



INTERNATIONALIST PERSPECTIVE

**THE WORLD AS WE
SEE IT:
Reference points**

**1995
27**



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NEW WORLD DISORDERS

1. Since the world economy plunged into open crisis at the end of the sixties, every recession has been more devastating than the previous one. Today, five years after the beginning of the latest recession, there still is no hope for global recovery. Even in the strongest countries, high unemployment levels persist, while the weaker ones experience vertiginous drops in production. As we predicted, the gap between the weaker and the stronger capitals has widened further. Today, part of the world economy is stuck in deep depression, part of it is mired in stagnation and only a small part is enjoying significant growth. The recovery of the '80s was in large part fuelled by debt creation. In the US, the locomotive for this recovery, total outstanding debt on the economy (public and private) rose by almost 200% in the '80s. Profits were increasingly crushed by the weight of interest obligations. The recession that followed this debt binge was not just another cyclical downturn. The resulting massive wave of bankruptcies and curtailment of government spending increased the fragility of international financial structures and marked the end of capitalism's capacity to postpone its problems into the future by piling debts upon debts. We predicted in 1991 (see IP 19) that because of this no global recovery could occur. As soon as one began to take shape, competition for capital would lead to sharply rising interest rates, aborting the recovery. Only the absence of a real recovery, and therefore a relatively low demand for capital, could prevent interest rates from spiraling out of control.

2. Given the impossibility of a real recovery, the shortage of capital resulting from the shortage of profit, and the continuously growing overcapacity to produce in relation to solvable demand, an ever larger part of the world population becomes useless for capital and in being ejected from the world economy. While this ejection process is visible in the strongest economies too, where the army of long term unemployed continues to grow, it is the starkest in the weakest economies, for whom foreign investment has dried up and whose export prices are caught in a deflationary spiral. In the former Eastern bloc, the promised Western investment boom to a large extent remained a mirage. Many "third world" countries, especially in sub-Saharan Africa, are almost in their entirety being expelled from the international production process.

3. The shrinkage of the global pie has inevitably also exacerbated competition between the strongest capitals. "Competitiveness" is the watchword, in every company, in every country. Competition forces every

one of them to try relentlessly to lower production costs through the introduction of labor-saving technology. "Downsizing, the trend of the nineties", is the kind of fashionable slogan in which the media package this brutal wave of lay-offs, by which the strongest capitals defend their grip on the market. While they do, the unemployment they create further reduces demand and therefore chills the market. But, more fundamentally, by lowering the amount of labor in the production process, capitalism is attacking its own profits at their very source. Because living labor is the only commodity which puts more exchange value into the production than its own worth, it is the only source of profit. When one capitalist lowers his production costs by using less labor, he makes an extra profit because he produces cheaper than his competitors. But when all apply the same technological changes, the total amount of labor used decreases, and therefore the total amount of surplus value, i.e. profit, does too. This phenomenon is masked because of the rise in profits which the strongest capital initially enjoy when they lower their costs and improve their competitive position in relation to the rest of the economy. But that makes it no less real.

4. The drive of the strongest capitals to lower their production costs and maintain their markets, and the removal of the obstacles to this drive that were created by the division of the world in two rival blocs, have accelerated the globalisation of the world economy. Restrictions to the mobility of capital and protectionists barriers to trade are being knocked over (Nafta, GATT, the extension of the EC, etc). The markets to which the stronger capitals are securing greater access include of course the labor market, which has at the same time become more accessible because of technological changes, greater specialisation, lower transportation costs, increased skillness and other factors. It's now much easier to transplant production to faraway places where wage costs are extremely low. This also makes the threat of plant closure all the more credible and thereby puts strong downward pressure on wages in the strongest countries. For capital, globalisation is a boon because it increases the rate of exploitation and thereby helps to counteract the decline of its profit rate. For workers, globalisation spells more misery. But it also intertwines their fate with that of others in far away countries, who have the same interests, making them potentially stronger.

5. This double movement of integration and ejection is shaping the "new world order". On the one hand, globalisation is making the world economy

increasingly efficient, productive, internationally interdependent and so global that its dynamics tend to spin out of control of even the strongest states. On the other, the "downsizing" of the world economy makes ever larger parts of the world fall into ruins, chaos and misery. Both aspects highlight the increasing absurdity of capitalism as the organisational framework for the world economy.

6. Despite the trend towards trade liberalisation, trade frictions are also on the rise. Both express the rapport de force between capitals. While all stronger capitals tend to benefit from globalisation, only the strongest, especially the US, have the power to bend the rules of free trade to their own advantage and to use economic sanctions impose to its will on its competitors. The strong-arming of Japan by the US over the last year is a case in point. In such "trade wars" the seeds for real war are present. While no such conflict is imaginable in the near future, on a longer term, global economic competition, intensifying as the crisis deepens, will tend to become global military competition.

7. In such conflict, Russia would play a pivotal role. Even today, with its economy in depression, its constant political and social turmoil and the dislocation of its army, it is reasserting its imperialist appetites. After years of disintegration of the empire, the pendulum begins to swing back. Through economic and military pressure (manipulating local conflicts) Moscow is re-establishing its dominance over its "near abroad", scheming in particular for the reintegration of Ukraine and Belarus.

8. As for the US, although it won the cold war it has not simply inherited the world. It would be a mistake to equate the present situation with the aftermath of a real war. The rising tensions resulting from the deepening crisis and the disappearance of bloc discipline have made the control of Washington over the rest of the world much more difficult. While the Gulf War demonstrated its supremacy, its size and costs also demonstrated the limits of the US's global power, and its constant danger of over-reaching itself. In order to remain the sole superpower, the US continues to spend as much on its military as the rest of the world combined. To keep its military assembly lines open, it has aggressively expanded its arms exports (its share of the arms market in the 'third world' has increased from 13% in '87 to 57% today). Other arms producers follow suit, fanning instability and spreading the fuel for new wars. It was reported that, even before the recent bloodbaths, there were more Kalashnikovs in Rwanda than bicycles.

9. Many countries have not only become more or less useless for global capital economically. Because of the end of the cold war, they also lost whatever geo-strategical importance they had in the East-West

conflict. In this context of economic depression and indifference of global capital for their fate, the weakest states tend to disintegrate. This disintegration process goes hand in hand with brutal war, genocide, a general breakdown of "civilisation" and its rules. Capitalist media are quick to blame these atrocities, be they in Bosnia or Rwanda, on pre-capitalist "tribal and ethnic rivalries". But they are very much products of capitalism's own decadence. Because the crisis of the world economy can only deepen and because this will further accelerate the expulsion of its weakest parts, such local wars and bloodbaths will increase too.

10. Inevitably, this is a period of great confusion for the working class:

- The collapse of the "old world order" and the lack of clarity on what replaced it, make it difficult to make sense of the world. The horrific byproducts of capitalism's crisis in the weakest parts of the world naturally make workers in the stronger countries thankful that they live elsewhere and therefore more hesitant to fight.
- Furthermore, the working class has, and still is, undergoing vast transformations in its own composition. The retrenchment of many industries, the expansion of the service sector and the globalisation of the world economy are creating a working class that is more heterogenous, more multicultural, multiracial, multi-ethnic, multi-sexual than ever. While this shows potential for the future, in the short term it also creates a lot of potential for division, for pitting one group of workers against another.
- Through privatisation and deregulation, states are deflecting responsibility for lay-offs and attacks on wage levels, drawing ideological cover for these politics from the bankruptcy of the stalinist model of state management.
- Living conditions do not only degrade as a result of direct attacks on the working class but also through social decay, homelessness, crime, etc. These social problems tend to evoke individualised reactions rather than class struggle, thereby intensifying alienation.
- It has increasingly become impossible for workers to protect their interests through limited, passive, union-controlled strikes. While this realisation has sunk in, it does not automatically lift the struggle to a higher level.

11. Almost everywhere, the traditional parties of the capitalist class, from left to right, have suffered enormous loss of credibility. No party offers a credible perspective for the future, all base their propaganda on the claim that their opponents are worse than they are. But the loss of credibility of the

political apparatus of the ruling class, does not automatically translate into the emergence of a proletarian perspective for the future. To some degree, the extreme right and similar factions who exploit fears and frustrations and desires for scapegoats, have filled the ideological vacuum. But that doesn't mean that the world is evolving towards a situation such as in the '30's. Then, the extreme right had a program to offer, a real perspective for economic recovery, even it was based on war preparation. Now the extreme right has nothing else to offer than its swagger and meanness. Then the extreme right could really mobilize large parts of the population; now its support is largely based on the rejection of the other parties. Then it triumphed because the working class was demoralized and defeated; now, there are abundant signs all over the world that the reservoir of workers' combativity is far from exhausted.

12. In recent months, important strikes have taken place in Western Europe and America as well as in the former Eastern bloc and the newly industrialized regions of South East Asia. In China for instance,

social unrest is growing. In the last two years, a steep rise of strikes was reported. They are always illegal and fought with much determination, as was illustrated last april when the army was send to Guangdong to quell the revolt of striking workers. In France this spring, the massive and succesful struggle of high school students against the law lowering the minimum wage for young workers (CIP), was a moment in which many proletarians discussed the darkness of capitalism's perspective for our future and began groping for an alternative.

Clearly, the emergence in our class of the proletarian perspective for our future is today both possible and very difficult. Part of the difficulty is that this perspective (how life on the planet can be organised for freedom instead of exploitation, for fulfillment of human needs instead of profit, how we can get from here to there) is not yet articulated for our times with a clarity that provokes recognition. On this crucial task, revolutionaries must concentrate.

17 July 1994

BALANCE-SHEET FOR A NEW START: INTERNATIONALIST PERSPECTIVE

The External Fraction of the ICC, formed in 1985 after it was, as a tendency within the ICC, de facto excluded from that organisation, drew a general balance-sheet of its activity at its conference in May 1994. The conference tried to understand the road the Fraction has travelled, in order to be able to draw clear perspectives for the continuation of its militant work.

The name "External Fraction of the ICC" indicated the will to continue, on the basis of its original political framework, i.e. the ICC platform of 1976, the indispensable work of theoretical and political deepening. At its founding conference in November 1985, the EFICC saw itself as the programmatic and organic continuation of the pole of regroupment which the ICC once was: not in a static way, but as a starting point, a necessary basis for further clarification and development. The EFICC didn't think that the communist left movements of the past had left us a finished theoretical package. Marxist theory needed to be developed, on issues such as class consciousness and the role of the party.

For the EFICC, the split with the ICC did not automatically mean a total rejection of the ICC's framework. But it made it necessary to analyse the theoretical deficiencies which had dragged that organisation into immediatism and led it to reject the understanding of the development of class consciousness defended in the platform of 1976. We had to pursue the work of political re-elaboration.

This task remains a priority: clearly, the revolutionary milieu has not drawn all the political lessons of the experiences of the past. It's important to continue to reflect, to follow new trails of analysis. This process has led the EFICC to clarify its critique of the degeneration of the ICC and to conclude that the initial framework of that organisation is no longer adequate.

Today, we have arrived at the conclusion of the tasks that we set out at the founding conference of the EFICC in 1985. Why? We have showed the roots of the ICC's mistakes in IP. We have also put forward a number of theoretical contributions towards a new vision of the communist programme. This led us to constitute ourselves, at our conference of May 1994, as an entirely autonomous group, with the name Internationalist Perspective, and a political orientation whose outline is drawn in the text "The World As We See It", published in this issue. This

orientation will be further developed in a new revolutionary platform, the elaboration of which is one of our principal goals for the future.

FOR A BALANCE SHEET OF THE EFICC

In the short history of the EFICC, three broad periods can be distinguished:

1. The explanation of our departure from the ICC and the affirmation of our autonomous approach: the creation.
2. The identification of the weakness of the theoretical framework of the ICC and the elaboration of a new framework: the going beyond.
3. The maturation of the process of political separation: the break.

Although it is somewhat schematic, this periodisation can help to understand the evolution of the group and the decision of the conference of May 1994.

1. The Creation

It hurts to find yourselves outside the militant organisation which you have helped to form. As with all departures, this fissure had to be faced. During this first phase, the EFICC clarified the reasons for this break in several articles. The EFICC saw itself not as a group trying to "save" the ICC or to lead it back to the right path, but as one that continued on the initial road of reflection, confrontation, and theoretical elaboration. The ICC has always refused to recognize formally the exclusion of the "tendency" (before we were excluded at the ICC Congress of 1985, most of us waged an internal battle for two years as a tendency within the ICC). While the break was a fact, the ICC used all sorts of parliamentary games to reject our position and deny that another pole of political reflection could exist.

