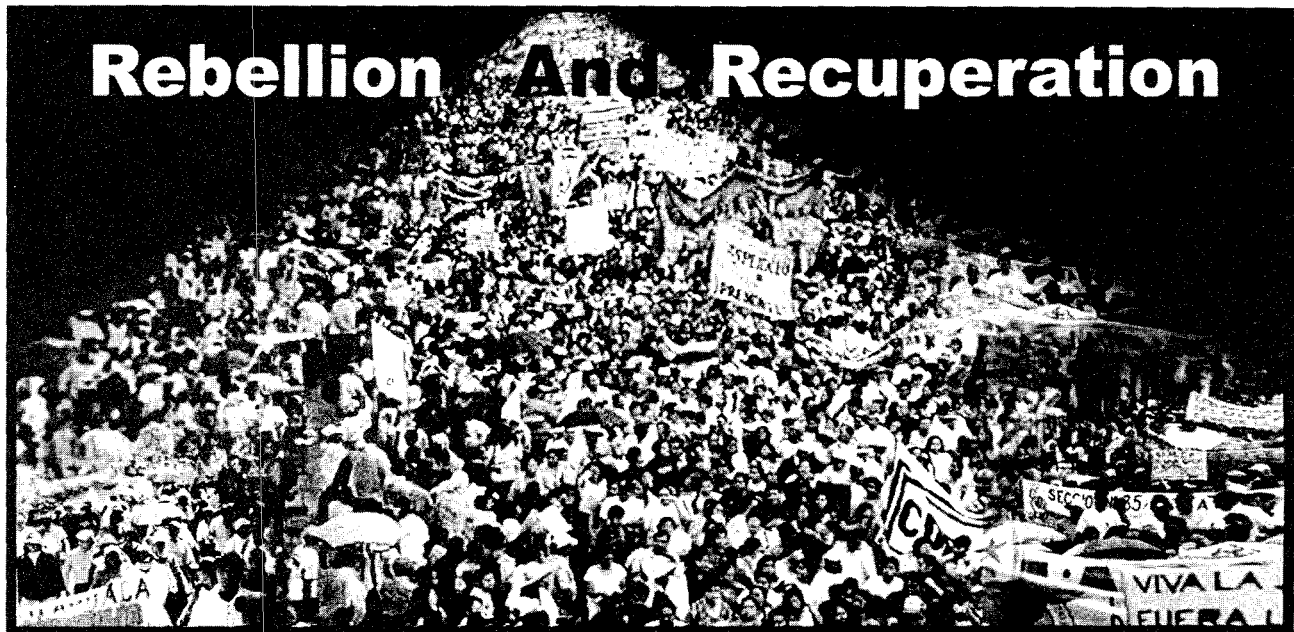


INTERNATIONALIST PERSPECTIVE



- Disaster in Iraq
- Imperialism : Hegemonic Powers And Contender States
- Oaxaca: Rebellion And Recuperation
- 'The Struggle' Of The Workers Of VW In Brussels : An Exchange With '*Temps Critiques*'
- A Revolutionary Conference in Korea
- On Revolutionary Perspectives
- Human Nature, Class Consciousness and the Material Imagination

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Disaster



For the dispossessed, the war in Iraq has been a disaster from its first day. Since then, the misery that it has brought has grown exponentially. It would be hard to imagine a place where life is more hellish than it is in Baghdad today.

By now, it's also clear that the war is a disaster from the point of view of those who started it. American capital is worried, not about the loss of Iraqi lives, or even those of American troops, but about the hundreds of billions spent on this undertaking with so little result. It is worried about putting so many resources into one place that other geo-strategic investments (like Afghanistan) become neglected. It is worried about the destabilizing effects of a military escalation that has no popular support. It raises big questions about the priorities and effectiveness of the Bush government. Illustrating how the tide has turned for the Bush team, a recent report of the Council on Foreign Relations, a think tank that often articulates the majority view within the ruling class on foreign affairs, has said that an American "military victory was impossible in Iraq." Nothing more could be achieved, according to the report, so it is time for an orderly retreat.

It could be conceived that a massive military escalation, which would shift the struggle back to more battlefield type of operations and inflict heavy destruction, could allow the US to pacify the country. But Bush has lost the popular support that would be needed. He spent all the political capital that 9/11 gave him; nothing more can be squeezed from it, at least not for the war in Iraq.

The remarkable contrast between the ease with which the US conquered the country and the difficulty it has in pacifying it, points to the chink in the US's armor. Its military dominance is such that no other state can even think of waging war against it. But occupation is a different game from conquest. The military advantage is not so lopsided. Cheap small bombs prove to be very effective, as long as there is enough cannon fodder ready to commit suicide. The despair that living in Iraq today provokes is fertile ground for heroic madness to bloom. As cheap as they are, these weapons are not, for the most part, home made: they come from somewhere else. They come from the powers that used to sell to Saddam Hussein. Large parts of the arsenals of his army are now spread all across the country. They come from neighboring

countries – Iran, Syria, Saudi Arabia -- that all hope to dominate Iraq, or at least a part of it, after the Americans leave. They come from states with imperialist designs that clash with the US's hegemonic domination, and who relish the opportunity to bloody



Washington's nose at a bargain price: Russia, perhaps China too.

The very fact that the focus of the conflict in Iraq has shifted, from an insurgent guerrilla war against occupation, to a war between the different factions of capital in Iraq and has thus become a conflict of Sunni's vs. Shiites and of Arabs vs. Kurds, clearly indicates which way the wind blows. The conflict is already about who will have power in what part of Iraq *after* the Americans have gone.

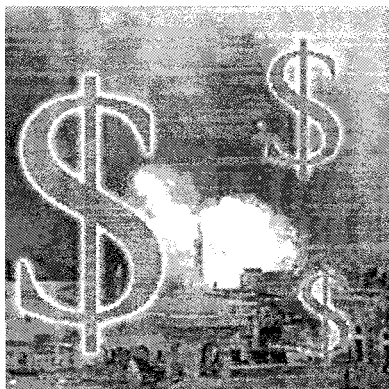
Even though the Washington consensus has turned against it, the faction of the ruling class that designed the Iraq war, the so-called neo-cons are still entrenched in the government. It doesn't have a free hand, but neither is it willing to throw in the towel. It started the war because it could -- 9/11 made it possible -- and with the dual aim of projecting America's power in defense of its world order and securing oil-rich Iraq as the centerpiece of a Pax Americana in the Middle East. It hasn't succeeded on

either level. The present escalation or "surge," already openly opposed by Congress, is an attempt to still achieve these goals. But it seems too little too late and thus likely to fail, after which the US will probably have to change course in Iraq.

Even before exploring the possible options that the American ruling class still has in Iraq, it's important to recognize that the debacle there, and the loss of influence of the neo-cons, has not yet entailed any kind of challenge to the overall policy of American imperialism as it seeks to dominate Central Asia, the Middle East, and to control the flow of oil so vital to global capital. A foreign policy or military debacle on this scale, in most other states would have resulted in regime change, the fall of a government, a shift in power from one faction of the ruling class to another. However, the very suppleness of the American state-form, the power that "democracy" provides its ruling class, has meant that the loss of popularity of the President, and the opprobrium directed at the neo-cons, has *not* translated into a loss of confidence in the political system on the part of the populace. Indeed, the opposition to the war has largely been directed into efforts to have the foreign policy establishment (the Iraq Study Group), Congress, now controlled by the Democrats, or a new President elected in 2008, adjust the *tactics* of American capital in Iraq and the Middle East, even as the overall *strategy* – American hegemony – remains the same. The fact the electoral campaign of 2008 has already begun indicates how well the ruling class has been able to so far contain the opposition to the war *within* the framework of the overall management of the capitalist state, and its circuits of control.

