system of exploitation then tries to fill.

Nationalism

Today's resurgent nationalism is not an ideological reflection of a capitalism with a future to look forward to. In the

ascendant phase of capitalism, nationalism was an ideology that went hand in glove with the development of the fundamental building block of the system: the nation-state, which had to be constructed from the vestiges of pre-capitalist formations. As we indicated above, the need of capital today is to globalize as much as possible, to facilitate the flow of funds so as to support global production lines. The nationalism in the states emerging from the breakup of the Soviet Union in Asia or in the Baltic, or out of the disintegration of Yugoslavia, does not in any way contribute to the creation of more effective units of production or to the better functioning of markets, as in the EC for example. It does, however, divert workers away from fighting for their own interests.

This is not to say that the virulence of the nationalism in the ex-Yugoslavia, for example, originates in capital's need to deal with worker's struggle today, nor that its intensity is a measure of the threat posed by the working class. This virulence also corresponds to the weakness of these capital's which, confronted with the deepening of the crisis and the concomitant shrinkage in the pie to be divided, can no longer prevent their old internal divisions from degenerating into a kind of bloody and irrational turf warfare.

Racism

The widespread increase in racism is not only linked to the worsening conditions of the workers, but also and perhaps above all, to the insecurity and lack of any perspective of the middle strata. It is stimulated by the lack of any hope for the future and from the growth of the refugee/immigrant population. In addition, the absence of any credible perspective for the future of capitalism generates enormous anxiety and dread within the middle strata, with their fear of being proletarianized. These conditions are ideal for the activities and ideology of the extreme right.

In the US, the old mystification of anti-black racism is utilized for this goal; in Europe, a xenophobic hatred is directed against immigrants who have fled the famine and terror that capitalism has sown in the peripheral countries. The targets often represent the poorest strata of the working class and the sub-proletariat. Although the traditional political parties maintain their distance from the attacks led by the far right, they help to magnify their message and benefit from their activities to accelerate austerity measures directed at the social wage.

Fundamentalism

The fundamentalism seen in so many religions over the last decade has been used in many instances to compensate for a weakening of certain state institutions and their ideologies. Perhaps the clearest example is that of the country that has

become synonymous with Shia fundamentalism: Iran. In the late 1970's, the Iranian state machine was unable to deal with the growing working class struggle. In the face of that struggle, the Iranian state (and the US government) ditched the Shah and permitted the strengthening of the clerical organizations that had long been a voice of opposition to the Shah. These reactionary mullahs used the crudest ideological attack to successfully weaken and then crush the worker's struggle -- backed up, of course, by the state and the most backward elements of society.

Although the fundamentalists (of all religions) have been active for a long time, and these tendencies were already growing in many countries, the example of Iran encouraged a far greater scope for such ideologies -- especially in Muslim countries -- as a means of social control.

The Perspective

All these ideologies respond in some way or other to the desperate plight of millions, particularly where the post-war increase in living standards has become a thing of the past and workers are being stripped back to being mere units of production and consumption, and nothing else; where millions of workers have become superfluous to production requirements; where masses now live well below subsistence levels. These ideologies provide some notion of "community" and "identity" based on a rejection of those outside their category, and on the nostalgic idea that a reversion to a "better" time is possible and

desirable. In this, nationalism, racism and religious fundamentalism are all linked.

The fact that capitalism is making such widespread use of these ideas is evidence of its own ideological bankruptcy. None of these ideologies is being used in conjunction with a movement to mobilize workers behind a new capitalist perspective; rather, their sole purpose is to keep the populace in its place and at each other's throats.

These developments are occurring because of the lack of any proletarian perspective: the only possible vision for humanity. Outside of such a development, in struggle, to which other non-exploiting strata can relate, the resulting hopelessness enables these pernicious ideas to fester, all to the advantage of the ruling class.

Yet, there are positive aspects to the present situation. One of the most important is the growing material basis for the unification of the working class. Not only has capital globalized but so too has the "production line", with commodities being made from components passed around the world. As time passes this material reality is strengthening the bases for a real community of struggle. All other notions of "community" or "identity" through nation, race, or religion are false, divisive and permit the capitalist class to manipulate the exploited and oppressed. For without such a perspective of a real community of struggle based on the globalization of the economy, there can be no production to meet the needs of people instead of the lust for profit. And never has humanity been in such need!

The Future of Imperialism

It hasn't been easy for anyone to assimilate the dramatic changes of the last few years. For some in the revolutionary milieu, the events have been so disorienting that the net-effect was demoralization and withdrawal from politics. For the ICC, they were the occasion for a new grand theory for the '90's, in which "social decomposition" replaced world war as the logical outcome of capitalist crisis, if the working class fails to make its revolution. Placing the collapse of the Eastern bloc in the context of worsening capitalist barbarism, they portrayed world capitalism as rapidly falling apart, moving towards total chaos. While they were never clear on the nature of society after capitalism's implosion (when we asked the question at a Public Meeting, the answer was: "who cares?"), what they have in mind seems to resemble more a scenario of SciFi-films about the post-nuclear age of the "Blade Runner"-type, than a Marxist analysis.

We have to admit that the ICC's theory is rooted in observations of reality. The

worsening of all aspects of barbarism, from ecological destruction to increasing poverty and despair, is real and so is the collapse of the Eastern bloc. It is also true that both are related, both are a consequence of the deepening economic crisis. Nor is it a mistake to see in the stalemate between the classes -- the inability of capitalism to mobilize the working class behind its perspective and the increasing cynicism about all capitalist mystifications on the one hand, and the inability of the working class to connect its defensive struggles with its own political perspective for society, on the other -- the key-factor to understand the present situation.

The ICC's big mistake is to translate this into yet another grand scheme that reassures the membership and makes the most complicated realities seem deceptively simple. At the beginning of the '80's, in the midst of a wave of class struggle whose importance the ICC had rightly emphasized, it projected its simple, linear increase

into the immediate future, proclaiming the '80's "the years of truth", in which the massive struggles "that will decide the course of history" would take place. At the beginning of the '90's, the mistake is repeated. It has correctly grasped an important dynamic in the present and projected its simple, linear increase into the future. And when history once again refuses to follow the scheme, the ICC presumably will once again see no reason for self-criticism.

The main objection against the ICC's theory is that it is completely a-historical and anti-dialectical to think that it's possible for a class society (any class society, not just capitalism) to fall apart by itself, without being challenged by a revolutionary class. Countries, even blocs may disintegrate but they are replaced by other forms of capitalist rule. Such restructuring may look like an implosion and increasing chaos, but the chaos will inevitably give away to a stabilisation, unless another class offers a revolutionary alternative. Therefore, our Fraction was correct when it analyzed the events in the East as a capitalist restructuring, rather than an implosion of capitalist rule. But it is also true that we had the tendency to underestimate the scope and the implications of this restructuring. Some amongst us even had trouble accepting that it implied a major strategic retreat for Russia, even



though this retreat was taking place before our eyes.

Today, it's clear that even those of us who saw this retreat, underestimated how far it would go. We continued to speak about the "Russian bloc" but now this has lost all meaning. Russia has no bloc anymore. For the moment, it has stopped being a major player on the world scene, a challenger of US-imperialism. For the near future, its imperialist goals will be limited to regaining control within what used to be its borders.

The division of the world into two rival blocs, which was not only a characteristic of the last half century but also a precondition for global conflict, today does not exist. Only one bloc survived the crisis. It has no challenger at this point. Yet, contrary to the predictions of the ICC and others, for the moment it shows no signs of falling apart. Its existence is no longer based upon imperialist rivalry with Russia but on ruling the world according to the needs of the strongest capitals. That's what "the New World Order" means. As Iraq experienced, the end of the cold war did not open a period in which local imperialist appetites were given a free rein. In the short term, the US and its allies are tightening their grip on the world, imposing "democracy", "privatisation", "free markets", "free trade" where it suits them, in order to assure the mobility of capital, low commodity prices, low wages, in other words, to shift the burden of the deepening crisis to the extent possible onto the weaker capitals. Or to phrase it more correctly, to obtain maximal exploitation of the working class around the world with minimal costs.

What will be the fate of the former USSR in the short term? There are several possibilities. One unpredictable factor is the class struggle. There are no indications that a massive working class struggle is in the offing. But it is always hard to see "the great mole" at work. The struggle of our class often resembles a volcano, seemingly dormant for long years and suddenly erupting with unforeseeable power. But in order to really change the course of events, the volcano would have to erupt not only in the East, but in the West as well.

Barring this, one possibility would be the 'thirdworldisation' of the Russian empire. If centrifugal forces continue to gather strength, the former empire would fall apart into smaller and smaller entities, consumed by bitter interimperialist rivalries, using military means, as much to cement internal cohesion as to expand their borders, until a new regional hierarchy is established. Economically, these new countries would be like much of the rest of the "third world", suffering extreme poverty and dependence on stronger capitals. Imperialistically, even the stronger of those new countries would be minor players on a global scale, despite the

presence of the nuclear arsenal, which itself could become the source of uncontrollable catastrophes, if this scenario were to come true.

But a much more likely possibility is that the centrifugal dynamic will at some point be halted and even reversed. After a period of deep economic depression, inflation, privatisation, strikes, secession-attempts, etc, the pendulum could swing back to political and economic stabilisation in Russia, which would reassert its dominance, in a different way, over most or all of the former USSR. For the reasons outlined in "The Evolution of Interimperialist Tensions" in IP 20, p.9 (its formidable military arsenal, its land mass and resources, its history) it would once again aspire to the role of global imperialist pole, challenger of US-domination.