From the first issue of IP, we affirmed that the revolutionary milieu was facing the effects of a crisis. This crisis had led to the breakup of the PCI and the degeneration of the ICC. The EFICC came into being as a reaction to this tendency, as a positive dynamic,

defending in the milieu the need for discussion, the rejection of dogmatism, the search for a coherent global perspective. We have already written enough on the process of degeneration of the ICC (see IP # 1, 2, 3 and 9), so we won't return to the subject here. We had to react to the fossilisation of the ICC's approach to theory which abandoned deepening and the confrontation of ideas for an auction in theoretical self-justification, replacing dialectics with cheap rhetorical polemics.

The formation of the EFICC was a reaction against this sectarian tendency. It wasn't a bad-tempered voluntarist act but the result of a struggle inside the ICC for a proletarian concept of the political framework of the organisation and of debate, in accordance with our understanding of how class consciousness develops. The EFICC was formed because of the political will to wage the debate openly, the will to intervene in our class to defend our concept of the communist programme, the will to continue the work of reappropriating and developing communist theory. It was formed at a moment in which it was important to resist the pressure of bourgeois ideology which had led other proletarian organisations to previous mistakes.

The EFICC produced a synthesis of its critiques of the ICC (See the text: "The Decline of the ICC: On the Roots of Its Degeneration" in IP # 9) which allowed it to affirm itself politically in a more autonomous way and to go beyond the critique of the ICC to reexamine the rhetorical bases of its platform of 1976.

2. The Going Beyond

An important discussion, on the evolution of the Eastern bloc countries, revealed what until then was only an suspicion, the inadequacy of the programmatic framework of the ICC. The platform of 1976 was based on a view of the world divided into two antagonistic blocs; the existence itself of state capitalism in the East was seen as based on stalinist domination which could only be brought down through war or revolution. It became clear that this document did not permit understanding of the collapse of the Eastern bloc and was even an obstacle to clarification of this question.

The elaboration of our own understanding did not take place without difficulties. Even if we tried to foresee the perspectives which the coming to power of Gorbachev implied well before the events (see: Theses on Gorbachev in IP # 14), we debated our views on the changes in the East for a long time. We have published these debates, showing the need for a re-elaboration of our analytical framework, which itself had to occur publicly.

But the inadequacy of the platform of 1976 for today went well beyond that. It really resulted from schematism, from an analysis frozen in history, which didn't take into account the changes which have occurred in the 20th century, in particular since the Second World War. In this sense, it had become generally obsolete. It lacked clarity on a whole series of issues, such as:

- the transformations of capital in its decadent phase and the evolution of state capitalism in relation to the passage from the formal domination to the real domination of capital;
- the transformation of the social classes in state capitalism and in the current phase of prolonged crisis;
- the process of the development of class consciousness in this context;
- the Marxist methods of analysis of the social reality;
- the perspectives on how communist society emerges and develops.

We are facing the very limits of the contributions of the communist left. These are historical limits, pushing today's revolutionaries, not to condemn or denigrate, but to go further, to develop the contributions of Marxism. It is therefore not a question of readjusting the old platform, to make a simple correction, but of fundamentally changing our understanding of today's world.

So we arrived at a conclusion: the increasingly pronounced inadequacy of the platform of the ICC. This didn't put into question the historical importance of this document, but we had to accept the evidence that the framework it offered couldn't explain the events in the East, that it didn't take into account the evolution of capitalism, that it presented the working class in a static way, in images of the past. Despite our common historical references, today daily praxis and theoretical and political understanding are really separating us from the ICC. A real gap exists between the ideologisation of the ICC and the approach of the Fraction. A change became necessary. But this change could not occur in any old way.

3. The Break for a New Departure

How to break with a political organisation? Don't we risk appearing as spoilers, adventurers, as irresponsible, while the unity of the proletariat against its class enemy is more than ever decisive? This is not an academic issue nor one facing only the EFICC. It's a problem for many militants, but many unfortunately prefer not to deal with it but to wait in silence for better days, or worse, to give up the political struggle.

At its conference of May 1992, the EFICC indicated publicly how it intended to make this break, affirming the need to elaborate a new revolutionary platform. To break definitely with all references to the ICC implied the capacity to move to the higher stage of the dialectical process of going beyond. We couldn't create a new group without being able to present to our class a new vision of the historical program of the class. In our work of theoretical and critical deepening, we had begun to work out another view of the world, other explanations of the current world situation. Even if this work is far from being completed, today we can present a more dynamic vision of the movement of capital, going beyond the schematisation of the dichotomy between the ascendance and decadence of capitalism and allowing a better understanding of today's reality. The break must not be seen as a negativist act but as a necessary moment for the affirmation of new perspectives. It doesn't mean the loss of a programmatic framework. We still refer, albeit in a critical way, to the platform of 1976. That text has become an historical document which, like others, provides a point of reference, a general orientation which makes the elaboration of a new platform possible. Today, the "reference points" adopted at our conference of May 1994, trace the outlines of our new understanding.

A Lesson

Thus, our initial objectives, to make a critique of the ICC and to go beyond its framework, have been realised. It now became possible to seek regroupment, taking of course the conditions of the period into account: the level of combativity of the class and the evolution of the revolutionary milieu itself.

In accordance with the historical tasks of a fraction as they were elaborated by the group BILAN in the thirties, we also set ourselves the task to build a bridge between the pole of regroupment of the past, which the ICC initially was, and a future pole of regroupment for the revolutionary milieu. In that regard, our own experience has led us to draw a general lesson, which applies also to the fractions of the past, Bilan included: if the fraction plays the role of a "bridge" from the old pole of regroupment for revolutionaries to a new one, it does so essentially on a political level, not an organisational one.

A fraction does not automatically give birth to a new party or regroupment pole, whose emergence depends on the jerky course of the class struggle.

It was normal to make a major effort to open the milieu, to try to bring certain points of view closer together, to go beyond sectarian archaisms. It was by

acting in this sense and by devoting our efforts to achieving a new understanding of the needs of the present period, that we contributed to the preparation of the conditions for a future regroupment. But its proper realisation can in no way be linked to the specific tasks of the EFICC. As we have shown, these tasks have ended, while the work for a future regroupment continues.

OUR PERSPECTIVE: TOWARDS A NEW REVOLUTIONARY PLATFORM

The history of the workers movement teaches us that nothing is acquired in a definitive way. Throughout its history, the movement of our class has produced a diversity of political organizations, expressions of an effort of reflection and of becoming conscious of the necessary conditions for the emancipation of the proletariat and for its more determined struggle against capitalism. These organisations represent a moment in the general process of the development of revolutionary class consciousness and reflect advances and retreats. They express an historical synthesis through programmatic documents presented to the class as a whole.

Of course, the fundamental goal is the same for all: communism, the establishment of a new society in which exploitation is abolished, human alienation is ended, and a human community becomes a reality. These perspectives cover the main points of the historical programme of the working class and appear to correspond, although not in any inevitable way, to the future of humanity. But this programme is still becoming; it's not the product of some mechanical process. It implies the intervention of an active historical subject, conscious of the choices it faces: the proletariat. It is not invariant, but is enriched by the experiences of the struggle, by the historical lessons drawn by revolutionaries within their class. This process is not linear: it depends on the historical situation, the balance of forces between the opposing classes, the degree of combativity and the level of organization of the working class. It also determines a diversity of political organisations which arise in the working class. This diversity corresponds to the degree of understanding of the road to follow to realize the general communist goal.

As a historical document that contains the general political orientation of a revolutionary organization for its intervention in the working class, a platform expresses the understanding of revolutionaries of the general programme of the working class at a given historical moment. It is therefore not an unchangeable text but a fundamental contribution to the definition of the revolutionary program. It

responds to a specific historical situation, to a movement in the class towards the surge and regroupment of revolutionaries. It is as much a product, as a motor of this tendency.

We don't want to create this process artificially but we want to prepare for it. After having realized, within the EFICC, theoretical and critical work leading

to a programmatic re-elaboration, our group, Internationalist Perspective continues this work, presenting for now "Reference Points" for the theoretical course to follow. Later, this work must lead to the elaboration of a new revolutionary platform, adapted to the needs of the current period.

THE WORLD AS WE SEE IT

REFERENCE POINTS

Slowly but unrelentingly, the capitalist world is sinking into an ever deeper crisis, which touches all aspects of human life. When so-called "communism" collapsed in the East, governments, bosses, ideologues and media all celebrated the victory of the West, proclaiming noisily the final triumph of capitalism and democracy, even "the end of history". Since then, the victory cries have given way to the more prosaic daily reality of a capitalism corroded by its economic contradictions, of a democratic facade which masks with ever more difficulty the growth of state capitalism, of a social order which has no longer any perspectives to offer. In reality, there never was any communism in the Eastern bloc, there was only its antithesis, state capitalism, which differed only formally from the kind reigning in other parts of the world. The collapse of the political regime in the East did not herald economic and social renewal. It was, on the contrary, a spectacular manifestation of the progression of the worldwide economic crisis, which first devastates the weakest parts of the capitalist world and then drags the national economies that are incapable of sustaining international competition, one after the other, into bankruptcy.

While the social productive forces were never as developed as they are today, while the material means to satisfy the needs of the whole of humanity are powerfully present, hundreds of millions of men and women are excluded from social production and hurled into material and moral misery. In the least developed zones of the planet, life has become an atrocious struggle against death for entire populations plagued by famine, epidemics, wars and ethnic massacres. But unemployment and misery are spreading like a cancer to the great economic and financial centres, where living and working conditions are degrading, year after year. The crisis is neither temporary nor exclusively economic. It also manifests itself in the stupefying accumulation of armaments, the pervasiveness of wars, the growing destruction of the natural environment, state totalitarianism (including its democratic form), social violence, or the development of nationalist, racists and religious ideologies.

This general crisis shows that the capitalist social order has run its time, and that a new social order is necessary. At the very moment when pseudo-marxism and the stalinist regimes are bankrupt, it therefore confirms the historic foresight of

revolutionary Marxism and puts on the agenda the passage of humanity to a communist society - not to the state capitalist "communism" of Moscow, Beijing or Havana, but to a society, without money, without classes, without borders and without states: to the communism foreseen by Marx and the generation of revolutionaries which followed him. But history doesn't repeat itself; it's not enough today to invoke Marxism to make it into a theoretical tool capable to respond to the needs of the present period. What's needed is a Marxism that can overcome the weaknesses which made its complete denaturation by social-democracy, Stalinism and all derived ideologies (Maoism, Trotskyism, etc) possible. It must become a living theory, capable of returning to its roots to produce its own critique and to develop according to the evolution of the historic social reality. The forms which capital, labour and their antagonism have taken, have profoundly changed over the course of this century. The class struggle which resurged in response to the crisis of capital, encounters much more difficulties than in the past century to affirm itself on the historic scene. But at the same time, it is forced to direct its attacks more profoundly to the roots of the existing social order, and, because of this, it contains greater potential. If Marxism wants to contribute to a revolutionary process leading to a new society, it must understand these changes and their implications.

CAPITALISM, A TRANSITORY PHASE OF HISTORY

Contrary to the claims of the dominant ideology, which show it for what it is, the ideology of the dominant class, of the capitalist social order, capital is far from being the "natural" form of the relations between men. The development of humanity occurred through a succession of social forms, of which the first and by far the longest (lasting millions of years) was primitive communism; followed, in Europe, by a few thousand years of slavery; then came feudalism which lasted more than a thousand years; and finally, capitalism, which has existed only a few centuries. In large parts of the planet, capitalism has extended its domination only over the course of this century. And yet, capital has revolutionized the world more than all the social forms which preceded it. Capital incarnates the

development of the productive forces, the accumulation of social wealth, in its purest, most abstract form. While the previous modes of production were based on the production of useful objects, of use values, and producers exchanged only their surplus, capitalism makes the exchange penetrate even inside the production process, which is based on the exchange of labour power for wages. It has made exchange value, and its universal form, money, the very goal of production, the absolute criterion of wealth, the new god on earth. Humans have become the slaves of this new god. Their only use, which determines their right to live and to eat, is to make this value grow, to produce surplus value through their labor. It is in this extreme exploitation and alienation that the secret of the stupendous social development realised by capital resides.

