

INTERNATIONALIST PERSPECTIVE



Imperialism Today

The War Against Iraq

Why Was There –So Far- No World War 3 ?

On Negri And Hardt's « Empire »

Theses On War

Behind The Surge Of The Extreme Right In Europe

Wither The Anti-Globalisation Movement ?

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The Gulf War of 2003



Judging from the preparations that are already under way, the American government is dead serious about its intent to invade Iraq.

As we write this, US logistical personnel are swarming over the Gulf region. In Persian Gulf states such as Bahrein, Oman and Qatar, munitions are being stocked, harbors are being prepared for the arrival of war ships, bombers and fighter planes are amassed. The HQ of the US' Central Command has been moved to the region. Several invasion plans have been drawn up and leaked to the press. The Defense Intelligence Agency has established a long list of Iraqi targets for air attacks. President Bush has announced that preemptive attacks and limited nuclear strikes are from now on an integral part of US military doctrine. Kurdish leaders and Iraqi opposition groups have been told that "payback time" is approaching. Turkey has been warned that it cannot count on US aid to stem its devastating economic crisis unless it cooperates. Saudi Arabia has been threatened too, with highly publicized hints that there are people in the Pentagon just itching to occupy its oilfields.

US capital feels it's on a roll since 9/11. Having been handed the ideal pretext, it has exploited the tragic fate of the thousands who perished in the terrorist attacks to unleash a barrage of jingoist propaganda, to establish an almost permanent climate of fear in the population in order to promote feelings of helplessness and support for military action, to strengthen its repressive powers and eliminate legal obstacles to it, to intimate striking workers,

to hide the real cause of the economic slide, and to advance its geo-strategic interests worldwide. There is no question that the US possesses overwhelming military superiority over anybody else. What restrains its use in the first place is the risk of a loss of social control. But 9/11 has opened a window of opportunity which allows Washington to get away with murder -- literally. It fully intends to do so, before that window closes again.

The pretexts to launch yet another war are paper thin. An early attempt to link the regime in Baghdad to the terrorists responsible for 9/11 -the so-called Prague-connection- collapsed. The State Department's own report on worldwide terrorism in 2001 does not mention a single terrorist act for which Iraq is deemed to be responsible. Far from us to deny that the rulers of Baghdad are ruthless butchers. They are gangsters like all the rest of them, those in the White House included. It just so happens that this secular regime and the Islamist terrorists are rivals rather than collaborators. As for the military threat emanating from Iraq, it can't be that great since it has been unable to import new tanks, planes, missiles and other military hardware since the Gulf war, and UN-inspectors declared in 1998, just before they were withdrawn on orders from Washington, that Iraq's nuclear program and its missile capacity were destroyed. It is true that Iraq possesses anthrax and other deadly biological material. It received them from the US in the '80's, even after it was confirmed in 1988 that Iraq had used chemical weapons against civilians. Oh well, Saddam was an ally then. And now the US claims it must invade Iraq because it possesses some substances given to it by the US! Iraq, feeling cornered, may at some point allow UN-inspectors to return but the

US already has declared that this would not derail its war plans, contradicting its claim that this is all about preventing Iraq from acquiring weapons of mass destruction.

No one of course has more weapons of mass destruction than the US and it does not hesitate to use them. They're not all high tech. The economic sanctions against Iraq for instance, which killed at least half a million infants according to a UN-study, are a form of mass destruction through deprivation, the most commonly used weapon of mass destruction in capitalism's arsenal. But rarely, very rarely, is the immense suffering of regular people as a result of capitalism's imperialist games even mentioned in the debates about the impending war in the media, Congress or other forums of US capital. Half a million of Iraqi dead? That's just a number for these people, and one that evokes much less emotion than the one indicating the latest swing of the Dow Jones index. In a debate of 'experts' on CNN about one of the proposed strategies for the invasion, the so-called 'inside out'-option that would begin with the bombardment and conquest of Baghdad, nobody said a word about the implications for the more than 4 million inhabitants of this city. In their polite, soft spoken way, these talking heads contribute to the dehumanization of the enemy, a necessary ingredient of war preparation, just like Randall Graham and many other 'evangelist' leaders who have launched a vicious campaign against the Islamic religion. They cannot claim ignorance about the looming mass destruction. Classified Pentagon documents have been leaked which estimate a death-toll of 10 000 civilians and the outbreak of epidemics as a result of the bombing of water purification stations and other infrastructure (according to a Unicef-report, in the first Gulf war such bombings indirectly killed hundreds of thousands of Iraqi's, "particularly children").

While such objections against the war are seldom heard, others are. Many point to the risk of destabilization in the Middle East, as corrupt and weak pro-American regimes would come under heavy pressure, to the probability of increased terrorism, to the need, after the war, to keep an army of occupation and a colonial-style management in Iraq for a long time, to the danger of Iraq falling into pieces and the implications thereof for neighboring countries, to the risk that an unprovoked American attack might be seen by other nations such as India as a green light to do the same and so on. These arguments come from within the capitalist class, from people such as Brent Scowcroft, the national security advisor under Bush senior. They are also said to be voiced within the US government, by secretary of State Colin Powell and CIA-director George Tenet. Circumstances may yet change so as to strengthen their hand. But for now, the war perspective has the upper hand, in the government as well as in both ruling parties.

Given that the risks are both so great and obvious, the question is what Washington thinks it will gain. The war in

Afghanistan has already yielded substantial benefits to American imperialism. It is now militarily implanted in all seven 'Stans', including Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan which have large oil and gas reserves. Russia has not objected to this. In the short term, Moscow is banking on closer relations with the Western powers. After the installation of an American sponsored regime in Baghdad, Iran would be the only remaining anti-American country among the big oil producers. But it would be surrounded by American allies and become the next target for military pressure. In this way, the US is weaving a web of control over the world's oil supply.

The implications are both economic and geo-strategic. It is expected that the demand for oil from the Middle East, which possesses two thirds of the world's oil reserves, will double in the next 20 years. By strengthening its political-military control over the region, the US would assure a steady oil-supply for its own economy. At the time of the previous Gulf war, the US imported only 10 % of its oil from the Middle East but because of the relative depletion of its own reserves, this figure is expected to rise steeply. Other countries, such as Japan, China and most of Europe, are even more dependent on Middle Eastern oil. By establishing a strong control over the oil spigots, the US would also be in a position to cripple them economically at will. It would be a factor that for instance China could not ignore when it's casting a greedy eye across the Taiwan straits.

The war against Iraq would be a huge cost for the American economy but it needs a stimulus badly. Its private sector, wrestling with overcapacity, falling profits and a large debt-overload, cannot provide such a stimulus and the Federal Reserve has already lowered interest rates so much that it risks running out of ammunition. So the stimulus can only come from a return to vast deficit spending and nothing justifies that better, for the capitalist class, than war. There is a remarkable correlation between wars in the Middle East, the accompanying oil price hikes, and economic slumps. At first sight the latter are caused by the former but in each case, the economic problems preceded the war. The oil price hikes made them worse but especially so for the countries that lacked energy sources themselves. Less so for oil-rich countries like the US who improved their global competitive position. The rising price of a particular commodity is never in itself the cause of deterioration of the global economy. The buyers lose but the sellers win, there is a transfer of surplus value but it's a zero-sum game unless the winners spend their windfall profit less productively than the money would have been spent if it had remained in the pockets of the buyers. In the case of Middle Eastern oil, much of the extra profits resulting from the price hikes ended up in the US. Saudi-Arabia alone invested roughly 700 billion dollars in the US economy. About 80 % of the costs of the last Gulf war were paid by America's allies, mainly Saudi-Arabia and Kuwait. In economic terms, these countries 'bought' the American war effort and paid for it by taxing

their customers with a higher oil price -- in dollars. Not a bad deal for US capital.

The economic sanctions against Iraq are another smart business deal for the US. All the money resulting from Iraqi oil sales, on which restrictions have been gradually lifted, are deposited in a bank account in New York, administered by the Security Council. Money is disbursed from that account for Iraqi imports, only with the permission of the US, and it goes almost exclusively to foreign companies, many of them American. It goes without saying that if the sanctions were lifted, the present Iraqi government would stop all imports from the US and would make oil exploration deals with European and Russian capitals. That's why the Europeans and the Russians have been pressing for lifting the sanctions while the Americans have resisted this. It wants to assure that Iraq has a regime that's loyal to the US before the sanctions are ended.

We are not suggesting that all wars and political crises in the Middle East are constructed by the US to improve its competitive position. Sometimes, this factor was more important in triggering these wars, sometimes less so. But the roots of these conflicts are more complex; America's goals are wider, the role of local imperialisms weighs heavily too, as do social pressures. But the ability of the capitalist rulers to exploit even those events which they have not machiavellistically created, should not be underestimated. US capital is now facing a serious worsening of global economic conditions. There is nothing it can do to prevent that, the cause is capitalism itself, the global overcapacity and falling rate of profit that result from its fundamental contradictions. Given that prospect,

the war against Iraq makes (capitalist) sense. The war would powerfully reinforce the 'safe haven'-effect (the flight of capital from all over the world to the US) and thereby re-inflate the American bubble (the overestimation of the value of American capital, which gives it purchasing power in exchange for nothing) at a time that its hot air is escaping at an alarming rate. This, and the probable rise of the oil price, would stimulate the global demand for dollars (oil is paid in dollars) and thus restore king dollar's hegemony. It might give the nationalistic propaganda-campaign that was so useful for capital since 9/11 new vigor and thereby strengthen capital's deadly grip on society, and represent an important step in the US imperialist designs.

But while the potential gains are great, so are the risks. It could all blow up in the US's face and lead to a diminished control, both over the geo-strategic game and over the working class. For the sake of the countless innocents who would be the victims in this war, we hope that the risk-averse among the rulers in Washington, will eventually prevail. But don't count on it. The war in Iraq, and other wars behind it, are likely because they are quite rational from a capitalist point of view. As several articles in this issue show, the inevitable prospect of a deepening crisis of the global capitalist economy makes the threat of mass destruction ever greater, despite the end of the cold war. Capitalism must be killed before it kills us.

Internationalist Perspective

(August 2002)

WHY WAS THERE (so far) NO THIRD WORLD WAR?

After the events of September 11 and the war in Afghanistan which followed it, a debate developed in the Internationalist Discussion Network on the significance of imperialism in today's world. The following text was written as a contribution to that debate. It has been expanded since it was posted on the Network's internet discussion list. It explains that, contrary to the claims of those who think that imperialism is dead or dying in the era of globalisation, it remains very much an integral part of capitalism. But it also concedes that the 'classic' Marxist explanations of this phenomenon have not been confirmed by history. Its central thesis is that the root-cause of imperialist war lies within the capitalist production system itself and that the pressure for an orgy of worldwide destruction is once again building. But imperialism and war are not merely capital's mechanical reflexes to the pressure from the productive forces. Different, complex factors shape the response of capitalism to that pressure and need to be taken into account to understand history. On the base of that analysis, the text probes the question: how will imperialism and war evolve in the future?

In the debate on imperialism, the question was raised: why was there (so far) no third world war? Has this danger completely disappeared together with the collapse of the Russian bloc? Given the fact that most of us in the network used to adhere to the 'classic' revolutionary Marxist position on imperialism, in either its Leninist or Luxemburgist version, in which a global interimperialist war is the logical product of the crisis of the capitalist system, and given the fact that history seemed to have confirmed this hypothesis twice, it is indeed an important question. Some have answered it by stating that imperialism, rather than being a characteristic of capitalism in its endstage, as Lenin and Luxemburg thought, was an expression of the weight of the past on the capitalist class, and that since the last world war and especially since the collapse of the Russian bloc, the capitalist class, pushed by the growing interdependence of global capital, has rid itself of this infantile disorder. Looking at today's reality, the perspective of global war between the different developed capitalist nations or between them and a coalition of weaker nations, seems indeed highly improbable.

Lenin and Luxemburg, looking at the reality of their time, at the frenzied colonial conquests, the rise of nationalism and protectionism and the outbreak of the first world war, thought they saw the endgame of capitalism. In hindsight they were clearly mistaken, at least in any immediate sense (I think that terms like 'endstage' and 'final crisis' reflect a mechanistic view of history and I look forward to the day when they can be used with justification -that is, after the fact). But they were right on the fact that they were not witnessing a passing fad in capitalism's life, that a major shift was taking place, that capitalism had entered a phase of ferocious destructiveness. Indeed, in the relatively short time since they formulated their theories, war has created more casualties than in all of human history up to then. They were also right in realizing that economic competition, in times when the economy does not provide enough room for it, tends to become military competition. Capitals do

not tend to gently fade away into the night, they fight to survive, at the expense of humankind.

