

INTERNATIONALIST PERSPECTIVE

Towards new forms of class
struggle ?

Globalization of capital and the
transformation of the state

A new discussion network

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Contact Addresses

Write only as shown below :

Destryker
BP 1181
Centre Monnaie
1000 Bruxelles
Belgium

AM
PO Box 40231
Staten Island
NY 10304
USA

BM Box 8154
London WC1N 3XX
UK

Responsible Editor :
F. Destryker
5 drève des Lilas
B-1310 La Hulpe
Dépôt Bruxelles X

IN WHAT WORLD DO WE LIVE ...

Depending on whether there is a question mark (?) or an exclamation point (!) at its end, the above phrase captures two major characteristics of the present period: the need to provide ourselves with new theoretical tools to comprehend the present world, and our disquiet with respect to the perspectives offered by capitalism today. The new century that has just begun is marked by both continuity and by profound transformations: the continuity of a system riven by its own irremediable economic contradictions, and which is creating the conditions for its own replacement; the transformation of a society which, just as every living organism, changes, evolves, and adapts, in order to survive. The world such as it was defined after the two world wars is dead, and if crisis, exploitation, and capitalist barbarism under all its forms continues to mark the course of history, these terms are no longer defined in the same way on the plane of the composition of classes, the economic and political organization of production, and of social organization, or the manner in which the law of value infiltrates the most private domains of human activity and thinking.

IN WHAT WORLD DO WE LIVE?

The term globalization encapsulates ongoing and profound transformations. Starting from the natural movement of expansion of capital, globalization is marked by an unprecedented inter-dependence of capitals, enterprises, and trade, at a world level. Therefore, it is inscribed in the continuity of the development of the system, even as it also constitutes a qualitative leap, and thus a profound transformation, in the economic, political, and social organization of the system. It makes possible a higher rate of surplus-value thanks to a greater exploitation of the working class, and to the transfer of surplus-value that it organizes to the most technologically developed countries, in particular the US. In addition, globalization makes it possible to contain the more and more profound contradictions of the economic system by facilitating the rapid circulation of capital and considerably increasing the flexibility of economic structures, making them better able to quickly adapt to the requirements of the economy and competition. If globalization provides no solution to the inherent contradictions of the capitalist system, it is nonetheless a positive factor in the way it presently functions, at least for the most technologically developed countries which can temporarily profit from it.

Globalization, therefore, implies an internal dynamic of development which, in its turn, brings about a certain progress

for capital. Thus, globalization entails new tools: the "new technologies" that have profoundly transformed the way in which production, communication, and individual labor are organized, literally remodeling the very private sphere via the entry, into the home, of the personal computer and all its technical applications. The various aspects of production and distribution are no longer confined to the factory, a site where the workers are physically concentrated, and organized according to a Fordist model linked to a specific sector of production. Instead, production and distribution are increasingly dispersed over a number of different countries, dissociated one from the other in their functions of innovation, production and commercialization, these latter being confided to ephemeral service structures which are created and dissolved as a function of the immediate needs of production and sale, more and more "virtual," and less and less linked to the concrete production of a discrete commodity, in the image of the growing independence of financial circuits vis-a-vis their industrial counterparts. The worker too has been profoundly reshaped: he/she has passed from a fixed site of production to a much greater mobility. Changing sites, countries, functions, the worker is more than ever subjugated to the great flexibility of the new circuits of production. Here is one of the manifestations of the real domination of capital: if previously, exploitation occurred through the visible and formal lengthening of the working day, the passage to the real domination of labor permits the exploiting class to sing the praises of the leisure society, the passage to the 35 hour week in the "rich" countries, all the while considerably increasing the volume and efficacy of labor without seeming to make new demands on it.

This context of mobility and of the deepening of the effects of the economic crisis and of exploitation, hurls more and more of the world outside the circuits of labor. Those excluded henceforth constitute a stable group, socially recognized as the incontrovertible mark of the very functioning of the system. Previously, workers could be expected to re-enter the circuit of production at one point or another. Today, the unemployed, just like the "economic refugees" and other migrants driven from their homes by insupportable conditions of life, amplify this perpetual movement of populations and a circulation subject to the needs of the economy, as well as the reactions of states to this migratory movement, through the expulsion of "undesirables" from within their borders.

If globalization has redefined in a profound way the organization of production and the contours of the market, it has also had an impact on political structures and on their relations. Thus, the nation has long served as a delimitation of an economic space, administered by the law and the more or

less significant and direct intervention of the state. Globalization entails another economic geography, one involving exchanges that are no longer international but rather trans-national. If states retain their function of social control, of coercion, and, at certain moments, economic regulation, the necessary adaptation and articulation with supranational structures entails modifications in their role and interventions. Similarly, on the imperialist plane, if tensions continue to grow, provoking local conflicts, more and more frequent genocides, and a growing instability in the economically most fragile zones of the planet, a perspective of world conflict is temporarily set aside by the movement of integration that prevails at the economic level in the developed countries. If the wars of the past had their origin in the need to control territory, the present situation reveals itself more as the defense of an economic and political supremacy, in particular under the increasingly assertive hand of the US. The world such as we understood it in the wake of the two world wars, divided into two imperialist blocs destined to directly confront one another at the time of a world conflict, has given way to another vision in which American hegemony is not now openly contested and in which the imperatives of the world crisis pose the modalities of imperialist conflict in very different terms. Even as the collapse of the Russian bloc as an imperialist power was not brought about by a battle lost to the proletariat, but rather by the more general incapacity of the ruling class to face the challenge of the worsening world crisis and to adapt its economic and political structures, so too the perspective of a third world war is not now removed because of confrontations between the classes, but also by immediate economic necessities.

IN WHAT WORLD DO WE LIVE!

This uneasy exclamation point reflects the questioning that has been manifest in the various class movements since 1995. Of what perspective is capitalist society the bearer, and in what conditions of existence does it threaten to place us, and the generations to come?

It is only by becoming aware of its alienation, and of the inhumanity of its life, that humans will liberate themselves through the creation of a society that will fulfill their redefined needs. Today, inhumanity increasingly becomes the dominant feature of the capitalist world. Genocides, generalized political corruption, the bankruptcy of democratic or Stalinist ideologies, the increase in local wars, military interventions under cover of humanitarian missions, and the recrudescence of epidemics and diseases that science has long since made it possible to eradicate; mad cow disease, trichinosis, high mercury levels in our fish; global warming and the destruction of the rain forests -- all have made life increasingly unbearable. If one adds to all this the economic uncertainty, the absolute impossibility of knowing what tomorrow will bring, it is reasonable to believe that the capitalist world is in the process of revealing its real and

profound bases more clearly than before, and that it is the development of a consciousness of the functioning of this system that will generate a new questioning within the proletariat about the perspectives offered to it by this society.

This is the paradox of the division of society into two classes, each one the bearer of an antagonistic perspective: as its very basis capitalism secretes within itself an exploited class. To control it, the ruling class must increase its ideological stranglehold and hook the population with the bait of consumption. But it is precisely through the insupportability of its conditions of life and the failure to have its real needs met, that this exploited class can formulate a project for a society that is its own. The ideal of an economic eldorado, of a peaceful haven, and a society delivered by science from the constraints of disease and suffering, all within the framework of capitalism, is only a trap. The reality of a world shaken by economic and ecological contradictions, and by constant warfare, has shattered any illusions about peace and prosperity, and demonstrated the infernal logic of the quest for profit at any price. In that sense, the ripening of both objective and subjective conditions making possible a social upheaval, that is to say, the worsening of conditions of existence, and the development of a consciousness about these processes, continues -- in spite of the difficulty of quantifying this development, and, above all, without this perspective of the birth of a new society constituting an outcome that can be traced in a mechanistic fashion. The alternative "socialism or barbarism" may have seemed to be an abstract formula during the years when illusions were still possible, but today, it demonstrates on a daily basis the cruelty of its truth in the life of each of us.

Thus, if globalization now shatters the link which brought workers together at the same site, thereby hindering their struggle against an identifiable boss, obscuring their community of interests, and their belonging to a single social class, this same globalization is also the bearer of another perspective: that of the end of an attachment to a fatherland, to the defense of one's own "tools" or of the corporation. The stirring phrase "the workers have no fatherland" is made more visible by the mobility and migratory flux provoked by world-wide circulation. The international organization of production is the bearer, for the future, of another prospect: that making it possible to see and grasp the general character of the exploitation of labor, beyond national specificities.

The present period, if -- superficially -- it can be seen to mark the triumph of an immutable capitalist system, dominated by a bourgeois class less and less threatened, is also the bearer of the prospect of more and more clearly seeing the logic and global foundations of this capitalist system. The new questioning that has arisen since 1995, which poses the question of the perspectives offered by capitalist society, as well as the need to challenge these perspectives, despite its errors, its confusions, its lack of concretion, is an integral part of that historic movement through which a social force embodies a fundamental social antagonism, and the perspective of a radically different kind of society.

What individuals seeking a new perspective often do not see, is that very historic tendency. Humans pose questions on the temporal scale of their own existence: the political milieu arising from the wave of struggles symbolized by May '68 thought that they could see the disaster of an economic crisis bringing about a rapid development of class consciousness on the part of the class that was the bearer of a new social project. That did not take into account the temporality peculiar to the history of societies: if the decadence of Rome lasted 250 years before giving birth to another economic and social system, one can only smile when we think of our hopes of

seeing capitalist society disappear in a matter of decades. What was overlooked was the capacity of an economic system to transform itself, to attempt to adapt to its crisis and to keep going. There too, we demonstrated our naivete in seeing capitalist society as a rigid system patiently awaiting its own overthrow. Revolutionaries cannot be either "pessimists" or "optimists" with respect to the future of the world, but rather must point to the contradictions and the possibilities contained in each period, and be able to provide them with a meaning by linking them to the perspective of social transformation.

Towards new forms of class struggle?

Once again, we have decided to raise the issue of class struggle. And this for several reasons. First, it's a subject that regularly preoccupies us in our discussion meetings. Second, recent movements, as well as the upheavals that have occurred in the functioning of the economic system and in the composition of classes, have raised questions about the very criteria for evaluating class struggle, and have posed the question of the new forms that this struggle can take in the future.

In particular, we want to situate the struggles of our class in an historical perspective so as to ascertain its evolution, and to see the new kinds of questions with which we are confronted since 1968. More specifically, we want to focus on the meaning of anti-globalization movements. With respect to these latter, although they do not constitute reactions of the working class, they have involved elements of it, and pose a certain number of new questions. In that sense, rather than denounce or deplore the existence of these movements, which seems to us to constitute a groupo-centric view, it is more important to understand why these movements, with their errors and weaknesses, have arisen and to what in the present period they correspond.

I must insist, that to understand the class struggle today is not an easy task. The criteria and schemas of the past no longer suffice to understand the rapidly shifting period in which both we and our class find ourselves. There is no longer a single position within *Internationalist Perspective*; different views have been expressed in the course of the debate, in particular concerning anti-globalization movements. Nevertheless, we do not hesitate to raise an issue in a public manner, even if the discussion has not reached a degree of clarity and maturation within our group. Public debate is an asset that can make it possible to advance towards a deeper understanding. In that sense, we hope that this text, which is based on a talk given at a recent discussion meeting, will encourage a collective discussion and deepening of the issue.

