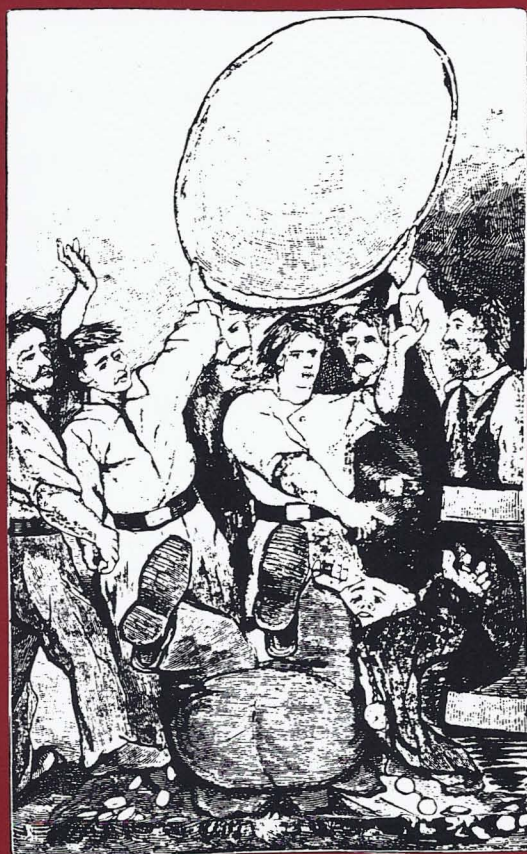


INTERNATIONALIST PERSPECTIVE 26



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Editorial

PERSPECTIVES OF THE FRACTION

At the end of May 1993, we held our annual conference. This was a time for fruitful, and thoroughgoing, questioning and discussion concerning subjects as fundamental as the issue of the function of a revolutionary organization in the present period, the balance sheet of our existence during our years of work as a fraction, the changing of the name of our organization (which entails a further distancing, theoretical as well as organizational, from the ICC), and our new platform.

With respect to this last point, we evaluated the course we have taken in our writings, and in the theoretical deepening of our programmatic bases, and, therefore, of the gap existing between our present positions and those of the ICC. After drawing a critical balance sheet of the platform of the ICC, we examined the gap between us programmatically: beyond political positions that appear to us deficient or incorrect, it is the whole spirit that underlies the platform of the ICC that seems to us to be obsolete. Overall, this can be seen by two elements. On one hand, the platform of the ICC provides a vision of the world that the collapse of the Russian bloc has swept aside. As a result, the very framework for understanding the world contained in that platform is no longer correct. On the other hand, our theoretical work has led us to conclude that the Communist Left (that is to say, the German, Dutch, and Italian left, coming out of the Third International) had made an indispensable contribution on two fundamental points: the basic class lines, and the theoretical analysis of the capitalist system in its decadent phase. But, the Communist Left had an insufficient understanding of three other crucial questions: the developmental trajectory of capitalism, the organization, and role, of the capitalist state, and the composition-recomposition of the working class. These theoretical insufficiencies are also to be found in the platform of the ICC. One of our tasks, therefore must consist in providing ourselves -- and our class -- with a deeper, and more developed, theoretical framework.

We know that the writing of a new platform will take some time if we want to produce a thoroughgoing document. That is why we have decided not to wait to provide a first indication of the outlines of our basic political positions, even though they are still germinating. The appearance of such a document constitutes for us an intermediate step. It seems to us that the gap existing between the platform of

the ICC, and our own theoretical advances, requires the rapid publication of a short platform, conceived as a synthesizing document most appropriate to the period. Nevertheless, in view of the exigencies of this period, and of the work of theoretical deepening that still remains, we know that a more complete platform will only be ready after a longer time.

This synthesizing document will be based on the fundamental positions that we defend, and which will figure in the more complete platform. Here are some points:

- * We think it crucial to present the perspective offered by capitalism, that is to say, barbarism, catastrophes, even the destruction of the human species. No solution is possible within the framework of capitalism, and only the destruction of that system provides a future for humanity.
- * It is also fundamental to emphasize the functioning of the capitalist system, particularly at the economic level. A temporary phase from the historic point of view, capitalism has known a period of ascendance (which also constitutes a distinct political nexus) and a phase of decadence, with the passage from the formal to the real domination of capital, and a different political nexus characterized by the development of state capitalism, the globalization of capital, and the recomposition of the working class.
- * Finally, questions of historical perspectives, of communism, of the period of transition, and of the development of class consciousness, are necessary to develop within the framework of a platform.

The debate around our platform, the evaluation of the gap between our positions and those of the ICC, galvanized a debate already posed in our organization: that of an organic break with the ICC, concretized by the changing of the name of our group.

The arguments in favor of an immediate break insisted on two points. On the one hand, the critical work appropriate to a fraction had been accomplished. In effect, the constitution of a fraction corresponds to a precise historical moment. No fraction in history has been charged with

writing a new platform. Therefore, we must constitute ourselves as a new organization, based on the supersession of the old programmatic framework, and charged with elaborating a new one. On the other hand, the recognition of the extent to which the platform of the ICC has been superseded by reality itself, the degree to which it is impregnated by an outdated vision of the world, necessitates an immediate break with such an inadequate program.

By contrast, for the comrades who insisted on the need to continue the existence of the fraction, the principal argument was the fact that the fraction was originally constituted on the basis of a distinct programmatic framework: that of the ICC. As long as it has not yet elaborated a new framework, the fraction must remain as it is. It is the coherent whole of the positions that constitute a platform which politically defines an organization, and not its name. As at the time of our 1992 conference, it was this

latter position which prevailed.

Other debates enlivened this conference, but readers will understand that we cannot here provide an exhaustive summary. One of the texts presented at the conference is being published in this number of IP: the resolution on the present situation of imperialism.

Finally, among the changes in our activity, we have decided to modify the rhythm of publication of IP. Taking account of the priority that we are giving to theoretical work, as well as the exigencies of the present period, Internationalist Perspective will henceforth appear twice a year. in the spring, and in the autumn, with a content largely consisting of theoretical texts, and the taking of general positions. This will not prevent us from producing shorter texts rapidly, which respond to the necessity for intervention, when the situation demands it.

ON THE REVOLUTIONARY NATURE OF THE PROLETARIAT

Continued from page 25

Last point: a short undeveloped comment on the notion of "collective worker" which you put forward (as well as GS's text in IP n° 24) as being somehow the new reality of the working class when you write: "For us it seems important to demonstrate economically how capitalism has evolved and how its transition to "real domination" of society has led to the emergence of the "collective worker" (whom Marx foresaw)".

Collective work is a direct consequence of the capitalist division of labour. I would say that Marx did more than foreseeing it, since in the Communist Manifesto again, we can read: "Capital is a collective product, and only by the united action of many members, nay, in the last resort, only

by the united action of all members of society, can it be set in motion. Capital is therefore, not a personal, it is a social power". The idea of a "collective worker" is not new indeed, as is not new its actual existence. What has evolved is its extension throughout the world and the forms adopted by this collective character, following the evolution of capitalism. Anyway, what matters for revolutionaries is that this worldwide collective character of labour for capital, be transformed into a worldwide collective activity for the well-being of men.

TM

January 1993

Notes:

(1) I use the term "revolutionary milieu" in the same sense as you do, i.e. with the content given by the ICC at the end of the '70s, when the "International Conferences of the left communist groups" were held, convened by the Internationalist Communist Party of Italy. This term related in fact to the groups which had been invited to those conferences. It must be said that, among the groups invited to those conferences, the FOR (Fomento Obrero Revolucionario) always distinguished itself by rejecting the idea that the economic crisis is a favourable factor for revolutionary action of the proletariat: "the working class doesn't need a crisis to find the roots of its coming to consciousness ; they are found in the general conditions of life" and by denying the existence of an economic crisis: "We are in a crisis of decadence and not of over-production" (the FOR left the conference). Therefore the criticism I'm making here to the "revolutionary milieu" does not apply to the FOR.

(2) It's the term "inexorably" which is wrong. It's obvious that the economic crisis is a necessary factor for the upsurge of revolutionary struggles, because "when everything is fine" you don't feel like changing things. But experience shows that it's not a sufficient factor. I know that I'm making a caricature of reality when I attribute such a schematic vision to the "revolutionary milieu", but I think this criticism is justified.

(3) In this respect I recommend the series of articles written by CDW on "Communism is not a nice ideal but a material necessity", published in the International Review of the ICC, particularly the article of issue n° 71 which develops on the vision of man developed by Marx.

Resolution

THE SITUATION OF IMPERIALISM

A. The imperialist scene was thrown into turmoil by the collapse of the Soviet Union. The general framework for an understanding of the present situation of world imperialism, as it was traced in our text, "The Collapse of the Eastern Bloc and the New World Order: Critical Balance Sheet and Perspectives" (IP no.22), remains sound for a comprehension of events that have unfolded since then. The basic tendencies identified in that text were the following:

1) The disappearance of the Russian bloc confronts us with the issue of a re-division of the world, but in very different conditions than those which would exist following a world war:

- The disappearance of the Russian bloc was not accompanied by the massive destruction of capital which characterizes world wars; it therefore left intact the condition of generalized, and growing, economic crisis, and precluded a period of reconstruction.
- The organization of blocs since World War Two created a real dependence of the different countries on their bloc leaders, in particular on the military plane, which prevented an immediate recomposition of alliances or imperialist blocs.
- The defeat of the Russian bloc not having resulted from war, Russia remained -- at least for the moment -- the second ranking military power in the world, even if for the time being this power cannot be exercised.

2) Despite these inhibitory factors, two tendencies are pushing towards an inevitable reshuffling of the long-term imperialist rapports de force on the world scene:

- The open economic crisis in which Russia has been plunged, can only accelerate the erosion of its military power.
- Thanks to its economic power, and to its geographical position, Germany is engaged in constituting an economic empire in the void left by the dislocation of the Russian bloc in Eastern Europe. This rebirth of German imperialism will, however, be largely restricted to the economic plane in the coming years, for two main reasons: first, Germany has been the first to feel the impact of the recent upheavals on the economic plane;

second, Germany is not ready to defy the American economic giant on the military plane.

B. These tendencies have been confirmed by recent events, notably in the conflicts in the ex-Yugoslavia, or in Somalia:

- The further weakening of Russia on the world imperialist scene has been confirmed by its limited influence over the present conflicts -- indeed zero influence in Somalia.
- The tensions between the great economic powers (US, Europe, and in particular Germany, and Japan) have been concentrated on the planes of commercial competition, and on clashes of economic and strategic interests in Yugoslavia, but these tensions are a still long way from resulting in the constitution of new imperialist blocs.
- Germany is developing its economic hegemony over the European continent, on the one hand through its financial policy in the West, on the other hand through a growing control over key economic sectors in the East; but it is not looking to engage in any military conflicts with other powers, in particular the US.

C. The military conflicts in the ex-Yugoslavia have not led to a military confrontation between new imperialist blocs in the process of formation. The origin of those conflicts resides on the one hand in the ravages of the world economic crisis in a relatively weak country, and on the other hand in the break in the status quo which had prevailed between the two great imperialist blocs since World War Two, of which Yugoslavia was one of the symbols. Those two factors exacerbated the contradictions internal to the Yugoslav ruling class, to the point at which they exploded onto the military terrain. The development, and continuation, of those military conflicts are, however, also imputable to conflicts of economic, and strategic, interests between the great powers, in particular between Germany and the US. Germany, in its push towards economic hegemony in Europe, sought zones in which its economic interests would effectively, or potentially, prevail. In Yugoslavia, its historic and economic links with Croatia, and Slovenia, naturally led Germany to support these regions bids for independence. By contrast, the US, had no major economic interests in Yugoslavia, but in trying to maintain its world imperialist hegemony, it necessarily

sought to prevent an explosive, and unstable, situation in Europe. That is what led the US to originally support the Serbian goal of a unitary state, and then to accept the partition of Yugoslavia when that became inevitable. Basically, the American ruling class is uninterested in the precise fate of Yugoslavia, and even less in the fate of the local populations (in which disinterest it differs not at all from other capitalist classes), save for the need to manifest its supremacy in Europe. These divergent interests, as well as those between several other European countries, have contributed to the putrefaction of the conflicts in Yugoslavia. Finally, the factor that in the final analysis makes these military conflicts possible is the capacity of the local bourgeoisies, and of the international bourgeoisie, to dampen the class struggle, and to divert the proletarian response to the crisis into a defense of the "nation." These conflicts are then utilized as bugbears to increase the paralysis of the proletariat on an international scale, and in particular in Europe. The only means to respond to military conflicts, whether in Yugoslavia or elsewhere, resides in the development of the class struggle and the intransigent opposition to any form of nationalism and imperialism.

D. The long-term tendency towards a recomposition of the rapports de force on the world imperialist scene also manifests itself in the recent difficulties on the road towards European "unification." The economic integration of the countries of the EEC has been a real historic tendency since World War Two, and is itself an expression of the growing internationalization of capital. The movements of capital, and considerable changes in control which have occurred in

Europe over the past decade, constitute the material basis for European unification. Today, two factors have emerged to disturb that process: on one hand, the recent worsening of the economic crisis has reawakened the reflex of "every man for himself;" on the other hand, changes in the rapports de force between the great powers following the disappearance of the Russian bloc have shattered the former equilibrium. In particular, the growing weight of Germany in Europe has produced tension between national economies and states, a spectacular manifestation of which has been the changes in exchange rates between currencies. These tensions do not necessarily mean the end of the process towards European economic integration, but rather that the precise configuration of Europe could be substantially modified.