So why then has the threat of world war receded, while the economic contradictions have worsened? I think it is important in this discussion to distinguish, on the one hand, the underlying build-up of the need for a massive devalorization of capital from which the urge to make war ultimately springs, and, on the other, the way society, the classes, react to this impetus coming from the development of the productive forces.

Capitalism's Need for Destruction

The first is a given. Because of the insoluble nature of capitalism's contradictions, it is predictable that the gap between the value of the existing capital and the value that is newly created and realized, will grow to a point that it becomes impossible for the first to postpone massive devalorization, a collapse that is ultimately good for capital but bad for capitalists. Capital cannot maintain its value if it does not participate, directly or indirectly, in the creation and realization of new value. We have analyzed elsewhere how overdevelopment creates obstacles to both. The hallmark of capitalist decadence is not that there is permanent stagnation or no development of the productive forces but that periods of massive violent destruction become an integral, essential part of its 'life' cycle. It is a given that they must reoccur because the cycle of value demands it and the proportion of capital that must be devalorized, of value that must lose its value to relieve the pressure on the creation and realization of new value, grows in every expansive period. Crisis alone therefore, does not suffice to accomplish the necessary devalorization, hence industrially organized military destruction must be in some way or other part of the accumulation process.

Maybe the hypothesis could be entertained that the needed devalorization could be accomplished through the crisis-process alone, so that war could be avoided. But violence certainly could not be avoided. Such a descent into depression would be an extremely messy, chaotic affair, with enormous upheavals, even in the absence of proletarian revolution. Given the nature of capitalism, it's hard to conceive that this would not lead to war. In any case, the capitalist class would want to harness all the inevitable unrest, to canalize it into a struggle against a common enemy, so that it would already have a strong incentive for war from this need alone. So as long as capitalism continues to exist, periods of wide scale destruction will reoccur, each time more massively. This is a predictable, 'mechanical' reaction to the underlying pressure of the productive forces. But there is nothing mechanical about the forms that this destruction takes, nor about its timing. These are to a large extent influenced by the understanding of the two main classes of their

situation, of the stakes, of the possibilities, the perspectives, an understanding which is itself a product and an agent of history.

The overdevelopment of the productive forces in relation to the straightjacket of the capitalist relations of production always leads to the same combination of roadblocks: a structural impossibility of the capitalist market to follow the pace of growth of the productive forces, and the tendential shrinking of the rate of return on capital resulting from the increasing technification of -and thus labor-elimination in production. If history were a mechanical process, it would go through repeated cycles of crisis-war-new expansion. Despite the claims of some, it has not done so. Before world war one, although there were numerous signs that the above mentioned roadblocks were beginning to form, there was no open crisis, no depression.

So it's important to see the way the capitalist class understands its world not as an autonomous factor but neither as a mechanical reflex to the state of its economy. In regard to its policies of imperialism and war, several factors shape that understanding. Let's briefly look at the main ones.

The Weight of the Past on the Capitalist Class

Throughout history wars have been fought for conquest, pillage and theft, to increase the power and wealth of the rulers. The bourgeoisie inherited the bellicose traditions of the previous managers of state power and carried them on with gusto, there was no breaking point. Even the wars the bourgeoisie fought to establish its political rule and to forge their nations, extended into or were interwoven with imperialist conquest and interimperialist conflict. For the bourgeoisie therefore, war for conquest presented itself as a normal, natural course of action, not just when faced by insoluble economic contradictions, but especially then. This is especially the case as long as the capitalist class has only established its 'formal domination' over society. The weight of the past recedes as capitalism gradually extends its real domination over society (as it becomes adult, so to speak), and brings its methods of geo-strategic control more in harmony with its economic modus operandi. In this sense Negri and Hardt are right when they write that 'imperialism' as it has been usually understood and as they narrowly define it - territorial expansion of the nation-state, the creation of colonial relations...- no longer characterizes capitalism today. Negri and Hardt think imperialism no longer exists at all which I think is a mistake (see the critique of their "Empire"-thesis, elsewhere in this issue). The urge of capitals to survive through conquest, pillage or physical elimination of the competition, has not disappeared but such tactics only make sense when the capitals concerned see no other

means to survive, or when the opportunity is created by the collapse or weakening of central state power.

Does that mean that 'imperialism' survives, but only in the periphery of global capitalism? That's a question which will be addressed in the second part of this text. But it seems quite obvious that for the most developed capitals, territorial conquest and colonial type of control is no longer part of their arsenal, as a result of the evolution of the productive forces whose needs have become antithetical to such forms of control, and of the evolution of the capitalist class' understanding of these needs. But imperialism is wider than the definition of Negri and Hardt. The weight of the past, the ruthless traditions of all ruling classes continue to live on in the capitalist class and capitals continue to be national. Even as they operate more and more globally, and as tensions between the global economic structure and the narrowness of the national political structures increase -no global structures of political power have as yet replaced the nation-state nor are they emerging (which does not deny the importance of international organisations such as the IMF. But they are mainly instruments of the US's global domination. Even the WTO, which has sometimes ruled against the US in trade disputes, serves the same purpose. Its arbitration aims to prevent escalating trade wars, and thus to maintain order in a system that benefits American capital in the first place). The emergence of the European Union seems an exception, but rather than expressing a new, supra-national structure, the EU is an attempt to forge a new, more potent national entity, able to compete with US capital and to challenge its domination. The goals remain the same. For profit and power, capitals use all the economic, political and military means at their disposal, but these means have changed and are no longer used as they were in the past.

Experience Counts

A second factor is the capitalist class' knowledge of its economy. While always limited by its inherently competitive and therefore partially blinded point of view, this knowledge has developed greatly over the course of its history, both as a result of experience and of scientific research. It is as much a material factor explaining history as the state of the economy itself. Based on it, the capitalist class makes decisions which can sharpen or soften its economic contradictions, give it a shot in the arm or shoot a bullet through its knee. While it is true that the capitalist class also lost knowledge of its economy because under real domination almost all economic research became directly tied to the narrow goal of increasing profits for this or that capital, while the early 'classic' bourgeois economists looked deeper and at the global picture, it's also true that its earlier lack of experience led to a dogmatic approach with sometimes disastrous results. Empiricism and dogmatism go hand in hand. The incapacity to go beyond the first leads to the second. That is why the capitalist class often clung to policies that

worked in a given set of circumstances even when these circumstances had changed. That is why it hung on to the gold standard and to rigid balanced budget-policies when their effects had become counter-productive. That is why it sought protection in protectionism (which had fostered industrialization in many cases in the 19th century) when its interests demanded precisely the opposite. It was no coincidence that both world wars were preceded by periods of increased protectionism. These sharpened the economic contradictions and limited the options to the point of making war inevitable.

Protectionism and imperialism are linked. While the second is aimed at enlarging a national capital's economic territory and the first at defending that territory, both express the same territorial logic. Experience taught the capitalist class the dangers of unbridled protectionism and of other policies that had outlived their usefulness, but there was more to it than just experience: as capital's real domination progressed and capitalism created its own, specifically capitalist technology, its own biopolitical structures of power and control as integral parts of the network of value relations that came to characterize society as a whole, it stands to reason that its technical skills of economic management also vastly improved, both at the micro and macro level. Keynesianism should be seen in that light. It is not a policy or ideology among many, it is not something the capitalist class has retreated from or is questioning in any serious way. Keynes helped to free capitalism from dogmas of its past, by explaining how the levers of fiscal and monetary policies can soften contractions and rein in too rapid expansions. While the question of how to apply his principles is an endless source of debate, only the most rabid ideologues want to throw them away and leave everything to the free market. Keynes' name has been wrongly identified with the ideology advocating direct state possession of a large chunk of the productive forces. While the latter uses Keynesianism as justification, it is itself an expression of the same outdated logic that inspired imperial conquest and protectionism, equating power and wealth with sovereignty, direct ownership. Although this ideology was fueled by the expansion of state-capitalism and had its material base within the state bureaucracies and the social-democratic political apparatus linked to them, who sought more power through an internal conquest of the economy, it is not identical to state-capitalism. The retreat from such an ideology, whether in the name of neo-liberalism or of 'third way-ism', is not a retreat from Keynesianism or from state-capitalism. It rather shows a maturation of state-capitalism, a fine-tuning of control and regulation, a better understanding of market forces and therefore a more efficient management of them. But I digress...

The Cost-Benefit Analysis Of War

Thirdly, the capitalist class' understanding of war itself, the cost-benefit analysis it makes of the undertaking. Obviously in this too, the weight of the past, experience and knowledge play a role. It's also obvious that the cost-benefit analysis can differ greatly between capitals. If the existing geo-strategic order works to its benefit, a capital has no incentive to change it drastically. If it is winning in economic competition, it has no incentive to escalate to military battle. The incentive is the strongest for the losers, for those who have lost and want to reverse that loss, for those who are economically hitting the wall and see potential military weakness in their competitors. Its earlier loss, as well as its need for a wider market, changed the cost-benefit analysis of German capital before the world wars. Its gradually increasing economic weakness vis a vis the West made Russian capital cling to a war strategy (though it never found one that worked). And so on down to the hungry African tribe which has fewer cattle but more machetes than the neighboring tribe.

Cost-benefit analyses, since they can be heavily influenced by illusions rooted in the past, by inexperience and wishful thinking, are often wrong. In regard to the wave of imperialist conquests in the late 19th century for instance, it is highly debatable whether the profits they generated justified the costs of their undertaking. What seems certain is that the economic role of the new conquests for the European imperialist nations, as market for their surplus commodities and outlets for their surplus capital, was much too marginal to accord it the crucial role that Lenin and Luxemburg thought that it had ("In spite of protective tariffs, the industrial, imperialist nations of Europe continued to trade predominantly with each other" -Cameron, Economic History of the World, p. 301). Both theories were rooted in mistaken economic analyses and are of no use in understanding either the imperialism of the past or that of today.

Obviously, the more that is known about the potential costs and benefits, the more accurate a cost-benefit analysis can be. Before world war one, few people could really fathom what an industrial war would be like, although the bloody American civil war had given the world a foretaste. After the millions of casualties were buried in 1918, a cry went out all over the earth: 'never again!'. Although this cry was heartfelt, deeply and widely, it did happen again after no more than 22 years and of course it was much worse, just because of the industrial-technological development that had taken place since then alone. Which shows the limit of what experience teaches, both to the capitalist class and to society as a whole. Nevertheless, knowledge of the potential destruction is a factor that must be taken into account. Destruction as such is the function that war has for capital as a whole, it serves to restore the conditions for accumulation, but it is not the conscious goal of the warring capitalists. The first reason why the cold war never became the hot war was the knowledge of both sides that the costs would be almost surely unacceptably high, that each side would very likely suffer a thousand

Hiroshimas and maybe many more. It is very difficult to draw up a positive cost-benefit analysis in such conditions. Even though the blocs came very close to nuclear confrontations at one or two moments, they pulled back after staring into the abyss. The cold war was eventually won by the West, less by waging war than by developing the technology of war so that the possibility that global war would not necessarily spell total destruction, that there could be a winner, gradually increased. But as I said, the world did come close to nuclear war; experience and technical knowledge are not a guarantee against the madness of capitalism. During the Korean conflict and the Cuban-crisis, the leaders of the blocs were cool-headed enough to step away from the brink. But the same push from the productive system for devalorization that feeds the urge for war, also brings to the helm of states and proto-states charismatic leaders with a bold vision, with burning ambition and supreme self-confidence, with a captivating voice and an unwavering sense of mission and purpose. In other words, raving madmen. Hitler is the prototype, though there are many others. To some extent, they represent the madness of capitalism, the alienation of its economy and politics from the needs of real people. But the blooming of Hitler's madness may also have expressed a loss of control, over the course of the war, of the German capitalist class as a whole, over the state and its war-machinery, which, propelled by the war dynamic, did not hesitate to sacrifice the interests of German capital for its course towards annihilation. The point is, once a global war is launched, all bets are off. The weight of the war-machinery on society can become such that all rationality goes out the window. That brings us to the next point.

The Proletarian Roadblock

The final, decisive factor in the understanding of the capitalist class of war is the consciousness of the working class. Capital needs the support, or at least the passive acceptance, of its workers to launch a war. Obviously, the more the war affects the life of the workers, the more crucial that support is. If the workers don't feel any impact of the war on their living and working conditions, their passive acceptance or even active support will be more easily obtained. The workers make a kind of cost-benefit analysis too, at least intuitively. Their own consciousness is a factor therein. The more self-awareness and thus self-confidence they have as a class, the less willing they will be to accept the consequences of the war, be it in the form of wage-eroding inflation or direct participation as conscripts in the army.

