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INTERNATIONALIST PERSPECTIVE

**Today's Burning
Questions**



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THE NECESSARY RECOMPOSITION OF THE PROLETARIAT

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COLLAPSE OF THE RUSSIAN BLOC & THE NEW WORLD ORDER : CRITICAL BALANCE SHEET & PERSPECTIVES

In the space of two years -- from 1989 - 1991 -- the face of the capitalist world has been transformed. The organization of the world into two rival blocs and the balance between them, inherited from the second World War, and preserved for 45 years, suddenly collapsed like a house of cards. Stalinist "communism" has been virtually liquidated as a form of capitalist class rule. States have disappeared, while others have been reconstituted. The political and ideological map of the capitalist world is being redrawn.

In this article, it is not our aim to retrace the evolution of these developments, their detailed causes and effects, all of which we have regularly done in the pages of Internationalist Perspective over the past few years through analyses, debates and polemics. However, with the completion of the process of political transformation of the bourgeoisie in the East, following the disappearance of the USSR, it is necessary to take a critical look at the meaning of these developments, at the analyses we have previously made, and at the perspectives that they open up.

Our concern is characterized by a rejection of dogmatism, and by a defense of open debate within the revolutionary movement. Against all the sclerotic visions of an "invariant program" and revealed truths, Marxism affirms itself as a living theory, which develops on the foundation of principles drawn from the past experience of class struggle, while assimilating the new experiences of the working class. A capacity for self-criticism is an integral part of this process of development, although it has been largely absent from a revolutionary milieu more often preoccupied with being recognized as the infallible leaders of the class, than with the necessity of contributing to the necessary clarification of revolutionary consciousness.

A CRITICAL BALANCE-SHEET OF THE ANALYSIS OF THE BREAKDOWN OF THE RUSSIAN BLOC

In drawing a balance-sheet of the evolution of our analyses over the past several years, we want to insist on two points: on the one hand, our framework for the analysis of the causes and the objectives of the political changes in Russia that were initiated by the Gorbachev faction in the late '80's (see IP 7, 12, and 14) were globally correct; on the other hand, we were constantly trying to catch-up with the speed with which events on the

level of the balance between the two imperialist blocs -- beginning in the Fall of 1989 -- had led to the collapse of Russia. The evolution of our analyses on this last point took the following course. At the outset, the majority of our Fraction refused to acknowledge in the political upheavals in Eastern Europe any retreat of Russian imperialism (IP 16). In a second phase, the majority of our Fraction defended a perspective of a retreat of the Russian bloc (a position defended from the beginning by a minority of comrades), but nevertheless insisted that the Russian bloc itself remained intact, while a minority of comrades argued that no major change in the balance between the two blocs had occurred (IP 17 and 18). In a third phase, the whole of our Fraction acknowledged that Russia had retreated behind its own frontiers, but insisted that Russia nonetheless remained the second imperialist power on a world scale (IP 20). Finally, the idea was put forward that Russia could only recover its position as an imperialist pole by seeking an alliance with a major industrial power (IP 21). In other words, the steps in the process of the breakdown of the Russian imperialist bloc, and its meaning, were only recognized after the fact, and hesitantly. A similar hesitance (although to a lesser degree) also manifested itself in the analysis of the end of Stalinism as a mode of capitalist domination in the East. Today, the collapse of the Russian bloc, of Stalinism, and of the USSR itself, is clear.

How can we explain our difficulties in grasping the general direction of events, and what lessons can we draw from this experience? The logic which grounded our positions rested on the following axioms. First, the bourgeoisie never abandons power on its own; that power must be taken from it by another faction of the world bourgeoisie or by the proletariat. Second, the economic crisis does not attenuate imperialist conflicts, but exacerbates them. Third, the development of imperialist rivalries into imperialist blocs is an irreversible historical tendency of decadent capitalism. Fourth, the backwardness of capital, as in the case of Russia, prevents a "democratic" rotation of power. From these axioms the conclusion was drawn that the Russian bloc could not collapse by itself, and that Stalinism could not give way to another political system in Russia.

Paradoxically, and contrary to the propaganda of the ideologues of capital over

the past few years, these axioms remain basically correct. The fact that the bourgeoisie does not abandon power on its own has been demonstrated innumerable times in this century alone, and it was demonstrated again at the time of the coup d'etat in Russia in August 1991: far from having abandoned power in the face of popular discontent, as the mass media portrayed the events, the Stalinist state apparatus merely passed the baton to a faction of the ruling class that had arisen from within its own ranks, the Yeltsin faction, which could assure -- under a different form -- the continuation of capitalist domination. The fact that the economic crisis exacerbates imperialist antagonisms has been amply demonstrated by the run-up to the two world wars. And, as we will emphasize below, the breakdown of the Russian bloc was itself caused by the exacerbation of imperialist tensions, and in no way promises a new era of peace, as the bourgeoisie tries to make out. The historic tendency to the construction of imperialist blocs could only fully express itself for the first time in the division of the world which has lasted from the second World War until today. But that tendency is inscribed in the logic of decadent state capitalism, which is inexorably compelled to raise competition to a higher degree, culminating in the construction of blocs. Nothing has arisen on the historical stage to contradict that tendency. The incapacity of backward economies to maintain a democratic system of the Western type has also been demonstrated on numerous occasions, the latest of which is none other than the seizure of power by the "democrat" Yeltsin himself, whose openly dictatorial methods of government scarcely need to be demonstrated.

If the problem does not reside in the axioms themselves, it therefore resides in the analysis of the international situation which establishes the links between them. Basically, we underestimated the gravity and the implications of the historic impasse faced by the ruling class in the USSR -- an impasse which made the imperialist configuration, apparently immutable in the absence of world war or revolution, break into pieces. The Soviet ruling class was confronted not by a simple economic crisis, but by a real historic dead end encompassing a chronic -- though in large part latent -- triple economic, political and social crisis. Although we had pointed to the principal elements of this crisis for many years, we were nonetheless surprised by the extent and spectacular character of its consequences, in particular on the world imperialist scene.

It may appear paradoxical that the Russian bourgeoisie should have undertaken a policy the result of which is an unprecedented economic crisis and retreat from the inter-imperialist chess board. In every respect, the situation of Russia today appears far worse than its situation before perestroika. It is with this in mind that the "conservatives" in the Russian state apparatus criticize the present policy.

Nevertheless, a simple examination of the way things appear, of immediate circumstances, does not allow a real understanding of the actual historical conditions with which the Russian bourgeoisie is confronted on the economic, military, political and social planes.

On the economic and military plane, the issue goes way beyond the slow decline in the economic indicators which characterized the Brezhnev era. In fact, the Russian economy has never succeeded in overcoming its backwardness relative to the economies of the Western powers, and the USSR based its imperialist domination on force of arms and the "export" of tanks rather than on economic power and the export of capital. Russia raised itself to the position of the second world power and the head of a bloc, thanks to its territorial extent, its natural wealth, its strategic position, and the development of a gigantic war economy, and in particular, a powerful military-industrial complex, which constituted more than a third of the whole Soviet economy. Up to a certain point, Russia succeeded in compensating for the low level of development of the general productive forces of society by the development of that military-industrial complex which assured it an advanced technology (though less advanced than in the West), and a real economic power in the military and space domains. However, the development of that military-industrial complex, which manifested all the characteristics of the phase of the real domination of capital (predominance of heavy industry, incorporation of science and technology into the process of production, etc.), occurred on the basis of a massive extraction of absolute surplus-value in the whole of the economy. Through recourse to the extraction of absolute surplus-value, and abandoning the modernization of the consumer goods sector to the benefit of heavy industry linked to the production of armaments, the Russian capitalist class blocked its own transition to the real domination of capital on the scale of the whole society, and to the extraction of relative surplus-value. (1)

At the outset, that policy paid off inasmuch as it permitted the USSR to seize territory and foreign capital following the second World War, in particular in Central and Eastern Europe. But in the long run, in the absence of a continuous imperialist expansion, it could only be a losing proposition. While the USSR depended in large part on the extraction of absolute surplus-value to assure its domination, the Western powers, through their generalized recourse to the extraction of relative surplus-value, increased in a continuous fashion their rate of capital accumulation relative to that of Russia and its bloc, and therefore increased their economic lead over it. To the extent to which the USSR oriented its economy towards military power, and depended on a system of exchange that was to a great extent autarkic within its imperialist bloc, the growing economic gap

between the two blocs was not directly apparent on the plane of economic competition, but rather first and foremost on the military plane. In fact, since the 1960's, the USSR has been in continuous decline on the world imperialist chessboard, abandoning one country after another outside Europe under pressure from the American bloc.

However, it was at the beginning of the 1980's that Russian imperialism was at a decisive turning point. Exhausted by its confrontation with American imperialism, Russia found itself incapable of meeting the challenge posed by the policy of rearmament launched by the US under the Reagan presidency. Not only did it lack the capital to sustain such an effort on the purely quantitative level, but -- even more serious -- the gap in productivity between the two blocs had reached the point where Russia faced a decisive technological backwardness precisely in the most sophisticated armaments sectors. The vertiginous development of computer technology in the West thus became one of the factors that precipitated the collapse of the Soviet empire. When you realize that the power of computers increases by a factor of 1000 every ten years on average, you can measure how a technological gap of only several years can be translated into a qualitative difference in the level of performance, of reliability, and of blue prints for materiel, particularly in the military sector.

In addition, the gap in productivity between the two blocs had reached the point where the system of exchange within the Russian bloc had broken down. Despite a pricing policy favorable to Russia, the price of goods imported by Moscow from the Eastern European countries had risen above world market prices, while the price of oil exported from Russia to these same countries was below world market prices. For the Russian economy, the imperialist bloc itself had become an economic burden.

On the political and social plane as well, the situation had culminated in an historic dead end. Given its inability to complete the transition to the phase of extraction of relative surplus-value, Russian capital had no other recourse than to increase the labor time and to lower the real wages of workers. But such a policy could not be continued indefinitely under pain of exacerbating the economic crisis itself. On the one hand, though it suited capitalism at its beginnings, a starving and exhausted proletariat cannot serve the needs of a modern economy; on the other hand, a greater aggravation of the conditions of existence of the proletariat contained within itself the threat of generalized class struggle. In spite of the absence of significant class struggles in the USSR itself, the experience of the mass strike in Poland in 1980 had sounded a warning bell for the bourgeoisie of the Russian bloc. That ruling class was singularly disarmed in the face of such a perspective because of the absence of social shock absorbers

typical of the developed economies.

The ideological domination of Stalinism was crumbling at an accelerated rate in the face of its incapacity to deal with the growing economic difficulties, with the decline of its imperialist power, with the repression of nationalist tendencies in Eastern Europe, and also, and above all, because of the renaissance class struggle which put in question its domination. Stalinism had already gone through a crisis in the West, which had led either to its Social-Democratization or to its marginalization. But Stalinism as an openly totalitarian system could not tolerate an opposition, the democratic game, without putting its own existence in question. Stalinism hung on without finding any solution to its contradictions.

In the context of an historic crisis, at once economic, military, political and social, the Russian bourgeoisie had few options. If it continued down the same path, closing its eyes to the gravity of the threats which assailed it, the Russian ruling class would in the end face either a military debacle (of which the experience of Iraq last year would be a foretaste), or a class movement, either one of which would imperil its rule. Its only other option was to make a wager on the future, by attempting to transform its mode of domination under the impact of the most serious open crisis in its history. In the final analysis, the disappearance of the Russian bloc, and of Stalinism as the mode of capitalist class domination in that bloc, was virtually ineluctable. The only real question was at what point, and under what form, that outcome would be reached.

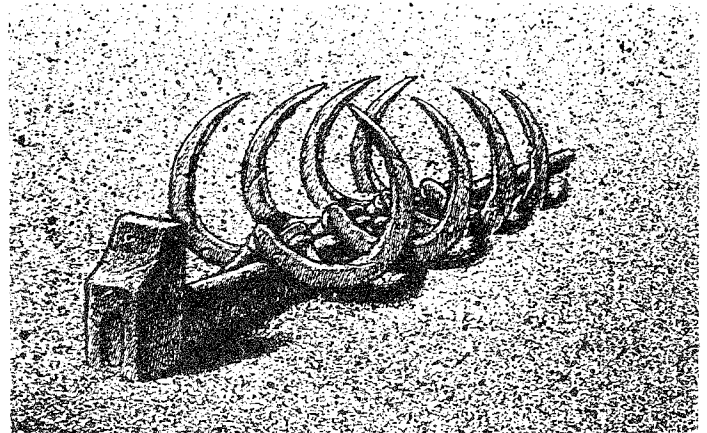
Our weakness -- like that of the rest of the revolutionary milieu -- was not clearly discerning that historic tendency. Even when it was actually happening, we refused to acknowledge that the ruling class in the USSR could adopt a policy that ultimately meant the end of its imperialist domination on the world scene, and the end of its specific form of capitalist domination within its own frontiers. However, neither the fact that the economic crisis exacerbates inter-imperialist tensions, nor the fact that the tendency of decadent capitalism is towards the crystallization of imperialist tensions in and through the formation of imperialist blocs, is refuted by the collapse of the Russian bloc. Indeed, the exacerbation of imperialist tensions linked to the economic crisis was precisely one of the principal factors that made clear the incapacity of the Russian bloc to compete with its Western foe, and which as a result led to the collapse of that bloc. The uniqueness of the present period resides in the fact that Russian imperialism was defeated without a war. That uniqueness, which has created a new historical situation today, must not, however, hide the reality of that defeat.

One question which has created many obstacles within the revolutionary movement to a clear analysis of the recent historical situation is the degree of control exercised

by the bourgeoisie over the unfolding of events. One of the remarkable aspects of the unfolding of the recent upheavals in the East is that they occurred under the control of the Russian bourgeoisie. The decision to hold the elections that would bring Solidarity to power in Poland was made in Moscow. The Soviet army prevented the repression of the opposition movement, and thereby made possible the transfer of power, in East Germany. One could multiply the examples which demonstrate that the ruling class in the USSR permitted the political transformations in its satellites. Within the very frontiers of the USSR, at the time of the August 1991 coup, despite the severe political crisis which had raged for years, it was not bloody confrontations between rival factions of the ruling class that occurred, but a relatively homogeneous reaction of the Soviet army, which by taking the side of Yeltsin's "reformist" faction, sealed the fate of Stalinism, and of the USSR itself. That immediate control over events on the part of the Russian ruling class, and particularly of its powerful military faction -- which had been responsible for all the transformations in the Soviet empire -- hid from us the historic tendency towards the collapse of that empire. The capacity for immediate control over day to day events on the part of the ruling class cannot be identified with a capacity for historic control over the basic tendencies of social life. These large-scale historic tendencies impose themselves on the bourgeoisie like an external necessity, because they are dictated by the blind laws of the economic system of which it is merely the agent, as well as by the class contradictions that flow from that system. The power of the bourgeoisie vis a vis these historic tendencies is limited to affecting the form, the rhythm, the consequences. It is these limits to the capacity for historical control on the part of the bourgeoisie that makes revolution possible. If it were necessary to wait for the bourgeoisie by itself to lose its immediate control over the course of events, we could wait a long time.