But in the meantime, the already considerable lead which the US now possesses both economically and militarily, would be so much larger. Even if Russian capitalism could succeed in keeping its military strength intact (which is a big "if", although so far, the armed forces show no signs of falling apart), even if it could succeed in mortally defeating the working class within its borders (which fortunately is an even bigger "if") it would be in no position to take on the US and its allies.

Even if it could forge an alliance with other economically underdeveloped countries (China, India), the match would be almost as lopsided as in the case of Iraq against the US-coalition. (Of course, Russia could use blackmail more efficiently than Saddam, given its nuclear capabilities. But blackmail isn't global war and by giving up relative autarky and putting its fate in integration in the world market, Russia became also much more vulnerable to economic retaliation). It's clear that Russia could never regain the strength to take on the US on a global scale, without an alliance with a major industrial power.

Could such an alliance occur? While history has shown that global war has been the only means through which capitalism as a global system could find a temporary way out of its global crisis, its incapacity to react globally to its contradictions is its hallmark, rooted in its very foundations. Capitalism has not created world war because it saw this as beneficial to its survival but because its economic competition took on military forms. Therefore, the question is whether the economic competition which now exists between the US, Europe and Japan could at some point become so exacerbated that war would be its inevitable extension. For the foreseeable future, such possibility seems highly unlikely. Today, the military apparatus of both Japan and Europe are but parts of a global military network controlled by the US and dependent on it. Economically, there exists an interdependence between them which is unprecedented in history. Neither the US nor

Europe and Japan could survive without access to each other markets and capital. And of course, neither of these countries is in a position to mobilize society for such a horrendous goal.

But on the longer term, the nightmare of global conflict cannot be excluded. Only the working class revolution can remove this threat.

If the present rapport de forces between the working class and the capitalist class in the industrial heartlands can be described as a stalemate, it's also clear that this stalemate cannot last. Capitalism's economic crisis is on the verge of a major deepening. The approaching worldwide depression will leave neither the rapport between the classes, nor the relations between the capitalist powers untouched.

In the coming years, the focus will likely be on the first. The attacks which the working class in the industrial countries of the West has suffered, may seem peanuts compared to what's coming. The hesitations and confusions which the working class now suffers, may give way to renewed combativity. The collapse of the false alternative of pseudo-communism, the widespread disillusion in capitalist mystifications of the left and right, may create room for a real working class perspective to emerge.

But there is also the possibility that the working class would suffer decisive defeats. If that were to occur, the focus would shift to the deadly struggle between capitalist powers. It would be foolish to try to predict what forms this would take. But to say it is possible means saying that the seeds for such a conflict exist in the present. We can see them in the way the 3 economic powerhouses are building up and protecting their zones of influence, each in its own continent. We can see them in the extra-ordinary position of the US in today's world: by far the strongest military power yet, year after year, losing economic ground to its competitors. Year after year, the US is running huge trade deficits; year after year, it is borrowing billions upon billions from its competitors, thereby piling up interest-obligations that are taking an ever larger bite out of its economy. It is far from impossible that the day will come that the US finds the situation unbearable and uses its military might to impose an economic diktat upon its competitors, one that drastically changes the rules of the game. And it's far from impossible that those on the receiving end will then look at a possible alliance with Russia with different eyes.

Again, the purpose of drawing such a scenario is not to predict the future but to point out that the future holds such drastic changes in today's parameters that what today seems unimaginable can one day be reality. Capitalism has no way out. Its future is death piled upon death, unless it's destroyed.

Sander 11/91

HOW THE CHANGES IN CAPITALISM HAVE TRANSFORMED THE MAKE-UP OF THE WORKING CLASS

World capitalism is today in the throes of the final stage of a long and complex process of transformation: the transition from the formal to the real domination of capital. This process, the bases of which were already clear to Karl Marx more than a hundred and thirty years ago, and which has still to be theoretically grasped by revolutionary Marxists today, is only being completed in our own time. The indisputable sign of just how recent is the transition from the formal to the real domination of capital can be seen in the agrarian question. As long as the vital sphere of food production remains outside the framework of capitalist production relations, as long as the production of food remains largely in the hands of a petty commodity producing peasantry, not subject to capitalist wage labor, there is not yet the real domination of capital (let alone the completion of that process). In this regard, the case of France may be instructive, as a representative of advanced capitalism in the industrial heartland of Western Europe. Fernand Braudel, in his The Identity of France, volume two, points out that it was only in 1931 (!) that the peasantry ceased to be a majority of France's population. Throughout the advanced capitalist societies of Western Europe and North America, peasants or farmers engaged in petty commodity production still constituted anywhere from 30% (in the USA) to 60% (in Italy) of the population until the 1940's. England alone had a peasant population of under 20% before 1950.

The real domination of capital, which entails the spread of the capitalist wage labor relation to every sector of production, is organically linked to the statification of capital, to the swallowing of civil society by the state. This aspect of the real domination of capital may historically proceed through Keynesian, Fascist or Stalinist forms, though its model has been the kind of fusion of state and capital provided by the USA (a model now replicated in Germany and Japan, where as in the USA, state capitalism can assume a "democratic" facade).

The real domination of capital also involves a recomposition of both the capitalist and the working classes. The former involves the elimination (gradual or brutal, depending on historico-economic

conditions) of the bourgeoisie as the functionaries of capital, and their replacement by a stratum of bureaucrats (state, corporate and intellectual) who now act as the functionaries of capital in the epoch of state capitalism. The latter involves the replacement of the blue collar, industrial proletariat (so dear to traditional Marxist theory) by what Marx termed a Gesamtarbeiter or collective worker, who constitutes the veritable source of surplus-value in the epoch of the real domination of capital.

Marx's Gesamtarbeiter is an expression of the stage of capitalism when technology -- in the form of the collective worker who develops it and wields it -- has itself become a source of surplus value. Where the Gesamtarbeiter has been created by capital, surplus-value ceases to be extracted from individual workers or even determinate groups of workers. Instead, it is the product of a collective worker, in which the earlier distinctions between blue and white collar, manual and intellectual, productive and unproductive, labor have been shattered and recomposed.

The emergence of the Gesamtarbeiter involves three inter-related phenomena.

First, a transformation of industrial production itself, in which the boundaries of skilled and unskilled, blue and white collar, labor are increasingly blurred. This phenomenon entails the obsolescence of Taylorism as the most advanced stage in the organization of the industrial labor process. Those industries organized on Taylorist lines since the 1920's, such as automobiles, are witnessing a reorganization of the labor process based on robotics and new work techniques. In the most advanced industries today, such as computers and electronics, where Taylorism never prevailed, the role of scientists, engineers and other specialists has become the basis of the activity of the collective laborer, from whom surplus value is extracted.

Second, the accumulation process of modern capitalism depends on the labor of vast numbers of workers engaged in financial, clerical and service activities. Whether these workers are employed by banks and insurance companies, work in the

financial and service departments of industrial corporations, or are employed by mammoth state agencies, they have become an integral part of the Gesamtarbeiter of capitalism in its phase of real domination. Many of these workers are engaged in unproductive labor, while the labor of others is indisputably productive; in many cases, the line between productive and unproductive labor has been redrawn. However, none of this (important though it may be to an understanding of the crisis mechanism of capital in its present phase) changes the fact that this mass of laborers are all part of the working class, a vital component of the collective worker. While such strata have always existed, even in earlier phases of capitalism, what is different today is the sheer growth in the numbers of financial, clerical and service workers over recent decades, their proportion within the working class, which has risen at a fantastic rate.

Third, the transformation of whole categories of employees, who in the past would have constituted strata of the petty bourgeoisie, into an integral part of the working class, a part of the Gesamtarbeiter. I am referring to those workers engaged in sectors such as education, health care, research and development, the applied sciences, etc., which are today a crucial component of the capitalist accumulation process, and whose labor power produces the use-values without which the process of production cannot continue. The education and training of the next generation of the working class, the health care of the worker, the development of new techniques and technologies, have all become as vital to the extraction of surplus-value as the operation of the machine at the point of production itself. Indeed, the very site of "the point of production" has been displaced by the transition to the real domination of capital, and is now to be found as much in the laboratory, the programming of the computer, the education of the worker, the care of his health, as it is in the operation of the machine that produces the product. As a result, the vast numbers of workers whose labor is necessary to prepare for and assure the extraction of surplus-value in the immediate process of production take their place as an integral part of the collective worker.

The formation of this Gesamtarbeiter, however, does not immediately eliminate the previous differentiations within the working class. Rather, as a result of the historical development of world capitalism to its phase of real domination, there now exist -- side by side -- both synchronous and non-synchronous strata of the working class. By synchronous strata, I mean those strata of the working class who are the expression of what is contemporary, modern, the product of the most advanced stage of capitalist production. Thus, the synchronous strata are those created by the completion of the transition to the real domination of

capital, those generated by the most up to date and technologically advanced organization of the production and accumulation processes. By non-synchronous strata, I mean those parts of the working class who are an expression of earlier, more primitive, stages of capitalist production, such as piece work, the Taylor system, etc. The non-synchronous strata of the working class are that part of it created, shaped and perpetuated by modes of organizing the labor process that have been historically and technologically superseded.