In the post-world war two period the capitalist class underestimated this factor, as the turmoil over the war in Vietnam made clear. Not coincidentally, the resistance against that war-effort occurred in a period of rising working class combativity. This illustrated the high risk

for the capitalist class of undertaking a major war effort when its working class is not ideologically defeated: it can lead to the weakening and even the unraveling of its authority. The only (momentarily) successful proletarian revolution –Russia 1917– was in large part a result of the rejection by the working class of the war effort. On the other hand, the danger of rising class struggle can be itself a major incentive to launch a war: when social turmoil is inevitable as result of the direction the economy is taking, the capitalist class often tries to harness the frustrations and anger of the population and direct it towards a foreign enemy in order to bind the nation together. But this backfires when the war is unsuccessful or drags on (the collapse of the Argentine military regime after the Falklands war is a case in point). The Vietnam-experience made the capitalist class in all industrial nations very cautious about limiting the impact of imperialist undertakings on its working class (the so-called Vietnam-syndrome). Negri argues that the experience of the workers struggles at the end of the '60's and the early '70's was the primary reason for the wave of technological change in the production process since then: in his view capital concluded that the Fordist organization of production made it too vulnerable to mass strikes, so it undertook a major effort to move beyond that phase of its organization of the productive apparatus. He overstates his case –many technological innovations would have taken place even if there would have been no class struggle– but he does have a valid point. It certainly rings true when applied to the war-technology. The desire to avoid direct consequences from military undertakings on the life of the working class, stimulated the development of high tech weaponry and the replacement by most industrialized nations of conscripts by highly trained professionals.

That change was quite successful. Recent wars like the Gulf war, Kosovo or recently Afghanistan had no impact whatsoever on the life of the working class, except of course in the countries where those wars took place. Still, that solves the problem for the capitalist class only in regard to limited wars. If and when the capitalist class feels compelled by its economic contradictions to intensify its war making, the combination of war and crisis remains a mix that can blow up in capitalism's face. The key is clearly the ideological control over the working class. But the more serious the war effort, the deeper that control must be. It's not enough to have popular support at the start of the war. What is needed to sustain a major war is that the working class has ceased to see itself as a working class, that its consciousness is drowned in the soup of the nation, of (capitalist) civilization. If that condition is not fulfilled, the class confrontations that the capitalist would hope to avoid through war, might happen with even greater intensity. Whether capitalism can achieve that destruction of class consciousness only by first defeating the working class in a series of battles of class against class or whether it can achieve it through the totalitarian pressure of capitalist civilization, the deep penetration of the law of value in all aspects of people's lives, the brainwashing social practices of alienated production and

alienated consumption...that is the big question I don't think anybody can answer with any certainty today. The capitalist class is well aware of this uncertainty; its practice shows that it would rather not take the risk.

What counts is the window through which the working class looks at its world; the narrative that explains it. Revolutionaries of the councilist or ultra-councilist school of thought think that eventually the force of the crisis will be such that the class struggle inevitably becomes that window, that narrative. I'm not so sure. History, and in particular the depression of the '30's, does not seem to confirm that thesis. What is inevitable is that the working class will see misery, that it will see horror. But through which window it will look at that horror, is not determined. That's why I think that what we do, can be terribly important. We need to develop a clear and true narrative and to use it as well as we can –I don't see what else we can do. If the working class does not recognize itself in that narrative, there is no direct action that can ignite the fire. But if it does recognize it, it can be powerful and contagious.

Class consciousness is not just about wages and the threat of unemployment. The working class looks at the world not only as workers but also as human beings. In its condition of being a working class it encapsulates the situation of humanity as a whole: powerful yet powerless, enslaved by the machine of its own creation, yet potentially capable to stop it at will. The capitalist class is also both powerful and powerless, but in a different way. It controls society yet is itself controlled by the blind pressure of the productive forces. To see the madness that this leads to, a class must have the distance of the powerless, but it must also have the potential power to stop it. Only the working class does.

So when it weighs, in its cost-benefit analysis, the risks of not resisting, it is not just the economic hardships that it is taking into account. The capitalist class has the power to increase the risks of resisting for the working class but it is essentially powerless to diminish the risks of not resisting. That severely limits its options and is probably the principal reason why there has been no third world war. The reasons why the Russian bloc collapsed were not just economic backwardness and the inability to keep up with the arms race. If the rulers of the Kremlin had felt free to play their military cards without risking the loss of social control, if the tolerance of the working class in regard to the direction in which the Kremlin was taking society would not have been so thin, who knows what the world would look like today?

Imperialism Today

Today, American imperialism is at the height of its power, despite the serious but not immediate threats to the economic strength on which it is based (the tendential hollowing out of its industry). No other nation or group of

nations has the economic incentive and the military capacity to seriously challenge its overwhelming dominance over the planet.

While I agree with MacIntosh's critique in this issue of the Global Empire-thesis of Negri and Hardt, who claim that interimperialist conflicts of interest between capitalist states are vanishing in a process of transformation of capitalism into a global superstate, it is nevertheless true that today, the main capitalist powers no longer seek territorial expansion (it's rather their weaker neighbors who would like to be annexed by them, as the waiting list for entry in the EU shows) and have, for a variety of reasons, in the first place the increasingly global, interdependent, nature of the capitalist economy, a commonality of interests which for the moment is stronger than their inevitable antagonism. There are no signs that any of the other main capitalist powers is considering, either in the short or in a longer term, a challenge to the military domination of the US. That does not mean however that their rivalry over influence in various parts of the world has disappeared. Rather, this rivalry takes other forms than military challenge or confrontation. I do not believe that recent conflicts such as in Bosnia or Afghanistan were an expression of interimperialist rivalry between the main powers through intermediaries. While they expressed interimperialist rivalry between the smaller, local powers, the intervention of the US and its allies expressed their common interest in maintaining a global order and stability which are beneficial to them all.

This global geo-strategic order was challenged by capitals who had the economic incentive (because of threats to their present or future profits such as falling oil-prices and dwindling oil-reserves) and the social incentive (war and nationalism as means to canalize and subdue the unrest in society) and who gambled that they had the military means for imperialist conquest, while thinking that for the main powers, mainly the US, the economic incentive (the cost of war) and the social incentive (the 'Vietnam-syndrome') to not-intervene would be stronger than the incentive to intervene. They lost their gamble (Iraq and Serbia may even have been intentionally mislead by the West to make a show of force by the latter possible) so that, after the Gulf- and Kosovo-war there can be no doubt about the willingness of the main powers to maintain global geo-strategic order. The urge to challenge that order did not disappear, it rather increased, fed by the economic contradictions, but the demonstration by the main powers that any serious imperialist conquest would not be tolerated drove it underground, to transnational terrorism and to military preparation in the expectation of future conditions that would be more favorable for war.

9/11 provided for US capital the social-ideological conditions to vigorously pursue the remaining threats to the global order (the 'axis of evil' capitals and the factions that organize and promote terrorism) and, in the process, to strengthen its global hegemony, and to establish stronger ideological-social control over society and the working



class in particular, using fearmongering and nationalist fervour to expand its repressive power. For other capitals, there are conflicting interests: on the one hand, they share the goal of global order, on the other, they do resent American hegemony, have their own economic interests and need different tools to maintain social control domestically --they cannot just adopt those tailored to American nationalism. So they want the 'rogue states' down but not taken out, they do not want a military solution to the Palestinian problem, they do not want total American hegemony. There are of course many shades and differences between them, but almost all share that basic conflicted attitude in their relations with the US.

Russia

Among those other countries, Russia has a unique position. It has lost the cold war but it has not been militarily defeated; it remains the only country on earth against whom the US does not have the military capacity to inflict a defeat without risking an unacceptable level of retaliation. That remains an important factor on the global chessboard and is not likely to change in the foreseeable future, not even if the US would be able to establish some kind of missile defense system.

In the short run, that does not seem so decisive. With the fall of the Stalinist regime, Russia has largely given up the territorial conquest-logic which other powers had abandoned much earlier (it has no desire to re-expand its borders although it does not want them to shrink further

and wants to remain the dominant outside power in most of the states previously belonging to the USSR and, given its military might, that is something other powers cannot simply ignore), and its economic deterioration and increasing dependency on the global market and foreign capital give it a stake in the global order. So in the short term, further integration in that global order and good relations with the US and other powers are more important to it than the possible gains of imperialist conquest. Furthermore, its social-ideological control over its working class remains too weak to give it a free hand in using its military cards.

China

For China, in the short term, the advantages of further integration in the US dominated global order are even greater. Arguably, no other country on earth besides the US is benefiting as much from globalization as China does. This year, it is expected to displace Japan as the biggest exporter to the US (only 10 years ago, Japan exported 4 times as much as China to the US). Globalization has a huge price for China too, especially for the many millions of farmers and workers dislocated by it, but there is no question that the formidable growth of the Chinese economy is fueled by foreign investment and foreign markets and remains absolutely dependent on them. On the other hand, Chinese capital has also serious and growing incentives for war: to control dangerous internal unrest with nationalism, to challenge the existing regional strategic order, to conquer important capital assets (Taiwan, Japan...). These incentives are likely to become even stronger in the future, as its economic choices narrow.

Like Russia and China, there are many other capitals who combine relative economic weakness with relative military strength and who are under increasing economic pressure. As long as the existing global order and the continued globalization brings more advantages to them than disadvantages, their imperialist tendencies are checked. However, should the global economy break down or suffer serious blows, their cost-benefit analysis of challenging existing regional balances through imperialist war would change.

The contradictions that push the global economy to a breakdown or at the very least to deep, wrenching crisis, are sharpening. While it remains impossible to predict a precise time-frame, the direction is clear. As more and more capitals will find it difficult or impossible to valorize, as the specter of global depression becomes more and more threatening, a different environment for imperialism will emerge.

Imperialism Tomorrow

The increasing economic pressure will affect the commonality of interests of the major capitalist powers and lead to an intensification of their interimperialist rivalry, fought on an economic terrain.

Euro versus dollar

A major battle will be fought between them over the movements of capital. The more the contradictions of the capitalist economy lead to overproduction, falling profitability and deflation, the greater the advantage of possession and control of the international currency becomes, because capital seeks refuge in it and thereby props up the value of the nation that emits it. Without this context, the prospect that the euro would become a second international reserve currency, would probably be no threat to US capital. On the contrary. Apart from the advantages of simplifying trade with European capital and reducing overhead costs etc, a system supported by two strong pillars would be more stable than one that has only one. But in the context of more and more capital facing increasing difficulties to valorize, the advantage of having monopolistic control over the international currency becomes enormous. Already now, to protect itself against devalorization, more and more financial capital is seeking refuge in dollar-assets, pushing up their price and thus their purchasing power. From 1995 to the spring of 2002, the euro (together with its predecessor, the ecu) has fallen by 31,5% in relation to the dollar, the yen by 23% and most other currencies by a lot more. To protect themselves against the loss of value caused by their falling currencies, more and more capitals price their commodities on the international market directly in dollars. More than 60% of international trade is already dollar-denominated today, and the percentage rises each year. But this too means that the US is buying commodities with its overpriced currency under their value and that all others are paying a surcharge. Furthermore, it allows the US to buy, year in, year out, hundreds of billions of dollars more from the rest of the world than it sells to it with impunity. There are disadvantages too - the US' share of world trade tends to shrink somewhat because the overpriced dollar makes its commodities less competitive- but they pale compared to the advantages which imply a huge transfer of value from the rest of the world to the US. Only the euro could potentially dethrone king dollar. It seems a long way from doing so but that could change. In any case, a fight is on which would intensify in deteriorating global economic conditions and erode the commonality of interests between the US and Europe and affect the global environment for imperialist conflict.

Secondly, the worsening economic conditions may make it very difficult to avoid increasing fights over market access. Sometimes the impression is created that globalization has created a free world market but this is far from the truth. Tariffs and other obstacles have diminished but not disappeared. In March, the WTO stated that the agricultural subsidies paid out by the US and the EU alone cost other countries more than 250 billion dollars a year in lost markets. As the recent American decision to impose

new steel tariffs illustrates, even in today's relatively calm economic environment, even the most 'enlightened' defenders of free trade have not lost the inclination to protect their domestic market, regardless of the global consequences. The rejection of protectionism remains relative and 'might makes right' is still a stronger rule than all those agreed upon in the framework of the WTO. In a much worse economic environment this tendency would become stronger and further erode the commonality of interests between the most developed capitalist powers and between them and the weaker ones. It is conceivable that deepening crisis would lead to the formation of trade blocs protected by walls of tariffs (they exist already to some extent) which would diminish the incentives of other capitals outside of them to place their integration in the global order above their other interests, including imperialist interests.