The alternatives to Bush's Iraq strategy, articulated by Democratic presidential candidates, like Hillary Clinton, Barack Obama, and John Edwards, and even some Republicans (Chuck Hagel), entail a quick, or not so quick, redeployment of American forces. However, with the exception of marginal candidates, none of them is advocating giving up Iraq; all want to retain a strong military presence, either inside the country or at its borders (Kuwait, Saudi Arabia), to assure a steady Middle Eastern oil supply and to prevent the emergence of an anti-American regime in Iraq. All of them are committed to a continuation and strengthening of American hegemony and control over the world. Indeed, as the new Democratic Speaker of the House of Representatives, Nancy Pelosi, has put it, the Iraq quagmire has adversely affected the war on terrorism, and especially

the military struggle against a resurgent Taliban in Afghanistan, as well as jeopardizing the ability of the US to mobilize its Allies for coordinated action in the



Middle East, including a “solution” to the Palestinian issue, and especially with respect to the regional challenge posed by Iran and its nuclear program. What these figures represent is an effort by the foreign policy establishment to reverse course in Iraq so as to *consolidate* the power of American capital and to preserve its global hegemony.

Meanwhile, within the Republican Party, the likely candidates, McCain or Giuliani, support Bush’s “surge” and the claims that it can salvage the policy of preserving a united, albeit federal, Iraqi state under some kind of majority rule. However, one has the sense that behind the support for the surge, and the present Maliki government, what may really be at stake is the prospect of shifting the blame for who *lost* Iraq onto the Democrats, who will have purportedly snatched defeat from the jaws of victory by their failure to “hang tough” and support the President in his one last effort to crush the insurgencies and control the sectarian violence. Given the problems with the strategy pursued by the leaders of the Democratic Party, and especially if there are new terrorist attacks on US soil, such a political strategy could yet prove successful in 2008.

This brings us back to the inherent difficulties in a strategy of “retrench yet maintain control” in Iraq advocated by much of the foreign policy establishment and the leadership of the Democratic Party – a strategy that may be just as hard to implement as a “surge” strategy. The closer the US moves towards implementing such a strategy, the more intense the struggle between Iraqi factions for control of the country in the post-occupation era will become, and thus the more difficult it will be to disengage. If it wants to maintain control of the country, the US cannot simply turn its back on it while civil war escalates. So it has to find a political solution before it can retreat. Given the dynamic of the conflict today, the least difficult (but not least bloody) “solution” might be one based on a partition of Iraq in 3 semi-independent states: Shi’ite, Sunni, and Kurdish. Such an outcome would not necessarily go against Washington’s interests, though the kind of ethnic cleansing entailed in drawing the boundaries of these statelets will escalate the scale of violence. To that must be added the strong possibility that one or more of them would fall under the sway of a power challenging American domination of the region, Iran in the case of a Shi’ite statelet, for example. That is not something either party in Washington is prepared to accept.

Whatever strategy the US follows in Iraq, for the foreseeable future, more violence, death, and fear, will be the fate of the ordinary people there. And it is here that the illusions of the “peace movement” in the US and Europe need to be confronted. Quite apart from the fact that important elements of the ruling class are involved in such a movement, as they seek support for their own preferred strategy for capital, a peace movement that fails to recognize that a capitalist “peace” in Iraq will entail not a decrease, but an *increase* in the barbarism, and mass death to which the population of that land is exposed, becomes one more factor in the murderous train of capitalist power politics that the operation of the law of value imposes on humankind. The struggle against that brutalization of life begins, not with a peace movement, but with the struggle against capitalism.

Internationalist Perspective

February 2007

Imperialism: Hegemonic Powers and Contender States

This article will attempt to both theoretically and historically – albeit somewhat schematically – explain the relationship between a *hegemonic* power and the rise of *contender* states in a capitalist world shaped by *imperialism*. It will also attempt to demonstrate the enormous power that a *liberal* state-form provides capitalism, especially in its phase of real domination. Finally, it will survey the prospects for a challenge to the hegemony of American imperialism by one or several prospective contender states over the medium term.¹

The development of capitalism has entailed imperialism from its very inception. The capitalist accumulation process is inseparable from imperialism. As Paul Mattick put it more than six decades ago: “The insatiable need for ever more and more profits, the fact that capitalism is nothing but profit production, makes it necessary to explain the driving forces behind imperialist actions in terms of economic categories. More than that, whatever the phenomenon that may be brought forward to explain imperialism, as, for instance, the ideological arguments, the desire for security, for land and raw materials, the monopolization of markets, capital export, strategic-military requirements, or anything else, can be reduced finally to its simplest terms: capitalism’s vital necessity to accumulate profits.”² Certainly any imperialist project is over-determined by a complex of factors. Nonetheless the imperative of accumulation is decisive in its explanation. Moreover, conflict between rival capitals is unavoidable, clashes and wars inevitable. As Mattick goes on to say: “Capital must expand or disintegrate. In either case nations, blocs of nations, or continents must of necessity encroach upon

the interests of other nations and coalitions.”³ The result is *inter-imperialist* conflict.

Indeed, even before capitalist social relations of production were firmly established, mercantilism, colonial expansion, and the slave trade shaped the imperialist politics of the most powerful European absolutist states. The development of capitalism, the consolidation of its social relations and property forms, the rise of the bourgeoisie, also entailed the emergence of a hegemonic power astride the world system in formation. That hegemonic power, of course, was Britain. While Britain was the site where capitalist social relations of production were first consolidated, its global hegemony was also the result of a series of successful wars against the French contender state, beginning in the seventeenth century -- a process that culminated at Waterloo. That hegemony rested in large part on the ability of British capital to construct a series of industrial, commercial, and financial institutions and networks that established it as the veritable core or center of the emerging political economy. These included the vital role of the Bank of England and the city of London in assuring the smooth functioning of the Gold Standard, and controlling the financial networks essential to capital. Yet, slowly over the course of the second half of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth, the British and *American* economies combined into an emerging trans-Atlantic economy, with the balance of power shifting towards the latter. The rapid growth of American *industrial* capacity, the enormous *financial* power of Wall Street, and even the US’s burgeoning *military* power (the parity, grudgingly accepted by London, between the British and American fleets in the Treaty of Washington, 1922, was a landmark here) combined to transform the US from a junior partner of Britain into the presumptive hegemonic power in the capitalist world system in the aftermath of World War One. World War Two completed the consolidation of American imperialism, with its industrial, financial, and military supremacy, as the veritable *hegemon* of the global capitalist system – one shaped by a network

¹ Despite considerable theoretical differences, the work of Kees van der Pijl, *Transnational Classes and International Relations* (Routledge, 1998) based on a vision of the capitalist world divided into a “Lockean heartland” and “Hobbesian contender states,” has helped shape the following analysis.

² “The War is Permanent,” *Living Marxism*, spring 1940, p.5.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

of institutions like the IMF, the World Bank, and now the WTO, all controlled by the US. While this process certainly occasioned resistance from the British ruling class, confronted by a choice between German or American global hegemony, London's decision to choose to become the junior partner of American imperialism is not difficult to understand, especially when one considers the elaborate network of financial, corporate, military, and cultural links between their respective capitalist classes.

What, then, of contender states that challenged first British and then American global hegemony over the capitalist world market? After the defeat of Napoleon, and the end of the French challenge to British hegemony, it would be Germany that would emerge as a serious contender state in the decades after its unification in 1870. The defeat of German imperialism in World War One, a defeat in which the US played a decisive role, might have led to the incorporation of Germany into the world system under Anglo-American hegemony. However, the shattering of the basic institutional structures of the global capitalist system under the impact of the Great Depression, instead led Germany to make one more bid for global hegemony, even as Japan challenged Anglo-American supremacy regionally in East Asia and the Pacific. The defeat of these contender states then left only Russia as a serious contender state with which the American hegemon would have to contend for the next four decades, until the collapse of the Stalinist regime. It is not the history of the unfolding of the conflicts between the Anglo-American hegemonic power and its rival, contender, states, which I want to explore now, but rather the very different political or *state* systems that historically have characterized the hegemon on the one hand, and the contender states on the other. These different state systems are no *mere* superstructure, no epiphenomenon, of little or no consequence, but rather crucial elements in the very *power* of the hegemon; key factors in its hegemony over the global capitalist system.