Clarity on this point is crucial. Without it, either one is led to overlook the historic tendency behind immediate events, or -- at the other extreme -- one falls into a simplistic analysis which reduces every event to the expression of a general tendency, and which usually leads to a sort of propaganda devoid of real content. This last tendency has been expressed within the revolutionary milieu by the ICC, which much more rapidly than us identified the tendency to a breakdown of the Russian bloc and of Stalinism, but which made of it a veritable caricature: the ICC saw only a loss of control by the bourgeoisie, "chaos" and "decomposition", after having only seen a Machiavellian control on the part of the ruling class for many years. Such a caricature, far from making possible a clarification of the situation, leads to a discrediting of the very analysis of

historic tendencies, and to periodic and dogmatic ideological reversals.



THE NEW WORLD ORDER AND ITS PERSPECTIVES

The present situation is without any equivalent in history, inasmuch as an imperialist bloc has been defeated not following a war or revolution, but in a period of economic crisis. The disappearance of the Russian bloc poses the question of a redivision of the world -- though in conditions very different from those prevailing after a world war. This redivision is occurring on the basis of generalized economic difficulties, and therefore without the possibility of a phase of reconstruction as was the case after the massive destruction of capital in the world wars. Moreover, the very organization of blocs since the second World War has created a considerable dependence of the different countries on the head of their bloc, in particular on the military plane, which prohibits an immediate recomposition of alliances or imperialist blocs. In particular, the two economic giants -- Germany and Japan -- are today military dwarfs. Finally, the defeat of the Soviet bloc not having been caused by war, Russia remains for the moment the second military power in the world, despite the disappearance of its bloc and of the USSR, and even if this power cannot today be utilized.

All of these factors together make the present world situation highly unstable, while at the same time subject to a considerable degree of inertia. Western investment in the countries of the ex-Soviet bloc is much lower than had been hoped, and the bonds of economic dependence forged over 45 years within the Russian bloc cannot be shattered from one day to the next. As a result, these countries have not been absorbed by the Western bloc, but remain more or less bound together in a state of limbo. For its part, the Western bloc remains intact because of the overwhelming power of the US vis a vis the other countries, links of economic dependence within the bloc, and uncertainty concerning the future of Russian power (see the analysis developed in the text

"Inter-Imperialist Antagonisms: An Orientation for the '90's", IP #20).

However, this situation will not last forever. Two tendencies operating in the direction of a transformation of the imperialist scene on a world scale are recognizable even now.

The first is the very tendency that brought about the collapse of the Russian bloc, i.e. the historic crisis of Russian capital. Russia is today in the grip of the most serious economic crisis in its history, as a result of the upheavals in its state apparatus, in its mode of economic administration, and in its mode of political organization. And the end of this crisis is nowhere in sight. It is difficult to predict in what condition Russia will find itself when the situation stabilizes even to a limited degree. What is certain, is that Russian capital can only hope to overcome its chronic weakness by modernizing the consumer goods sector, entailing a reduction in its armaments expenditures, and/or through dependence on massive investment of foreign capital. In either case, it has little chance of preserving or regaining its position as a dominant and autonomous imperialist power.

Thanks to its economic power, as well as its geographical location, Germany is in the process of constituting an economic empire in the space left vacant by the dislocation of the Russian bloc in Eastern Europe. Germany is by far ahead of the other Western investors in these countries, seeking to control the most modern and profitable sectors of their economies through a policy of selective investments, accompanied by strict conditions (see the figures and examples provided in the article "L'Allemagne en premiere ligne pour la conquete des economies de l'Est" in Le Monde Diplomatique, Jan. 1992). This re-emergence of German imperialism is, however, destined to be limited to the economic plane in the years to come. The assertion of military pretensions would -- for the time being -- be contrary to its interests. There are several reasons for this. First, Germany is the main beneficiary of the opening of the borders in Eastern Europe, as it is of the single European market in Western Europe. Consequently, it has no reason at the present time to seek to impose its will on the military plane. Second, The colossal financial burden of the re-unification of Germany has already led to economic difficulties in that country. A massive diversion of capital into armaments production is for the moment excluded. Third, Germany lacks the power to challenge the American military giant, and would risk losing everything by defying Washington under present conditions.

For its part, Japan is in the process of constituting a similar zone of economic influence in the Far-East.

If they will not provoke spectacular upheavals in imperialist alliances in the short run, these two tendencies will have an impact on the imperialist balance on a world scale in the long run. It would be pure

speculation to try to predict the actual form that a new world imperialist configuration might take, inasmuch as such a development would depend on the evolution of the complex relations between The US, Russia, Japan, Germany, and Europe as a whole. But, the principal uncertainty vis a vis the development of imperialist relations stems from fundamental world historical factors that transcend the framework of competition between capitalist entities, i.e. the world economic crisis and the global class struggle.

Isn't it a marvelous irony of history to see the triumph of "capitalism", of "free enterprise", and of "democracy", proclaimed amidst a chorus of joy by the Western bourgeoisie, accompanied by an aggravation of the crisis of capitalism, the bankruptcy of free enterprise, and an unprecedented discrediting of "democracy"? Only Marxism can explain this irony of history, by demonstrating that the triumph of "capitalism", of "free enterprise", of "democracy" is merely the victory of one faction of capital over another; a victory that in reality is only a defeat of that other faction, produced by the very crisis of world capital. In that sense, the "victory of capitalism" is only a harbinger of its debacle. The economic crisis will leave no capitalist powers intact. But, its amplitude and rhythm in different countries will not fail to have repercussions on the economic and imperialist relations between these powers.

The principal historical factor that will determine the future course of imperialism is the global class struggle, because it will in the final analysis determine the outcome of the economic crisis -- barbarism and war OR revolution -- and therefore the future of society as a whole. The class struggle has undergone a marked downturn in the past several years, as a result of the difficulties encountered by the proletariat in articulating a class perspective in the face of the slow aggravation of the crisis of capital and its multiple economic, political and social consequences; a situation exacerbated by the collapse of the Russian bloc, which has thrust the proletariat into the whirlwind of democratic and anti-communist propaganda. In spite of all this, the proletariat has not been really mobilized behind the ideological flags of capital, and the aggravation of the world crisis to come holds out the hope -- or the menace, depending on one's point of view -- of new class explosions, stronger than ever. For the bourgeoisie, the mobilization of the proletariat is not only an ideological necessity so as to utilize it as cannon fodder in war, but also a material necessity so as to undertake the economic effort that is a pre-requisite to war. Given the military weakness vis a vis the US of the two other principal economic powers, Germany and Japan, as well as the growing weakness of Russia, it is probable that none of these countries will be capable of re-constituting a military power capable of challenging the US without first achieving

a massive mobilization of the proletariat; and therefore without first crushing the class struggle. In that sense, the historic alternative remains war or revolution, but under a different form than in the past. It is possible that the tendency towards the constitution of new blocs cannot reach a conclusion as long as the danger of massive class struggle remains on the historical agenda.

More than ever, the future of humanity depends on the relation between the economic crisis and the class struggle, particularly in the great world centers of capital, which are Europe, the US and Japan. The open crisis of world capital which has now raged for 25 years has accelerated the concentration and globalization of capital to a hitherto unheard of degree, mercilessly smashing down the frontiers that blocked it. In this context, the collapse of the Russian bloc represents the crumbling of a more and more artificial barrier to that globalization of capital, and is therefore the most spectacular expression of that very process. Another expression of that tendency is the ongoing unification of the European market. This globalization of capital is accompanied by a growth in its mobility, and of its concentration in the hands of the great economic powers. The crisis has thereby considerably increased the gap between the "poor" countries, which have become ever poorer, and the "rich" countries which have protected themselves from the worst effects of the crisis. On the scale of entire geographic zones, or even entire continents (e.g. Africa), the slow progression of the crisis of capital is accompanied by a veritable barbarism, under the form of the decomposition of the economic fabric and a regression towards modes of elementary subsistence, which engender -- and in turn are exacerbated by -- famine, war, "natural" catastrophes and the migration of refugees. In the economically most developed countries, the crisis manifests itself by a slow and unequal worsening of the conditions of life and labor of the proletariat, by a double phenomenon of decomposition - recomposition of the economic fabric of the working class, which leaves a mass of people reduced to permanent unemployment and poverty. The strengthening of the strongest capital's to the detriment of the weakest, and the development of fictitious capital, with its corollary of indebtedness, have thus far prevented a major breakdown of the most developed economies.

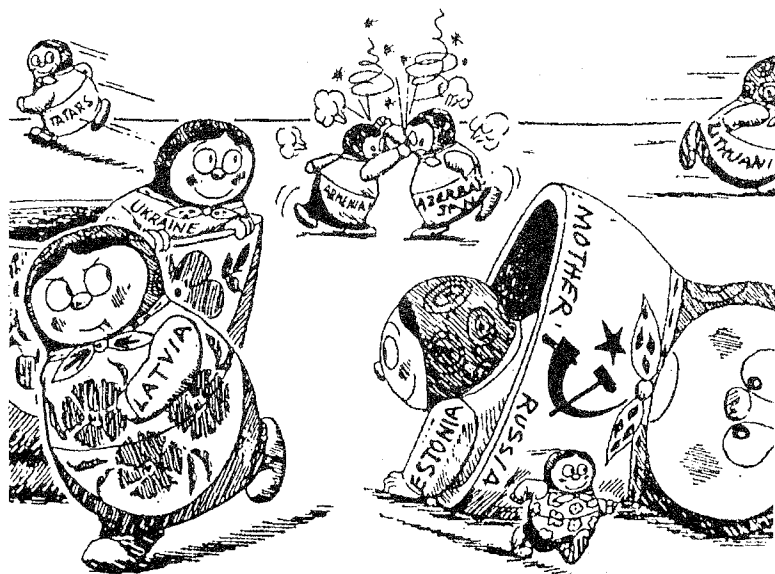
But, the day of reckoning inexorably approaches. Each day that passes sees the contradictions of capital slowly accumulate, notably under the form of indebtedness (thus the debt of the US alone is now greater than that of all the countries of the Third World put together). A major crisis of capital in its principal centers cannot be avoided, which in its turn would lead to the explosion of class contradictions. The future of humanity rests on the capacity of the proletariat, in these confrontations, to affirm its project of

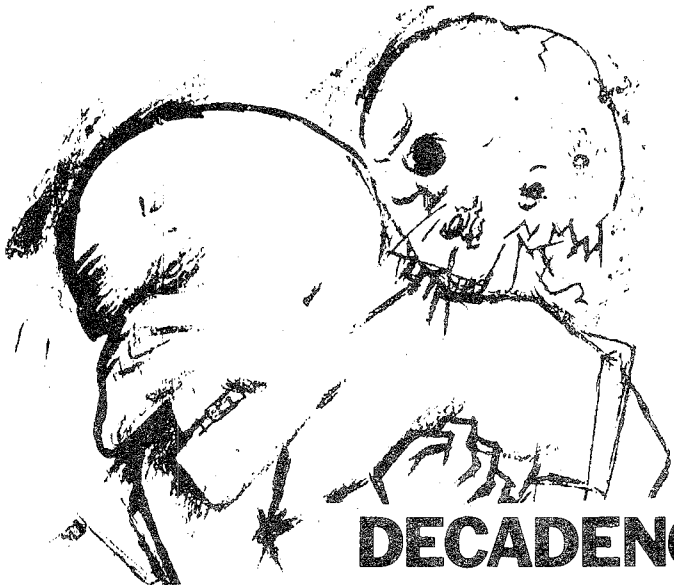
class autonomy, to unify itself, not merely in the principal capitalist centers but also with its class brothers in other countries, and to draw into its struggle the masses of permanently unemployed to whom capitalism offers no other future.

(1) "I call that surplus-value which is produced by the lengthening of the working day, absolute surplus-value. In contrast to this, I call that surplus-value which arises from the curtailment of the necessary labour-time, and from the corresponding alteration in the respective lengths of the two components of the working day, relative surplus-value."

In order to make the value of labour-power go down, the rise in the productivity of labour must seize upon those branches of industry whose products determine the value of labour-power, and consequently either belong to the category of normal means of subsistence, or are capable of replacing them. But the value of a commodity is determined not only by the quantity of labour which gives it its final form, but also by the quantity of labour contained in the instruments by which it has been produced. Hence a fall in the value of labour-power is also brought about by an increase in the productivity of labour, and by a corresponding cheapening of commodities in those industries which supply the instruments of labour and the material for labour, i.e. the physical elements of constant capital which are required for producing the means of subsistence. But an increase in the productivity of labour in those branches of industry which supply neither the necessary means of subsistence nor the means by which they are produced leaves the value of labour-power undisturbed." (Karl Marx, Capital, Volume 1, Penguin Books, p.432)

M. Lazare
February 1992





DECADENCE OF CAPITALISM, SOCIAL DECOMPOSITION & REVOLUTION

Introduction

For quite some time now, the idea of "social decomposition" has been put forward by bourgeois theorists, only to be taken up by segments of the revolutionary milieu, where it has ended up as a theory unto itself for the ICC. The fact that this idea of "social decomposition" haunts the revolutionary milieu compels us to ask what theoretical lacunae it is intended to resolve; what new phenomena does it explain? It is to that end that we are printing this contribution by comrade R.C.

We must first point out that R.C.'s analysis of the state of the class struggle, and the consequences vis a vis the historical perspective that he draws from it, are not shared by the rest of our Fraction. We are not going to undertake a critique of these positions in this issue of IP. However, we urge our readers to look at earlier issues of IP which contain articles developing our position on these questions, notably the text adopted by a conference of the Fraction, which is printed in IP #20.

We will limit our comments to briefly presenting the position of the Fraction on the question of "social decomposition" inasmuch as we believe it is a concept whose theorization is an obstacle to an understanding by revolutionaries of the present period; a concept that in our view has been engendered by the upheavals in the Russian bloc.

In 1981, the ICC (of which we were then a part) published a pamphlet that was crucial for the development of revolutionary theory: The Decadence of Capitalism. This concept of decadence has its point of departure in the analysis of the economic limits with which the capitalist system is confronted, as well as the insupportable contradictions that undermine it. On the

basis of that economic analysis, the ICC correctly pointed to the collapse of the political and ideological superstructures of capitalist society, and, at the same time, denounced what bourgeois ideologues termed a "crisis of civilization" or a "crisis of ideas".

In insisting on the link existing between the visible consequences (ever greater barbarism of the system, lack of perspectives, collapse of values, etc.) and the real cause, the ICC to its credit emphasized the specific characteristics of the phase of decadence of the capitalist system, thereby providing the working class and the revolutionary milieu with the theoretical weapons to understand this historical period.

What is at issue today, is most certainly not the recognition of the phenomena of decomposition in the several domains of capitalist society, but the fact that, contrary to the Marxist method, these phenomena are not seen to flow from an economic and political analysis, but rather themselves become a theory from which flow political and historical implications.