E. Despite the daily atrocities of the conflict in the ex-Yugoslavia (as well as those in other hot spots) the dominant historical factor in the present situation is no longer the opposition between two military blocs, but the fundamental contradiction of capital, the crisis of its economic relations, which is global and simultaneous. The collapse of one imperialist bloc gives way to the collapse of world capital -- of which it was only one expression. With the return of the economic crisis to the front rank, the hope for a return of class contradictions to the front rank is also reborn. Today, capital cannot proceed to world war without a violent confrontation with the proletariat. Despite the weak level of class struggle now, the conditions for such an outcome do not exist today.

May 1993

Addendum:

The recent Israeli-Palestinian peace accord, and the mutual recognition of Israel and the PLO, confirm -- in a spectacular fashion -- the present scale and scope of the world imperialist hegemony of the US. This accord marks the progress of a Pax Americana in the Middle East following the disappearance of the Russian imperialist bloc. The confrontation between the two blocs had been a powerful factor in the exacerbation of tensions within the Middle East during the whole post-war epoch. The Gulf War had signified a growing American control over the Middle East, and in particular a marginalization of the PLO, and heightened pressure on Israel to achieve a resolution of the Palestinian conflict, of which the recent accord is a result. The uncontested power of the US in the strategically vital region of the Middle East demonstrates the absurdity of the claim that new imperialist blocs are already being constituted; a point brought home by the military weakness of the principal economic rivals of the US (Germany and Europe in general, and Japan). These American successes, however, do not contradict the long-term tendency within the capitalist world towards a constitution of new imperialist blocs. But it is a mistake to see that long-term tendency at work in every area of tension between countries of the American bloc, as certain revolutionary political groups do; the constitution of new blocs involves a profound alteration in the rapports de force between economic powers, in which the economic crisis and the class struggle both intervene, and of which the outcome is far from being decided today. Finally, the proletariat can have no illusion that the Israeli-Palestinian peace accord will benefit it: that accord simply marks the strengthening of one imperialist power (the US) over others, but it will not eliminate bloody conflicts from the international scene (as the slaughter in the ex-Yugoslavia confirms), nor improve the conditions of life for the workers, either Palestinian or Israeli. Whether capital is locally at war or peace, the international, and internationalist, class struggle remains the only way forward for the proletariat.

Social Decomposition

UNDERSTANDING THE REAL CHANGES IN THE WORLD SITUATION

In its number 24 issue, IP published a thorough critique of the ICC's "theory of social decomposition", which unmasked the flimsy foundations on which this schematist edifice is built. The article demonstrated why this "theory" failed theoretically; how its thinking is closer to fashionable bourgeois ideologues than to the method of marxism. Given its length, the article could not devote much attention to the analysis of the reality which the ICC's "theory of social decomposition" tries to explain. To address this reality and to understand how an organisation which played such an important role in the revolutionary milieu as the ICC has, could arrive at its present conclusion that we have entered "a new phase" in which "capitalist society is rotting on its feet" because the two main classes are preventing each other from imposing their perspective on society, that is the goal of the following article.

Let's backtrack for a moment to the end of the sixties-early seventies, the era in which much of today's revolutionary milieu was formed. Many of us who are fighting for an internationalist, autonomous working class revolution, had the luck of being able to participate in the giant wave of class struggle which swept over the world at that time. This wave, following after a long period of reconstruction, economic growth and social peace, came like a lightning bolt from a clear blue sky. The capitalist class was not expecting it and was not prepared for it. Its unions, rather than radicalizing to contain the movement, often reacted to it in an openly hostile manner. As a result, self-organisation of the struggle developed strongly in the working class. Although it was the first massive and international wave of class struggle since the '20s, there was no shortage of claims that we were actually witnessing "the dress rehearsal" of the revolution.

Internationalist revolutionaries were groping for theory to understand what they were living through and they linked up with the survivors of the communist left of the past, in its Italian, Dutch-German and other varieties.

Some of these battle-hardened veterans, like M.C. who played such a pivotal role in the formation of the ICC and in many of the debates in the revolutionary milieu at that time, had an enormous influence on the elaboration of our theoretical framework. We had the impression of having a

rich theoretical life in those heady days but in fact most of our theoretical work consisted of assimilating the revolutionary theory of the past, with all its weaknesses. The great debates which we had, were largely a restaging of the debates in the communist left of the past, mainly on the question of the party. But the blind spots in the communist left's understanding of the lessons of the revolutionary wave which followed world war one, were barely addressed and even less attention was given to the task of understanding how the capitalist world had thoroughly changed since then, and how these changes affected the development of the class struggle. The weakness of our theoretical work was inevitably reflected in our positions and expectations, which in their turn hampered the development of our theory. Its shallowness allowed us to foster immediatist illusions which made us impatient with theoretical work. We thought, with the arrogance of the ignorant, that we had already the right position on every issue. Despite all its differences, which were more often pretexts for sectarian intolerance than starting points for healthy debate, most of the revolutionary milieu shared a set of schematist expectations, colored by what it knew, didn't know and hoped for:

- We expected the economic crisis to deepen at an accelerating tempo, forcing the capitalist class all over the world to ever more brutal and broad attacks on the living and working conditions of the working class;
- We expected that these attacks would spur the working class to growing resistance which would lead to increasingly massive class struggle and political organisation, opening the way, depending on the outcome of this struggle (depending on whether the working class would listen to us or to the leftists) to either world war or world revolution (the ICC explicitly predicted that those decisive battles would take place in the '80's, "the decade of truth");
- We expected the capitalist class to resort to ever more state intervention and control, both to try to contain the effects of its economic crisis and to prepare for world war, which it would unleash as soon as it had defeated the working class.

A. The Deepening of the Crisis

Well, it didn't quite turn out that way. The crisis deepened but didn't lead to a general pauperisation of the working class. It's true that the living standard of the working class declined, but in the most industrialised countries, where the strongest sectors of the international working class are, this decline was not nearly as vertiginous as we expected nor as it was in previous historical moments of crisis. The living conditions of most workers have deteriorated more by uncertainty, violence, pollution and other degradations of the quality of life which leave the perpetrators relatively out of reach, than by direct attacks on the wages.

The capitalist class has managed its crisis-economy differently from the past, both for economic and political reasons:

1) In the past, economic crisis led to a steep increase of protectionism. The world economy was much less integrated and each national capital followed its natural inclination to try to save its own skin, with disastrous global results. Protectionist measures greatly contributed to the speed and the scope of the shrinking of the world market, and therefore also to the generality and depth of the decline in the working class' living standards, especially in the most industrialized countries, most dependent of the world market. Not only has the capitalist class learned from its past mistakes, the world economy today is also much more integrated and therefore even more interdependent. This time, the crisis itself has been a strong impetus for accelerating the process of globalising the world economy. The tendency to react to the crisis with protectionism and a retreat from the larger market exists in today's capitalist class too, as we can see in the secessions taking place in Eastern Europe and the rise of ultra-nationalist, protectionist ideologies around the globe. But today, this tendency is typical for the weaker capitals and for the weaker segments of the capitalist class in the stronger countries. The stronger, most influential capitals are moving in the opposite direction, removing obstacles for the movement of capital and commodities, in an increasing hunt for lower production costs (which implies more specialisation and a better integration of low wage-countries in "the global assembly line") and larger markets. The way capitalism is reacting to the crisis of today, creates, as in the past, increasing non-utilisation and destruction of production capacity and exclusion of people from the labour force. But in past crises, a large part of this was the arbitrary result of protectionism, i.e. the interruption of the circulation process by the use of political power. Today however, because of the much greater mobility of capital, labor force and commodities, this elimination process is much more "normal"; that is,

based on the rules of capitalist competition. The weakest competitor (producing at the highest production costs) is the first to go broke, and the parts of the world economy that have the least to offer to capital (infrastructure, skilled labor, closeness to markets, stability, etc) are the first to be abandoned by it. Contrary to the past, the deepening of the crisis has not homogenized the living and working conditions of workers around the world, but has increased the differences. While workers in most of what used to be called the "third" and "second" world now live in abject poverty, the bulk of the working class "in the first world" has suffered a much less dramatic decline.

2) Another cause of this is the role of the state today in managing the crisis. In the past, the capitalist state was very reluctant to use deficit spending by the state to stimulate growth and rein in the destructive effects of the crisis. It was only in the mid-thirties that the capitalist class in the major industrialized countries abandoned the dogma of the balanced budget and allowed the credit markets to expand to counteract the retraction of the markets. Today, the redistribution of surplus value and the creation of fictitious capital by the state, and by the international organisations dependent on the most powerful states (such as the IMF and the World Bank) in order to manage the level of economic activity, have become the norm. Revolutionary groups were well aware of the changed role of the state but underestimated the enhanced flexibility it gave to capitalism. It's only today that capitalism is reaching the limits of its attempts to push its problems into the future and is no longer able to counteract stagnation with an increase of deficit spending or money creation. Despite the current global slump, all states are frantically trying to cut their deficits at the expense, less of the working class as a whole than of the unemployed and partly employed, and the increasing segment of the population who never got the chance to become part of the labor force.

3) In past crises, most of the world still lived to a large extent under what Marx called "the formal domination of capital". That means that the exploitation of the working class was still largely based on the extraction of absolute surplus value. The capitalist sought to increase his profits by making his workers work for longer hours and lower wages. Today, the transition to "real domination of capital" has been completed in most industrialized countries. The emphasis has shifted to the extraction of relative surplus value, based on the increase of the productivity of labor. This implies an increasing dependence on a skilled, well trained and versatile work force. The capitalist of today has therefore less incentive to attack the wages and increase the working hours of his workers (in many parts of today's production process, undernourished and exhausted workers cannot function) but

more than ever to reduce his workforce - hence the exclusion of a growing part of the world population from the global production process.

4) To these economic factors, a political one must be added. The capitalist class doesn't want to launch an all-out offensive against the working class because it isn't at all assured of the outcome of such a confrontation. In previous crises, it had a much better ideological grip on the proletariat. The defeat of the working class revolutions following world war one still weighted heavily on the consciousness of the proletariat in the last crisis. In the weakest, so called "third world" countries, the working class has suffered savage attacks in recent decades but the proletariat there is relatively weak. In the more industrialized "second world" (the Eastern bloc), the lack of ideological control became very obvious and that was no coincidence, because the inability of the capitalist class there to increase relative exploitation (due to its technological backwardness) forced it to try to increase absolute exploitation on the whole of its working class. Explosive class struggle such as in Poland 1980-1981 was only the most spectacular sign of how difficult this was. Indeed, the creeping but general breakdown of labor discipline in the East was one of the main reasons why the bloc finally imploded. As we explained before, there were other reasons; the incapacity to manage the deepening economic crisis and the increasingly lopsided military rapport de force with the West. But both to defend itself better in the maelstrom of the crisis and to gain the capacity to launch a global war to "solve" its economic problems, capitalism in the East needed to get a much tighter ideological control over its working class while in reality the opposite occurred. So capitalism there was forced to a major restructuring at the expense of its internal cohesion with the results we all know but which so surprised us, understandable as they may be in hindsight.

The situation in the West was different: as the stronger bloc, Western capitalism had no reason to want to launch a global war (for what purpose?) and as an economy based on relative exploitation, it has not yet been forced to launch an all out attack on the entire working class. And it undoubtedly has much better ideological tools to confuse and derail the working class, which is one of the reasons why the capitalist class in the East is trying to adopt them. But in the past decades, the strength of capitalist mystifications in the working class has suffered. Governments are understandably reluctant to take measures that risk to stir up broad working class resistance, despite the debt situation.

Thus, much of what the ICC describes as symptoms of "social decomposition" are the effects of the deepening of the crisis in today's conditions. The implosion of the

Russian bloc, the spiral of exclusion leading to mass starvation in the "third world" and growing poverty among the unemployed and underemployed in even the strongest countries, the increase of homelessness, despair, drug addiction, violence, etc. They are indeed making living conditions on this planet increasingly barbaric. But this gradual descent into barbarism does not mean that the capitalist class is paralyzed or losing control over society, as the ICC thinks. Why would it be a problem for capitalists that the poor are starving or living in sewers? Why would they care that homeless people are dying in the streets, that ghetto inhabitants are looting their own neighborhoods, that cocaine and heroine use is up and crime is rampant in places where they never come? It only shows how well capitalism is managing its crisis through exclusion, how efficiently it is making the lowest rungs of society pay for its crisis while avoiding pauperisation of the bulk of the working class. As long as the consequences do not lead to revolt and do not impair production, why would capitalists give a damn? They can, and increasingly do, live in a world that is perfectly insulated from all that decay. And they live there quite well. In the US for instance, according to official data, the income of the richest 1% of the population grew by 77% between 1977 and 1989, (while the income of the poorest 20% declined by 11%). The number of millionaires in the US multiplied by 14 in the '80s, to 1.3 million. This, of course does not mean that all is well for the capitalist class. Its system is in deep trouble and it has no perspective to get out of it. But to suggest that all the suffering that it causes is a sign of its paralysis and losing its grip is a big mistake.