And yet, the contradictions of this social relation manifest themselves brutally. First, the tendency to overproduce is inscribed in its very foundation, the relation between capital and labor. Since they are only of use for capital to produce value, the workers get to consume only that part of the social product which is necessary to restore their labor power, which corresponds to their wages. At the same time, capital produces commodities on an ever larger scale. The markets can't keep up with the growth of production because of the limits which the relations of production impose on the capacity to consume. The result is a lack of demand: the value produced can not be realised through exchange, commodities find not enough buyers, there is a crisis of overproduction.

Second, the more capital accumulates and the productive forces develop, the more the importance of buildings, machines and raw materials grows in relation to labour power in the production process. Past, dead labour dominates ever more living, current labour. But only living labour creates new value. As a result, the rate of profit of capital historically tends to decline. At the same time, the increased labor productivity made possible by the growing importance of machines, means that commodities are produced on an ever larger scale. Each one contains less and less value. The tendency to overproduce becomes thus more pressing at a time when capital experiences more and more problems to invest with sufficient profit and thereby enlarge its market. Capital is historically condemned by its own laws.

Ultimately, the most decisive contradiction of the capitalist social relation, the one which makes it possible to overcome it in a new society, is the contradiction between capital and labor, expressed in the struggle between the capitalist class and the working class. By its own development, capital not only signs its own death sentence, it also creates its gravedigger and the conditions necessary for a society to replace it. Under capitalism, human

relations dissolve into relations of value, but, while capitalists draw power and wealth from this and are glad to be the agents of capital, for workers, this dissolution feels like a loss, self-alienation, a form of slavery. In the capitalist relation, living labour represents the negation of capital, its active, human side; that's why the working class is the only class capable of facing it, of understanding it objectively and of bringing a revolutionary perspective - in practice as well as theory.

Communism is made possible and at the same time necessary by the maturation of the objective conditions for its hatching and by the development of the class which is its carrier. On one hand, capital has pushed the relations of value to their limits; only a society which abolishes value and thus the exchange which generates it, can replace it. It has transformed the process of production and reproduction into a gigantic collective process; only a collective social form can succeed it. It has developed society's productive forces to a point where the satisfaction of the needs of the whole of humanity has become a possibility and where the division in classes, based on scarcity, has become anachronistic. It has developed the means of production to a point where surplus labor is no longer a condition for the development of social wealth, where necessary labor can be reduced to a minimum and the division of labor can be abolished. On the other hand, the proletariat is brought to realise these objective potentialities because of its very conditions as the class which produces on an associated basis and for whom value, the exchange of its labor power and class domination mean alienation and exploitation. Communism, as a unified human community liberated from value, money, exchange, the division of labor, classes and the state, is therefore the possible and necessary step beyond capitalism.

THE HISTORIC TRANSFORMATIONS OF CAPITAL

From the young capitalism emerging from the womb of feudalism to the decadent capitalism of today, this system has gone through an historic trajectory which has profoundly changed its contours and which made a number of concepts which revolutionaries of the past had about it, totally obsolete. Like all societies preceding it, capitalism went through an ascendant phase, during which it revolutionized the world, developed the productive forces considerably and prepared in this way the necessary conditions for the advent of the next social formation, to enter then in its phase of decadence, during which its contradictions explode and it becomes an obstacle to the development of society. Yet by its nature, capitalism is a dynamic social

formation; the growth of value is its very essence. Therefore its decadence in no way implies a long-term halt of the development of its productive forces and even less implies a regression, at least from a quantitative point of view.

Its decadence, of which world war one marks the beginning, is rather characterized by growing convulsions - crises and world wars - and of qualitative changes in its mode of existence. In particular, it goes hand in hand with its transformation into state capitalism.

On the economic level, the concentration of the whole of the national economy under the aegis of the state is the completion of a tendency already present in the most developed capitalist countries during the 19th century, resulting from the transition from the formal domination of capital over labour to its real domination. At first, the domination of capital over labor exerted itself through a formal change of the social relations. Surplus value was produced merely by the lengthening of the work day (absolute surplus value). Its real domination, under which surplus value is mainly obtained by shortening the labor time used in production, as a result of the general augmentation of labor productivity (relative surplus value), required a transformation of the mode of production itself, the generalisation of the use of machines and the incorporation of science and technology in the production process. This transformation goes hand in hand with the penetration of the capitalist social relation and the law of value, not only in the entire sphere of production, but also in the spheres of circulation and consumption, and with the submission of all aspects of human existence to the imperatives and logic of the production of value. This transition stimulates an acceleration of the development of capital as well as the factors which plunge it into crisis. It requires a growing state control over the economy, to guarantee the ever larger investments needed in fixed capital, to prevent interruptions of the production process and to train form a multi-skilled labour force. And the more menacing the contradictions of capital become, the more this need for state control is felt.

On the military level, war has ceased to be a means to establish a national framework for the development of the productive forces. In decadent capitalism, it is the armed prolongation of the heightened competitive struggle which states, groups of states or parts of states wage over the control of the means of production and the world market or a part of it. Especially in its generalised form of world war, it has become a moment of violent destruction of capital, which every national capital tries to push onto the others. Today, imperialism is the universal policy of all states: this creates the tendency to the formation of imperialist blocs which respond to the

need to increase military and economic power in international conflicts. The accumulation of armaments takes over a growing part of the social product; the war economy tends to become permanent. This tendency again demands a firm control of the state over the whole economy.

On the political and social level, the control by the state over the whole of the economy goes together with a totalitarian control over the whole of social life, in particular over the waged labour force, but also over other classes and social layers and over the conflicts of interest within the capitalist class itself. The absorption of civil society by the state becomes a necessity under the real domination of capital, and even more so in the decadent phase of capitalism, when its contradictions become manifest so as:

- to prevent the interruption of the process of reproduction and to contain the imbalances between the sectors of production;
- to regulate the wages around the value of labor power, to allow its efficient reproduction in favorable periods of the economic cycle in the most developed countries or to keep wages under the value of labour power in periods of open crisis and in the least developed countries;
- to impede the explosion of class contradictions which are threatening the very survival of capital.

It therefore means the end of any possibility for the proletariat or any other non-capitalist layer, to maintain independent, permanent mass organisations, such as parties and trade unions: they all were swallowed by the state and used as organs of control over the proletariat and other social layers. It also means the end of any possibility to draw support from one fraction of the capitalist class against another and the reduction of democracy and parliamentary mechanisms to mere forms of ideological control.

Although these tendencies are general characteristics of capital in its phase of decadence, it has continued to evolve, especially since the second world war. Today, capital differs from what it was at the beginning of this century in many ways. Its entry into its phase of decadence with the outbreak of the first world war, was the result of the creation of the world market and the extension of the domination of capital over the entire planet; it was shaped by the development of capital and of its contradictions to a global scale. But the forms of domination and the degrees of development of capital on a national scale were very unequal. While its domination was already real in the most advanced capitalist countries, its impact was mostly indirect, through the world market, in the least developed countries, where precapitalist forms or the characteristics of formal domination still largely subsisted. So real domination was

considerably extended over the course of the 20th century, although in different forms than in the 19th century. The growing dependency of national capitals on the most powerful capitals, economically through the world market and militarily through imperialism, brings a growing internationalisation of capital, within the imperialist and commercial blocs, which is accompanied by the appearance of supranational control structures dominated by the most powerful states. The extension of this real domination meant, for the economically weakest countries, the selective development of production sectors turned towards the demands of the world market and the expulsion of all forms of social production for a large part of the population, which is then reduced to misery. In the most advanced countries too, the progress of technology and of labour productivity contribute to the rejection of a growing proportion of the labour force from the production, exacerbating the contrast between the productive forces developed by capital, and the narrow, anachronistic base formed by the social relations in which they develop.

State capitalism itself has evolved from a largely formal stratification of the economy, corresponding to a tendency to concentrate the legal control over the existing productive apparatus in the state's hands, through nationalisations, to a real stratification, corresponding to a transformation in depth of the ways in which capital controls the monetary and financial systems. Some important factors in the pursuit of enlarged reproduction of capital in its decadent phase were: the creation by the state of a growing mass of fictitious capital, by boosting credit to compensate in the short run for the lack of sufficient market expansion; the expansion of the world market, made easier by the supranational control structures; and the successive transformations of the organisation of labor which intensified exploitation, such as Taylorism, and which were also generalized under the state's guidance. The growth of fictitious capital in particular, makes the monetary and financial systems in the hands of the State increasingly important. The legal ownership of the means of production ceases to be the determining factor of State control, which explains the recent tendency of privatisations of economic sectors.

But the more capital extends its domination and develops the means to suppress its immanent contradictions, the more it exhausts its possibilities to pursue its further development. The accumulation of fictitious capital had led to such a massive indebtedness of the national economies, even the most powerful ones, that it threatens the international financial system and crushes profits under the weight of interest obligations. In this sense, the current crisis goes much deeper than all previous ones, despite the slowness of its unfolding, and the objective conditions of the communist revolution are more mature than

they were during the first revolutionary wave at the beginning of this century.

THE HISTORIC TRANSFORMATIONS OF CLASSES AND OF THEIR STRUGGLES

State capitalism eliminates the barriers between the previously different spheres of production, circulation, and consumption, unifying them into a single process of the production and accumulation of the national capital. It thus brings together productive and unproductive labour, manual and intellectual labour, in a total labour process where the different types of labour participate in the valorization of the national capital. The real agent of the labour process is no longer the ensemble of workers in a given factory or enterprise, but rather the social labour-power of the whole nation, which constitutes the total productive machine of the national capital. Similarly, the capitalist class, the class which personifies capital, ceases to be defined by individual property in the means of production, to become the social entity which collectively directs the process of the reproduction of the national capital. This class includes what remains of the private bourgeoisie, as well as the state bureaucracy. The recomposition of classes which occurs under state capitalism has made forever obsolete the old image of the worker with his calloused hands and blue shirt as the representative figure of the proletariat, as well as the man in top hat, smoking his big cigar, as the representative figure of the capitalist. The determination of one's class ceases to be an individual question, and becomes a collective one. The tendency to a formal universalization of the wage as a form of remuneration to all classes and social strata makes the lines between classes less clear than before. Nonetheless, in contrast to the members of other classes and strata, the proletarian retains his or her essential attributes: facing capital as the mere possessor of his or her labour-power, separated at one and the same time from the means of production and from the products of his or her labour.

The historic transformations of capital, and of its social classes, have profoundly changed the conditions of the class struggle. In the ascendant phase of capitalism, the working class could win durable improvements in its living conditions, improvements made possible by the expansion of capital, and the growth in the productivity of labour. The permanent struggle for demands within the capitalist system and, with it, the development of permanent mass organisations, such as unions and workers' parties, was possible because it went in the direction of the very development of capitalism itself (even if these struggles were often bitter and violent).

Thus the reduction in the working week won by workers' struggles in the nineteenth century was a factor stimulating the use of new machinery, and the transition to the real domination of capital. In the phase of the formal submission of labour to capital, workers also found themselves in a personal relation with the capitalist who exploited them: class conflict pitted the workers against the boss of a particular enterprise in a direct fashion. Antagonisms were clearly identifiable, and the consciousness necessary to carry on the immediate struggles was relatively elementary.

The decadent phase of capitalism saw the completion of a tendency already at work at the end of the nineteenth century in the most industrialized countries, as a result of the transition to the real domination of capital: permanent struggle became impossible, and the old mass organizations become definitively integrated into the capitalist state. Henceforth, the capitalist state imposed the conditions of exploitation on labor-power as a function of the needs of the national capital. The proletariat now objectively faces the whole of the national capital, represented by the state. Immediate struggles become much more difficult to wage, and are typically condemned to defeat. The developed form of the class struggle is from this point on the mass strike, a general movement combining economic and political demands and tending to the self-organization of the class, which prefigures the revolutionary struggle and its organization into worker's councils.