In 1981, the ICC's pamphlet on decadence had already mentioned the phenomena of decomposition. The fact that in the intervening decade the world economic crisis has deepened means that there has been an exacerbation of the contradictions inherent to the capitalist system, including a development of the infernal crisis of its "superstructures".

If our Fraction now seeks a deeper understanding of the mechanisms of the capitalist system, of its crisis, and of the palliatifs with which it attempts to ward it off, we have never thought that that entails inventing a new theory to replace that of

decadence in order to explain the present economic mechanism and the superstructural phenomena that flow from it. Thus, if it is clear that phenomena of decomposition increasingly manifest themselves, from our perspective they are due to the unprecedented duration of the world economic crisis, and to the impossibility of any durable "solution" to it put forward by the bourgeoisie.

If comrade R.C. has provided us with a rigorous contribution, linking the theorization of a "final phase of decadence" to the fact that in his opinion the proletariat has never emerged from the period of counter-revolution, one does not find the same rigor in the ICC, which not content with inventing the theory of "social decomposition", makes new historical alternatives flow from it. This "qualitative leap" in the phase of decadence becomes a veritable catch-all in which drugs, murder and pollution are all jumbled together. The problem resides in the fact that these murders and other signs of the barbarism of capitalism proceed from a wholly new analysis of the international situation, the defining characteristic of which is chaos, and a new historical alternative, inasmuch as a train of indiscriminate catastrophes has been substituted for the alternative war or revolution as the end point for a society that is self-destructing.

Wondering whether or not communism is really possible today means rejecting all the messianic certitudes that history has failed to confirm. It means questioning the more than fifty-year history of a workers' movement that has failed to end the domination of capitalism despite the economic crisis that has been weakening the system. This history has been economic as much as political, social as much as intellectual. It is the very destiny of mankind that is involved. There has been a lot written about the workers' movement; this text wants to stress the cardinal issue of how we define the revolutionary class and the possibility of communism.

A century and a half has passed since The Communist Manifesto proclaimed the imminent and inevitable demise of modern bourgeois property. A century and a quarter has passed since the Communards of the Paris Commune defied Versailles and "set out to take the heavens". Three quarters of a century have passed since the "ten days that shook the world" in Petrograd were to signal the start of a victorious world revolution. But the revolutionary waves born in the tumult of October 1917, carrying the hopes of socialism, betrayed by the social-democratic parties, weakened by internal divisions and political immaturity, were all bloodily suppressed one after the other.

Marx and Engels in 1848, Lenin and Trotsky in 1918 launched into overly optimistic predictions of world

The present period is difficult for revolutionaries to understand: insufficiently armed on the theoretical plane, isolated from their class, and drowning in sectarianism, there is a great temptation to seek explanations that dispense with the theoretical framework of Marxism in trying to grapple with the upheavals that have shaken the capitalist world for the past decade. In our view, it is only through an enormous labor of theoretical rigor, on the bases of the Marxist framework, that it will be possible to grasp the cause, the meaning, and the consequences, of these upheavals and to understand the present period.

For us, the appearance of the idea of "social decomposition" as the theoretical key that unlocks the mystery of present-day phenomena is a desperate attempt to explain things that contradict past certitudes. This is particularly the case for the ICC which, with its schematic and linear vision of the 80's as the "years of truth", finds itself compelled to scrape together a framework to hide its theoretical failings.

We hope that the publication of this contribution by comrade R.C., through its discussion of the present period and the chances for revolution, will open a debate on the current situation, a task that is integral to the work of revolutionaries today.

revolution. The former did not correctly assess the possibilities for the growth of the productive forces contained in ascendent bourgeois society. The latter overestimated the revolutionary capacity of the proletariat and thought the bourgeoisie would be forced to cede power to the Soviets and Workers' Councils.

The proletariat was not able to overthrow the bourgeoisie in 1848 or in 1871 because the socialist revolution was premature at these times. In a capitalist mode of production that was still young and healthy, society continued to progress on the basis of the development of the productive forces. And Marx withdrew to the Reading Room of the British Museum to write a serious study of capital. The proletariat did not seize power in the industrialized countries in 1919 even though this time the material conditions for communism were ripe and capitalist organization had entered its phase of decadence. The communist Fractions of the working class were left trying to learn the lessons of the defeat.

The world went through fascism and stalinism and nazism leading to the second world war. The proletariat was unable to transform that war into a revolution, showing how far it had fallen behind its forebears of 1919. The ruling classes didn't have to worry about a communist revolution; the proletariat gave itself body and soul to the enemy.

Then the cruel history of capitalism

went through hundreds of horrible local wars called "national liberation struggles". In fact, these states were vassals for one or the other imperialist bloc and simply contributed to the development of state capitalism.

The revolutionary perspectives of The Communist Manifesto and the Communist International have not been realized. But Marx's predictions about the development of capital during the period of his London "retreat" were. Modern bourgeois property has not disappeared but capitalism has undergone profound modifications. Either it has become "socialized capitalism" where management is separated from ownership and the manager represents the "soul" of the industrial system (Marx, Capital, III, ch 5). Or it has taken the form of planned state capitalism in all its various forms. It is the State of a capitalism that has been socialized. It is the State of the "Welfare State" wrongly considered "state socialism" by the workers it has fooled. State capitalism merely tries to regulate capitalist profit via autocratic planning of production and distribution. The exploited still get only the crumbs. The war economy was a powerful lever orienting towards what we call "state capitalism".

Whether it be state capitalism or the capitalism of managers, nothing fundamental is changed; it is still production for profit and not for the satisfaction of human needs. In one case "organization" overrides the "market" and in the other, the "market" overrides "organization" but the capitalist mode of production remains the same.

Our century has seen private property replaced by anonymous property, corporations, state property, new forms to exploit labor power and expropriate surplus value. Evolving from the anarchic/liberal phase to the monopolistic stage (trusts, cartels, syndicates) and then to the phase of state concentration (industrial and financial concentration in the hands of one national enterprise), the capitalist mode of production has finally fallen into its decomposition.

Shareholding capital, which Marx considered a necessary transition point, is no longer an isolated or sporadic occurrence. It predominates in massive sectors of the contemporary economy. The collective forms of the economic exist and grow. This development, which is not the abolition of property, provides the key to understanding the new composition of the working class. It leads to the need to examine and refine our ideas about the proletarian revolution, its forms and unfolding process.

The proletariat has to be able to

analyze events caused by the evolution of capitalism so that it can create an autonomous class policy leading to revolution. "The proletariat can only defeat the bourgeoisie if it has developed its own arsenal of principles, political rules, strategies and tactics inspired by the era it lives in. The criteria it has to develop today in this era of extreme class tension are obviously not the same as the ones it used in 1848 or in 1870, in 1905 or even in 1919-1920." (Communisme #3, 15 juin 1937).

The collective forms of the economy do exist and multiply. But the socialist embryo has aborted. Contrary to what Lenin --and Engels-- expected, state capitalism did not prepare the way for socialism but for the social decomposition we suffer today and will suffer even more in the future. Since the war in the Persian Gulf, capitalism is feeling the convulsions of its final catastrophe.

A specter haunts the world, the specter of social decomposition against which all factions of the ruling class, anyone with any knowledge or power, are fighting. Put all together, the images of the effects of the crisis of the capitalist mode of production are like a scene from Dante's *Inferno*, a fresco of the end of civilization: the Gulf War, chaos in the USSR, pogroms in the Caucasus, imperialist civil war in Yugoslavia, clan warfare and massacre in Africa, inter-ethnic massacres in India, the hardening of despotism in China, Iraq and Turkey.

On our planet, from one ecological disaster to another, the destruction of nature is profoundly altering the climate which will lead to the massive exodus of populations, devastating famines creating a favorable terrain for the epidemics that ravage Africa, Latin America and a good part of Asia. "The development of agriculture and industry has always been so destructive of the forests that whatever was done to conserve or restore them has seemed a drop in the bucket". (Marx, Capital vol II, 2nd section).

For the hundreds of human beings whose minds the media have turned to mush and whose lives the great machinery of the capitalist system has crushed, the growth of drug use in all classes and age groups, the return of irrational reactionary ideologies, the cult of violence and egotistical individualism are the result of the breakdown of the family which protected the moral values of the dominant ideology and "the dissolution of all traditional institutions with their panoply of old ideas and attitudes." (Marx)

Tens of millions of the unemployed have been brutally excluded from production in the name of defending the

interests of the national economy. They are the other side of the coin of the millions of people in parasitical occupations or involved in wasting astronomical sums of money in armaments. The misery of the population in the underdeveloped world goes hand in hand with the enormous waste of the so-called richer countries. While two-thirds of mankind lacks the necessities, society artificially destroys nature, living labor and past labor, all to satisfy this appetite for profit.

In our society today, suicides and murder have attained the level of a mass phenomenon. This is a picture of social decomposition that no one can deny. Against this depiction of social pathology, no beam of light appears from a proletariat conscious of the need to make a communist revolution in order to abolish classes, money and the State. Beset by a deep regression, the proletariat seems more strongly tied to capital and its industry than in the past.

All these epiphenomena lead marxists to talk not about decadence any more but about social decomposition. A decadence begun in 1914 will be qualitatively different in 1992. Social decomposition must be seen as a qualitative leap in the decadence of the very roots of bourgeois rule.

From the viewpoint of historical materialism, the capitalist mode of production and the institutions of the superstructure last a certain time and will disappear when their task is finished. But a political revolution is necessary, led by the revolutionary class, in order to go on to a new social system. In the absence of a proletarian revolution, the capitalist mode of production keeps on going beyond its historic limits and like a vampire, sucks the blood of society. Capitalism is no longer destroying the vestiges of feudalism or local separatism or previous classes and hierarchies. Now decadent capitalism is destroying the productive forces themselves and thus the very basis of the communist revolution.

Yes, decadent capitalist society has reached the stage where it is destroying the objective and subjective conditions for communism. From that point, the capitalist mode of production will condemn its slaves to a life of material, moral and intellectual misery without end. As long as mankind persists in this unconscious, irrational mode of production the crisis will get worse and worse, spreading its tendrils everywhere into everything. The present social decomposition will only accelerate. The capitalist mode of production has become permanent destruction.

Speaking about social decomposition doesn't mean abandoning the solid terrain

of marxism or defending a new metaphysical theory or falling into moralizing claptrap. Social decomposition cannot be explained with the usual banalities about material values vs spirituality. Its explanation is political. It is the ransom the society is paying for keeping an increasingly murderous capitalist system. It is the result of the fact that the proletariat awoke only halfway in 1968 from its historic worldwide defeat in the twenties.

Ever since the productive forces entered into conflict with the social relations of production and the political form of government, the world has needed a revolution to live and flourish and develop all its possibilities. Already in 1914 the development of the productive forces, human potential and general culture had achieved the level necessary to carry out a communist revolution. Fifty-four years later these conditions were even riper, more compelling. But Mai 68 was not a revolution or a mass strike that could pose the essential questions for the class. Instead of putting forward their own class project clearly separating themselves from the students and bringing the movement onto a higher level, the workers intervened massively but without a clearly articulated program of their own. The class dynamic was spontaneous but unable to assert a class perspective for society. We had the proof that a strike, even a spontaneous massive wildcat, is only important because of its class content and not by the form of the demands.

The last decade has only served to accelerate the maturation of different factors. Today we are able to see certain things more clearly. Social decomposition can be more fully understood today because nothing has happened with the scenario predicting massive class confrontations between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie. History found no actors willing to bring that scenario to life!

What did the two major movements of the last twenty years, Mai 68 and the workers' revolt in Poland, really bring us? In the West, yesterday's protesters have become today's managers and yuppies. In the East, the dissidents have become State dignitaries; the prisoners of yesterday have become the jailers of today.

Increasingly devastating and generalized, the crisis of the capitalist mode of production has not made the proletariat stand on its feet; it hasn't been able to inject a dynamic into the struggle of the unemployed. In the process of social decomposition, the proletariat has not emerged in a full-scale conscious rebellion. In the countries of the periphery, revolts were crushed in blood and led to a massive

reversion to nationalism and religion. Chronic unemployment has provided the reservoir feeding recruits to the fanatic partisans of religious fundamentalism. In the heart of the capitalist mode of production, strikes don't seem to favor the spread of consciousness among the workers but only put them at the mercy of their enemies.

For the last two and a half years the motor of proletarian class struggle has been paralyzed. The fall of the Berlin Wall meant the beginning of a phenomenal anti-communist ideological media campaign whose effects are still with us. The events in Russia served as an ideological weapon to stifle any movement towards social emancipation, to avoid any revolutionary contagion, to condemn any radical critique of today's society. The more society is falling apart, the more it makes the workers sing its praises and chant the wonders of democracy.

Certainly class struggle has not disappeared. There is still a class that fights back against its own social exploitation. But it is too weak to stop the slide to barbarism or present a clear perspective for mankind. Because of the slowdown and weakening of class struggle, because the proletariat has not gone on the offensive despite the worsening of the crisis, capitalism has entered its final phase : social decomposition.

The report entitled "Class Struggle and the Revolutionary Perspective" in I.P. 20 said, "It is clear that in the last 10 years, pressure from the proletariat, a class that has remained on the defensive, has not been the hand that held back the global war preparations of the capitalist class". The workers are used to seeing social riches created by the collective worker be destroyed, seeing production that should be going to fulfilling human needs be funneled into the needs of the war economy. Unaware that in the past it was only a proletarian revolution that put an end to the butchery of the first imperialist world war, the proletariat is ready to admit the legitimacy of war. The mere fact that mankind lives under the threat of thermonuclear destruction means that we all live a life of moral degradation.

It is clear that the subjective part of the revolutionary equation should not be taken for granted. The decline in economic conditions through the crisis has not pushed the class into decisive widespread confrontations. On the contrary, the gap between the crisis and the class response has only gotten greater. The proletariat, paralyzed at the moment, cannot exist without raising the question of revolution, of communism.

In the past, we thought that to have a

proletarian revolution it would be enough to have a proletariat and the objective need for a revolution. But proletarianization has not led to revolution; far from it.

Marxists educated in the confines of social democracy only retained the economic aspect and thought that objective conditions in themselves would automatically lead to socialism. We can no longer put our faith in their simplistic optimism, we can no longer afford their naivete which believed that machines and technological progress would work towards a liberation of humanity without the need for a political revolution. The crisis of the capitalist mode of production is here and has been here for the last 20 years. What the workers have to do is to overcome a lack of consciousness, develop a will to fight. The sujagation of the masses to the capitalist mode of production is, in our opinion, what has led us to social decomposition instead of social revolution.

Capitalism is doomed because the machines that could fulfill all human need are not freeing men from their needs or misery. The bourgeois mentality of society precludes abundance.

Despite the cries of the malthusians calling on us to balance the population against our available resources, the earth and its resources are truly able to feed and nurture a growing humanity.