B. The Class Struggle

Needless to say, the class struggle didn't live up to our immediatist, schematist expectations. The predicted decisive confrontations didn't occur, the working class resistance didn't become increasingly massive and self-organized, the political organisations of the proletariat are as tiny and weak as twenty years ago. The rapport de force between the classes has not greatly changed since the onset of the crisis. Capitalism is not closer to launching a third world war but, as we have seen, this can not simply be explained by the sole factor of working class resistance. Neither can the fact that the working class hasn't made its revolution be blamed on an evolution of the balance of forces to its disadvantage. The fact that class consciousness has not yet developed to a degree that the revolutionary perspective takes hold in the class is not the result of major defeats. One reason is the capacity of the capitalist class so far to avoid major class confrontations in the countries where the working class is the strongest. Another is that the working class itself has undergone important changes in its composition (see articles on the recomposition of the

working class in previous issues of IP) which it is still digesting. Thirdly, we can hardly overestimate the enormity of the step between the realisation that a limited, union-led economic struggle has no longer any perspective, and the realisation that therefore, a class-based international revolutionary struggle must be waged. Indeed, the fact that many workers are well aware of the first but don't see in the reality around them the potential to move to the second, is one of the main reasons why the loss of illusions in capitalist institutions, such as the unions and the left, has gone hand in hand with a growing reluctance to fight. (More on this in "Metaphor and Reality" in IP # 16 and "Perspectives for class struggle in the '90s" in IP # 21). Finally, the political organisations of the working class must be faulted for their failings in developing their theoretical clarity, unity and clear-headed intervention in the class.

The evolution of the class struggle since the late '60's doesn't show any constant, stable gains for either the working class or the capitalist class. Class resistance hasn't paralyzed capitalism, the balance of force has remained in its favor. The very fact that class resistance has diminished while the crisis has deepened, is a victory of sorts for capitalism but the growing loss of illusions in capitalism's mystifications suggests that this victory may be pyrrhic. The future remains to be decided.

Its schematist expectations made the ICC describe the development of the class struggle as a succession of waves (and refluxes). Each wave was supposed to start on a qualitatively higher level than the previous one and lash against the dyke of capitalist defence each time with greater force. Reality didn't conform to the scheme, despite the ICC's efforts to refine it by introducing various subphases in its latest "wave". But now that it's patently clear that the wave-metaphor is deficient, the ICC has replaced it with a new metaphor, of society "rotting on its feet" because the capitalist class and the working class are paralyzing each other. This new metaphor saves the ICC a lot of work. It frees the ICC from the need to examine why its expectations and predictions were so wrong. It can continue to pretend that it was always right, except for the unforeseeable: that a perfect balance between the forces of the two main classes would come into being, so that neither class can impose its solution for the crisis on society. So it's no wonder that we're neither close to world war nor to world revolution! You have got to admire the neatness of the trick. Just when its entire schematist edifice seemed at the point of collapse, the ICC quickly pulled out the most rotten beam and replaced it with a new one.

The building is saved. But for how long will this new beam give support? How long can the ICC pretend that a dialectical relation, unstable by its very nature, risks to be

indefinitely frozen in a stalemate, until capitalist society has "rotten on its feet" and fallen apart (into what? that part of its "theory" the ICC hasn't thought through yet?) without being overthrown by a revolutionary class?

Just try to imagine such a thing. Picture the two classes as wrestlers who are exactly equal in strength so that neither one can floor the other. Neither one gives an inch, so they remain locked in each others grip until they "rot on their feet" and die of gangreen... Anybody would recognize that such a scenario is ridiculous and impossible. Not only is the chance that two persons have equal strength infinitesimal, but there are so many other factors besides their objective strength, that could alter the rapport the force, such as the shouts of the crowd, thoughts about pride or prize money... The slightest shift in attention could alter the rapport the force and give the fight a new dynamic. So if an indefinite stalemate is unimaginable in a struggle between two individuals, how much less is it in an historic struggle between two international classes, in which the number of factors that can have an impact is so much greater? The very idea that such a thing is possible is a rejection of dialectical and historical materialism, as Alma shows in IP # 24.

It is true that neither the capitalist class nor the working class has scored a decisive victory in the past two decades. But that only proves how crude and immediatist our assumptions about the development of the class struggle were. With its social decomposition theory, the ICC only proves its own unwillingness to critically reexamine these assumptions, according to which the decisive class confrontations should already have taken place by now. Since they haven't, and since the ICC never makes mistakes, it must be that we're in an historical stalemate, causing capitalist society to decompose.

C. The Danger of Global War

The reality of the past decades does not disprove that the undefeated condition of the working class, its reservoir of combativity, was an obstacle to global war (indeed, it is hard to see how the Russian capitalist class, which because of the economic inferiority of its bloc was the one with a motive to launch a global war, would have made its population fight a sustained and incredibly gruesome war if it was increasingly losing even the capacity to make its workers work!) but it did show that it was not the only one.

Inter-imperialist antagonisms took place against an entirely new background. For the first time in history, total war now meant almost certainly total mutual destruction. Conditions for war now not only included the

establishment of the necessary social control for inflicting such horrors on humanity, but also the development of a strategy that would allow the ruling class to believe either that war between the blocs could be restrained so that it never would reach the suicidal stage of strategic nuclear warfare; or that global war could be won and survived (by somehow, eliminating the opponent's capacity to retaliate to a nuclear attack).

The evolution of the interimperialist antagonisms against this backdrop is a good illustration of the fact that, in social reality, what may look like a frozen stalemate, is actually anything but. For a superficial observer, it may have seemed that the existence of enormous arsenals on both sides maintained a perfect balance of forces during the cold war. On the surface, that was true, but underneath, there was no stability. The search for the means to win and survive global war fueled a feverish arms race. During the '70's, the deepening economic crisis heightened the pressure on the Russian bloc to seek relief through imperialism. It increased its military forces in Europe and began to project its power outside its sphere of influence. (Africa, Afghanistan). The US countered in the '80's with the largest military buildup ever undertaken in peacetime, and accelerated production of new nuclear weapons, precise enough to allow the development of strategies based on "decapitation", i.e. the destruction of the political, military and economic nerve centers of the enemy, in order to eliminate or at least reduce his capacity to retaliate. The jewel in the crown of Reagan's military build-up was the SDI ("Star Wars") project, the first major attempt to acquire a defensive capability against nuclear weapons. It's true that there was a lot of scepticism about the potential effectiveness of this so called "space shield". But even if the program (the most expensive ever undertaken) would only be a very partial success, the nuclear stalemate would be broken. The US would have an offensive and defensive strategic arsenal, making it capable to launch a nuclear attack against Russia and to parry (more or less) the counter-attack.

Given its growing technological disadvantage, there was little hope for the Kremlin that it would ever be able to catch up. No longer could it foster the illusion that it would solve its economic crisis through military conquest. The defense of its (capitalist) class interests now meant retreat, restructuring, the acceptance of its defeat against the West and the implosion of its bloc.

For the West, on the other hand, there was no reason to seek in war with the Eastern bloc a solution for its economic crisis. The spoils wouldn't be worth the effort, as the lukewarmness of the present Western interest in the ex-Eastern bloc's markets illustrates. Therefore, the implosion of the Russian bloc has eliminated the danger of

global war in the short term. Even if the working class had suffered decisive defeats and the capitalist class were free to impose on society whatever it wished, there would still be no reason for global war to break out at this time. Sure, Iraq or China would love to conquer the US, but they can't. Sure, the US could conquer Iraq or China, but why would it? There is no economic or other motive.

Capitalism doesn't make war for war's sake. And neither because it understands that massive destruction and devaluation of capital would give its system a new lease of life. Capitalism is genetically incapable to see its problems and "solutions" in global terms. What drives capitalist powers to war is the exacerbation of their "normal" competition under the pressure of the deepening crisis. The end of the cold war hasn't changed this. With a worldwide depression looming on the horizon, we can on the contrary expect an intensification of inter-imperialist antagonisms. It is significant that the end of the cold war has brought only a marginal decline in the record high military budgets of the '80's, despite their impact on the deficits. The Pentagon's "Defense Planning Guidance", which provided the rationale for the projected military spending of more than 1200 billion dollars from 1993 until 1997, stated clearly that the goal is to assure that the US remains the only superpower. At the same time, a German-led Europe and Japan are becoming increasingly assertive in staking out their international interests, now that there is no longer a common Russian enemy to maintain bloc discipline. In the coming period, the shortage of markets and the decline of profits will become increasingly dramatic. Its inherent dynamic will push economic competition to a military level. If capitalism can obtain the necessary social control, by defeating working class resistance, we are likely to see a new arms race and new alliances opening the way to global conflict. In IP # 21 (p.5) we sketched one possible scenario:

(The US is) "by far the strongest military power yet, year after year, (it is) losing economic ground to its competitors. Year after year, the US is running huge trade deficits; year after year, it is borrowing billions upon billions from its competitors, thereby piling up interest obligations that are taking an ever larger bite out of its economy. It is far from impossible that the day will come that the US finds the situation unbearable and uses its military might to impose an economic diktat upon its competitors, one that drastically changes the rules of the game. And it's far from impossible that those on the receiving end will then look at a possible alliance with Russia with different eyes."

The chances that such a situation could lead to global war are greater than that the cold war would have opened up into World War III, because one of the factors that stopped

the outbreak of the latter, the lopsided economic balance of forces between the blocs which shredded any realistic hope of victory for Moscow, will not necessarily exist next time.

Is it possible that war could engulf the world not in the form of global conflict between two alliances, but in the form of a growing number of local wars, creating, as they multiply, the disintegration of society as we know it? That seems to be what the ICC sees as the outcome of "social decomposition". And there is a factual basis for this view: right now, there are already plenty of local wars going on, in ex-Yugoslavia, in the ex-USSR, in Africa and elsewhere and there are plenty of tinderboxes that seem ready to ignite. But once again, instead of analyzing these phenomena, the ICC simply projects their linear growth into the future. A lot of these wars are part of the dust thrown up by the collapse of the Russian empire; dislocations and readjustments that inevitably accompany the end of the cold war. But as explained in IP #23, these wars of secession, and the rise of the ideologies of sub-nationalism, racism, ethnicism and protectionism that accompany and justify them, are also "a hopeless reaction on the part of factions of the bourgeoisie of the weaker countries to the weakness of their national capital on the world market. The local mini-bourgeoisie hopes that by the separation of its capital from that of the national state to which it had belonged, or with respect to other economically weaker regions of that state, to be better able to resist the crisis. What occurs is a reduction of the productive base, which runs counter to the tendency of a concentration of capital which characterizes the present period." (IP #23,p.4)

In other words, they are the expression of the desperation of the losers, of the weaker players in the game, and as such, they can hardly become the dominating trend. Just like the intensification of competition stimulates the concentration of capital, for the simple reason that that more concentrated capital is better armed to win the competitive struggle, the intensification of inter-imperialist antagonisms stimulates the concentration of military power, through the formation of military blocs. No marxist would

expect the economic infrastructure and the political superstructure to go in opposite directions.

The strongest argument for the inevitability of capitalism's march towards war, if it is not stopped by the working class, is its absolute incapacity to provide any other 'solution' to the ever more catastrophic state of the world economy. But that doesn't mean that capitalism itself is aware of this inevitability or is actively scheming to realise that perspective. As we noted, capitalism doesn't think about itself and its problems in global terms. If the perspective for the future is unclear for the working class, it's unclear for the capitalist class as well. There is no 'master plan' that it is executing, which is one reason why the ICC's constant discoveries of Machiavellian plots is often so hilarious. Capitalism is muddling on, without a long-term goal or solution. The future is far from being predetermined. Rather than being frozen in a stalemate, social forces are churning underneath a surface of deceptive calm. As explained in IP24 ('The Light Goes Out at the End of the Tunnel') capitalism is rapidly losing its ability to shove its problems into the future. An economic storm is in the offing and it will leave neither the rapport between the classes nor the relations between the capitalist powers untouched. To intervene effectively in these events, revolutionaries must deepen their understanding of where capitalist society is heading, what society it is they are fighting for, what the means are to get there. The chasm between what we expected and what really occurred tells us we must re-examine the assumptions on which these expectations were based, recognize our mistakes instead of trying to cover them up like the ICC does, and formulate a revolutionary platform for our times. That's what our group is trying to do with the help of others in the revolutionary milieu.

Great challenges lie ahead, for our class and for us revolutionaries. But in order to play our role, we need a better understanding of reality than the ICC provides us with.

Sander

January 1993

Critique of a Book by Paul Kennedy

VISIONS OF AN IDEOLOGUE ON THE FUTURE OF HIS SYSTEM

Paul Kennedy's *Preparing for the Twenty-First Century* is a primer for the statesmen, policy makers, bureaucrats, and technocrats, who will be grappling with the momentous problems, and multiple crises, that confront the capitalist world-system in the post-Cold War era. This is a book that will be read in the Brookings Institution, in the offices of *Foreign Affairs*, and in the state department -- wherever those who shape and mold the policies of the late capitalist state do their thinking; wherever those whose task it is to perpetuate the system of value-production take stock of the world around them. In that sense, Kennedy's work also needs to be read by those of us who are convinced that the survival of world capital may well mean the possible extinction of the human species, or, at the least, its descent into a growing barbarism.

Preparing for the Twenty-First Century addresses two dilemmas that confront the capitalist world-system as it faces the new millenium. First, a series of problems, demographic, technological, and ecological, that confront the system as a whole; problems that must be resolved if capitalist civilization is to survive in the next century. Second, the question of which nations, or economic blocs, will be the winners, and losers, in the coming decades; which countries are best and worst placed to emerge triumphant in the competitive struggles to come.

While highlighting the dangers that face world capital as it confronts a veritable demographic explosion in the poor countries, with its inevitable massive flow of emigrants towards the few pockets of relative prosperity in the advanced world, the impact of new technologies (robotics, biotechnology, etc.), and the potentially lethal effects of global warming, and the greenhouse effect, Kennedy, despite his frequent references to Thomas Malthus, is ultimately no pessimist. Quite the contrary! Having spelled out the dimensions of the problems, Kennedy sees solutions to each of them. And the solution, for him, in each case is to embrace the very technology, science, and rationalism -- each inextricably linked to the capitalist world, and the law of value, which spawned them -- that have brought us to the present impasse. For Kennedy, if the poor countries only

adopt the cultural values which have shaped the West since the seventeenth century, productivism, the protestant ethic, the thoroughgoing rationalization of life, and the market economy in which they are embedded, then the crises which threaten us can be resolved. Far from questioning the very forms that technology, and science, have assumed in modernity -- something that few Marxists are yet prepared to do either -- Kennedy merely bemoans the fact that most of the poor countries, and their growing populations, have yet to fully embrace them. Once they do, Kennedy is convinced that their prosperity will be assured. Clearly, the thinkers whose lives are devoted to perpetuating the capitalist world-system, cannot grasp the dimensions of the crisis in which it is entangled.