The development of capitalism creates new, synchronous strata of the working class, indeed a new collective worker appropriate to the phase of the real domination of capital. In so doing, however, it does not immediately (or even at all) totally eliminate those strata created by an earlier stage of capitalist production -- though it certainly reduces the socio-economic weight of such non-synchronous strata within the working class as a whole. In fact, capitalism is like a living museum in which more primitive strata of the working class, non-synchronous strata, are preserved alive, still producing surplus-value, though the phase of capitalism that first brought them into existence is long gone. For example, in Brazil today, one can still see gold mining carried on with the same basic production techniques and organization of labor as existed 200 years ago. In parts of Amazonas, thousands of "miners" drag buckets full of earth up wooden ladders dozens of times each day, paid on a piece work basis by the Patron, as if the twentieth century had never dawned. In New York today, tens of thousands of mainly immigrant (and illegal) workers labor in "sweat shops" no different from those that existed at the turn of the last century (except that today the workers speak Chinese or Spanish, while then it was Italian or Yiddish). In Thailand and Taiwan today, thousands of workers are now first being introduced to the Taylor system, in conditions little different from those that prevailed in Detroit or at FIAT Mirafiori thirty years ago. In short, today virtually every stage of capitalist production is represented to one degree or another in the global production process, and the non-synchronous strata of the working class along with them. What has changed is that those earlier modes of organizing the production process, and the strata of the working class specific to them, are no longer central to the capitalist production process, no longer the embodiment of its most advanced forms. It is the synchronous strata of the working class, the expression of its most advanced production processes, on whom the prospects for a world revolution and the advent of communism, of the human Gemeinwesen to use Marx's term, must today be based.

However, the paradox of the present situation is that it is often the non-

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Perspectives for Class Struggle in the 90's

The following article was written by E.R. of the Seattle/Vancouver Discussion Group. We share its concerns and overall thrust.

* * *

Anyone who makes it his task to assess the development and direction of the class struggle --particularly in the "advanced" countries of Europe, North America, and Australia --in the early 1990s is faced with a number of difficulties. While it is clear that the social conditions and forces which confront the class struggle today are rapidly deteriorating and becoming increasingly hostile, it is much less clear how the working class is responding and where its struggle is going.

In looking at the trends that have developed in recent years, there is one which is especially glaring, and which demands explanation if we are to be able to develop a perspective that is grounded in contemporary reality. That is the trend towards what some have called the "increasing passivity" of the working class in the face of increased attacks on living and working conditions. It cannot be denied that workers are far more reluctant to enter into open struggle than they were 15 or 20 years ago. The facts are clear : in Britain (always in the forefront of general trends in the international class struggle), from the mid-70s to the late-80s the average annual number of working days lost to strikes declined by more than 70 % (from 11.7 million to 3.1 million); while the decline is smaller in some other countries, the tendency is general to all the "advanced" countries, and it is indisputably significant. What is the explanation for this tendency ? Are workers abandoning the class struggle ? Or is the terrain of that struggle shifting away from the workplace strike towards something else ?

This problem has caused a lot of incomprehension and demoralization in many people who used to (and some of whom still do) put their faith in the class struggle to eliminate all the misery and barbarism in the world that the existing capitalist order is responsible for. "Are the workers giving up the fight ?". they ask. The answer to this question is important for all of humanity, for if it is affirmative then WW3 is all but inevitable.

In order to explain the apparent "passivity" of the working class today, we

obviously must explain why workers are increasingly reluctant to go on strike. First, a few basic truths which ought to be well known. Normally when workers go on strike it is with the intention of forcing their employer(s) to make concessions, to gain improvements or to minimize reductions. Going on strike is a risk, and there is always the possibility that the strike will not succeed. If workers are convinced that striking will not be fruitful, that nothing will be gained from doing so, then they won't do it. It is too often simply assumed that if their employer(s) "offer" (s) them conditions of employment which most workers concerned consider unsatisfactory, then they will decide to go on strike. But this assumption fails to take into account that while the workers may be strongly opposed to accepting their employer(s)' "offer", they may be convinced that there is nothing they can gain by going on strike. In fact, they may be convinced that the result of striking will be worse (perhaps significantly worse) than not striking. (Not striking of course does not preclude lesser forms of job action.)

The "normal" strike referred to above is the legal trade union organized strike engaged in during the "legal strike period" of a collective agreement when the union(s) is (are) engaged in "collective bargaining" with management representatives. These strikes are usually limited to only those workers covered by the agreement in question. (normally confined to the workers of one enterprise, or of a number of enterprises within one industry, or of a certain trade in a number of enterprises and perhaps in more than one industry). Sometimes these strikes are undertaken illegally (ie. outside of the "legal strike period" or "not according to legal procedure") and sometimes they are undertaken without union consent (ie. "wildcats"). But what they have in common with the legal strike referred to above is their essentially limited character; they remain concerned with conditions of employment and are confined to those workers covered by a specific contract. We will call strikes of this limited kind prime examples of "traditional" (some people might prefer "reformist" or "revendicative") methods of class struggle.

How, then, do we account for the increased reluctance in recent years of workers to engage in open class struggle? In our view, many workers are today in the process of learning that the "traditional"

methods of class struggle that seemed to be so effective during the 1950s, '60s, and to a lesser extent in the '70s, are effective no longer. During those years of "prosperity", workers --at least the strongest and most militant concentrations of them --could engage in limited struggles through legal trade union negotiating procedures and gain modest improvements in wages, benefits, and (occasionally) working conditions. Even then, though, rapidly rising costs of living and relentless attempts by employers to speed up work processes and otherwise raise productivity by imposing more difficult working conditions, quickly eroded these gains and forced workers to return again and again to the open struggle. Now (in fact, for a number of years), more and more workers are realizing those days are gone. They know the basic reason for this "new reality" is the severity of the economic crisis -- not just the current recession, but a chronic crisis --the increasingly bleak circumstances capitalism everywhere today is facing. This has been going on for a number of years, and, undoubtedly, growing numbers of workers will develop this understanding in the next few years, as the economic crisis reaches unprecedented depths. What workers have learned is that the sort of strikes and struggles that succeeded 15 or 20 years ago invariably fail today. While some of the most powerful sections of workers can make occasional wages and benefits gains, these end up turning into losses as living costs continue to rise, and they come at the cost of worsening working conditions and layoffs for those with the least seniority or at not sufficiently profitable workplaces. These are the "fortunate" ones. The draw is that it "doesn't pay" any more to strike or struggle in the way that they successfully did during the post WW2 "boom".

Now, if this right, then an increasing number of workers are going through a process of difficult reflection --the results of which are not easily detectable --about their future, about what they can do to prevent their living conditions and (for those still with jobs) their working conditions from deteriorating even further. They know that international competition has become so intense (and shows no sign of abating), forcing all employers to drastically reduce their production costs in order to remain sufficiently profitable, that almost every company today will threaten to "close up shop" and eliminate all its employees if workers don't accept managements's "offer" of a large reduction (often over 30 %) of the workforce and either wage cuts or freezes (for a 2 or 3 year contract). By now everyone knows these threats are not idle. If workers say "no", and go out on strike (using the "traditional" methods referred to above), then they will likely all be dismissed (whether the company moves to set up shop elsewhere --usually in another country --or goes out of business altogether --to get

into another one of course). No wonder workers are increasingly reluctant to go out on strike or otherwise engage in "traditional" methods of class struggle !

If this is a generally valid interpretation of the apparent "passivity" of the working class today, what must be asked, then, is what sort of conclusions workers are drawing from their understanding that "the good old days" are gone. As of yet, we really can't say -- at least not with any justified confidence. Part of the problem is that many workers are still unsure whether the current "bad times" are only temporary or not. This lack of confidence or certainty about the future leads to a kind of inertia, hesitation, or "wait and see" attitude, a tendency which is becoming increasingly prevalent. Because of this, it is still too early to justifiably claim (on the basis of the generalized decline in number of strikes) that most workers have concluded that not only the traditional, limited or partial strike (and collateral forms and methods of struggle) no longer "pay", but that class struggle itself, as a whole, is no longer worth engaging in; and thus that we can no longer afford to resist, but must on the contrary willingly agree to all the demands that the bosses, the unions, the media and the politicians make of us. This would be to conclude that what's good for capital -- not just this company or that, since virtually any might go under, but all capital that could conceivably play a role in providing employment -- is good for workers, or at least, is good for oneself. While there are undoubtedly are -- just as there always have been -- some workers who hold this view, there is no convincing evidence that a significant number of workers in the "advanced" countries who previously were active supporters of strikes to defend or improve wages, benefits, and/or working conditions have reached this general, defeatist conclusion.

For those members of the working class who have not given up on the class struggle, some very difficult choices are (or soon will be) facing them. The problem is: what can be done to prevent a drastic reduction in our conditions of life and work? Is there anything that can be done? Since part of their profits depend on working class spending on consumer commodities, the ruling capitalist class is obviously doing (and will continue to do, in the years to come) everything in its power to prevent working class living standards from declining significantly. However, it is one of the fundamental contradictions of the capitalist system in its period of historical decline that the imperative for each unit of capital to remain competitive on the world market -- an imperative which demands a relentless lowering of productions costs -- leads inescapably to a continuous lowering of working class living standards. (And it goes without saying that the more this tendency plays itself out, against all the counter-

measures the capitalist state implements, the further into irreversible crisis the world capitalist system sinks.) It is this contradiction (which revolutionary Marxism alone is capable of articulating and explaining) that we are seeing realized in all its devastating (in)human consequences today in every corner of the planet dominated by capital.