Proletarian communism is not a survival plan for an impoverished humanity. It is a form of centralized organization for the whole planet, offering a society freed of antagonistic classes everything it can produce, all the material means to flourish. With the bourgeoisie overthrown and the capitalist system of production overthrown, the productive apparatus will be used to satisfy the needs of the population, all its needs without discrimination and mankind will flourish. Want will be abolished because a certain percentage of free consumer goods will be put at the disposal of everyone.

Communism will not emerge automatically from the convulsions of capitalist crisis. Just as the previous cyclical crises did not improve conditions for the workers, the final crisis of the capitalist mode of production will not of itself bring communism. Only the working class, led by a clear consciousness of a socialist economic organization for the entire planet, will be able to do that.

Although "objective" conditions are necessary for the the victory of the proletarian revolution and the creation of a socialist society, the real motor of

history is the conscious, creative activity of the working class. No revolutionary transformation is possible unless this class consciously intervenes in the historical process.

This confirms one of the basic ideas of Marx, that the problem of getting rid of the capitalist mode of production is not going to be solved by science. It is a matter of a will to change and above all the conscious self-activity of the revolutionary class. The decline in the profit rate, the saturation of markets can cause capitalism to collapse but only the revolution can eliminate it.

In the past, workers have lived through both the favorable and disastrous aspects of the objective conditions of capitalism. Today revolution has become above all a question of the consciousness of the class bearing communism. The revolution no longer depends on objective conditions because these objective conditions are already present and accounted for. They cannot lead to the transformation of this world unless the workers want this transformation to happen and are prepared to do something about it.

Without revolutionaries, without a revolutionary class, there can be no revolution whatever the objective conditions. Lenin and Trotsky obeyed this imperative in their way by making the Russian revolution depend on the action of the Bolshevik Party, the repository and representative of proletarian consciousness, according to them.

It is only by becoming a class-for-itself that the proletariat represents the negation of the capitalist mode of production. Then, and only then, will the capitalist mode of production have produced its own negation "with the inevitability of a natural law". This formulation by Marx has caused a great deal of misunderstanding. It has led many Marxists to a fatalistic interpretation of social development. They believe in an automatic collapse of the capitalist system, either through the disappearance of markets for the realization of surplus-value, or because of the tendential fall in the rate of profit. For them, the change in the intellectual capacity of the proletariat (its consciousness) becomes superfluous. For Marx, however, the inevitability of socialism was not a necessity outside of the praxis of the class, an immanent necessity executed in spite of man. The natural necessity of which he spoke, was the natural necessity to struggle against capitalism.

To a blind thought with which man has a false consciousness, Marxism opposes a conscious thought which grasps human and social reality. Marx never forgot that not only do conditions create man, man's thought, but that man and his thought also create those conditions. That's why he accorded an active role to man in the

historical process. To assert that without the subjective conditions there will be no revolution is not to renounce materialism; it is to return to Marx, and to take a position identical to his.

Because the proletarian revolution follows a different course than that of the bourgeois revolution, the coming to power of the working class will not be the consecration of a pre-existent state of affairs in the economy, the simple adaptation of the superstructure to an economic base already "socialized" within capitalism. Communism cannot arise as a natural adaptation of the superstructure to a pre-existent infrastructure!

A socialist transformation, the passage from capitalist decadence to a new social system requires the conscious, willful, intervention of the class directly interested in a change of the social regime. Now, this consciousness, and this will, nowhere exist to the necessary degree. The capitalist mode of production's capacity for survival has no other explanation.

For a revolutionary process to occur, it is necessary that as large a fraction of the working class as possible become conscious, either directly or as a result of the organized intervention of revolutionaries. For the moment, the proletariat is not revolutionary, and nothing permits us to expect its development of revolutionary class consciousness in the short run. The powerlessness of the capitalist mode of production to assure a minimum of well-being and security to the workers is only equaled by the powerlessness of those movements normally designated as "social", or "class struggle". Always asked to mobilize itself for causes absolutely foreign to its real existence, the working class finds itself weak and ideologically swindled.

In the Communist Manifesto, Marx and Engels foresaw the proletarian revolution as a result of the development of the productive forces that the working class had set in motion; they saw the proletariat as the gravedigger of the bourgeoisie. They could not foresee that the decadence of the capitalist mode of production, its social decomposition, would engender a class subject to the ideology of labor, to the defense of the national economy.

Never has the communist program seemed more abstract, more alien to a class which swallows the lies that the bourgeoisie churns out through its media, identifying Stalinism and Marxism. It has acknowledged that communism was compatible with the use of money, with wage-labor, with credit; that proletarian internationalism went hand in hand with the defense of the fatherland; that the revolutionary could be transmogrified into the cop and functionary of the "worker's state".

One could well ask: is the proletariat still capable of reversing a political situation that is so desperate, of expressing the necessity for the communist revolution and fighting for it? Where could the world party of the communist revolution

come from, if the revolutionary subject of history has regressed towards an incurable a-politicism?

It being virtually midnight in this century, one could well ask if the working class can extricate itself from its dead-end, from its political void; if the series of prior defeats, organized not by the bourgeoisie but by its own class organs, was really broken in 1968; if the cycle of struggles unleashed then really marked a definitive break with the counter-revolution. Today, we must ask ourselves if the decadence of capitalism -- in terms of its decomposition -- has not necessarily led to a disqualification of the proletariat, which renders it incapable of achieving the "historical mission" that Marxism assigned to it.

Aware of the fact that the Marxist method does not mean that communism is fated, that Marxism is not some sort of revealed religion, in which communism replaces the Messiah, class militants, the thinking subjects of revolutionary praxis, inscribe their activity on the terrain between the dread of a war which would mean the end of humanity, and the hope of a proletarian revolution.

Everything rots and putrifies. How could it be otherwise inasmuch as communism doesn't now exist? It is the devastating crisis in which capitalism is mired, which exudes social decomposition from every pore. Nonetheless, the revolt of the proletariat against capital remains the only force capable of putting an end to the slavery perpetuated by the dictatorship of the law of value. All would be possible if the working class could seize the moment. Only the communist revolution -- anti-individualistic, anti-national, anti-mercantile -- can put an end to social decomposition. In Marxism, one does not find the certitude that the communist revolution is inevitable, still less that its triumph is: "The revolution only represents one branch of the alternative that [capitalism's] development today imposes on humanity. If the proletariat does not come to a socialist consciousness, the result will be the opening of a course towards barbarism, of which we can today envisage only some aspects." (Internationalisme, 45, May 1952) We are now well within this course towards barbarism. The capitalist world has led humanity into a monstrous situation.

To speak of social decomposition does not mean that any restructuration of the capitalist mode of production is henceforth impossible, inasmuch as the conversion of the countries of the ex-Russian bloc to market economies proves the contrary. The crisis had begun to impose a basic restructuration in the 1970's, and that failed to extricate capital from its impasse, or to protect it from social decomposition. However drastic it is, restructuration will be powerless to prevent the basic tendency of the system to decompose, to rot. All its police and politico-juridical institutions, all its forms of social control, can be

restructured, but it will not provide any real dynamism to the capitalist mode of production. No restructuration of capital, no recomposition of wage-labor, can halt the crisis of the capitalist system. However annoying to those who speak of a "third industrial revolution", of a restructured economy, social decomposition is here. It is absurd to speak of a third industrial revolution when the capitalist mode of production is collapsing and dying as horribly as it first came into the world: dripping blood from every pore. Senile and cannibalistic, the capitalist mode of production has no more worlds to conquer, and for that reason can only exist under the form of totalitarianism, basing itself on an accumulation that is all the more reactionary as it plans for the non-satisfaction of the most basic needs.

The conversion of the left intelligentsia to militant anti-Marxism is also a part of this social putrefaction. These non-conformist intellectuals now denouncing the horrors of the gulag and the injustice of the nomenklatura (which they previously studiously ignored) legitimate the West, its freedoms and its pethora of gadgets. These functionaries of freedom and democracy, are working so that the ruling class can obtain an "anti-authoritarian" consensus that will divert the consciousness of the working class. Their function is to paralyze the proletariat in the short run, and to make it accept the capitalist "solutions" to the crisis.

Each retreat by the proletariat is marked by an advance of social decomposition. In whatever direction it turns, by whatever political means it utilizes to try to extricate itself from the grip of the crisis, capitalism is irresistably drawn towards its fate of social decomposition.

With respect to generalized war, social decomposition does not make it impossible. Rather, it becomes an integral part of this process of decomposition. To forget that, would be to fall into the illusion that imperialism has ceased to exist. On the contrary, social decomposition brings humanity to the very abyss of war. No government, Western or Eastern, can prevent war, because war is inscribed in the expansionist nature of capitalism. Capitalism is the very cause of modern war; war is the end point of imperialist rivalries. "War is an integral part of the capitalist system. It is merely the extension of the mercilous competition in which states are engaged." ("Oppose class war to the Gulf war", IP leaflet)

Must we dread war in the near future? Indisputably, yes. The method that consists in setting aside the perspective of war -- which is that of the ICC -- reflects the influence of pacifist sirens who justify their propaganda on the basis of the disappearance of the USSR as a military bloc that represents a danger to the USA. It is true that the USSR -- having exhausted itself as an imperialist power -- in its present weak state cannot challenge the US.

But it is just as certain that new imperialist constellations will arise, and will be compelled to confront one another, weapons at the ready, in the same way as in the period preceeding the two imperialist world wars.

To trace the evolution of the several imperialisms, is to trace the line that goes towards war, all the more so as for the moment imperialism has its hands free: "Imperialist war is, therefore, a phenomenon specific to the phase of the decline of bourgeois society, and represents an active agent in its decomposition; in contrast to national war which incontestably propelled capitalist development." (Communisme, no.3, June 15, 1937)

Just as state capitalism does not eliminate the crises of the capitalist mode of production, social decomposition does not eliminate imperialist war. In our epoch, the military-economic preparation for war encompasses all the branches and all the activities of civil society. The great world butcheries have shown that the productive forces can no longer be contained within the framework of capitalist social relations of production. Today, the domain of the destructive forces has become the most important sector of human activity. If science and technology still advance, it is in a negative sense, that of destruction. One example will suffice: put together, the power of the American and Russian arsenals represent 1 million times the power of the atom bomb dropped on Hiroshima, or 4 tons of explosives for each inhabitant of the planet. Thus, weapons that are apocalyptic in their potential stand ready to bring death and destruction to all points on the globe. To this progression of the military-industrial complex there corresponds a social regression: "Even the space program, the glory and object of so much publicity on the part of the great imperialisms, is animated by homicidal designs. And for each Gagarin and each Glenn, millions of men labor for interminable hours -- most without really satisfying their elementary needs." (Munis/Peret, Pour un Second Manifeste Communiste, 1965)

Until now, IP has interpreted the development of events on the basis of the concept of decadence, though it has failed to grasp the implications of this concept. It refuses to incorporate the concept of "social decomposition" into its Marxist understanding of history. To speak of decadence is necessary, but clearly insufficient. To refer only to decadence is to remain behind the pace of the actual historical development. The capitalist mode of production has entered its final phase of social decomposition. To deny it, is to make it impossible to grasp the real meaning of the present development. To reject it, as alien to the Marxist corpus, is to demonstrate an incomplete understanding of Marxism. The idea of social decomposition is in no sense in contradiction with the Marx's method, which has provided us with a theory of social development, which is also a method for the sociological explanation of

human history. Marx showed that the class struggle was the motor of history. His heirs must have enough intelligence to understand that the defeat of a social revolution -- when the material conditions are ripe -- will propel the historical tendency towards social decomposition.

IP does not want to utilize the concept of decomposition -- undoubtedly because it would align it with the ICC. It is difficult to grasp why IP would criticize the use of the term "decomposition" and accuse the ICC of leaving the framework of Marxism because it has developed and used that concept. It is as if there was an orthodox understanding of decadence, an invariant concept of decadence, which it would be unseemly to question. In utilizing the concept of "decadence", while studiously avoiding the incorporation of the concept of "social decomposition" into its analysis, the comrades of IP are simply unwilling to draw the necessary conclusions. In a sense, they are demonstrating their inability to be truly radical. In so doing, IP contents itself with a theoretical concept -- decadence -- that they are incapable of enriching. As a result, IP's analysis remains behind the actual course of events in social reality -- a social reality that IP has the task of making clear. In my opinion, IP has chained itself to a fixed and immutable theoretical framework. As a result, we are heading towards a situation analogous to the one in which we were deficient in grasping events in the East. We acknowledged the disappearance of the Russian bloc two years too late. We are in danger of acknowledging the reality of social decomposition with just as shocking a delay.

Communist thought, which must grasp the diversity of, and incessant changes in, social life (which is not the same as "progress") does not work with concepts that are defined once and for all, but rather with concepts that require constant criticism and enrichment. The Marxist method must be directed not to a frozen reality -- which would be suited to concepts that are ideological in character -- but rather to unearthing the most likely direction that the course of events will take. Militants are not the priests of a religion, but the architects of a critical thought. Far from being prohibited from forging new conceptual instruments, Marx's method demands that revolutionary theory enrich its vocabulary. So it was when the communist "fractions" before us defined the class nature of Stalinist Russia, and went beyond the concept of "centrism", when they grasped the nature of Nazism and fascism as products of the decadence of the capitalist mode of production, when they deepened the understanding of the character of the state in the period of transition. As Engels put it: "Marxism can be defined as a movement of thought which is not linked to a fixed result, but rather one which incessantly transcends the results attained, a practice which is not bound to acquired positions, but one which incessantly transcends its

earlier positions." (Against Carlyle)

IP must be inspired by the view of the International Bureau of the Fractions of the Communist Left (on the eve of World War Two): "No serious analysis, no clarity, no step forward, is possible outside of a radical revision of the positions that now prevail within the workers movement. When it is a matter of grasping the historic nature of the present development of the world situation, the cliches bequeathed us by "respectable tradition" often become a form of "betrayal" of the interests of the working class." (Octobre, no.2, March 1938) On the question of decomposition, IP does not have to distinguish itself from the ICC at any price. That would be too sterile and negative. Its role -- we repeat -- is to enrich a living thought, without fear of where its conclusions lead.

IP has always defined itself in opposition to dogmatism, to the absence of discussion and polemic; it has committed itself to fraternal debate between class militants, and even between militants of the same group. In a manner identical to that of Marx and Engels, we must learn as well as teach. In our theoretical work, we must demonstrate our intellectual audacity, our capacity to question, whatever the results or outcome of the process may be; and we must not be afraid to take a "leap into the unknown" when the situation demands it. In these difficult times, when Marxism is the target of the ruling class, it is a matter of keeping alive the critical and constructive spirit of Marxism, so as to oppose immobile dogma, and its intellectual sterility. Only in that way will our analysis become more rigorous.