If Kennedy is too optimistic by far concerning the prospects for world capital as a global system, then he is too pessimistic regarding the prospects for its present world leader: the United States. In evaluating the prospects for winners and losers in the next century, Kennedy develops the theory that he first advanced in his *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers*. In that book, Kennedy argued that the US was in the midst of an irreversible decline relative to other powers, one comparable to that of Great Britain in the first half of this century. While such a decline, in Kennedy's view, was inevitable, intelligent policy making could slow its tempo. In *Preparing for the Twenty-First Century*, Kennedy concludes that not only is America's decline inevitable, but that the nature of its political system will make it nearly impossible to adopt the policies that might slow it down. By contrast, Kennedy sees both Europe (and Germany in particular), and Japan, as the heirs to a waning American power, much as the US replaced Britain as the dominant world power in the first half of the century.

It seems to me that Kennedy overlooks the very real differences between Britain and the US, the strengths, not just political and military, but economic as well, that America retains relative to its European and Japanese competitors, and -- most important-- some of the real weaknesses that will plague Berlin and Tokyo should they seriously attempt to supplant the US as a hegemonic power.

Quite apart from the fact that Britain faced serious political and military challenges to its hegemony throughout the first half of this century, whereas the supremacy of the US in these areas remains, at least for now, unchallenged, America-- in contrast to Britain earlier in the century -- remains the number one economic power in terms of productivity, and is the locus of the most profitable market in the world. Moreover, the US is engaged in expanding that market through the creation of a vast trading bloc that will encompass all of the Americas -- the largest trading bloc in the world. Even if NAFTA is defeated in the Congress, it will merely slow what even most of its current opponents concede is inevitable: a free trade zone that will extend from the Arctic to Tierra del Fuego.

The pressure to create such vast trading blocs is also felt in Berlin and Tokyo. However, the obstacles faced by Germany and Japan in this respect are more formidable than those faced by the US as it seeks to create a Pan-American trade bloc.

An expanding European Community (expanding geographically, and expanding politically) will inevitably be a German-dominated EC, and it is precisely this fact that provokes opposition. On the one hand, in Western Europe, Britain, and France, in particular, will seek to have an American presence in Europe as a counterweight to Germany; in Central, and Eastern Europe, German hegemony is unwelcome in countries like Poland, and the Czech Republic (which will also look to the US), but will also lead to tension with Russia. Even if Russia is for the moment in a weakened state, that situation will not last forever.

While Japan will be constrained to forge a Far Eastern economic bloc, particularly if the EC and a Pan American bloc become inhospitable to Japanese capital, it will

encounter a great deal of opposition on the part of its trading "partners". South Korea, Taiwan, and Thailand, have no desire to be forced into a new version of the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere; China too will resist Tokyo's plans -- and it has the political, military, and -- increasingly -- the economic muscle to be a real obstacle to Japan's designs. Moreover, each of these countries will seek American help, and an American "connection" to ward off Japanese hegemony.

Kennedy seems oblivious to these deficits with which the Germans, and Japanese, are encumbered should they challenge America's global domination. While these factors will not prevent growing tensions, particularly as new trading blocs are constructed, they should temper the certitude that Germany, and Japan, are destined to replace the US as the leading world power in the coming decades.

The question of which countries will be winners or losers in the next century, presupposes that the capitalist world system will survive, and resolve the problems which face it. It is precisely that conviction, which Kennedy exemplifies, that is most dubious. Kennedy's proposed solutions to the demographic, technological, and ecological crises that capital has spawned, must be countered by a renewed determination on the part of Marxists to reject their own dogmas, and to confront the inextricable connection between modern technology, and science, and its foundations in value production. Such an inquiry will lead to a recognition of just how fundamental, and insoluble, is the permanent crisis of the capitalist world-system. And that it is not the decline of American power that looms on the horizon, but the decline of the world-system in which that power is embedded.

MAC INTOSH

Correspondence

THE FINAL CRISIS OF CAPITALISM?

Some time ago, a discussion circle was organized in Paris. It included a number of comrades defending the positions of the Communist Left. These comrades had been militants of organizations, and groups of the Communist Left (notably the ICC), but now belonging to no organization, because none of them are satisfactory. IP published the initial appeal of the discussion circle (IP #24) and has regularly participated in the discussions at its meetings. The first of them had been devoted to the present state of the crisis of capitalism. We are here publishing the contribution of comrade C.B., presented at that initial meeting.

C.B.'s analysis makes clear the historical limits of capitalism, which for that comrade are essentially linked to the increasingly insurmountable difficulties of the valorization of capital. For C.B., capital entered its final crisis in the 1970's.

However, contrary to our own analysis, C.B. rejects the concept of decadence, and develops the idea of a final crisis which has basically manifested itself since 1970 by a slow accumulation of capital, speculation, and permanent structural unemployment. These elements indicate to C.B. a new phase in the very movement of capital. According to him, capital continued its expansion until 1970, a position that overlooks the meaning of the two world wars which have rocked our twentieth century. The comrade points to indexes of the development of capitalist production to reject the concept of decadence.

In our own understanding of the phenomenon of decadence, we have never defended the idea of a sharp halt in the development of the productive forces of capital. For us, decadence is a concept that makes it possible to grasp the history of diverse human societies, and in particular the development of capitalism, and of its historic limits. In a first phase, capitalism could develop the productive forces through its formal domination, in order to finally extend its real domination over the whole planet. But that expansion was neither eternal, nor unlimited. In its second phase, the contradictions historically present in capitalism intensified, and have become increasingly unbearable. Capital has not been able to continue its progressive development of the productive forces. What has occurred is a slow process, beginning around the turn of the century, accelerating after 1914, and ineluctably continuing since then. The survival of capitalism has been characterized not merely by what C.B. terms a formidable development of the productive forces, but also by wars, massive destruction, waste, and by the growing exacerbation of the internal contradictions of capitalism. To interpret decadence as the end of accumulation, and of the valorization of modern capital, is to make a caricature of the position of those who articulate that concept.

Furthermore, C.B.'s text takes the defeat of the revolutionary movements early in this century in order to condemn the concept of decadence. The defeat of the revolutionary wave of 1917-1919 is an indisputable fact. We have already undertaken in IP the critique of the political positions of the revolutionaries of that period. Nonetheless, for us, there can be no question of making the action of the class a determinant factor in whether or not there is an acceleration of the economic crisis of capital. In the past, we have always rejected that thesis, once put forward by the GLAT.

C.B.'s text once again takes up an old debate, and our short introduction makes no claim to answering all the questions posed, or to refuting C.B.'s position. On the contrary, the debate is now open, and the discussion must continue.

Brief Remarks on the Present Crisis of Capitalism, and on the Perspectives that Flow from It

1. What crisis of capitalism? Is what we are seeing in the capitalist economy a simple growth crisis, a cyclical crisis of the system, or rather something more fundamental, the scope, and scale, of which it is necessary to carefully examine? The fact that since 1975 (the end of "30 glorious years"), the capitalist mode of production has been characterized by permanent economic stagnation, restructurations, more and more massive unemployment, and a new kind of poverty, and precarious conditions of life, for a not negligible portion of the population of the advanced countries, indicates that we are seeing a new phenomenon that compels us to raise questions about the historic stage that our fin de siècle capitalism has reached. Does capitalism still have before it a whole historical epoch of survival, or has it economically reached its final stage, it being understood that, as a specific mode of production, capitalism is not eternal?

2. Before answering that question, a short historical overview is necessary. This question was never raised in the original perspective of Marx, Engels, and the revolutionary workers movement, in the period before 1914. For them, it was a question of shortening the course of capitalism through the conscious, and organized, struggle of the proletariat, galvanized by its historic mission; for them, everything came down to the subjective preparation of the working class, which once it was sufficiently advanced would make it possible to engage in the decisive struggle against capitalism -- without the capitalist mode of production having first reached its final stage of development. In this respect, we need only recall what Engels said in his "testament" of 1895 (the preface to *The Class Struggles in France*) regarding the fact that revolutions led by a conscious minority at the head of an unconscious mass were now outdated.

A century later, it is apparent that this original perspective was not realized: the subjective factor which would have made it possible to precipitate the death of capitalism was not strong enough (capitalism, with its real domination, brought about a progressive intergration of the proletariat, at first ideological, then material, resulting in its embourgeoisification). This defeat had as a consequence not the decadence of capitalism, as some have theorized, but its development on all planes; from then on, capitalism was

able to realize all its historic possibilities for expansion as a specific mode of production, conforming to the historical materialism of Marx, for whom a social formation never disappears until it has developed all the productive forces which it is large enough to contain (see the *Introduction to the Critique of Political Economy* of 1859). That said, if we now turn to the present situation, has capitalism now reached the prophesied point where henceforth one can say that it has entered its final stage?

3. There is good reason to conclude that in the most advanced countries of its domination the capitalist mode of production has now reached the end of its historical cycle. There, dead capital (since the last technological revolution, the electronic one, with its diverse applications in computers, robotics, and bureaucracy) has assumed such importance vis a vis living capital that it has made the valorization of capital increasingly problematic. That has resulted in a fall in the rate of profit as a result of an organic and technical composition of capital that is so high that it has reached the stage of semi-automation. This can be verified by the absolute -- not relative -- diminution of the industrial working class producing surplus-value in the advanced countries over the last 15 years, and by the parallel increase in unproductive jobs, which now represent 50-60% of the active population. That is the proof that production based on exchange-value has reached its limit; that, conforming to Marx's economic theory, "the real limit of capitalist production is capital itself; put another way, that capital, and the realization of value, appear as the point of departure, and the end-point" (*Capital*, volume III).

4. This end-point has as a consequence a weak accumulation of capital, close to a state of stagnation -- capital having a tendency to take refuge in speculation -- and a permanent, and growing, structural unemployment. But this stage of final crisis has only begun. For the moment capital can still survive: to revalorize itself, ever so little, and thereby improve its rate of profit, it can lower wages, to the point where it disposes of an impoverished, and hapless, labor force. This is already happening through massive lay-offs, and real wage freezes enforced by the existence of an industrial reserve army of the unemployed. But that is not enough; capital will go still further in the direction of social regression. That will involve a competition between the developed countries with wage

scales that are still high, and the low wages of the less developed lands, so that the former come to progressively resemble the latter. Through "shared labor" and the dismantling of the "welfare state" which assured a certain number of social gains, capital is proceeding to that solution. Henceforth, we can expect not so much a spectacular increase in unemployment, but rather an increasing return to growing misery, and absolute pauperization, which will not simply affect productive workers, but the unproductive -- those great consumers of surplus-value, because of the unproductive nature of their services -- as well. This generalized social regression will become another aspect of the final crisis.

5. This swing of the pendulum will not save capitalism. From Scylla, it will fall into Charybdis; if profitability will improve ever so slightly, capital will then face the hell of overproduction. As wages diminish, the capacity to consume on the part of the masses will shrink, and therefore the old problem of overproduction, which capitalism after 1929 had believed it had vanquished, in part thanks to "mass consumption", will return with renewed strength. Cyclical crises (which since 1945 had been greatly attenuated) will reappear with full force, and end up by provoking the final economic breakdown of the system. These cyclical crises, superimposed on the general crisis, will be all the more violent inasmuch as they will be fed by the growing indebtedness which characterizes all economies, and which is an indication of the saturation of the market.

6. The perspective for capitalism is a grim one. Capitalism has been reduced to three -- more or less dynamic -- great poles: North America, the EEC, South-East Asia. For the countries of the south and east, the perspectives for development are virtually non-existent. No "Marshall Plan" is on the horizon, and there is no way that any of the three blocs will encourage the appearance of a new competitive pole. In short, there will be no second childhood for capitalism. That means there will be no solution to its crisis, and that it cannot extricate itself through war; war can provide no economic solution for the survival of the system, and will entail enormous risks for the bourgeoisies which unleash it. Such a war, if it was on the cards, would

already have begun. Instead, what we have seen for the past 15 years has been an inexorable sinking into crisis on the part of capitalism -- proof that there is no solution for it.

That said, this final crisis has only just begun, and it can last a long time. For the moment, capitalism can still deal with the effects of unemployment, by way of social allocations, unemployment benefits, welfare, etc. The mass of workers have not yet experienced a drastic fall in wages, and their "social gains", though threatened, have not yet been brutally snatched from them. Whole sectors of the working class -- functionaries -- still remain protected by a guaranteed job, sheltered from lay-offs. In short, as long as only a minority of workers has been hit with the full force of the crisis, its impact can be controlled without risk of a general explosion. As a whole, the proletariat remains much too embourgeoisified to undertake a revolutionary struggle, contenting itself with being on the defensive so as to save what it can of its "gains", a posture that can only lead to actions -- if they occur at all -- that are conservative in nature. As a result, it is completely mistaken to believe that the objective conditions (for revolution, not, evidently, socialism) are already ripe, and only the subjective conditions are lacking. If the latter are not present, fundamentally, it is because the former are still absent. Any other conception of the development of revolutionary class consciousness derives from a metaphysical, and idealist, vision of history -- in short, a non-Marxist one. The final crisis poses the perspective of revolution as the only solution to the bankruptcy of capitalism. But this perspective will ripen at its own time, the revolutionary will arising -- even if that will occur through a more or less complex process -- only to the extent that the end of the historical cycle of capitalism will become evident to all. Once this economic breakdown of capitalism is upon us, the outcome of its own internal, and objective, contradictions, and not the will of humans, there will remain the task for humans to overthrow the bourgeois state, that is to say, to make the revolution. That task will be facilitated to the degree to which the state will have been considerably weakened by the very collapse of capitalism.

