



INTERNATIONALIST PERSPECTIVE

Rwanda

Chechnya

Is there a Revolutionary Perspective?

The Concept of Decadence of Capitalism

The Economy in the Russian Revolution

Fall 1995
28

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RUSSIA DOES NOT SULK, IT DRAWS TOGETHER

"Russia does not sulk, it draws together": it was with these words that the Czarist Chancellor Gortchatov described the condition of his country in the aftermath of its defeat in the Crimean war. On the surface, it seems impossible to utilize these same words to describe the condition of Yeltsin's Russia in 1995, in the aftermath of the disintegration of the Soviet Union, and the economic collapse which followed. Inflation reached 300% for 1994, and despite the injection of two billion dollars of foreign capital into the economy last year, industrial production fell at least 16%. Beyond the economic free fall from which Russia seems incapable of extricating itself, two recent events symbolize the social decomposition which *appears* to afflict Russia: first, the ineptitude of the military as it first stumbled into a conflict in Chechnya, and then seemed unable to inflict a defeat on Chechen warlord Dudayev's militias; and second, the gangland style rub-out of popular TV journalist-entrepreneur Vladislav Listyev, in which Russia's powerful "Mafiya" was almost certainly involved, and which is emblematic of the seeming breakdown of order which now reigns. The apparent disintegration of Russia's once vaunted military machine, and the seemingly unbridled power of the Mafiya, appear to confirm the social decomposition of the Russian socio-economic formation.

However, if we look beneath the tumultuous surface of events, Gortchatov's description of Russia may indeed be apt. Ever since Peter the Great first sought to link it to the embryonic capitalist world market, in the Eighteenth century, Russia, as Engels reminded us more than a hundred years ago, has had permanent interests. Beneath the apparent chaos into which Russia under Yeltsin has been plunged, and despite an economic crisis far more devastating than that faced by Germany in the years before Hitler came to power, the ruling class has cleverly pursued those very interests.

Over the past year, a significant change has occurred within the ruling power bloc of Russian capital. The "democratic," pro-Western faction of the ruling class, linked to Yegor Gaidar, Boris Fyodorov, and Ella Pamfilova, who originally surrounded Yeltsin on his accession to the presidency, has now completely given way to a faction which is more nationalist, anti-Western, authoritarian, and committed to central planning; a faction linked to Viktor Chernomyrdin, industrialist Oleg Soskovets, and former head of the Russian National Security Council Yuri Skokov. Moreover, within the ruling

power bloc, the military-security apparat has increasingly come to the fore.

This has had an immediate impact on the regime's pursuit of what has always been foremost amongst Russia's permanent interests: the attempt to win and preserve hegemony in Central and Eastern Europe; indeed, to be a global power, ruling the whole Eurasian land mass. Russia is now engaged in reasserting its claim to a sphere of interest in Central Europe, through its determined opposition to NATO membership for Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic; in the case of Poland, this has led Russia to again openly proclaim its right to insist that its former satellite accept the status of a cordon sanitaire to protect it from the West. In the Balkans, Russia has adopted an increasingly pro-Serbian policy, which risks embroiling it in new conflicts with the West, but which also holds out the prospect of regional domination through a Serb-Greek alliance (based on the partition of Macedonia) backed by Moscow. In Eastern Europe, Russia has brought about the de facto reincorporation of Belarus into its empire, and is vigorously engaged in the pursuit of a similar policy in the Ukraine. In Transcaucasia, direct Russian military intervention in Georgia, has already turned that country into a vassal of Moscow, and is a portent of similar efforts in Armenia and Azerbaijan. In Central Asia, Kazakhstan has agreed, under intense Russian pressure, to partially unify its armed forces with those of Russia. Meanwhile, the Russian army has decisively intervened in the bloody civil war in Tajikistan, to impose a client regime. In effect, the CIS is quickly becoming the temporary framework for the recreation of Russian military, political, and economic hegemony over the vast Eurasian land mass that was once ruled directly by Moscow, even as Russia bids to restore its influence in Central and South-Eastern Europe.

Indeed, even the most glaring signs of decomposition - Chechnya and the power of the Mafiya - to which we pointed above, may be harbingers of a Russia which draws together; a drawing together which is fraught with danger for the working class, both within and outside the borders of Russia.

The assassination of Listyev has solidified public opinion behind the need to restore "law and order," a mandate which is perfectly suited to the needs of the authoritarian power bloc which now controls the Kremlin. Despite the ties between the military-industrial complex, and the Mafiya, a crackdown on "lawlessness," and an enhanced role for the police

function of the state, are integral to the permanent interests of the Russian ruling class, interests which Engels so clearly saw in 1890. Listyev's death has now made it difficult even for erstwhile liberals, and reformists, within the capitalist class to resist the demand for a state that will put an end to the wave of violence with which ordinary Russians now contend, or to oppose the call for a strong state to accomplish that goal. Yeltsin, and the ruling power bloc, can be expected to accelerate the authoritarian turn that is now underway, using the call for law and order as a pretext to restore the rule of the knout under which both the Czarist, and Stalinist, regimes kept the Russian masses in thrall. In this sense, the very chaos symbolized by the murder of Listyev becomes a factor in the capacity of the ruling class to restore the reign of state terror which has been a hallmark of capitalist class rule in Russia for generations.

Can the Chechen quagmire possibly serve the permanent interests of Russia? Doesn't it surely demonstrate the disintegration of the Russian state power? The crudeness of Russian strategy and tactics in Chechnya should come as no surprise to those familiar with the history of the Russian military under both Czars and Commissars. The total lack of concern for their own casualties, displayed by the Russian Generals before Grozny, are part of the hallowed tradition of the Russian military. In the first Chechen war, against Shamil, in the nineteenth century, in East Prussia, or Galicia, in 1914-1915, in Eastern Germany even in the moment of victory in 1945, the Russian military cared nothing for casualties, sacrificing masses of conscripts in order to achieve the most limited objectives. This is how Russia has fought its wars, and despite the beginnings of discontent in the ranks, and on the part of the Russian public, over the Chechen war, the virtual obliteration of Grozny, with tens of thousands of civilian casualties, and the large number of Russian casualties, against which Russian civilians first protested, have not limited the military's capacity to wage its war. Indeed, because of a shift in public opinion, the Russian media, which originally was critical of the war, has now sounded a much more patriotic note.

Nor does the decision to invade Chechnya, and remove the Dudayev clique, necessarily indicate chaos, and bungling, in the Kremlin. Moscow's decision to brutally reassert its control over Chechnya obeys a logic integral to those permanent interests which Russia so singlemindedly pursues. The North Caucasus is already a terminus for the oil that flows from Baku to Moscow. Moreover, the development of new offshore oil fields in the Caspian Sea, in which billions of dollars are now being invested by foreign oil companies, raises the question of whether that oil will flow to the West via a new pipeline constructed in Russia, or by way of Turkey, thereby bypassing

Russia, and its Black Sea port of Novorossisk. For Russia, which sees the Caspian Sea, and its oil wealth, as part of what Yeltsin has termed Russia's "natural sphere of influence," control over the North Caucasus through which a pipeline terminating at Novorossisk would flow is vital. To that end, the restoration of order - Russian order - in Chechnya was crucial. That the price was the virtual destruction of the fabric of Chechen life, and the sacrifice of thousands of Russian conscripts, would make no difference in the Kremlin. And if the operation were successful, far from demonstrating the social decomposition of Russia, the undertaking would be one more step in the reassertion of Russia's permanent interests.

While the outcome still remains in doubt (though one cannot expect the Chechen rebels to receive the military aid and funds from the West which allowed the Afghan rebels to defeat The Russians in the 1980's), the superficial view that the very decision to invade Chechnya was indicative of the disintegration of the Russian state, must be seriously questioned. Instead, if we want to face reality, we need to look at the latest turn of events in Moscow in terms of the pursuit of those permanent interests which Engels insisted characterize Russian policy even through changes in the regime. And we need to acknowledge the possibility that the actions of the Kremlin indicate that Russia, in the person of its ruling class, after its seemingly fatal reverses of the past several years, may indeed be drawing together.

Two formidable obstacles, however, stand in the way of such a project: the virtual collapse of the Russian economy, and the weakness and backwardness of Russian capital on the world market; and the fact that the working class, the collective worker, shaped by the very operation of the capitalist law of value, has not been politically or ideologically defeated, and recuperated by the state.

The collapse of the Stalinist regime in Russia, the disintegration of the so-called Soviet Union, proceeded from the inability of Russia to successfully compete on the world market, or to win on the imperialist chessboard what it could not win in world trade or the financial markets. The past five years have only exacerbated this situation of acute economic crisis. And even a Russia that draws together has little prospect of economic recovery, in the absence of which it can hardly make a new bid for world power. Indeed, Russia's prospects seem reduced to only two real options. One possibility is to open her market to unbridled Western investment and trade. In this scenario, favored by the liberal faction of the ruling class, Russia's raw materials, and vast markets, would attract the foreign capital necessary to propel an economic recovery. The outcome of such a course, however, will only be the loss of any

independence which the Russian ruling class still possesses; the very outcome against which the emerging ruling power bloc has been mobilized. The other possibility is to seek a rapprochement with German capital, the old dream of nationalist forces in both nations, in which German capital and technology would be united with Russian raw materials and military capacity to form the basis for a potential challenge to American world hegemony. While such a course may indeed be amenable to the authoritarian and nationalist power bloc now being forged in the Kremlin, there are as yet few signs that important factions of German (and Western European capital) are prepared to entertain such a project, and overturn the present world order in which they are junior partners. Yet nothing less than such a decision in Bonn-Berlin would create the material bases for Russia to again make a bid for world hegemony.

The real force that can challenge the drawing together of Russia in the person of its ruling class, is

the collective worker, now reeling under the blows of an economic crisis not seen in the West since the early 1930s. The unprecedented decline in the standard of living of the workers of Russia over the past several years, the rising level of crime and violence on the streets of every city, and the utilization of the youth of Russia as cannon fodder in wars in the "near abroad," and in Chechnya, can also lead to a drawing together of the working class! It is that possibility alone that holds out the prospect of smashing the permanent interests of the capitalist state in Russia.

MAC INTOSH

A FUTURE FOR AFRICA ... AND FOR THE REST OF THE WORLD

Half a million killed, many more wounded, a hundred thousand dead from cholera and other diseases, a million refugees outside the borders and millions more displaced and homeless within them; growing hunger, continuous terror, overwhelming despair: such is the balance of the "civil" war in tiny Rwanda at the end of 1994, when we write this. But by the time you read this, the bloody toll may have mounted way above these mindnumbing figures, as the defeated Rwandese army is plotting counter attacks from Zaire and the unbearable conditions within the country produce ever more strife and tension. And if not in Rwanda, the slaughter may be resumed in Burundi, Zaire, Somalia, the Sudan, Angola, Sierra Leone, Nigeria, Liberia, Algeria or practically any other country in Africa, the continent where capitalism is showing what its future holds in store for the entire world.

THE NEW FACE OF WAR

Months before the massacres in Rwanda, the *Atlantic Monthly*, hardly a revolutionary publication, published an essay by journalist Robert Kaplan who was back from extensive travels in West Africa. His hallucinatory report describes a region in which the economy has fallen into ruins, the environment is being destroyed at an alarming rate, diseases spread unchecked, political structures fall into pieces and war is increasingly pervasive. This is not a radical view of the African reality. Even someone like Brian Atwood, the director of USAID, the official American Aid Agency, says that "there is not one state in Africa which could not collapse from one day to the next". But Kaplan goes beyond the obvious. He understands that the crisis that devastates Africa is of a global nature and predicts that "West Africa's future, eventually, will also be that of most of the rest of the world."