This talk contains two parts. The first will seek to provide a perspective for the present struggles, by linking them to past movements. The second, will try to comprehend the present reactions to exploitation by linking them to the specific problems posed by the present period. By way of conclusion,

we will briefly raise the question of the intervention of revolutionaries.

The present perspective

There is no direct or automatic link between an historical period and the path of class consciousness. Nonetheless, this latter is not separable from the context in which it must develop. One problem that we must face is the difficulty of evaluating any down turns in class struggle. We tend to analyze movements one after the other, and typically on the basis of criteria peculiar to those movements themselves. If we take a broader perspective, however, say the last thirty years in the activity of our class, and if one situates it in the evolution of the economy, it is possible to grasp a more general movement, whose immanent tendencies only gradually become clear.

Thus, if May '68 marked the reappearance of the working class on the international scene, that class nonetheless bore the marks of its own past experiences and many illusions besides. The end of the 60's allowed us to anticipate the specter of the great recessions of the 1970's, and some 25 years after the end of the second world butchery, the world trembled over its future. The workers struggles symbolized by May '68 therefore marked the reappearance of the international proletariat, and that point of rupture with the past calm was fundamental. However, we must admit that those movements were characterized by an incapacity to completely reject the control of bourgeois institutions such as the left parties and the unions, and did not constitute -- from the point of view of class consciousness -- a questioning of the bases of the capitalist system. Those struggles -- in spite of their amplitude -- unfolded in an economic context in which the crisis made itself felt to a much lesser extent than today, and which was therefore characterized by many more illusions. The political groups that emerged from those movements intervened in the struggles with the reflexes inherited from past conceptions, developing an intervention based on agitation and propaganda. We can also see in both the struggles themselves and the conceptions of revolutionaries a not negligible weight of both self-management and their opposite, Leninist, conceptions. In the

struggles, there were the experiences of self-management (Lip, Salik) as well as union control, and in particular the phenomenon of base unionism. Questioning about the future of society had not yet reached the point of radically challenging the very bases of the capitalist system, but rather had been recuperated by factions of the bourgeoisie, and diverted into partial struggles such as feminism, human rights, or fights for the defense of the environment. If the period was characterized by a renewal of social engagement, by the resurgence of class struggle, all that was strongly marked by an economic context which still left many illusions intact, as well as by the weight of experiences and traditions inherited from the past. Illusions that prepared the way for leftist groups and discourse.

The thrust of the economic crisis in the 1970's would propel a movement of economic transformation, with the beginning of the progressive liquidation of traditional sectors of the working class. Think of the struggles directed against the closure of the steel mills at Longwy and Denain (France), or the fight waged by the English coal miners. That pressure would worsen and lead, during the 1980's, to a movement of both disillusion and profound hesitation at the level of ongoing struggles. That can be linked to the insecurity and brutal competition that the economic crisis provoked amongst workers, but, even more fundamentally, to the progressive restructurations of the economic mechanism itself, which marked the beginning of a new class recomposition. This last element was not grasped by revolutionaries, and the situation, which was not clearly understood, left them in a state of denial, frenetic activism, immobility and a turn back to the past, or discouragement, with an abandonment of political activity. The proletariat, unsettled in its identity, under the impact of the failure of its illusions, and successive defeats in what had been the very bastions of its power, no longer found the path to class confrontations. These profound doubts led to the relative silence of the working class, as well as to a profound crisis in the revolutionary milieu.

The movement of an internal reorganization of capital gained steam in the 1990's, marking a qualitative leap in the process of the internationalization of economic circuits and profoundly modifying the contours of the social classes. It is in this context of a very basic disturbance to the very identity of the working class, the absence of a class perspective, a break with the experience of the struggles of the past, that movements of struggle reappeared in Europe in 1995-1997, particularly in Belgium and France.

At the time, *Internationalist Perspective* characterized those movements as marking the beginning of a new period. That entailed two elements: a reappearance of class struggle and, therefore, a break with the calm of the preceding ten years; and the renewal of a questioning about the future and the perspectives offered by capitalism. The malaise expressed in '68 took on new life, but inscribed in an economic context which left few hopes, and which permitted a balance-sheet of the struggles that followed to be made. The illusions in leftism and the base unionism of the '70's had given way to an enormous distrust of all the political structures and

instruments of control, as well as to a disgust with bourgeois political organs. These reactions indicated the gap existing between human and social needs and the direction imposed by the capitalist system. In that sense -- and this is an important difference with the kind of questioning that prevailed in 1968-1970 -- it is more the overall perspectives offered by the capitalist system which were now being questioned, rather than certain partial aspects of its functioning. The struggles of 1995 expressed a global malaise inscribed in a context of an open economic crisis, palpable to everyone. These movements showed, albeit in a confused way, signs of a modification in both the forms and content of the struggle. Thus, this was a movement beyond sectors, borders, social categories, and partial demands, an expression of a diffuse discontent whose overall content could be summarized by: "we are all in this together, all threatened, all one in our refusal of a global direction imposed by the system."

At the time, we emphasized the enormous weaknesses and confusions contained in these movements. That was to be explained by the profound upheaval which the proletariat had just undergone, and which made it incapable -- even today -- of defining the identity and specificity of itself as a class, of its struggle, and its perspectives. Nonetheless, we also emphasized the novelty of the questions posed, as well as the difficult path to class consciousness since the resurgence of struggles in '68. If we are to characterize the path traversed from 1968 to 1995, we would have to emphasize the impact of the economic crisis, both on the functioning of the system and the disillusion that it has implied for the exploited class. That means that much more fundamental questions with respect to the way the economy functions and the place of workers within the system are posed, though with the added difficulty of knowing how to pose them and with what alternative. Thus, to take some examples, if one looks at some struggles that have recently occurred, they sometimes have the characteristic of a rejection of union representation. However, even these struggles do not concretize the most fundamental issues present in society and among the workers. Besides, these movements often break out in traditional sectors, even in enterprises that the present mode of economic organization has made obsolete. For example, movements like those at Cellatex at Givet, Forgeval at Valenciennes, Adelshoffen at Strasbourg, Bertrand Fauré at Nogent, Continental at Meaux, have been characterized by a distrust of the union representatives and by a threat to the equipment and the means of production themselves. If one recalls that in earlier years many conflicts ended with a demand to preserve equipment and the means of production, one can say that the determination of the French workers represents, in that respect, a loss of illusions with respect to a defense of the means of production as a solution to the social problems that brought about the closure of a plant. In Belgium too, the determination and open opposition to the unions has been a feature of the six weeks long struggle of the bus conductors in Wallonia. But, there too, if that determination and that autonomy are emphasized as the products of a global disillusion, these questions have not yet been taken up and developed by a movement of struggle that is even more vast.

On another terrain, it is these same questions and these same weaknesses that are present in the anti-globalization movements. The inter-classism in which they are posed reflects the incapacity of the proletariat to define the contours of its own identity, and to pose problems on its own terrain.

Present problems and their impact on recent movements

After having attempted to trace the guiding thread in recent struggles and the path of the development of class consciousness, we can now focus more precisely on the impact of globalization and the recomposition of classes on present movements, and thereby reach an appreciation of them, including anti-globalization movements.

In the period of the formal domination of capital, things were simple: the identification of the bourgeoisie, the petty-bourgeoisie, and the workers in a given enterprise was easy. The bourgeois wore a shirt and tie, the worker wore blue overalls. There was no doubt who was who, no doubt about the class nature of the movements that took place.

The recomposition of classes makes things much more difficult to appreciate, both for the proletariat and for revolutionaries. At the risk of simplification, we need to ask if we still tend to see class movements through the lenses of the past; if everything that is not in blue overalls is suspect, and never enters our line of vision.

The question of recomposition poses two problems. The first is that a whole group of individuals who are not directly producing surplus-value find themselves proletarianized by virtue of their participation in an indirect manner in the global process of the valorization of capital, and find themselves placed in proletarian conditions of labor and life. This gives to the working class a much more heteroclite composition than in the past. The second problem -- one already evoked -- is that of the identity of the class, the feeling of belonging to a class, which is now very feeble. For proletarianized youth, the proletariat as a class to which one belongs does not mean very much. The image of the proletariat is too often linked to old and obsolete industrial bastions. They are, therefore, cut off from a tradition of struggle, a class culture, and even, at times, from the very notion of class solidarity. The very being of these young proletarians is characterized by precariousness and mobility. They are, therefore, more preoccupied with the need to adapt to the immediate reality and to deal with their precarious status than with a concern with the history of the class transmitted by oldtimers, or forging solid links based on the site of labor.

Economic evolution and globalization contribute additional features to this already complex picture: if

internationalized production entails the need to pose the question of struggle in an international context, in the short term it produces a fragmentation of sites of production, and makes it sometimes impossible to clearly identify the specific enemy against whom one must make demands. In addition, there exist today ever greater numbers of those totally excluded from production. That poses the question of the class terrain of those excluded. Where and how can they express their revolt against exploitation and against their conditions of existence? Although the perspective of linking up with the struggles of active workers remains correct, it does not seem to me to be sufficient, and requires much thought. This is no longer a matter of a marginal phenomenon, but of a new social status, especially if one thinks of the countries of the third world or the fact that one American in ten has recourse to a soup kitchen because he/she lives on the threshold of poverty. It is clear that the exploited class cannot generalize its struggles as long as it has not grasped in a more profound fashion its current place in the actual functioning of capitalist society. There, where the worker can only recognize him/herself formally by the past (in the site constituted by the factory), it is much more difficult to identify what links the worker in an auto plant to the proletarian who works on a computer or to the long-term unemployed who has lost any social status. There exists for these workers different relations to the terrain of struggle, to the means of production, to blocages in production, to collective action, that we must try to define. Even if we have not yet resolved these issues, it is apparent that these features mean that struggles occur in a different way than in the past, and will take new forms in the future. While we cannot decide, in the place of the class, the forms that can only arise from its own experience of struggle, we must remain attentive to any new developments in the forms of class struggle and not try to analyze them on the basis of criteria utilized in the past.

Alongside movements of class struggle, we see the anti-globalization movements. What are they, where are they situated in the gamut of questions posed to the exploited class, and what are they the bearers of? By way of background, they began in Seattle, and other confrontations have taken place in Washington, in Italy, at Davos, in Tokyo, and most recently in Prague. These movements are very heterogeneous: in their ranks one finds leftists, third worldists, "pure" anti-globalization militants, ecologists, and a whole gamut of legalist, non-violent, elements, whose goal is to set themselves up as a counter-power to the leading factions of capital. But, along with these elements, there are others, constituted by elements of the proletariat and individuals -- often young -- who are much more radical, who are prepared to confront in a direct and violent fashion the forces of order, the sacro-saint American or Czech democracy, and who directly challenge the symbolic representations of the functioning of capitalism: the international economic structures and political institutions. Thus, alongside the moustache of José Bové and his anecdotes about French camembert, one finds slogans like "capitalism kills, let's kill capitalism" or the denunciation of the growing poverty engendered by the reigning economic evolution. Another

characteristic element of these movements is their capacity to bring together a large number of people, and to generate important discussions.