C.B.

Book Review

TO GET RID OF THE NATIONAL FRONTAND OF CAPITALISM

The following article is a contribution by comrade Everhard, a sympathiser of IP. It is a critical review of the latest book by Alain Bihr: "Pour en finir avec le Front National" ("to get rid of the Front National" - the extreme rightist party in France).

Everhard's review points to Bihr's solid analysis of the emergence of the Front National while it rightly criticizes Bihr's concrete proposals. These proposals reject the revolutionary view and boil down to a defense of a "reformist" alternative, to make a new "mass movement" possible.

The review is followed by a response by Bihr, which in our view does not go beyond the classical arguments and which fully confirms, a posteriori, Everhard's critiques. As Everhard emphasizes, Bihr tries to update Trotsky's beloved transitional program, whose bankruptcy was already fully shown in the period between the world wars. Bihr believes in illusions if he thinks he can mobilize the mass of workers behind unionist demands which are a bit more radical than what the current unions demand. He himself seems unsure and recognizes that his proposals "do not avoid a certain ambiguity, by offering the risk of reformist deviations".

As for us, it's true that we don't understand the "revolutionary" scope of demands even as radical as the massive and rapid reduction of the work week. The road to revolution doesn't open through higher bidding in demands but through the working class becoming conscious of the impossibility to defend its living conditions under capitalism and of the necessity and the possibility to engage in a complete overthrow of the existing order.

A Salutary Book

Now that almost all publications are filled with ineptitude and cynicism and the steam roller of the dominating ideology leaves only room for glorifications of "democracy", the publication of a book such as Alain Bihr's "Pour en finir avec le Front National" (To get rid of the National Front"-France's extreme right party) (Syros, Paris 1992) is a breath of fresh air. Even if we disagree with certain analyses and even more so with its proposals for action (we'll come back to this later), this political essay does not leave the reader indifferent but stimulates serious questioning and reflection, as well because of the solidity of its arguments as because of its clarity of its exposition. For this only, it's worthwhile recommending it: this book has a beneficial urgency.

As its title suggests, it is preoccupied by the rise of the Front National (F.N.) and by the ways to do something about that. We have to acknowledge that the results of the latest parliamentary elections in France (March '93) only confirm his analysis of this phenomenon of spectacular advances of the extreme right. The editorial of the April issue of the review "A contre-courant syndical et politique" ("Against the political and trade unionist current"; address:

1, rue Hugo, F-52100 Bettancourt La Ferree, France) -of which Bihr is a contributor, emphasizes this in a lucid way: "(...) everybody foresaw the collapse of the Socialist Party (P.S.) but many so-called well informed observers put their feet in their mouth predicting (once again) a setback for the FN. Not only has it not lost, it gained 3% compared to the last parliamentary elections of June '88. For the second time, it captured more than 3 million votes, an advance of 800,000 votes. And what's worse, it fully confirms its implantation in a working class electorate. With 18% of the votes of skilled workers, it got four points more than the Communist Party and almost as much as the P.S." (Cf. "Sombre Perspectives", # 43). But the work of Bihr is not limited to a narrow analysis of the F.N. Searching for the causes of the growing appeal of the positions of the F.N. amongst the people, in particular the proletariat, he constantly repositions this phenomenon in a general context. He breaks in this sense with the absence of theoretical reflection which also characterizes the whole frontist, anti-racist, anti-fascist movement, which is incapable to develop a revolutionary alternative independent from the left and leftist factions of capital, as the ultra-left which refuses, out of dogmatism, to take the new elements of the situation into consideration.

Bihr, on the other hand, analyzes at great depth the transformations which capitalism underwent under the pressure of the worldwide crisis and the collapse of the old workers' movement which expressed itself in the "Fordist" compromise, managed by the reformist and counter-revolutionary apparatus (parties and trade unions). To explain the nationalist crispations, the corporatist reflexes and the national fears which ooze every day from the social body and crystalize around events such as the referendum on the Maastricht-treaty, he points to the globalisation of capital and its consequences, not only for the economy (massive unemployment) but also on all other levels of the system (politics, ideology, culture, etc):

"By its nature, the capitalist mode of production implies the overflowing of all geopolitical limits, national and others. In this sense, it is from its very beginning a "world economy", even if its international destiny passed through the formation of nation states which served as support and agents of the dynamic of world wide accumulation. This "nationalism" of social formations culminated during the Fordist stage of their development. It is precisely the centrality of the nation state which the current phase of globalisation of capitalism is putting into question, without however abolishing the national realities. This explains the contradictory nature of the current international space: on the one hand, homogenisation, through the flow of commodities, capital, labor force, technologies, information etc; on the other hand, fragmentation caused by the persistence of national specificities inherited from history and the socio-political compromises which are different in every nation, and by the hierarchisation imposed by the unequal developments on which the international division of labor is based" (p 117).

This evolution meant that the internationalisation of capital changed into transnationalisation, which weakened "the capacity of the national state to manage and integrate" and created "the conditions for a real political vacuum which the F.N. could fill at the right moment" (p 115). This vacuum was all the more significant because these modifications in the life of capital bankrupted the social-democratic model based upon state-regulation, included its Stalinist variation (collapse of the USSR). The proletariat was then confronted with a process of fragmentation (changing work rules, lay offs etc). In traditional sectors, where successive restructurations wrecked havoc, there is more resentment than development of consciousness. Bihr is entirely right when he denounces the role of the left in power in what he calls a perversion of class consciousness: "This resentment became even greater because of the feeling of having been betrayed by their own: by their own political and trade union-representatives, by the left in power since 1981. The arrival of the left in power in France happened already at a time of a defensive retreat of the workers' movement and

of unmistakable confusion amongst the workers over the effects of the crisis, the hardening attitude of the ruling class, the repeated failures of their struggles. So it was on the left that workers pinned their hopes to change the balance of power in their favor, this left which promised them to "change life". But it showed itself as incapable as the right to "get out of the crisis", and by reneging on all its promises, its attacks were even worse than those of the right. It was the left, not the right, which ended the indexation of wages to prices (COLAs); it was the left which forced through massive lay offs in the shipyards, the steel and car industry. It was again the left which deregulated the wage relation by creating deadend artificial temporary employment. The left never ceased to break down social protection while increasing its cost for the workers. It did much more than the right ever could have for the rehabilitation of "liberal values" such as the spirit of enterprise, money and individual success, while at the same time the number of the unemployed increased with more than 50% between 1981 and 1991." (p 93)

Instead of joining the current fashion of demonising the F.N. and its leader, Bihr tries to show the roots of this phenomenon by analyzing the reactions to the capitalist crisis in the social texture. Without falling in the trap of simplistic overestimation and dramatisation of this event (in particular on what it implies for the control over the proletariat or a possible proces of fascisation) he takes the new realities into account:

- While acknowledging the indisputable support for the F.N. in a part of the proletariat (mostly coming from workers who used to vote for the P.S.; much less so -only 5 to 8%, contrary to what's often said -from voters of the Communist Party), he also shows the extreme right's contradictions and the limitations of its current capacity to mobilize the proletariat, because of its conservative social-economic program, defined by the social-professional interests of the traditional middle class.
- Acknowledging the undeniable authoritarian, xenophobic, racist and ultra-nationalistic characteristics of the F.N., he also points out its ideological heterogeneity and doesn't see it as specifically fascist because "the current structural crisis of capitalism does not contain the elements which fed the process of fascisation in the '20s and '30s." (p 91) This however does not preclude the possibility of a hardening of the conditions of capitalist domination (state of emergency, etc), which could be the framework in which the-F.N. could play a role as prison guard.

One More Effort to be Revolutionary

There are books written which give a splendid theoretical analysis without drawing the political and practical conclusions which flow from it. Unfortunately, Bihr's is one of them. The whole last part ("How to struggle?") is marred with confusion and gives no clear answer to the question how to get rid of not only the F.N. but the entire crisis-ridden capitalist system which has produced it. The writer does, however, emphasize what he calls "the insufficiencies of the opponents": the ambiguities of organisations such as SOS-Racism, linked with the left in power, the absence of theoretical analysis of the phenomenon of the F.N., the defense of parliamentary democracy and traditional humanism (such as anti-racist moralism), the efforts to make it a single issue-debate on immigration, the perverse effects of certain attacks which make FN-leader Le Pen appear as a martyr. He also points to the need to "face up to the crisis in the workers movement" which he sees as an essential factor in the rise of the F.N.: "Only through the rebirth of a workers movement that is powerful and inventive and that takes again the road of the class struggle and faces up to the new challenges, will the attempts of the extreme right to implant itself in the proletariat be fought off in an efficient and decisive way" (p 249).

But when he moves to concrete proposals, things turn bad. Instead of keeping the indispensable perspective of a revolutionary break with the existing order, he gives a catalogue of transitory measures borrowed from the trotskyst, revolutionary-syndicalist or anarcho-syndicalist tradition: the reduction of the work week, the institution of a guaranteed social income, new ways of producing and consuming etc. With such steps, he thinks that parts of the middle class can be drawn to the proletariat's side. He addresses himself in particular to "rank & file unions" such as the "Confederation Paysanne" (Farmers' Confederation) and the "Syndicat de la médecine générale" (Union of general medical practitioners). Revolutionary unionism (whose concepts went bankrupt in 1914 with its support to the "Sacred Union" for the war) is only one step removed from democratic frontism. And Bihr makes this step without thinking twice. Believing to reestablish an autonomous and vigorous workers movement by means of reforms and interclassist alliances, he sails in the opposite way on a float of democratic demands. After having made the critique of parliamentary democracy, he announces a list of measures to... "extend and deepen democratic representation" (!): the institutionalisation of referendums, the struggle against the professionalisation of politics (for the restriction of cumulation of mandates, for term limits, for quota for women and young people etc), for the proportionality in all

elections, for the rehabilitation of Parlement, for a reduction of the powers and term of the president, and so on- the rest is no better. While the minimal goal of a revolutionary movement would be to advocate the destruction of capitalism by all means, Bihr wants to develop "counter-powers" and remains in this way a prisoner of the schemes and tactics of the past. Indeed, he himself points to the archaic side of his project: "What's at stake is to regain the inspiration of the labour exchanges (bourses de travail) of the beginning of this century, but also of the "people's house" of the Anglo-Saxon community action." (p 257).

How to explain how a theoretical reflection which perfectly illuminates the crisis of capitalism and its disastrous consequences can slide into a regular defense of political democracy? There are of course the errors due to Bihr's revolutionary-syndicalist views, but there is also his misunderstanding of the needs of the human community faced with the global crisis of capital, not just an economic and cultural one. Once again, he writes very convincing pages (it is a worthy book, despite its failings) about "a world deprived of sense": "the precapitalist societies had a powerful symbolic order, encompassing the individual, society, nature and the supernatural in the same mythical-religious universe. Capitalism has inexorably ruined this universe. First through the development of science and technology, the control by men over natural processes. Secondly through the continuous upheaval of the living conditions, the permanent instability of social relations, of the institutions and representations which result from its economic dynamic. Finally, through the dissolution of the traditional collective identities (family, neighborhood, village, borough, region, country, professional guilds) with all that they imply for community bonds and identities, which are at the same time fragmented and homogenized by the development of commercial relations and the social division of labor which accompagnies them, and by the rise of individualism and of the privatisation of social life which result from them". (p. 134-135).

And further on, he clearly shows the link between the economic crisis and what he calls "the crisis of sense" which feeds the "F.N.'s fantasyland" (the F.N., becomes in his view "the asylum for the rejects of modernity"): "It is the continuous aggravation of the economic crisis of the last two decades which has powerfully reinforced the effects of the cultural crisis, by realizing all its negative and destructive potential (...) the destruction of traditional social and professional categories resulting from the rise of unemployment, the insecurity and the new flexibility could only heighten the individual and collective identity crisis" (p 139). But in the last part, devoted to his proposals for struggle, his "facing up to the crisis of sense" reveals that his vision of social change is far from reaching the deep-

seated anti-capitalist radicalism on all levels of the communist theory initiated by Marx in the 19th century. He identifies, for example, the human needs, in search of a new symbolic order, with a project allowing "individuals and groups to (re)conquer a power over their daily living conditions, in work as well as outside work" (p 268). In other words, the workers are invited to struggle to... control (through self-management?) the same shit of the political economy which would continue to exist in other social forms of self-exploitation, keeping the essential characteristics of capital: wage-labor, exchange value, programmed "free" time... which only reinforce, every day, worldwide barbarism. In addition, he proposes to recreate a "communautarian link", through categories completely integrated in the movement of capitalism (places of work and habitation), and using structures, such as unions and parties, which have long since become clogs of the state apparatus.

Indeed, Bihr's own book gives powerful arguments against his proposals for action. His analysis of the capitalist crisis should lead him to clarify "the alternative road" which he defines as "a conquest of the individual autonomy" (practically, emotionally as well as intellectually) in and through the non-alienating participation of the individual in the struggles to extend the collective autonomy, against those two reductionist powers which seem to want to dictate the future of mankind forever: capital and the state" (p 269).