Given the temporary "prosperity" that the working class was able to obtain between the end of WW2 and the 1970s (at the cost of tens of millions of their class brothers' and sisters' lives), it is understandable that many workers have been willing to "wait and watch", to see to what extent the ruling class is capable of preventing living standards from falling. In exchange for promises by bosses, unions, and politicians, workers have thus far been extraordinarily patient and have put up with enormous sacrifices -- not however, without a bitter fight. As was noted above, however, it appears that increasing number of workers in all countries are (quietly) beginning to realize that the ruling class can do little or nothing to prevent living conditions from continuing to deteriorate (for those with and those without jobs)...to no apparent end. The corollary to this conclusion, as was also noted above, is that the traditional, limited, trade union-type strike (and associated sorts of struggle) is no longer worth fighting. The problem, then, is : where do we go from here?

TOWARDS A NEW STAGE

"It could very well be that we are today at a juncture of two periods : the period in which the proletariat struggled bravely but full of illusions in the viability of the existing economic order and the period in which the proletariat's own perspectives are beginning to emerge." (IP No. 16, p. 23) So what are the choices facing workers ? It should be clear from what has been argued here that these choices are historic. Ultimately, they are concerned with the question of what to do when confronted with the historic, undeniable bankruptcy of the economic-social system which throughout this century has been responsible for the means and mode by which humanity (led coercively by the bourgeoisie in each country) has attempted to provide itself with the means of material life. Such a question is obviously very difficult to openly face up to. The consequences are so frightening that most workers will probably do everything they can do avoid it, until they can no longer deny that the reality which the existing order is bound to provide (if it persists) is at least as bad as any consequences of attempting to overthrow that order and replace it with something else. Only then will they be convinced of the need to finally give up on, and therefore break decisively with, capitalism and its defenders.

It would seem that the process of facing

up to and trying to answer this question -- that is, the rate at which this process develops within the working class -- is linked closely to the rate at which overall working class living conditions deteriorate. Of course, there are a number of other factors involved in this process, including the actual extent to which living conditions decline generally, the degree to which the ruling class is able to keep the working class divided (passively or actively) on the basis of differing standards of living and working conditions as well as with the usual ideological mystifications, and the degree to which the working class is able to collectively confront this question as a distinct class and to elaborate in practice its own revolutionary perspective. It certainly doesn't make things any easier that there are no political parties or well known organizations available to assist the working class in this process. As a result, workers today must take it upon themselves (with the help only of tiny revolutionary groups, insofar as workers become aware of them and recognize them as their own) to begin raising and working out these historic questions.

As long as the bourgeoisie is able to maintain a gradual, drawn out decline of working class living conditions, the process of the development of revolutionary class consciousness will likely be a very difficult one. Any room to manoeuvre which our rulers find themselves with, they will use to hold back this development. One such method --which has thus far proven itself to be of great value-- they will continue to use as long as they can to keep alive illusions in the possibility of improvements, and at the same time to keep workers divided, is to offer concessions (whether actual gains or only minimal reductions) to those workers who are the most militant and essential to the "smooth" functioning of the economy. In this way they will hope to: 1) keep these most combative concentrations of workers contained within the relatively safe confines of isolated, limited, trade unionist struggles; 2) demonstrate to the rest of the class that "it is still possible to prevent reductions in living standards and working conditions" and that it is still possible to make "traditional", trade unionist methods of struggle "pay"; and 3) maximize divisions within the class, not just over conditions of life and work, but, more importantly, concerning consciousness of what is still possible within capitalism and what kind of struggle is becoming increasingly necessary. The last thing the ruling class wants is homogeneity in our living conditions and social circumstances, since that would only foster homogenization -- and thus unification -- of our struggles and our consciousness.

Until clear options begin to emerge, in practice, and as long as workers remain reluctant to engage in limited, partial strikes, there will be a very real danger of

the growth within their ranks of demoralization, of nihilism, and of various reactionary ideologies (some of which will involve certain barbaric "solutions"). During this period of "apparently death-like peace" (Rosa Luxemburg), the bourgeoisie will likely gain the confidence that it can "get away with" (ie. impose on the working class) what it never would have dreamed of only 10 or 15 years ago. And it will likely be in response to the bourgeoisie's attempt to impose a massive, generalized attack on the working class that workers will resist on a scale and to a degree that (atleast for those involved) they never have before. While such a struggle will likely be dominated by all sorts of illusions and confusions, it will just as likely be in the wake of its failure that the practical elaboration of a revolutionary perspective begins to emerge on a relatively widespread scale in today's working class.

The strike is still the basic weapon of the working class struggle. Even if the partial, limited strike is no longer effective, that does not mean that all forms of strike action are now impotent. There is a risk that significant numbers of workers will, nevertheless, be led to conclude that the strike in general is no longer of any value. Of course, this result will only be achieved if the ruling class can convince these workers that, as bad as life in this society is becoming, there is no real alternative, that the only hope for a better future lies in a new set of policies and a new team in government or else a "just war" to eliminate a foreign enemy who is supposedly responsible for the major problems afflicting this society. However, we know from the historical experience of the class struggle in this century that under certain circumstances the working class tends to engage in the mass strike; and that the mass strike "...is not artificially 'made', not 'decided' at random, not 'propagated', but that it is a historical phenomenon which, at a given moment, results from social conditions with historical inevitability" (Rosa Luxemburg, The Mass Strike) --as long, that is, as the working class has not first been historically, decisively defeated by the bourgeoisie and mobilized for the latter's proposed "solution" to the crisis. Prominent amongst the social conditions which give rise to the mass strike is the inadequacy of all lesser, limited or partial forms of struggle as a means of basic working class self-defence. While the occurrence of the mass strike does not depend on workers' prior understanding of the need for it, there are, nonetheless, many workers today who are aware of the occurrence of mass strikes in our time (from France 1968 to Poland 1980, as well as lesser instances such as Denmark in 1985 and Belgium in 1986), who understand the great potential that they contain.

It is not being suggested here that the mass strikes which next occur will be openly "offensive", consciously revolutionary

uprisings. On the contrary, as Rosa Luxemburg emphasized, and as history since then has confirmed, the mass strike invariably originates as a means of self-defence. It becomes "massive" because of the conditions of life and work of the class are worsening on a generalized scale, across all divisions of trade, economic sector, and geographic location, and the need for active self-defence which impels the first section of the class to take strike action is directly identified with by other, larger groups of workers, who then decide to join in.

However, what is being suggested here is that workers will enter into the coming mass strikes with fewer illusions in the possibility of actually preventing (for more than a short period of time) their living and working conditions from deteriorating -- as long as the existing order isn't overthrown, that is --than they have since before WW2. What is being suggested is that significant sections of the class are today going through a process of "subterranean" (ie. not publicly visible) maturation of class consciousness which will lead them, when they are next compelled to enter into active, collective self-defence, to, first and foremost, understand more or less clearly the necessity to move immediately beyond the limited, isolated strike. Whatever ideas they have when they embark on such a course of action about what they will be able to achieve (and there is likely to be a significant difference of opinion about this), the realization and consolidation of the mass strike will result from the relatively clear understanding that anything less will without doubt end in complete failure.

And once the mass strike erupts -- assuming what has been hypothesized here is more or less accurate --then its development and evolution will likely lead to an open, widespread, qualitative advance in class consciousness. It is during this period, and in its aftermath, that the force of events will clarify for large sections of the class that they really are confronted with the absolute, historical bankruptcy of the existing social order and consequently with the need to overthrow it. What will force this clarification to take place is not only that their basic demands for the maintenance (or minimized decline) of their living conditions will not be met, and that they will be openly, collectively forced to realize that the bourgeoisie is not able to meet those demands, but--more importantly -- that the power they possess when they act together to impose their collective will on the ruling class and on all of society is enormous, in fact, far greater than most had ever imagined. This will result in a massive advance in both the extend and the depth of questioning in the class of various problems --problems which will come to be regarded as eminently practical and positively urgent. Questions such as: How to achieve the active

unification of the class on as wide a scale as possible? What will it take to overthrow the existing order? What exactly is it that needs to be overthrown? Is this a global problem or something less? How best to minimize the violence and needless destruction in this process? Just who can we count on as allies and who are our enemies? And just what are we to put in place of the existing order? Are there, in fact, distinct, real alternatives? Etc.

Whether or not their struggle is able to qualitatively advance in these circumstances will depend essentially on the ability of the class to provide coherent, historically valid answers to these questions in practice, and thereby to develop a viable revolutionary perspective for the entire world working class. There can be no guarantees against inadequate answers being taken up and false "solutions" being pursued. The ruling class will do everything in its power to mislead, to confuse, to divide, and to derail workers' attempts at collective clarification. In particular, and as in the past, all sorts of leftist and pacifist organizations, groups, and "celebrity leaders" will step forth to present themselves as "genuine representatives of the workers", to announce that they possess the answers (and therefore that workers must support their attempts to attain a position in the power structure, whether this is explicitly proclaimed or not). We can expect to see the unions significantly radicalize their image (in order not to lose their power and influence), for faction fights between "corrupt leaders and hierarchies" and "rank and file union democrats" to proliferate, and perhaps even for new "self-managed" and "revolutionary" unions to come into being. Workers will have to directly confront and work their way through all these attempts to hold them back, to confuse them and lead them into dead-ends --they will need to come to clearly recognize that all these "radical alternatives" offer nothing but defeat to the struggle to eradicate the capitalist world order.