For us, it is clear that these movements are not movements of class struggle, and have no perspective in themselves. Nevertheless, taking account of the important questions that they pose, and their capacity to tap into elements of the proletariat and youth, it is important to try to understand why these sometimes fundamental questions are being posed by this movement, and not on the terrain of worker's struggles. I must emphasize here that we do not have a single answer to that question within *Internationalist Perspective*. For some comrades, these anti-globalization movements are similar to the partial movements of opposition to certain aspects of the functioning of capitalism that have always existed. For others, notably for me, they pose much more direct questions with respect to the overall perspectives offered by the capitalist system. And they are the terrain for a violent and relatively massive confrontation with the forces of order, besides which they bring together proletarian elements. The question is, therefore, how to understand why these questions and these elements are brought together on a terrain that is not that of the working class, and why these movements have such a power of attraction for elements of youth and the proletariat. I refer the reader to the contribution on the events in Seattle that we published in *Internationalist Perspective* 37. The elements of the analysis that I am now going to present are therefore my own position, and will be contested, discussed, and refined through debate.

As a function of the difficulties evoked above with respect to the recomposition of classes, I can offer the hypothesis that a proportion of youth, of proletarianized elements, of those excluded from production, who do not for the moment identify themselves as part of the working class, cannot express themselves on the terrain specific to that class. Anti-globalization movements then constitute both a catalyst for revolt and the site where a direct and immediate engagement with social problems seems possible (directly attacking the forces of order, international financial institutions). At that level, the inter-classist context in which these fundamental questions are posed reflects the present difficulty of the working class as a whole to see itself as a specific class, with an identity, perspectives, and a terrain of struggle that is its own. For me, these movements are therefore the expression of a double context: that of a fluid and temporary situation of the recomposition of classes, and that of confused questions which nonetheless go to the very foundations of the capitalist system and which have been present in a diffuse way in society since the movements and demonstrations of 1995-1997. Thus, the anti-globalization movements bear witness to the absence of a response by the working class to the need to elaborate its own perspectives, and to provide the new forms of struggle that the diversity of its own activity and non-activity impose on it.

Another element that must be considered concerns the historical perspectives (and the way they are put forward) that revolutionary organizations articulate in their intervention.

Most often, the revolutionary alternative to the capitalist mode of production is presented in a language that appears self-evident to revolutionaries themselves. That language, these concepts, have been transmitted to us by the writings of past revolutionaries, and by the whole historical experience of the proletariat. However, young proletarians today live in a rupture with the past, without the direct transmission of the revolutionary tradition. For them "politics" is a source of power, of corruption; it is rotten. Communism and its organizations are assimilated to the Stalinism of Russia or China. One hypothesis that I can then formulate is that anti-globalization movements appear as a falsely neutral terrain, one removed from the danger of political recuperation, which may also explain the present craze for the anarchist discourse often linked to these movements.

The questions posed in a confused way in the worker's struggles of 1995-1997 concerning the perspectives offered by the development of the capitalist system, are today found again in the anti-globalization movements. And this leads us to a reflection on another concept: the subterranean maturation of class consciousness. Previously, we have defined it as the red thread that links together worker's struggles, preserving the acquisitions of one set of struggles and making it possible for subsequent movements to begin with a greater degree of clarity. I think that that definition is today too restrictive and too schematic. With respect to the higher level from which new struggles take off, that seems to me to be incorrect. It is indicative of a too linear vision, proceeding through successive stages, a vision developed by the ICC and which constituted its way of grasping the social dynamic, including the deepening of the economic crisis. That vision excludes errors, steps backward, improvements in the economic situation, none of which could be grasped by the ICC. On the contrary, I think that the process of subterranean maturation is a much more hesitant process, much slower, non linear, and also much more global. Thus, I think that it feeds on questions and experiences that affect the working class globally, without being elaborated solely on its own terrain or in its own experience of struggles. Just as with the development of individual consciousness, class consciousness can, by an association of ideas, or by an opposition of ideas, appropriate questions that are posed on a larger social terrain, reappropriating them so as to enrich its own consciousness. In that respect, embryonic or confused questions can participate in the global process of the elaboration of class consciousness, just so long as that elaboration occurs on a class terrain. In that perspective, questions posed by the anti-globalization movements, even if not posed on the class terrain of the proletariat, can be taken up by it and participate in this slow elaboration of its consciousness.

Conclusion

The analysis of movements of class struggle and of the state of development of consciousness is only possible if it is linked to an understanding of the successive stages and

periods that it traverses, and if it is firmly connected to the general social context in which it is elaborated.

In that sense, the crucial questions posed in a confused manner since the movements of 1995-1997 are both the result of the progressive loss of illusions resulting from the confrontations of the 1970's and 1980's, and the reflection of the profound difficulties that the proletariat encountered in the perception of its own identity. The present period is therefore a sort of hinge period in which fundamental questions are present, but in which these questions cannot be really elaborated or advanced by the action of the working class. In spite of this difficulty, the questions posed today are inscribed in a continuity of experience of the working class since the re-emergence of its struggles in 1968, but also constitute a slow turning since they are impregnated with the characteristics and questions of the present period. The development of the experience of the working class must be envisaged on this level, and thereby is comparable to what one can see of the historical evolution of the economic system and its crisis. This should lead us to definitively turn our back on the groupo-centric perspectives which lead us to fixate on measuring the gap between our hypotheses concerning the class struggle and the reality of the struggles themselves.

The understanding of the difficulties with which our class is confronted should make us rethink our intervention. On the one hand, it is important to pay attention to every movement, to every question, confused though it may be, linking them to the general confrontation between the two classes and the antagonistic perspectives that flow from them. The transformations under way in the functioning of the capitalist system and in the composition of social classes will very probably lead class struggles to develop under new forms. The old schemas of analysis will then be insufficient to grasp the ensemble of questions with which we will be confronted. On the other hand, we live cut off from our class, attached to the concepts of the past and to the transmission of the historical experience of the proletariat. The way in which we present the alternatives to capitalism are often linked to representations that no longer make sense to the young proletarians of today. Our intervention must therefore make explicit the concepts that we wield in order to make them comprehensible for the proletariat now.

Rose

Book review

The end of statist containment of the working class

Loren Goldner is well known, or should be, to revolutionary Marxists for the acuity of his analyses of the trajectory of world capital articulated over the past three decades, and for his unflinching commitment to the task of overthrowing the regime of value production and wage-labor. In *Ubu Saved Form Drowning: Class Struggle and the Statist Containment in Portugal and Spain, 1974-1977*,¹ Goldner republishes -- largely unchanged -- two texts written in the 1970's and early 1980's on the collapse of the authoritarian dictatorships on the Iberian peninsula, and what then seemed to those on the ultra-left to be the prospects for a course towards proletarian revolution. What makes the publication of these texts especially interesting today, and extremely important for militants to read, is Goldner's introductions, which offer a fascinating periodization of the capitalist trajectory in the twentieth century, and which demonstrate with theoretical rigor, that far from marking the inauguration of a course towards revolution on the European continent (as we all, including Goldner, believed at the time), the upheavals in Portugal and Spain marked the last gasp of a statist project which was not post-capitalist, but rather an effort to promote capitalist industrialization in still backward, agrarian, societies. That project sought to accomplish the tasks of capitalization within the framework of the nation-state, outside the confines of the world market shaped first by English imperialism, and after 1918, largely by American imperialism. For Goldner, the original model for that project was "the 'Lassalleian' 'people's state', the national-populist bureaucratic development regime of progressive civil servants that first consolidated itself in Bismarckian Germany and which was generalized to the world in different welfare statist, Stalinist and Third World nationalist regimes over the next century. It was in the German SPD, which co-evolved with and ultimately integrated itself into the German state, that the work of Marx was first transformed into an ideology of backward development regimes, recapitulating the linear progressive world outlook of the bourgeois Enlightenment of the 18 century, to promote industrialization in largely agrarian societies. These German beginnings were taken over and further refined by the early Russian "'Marxists' (whom Marx himself attacked as apologists for capitalism), passed into the origins of Bolshevism, and acquired a world dimension through the triumph of the Russian Revolution after 1917.

¹ Available from Queequeg Publications, PO Box 441597, West Somerville, MA 02144, USA for \$10.

From Lassalle to Lenin to Stalin to Pol Pot there is degeneration, but also continuity."(p.6) Goldner's analysis allows us to see that the project of capitalization undertaken by regimes claiming to speak in the name of the working class, did not begin with the degeneration of the Russian revolution, but rather was integral to one wing of the socialist movement even in Marx's time! That wing came to dominate the Second International, was predominant in the leadership of the Bolshevik party, triumphed at Kronstadt, consolidated its power through the doctrine of "socialism in one country" (sic.), and ultimately came to shape the very image of socialism for a generation of "radicals" in the West beginning in the 1960's.

To Goldner's analysis of this project, I would add not only its abject failure to assure the "independence" of the nation-state's committed to it from the domination of the world market shaped by Anglo-American capital, its inability to make it possible for any nation-state -- even Russia or China -- to replicate the developmental trajectory of its Anglo-Saxon rivals, but more importantly that the signal success of what Goldner terms this "modernizing 'ontology'" lay in its ability to crush the working class, to impose on it a regime of super-exploitation and mass death (the Gulag, the "Great Leap Forward," the Cultural Revolution, etc.), all in the name of an industrial development that would "liberate" the backward nation from the domination of Anglo-American imperialism -- and all with the fervent support of middle class intellectuals in London, Berkeley, and Paris. Moreover, As Goldner makes clear, The upheavals in Portugal and Spain in marking the last gasp of that developmental project, also marked the beginning of a new phase of capitalism, globalization, post-Fordist production, in which we are now living. This is a phase in which, at least for the moment, the farthest corners of the globe have been incorporated into the world market dominated by Anglo-Saxon imperialism, in which "privatization" (which I would argue is not antithetical to state control, but is rather conditioned by it), and the market economy now reign supreme. As Goldner, in his analyses of the events in Seattle, and as *Internationalist Perspective* sees it, this capitalist hegemony, which was never for a moment threatened by the statist-developmental model, but which was, indeed, instantiated by it, can now be challenged by the only force that could ever challenge its domination: the collective laborer called into being by capital itself, Marx's *Gesamtarbeiter*. All else was bloody prelude.

.Mac Intosh

The globalization of capital and the transformation of the state

. An evolution of the world market is presently underway. The appearance of an information network, without borders, virtually without barriers, has led to significant economic changes, and to manifest transformations of the capitalist state, or at least to the way it functions. We have here a movement of adaptation on the part of capital. This evolution must be understood as an historic change within the capitalist mode of production. It is apparent that a loom or a computer are productive forces capable of transmitting value, but such material forces are always invented, developed, and deployed in the context of determinate social relations of production, and have significant consequences for both the economic evolution itself and on the state administration.