Let's make another effort, comrade... because we won't get rid of the F.N., nor, for that matter, of all the other nationalist, liberal, "socialist" or "communist" factions, without uprooting, once and for all, the capitalist system!

The Decisive Role of Class Consciousness

It's useful to conclude with an attack on the sectarianism of those ultra-left groups and persons which, are preoccupied with guarding over their patrimony and seem struck by total historical blindness. Either they stick their heads in the sand faced with a situation they don't understand, or they stubbornly misgauge the phenomenon of the rise of the F.N., and, more generally, of the weight of the perverse effects of the crisis. For them, the crisis is in itself the proletariat's best friend, because it created a political vacuum, by causing the electoral collapse of the reformist, counter-revolutionary bloc (the socialist and communist parties). This ultra-deterministic position, has been, for some 20 years (1973-1993), implicit in all the analyses of the political milieu which claims the heritage of the (Italian and Dutch/German) communist left, which rejuvenated with the mass strike of May 1968. Its main consequence is an

underestimation of the ideological factors which are too often seen as simple mystifications created by the ruling class to deceive the good proletariat. But if, indeed, the crisis of capital which generates the tendencies towards globalisation, is a necessary condition for the development of an international class struggle, it is not the only one. One reason, amongst others, is that the same crisis also created obstacles on the road of class consciousness (massive unemployment, fragmentation of the exploited class, etc). To see only the opportunity of the "vacuum" that is created, means denying the importance of the role of revolutionary subjectivity. Furthermore, if this vacuum is not filled by the workers' movement, the bourgeoisie will fill it because it never leaves such a political space open for very long and it can occupy it under the most diverse forms (the return to order after the end of World War two demonstrated clearly that it had drawn the lessons of the faults of 1917-18 which facilitated the workers' revolts). The F.N. appears more and more as one of those potential forms which are growing on the dunghill of the crisis. Even if its ideology is not homogeneous enough to launch a process of fascisation, it's strong enough for large scale-mischief (racist crimes) and to contribute to an extreme security-control and postulate a place of choice within the state apparatus.

We must break with fatalism: true, it's in given conditions that humans make history; but it's they who make it! The maturation of the objective conditions, no matter how advanced, could never replace the intervention of the masses becoming conscious and taking their fate in their hands. Granted, in the Bolshevik and councilist tradition, the subjective factor, was enormously overestimated, in its organisational forms (party or councils) and the history of the Internationals (1st, 2nd, 3th) Marx himself thought the revolution was possible in the 19th Century, when capitalism had far from exhausted its capacities to develop the productive forces and was therefore far from completing its historic cycle. That's why he theorized the idea of a permanent revolution and later of a period of transition during which the proletariat would have no choice but to continue the accumulation instead of the bourgeoisie, which looked weak at the time. Only after that would it be able to move by its own action to integral communism and accomplish thus what Engels called the leap from the reign of necessity to the reign of freedom.

But those who today bend the stick in the other direction in the name of a "final" crisis which solves all problems, and proceed with an objectivist critique a posteriori, risk a real flattening of the human role in history and feed the pernicious propaganda (of the "nouveaux philosophes", the charity business, churches of all sorts) which presents human nature as the source of all evil, wrongs, totalitarianisms and other diabolical incarnations.

We must, on the contrary, affirm that collective class consciousness plays a decisive role and can tilt the balance in favor of a revolutionary process; (even if there is always a degree of uncertainty that depends of the conjuncture of circumstances at a given moment). It's therefore urgent not to leave the terrain empty and to intervene to contribute to our class becoming conscious, knowing that the experience

of the coming struggles will bring a consciousness inherent to the movement. Otherwise, what sense would it have to develop a new platform and to seek to stimulate a theoretical reflexion as broad as possible (discussion circles, public meetings etc)?

Ernest Everhard

May 1993

RESPONSE FROM ALAIN BIHR

Comrade Everhard sent me his critique on my book on the Front National and invited me to answer it. I gladly take the opportunity to explain myself.

Comrade Everhard has clearly appreciated my analysis of the causes of the emergence of the extreme right in its implantation in French society. But he finds no merit in the proposals I advance in the last chapter to fight it. He reproaches me for two, linked faults: a lack of coherence and a lack of radicalism. In his view, my analysis shows that the emergence of the Front National and other extreme right movements must be explained by the current general crisis of capitalism and therefore can lead to only one conclusion: to get rid of the Front National, we must get rid of capitalism. In short, "there's only one solution: revolution!", as we used to say. If I don't draw that conclusion, I contradict myself and condemn myself to reproduce all the mistakes of the past.

Only one solution: the revolution? Sure. But the problem then is how to bring that perspective closer, or simply how to (re)create the conditions for a revolutionary movement in a context of a balance of forces that has considerably worsened for the working class. That's what my proposals are aimed at.

Doing this, I'm perfectly conscious of the fact that some of my proposals do not escape a certain ambiguity, by offering the risk of reformist deviations. That's the price we must pay to rediscover the road of the mass struggle. The separation between the reformist and revolutionary tendencies will occur as the struggle against capitalist oppression develops again and it will be one of the stakes of this struggle.

But this is no excuse for caricaturing these proposals, as comrade Everhard sometimes does. He does so for instance when he presents goals such as the massive and rapid reduction of the working week or the institution of a

guaranteed social income as "transitory measures". He doesn't seem to understand their potentially revolutionary bearing. Or when he accuses me of wanting to "attract factions of the middle classes to the proletariat", while all I did was making some proposals to make sure that the proletariat has a hegemony over these factions in the workers movement, while at the same time dividing and weakening the enemy; and this after carefully noting that "because of their divergent and even contradictory historical interests, the possibility of a strategic alliance between the proletariat and these classes as a whole is excluded" (p 249). A final example: he neglects to mention that my proposals "to extend and deepen the representative democracy", were explicitly linked to the constitution of structures of counter-power, within and outside of the workplace. Only these can make it possible for the exploited and oppressed to regain an autonomy of decision and action and to pressure the State, not only to democratize it but above all to delegitimize it, to short-circuit it and finally to neutralize it, all preliminary steps to its destruction.

These proposals must of course be discussed and can therefore be criticized. But, again, their essential purpose is to (re)create the conditions for an offensive social movement, capable to at least turn around the social dynamic which, as a result of the structural crisis of capitalism but also of the revolutionary movement, becomes increasingly catastrophic.

It is by the measure of this goal that these proposals should be judged and discussed. Except if one considers that the question it tries to answer: "Why and how struggle today?" is itself without object; and that the repetitive incantation of reputedly magic formulas about the revolution will be enough to get us out of the fix we're currently stuck in.

A. Bihr

Reply To IP

ON THE REVOLUTIONARY NATURE OF THE PROLETARIAT

What follows is a new text by comrade TM of the Paris Discussion Circle, in response to our introduction of her previous article "Who is the proletariat?" (IP # 23). This new text does not deal with the specific question of the recomposition of the working class, which was the original subject of the debate (see articles in IP # 15, 21, 22) but it does address basic issues such as: why hasn't the proletariat succeeded in making its revolution so far? What is the role of those who are most conscious of the general perspectives of the movement, the revolutionaries?

TM's text attacks the deterministic idea that the absence of revolution is the simple result of the immaturity of the economic conditions. But in her zeal to insist on the active role of the revolutionaries TM adopts, in our view, the mirror-image of the error she criticizes and defends the idealist view that all that's lacking is consciousness, independent of the economic conditions. This debate between determinism and idealism, which is hotly discussed in the circle in Paris, seems to us wrongly posed. In any case, TM is wrong when she thinks that we agree with the deterministic position. Let us clarify.

TM states that "from an abstract economic point of view, the revolution should have taken place since a long time". We should first ask what these "abstract economic conditions" are. Maybe TM means - and with this we agree - that since the turn of the century when the capitalist system entered its phase of decadence, the general historic conditions for the surge of the revolution exist. This position is rejected by determinists who contend that the continued development of the productive forces since then, shows that capitalism had not accomplished its historic cycle and, therefore that any attempt to overthrow it was premature and voluntaristic. We'll elaborate our arguments against their position in a future article. Here we want to emphasize that the concept of decadence and the recognition of the real development of the productive forces in this century are not contradictory. Indeed, the concept of decadence has often been wrongly understood as meaning a halt in the development of the productive forces, maybe in part because of the much slower growth rate between the two world wars. For us, the concept of decadence implies that the development of capitalism can only take place at the expense of the needs of humankind. This destructive aspect of capitalism's development shows clearly in the wars which incessantly ravage different parts of the globe and in the economic collapse of the "Third" and "Second" worlds. The areas on this planet where survival is possible are being reduced to a few pockets (North America, Western Europe, South East Asia).

It would be foolish to deny the development of the productive forces in this century and in particular since the end of the Second World War. During the last 15 years, with the incorporation of the information technology in the means of production, a new and enormous leap has been made in labour productivity. The robotisation of sectors of the production which earlier demanded an abundant work force, solidifies the economic bases for the arrival of communism because it partly frees humans of the work necessary to fulfill their needs. In this regard, we take issue with TM where she states that the material force of the proletariat which makes it possible to transform society comes from the fact that it "produces everything, at least the bulk of what society needs to live". This affirmation has a strange ring at a time in which entire stages of the production occur with minimal human intervention. If one accepts TM's view, one would be tempted to conclude that we go towards a reality in which revolution would be impossible... for lack of a revolutionary subject! We think the proletariat is revolutionary because it is - collectively - the source of the surplus value on which capital lives.

This being said, it does not mean that the absence of revolution is simply due to a lack of consciousness, independent of the economic conditions. The development of the consciousness of the proletariat is determined, not only by the historic period, but also by the evolution of the specific economic and social conditions within that historic period. TM reproaches us to "bet on the crisis" as a sufficient factor to give birth to a revolutionary process. It's clear that the crisis isn't sufficient. Just look at the '30s when the crisis was deep but the proletariat's consciousness weak. But nobody can deny that the crisis is a necessary factor for the development of revolutionary movements. It's not enough however, that this crisis appears in disastrous economic figures, it must also appear in such a way the proletariat realizes that capitalism is no longer capable to meet its most elementary needs. We think that this consciousness will develop under the impulse of the growth of massive unemployment and the acceleration of the attacks on the living conditions of the working class in all the central countries of capitalism (Germany, France, US etc). We don't mean to suggest that there is sort of a fixed level of crisis that must be reached to unleash the class struggle: the relatively mild level of crisis of the end of the '60s and early '70s was enough to provoke an

international wave of struggles. But today more is needed to get a renewal of the struggle because the stakes are much higher: the loss of illusions in the possibility to gain something real within the system leaves no other possibility but the rise of the radical will to destroy that system. Now it's a time of unbridled individualism. Everyone is trying to save his own skin. But the inevitable deepening of the crisis may change this and foster the development of a revolutionary will and consciousness.

TM blames the intervention of the revolutionaries in their class, its lack of efficiency and faith (sic), for the lack of development of revolutionary consciousness. We understand and share her concern for making the revolutionary press more accessible and free of jargon. But it would be an illusion that this could radically alter the situation. The revolutionaries can only have a real impact (and then their language, the way they speak to their class, changes too) when the class is sufficiently receptive, ready to hear the ideas about the need and the possibility to overthrow capitalism and begin a new society. So far, that hasn't been the case. We must admit that the revolutionary milieu has been wrong, since 1968: it has underestimated the time it would take for the revolutionary quakes to appear, and has therefore overestimated the immediate receptiveness for their positions in the class struggle. It was obnubilated by its desire to reach the class, even when the latter was not struggling. This has led, not only to occasional blunders (which were less dramatic because of its weak influence) but also to neglect of its theoretical task, which nobody else can do in its place.

Dear Comrades,

Here's a contribution to the debate on the proletariat which may seem to you very mixed because it deals with questions as varied as the role of revolutionaries, the revolutionary milieu, marxism, academicism, revolutionary consciousness, man. I know it's risky to touch to so many vast questions in a few pages; every question should need more developments. But the fact is that all those questions are of direct concern to the proletariat. They are meant to be elements of response to the the introduction you wrote to the text "Who is the working class?" which I sent you and which you published in *Internationalist Perspective* n° 23.

These critical comments on your criticisms will at least help to locate our divergences on, let's say, "the role of revolutionaries". It may seem that this question has nothing to do with the subject we are dealing with (the recomposition of the proletariat), but I think, on the contrary, that it's quite at the heart of the subject. What ultimately defines the revolutionary proletariat is its consciousness, on which depends its capability to create a new worldwide social and human order, rid from capitalism. Revolutionaries are expressions of the consciousness of the proletariat and their weaknesses are weaknesses of the proletariat -and vice versa-, even if they are not expressed in the same manner. Thus, to a proletariat which for years has been floundering, suffering and drawing back on the terrain of economic struggles, "without managing to present its historical alternative" -as you have

often written- corresponds a "revolutionary milieu" (1) which rooted its work on the conviction that the economic

crisis of capitalism would inexorably (2) bring about massive struggles which would allow the proletariat to find again the way to revolution. Hence, a lot of work devoted to the study of the evolution of the crisis of capitalism, as a forerunner of massive struggles; on the other hand, hardly any effort devoted to developing answers to the questions that such massive struggles pose: what can be done to really change things?, or, in other terms, what is, concretely, the way to revolution? (I mean more convincing answers than the various versions of "the leading party" which will find all the answers). Perhaps, if revolutionaries had devoted more effort to this aspect of revolutionary work, the so longed for massive strikes, would have taken place, encouraged by the faith (the faith is "the fact of believing in something") in the possibility to make a new world. I know we cannot work on such abstract hypothesis; this is just an interrogation which cannot be answered.