The difficulty of immediate struggles is increased by the impersonal and collective character of class relations which demand of the proletariat a consciousness of the social relation of capital as a totality. What was a still abstract historical requirement in the phase of the formal submission of labour to capital, becomes an immediate requirement under state capitalism, making the immediate and the historic programs of the proletariat inseparable. But this requirement also has its positive side: it compels the proletariat to an ever more profound consciousness of the capitalist social relation, and of the nature of communism. Social-Democratic and Leninist conceptions of class struggle, which predominated at the beginning of the century, at the moment of the revolutionary wave which culminated in the Russian revolution, were based on the historically outdated conditions of the formal domination of capital: it was believed that to bring about socialism, it was only necessary to eliminate the formal relation of the submission of labor to capital by seizing hold of the means of production. Such vulgar materialist conceptions are today totally worthless in the face of the reality of state capitalism. In that sense, the historic potential for the class consciousness of the proletariat is greater than in the past, although it will be more difficult to realize.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE CONSCIOUSNESS AND THE ORGANIZATION OF THE PROLETARIAT

Unlike all the ruling classes of the past, as a revolutionary class which is the bearer of communism, the proletariat will neither have to submit to economic laws, nor administer scarcity, but bring about abundance for all. It will no longer maintain the domination of a particular class, but will abolish classes. It will not perfect the division of labor, but abolish it. The society that the proletariat bears within itself must be fully conscious as a totality, because only conscious control of all of social activity can replace the blind mechanisms based on the division of labor, and competition, which have hitherto assured the regulation of social activity. Until now, consciousness has played only a secondary role in history, because class divided society subjected the individual to blind economic relations which transcended her, and his consciousness could not go beyond his individual act of production to englobe the whole of social reality. Communism is, in its very bases, the passage of society to consciousness. Besides, under capitalism, the proletariat disposes of no economic power through which it could bring about the transformation of society. Its consciousness and its organization are therefore its only weapons in its struggle against the prevailing order, even as they announce the essential characteristics of the new society.

The consciousness of the proletariat radically differs from ideology, the alienated form of social consciousness which is born of the division of labour in class societies. Because class societies are divided between those who produce and those who possess the means of production, between those who act and those who think, social consciousness is split into thought and action, theory and practice, and is identified with the first terms of this dichotomy: with thought, with knowledge. If the proletariat bears within itself the abolition of the division of labour, it also bears within itself the abolition of the separation between theory and practice, between being and consciousness. Consciousness ceases to be ideology and becomes identified with its capacity to take in hand the transformation of the world, of its conditions of existence and, therefore, of itself. Thus, the organization of the proletariat can be nothing other than its conscious self-organization.

Under ascendant capitalism, the permanence of organizations of the proletariat and the generally limited extension of both struggles and their objectives, at the same time as the heritage of the bourgeois revolutions, led to a theorization of the

nature of class consciousness, and of the relation of party to class, on the model of bourgeois ideology. Such was the case with both Social-Democratic and Leninist conceptions. However, the profound nature of class consciousness as a conscious class, and of the organization of the proletariat as self-organization, burst upon the scene in decadent capitalism, in the course of sudden eruptions of mass strikes and revolutionary movements. The general movement of the class and its unitary organization into workers' councils tended to smash the separation between theory and practice, between the economic and the political, as it took in hand all aspects of the tasks of social transformation.

This historical tendency will only be completed with the disappearance of the proletariat itself at the end of the revolutionary transition from capitalism to communism. As an exploited class, the proletariat is always subject to two contradictory tendencies. On one hand, the internal contradictions of capitalism and its conditions of exploitation impel the proletariat in its historical movement towards its affirmation as an autonomous and conscious class. On the other hand, these same conditions reproduce the dominant capitalist ideology, the effect of which is to destroy the proletariat's class consciousness. This contradiction engenders sudden movements of advance and retreat in the class struggle, in the course of which one or another of these tendencies prevails. The primary factor which impels the proletariat to struggle against capital is provided by the worsening of its living and working conditions under the effects of the capitalist crisis. But class consciousness is not pre-ordained, an automatic and mechanical product of the existence of exploitation and crisis. It is created and develops in the course of the struggle itself. By virtue of this fact, class consciousness is a heterogeneous process in both time and space. It is this heterogeneity of the process of the development of class consciousness, which makes it unceasingly arise from vanguard fractions within the proletariat, and which makes necessary their organization into groups, fractions or parties.

If the theorization of its own conditions and experiences constitutes a permanent effort of the proletariat, this effort is constantly counteracted, repressed, and destroyed by the material and ideological conditions of capitalist society. Outside of revolutionary periods, for the great majority of the class, this effort results in partial elements of understanding, drawn from the lived experience. It is only among more or less small minorities that this effort achieves a global and historical understanding, and cristalizes into a coherent theoretical form. This crystalization can, under favourable conditions, in its own turn, have an important catalytic effect on the overall process, by furnishing a theoretical core to which elements formed in the struggles of the whole

of the class can attach themselves. Thus, in a pre-revolutionary period, such minorities can even accelerate in a decisive way the development of class consciousness. That was shown by the example of the Bolshevik party in the development of the consciousness of the possibility and necessity of revolution in Russia between April and October 1917, notwithstanding the fact that the Bolshevik conception of the party as the sole representative of the proletariat was to have disastrous consequences. Products of the heterogeneity of the development of class consciousness, parties and revolutionary organizations are, therefore, organs that the proletariat creates to overcome this heterogeneity and bring about a conscious transformation of social relations. Their function is to be a catalyst for the development of class consciousness, by elaborating and defending a revolutionary theory and program within the class struggle. And to fulfil this function, they must organize themselves in such a way as to facilitate relection and debate within their own ranks, and to expand that debate to the class as a whole.

THE PERSPECTIVES FOR THE PRESENT PERIOD

The present crisis of capitalism, the first manifestations of which appeared more than 25 years ago, is an insoluble crisis, which marks the historical exhaustion of the capitalist mode of production, and of its final form, state capitalism. The colossal development of fictitious capital under state capitalism permitted the continuation of the enlarged reproduction of capital after World War Two, even while it fundamentally expressed the historic difficulties of capital in assuring this self-same enlarged reproduction. Capital has accumulated contradictions under the form of indebtedness, the weight of which today threatens capitalist profit and the international financial system on which the continuation of the reproduction of capital depends. In its attempt to balance the growth of indebtedness and the fall in the rate of profit, the capitalist state has sought to limit the burden that it itself represents for the economy by discharging the effects of the crisis onto the weakest national capitals through the operation of the world market, and by lowering the global price of labour power. The crisis has already spread devastation over the greater part of the world, precipitating numerous countries of the "third world" into economic bankruptcy, then overturning the Russian bloc, and with it the organization of the world which arose in the wake of World War Two. The next step in this cataclysm is only too clear: it is to the heart of capitalism, in its core countries, that the ravages of the crisis will now reach.

The "natural" outcome of world crises under

decadent capitalism is world war, as a result of the exacerbation of economic competition, and imperialist tensions on the international scene. Only world war has brought about the massive destruction that has made possible the renewal of the accumulation process of capital on a global scale. But war represents a solution for a national capital only if it can hope to draw a profit from it. The breakdown of the Russian imperialist bloc has opened a new situation, where a single great power - the United States - alone dominates the imperialist scene. The exacerbation of the economic crisis and of tensions between the great economic powers within the American bloc will tend to generate new imperialist blocs. However, this process will be slow and complex, because of the growing economic interdependence of capitals, because of the gigantic scale reached by armaments in the US, and because of the difficulties in mobilizing the financial resources to assure an equivalent accumulation in other countries. Besides, in the most industrialized countries, capital does not possess sufficient ideological control over the proletariat to impose the extreme sacrifices required by a generalized war. This last factor, moreover, has already played a key role in the imperialist strategy of the Russian bloc, which led to its collapse. Therefore, world war is not a short-term or medium-term perspective in the present period.

More than ever before, the generalized crisis confronts capital with its living negation: the proletariat. The warning signs of the crisis at the end of the 1960's sparked - from 1968-1975 - the first international wave of class struggle since the revolutionary movements of the early part of the century. Since then, the slow aggravation of the crisis

in the core countries has produced a jagged course of class struggle, with significant class movements, such as the mass strike in Poland in 1980, as well as periods of profound reflux. Today, the proletariat is confronted by immense difficulties in developing its struggle, unifying itself, and articulating its own perspective in response to the conditions created by state capitalism and its general crisis. These difficulties are heightened by the recomposition that the proletariat has undergone as a result of the new transformations in the process of production (computers, automation) and in working conditions (overtime, part-time work), accompanied by massive unemployment. Exclusion and fragmentation weigh on the consciousness of the proletariat. But, the conditions for generalized confrontations between the classes are also ripening with the necessity for the most powerful capitals to drastically lower wages, and the number of workers utilized in production, as the effects of the crisis hit them with full force, with the result that workers become increasingly disillusioned with the policies of the capitalist class.

In these confrontations, the consciousness and the organization of the class will find a fertile terrain for their development. As a result, both the perspective for communism, and revolutionary theory, could again become material forces. The capacity of revolutionaries to contribute to this movement is strictly dependent on their clarity. Now is the time to achieve that clarity, through the development of the theoretical bases of Marxism, and the understanding of the historic conditions of the present epoch; through an open confrontation of ideas, together with a theoretical rigor, and by intervention in the struggles of the proletariat.

ECONOMIC ASPECTS OF THE TRANSITION FROM CAPITALISM TO COMMUNISM

If "the history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles" (1), classes themselves and the struggle they give each other are only an expression of the antagonistic form taken by the development of the productive forces of humanity. "In trying to extricate himself from the stranglehold of the laws of nature over the whole of his existence, man subjects himself to new laws, engendered by his own social activity: the laws of the economy. These laws, pertaining to the relations of production and distribution of material goods amongst men, have until now dominated the history of humanity because the weakness of the productive forces has precluded the full satisfaction of the needs of all." (2) Even though the communist revolution is political at the beginning - because the proletariat has no economic power under capitalism and has to take political power in order to transform economy and society as a whole - its essential goal is to abolish the material conditions which reproduce classes and political power. The historical task of the proletariat is then to put an end to the realm of economy and, to do so, it must overturn from top to bottom the narrow economic basis on which class society stands.

How can such an overturning - the most gigantic ever known by humanity - be accomplished? We must admit that the richness of marxism on this point is rather limited, and this can easily be explained by the fact that our only practical experience is the Russian revolution which was circumscribed to an economically backward country, which represents anything but a model for the future. Nevertheless it is vital to try and find out the general principles which will have to guide the revolutionary transformation of economy, based on the analysis of the present capitalist mode of production and of the meagre experience of the Russian revolution. With this purpose we published contributions to debate on this subject in *Internationalist Perspective* (n° 11, 12, 13 and 21). The present text aims at proposing a general framework, directive lines on the economic aspects of the transition from capitalism to communism, in order to continue and deepen the reflexion. As in the previous texts, we won't deal here with the political aspects of the taking of power and of the period of transition which would require long developments. Let's recall that those political aspects have already been studied several times in the revolutionary milieu; we can mention in particular the ICC booklet on "The period of transition from capitalism to socialism. 1. The withering of the State in marxist theory".

GENERAL CHARACTER OF THE TRANSITION FROM CAPITALISM TO COMMUNISM

The transition from capitalism to communism presents a unique character in history. In the past, the periods of transition between two successive modes of production were characterized by an overlapping of both modes of production, the new mode imposing itself in part of the economy whereas the old one kept dominating another part of economy. Such was the case, for example, in the progressive transitions from slavery to feudalism and from feudalism to capitalism on the European continent. Political revolutions sanctioned economic transformations already realized. The process is quite the opposite in the transition from capitalism to communism. Communism can only be realized by the negation of capitalism, by the abolition of the laws which rule the movement of capital; both systems are worldwide and radically antagonistic. The proletariat, as an exploited class which owns nothing but its labour force, has no power to transform economy as long as capital is dominant. That is why the political revolution is the first act by which it asserts itself as the subject of history; political power is and remains all along the period of transition, the precondition for the transformation of economy.

This is also why the transition from capitalism to communism cannot be done overnight but will necessarily last over a certain period of time. After the revolution, the proletariat will inherit capitalist society as it is; it is only the beginning of social and economic transformation. Of course, new forms of social organisation appear spontaneously during revolution itself. But the most difficult and longest task which remains to be done is the profound transformation of all the basis of material production, as well from a quantitative point of view (development of productive forces) as from a qualitative point of view (re-orientation of the goal of production and the consequent reorganization of the productive apparatus).

By developing considerably the productive forces of society, capital created the economic conditions for communism but it did not develop, and cannot develop, the productive forces to an extent which would make communism immediately possible. In fact, capital develops the productive forces in an extremely antagonic form: an accumulation of riches

at one pole and an accumulation of misery at the other pole. It develops more productive forces than it can contain, while it rejects ever greater masses into misery and starvation. The extreme class antagonism which it contains is rooted in the insufficiency of production for the satisfaction of the needs of all, in a scarcity for the majority which it perpetuates. It is therefore incapable of providing the means for an immediate realization of communism, which requires the satisfaction of the needs of all, i.e. abundance.