To the initial foundation provided by Marx and Engels, Marxists today must make their own contribution, while basing themselves on what is fundamental, not secondary. We must verify the basic points layed down by Marx, by confronting them with the living reality of capitalism today. The results of such a process favor Marxism, and not its detractors. Everything that Marx and Engels said about the historic limits to the capitalist mode of production, everything that their heirs, Lenin and Luxemburg, foresaw about that catastrophic development, has come to pass. At the very moment when the capitalist mode of production has broken down, the enemies of the proletariat have the gall to speak of the death of Marxism.

To preserve its rate of profit, the capitalist mode of production has had to take back the concessions that it had earlier made to the working class. To grab new markets, to evict competitors, the capitalist mode of production has hurled itself into a furious competitive struggle, and has compressed wages to the fullest extent possible. To contain the expansionism of the Iraqi regime, Western imperialism unleashed its murderous war, and imposed a "Pax Americana". To preserve the bases of its domination, the Russian bourgeoisie is restructuring its productive apparatus so as to re-establish the traditional economic meaning of the law of value.

Can one imagine a more striking confirmation of the impossibility of the capitalist mode of production to provide humankind with the possibility of life, of having its needs fulfilled? Can there be a more tangible proof of the impasse of humanity, of the triumph of death over life? Can one conceive of a more conclusive demonstration of the "catastrophism" that is the foundation of Marxism?

R.C.

September 1991

Response to the C.B.G. Development of Revolutionary Theory & Regroupment

In a recent issue of the Communist Workers' Bulletin an article entitled "What About Positions?" calls on I.P. and the revolutionary milieu as a whole to clarify certain problems.

The article concerns the issue of the role of revolutionary organizations within the working class, the question of divergences and of regroupment of communist forces. Comrade Ingram addresses us in I.P. and accuses us of a lack of fervor in wanting to regroup with the CBG.

When we contacted the CBG, our first concern was to end the ostracism directed at them in the revolutionary milieu. We wanted to break out of the sectarianism that pervades our milieu. It was also important to begin a discussion so that we could see more clearly what would be necessary for a regroupment.

Contrary to what Ingram seems to suggest, regroupment is not an automatic process that follows from a simple agreement on what has been called "the class frontiers". Regroupment implies a process that deals with several points :

- a characterization of the period and its implications for the combativity of the proletariat and its effect on the difficulties of the revolutionary milieu;
- political agreement on the platform;
- agreement on the present situation and its influence on the tasks of the organization;
- the coherence of the method of analysis used to understand social change : what revolutionary theory?;
- the need for a militant organization involved in the struggles of the working

class;
- and finally, the will and intention to work together in solidarity.

But regroupment implies dealing with another issue that many people are wondering about : why such a dispersion of revolutionaries today? Why is the revolutionary milieu so weak? We will try to answer this question before going on to the conditions for regroupment.

Ingram's text explicitly states that revolutionary minorities participate in the process of class consciousness and makes it clear that this is not just a simple physical presence in struggles. The article defines the revolutionary camp by referring to the class positions but states that different interpretations are possible in the process of clarification within the working class. For Ingram this clarification is not linked to any one group but implies the whole revolutionary milieu. The CBG comrade then defends the need for a large regroupment of revolutionary forces at the present time.

There are many interesting elements in this text but it seems to us that the central issue is not the way groups centralize organizational decisions and take measures to avoid bureaucratism or even the need to grant minorities the right to develop divergent positions, but rather an understanding of the development of revolutionary theory. This can lead us to understand why there has been such a dispersion of revolutionary forces.

It is true that the existence of several revolutionary groups is not an inevitable situation. The dispersion or rather the political differences that led to this dispersion are the result of a particular historical situation and of the very nature of revolutionary theory.

THE PROGRAM

In the course of its struggles, reacting to the exploitation of capitalism, the workers' movement has continually worked to identify the fundamental principles underlying the proletarian movement. These principles, meant to define the meaning of its revolt, are embodied in the communist program for social revolution. These principles are not abstract ideals; they are the products of the historical struggle of the working class. They were understood as an emanation of the movement and synthesized into a class program by the revolutionary elements of the proletariat.

The abolition of the law of value, the destruction of the capitalist state, the instauration of a new political power, these are the main points of these proletarian principles. They are

guidelines for the future conscious action of the class in social transformation. Unlike the bourgeoisie that could unify around the need for profits and the valorization of capital, the proletariat can only unite by destroying the existing relations of production that cause alienation and atomization. Thus, the program is not a fixed and finished product but a movement constantly enriched by the proletariat from the lessons of its daily struggles. This program is the result of the experience of all the struggles against capitalist exploitation. In fact, it is the development of the struggle and the tensions created by these class antagonisms (and not a simple economic or technological necessity alone) that makes the revolutionary program embody the real movement of the class.

Although in the 19th century revolutionaries like Marx and Engels played a major role in formalizing this movement, the original program -- social revolution, the reorganization of society on the basis of communist relations of production spearheaded by the action of the working class -- has been modified and deepened by the historical experience of the class since that time. What has been clarified for us is an understanding of the need to destroy the bourgeois state, the rejection of parliamentarism, the need for autonomous organizations of the working class, an understanding of the integration of the unions into the state apparatus, the rejection of the vanguard role of the party taking state power and substituting itself for the activity of the class, the intransigent defense of internationalism against all the nationalist panaceas, the theorization of capitalism's decadence as a system, and the rejection of any frontism with bourgeois organizations. This historic movement can be understood through revolutionary theory, by the effort towards systematic thought on the part of revolutionary communists. And, for us, the most coherent theory to explain this movement remains marxism.

But the assertion that marxism is the theory of the working class can be interpreted in many ways and can have different consequences both for revolutionaries and for the class itself. It could be interpreted to mean, for example, that marxism is in itself, and by rights or dictat, the theory of the working class whose action it guides. Or it can mean, more appropriately, that marxism is the theoretical expression of the real practice of the working class. In other words, that practice implies its own theory which is expressed in marxism to such a degree that the workers can recognize the hidden meaning of what they are engaged in doing as a class and more fully grasp the implications and consequences of their activity. On the one hand, we could have a theory coming

from the outside, brought by intellectuals, which is what leninism claims. Or a theory that emerges from practice as we see it, following the insights of the German-Dutch left communists of the 20's and 30's.

REVOLUTIONARY THEORY

The proletariat is an exploited class, suffering from alienation and increasing atomization, mentally crushed by the intensity of the ideological barrage from the dominant class but it does not remain passive. Reactions to capitalist exploitation mean attempts to break out of the chains, to break through the alienation by developing networks of solidarity in thought and action.

The thought that emerges from these efforts is essentially critical thought, the denunciation of existing reality, of existing knowledge. History gives us many examples of this. Marx began his work leading to the formulation of historical materialism by denouncing "German ideologies". His idea was clear : to break with the schemas of dominant bourgeois knowledge. The Communist Manifesto is another text written as a critique, explaining proletarian goals through negative examples. It was not meant as a recipe for the future, a full-proof plan for future generations to slavishly follow. It was an example of the use of the critical method which alone can help the struggle against capitalism.

In the same way, "The Introduction to the Critique of Political Economy" is not necessarily the last word in criticism of the concepts of bourgeois economy. But it pointed the way to future work and thought that still remains to be done.

There is no fixed and abstract theory. For us, marxism is not a science or an interpretive philosophy of the world. It is a practical-theoretical questioning of social reality in order to contribute to changing it. This theoretical reflection has one major, unchanging hallmark : the use of the critical method.

The proletariat's viewpoint, a universal one, has nothing to do with recipes whether they belong to structuralism or psychoanalysis. It is a method of investigation allowing us to understand social reality at a given time; it is the critical method of a movement to go beyond the system and its stereotypes. Marxism is not a frozen litany or a religious relic that must be preserved.

With Capital, Marx gave us an example of the method to use. Along with him, we reject empiricism, the analysis of facts in and of themselves. Facts have a meaning only in their correlation, in their totality. Capital confirms the work of deconstruction of political economy.

But the fundamental inspiration that goes through all of Marx's work is not simply the critique of liberal ideology but a commitment to the social movement that embodied this critique, whose practice aims at overthrowing the established order. It is from this commitment that comes the theoretical analyses of the role of social classes in history and the identification of the contradictions inherent in the capitalist mode of production.

THE ROLE OF REVOLUTIONARIES

In the Junius Brochure, Rosa Luxemburg reminds us that :

"People do not make history as they choose. But they make it nevertheless. In its action, the proletariat depends on the degree of maturation of social evolution. But social evolution does not intervene without the proletariat. The proletariat is the motor force and the cause of this evolution as much as it is the effect and the product of it. The action of the proletariat itself is a co-determining factor in history."

This quote contains something fundamental for the theory of history which must get rid of any idea of a pre-determined necessity, any mechanistic, external approach. History must be seen as a question of choices and of creation on a daily basis. This means that class consciousness, a non-determined element in this history, is where revolutionary activity comes from and returns to. We question the dogmatism of the inevitable "final goal" and any linear vision of the road leading from capitalism to socialism. We do not want to offer any recipes, any tactics. We simply try to understand, express and crystallize the meaning of the real struggles and therefore contribute to making the aim of the movement clearer.

The assertion that class consciousness is the essential component, the sine qua non of any revolutionary movement, is certainly not something that distinguishes us from the rest of the revolutionary camp. But, for us, consciousness is not something injected from outside of the proletariat or outside of the movement of the class. It expresses the level of organization reached in the struggle and the degree of questioning of capitalist norms. In this sense, it is variable and cannot be artificially maintained.

It is not an external entity, the product of a theory or the property of a party. It is the condition for the development of the struggle and the result of that struggle. We can speak of the elements that play a role in determining this consciousness, of the material conditions that determine the forms of this consciousness. But there is never an empirical relation of cause and effect between them. The same conditions

can lead to very different forms of consciousness and action. Material conditions can have an effect on the class only insofar as the class itself is open to this, that is, to the extent that the class gives a meaning to what is happening to it.

Our task is not to "point the way forward"; to play the "great leader". It is to reveal the hidden meaning of a situation and avoid falling into a linear, non-dialectical concept of history. History as it is lived is an open question and our task is to emphasize this opening and the potential class consciousness possible in a given situation.

The class struggle determining the historical process does not have a fatalistic outcome; it is open, variable, creating new meanings. Theory is not and cannot be a closed system. Theory is the historical meaning of this proletarian struggle, not a meaning consciously attached to individual actions but their latent meaning.

PROGRAM AND PLATFORM

We would like to make a distinction here between the platform of a revolutionary organization and the program of the working class. The program is a general reference to the action of the class, to the overall aims of the struggle. A platform is a more precise document, belonging to a revolutionary organization, expressing its understanding of the communist program. The specific function of a platform is to crystallize the method of revolutionaries in expressing the different analyses they deem essential. It expresses an understanding or even an interpretation of the program but it is not the program. Contrary to the wishes of comrade Ingram, our task today is not to widen the content of the ICC platform so as to avoid any sectarianism. Our task is to make a critique of the inadequacies of that platform.

The ICC platform represented an important moment in the reawakening of class struggle in the 60's and 70's. It was written by militants still heavily under the influence of the wave of class struggle that followed Mai 68. But this platform has to be redone in the light of events in the last 20 years. For the ICC, however, all critical spirit has been thrown out the window in favor of pragmatism and conformism, in favor of trying to maintain the fiction that they have always been right. The ICC is now revising its platform...but in the sense of a political regression back to the certitudes of leninism. This will surely have a negative effect on their concept of the communist program.

In the first issue of I.P. we stated

our tasks as follows : "To draw the lessons of the ICC experience for the workers' movement and work towards the programmatic enrichments that are now necessary. The proletariat can lift itself up from failure only if it has gone to the root of the causes of that failure and learned from it for the future."

We have gone about this work, patiently and with respect. We have invited the comrades of the CBG to join us in this effort. This is not some academic exercise to update a few old texts but a contribution to the understanding of today's events : a deeper understanding of state capitalism and the recomposition of the working class.

It is impossible to work towards a large-scale regroupment of revolutionaries without undertaking this critique of the platform. This of course does not preclude working with others to accomplish this task. Quite the contrary.

The critical work done so far does not yet allow for a synthesis of a new platform or the abandoning of our reference to the old ICC platform. Discussion has only begun and this kind of theoretical work cannot be bound by any infallible formulations or any a priori assumptions. New theoretical experience can only be the result of real discussion. This approach lets diverse ideas come together, expressing different tendencies, so that thought can develop and become a collective product.

THE PRESENT PERIOD

The underlying economic crisis, the stagnating class struggle, the ideological offensive of the bourgeoisie...and the revolutionary milieu has not been spared. We have diagnosed a crisis in the milieu whose origins we must pinpoint so that a cure can be found. Sectarianism and bureaucratization are only symptoms, rightly brought to the fore by comrade Ingram. But they alone cannot explain the theoretical regression suffered by so many groups. This situation has allowed many divergent views to flourish. The timidity of the working class reaction has produced new leninist tendencies in the milieu, adding to the general confusion. Nevertheless, without falling into any mechanistic tie between the development of the crisis and the growth of class struggle, we must be able to understand the meaning of today's events. Capitalism is desperately trying to restructure its productive apparatus and the working class is suffering the effects of this new technological revolution with a pervasive austerity touching most members of the class. Capitalism has shown the face of barbarism and the futility of its democratic charade.

Disorientation, demoralization; the return to the demons of substitutionism out of powerlessness and desperation... we can understand the efforts made by some in the revolutionary milieu to break out of their isolation like Communisme ou Civilisation (Belgium) that started the RIMC.

In terms of the comrades who participate in the CBG, we have to keep up the process we began two years ago :

-increase contacts, exchanges and correspondence;

-keep working on the critique of the

platform of the ICC and continue the discussions begun in I.P.;

This means carrying on a lively discussion leading to written discussion texts (published in our respective magazines), syntheses of the progress of the debate in order to be clear about eventual agreements and disagreements.

But we must also maintain the discussion with the whole political milieu via public meetings so that discussion meetings can become real places for political confrontation and elaboration.

F.D.

ON THE REVOLUTIONARY PROJECT

Open Letter to the EFICC

This article is a contribution from a comrade who left the I.C.C. after being "suspended" from political activity by that organization because she dared to attend one of our Public Meeting without being told to do. She is now discussing with I.P. We cannot help being appalled by this new manifestation of the ICC's downward spiral. But we are glad that this comrade, far from being discouraged by such treatment, has redeveloped a new and sustained political activity since the break, as this article shows.

The article deals with several important issues : the need for new developments in marxist theory, the contributions and the limitations of the legacy left by the German-Dutch and Italian left communists, a critique of the I.C.C., and a discussion of the importance of class consciousness in the

development of a revolutionary perspective. Despite their apparent diversity, these questions are all related to the same point : a better understanding of the impasse the revolutionary milieu has found itself in since the 80's and a search for the possibilities of a revolutionary action that can answer the needs of working class struggle in the years to come.

It is clear that all of these questions are the subjects of extensive debate and that these discussions must be gone into very deeply. In the spirit of this discussion, we invite our readers to become familiar with some of the articles we have written on these subjects particularly on the degeneration of the I.C.C. in I.P. #9 and on the development of class consciousness and the role of revolutionaries in I.P. #4 & 6.