The kind of war which he sees spreading all over the continent, differs from the "orderly" wars, between states or "liberation" movements controlled by other states, to which we've grown used in this bloody century. In the context of the economic collapse of Africa, says Kaplan, central governments are losing their authority and the political power splinters along regional, ethnic and religious lines. To

the degree the state loses the monopoly over armed force, the boundaries between war and crime, between armies, gangs and vigilantes, between soldiers, militias and civilians are becoming increasingly vague. The combination of economic and political decay produces terror engulfing civil society. For many, violence itself becomes a drug, delivering an adrenalin rush, concentrating all senses on here and now, allowing a momentary escape from the monotonous despair of daily misery. Kaplan compares these wars born from capitalist decay with the chaotic conflicts which marked the period of decadence of the previous dominating system, European feudalism. The biggest difference is of course, the kind of weapons with which these wars are fought. Today, there is everywhere an abundance of modern killing tools to assure a methodical and efficient mass destruction of human life. Even if it lacks the funds to import anything else, no country seems ever too poor to be a market for arms merchants. In the case of Rwanda, French weaponry was still pouring in after the killings had started. (France, which in the European context is rapidly becoming German capital's subsevient junior partner, seems determined to hang on to its imperialist role in Africa, where the disengagement of greater powers creates the room for Paris's delusions of grandeur). Other states that provided the fuel for the Rwandan fire include Egypt and South Africa (whose arms exports have even increased since Mandela, the hero of the left, became its president). Elsewhere in Africa, the arsenals left over from the time the continent was still a theatre for the inter-imperialist rivalry of the Cold War, are now fuelling scores of "low intensity" wars. Russia and other ex-Eastern Bloc countries desperate to make a buck, have been selling massive quantities of arms to Rwanda and many other African countries at dumping prices. Other countries, such as Israel and China, claim their share of the market of death. The worst of them all is the US, which has, since 1987, increased its share of the "Third World" arms market from 13 to 73% while proclaiming non-proliferation of arms to be a top priority of its foreign policy. All these "civilised" nations are shedding some very public crocodile tears over the massacres in Africa, which they themselves made possible with their not-so-public arms deals, because profits and the defence of their arms industry takes precedence over human life.

SEARCHING FOR THE CAUSES

Voices such as Kaplan's, which unveil the global nature of the catastrophes in Africa and point to the role of outside powers, are rare but not unheard of, in the big media. But the main question, of course, is: why? What is the cause of this apocalypse unfolding before our eyes? On this question, Kaplan's analysis is less elucidating. He does avoid the racism which is implicit in so much of the media's coverage of Africa, but falls into the trap of neo-Malthusianism, seeking the roots of the crisis in demographic and related environmental pressures. We have criticized such views before (see *IP #26*: "Visions of an ideologue on the future of its system") not because we deny the reality of these pressures, but because they are themselves effects rather than causes of the crisis humankind is facing. The ever greater destruction of our environment is a direct result of the fact that the entire world economy is organized for the goal of profit, not for the satisfaction of human needs. The more this system sinks into crisis, the greater the pressure becomes to cut costs by all means, regardless of the consequences for the environment and the people who live in it. The more it pushes ever larger masses into poverty, the more it forces them to plunder their own environment in order to survive. That process is certainly very visible in Africa, where trees are felled 30 times faster than they are planted. But there is absolutely no reason to assume that it has to be that way, that humans don't have the know-how or resources to produce in ways that are environment-friendly and treat the whole earth with the same respect which the bourgeois reserves for his own house. It's similarly misleading to portray the demographic problem as an autonomous force, independent from its socio-economic context. Human reproduction habits vary widely in time and space, because of many complex factors. One, however, stands out: poverty which, especially for people who live on the land, almost always prompts people to have large families. The more the capitalist crisis robbed people of their livelihoods, the more the demographic pressure increased and became an ingredient in the volatile cocktail from which the massacres spring. But because it is itself a symptom, it will not go away, regardless how many "world population growth" conferences such as the one last year in Cairo are held, if the real disease continues to fester.

THE ROOTS OF THE CRISIS

The real disease must be sought in the very foundations of the world economy. Because we live in a capitalist world, the potential to make profit

decides whether production takes place or not. When that potential is gone, production stops, regardless the needs for it. It is the search for profit which has constantly improved production methods, replacing human labor by machinery, because the capitalist who produces cheaper than his competitors, reaps the higher profit. But this higher profit is solely the result of his competitive advantage. His production itself contains less profit, because it requires less labor, and therefore contains also less surplus labor (the value created through labor in the production process, minus the value of the wages paid for this labor - in other words, unpaid labor). Thus, the generalisation of labor-saving, capital-expanding production methods over the entire economy eliminates the competitive advantage and, over time, makes the source of profit dry up. This process is not obvious, because competition makes it appear as exactly its opposite: precisely those capitals who use the least labor in production and therefore produce the cheapest, make the highest profits, because they can sell their products above their value or expand their markets at the expense of those who produce at higher costs. Only on a global, aggregate level, where competition doesn't play a role, can this baffling phenomenon be understood: the more capitalist production's efficiency and productivity rise, the more it sinks into crisis; the spectacular technological advances of recent years have only worsened the sickness of the global economy. Even in the strongest economies, the decline of the profit-rate made an explosion of debt the condition of continued growth (public and private debt in the US rose by almost 200% in the '80s). The resulting burden of interest obligations and shortage of investment capital show the limits of this crutch. This shortage of capital evidently hits the weakest, least competitive capitals the hardest. Because of the competitive advantages which the strongest, most developed capitals hold over the weaker, the deepening of the crisis progresses from the periphery to the center, from the weakest countries to the stronger. This dynamic, more than anything, gives validity to the view that in Africa today, the future of the whole world is visible. Already large parts of the rest of the so-called "Third World" are in a worse situation than most of Africa was ten years ago. Most of what used to be called "the Second World" is close behind. The "First World" shouldn't feel too safe either.

There is another angle from which we can see the fundamental rot. While the constant rise of productivity has increased the world economy's capacity to produce immensely, its market hasn't grown accordingly. It is not the needs of consumers that determine the size of the market, but the value generated in the production process, the purchasing power whose distribution is determined by the social relations in the production process. The capitalist class, taken as a whole, sees its profits decline and

thus cuts its costs, through disinvestment, wage reductions and lay-offs, and thereby reduces the purchasing power of ever more people. The gap between the world's capacity to produce and the world's capacity to consume, in the straitjacket of the capitalist social relations, becomes ever wider.

The resulting problem is obvious: an astonishing large and fast-increasing number of people are no longer needed or wanted to make the products or deliver the services which the paying customers of this world can afford. The unwanted are thus, inevitably, ejected from the global production process. Why would a capitalist hire workers he doesn't need? Why would he invest in a country, if this doesn't augment his profit? From his point of view, that would be sheer stupidity. The situation looks of course quite different for the worker who is laid off or the young man who never gets a chance to join the labor force. He could work, he could do all sorts of useful things, but he gets no opportunity, no place, no role in society, no sense of self-worth.

WHY AFRICA?

The situation looks also quite different for most of black Africa, which is ejected from the world economy like so much excess ballast. Foreign investment in Africa has become so insignificant that it is not even measured in the latest World Bank study. In the meantime, the continent spends four times as much on interests on its foreign debts than on health care and education combined. No wonder that more than a third of its children receive no education whatsoever and that four million of its children born this year will be dead before they reach the age of five.

According to the World Bank, one third of Sub-Saharan Africa's children are severely malnourished. 220 million black Africans live in "absolute poverty", meaning that they are unable to meet their most basic needs, and by the year 2000 their number will rise to 50% of the total population. Because of the loss of infrastructure, soil erosion, war and other symptoms of decay, food production in Africa is now 20% lower than it was in 1970. And yet the continent has the potential to feed itself and a good part of the rest of the world. It has the world's largest reservoir of arable land - almost 2,5 billion acres, of which only one-fifth is presently cultivated. But why would European or American capital, which already have gigantic agricultural surpluses, make the necessary investments to develop this richness? Because people need it? For capitalism, that reason is as senseless as hiring unemployed workers because they need a job. There are only some pockets of wealth creation left in Africa (essentially for mineral extraction) which continue to interest foreign

capital. For the rest, the continent has been starved of the capital that makes the productivity of the developed countries possible. As a result, the whole of Sub-Saharan Africa, with the exception of South Africa, an area with more than 600 million inhabitants, has now about the same gross product as Belgium, a country of 10 million people. Only the very nature of world capitalism can explain this absurd, intolerable disproportion. The only alternative explanation is racism - Africans are stupid etc. Even if they don't say it out loud, that is often the implication of bourgeois analyses of Africa's plight.

The reason why Africa is suffering worst under world capitalism's crisis, is simply that it was the last area on earth to be integrated in its system, and therefore the first to be tossed overboard. The colonial powers dislocated the existing social structures and structured the economy on the basis of the needs of European capital. It found in Africa plenty of raw material to rob and plenty of cheap labor (slaves, forced laborers) to exploit. But in this century, the economic value of Africa for capitalism gradually declined. The development of technology made raw materials elsewhere more accessible, provided cheaper, synthetic replacements for African export crops such as rubber and sisal, and progressively diminished the role of unskilled labor in the production process.

The loss of power of European capitalism in the wake of World War II (for the winners, the USSR and especially the US, the colonial structures were obstacles to the expansion of their influence) and the fact that the output of the colonies compensated less and less the costs of the colonial administrations, opened the door to the decolonisation process. But what the colonial powers left in Africa, upon finishing their work of "civilisation", was not a mirror image of their own society. On the ruins of the social structures they shattered, they left only a thin veneer of European bourgeois democratic rituals plus, of course, a strong repressive apparatus and economies which remained utterly dependent, both for their import needs and markets, on foreign capitals. Only now, the main decisions on Africa's fate were taken in Washington and to some extent in Moscow, rather than in Paris, London, Brussels or Lisbon. So it came as no surprise that the new indigenous African rulers resembled their not-so-ex-masters like caricatures resemble their originals. The African mirror reflected the power hunger, greed, vanity and corruption of European capitalism in grotesque ways.

The boundaries of the colonial possessions became the borders of the new African states, without any regard to the boundaries and relations that had existed between African societies for centuries. Such artificially dictated unity was doomed to be very fragile, as was soon demonstrated by wars

such as those in Congo and Nigeria, and other opportunities for the big powers to further their imperialist goals. This fragility could only worsen a thousand times when the continent became engulfed in economic crisis. In other underdeveloped countries which experienced the same economic downfall, the ideological force of the national tradition, coupled with a unifying religion, proved to be a tremendous asset for the state to maintain, complemented with ferocious repression, a strong social cohesion. Most African states lack such weapons and it shows.

As soon as it gained its pseudo-independence, the economic decline of Africa began. But the real slump occurred when the economic crisis in the West drastically reduced the demand for Africa's export commodities. Especially since the recession which heralded the '80s, the prices of almost all products which Africa sells to the rest of the world - from copper to coffee and cocoa - went in a free fall. At the same time, foreign investors, which had ripped their pants on Latin America's megadebts, dropped Africa like a hot potato.

The '90s brought new strikes against Africa. Because of the collapse of the Eastern Bloc, itself a result of the deepening economic crisis, it also lost its geostrategic importance for the West which therefore also drastically reduced its already meager development aid to the continent. Furthermore, the end of the cold war opened investment zones for the West where the labor force is as dirt cheap as in Africa but which offered more infrastructural and other advantages. The acceleration of the tendency towards globalisation of the world economy, with the elimination of tariffs and other obstacles to free trade (cf the recent GATT treaty), creates an intense competition between the cheap labor areas of the world, forcing wages even deeper below subsistence level. It furthermore imposes on African farmers the impossible task of competing against the agribusiness of countries like the US and Australia, which will undoubtedly wipe out the livelihood of millions who will be forced to flee to the already unlivable cities, which will foment new wars and genocide.

Whereas the degree of human pain in Somalia and Rwanda forced the big powers to show some sort of reaction, to take some measures to deliver emergency aid, it is likely that in the future there will be even less aid, less mass media attention, less UN intervention in Africa.

The almost total indifference of the capitalist world for the African holocaust is hardly surprising. Why would it care? "Africa's share of world trade has fallen below 4% and is now closer to 2%. That is so marginal it is almost as if the continent has curled up and disappeared from the map of international

shipping lanes and airline routes." (*New York Times*, June 20th, 1994). While most capitalist powers are turning their backs on Africa, their representatives, the IMF and the World Bank, are now directly managing the economies of some 30 bankrupt African countries. There they impose, as if the misery isn't great enough, wholesale lay-offs and elimination of subsidies for food and other basic necessities. In the meantime, aid organisations such as Oxfam, Medecins Sans Frontieres and the like - which are manned by people who are often motivated by a genuine solidarity with the suffering - are being used by capitalism as its face-saving figleaf, as the machine that prevents the comatose patient to exhale its last breath.