The EU's Weakness

One can wonder why the EU, in its quest to forge a unified state from the heartlands of Europe, so far has made no attempts to give its emerging superstate a military component at the level of its economic might. On the one hand, Europe seems to follow a different strategy from the US. It saves itself a huge burden by not spending as much on its armed forces and as long as its geo-strategic interests coincide to a large extent with those of the US, that seems like the smart thing to do. On the other hand, Europe today does not even possess the capacity to intervene in its own region in a rapid and sizable way without American logistical support, as the wars in the Balkans have shown. This dependence on the US seems contradictory to the desire for autonomous power implicit in the European unification project. Even quite apart from the possibility that Europe and the US might one day become military rivals, the capacity to act on its own to maintain order in its 'own neighborhood' is a minimal requirement to give the EU credibility as a geo-strategic power. That it does not have this capacity and doesn't seem on the verge of acquiring it, seems less a strategy than a reflection of its political weakness and heterogeneity. That Europe's unification has come as far as it did is already quite amazing. I don't think many people could have imagined, say in 1980, that we would see Russian capital giving up Eastern Europe and rid itself of Stalinism, and European capital creating a common central bank and a common currency and transferring more and more power from national to European institutions. It was economic pressure which forced the capitalist class to adopt such once unthinkable reforms. In the case of Europe, the economic advantages of unification are obvious and the faster it would proceed in that direction, the better it would be for European capital. But apart from the fact that there are in each country factions of capital who have economic reasons to resist unification, we cannot underestimate the weight of the past. Their history of conflict, the many wars these nations have fought against each other, are still embedded in their national "consciousness". Britain in particular, once the mightiest capitalist nation on earth, is the prey of

conflicting impulses: it cannot live outside Europe but it cannot live within it and seeks a counterweight to it in its 'special relationship' with the US. Other nations to a lesser degree suffer from the same contradiction. This cannot bloc the path towards unification but it makes it very difficult and much slower than the common interests of European capital would require. Meanwhile, the gap in military capacity with the US grows wider and wider and the economic interdependence between the EU and the US continues to grow. This makes it seem unlikely that the US and the EU would one day form opposing geo-strategic blocs. Unless at some point Europe would seek to compensate for its military weakness by seeking an alliance with Russia, which would likely meet stiff resistance from the countries formerly under Russian domination. Today such a scenario seems farfetched, albeit not entirely impossible.

Crisis And War-Fever

But let us now examine the consequences of a deep global economic crisis on the imperialist impulses of other countries. The worsening economic conditions would be felt most acutely in the periphery of the global order, where already now many capitals feel the knife of devalorization on their throats and many states are losing their authority over parts of their territories and their monopoly over the use of armies. Thus, the economic collapse will inevitably ignite more interimperialist fires, wars of states against states as well as so-called civil wars. Increasingly, the US and its main allies will face the dilemma whether to put them out or not. The line of what the sheriff of the global order permits will be constantly shifting. Given their own economic problems, the cost of intervening militarily will weigh increasingly heavily. The dispute over who should carry the burden will come on top of the other conflicts created by the economic crisis and further undermine the perception of commonality of interests between them. Furthermore the willingness of society and of the working class in particular to accept growing military intervention may throw up an impassable roadblock. What is and what is not in the vital national interest of the US and Europe will be constantly squabbled over and redefined. It seems very likely then, that an increasing number of conflicts will have to be allowed to go on without intervention of the major powers. Countries such as Russia, China, Iran and others would jump into the vacuum to advance their own imperialist interests. Alliances and connections between different conflicts would emerge. The deeper the economic crisis becomes and the more wars are permitted, the more the imperialist impulse would snowball. Even if the major powers would succeed in imposing a retrenched but hard line of defense of the global order, which is a very big 'if', and prevent war between the nuclear armed India and Pakistan, between China and Taiwan or Japan, an invasion of South-Korea by the North or wars that would endanger oil-production in the Middle East, the fire would burn wide

and deep. To summarize: for many capitals, the cost-benefit analysis of imperialist undertakings would drastically change because the severity of their economic problems would increase the incentive to seek compensation through conquest and pillage, while the disincentive to do so would diminish because the global economy in crisis would offer them less benefits, especially if the developed capitals react to this crisis in a defensive, protectionist way. The military disincentive would progressively diminish by a growing reluctance and incapacity of the US and other powers to intervene and last but not least the social incentive would increase because through nationalist, racist and xenophobic war and ethnic/religious cleansing campaigns, capitalism would seek to channel the increasing unrest, anger and violence in society to protect its own rule and domestic order.

In capitalist decadence, crisis and war are intimately related. In the Internationalist Discussion Network, our position, that decadence is characterized, not by the fact that the capitalist productive forces reach a point at which they can no longer develop but the fact that their overdevelopment, in relation to what capitalist society can contain, necessitates a process of devalorization so great that it takes the form of massive destruction, was criticized by the group 'Robin Goodfellow' ('RGF'). According to them, our position is moralistic, an abandonment of materialism, because it would imply that the working class would make its revolution not because capitalist crisis forces it to, by degrading its living conditions, but out of moral outrage over capitalism's destructiveness.

Deliberately or not, RGF misrepresented what we're saying. It is not true that we see "humanism and ethics as the material basis" for revolution or that we hold "pacifism and reformism as a political perspective", as RGF claims. What we're saying is that the working class is not confronting crisis and war as separate issues. Their dynamic is interlinked; in both, capitalism manifests the contradiction between its survival and the basic interests of humankind and of the working class in particular. The working class resistance to them is therefore also interlinked. It is foolish to claim that only resistance to economic crisis in a narrow sense has a material base and that resistance to war is merely idealistic humanism. A massive war cannot be waged, nor even prepared, without a massive attack on the working class. The most massive attack on the working class possible is the war itself, since its goal (not necessarily its conscious goal but nevertheless its immanent goal) is the destruction (among other things) of variable capital, of superfluous labor power. So, a factor which quite literally is a question of life or death for the working class, would be, according to RGF, not material? They must be joking. Let's not portray the working class as a herd incapable of more than instinctive reactions, incapable of seeing the link between its living conditions and the destructive perspectives of capitalism because if that were the case, there would not be much hope.

Will we ever witness a third world war? The chances that there will be one in the pattern of the previous world wars, an all-out confrontation between two blocs comprising the most developed capitalist powers, are rather small. Not non-existent: there are too many unpredictable factors that could have an effect on the overall picture to use the word 'never'; but small nevertheless. Not only because of economic reasons (it's hard to imagine a situation in which the economic incentives would be perceived by them as weighing more heavily than the economic costs) and not only because of military reasons (the lopsided rapport de forces in favor of the US and the continuing risk that the use of nuclear weapons would lead to mutual annihilation) but even more so because of social reasons: I don't think the capitalist class is anywhere near to achieving the destruction of working class consciousness that would be indispensable to give it the free hand to impose a perspective with such devastating consequences on the lives of the collective worker.

A much greater danger is that the continuously building need for devalorization and attending urge to destroy would manifest itself, instead of in a third world war, in a series of regional wars which, taken together, would be more devastating than world war two was. In a perverse way, class consciousness in the developed countries could be a factor in such an outcome, if it is strong enough to prevent the major capitalist powers from increasing their military intervention in defense of the global order because of the working class' unwillingness to accept the social costs thereof, yet not strong enough to link the struggle of the strongest segments of the working class to that of its class brothers and sisters in the lesser developed parts of the world.

Clearly such developments are not on the immediate agenda. Whether they could one day become reality will depend in the first place on the development of class consciousness internationally in the period of growing economic crisis and increasing imperialism ahead of us.

SANDER

Critical Notes on the Thesis of Tonio Negri

NATION-STATE OR EMPIRE?

This text challenges the claim of Tonio Negri and Hardt that imperialism has now been superseded by new, supranational, political institutions and forms of sovereignty. The text seeks to demonstrate the continued viability of the nation-state and of nationalism in the present epoch of the real domination of capital.

Capital, the operation of the law of value, has continued to ceaselessly transform the world, economically, politically, ideologically; the point, however, is for revolutionaries to grasp the nature and impact of these changes.

Today, at the dawn of a new century, revolutionaries, for the most part, continue to "see" the world through the lens of theories articulated in the first decades of the last century; through the lens of theories of imperialism first articulated on the eve of World War One, by Lenin and by Rosa Luxemburg. Yet, capital has continued to transform the world over the past century. The epoch of the formal domination of capital has given way to an epoch of the real domination of capital. The law of value has spread from the point of production to all spheres of the economy, including distribution and consumption. The point of production itself has been transformed; the Fordist factory and the material labor of the proletariat has, in significant respects, given way to global networks, information technology and the immaterial labor now an integral part of the activity of the Gesamtarbeiter. And the law of value has spread from the economic realm to the political, social, familial, linguistic and cultural realms as well. Indeed, commodification and the law of value now preside over the very conditions in which the human subject is constructed, over the complex processes of subjectivation itself.

In the face of those transformations, it is inconceivable that the theories of imperialism articulated by Marxists on the eve of World War One can explain the structure of the world market and of international relations today -- quite apart from the question of whether or not those theories adequately grasped the operation and structural

dynamic of capitalism at the historical moment in which they were first conceived. It is in this context that the theory of "Empire" articulated by Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri has burst upon the scene. Here is a theory that acknowledges the very transformations in the operation of the law of value that have been enumerated above; a theory that takes its point of departure in the existence of a "global market" and the emerging organization of political power that corresponds to it. Hardt and Negri claim that the new organization of the world market requires a new politico-juridical order, a new organization of global power, one that corresponds to the transformations in the operation of the law of value, and which concentrates in its hands the elements of sovereignty: "the military, monetary, communicational, cultural and linguistic powers."¹ For Hardt and Negri, what has emerged over the past several decades is a new apparatus of political power, one that supersedes the nation-state and imperialism; a political order and apparatus of "collective capital," in which the highest ranks of the capitalist class, the administrators or executors of the collective capital, are not Americans or Europeans or Arabs, but rather a truly supranational class, no longer bound to any national framework: "This apparatus is supranational, world-wide, total: we call it empire."²

There are three issues that we want to pose. First, has empire superseded the nation-state, is it supranational; or is this empire a new manifestation of the American empire, of American imperialism? Second, in terms of the conditions for its hegemony (understood in the Gramscian sense), for the control of the processes of subjectivation (that of the capitalist class and the working class too), can capital dispense with the framework of the nation-state and the ideology of nationalism? Third, even if the tendencies that Hardt and Negri have identified (empire as a supranational juridico-political apparatus of power) are, indeed, operative, aren't there powerful counter-tendencies, centrifugal tendencies, that portend conflict and war (inter-imperialist

¹ Toni Negri, "Vers l'agonie des états-nations? L'"Empire", stade suprême de l'imperialisme," Le Monde diplomatique, Janvier 2001, p.4. This article, which summarizes the thesis advanced in Empire, provides a succinct account of the argument as it pertains to the question of imperialism.

² Ibid.

war) between capital entities, that is, capitalist states or proto-states?

To a considerable extent, the events of September 11 (2001) will shed light on all three of these issues, inasmuch as the "war on terrorism" has revealed divergences within the capitalist class(es), and raised (again) the issue of American unilateralism; inasmuch as patriotism and nationalism have re-emerged as powerful elements in the social imaginary; and inasmuch as conflict, not between the historic classes (class struggle), but between capital entities themselves has again taken center stage.

There can be little doubt that to the transformations in the operation of the law of value there have been corresponding transformations in the apparatus of power through which capital controls its "world." These changes, set in motion during and after World War Two, include the powerful role of the IMF, the World Bank, the GATT, and other financial and monetary institutions that operate on a global scale. However, whether these institutions are the supranational institutions of the "Empire," or whether they are extensions and appendages of American imperialism and its global hegemony, is what is at issue. And, given the still undisputed power of the dollar, and the power of the Federal Reserve System over global financial networks, the latter would seem to be the case. Moreover, in the political or military realms no comparable "supranational" institutions or power containers even exist: The UN remains dependent on the (still) sovereign states that constitute its members, and especially on the permanent members of the Security Council (and especially on the US), and the transfer of power from individual national states to European power containers in the EU does not constitute the formation of a supranational organization of economic, social, and political power at the level of global capital, but (perhaps) the emergence of a European nation-state, one that could potentially rival the US. The new framework for "imperial power," "that would give to the American Constitution an expansion making it possible to develop -- on a world scale -- a multiplicity of functions of government ..." ³ has yet to make its appearance. Certainly, the influence of representatives of collective capital, of its non-American elements, have an impact on the decisions made in Washington, but there are as yet no sovereign political or military institutions that correspond to a supranational structure of power. And, as the aftermath of September 11 demonstrates, the decision to launch a war, and the operational control of a military campaign, despite its potential impact on the global economy, and on the future of the collective capital, remains firmly in the hands of the American nation-state. ⁴ Thus, the claims of Negri that "the

three substantial characteristics of sovereignty -- military, political, cultural -- [have been] absorbed or replaced by the central powers of the Empire," ⁵ is, at the very least, premature. While such tendencies may, indeed, be operative, the present configuration of political, economic, and military, power on a global scale, whether manifest, for example, in the diplomacy in the Middle-East, the actions of the IMF in Central Asia or Latin America, or the Pentagon in Afghanistan, all seem to point to the power of American imperialism and its global reach.