After leaving the ICC in July 1991, I was free to get in touch with you and begin a study of the basic questions you have developed in Internationalist Perspectives. I find your work very positive and I want to contribute to it by communicating my thoughts to you on the needs of the present period.

THE NEED FOR A NEW POLE OF REVOLUTIONARY REGROUPMENT

In the first issue of I.P. you state your aim as follows : "working towards the rebirth of a real revolutionary milieu able to clarify proletarian class positions and contribute to the regroupment of a clear revolutionary

avant-garde." You have certainly put this idea into practice by breaking with the sectarianism of the ICC, by publishing a magazine open to debates and discussion, by holding public meetings where one can feel once again a pleasure in debates and confrontation of ideas, by showing that it is possible to create a revolutionary organization that is not monolithic. "The existence of divergences in the organization is a manifestation of the fact that it is a living organism which does not have a pat answer to all the problems the class will confront. Marxism is not a dogma or a catechism. It is the theoretical instrument of a class which through its experience and in view of its historic mission, gradually advances with

ups and downs towards the class consciousness that is the sine qua non of its emancipation. Like all human thought, the development of class consciousness is not linear or automatic; it is a contradictory, uneven process requiring the confrontation of positions." (Excerpt from "Report on the Structure and Functioning of the Revolutionary Organization", point 8, International Review # 33 of the ICC which has forgotten to put this into practice). Even though you have limited resources to realize these goals, your efforts still show that this needs to be done and that it can be done.

In the last two issues of I.P. (#20 and 21), you have published articles about the terrible state the revolutionary milieu has gotten into. But these texts have also pointed to some small signs of a will to emerge from this destructive atomization. You stress the need for a "living practice of marxist theory", the need to "cut the umbilical cord with the Russian experience" by refusing to see it as a model for today's perspectives, and the need to "renew theory". (I.P. #20)

I agree with these statements wholeheartedly and the first consequence of this should be to stop calling yourselves "the External Fraction of the ICC", a name that can only limit your field of influence. Among revolutionaries, those who share the ideas of the ICC or sympathize with them naturally prefer "go directly to the source". Those who do not agree with the ICC can only feel a little suspicious of a group that keeps claiming a link to the ICC. For the vast majority of proletarians who know neither the ICC nor the "political milieu", your "Positions", which appear on the back cover of the magazine, seem obscure -- hardly a minor point.

Of course, this would require the elaboration of a new platform of regroupment. This cannot be undertaken lightly and requires a great deal of time. But the new world situation demands it. The collapse of one of the greatest lies of modern history, the existence of a so-called "communist bloc", has begun a time when conditions in the world will be clearer because more uniform. Everywhere there is the same cruel "market" capitalism slowly destroying a humanity where the proletariat has become the majority (1). Objectively speaking, conditions for the communist revolution have never been better. But capitalism will not fall of itself. It will drag us all to barbarism as long as the proletariat with its conscious and collective activity has not grabbed power away from the inhuman class that now wields it.

But how? And what will we put in the place of capitalism? This is the basic question raised by the failure of the

Russian revolution (2). The least one can say is that the answer is still unclear. The fundamental question is : how can we explain in positive terms the proletarian revolutionary alternative. This is surely one of the major tasks of revolutionaries.

This letter is only going to try to clear up some of the confusion around this issue. All these points must be part of the debate and discussion among revolutionaries. The aim is to up-date the criteria defining the proletarian camp and decide how this camp should see itself and act in the coming period. I think that without this work, we cannot find a new "marxist practice".

THE INADEQUACIES OF LEFT COMMUNISM (the "party" type and the "councilist" type) IN DEFINING THE REVOLUTIONARY PROJECT

The German, Dutch, and Italian left communist movements from which we claim our heritage had this in common : they were the first to denounce the degeneration of the Russian revolution and the imposture of stalinism. But although they all share the position that the fundamental cause of this degeneration was the failure of the revolution to spread to Germany and other European countries, they still drew diametrically opposed lessons from this experience. For the "partyists" (the "bordigists", "leninists", of the Italian left), the party is everything because without it, the Russian revolution would never have succeeded. The party is "consciousness incarnate" without which the workers' councils are just "a form without a content".

For the "councilists" or the "council communists" of the German and Dutch left, the unitary organs of the class (the workers' councils) and the spontaneity of the masses were everything because the councils were the real force that paralyzed the bourgeoisie and pushed ahead; without them the revolution would never have taken place. Seeing how the Bolshevik party became the state party and gradually crushed these organs making them subservient to the will of the Party-State dictatorship, councilists concluded that the party could only play a negative role by cutting off spontaneity and stifling the initiative of the masses.

Any theory that expresses a partial view of reality contains positive and negative aspects. In a very schematic way, partyism, let us say "leninism" since this is the usual term, contains something positive in that it realizes that for the proletariat to seize power in society as a whole, it must have a consciousness that goes beyond its immediate interests; it must develop a more global consciousness capable of defending a revolutionary program that can supplant the power of the

bourgeoisie. Due to the material conditions of existence of the proletariat, this consciousness is not going to be expressed uniformly throughout the whole class at exactly the same time. It is a heterogeneous process where revolutionary minorities must take the responsibility of convincing the rest of the class, of pushing the workers to shake off the hold of the dominant bourgeois ideology and present a proletarian political perspective.

But "leninism" is negative in that it contains the outdated idea (based on the working class as it was in the 19th century and in the early 20th century when it was a minority and much weaker than today) that the proletariat as a whole cannot gain access to this consciousness and that it must delegate this task and give its power to whatever party gains its confidence. The role of the party would be to exercise state power in the name of the proletariat while waiting for the proletariat to be able to take over this task and dissolve the State. But just as the parliamentary practices of the social-democratic parties led them to the defense of nationalism, the Russian experience has shown that a party that assumes state power ceases to be a proletarian party and turns against the working class. It proved the popular saying that "power corrupts" and showed that even the most dedicated and honest working class organizations cannot resist the corruptive influence of power. For "leninists" the notion of "politics" remains firmly fixed to the State and the government and on finding out how the party can get in on that.

"Council communists" or "councilists" have have something positive in that to them the main lesson of the Russian experience is the idea that the proletariat is capable of creating a network of unitary organizations based on general assemblies at the workplace and that these unitary organizations can join together through delegates directly responsible for their mandate. In doing so, these unitary organizations can gain control of production and social life. This is the fundamental weapon of the working class to get power away from the bourgeoisie. The "councilist" movement knows that the councils constitute the real strength of the proletariat and that through their experiences, the councils will gain the consciousness necessary to exercise power. This is the only guarantee against the danger that power will escape from their hands and, wielded by a minority, turn against them.

It is this consciousness and confidence in the capacity of the proletariat to organize on an autonomous terrain that forms the bedrock of the councilists' refusal (clearer than that of the Italian left) to participate in or support institutions of capitalist

society (parliaments, unions, national parties, etc) because this new social organization, based on direct proletarian democracy, makes the organs of capitalist "democracy" historically obsolete. It is clear that this vision, unlike that of "leninism", remains true today and more than ever adapted to the needs of proletarian struggle against capitalism today. It is not surprising that the German and Dutch lefts represent the insights of a more developed and experienced proletariat than the Russian one. It is the German and Dutch left that has contributed the most to the elaboration of a social program based on the workers' councils with works such as Fundamental Principles of Communist Production and Distribution which can (along with the texts of Bilan which reflected the contacts of the Italian left with the ideas of the German and Dutch tradition) serve as a starting point for future theoretical work. This current produced a Pannekoek whose work seems to me to be the most profound and necessary for our period.

On the negative side, council communists took the danger of the degeneration of political organizations of the working class so far that they denied that the class even needed such organizations. This put revolutionaries in a bind : if they want to spread their ideas (put out a publication, for example) they have to organize, but because they fear the fossilization of fixed structures, they refuse any organizational theory out of respect for the freedom of the individual. But because every individual is subject to the weight of the dominant ideology, the result is chaos and inefficiency : little informal groups where the same people do everything, unable to create a collective framework of participation and deepening, unstable because they are at the mercy of the whims of each individual.

Councilists exclude the possibility of giving a direction or a perspective to the struggle of the class because "the proletariat doesn't need to be told what to do". Revolutionaries should limit themselves to "giving information", "analyzing", "being a witness", "making people think more deeply". This is their reasoning : "There is a very widespread opinion holding that a necessary and essential part of what is called a 'revolutionary attitude' or 'revolutionary actions' depends on a 'class consciousness' or a 'unity' among the workers. This point of view does not know or misinterprets the way action and consciousness interact. Workers do not act 'as a revolutionary class' because they are 'conscious' or 'united.' 'Consciousness' and 'unity' do not precede the struggle, they emerge during the struggle and are the products of it. Social struggle transforms the mentality of those who engage in it. Their place as

a class in the capitalist system leads them to the defense of their interests and to a confrontation with the existing social order. Such struggles emerge constantly and they are potentially revolutionary." (point 2 of the "Basic Principles" of Echanges et Mouvement) (4)

This blind confidence in the revolutionary spontaneity of the proletariat is based on the Russian experience where the masses showed such a radical audacity that they often went beyond the consciousness of the political parties of the "avant-garde". But we cannot remain at such a superficial level and elevate this empirical fact to an absolute truth without looking for the factors that allowed this spontaneity to take a revolutionary form in Russia.

First of all, we cannot ignore the extreme weakness of the Russian bourgeoisie that had none of the social "shock absorbers" in place (unions, etc) which the bourgeoisie has since developed so well. Also, even if such a thing cannot be measured exactly, we cannot ignore the influence of all the propaganda work done by the social-democratic parties in Europe and in Russia itself (Bolsheviks and Mensheviks) when they denounced capitalism and the autocracy and put forward the social program of the "Republic" (the "socialist Republic" or the "Republic of the workers"). Obviously, this kind of revolutionary work was a determining factor in the revolutionary nature of the Russian events because it gave a goal to the struggle; it gave the courage and enthusiasm that only those who fight for a "cause" can know.

How can we explain why this "spontaneous transformation of struggle" did not happen in other places (or why it didn't go beyond an embryonic phase elsewhere) if it is not that since the Russian revolution there has not been a new alternative offered for the new society?

"Spontaneous generation" exists only in simplistic visions. A qualitative change is nothing more than a reorganization of the elements that already existed, a new relation between the parts that transforms the whole into "something else".

I do not mean to deny the existence of spontaneity and my words should not be twisted to mean anything like : "we revolutionaries will have to invent the organization of the future society and the proletariat will only need to carry out our model"! What I want to say is this : "When a man has something to build, he must first think it over in his mind, in the form of a plan or an outline that is more or less conscious. This is what separates the actions of human beings from the instinctive actions of

animals. This is also true, in principle, of social struggles, of the revolutionary struggles of social classes. Not entirely, of course, because spontaneous, unpremeditated actions play a big role in the explosions of passionate revolt. Workers in struggle are not an army led by officers from the party acting according to a carefully prepared battle plan." (Pannekoek, Workers' Councils, "Organisations at the Workplace".)

THE DERAILMENT OF THE ICC

The ICC was supposed to go beyond the insights of both these currents of left communism, keeping what was best and rejecting the errors. Unfortunately, we have to conclude that the ICC got lost somewhere along the way because it has ended up keeping the errors of both currents. From the councilists, it has kept an "economist" vision of coming to consciousness according to which the crisis of capitalism will necessarily lead to defensive struggles that will necessarily be transformed into revolutionary struggles and that it is during these struggles that the proletariat will spontaneously find and assert its revolutionary perspective. This reasoning has served as an excuse for ignoring the fundamental task of revolutionaries which is to show the way forward by developing a positive vision of the revolutionary goal. From the "bordigist" current (the Italian left), it took (or developed in practice after several years of existence and despite a refusal to recognize what was happening) the same sterile and sectarian megalomania.

These two deformations are linked. The only guarantee (and there is no absolute guarantee) that we can try to have against degeneration is to keep our eyes on the goal because the goal determines the means to achieve it. It is the goal that allows you to evaluate whether or not your practice is adequate to the task. Based on the principle that "the proletariat will find the road to revolution by itself" (an idea that is part of the councilist error of seeing revolutionaries as outside of the class), this aspect of our work was completely ignored and the aim of political life became to "build and defend the organization". The organization became an end in itself, with an intense and highly-structured life, closed in on itself. The organization became a source of alienation (because it lost sight of the real objective of its activity) and a source of ideology (reasoning processes which become independent of reality, which become "deaf and blind" to the real world).

By making the organization an end in itself, it is not surprising that the ICC fell into the same errors that it had so criticized among the bordigists, the same errors we find in all the organizations

that claim to be "leninist". But organizations that claim to be "leninist", that take the Russian revolution as a model and defend the idea that the role of the party is to take power in the name of the working class, are coherent in that their means serve their ends which are to take state power and establish a dictatorship. If this is what is being prepared, then it is logical that priority is given to discipline rather than discussion, that other organizations are considered scheming "competitors", that no occasion is lost to claim superiority over all others and denigrate them, ridicule them and deny them any "right to exist". It is normal, also, that there is no real attempt to encourage thought in the proletariat or to present the true difficulties of the situation to the workers. There is no effort to openly deal with the contradictory aspect of reality, with the fact that there is no absolute "truth", that mistakes are inevitable and that the important thing is to correct them through open and fraternal discussion. No, the organization's efforts become directed to presenting itself as tough, macho, infallible.

The fact that the ICC has adopted this sort of ("non-centrist"?) behavior leads to a change in its revolutionary perspective. It is no longer the "power of the workers' councils" but the power of a party that counts. The ICC of course denies this and gets into a snit if you so much as mention it. Their reasoning is very convoluted. Workers' councils remain the organs of power but... the only real revolutionary workers' councils are the good workers' councils who follow the party. The party will take power as a "delegate" of the councils but it will prefer destroying the councils rather than let them fall under another party's influence. Exactly as the Bolsheviks did.

It's time that the ICC explained the reasons for the behavior that has contributed so much to the weakening and destruction of revolutionary political life. The ICC attitude is certainly not the only cause of this situation but how many revolutionaries have we heard say that they would like to discuss and debate but not with the ICC. The ICC sees this as a proof of its own superiority but it is really a proof of its alienation in the full sense of the term, a proof that it has "forgotten" the social program that supposedly determined its existence. There is obviously a link between the social program you fight for and the way you behave. As Pannekoek wrote about the Russian party, "The Communist Party did not intend to transform the workers into independent fighters, capable of building a new world through their own intelligence and understanding. It merely wanted to make them obedient servants that would carry the party to

power....With its idle discourses on the World Revolution, it hindered the development of any new perspectives and new struggles which were sorely needed. By cultivating the horrible vice of submission (which all workers must eradicate) under the name of discipline, by getting rid of any trace of critical independent thought, it prevented the development of the real power of the working class." (Workers' Councils, Ch V, "The Russian Revolution").