The evolution of the state is an historical fact. It is only normal that with the technological changes brought about by informatization, and that within the context of the real domination of capital, changes also occur in the functioning of the modern state. These changes in the economy and the state have significant repercussions on the struggles of the proletariat, and we must analyze the present development to ascertain whether or not it strengthens the political control of the bourgeoisie.

We therefore raise the question of the historical relation between state and market, the impact of technological innovation on the process of accumulation, and its repercussions on the state, so as to historically situate the ongoing changes and their impact on the proletariat.

What is happening today ?

Privatization of enterprises, liberalization of markets, a "new economy": have we, therefore, entered a new era? Are we seeing a weakening of the state? Does the movement of privatization constitute a reason to put in question the analysis of state capitalism? Can one speak of the triumph of the theses of neoliberalism? Bourgeois thinkers have not hesitated to raise these questions and to propose triumphalist answers by forging the concept of a new economy.

In the 1970's, in *World Capitalism*², Michalet proposes that we substitute the paradigm of a world economy for that of

²² C.A. Michalet, *Le capitalisme mondiale* (Paris: PUF, 1976).

an international economy. He points to the role of multinational firms and their rise since the 1950's. Caillé speaks of a "megacapitalism" completely impervious to attacks launched on a purely national basis.³ Other authors, like Latouche put forward the idea of a market that has become planetary under the control of a megamachine linked to the technosstructure. In *The Globalized Economy*⁴, devoted to capitalism in the 21st century, Reich indicates that the extension of the commodity sphere to the scale of the entire planet puts in question the concept of a national economy and makes the national particularisms of capitalism obsolete. With respect to the future, Michel Beaud, in his *Histoire du capitalisme* writes: "We think that capitalism is more powerful and alive than ever; what has begun is a new age of capitalism, characterized by the growing mobilization of technoscience for innovation on the part of firms, the creation of new products and new processes, and a permanent struggle, through competition, to recreate monopolistic situations."⁵

It is undeniable that the economy is still evolving, and that a new market economy is being created. Every trader must become globally competitive. Competition is no longer local; it knows no borders. There are financial networks, aerial networks, information networks which control the flow of available information. There is the matter of e-commerce, that is to say the emergence of the internet as an international network for the distribution of goods and services -- and of jobs for its operatives and specialists. Innovation has accelerated at a dizzying rate in the scientific and technical domains.

In 1968, in the US, 40% of products lasted less than 15 years, and ten years later the proportion was 60%. The methods used to produce them change just as fast. The rapid growth foreseen for cybernetics and telematics in the operation of enterprises further increases the uncertainty about the future of labor. A permanent change has also occurred in all the domains of knowledge, in particular in those of ethics and aesthetics.

³ Alain Caillé, *Comment peut-on être anticapitaliste?* (Revue du Mauss, 1977).

⁴ R. Reich, *L'économie mondialisée* (Paris: Dunod, 1993).

⁵ Michel Beaud, *Histoire du capitalisme* (Paris: Pont Seuil, 1999).

Today, the average volume of daily transactions on the international exchange market has practically reached 2 trillion dollars. This is a hundred times greater than the daily growth in goods and services. In the 1970's, the corresponding figure for such transactions was around 10-20 billion dollars. It reached 80 billion in 1980, 500 billion in 1990, and multiplied fourfold from 1990 to 2000. Only 7-8% of these monetary transactions correspond to regular commercial settlements or to transfers of capital destined for productive investment. In 1995, the total growth of world trade in commodities corresponded to only three and a half days worth of transactions on the exchange markets! In other words, more than 90% of those transactions serve as speculative monetary operations. It is a short-term exchange market (operations of purchase followed by re-sale), the site of a frantic pursuit of maximum profit. According to the figures of the Bank for International Settlements, 82% of these operation have a duration of less than seven days, and 43.5% a duration of less than two days. We could multiply these examples to illustrate this evolution. How are we to understand the development of this market? Is it -- as some maintain -- the triumph of a "new economy" that has freed itself from the shackles of the state?

The historical development of the world market in connection with the formation of the state

The movement of capital is always characterized by a close interaction between market and state. Significant technological innovations can result in important changes in the accumulation of capital, without putting the system in question. This confronts us with the need to be more precise in our understanding of the state, the market, and their reciprocal relations. Economists forged the notion of a "market" without integrating into it the existence of the state, just as sociologists elaborated their concept of the "state" without taking into account the existence of economic mechanisms. We are therefore in the presence of two close concepts which are nonetheless strangers one to another.

The international circulation of commodities is not a novelty, because, as Braudel emphasizes (he was the one to forge the term "world-economy"), this phenomenon already existed in the distant past, even as did the market, dear to the Phoenicians. The existence of a vast economic space is not a new phenomenon in itself. The Roman empire already constituted, in its time, a "world" (in the sense of the Mediterranean) market. Later, one could scarcely count the routes of international exchange -- salt road, gold road, spice road, silk road. It was a matter of international exchanges functioning to the rhythm of equestrian and maritime transport at first, then of motorized transport, which implied further transformations. The process of territorial expansion accompanied the movement of the accumulation of capital,

within the limits politically imposed by what could be termed the state. The state intervened to protect the movement of accumulation, either through closing borders, through customs protection, or by opening them.

Braudel has emphasized the importance of trading cities: Venice, Amsterdam, London, New York, which have succeeded one another as centers, first of the European economy, then of the the world economy. These cities constituted the convergence points for the great flood of commodities, and the starting point for their subsequent transfer to internal consumption. During the Middle Ages, when Islam, India, or China were more developed than Europe, Venice imported luxury goods, and spices from the Levant and the Orient, and redistributed them. In the 15th and 16th centuries, the two centers for the development of trade, and of economic transformation, were Italy and Flanders. These two regions, long linked, won control of the quasi-totality of world trade, then in rapid expansion, because of the voyages of discovery and the nascent colonization.

The Netherlands, Antwerp and Amsterdam, became -- in the 16th and 17th centuries -- the major centers for the re-export of gold and silver coming from America, and for textiles, and, indeed, international trade in general. In Europe, the middlemen of Amsterdam bought and sold within ever more dense networks of commerce. In Colbert's time, the Netherlands possessed 16,000 ships against 200 for France. That fleet cast anchor from practically every port in the world. The Europe of the 16th and 17th centuries can be seen as a unified economy in which the Italian cities and then the Netherlands dominated finance and commerce.

Certainly, that international economy only affected a small part of society at that time. It would be later, with the emergence of nation-states and their power politics and mercantilist spirit, that protectionist measures would make their appearance. Europe was an agglomerate of national economies, each one relatively closed. These two apparently contradictory features -- open to world trade and yet the creation of nationally protected economic spaces -- made possible a first spurt of industrial growth through the extension of international markets and internal markets as well.

That evolution of the international market had consequences for the development of the state. Machiavelli in his *The Prince* proposed to a rising bourgeoisie an identification with the modern state, one rid of the alienating influence of religion, so as to be able to meet the challenge of the economic transformations. The nation-state, which is without a doubt one of the major creations of modernity, and due in no small part to the genius of Machiavelli and Hobbes, has made it possible to separate politics from religion, and to establish the bases of the modern state, whose power and autonomy have not ceased to grow since the 17th century. The idea of the nation-state was born from political doctrines in which it was attached to individual freedom and collective dependence by basing oneself on reason and on the lived experience of communal solidarity and structures of

centralized power. But at the same time, it was also very concretely shaped by the advent of a new reality: bourgeois society. To the individualistic minds of the Renaissance, it seemed that acquisition, the exercise and guarantee of their privileges, needed as a framework a kind of human association no longer based on the clan or the divine right of the monarch, but rather on mutual consent, respectful of freedom and of personal engagements. If the nation then appeared not as a "natural," but rather an artificial construction, it had to serve the particular interests of elites, and, above all, of the rising class -- the bourgeoisie.

The bourgeois individualism of the 17th century did not oppose state to individual. On the contrary, one was implied by the other. Locke, who knew that individual freedom could not develop in anarchy, but rather in order, clearly noted: "It would be contradictory to suppose that an individual would associate to others so that his property could be protected, but that his land, the title to which must be regulated by the laws of society, would escape the jurisdiction of the government to which he is himself subject in his quality as a proprietor." That state had as an essential component the concept of sovereignty, such as it was defined by Jean Bodin, in 1576, in his *La République*, and which would prevail until the first world war.

It was the "rational" state theorized by Hegel, which made it possible to free man from insecurity, through the rational mastery of nature, although this utilitarian domination ensnared him in an implacable network of social domination. If Hegel conceived of civil society as a free market in which particular interests confronted one another, in the manner of Adam Smith, he was opposed to Smith when it came to the consequences for social existence. In civil society left to itself, each atomized individual according to the principle of self-interest becomes the enemy of all others. This is what, for Hegel, justifies the appearance of the state. The state, for Hegel, consecrates the passage from civil society to political community, which is at the same time the passage from the pursuit of particular interests to the accomplishment of a general will. For Hegel, it is in and through the state that the interest in freedom becomes the object of the general will, a will to organize collective existence in such a way as to insure the establishment of conditions permitting each to realize his own freedom.

Emancipated under the aegis of the Enlightenment, the rational state, positivist, utilitarian, and utopian, fully became the instrument of servitude when it was rapidly put in the service of capitalism. This state would assure the national unity of the territory, defend the national market at first, permit the bourgeoisie to extend its economic control over the national territory and then begin the conquest of other markets, thereby developing an imperialist policy. The state imposed regulation by violence in order to defend the integrity of its territory.

At the end of the 17th century, England supplanted the Netherlands. London became the major center for commercial exchanges. The maritime vocation of England was

encouraged by the state. At that time England was engaged as a world power in colonization, and the trade in tropical products, of which the most profitable became the cotton from its Indian possessions.

As Habermas has shown⁶, the 18th century saw the birth of a bourgeois public sphere, governed by reason, a reason that could contest the power of king and court. At the end of the 18th century and the beginning of the 19th century, the Ancien Régime rid itself of its heavy interventionist attributes. Relegated to its natural role of protector of goods and persons, the state let market forces operate on their own. Economic initiative had finally freed itself from its fetters. From the 19th century, an extraordinary economic expansion reshaped European society, opened the entire world to trade and industry, and produced wealth on a scale that previous centuries could only have dreamed about.

There thus developed a liberal theory of the state. In that vision, state and market are completely different entities. As such, they are separate and distinct from one another. But, can we accept the liberal assertion presenting the 19th century as a period of economic laissez-faire? Contrary to liberal ideology, the state is not external to the economic sphere. Were it, one could point to perfectly separate entities, which is not the case. It is impossible, even historically, to envisage two totally separate entities, with a "market" functioning without state interference, or a state created independently of any economic activity, which perforce entails the involvement of the market.