On the other hand, the intimate nature of capital is to be an accumulation of abstract riches; it is a process of valorisation of exchange value. It recognizes use value, man and the satisfaction of human needs only as long as they support exchange value and its increase. All the production is oriented towards this very goal of increasing exchange value, converted into its universal form, money. Communism asserts itself in total opposition to this process; it is the human community realized, "an association in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all" (3). The activity of individuals is directly social; it ceases to be mediated by exchange, merchandise, money. Communism does not recognize any longer abstract riches represented by (exchange) value; it only recognizes the concrete riches of material usefulness, capable of satisfying human needs first, then the free development of all human faculties regardless of value criteria. This radical transformation of the goal of social production can only take place through a deep overturn of the mode of production, but also of the means of production in their wider sense, including work places, science and technology. Since consumption is definitely a "moment of production" (4), this transformation goes together with a profound transformation of the mode of consumption as well as of the means of consumption, including housing. Thinking that such overturns can take place overnight is ignoring the deep sense of communism.

The irreducible antagonism between capitalism and communism has another fundamental consequence, which differentiates the transition from capitalism to communism from past transitions: it forbids the coexistence of a part of the economy being dominated by capital and another "dominated" by communism. The transition consists in the progressive abolition of the laws which rule capital, an abolition which cannot be realized by decree but by the abolition of the material conditions which engender and perpetuate capital. In the same way as, on the political level, the transitory state which emerges after the revolution manifests the subsistence of classes and, in this sense, it represents a survival of the bourgeois state (even if it was destroyed as such), in the same way, on the

economic level, capital survives through its laws which keep impregnating economy in spite of the immediate reorganization of the production in social life as a whole on new basis during and after the revolution. As long as all the basis of capital have not been eradicated, as long as communism has not been completely realized, the measures taken by the proletariat can be reintegrated in the framework of the subsisting capitalist laws (obviously being altered in their contents) and return to capitalism. The Russian experience is eloquent on this respect. Even though this experience took place in a framework extremely unfavourable and could realize only few things in the direction of an abolition of capital because of its isolation within a world which remained capitalist, nothing can permit to exclude such a return to capitalism after a world revolution.

For this reason the term "period of transition" is better than "inferior communism", "first stage of communism" or "socialism" to name the period which spans from revolution to full communism: this period is not characterized by a fix mode of production, but by a continuous revolutionary transformation of the mode of production as well as of the whole social organization. That is why one must also reject by principle any attempt to fix the transitory economy into any economic "model" of its own. Such a model should necessarily take into account, implicitly or explicitly, the constraints inherited from capitalism and could hamper the economic transformation and the realization of communism.

TRANSFORMATION OF THE MODE OF PRODUCTION

Since production is "the real starting point and therefore the predominant factor" (5) of the economic process, the economic policy of the proletariat concerns first of all the transformation of the mode of production. As we have already mentioned, the latter is characterized in the first place by a fundamental transformation of the very goal of production which must, to begin with, cease producing exchange values and produce d use values instead. This transformation, far from being purely formal, nevertheless encounters several obstacles.

The taking of political power by the proletariat necessitates both the expropriation of capitalists (in particular of the collective capitalist represented by the bourgeois state) and the taking of production by the hands of the workers (at least of the production already objectively socialized by capital). This transfer of power allows immediately the proletariat to abolish the antagonic character of production under the form of exploitation of man by man and to dispose of its labour and of the product of its labour. It also

allows them to abolish the contradictory character of the unity between production and consumption which characterizes capitalism; it orients production in a conscious and centralized way towards the satisfaction of social needs - on one hand individual consumption and on the other hand the extension of the productive basis. But, thereby, they cannot dispose of their labour and the product of their labour as they want, because the amount of labour which they supply and the destination of the product of their labour depend on the constraints imposed by the needs of society and its transformation.

The first contradiction they have to confront is the one between the subsistence of other social classes or strata. In contrast to what happened in the Russian revolution, as MacIntosh notes,

"The culmination of the real domination of capital, occurring within the framework of state capitalism, in full decadence, has largely removed the weight of petty production and those strata based on it (peasants, artisans, small shopkeepers). It is not that these strata have ceased to exist under the conditions of real domination, or even that their numbers are now infinitesimal (which is certainly *not* the case); rather it is the fact that the *social* weight of these strata has sharply diminished, their role in the productive process has drastically shrunk." (6)

Nevertheless those strata still exist and will not disappear before the productive forces are developed enough as to satisfy the whole of the needs of humanity. Besides,

"The problem of non-exploiting strata which perhaps constitutes the most formidable obstacle to the transition to communism under present conditions is the existence of a vast - and rapidly growing - which produces virtually no use values. This includes a number of strata: the lumpenproletariat, the inhabitants of the shanty towns surrounding the urban centres of the third world, the homeless and the permanently unemployed in the advanced capitalist societies, the army of low level bureaucrats and the middle strata engaged in 'waste production' (not in capitalist terms necessarily, but rather in terms of use values for humanity)." (7)

Regarding those social strata, the proletariat will need a policy of integration into the socialized production. The rhythm of this integration will depend on the rhythm of the development of the socialized productive forces. The socialization of production lies on such a process of collective labour, namely on the utilization in common of the means of production. It cannot depend on a voluntaristic policy, on a policy on constraint, like the enforced collectivizations of

Stalin, because then it is only formal and becomes even a fetter to the development of the productive forces and of communism. As long as the integration of those strata is not realized, the non-socialized small production will subsist or will emerge again spontaneously (legally or not) and, with it, the exchange of products.

The second contradiction which confronts the proletariat, and which is directly linked to the first one, is the need to continue the development of the productive forces in order to attain the full and whole satisfaction of human needs. To develop the productive forces implies that - as in every society - a more or less important part of the products of labour is not consumed immediately, but is dedicated to expand production. Therefore there remains a division of labour between necessary labour (the labour which is spent for the simple reproduction of the goods of consumption of the workers) and surplus labour (the labour which is spent in order to increase the scale of production and produce the goods of consumption for the idle). They do not correspond any more respectively to wages and surplus value as under capital, on one hand, because the goal of production is transformed (from production of exchange values to production of use values) and, on the other hand, because the part dedicated to the consumption of the workers is no longer determined by the law of value, i.e. by the goods strictly necessary to the reproduction of the labour force; in the same way, the relation between surplus labour and necessary labour measures no longer a rate of exploitation. But this relation of surplus labour to necessary labour keeps playing a key role: it measures the effort which the proletariat must yield today to ensure the social development of tomorrow. The economic policy of the proletariat, on this level as on the others, must move in the direction of communism and not of capitalism. The direction of history is clearly drawn:

"The theft of alien labour time, on which the present wealth is based, appears a miserable foundation in the face of this new one, created by large-scale industry itself. As soon as labour in the direct form, ceases to be the great well-spring of wealth, labour time ceases to be the measure, and hence exchange value [must cease to be the measure] of use value. The surplus labour of the mass has ceased to be a condition for the development of general wealth, just as the non-labour of the few, for that development of the general powers of the human head. With that, production based on exchange value breaks down, and the direct, material production process is stripped of the form of penury and antithesis. The free development of individualities, and hence not the reduction of necessary labour time so as to posit surplus labour, but rather the

general reduction of the necessary labour of society to a minimum, which then corresponds to the artistic, scientific etc. development of the individuals in the time set free and with the means created, for all of them." (8)

Thanks to the increase of the productivity of labour and of the part of the machines in the production process realized by capital, overlabour ceases to be the determinant factor of the development of the productive forces of society. Consequently, the proletariat can immediately take measures aimed at the reduction of surplus labour without hampering fundamentally the development of the productive forces. This development will of course be slowed in the same measure, but, in relation to its rhythm under capitalism, it will certainly be accelerated since the drastic reduction of unproductive consumption of production, hypertrophied by state capitalism (in the form of arms expenditures, maintenance of state bureaucracy, etc.), and the suppression of the factors of destruction of social wealth (crisis, wars) will eliminate a considerable brake to this development. The reintegration of the ever increasing mass of unemployed into production will be another factor which will contribute to economic development.

Without hesitation the proletariat will undertake a massive reduction of working hours, increasing at the same time the living standards of its poorest parts. And even if the development of the productive forces is affected by that, one must remember that "a proletariat "sacrificed" even for objectives which can seem to correspond to their historic interest (Russia's reality demonstrated that such was not the case), cannot constitute a real force for the world proletariat" (9). The march towards communism requires a proletariat which participates actively and consciously and not a proletariat besotted by work or gnawed by hunger.

The two contradictions we have just discussed prevent the proletariat from emancipating itself immediately from labour time and therefore from value. As a matter of fact, the inevitable exchange of products between the socialized and the non socialized sectors of production on the world scale implies a confrontation of labour time crystallized in those products. In the same way, the insufficiency of productive forces regarding the full and whole satisfaction of everybody's needs means that the labour necessary to the production of consumption goods remains a limiting factor which implies also the confrontation of the labour time crystallized in those goods of consumption. The determination of value will then still exist - whether we want it or not - even if value ceases to govern despotically the economic process as it does under capital. It will fade away progressively with the material conditions of its

existence, i.e. when humanity unifies in a unique process of collective labour and when the productive forces will allow the satisfaction of everybody's needs. When scarcity ceases to exist, so will the necessity to measure labour time and, therefore, value. To get rid of this heritage of capital represented by value, one axis of the economic policy of the proletariat must be to try and realize abundance and free availability of the most elementary means of consumption as soon as possible, which will permit the extraction from the framework of the law of value the means of ensuring people's survival. Such a realization would constitute by itself a powerful obstacle to the restauration of capitalism and a powerful catalyst of the march towards communism.

"It is not only the object of consumption, it is also the mode of consumption which is produced by production, objectively and subjectively" (10). On the other hand, "consumption creates the need of a new production, therefore the ideal driving power, the intimate motor of production and the condition of it." (11) The transformation of the mode of production is then simultaneously the transformation of the mode of consumption in the period of transition, all the more so directly as production is oriented consciously towards consumption. Not only will production have to be re-oriented in its driving power (production of use values instead of production of exchange values), but also in the objects of production. This is already obvious for the important part of production which is today dedicated to unproductive consumption and which does not satisfy any human need, particularly armaments production. But the needs themselves will be modified with the transformation of social life, inside and outside production. The extremely individualized modes of consumption and life under capital will give place to more collective means of consumption and life; the subjective driving power of consumption will cease to be the possession of abstract richness, produced by the alienation under capital, to become material usefulness first, and then beauty. Therefore, the proletariat will have to proceed progressively to a complete refounding of the productive apparatus and, with it, to a revolution of science and technology.

Finally, the organisation of the process of production will also need a profound modification in the direction of communism, i.e. of "the free development of everyone". The iron discipline which reigns in the factories is the expression of the antagonistic character of the capitalist social relation and of the need to increase surplus labour to a maximum. Even within the capitalist organization of labour, beyond a certain point, this discipline turns into a fetter on the productivity of labour - the failure of the stalinist model is an obvious demonstration of this fact. In the period of transition the organisation of labour, as well as of the political organs of the class,

will leave aside this enforced discipline and hierarchy to give an important place to individual initiative and to the confrontation of ideas. This is not only a political necessity - to facilitate the participation of all to the transformation of society and prevent the restoration of relations of domination, but also a factor for economic development. Indeed, a greater emphasis on individual initiative allows a more rapid realization of new inventions, a greater efficiency of labour and an easier integration of small producers into socialized production.

TRANSFORMATION OF THE MODE OF DISTRIBUTION

Even though the transformation of the mode of distribution is fundamentally only a secondary aspect of the general transformation of the economic process, we must examine it in particular because of the extreme susceptibility of the revolutionary milieu on this question. In a recent article of our magazine (12), RC defended again wholeheartedly the system of "work vouchers" proposed by Owen at the beginning of the last century, taken up by Marx in his Critique of the German Workers' Party and developed particularly by the Group of Dutch Internationalist Communists (GIK) in the '30s. RC goes as far as assimilating us with the German social-democrats à la Kautsky (13) because we did not support this system and because we dared mention the existence of money in the period of transition.