CONSCIOUSNESS AND ORGANIZATION

The main difficulty of the proletarian revolution is that it has to be made by the consciousness and the organization of the entire working class. Consciousness of what? Let's cite a definition of class consciousness formulated during the debates your fraction raised in the ICC :

"What distinguishes the consciousness of the proletariat from that of the bourgeoisie is its capacity to understand :

- that the capitalist mode of production is as transitory as all the other modes that preceded it;
- that capitalism is, therefore, condemned by history and the working class must carry out the sentence;
- that the struggles of the workers under capitalism, in addition to being a defense of their immediate interests as a class, are also a preparation for their role in destroying capitalism, transforming society, and building a new society....

It is important to emphasize that what is decisive, what is the beginning and the end of the development of a general consciousness of social reality on the part of the proletariat is the revolutionary project." (Excerpt from an internal text of the ICC, "On the Reasons for the Vote Of ML", May 1984)

(5)

THE IMPORTANCE OF PRINCIPLES IN A PROLETARIAN ORGANIZATION

The ends determine the means to attain these ends. The aim of the proletarian revolution is to take the means of production out of the hands of the capitalist class and use them to fulfill the real needs of mankind. This means taking power away from the capitalist class and reorganizing all social life on this planet. The only real guide to this endeavor is this very aim. Nothing else. It is clear that such an undertaking, unprecedented in history, cannot be accomplished without the agreement, the conscious will, the initiative, of the majority of people. These elements can only develop and flourish in the atmosphere of freedom and mutual confidence created by the revolutionary class. The aim of organizational principles (or principles of behavior) is to allow proletarian collectivities to

work together, without paralysis or self-destruction, to think and act together as a whole in spite of the inevitable existence of disagreements and even personal antipathies.

Active participation for all, freedom of thought and freedom of speech, not being required to defend positions that conflict with one's conscience, the multiplication and centralization of relations permitting the widest possible circulation of texts, positions and information, decisions voted on by everyone, the application of majority rule with the understanding that majorities do not necessarily represent "the truth" and that there must be freedom of expression for minorities, the creation of the best possible conditions for debates without taboos or prejudices but with method and honesty -- these are the sort of rules that allow consciousness to advance and develop. These principles are the result of the experience of the organized proletarian movement and are consistent with the nature of the proletarian revolution: "a movement by the great majority, in the interests of the great majority". The revolution cannot live without the active participation of the greatest number. It is necessarily a heterogeneous movement full of contradictions like any living expression. This is why these principles are not just valid for the political organization of the proletariat but are the basis for the life of any revolutionary proletarian regroupment. The constant objective of such a regroupment is to create a collective framework to understand reality, to work for its transformation, to take positions and spread them to others, to be active participants and not passive spectators in social transformation.

Experience shows that these principles are not so easy to put into practice (if they were so natural and so easy there would be no need to write them down and stipulate them so specifically). The dominant ideology in society, based on competition and personal ambition, weighs heavily on our minds and will continue to do so. It constitutes a constant threat of degeneration and death for proletarian political and unitary organizations and an obstacle to any regroupment process. Without proletarian principles, there is no proletarian revolutionary life.

PERSPECTIVES

I am not going to write that "because the historic course has not changed yet in favor of the bourgeoisie, we are still on the road to decisive class confrontations". I no longer share this way of looking at things. But I would like to quote a passage from Pannekoek that seems to me to be perfectly adapted to what is happening in our period.

"But the forces of capitalism work in

the depths of society, shaking up old ways, pushing people forward even against their will. The disturbing features of these changes are, for the most part, repressed to safeguard the old habits of life. But, accumulated in the subconscious, these effects only intensify internal tensions until in the crisis, arriving at their apogee, they break loose in action, in revolt. These actions are not the result of a deliberate intention; they emerge irresistibly, as a spontaneous act. In such spontaneous acts, mankind discovers what it is capable of and this never ceases to surprise people. And because action is always collective action, it reveals to everyone that the forces felt within one person are also felt in others. Confidence and courage awaken with the growth of that great strength of the working class, its common will; it fires the masses and lead them on.

Action breaks out spontaneously, brought on by capitalism itself and not desired by the workers. It is not the end product of a process of spiritual growth but rather its point of departure. Once the struggle has begun, the workers must continue to attack and defend themselves. They have to throw all their forces into the struggle. Indifference disappears: it was only a shadowy form of resistance towards forces the workers had felt powerless to affect. A period of intense intellectual effort begins. In coming up against the mighty power of capitalism, the workers realize that they can win only by marshalling all their forces. What appeared only in vague form in ordinary struggles now emerges clearly. All the dormant forces so long asleep among the workers burst forth. This is the creative work of the revolution. The need for a solid unity is thus firmly planted in the workers' consciousness. The need to know is felt at every turn. Any ignorance, any illusions about the nature or the strengths of the enemy, any weakness in resisting its tricks, any inability to refute its arguments and calumnies will be paid for in defeat and failure. An ardent desire emerges from the depths of being, making the workers use their brains. New hopes, a new vision of the future, animate their spirits transforming them into an active, living force that leaves no stone unturned in the search for truth, in the desire to understand." (Workers' Councils, ch VI, "The Workers' Revolution").

I think that priorities in the tasks of revolutionaries have to be consistent with this view of the revolutionary process as quoted above. The revolutionaries' task is to offer the clearest possible response to the questions that emerge from the struggle and that are with us now if people would only choose to hear them. Only the deaf cannot hear. The more publications bringing some clarity on important questions, the better the chances that

these struggles will lead to a revolutionary solution.

The fact that since 1988 you have opened your pages (I.P. 11, 12, 13 & 21) to a debate on the period of transition seems to me to be a very positive development. One to continue.

Also, the discussion you have begun on the nature of the proletariat ("State Capitalism" in I.P. 7; "The Recomposition of the Classes Under State Capitalism" in I.P. 15) is absolutely fundamental. Another major reason for the "crisis in marxism" is the fact that the proletariat, the revolutionary class, the subject of history, does not know how to recognize itself as a class in today's world.

Encouraging you to continue your work, and hoping that the difficult years you have gone through have not exhausted your courage, I send you my fraternal greetings.

TM
February 1992

(1) You should go back to this issue and follow up the work you did on the proletariat today because it is clear that this is a fundamental question that is the source of so much confusion among revolutionaries. The ICC, for example, continues to think of the working class as a minority class in society and this directly affects their view of the role of revolutionaries.

(2) The question that was the most often raised during the tumultuous events of Mai 1968 in France was : what do you want to replace capitalism with? To answer this question, the first issue of Revolution Internationale was printed in December 1968 on "The Workers' Councils". It tried to answer this question based on the insights of the R.I. platform and under the influence of readings from Socialisme ou Barbarie. It is worth rereading because it has been forgotten by many although it is an important document in the revolutionary experience of our current. It was written under the pressure of proletarian struggle and was an important factor in the regroupment process that led to the formation of the ICC.

(3) I use "council communism" and "councilism" interchangeably to describe those currents that rejected the social democratic and leninist vision of the role of the party and indeed any role for the party or the political organization. Unlike the ICC, I attach no pejorative meaning to this word any more than to the word "leninist" or "bordigist" or "partyism". In the middle of the 1980's, after an internal discussion, the ICC began to claim that "councilism was the greatest danger for the working class"

which you in I.P. quite correctly criticized. The ICC showed itself an ungrateful offspring because its principles owed more to council communism than to the leninist vision.

(4) Echanges et Mouvement, BP 241 75866 Paris Cedex 18.

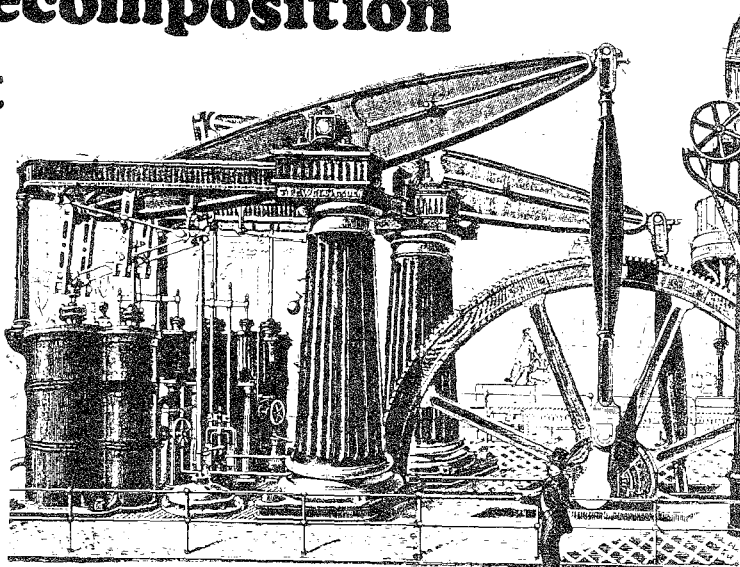
Ironically, apart from the first sentences, the rest could have been written by the ICC. This is the reasoning it used in internal debates to say that my insistence on the need to affirm the positive content of the socialist revolution was "idealist and non-marxist". When we know that the ICC has claimed that "councilism is the greatest danger for the proletariat" we cannot help but laugh.

(5) Two comments on this quote : its quality shows :

. how true it is that debate and controversy are the best enrichment for thought;

. how debilitating and vile it is to turn debate into a power play between individuals or organizations, by bringing in personal attacks and bad faith as the ICC has done. The ICC is even proud of itself, using the excuse that "great revolutionaries of the past" did the same thing. We should at least be able to distinguish what in the actions of "the great revolutionaries of the past" expressed only the weight of the practices of bourgeois political parties for whom politics was just a question of rivalry and competition!

The Necessary Recomposition of the Proletariat



This text is a new contribution from comrade GS on the question of the present-day composition of the working class. To GS and to us, this is a major question that deserves the widest possible development. A confrontation of ideas is the only way to work towards the development of real revolutionary thought. We hope that the publication of this text and the contributions of our texts in I.P. #15, 20, & 21 will encourage thoughts and written contributions from other people or groups in the revolutionary milieu.

I. A Tragic Muzzling Of The Proletariat

The 1980's began under the star of the mass strike in Poland, and one had reason to hope that they would see the development of a proletarian offensive on an international scale, or at least in all the countries of the Russian bloc, which were in the midst of a more and more acute crisis.

A decade later, we are compelled to acknowledge that the autonomous movement of the proletariat was limited to Poland, which explains the relative ease with which the forces of capital -- and in the first place, Solidarnosc, the trade union, and its experts -- could canalize and recuperate it via the "democratic" path. Today, the circle is closed: the charismatic leader who emerged from the ranks of the workers, the little electrician Lech Walesa, who was hunted down during the period of the state of siege declared by General Jaruzelski on December 13, 1981, has been elected president of the republic, in which capacity he is attempting to manage the contradictions of his national capital! Still worse, with the descent into crisis, the very symbol of working class radicalism, the shipyards of Gdansk, are in the process of liquidation, thereby throwing tens of thousands of laid-off workers onto the scrap heap!

The '80's have ended in a scene of general inertia on the part of the working class. Everywhere, but principally in

Eastern Europe (starting with the fall of the Berlin wall in the Autumn of '89), the working class has acted merely as a spectator at the various political upheavals, leaving a free hand to the bourgeoisie to attempt its own transformations (economic restructuring).

Right now, it is necessary to inquire into the reasons for this inertia, and not to minimize the problem by simply invoking that old stand-by, capitalist mystifications.

The very beginnings of the 1980's already violently shook the complacency sown by a certain revolutionary milieu. Blow by blow, international capital demonstrated its capacity to control the situation, and to promote a "new world order"! True, there was the October 1987 Wall Street crash, which pointed up the fact that every Colossus has its Achilles heel, and that, in this case, the world economic crisis did not cease to undermine the very functioning of the system. Nonetheless, first the Gulf war, then the spectacle of the counter-coup in Moscow (all of it accompanied by a media blitz, with its lies and censorship) have demonstrated to the n'th degree the muzzling of the proletariat. Revolutionaries have to seriously think about the evolution (reversal??) of an historic course that until now seemed favorable to a revolutionary perspective. What analysis can emerge from such a process, if not that capitalism can henceforth, and without any opposition, unleash war in the heart of Europe? Don't the dead Yugoslavs (Croats, Serbs, Slovenes, and others) sound the death knell to the possibilities of a militant class struggle, which alone is capable of staying the murderous hand of capital? This past Summer, the boat-people no longer sailed the China sea from the shores of Vietnam, but the Adriatic; and the forces of order of oh so democratic Italy distinguished themselves in the forcing back (guns in hand) of the Albanian refugees, after having parked them in a soccer stadium, just like some dictatorship in South America during the 1970's. Today, the flood of refugees coming from Yugoslavia is

banging on the Northern frontier of Italy. The situation is grave indeed, and important questions must be asked. At the price of disturbing those who are still content with their dogmas, it is clear that one of the most crucial questions is: What's become of the proletariat?

We are not going to discuss all the consequences of Russian state capitalism, which, passing for communism, weighed heavily on class consciousness, and contributed still more to the control of the workers. That issue merits a detailed analysis of its own, which would have to take account of the responsibility of revolutionaries on the level of method, theory, intervention and organization, vis a vis the enormous tasks that await the proletarian movement: a critical history of the counter-revolution in Russia, and of the Bolshevik party, the meaning of "Marxism", an understanding of the present situation, an elaboration of the communist project, etc.

To begin to respond, we will basically stick to examining the modifications (technical and practical) that the exploitation of the working class within the framework of capitalist relations of production has undergone in the past twenty years (1970-1990). And we will try to determine whether or not these modifications have produced different types of behavior amongst the workers regarding their sense of identity as proletarians. What's at stake, is knowing if all these changes are not themselves an explanation for the inertia and downturn in class consciousness, for the difficulty of proletarians to see themselves as such, in terms of collective and conflictual social relations with the interests of the capitalist system. In short, it's a matter of knowing if these changes are the efficient cause of the muzzling of the working class.

The theoretical effort that we are undertaking requires a break with archaic views about the immutable nature of the working class. Under the pressure of events, the ICC seems to accept the need to integrate new elements into its traditional analyses: "The economic machine only exploits an ever dwindling number of proletarians. A growing part of society finds itself ejected from the sphere of capitalist relations of production, and atomized, marginalized, forced to live by part-time work or other expedients. This is the generalization of misery. It is the decomposition of the capitalist social fabric." ("Le chaos", editorial in the "Revue Internationale", no. 66, Third Quarter 1991) But it refrains, out of a dogmatic reflex, from drawing all the conclusions that flow from that insight; perhaps, animated by a dread of confronting the crisis of the proletariat that flows from that situation. It prefers to regurgitate the analysis of Marx, who foresaw an "absolute pauperization" of society. It is true that this position puts in their place those who deny the catastrophic aspects of the crisis of capitalism, but it does not advance one iota the necessary examination of the consequences of this decomposition on

the labor process. To recognize that the number of proletarians is constantly shrinking, is to already acknowledge one of the modifications in the exploitation of the working class. Why then not provide one's self with the tools for a thoroughgoing theoretical analysis on this subject?