As everywhere else, the capitalist class continues to live well in Africa. The government bureaucrats, the army officers, the bosses, always find ways to deflect the brunt of the crisis to those below them. But the vast majority of the population is being subjected to a genocide. "Every day 10 000 children die of preventable causes. And another 10 000 are crippled for life", says Djibril Diallo of the UN's Childrens Fund, "What future is there for the continent?"

ANOTHER FUTURE

There is no future for Africa, if capitalism is allowed to perpetuate its increasingly absurd system. And neither is there a future for the rest of the world, which would be gradually sucked into the same maelstrom of decay and violence. The relative prosperity and stability of the developed countries keeps the illusion of the viability of capitalism alive. But the dynamic and direction of the crisis there is the same as in the weakest parts of its system. Already on Europe's southern flank, in ex-Yugoslavia, a state has splintered into different regional and ethnic factions, all fighting for the biggest slice of the shrinking pie and dragging the whole population into a nightmare of endless devastation, massacres and hate.

Despite the similarities between the conflicts in ex-Yugoslavia and conflicts in Africa, we do not suggest a pattern that will simply be repeated all over the world. The strength of capitalism in the most developed countries means that the progression of decay there will be more controlled and therefore take different forms than in places like Africa. But if allowed to continue, it will become as violent and terrifying. There is no way to solve the crisis while preserving the capitalist system. A solution must therefore come from outside the capitalist class. Only the working class has the power to change the global direction of society away from the abyss, by changing its rationale from profit to the satisfaction of

human needs.

In Africa, unfortunately, the working class is weak and has little tradition of class resistance. Only in a few countries, such as South Africa, have workers demonstrated the power of class resistance. The new regime in South Africa had already to cope with waves of wildcat strikes in which workers defended their class interests, not some racial, tribal or ethnic "rights". We hope their example will be followed throughout the continent. We hope to see the day when African workers, faced with ethnic or other factional conflicts, refuse to take sides, organize and arm themselves and defend their neighborhoods and workplaces against all capitalist warmongers. That day can only come when workers see themselves as workers, instead of Hutus and Tutsis or Muslims and Christians. When they fight for their own interests, instead of those of their rulers and exploiters who happen to speak their language or share their ethnic background, they will discover that the rejection of all ethnic, religious and national divisions increases their strength. They will discover that they share the same hopes, the same threats as workers across the borders and unify their struggles. Continuing along that road, they will eventually transform the organisation of their struggle into the infrastructure of a new society.

This would be an impossible dream for the

workers of Africa, if they were on their own. Their weight in society is so small, that they tend, more easily than workers in industrialized countries, to be lured away from autonomous class struggle and sucked into the defense of one capitalist faction against another, like the striking Nigerian oil workers in 1994. Hopefully, they will learn to resist that pressure. But only when the working class in the West rises up and fights autonomously and massively enough to recognize itself as an historical force, only then will the dream become possible for African workers too.

Obviously, we're not there yet. We're not even close. The struggle of the working class is hampered and slowed by many difficulties, which are discussed in other articles in IP. But rather than moping and getting demoralized by this slowness, revolutionaries should use the time to develop the necessary theoretical tools for their class. They must, far better than they've done so far, prove to their class that capitalism offers no hope, only holocausts. And they must show that a new society can be imagined and realised. Such are the tasks that we have set out for ourselves and in which we want other revolutionaries to participate.

Sander

IS THERE A REVOLUTIONARY PERSPECTIVE?

The contemporary world is living through a period of anxiety and anguish in the face of a crisis which leaps out at us onto our TV screens on a daily basis: images of war, hunger, unemployment, expulsion and poverty. For the Marxist revolutionary movement, the crisis of capitalism is ineluctable. Capitalism as an historical system is doomed to disappear, and give way to a higher mode of production. But, a question arises: while the communist movement theorizes the ineluctability of the crisis, what is it that prevents the revolutionary upheaval from rocking society today?

In effect, we are asking where do things stand at this fin de siècle? Our century has seen, in its first decades, a formidable social upheaval in the form of a proletarian revolutionary wave in Russia, and then in Germany at the beginning of the 1920's. Unfortunately, that movement was halted, and then gave way to the counter-revolution. Fascism, Stalinism, democracy: each has set itself the task of erasing the very memory of those revolutionary events. Nonetheless, the memory of that formidable movement remains alive within our class, forcing the bourgeoisie to distort the facts, to squash the hopes, the very perspective of another way of life, another society.

Thus, in the recent past, while the failure and collapse of the Russian economy illustrate the fundamental contradictions of world capitalism, and reveal the scope of the present crisis of capital, the bourgeoisie has utilized this event to discredit the revolutionary perspective, and to accentuate its defeatist campaign preaching the necessity of austerity, and justifying the precarious state of millions of workers.

In the face of what the bourgeoisie insists is a baseless dream, Marxists still defend the thesis of the inevitability of the overthrow of capitalism. However, that thesis has been the object of diverse interpretations within the workers' movement itself. We are confronted by positions oscillating between a categorical determinism, leaving no room for anything but economic determinations to explain history, on the one hand, and an idealist spontaneism eliminating socio-economic presuppositions, on the other. Our concern here is not to polemicize against these conceptions, but rather to clarify our own conception of the evolution of the world scene, which is indispensable to a grasp of our present socio-historical development. However, a detour is necessary to clarify our view in relation to that old debate, which has regularly arisen within the revolutionary

movement: the clash between voluntarism and determinism, or, if one prefers, between determinists and indeterminists.

We absolutely do not deny the weight of superstructures in having determined the historical development of diverse societies leading up to today's capitalism. We believe that the social relations of production determine the economic and social development, the constitution of classes, and the very form of social institutions. The capitalist economic system contains its own element of contradiction: the proletariat and the struggle of resistance that it wages against capitalist exploitation, are integral to the tendency to a fall in the rate of profit. This is a struggle which can only have a revolutionary outcome with the radical suppression of value itself, and the passage to a higher mode of production: communism.

Marxism rejects the reduction of the class struggle to a simple clash of interests, and socialism to a simple overthrow of one class by another, overlooking what is specific to it: the immediate establishment of the relations of production of a classless society. Thus, the proletariat is pre-eminently the class of consciousness. The ineluctability of the deepening of the crisis of capitalism is a historical fact. However, it does not automatically, or in a mechanical fashion, mean the overthrow of capitalist society. That must be the work of a class, the proletariat, freeing itself from the chains of its exploitation, through the development of its own class consciousness, and not the mechanical product of an economic breakdown.

The revolution, while the product of a determinant situation, is not ineluctable, but rather the result of a break, unleashed by the struggles themselves. These class struggles break-out at the cross-roads of all the objective contradictions of capitalism; contradictions which worsen each day by revealing their presence in new domains. We can, therefore, affirm the necessary revolution in the social relations of production, and in social relations as a whole, and affirm too the will to resolve the explosive contradictions of capitalism by a fundamental transformation of society. That means being able to grasp the state of the objective contradictions of capitalism today through the evolution of the crisis, and understanding the will of the revolutionary class to transcend these contradictions.

DETERMINISM OR INDETERMINISM

A "spectre" has haunted Marxism since its beginnings: the spectre of determinism. Historical materialism has often been understood as a new sort of mechanistic determinism. Marx insisted that the conditions of economic life determine social structures, the political regime, and the forms of social consciousness. He emphasized that necessity exists in history, that it can be compared to that found in natural processes. But, when it is a matter of a dialectical and revolutionary process, necessity takes on a completely different meaning: the necessity of the new, of change. Following Hegel, and Marx, we conceive historical development as a dialectical process, which excludes any unilateral or gradualist perspective. Engels developed a critique of mechanistic materialism, and of all forms of explanation which base themselves on external causality.

True, it is necessary to remember that the fundamental process in the last, the decisive, instance, is the development of the material and social productive forces. It occurs in stages, through all sorts of detours and complications. The great historical periods succeed one another according to an order that can be comprehended, because each one prepares the next, although not intentionally. The productive forces can only be developed within certain relations of production, which are adequate to them: relations between masters and slaves, lords and serfs, capitalists and workers.

The affirmation that social and political life is conditioned by necessities of a vital order is not new. Materialists have always thought so, thinking above all of vital individual needs. Marx enlarged and relativized what was meant by material needs: these are "socio-historical" needs which vary from one class to another, and according to historical epochs. There exists a tight, "necessary" link, an interdependence, between determinant social needs and determinant social relations. A certain type of social relations defines a mode of production. During a whole period, those relations are dominant: they define the classes, though they involve a great historical variability.

MAN AS THE BASIS OF HISTORY

Contrary to the usual manner of understanding science, that did not lead Marx to a purely positivist conception of history. Rather, he developed a conception according to which men are, collectively, the principal agents of history, and that they take a growing role in the historical process; this latter

becoming, little by little, conscious and voluntary. This process is not, however, gradual; the development of consciousness each time implies the necessity of a violent break with the established order. This is the case for all revolutionary classes in history, but for the proletariat, in contrast to other classes, conscious action is the only determinant element, alone making possible the overthrow of the established social order by the utilization of revolutionary violence. Marx, therefore, believed in the primacy of the role of consciousness, of conscious action, in the process of revolutionary transformation, and that particularly in the case of the proletariat.

Marx did not believe that history is always made in spite of its protagonists, classes and social individuals, and against their will. For him, men make history; they can become conscious of the historical process, and indeed must be so if they are to bring about the final break, and put an end to class society. To that extent, humans can hasten the solution to class conflicts once they comprehend their roots both in the past and present. But this comprehension is itself linked to the very nature of the relations of production.

Economic necessity, therefore, is nothing but that of the general social needs and interests. The first, and most imperious of these, are "material," in particular when the masses of humans are at the limits of survival. It is not a matter of an external necessity, but on the contrary the internal pressure of vital needs. This necessity is not so much "mechanistic" as vital; it is rooted in the very bases of existence. It makes itself felt in both exploited and oppressed classes, and in the ruling class. The latter, in order to retain its power is under the necessity of reproducing the social relations upon which that power rests. As a result, the class struggle shapes history: sometimes latent and beneath the surface; sometimes exploding in crises and revolutions, when the most endangered social groups have no other prospect than the recourse to violence.

History is not abandoned to chance, even as it is not regulated by a pre-determined and inflexible necessity. History follows a certain course, a general development, in which the consciousness and will of individuals have a relatively modest role - at least until now. A certain level of development of the productive forces implies social relations which correspond to them. All social institutions must adapt themselves to these social relations, according to a complex system of inter-dependencies. The relation between social relations and productive forces is not a unilateral one. There is no exteriority of terms, but rather a dialectical unity.

Marx thought that human action is the basis of change: men change their mode of production. It is

difficult to say precisely to what extent these changes depend on them, but they are in part willed. Nonetheless, the history resulting from the activity of men, and from the class struggle, reveals its most profound secrets through an analysis of the essential activities which condition the classes themselves; and in the first place, the most fundamental one of all, the activity of material production, which until now has been a constraining necessity, and which will always remain the basis of human existence.

After this detour, let us turn to the determinant factors in a possible revolution: the ineluctability of a deepening of the crisis, the explosion of its contradictions, and the process whereby the proletarian class acquires consciousness, as the motor of history to come.

THE CRISIS OF CAPITALISM

We want first to re-affirm our commitment to our general framework for the analysis of the development of capitalism, which includes the notion of the decadence of the present economic system. Capitalism is not an eternal system, and the evidence for its decadence only makes this apparent. Having known over the course of several centuries a progressive growth making possible a spectacular development of the productive forces, capitalism has historically reached the point where it comes into conflict with its own inherent limits. The renewal of the cycle of enlarged reproduction becomes increasingly difficult, forcing capital, since the beginning of the present century, to utilize the subterfuge of the massive destruction of excess productive forces to allow the recomposition of capital, and the realization of surplus-value. Thereby, the means employed by capital stand in contradiction to its goal. Its goal is to reproduce and expand the existing value. Its means is the expansion of the productive forces, which thereby also expands the quantity of goods produced. Inasmuch as capital takes no account of the capacity for consumption, the goal and the means end up in opposition, because the capacity for consumption is limited by the social relations. The productive forces thus enter into contradiction with the social relations. Economic crises exacerbate class divisions, and result in intense social conflicts which culminate in revolutions.