In the struggle for revolutionary clarification, some sections of the class will see through the lies and mystifications of the left and the rest of the political apparatus of capital and discover the means necessary to realize the revolution before others. But because the revolution demands that the whole working class becomes sufficiently conscious of what we must do, those workers who first develop this clarity will have to understand that it is incumbent on them to reach out to the rest of the class with the understanding they have developed and the perspective they are in the process of actively elaborating. In this way, they can become a decisive factor in accelerating the development of revolutionary consciousness throughout the class, throughout the world. To do this, the most determined and far-sighted of them will have to organize themselves separately on a

political basis to publicize their perspective and spread their ideas. Finally, everyone --whether they are a member of a political group or not --who set themselves the task of being a dynamic factor in the revolutionary process will have to prepare themselves for the coming confrontations and the influence on them they can have if they are able to develop their understanding of the rapidly changing world situation and of what role in the class struggle they are capable of playing. To do this, they will have to abandon those conceptions from the past which are no longer applicable and raise themselves to the level demanded by the role they aspire to fulfill, and to increase their efforts towards international co-operation, clarification and unification. E.R.

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Leeds

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existence of a proletarian political milieu potentially represents, and of the unfettered political discussion that must animate it, the CBG and IP are determined to continue to pursue this opening, which has already born some fruit, even if we must not underestimate all the obstacles that must still be surmounted.

When one measures the amplitude of the need that exists in the proletarian milieu for a real political opening, one cannot fail to be struck by the disastrous attitude of the ICC which exhausted what little credibility it still had left. Avoiding all political discussion, its representative contented himself with denouncing the meeting that was taking place and asserting that it had no reason to occur! It is more and more clear that this very attitude has played its poisonous role in sowing the mistrust, backbiting and sectarianism that has had so disastrous an impact on the revolutionary milieu over the past period.

But such crap will no longer pay. And organizations that embody such practices will no longer be able to prevent the re-emergence of authentic working class political expressions. The Leeds meeting also made that clear; even if it was only the stammering of revolutionaries that marks a new beginning.

The "Anti-Sectarian" Sectarianism of the ICC

No one in the revolutionary milieu can claim to have really foreseen the present situation. Since its inception, our Fraction has defended the idea that the revolutionary program is not a "finished product" that can simply be grafted onto today's reality in the form of conjunctural analyses and convenient recipes for class struggle. The truth of this assertion has been amply demonstrated by the events of recent years. What may not have been so clear when we first stated it has become obvious today : if the revolutionary milieu wants to carry out its historic task, it must be able to renew and revitalize marxism, re-examine its tenets, get rid of schematism, and search for fresh answers to the many questions arising from a reality that has vastly changed since revolutionary theory was first elaborated. No group can carry out this task on its own. More than ever, the revolutionary milieu needs fraternal debate, real openness to what others are thinking. It must be obvious by now that no one organization can continue to act as if it possesses all wisdom and truth.

But this is far from obvious to the ICC. More than ever, this organization acts like the sole owner of revolutionary truth, jealously guarding its "possessions" against the competition. If it discusses the thought of any other organization, it is only to indulge in name-calling orgies. In International Review #64 for instance, it managed to call us, in the space of less than a page, "crazy", "ignorant", "ridiculous", "mentally confused", "pathological", "absurd" and "stupid" (five times), ending, as usual, with the wishful thought that we should die very soon. Its main concern seems to be to prove that it has never made a mistake, that it is always right, that it foresaw everything and that all other groups are idiots.

Yet even the ICC seems to feel that there is something vaguely pathetic about the sectarianism of a milieu that is so weak (the ICC included), so manifestly falling short of its

promise, so obviously in dire need of real debate. So it decided that once again a grand Statement was called for : a solemn "Appeal to the Proletarian Political Milieu", reprinted in all its publications, to cast aside the scourge of sectarianism. Does the ICC really believe that this is enough to cover up the many symptoms of this disease in its own body?

We have to admit that the Statement sounds quite positive. The ICC says that "it is necessary to facilitate everything that works towards increasing contacts and debate among internationalists" and takes aim at "those who say the debate must only include groups coming from the Communist Left of Italy... ..those who see the debate only as a way to annihilate other groups...those who think that real debate won't be possible until a pre-revolutionary phase...and those who are open to discussion only with newcomers and not with 'old-timers'". We can only applaud this critique of all sorts of excuses for avoiding debate and perpetuating sectarianism. But "in cauda venenum", -- the sting is in the tail. In a footnote, the ICC excluded from any debate "the myriad of little groups" which it deems "parasitical". In a milieu which consists entirely of "little groups", to exclude "a myriad" of them is an act of breathtaking sectarianism indeed. Now, just who are these "parasitical groups"? Those who, in the judgment of the ICC, "gravitate parasitically around the major currents". The ICC seems to see the milieu like a capitalist company sees its potential market. It has a cartel-view of this market. It sees enough room for itself and the Bordighists, two companies with a supposedly recognizable brand-name. But the rest are just parasites and must quickly disappear. No debate, please. The ICC says disappear.

It's easy to write, as the ICC does in its Appeal, that "even if there are only two organizations who meet to publically discuss their agreements and divergences, that, in itself, would represent a step forward for the whole milieu and we would support it with conviction". But what do these fine words mean in actual practice? In early December, we co-organized a Public Meeting in Leeds (UK) on the events in Eastern Europe and their implications for revolutionaries. Apart from ourselves, there were members of the CWO (Communist Workers' Organization), the CBG (Communist Bulletin Group), "Subversion", "Partito Comunista" and others. After the initial presentation, the representative of the ICC rose to denounce the meeting for being organized by "gangsters" and "parasites" and to say that only the ICC understood the present world situation. Then he left. The real discussion could begin.

ERRATA

In IP #20, in the article "The New Clothes Of Russian Capitalism", the last 28 lines of the left hand column on page 3, beginning with "'workers on the streets..." through the end of that column, should start the page, i.e. appear at the top of the left hand column.

Public Meeting

The Bases for Debate in the Revolutionary Movement

Last December 14, IP and the CBG (Communist Bulletin Group) held a public meeting together in Leeds, England devoted to the analysis of the overall international situation.

For our two groups, this meeting had as its objective the concretization and development of the whole dynamic of political clarification and rapprochement that had occurred over the preceding months.

In effect, many difficulties and misunderstandings had hindered this process. This is one more sign of the overall difficulties that the present period -- marked by an incapacity of the proletariat to affirm its own social project -- engenders within the proletarian political milieu. For that milieu, the very maintenance of revolutionary activity, even on a reduced scale, is an accomplishment. In recent issues of IP, we have spoken of these problems at length.

Animated by a real concern to break out of sterile patterns and to overcome the weaknesses that we had encountered in the milieu, we saw the holding of a joint public meeting as a way to make tangible our capacity to carry on work together with the CBG. This would also constitute a basis for further and even more fruitful contacts between our groups. That is so because the bases for a real rapprochement between our groups and a genuine common activity in the future could only be prepared through a living and ongoing practice of discussion. In that way, we could seek to better elaborate and work out the theoretical analyses, as well as delimiting the practice and revolutionary perspectives flowing from them, that are still generated separately by our two groups.

The success of the December 14 meeting, the capacity of our two groups to create a framework for the confrontation of even the most opposed revolutionary perspectives (such as those concerning the historic course in the midst of which we find ourselves, or the interpretation of the events in Eastern Europe) demonstrated the soundness of the initiative and the absolute necessity to continue this type of activity in opposition to any tendency to retreat into isolation.

The importance of the political presence of a number of groups at the public meeting (IP, the CBG, the Communist Workers Organization (CWO), Subversion, the ICC, and a Bordigist, together with the seriousness and fraternity with which each participated (with the exception of the ICC, of which more later) made a number of things clear.

First, the vital need which exists in the proletarian milieu to break the growing isolation that has characterized the past several years, and which has been accentuated by the present historical context. It is urgent that we break with the sectarian spirit which has led a goodly number of groups to become a veritable caricature of a revolutionary organization, while others stand poised on the edge of political extinction; we must overcome the fear of political debate which leads to a practice of systematic denigration of any other component of the milieu than one's own. Second, the real possibility of responding to this need, of constituting a framework for frank and open discussion, which is the essential condition for really embodying revolutionary perspectives and of opening a breach in the wall constituted by the dominant ideology.

It is more and more clear that if it simply wants to survive, the revolutionary milieu has no other choice than to break with its sectarian and sterile habits, for which it is paying an extremely heavy price: A growing incapacity for theoretical activity and genuine revolutionary practice; enormous difficulty, if not incapacity, in situating the events of the past several years (the imperialist balance of forces, the passivity of the proletariat, etc.) within a framework that can make coherent the global evolution of capitalism. This heavy price that the milieu is paying was also felt in the course of our public meeting at Leeds -- and that in spite of the good will of most of the participants. As much as the attitude of the participants could only inspire enthusiasm by virtue of its break with past practices, so too did the weakness of the actual debate demonstrate the effects of the milieu's inability to elaborate a coherent analysis of the whole of the present period. This failing involves the understanding of inter-imperialist antagonisms, of the balance of forces between capital and the working class -- in short, the very foundations of our revolutionary activity which demands a growing theoretical clarity. At the moment, that is far from the case. Divergences on the present historic course, on the situation of the proletariat, which must be reexamined in the light of recent events and the mistaken analyses of the past, remain enormous and require a collective theoretical effort that is just as great.