Many revolutionaries reject the idea that a link can be made between the writings of revolutionary publications and the actions -or the inaction- of the proletariat as a whole: "anyway, given the number of readers we have, we have no influence at all on what happens, and it's not us who'll be able to change the world". I think there is a cause and effect relationship between the contents of the revolutionary press and its little influence. I'd say that the main weakness of its contents is its difficulty to address to readers who "know nothing about politics", which is the case of the majority of the workers. Too strong a tendency to write "for the other revolutionaries", i.e. on an ideological level and handling notions which can only speak to a tiny minority of "initiated" in politics (of course, this varies a lot according to the different publications). Writings for "initiated people" cannot have a wide distribution, it's obvious. If we cannot ask the working class to make the effort to "initiate" itself to our press (we could do it but it

would be useless), we can try to make our revolutionary convictions more accessible to anyone.

That's why I find it necessary to send you those critical comments on what seems to me an "academic" conception of marxism, a marxism which assigns itself as a prime task to "analyse events" and puts revolutionaries in a position of observers, making them forget that they are themselves an expression of the proletariat and that to "analyse capitalism" is not equivalent to combatting it.

You write that: "This debate is neither "academic" nor "sociological", and indeed it must not be. But I think that it can easily become academic if we adopt the standpoint you defend in this introduction: the study of the proletariat from a "strictly economic" point of view. I think this approach is a mistake which has already been costly enough to the revolutionary movement .

To begin with, I must express my disagreement with the way in which you formulate the goal of the debate on the "reconstitution of the classes in decadent capitalism": "it should help us to respond to a very real need: to understand why the working class finds it so difficult to express openly its revolutionary consciousness, despite capitalism's deepening historical crisis". (IP n° 23, p. 10).

I would say first that only those who are already convinced of the revolutionary nature of the working class, i.e. the revolutionaries, feel this need to "understand why the working class finds it so difficult to express openly its revolutionary consciousness". The others, i.e. the immense majority, merely think that the working class is not revolutionary and don't ask themselves this question.

Besides, we can answer this question very simply: if the working class "finds it so difficult to express openly its revolutionary consciousness" it's because this consciousness does not exist and this is the problem to solve. The way in which this question is formulated suggests that "revolutionary consciousness" is be something inherent and intrinsic to the working class, some sort of divine grace which is always there, ready to "express itself openly". Ironically, this vision of the working class which appears almost mystical, comes from the materialist theory of marxism according to which "the material conditions of existence determine consciousness". Hence, a strict and direct link between "the economic crisis" and "the emergence of revolutionary consciousness" was established, wishing perhaps to push this materialism to a "scientific" level. This leads to a "hyper-determinist", fatalistic vision of revolutionary consciousness, which in turn leads to a distorted vision of the role of revolutionaries. As a matter of fact, if one considers that revolutionary consciousness is permanently inherent to the working class (or proletariat),

it follows that revolutionaries can be content with studying the conditions which will -or will not- allow this "pre-existing" consciousness to express itself openly, and only have to wait for the day when their ideas will be understood by the masses in struggle.

In this respect we can recall the notorious mistake made by Bordiga when he announced that 1975 would be a watershed year for the process of the emergence of revolutionary consciousness because of the aggravation of the economic crisis; or the ICC's mistake when it predicted that the future of humanity would be settled in the 80s, also because of the crisis. The economic crisis was there indeed, but not the revolutionary working class. The fact is that, from an abstract economic point of view, the proletarian revolution should have taken place a long time ago. If it didn't take place it's because other factors were missing. Still, you keep thinking that "if the working class has not yet become offensive -a conscious offensive leading to a revolutionary process- it's because capitalism has not yet pushed it into a corner" (IP n° 24, p 17); I think this prolongs the same mistake of "betting on the crisis" as a sufficient factor to give birth to a revolutionary process.

Reality shows that the determining factor which is missing for revolutionary struggles to emerge is not the economic factor but the consciousness factor. Revolutionaries exist to act at this level, and not to "reaffirm the marxist foundations of the analysis of the revolutionary nature of the working class" in abstracto, but to push and encourage so that this revolutionary nature recognizes and expresses itself in the working class as a whole. It's only with this approach that this discussion can contribute to confirm the validity of the marxist vision of the working class as a revolutionary class.

Academic Marxism and Revolutionary Marxism

There is an academic marxism, the one which is lectured in universities because the ruling class finds it useful to utilize all that can be interesting in Marx, especially from an economic point of view, to try and assure a rational administration of society. This kind of marxism produces every year many studies and thesis on economics, sociology, political science, etc., which are very helpful to the administrators of capitalism (and also to the revolutionary militants who can find there quite a number of data for their own analysis). The characteristic of this marxism is that it stands on the point of view of capitalism which is "scientifically" observed and "objectively" analysed, in order to describe and explain its phenomena.

It does not leave the terrain of its observations, i.e. capitalism. It can analyse and expose all sorts of phenomena linked to the existence of capitalism but it is not revolutionary. It is not paid to destroy the existing order but to help it survive.

There is also a marxism which shares the same academic approach but calls itself revolutionary, ie for which marxism is not a bread-winner but a "powerful theoretical tool", "the arm of criticism", a "scientific theory" for which the communist revolution is inscribed in the evolution of capitalism "as surely as if revolution had already taken place" (as Bordiga put it). Practically, the only difference between this marxism and the plain academic one is that it claims to be for revolution -or for "the theory of revolution"-, but its militancy does not go beyond the study of the conditions which make that revolution is inscribed within the contradictions of capitalism. It does not see revolution as a "sensible human act" but as a theoretical abstraction. It does not see the working class as a social human entity, but as an economic category.

In your text of IP n° 23 you are tending to adopt the approach of this kind of marxism, when you write, to justify the interest of studying the working class from an economic point of view: "The intellectual journey of Marx shows this. While he was at first mainly concerned with philosophy, he felt the pressing need to base his vision of the proletariat on a strictly economic analysis of the functioning of capitalism". As a matter of fact, after the reflux of the social struggles of 1848 and 1871, Marx dedicated himself to deepen the study of capital. But, first, even in *Capital* Marx's vision of the working class is never "strictly economic". It is only such when he wants to demonstrate the laws of functioning of the capitalist system which considers the working class only as "variable capital". Then, must we think that because Marx dedicated the last years of his life to this economic work, it is this aspect of marxism which is to be considered as the "best of" marxism, the aspect which must be imitated and continued? Must we understand that "to be marxist" means to mime the acts and gestures of Marx? Certainly you don't think so but this is what you are suggesting. Or then you are suggesting that, like Marx in this period, we have in front of us years of economic prosperity and social quiet which will allow us to indulge in deep theoretical studies in the silence of libraries. I think that theoretical deepening must be done, but quickly, in open and public debates and being aware of the urgency of the world situation.

Revolutionary Consciousness is Globalizing

You write: "TM's article also contains some ideas with which we disagree. The author thinks it's useless or intellectualistic to analyse the reconstitution of the working class economically. What characterizes the working class in TM's-view, is not that it produces surplus value but that it produces everything. These are formulations we reject."

That's right, I think that revolutionaries have much more important things to do than dissertate on the transformations of the conditions of exploitation brought about by the evolution of capitalism. I'm not saying it has no interest. Everything is interesting. But what characterizes revolutionaries is not the fact that they can make very clever analysis of the state of things, describe and analyse events. Academics can do that. What characterizes revolutionaries (or should characterize them) is that "they point out and bring to the front the common interests of the entire proletariat", that they are the "section which pushes forward all others" because "theoretically, they have over the great mass of the proletariat the advantage of clearly understanding the line of march, the conditions and the ultimate general results of the proletarian movement" -to use the terms of the Communist Manifesto of Marx and Engels on "what distinguishes communists". It's this marxism, the one which exhorts: "Workers of the world, unite!", which is revolutionary marxism. It stands on the point of view of the proletarian revolution, the point of view of the interest of humanity, the point of view of man as a human being. This is not to say that all studies must be dropped -by no means- but to stress the active and dynamic character which must always motivate revolutionary thought: we are not contemplators and analysts. We work for a goal: the constitution of the proletariat as a class conscious of the necessity and the possibility to rid humanity from the domination of capitalist laws. This implies: put the emphasis on what is common and unifies the entire working class, make efforts to be understandable by most people, try to convince.

Therefore I must admit that I do think that "it is intellectualistic to analyse the reconstitution of the working class economically" because it implies to consider the working class as an abstract entity. But no abstract entity can make revolution ; only human beings armed with a conscious goal, human beings who are not only conditioned and concerned by "the economic conditions of their exploitation" but also by all what surrounds these conditions of exploitation, by all the aspects of the life of society. It is important to be able to think in abstract (for

example, to adopt a "strictly economic" point of view) to understand the general laws which rule concrete reality. But to remain in abstraction leads to cutting oneself off from concrete reality and opening the door to mistakes.

An example of concrete reality is that there is no direct link between the particular conditions of exploitation of the workers and their capability to develop a revolutionary consciousness. Revolutionary consciousness tends to globalize right away and has always done so. The working class asserts itself as a revolutionary class from the moment when it works out a global criticism of the capitalist mode of production and proposes a global vision of a future society. The difference between "massive struggles" and "revolutionary struggles" (or what indicates the passage from the first to the second) is that the latter globalize the demands ("bread", "land", "freedom", "peace", "solidarity", "what do we want? Everything !"...) and put into question the existing social organisation as a whole while proposing projects of a new organisation of society, according to new principles. This is also demonstrated by the fact that, even at present, among the revolutionary individuals who exist and who are, as far as I know, elements of the working class, there must not be a single one who would say that it's the immediate working conditions which made him/her become conscious of the necessity of revolution. Obviously, working conditions have their share, but they are only an aspect of "the crazy life we live".

It is absurd to reduce the working class to a "strictly economic aspect".

It is very surprising to read in the pages of IP 23 that "the question which many in the revolutionary milieu pose: are the "productive" workers (those who directly produce surplus value) a part of the working class?" and that therefore "You can't skirt around the problem of surplus value.", whereas in IP n° 15 you write : the proletariat "it's not only the workers who directly produce surplus value but the whole of the producers who are involved in the process of valorisation of capital and who participate to some degree to the global production of capital". It seems to me that what flows from the last sentence is that the problem of surplus value is no longer relevant regarding the definition of who is a proletarian and who is not.

Revolutionaries are concerned by the destruction of capitalism and its replacement by a new social organisation. It's from that point of view that it's important to underline that "the proletariat produces everything, or at least, the essential part of what society needs to live". Because there lies the material force which can allow the proletariat to transform society. It holds in its hands the means of life. You say that you don't share this formulation (this astounds

me), but then you must answer the question: who, according to you, builds the houses, makes the goods of production and of consumption, who assures all the services which allow the distribution of goods, who, in practice, assures all the functions which society needs for living, if not the proletariat? Of course, it does all that following the directives of the capitalist class -and that's the problem- but this does not contradict the fact that it's the proletariat who, ultimately, executes everything. It's for this reason that it can present a revolutionary project in which the social organisation of production is no longer submitted to the laws of capitalist profit but to the satisfaction of human needs.

You write: "in the course of the article, TM gives a somewhat mythical and gargantuan vision of the "productive" worker, supposedly closer to the "human needs" (seen in a historical way) and therefore, more capable of recognizing and expressing his revolutionary nature. We want to stay clear from an idealistic['folkloric' in the French] view of the worker close to the "noble savage", with whom he would share his innocence and unchangeable nature"

It is true that my approach to the proletariat can be seen as "folkloric" in the sense of "folk" meaning "people" and "lore" "knowledge" (in old Germanic, according to the dictionary)-note by the way that the evolution of this word into a pejorative sense -"picturesque thing but without any importance"- reflects the power of capitalist ideology for which people don't mean much except as exploitable labour force or as merchandise buyers. My purpose was indeed to deal with the proletariat on its human aspect. My text wanted to insist on the human qualities which exist in the proletariat (but which are constantly crushed and stifled by the weight of capitalist ideology), which permit to think that the communist revolution is possible; that the modern working class can find in itself the qualities which are necessary to bring to a successful issue the social transformation that the world needs -as opposed to the ruling ideology which hammers the idea that the communist revolution is not possible because men are selfish, power greedy, war lovers, and so on.

I can't say more here about this aspect of the proletariat which you "want to stay clear of" and which would take too long. What is to be retained is that, in this world where man is denied by capitalism to such an extent that "he lost himself" (as Marx and Engels would put it), it falls to revolutionaries to reaffirm the grand vision of man developed by Marx and Engels (3).

Continued on page 2

Open Letter to the Communist Bulletin Group, and the Communist Workers Organisation

OUR CONCEPTIONS OF POLITICAL DEBATE

Dear comrades,

For some months now, contact between the three groups has been sporadic. Although there have been practical difficulties, it is important not to let them obscure important underlying political disagreements concerning the main tasks of revolutionaries today.

As you both know, there has been an ongoing process of discussion between the CBG and IP for about three years. We had had group-to-group meetings, jointly arranged public meetings and corresponded. With a seeming new openness towards discussion from the CWO, they were able during 1992 to participate in creating a wider forum. However, although one open meeting was held in which the three groups participated, the process since then has become somewhat fragmented. But, worse than this, the promise of purposeful public debate between the groups is being shown to be too weak to raise the CBG and CWO out of old patterns of behaviour. So, the three-way discussion is not being sustained.

The CBG has again become fixated on the regroupment question, this time with the CWO; the CWO has shown - again - that its interest in discussion is more a search for a milieu to absorb its political ideas; and at the third corner of this triangle IP stands with our views on the tasks of revolutionaries in this period regarded with deep suspicion - for different reasons - by the other two groups.