The preoccupation of the revolutionary milieu on this question is in itself an expression of the weakness of theoretical reflexion. On one hand it shows a will to establish a fixed "model" of social organization for the transitory society, whose futility and even danger we have already mentioned, whereas even for Owen, for example, the "work vouchers are only a transitional form to complete community and free utilisation of social resources; and, incidentally at most, a means to render communism plausible for the British public" (14). On the other hand, it ignores the main determinations of the economic process. Immediately after describing the principle of work vouchers - but also its disadvantages, Marx adds:

"Quite apart from the points made so far, it was a mistake anyway to lay the main stress on so-called *distribution* and to make it into the central point. The distribution of the means of consumption at any given time is merely a consequence of the distribution of the conditions of production themselves; the distribution of the latter, however, is a feature of the mode of production itself. [...] Vulgar socialists (and from, in turn, a section of the democrats) have followed the bourgeois economists in their consideration

and treatment of distribution as something independent of the mode of production and hence in the presentation of socialism as primarily revolving around the question of distribution. Why go back a step when the real state of affairs has been laid bare?" (15)

Since the "structure of distribution is completely determined by the structure of production" (16), the transformation of the mode of distribution is only the other side of the transformation of the mode of production, whose main features we have drawn above. To the collective appropriation of the means of production, socialized by the proletariat since the taking of the political power, echoes the collective appropriation of the socialized means of consumption such as transports, the health sector, or education. Those means cease to belong to the framework of distribution as such: they are at everybody's free disposal. The same thing applies to individual consumption goods, once they are produced abundantly enough as to satisfy everybody's needs. Then remains the distribution of the individual consumption goods whose production is not yet sufficient as to satisfy all the needs and whose importance is more or less big after the revolution, but decreases progressively during the transition towards communism.

As we have seen, the labour time which is necessary for the production of those goods remains the limiting factor which confers them some value. Besides, the transitory society is not a juxtaposition of two closed worlds, one of socialized production, i.e. the proletariat, and one of small production; products will need to remain accessible to all, otherwise we would see a regression instead of a progression vis-à-vis capitalist society. The products which are not abundant enough will therefore need to be exchanged on the basis of the law of value, inherited from capitalism - even if, of course, the proletariat determines how it will be applied and modifies it, something which the capitalist class itself has been doing for a long time. Consequently, their distribution will need to be done through some form of money, and the workers will have to submit to this scourge which is the remuneration of their labour.

However, the content of this remuneration differs from the wages they get under capitalism. Indeed, wages represent the price of their labour force, determined by the price of the consumption goods which are strictly necessary to the reproduction of this labour force. Whereas here there is no more question about limiting the consumption of the workers to what is necessary to reconstitute their labour force, no question either of including in the remuneration of labour the part of consumption which takes a collective form. There is then an essential difference with the capitalist mode of production and

distribution: on one hand, the law of value applies only to a part of the social production, and on the other hand, and above all, it does not apply any longer to labour power which has ceased to be a merchandise. In the same way, money is deeply altered in its content and in its form: it loses its "character of "abstract richness", its power of general equivalent capable of appropriating any richness" (17) and, consequently, it ceases to be accumulatable, it only serves as a means of distribution and exchange with very limited powers. The extinction of value, the foundation of capital, is not hidden here by clever calculations or arguments on the "right" mode of distribution: it takes place, so to say, in front of everybody's eyes, through the progressive disappearing of the part of consumption goods submitted to exchange. This aspect is politically very important, since it allows the proletariat as a whole to perceive clearly the withdrawal (or the advance) of the laws inherited from capital.

We can note that the term used to name this remuneration of the workers - be it "wages", "labour voucher" or "ration voucher" - does not matter. What is important is to keep in mind is, on one hand, that fundamentally it is not a wage, and on the other hand that it functions as an altered form of money, whether we want it to or not. The experience of the Russian revolution is instructive on this respect:

"In January 1920, the third All-Russian Congress of Councils of National Economy at length accepted a thesis which declared that, in view of the excessive instability of the monetary unit and unit of account (the rouble), it was desirable to establish a new unit of economic accountancy 'adopting as a basis of measurement the unit of labour'. This proposal was referred to a commission. It occupied for many months the best economic brains of the country; and the term 'labour unit' became familiar enough to be known by a current abbreviation as *tred* (*trudovaya edinitsa*). Robert Owen had issued 'labour money' for his model settlements; and the adoption of labour as the source of value seemed a tribute to orthodox Marxism. It also seemed to be based on sheer common sense. [...] In a resolution of June 1920 VTsIK spoke of the importance of extending moneyless settlements 'with a view to the total abolition of the monetary system - a solution which is fully in harmony with the fundamental problems of the economic and industrial development of the RSFSR'. But this contributed nothing to the practical problem of finding an alternative unit of account; and accountants continued to work in terms of the declining rouble, however inconvenient and misleading their calculations might appear. [...] None of several schemes for replacing money by *tred* or by some other unit had won acceptance

when the introduction of NEP caused the whole project to be relegated once more to the realms of academic speculation." (18)

In the same way, the only result of the rationing system which was set up in the period of "war communism", was that 60 to 80% - according to estimates - of the consumption of the workers came from the black market (19). In this respect, the experience of the Russian revolution confirms theory. Obviously, the transition towards communism after a world revolution would take place today in much better conditions, but it would not be able to suppress, as we have seen, the contradictory conditions which provoke exchange and money.

The result we obtain, on the basis of the objective analysis of the general material conditions of the period of transition, does not differ essentially from that of Marx when he exposed the labour vouchers system:

"Clearly, the same principle is at work here as that which regulates the exchange of commodities as far as this is an exchange of equal values. Content and form have changed because under the new conditions no one can contribute anything except his labour and conversely nothing can pass into the ownership of individuals except individual means of consumption. The latter's distribution among individual producers, however, is governed by the same principle as the exchange of commodity equivalents: a given amount of labour in one form is exchanged for the same amount in another." (20)

In this sense, the labour voucher suggested by Owen and Marx functions indeed as a substitute for money. The difference dwells in the fact that Marx supposes in this passage a pure "co-operative society founded on the collective property of the means of production", in which "the producers do not exchange their products at all" (21), a supposition which RC, as the GIK, adopts implicitly without a critical examination. In that case we cannot speak of exchange nor money as such. Still, we have noted that just after the revolution we can be positive on the fact that the whole of the world population will not be integrated into the socialized production, so that the scheme imagined by Marx cannot be applied as it is.

Another aspect of the problem is on the possibility to calculate the labour time socially necessary for the production of a given product. Indeed, the labour voucher system is based on an precise accountancy of labour hours at the level of the whole society. Mitchell (22) showed that such a thing would be a puzzle, and, moreover, a useless puzzle; we won't repeat here this demonstration. But RC pretends he

has solved the problem by saying that "the labour spent in the production is counted in a direct manner by the number of working hours reduced to one single value: 1 mason working hour = 1 engineer working hour (23). Let's note first of all that here RC moves away from Marx's labour voucher and gets closer to a rationing voucher as it was suggested by Macintosh, for example (24). Indeed, for Marx, "such individual is physically or intellectually superior to such other and therefore he [chercher citation] (25). For Marx then, works as labour vouchers are unequal.

But this is not the essential point. RC here mixes up two things: the remuneration of labour and the value of the products. We can certainly imagine in a speculative manner that the proletariat might decide to attribute the same remuneration, or the same ration, to everybody. This possibility seems to us purely theoretical because, if in the big industrial centers the remunerations can indeed become rapidly equal, the considerable inequality of living standards between different geographical zones cannot be abolished overnight. Once again, the policy of the proletariat must be to create the material conditions which will allow those inequalities to be absorbed, but they will not disappear overnight by decree. Something different is the value of the products to distribute. As we have seen, the remuneration of labour is no longer determined by the law of value, whereas the value of the products still is. Consequently, even if the equality "1 working hour of a mason = 1 hour working hour of an engineer" is applied concerning the remuneration of labour, this does not require that this equality be verified concerning the value of the products. Here, not only the intensity of labour intervenes, but also its qualification, because a complex labour demands a greater social working investment, under the form of a longer education or formation (at least as long as the differences in qualification have not been abolished, i.e. as long as there are "masons" and "engineers"). The problem raised by Mitchell still subsists then. The best accountancy in the world cannot give more than it can; it must adapt to the conditions of real life and not the other way round, otherwise it will simply be vain and impotent. One can print as many pieces of paper as one wants, but they will only fulfill their economic function if they correspond to real economic relations.

TRANSFORMATION OF THE RELATION OF MAN WITH NATURE

Work, man's productive activity, is first of all a relation of man with nature. By producing, man transforms nature and transforms himself at the same time. If, at the beginning, his relation with nature is a determinant factor of his mode of production, all

through his history he has progressively emancipated himself from natural determinations by developing the technical and scientific means for a production more and more founded upon itself. The relation of man with man, under the form of economic laws, has become the foundation of social life and of the relation of man with nature. This tendency became extreme under capital, where abstract richness, value, becomes the very goal of production, whereas use value, and with it man and nature, are reduced to being simple supports of the movement of value. To the exploitation of man by man corresponds the exploitation of nature by man.

By transforming from top to bottom the relation of man to man, communism is also the transformation of the relation of man with nature. This transformation is conditioned by the first one; that is why marxism seldom deals with it. However, it is of great importance, as MacIntosh emphasizes it (26), and will become greater and greater all along the transition towards communism. In reality, its importance is already great but capital is intrinsically incapable of overcoming the contradictions it accumulates, both in its relation with itself as in its relation with nature; the essential problem is left aside and the ecologist currents see it as a problem in itself, separated from the relation of man with man. By considering nature as a pure matter, a simple support of value, capital has not only transform nature; it despoils and destroys it more and more with no counterpart for man. It impoverishes the soils and then seeks other soils to impoverish; it destroys the forests, the fauna and the flora, and this destruction does not even contribute to increase people's well-being; it pollutes the air, the rivers and the seas; it even threatens changing the climate of the whole planet without having any control at all of its consequences. Here, "it" is capital, because it's the laws of capital which push men to behaviour which is irrational from a human point of view, but rational from the point of view of capital.

The proletariat, in the period of transition, must not ignore this relation with nature and abandon the problem to future generations, because by pushing the contradiction between man and nature to its extreme form, capital brought society to the point where the conscious taking in charge of the relation of man with nature becomes a necessary condition for the development of the relations between men. For man nature is its "non-organic body" (27), the prime condition of his life and his work; he must then take in charge its subsistence and its transformation as his own.

The abolition of the enslaving division of labour, which will progressively give place to the free accomplishment of activities in the course of the transition towards communism, constitutes one of the basis for the re-establishment of a harmonious relation

between man and nature. Indeed, "the first great social division of labour is the separation between the towns and the countryside" (28). The abolition of this separation puts man again in front of his relation with nature.

"The abolition of the antithesis between town and country is not merely possible. It has become a direct necessity of industrial production itself, just as it has become a necessity of agricultural production and, besides, of public health. The present poisoning of the air, water and land can be ended only by the fusion of town and country; and only such a fusion will change the situation of the masses now languishing in the towns, and enable their excrement to be used for the production of plants instead of the production of disease." (29).

The progressive abolition of value and the increasing satisfaction of human needs, which constitute the essential economic aspects of the transition towards communism are in themselves a

powerful tool for the transformation of the relation of man with nature. On one hand, as the goal of social activity ceases to be the accumulation of abstract richness, the mobile of the destruction of nature disappears. On the other hand, the satisfaction of the needs and the establishment of a real community will progressively put an end to the crazy race for the development of the productive forces which characterizes the still present pre-history of humanity, as well as to the galloping demography of this century, which will reduce the pressure put on nature.