Conscious of the importance that the

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DEBATE ON THE PERIOD OF TRANSITION

Beyond Wage Labour: Distribution in a Post-Capitalist Society

Since 1988, "Internationalist Perspective" has opened its columns to a debate on the perspectives for communism. What's at issue, is the question of the period of transition beginning with the proletarian revolution. To start off this debate, we published a text of historical value by comrade Mitchell that had been written in the framework of the earlier debate carried on within the Communist Left in the 1930's. (see IP #11 and 12)

In IP #14, Mac Intosh continued the discussion by publishing critical notes a propos that debate between the Italian left and the GIK (Dutch left). Since then, within IP, we have continued this debate. Now, we are publishing the contribution of comrade R.C.

Recent events have in a certain sense made clear just how acute is this discussion on the perspectives for communism. The opening of the Russian capitalist market to

the intrusion of Western capital points up the correctness of the analysis provided by the Communist Left around "Bilan", and taken up today by the main revolutionary groups, including the EFICC, on the capitalist nature of the relations of production in Stalinist and post-Stalinist Russia.

Mitchell's text had already insisted on that point, and posed the problem of the disappearance of the law of value, which is essential to the functioning of a non-capitalist economy. But the really vital question is to see how the elimination of the law of value can in fact be brought about.

R.C.'s text is inscribed in this debate by virtue of its defense of the theory of "labor vouchers" or "coupons" proposed by the GIK. This debate will continue in future issues of our revue. We invite other comrades to contribute to it.

Since the 1920's, revolutionaries have been deeply concerned about the problems of the period of transition following a successful working-class revolution; each new contribution has led to heated debate. Such was the case when the GIK (Group of International Communists) in Holland published its Basic Principles of Communist Production and Distribution. The text was criticized by Mitchell in the pages of Bilan (the publication of the Italian Left in exile in the 1930's) in his article, "Problems of the Period of Transition", written in 1936-7. By reprinting this article in I.P. # 11 and # 12 with a critique in # 13, Internationalist Perspective has tried to reawaken this debate.

Despite the fact that the GIK's contribution was inspired by the most authentic marxist principles, it suffered the same fate as Rosa Luxemburg's work, The Accumulation of Capital, sixteen years earlier. There is reason to fear that the critics of the GIK have not understood the full theoretical scope of their contribution. They have mistakenly confused the GIK's concept of labor vouchers with the concept of hourly wage coupons dear to Bray and Daimons in the 19th century. But the comrades of the GIK were too well aware of Marx's critiques of Bray and Daimons to make such an error.

Proudhon, who was Bray's disciple, defended the notion of hourly coupons which were sup-

posed to be labor-money. With these hourly coupons, Proudhon wanted to tame the law of value and the industrial crises which brought bankruptcies and unemployment. His goal was a workers' capitalism without bosses, without social or economic contradictions. Workers would be able to deposit their coupons in the "People's Bank" and then withdraw an equal amount of any product the bank contained. These coupons would circulate in the economy and be used as a means of exchange; they could be accumulated and used for paying wages in exchange for labor power which would remain a commodity. Thus, the economy would still be based on value production. Marx attacked this concept mercilessly calling it a fraud. (See the Grundrisse)

Marx was no utopian. He was always concerned about the problem of keeping accounts in the new society. Every society has to project its future needs in terms of production and distribution. Marx spoke of "labor vouchers", an idea he picked up from Robert Owen but he based himself on studies of commodities and money and on the critique of Ricardo's theories of surplus value. Marx thought that after money capital had disappeared, the new society could use labor vouchers which would no longer be money and could not be circulated. (Capital, Bk II, Part 3)

In socialized production, this labor vou-

cher would only be a certificate showing each person's individual share in the product of common labor. It is clear that "remuneration" of labor would still exist but labor, and not capital, would become the mediation between the individual and society : the voucher is the recognition of one's participation in social life. Granted, the labor voucher still measures value but only in order to gradually abolish it. The law of value persists but in altered form. This would be a necessary stage, and its disappearance would be linked to the disappearance of social classes themselves.

Workers would be able to use their labor vouchers only once to collect consumer goods from the social reserves representing the quantity of their labor. If the voucher is not used, it becomes worthless because it cannot be exchanged or accumulated. "Owen's labor voucher has as little in common with money as a theatre ticket." (Capital, Bk I, Ch 3)

The Italian left had its shortcomings but federalism and self-management schemes for capital were not among them. Yet they regarded labor vouchers favorably although they preferred to call the vouchers "ration cards".

If labor vouchers do not correspond to the needs of the period of transition and cannot be used as an instrument to destroy the law of value, then we must conclude, like Bernstein, Sorel and Graziadei, that Marx's theories on the law of value are mistaken.

The GIK did not defend any sort of federalism for the period of transition but this did not apparently stop their critics from accusing them of doing just that. The GIK's members were people who had organized the left communist parties in Holland and Germany where for a while they had grown to mass proportions. The GIK knew very well that production and distribution in the period of transition would have to take place in a centralized way. In the structures they wrote about, the producers were masters of the productive forces on the central level where real economic life takes place. The GIK wrote, "Since modern technology already makes all the different companies interdependent, the revolution must weld them together." (Basic Principles)

Contrary to the claims of their critics, for whom there is never enough "centralism", the GIK had a unitary view of the process of social labor. For them, even in the lower stage of communism, all workplaces would be an integral part of the overall process of production and distribution. Every workplace would carry out a part of the work necessary to meet society's needs. Total social production would involve the cooperation of all. No workplace would exist in isolation, cut off from the rest.

The ICC's attacks on the GIK are, in our opinion, null and void. They bear too much of the imprint of the "Bolshevik-style" of polemic. For the sake of clarity in the debate, it would have been better if I.P. had printed

Hennault's scrupulous summary of the GIK's work (also published in Bilan in 1935-6) before reprinting Mitchell's critique. That would have made it clear that the critiques of the ICC and others against the GIK are seriously flawed.

The GIK's critics always seem to hide behind the argument that the political struggle of the proletariat takes precedence over economic tasks or any other concern. This shot misses its intended target. Far from rejecting the political struggle, the GIK saw politics and economics as dialectically united and inseparable. Although this is clear to any honest reader of their text, the ICC apparently prefers to trumpet the same accusations as the bordigists who dismiss the GIK as "anarchists".

The ICC got so carried away with its concern for the primacy of politics that it ended up forgetting why the proletariat has to take over political power in the first place. Its theoretician RV focuses on the political process of the proletarian revolution while ignoring all the economic issues that must be dealt with. In fact, he is separating the world revolution from its final goal of communism. He is just repeating the errors of Social Democracy which made the same separation between "politics" and "economics" although emphasizing the economic aspect. All of RV's "marxist" wisdom boils down to one simple thought : political power is all that counts. That politics rests on economic foundations, he seems to have forgotten. Councilists have fetishized the form of wildcat strikes to the point of sinking into a sort of economic cretinism. RV, on the other hand, fetishizes political forms and falls into the opposite, political cretinism.

Before they disbanded to regroup in the ICC, some revolutionary groups clearly raised the problem of the economic tasks of the period of transition. But these points were buried under a flood of purely political considerations. The question was never seriously discussed. The pamphlet of the ICC on the period of transition deals only with the question of the State and never with the social character of this period. With a convenient use of the argument of economic materialism, the ICC condemned any attempt to describe communist society in detail as a utopian effort. Its exclusive focus on political primacy was not without consequences for the task of theoretical development. After many detours to avoid the question, it finally recognized that the period of transition implied a social transformation. But, as though pursued by some devil, the ICC later took the occasion to return once again to this question of the State in the transitional period only to tell the working class to take political power and accept... wages!

It's no small paradox that the ICC and unfortunately also some comrades of I.P. reject labor vouchers because they are too "individualistic" and "technically impractical" only to accept money in the period of

transition, as an instrument of measure as well as a means of circulation. This is just like the German Social-Democrats, Kautsky and Co. What a wonderful perspective! What a great step forward for revolutionary theory!

This idea goes totally against the views of Marx who was against wages in the period of transition. Such flirting with Social-Democratic economic theories can hardly be considered a contribution to marxism. Compared to this, one cannot ignore the breakthrough in revolutionary thinking represented by people such as Appel, Korsch and Pannekoek. Not because their words are holy writ but because their work contains so many insights.

The concept of labor vouchers defended by the GIK is much closer to the spirit and the theoretical continuity of Marx. The GIK said nothing different from Marx on the transition period. But it developed his work further by giving a primary role to the workers' councils in the social transformations of that period. This was a real advance for marxist thinking. Mitchell, in his critique of the GIK, said nothing at all about workers' councils. He preferred to emphasize the role of the class party. For him, the party was the visible incarnation of class consciousness and it should, therefore, be the leader of the dictatorship of the proletariat. In this vein, Mitchell had little to say against Lenin, the New Economic Policy (the NEP) in 1921 or the state capitalism it developed under the banner of socialism.

It was the GIK that condemned the growth of state capitalism in Russia. Mitchell couldn't because even in 1939, he still considered the "USSR" a workers' state in the grip of Stalinist "centrism". As Bricanier remarked in his book, Pannekoek and the Workers' Councils, Mitchell viewed the contributions of the GIK the way a radical Bolshevik would. So does the ICC!

But today we should be able to make a serious study of the Basic Principles of Communist Production and Distribution. Like Pannekoek, the GIK defended the key idea that the economy of the period of transition must be based on an accounting unit : an hour of socially average labor time.