Has the transition from the formal to the real domination of capital severed the historic link between the nation-state and capitalism? Is the nation-state today no more than a residue of an earlier stage in the development of capital, one that can be dispensed with in the epoch of a global market? Has nationalism been superseded as a crucial element in the processes of subjectivation -- of the members of the capitalist classes or in the culture that shapes the working class?

The processes of subjectivation under the real domination of capital seem to proceed along two distinct, and seemingly opposite tracks. On the one hand, the outcome of the inexorable destruction of the affective bonds of the pre-capitalist community, and the corresponding relentless processes of massification, atomization, and privatization, result in a hyper-individualism in which all social bonds not directly linked to the cash nexus have been eliminated. On the other hand, the desperate quest for some kind of social bond, some kind of affective connection to other human beings, seeks an outlet in some kind of replacement for the lost community. Capitalism satisfies this quest through the ideology of nationalism, through processes of subjectivation in which a sense of "belonging" to a nation or race is central. Nationalism has proved itself compatible with capitalism throughout its history, playing a progressive role in the shattering of feudal bonds in the epoch of the bourgeois-democratic revolutions, and a reactionary role in the colonial expansion of capitalist states and in the epoch of inter-imperialist wars, when it provided the bases for a mobilization of the population behind the flag and country. Indeed, the complex political, social, cultural and psychological processes of what George L. Mosse has termed the nationalization of the masses, has been an essential bulwark of capitalism throughout its history, and especially in the present epoch when capitalism has, as a mode of production, become reactionary and a threat to the very existence of the human species.

Privatization and atomization do not provide the bases for a mass mobilization, either in the face of the need for a

³ Ibid., p.5.

⁴ This American unilateralism in the military realm, in which, of course, America's "allies" are expected to march in lock-step, has also been manifested in the US decision not to ratify the Kyoto treaty, and to impose tariffs on imported steel, to take but two other recent examples. The issue is not

the decisions themselves, but rather the fact that the US can and does act unilaterally; it is not subject to supranational institutions, even while the purportedly "supranational" institutions, e.g. the IMF or the World Bank, are, in fact, subject to Washington.

⁵ Negri, op.cit., p.4.

concentration of human and material resources to develop the national economy or capital, to defend it in the face of its enemies, other nation-states or capitals, or to assure the loyalty of the working class to its rulers. Abstract symbols, such as a constitution, human rights, free elections, consumer choice, etc., lack the emotional charge necessary to effect such a mass mobilization. Indeed, as the flourishing of patriotism in the US after September 11, or the willingness of large numbers of Palestinian youth to die in suicide bombings indicates, nationalism, and its attendant xenophobia, and racism, appears to be a necessary element in the processes of subjectivation through which capital can seek to create the social bonds necessary to perpetuate its hegemony and rule. And those very social bonds seem to require the existence of the nation-state in some form. Who, after all, will be prepared to die for the Strasbourg Parliament or the bureaucrats in Brussels, unless of course these latter can be linked in an emotionally powerful way to a European nation, a European people?

Yet, even if capital could find a substitute for nationalism, and even if there was a tendency to the formation of supranational political institutions and forms of sovereignty, such developments would not proceed smoothly or unopposed. Even if the nation-state is no longer the necessary or adequate political form for capital (and it is not at all clear that that is the case), the assertions about its demise are still premature, and it will not disappear from the historical scene without a protracted struggle.

The very pronounced tendencies to American unilateralism, about which European political leaders, and especially the European cultural elites of the left and right, have complained since September 11, and the upsurge of Islamism throughout the Arab-Muslim world, are indicative of the resilience of the nation-state and nationalism in the contemporary world. China may have joined the WTO, but can anyone doubt that there is a Chinese capital which seeks the economic development of its nation, and the extension of its strategic and imperialist interests in East Asia and the Pacific? India may have opened its economy to foreign investment and its markets to foreign goods, but can anyone doubt that Hindu India has its own strategic vision in South Asia? Russia's President Putin may cooperate with the Americans in the war against terrorism, and in the WTO, but it would be a mistake to think that the Kremlin has no strategic or imperialist interests of its own.

Hardt and Negri's vision of a single collective capital and a corresponding supranational political order and denationalized capitalist class (an updated version of Kautsky's vision of super-imperialism, articulated, as luck would have it, literally on the eve of war, in August 1914) represents a tendency that revolutionaries cannot ignore. But, it is only one tendency of late capitalism, and not necessarily the dominant one. Divisions within the capitalist class, divisions corresponding to nation-states, and manifesting themselves in nationalism and racism remain hallmarks of the epoch in which we live. Moreover, nationalism and racism not only fuel, and will fuel, the struggles between rival factions of the

capitalist class, but will also serve as vehicles of the wars launched against those ejected from the productive process, rendered marginal by a capitalist system increasingly dependent on information technology and immaterial labor to produce its plethora of commodities. Capital must not only produce surplus-value in order to survive, but it also increasingly produces a human mass whose very existence bears witness to its inhumanity, a human mass whose conditions of existence are an invitation to capital to engage in racial wars of extermination, and -- that is one of the challenges to revolutionaries -- a human mass whose emancipation can only be assured as an integral part of the Gesamtarbeiter, whose material and immaterial labor alone produces the wealth that can make it possible to free us from the shackles of the law of value.

Imperialism assumes new shapes, forms, and configurations in the present epoch, but its supersession does not seem to be integral to the "logic" of capital, inherent in the trajectory of capital, as Hardt and Negri believe. That outcome may only be the result of the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism as a mode of production; inseparable from the end of value-production itself.

MAC INTOSH

IMPERIALISM TODAY

This text served as the introduction at the public meeting of IP, in Paris this past April 20th. It is an integral part of the discussion begun at the meeting of the Francophone branch of the Discussion Network last January 19th, and continues that debate:

- 1) Can one still speak of “imperialism” in a society whose dominant tendency is globalization?
- 2) How are we to understand the present period in the life of the capitalist system, and with that in mind, does the cycle crisis-war-reconstruction still make sense?
- 3) How do the structures of national states, supra-national structures, and imperialism, fit together?
- 4) How do we understand the most recent conflicts and wars in the light of the above questions?
- 5) Finally, where does the proletariat fit in; is it still a “brake on the tendency to war” and, if so, how can we understand its lack of reaction to these conflicts?

1) The capitalist system, like every living historical system, goes through an evolution and process of change. We have indicated the nature of those economic transformations and some of their implications, for example, with respect to the composition of the different classes. But our understanding of the amplitude of those changes is still insufficient: either we did not grasp their amplitude, and sought to comprehend the world with outdated analyses and theoretical tools, or we saw only the changes, and did not perceive the continuity in the functioning of the system and the continuing need to utilize certain concepts to understand the world in we live.

Can it be that our questions about whether the concept of imperialism is still operative reflect that same



difficulty? If Lenin or Luxemburg's theory of imperialism is not adequate, one is tempted to reject the concept of imperialism itself, dispensing with an understanding of the world divided into antagonistic blocs, grabbing territory and markets, and proceeding to an image of a unifying globalization, transcending internal conflicts; in short, the world of super-imperialism a la Kautsky, but under the aegis of American capital.

2) Based on the mechanism of value production, valorization-devalorization, we need to ask ourselves about the pertinence of the schema “crisis-war-reconstruction,” and take another look at the causes of the unleashing of the two world wars.

If capitalism is regulated by economic laws, it is also a complex set of global social relations in which economic, political, and ideological means are wielded by the ruling class in order to control those laws; and that as a function

of the ruling class's understanding of those social relations at a determinate moment in its history, and taking into consideration both its own internal conflicts and the existence of the proletariat – an antagonistic class, but one necessary to the maintenance of the domination of the ruling class itself. It is only by taking all those factors into consideration that one can understand the decisions of the bourgeoisie, whereas too often we have had a tendency to see the origin of a war only through the lens of economic laws. If war is inevitable in capitalism, neither its precise form, nor the moment of its unleashing, is predictable in advance. It's not a matter of a mechanical reflex, but rather of the understanding that the ruling class has of its own margin for maneuver, of its evaluation of the putative costs and benefits of a war, as well as of its control over the working class. We can, therefore, understand the cycle "crisis-war-reconstruction" as a general description of the functioning of the capitalist system in the modern epoch: the crisis alone does not suffice to bring about the needed devalorization; war is needed to complete the process. Were devalorization alone sufficient, it would itself permit the renewal of the cycle of the production of new value.

One factor that must be emphasized with respect to the unleashing of the two world wars were the protectionist policies adopted by the ruling classes before each of them, as well as a reflex for territorial conquest inherited from the past, and which no longer corresponded to the needs for the enlargement of capital, and which rapidly led to a new open crisis after the first world war. It is clear that the modifications in the operation of the law of value have as a consequence the transformation of economic structures, and the modes of decision-making. Those modifications generated supra-national structures, such as the World Bank and the IMF, after the second world war, under the aegis of the victorious and dominant American capital.

If the capitalist system has gone through profound upheavals, lending its component parts different forms, it still remains a system whose economic and social relations are dominated by the law of value, and one marked by a necessary scarcity, by ferocious competition, and by intrinsic contradictions. To recognize this opposition between transformation and continuity must lead us to recognize other contradictory tendencies such as the existence of an increasingly globalized functioning vis a vis the maintenance of particular interests; the opposition between the interests of global capital and individual capitalist interests; centrifugal and centripetal movements, all of which we shall have to ultimately deal with.

The passage from the formal to the real domination of capital, and the progressive generalization of the latter, has brought about an unprecedented development of the productive forces and technological progress. We know that that formidable expansion has put the system in a state of enormous tension between the continuation of that dynamic of the development of the productive forces and the necessity for the massive destruction of capital. That

process of devalorization takes place through crises and wars, and constitutes an extremely violent manifestation of the functioning of the system. The fall in profits exacerbates competition, and makes the weakest states increasingly fragile, even as the stronger one's grab ever bigger pieces of a shrinking pie. The need to create and the necessity to destroy, a tendency to unlimited expansion and a confrontation with the limits imposed by the necessary scarcity, a tendency to the integration and interdependence of the different capitals and the expression of divergent interests, all reflect that opposition inherent in capitalism, and make it possible to explain why both globalization of the economy and imperialism co-exist and the tension between those two tendencies becomes ever sharper.

3) It is through that link between globalization and imperialism that we can also understand the co-existence of supra-national structures and the maintenance of separate states. We already know the opposed tendencies at work in the overall process of globalization: the tendency to enlargement and integration on the one hand, and the tendency to a splintering into local entities and withdrawal into oneself on the other. If world capital has provided itself with structures for the control and administration of its economy and politics, the national state still continues to fulfill vital functions within the capitalist world: the instantiation of a feeling of "belonging," it constitutes the ideal ideological entity for the control of the proletariat, confronted by its own atomization and recomposition. The national state also makes it possible to express the particular economic interests of individual capitalists, and, therefore, makes it easier to hide from the proletariat the reasons for the economic crisis and the means to overcome it. The supra-national structures increasingly have the function of economic administration and the national structures the function of ideological control and the representation of opposed capitalist interests.

4) The Gulf War began an era of unprecedented conflict. The crushing of Iraq, the dismantling of Yugoslavia and the putative consolidation of Serbia, the regaining of control in Afghanistan, the re-igniting of the war in the Middle-East – all these wars have a common source. The first, is that they were all unleashed by the strongest capital: American capitalism, together with its "allies." On each occasion, two elements were present: the economic importance of the zone in question, the existence of important stakes for the US, and a threat to those interests represented by a political destabilization, too great a bid for autonomy on the part of the local bourgeoisie, or the expression of local economic interests. The economic interests at issue concerned the provision of energy (oil and gas) for world industry, its free circulation via pipelines or commercial routes, and the control of their exploitation by consortia dominated by the US. The

assertion of those economic interests would tolerate no destabilization, no fetter, no challenge.