To grasp the outlines of a proletariat in full mutation, we need to look at the broad tendencies which -- under the pressure of capital -- delineate what economists term the employment, or unemployment, figures. What is involved is permanent unemployment, part-time work, the hypertrophy of the tertiary sector, industrial decline, automated systems, and especially the transcendence of the framework of the nation-state in the formation of a new proletariat.

In a letter published in IP No15, I emphasized the outdated character of Marx's view of 1848, which identified the proletariat with the industrial working class. If revolutionaries want to be equal to their time, they must respond otherwise than with religious dogmatism to the challenges that a rotting capitalism -- though one still capable of transforming the structure of social classes -- sets for them. It is urgent to really understand what has happened since 1968, which is nothing less than a global recomposition of the class landscape, with all that that implies.

II. What's Become Of The Proletariat?

Until the end of the 60's, the proletariat remained relatively homogeneous, based on the industrial working class (blue collar workers), even if the growth of the tertiary sector already had produced a not inconsiderable mass of salaried workers. These latter were the white collar employees, who, while seduced by the ideology of the middle class, did not feel themselves to be completely alien to the struggles of the working class, to the degree to which those very struggles brought benefits to all wage-workers.

However, since the end of the 70's, the economic crisis having frontally attacked the great bastions of the industrial working class (e.g. steel, automobiles) and undermined their resistance through successive waves of massive layoffs, there has been a development of heterogeneity, a loss of class unity. The proletariat has undergone an accelerated process of fragmentation, which has weakened its capacity -- as a social force -- to impose change, or at least to make capital back down. It is necessary to acknowledge the fact that the struggles in this period, with the exception of Poland (Summer 1980), have been confined to a defensive or even sometimes corporatist level.

Not only has the industrial proletariat been dislocated by the weight of an ever more massive and long lasting unemployment, which expels it from the labor process, but it has seen its own cutting edge -- those workers in still stable factories -- little by little lose the attributes inherited from the Fordist organization of labor, which

made them the essential cog in the wheel of capitalist production. Under the pressure of saturated markets, and with the aid of state of the art technologies (electronic automation), a new productive order has been set up, one which frees itself from the limits of Taylorism in order to obtain greater gains as a result of the intensity and productivity of labor. This has progressively led to the disappearance of unskilled workers, whose level of knowledge or qualifications are insufficient. Generated by new forms of exploitation and the domination of labor, a recomposition appears to be occurring around a category of highly skilled proletarians (the operators of the automated systems). But, beyond the capacity to defend their own interests, these proletarians must give proof of their ability to stop the fragmentation of the class by acting as a beacon which can reforge class unity and transcend categoriel demands. In effect, the other parts of the proletariat are being ever more dispersed in the floating mass represented by part-time and short-time workers: temporaries, seasonal workers, intermittent job-holders, probationary workers, sub-contractors, etc.

To manage its crisis, capital exacerbates the individual competition between workers, and as a result weakens the class struggle.

A. The Spectre Of Exclusion

At the beginning of Autumn 1991, the statistics were frightening: they indicated an increase of unemployment everywhere, and economic experts did not hide their pessimism for the future. Thus, in France, the cap of 3 million unemployed would be officially surpassed because in most industrial sectors the biggest firms, such as Bull, Michelin, Citroen, CGE-Alsthom, Thomson, etc., more and more clearly declared their intention to thin-out their personnel. In fact, that figure had long since been passed if one takes into account the number of youth in training camps (unemployment of those under 25 had increased 6.7% in a year), and departures due to early retirement. Economic activity had slackened: layoffs had risen 10.6% since the beginning of the year, and, as a significant sign of the scope of the problem, it was no longer the least skilled who were hit, because unemployment amongst engineers and administrative staff had climbed by 25%. Confronted by that situation, the left government more than ever acted as a "loyal servant of capitalism". It took up the slogan put forward in 1980 by Raymond Barre, then Giscard d'Estaing's prime minister: "Unemployed, start your own enterprises!" After ten years in power, the Socialists can find nothing better to do than to orchestrate a media campaign to incite the unemployed to start new companies. At the least, we have here a glaring example of the ideological exhaustion of the left!

The spectre of exclusion is now apparent to all workers, who grasp the fact that to be unemployed today, is not merely to lose one's job, but also one's social

standing and identity. The average length of time that a worker stays unemployed is rapidly growing; it is now more than a year (373 days in France to be exact). This has as its corollary, the strengthening of both individualism and isolation. For the young, integration into the labor market, once quasi-automatic, now entails going through a bureaucratic-governmental labyrinth, at the other end of which there is rarely a job. That is why the impoverished suburbs have become powder kegs: in the absence of any perspective for work, these largely immigrant neighborhoods are on the brink of exploding. As the sociologist Adil Jazouli points out in his government sponsored report, a logic which results in the constitution of urban ghettos is in place: "It is no longer a matter of youth who define themselves in the first place by their immigrant origin, but of youth who define themselves by their position vis a vis the social relations from which they are excluded; not because of their ethnic origins, but because of their social origins." And he concludes that we are witnessing "the birth of new popular and proletarian classes" based principally on their exclusion from the productive process, and incarnated in "the suburban youth, with their violence, their rioting, their rage, and their desire for collective action". All efforts to integrate these strata into the system have ended in abject failure. The system can only take the cream of the crop, who are destined for individual success, while the bulk are condemned to collective exclusion.

The capitalist crisis has led to a decomposition of the social fabric, which has eroded the capacity of the workers movement to react. In the first place, this decomposition has eliminated whole sectors of the productive apparatus, turning once flourishing industrial centers into ghost towns. That has entailed a significant decline in great working class centers, and a consequent process of atomization, ending in a splintering of class consciousness. In France, it took the left in power, then sharing power with the right, to make the working class swallow the bitter pill that capitalism proffered.

Throughout the world, the general tendency is the same, and the situation in the countries of the ex-Russian bloc has taken on a nightmarish quality for the administration of capitalism. The International Labor Organization estimates that the number of unemployed in those countries could reach 22 million in 1992!. The accumulation of capital proceeds through the modernization of the productive apparatus, and has as its counterpart the reduction in the number of industrial workers and the elimination of many employed in service functions as well. The objective for the year 2000 is to reduce the number of manual workers from 50% of the labor force to 20%.

B. The Mutation Of Labor

The economic crisis has deepened for the past twenty years, and the exacerbation

of competition has produced ever greater modifications within the process of production. Through the introduction of new technologies, the capitalist system has attempted to modernize, i.e. to rationalize, its productive apparatus. As a result, it has thrown the very status of the proletariat as an economic category into turmoil. Besides the threat of massive exclusion, the exploited class is confronted by a veritable mutation of labor, which is occurring as a result of the attempts to establish a regime of labor different from Taylorism.

Of course, even if this mutation succeeds in better resisting the effects of the crisis, that will in no way change the antagonistic nature of the proletariat towards the capitalist system of exploitation. On the contrary, the proletariat will be under even greater pressure to have surplus-value extracted from its labor through more sophisticated means. Nonetheless, from a materialist point of view, it is important to grasp the amplitude of the consequences of such a mutation on class consciousness. At the least, it's a matter of recognizing the effect of the phenomenon in terms of the prospects for confusion which would have a negative and disturbing impact on the development of class consciousness.

In France, it is now clear that the capitalist government of the left has chosen to support the consolidation of a new organization of labor. Faced with the saturation of markets and Japanese competition, the labor ministry has made that political decision into its hobby horse. That is also the meaning of Martine Aubry's recent article in "Le Monde" (11/28/91):

"Taylorism, the scientific organization of labor, as its promoters termed it, made possible great increases in productivity in past decades. The analysis and rationalization of tasks that it brought about, prevented wasted motion, and waste of materials, and made possible the mass production of consumer goods. The automobile industry is a perfect example of this. But, it is no longer adapted to the constraints of production today.

The development of automation and computers has simplified the tasks of fabrication and increased the place of control and maintenance. Individual output loses its meaning to the benefit of collective efficacy. The mass production of a single object -- the model T Ford of the '30's or the Renault 4CV of the post-war era -- has given way to a multiplicity of products and options. To make a sale, you now have to offer many models and to change them often. This is even more the case when you export, and you have to take into consideration a diversity of tastes, legislation, etc. The assembly line and extreme division of labor are not adapted to these requirements. To produce in this manner, it is necessary to reduce stocks, and to organize into teams around the product to be fabricated. You need more skilled, more autonomous, labor, which guarantees flexibility and quality".

To sound the death knell of the Taylor system means to acknowledge a tendency generated by the real domination of capital, i.e. the evolution towards an abstract labor which is characterized by a pressure on the workers' grey cells and not only his physical strength. High-tech capitalism rids itself of unskilled workers because it is in search of workers -- albeit manual workers -- who are above all capable of intellectual initiative. Because of automation, which transforms the very meaning of work (from fabrication pure and simple to surveillance or guidance), capitalism now requires autonomy of decision at the expense of purely repetitive tasks. An emphasis on intelligence has now become an imperative for the system.

The stakes of this more or less rapid mutation of labor involve what can be designated as a crisis of the proletariat, in terms of its consciousness, including its very class identity. The wage relation is transformed and exploitation assumes new forms, sometimes both more subtle and ferocious than before. There is a fundamental shift within the capitalist relations of production that is being camouflaged by the ideological horse shit of an Edgar Morin on "complexity": the ex-Stalinists converted to camp followers of Social-Democracy continue to play the role of the loyal servants of the interests of capital as they grind out their labored analyses -- which they think of as high theory -- of the wonders of technological modernity. In reality, in the daily practice of the labor process, these changes have very clear names: massive layoffs, part-time work, etc. Until now, in spite of some upheavals, quickly stifled by the unions (as at the time of the strike at Renault-Cleon), the proletariat has borne the assaults of capital without reacting. And, little by little, it has seen the perfecting of the organization of labor imposed on it. Through the movement towards an abstract labor, the proletariat's knowledge is completely integrated, and bound to the imperatives of the productive apparatus. It is no longer merely its arms, but its brain, that has become the slave of the machine!

"More than just a shift", that is the subtitle under which two "experts" look at the evolution of labor in Renault's model factory at Billancourt, where, even before 1914, the methods of Frederick W. Taylor were first introduced in France: time and motion studies, the assembly line, an extreme division of labor. Well situated as labor inspectors and secretaries of the trade union, the CFDT, these two individuals can only shed crocodile tears at the "unfortunate" aspects of the modernization of a system the foundations of which (the free market) they defend; a fact that does not render their eye-witness account any the less revealing:

"... even more than in the past, today's workers are robbed of any control over the organization of their labor. The physical constraints may have been attenuated, but the nervous constraints have sharply increased as the labor has

intensified; in addition fear is always present. The working class culture, which once permitted workers to let off steam, or even defend themselves, is in total disarray.

Modernization has made the system more productive. Taylorism wasted human energy (too much useless effort, too much unnecessary fatigue) simply because the organization of labor had not taken account of the particularities and the limits of each worker. Modern industrialists leave nothing to chance; at every point in the production process they demand the most efficient expenditure of effort. As a result, in a cruel turn of events, the workers are actually the victims of the improvement in the conditions of labor! The relative disorder of Taylorism, its ignorance vis a vis the real performance of the workers, of what was going on in their body and soul, still allowed some space for freedom, for individuality, minimal though it was. The present modernization, unfortunately eliminates even that, and perfects the scientific organization of labor." (Daniel Labbe and Frederic Perin, Que reste-t-il de Billancourt? Enquete sur la culture d'entreprise, Hachette, 1990)

By the end of 1992, the number of workers employed by Renault will be reduced to 60,000 -- a decline of 37,000 in eight years. The most spectacular measure (and oh how symbolic in terms of the memory of the proletariat) will be the final shutdown of the complex at Billancourt. For those who remain at Renault, there will be new modes of organization, in particular the development of half-time work, paid -- according to the wage agreements -- at 80% of the wage of a full-time worker!

To conclude this part of our text, we want to present a long extract from Alain Bihr's book, Du "Grand soir" a "L'Alternative": Le mouvement ouvrier europeen en crise (editions ouvrieres, 1991). Despite serious divergences, especially with respect to the positive role that Bihr attributes to a purportedly revolutionary trade unionism, we think that he provides an insightful theoretical analysis of the crisis of the proletariat and its necessary recomposition.

"The transformations that the wage relation are now undergoing reveal a profound logic: through them, capital is attempting to undo the massification of the proletariat brought about by Fordism -- a massification to which it ended up succumbing.

The mass-worker was the proletariat concentrated in productive space, and more accurately in social space; today, it is a matter of diluting the proletariat in social space, by transforming the fortress-factory of the Fordist age into a diffuse productive matrix. The mass-worker was the proletariat homogenized in its forms of exploitation and in its status; today, the development of unemployment and part-time work, the partial dismantling of the welfare-state, tend to accentuate the heterogeneity of status within the proletariat. The mass-worker was the proletariat rendered inert, that is to say, devoid of all autonomy in the labor

process, reduced to the rank of a simple cog in the "dead body" of capital; today, capital attempts to re-involve, re-mobilize, the workers in the labor process, by appealing to their initiative and their knowledge, by assuring them autonomy and title. The mass-worker was the proletariat made rigid by its integration within the universe of mass production and consumption; today, capital attempts to impose a multidimensional flexibility: on the organization of labor, on labor time, on the status of labor, and on wages.

In fact, the ongoing transformations of the wage relation, with their global impact of fragmentation and "de-massification" of the proletariat, involve a veritable overthrow of the Social-Democratic model of the workers movement. Firstly, by virtue of the profound modifications in the "technical" and "political" composition of its proletarian base. More precisely, they tend to dissolve the two proletarian forms which furnished its big guns during the Fordist phase: on the one hand, the unskilled worker, especially hard hit by the current transformations, the old categories of unskilled workers disappearing while new categories of "professionals" appear as a counterpart to the new automated process of labor; on the other hand, the specialized worker, the cutting edge of the proletarian offensive of the 60's and 70's, finding himself progressively eliminated and replaced by part-time workers within these very automated labor processes.

In these conditions, can one follow the Italian autonomists and assume that the part-time worker, denominated the "social worker", is destined to supplant the mass-worker of the Fordist period in its role as hegemonic element within the workers movement (the segment around which the political unity of the proletariat will be realized)? But that would be to make quite a leap, to omit or underestimate an essential difference between the "mass-worker" and the "social worker": while the former resulted from a process of homogenization of the proletariat, and thus could draw behind it the whole of the class, the latter results from a process of fragmentation of the proletariat, one that must be surmounted if the proletariat is to re-affirm itself as a unified social force. The transformation of the wage relation faces the workers movement with a dual challenge: it simultaneously forces it to adapt itself to a new social base (a new "technical" and "political" composition of the class) and to make a synthesis between categories a priori heterogeneous as the new professionals and the part-time workers, a synthesis much more difficult to bring about than that between unskilled and skilled workers during the Fordist period."

To be continued
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