Once the workers have taken political power in their own hands, any appropriation of the fruits of other people's labor, any exploitation of man by man, is over and done with. But since an important part of what is produced must go to the social fund, no worker can expect to receive, in the form of goods and services, the exact equivalent of what his quantum of labor represents. He receives from society a voucher which states that he has contributed a certain number of labor hours from which a part is deducted to replenish and improve the social fund. With this voucher, he withdraws from the social storehouse a quantity of consumer goods corresponding to the labor he has furnished.

This is the phase of lower communism or the

formal domination of communism. The worker obtains an individual share of social production, regardless of his "qualifications". He no longer receives a wage to buy increasingly useless and alienating consumer goods. Working for a wage -- so much money for so much work -- exists no more. There are no more wages expressing the capitalist commodity, labor power, because the means of production now belong to the community as a whole. Labor power is no longer bought and sold for money. It is no longer a commodity which later on in the market will represent so much meat, butter, books or tapes.

Both the GIK and the Italian Left carried on where Marx left off and tried to explain how production and consumption could be organized in the society of lower communism. What distinguished them is the fact that the German-Dutch Left emphasized the role of workers' councils, while the Italian Left stressed the centralization of the new way of producing and consuming. But for both these currents, even if the law of value were no longer operating, there would still be an accounting problem in the new society, as Marx himself pointed out. "No type of society can prevent socially necessary labor time from regulating production in one way or another" (Letter to Engels, 1868). Marx wrote about labor vouchers in all his writings on the subject; this was then taken up by Lenin in State and Revolution and later by the German-Dutch Left and the Italian Left.

Transitional society may indeed be able to eliminate capital but manna will not miraculously fall from the heavens. There must be a norm to regulate society's production and distribution. The marxist thesis, which holds that distribution depends on production, will be confirmed here : by completely reworking the way it produces, society will change the way it consumes. Bray, Gray and Proudhon with their "hourly coupons" got things backwards.

The new society should use socially necessary labor time as the accounting unit to determine the share that the individual producer/consumer will receive. This is collective labor time, the labor time of freely associated labor, used not to divide up the profits of a business, but to satisfy the essential needs of the producers. Labor time will serve as a way of distributing consumer goods. As we have said, value will no longer exist in the new society; only the concrete length of time will count. Individual work will be cooperative right from the outset. Producers will no longer compete with other producers to arrive at the value of their labor through exchange.

Because there will be cooperative production, labor exerted in production will be counted directly by the number of hours, with all hours reduced to the same value : one hour of a bricklayer will equal one hour of an engineer. One hour of work in any given sector will be equal to one hour of work in any other sector; one hour of work in one country will equal one hour of work in any other country. Labor always involves time and energy

(physical, nervous, intellectual energy) but it will no longer be labor power as a commodity whose value has been fixed as a wage (in other words, the value of the consumer goods necessary for the production, maintenance and renewal of labor power).

In capitalist society, complex or higher labor is seen as the expression of labor power whose formative costs, measured in money, are greater than those involved in the formation necessary for simple labor. For capitalism, one hour of a dentist's labor is worth eight hours of a ditchdigger's labor because the former studied for a long time while the latter was thrown on the labor market as early as possible. But this kind of hierarchy must be done away with in communism, even in the "lower communism" characteristic of the beginning stages of the new society. Along with the socialization of the productive forces and their use for the satisfaction of social needs and not profit, all human work will be equal. Socialism clearly means reducing complex labor to average social labor time just as it also means working to resolve the opposition between productive and unproductive labor. In communism we will no longer have to deal with the capitalist categories of complex or simple labor, productive or unproductive labor.

The time of the slaves with gilded chains will be over, the time when the cleverest of the wage slaves sold themselves at a higher price than the others. The high incomes that produce and maintain social classes will be ended. Yes, equal "remuneration" for simple and complex labor will be a powerful incentive working towards the gradual disappearance of the social divisions of labor.

All work projects will be complementary, discussed and decided upon by the collectivity. No one will sell his labor or the products of his labor to anyone else. No one will alienate labor because private property will have disappeared. A class that controls the means of production does not sell its own labor power to itself. Individually and collectively, workers will make the means of production they have socialized work to their advantage. Labor power will no longer have a value or a cost of production and reproduction; labor power will cease to be a commodity. The socialization of the means of production not only allows the suppression of exchange values but also eliminates wages because wages are simply exchange relations between buyers and sellers of labor power.

In the new society, factories, services, and transportation will all belong to the collectivity of the workers. The autonomy of these sectors will be ended and they will become part of the production and distribution decisions of the producers' collectivity. The proletarian revolution does not mean the conquest of the factory and then its autonomous management, as certain "councilists" may have originally thought. The enemy is not the boss at the head of the factory unit but the capitalist system itself. We

cannot return to some dream of medieval artisans and guilds or to some sort of separate "economic democracy" for each factory.

With systematic accounting, the collectivity of the workers will be able to compare their results to the original plan, honestly and with no tricks. The workers will become freely associated labor with an overall view of what has to be done and what is being done, including the needs of the health and education sectors. With this conscious and objective control, the alienation of man due to his separation from the means of production will gradually disappear and human beings can truly flourish. Society will have no idlers or parasites.

It will be "give and you shall receive", a certain amount of work for a certain amount of goods and services. Everyone who has worked the same number of hours will receive the same amount of goods.

In terms of distribution, the use of labor vouchers is a way of dividing the social product according to the work furnished by each producer while strictly maintaining the proletarian principle that "if you don't work, you don't eat". The labor certificate simply states the amount of work an individual producer contributed and, therefore, the share of social consumer products the individual is entitled to. A producer receives from society what he or she has given to it, regardless of whether it was "complex" or "simple" work because society will no longer be organized as a hierarchy.

From public storehouses, the collectivity will distribute among itself all of the social product, apart from deducting what is necessary for social funding. This distribution will not go through a marketplace and it will not be regulated by sales; it is direct. Money, the general equivalent of goods, will disappear ipso facto with the disappearance of value and exchange. Labor vouchers do not measure any mercantile value and cannot be transformed into value. A flower pot or a piano will both find expression as necessary labor time and not as abstract labor, as value. Labor vouchers do not represent any exchange value, or any commodities representing private persons competing on the market. They are not money to buy the means of production or labor power. This is the essential reason why we say that the use of labor vouchers is perfectly appropriate to the march towards socialism and adequate to the needs of the period of transition.

A transition to communism is inextricably linked to a break with the value of labor power. Therefore, wages can no longer exist in the period of transition no matter what name you hide them under because the existence of wages means the existence of capital. That is just those who oppose labor vouchers and who favor "social wages" have forgotten. They do not see that the capitalist state itself has been realizing the "social wage" : guaranteed minimum wages, a sliding scale of

wages, welfare, unemployment payments, etc. From the "social wage" to the "socialist wage" there is hardly a step.

When Mitchell wrote, "We think we have shown, on the basis of the marxist thesis, that value can persist without an antagonistic content, without the remuneration of labor power" (I.P. #11), he totally abandoned Hegel (for whom content as such is what it is by being contained in a certain form) in favor of Kant (for whom the form is alien to the content, simply an envelop for whatever content comes along).

- Mitchell asserted that the period of transition will be a sort of purgatory before we can reach the communist paradise.

- He did not see that the market and the world of commodities must be destroyed en bloc and that there can be no middle ground.

- He contradicted Marx who wrote of eliminating money and wages as fast as possible in the period of transition.

- The fundamental error is to believe that the law of value will still operate in what Marx called lower communism. If so, that implies that at the same time we are trying to create socialism, we will still be needing super-specialists to do it. It means that the period of the dictatorship of the proletariat will have to last forever.

In proposing the labor voucher system, the "GIK" (the German-Dutch Left) defended what Marx had suggested throughout his writings on the subject : in The Poverty of Philosophy (1847), the Grundrisse (1857-9), The Critique of Political Economy (1859), Capital Vol I (1867), vol II (1869-79), "Critique of the Gotha Program" (1875), "Notes on Wagner" (1880), and also Engels in Anti-Duhring (1877). In Marx's writings, the labor voucher idea is not a fortuitous detail; it is a fundamental principle, an instrument for the destruction of the process of valorization that rids labor power of its nature as a commodity by which the proletarian "earns his living".

What is correct in Mitchell's writings is the critique of the GIK's idea that to free itself, the proletariat need not form a political party; it just needs workers' councils. Although the GIK's criticisms of the Bolshevik revolution were justified, we should not accept their denigration and even elimination of the role of the party in the period of transition. The GIK made a grave error when it defended very negative ideas on the party. To them, the party was, at best, an instrument of propaganda and clarification, expressly established as an ensemble of "working committees". These groups were to function as "organs of collective thought"; their role was the growth of theoretical clarification which would then spread to develop the consciousness of the workers. For the GIK, the party had become an arm of state socialism, a machine producing poison. The only way to survive was to keep away.

The GIK did not have a clear grasp of all the problems. It put forth ideas about a "new movement", about industrial democracy (a little along the lines of Sorel and Gramsci), and when it saw that the working class was unable to live by these principles, it proposed a new organizational synthesis of just the most advanced workers. Quite rightly, Mitchell remarked that with such a federalist, anarchist type of thesis on this question, the GIK was placing itself outside of marxism.

For a long time, Marx and Engels defended the idea of nationalizations as an appropriate measure for the most economically advanced countries. All means of transportation and communication were to be centralized in the hands of a "workers'" state. The new revolutionary power had to expropriate landed property and contribute land rents to the public treasury and, in accordance with collective planning, open up new lands, etc.