The market is not a natural phenomenon, as liberal thought supposes. According to that vision, there would exist within society a closed space -- the market -- within which the state would have to first intrude. Historically, the market has never functioned without the existence of the constraints of the state

-- a common currency, the defense of private property by the state and its laws, courts, stock exchanges. It is a matter of social creations in which the state directly interferes. Thus, the railroads correspond in a decisive fashion to the very development of modern capitalism. However, the state played a considerable role in that phenomenon. Adam Smith, whom one would never suspect of statist sympathies, as is clear from his *Wealth of Nations*, in which he did not hesitate to qualify politicians as "insidious and sly animals," defended certain state interventions: regulation of bank reserves and interest rates, encouragement and subsidies for education, culture, and even certain types of production (agriculture, breeding), the utilization of fiscal powers to encourage or discourage certain activities.

Germany overcame its economic backwardness in the second half of the 19th century, thanks to its political unification in 1871, and to a policy of willful industrialization. The German state provided the push for industrial

⁶ J. Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* (Cambridge, MA: MIT press, 1989).

development by directing the construction of the railroads, on which it imposed a centralized direction. But its most spectacular role was in education where it established a complete system of technical education, and in the social domain, with the social security laws of the 1880's. These examples show the link between the state and the development of the market that has continued in the 20th century, and which has adapted itself to the new information technologies.

The first world war, the 1929 crisis, and the second world war, profoundly changed this state of affairs. Until the second world war what prevailed was a capitalism split into rival and sovereign states, separated by their frontiers. The attempt at international regulation through the League of Nations was condemned to failure. After the war, the state assumed a more and more important role, and took responsibility for economic reconstruction. The rationality of the state also changed. If for Hegel, the state's rationality derived from its realizing the ends of reason, for Max Weber, by contrast, rationality depended on the calculation of the adequacy of means to ends, and functioned purely in terms of efficiency: instrumental rationality in the service of economic values, which are themselves not determined rationally. It justified state intervention in economic life in the name of the concept of economic rationality.

The state intervened more and more in the administration of the economy, and at certain times raised protectionist economic barriers and controlled the movement of workers. After the second world war, Truman's "Fair Deal" (which continued Roosevelt's "New Deal"), the social market economy of Konrad Adenauer, the French conception of planning, were all the manifestations of a new role confided to the state, which would henceforth play the role of regulating the economy. With the accentuation of the passage from the formal to the real domination of capital, accumulation necessitated the opening and conquest of new markets, and provoked a movement towards unification, which would at first manifest itself in small, and later in more fundamental, structural changes. The world-economy, a concept banalized by Wallerstein and Braudel, was characterized by the existence of hierarchical networks, with centers and peripheries, a world divided between two great powers possessing nuclear weapons. That does not mean that the earlier situation was one of order: nuclear order, monetary order, financial order, commercial order, an order which was shattered at the beginning of the 1970's with the financial crisis and then the oil crisis.

A new model for the organization of labor appeared in the industrialized countries of Europe in the 1970's, based on the notion of "enlarged or enriched work" and constituting a counter-point to the Taylorist dynamic. We have raised this point in our articles devoted to the recomposition of the working class in *Internationalist Perspective* 15, 21, 22, and 24. And beginning in the 1980's, with Reagan in the US, and Thatcher in Britain, if the vision of an interventionsist state declined, this was a result of the new technological transformations that were occurring. Privatization and

deregulation are the new watchwords of the new state policy, the market becoming the only mechanism whose authority cannot be questioned, as we have shown in *Internationalist Perspective* 25.

The influence of technological innovation on the accumulation process

New technologies can affect the way the economy functions, and change the strategy of the state. At the beginning of the development of capitalism, a revolution occurred in the 15th century with the invention of the printing press. After 1440, within fifty years, that invention had transformed Europe and radically changed its economy and its psychology. Thanks to the printing press, Luther's Bible would change society. It made it possible for Protestantism to conquer half of Europe, and forced the Catholic church to reform itself. The printing press created a new type of capitalist investment. The greats of the world, the public powers and the Church invested in publishing houses. The most celebrated example of a typographical factory created by such investment was Christophe Plantin's in Antwerp. Thanks to Antwerp capital, and then the support of Philip II and his state, Plantin made himself the most powerful manufacturer of books.

From 1770 to 1840, inventors created machines and technical processes that would increase the profitability of textile manufacturing in an exponential fashion. The accumulation of capital due to world trade during the 16th and 17th centuries, the agricultural revolution of the 18th century, the technical innovations which transformed Northern Europe and North America in the 19th century, all bear witness to this phenomenon. Factories expanded, employing ever greater masses of workers, and their location was henceforth determined by the availability of coal and the proximity of a pool of labor. The diffusion of industrial and manufacturing products improved throughout the 19th century, thanks to a constant improvement in the transportation network, as a result of the active complicity of the state.

At the beginning of the 19th century, with the impact of the steam engine, the Western world underwent the greatest technological boom in economic history, that stimulated by the railroad. The veritable leaven for the industrial revolution, the railroads transformed, in their turn, geographical relations between men, making possible an acceleration of exchanges. Humans acquired a new mobility, making frontiers recede. All that made it possible for Great Britain, based on its enormous colonial and imperialist power, to impose a financial unity on the world through its pound sterling.

Repercussion of the new information technologies on the role of the state

It is apparent that the introduction of new information technologies has had repercussions on the economic functioning of capital. What has been designated the information revolution is in fact a revolution in knowledge. It is not the machine that makes it possible to standardize production operations; the computer only served as a means. As Lyotard points out, knowledge has changed its status. Knowledge is produced to be sold, to be exchanged. It becomes an informational commodity, and the major stake in the quest for world power, accentuating globalization such as Parsons understood it.

The constitution of multiple networks implies that the traditional nation-state no longer has control over the circulation of commodities. In the present process of globalization, a revolution of the same amplitude as the industrial revolution of the 19th century is occurring. Commerce, the new technologies, and exchanges of all kinds, are shattering the framework of the nation-state inherited from the 20th century. This challenge to the nation-state by these networks concerns the capacity of governments to levy taxes, and that of national central banks to issue money. The network can become a fiscal paradise where all sorts of -- a-national -- transactions will be effected with virtual money, outside of any fiscal exactions by a state. State's could see themselves deprived of their means of subsistence, their fiscal receipts. The freedom of international transactions, the opening and deregulation of stock and commodity exchanges, have removed from the state the control that it previously exercised. The "big bang" of this tendency was the deregulation of the London stock exchange in 1986.

We are, therefore, seeing a technological redeployment, technical mutations, an evolution of the state requiring it to dispose of information so as to accentuate the criteria of efficiency, of performance. There are new issues concerning the education of workers, which privilege information, changes in the criteria for qualifications, which accompany this "postmodern" society. The nation-state can no longer pretend to assure the regulation of an economy which has been redeployed in large part thanks to new technologies.

There exists an unbelievable gap between an economy developing in spaces that transcend the nation-state, and institutions, international organizations, like the UN, the IMF, the World Bank, the OECD, essentially created following the second world war, which remain fundamentally attached to the nation-state. These institutions, each in their own sector, have played an important role over the last fifty years. Parallel to this, a very complete, and complex, ensemble of international accords, still between nation-states, has been elaborated in the most diverse domains. Today there are more than five hundred. But in spite of their number, these

organizations and the accords that they administer, are no longer on the cutting edge of problems posed by the world-economy. And they cannot prevent crises. They remain largely absent from certain of the great networks that are being constituted. They do not make it possible to grasp the interdependences born of globalization. This gap between a very advanced economic technology and a very retarded political and cultural internationalization is a menace for capital.

In suppressing distance and borders, the present economic technology has given new life to an old question: is it possible to establish a single world government? This technological movement is also characterized by the emergence of new powers at the base. Thanks to the new tools of informatics, it favors the expression of agents until now handicapped by the weakness of their means: the regions and diverse individualisms specific to "postmodernity." While internationalization was based on the nation-state, the globalization of technological means, by mobilizing other actors, has escaped their control. Unlike internationalization, globalization supposes an expansion of exchanges, a network of localized globalisms and globalized localisms. The rupture of national frontiers at first reinforces the effect of fragmentation. With the explosion of the flux inherent in globalization, and the porosity of frontiers that results, the coincidence of law and sovereignty is shattered. A new international law also appears, a contractual law produced by transnational actors, like the offices for commercial arbitrage, a law which finds its pertinence in its adaptability to the market.

Everything was simple in the past. The state was the central player on the world stage, internally and internationally. Today, the national state is no longer the sole actor. The multiplication of actors changes everything. More and more events escape the control of the state. We live in a world in which an inter-state system and a globalized flux of financial capitals coexist. One of the connections of territory and power is in the process of disappearing. Imperium once meant the capacity to determine the site of production. Today, powers and countries do not need to control territory, and deploy their power through multinationals. The exchange of products increasingly takes place through new technologies. That increases efficacy and flexibility in the short run, but increases the risk for each enterprise. These new forces on the international scene, not linked to territory, have -- with the new technologies -- new and more effective means of manipulation too.

We are thus confronted by a crisis of sovereignty. It is the disappearance of the monopoly of organized violence, the disappearance of the single general interest rationalized in the figure of the state. The nation-state was at the center, but technological globalization has created a void where that center once existed. The sovereignty of states has been eroded. Governments lose control over global economic development. The new technologies reduce their margin for maneuver. The nation-state, the determinate historical

framework for the regulation of the economic field, is thus attacked at its very foundations.

To summarize, the process of technological globalization, which has become generalized over the last ten years, has brought two principal changes to the world economy: markets have become the dominant mode for the regulation of the economy, which means that public policy has lost its importance vis a vis private agents; the principal countries of this new economic order are largely open to the world economy, thereby reinforcing the interdependence of national economies. Globalization has always come about through states. The first question to be asked on a world scale is whether the world is now a unified society. The answer is no, But there are important changes that have occurred not at the level of the unification of social classes, but rather at the level of the structure of the state. The nation-state is not dead. Globalization is accompanied by a growing fragmentation of the world. There were forty-six nation-states at the beginning of the 20th century, there are now more than two hundred!

A new role for the state

We must not forget the state of the present economic crisis, which is without a doubt the most serious in terms of its depth and the number of countries afflicted. After having begun in Asia in 1997, the crisis destabilized Japan, then generalized to other emerging countries of Europe (Russia) and America (Brazil, Mexico). It is a matter of a general crisis, not reducible to a financial accident, but affecting the very bases of world growth. Financial globalization has been especially affected. Debacles have succeeded one another at an accelerated rate: a stock market crash in 1987, European and then Mexican monetary crises in 1994, the crises of the emergent Asian countries in 1997, the ongoing Russian crisis.

Preceding crises had been mastered by public actors playing a still more important role. Thus the Latin-American debt crisis of the early '80's concerned the public debt of countries on the road to industrialization, and not the private sector. Today, the configuration is completely different. The financial swamp into which Asia has sunk essentially concerns private actors. It results from complex interactions between a multitude of actors obeying a micro-economic logic. The strong interdependence of national economies engendered by globalization increases its gravity. One is thus confronted by the difficulty, indeed the incapacity, of the globalized market economy to regulate itself. Capital therefore faces the necessity of finding another mode of regulation for the world economy, by limiting the exorbitant power of markets, and restoring the importance of state intervention through the taxation of financial operations, and by attempting to reduce the negative effects of the interdependence of economies.