We hope that, by highlighting matters here we can help dismantle this gridlock. We are writing this open letter because these matters are relevant to the proletarian movement as a whole. We are writing to both of you together because of the interlinking of the separate discussions taking place between the three of us.

Regroupment at What Price?

This is not the first time we have drawn attention to the fixation that you CBG comrades have about regroupment. We have already written in our press over the past few

years about your concern over our more cautious approach, and about the existence of several other criteria beyond a basic agreement on class lines.

In the CBG's recent relationship with the CWO we can see many parallels with the your relationship with IP, but now the dangers of your approach to this question are showing up much more clearly. We'll make just two points on this here.

First, we think you are using the issue of regroupment to hide the fact that the real reason the CBG is not developing/evolving is that it does not take positions in the course of its political debates, neither internally nor with other groups. Ironically, this blocks any hopes of regroupment taking place for, if you do not confront positions internally others do not know what defines your group, and if you don't confront positions between groups you cannot work out a basis for regroupment which has any hope of lasting. We could not accept such a perspective and from what we can gauge of the CWO's views neither can they (although we'll come to that later).

The CBG must not continue to attribute only to the sectarianism of the milieu your lack of success with regroupment since you left the ICC. Although this is a major and widespread weakness in the milieu, you have to see the consequences of your own reluctance to take positions. It is particularly unfortunate in view of the positive attitude the CBG has taken to discussion with other groups in the milieu.

Second, if we say that it is insufficient for organisations to regroup on the basis of agreement on class lines, this agreement is nonetheless a pre-requisite. We were therefore alarmed to find in your account of the CBG/CWO meeting held at the end of 1992:

"The real area for discussion here seems to be that of the question of programmatic identity and the problem of taking positions. ... This discussion would help to demarcate essential position from those which are non-essential (eg the problem of the economic basis of decadence, the role of the party in the revolutionary situation, how such questions are

to be appraised and given weight within an organisation; specifically, how possible is it for the 'competing' interpretations of the German/Italian Left to exist within one platform and practice?) It should be clear by now that the CBG sees no real barriers here. We believe that regroupment could occur without total agreement on these issues."

If the working class has only 'its consciousness and its will to act', how can you possibly reduce the importance of the question of the party to "non-essential"? Class lines were drawn from the experience of the first revolutionary wave: the party does not embody the consciousness of the class; the party does not take power in the name of the class.

The eagerness of some members of the CBG for regroupment with the CWO is clear in the account of the meeting referred to earlier; it is imperative that you don't demote class lines to a lower league in order to preserve a momentum towards regroupment.

We have an additional question for both groups, which to outsiders may seem frivolous given the above. Are you discussing regroupment or not? We ask because, although the CBG is apparently unanimous in saying that it is, the CWO has written to say its comrades were "stupified" to read the CBG account of one of your meetings as there is "no talk of regroupment here". What can we (IP) or the milieu make of this?

What Kind of Discussions?

To the comrades of the CWO we have some further points to make. While there are views you have expressed in our correspondence and discussions with which we disagree, these do not provide an obstacle to continuing to debate publicly with you. However, we find aspects of your behaviour which are questionable. There had been a process of discussion between the CBG and IP at open meetings and we both asked you to participate and help widen it. We emphasised how important it was to have proletarian groups discuss publicly and internationally. Last year at the Manchester meeting you went so far as to propose annual conferences between revolutionary groups in Britain.

However, since then you have narrowed your views. You wrote in March to say "All we thought we have agreed to create have agreed to was that we would continue to create a forum where all internationalists in Britain could discuss on a regular basis (about once every three months) ..." We wrote back to ask: "Are you saying you do not want to participate in furthering the creation of a forum outside

Britain? We suggested that you participated in our meetings in Brussels and Paris and asked that you helped arrange meetings in Italy through your BC contacts. You explained at the time that there were IBRP organisational issues which have to be resolved with BC. What is the position? Is all possibility for this outside Britain now dead as far as you are concerned?"

Evidently it was, because you wrote back to say that "The reality is that our differences are probably as great as ever. This does not preclude discussion between IP and the IBRP as a whole but there would have to be a preliminary period of dialogue and correspondence before we could even begin to think in terms of visits to Paris and Brussels for joint meetings." You also explained that your "general concern about the lack of wider influence of revolutionary ideas and the tendency for existing organisations (to) restrict their relations with each other to polemics over what divides them (editorial to Communist Review 10) ... is why the CWO was ready to take part in joint public meetings with other groups who, despite the differences, should be able to present a recognisably distinct analysis of current events - ie distinct from Leftism et al."

This narrowing of horizons - to national limitations, to current events - is hardly in the spirit of the original (CBG and IP) aim of developing a broader involvement of the proletarian milieu in public debate. No-one is suggesting that we do not continue to discuss with each other, but it is sad that such broadening as had begun so quickly contracted. We have to ask why you wanted to be involved in this in the first place.

The State of the Milieu

In the CWO letter of 4 March you say that "the EFICC seems to be a purely theoretical paper organisation". This statement is made against the background of assertions that "communist groups have got to be committed to getting their ideas across whatever the balance of class forces at any given time. Communist politics is a totality of constant intervention and theoretical reflection on that intervention. Twenty years ago there were not even the small groups of left communists in Britain that there are today. We are therefore better off."

As we said in April, "We're bemused by your assessment of the state of the milieu. You say that twenty years ago there were not even the small groups of left communists that there are today. You say that there was not a real milieu and that you are now trying to put this right. Although it is important not to look at the past through rose-tinted glasses, you seem to forget the relative vibrancy

of political life twenty years ago - and even the roots of your own group. In our view the crisis of the political milieu has for some years been horrendous - many groups have disappeared, with widespread departures from the political milieu. There has been a chronic inability to face up to the realities of the current period, accompanied by retreats into dogmatism, abandonment of principles, and sectarianism."

Unfortunately, comrades, you are not giving us much cause to share your views on this.

What Kind of Platform?

We three groups each say we want to review our platforms. However, this means different things to each of us. The CWO has told IP: "... we find it very difficult to share your concerns. Let's talk about the Platform issue. When we talk about re-writing our Platform we are talking about up-dating it so that it represents the post-1991 world and not simply the post-1945 world. Only the arrogance and intellectual dishonesty of the ICC can deny this is necessary to make our politics more effective (they seem to go in for subtle amendments as they go along). But your project is of another order altogether." (Letter, dated 4.3.93) The CWO is correct.

The CWO subsequently expanded on what their update would entail. "This is not not to say that we think we can cheerfully ignore recent developments and their implications - the unexpected ability of capital to restructure despite the crisis and the subsequent dislocation of the working class; the collapse of the Russian bloc; to name but two aspects of the present period. However, your crisis of perspectives and the role of revolutionaries is not ours." (Letter to IP, 27.4.93)

The CBG, for their part, have acknowledged that the major upheavals of recent years are exposing fundamental weaknesses in the theoretical acquisitions of the revolutionary movement. However, when it comes to a platform they say in their account of the December 1992 meeting with the CWO that:

"the existing IBRP Platform is, more or less, already broad enough for us and could be accepted in lieu of a new Platform. However, for reasons argued at (...) it is felt that a new Platform incorporating the realities of the new situation would best meet the needs of any form of regroupment. To be concrete we suggest the following:

(a) each group undertakes to produce a written critique of existing Platforms.

(b) that these critiques form the basis for a new synthesised Platform."

But is this merely to be a lowest common denominator platform? That's what it would be if there is no confrontation of ideas within each group and between your two groups. Where then would be the value of the regroupment? What would be the worth of the platform?

IP does have a different view. For us, Marxism remains the only valid theoretical framework for the revolutionary movement of the proletariat. However, it is not static, or merely a litany of eternal truths. Just as capitalism keeps on revolutionising its own mode of production marxism must be constantly revitalised otherwise it will not keep up with the changing objective reality within which the proletariat must struggle. Unfortunately, many revolutionary groups treat this task superficially.

We are not here commenting on the efforts applied to try to understand any particular question more deeply - in a sense a sizeable proportion of articles in the revolutionary press attempt to do that. What we are stressing here is the need to question the continuing validity of the theoretical tools that we are using - those inherited from the past revolutionary movement as well as those developed in our present generation.

For some time we in IP have written about weaknesses in our theoretical armoury. At the time of our expulsion from the ICC we thought the platform was substantially sound but needed development in certain areas, on class consciousness particularly. Since then, massive changes have taken place in the global edifice of capitalism - the fall of the eastern bloc, the fragmentation of the Soviet Union, the restructuring of capital, the globalisation of capital and the reconstitution of the proletariat. Together these have forced us to question the very basis of our platform and to conclude that it has fundamentally flaws.

This assessment has led us to some crucial decisions at our conference in May. We have now embarked on a process of drafting as a matter of urgency the outline of a new platform; a full platform may take a considerable time to develop. When we have this outline platform ready we shall be able to change our group's name - the External Fraction of the ICC - which, as the above account indicates, has long since lost its meaning.

In investigating the weaknesses of the platform we are led also to re-examining the heritage of the Communist Left which is one of its linchpins.

The Dual Heritage of the Communist Left

The CWO said to IP in its April letter, "For you there is a question mark over the basic validity of the left communist framework." We have also seen in a letter from Flett of the CBG to the CWO commenting on a CBG/CWO discussion that, while having criticisms of IP, the comrade found it necessary to defend IP from CWO accusations that we "seek" to liquidate all the gains of the Communist Left'. Well, CWO comrades, what do you think the Left Communist framework is? - and, as a totality, is it sacrosanct?

As with the whole development of marxism, we in IP think that the theoretical heritage of the Communist Left should be open to re-assessment. This is a far cry from seeking its liquidation.

When we in IP left the ICC it was in the process of repudiating its own platform. From having denounced social-democracy in the First World War as having crossed over from the camp of the proletariat to that of the bourgeoisie, the ICC used its 'centrism' theory to justify keeping these architects of the workers' mobilisation into the War back into the workers' movement; it also rehabilitated the IKPD as a proletarian expression. Subsequently, we saw the ICC change its platform to formalise these regressions. For some time we were misled by what the ICC was doing. The degeneration of fundamental political positions of the ICC (some being acquisitions taken from the work of the Communist Left) was masking the fact that some of those positions were in themselves politically unsatisfactory. This realisation came about both in the course of theoretical discussions as well as in the unfolding of external reality.

Our discussions on class consciousness and on the relation between party and class have shown marked limitations in the theorisations of the Communist Left; we - indeed the whole milieu - has been poorly equipped to understand the developments after Poland in 1980, the profound quiescence of class struggle despite the worsening of the crisis, and the effect of the global restructuring of capitalism. So, too, the capacity of capitalism to continue to develop despite the permanent crisis has challenged the revolutionary milieu to explain it satisfactorily.

Indeed, the very concept of decadence itself has to be understood better by marxists. It is still tainted both by economic and by moralistic interpretations, both of which have to be replaced by a thorough materialist, marxist explanation. It is wrong to think that by just going back to the acquisitions of the Communist Left these problems will be resolved because, while recognising the value of those acquisitions, they are nonetheless inadequate.

The organisations of the first revolutionary wave were

seriously hampered by many of the ideas developed in the ascendant epoch of capitalism, and therefore had some negative as well as positive effects on the proletarian movement. The Communist Left were able to draw many lessons, but they too were prey to errors because of the restricted vision from their historical vantage point. While ours is not perfect either, we have moved on another, event-filled half-century from which we should be able to make a further critique.

The gains of the Communist Left must not be thrown overboard; but to stand pat and argue that it has all been essentially worked out is a recipe for dogmatism. There is no virtue in being the Jehovah's Witnesses of the revolutionary movement.

The Stakes of the Period

The CWO says that IP "seems to be a purely theoretical paper organisation." (Letter, 4.3.93) We intervene in struggles as and when opportunity and our resources permit - although, for some time the level of class struggle has dropped considerably below that of the early '80s. But it would be entirely wrong to consider that our theoretical work is an alternative to intervention, or a filler when the class struggle is low. On the contrary, any effective intervention in future class struggle will have as a pre-requisite a thorough-going re-assessment of the developments which have taken place this century. If you CWO comrades deny this, you are saying that the present period has no special tasks or needs. The idea that the theory is essentially there and is only to be picked up or understood more widely is pernicious and potentially debilitating of the revolutionary movement.

On the contrary, there is an enormous amount of theoretical work to be done. And one means of encouraging this in the milieu is to promote public debate between our organisations. If the CBG allows itself to be diverted by its fixation on regroupment, or the CWO by its clinging to a holy writ, then the revolutionary milieu's ability to face up to these theoretical tasks will be all the weaker.

We have to be clear on the tasks of the hour. Military historians have often scorned the generals who entered new wars prepared only for those of the past. It would be unforgivable if the revolutionary movement went into the class wars of the 21st Century prepared only for the struggles of the 19th Century.

Fraternally,
Marlowe
for IP

OUR POSITIONS

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

In this epoch, the trade unions everywhere are organs of capitalist discipline within the proletariat. Any policy based on working in the unions, whether to preserve or 'transform' them, only serves to subject the working class to the capitalist state and to divert it from its own necessary self-organisation.

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

The so-called 'workers' parties 'socialist' and 'communist', as well as their extreme left appendages are the left face of the political apparatus of capital.

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

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

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

ACTIVITY OF THE FRACTION

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

1. The development of revolutionary theory on the basis of the historic acquisitions and experiences of the proletariat, so as to transcend the contradictions of the Communist Lefts and of the present revolutionary milieu, in particular on the questions of class consciousness, the role of the party and the conditions imposed by state capitalism.
2. Intervention in the class struggle on an international scale, so as to be a catalyst in the process which develops in workers' struggles towards consciousness, organisation and the generalised revolutionary action of the proletariat.

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