Both the British and American hegemons were characterized by a *liberal* political or state system. I will argue that this state-form was not incidental to their hegemony; nor did they possess liberal state-forms just because of their hegemonic role in the world capitalist system. Rather, I want to argue that a liberal state, and the contingent historical factors that created and shaped it, was itself a critical element in the very power that made, first Britain and then the US, the hegemonic capitalist power. The liberal state, as it

developed in Britain and the US, with its parliamentary system in the former and its constitutional system, based on a separation of powers in the latter, with its electoral systems, which permitted both the formation of strong governments and a rotation of political teams in power, with its legal system and recognition of individual and corporate rights, all coalesced to provide the institutional guarantees of law and order which maximized the potential for the development of a system based on commodification and the law of value, even as the state apparatus itself operated only indirectly in broad areas of social and economic life. Indeed, under the auspices of the liberal state, the value form and the exchange mechanism could spread from the point of immediate production throughout the economic sphere, and then into the political and cultural spheres, finally re-shaping the very subjectivity of each individual until it was consonant with the mechanisms of value production. Indeed, to speak of a liberal state does not at all contradict the claim, that I also want to make, that this is a *totalitarian* state-form; a state-form that permits capital to maximize its control over every sphere of social and private life; indeed a state-form that tendentially destroys what was once the hallmark of the bourgeois world: civil society, and especially the bourgeois public space, and the private realm. Where the public space and the private realm preserved considerable autonomy under the formal domination of capital, the liberal state has facilitated the penetration of the law of value into these once autonomous spheres of social existence, and their subordination to the capitalist state. In short, this is a state-form within which the transition from the formal to the real domination of capital could be seamlessly brought about.

By contrast, contender states, historically weaker in terms of their capitalist organization and structures of power, have been characterized by a state-form that becomes the veritable locus of capital accumulation. In an effort to "catch up" with the hegemonic power and prevent itself from being incorporated into its institutional and power structures, the contender *state* apparatus itself directly becomes the fulcrum of economic growth, organization, and control. Given the relative weakness of contender states vis à vis the imperialist hegemon, statism is both an expression of that weakness, as well as a necessity. It is the very weakness of the contender state in terms of capital accumulation, and its institutional structures and circuits, which leads it to compensate for that weakness by a more direct reliance on the power of the

state apparatus. As a result, state monopolies, nationalization, exchange and capital controls, a single party, secret police and state sponsored block associations, censorship, internal passports, compulsory job assignments, and “voluntary” workdays, are all hallmarks of contender states. Yet, the level of control over the population thereby achieved pales by comparison with the effective control over human life attained by the hegemonic power and its liberal state. The totalitarianism of the Nazi or Stalinist state, incomparable in their violence and brutality, turns out to be a misnomer, when compared to the ruthless effectiveness of the multiple control mechanisms characteristic of the liberal state, especially in times of “emergency” or war. Here, a comparison of the war economies in Britain, the US, and Nazi Germany during World War Two is illuminating. Whereas Britain and the US mobilized millions of women to replace men in the factories, the Nazi regime, fearful of civil discontent, relied on the forced labor of foreigners to replace men at the front. The outcome was both low out-put in German factories as slave laborers resisted the demands of their masters, in contrast to the patriotism that prevailed in Britain and the US, as well as a generalized resentment and resistance to the demands of the Nazi regime throughout “fortress Europe.” The difference between reliance on force and coercion by the Nazi contender regime, and the effectiveness of the multiple circuits of control and “democratic” mobilization in Britain and the US, is directly linked to the liberal state-form in the Anglo-Saxon world.

Indeed, here is an issue where revolutionaries need to *reject* the tradition of the communist left in its confrontation with fascism and Stalinism. The communist left never really understood the significance of liberalism and its state-form. Thus, as the German left (in exile) confronted the specter of fascism, for Otto Rühle, Paul Mattick, and Karl Korsch, liberalism and democracy appeared as *weak* forms of bourgeois rule, historically condemned to disappear when confronted by the more “robust” and purportedly efficient red and brown fascism (to use Rühle’s terms), i.e. Nazism and Stalinism. For these theorists, the very survival of the Anglo-American regimes would necessitate their transformation from liberal regimes into fascist ones in order to defeat their imperialist rivals. That the liberal regimes in Britain or the US had more control over their populations, and achieved a better organization of the economy, than their fascist antagonists, was incomprehensible to these

comrades. With the defeat of Nazism, the communist left persisted in seeing liberalism as a weak and outdated state-form: thus, both the *Gauche communiste de France* and *Socialisme ou barbarie* claimed that capitalism could see its own future in the purportedly better organized state capitalism ensconced in Stalinist Russia. It was not their conviction that capitalism in this epoch had to be totalitarian that was mistaken, but rather their inability to see that the liberal state could be a far more effective form for the totalitarian control of society than either fascism or Stalinism.

The liberal state, in its classical form in the nineteenth century, in the form of “corporate liberalism” and Keynesianism in much of the twentieth century, and in the form of “neo-liberalism” over the past quarter of a century, has presided over the creation and consolidation of the global capitalist market, under Anglo-American hegemony. Neo-liberalism, and its purported reliance on market mechanisms and “privatization” may, and probably will, give way to new institutional forms to grapple with the intractable issues spawned by a *global* capitalist economy, but short of a virtually complete breakdown of the prevailing capitalist economic and financial structures, it seems clear that the liberal state will reinvent itself and provide the political framework within which the global capitalist economy will most effectively function. Indeed, the very suppleness of this state-form, its ability to organize, manage, and control social life, means that the capitalist hegemon will not easily give it up. Indeed, it is difficult to imagine a state-form better suited to the hegemonic capital in this epoch, where its tasks include the coordination of the global accumulation process and the modes of subjectification and control made possible by capital’s unprecedented *power over life*, both linked to the development of techno-science and its centrality to the *real subsumption of labor to capital*. Moreover, within the ambit of a liberal state and a global capitalist economy, the very physiognomy of the capitalist class has been transformed. From the old, left, Club of Rome, to the right, Mount Pèlerin Society, to the meetings of the IMF, and through a network of corporate board rooms based on trans-Atlantic, indeed global, shareholdings, to military exchanges at the highest levels and ongoing governmental linkages (the G7, for example), an increasingly global capitalist *class* has emerged under American hegemony.

This brings us to the question of new challenges to the American hegemon, the prospects for new contender

states, perhaps anti-liberal in their state-forms, on both the regional and global levels. Indeed, within the revolutionary milieu, and especially in the face of the debacle of American policy in Iraq, and its global implications, there is widespread talk of a challenge to the dollar as the global reserve currency of the capitalist world by the Euro, of the determination of Russia to use its vast oil and gas reserves as a political weapon, perhaps in conjunction with Iran's efforts to reshape the Middle East, and especially of the challenge to American hegemony represented by a rapidly growing China.

While Euro holdings by central banks have dramatically increased, so have dollar holdings, and there seems to be no concerted move to directly challenge the dollar as the reserve currency of the capitalist world. The tentative moves by Iran, and by Hugo Chavez in Venezuela, to denominate the price of oil in Euros, not dollars, have remained just a threat. Indeed, the denomination of oil in cheap dollars (relative to a strong Euro) means lower oil prices for Europe, which for the moment means that the EU has little interest in such a move. But what is important here is that talk of a switch from the dollar to the Euro as the reserve currency is not linked to any moves on the part of European capital to challenge the hegemonic role of the US in the world capitalist system. Despite the weight of the EU in the global economy, the key elements for a challenge to American hegemony by European capital are lacking. Any prospective challenge on the part of European capital would have to be based on the complete *political* unification of the EU, and on the development of an independent *military* capacity, and a distinct culture, a European *nationalism*, with a concept of a *nation-Europe*, opposed to "colonization" by America, even as it would have to presuppose the breaking of the innumerable links that over the past fifty years have forged a *trans-Atlantic* capitalist class. As the debacle of the European constitution showed, even the tentative steps to forge a European political entity, or state-form, have been, for the moment, a failure, and the steps to redraft the constitution, and try again, are not seen as a threat by the American hegemon. Moreover, as far as the military is concerned, Europe remains dependent on the US for, technology, logistics, planning, and even combat units, the evidence for which can be seen in Bosnia, Kosovo, and Afghanistan. Meanwhile, the vision of a militant European nationalism as part of a coherent political project directed against American hegemony still

remains largely confined to the extreme right and left fringes of the political and cultural spectrum, where it manifests itself in visions of an alliance between Europe and the Arab-Islamic world against American imperialism or dreams of a Franco-German-Russian condominium to challenge the US, neither with significant support within the capitalist class. And within the EU itself, the American hegemon can count on the support of a ring of states from Britain to Poland, to the Baltic republics and now the Balkans, who clearly prefer the American link to a Europe dominated by Germany and France, further indications that the path to European unity will not be smooth. In the absence of a breakdown of the global capitalist economic system forged by the US over the course of the past century, which would dramatically transform the capitalist landscape, it is difficult to see the conditions coming together that would propel Europe on a path to challenge the global hegemony of American imperialism.