The administration of risk is transferred to the financial system by means of the system of insurance. But to return it to

the financial system is to return it to the state. The interpenetration of the state and the financial system permitted the survival of bankrupt banks in Norway and Finland at the beginning of the '90's, where the state repurchased all the banks. In France, the repurchase of the *Crédit Lyonnais* by the state cost 2,000 Francs per person. The IMF did the same thing on an international scale. The new role of the state contradicted the talk about the disappearance of the state from the economy. the state disappeared from immediate production, but controlled the process as a whole.

Why did the technological and economic revolution, marked by a phase of growth and the exceptional creation of jobs, occur first in the USA, and only much later in Europe? On economic and monetary questions, Germany had acquired a weight and capacity almost as important as that of the US. From 1958, decisions concerning the common commercial policy of the European Union were taken by majority vote; since 1999, a European Central Bank watches over the euro. Globalization gives a supplementary justification to European integration today. With the birth of the euro, a wave of corporate mergers occurred at the European level.

At the beginning of this new millenium, the bourgeoisie has accentuated political changes with respect to the administration of the state. The necessity and urgency for the state to reform its institutions demonstrates the intensity of the crisis of the state. It tries to restructure itself, to refit itself, but it poorly masters the task of overcoming the contradiction between its old, nation-state, form and the reality of its latest developments under the form of a state-network. If the nation-state imposed its republican or monarchist centralism through the idea of the same public service for all throughout its territory, the state-network deterritorializes its presence by closing rural schools, post offices, and small town hospitals. Service is to be maintained without agents of the state, by telematics and virtualization, with more and more private agents. Thus in Belgium, the Flemish region already functions on that model, while in Wallonia the restructuration is now happening. But this movement is not effected without contradictions. There is no "Plan of Capital" of which the state would be the operator. Without a true vision of the whole, the state-network is torn between the demands of its rival factions.

New governmental teams, embodying a progressive liberalism, are being tested in Europe, replacing the old populist and conservative formations. In Italy, in France, in England, in Holland, in Belgium, in Spain, Christian-Social formations are in the opposition, replaced by Centrist coalitions with a democratic coloration. These changes correspond to the evolution of capitalist society confronted by the need to modernize its state apparatus, while permitting the growth of nationalist formations of the extreme right, which can recuperate the discontent of populations facing the contradictions of globalization. This latter entails a necessary rationalization of the divers centers of bureaucratic command, a rationalization that cannot take place without the consent of the social-democrat and union apparatuses that control that sector.

Thus, we see a double movement in Europe, corresponding to the evolution of the USA: a federal centralization at the level of Europe; and an accentuated regionalization at the level of the national states, permitting the constitution of a new economic pole. One must not confound the tendency and the end-point of capitalism. Several times, we have believed that we could see the final point in the evolution of capitalism, and each time its evolution continued on bases previously unknown.

pauperization and misery."⁷ "Postmodern society" in this sense means the retraction of social and individual time, even as it imposes still more the necessity to regulate and organize collective time. What is at stake is the difficulty that workers have under these conditions of developing a collective consciousness, a feeling of belonging to a class.

F.D.

Implications for the proletariat

With the increase in the capacity to transmit information, a software enterprise can employ workers in India at low wages and transmit the product to Europe. Another example: a pharmaceutical company utilizes the labor-power of illiterate workers in Central America training them through images on the computer screen for the specific needs of production. In the US, labor-power can be rapidly shifted from place to place without any consideration of the social consequences of such upheavals. This has also happened of late in Britain, and continental Europe is now experiencing the same phenomenon. This is not a matter of one simple change among others. Structural changes are more rapid than ever before, and do not only affect the information sector. Pressure is growing on the financial sector. The law of value penetrates all aspects of the economy, and even social life, in an immediate way. This also affects the possibilities of class struggle: it's difficult to take action against strike-breakers when they do not even work at the same place as those on strike.

Meanwhile multinational firms must adapt and strengthen themselves. Certain global enterprises have succeeded in constituting world monopolies, which have an economic clout greater than that of many countries. At the same time, American enterprises, notably in the high tech sector, have a problem of worker loyalty. Highly skilled workers have no sort of identification to their firm.

Today, disorder seems to prevail, even as society engenders an ever more thoroughgoing economic globalization. Why? The answer to that question is to be found in the dialectical movement that accompanies this globalization, and which engenders a contradictory movement of regionalist, localist, reaction, effectively posing not the question of identity, but rather a nationalist projection favored by the diverse institutions linked to production. The ongoing globalization is perceived as a threat, leading to a loss of cultural reference points and bonds. The process of the disappearance of the nation-state is felt as a danger. As Roland Bruner has pointed out: "Man questions himself about the place of symbolic relations in a world essentially regulated by money and the economy. The state as a protective paternal metaphor is more and more felt to be an absentee and powerless father, delivering a part of his family to

⁷ Roland Bruner, *Psychanalyse et postmodernité* (L'Harmattan, 1999).

Pamphlet of the Cercle de Discussion de Paris

It is not easy to know what not to do

The Cercle de Discussion de Paris (CDP), comprised of longstanding comrades of the ICC, having broken with that organization, has published its reflections in a pamphlet, *Que ne pas Faire?* (What not to do?) In their introduction, these comrades tell us that: "The texts that make up this pamphlet are the expression of a critical reflection on a traumatizing experience: the evolution of a revolutionary organization into a paranoid sect. But, not only that. Beyond this experience, the texts ... raise more general questions, in particular, the way in which revolutionaries have understood and analyzed the reality of the century that has just ended."(p.1) As the title of the pamphlet indicates, the experience in the ICC has taught the comrades essentially a negative lesson: how the struggle for communism should not be waged. A first article gives a vivid description of the suffocating and hallucinatory atmosphere in the ICC at the time of their split. A second one shows how the ICC's incapacity to question its positions made the gap between its analysis and reality ever wider. A third one, searching for the organizational roots of the degeneration of the organization they so passionately believed in, very clearly demonstrates, as *Internationalist Perspective* did years earlier (see "The decline of the ICC" in *Internationalist Perspective* #9, Spring 1988) "the mortal risk faced by an organization that tends to make of its own existence the ultimate reason for its activity."(p.3)

Beyond their fascinating, and very disturbing, account of the degeneration of a revolutionary organization into a sect, both theoretically sclerotic, and increasingly engaged in brutal and obnoxious campaigns of harassment against its own members, what is especially significant about these texts is the honesty and theoretical rigor with which they confront the actual trajectory of capital over the course of the twentieth century. That trajectory, as we have also argued in the pages of *Internationalist Perspective*, has followed a radically different course than that inscribed in the core texts of the ICC. Nowhere is this more clear than in the absolute disconnect between the dynamic of capitalism and the core concept of decadence, which for the ICC has always been the key which unlocks the doors to a theoretical comprehension of that dynamic.

In this review, we want to focus on the arguments with which the comrades of the CDP repudiate the concept of

decadence as it has been wielded by the ICC since its inception. These arguments shatter the theoretical house of cards upon which the platform and politics of the ICC has been based. However, in rejecting the concept of decadence as the veritable basis for understanding the trajectory of capital in the twentieth century, the comrades of the CDP also call into question -- perhaps inadvertently -- the very class lines which have been theoretically linked to the concept of decadence proffered by the ICC. Thus, we will also inquire into the political implications of the very effective work of theoretical demolition which the comrades of the CDP have engaged in -- implications which are themselves potentially very disquieting for revolutionary Marxists. In addition, the CDP also rejects the theory of imperialism that has guided the analyses of revolutionary Marxists, a point about which we will have much to say below. Finally, we also want to consider the vexing question of whether the ICC's complete failure to comprehend the actual development of capital in the twentieth century means that the concept of decadence is not integral to Marxism, OR that the moment at which capitalism enters its phase of decadence has not yet arrived, OR that the trajectory of capital requires a different conception of decadence than the one offered by Marxists until now.

While the theoretical progenitors of the ICC, Bilan and the Gauche Communiste de France, claimed that the decadence of capitalism, inaugurated by the outbreak of the imperialist world war in 1914, is characterized by a halt in the development of the productive forces, the ICC, incapable of a complete denial of reality, in its own pamphlet on decadence (1981) asserted that decadence (in capitalism as in pre-capitalist modes of production) "cannot therefore be characterized by a total and permanent halt in growth of the productive forces, but, rather, by a definitive slackening of that growth." The conclusion that the comrades of the CDP have reached, after a thorough investigation of the actual development of capitalism in the twentieth century, is that the theory of decadence, either in the form elaborated by the progenitors of the ICC or by that organization itself cannot result in an understanding of the trajectory of capitalism since 1914. Moreover the disconnect between the theory of decadence and the reality of capitalist development, apparent throughout the

twentieth century, becomes especially striking in the period since 1945.

Let us start by following the main argument of the CDP concerning the theory of decadence. The theory of decadence, with its vision of a definitive slackening in the growth of the productive forces, has two prongs: first that the outbreak of the imperialist world war in 1914, which marked the onset of capitalist decadence, was the result of the saturation of the world market such that the rapid growth of the productive forces characteristic of capital's ascendant phase was henceforth permanently blocked, a moment of economic crisis to which capital's only response could be war; second, that the continued existence of capitalism, now decadent, would be characterized by a ceaseless cycle of crisis-war-reconstruction and a permanent slackening in the growth of the productive forces, which could only be ended by proletarian revolution. The comrades of the CDP demonstrate that far from there being an economic crisis that provoked the war in 1914, "the figures show that the period preceding the first world war was not one of crisis, nor even one of economic slowdown. On the contrary, the years just before the outbreak of the war constituted on the world level, and notably for Germany, France, and England, a period of unprecedented economic development." (p.33) Moreover, the CDP also shows that in 1914, the possibilities for the continued development of capitalism were still enormous, both in terms of the existence of immense territories and huge populations still untouched by capitalist relations of production, and the fact that the real domination of capital was still in its infancy -- even in the most industrially advanced nations, where artisans, petty shopkeepers and peasants, not yet fully integrated into wage-labor, still constituted a significant part of the population. With respect to the growth of the productive forces since 1914, the comrades of the CDP clearly show that in comparison with the nineteenth century, the rate of growth in the twentieth has been faster! If the claim of a permanent slackening in the growth of the productive forces, the veritable basis of the ICC's conception of decadence, is to have any meaning, then the rate of growth since 1914 must be significantly less than the rate of growth of the productive forces during the ascendant phase of capitalism -- the bulk of which was in the nineteenth century. The figures provided by the CDP show that while the annual rate of growth for world production in the period 1800-1900 was 1.0%, the annual rate of growth for the period 1900-1995 was 2.7% -- almost triple! While the claims for a slackening in the growth of the productive forces were not unreasonable for the period between 1914-1945, with its two world wars and the great depression, for the period since 1945 only those unable to face reality could claim that such a slackening in the rate of growth of the productive forces has occurred. Indeed, the vertiginous advance of the real domination of capital over the past half-century, with its incorporation of vast territories and population into the wage-labor relation, a development which can be seen in the depopulated countrysides of Europe and in the teeming industrial metropolises of Seoul, Shanghai, and Bombay, is merely the

other side of the coin of the prodigious development of the productive forces during that same period.