In his analysis of the conditions for the final crisis of capitalism, in *Capital*, Marx asserted two things: the periodicity of general crises, and their aggravation. The combination of these two factors leads to the assertion of an inevitable final catastrophe for the modern bourgeois socio-economic formation. Marx was never specific with respect to the degree of aggravation of crises which would provoke a revolution. Thus, there can be no question of saying

precisely what degree in the fall of the rate of profit would unleash a revolution, *because that also depends on the initiative of men, on the unification of the exploited class*. The fall of the profit rate - an objective element - merely indicates a general perspective for the development of the crisis; one element amongst many others. The crisis breaks out because the surplus-value, for which reason commodities are produced, cannot be realized; and this, despite the fact that this surplus-value only exists because the quantity of labor and the means of production necessary to its production have been expended. On the social side, valorization encounters the limit to the exploitation of labor-power which depends on the level of the class struggle, and the outcome of social conflicts. The rapport de force between the contending social classes, the power of the ruling class, and the capacity for resistance of the exploited class, also intervenes as a crucial factor.

Today, world capitalism in its phase of decadence reproduces its cycle of accumulation with ever increasing difficulty. Since 1990, world economic growth has been less than 1%. That growth has not seen any rise of long duration. For such an rise to take place, it would be necessary to stimulate effective demand without increasing deficits. Deficits can no longer be increased without unleashing inflation and/or raising interest rates so high that a still more disastrous recession would be brought about.

The present recession is only a symptom, not the sickness of capitalism itself. The real problem with which capital is confronted is its growing incapacity to generate sufficient profit for its own survival. The cause of that problem is located in capitalism's own fundamental structure, and cannot be solved. It has become impossible to ignore the problem of the deficit. But any serious attack on it, by way of increased taxes or a reduction in social expenditures, reduces effective demand still further and increases deflationary pressures on the economy, even as any new weakening of the economy exacerbates the problem of the deficit. The efforts of the capitalist class to contain this problem by trying to coordinate the diverse national economic policies, by organizing production more efficaciously fashion, and by globalizing the process of production on a world scale, may permit it a certain respite, but will not in any way resolve its underlying problems. The initiation of a new cycle of accumulation can still occur, but only with ever increasing difficulty: the crisis has already had as one of its effects the destruction of excess value, the devaluation of debts, and the "natural" elimination of certain parts of the productive forces.

Since the outbreak of the open crisis at the end of the 1960s, the world economy has undergone several phases during which the contraction of markets, and

the decline in the rate of profit, have accelerated. In its efforts to struggle against the contraction of the market by stimulating artificial demand, the capitalist system has only succeeded in further eroding its profit rate. In injecting more money into the economy, the state has given the impression that it is restoring it to health. But, the fictitious nature of capital has been rapidly revealed through a process of devaluation and inflation. At the end of the 1970s, that policy had led the world so close to hyper-inflation that the most severe recession since the 1930s was necessary to control the situation. The world market is saturated, and it is impossible for the bourgeoisie to expand it, even in the most limited way, without unleashing the forces which threaten to provoke hyper-inflation and the breakdown of the world financial system. The war economy, the basic organization of capitalism in its phase of decadence, has reached a point of development where it can no longer stimulate the economy as a whole. The stimulation that it provides to those economic sectors most closely associated with it, only masks the fact that, like a parasite, it drains the productive resources of the capitalist system.

We are presently seeing an under-utilization, and a growing destruction, of the productive capacities of the industrial apparatus developed by capital. Similarly, the labor-power of a growing number of proletarians is being excluded from the process of production. The bourgeois solution would be to intensify imperialist conflicts. The present situation, however, renders the illusory response of a heightened protectionism more and more difficult. State indebtedness, which in the past could be a makeshift "solution," now renders any recovery more difficult. Capitalism has little by little fallen into stagnation, and the weight of what we have designated as fictitious capital no longer permits it to escape its limits. The elimination of budget deficits is highly unlikely, even while bankruptcy faces many societies, and certain states have thrown down the gauntlet. The effects of this crisis have already provoked the implosion of the "Soviet" empire, illustrating the extent of the contradictions. Indeed, one can really speak of an insurmountable obstruction.

This development of the crisis does not mean, however, a final paralysis of the economic system, or that capitalism will decompose by itself, allowing the proletariat to takeover. What is certain, however, is the maturation of conditions making accumulation more and more difficult, forcing the bourgeoisie to prepare new scenarios to preserve an acceptable rate of profit. It will surely be necessary for capital to limit the expenses represented by the costs of living labor, to attack the standard of living of the working class, and to attempt to grab the markets of competing capitals.

THE REACTION OF THE WORKING CLASS AND THE FACTORS OF CHANGE

The determining character of the crisis, and its worsening course, are not typically at issue in debates within the revolutionary milieu. What is at issue, is the manner in which class consciousness develops, its role as a determinant factor in the revolutionary process, and the appreciation of the reactions of the bourgeoisie. Certain elements of the crisis, however, do not seem to be understood in the same way by everyone, particularly when it concerns its repercussions on the working class, the producers of surplus-value, those who historically represent the negation of capitalist accumulation.

We have sought to highlight the changes in the composition of the proletarian class and in the conditions for the development of class consciousness, which have occurred in recent decades following changes in the structure of capital itself; changes provoked by the crisis, and by the globalization of the economy. That whole evolution of capital proceeded through the intervention of the state. In effect, state capitalism developed on the basis of the real submission of labor to capital as the highest stage of the concentration of capital, and of the collectivization of the valorization process of capital. It has overturned the barriers between the different spheres of production, circulation, and consumption, unifying them in a single process of reproduction, of valorization, and of the accumulation, first of the national capital, and then of internationalized capital.

Under the pressure of the crisis, and of competition, capital has continued to concentrate, but by playing the card of globalizing production. The 1980s saw the development of smaller individual units of production, and of sub-contracting. The creation of new jobs has basically occurred either in those new types of enterprise, or in sectors directly linked to the administration of capital, such as insurance or banking.

The changes which have occurred can be characterized as follows:

- the transformation of industrial production such that the lines between skilled and unskilled labor, blue collar and white collar, are increasingly blurred. This means the end of Taylorism as the highest stage in the organization of the process of industrial labor.
- the dependence of the accumulation process of

modern capitalism on the labor of a great number of workers engaged in financial activities, in offices, and in services. These workers have become an integral part of the collective laborer.

- the transformation of whole categories of workers, who in the past had been strata of the petite bourgeoisie, into an integral part of the working class. These workers now constitute a crucial component of the process of capitalist accumulation, whose labor-power produces use-values without which the process of production could not occur.

The recomposition of the proletariat which has occurred under state capitalism is a permanent process. Any change in the composition of the working class is a potential factor in new divisions within its class ranks, divisions fomented and provided with ideological rationale by the state and its organs of control and surveillance. However, despite constant changes in their composition, and in their concrete conditions of existence, social classes change neither their fundamental nature, nor their basic relations. What continues to account for the revolutionary nature of the proletariat is not merely its antagonism to the agents of capital over the extortion of surplus-value, but also the specific form which that antagonism takes in the relation between capital and labor.

The struggles of non-synchronous strata of the working class took the limelight in the 1970's. The last gasp of strata doomed to disappear by the very evolution of modern technology, the highest point in the aspirations for mass solidarity was expressed in the movement unleashed in the shipyards of Poland in 1980, which demonstrated the potential for social upheaval, but which was recuperated by the ideological reserve apparatus of the bourgeoisie through base unionism incarnated by Solidarnosc. But those struggles - recuperation apart - clearly indicated their limits, seeking as they did to prevent inevitable restructurations of the capitalist industrial apparatus, while the new strata of the working class reacted only sporadically. Meanwhile, factory and pit closures have multiplied, while lay-offs have increased the number of unemployed, plunging those strata linked to relatively archaic sectors of capitalist production into the world of joblessness.

We now find ourselves in the trough of a wave, where the proletariat is confronted with the limits of the system. In recent outbreaks of struggle, numerous workers have denounced the platitudes of capital. The apparent class consensus is beginning to crack. The unions face increasing difficulty in controlling their critics. The last quarter of this century has seen the exhaustion of the potential for resistance of a traditional sector of the working class not because of

lack of combativity, but as the result of globalization, downscaling, and the attempts at a restructuring of capital.

WHAT PERSPECTIVE?

It is time to acknowledge that the hopes of May '68 have been dashed. May '68, a class movement against the counter-revolution, was recuperated by leftism, which sought to canalize the changes occurring within capitalism. The period after May '68 saw the flourishing of a radical left rhetoric, which successfully adapted itself to diverse social movements. In response to workers' struggles it produced a reactionary humanist discourse preaching a return to original values: love of nature, of the primitive community, of solidarity, of aesthetic communion. From hippies to ecologists, the course was charted for the development of a philosophy of crisis, theorizing the absence of perspectives, liquidating the stammerings which might have led to a return to critical thought. If structuralism has not resisted academic critique, the "new philosophy," Derrida, Domenach, Luc Ferry, Francis Fukuyama who theorizes the end of history, Habermas who has lost the subject of history, and Morin, are the new stars of Western thought, awaiting their critique. The revolutionary movement, a product of the situation of May '68, could only reflect the difficulties of that situation: in a society in which the proletariat is atomized, where class reactions can be rapidly recuperated by the ideological apparatus of the democratic left, the path to autonomous, critical thinking, is a difficult one.

It is not easy to speak when the class is silent. We have not wanted to see - or to hear - that silence, a product of the recomposition now taking place. While we theorized the end of the counter-revolution with the appearance of a new generation of workers engaged in struggle, we did not take account of the restructuring of whole industrial sectors. Nonetheless, we did point out the absence of historical links, of references to the experience of the workers' movement of the past, to explain certain weaknesses of the struggles. Today, that gap is even wider.

The many struggles which have broken out in recent years reproduce a familiar schema: opposition to plant closures, and to massive lay-offs, controlled by the unions, and ending each time in victory for the bosses, and acceptance by the workers - in the absence of anything better - of the "solution" advocated by the unions. But, there have also been other movements, having a more pronounced political character, such as those in Italy in 1992. An effort to put the system in question more globally? One thing is clear today: those who still believe it is possible to save capitalism are the real utopians.

Marx's economic analyses provide his conception of history with its scientific dimension and character. His most important idea is undoubtedly the distinction between what is already out of date and must be left behind, and what must develop. What is destined to disappear are the present social relations between the ruling bourgeois class and the dominated and exploited working class; what must subsist and grow are the material productive forces. We are confronted by the paradox of a thought based on necessity even as it insists on freedom. This is only an apparent paradox, which disappears once we acknowledge, with Marx, that historical becoming results from the transformative activity, undertaken by humans, of the material and social conditions of their existence. That is to say, of a process of development in which contradictions are resolved dialectically: history proceeds through phases, through stages, punctuated by revolutionary upheavals. We are subject to the conditions in which we find ourselves, with which we must deal, but these same conditions also serve as the basis for our action: it is we who make our own history on the basis of these given conditions. Economic laws impose themselves on us humans from "outside", because we pursue our goals individually, in a context of more or less complete social anarchy. The involuntary consequences of our voluntary actions become powers which dominate

and oppress us.

A movement is underway: the ineluctability of the crisis can be no more in doubt than the perspective of a revolutionary wave. But factors of consciousness intervene as well. The bourgeoisie is not totally disarmed despite the ideological crisis that it confronts, and the breakdown of several poles of reference that have served it well in the subjugation of the working class. The proletariat, meanwhile, is faced with a seeming lack of perspective, of the historical difficulty of revolutionaries to appear in a permanent and effective manner *within* the struggles which are breaking out on a world scale.

F.D.