What of China, whose economic growth and military expansion has been prodigious? While the European capitalist classes lack the *will* at the present time to directly challenge the American hegemon, the Chinese capitalist class, which may indeed have the will, lacks the *resources* to mount such a challenge. Mesmerized by the rapid growth of the Chinese economy, and the transformation of its urban landscape over the past few decades, it is all too easy to overlook the extent of the backwardness of China, its enormous agrarian sector, the numerical and social weight of its vast peasant population, and the enormous difficulty of incorporating the mass of its population into an industrial, let alone post-Fordist, economy. What took Europe centuries to accomplish, for example, Chinese capital must attempt to accomplish in decades, lest social unrest threaten to overwhelm its state-form and the power of its ruling class. Moreover, while one faction of Chinese capital seems content to integrate itself into the global division of labor prescribed by the American hegemon, to permit China to serve as a reservoir for cheap but disciplined labor for the production of consumer goods exported to Europe and America, another faction, perhaps the dominant one, seeks to transform China into at least a regional hegemon in East Asia – a project that is a direct threat to American capital. If China is not to be directly subjected to American hegemony, this latter faction of Chinese capital, with its power base in the military, the single party, and the state apparatus, will have to challenge American

hegemony in East Asia. However, that project will likely be resisted by the other capitalist states of the region, the Asian tigers, for whom the rise of China to regional power can only be seen as mortal danger, one that will drive them more firmly under the shelter of the American hegemon. This is also the case for Japan, now the biggest investor in China, but whose own capitalist class will probably see the rise of Chinese power more as a threat than an opportunity. For Japanese capital, for both economic and historical reasons, the American hegemon seems far less of a danger than a putative Chinese hegemon, and as China extends her political and military reach in East Asia, Japan can be expected to draw closer to the US. Indeed, Japan and the tigers to her East, and a rapidly growing India to her West, both nestled within a global economy dominated by the US, will serve to check Chinese imperial ambitions.⁴ My point is not to foreclose the prospect of a Chinese challenge to American imperial hegemony, but rather to highlight the formidable obstacles that any such challenge will face.

Clearly in a capitalist world, the hegemonic power, no matter how firmly established, will inevitably face imperialist challenges. The dialectic of hegemon and contender states is a hallmark of the life of capital, and economic crisis will only heighten these tendencies. The dialectic of hegemonic power and contender states in a capitalist world is definitely not a theory of *super-imperialism*, of a worldwide cartel of capitals that would supersede imperialist antagonisms. Those antagonisms are integral to the dialectic of hegemon and contender state that I have traced. Indeed, significant tensions exist between capitalist states within the orbit of American hegemony, and regional challenges to the American hegemon abound especially in Central Asia and the Middle East. However, in trying to evaluate the prospects for continued American hegemony over the capitalist world, it is important to recognize the enormous economic, financial, political, military, and cultural, power of the American hegemon, established over the

course of more than a century, relative to any contender state or states. While a massive global economic breakdown or financial collapse would shatter the bases of American hegemony, until that occurs, in my view, analyses of the imperialist balance of forces, both regionally and globally, too often underestimate the power of the American hegemon, and its profound bases in the very structuration of the capitalist world today. Indeed, the *real* and *realistic* challenge to American hegemony comes not from a contender state, an *inter-imperialist* rival, but from the global working class, which alone constitutes a challenge to the awesome power of capital.

Mac Intosh

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⁴ Indian capital, in contrast to Chinese, seems content to play a role as a regional power *within* the global system shaped by American imperialism. Unlike Chinese capitalism, Indian capitalism is far more open to the international financial networks established by the US, and given the danger its Hindu ruling class sees in the Islamic world, far less likely to challenge American hegemony regionally.

Oaxaca:

Rebellion and Recuperation



Introduction

Since the spring of 2006 a popular uprising has occurred in the southern Mexican state of Oaxaca. This uprising resulted from a number of events arising out of the deteriorating material social conditions of life faced by most Oaxacans. What began as an isolated strike, an annual ritual normally of minor significance, by the public school teachers of the state, turned into a mass popular revolt in open defiance of the government led by an 'old-guard' *casiquero* (leader), Ulises Ruiz Ortiz, of the long dominant PRI (Institutional Revolutionary Party).

While the principal demands of this struggle were/are political, in particular, the resignation or removal of Ruiz from office, it is clear that impoverishment and declining economic conditions generally, which of course are not unrelated to political

matters, fuel an underlying current that energizes this revolt. Thus, at the end of December 2006, the Popular Assembly of the Peoples of Oaxaca (APPO), which claims to be the organized form of the movement, issued a 'notification' in which it asserted that "we are building a public and open board for dialogue and negotiation", presumably with the federal administration of the new president Felipe Calderon, in order to "make it possible to end poverty and aid economic, political and social development in our state." This was after the uprising had been violently repressed (mostly between late October and early December, but still ongoing) by the state, involving both federal and state security forces, while Ruiz remained in office.

As the following article, from the American anarchist journal *A Murder of Crows* (issue #2), points out, Oaxaca is the second poorest state in Mexico and it has the second largest population of indigenous peoples (in both cases following the neighboring state of Chiapas, where another social uprising has been occurring over the past dozen years). These facts reflect the lack of economic development in Oaxaca historically, and the continued existence of small-scale commodity producers, both agricultural and artisanal. However, over the past 15 or so years, especially since the implementation of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) with the U.S. and Canada in 1994, two forces have increasingly squeezed this layer of the population from their traditional way of life and work: 1) free trade has eliminated markets for local corn and coffee growers, among others, in Oaxaca by forcing them to compete with massive foreign corporate producers whose products contain a far lower quantum of living labor, enabling them to be sold profitably at a far lower price; and 2) previously common, public lands used by such indigenous peasants for centuries to maintain their subsistence have been appropriated by governments and sold to private, usually foreign, investors (whichever offers the highest bid). Meanwhile, chronic lack of development of infrastructure and of public education adequate to the demands of global capital today, mean that very little employment is available for these recently dispossessed peasants who capital does not require. What little employment there is at minimal wages (by Mexican national standards) is in the tourist sector. The result is that, out of a population of 3.5 million, roughly 150,000 people are leaving the state of Oaxaca each year, most heading north to work in the U.S.

Political factors have of course played a central role in Oaxaca's chronic lack of development, as well as in recent changes in economic conditions. The very serious economic crisis of the 1980s led to the adoption on the part of the politically dominant fraction of the Mexican ruling class of a neo-liberal, pro-globalization agenda; one which has been adhered

to by every federal administration of the past 20 years. This 'opening up' of Mexico's economy, after decades of a large degree of statist nationalization and economic management, has eroded much of the basis of the monolithic domination of Mexican political life by the PRI party. The latter, thoroughly corrupt and historically operating by means of a vast system of patronage throughout the country, has been seriously diminished in its extent of political control, as the ruling class in Mexico tries to modernize its political apparatus in concert with its opening of its economy to the forces of global capital. Over the past decade another political party, the PAN (National Action Party), has come to the fore, especially at the national level, to defend the neo-liberal agenda, providing both the previous president, Vicente Fox, as well as the current one, Felipe Calderon. At the same time, a left-wing party, the PRD (Party of the Democratic Revolution), has split from the PRI in order to represent the constituency of left-nationalism and 'anti-imperialism', opposing both the neo-liberalism of the PAN and the entrenched corruption of the PRI. This party has made formal overtures to the APPO, but so far the latter has remained suspicious of the former's motives.