On each occasion, the response was violent; no question of reaching an agreement or international mediation. American capital asserted itself by deploying a military force completely disproportionate to the "challenge," implacable, and particularly lethal. It is no longer more useful to place friendly "leaders" in those zones. Puppet governments accompanied by an American military presence or the threat of same, suffice. There is also no point in stabilizing those entities by seeking "credible" local majorities: the heavy hand imposed by the past war, and the threat of the one to come, provides a precarious calm, though one sufficient for the pursuit of the American-led economic development projects.

If military budgets had been somewhat reduced, the Gulf War marked a new wave of spending on armaments. Indeed, wars are the occasion to test and produce new weapons systems, and equip the troops who will use them. The end justifies the means: no financial limit is now imposed on military deployment.

Finally, the US brooks no limit on the assertion of its own imperialist interests, with which it simply identifies the interests of world capital as a system. It therefore scoffs at the assertion of the interests of its own supposed partners, taking for granted the consent of the UN when it decides to intervene in a region. The elements of this new face of imperialism are thus assembled in these various conflicts: violence and destruction; the defense of the economic interests of the dominant capitalism; the disregarding of any limits and the crushing of any expression of competing economic interests; the more and more frequent recourse to arms.

6) Faced with this situation, how are we to understand the apparent indifference of the proletariat? We have already pointed out that at the time of the unleashing of these recent conflicts, the working class did not openly assert itself as a class in opposition to the outbreak of war. The lack of a direct impact of these wars on the populations and the proletariat of the most industrialized countries has surely been an important element in that relative apathy. By contrast, however, we see in the countries that are the locus of the conflicts themselves movements of desertion or opposition, that make it reasonable to conclude that the working class of those countries is far from supporting the interests of the ruling class, even if nationalist, ethnic or religious ideology weighed heavily upon it in a series of such conflicts (in Yugoslavia, for example). We have also pointed to the fact that many of those conflicts have been presented by the bourgeoisie as almost humanitarian interventions in

defense of oppressed minorities, defense of freedom, or the struggle against terrorism – this latter following the emotional impact of September 11th.

However, it is clear that the proletariat remains a brake on the outbreak of war. Even if the most recent conflicts have been fought by professional armies, and not by conscripts (one sees what that means in Israel!), a military engagement always has an economic impact, above all if it is prolonged. The fact that a third world war has not occurred is probably linked, as one factor at least, to the absence of the adherence of the proletariat to the bellicose discourse of the ruling class.

But, even if the ruling class must remain on guard concerning the social reaction that a military engagement on a grand scale might provoke, this kind of "passive resistance" on the part of the working class is not enough. All of which means that we are in a complex temporal perspective in which the economic contradictions and the impact that they will not fail to have on conditions of life and labor, as well as the more and more somber perspective offered by capitalist society, could provoke significant social reactions.

Conclusion

It is clear that the tendency to the globalization of the economy, the tendency towards consensus between bourgeois factions or nations, and the existence of supra-national tools for economic and political administration, have not brought about the elimination of imperialism. On the contrary, the violence and destructiveness that are an integral part of the functioning of decadent capitalism have only increased imperialist rivalries.

Today, imperialism manifests itself more in the form of quasi-permanent local conflicts and the control of capital movements or flows, than in the conquest of territory (even if these different tendencies are not mutually exclusive). Nonetheless, if a third world war has not yet occurred, such a perspective has not been banished from the scene.

Finally, more than ever before, the fate of humanity is in the hands of the world proletariat. The bearer of another social project, it is also a brake on war. Imperialism will never disappear as long as capitalism continues to exist. The only means of doing away with imperialism and its string of murderous orgies is to put an end to capitalism itself.

ROSE



Frans Masereel

THESES ON WAR

- 1) Wars, conflicts between armed enemies, have been a continuous feature of human history, through a succession of modes of production and social formations. Yet, within Marxist theory, war has been underthematized; its theoretical dimensions inadequately addressed. While the structure, nature, organization, strategy and tactics of warfare are integrally linked to a given mode of production (e.g., feudal war is different in nature from capitalist war) they are not reducible to it; war, like other spheres or domains of social existence, possesses an autonomy vis à vis the economic realm — an autonomy that must be acknowledged in order for the phenomenon of war to be grasped within Marxist theory.
- 2) Capitalist war, war against external enemies of the capitalist state, first emerged in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, in two distinct forms. From the end of the age of religious wars in Western and Central Europe -- wars between Catholics and Protestants -- in the seventeenth century, wars that turned Europe itself into a charnel house, to World War One, wars between rival *capitalist* states were confined to hostilities between armies, in which the defeat of an enemy did not entail his destruction, and in which the distinction between combatant and non-combatant, soldier and civilian, was by and large respected. Such wars, fought to consolidate the emerging nation-state or to expand its frontiers, typically led to the re-drawing of the political map, but not to the expulsion or extermination of populations. A second type of war, war between capitalist states and pre-capitalist states or societies, *colonial* wars, the expression of a nascent imperialism, did involve the reduction to slavery or the extermination of native populations, ideologically constructed as sub-human or non-human.
- 3) With World War I, the nature of *inter-imperialist* war was transformed, in large part because of the advances in military technology and the transformation of the ideology of nationalism into racism and xenophobia. The former made possible the mass slaughter of millions of conscript soldiers on the battlefields, while the latter turned the "enemy" from a rival to be defeated into a "foe" to be annihilated. In a certain sense, the conditions prevailing in colonial wars were now transposed to the wars between capitalist states themselves: mass murder of the enemy.
- 4) With World War II, inter-imperialist war was transformed into *race war*, in which the development of military technology made it possible to erase any distinction between combatant and non-combatant, soldier and civilian, and in which xenophobia and racism made the extermination of the foe — now primarily the civilian population -- an integral part of the

very structure and organization of war. While this was particularly clear in Hitler's war on the Eastern front, and in the genocide of the Jews and Gypsies, it also characterized Japan's war in China, and the Anglo-American strategy of strategic bombing of German and Japanese cities, culminating in the dropping of the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. All subsequent capitalist wars have retained this character of race war, from the war waged by the US in Vietnam to the war waged by Russia in Chechnya, and including the wars fought by Israel to control the Palestinian territories, and the current American "war on terrorism."

- 5) Since World War II, however, in addition to the wars waged by capitalist states, there have emerged guerilla wars or *partisan* wars waged by capitalist *proto*-states. These wars, whether waged by the Tamil "Tigers" in Sri Lanka, Hamas in Palestine, Abu Sayaa in the Philippines, the UCK in Kosovo, in short, all the multifarious "national liberation struggles" dear to the left and leftists, including the attacks launched by al-Qaeda against the US on September 11, share the character of race war that has now become the hallmark of capitalist war in this epoch. All "construct" the Other as a foe to be ethnically cleansed or exterminated, a foe defined in biological or quasi-biological terms: Singhalese, Jew, Christian, Slav, "infidel, in the above examples.

- 6) Marxist theory must confront the changes in the nature of war that have been wrought by capitalism, and their link to the transition from the formal to the real domination of capital. In seeking to articulate a strategy and tactics for the working class, the *collective laborer*, confronted by a war in which its own members are designated as an integral part of the racial foe to be exterminated; in which the death of its own human mass is one of the objectives of the very war waged by the capitalist or proto-state (partisan army), Marxists must do more than simply repeat the mantra of "revolutionary defeatism." Clearly, defeatism remains a class line, and no form of "defensism" of any kind can be anything but a capitulation to the class enemy; an acceptance of the genocidal "logic" of capital. However, the application of defeatism has to adjust to the conditions in which the working class has been ideologically constructed as an integral part of the racial Other, the foe to be exterminated. To break that ideological construction, to smash the very form in which workers themselves have been subjectivated, is an even more formidable task today than it was in the early part of the twentieth century; and that because of the totalitarian domination of the law of value over all domains of social existence today. Yet, it is precisely that task that revolutionaries must undertake, if the barbarism of capitalist -- race -- war is not to swallow up the planet.

MAC INTOSH



WHAT'S BEHIND THE SURGE OF THE FAR-RIGHT IN WESTERN EUROPE?

A majority of the countries of Western Europe have seen far-right or "populist" political parties do well in elections or even win a place in government. In addition, with the recent French elections and the assassination of the Dutch leader Pim Fortuyn, we have seen an impressive popular mobilization. Confronted by this phenomenon, it is important to understand its real well-springs. What follows is a contribution to the comprehension of these recent events.

In several Western European countries there has been a significant breakthrough by factions of the extreme-right -- though to put things in perspective, it is worth noting that in Eastern Europe it is factions of the old Social Democracy or ex-"Communists" that have achieved electoral victories. With respect to the success of the far right in Western Europe, it serves no purpose to pretend that it is still only a minority of voters who support these parties, or, on the contrary, to fall into utter despair and conclude that political consciousness or class consciousness no longer provide any hope for a real social transformation. If these electoral results indicate the weight of the dominant ideology and the impasse into which it has succeeded in channeling discontent, they also express other tendencies present within society. Moreover, if it is clear that such factions of the far-right have entered governments or parliaments thanks to having won a certain number of votes, we still must not overlook the very high rate of abstention in all these countries, a fact that is also indicative of a profound loss of confidence in "democratic" mechanisms.

1. What changes ? ...

The functioning of the economic system has undergone very profound changes in the course of its recent history. The massive utilization of technology, the globalization of the

economy, have transformed the processes of production and have had a direct impact on the composition of social classes, the organization of commercial exchanges, and the relations between nations -- in short, everything that constitutes the system's historical economic and social benchmarks. The development of technology and of the economic crisis have sharply increased the gap between poor and rich countries, and the tendencies to destruction and exclusion. Today, technological progress is no longer synonymous with welfare and security for individuals, but rather entails a massive destruction of the environment, permanent layoffs, the existence of whole segments of the population denied any access to the labor market, and a situation of instability, genocide and war throughout the world. The climate of insecurity to which the bourgeoisies of Europe have pointed, and its link to the growth of violence and crime, is, therefore, connected to the profound insecurity engendered by the degradation of the overall economic situation and to the socio-economic transformations described above. The insecurity felt by each is not linked to social violence alone (we will come back to this point), but rather to a much more global and profound feeling of insecurity, one which is linked to a questioning of the very functioning of society and its economic and political perspectives. To put all the weight on the single phenomenon of urban crime is one of the weapons of the dominant ideology, wielded to prevent a link being made between insecurity and the very foundations of society. A simplistic link is then forged: insecurity = crime; security = drastic police measures to fight it. That is the equation made by the ruling classes of Europe, one that provides the basis for, and legitimation of, their discourse on the growth of violence and the security measures needed to combat it. It is all the factions of the bourgeoisie that have jumped on this hobby horse of violence, and have taken advantage of the situation to undertake unprecedented policies of control and repression.

Several years ago, at the time of the struggles that shook Europe in 1993-95, questions -- albeit confused -- were raised about the perspectives offered by the reigning system: it was the beginning of an awareness of violence, of the impasse towards which production for profit at any price was leading society. Parallel to that, the "affairs" linked to the corruption of the political and juridical systems provoked indignation and disgust among broad segments of the populace. If that

development of consciousness was latent, confused, and found no real outlet on the terrain of workers' struggles, it continued to grow and could be seen in the "anti-globalization" movement, despite its heteroclitic and inter-class nature, and its absence of any real coherence. That beginning of popular questioning constituted a real threat to the bourgeoisie, which reacted by attempting to channel it onto another terrain. In a sense, then, the ideological campaigns about insecurity and violence are a response to the contestation expressed on the terrain of workers' struggles from '93-95 and in the heteroclitic and inter-class anti-globalization movements – as is the vigilance and heightened trade-union presence around that popular discontent.

The questioning about the functioning of society, the fears linked to its perspectives, as well as the loss of the social bonds and links provoked by globalization have led to a turning inward, a falling back on one's region, religion or race. Similarly, massive exclusion, and poverty, which has now reached the heart of Europe, has set in motion masses of the population, desperate and with no real chance of being integrated into the productive process. One's share of a diminishing cake gets ever-smaller; the fear of the Other grows, a fear both linked to, and produced by, the functioning of the economic system.

2. Discourse on violence, the "consecrated bread" of the ruling class ...

It is on that social landscape that "populist" and far-right political parties have returned to center stage. Basically, what do they defend? The turning inward onto the familiar and comforting national or racial entity, jobs for the natives and expulsion for the Other, the surplus population; the illusion that the growing violence in society can be assuaged. These far-right parties are merely taking a leaf from the traditional parties, by proposing simplistic policies for a society without any real perspectives.