But with the events of the Paris Commune, Marx and Engels had to rethink their ideas because the real movement had shown that some of these ideas were outdated or inappropriate. The proletariat could no longer be satisfied with the conquest of the state. It had to destroy the state and the whole political, administrative, judicial, military and police apparatus that guarantees capitalism's exploitation of the working class. There was no longer any question of nationalizing the economy. Along with destroying the capitalist state went the need to create conditions that would mean the end of labor subject to the laws of economic necessity and the beginning of freely associated labor. The new society would carry out production and distribution by linking associations of free producers. But in their time, Marx and Engels could not bring definitive answers to these problems because historical experience was lacking.

The Italian Left of Bilan, the GIK, the Internationalist Communist League of Belgium, the Left Communists of France and the internationalist tendency of Munis were all inspired by this method. After the defeat of the Russian revolution from within and the disorientation of the revolutionary attack of the Spanish proletariat, these elements enriched revolutionary thought with new and vital contributions.

These contributions were linked to all the efforts to change the world. With an experience born of defeat, gained at the price of great hardship, revolutionaries between the two wars were able to offer a contribution to the definition of the program for the period of transition from capitalism to communism. They went farther than Marx or Engels on many issues that could not have been clear to the founders of marxism.

We have previously stated that the GIK gave the "workers' councils" an essential role in the process of the socialization of the means of production. The great lesson it drew from

history was that after coming to political power, the proletariat should socialize and not nationalize the totality of the productive forces and never cede them to anyone. The Dutch Left also denounced the role of the Bolshevik Party at the head of the so-called "workers' state" in the degeneration of the revolution both politically and economically. They condemned the Bolsheviks for preparing the counter-revolution and Stalin. The ICC and RV obviously feel they can afford to make fun of the GIK but at least the Dutch left never separated the political from the economic. Its point of view was materialism, where the economic base determines the political and ideological superstructure. The German and Dutch left analyzed the degeneration of the revolution in the light of the marxist category of the totality. This is more than we can say of most of their critics. These same critics are usually the ones who also deny the validity of the contributions of Munis which, in our opinion, were very important in more than one way.

After the violent expropriation of the capitalists in Russia, the proletariat was able to do many great things because it was in political control, despite the weakness of the economic base and the ravages of the long and bloody civil war. With a great effort, the proletariat tried to turn away from the capitalist mode of functioning. There were many interesting communist experiments as the proletariat tried to organize production in a way consistent with its nature as a non-exploiting class.

But this process of socialization was held back by the Bolshevik state party and the state apparatus of the so-called "workers' state". The Soviets, territorial organs of the dictatorship of the proletariat, were emptied of their class content. The first social institution to undergo the elimination of proletarian power was the red army where all the old structures of command, destroyed by the revolution, were later reinstated. Party secretaries began to wear epaulets to intimidate the workers. The methods of workers' democracy were inhibited, interfered with, and outlawed. A new bureaucracy rained down decrees on the workers, reminiscent of the old czarist apparatus. This usurpation of workers' power by the State began under Lenin when the workers' factions of the communist party tried to oppose these developments. Their initial effort pointed out the tragic gap between having Lenin in power and the workers out of power.

In the management of the factories, in the factory committees which they supported for a time, the Bolsheviks tried to get the workers to take a more "realistic" attitude, less "anarcho-syndicalist", according to them. Eventually, the Bolsheviks replaced the factory councils with "collegial management" by experts and specialists with high salaries and wide-ranging discretionary powers. A new version of Thermidor occurred in the time of Lenin. The Bolsheviks replaced the socialization of the early days with nationalization

under the control of the State by transforming the factory committees into organs of the bureaucratic union apparatus of the State machine.

The "new soviet worker" had two masters : the "communist" one, the secretary of the party who became director of the factory, and the "specialist", engineer or foreman, who imposed working conditions. With Trotsky, hours of labor became longer and longer and work itself was militarized; strikes were outlawed. Trotsky claimed that the only real task of the workers' councils was to ratify the decisions of the party, the supposed infallible central command of the revolution. When workers began to protest against bureaucratism and demanded the satisfaction of their needs, Lenin and Trotsky swept aside their demands en bloc, calling them "petit bourgeois", anarchists and counter-revolutionaries. The interests of the bureaucracy were presented as the interests of the proletariat.

In Russia, the political victory of the proletariat did not lead to the development of new relations of production. This can be blamed partly on the isolation of the Russian revolution which found no successful echo in other countries, and partly on the economic policy of the Bolsheviks which was not the result of specific circumstances so much as the corollary of their conception of state capitalism. Like Kautsky, the Bolsheviks thought state capitalism was a way to lead into socialism, instead of what it really is, the antithesis of socialism. For Lenin, socialism was a sort of state capitalism on the model of the German postal system. Lenin and Bukharin both raised the question of how the proletariat can use the structures of state capitalism without losing proletarian class content. History has shown that their very question was a non-starter because this cannot be done. In the name of the Plan, the Russian workers and the Russian left communists were crushed. And it all happened very fast, faster than anyone thought possible. Lenin, much more even than Bukharin, was the able defender of state capitalism. This is what the ICC has so conveniently forgotten.

Of necessity, because of the deliberate policies of the Bolsheviks, the State did not wither away. It became the State-Boss in the factories; the State-Party and its myriad of bureaucrats lived off the surplus value extracted from the workers. The anti-State revolution as it was conceived and defended by Lenin for a certain time, became a capitalist, bureaucratic, counter-revolution.

The lesson that the Dutch left's detractors have not learned is that the Russian experience has amply proven that proletarian political power had absolutely no chance of maintaining itself on an economic base of state capitalism. While Lenin and Trotsky saw the NEP as a historic advance for the cause, the "Workers' Group" of Miasnikov saw more clearly that the NEP was the victory of private property and peasant interests.

Lenin's idea of a state capitalism dominated by the political power of the proletariat, a state capitalism by and for the workers, was an impossibility and an incredibly dangerous illusion. This the Italian Left never saw clearly enough. All power to the territorial soviets and the management of the economy by the workers' councils -- this is the essence of the period of transition from capitalism to communism. The political power of the proletariat has to go together with economic power in the production process itself. This is what the Russian "avant-garde communist groups" proclaimed, along with the KAPD in Germany and the GIK.

The concrete history of the Russian revolution has amply shown that the political and economic power of the working class cannot go off in diametrically opposed directions. Although it is true to say that without a successful political revolution on a world scale, there cannot be any real advance towards communism, it is also true to say that without the socialization of the relations of production, the political power of the proletariat will rapidly lead to state capitalism, built on the extraction of surplus value from the workers and not on any "socialist accumulation", as Bukharin, Preobrazensky, Trotsky and Stalin claimed.

In Russia, it has meant the coming of a new exploiting and repressive society, based on regression, both in relation to liberal capitalism and in relation to what socialism could really be like. On the economic level, it was state capitalism; on the social level, a bureaucratic world suffocated by the Plan; on the political level, a despotism of some of the coldest monsters the world has ever seen.

Communists have no idols, "no gods, no Caesars". They must reject the example of Trotsky, the patriarch of all the bureaucrats, the man who militarized labor, who organized "red Saturdays" when the workers worked for nothing, the implacable adversary of the Petrograd strikers, the man who carried out the massacre of the workers of Kronstadt. And we must not be afraid to criticize Lenin either, who was an equal partner in all these decisions. Lenin was the scourge of the left communists when left communism was, in fact, the only genuine voice of the proletariat desperately trying to keep the Communist International alive in the service of the world revolution.

R.C.

The Make-up of the Working Class CONTINUED FROM P.7

synchronous strata of the working class who are the most combative and militant (one thinks of the Russian coal miners over the past few years, for example). Nor should this surprise us. It is precisely these non-synchronous strata who are faced with extinction today by the closure of plants and mines, by the loss of any chance of earning a living. It is these same strata who are the living repositories of the tradition of class struggle, of hatred of capitalism -- traditions of rebellion and revolution that it is vital to salvage and transmit to the collective laborer, even as the strata who directly embody these traditions disappear. In that sense, these non-synchronous strata have a tremendous political role to play in the development of the class struggle. Their traditions are essential to the constitution of the collective worker as a class-for-itself.

If we turn to the synchronous strata of the working class, the situation is extremely complicated. On the one hand, the strata that have taken their place as components of the *Gesamtarbeiter* in the phase of the real domination of capital lack the traditions of class struggle typical of the older strata of blue collar workers. An integral part of the working class, essential to the production process of modern capital, these strata often lack even a rudimentary sense of being a part of the

working class. In fact, certain of these strata continue to manifest the consciousness appropriate to their distant social origins within the petty bourgeoisie, sometimes complete with a contempt for the "working class" and a fear of "proletarianization". On the other hand, however, these strata are often free of the corporatism and trade union mentality that frequently plagues even the most militant blue collar workers, and constitutes such a deadly obstacle to the class struggle. It is this question of the development of class consciousness that must become our preoccupation in the period ahead; but such a preoccupation is only fruitful if we first grasp the enormity of the recomposition of the working class and its implications.

As long as Marxists refuse to face reality, to theoretically grasp the new situation created by the very development of capitalism; as long as Marxists continue to search for salvation in a blue collar proletariat that is fast becoming a vestige of an earlier stage of capitalist production, they will be theoretically -- and hence practically -- disarmed by the system whose continued existence more than ever now brings with it the prospect of an extinction of humanity or its total barbarization through global war and/or ecological devastation.

MAC INTOSH

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.