While the power of the PRI has eroded significantly over the past decade, and its political obsolescence is increasingly clear to all sectors of Mexican society, it of course desperately tries to hold on to what power it retains. Such is the case of Ulises Ruiz Ortiz and his regime in Oaxaca. His open corruption and his use of unofficial paramilitary death and torture squads to violently intimidate and repress the increasingly rebellious dispossessed people of Oaxaca, has given rise to this recent mass uprising, resulting in a situation of near 'ungovernability' and a movement towards a state of dual power (with the APPO transforming itself in November into a 'State Council' of the Peoples of Oaxaca [CEAPPO]), before the intervention of the forces of the Federal Preventative Police (PFP) reclaimed most of the public areas occupied by the Oaxacan insurgents.

This is What Recuperation Looks like: the Rebellion in Oaxaca and the APPO

By Kellen Kass

On May 22, 2006, teachers in the state of Oaxaca, Section 22 of the National Education Worker's Union (SNTE), went on strike. Section 22 has yearly strikes in Oaxaca to demand a variety of concessions from the state, and this year's strike included calls for higher wages, the construction of more schools throughout the state of Oaxaca, as well as free lunches and supplies for students. Section 22 members occupied the city center, the Zócalo, to further their protest and disrupt the state capital during the beginning of the tourist season. They set up camping sites in the main square, occupied public buildings and organized large marches, or mega-marches as the Oaxacans call them, to reinforce their economic demands as well as calling for the resignation of Governor Ulises Ruiz. Public support was quite strong for the marches as well as the occupation.

In early June, teachers were given a final offer and ultimatum to vacate the Zócalo. On June 14, a police raid authorized by Gov. Ruiz involving nearly 3,000 officers from the state police attacked the central square in the early morning hours. A helicopter dropped tear gas into the square to disorient the occupiers, while outside of the city riot police readied themselves for an invasion. Police attacked the main square, completely destroying the teachers' encampments and injuring hundreds. Teachers and Oaxaca residents fought back against police aggression and were able to retake the square in a matter of hours with their fists and makeshift weapons. During the fighting, however, 8 people died and others were "disappeared."¹

After people reoccupied the Zócalo and took control of surrounding blocks, a mega-march was held on June 16, with an estimated 400,000 people taking part. This time however, the teachers dropped their

economic demands in exchange for one political demand: the removal of Gov. Ruiz. Despite the narrowed focus, the struggle was extended in a variety of ways; teachers occupied seven city hall buildings across the state, and students at the Benito Juárez Autonomous University of Oaxaca (UABJO) took over their school radio station in support of the striking teachers.² In addition to these actions, teachers and many on the left formed the Popular Assembly of the People of Oaxaca (APPO). The APPO was an ad hoc organization for people to come together to talk about the events transpiring and to plan future action.

July was contentious as well because the Mexican presidential elections took place at the beginning of the month. Much like Ruiz's election, the presidential election was fraught with allegations of fraud. Throughout the recount, groups in Oaxaca managed to not be drawn into any particular party's machinations.

On August 1, a women's march involving some 2,000 people made its way through Oaxaca to the city center. From there a few hundred women took their protest out of the street and into the building of TV Channel 9. They occupied the building and took over the station, broadcasting themselves and their views on the current situation; video footage of the various marches and police raids was also shown.³ By August 22, Ruiz and his cohorts had had enough, and they launched a paramilitary attack against the station. In response, people took to the streets, overturning several city buses, setting them on fire, and using them to block major roads. In addition, demonstrators took over private radio stations to spread news of the raid and to announce solidarity messages. At the same time various smaller groups armed with clubs shut down

¹ "Oaxaca Teachers Union Protests face Police Repression," available at: <http://www.chiapaspeacehouse.org/node/286>, and "Up From Below: The New Revolution in Southern Mexico," available at: <http://www.counterpunch.org/ross07142006.html>

² "In Oaxaca Mega-March, 400,000 Send A Firm No to the Repression by Governor Ulises Ruiz Ortíz," available at: <http://www.narconews.com/Issue41/article1906.html>

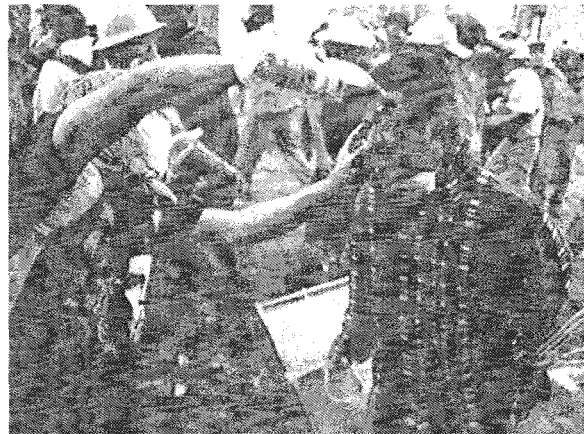
³ "Oaxaca's State TV Station Under Popular Control," available at: <http://www.narconews.com/Issue42/article1990.html>

intersections across the already paralyzed city.⁴

Paramilitary violence has been a serious problem throughout the teachers' strike and occupation of the city. The term paramilitaries is awfully vague, and it has been extremely difficult to find out who has been behind some of the shootings; those captured are seldom identified by the state. Certainly the paramilitaries involve Mexican military, Oaxacan police, as well as the private army of Ruiz who is, at the time of this writing, still desperately clinging to power. At a march on August 10, gunmen opened fire killing one teacher, Jose Jimenez.⁵ On October 18, a teacher and APPO participant, Pánfilo Hernández, was shot and killed in a paramilitary drive-by. On October 27, Brad Will, anarchist and Indymedia journalist, was shot and killed by paramilitaries, as were Emilio Alonso Fabián and Esteban López Zurita. These are some of the most well documented cases, but there are dozens of others who have died in this fight as well.

Events in October were tumultuous, and the month came to a crashing conclusion. On October 26, Section 22 teachers voted to end their strike amidst allegations of voting fraud and accusations that their leadership had sold out. And on October 28, Vicente Fox announced that he was ordering thousands of Federal Preventative Police (PFP) into Oaxaca in order to retake the city. When the PFP invasion came, the APPO urged peaceful protest and non-violent resistance to the police. Lines of riot police equipped with tear gas and batons pushed back thousands of people, and they also used armored trucks with water cannons and plows to disperse people and destroy barricades. The APPO sent out numerous communiqués exhorting people to act peacefully, and even went so far as to denounce all violent actions against the PFP as the work of agent provocateurs.⁶ People lay down in the roads, pushed against police lines, but by nightfall the PFP had made its way into the city center.

As police pushed further into the city on November 2, they attempted to retake the university and destroy the occupied radio station within it. In a six-hour battle with police, students and many other



people used molotov cocktails, rocks, steel pipes and slings to fight police, and they overturned cars and buses to further reinforce their blockades. This fierce resistance forced the police to withdraw, and put a stop to police advances into the university area. Students and many others were clearly upset about the loss of the Zócalo to state forces. Therefore they decided to use violent means to continue occupying the university regardless of what the APPO said. At the time of this writing, the students and the APPO still control the area surrounding the university.