Debate

THREE STAGES OF THE CONCEPT OF DECADENCE

We are publishing this text as a contribution to the discussion of the problem of the decadence of capitalism. The text focuses on a fundamental point: the *definition* of the concept of decadence. Its principal thesis is that the period of decadence is *not* characterized by a slackening in the growth of the productive forces. This view, however, is not shared by all of the members of *Internationalist Perspective*. The discussion initiated within our ranks, will continue with an article in the next issue of *IP*. We also want our readers and sympathizers to communicate their own reflections, commentaries, and criticisms occasioned by the reading of this text.

Marxism is based on a rejection of any static conception of the world, on a recognition of the historicity of existence - human and natural. Similarly, Marxism rejects a vision of the world based on eternal truths which capture the essence of social reality. Indeed, all such "truths" are refuted by the very historicity of existence, and by the theory-praxis which is one of its components. Yet Marxism itself is not immune to the canons of the dominant ideology, and its truth claims. One form in which Marxism succumbs to the power of the dominant ideology is in a tendency to substitute *dogma*, and its Truths, for the constant effort of theory-praxis to grasp and transform a living, ever changing, historical world.

This article is an effort to combat one such dogma, one such attempt to "freeze" a social reality in fixed and immutable forms: the concept of the decadence of capitalism as a halt or definitive slackening in the growth of the productive forces, which is the basis of the platform of the International Communist Current, from whose ranks we were expelled nearly ten years ago, and whose original platform we continued to defend. This article must be understood as an attempt to remove, and discard, the ideological debris, in the form of a dogma concerning the inability of the productive forces to develop in the decadent phase of capitalism, which constitutes a formidable obstacle to any effort to fashion a theory-praxis adequate to the social reality of capitalism in this fin de siècle. What is at stake is nothing less than the capacity to face reality, without which Marxism is quickly transformed into the dogma typical of religious sects; the fate of so many groups which once wore the mantle of revolutionary Marxism.

The concept of the decadence of capitalism is the veritable lynchpin or foundation of the platform of the ICC; and - inasmuch as the EFICC was born to defend that platform from its implicit or explicit

repudiation by the ICC - of *our* platform. In initiating the process of discussion with a view to drafting a new platform, we must decide whether or not we will continue to base ourselves on a conception of decadence; and if so, whether or not the concept of decadence articulated in the platform of the ICC is adequate as a basis for revolutionary Marxism. As a preliminary contribution to a discussion of this issue, I want to begin by asserting that I believe a concept of decadence is indeed vital, even while I am convinced that the particular concept of decadence contained in the ICC's platform (and in a more developed and theoretically elaborated form in the ICC's pamphlet on *Decadence*), with its insistence on a dramatic, and permanent, slackening in the growth of the productive forces, is profoundly mistaken.

It seems to me that we need a concept of decadence in order to clearly distinguish between "progressive" and "reactionary" phases of the capitalist mode of production, to delineate the historical point when capitalism ceased to be a condition for the development of the powers of the human species, and became an obstacle, indeed, a mortal threat, to that very development. I have deliberately spoken of the "powers" of the human species, rather than the "productive forces", because I believe that the productivism underlying the latter formulation is itself mistaken, even if it is present in Marx, and most certainly in Marxism, including the Marxism of the Communist Left, the revolutionary tradition from which we ourselves spring. That very productivism, often linked in the Marxist tradition to a crude economic determinism, is itself a fetter on the revolutionary tasks of Marxism, a legacy of the culture and social forces that originally gave birth to capitalism, and to the triumph of value production in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. More to the point, as far as decadence is concerned, the thrust of this article is that capitalism has indeed continued to develop the productive forces throughout its decadent

phase - moreover, at an extremely rapid rate - and that this very development has itself become a quintessential feature of the decadence of the capitalist mode of production.

Indeed, I will argue that the concept of decadence as it has been elaborated by the ICC must be categorically rejected on two grounds. First, it has been *empirically* refuted by the very course of capitalist development since 1914, an epoch which has seen an extremely rapid, and profound, development of the productive forces; indeed, a development which has included two transformations in industrial production, each of which rivals that provoked by the first industrial revolution itself: Fordism, and the application of the assembly line to industrial production in the period just after World War One (the second industrial revolution); and computerization and fibre-optics, which have in the past decade once again transformed the industrial landscape, and the very bases of value production, as well as the working class itself (the third industrial revolution). Second, and perhaps more important, the ICC's concept of decadence is a *theoretical* obstacle to the elaboration of a Marxist theory adequate to the compelling revolutionary tasks of this era. The ICC's concept of decadence is hopelessly, and inextricably, entangled with the productivism that is capital's trojan horse within the camp of Marxism. This productivism makes the development of technology and the productive forces the very standard of historical and social progress; within its theoretical purview, as long as a mode of production assures technological development it must be judged to be historically progressive. Such a vision, were it to be joined to an empirical grasp of the actual realities of capitalist development since 1914, would have to deny that capitalism is in its phase of decadence today! The political consequences of the ICC's concept of decadence, with its productivist logic, would lead to a celebration of the accomplishments of capitalism at the very historical moment when its lethal consequences for the human species have never been more clear. The consequences of the ICC's continued insistence on its vision of decadence (and of the EFICC's defence of such a perspective) will be either a flight from reality in the form of a sectarian denial of capitalism's capacity to prodigiously develop the forces of production, or if there is a willingness to face reality, a designation of late capitalism as historically progressive - in short the abject surrender of the political principles upon which the Communist Left has based itself.

The theoretical understanding that I believe must underpin revolutionary theory-praxis today requires a radical transformation of our concept of decadence; and the theoretical necessity for that transformation is the point of this article.

As long as we defend the vision of decadence contained in the platform of the ICC, we will be unable to grasp the significance of the transition from the formal to the real domination of capital; the concepts of formal and real domination, so vital to an understanding of the historical trajectory of capitalism, cannot coexist with the concept of decadence as *it was articulated by the ICC, and its theoretical precursor, the Gauche Communiste de France*. For Marx, in the manuscripts which were part of his vast work on *Capital*, and which only became widely available *after* the ICC had already elaborated its concept of decadence, the real domination of capital involved the penetration of the law of value throughout the immediate sphere of production, not just in its original Western European or North American geographical area, but globally, AND its complete subjugation of the global spheres of distribution and consumption as well. In short, the transition from the formal to the real domination of capital entailed a vast development of the productive forces, through which all facets of human existence would be subjugated to the imperatives, and logic, of value production. To the extent that the ICC even acknowledged the existence of Marx's manuscripts, or the theoretical elaboration of the distinction between the formal and the real domination of capital, it simply announced that the transition from formal to real domination had already been completed by 1857, and therefore had no impact on its concept of decadence, or the reality of capital's historical trajectory in the twentieth century. In the face of a vast historical transformation, a transformation of epochal proportions, which is still ongoing today, and the contours of which Marx could only adumbrate more than 130 years ago, the ICC can only respond that it was already finished at a point in time when capital was still in its infancy, and the lives of most of humanity had not yet been touched by the logic of value production.

My own view is not that the decadence of capitalism coincides with the completion of the transition from the formal to the real domination of capital. Such a conception would put off the historical moment when capital entered its phase of decadence into a still distant future, inasmuch as the transition from formal to real domination is a continuous, uneven, and ongoing process, one which has still by no means reached its conclusion. Our own view is that the decadence of capitalism occurs in the midst of the transition from the formal to the real domination of capital, a transition that had by no means reached its culminating point in 1914 (let alone 1857!); and that the decadence of capitalism, far from being characterized by a halt, or even a slowing down, in the growth of the productive forces, not merely co-exists with, but is characterized by a frenzied, all consuming, and lethal development of those same

productive forces - a development that not only saps the emancipatory powers of the human species, but that threatens its very existence.

What is at issue in this article is, therefore, not the concept of decadence, but the particular form it has assumed in the theoretical arsenal of the Communist Left. I want to concentrate on two stages or metamorphoses of the concept of decadence in the Communist Left, and then indicate what I believe should be the contours of a third stage of the concept of decadence, the one that I hope - after thorough debate and discussion - will in one or another form be concretized in the new platform that we are writing. The two stages of the concept of decadence that I want to elaborate are:

- decadence as it was understood by the Gauche Communiste de France (*L'Internationalisme*) in the period 1944-1952;
- decadence as it was elaborated in the platforms of RI, and the ICC, in the early 1970's.

The concept of decadence that was the foundation for the activity of the Gauche Communiste de France (GCF) was the same concept that is concretized in Trotsky's famous phrase from "The Transitional Programme": "The productive forces have stopped growing." Such a vision had already been adumbrated by Trotsky at the first Congress of the Third International. It would be developed by those groups breaking from the Fourth International in the 1940's (the UCI, The RKD, and Socialisme ou Barbarie). The idea that decadence entailed a *halt* in the growth of the productive forces had also been articulated within the Italian left (*Bilan*) in the 1930's (particularly by Jehan-Mitchell), where it found its theoretical basis in Luxemburg's *Accumulation of Capital*, with the proviso that Luxemburg's view of military production as a field for accumulation be rejected. Here was the basis for the GCF's understanding of decadence. That vision dominated the pages of *L'Internationalisme*, where it soon hardened into dogma. On that basis, the GCF denied any possibility of reconstruction after World War Two (even on the scale of that following World War One), and instead insisted that a course towards a Third World War had been opened as soon as World War Two ended without a revolutionary wave having been unleashed. Thus as late as 1951, the GCF was insisting that production in France had not, and - more significantly - could not reach pre-war levels (such an outcome being theoretically precluded!), and in 1952 comrades such as M.C. argued that the Korean war was the long anticipated first shot in World War Three (a war that on theoretical grounds *had* to break out in the immediate future). That political perspective of the GCF (completely mistaken, as we now know) rested on the foundation

of a concept of decadence in which the growth of the productive forces had come to a standstill.

Fifteen years later when M.C. renewed political activity on a group scale in Venezuela, followed by the formation of R.I. (just after '68), and then the ICC, the concept of decadence that he defended had undergone a silent metamorphosis (silent, because M.C. never acknowledged the theoretical bankruptcy of the theory he had so vociferously, and dogmatically, defended in the GCF). In the platform of the ICC, decadence no longer means a halt in the growth of the productive forces, but rather a *slackening* in their growth, a considerable, and permanent, slowing down in the rhythm or rate of their development.

Is the ICC's concept of decadence valid? Has there been a slackening in the growth of the productive forces since 1914, so that we can say that this is the meaning of decadence? The answer to this question can only be a clear and unambiguous NO! If we simply look at world manufacturing production since 1900, for example, the argument for a slackening in the growth of the productive forces will immediately collapse:

1900	100.0
1913	172.4
1928	250.8
1938	311.1
1953	567.7
1963	950.1
1973	1730.6
1980	3041.6

(P. Bairoch, "International Industrialization Levels from 1750-1980" in *Journal of European Economic History* 11, 1982, p. 273.)

These rates of industrial growth, particularly in the period since 1963, hardly indicate a slackening in the growth of the productive forces since 1914. Nor can this rapid growth be accounted for by the reconstruction of war shattered economies, which the ICC has argued had by the mid 1960's been long completed, so that by 1967 both Western Europe and Japan had once again become formidable competitors for American capital on the world market.

Indeed, the most prodigious rates of growth for world industrial production have occurred since the end of the 1960's, and correspond to what I earlier designated as the third industrial revolution based on computerization and fibre-optics. Perhaps most significantly, this period is one which the ICC has always designated as a period of virtual stagnation in the growth of the productive forces.

If we look more closely at the different facets of the slackening in the growth of the productive forces to which the concept of decadence contained in the ICC's platform commits us, the results will also lead us to reject this form of the theory of decadence.

Thus, the ICC speaks of a more and more unequal development of the productive forces over *time*: more and more frequent crises in which any growth ceases is the only pattern that capitalism can know. Yet, in the period since World War Two such cyclical crises (what the ruling class terms "recessions") have been *less* frequent, and the declines in industrial production *less* severe, than in the 1920's and 1930's, not more.