The political implications of the CDP's repudiation of the ICC's theory of decadence are, however, staggering. Indeed, the CDP appears to recognize them: "What becomes of positions that find their bases in the theory of decadence (and therefore in the thesis of a halt in, or brake on, the development of the productive forces: positions against the unions, parliamentarism, national liberation struggles?" (p.46) In the ICC's theory, each of those class lines is integrally linked to a vision of decadence; a conception of capitalism no longer capable of developing the productive forces; a mode of production which has completed its "historic task." If capitalism had not reached the limits of its expansion in 1914, if it has continued to develop the productive forces, without any slackening, then don't we have to raise the possibility that "there have been durable reforms since 1914?" (p.46) And if such durable reforms have been possible, on what basis can we continue to insist that participation in the unions or in parliaments constitutes a crossing of the class line into the camp of capital? How can we continue to argue that support for national liberation struggles constitutes a betrayal of the proletariat and an enlistment in the camp of capitalism? After all, such positions were consonant with the struggle of the proletariat, the struggle for socialism, during the ascendant phase of capitalism -- or so Marx, Engels, and the first and second Internationals argued. If capitalism in the twentieth century has continued to develop the productive forces as it did in the nineteenth, then on what basis have the class lines been so thoroughly redrawn? The CDP correctly recognizes that their rejection of the ICC's concept of decadence raises questions about the class lines that revolutionaries have insisted separates the proletariat from its class enemy, but it does not -- at least in this pamphlet -- attempt to resolve the dilemma. For our part, the class lines defended by revolutionary Marxists since 1914 remain valid, but they must be uncoupled from a vision of decadence based on a halt or slackening in the growth of the productive forces, and uncoupled too from a vision of a capitalist mode of production no longer capable of conceding improvements in the standard of living of the working classes. We shall elaborate on this below.

According to the CDP, "the theory of decadence is based on the analysis of imperialism." (p.33) In rejecting the ICC's vision of the former, the comrades of the CDP are also led to reject the classic Marxist vision of the latter. Far from being inherent in the very logic of capital and its development, as Marxists have long maintained, the CDP asserts that "Imperialism (such as it existed until 1945) did not express the real basic tendencies of capitalism, but in reality constituted a brake on the extension of the capitalist mode of production, and led to an impasse." (p.36) The victory of the United States in World War Two, and then in the Cold War, shattered that impasse, and the subsequent development of capitalism, an expression of its "true" tendencies, according to the CDP, has proceeded in the direction of a "capital becoming 'a-national'" in which the

very "framework of the nation-state, from an economic point of view, is transcended." (p.45) -- the very antithesis of imperialism as it has been understood by Marxists. If imperialism, as it incontestably presided over the policies of European states in the period leading up to 1914, was not an expression of the developmental "logic" of capital, then what accounts for such a phenomenon? The answer of the CDP deserves serious consideration: "If imperialism is not an inherent tendency of capitalism, it is necessary to explain why it developed. There is probably no single factor to explain that phenomenon, but it would seem that the dominant factors are linked to a backwardness and a relative autonomy of the superstructures with respect to economic conditions; a confrontation between economic development and the persistence of backward superstructures, and the persistence of a significant agricultural sector"(p.36)

In itself, the CDP's acknowledgement that the economy doesn't explain everything, its implied repudiation of the crude economic determinism that presides over so much of Marxist theory, its recognition of the active role of factors such as politics and culture (the "superstructures") in the shaping of history, are a welcome and necessary corrective to the dominant strains of Marxist thinking. But if its position on imperialism at first sight seems a rejection of such a schematic approach of history, closer consideration reveals quite the opposite. For the comrades cling to a vision of a quasi-mechanical "logic" of capitalist development which explains the unfolding of all historical events (except when it doesn't!); a logic from which they claim imperialism was a deviation. Such a conception smacks of a teleological philosophy of history more in keeping with Hegel's than with a Marxist analysis, which is more sensitive to the aleatory, the contingent, in history, and which recognizes that a historical trajectory always contains several possibilities, and that its result is only appreciable a posteriori. The CDP on the other hand, argues that capital has an "historic mission" to create the world market, and to subject the world and its population to capitalist relations of production -- what we would designate as the real domination of capital. The teleological overtone is clear here. It is one thing to say that the outcome of capitalist development has been the real domination of capital; quite another to impute to it a "mission." As a metaphor, Marx's reference to a mission is unimpeachable; but in a world suffused with Hegelian teleology and philosophy of history, and visions of economic determinism, it can be extremely dangerous.

The logic of capitalism is that capitalists are constantly seeking a higher profit, even in those cases where it can be demonstrated, again a posteriori, that this occurred at the expense of capitalism's "historic mission". We won't explain here again why imperialism and other phenomena which, in the CDP's view, were deviations from capitalism's logic, such as the protectionism preceding World War One, were in fact very much in concordance with it. We have analyzed quite extensively the circumstances in which the incentives for imperialism and

capital-exportation were greater than those for industrial development at home (see: "The law of value and the world market", especially the last part, "ascendancy, decadence and the world market" in *Internationalist Perspective* #37, p. 17). The comrades of the CDP are of course not obliged to agree with our analysis but they should at least consider the arguments. In their hunt for higher profits, capitalists have often created obstacles to the spread and the health of capitalism and they continue to do so today. Indeed, the insoluble contradiction between the interests of capitalists and those of capitalism is an indelible feature of this mode of production, especially in its decadent phase, as we have argued before. So while the CDP is right when it sees a detrimental effect for capital in the imperialist policies of European powers in the period before 1914, where the construction of vast colonial empires, as the pamphlet shows, led to a slower rate of growth in England and France than in its capitalist rivals, and to see a linkage between imperialism and underdevelopment, imperialism was no less a facet of capitalism than the phenomenon of globalization that -- for the moment -- is dominant today. And while the CDP seems mesmerized by globalization, which for them is the antithesis of imperialism, it seems to us that they overlook the extent to which this "a-national" capitalism is, in fact, shaped and directed primarily by Washington, the extent to which it is a manifestation of American imperialism, albeit an imperialism very different from the traditional imperialism which the CDP identifies as the "essential" imperialism, as well as tendencies within a number of nation-states or proto-states (nation-Europe) to oppose globalization. As *Internationalist Perspective* has argued before, "the present imperialist policy does not revolve around territorial conquest, as in the past, but rather around the control of globalized capital." (*Internationalist Perspective* #36, p.11). It may be noted that this point was made in a debate on the war in Kosovo, to which the CDP contributed a text which argued that imperialism has remained unchanged: "The new war over Kosovo is but the continuation of those confrontations in which the great powers try, always in the name of their 'humanitarian' concerns, to expand their zones of influence." (*Internationalist Perspective* #36, p.8) If there is a coherence between this position and the one in the CDP-pamphlet, we don't see it.

The CDP insists that the evolution of the human species rests on a "law of progress," which determines a succession of modes of production, each one consisting of an ascendant and decadent phase, with the former permitting a development of the productive forces and the latter blocking that self-same development. It is this teleological vision of history that frames their view of capitalism's decadence. Since economic development manifestly was not blocked in the 20th century and is not today, the inevitable conclusion would be that capitalism's decadence has not yet begun. So it does seem that for the CDP the problem with the theory of decadence, as a halt or slackening in the growth of the productive forces, is merely its dating; that the ICC's insistence that 1914 marked the onset of decadence is wrong, and that capital has yet to

exhaust its possibilities for expansion, but that that point must necessarily come sometime in the future, that such a phase in which the growth of the productive forces permanently slackens is historically inevitable. If that is indeed the conclusion they draw, it is difficult to see how these comrades could --with any theoretical consistency -- today defend the class lines that have been the hallmark of the communist left.

While the CDP never claims this position explicitly, the effort to prove that “the era of war and revolution” has not yet arrived, despite what the history of the 20th century suggests, runs like a red thread through several texts in the pamphlet. The world wars fall under imperialism and have therefore nothing to do with the fundamental tendencies of capitalism, and the revolutionary wave is reduced to the October-revolution only, which itself is described as “utopian” and “voluntaristic” (p.67), to be explained “essentially by the particularities of Russia” (p.55). Today, China still “constitutes a gigantic field of expansion for capitalism” (p.46) and the terrain is still being prepared with “immense technological progress” which “will produce the general conditions for the advent of a new society,” (pp.51-52) that is, communism.

First something on this last point. It is one thing to assert that specific technological developments, e.g. the computer, can also facilitate the advent of communism, but it is quite another to see technology as neutral, a tool that can be utilized either by capital or by the proletariat. That would be to fail to see that the historically contingent, but specific, forms of technological development have themselves been impregnated by the capitalist law of value; that they are not neutral tools, but rather historically conditioned by the capitalist integument within which they have been generated, and from which they cannot simply be separated. It was just such a separation that Lenin sought to make concerning the Taylor system, which he believed could be appropriated for socialism, but through which the very dynamic of capital asserted itself.

Not only has the prodigious technological development which has transformed the human landscape over the past century been intimately linked to the spread of the real domination of capital, as the CDP asserts, but that very development has not simply favored the advent of communism, as the CDP also claims. Rather, that same technological development has also constituted the unleashing of barbarism on an unparalleled scale; it has let loose the destructive forces that have turned the twentieth century into a vast slaughterhouse, and that threaten to make the new century a graveyard for the human species. It is this side of the enormous technological development that capital has wrought which the pamphlet of the CDP ignores -- a development that has been disastrous for the human species. It is this very destructiveness of capital -- which since 1914 has afflicted the capitalist metropolises and not just the peripheries -- which led Rosa Luxemburg to insist that World War One placed humanity before the choice of socialism or barbarism. The epoch that opened in 1914 has

been one in which the continued development of capitalism threatens the very existence of the human species. It has been characterized by a destructiveness and barbarism not despite its continued technological progress, but precisely because of it! There is a straight line from Sarajevo 1914 to Sarajevo 1994. There is a firm link between the development of capitalist technology and the smokestacks of Auschwitz. It is decadent capitalism that is responsible for the shape and content of technological development in the 20th century and the orgies of destruction it unleashed. Their root-causes are not to be found in the weight of “backward superstructures” but in the fundamental change in the conditions of capitalist accumulation in the 20th century, which the CDP never analyzes from the point of view of Marxist value theory.

As we explained before in our series on “The Roots of Capitalist Crisis”, before the 20th century, there was a fundamental harmony between capitalist society and the productive forces, between the mode of production and its basic rule, the law of value. That doesn’t imply that capitalism did not experience crises. On the contrary, they were more numerous then, but they were mostly caused by a lack of development (bad years in agriculture, shortages of raw materials) or the still limited containment of capitalism’s intrinsic chaotic tendencies (speculation driven financial shocks). Insofar as they were caused directly by capitalism’s most fundamental contradictions, they remained limited in scope and impact. The overall conditions of scarcity of output in relation to effective demand and capitalism’s reliance on increasing absolute surplus value (appropriating more unpaid labor time) assured that, generally speaking, economic growth, employment and profit developed hand in hand. This slow, yet fairly harmonious growth, was buttressed by a balance between the creation of exchange value and of use value.