Roots of Rebellion

“The rich will do anything for the poor but get off their backs.” – Karl Marx

The uprising in Oaxaca and the popular mobilizations have made international headlines recently, but the causes of the situation have not garnered as much attention. In August 2004, Ulises Ruiz Ortiz, a lawyer, “won” the Oaxaca governor’s election by a slim margin. Ruiz’s opponents immediately contested the election results, charging that he and his cohorts had rigged the outcome. Apparently the opposition’s claims were not unfounded, but Ruiz still took office in December later that year. Ruiz is a member of the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) that completely controlled the Mexican federal government for over 70 years until the 2000 election of Vicente Fox, a National Action Party (PAN) member, to the presidency.⁷

Considering the extreme poverty in Mexico, with some 40 million living well below the poverty

⁴ “Mexico Teachers Extend Protest,” available at: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/5272462.stm>

⁵ “Violence Flares in South Mexico,” available at: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/4782837.stm>

⁶ For the APPO’s denunciation of violence, see <http://codepappo.wordpress.com/2006/10/29/urgente-la-pfp-en-oaxaca>

⁷ “Under the Volcano,” *The Economist*, September 28, 2006.

line, it is not surprising that one of the main ways that the PRI remained in power was through a system of patronage: contracts, jobs, and funding for education and basic services are handed out after successful elections of PRI officials on the local and national level.⁸ In thousands of other cases, and specifically in Ruiz's case, bags of groceries were handed out in exchange for votes. In Oaxaca though, it was not just Ruiz who came to power in this way. In the first few months of 2006 there were also conflicts over town elections in San Blas Atempa, Oaxaca between the Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD) candidate and a PRI candidate over issues of voter fraud and purchasing of votes. While this may seem outrageous, patronage has been a normal procedure in politics worldwide for centuries, and the PRI is just a standard political machine that many throughout Mexico are finally fed up with. Unfortunately, many people think that these corrupt politicians should simply be replaced by honest politicians.⁹

The roots of the problem, however, go much deeper than PRI patronage and corruption that permeate Mexican politics. The cause of the mobilization and violent clashes with police lies in the absolutely wretched economic conditions that dominate life across southern Mexico. Oaxaca, bordering Chiapas to the west, is Mexico's second-poorest state and has the second-largest population of indigenous peoples. According to human rights organizations, nearly 80% of Oaxaca lives in extreme poverty.¹⁰ The main industry that props up the economy of Oaxaca is tourism. And like all tourist areas, most people work in services where wages are low, and many public services are geared towards visitors as opposed to actual residents.

International trade agreements such as the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) have only made things worse. The implementation of neo-liberal reforms to the Mexican state, which has meant overall cuts to basic necessities over the past several years, has made it even more difficult for people to survive.¹¹ In recent years, Mexico has been

unable to keep pace with China's offer to the altar of economic sacrifice: its immense, expendable and therefore cheap work force. Thus Mexico has been subject to the migration of factories and jobs to Asia in the same way that the United States has experienced "job loss" to Mexico. Thus it is not hard to see that dictates of the market care little about countries, and that capital flows in the direction of greater profit and greater misery.¹²

It is this complex situation that has led to decades of social conflict and has culminated in the struggle we see now.

We're all on the Same Team: the APPO

"Our aim is a more democratic government that listens to the people more than the current government does."
—APPO Spokesman Florentino Lopez Martinez

While many inspiring actions are taking place in Oaxaca, one must not lose the ability to look critically at situations. On the surface the APPO appears to be simply an assembly of common people charting out their future, but there are very distinct political perspectives and groups involved. The membership of the APPO is extremely varied and is composed of a variety of social organizations, political groupings, unions, and human rights organizations. Members of Section 22 are involved, as are anarchists, municipal authorities, and indigenous organizations such as the Movimiento de Unificación y Lucha Triqui (MULT) and the Popular Indigenous Council of Oaxaca – Ricardo Flores Magon (CIPO-RFM). Within the APPO, representatives from each group participate in meetings where issues are decided based on consensus as opposed to majority rule. Members are not supposed to be involved in parties participating in electoral politics, but membership is open to groups such as the Revolutionary Popular Front (FPR) and the Union of Revolutionary Youth of Mexico (UJRM), both of which are openly appendages of the Marxist-Leninist Mexican Communist Party. One of the spokesmen for the APPO, Florentino Lopez Martinez, has stated in interviews that he is a member of the

⁸ "Oaxaca's Dangerous Teachers," *Dollars & Sense: the Magazine of Economic Justice*, September/October 2006.

⁹ "Police Retake Oaxaca Town Hall Occupied Since January 2005," available at:

<http://www.narconews.com/Issue40/article1654.html>

¹⁰ "How Many Deaths Is the Oaxaca Governor Worth?" available at:

<http://www.commondreams.org/headlines06/1103-08.htm>

¹¹ "Oaxaca's Dangerous Teachers," *Dollars & Sense: the*

Magazine of Economic Justice, September/October 2006.

¹² For more information about the economic background of Mexico, see "A Commune in Chiapas? Mexico and the Zapatista Rebellion," *Aufheben* #9, autumn 2000.

FPR.¹³ (13)

Aside from small aspiring states such as the Marxist-Leninist Mexican Communist Party, there are other politicians in the midst of the APPO. One of the spokespeople of the APPO, the media-darling and crass opportunist Flavio Sosa, was a part of Vicente Fox's election campaign in 2000 through his organization the New Left of Oaxaca. Sosa has also

been actively involved in the PRI splinter-party the Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD) for years, a party he actually quit in order to be involved in the APPO.¹⁴ It should be pretty obvious that Sosa is a political opportunist who moves from one group to the next in hopes of carving out some kind of position for himself. He's a classic recuperator, and one in serious need of an ass kicking.

It is also interesting to note that APPO member and Section 22 leader, Enrique Rueda Pacheco, gave a speech at the fifth mega-march in Oaxaca in early September calling for "national unity" and a movement that would incorporate the PRD and the Zapatistas. He has also been involved in trying to end the teachers' strike as far back as July. Like a typical union hack, he consistently tried to undermine the strike in exchange for political clout. Clearly, the APPO is a mixed bag and includes its fair share of aspiring politicians and real politicians. This, however, is not the most damning aspect.¹⁵

At the end of September, three days of meetings were held to discuss the transformation of the APPO from an ad hoc organization to a more formalized and permanent organization in Oaxaca. Following the meetings, a document entitled "Resolutions of the First State Assembly of the Peoples of Oaxaca" was released. This document is perhaps the best indication of the nature of the APPO because it is an attempt to define "...Statutes, the

Declaration of Principles, a definitive Structure and a Program of Struggle." Within the resolutions there is a section entitled "Proposal for a Program of Struggle," which is most revealing of the overall aims of the APPO.

The first point of the program of struggle is entitled "For the Defense of National Sovereignty," in which they outline their proposal for withdrawing the Mexican state from trade agreements such as NAFTA and the FTAA, as well as from organizations such as the IMF and World Bank. Their second point, entitled "For a New Model of Economic Development" reaffirms national ownership of natural resources and calls for the re-nationalization of industries that have been privatized, as well as the nationalization of monopolistic industries such as banking. Thus the APPO identifies neo-liberal institutions like the IMF and World Bank and privately owned corporations as "bad" and the sovereign Mexican state as "good." A later portion of the economic program even calls for further economic integration of Latin America and the Caribbean and the creation of a common market therein, a sort of alternative FTAA. According to the APPO, the problem is not with the market, not with capitalism, not with the existence of bureaucratic institutions, but rather with US imperialism and the bad countries of the North that take advantage of the good countries in the South. It's the same tired charade of national liberation that has proven time and time again to be a miserable dead end.

The third point of their program of struggle is "For a Popular Democracy," in which they proclaim that the "present antidemocratic State should be replaced with a new State with a democratic and popular character..." which in turn will be based on "...the will of the Mexican people to constitute and make effective a Democratic and Representative Federal Republic." This point asserts that the state is a neutral institution and that everything would be better for all of us if only the corrupt, lying politicians were replaced by honest, democratic politicians. Perhaps their critique of the state is so liberal because many representatives in the APPO would like to see themselves as the next ruling elite, but that remains to be seen. Thus their program of struggle is not proposing the revolutionary transformation of social life, but rather the democratization of the state and the continuance of capitalism, albeit with a friendlier face.¹⁶

¹³ Frente Popular Revolucionario:

<http://fprweb.tripod.com/index.htm>, and Unión de la Juventud Revolucionaria de México: <http://pagina.de/ujrm>. For interview with Florentino Lopez Martinez see: <http://www.infoshop.org/inews/article.php?story=20061022084418717>.