The ICC also speaks of an unequal development in *space*: no new countries according to its conception of decadence can industrialize, and challenge the old; only a reshuffling of the balance between already industrialized countries and regions is possible. Yet, since World War Two, Japan has become the world's second economic power; China is fast becoming a major economic power in its own right; South Korea, Taiwan, Singapore, etc., have recently entered the ranks of industrialized countries (in 1960, for example, South Korea, and Ghana had the same GNP, while today South Korea is ten times more wealthy!). Yet the capitalization of East Asia had scarcely begun before 1914, and, Japan aside, little had changed as late as the end of the 1950's. As recently as 1962, the Western Pacific, East Asia for the most part, accounted for only 9% of world GNP, by 1982, its share was 15%, and by the end of the century it will probably account for 25% of world GNP - a larger share than either that of Western Europe or North America. Such a capitalization of East Asia, the entry into the ranks of the industrialized world - on a level able to challenge North America and Western Europe - of a region which before World War Two was industrially marginal, simply cannot be accounted for with the ICC's concept of decadence. Moreover, several South American countries, led by Chile, are now undergoing a transformation into first world economies as well.

The ICC also speaks of stagnation in world trade (relative to the nineteenth century) as a hallmark of decadence. But, world trade has actually increased faster than industrial production throughout the phase of decadence! One need only consider the role of

foreign trade in the economies of Germany, Japan, or the US, today, in comparison with the period before World War One, to appreciate the meteoric rise in world trade that has marked the phase of capitalist decadence.

Whatever measure the ICC itself has chosen to illustrate the slackening in the growth of the productive forces, has been confounded by social reality, by the actual historical course of world capital. It is not we, armed with our theories, but social reality that has refuted the conception of decadence of the ICC, a conception that looks increasingly like the Ptolemaic theory in the aftermath of the Copernican revolution.

In order to articulate a concept of decadence that is consonant with the actual historical trajectory of capitalism, with social reality, we must *detach* decadence from its crude economic determinist link with the growth of the productive forces (decadence = a halt in the growth of the productive forces; decadence = a slackening in the growth of the productive forces). That very link, the basis of the ICC's concept of decadence, the bases of the first two stages of the concept of decadence, must now unconditionally be rejected. What is necessary is a third stage of the concept of decadence, one compatible both with the actual dynamic of decadent capitalism, which continues to develop the productive forces (but to the detriment of humanity, in ways which threaten its very existence), and with the understanding of the transition from the formal to the real domination of capital, an understanding which must be incorporated into our new platform as a vital element.

The outlines of such a concept of decadence can already be perceived through the ideological haze which the productivist, and counter-empirical, conceptions of the ICC has created. Such a conception must be based on a radical distinction between the development of the emancipatory potential of the human species on the one hand, and the development of technology and the quantitative expansion of the productive forces on the other. Not only must we acknowledge that the decadence of capitalism is compatible with a rapid technological development, but indeed that such an expansion of the productive forces is one of its hallmarks. In contrast to the productivism that has plagued Marxism, we must insist that technological development has a lethal, and destructive, side to it. What is at issue is no reactionary romantic repudiation of technology, but rather an understanding of the inseparability of a *certain kind* of techno-scientific development from the logic of value production. Moreover, our understanding of the course of capital must contain a recognition that the capitalist development of technology, the science

yoked to the law of value, can -- and now has -- become the mortal enemy of humanity itself, bringing in its train a degradation of existence, the prospect of ever more murderous and genocidal wars, and the real possibility of ecological destruction on a scale that could, were this lethal process to continue unabated, jeopardize the very existence of human life on this planet. Only by detaching the concept of decadence from its link with a halt or slackening in the growth of the productive forces, indeed, only by insisting that that very growth of the productive forces is itself today a decisive feature of the decadence of capitalism, can we hope to contribute to the needed renaissance of Marxism.

The theoretical ramifications of actually linking the decadence of capitalism to the frenetic growth of the productive forces can, of course, only be hinted at within the purview of this first article, and will have to be developed and elaborated in future ones. Nonetheless, it is imperative that in uncoupling the decadence of capitalism from a slackening in the growth of the productive forces, we at least briefly indicate in what sense it is meaningful to describe an epoch characterized by an expansion of the forces of production as decadent. Late capitalism is a phase of value production in which there is a *constant* and *violent* devaluation and destruction of capital. The very devastating economic crises which have been a hallmark of decadent capitalism are temporarily overcome precisely through the frenzied development of the productive forces, and unprecedented

technological innovation. Yet this process, in which the objective is accumulation for the sake of accumulation, the very logic of value production, entails both massive ecological destruction, and the ejection of living labor from the production process. As a result, the accumulation of capital, and its development of the productive forces, destroys the very bases for its own continuation. It is precisely this contradiction at the heart of value production that constitutes the permanent crisis of decadent capitalism. In terms of the powers of the human species, then, this phase of capitalism is characterized by a constant increase in human misery, as masses of people, and whole geographical areas, become superfluous to the accumulation process, and as the material condition for human life, nature itself, is sacrificed to the imperatives of the accumulation of capital. Not a halt or even a slackening in the growth of the productive forces, but crises of accumulation, the frantic development of a techno-science yoked to the law of value in a ceaseless quest to secure the bases for further accumulation, the degradation of the eco-system and the reduction of ever larger masses of humans to misery, and the resultant increase in wars and genocides as capital seeks to fortify its control over the population, are the defining characteristics of the decadence of capitalism.

MAC INTOSH

Debate

THE ECONOMY IN THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTION

In November, thousands of Russians, nostalgic for the old regime, commemorate the October Revolution. For revolutionaries, the issue is not to celebrate an anniversary but to return incessantly to the understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of this proletarian revolution, unique in history.

To draw lessons from it therefore does not mean to worship a movement and transform it into dogma, as the bourgeoisie would do. We must, on the contrary, understand past mistakes to clarify our perspectives for future class struggle. The Russian Revolution, the highest expression of the proletariat's existence as a class in the history of capitalism, has many things to teach us on the period of insurrection period and the delicate period of transition between capitalism and communism.

It is in this perspective, of understanding the political lessons that we can draw for us and our class, that this article was written. It is far from our intention to question the proletarian nature or the very existence of this revolution. We believe indeed that it was a spontaneous movement of the working class. Set in motion by the strikes of 1905, it re-emerged with much more force in 1917. The *International Women's Day* of 23rd February was transformed into a near-general strike in Petrograd. Launched on the base of demands as general as "peace" and "bread", the movement spread rapidly and changed into a directly political insurrection. This ground swell which went all across Russian society, led to the fall of the secular and obscurantist Tsarist regime. Whole garrisons of soldiers joined the cause of the proletariat. For several months, waves of struggles followed each other and made it possible for workers' consciousness to mature sufficiently to eliminate the bourgeois political structures and replace them with a social and political organisation based upon the direct domination of the political organs of the exploited (the Workers Councils amongst others). To the surprise of the bourgeoisie, but also of the Bolsheviks, the Russian revolution completed its insurrection in October 1917. The workers' revolt against exploitation and against the slaughter of the First World War, was not limited to Russia. Germany was shaken by the same convulsions. Unfortunately, they were better contained by the German bourgeoisie and never led to a victorious revolution.

Much has been written on the political meaning of October 1917 and on the political structures created by the proletariat. But the period following the revolution must pass through the fine comb of revolutionary understanding.

Because the problem of the political organization of the class (workers' councils, party...) has been dealt with in other articles, it is the economic problem of post-revolutionary Russia that is the subject of this article. The economic questions are fundamental and must be raised at the very onset of the take-over by the proletariat. The period of transition must be a real destruction of the economic bases of capitalism. Without this destruction, even if it occurs gradually, communism, as a system in which the relations of production and the relations between people are totally new, will never be possible. The possibility of the creation of a new society depends on the period of transition.

When we look at the Russian revolution, we see that the Bolsheviks took measures on two "levels". While on the level of the political organization of the proletariat, the measures taken went in the direction of a break with the old system - to the advantage of proletarian structures (such as the Workers Councils) - we can't say the same of their economic policy. On that level, the measures taken (as we shall see later), affected primarily the forms of capitalism, without touching its foundations. Several factors explain this: the economic backwardness of Russia at the time of the revolution; the impossibility of transforming a capitalist economy into a "communist" one while the rest of the world remains capitalist; particular phenomena such as the civil war; finally the lack of theoretical elaboration by the Bolsheviks of these questions. All this led to a situation in which, despite the proletarian nature of the revolution, the foundations of the capitalist system were never destroyed. Rosa Luxemburg drew the following lesson:

"In this, the Russian revolution only confirmed the fundamental teaching of every great revolution, whose essential law is this: you have to go forward very rapidly and resolutely; overthrow all obstacles with an iron hand; place the goals ever further, or else the revolution will quickly be led back

to its fragile point of departure, or be smashed by the counter-revolution." (*Political Writings - The Russian Revolution*).

To understand this better, we will examine three points:

- the ownership of the land;
- value and its expression in money and wages;
- the development of the productive forces.

I. THE OWNERSHIP OF THE LAND

This issue was a war-horse for the Bolsheviks. From 1907 on, Lenin defended the idea of "equality of land use". For him, the large landownership and its corollary, serfdom, were the most caricature expression of social inequality in Russia. The means to overcome this inequality was therefore the fight against large private ownership and its replacement by collective ownership. Other revolutionaries shared the goal to abolish large landownership. The Social Revolutionaries published in August '17 a decree, based on 242 demands for the peasantry. This decree contained, amongst other measures, the expropriation of estates, the return to the people of all land ownership and its distribution "on a base of equality, either according to labor or consumption, as local conditions dictate". Lenin supported this decree, adding as a condition that it could only be carried out as part of the socialist revolution against capitalism.

So in the aftermath of the revolution, the land was confiscated and redistributed, more or less according to local conditions, amongst the peasants or more collective organs such as collective farms, agricultural cooperatives or rural communes. The Bolsheviks developed a particular strategy. In his *April Theses*, Lenin defined the peasantry as "a mass consciously on the side of the capitalists". The issue therefore was, to rally them to the cause of the proletariat. They focused on the "poor peasants" (workers without land). These peasants, having no land to defend, were seen as in the same boat as the workers who did not own the means of production either. So the Bolsheviks saw them as potential supporters of the revolution who would defend proletarian interests amongst the peasant masses. Many large estates were therefore confiscated and divided amongst "poor peasants".

What was the real impact of these measures? Lenin's first objective was quickly accomplished: the large estates no longer existed and the land was distributed in a more equitable way. However,

questions can be raised on the political impact of this measure. After the redistribution of the land, 11% of it was owned by the farms of the Soviets (that is, the state); 3% by agricultural collectives and 86% by private farmers. So it was private, small ownership which was most favored by it and this was the direct result of the Bolshevik tactic towards the "poor peasants". The most outrageous inequalities no longer existed but private ownership was far from abolished. On the contrary, it created problems in the delivery of agricultural products and an impoverishment of the variety of crops. As for the delivery problems: each peasant was obliged to deliver his surplus production, through requisitions, taxes or exchanges for manufactured products. But often, surpluses were hidden or destroyed, which created a flourishing black market. So-called "bagmen" criss-crossed the countryside with large bags which they filled with stuff bought from farmers which they re-sold in the cities at very high prices. As for the impoverishment of crops: the peasants tended to grow the products which they needed for their own consumption and to reduce their cultivated acreage to escape the requisitions of surpluses. As a result, agricultural production fell steeply, and more specialised cultures were altogether abandoned. This led to famine in 1919-20, which provoked massive shifts of population. The Bolsheviks response to the deterioration of the economic and agricultural situation was the *New Economic Policy* (NEP) of 1921.

The survival of the country (and thus of the revolution) demanded an end of the famine. The Bolsheviks were forced to increase food production at any price. Openly capitalist measures were taken to stimulate agricultural productivity. In 1921, Trotsky re-introduced the trade of surpluses for any farmer who paid his taxes. Taxes were lowered for farmers who increased their acreage and they could once again employ wage laborers to increase production. So, when Lenin called the NEP "a necessary capitalist retreat", he clearly showed what type of response was given to the economic problems of scarcity and the development of the productive forces.