Only in the 20th century, when the real domination of capital, the specifically capitalist industrial mass production with its reliance on technology replacing human labor-power, became the prevailing method of production, did the creation of exchange value and of use value begin to follow widely diverging paths. The capacity to create use values --material wealth-- grew at a frantic pace, but the capacity to create exchange value could no longer keep pace. The condition of scarcity in relation to effective demand was eroding and with it, the conditions for capital’s valorization. The value of existing capital is conditioned by its capacity to generate and realize new value. The imbalance between the enormous mass of existing, accumulated, capital and the value it generates and productively realizes cannot keep widening without making the valorization of total capital, not just part if its surplus value, impossible. There is but one “solution” to this: the balance between the value of existing capital and the value of newly created capital (which is also the balance between purchase and sale) must be restored through a massive devalorization of existing capital. This explains why decadent capitalism is so extraordinarily destructive: only

through the violence of deep depression and cataclysmic wars can this devalorization be accomplished.

The shortness of this description inevitably makes it somewhat schematic and we refer the reader to the crisis series and other texts in *Internationalist Perspective*. Also, we want to emphasize that this analysis explains in our view the general context of capitalist development in the 20th century but by no means all the particular and complex ways in which history unfolded. For instance, it does not adequately explain why World War One broke out in 1914, at a time of no open economic crisis, nor why the crisis took the specific forms it did in the '20's. But that doesn't mean that either event can be understood outside of this context.

How does our analysis square with the quote from Marx which the CDP emphasizes, the one in which he stated that "never has a society expired before it has developed all the productive forces which it is large enough to contain" (Preface to *The Critique of the Political Economy*)? Note that Marx says "expire", not "become decadent". But even so, if taken literally, this statement cannot be correct. It is demonstrably untrue for feudalism, which continued to develop agricultural productivity long after it expired as a political system and is even less conceivable concerning capitalism. It would mean that capitalism will continue to exist until it has exhausted every potential to accumulate at which point it would expire suddenly and spontaneously, without needing any help from the working class struggle. The capitalist mode of production is not conceivable without accumulation, without growth; it is synonymous to it. Furthermore, the exacerbation of its contradictions acts as a powerful impetus to raise productivity through technological development, since that is the way in which capitalists must try to escape from the declining rate of profit of total capital. Marx sometimes used a very broad brush to paint a picture which required some distance to be seen properly, for in the larger context of his theory it acquires a meaning that seems absent when seen up close, in isolation.

What the comrades of the CDP do not seem to grasp is that the tension between the capitalist mode of production and economic development cannot be understood as a condition that grows in a linear fashion, that results in a static, irreversible immobility. It is dynamic and must be analyzed as a dialectical movement of development and destruction that condition one another.

From the above, it may be clear that we think that both the real domination of capital and the general context of decadence should be taken into account to explain the validity of the revolutionary class positions. On the trade union-question for instance, it is the real domination of capital which explains why there no longer remains any space unconquered by the law of value in which large, permanent organizations can operate autonomously. It is decadence that explains why these union organizations, having become part and parcel of the fabric of capitalist society, are compelled to act against the interests of the working class, against the future of humankind.

If we have taken so much space to criticize the positions developed in the pamphlet of the CDP, it is because we think the debate is worth it. The comrades of the CDP have demolished the theory of decadence upon which the coherence of the ICC was based, revealing its theoretical vacuity. They have raised serious questions regarding the role of imperialism and the prospects for the overcoming of the nation-state. They have demonstrated in practice that there can be no "invariance of Marxism," that constant theoretical innovation, and, yes, revision, is inseparable from the development of Marxist theory. Perhaps most important of all, they have demonstrated an openness to discussion and debate, without which that development of Marxist theory will be impossible. *Que ne pas Faire?* should be read by all those who wish to participate in the renaissance of Marxism; they will not be disappointed.

Mac Intosh and Sander

A discussion network has been organized

. For many years an inhospitable climate has existed within the revolutionary milieu concerning the need to talk to one another, to have discussions between groups, to debate the burning questions facing our class. Each group or individual stuck to its own positions, withdrew into itself, without feeling any need to break its isolation, nor to question the reasons for it. The appeals of *Internationalist Perspective* for the participation of other groups or individuals in its debates, notably our appeal to discuss both the need for, and the content of, a new revolutionary platform, seemed to fall on deaf ears. It was only intermittently, through discussion meetings that we held approximately twice a year in Paris, that one could really feel that a need to discuss, to confront rival points of view, existed in a latent manner. However, in recent months, it seems that a change has really occurred in the revolutionary milieu. The clearest sign of that change has been the organization of a discussion network, first in the French language, and now in English too. In December 2000, we participated in a meeting in Paris to organize a "discussion network." Since then, a network in English has also been set up. With this article, we want to inform readers about the initial discussions that led to the organization of the network. It is still too soon to draw any conclusions concerning the results of the different discussions that have been generated in the network, a point to which we will doubtless return in future issues of *Internationalist Perspective*.

What is the 'discussion network' ?

The call for meetings to set up a discussion network was made by the Paris Discussion Circle (PDC). This group of militants, expelled, or having resigned, from the International Communist Current (ICC), has met regularly over the past two years to draw up a balance-sheet of the degeneration of the ICC, and to lay out the limits of the political positions of that organization. That work was concretized in the pamphlet *Que ne pas faire?* (See the critical review of that pamphlet in this issue.) Once that work of drawing up a balance-sheet was concluded, the militants of the PDC decided not to constitute themselves as another political organization, because they found that there were no satisfactory answers to the most important questions facing revolutionaries today. They decided, therefore, to make an appeal for the organization of a "discussion circle," so as to facilitate as broad as possible an exchange between revolutionaries on the issues that

confronted us, and to which no one -- neither group nor individual -- had as yet provided a satisfactory response. The technical possibilities provided by the Internet, together with regular meetings, permitted the process of discussion to develop internationally, and guaranteed the possibility of the participation of all its members.

Who is in the network?

The call for a meeting to organize such a network was addressed, at the international level, to every group or individual who wanted to engage in revolutionary struggle and to contribute to the development of revolutionary theory. That call generated a considerable interest, inasmuch as there were many who had participated in the first two meetings in Paris. Thus, we had been happy to see at the December meeting a number of old comrades with whom we had remained more or less regularly in contact (to cite only the groups: Robin Goodfellow, *Echanges*, the PDC), and to meet for the first time many other comrades (Cercle Social, *Aufheben* (a group from Britain). Still more comrades participated in the January meeting. These meetings demonstrated a real will and need to look beyond the divisions between groups, and the separations and clashes that had occurred in the past.

Certainly, most of the members of the network are experienced militants, whose very presence is indicative of the bankruptcy of the organizations from which they have emerged. The very organization of the network, however, indicates a will to go forward on the basis of the recognition that "no one is the holder of the truth." We hope that comrades who do not have a long militant past will also become part of the network, thereby contributing new blood to the revolutionary dialogue. The kinds of issues raised for discussion in the network, and the comradely spirit and open mindedness that characterize its members, constitute conditions extremely favorable to the birth of a new generation of revolutionaries.

The originality of the network consists in the fact that militants who do not necessarily share the same political positions are ready to debate together. That constitutes an important change with respect to the situation that has existed until now, in which political discussions took place essentially within political groups, while polemics prevailed between them. Several efforts were made in the past to break with that

lamentable tradition. The group *Communisme ou Civilisation* had launched an initiative for a common publication, the *Revue Internationale du Mouvement Communiste*. A discussion circle had existed for several months in Paris a few years ago, but it then dissolved. *Internationalist Perspective* had then organized -- for several years -- discussion meetings in Paris with the principle objective of creating a site where the diversity of positions in the revolutionary milieu could be expressed without censorship. Nonetheless, a real debate on the burning questions was not generated, and our call for a discussion to write a new revolutionary platform (See *Internationalist Perspective* 23 and 25) received little response.

With the organization of the network, everyone acknowledges, for the first time, or so it seems, that a constructive discussion can take place between comrades sharing a minimal number of common principles (internationalism, the necessity for communist revolution). The content of the principles that must be held in common was itself the object of considerable discussion. It was finally decided to renounce the adoption of certain criteria that had been initially proposed, such as the rejection of substitutionism (rejection of the seizure of political power by the party) and the denunciation of anti-fascism, out of concern that insisting on them would have prevented the participation of revolutionaries who had something to contribute to the network, in spite of their fixation on the question of the party or their positions on anti-fascism.

The idea that the network must only consist of individuals, and must therefore reject the participation of political groups, was also discussed. Most of the comrades present at the meetings thought that the existence of the network was in no way incompatible with the existence of political organizations, and defended the idea that the network remain open to groups constituted around a platform as well as to individuals. It is a question of different moments of the same work of theoretical clarification and elaboration.

What orientation for a discussion network ?

Just as there existed an evident correspondence between the feelings of certitude, of unwillingness to question positions, and the absence of discussion between groups in the past, so too the organization of the network is explicitly based on the recognition that important theoretical work is an urgent task at the present moment. The network has set as its task the discussion of burning questions, that neither the Communist Left, nor those who claim its heritage, could really comprehend. These basically concern the understanding of the evolution of capitalism in the course of the twentieth century on the one hand, and the prospects for revolution today on the

other. How has capitalism developed since World War Two? What are its major contradictions today? What role has war played in that development? Can one still envisage a world war today? Is capitalism moving ineluctably towards a breakdown or -- after each recession -- is it capable of restarting the machine of accumulation? How can the working class, whose composition has radically changed since the 1960's, develop a consciousness of the possibility of transforming society? What can we say today about the society to which we aspire, communism?

In the months since its beginning, the debates in the network have focused on economic questions and the issue of fascism and anti-fascism during World War Two. It might seem astonishing that the question of the attitude to be adopted by revolutionaries towards fascism has generated such a heated discussion now. However, the network is ready to consider and to discuss the arguments of those who put in question the positions of the Communist Left on this issue. The facility of communication in the network does not change the fact that theoretical work is difficult, time consuming and laborious. Substantial theoretical contributions will be necessary to advance the debates. We can only hope that the network will be capable -- on this point, as on other points of discussion -- of producing a higher synthesis than that contained in the texts produced in the past.

Conclusions and perspectives

From a technical point of view, the network was in the beginning essentially Francophone, even if comrades speaking other languages had indicated an interest, and had participated in meetings. However, there very rapidly appeared a need and a possibility of parallel networks in other languages. A proposition for an English language network was made by *Internationalist Perspective* and received an enthusiastic response. An English language network has now been organized. In the medium term, we can envisage networks being organized in Spanish, as well as in Asia and Eastern Europe. We need to think about how communication between these networks can be assured so as to create a really international discussion.

In conclusion, the dynamic that animates the discussion networks reflects both the needs and possibilities of the hour. The need to go forward, which proceeds through discussion, and the confrontation with the positions of others; the possibility of discussing at a really international level, in a joint and virtually simultaneous manner. An unprecedented opportunity for the development of Marxist thinking exists thanks to these networks. Let's seize it!

Adèle

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