Beyond that, it is necessary to point out another pernicious maneuver of the ruling class. Let's take the example of France and Le Pen, who only says aloud what the other factions of the ruling class just whisper. If one looks at our "democratic" European societies, what do we see? A systematization of police control, identity cards, telephone wire taps, round-ups, strengthening and reorganization of the national police, strengthening of measures of repression directed against the under-age, and all under the cover of the safety of the ordinary citizen; the creation of refugee camps, which cannot fail to recall those other "camps;" the legitimization of murderous military campaigns in Yugoslavia, Afghanistan or Palestine. In addition, the attacks of last September 11th in the US provided the occasion for the ruling class to unleash an unprecedented ideological barrage around the permanence of the terrorist threat throughout the world, as

well as the necessity to deploy a vast repressive arsenal to combat it.

Violence is inscribed in the very functioning of the system; it is practiced daily by the ruling class of each country, and the policies of the extreme-right are only a caricature of the policies of the dominant parties.

Another lesson that we can draw from this, and of which the French situation is a clear example, is the extraordinary capacity for political recuperation possessed by the bourgeois political parties. While the votes for the far-right (and the far-left) are a snub to the dominant parties (Jospin and the Socialists in France, the majority in Holland), Chirac ends up with a majority that would have been inconceivable had not Le Pen been on the ballot. There, where disgust with politics as usual had seemed headed to a massive refusal to participate in the electoral circus, we saw an unprecedented mobilization against abstentionism!

This ideological sleight of hand is certainly necessary in a social context in which disillusion reigns and the parties whose task it was to control the working class have an ever-harder time maintaining a semblance of credibility. Thus, the left parties present in most of the Western European governments have carried out "realistic" policies, and are (correctly) seen more as defenders of the interests of a ruling class confronted by an unprecedented economic crisis than as defenders of the interests of the working class -- an ideological discourse that they assiduously cultivated when they were in the opposition. There is therefore an ideological void that the "populist" parties now try to fill.

Finally, what is the real issue when it comes to violence and immigration? Is it a matter of a new phenomenon, or one that has now taken on an extraordinary amplitude, or is it being blown out of all proportion by the ideology of the ruling class? We have already pointed to the roots of violence: they reside in unemployment, in the absence of any perspectives and anxiety about the future. That anxiety is often manifested by a desperate destructiveness that increases acts of violence in the cities and poorer suburbs. There is, however, a distinction between stating these facts, and describing (as does the European ruling class today) a European space in which everyone is permanently obsessed by the fear of acts of aggression and/or where this has become the whole Truth about reality: for example, during the electoral campaign in France, there was virtually no news story without an act of violence, such that one could literally not escape the climate of fear, powerlessness, and danger to the nth degree. Such an atmosphere is generated by the ruling class, and is not a reflection of social reality.

3. Immigration: threat or bugbear ...

With respect to immigration, here too -- via the media -- Europe is presented as an unprotected space, invaded by

swarms of aliens who have come to steal the already scarce social resources of the national states. It is obvious that the

economic crisis leads fringes of the population to flee their miserable conditions of living, to flee war, to flee fear. But to only see that, is to fail to also see the policies of drastic control that the various governments have instituted against the migratory flux, the camps for those asking for asylum, the housing centers that have been closed, and the forced repatriations. Beyond that, to

first make an appeal to immigrant workers as cheap labor, and then to present that same potential source of labor as a horde of locusts who have come to devour the resources of the national economy, is a way for the ruling class to put pressure on the population, and on the working class in particular. It is a way to increase the competition between workers and to force them to accept ever-more precarious conditions of work; and it is also a means to break the solidarity that is established among those whose labor is exploited -- a solidarity that is their most important weapon in resisting that exploitation. Here too, just as in the case of urban violence, immigration is a phenomenon that exists, but that is utilized, manipulated, for ideological ends.

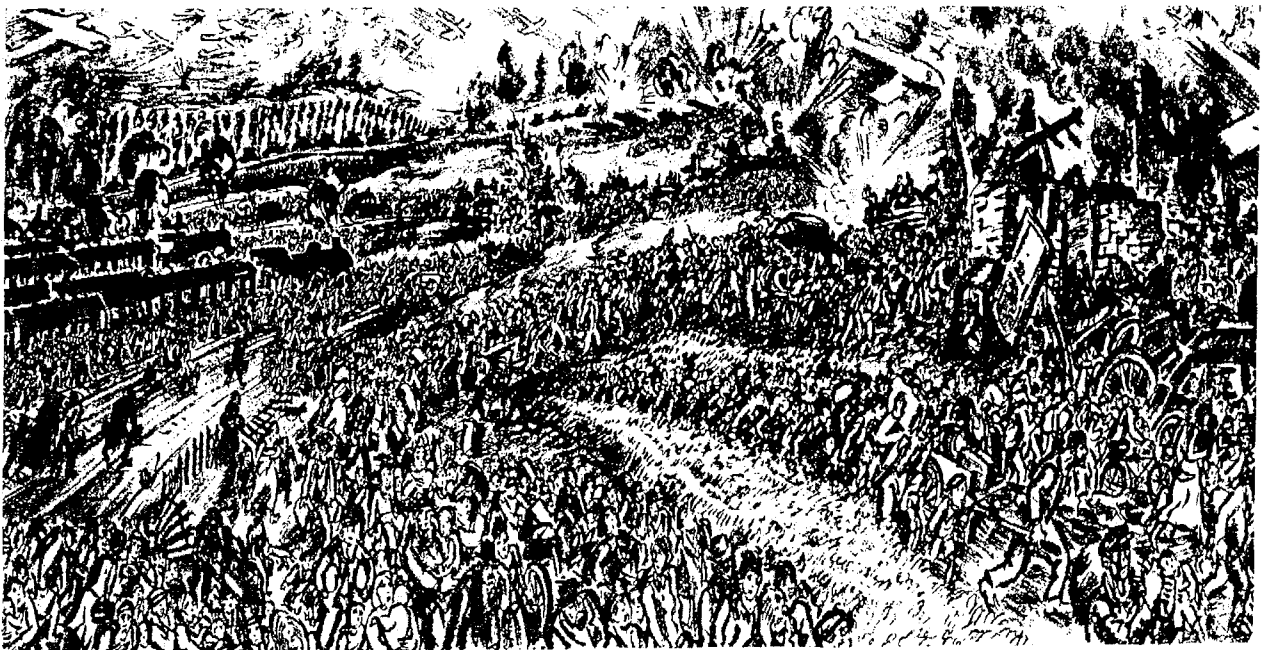
Perspectives ...

There is a double lesson to be drawn from all this: if the votes for populist parties reflect a certain social anger and a rejection of the prevailing policies, if in the same paradoxical movement, the mobilizations against the far-right also mean a rejection of racist solutions, solutions based on enhanced police security, the positive lessons stop there. As long as

social discontent, the questioning of the perspectives offered by the present society, are not expressed on a terrain in which a radical change in the very nature of society is envisaged, this contestation and this discontent will remain imprisoned by the dominant social relations.

The ruling class presents us with an image of contemporary society as a great mixture in which all class antagonisms have disappeared. But this very image results from the ideological confusion necessary to the blocking of any clear reflection and to the maintenance of the domination of that self-same ruling class. There are in this society, exploiters and exploited. The working class, even if the recent economic transformations have made its definition more fluid than before, is an exploited class; one that has no interest in the maintenance of the social relations in which it has been placed: social relations in which its only *raison d'être* is to sell its labor-power so as to produce the profits necessary to the continuation of the present system. The interests of the working class are clearly opposed to those of the ruling class, and it is, therefore, the only force capable of conceiving and bringing into existence a new society. Social violence will not be resolved by any plebiscite for Chirac; still less in the defense of our so-called democracy -- on the contrary! The perspective of capitalism is one of a deepening of this violence and this instability. The only way to free ourselves from it is to destroy its source: the present capitalist system, and the social and economic relations that it entails.

ROSE



The following leaflet was given out by Internationalist Perspective at demonstrations of the 'Anti-Globalization' Movement.

The 'Anti-Globalization' Movement

WHERE DO WE GO?

The ongoing process of the globalization of the world economy is an unmitigated disaster -- for the environment, for the laboring masses of the Third World, now increasing directly employed by multinational corporations or local firms producing for them, at wages and under conditions reminiscent of those in the capitalist metropolises at the time of the industrial revolution, and for the working class of those selfsame capitalist metropolises, many of whose jobs have either disappeared, migrated to the so-called Third World, or who must accept a drastic reduction in their standard of living as a condition for retaining those jobs.

However, the protests against globalization -- in Seattle, in Quebec, in Prague, in Genoa, and now in New York -- seem to be animated by the belief that globalization is a policy CHOSEN by the political and economic elites, by the ruling class, a policy that can be replaced by one more ethical, more just, if only sufficient public pressure can be brought to bear. Whether that pressure is electoral or violent, in the boardrooms or on the street, so long as it is animated by the belief that globalization is a choice, that the ruling class can be pressured into changing its policies and behaving ethically, it will be futile and achieve no results. No less than earlier forms of wage-labor and a commodity economy, the epoch of monopolies to take but one example, globalization is the outcome of tendencies inherent in the capitalist system, the unfolding of its inner logic and "lawfulness" -- a logic imposed on the capitalists themselves. As Marx pointed out in *Capital*: "...the immanent laws of capitalist production confront the individual capitalist as a coercive force external to him." Governments, central banks, corporations, in the capitalist metropolises today, can no more reject globalization and its imperatives than they can disregard the need for profit.

It is the capitalist law of value that determines the immanent tendencies of the economic system and that determines the range of options open to individual capitalists and to national economies. In the capitalist

metropolises, in the US, for example, the sole alternative to a policy of globalization is one of protectionism, a closed economy, which will sacrifice the high-tech industries (and their jobs) in a desperate effort to save jobs in certain dying manufacturing industries (textiles, steel, etc.). In the Third World, the equivalent of protectionism is import-substitution, a command economy, autarky, often entailing the complete militarization of society. Quite apart from the failure of such policies to provide a basis for economic development, such policies involve the most brutal exploitation of the working classes of those societies by their ruling elites and single parties. That is the path of fascism and Stalinism; the program of Islamism today. Like the path of globalization, a policy of autarky and militarization obeys the logic of capital.

Without a recognition that globalization is not a choice, but an imperative, so long as the capitalist law of value presides over the world economy, all protest against it will be ultimately meaningless. So long as the system of wage-labor and commodity production is not questioned, globalization will not be halted -- no matter how many people are in the streets or how violent the protests. If the frenetic course to more globalization -- and the disasters it brings in its wake -- is to be stopped, then the basis of these protests must shift from opposition to globalization to opposition to CAPITALISM, to wage-labor, the law of value and the commodity economy.

The future of capitalism is more and more misery and violence. Capitalism has outlived its usefulness for humanity. It was born in conditions of scarcity and needs scarcity to thrive. The lack of it means not abundance and the eradication of poverty but overproduction and crisis. Because human productiveness is now so developed, this crisis can only become deeper and unleash more destructiveness in the forms of terrorism and counter-terror, civil wars and wars of aggression. The alternative to this grim perspective is at the same time very simple and enormously complex: to produce for human needs instead

of for profit. Technically, this is more possible than ever. The fast development of information and communication technology has made it a lot easier. There is no doubt that it is feasible to create abundance in regard to the basic needs of all humans, and not just the basic needs, and to organize production so that all able-bodied people can work and there is a lot of free time for everyone -- and to find in the exploration of that leisure-time itself an endless source of creative activity. Of work, you might say, although it's not imaginable that 'work' would still resemble what it is today, when the elimination of drudgery becomes the conscious goal of society. But what this requires above all is the conscious will of humanity to make it real, to organize and control this revolution. We

believe that this will can only be forged in struggle, in revolt against the class whose existence depends on the perpetuation of the absurdity of production for profit. Only the autonomous struggle of the working class, the great majority of society whose work makes the wheels of the world economy turn and whose will can stop them and change their direction, provides this hope.

INTERNATIONALIST PERSPECTIVE

Reflections On Our Function And Functioning

In launching this discussion, we begin with the question of our function as a revolutionary organization in the present period. If the period has changed, if the recomposition of the working class makes the process through which the working class sees itself as a class much more complicated, and therefore poses the question of our intervention on new bases, we still have to ask whether the changes in our role within the class are as profound as we have thought, or -- conversely -- whether it is not the very conception of the revolutionary organization which has guided us over the years that was incorrect from the very beginning!