Through all this, it became fairly clear that the tactic of the Bolsheviks was inadequate. We don't want to re-launch here the debate on "what they should have done", but to understand, for the future revolution, the dangers of certain visions. We defend here the position of Rosa Luxemburg who commented on the Bolshevik tactic:

"Not only is this not a socialist measure, but it also cuts off the road leading towards it: it creates a mountain of insuperable difficulties to the restructuring of the agrarian conditions in the direction of socialism. The fact that the peasants took

over the estates, following the short and concise slogan of Lenin and his friends: "Go and take the land!" simply caused the sudden and chaotic passage of large landownership to peasant ownership. No social ownership was created, but a new form of private ownership, the break-up of large estates into small and medium sized properties; large scaled, relatively evolved cultivation was replaced by small scale, primitive cultivation, working with the technical means from the time of the pharaohs". (*Political Writings - The Russian Revolution*)

We know that Lenin emphasized the need to develop the collective exploitation of the large estates, with modern agricultural techniques. So questions can be raised on the adequacy of a measure, taken for "tactical" reasons, which made it all but impossible to move to a more collective production. We disagree with a "gradualist" approach, which would justify a "popular" measure to win over the masses, to move then in the opposite direction, once "the masses" have rallied to our cause. The political and economic measures of the period of transition are decisive and flow from the understanding of how a communist society functions. Although it's true that we can't replace a capitalist society with a communist one overnight, we think that the measures to be taken must, in any case, go in the direction of communism and not its opposite. In this case, while it was correct to seek the support of the landless workers, it was certainly necessary to push for the creation of collective farms, instead of distributing the land individually. Even if we take into account the problems which the Bolsheviks faced in reorganizing an agricultural sector as backwards as it was in Russia, it's clear that they hardly considered these problems from a global political view, flowing from an understanding of what a capitalist society, and its opposite, communism, are. On the contrary, they rather seem to have been inspired by strategic considerations of an ideological nature (to win over the peasant masses). In our view, such a position is inexorably doomed to failure.

II. VALUE, MONEY, WAGES

Value is one of the foundations of the capitalist system. Without entering into economic explanations that go beyond the scope of this article, we can recall, with Marx, that value is determined by "the relative quantity of necessary labor". To measure the value of a commodity in the exchange process, one category is taken into account: the exchange value. As Marx explains: "the use values are equivalents in the proportions where they contain the same labor time set in motion, materialized. As

exchange values, all commodities are only determined measures of coagulated labor time." (*Capital, "The Commodity"*) This exchange value becomes a universal and abstract category, totally independent from the simple use of a product. It is also the motor of the production and of capitalist wealth. It is clear that the Bolsheviks, in their economic measures, made attempts to abolish this category, but value continued to reign in the economic relations.

Even before the revolution, the Bolsheviks had an economic policy based on three points: the annulling of debts, the nationalisation of banks and the halt of the emission of paper money. Those measures were aimed against the independence of fictitious capital and money as an expression of value. The annulling of debts was quickly accomplished, but things were less simple regarding the other two measures. Capital, as a monetary mass and a mass of credit, destined for the functioning of companies, never ceased to exist. The banks, despite their nationalisation after the revolution, remained institutions whose function and usefulness were never questioned. They were simply put under the control of proletarian organs. The Bolsheviks even thought that the banks would become, under socialism, the supreme economic authority, the principal administrative organism of the country. Here is how Lenin saw it, on the eve of the October Revolution: "Without the big banks, socialism would be impossible to realise. The big banks constitute the 'state apparatus' that we need to realise socialism and that we borrow ready made from capitalism..." The Bolsheviks not only didn't compromise the function of the banks in the capitalist system, but they also made them a tool of socialism, seeking only to make this tool as efficient as possible. In 1918 for instance, the idea of a decentralisation of the banks was put forward. There had to be one bank for each industrial sector, half of its capital advanced by the state and half by the sector in question.

Another example of the persistence of capital and value, is the existence of taxes. Like any state in which value-money has not disappeared, Bolshevik Russia leveled all kinds of taxes. From 1917 on there appeared the first decrees on new taxes, either in money or in kind (agricultural surpluses). By deciding in November 1917 to advance the deadline for income taxes, and by amending the decree on taxes on tobacco, the Bolshevik government executed measures taken by the pre-Revolutionary government.

Finally, money: while it de facto disappeared for a short period, this happened not because of a conscious economic policy but under pressure of events. Indeed, despite the efforts of the Bolshevik state to procure its financial needs through taxes,

the economic situation in 1918 was close to bankruptcy. This, rather than theoretical reasons, prompted the Bolshevik government to change course. It used the only means to hand: a wild increase in the issue of paper money. When the decree of 15th May 1919 discarded the last obstacle to the unlimited issue of money, the circulation of money exceeded 80 billions rubles. The amount doubled in 1918 and quintupled in 1920. This disastrous inflation had its classic capitalist effect on buying power; that is, it made it collapse. In 1919, the money was so worthless that factory vouchers, written on bits of paper with the stamp of some local institution or authority on them, took over its role. More and more, workers were paid in kind (in forms of rations) rather than in money. Nevertheless, the ruble remained the official instrument for measuring values in the accounting of companies. But the incessant fluctuations of the ruble made it practically useless for this purpose, so the Russian financial organs looked for an alternative unit of measure. In 1920, the labor unit seemed the only reasonable answer to that problem. It would be at the same time universal, not subjected to fluctuations, and compatible with the Marxist principles on the suppression of money. During a good part of 1920, the financial specialists studied this proposal. Unfortunately, the NEP put an end to this research, and officially reintroduced money and trade in the exchange between products.

Neither was the wage of Russian proletarians ever abolished or even modified. Given the situation of scarcity, caused by economic backwardness, Russia's isolation and "war communism", the idea to give "to each, according to his needs", seemed a far away goal. Except for the short period in which workers received rations in kind, wages were globally determined by taking into account the difficulty of the work, the skills needed and the responsibilities assumed. While there was a struggle against productivity measures before the revolution, they never disappeared and a piece-rate system reappeared in 1918 and was generalized in 1921. In that year too, the directors of plants who were once again free from any form of workers' control, began using the term "waged workforce" again, as well as its corollary: unemployment. From then on also, wages were lowered for workers who were deemed insufficiently productive.

What should we conclude from all this? We must repeat, once again, that the situation in Russia was extremely difficult. The economic backwardness of the country, and the ruins created by an imperialist war and a civil war, sharpened the extreme scarcity and made economic measures tending towards communism more difficult. Nevertheless, without pronouncing ourselves on "what the Bolsheviks should have done", it is striking the degree

to which the economic measures were the results of the immediate circumstances. To respond to the most pressing problems; that seems to have been the motto of the Bolsheviks. Their decisions don't reflect any understanding of the capitalist economic mechanisms and how they were maintained (and even sustained) by their economic policies. The role of the banks, of taxes, of money: all that wasn't seen as part of a system that had to be abolished, but as tools that could simply be taken over and put into service for the oppressed. It was this false concept of socialism as a proletarian takeover of capitalist tools, which in our view was responsible for the Bolsheviks' incapacity to take economic measures tending towards the realisation of communism. It is in the period following the revolution in which such fundamental capitalist categories such as wages and value must be transformed. Even if those two categories continue to exist in the beginning of the period of transition, they should in any case be modified (This subject is discussed in greater detail in *Internationalist Perspective #27: "Economic aspects of the transition of capitalism to communism"*). Wage labor, if it is maintained as long as scarcity has not totally disappeared from society, can only be a temporary instrument for the distribution of social wealth, but must lose its function as expression of the value of labor power. In the same way, money, if it subsists also in the exchanges in the beginning of the period of transition, must lose its character of abstract value, capable to express any wealth and to be accumulated without limits, as is the case under capitalism. It seems quite clear that these questions were not clarified by the Bolsheviks. They weren't even raised.

III. THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE PRODUCTIVE FORCES

The disappearance of scarcity is the primordial condition for the elimination of the law of value. The Bolsheviks seemed to have understood this. The development of the productive forces was their constant preoccupation. But the aftermath of the revolution was a period of complete disorganisation of the production, which heightened the scarcity. Too few products were leaving the factories to be exchanged for agricultural products. Often, instead of an exchange, there was a simple requisition of agricultural stocks, to feed the urban population.

The Bolsheviks therefore sought to increase agricultural productivity. They turned naturally towards capitalist organisation models for solutions. The prime example was often the young German capitalism. The only critique that the Bolsheviks had of this economic structure was not that it was

capitalist, but that it was directed by a capitalist state. So all they had to do, was to take this economic model, and place a proletarian state at its head. This shows again the Bolsheviks' incomprehension of the interdependence between political and economic structures, between class relations and relations of production. In agriculture, the Bolsheviks therefore tried to replace small production units with larger ones, equipped with agricultural machinery. That's why they sought to develop the agricultural communes. Unfortunately, individual property predominated (see point I) and the peasantry showed little inclination to change its life style. So, agriculture did not develop but became more impoverished.

Disorganisation of production was a crucial problem in industry as well. The civil war weighed terribly on the orientation of production. It was geared towards the needs of the war, not the satisfaction of human needs. The Bolsheviks tried to elevate industrial productivity too. Unfortunately for the proletariat, they did so not by introducing new technologies, but by tightening the control over the workforce. To give some examples: in June 1919, a time-book was introduced for workers in Moscow and Petrograd; in April 1919, forced labor camps were created; around the same time, piece-work was systematized to stimulate productivity. The Bolsheviks also considered it was out of the question for workers to strike. So war communism marked a discrete return to authoritarian practices, under the cover of the defense of the interests of the revolution.

This situation was undoubtedly the most inexorable element in the panorama of post-revolutionary Russia. Indeed, the disappearance of scarcity largely depended on the stage of development of the productive forces. But we know how backward the Russian economy was, how little modern industrial fabric there was. We can therefore conclude that no quick solution was available to solve the problem of scarcity, without a worldwide revolution which would have posed the problem of production on a global scale and would have based productivity on less archaic areas. A rapid disappearance of scarcity could therefore not have been realised in Russia alone, regardless of the measures taken.

IV CONCLUSION

A revolutionary process is a political process. But to lead to a new society, it must be capable of transforming all the foundations of society: economic and social as well as political and structural.

The experience of the Russian Revolution shows us only a first sketch of this process. The take-over of

power marked the overthrow of the bourgeoisie and the installation of the dictatorship of the proletariat. New political structures were put into place. But the transformation of a society is a dynamic process, fed by contradictory forces, tendencies towards change and tendencies towards stabilisation, towards a return backwards.

The global situation was one of a country which had achieved a revolution but which remained isolated in the midst of nations which had succeeded in smothering these tendencies in their own proletariat. Russia could not extend the dynamic, count on its growing support and globalisation; it was enclosed in isolation. We know that Stalin's theory of "socialism in one country" is totally false. The revolution has to be worldwide or it has to fail. As for the policies of the Bolsheviks, we must recognize that they were insufficiently prepared. They did not have a clear political understanding of the society they fought against and of which society they were going to. Their economic measures showed that they did not understand which were the keys of the capitalist system's functioning and therefore which measures they had to take to make them disappear as quickly as possible. Their understanding was limited to the need of the political dictatorship of the proletariat over these structures, without questioning these structures themselves. For us, this holds a fundamental lesson. Indeed, while it seems useless to us to dwell on the specific measures which the Bolsheviks "should have" taken, because the material conditions in which the future revolution will take place will be radically different, it seems very important to us to understand that the completion of a revolutionary process requires the destruction of a capitalist society. Because of their lack of theoretical preparation, the Bolsheviks carried a series of illusions on this transformation of the economic structures, which have weighed heavily on generations of revolutionaries after them.

What took place in Russia was a proletarian revolution, but it didn't lead to a communist society. What the Stalinist bourgeoisie falsely called "communism", was only a capitalist regime in which all the economic and political machinery was centralised into the hands of the State.

We think that the situation which the Bolsheviks faced, will probably not recur in the same way for the generations of proletarians and revolutionaries of the future. The globalisation of capital has created a far-reaching interdependence of all economies and a great deal of movement of populations. This makes the revolutionary movement more global. Also, life in the decaying phase of the economic system leaves ever fewer illusions and doubts intact about what the capitalist system is and about what future it can offer to humankind. Only a clear consciousness of the

foundations of capitalist barbarism will make it possible to take the measures which will make of the post-revolutionary period a real transition to a communist society.