¹⁴ "Liderazgo "camaleónico": Flavio Sosa, cabeza de la APPO, apoyó al PRD, luego a Fox," *Diario de la Yucatán*, Nov. 6 2006.

¹⁵ "Oaxaca's Social Movement Develops Radical Vision for a National Government of the People" available at: <http://www.narconews.com/Issue42/article2038.html>.

¹⁶ Resolutions of the First State Assembly of the People's of

Given the participation of many dubious groups and characters, as well as the “Resolutions of the First State Assembly of the Peoples of Oaxaca,” we must conclude that the character of the APPO is reformist, and their overall plan is one of recuperating the rage and resentment of the dispossessed in order to manage the misery of the current social order. The APPO does not seek to destroy the state, but it intends to democratize it. The APPO does not seek to end capitalism, but it intends to increase state ownership of corporations and make capitalism fairer. Plainly stated, the APPO – an organization with defined principles and a long term strategy of struggle— does not share common goals with anarchists, and is certainly taking part in activity that will actively undermine the overthrow of this system. They promote false alternatives and question only the management of the state and capitalism, not the system itself.

Solidarity?

“Prepare to die...Put down your shields and take off your helmets, and I’ll beat the living shit out of you!” – anonymous Oaxacan woman defending the UABJO

This brings us full circle then to the issue of solidarity. Clearly the APPO is an organization with wide support from those who want to see major change come about in their lives; this cannot be denied. But their popularity does not erase the fact that there are micro-bureaucrats actively involved in the APPO, nor does it change the fact that the APPO’s program is one of promoting a new way to manage the state and capitalism. Also despite its name, the APPO does not represent everyone involved, or the revolt in its entirety. The uprising in Oaxaca has been inspiring because of people’s willingness to take their lives into their own hands and direct their own activity. This is the greatest potential of the rebellion: its ability to break with the normality of being controlled and directed by others and then spread further, eventually leading to revolutionary social transformation.

People are beginning to rediscover the ability to meet face-to-face in occupied zones – the Zócalo, the university, the neighborhoods and streets— in order to discuss matters of real importance. Direct actions such as strikes, occupations, blockades and

sabotage are being employed by all of those involved. Women are asserting themselves even more, planning actions, taking over television stations, organizing blockades, and participating in street fighting against the police. The cessation of “business as usual” and the casting off of subservience has opened up many possibilities and has led to massive resistance to the Mexican state. This growing self-organization must remain truly autonomous if it is not to be slowly ground down by piecemeal reforms and other political tricks. Therefore the APPO and its alternative management plan must be rejected.¹⁷

Despite the deficiencies of the APPO, we should extend solidarity to the people fighting in Oaxaca. In the United States many solidarity actions were undertaken during the PFP raids in late October and early November. Protests were held outside of embassies and consulates in many cities across the US, including Houston, Phoenix, and Seattle. Consulates in Sacramento and Minneapolis had their windows smashed, and other consulates and embassies were blockaded or occupied like in New York, Indianapolis, and Raleigh. Anarchists in the US have been very active in concretely demonstrating their solidarity with the events in Oaxaca, and one can only hope that these actions will spread.

The course of the conflict is being played out as we write. The Zapatistas have called for a general strike in Mexico on November 20, and scores of actions are planned in the US and abroad for that day as well. Consulates and embassies are clearly targets of interest, but one should not forget that we are fighting an entire system, and that demonstrating solidarity with Oaxaca can take many forms such as shut downs of corporations with financial links in Mexico as a whole, blockades in our own cities, and of course the escalation of activity against more direct issues in the US. People in Oaxaca are taking steps to combat this system as a whole, let’s do the same.

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Oaxaca are available online at:
<http://www.asambleapopulardeoaxaca.com/boletines/index.php?s=RESOLUTIVOS+DE+LA+PRIMERA+ASAMBLEA+ESTATAL+DE+LOS+PUEBLOS+DE+OAXACA+>

¹⁷ For a look at one neighborhood’s activities which are outside of the APPO, see “Two Days in the Life of Oaxaca’s Revolution,” available at:
<http://narconews.com/Issue42/article2021.html>

After word

Since this article was written, in mid-November, the movement has suffered further violent repression, particularly on November 25 and in the week that followed. The call by the Zapatistas for a general strike on November 20 was apparently widely ignored, with no reports of any strikes by any of the major sources of information sympathetic to the movement. As noted in the introduction, the APPO, at around the time the above article was written, issued a call to the people “to forge a new constitution for Oaxaca”, subsequently “dissolving” itself as the APPO, and reforming as the State Council of the Popular Assembly of the Peoples of Oaxaca (CEAPPO). The CEAPPO claims to include “merchants, students, bus and taxi drivers, unions, women, non-governmental organizations, political parties and social groups”, as well as the teachers whose strike initiated the movement. After being forcibly removed from the Zócalo in Oaxaca City, the APPO (or CEAPPO) moved its encampment to the plaza of the Santo Domingo cathedral, as well as continuing its occupation of parts of the university. Following the repression of November 25, these spaces were given up, and the CEAPPO apparently went underground. Since the beginning of the New Year, it seems that the CEAPPO has developed increasingly in the rural regions of Oaxaca, with the creation by a number of indigenous communities of new “autonomous municipalities” in opposition to the discredited and “dis-owned” municipal authorities tied to the regime of Ruiz. With the CEAPPO forced underground in Oaxaca City, and with the open struggle in retreat, we must assume that it is in decline there, however. At the same time, coalitions of groups in sympathy with the CEAPPO have formed their own Popular Assemblies of the Peoples of various other states in Mexico, most prominently in the Federal Department of Mexico, which includes Mexico City. The struggle does continue, nevertheless, with a ninth ‘megamarch’ of 30,000 people on February 3rd. What about the teachers? With a price on the head of many of them, approximately 30% of them are in hiding from Ruiz’s paramilitaries, while the rest returned to classes in November. They did, however, hold a state assembly of their union, denouncing and dis-owning their leader Rueda Pacheco, and his attempts to split the Oaxacan section of their union from both the APPO and the rest of the union. On February 2nd, they issued a public statement proclaiming their continued

support for the APPO, for the struggle against Ruiz and his regime, as well as against neo-liberal policies, privatizations, reductions in social spending, and the concentration of wealth amongst a few. They state: “We defend the popular economy and the economic well-being of all Mexicans.” These positions are reflective of the APPO generally. Elections to the state legislature occur in August, while elections of mayors in municipalities throughout Oaxaca occur in October this year. The APPO proclaims that it “reserves the right to back candidates in the united anti-PRI campaign, without itself becoming a political party.” It remains to be seen, however, if the APPO will be able to resist the tendency to align itself with the PRD in its fight against both the PRI and the PAN.

The article above by Kellen Kass offers a clear and cogent analysis of the struggle and of the APPO. That the APPO does not share common goals with anarchists, insofar as those of the latter involve the elimination of the state and capitalism, applies also for communists. At the same time, there are some anarchists who do seem to share common goals with the APPO, who do seem to see it as a liberatory rather than as a recuperative force. While there are anti-capitalist anarchist tendencies such as Kellen’s, there are also others which, when such popular struggles arise, support nationalist, statist, pro-capitalist popular fronts such as the APPO or the PF in Spain in the ‘30s.