The ideas which follow are only the beginning of a process of re-thinking this question, and, therefore, are tentative in nature. As such, they will have to be clarified, refined, and modified, in the course of the development of the discussion, and in light of the reactions of other comrades. In any case, we can begin with the acknowledgement, made by Internationalist Perspectives, and which has also been a starting point for the creation of the Discussion Network: the model of the functioning of a revolutionary organization that has guided us since the very beginning of our political activity around '68-'70 is a model that has failed. Just as in the case of any other theory that proves mistaken in practice, we have to ask what were the

false bases upon which our convictions concerning the revolutionary organization rested throughout that period. The sometimes monstrous errors of the ICC or the Bordigists are not without real bases, and are not merely "deviations" from an otherwise correct theory. For me, these errors are the logical outcome of what can only be described as false political foundations.

Here is the basic idea that I will articulate in this contribution: the Marxist political milieu that was reconstituted in the wake of the wave of struggles unleashed by '68, was dominated by a Leninist conception of class consciousness, of the working class itself, and of the function of the revolutionary organization. For many of the political groups, this conception was not consciously held, but was simply carried over from models inherited from the past. As a result, the whole conception of consciousness, organization, and function, developed on the bases of those Leninist premises.

The whole of that triad of concepts must, therefore, be totally redefined so as to clarify two things. First, what is the form that will assure a living political content, that will be able to tolerate the co-existence of divergent positions and theories, while at the same time allowing both the centralization and minimum framework for open discussion

and theoretical elaboration? Second, in light of what we have already learned in our theoretical exploration of the question of class consciousness, what is our political relation, as revolutionaries, to that consciousness, and what is our role in its development?

In August '79, the ICC published a pamphlet on "Communist Organizations and Class Consciousness." We defended the ideas contained in that pamphlet, believing that it provided a correct vision of class consciousness and of the function of revolutionaries. All that was before the '80's, with the ICC's bizarre notions of class consciousness in extent and in depth, which led us to finally denounce the Leninism that we saw seizing hold of the ICC. What is there in that pamphlet? Doesn't it already contain an incorrect understanding of the relationship between revolutionaries and their class? Doesn't it fall into the very trap that it ostensibly sought to combat? Here are some representative passages. "There are times, even in revolutionary periods, when the great majority of workers continue to be half-blinded by the maneuvers of the bourgeoisie. At those crucial moments, the 'acceleration' provided by a revolutionary minority more aware of those very maneuvers can be decisive. At such points, it is not the reaction of the broad masses of the proletariat, who are subject to bourgeois ideology, that constitutes the 'thermometer' measuring the level of maturity attained by class consciousness, but rather the clearest elements within the class. The task of those elements consists in extending their comprehension to the whole of the working class, and not in lowering their political vision to the level of the broad masses." "Communist organizations, far from passively following the flux and reflux of the struggle of their class ... are also an active factor in the maturation of proletarian struggles. ... their responsibility is not to passively await the spread of class consciousness to the whole of the working class, but to organize and advance a perspective for struggle. Such passivity would make any progression of consciousness impossible." "To orient the proletarian movement onto the revolutionary path The first meaning of the term 'orient:' direct, lead in a certain direction." Throughout the pamphlet, we find statements like: "homogenize class consciousness," or "the real impact of revolutionaries on the struggles."

I have re-read these passages with a certain bewilderment. Because, while the whole pamphlet is devoted to denouncing the Leninist vision of a party leading the masses, for me, there is only a very (too) subtle distinction between that denunciation and the understanding that we then had of our role as revolutionaries. I believe that that perception is connected to other factors. To present "clear analyses," to "take positions," so as to show the workers how to understand a situation, and not confuse their poor brains with a debate that is over their heads. The kind of relation existing between the class and its revolutionary minorities, and, therefore, the kind of intervention -- the term is, all in all, very well chosen -- in the class: to have a direct impact, to orient it. The necessity of preserving the organization --

the bearer of the revolutionary perspective -- at any cost, in the swamp of the reflux of class consciousness; in the image of our pre-historic ancestors keeping a flame burning in a basket. The very conception of the theoretical work of the organization: to reappropriate and develop the theoretical acquisitions of the past, and to reaffirm them at every opportunity (public meetings, press, interventions), just as the class must be able to "appropriate" a clear vision of things.

What strikes me in that vision is the one-way, non-dialectical, character of the relation between revolutionaries and their class. Theory seems to already exist, and must simply be appropriated -- whether by revolutionaries or by workers. Consciousness does not emerge through debate; indeed, it already exists, and there is no place for its permanent development. Basically, our class has nothing to teach us; it has everything to learn from us! Even if we had claimed that revolutionary minorities were a "secretion" of the class, we never considered ourselves -- in our actual practice -- as a part of the class. It was the same with the debates between revolutionary organizations: each had to present and argue for its own theoretical vision of reality; it had nothing to learn from the others, but merely had to convince them of the correctness of its own positions. Just as the capitalist world was divided into two imperialist blocs, the revolutionary world was divided into two groups: those who understood the importance of the revolutionary organization (and who articulated this Leninist vision) and those who rejected the organization -- the councilists (those who had, logically, become "the greatest danger").

We can hypothesize that the movement that arose from the dynamic of '68 had very little experience and suffered from the break with the political movement that had participated in the revolutionary wave set off by 1917. The groups coming out of the wave of struggles set off by '68 therefore sought to reforge links with that earlier experience, without, however, at the time (and this is understandable) being able to make a real critique of the body of ideas that characterized the working class and its revolutionary organizations at the beginning of the last century; and, above all, without being able to measure the profound changes that capitalism had undergone since then. That youthful political milieu was full of illusions, of romanticism, and had a very simplistic, and linear, conception of things. Within the complex unfolding of capitalist development over the course of the better part of a century, that movement sought to find fixed points on the basis of which to define itself: criteria to define what was and what wasn't real class struggle; criteria for intervention in the class that would be consistent with the practice of the earlier revolutionaries upon which it sought to model itself. It was in that period of a break with the past marked by the events of 1968, but full of illusions, and the attempt to align themselves upon past models of revolutionary activity, that Leninist conceptions imposed themselves on so many of the political groups, and came to

define our theoretical understanding of the revolutionary organization and its relationship to the working class.

Fortunately, our growing incapacity to comprehend the world in which we lived shattered our theoretical certitude. And it was that salutary movement of doubt that permitted us to forge contacts with political groups and individuals who were going through the same experience. The creation of the Discussion Network is a feature of that dynamic, with its openness, its questioning, and its recognition of the theoretical insufficiency and outright errors with which we had lived and worked for so many years. But its creation also represented an attempt to find a new form of organization that would escape the mistakes of the past. If the Network is indeed an extremely useful tool, making possible the circulation of ideas and contacts, it also seems to me to contain two illusions: that of being seen by some as a "virgin" model, and that of being the bearer of values such as the absence of hierarchy, of power, of commodity values and competition -- all elements that have poisoned the functioning of so many groups in the past. Despite everything that I think is positive in the existence of the Network, it has not -- until now -- debated the fundamental issue that was its *raison d'être*: what form to give to a permanent revolutionary political organization in the present period.

For me, the central element in the understanding of the relationship of revolutionaries to their class is the fact that they are a part of the class itself; and that their theoretical work and intervention in the class struggle constitutes a process of permanent activity within and with the working class.

As an integral part of the class, revolutionaries are experiencing a profound crisis in the understanding of who and what they are. If the working class is not simply the blue-collar factory workers of the past, revolutionaries cannot be merely those who harangue the multitudes and organize that class. The "crisis of the milieu" is a crisis of the very theoretical bases for the understanding of the capitalist world, the composition of the contending classes, and the dialectic through which the antagonism between these classes plays itself out and the way in which revolutionaries are an element of that process. For me, the function of revolutionaries is first and foremost to participate in the development of a clear understanding of the world, and to work to make that development an integral part of the life of the class. It is, therefore, not enough to take positions on political issues or to publish finished texts. What is needed, is to participate in, and contribute to, the process of questioning and clarification that is taking place within the multitude in general, and the working class itself. Thus, I do not believe that we fulfilled our role at the time of the various movements that shook Europe between '93 and '95. At that time, there was a confused questioning about "what can capitalism provide as a future." New questions had arisen, setting off that movement, and we should have taken up this

questioning and tried to develop it with our class. Instead, we had a tendency to see things from the "outside:" were those movements "autonomous" vis a vis the unions; were they on the "class terrain" of the proletariat? In the face of a half-hearted answer to those two questions, we vacillated. We thought that we had nothing to say vis a vis confused popular expressions of discontent, and that seems to me to be wrong today (and then too). If the task of revolutionaries is to denounce the traps, explain the impasses and how to overcome them, when there is a movement or a process of questioning, then we cannot remain mute, and we have to link our own activity to that of the class. For me, that is what it means to be an integral and active part of the process of development of class consciousness.

Comrades often feel discouraged, because they had hoped to have an "active role," an "impact." I believe that we must see ourselves, and our theoretical work, as a part of the dialectical process at work within the class, and of its development of its own class consciousness. One part of that process is a resistance to change, to the unknown, a holding on to familiar kinds of jobs, tools, even to the competition that prevails between individual workers. Another part of that same process, however, is the suffering imposed by those very conditions, and the revolt and consciousness that will ultimately arise. We live with this reaction of life against death and the hopelessness engendered by the way society functions. Without wanting to engage in psycho-babble, we exist in a state in which the life drive counterbalances the death drive. The elements of this life drive are startling: it is the drive that ceaselessly pushes us forward. The death drive, by contrast, acts as a sometimes necessary brake on that agitation. These two drives interact, pushing towards change and questioning the foundations of society, of the known, of "security," and of fear and resistance to change, to the abandonment of the known and of security. When those forces are present in a movement, there exists an opening where our reflection as revolutionaries can find an active place. For me, much more than the question of the autonomy of the movement vis a vis the unions, it is there that the criteria for our presence or absence in a given movement reside.

This vision places us in a very different situation than the one in which we found ourselves placed when we were in the ICC. We can anticipate a series of waves of struggle and levels of consciousness bringing about a revolution after 15-20 years of economic crisis; a vision of a slow process of social transformation in a different situation of historical temporality. As a function of such a situation of historical temporality, and of the uneven, contradictory, dialectical, character of this process, we have nothing in particular to "expect" from the working class. What we can hope for, is that the development of class consciousness will proceed in the sense of a questioning of perspectives, and in the perception of the antagonistic character of the interests of capitalist development and the life of humanity. But, I don't think that we can codify this into a rigid global process or be

sure about the way in which it will unfold on the historical level.

Finally, one last point: the question of organization. What has been revealed by the Network is that dialogue and the exchange of texts were necessary, but by no means sufficient, to permit an elaboration of revolutionary thought. For that to really occur, a clear framework for discussion is needed: a space must be created, not just to talk, but where we can see where we agree, disagree, or simply don't understand one another. For that, I do not see how we can proceed without more of a formal framework at a minimum; that is to say, an actual framework that can facilitate and make possible such a dynamic. To merely allow things to take their course, as the comrades of the Paris Circle did, cannot succeed. It seems to me, that there are two ways to centralize a discussion. The first is to undertake it with a precise goal in mind, to conclude the debate with the adoption of a single, common, position. That is how discussions were envisaged in the ICC. It is in part what explains the failure of so many discussion circles and efforts at regroupment. Another way to centralize a discussion, however, is to work towards the maximum clarification and specification of the different arguments and positions: what is clear and what not; what are the points that have been developed, explored, or not; who is in agreement on what; who wants to work on this point and who on another; what time-span is set for the next issue to be debated. This framework seems to me to be the one that increasingly characterizes the work of IP, which does not aim at closing a debate, but rather at continuing it and allowing it to develop. What's important is less the organizational structure than the objective for, and the conception that one has of, debates. This could be seen in the reproach that the ICC made to us

when we were still an "external fraction" of that organization: "there are as many positions in the EFICC as there are comrades." What seemed to them catastrophic, appeared to us to be the only possible way to carry on a serious discussion.

By way of conclusion, the revolutionary organization is not an organ apart from the class. Its existence reflects the dialectical process through which the consciousness of the necessity to change society emerges from an intensification of the pressure of the dominant ideology. The need to seek another way is created by the "inhumanity" of capitalist society and by the quest for a collective dimension to life, itself arising from the increase in loneliness, competition, and individualism, bred by that society. That alienation from bourgeois society gives rise to the expressions of revolutionary life and the confrontation with the reigning order. The function of the revolutionary organization today is, therefore, first of all to participate in an active way in the process of questioning and the development of an awareness of the societal and class stakes of the dominant order, together with a comprehension of the world in which we live. Its functioning requires an organizational framework that must be conceived as a tool for the development of debates, and their deepening as opposed to their closure. That means that the existence of divergences is not a brake on the development of the discussion, but rather the reflection of positions that must be explored. The theoretical elaboration undertaken by revolutionaries must try to link up, as often as possible, with the questioning -- confused though it sometimes is -- that arises in the ongoing social movements.

ROSE

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