Rose

CRACKS IN THE REARVIEW MIRROR

(A RESPONSE TO ROSE)

Comrade Rose wants to have it both ways. On the one hand, she emphasizes "the impossibility to transform a capitalist economy into a "communist" economy in a world that remains capitalist"; on the other, she reproaches the Bolsheviks for their "incapacity to take economic measures towards the realisation of communism." That's a recipe for a confused analysis.

Surely Rose will agree that the first condition to transform society towards communism is that the material resources to achieve that goal, exist. That goal, the creation of a human community without exploitation or oppression in which the economy is consciously used to shelter everyone from need, while always present in the longings of mankind, became only possible when the development of the productive forces reached a level at which the eradication of scarcity was practically achievable. Capitalism made this possible. But is it possible in one factory? Of course not. Is it possible in one country? No. Capitalism has developed the productive forces on a global scale and only at this global scale does the promise of abundance exist; every country possesses only a part of the puzzle. And if it's not possible in one country, it's even less possible in a backward, war-ravaged country such as Russia in 1917, as Rose recognizes.

The only hope that it would become possible to put society in Russia on the road towards communism was that the revolution would spread to the industrial heartlands of Europe. Whatever their mistakes, the Bolsheviks, or at least Lenin, realised this. Fashionable historians castigate him today because he devoted so many resources to help revolutionaries abroad, at a time of famine in Russia. I think it rather shows he had his priorities straight, and Rose forgets to give him credit for this.

As long as there was reasonable hope for an international revolution, it made sense to defend the Russian beachhead. But it was only a holding operation, like the defense of a surrounded city, waiting for reinforcements. We can discuss until we're blue in the face whether in the meantime the Bolsheviks took the right economic measures - which Rose does, while proclaiming no less than three times that she doesn't want to say what they should have done (isn't it a bit easy to criticize someone but to refuse to say what he should have done instead?) - but the fact is, they could do nothing to change the

fundamental absence of the conditions for the creation of a new, communist society. The only thing they could do is to make sure that power stayed in the hands of the working class. And in that, they failed miserably. Rose is mistaken when she writes: "While on the political organisation of the proletariat, the measures taken (by the Bolsheviks) went in the direction of a break with the old system, to the advantage of proletarian structures (such as the workers councils), we can't say the same of their economic policy." Quite the contrary, it was not the economic measures of the Bolsheviks that were daggers at the heart of the revolution, but their policies against "the proletarian structures". The over-riding lesson of the Russian revolution for the proletariat still is: never, ever, under any circumstances, delegate your power to a party, regardless how good it may look. Soon after gaining power, the Bolsheviks began to replace the organs of self-organisation by party dictatorship. The factory committees were absorbed by the unions and the councils were territorial organs which degenerated into rubber stamp parliaments. That didn't require a great battle. There was no need to violently disband the factory committees; the Soviets became empty shells by themselves. There was some reaction against this murder of proletarian power by replacement. But it came from a tiny minority, in the Bolshevik party (Ossinsky etc) as well as in the class at large (Kronstadt, etc.) After years of war and famine, the Russian proletariat was exhausted. Besides, the notion that socialism equates to party rule, was more or less generally accepted, not just in Russia. It was only some years later, in the German uprisings, that the crucial role of the self-organisation of the class as a whole was politically understood (KAPD). The proletarian revolution has to be a conscious revolution, because the proletariat has nothing else but its conscious self as a weapon.

In Russia, the retreat of class consciousness was not only fatal for the class as a whole, it was just as bad for the Bolsheviks, who became, corrupted by their monopoly of power, a party of and for capital. It is this retreat of class consciousness which revolutionaries must understand to draw lessons for the future. It made it inevitable that the consolidation of power in the hands of the Bolsheviks increasingly meant in the hands of the bureaucrats, the generals, the secret police, the union and party enforcers, the state. It is hard to pinpoint when exactly the "socialist" state became the capitalist state. But

what changed was not the economic infrastructure, but the sense of direction of the whole society. Loss of consciousness was inevitably followed by loss of power.

But even if that could have been prevented, Russia's economic foundations would have remained capitalist without revolution elsewhere. Neither the Bolsheviks nor anyone else could have changed that. So what should they have done? They should have worked for the creation of real workers councils and have encouraged those to meet as often as possible. Congresses of those councils should have decided on all important matters and imposed their will on all other structures in society. The councils should be based on workplace assemblies, which meet regularly and discuss the congress' decisions, give their representatives instructions and replace them when deemed necessary, and take decisions on local matters, including their own working conditions when possible. Such a political structure would certainly have had implications for what economic measures could have been taken, but again, within Russia, the way of functioning of the economic base could not have been changed. Isolated, beleaguered, war-torn, ravaged, backward, with a production capacity way below demand, the question of the hour was not how to reorganize production towards communism but how to increase the productive forces, which meant capital accumulation through the intensification of the exploitation of labor.

So there are not really any economic lessons for a future period of transition to communism to be drawn from the Russian experience, unless you think that a future revolution could find itself in similar conditions (in which case it would be doomed to similar defeat). Despite the claims of the ICC, who still sees in the whole development of capitalism in this century nothing but stagnation, the productive forces have grown tremendously since then. Not just quantitatively, also qualitatively. The world has changed. The global world economy today exists to a degree unimaginable in 1917. You don't need to read an economic report to know that. Just look around you, at the clothes you wear, the food you eat, the car you drive, the radio you listen to and the music on it: how much of that is made in your country? The world has become immensely more productive, international, intertwined. So intertwined that change is even more difficult: even the national leaders themselves are powerless against untouchable global forces. But it makes change also different. The greater linkage of direct interests of workers in different countries reveals its global nature.

The challenges after a future revolution will be totally different from those in Russia in 1917. Instead of making the productive forces grow to survive, the

task of the hour will be how to produce differently, how to re-orient production to shelter everyone from need, to give everyone the chance to do something with his life that is meaningful for others and makes him part of the human community, to liberate workers from drudgery and pollution, and so on. The international working class, the majority of mankind, will have to decide together on what to make, how to make it, where to make it. That implies all sorts of problems which revolutionaries haven't even begun to explore. But they can't look in the rearview mirror to the Russian experience for answers. The Russian economy was never socialist, was never even on a path of transition to socialism. The Bolsheviks who ran the economy, who made the workers work harder to accumulate capital for expanded production, were capitalist managers, even when they still could be considered as defenders of the proletarian revolution. Clumsy managers perhaps, but in their function of managers they couldn't be anything but capitalist. Because of their own concept of state socialism, they had no problems with that. Clearer revolutionaries would have had the merit of not portraying their economic management as "socialist". That would have saved the world from a lot of confusion and mystification. So the Bolshevik's policies regarding banks, money, taxes should be seen in that light. You can ask whether the Bolsheviks were good or bad capitalist managers, but not whether their policies brought Russia any closer to communism.

As for the agrarian question, to which Rose devotes quite a bit of space: let's not forget that the revolution in Russia was not made by the proletariat alone. Without the support of the peasantry, it would have failed; if not immediately, then in the civil war. The peasants, inevitably, wanted to divide up the land. They had dreamed of this for centuries. Should the Bolsheviks have prevented this and forced them to collectivize, instead of supporting their demands, to win their support? Whether that would have been right or wrong, in the beginning of the revolution, it would have been suicidal. Rose, while recognizing the impossibility to move towards communism abstractly, still clings to illusions (like Rosa Luxemburg, who didn't have the benefit of hindsight) on what was possible in the isolated Russian context. The Bolsheviks forced collectivization of agricultural production later, when the balance of forces was more favorable to them. But then again, it would be a mistake to judge that policy against the standard of the period of transition to communism. As managers of the national economy, they had to force farmers to produce more, because famine bred turmoil and underproduction.

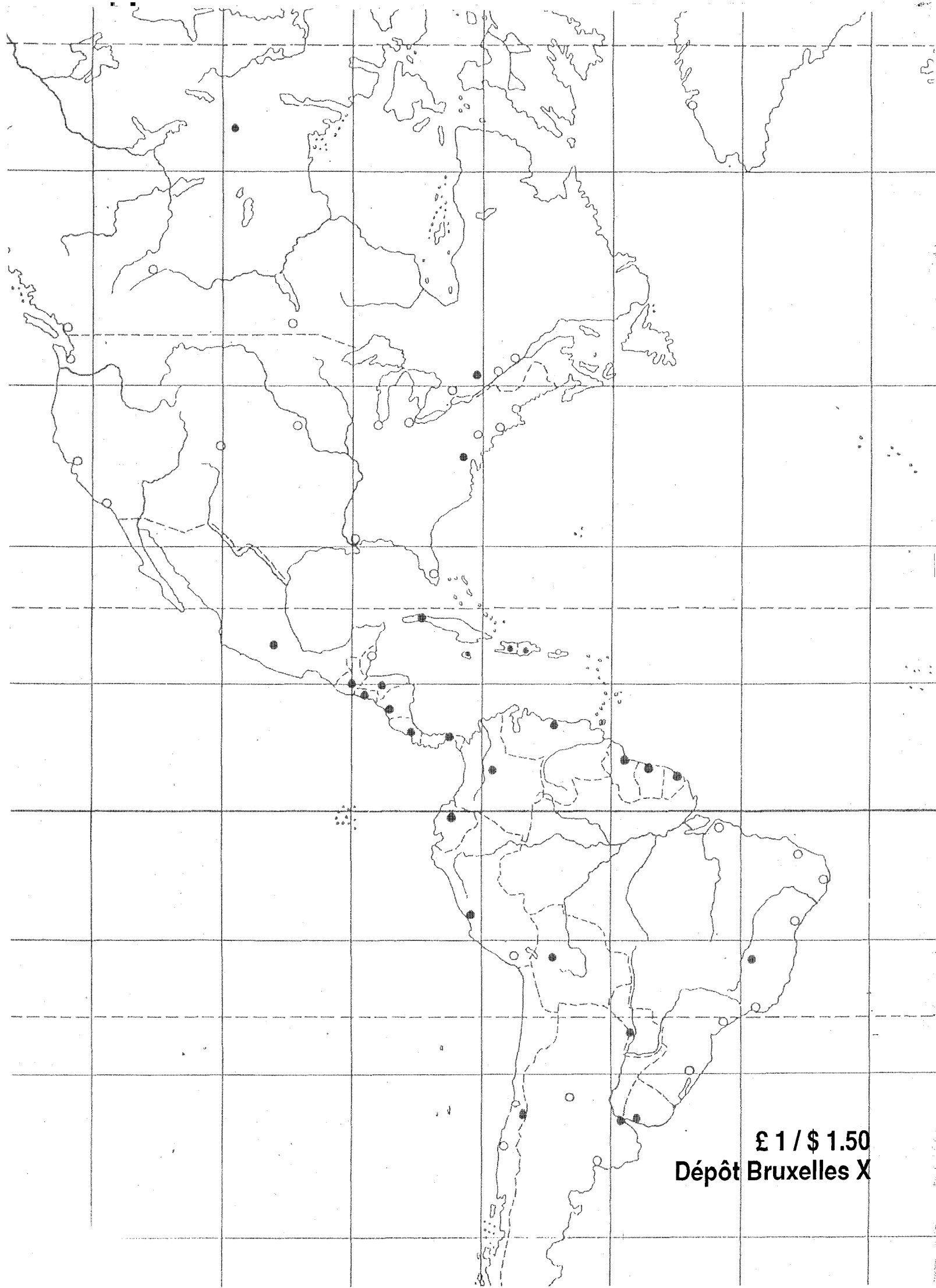
I don't think Rose is right when she writes that revolutionaries should "return incessantly" to the Russian revolution. For too long now, they kept their

eyes fixed on the rearview mirror, expecting a kind of re-run. Instead of writing that "the situation which faced the Bolsheviks will probably not be faced in the same way by the generations of proletarians and revolutionaries of the future", she should have clearly stated that such a situation will most certainly never recur. We have to stop being transfixed by the rearview mirror and recognize how the world around

us has changed. If we keep trying to solve the Bolsheviks' problems, we might remain blind and unprepared for the real problems that lay ahead.

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