"But the more this progresses the more will men not only feel but also know their oneness with nature, and the more impossible will become the senseless and unnatural idea of a contract between mind and matter, man and nature, soul and body, such as arose after the decline of classical antiquity in Europe and obtained its highest elaboration in Christianity." (30)

M. Lazare

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- (1) K. Marx and F. Engels, "The Communist Manifesto".
 - (2) Internationalist Perspective n° 11.
 - (3) K. Marx and F. Engels, "The Communist Manifesto".
 - (4) K. Marx, General introduction to the critique of political economy.
 - (5) K. Marx, *ibidem*.
 - (6) MacIntosh "Critical notes on Mitchell's text", Internationalist Perspective n° 13.
 - (7) MacIntosh, *ibidem*.
 - (8) K. Marx, *Grundrisse*, 3. Chapter on Capital, Penguin Books pp 705-706.
 - (9) Mitchell, "Problems of the period of transition", *Bilan*, republished in Internationalist Perspective n° 11.
 - (10) K. Marx, General introduction to the critique of political economy.
 - (11) K. Marx, *ibidem*.
 - (12) RC, "Beyond wage labour: distribution in a post-capitalist society", Internationalist Perspective n° 21.
 - (13) RC, *ibidem*.
 - (14) F. Engels, *Anti-Dühring* in Karl Marx/Frederick Engels, *Collected Works*, v25 p291.
 - (15) K. Marx, *Critique of the Gotha Programme*, in Marx, *The First International After Marx*, Penguin Books, p348.
 - (16) K. Marx, General introduction to the critique of political economy.
 - (17) Mitchell, "Problems of the period of transition", *Bilan*, republished in Internationalist Perspective n° 11.
 - (18) E.H. Carr, *The Bolshevik Revolution, 1917-1923*, Volume 2 pp 267-268.
 - (19) E.H. Carr, *ibidem* pp 242-243.
 - (20) K. Marx, *Critique of the Gotha Programme*, p346.
 - (21) K. Marx, *ibidem*.
 - (22) Mitchell, "Problems of the period of transition" *Bilan*, republished in Internationalist Perspective n° 11 and 12.
 - (23) RC, "Beyond wage labour: distribution in a post-capitalist society", Internationalist Perspective n° 21.
 - (24) MacIntosh, "Critical notes on Mitchell's text", Internationalist Perspective n° 13.
 - (25) K. Marx, *Critique of the Gotha Programme*, p346.
 - (26) MacIntosh, "Critical notes on Mitchell's text", Internationalist Perspective N° 13.
 - (27) K. Marx, *Economy and Philosophy (Paris Manuscripts)*
 - (28) F. Engels, *Anti-Dühring*.
 - (29) F. Engels, *ibidem* p 282.
 - (30) F. Engels, *Dialectics of Nature*, in Marx/Engels *Collected Works*, v25 p461.

A propos *Transition's* "Paradoxes of Materialism"

MARXISM AND MATERIALISM

In Morel's text, "The Paradoxes of Materialism" (*Transition*, No.3, B.P. 161, 1040, Brussels, Belgium), *Transition* provides us with an interesting study of the fundamental theoretical principles of Marxism and materialism. In an epoch when the dominant ideology presents Marxism as an anachronism, bankrupt in the wake of the collapse of what was designated as communism in the East, and in which those currents which continue to defend Marxism present it as a doctrine which requires no more than a statement of adherence, the encouragement to theoretical work embodied by *Transition* provides a breath of fresh air to the necessary act of self-reflection required of Marxism. We can only recall our own insistence on the work of elaboration and theoretical clarification in the present period. Without overcoming its outdated theoretical conceptions, the revolutionary movement will be incapable of fulfilling its role as catalyst for the emergence of the proletariat as an active and conscious revolutionary class, which can effect the practical supersession of developed capitalist society.

"The Paradoxes of Materialism" is in the first place a critique of vulgar materialism, which has too often corrupted the theoretical conceptions of Marxists, or those who claim the mantle of Marxism. Against the empiricism of vulgar materialism, which accepts as reality only the immediate, sensible, concrete, individual, object, Morel recalls for us the fact that reality is situated at the level of the process as a whole, which produces and reproduces the objects and individuals such as they appear to us, that is to say, capital. He shows us that the Marxism professed by Social-Democracy went no further than grasping objects, the means of production, while ignoring the relations which provided the social substance for these objects, for these means of production, and which made them operate as capital. This reduction of Marxism to a form of vulgar materialism has played, on the theoretical plane, a considerable role in the degeneration of the workers' parties and of the Russian revolution. Lenin's celebrated formula, according to which socialism is Soviets plus electrification, perfectly illustrates the abyss into which this reduction has sometimes precipitated even the greatest of revolutionaries. Such a formula could only serve as a justification for the domination of capital in Russia, and elsewhere.

But "The Paradoxes of Materialism" is much more than this. In its critique of vulgar materialism, this

text ends up as a critique of materialism in general, and a return to Hegel's dialectic. It establishes an epistemological break within Marxism, between the "young" Marx and the "old" Marx; and, indeed, between the "old" Marx on the one hand, and Engels and all of the Marxist currents on the other. On this path, we cannot follow *Transition*. There can be no doubt that the vulgar materialism, and positivism which constitute the pillars of the dominant capitalist ideology have introduced a gangrene into Marxist thought, including the thought of Marx himself, and that this gangrene must be cut out. How could it have been otherwise? Unless we are to believe that the scientific examination of reality can lead to absolute truth, which is in itself a form of positivism, it is impossible for Marxists - no more than for anyone else - to completely escape the dominant forms of thought. It is also true that the understanding of past and present philosophies can only help us in grasping the specificity and the foundations of Marxism. This is especially the case with Hegel's philosophy, inasmuch as Marx made no secret of the fact that he was profoundly influenced by it. But it is a whole other thing to proclaim a radical break between two phases of Marxism, and of Marx's trajectory, at the same time as one proclaims a continuity between Hegel and the "good" phase of Marx. Such a proclamation is curiously symmetrical to that of Althusser, who, as a good stalinist, rejected the "young" Marx who was purportedly still inspired by Hegelian philosophy.

THE MATERIALIST FOUNDATIONS OF MARXISM

Morel's demonstration of an epistemological break around 1850 between the "young" Marx, materialist and humanist, whose point of view is that of the concrete, the sensible, man and his immediate conditions of life, and the "old" Marx, a dialectician in the line of Hegel, whose point of view is that of abstract economic logic, of capital as a concept, rests on extremely fragile bases. It will not resist even a superficial examination of Marx's trajectory, such as he has himself defined it.

Marx began by affirming his materialist conception of the world in a still abstract manner, referring to man in a generic way, and opposing Hegel's idealism, while later he succeeded in

unlocking the secret of the process as a whole, in which things and men are produced and reproduced such as they are immediately given. This constitutes a procedure for the deepening of research which seeks to go to the root of things, and which is not any different than what one finds in any scientific procedure. The sciences have always begun with the affirmation of grand principles linked to an inductive procedure, based on immediate experience, in order to then develop by making an appeal to a deductive procedure, based on the articulation of concepts and logic. Marx has done exactly that. The opposition of the two phases of his procedure is artificial; it does not in any case correspond to the manner in which Marx himself consciously conceived his own work.

In this respect, it is worth noting that Morel provides few citations from Marx himself on his method after his purported epistemological break of 1850, while he extensively criticizes Engels who is accused of all the evils of "materialism." In fact, not only did Marx never break with his youthful writings, but he only really put forward his materialist conception of history after 1850, at the time when, according to Morel, he had already abandoned it. His *Introduction* to his whole work on the critique of political economy as contained in the *Grundrisse*, and *Capital*, which dates from 1857 - to which Morel refers - begins as follows:

"The object before us, to begin with, *material production*. Individuals producing in society - hence socially determined individual production - is, of course, the point of departure." (Marx, *Grundrisse*, Penguin Books, p.83)

In the preface to his *Critique of Political Economy*, written in 1859, Marx says:

"In the social production of their existence, men inevitably enter into definite relations, which are independent of their will, namely relations of production appropriate to a given stage in the development of their material forces of production. The totality of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation, on which arises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness. The mode of production of material life conditions the process of social, political and intellectual life." (Marx, *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, Progress Publishers, pp.20-21)

These classic phrases summarize the materialist method followed by Marx. Not only do they define its object as *material production*, but they also take as their point of departure the *individuals*, the *men*, who produce in society. However, this object, this point of

departure, leads to the examination of the ensemble of the process of capital. For Marx, there is no contradiction between man, the individual, and the social process which produces and reproduces man. As a result, the basic contradiction which Morel claims to see between the "humanist materialism" of the "young" Marx and the non-materialist dialectic of the "old" Marx is an illusion.

With respect to the continuity between Hegel's dialectic and his own, Marx could not be more clear. In his "Postface to the Second Edition" of *Capital*, written in 1873, he wrote:

"My dialectical method is, in its foundations, not only different from the Hegelian, but exactly opposite to it. For Hegel, the process of thinking, which he even transforms into an independent subject, under the name of "the Idea", is the creator of the real world, and the real world is only the external appearance of the idea. With me the reverse is true: the ideal is nothing but the material world reflected in the mind of man, and translated into forms of thought." I criticized the mystificatory side of the Hegelian dialectic nearly thirty years ago, at a time when it was still the fashion. The mystification which the dialectic suffers in Hegel's hands by no means prevents him from being the first to present its general forms of motion in a comprehensive and conscious manner. With him it is standing on its head. It must be inverted, in order to discover the rational kernel within the mystical shell." (Marx, *Capital*, Volume I, Penguin Books, pp.102-103)

These citations at least have the merit of unambiguously establishing the fact that Marx never broke with the conceptions, and the critique of Hegel, of his youth. They also show that Marx's conceptions were not fundamentally different from those of Engels, on which Morel concentrates his attacks. True, Engels did not always have the same clarity as Marx in his conception of the dialectic, and one can find in his writings a series of formulations which bear witness to the influence of vulgar materialism and bourgeois naturalism (from which, we must add, Marx himself was not completely immune). But on the bases of the dialectical materialist conception, just as on the political struggle, Engels found himself at Marx's side. If Morel wants to put in question historical materialism, he must have the courage to directly attack Marx, including the Marx who wrote the *Grundrisse* and *Capital*.

Rather than focus on the specific character of dialectical or historical materialism when he criticizes materialism, Morel usually criticizes vulgar materialism. This ambiguity makes his critique - like his commitment to Hegel - rather facile, but it does

not help to clarify the issues. Thus, Morel accuses the materialism of Marx and Engels of being based on the traditional antinomy between being and consciousness, matter and spirit, and therefore on a profession of faith, an a priori, and subjective, choice between the two terms of this antinomy; with idealism taking the part of spirit, and materialism that of matter (see, for example, *Transition*, No.3, pp.19, 24, and 36). Now, what is at issue here is not the dialectical materialism of Marx and Engels, but the vulgar interpretation provided by Morel, which does not differ from the one provided by Lenin and the majority currents of Social-Democracy. Karl Korsch long ago did justice to that vulgar interpretation of Marxism:

"Lenin regards the transition from Hegel's idealist dialectic to Marx and Engels's dialectical materialism as nothing more than an exchange: the idealist outlook that lies at the basis of Hegel's dialectical method is replaced by a new philosophical outlook that is no longer 'idealist' but 'materialist'. He seems to be unaware that such a 'materialist inversion' of Hegel's idealist philosophy involves at the most a merely terminological change whereby the Absolute instead of being called 'Spirit' is called 'Matter'. There is, however, an even more serious vice in Lenin's materialism. For he not only annuls Marx and Engels's materialist inversion of the Hegelian dialectic; he drags the whole debate between materialism and idealism back to a historical stage which German idealism from Kant to Hegel had already surpassed. The dissolution of the metaphysical system of Leibniz and Wolff began with Kant's transcendental philosophy and ended with Hegel's dialectic. Thereafter the 'Absolute' was definitively excluded from the being of both 'spirit' and 'matter', and was transferred into the dialectical movement of the 'idea'. The materialist inversion by Marx and Engels of Hegel's idealist dialectic merely consisted in freeing this dialectic from its final mystifying shell. The real movement of history was discovered beneath the dialectical 'self-movement of the idea', and this revolutionary movement of history was proclaimed to be the only 'Absolute' remaining. Lenin, however, goes back to the absolute polarities of 'thought' and 'being', 'spirit' and 'matter', which had formed the basis of the philosophical, and even some of the religious, disputes that had divided the two currents of the Enlightenment in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Hegel, of course, had already surpassed these dialectically." (Korsch, *Marxism and Philosophy*, MR, pp.130-132)

If dialectical materialism rejects the antinomy between being and thought, between matter and spirit, in what way is it to be distinguished from the idealist dialectic? Simply by virtue of the fact that

one presupposes the other:

"If we ascribe one category ontological priority over the others, we simply mean that one of them can exist without the other, without the opposite being the case. This holds for the central thesis of all materialism, that being has ontological priority over consciousness. What this means ontologically is simply that there can be being without consciousness, while all consciousness must have something existent as its presupposition or basis. This does not involve any kind of value hierarchy between being and consciousness." (Georg Lukacs, *The Ontology of Social Being*, 2. Marx, Merlin Press, p.31)

Marx conceived being and thought as two moments of the same reality, which are distinguished by the fact that one of them, being, pre-exists and determines the other, thought, at least so long as the latter has not been penetrated by the former:

"Therefore, to the type of consciousness - and this is characteristic of the philosophical consciousness - for which conceptual thinking is the real human being, and for which the conceptual world as such is thus the only reality, the movement of categories appears as the real act of production - which only, unfortunately, receives a jolt from the outside - whose product is the world; and - but this is again a tautology - this is correct in so far as the concrete totality is a totality of thoughts, concrete in thought, in fact a product of thinking and comprehending; but not in any way a product of the concept which thinks and generates itself outside or above observation and conception; a product, rather, of the working-up of observation and conception into concepts. The totality as it appears in the head, as a totality of thoughts, is a product of a thinking head, which appropriates the world in the only way it can, a way different from the artistic, religious, practical and mental appropriation of the world. The real subject retains its autonomous existence outside the head just as before; namely as long as the head's conduct is merely speculative, merely theoretical. Hence, in the theoretical method, too, the subject, society, must always be kept in mind as the presupposition." (Marx, *Grundrisse*, pp.101-102)

Any attempt to eliminate this distinction can only mark a step backwards, a falling into the contradictions of idealism. Morel pretends to transcend [dépasse] idealism and materialism, but he defines capital as a concept, thereby again taking up the terminology of Hegel. The ambiguity that he introduces no longer permits him to distinguish capital as an objective reality, independent of the consciousness that one can have of it, from capital as

a totality that is thought. Now, if the latter must coincide with the former, they are not any the less distinct. As Lukacs has pointed out:

"Socially necessary (and therefore *ipso facto* abstract) labour is also a reality, an aspect of the ontology of social being, an achieved real abstraction in real objects, quite independent of whether this is achieved by consciousness or not. In the nineteenth century, millions of independent artisans experienced the effects of this abstraction of socially necessary labour as their own ruin, i.e. they experienced in practice the concrete consequences, without having any suspicion that what they were facing was an achieved abstraction of the social process; this abstraction has the same ontological rigour of facticity as a car that runs you over." (*Ontology*, 2. Marx, Merlin Press, p.40)

It is the same with capital. Capital, which signifies the domination of dead labour over living labour, is not only an objective reality, prior to its concept, to the consciousness that one can have of it, but it must also appear and remain under the mystified form of a purely objective reality in the vulgar sense of the term, that is to say, of a natural necessity independent of the action of men. The work of Marxism is precisely to rip open this veil of mystification, to expose capital as an historical reality produced by man, and to show the necessary coincidence of subject and object, of being and consciousness, in the revolutionary transformation of society. As long as the revolutionary upheaval is not materially realized, the domination of the material over the spiritual cannot be abolished - save in a purely formal manner in philosophical thought. To define capital as a concept, as does Morel, can only lead either to a purely formal change of terminology, or to a return to idealism.

IS THE COMMUNIST REVOLUTION POSSIBLE?

This debate, which is philosophical in nature, may strike some as far removed from the concrete preoccupations of the class called upon to make the revolution: the proletariat. But that is not the case. The general theoretical conceptions of Marxists have always had important repercussions on their practical activity; and it could not be otherwise, inasmuch as theory is consciously conceived as a moment of practice. Thus, we have already pointed out that Lenin's vulgar materialism determined a conception of socialism which was a factor in the re-establishment of capitalist domination in Russia after the revolution; we could add that it has also determined other conceptions, the consequences of

which have been no less important, in particular with respect to the relation between party and class. With *Transition*, it would be premature to make a detailed critical examination of the political consequences of its conception of materialism, inasmuch as these consequences have not yet been explicitly brought out, and must await the conclusions to be drawn from a theoretical inquiry. Nonetheless, it seems to us important to point to certain consequences of vital importance which logically flow from the conceptions articulated in "The Paradoxes of Materialism," or which have been sketched in it. These consequences pertain to the very possibility of a communist revolution.

Morel's emphasis on capital as a process illuminates a number of its often neglected, though essential aspects, such as the key role played by the relation between necessary and surplus labour. However, his Hegelian reinterpretation of capital leads him to see a series of fundamental contradictions between Marx and Engels or other Marxists, where there are only differences of perspective. What we want to focus on here, though, is his presentation of capital as a subject of an omnipotent history from which the proletariat cannot free itself:

"Contrary to the humanist conception of history, it is not man who makes his own history, but the constant straining towards the general form of wealth; and it is this positive function of Capital, which propels labour beyond the limits of its natural needs, a quest that it must assume, with a view to a planned identification between Production and Consumption. It is Capital which creates "the material elements for a new Mode of Production." (Marx) It is Capital which is the true subject of History, not metaphysical man. It is in this sense that Capital is productive, that it is an essential relation for the development of the social productive forces. The class which will rule during the period of transition to a new mode of the reproduction of life, must assume this positive function of Capital until its abolition." (*Transition*, No.3, p.77)

"For Capital, the goal is not the material production of objects, but the perpetuation of the capitalist mode of production itself, of its laws and its social relations." (Marx) It is the same in the first phase of communism, where the goal will be the maximum increase of surplus-labour, and the reduction of necessary-labour to a bare minimum." (*Transition*, No.3, p.78)

"The revolutionary unity of action of the class can only be realized around the principles which lead towards that goal (the abolition of the capitalist mode of production), and by a strategy which

reduces the gap between the existing concept of Capital and its realization in a higher Mode of Production." (*Transition*, No.3, p.63)

At the outset, one finds here the fundamental contradiction that Morel sees between man and the social process that is capital - a contradiction which is absent in Marx, as we have seen above. When Morel says that the true subject of history is capital, not metaphysical man, he is right; but he overlooks, on the one hand, the fact that, for Marxism, metaphysical man does not exist, that real men are divided into classes, and, on the other hand, that capital is only a subject of history to the extent that a part of these real men - the capitalist class - is its agent. For Marx, there is no contradiction between the fact that "it is men who make their own history," and the fact that it is capital which dictates the laws of history in the present social stage. Isn't the contradiction that Morel sees there one of the contradictions of idealism, the danger of which we pointed to above? Capital is not situated above men; it exists by and through men.

But the Hegelian logic leads us to problems still more serious. In effect, according to Morel, communism would be the "realization of the existing concept of capital," and, in the first phase of communism, the proletariat must assume the "positive function of capital," that "the constant straining toward the general form of wealth" represents. Therefore, it would be necessary to increase surplus-labour to the maximum, and reduce necessary-labour to the minimum. In short, Morel demands that the proletariat subject itself to the very laws of capital, and to expect that communism will be brought about by that self-same movement of capital! Why, then, must the proletariat take power, and give itself the task of "the realization of the concept of capital?" Why not allow capital to fulfill this task (assuming it really exists) with the capitalist class in power? Morel will undoubtedly answer: because capital is mired in crisis, and is incapable of pursuing its positive work without the intervention of the proletariat. Such an answer, however, in no way resolves the problem, because it would then be necessary to explain why capital is in crisis when the capitalist class is in power, whereas it would not be with the proletariat in power - which would deny capital as a subject of history. And one would still have to explain how the proletariat would be led to take power, a key problem to which we will return below. Because "The Paradoxes of Materialism" do not contain any of the elements for a response to these questions, we can only insist on the glaring nature of these contradictions.

Marx elaborated a conception which is clearly opposed to the one formulated by Morel:

"The theft of alien labour time, on which the

present wealth is based, appears a miserable foundation in face of this new one, created by large-scale industry itself. As soon as labour in the direct form has ceased to be the great well-spring of wealth, labour time ceases and must cease to be its measure, and hence exchange value [must cease to be the measure] of use value. The surplus labour of the mass has ceased to be the condition for the development of the general wealth, just as the non-labour of the few, for the development of the general powers of the human head. With that, production based on exchange value breaks down, and the direct, material production process is stripped of the form of penury and antithesis. The free development of individualities, and hence not the reduction of necessary labour time so as to posit surplus labour, but rather the general reduction of the necessary labour of society to a minimum..." (Marx, *Grundrisse*, pp.705-706)

For Marx, communism is possible because labour has *already* ceased to be the principal source of wealth, because surplus labour has *already* ceased to be the condition for the development of the general wealth; therefore, it is no longer a question of increasing surplus labour, as under capital, but only of reducing necessary labour. One can object that Marx is talking about fully developed communism, and not the period of transition from capitalism to communism. But Marx is very clear on the fact that production based on exchange value, that is to say, capital, breaks down because the general conditions for communism are already in place. It is evident that the productive forces must continue to be developed in the period of transition until the satisfaction of all human needs can be realized. But this development can be realized through a reduction of both necessary and surplus labour. Were that not the case, capital would still be a necessary form for the development of the productive forces of society, and the proletariat could never retain political power. The Russian proletariat had that tragic experience after the 1917 revolution; the policy of "socialist accumulation" and the massive increase in surplus labour born of the isolation of the revolution in a Russia with relatively undeveloped productive forces, signed the death knell of the revolution. The problem posed by Morel's conception is that of the very necessity and possibility of the communist revolution. The proletariat can only make the revolution if the economic conditions are ripe to go beyond capital, to break with its logic, even if its abolition cannot take place from one day to the next, and will require a whole period of revolutionary transition. We will return to the question of the transformation of the economy in the period of transition in another text.

The conception developed by Morel poses the problem of the possibility of the communist revolution

under another one of its aspects - although implicitly this time. In effect, the separation - idealist in our view - that Morel introduces between the essential process of capital and the material existence of men and classes (which, for him, are only "apparent relations," see *Transition*, No.3, p.32) logically prevents the proletariat, which is situated at the level of appearance, from raising itself to the level of the concept of capital, and of attacking it in a revolutionary movement. The very possibility of revolution depends on the capacity of the proletariat to in its turn become the subject of history. Now this capacity is denied by Morel, who recognizes only capital as a subject of history.

Here again, we find ourselves confronted by a contradiction, pertaining to the relation between man and capital. Capital is indeed the social process as a whole to which men are subject in contemporary society, but that does not mean that this process unfolds in an ethereal world of pure value which valorizes itself. Every labour process is first and foremost a relation between man and nature, and a production of material objects making it possible for man to satisfy his needs. If capital, as exchange value which valorizes itself, as abstract wealth which grows, tends to ignore the constraints imposed by its relation to nature, and by the use value of commodities, it can never get free of them. In particular, man is not reducible to his labour power. The specificity of capitalism vis a vis other modes of production is to make labour power a commodity distinct from the labourer who possesses it; man, therefore, is never reducible to a moment of capital - it is this fact that constitutes the condition for the antagonism between the classes, and the possibility of a new social form embodied by the proletariat. For Marx, the relation between the classes is not an "apparent relation," alien to the essence of capital, but constitutes an essential contradiction of capital:

"The *use value* which confronts capital as posited exchange value is *labour*. Capital exchanges itself, or exists in this role, only in connection with *not-capital*, the negation of capital, without which it is not capital; the real *not-capital* is *labour*." (Marx, *Grundrisse*, p.274)

"As a slave, the worker has *exchange value*, a *value*; as a free wage-worker he has *no value*; it is rather his power of disposing of his labour, effected by exchange with him, which has value.

It is not he who stands towards the capitalist as exchange value, but the capitalist towards him. His *valuelessness* and *devaluation* is the presupposition of capital and the precondition of *free labour* in general. Linguet regards it as a step backwards; he forgets that the worker is thereby formally posited as a person who is something for himself *apart from his labour*, and who alienates his life-expression only as a means towards his own life. So long as the worker as such has *exchange value*, *industrial capital* as such cannot exist, hence nor can developed capital in general. Towards the latter, labour must exist as *pure use value*, which is offered as a commodity by its possessor himself in exchange for it, for its *exchange value*, which of course becomes real in the worker's hand only in its role as general medium of exchange; otherwise vanishes." (Marx, *Grundrisse*, pp.288-289)

The antagonism between capital and labour, and therefore between the capitalist and the labourer, lies at the very heart of the capitalist production process; and in this antagonism, capital represents exchange value, while labour represents use value. For the proletarian, the form of exchange value that his labour power takes, and the goods necessary to its reproduction, represent a constraint imposed by the capitalist form of social production: "He is only interested in use-value" (Marx, *Grundrisse*) It is this radical antagonism that makes the communist revolution possible. It is because in the process of production, the proletariat alienates its vital activity, which becomes alien to it, that it is possible to face capital as its living negation, and to become conscious of its objective nature. It is because, in the face of capital, it represents use-value at the same time as it is the living basis of a process of production which unceasingly raises itself beyond the limited horizon of producing to satisfy elementary, natural, needs, that the proletariat is the bearer of a new society based on the full and complete satisfaction of human needs, and the liberation of all the human faculties. It is for these reasons that the proletariat is potentially the new subject of history, with the capacity to abolish capital at the same time as its own conditions of existence.

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