There are some points and some omissions in Kellen’s article which also reflect weaknesses of the anarchist perspective. For example, there is a lack of class analysis of the APPO and of the struggle in general. Insofar as the APPO is a form of self-organization of those in struggle, and insofar as it assumes the general assembly and council form workers have utilized in mass autonomous struggles since 1905 in Russia, it is to be supported. However, the APPO is not organized primarily on the basis of either neighborhood/territory or of the workplace. Besides workers, the APPO contains dispossessed peasants, merchants, small-scale producers, and others. Thus the APPO is not a working class organization, and so its political content, its goals, will not be that of the working class either. Its struggle is a ‘popular’ struggle against a corrupt regime and political establishment and an extremely inequitable distribution of wealth. As such, it can only be nationalist, statist, and pro-capitalist. Basing itself on

previously existing non-governmental, semi-political and even openly political activist social organizations and union sections insures that the working class is buried under these vanguards, and that the struggle will tend to be 'popular' and thus on the terrain of capital rather than that of the working class. Such struggles typically reach a point, such as the one in Oaxaca currently, where the stakes are raised and there is no way forward without the struggle of the working class shaking the economy to its foundations and demonstrating who really has the power in the situation. However, 'popular' type struggles tend to prevent the assertion of working class power rather than fostering it, since they need to aim for what is common to all of the different classes and social layers involved, which in this case is everyone outside of the small political and economic elites in Oaxaca. In fact, the APPO increasingly identifies itself on an ethnic (indigenous, Zapotec, Mixotec, Triqui) basis rather than on a socio-economic (dispossessed or exploited) one.

While the article's promotion of violent action against a leader of the APPO and against an individual cop can be dismissed as anarchist macho (or at least ultra-militant) posturing, the calls for activist forms of solidarity at the end of the article reflect more weaknesses of the anarchist outlook. Protests at

Mexican consulates and embassies are not going to affect the power of the ruling class anywhere, and in case will inevitably be organized by leftists who support the agenda of the APPO. At best, they draw a small amount of attention to the situation in Oaxaca. Attempts to shut down corporations with links to Mexico or to set up blockades in cities outside of Oaxaca will have no effect unless undertaken by very large numbers of people, and in the case of businesses, should be done by or in connection with those workers employed there. In any case, mass meetings would need to be held first to involve all of those who would undertake such activity. Being more realistic, however, regarding the potential for active solidarity with the insurgents of Oaxaca, we see the role of pro-revolutionaries (whether communist or anarchist) to be publicizing relevant information and a clear analysis of the situation which will help to inspire workers and dispossessed people outside of Oaxaca to rise up in self-organized struggle against their own exploitation and oppression but with the goal of linking up with others throughout the world in a common struggle against global capital and every state that defends it.

February 2007



A Debate on ‘The Struggle’ of the Workers of VW in Brussels

AN EXCHANGE WITH “TEMPS CRITIQUES”

When the huge VW auto plant in Forest (Brussels), threatened with closure, went on strike, Internationalist Perspective participated in the conflict by passing out a leaflet, which was later posted on the internet list of the (francophone) International Discussion Network. There, it evoked a number of comments from JW of the review “Temps Critiques”. Below, after a presentation of “Temps Critiques”, we reprint our leaflet and the subsequent exchange on the list between JW and FD of IP.

“Temps Critiques” is a review that is part of the movement of the “communisateurs”. What they mean by *communisation* is that the revolution can only succeed and be emancipating if it undertakes from the very beginning a communist transformation on all levels, from the production of food and the way we consume it, to transportation, housing, learning, traveling, reading, doing nothing, loving, not loving, debating and deciding our future, etc, without any period of transition.

The comrades who publish this review say that it is not an in crowd publication devoted to pure theory, but rather a place for critical activity in France and elsewhere; an effort to conceive political action, taking into account the transformations of capitalism and its new contradictions.

They take note of the changes that have occurred in the way capitalist society functions, and think that capitalism has realized the unification of its forms of domination (the institutionalization of the world market, the dissolution of classes as subjects, the generalization of the political forms of authoritarian and managerial democracy).

They also recognize that the system encounters increasing difficulties to reproduce itself on the basis of what constitutes its fundamental value: (abstract) labor. While production continues, and valorization proceeds somehow (though more and more surplus value goes to the financial sector instead of to production), capitalism’s logic of power and domination, which is not just an economic logic, also leads to a crisis of the social relation.

From this, they draw a startling conclusion: the decline of the historical role of the working class. For them, the revolutionary proletariat is a thing of the past.

What they see is a resurgence of a critical movement outside the proletariat. This movement is not just intellectual, it expresses concretely the refusal of the tyranny of capital and of the myths of the society based on labor, the refusal to let individuals be reduced to a mere economic or social value.

For “Temps Critiques,” this movement expresses the ‘becoming-otherwise’ of the relations between the individual and the human community.

IP Leaflet

Our Only Power: Solidarity!

Layoffs, increases in productivity, flexibility, temporary contracts ... All that is presented to us as if it was fated, as the result of competition with workers of other factories, or from a country where wages are lower, or with underpaid immigrants.

But this "fate" is that of the logic of capitalism, that seeks profits at any price. And these profits are wrung from the exploitation of the workers: workers that it threatens, squeezes like lemons to be thrown out when they are dry. To set up workers against other workers serves two objectives: to hide the real cause of exploitation and layoffs and to break the solidarity that links the exploited.

The real cause of the massive dismissals is in the functioning of the system whose search for profits causes massive overproduction, alongside an impoverishment just as massive. Today it is the VW Forest factory that is the victim of this double movement of overproduction/ layoffs/impoverishment of workers. Tomorrow, whose turn will it be?

As usual, the ruling class closes ranks to keep matters under control and lead the workers to demoralization. While the police stand guard around the Forest factory, the employers make divisive promises to VW-workers (30 jobs offered here, 400 there...) and the government quickly draws up plans for the "re-conversion" of VW-workers; all this while VW has not yet made an official decision on the plant but is promising new production there in... 2009. All these maneuvers are aimed at preventing revolt.

A central pawn in this smothering of workers' resistance is the trade unions. As usual, they present themselves as professional strike-organizers and send the workers home to prevent the workers from organizing themselves together in general assemblies, to discuss and decide on their struggle and on their future. As usual, they organize pseudo-contacts with other factories to prevent a real spontaneous extension. As usual, they announce "tough" negotiations whose real purpose is to smooth the path for the implementation of the plans of capital. We've seen it a thousand times before. Once again the unions show that their real function is the containment of the working class.

The capitalist system is a machine to crush humans. Only profit counts and man is only one commodity among others, a useful tool, for a time, in production. Within that system, no other future is possible but one of ever more overproduction and unemployment, more violence, famines, wars, ecological destruction. Our only power to oppose this logic is our class solidarity: together with other workers all over the world, unemployed as well as employed, we have the power to refuse the place in which the capitalist system imprisons us.

Another world is possible: the capacity to produce what is necessary for the life of all exists. Together, we can create the bases for a society in which every human being has the right to a human existence; a society not in the service of profit but of the satisfaction of human needs.

Internationalist Perspective

December 2, 2006



JW's Response

In contrast to what IP's leaflet defends, we at *Temps Critiques* think that it is precisely because the working class cannot quit its place within the social relation, and thus cannot question its dependency on the pole of capital in this relation, that the trade unions retain an important role. In so far as they express the permanency of this dependence, their "betrayals" only show that the perspective of autonomy of the class within that social relation is an illusion.

The solidarity IP calls for is therefore not fundamentally different from what the unions advocate. Their only difference is that IP defends assembly-forms that are deemed to represent the autonomy of the movement (and yet we saw their limits in several recent movements in France), and that IP insists this solidarity must be "class-based" (which is contradicted, in the same leaflet, by a constant reference to "human beings" rather than proletarians).

The group "Mouvement Communiste" seems to have a better understanding of what's going on

when it exhorts the workers of VW simply to sell their skin dearly and even to uncouple completely the demand of a guaranteed wage from any effective work (and that is an important first: a group that is officially part of "left communism" which implicitly recognizes that the law of value is senseless, or at least broken!), which seems today, precisely on a "human basis," a minimal starting point for a critique of work and the subversion of this world.

If what we raise is of interest, it becomes understandable why we cannot intervene in this kind of struggle, with leaflets such as IP's. For it to be such that it can be passed out and understood while at the same time singing IP's little tune, it must stretch too wide to bridge the gap between, on the one hand, the typically leftist claim that the unions betray the class which is revolutionary in its essence, and on the other hand, the affirmation of the human dimension of the revolution.

IP's Response

JW's comments raise an important question: does the working class have the capacity to refuse to accept the place assigned to it within the social relations imposed by capitalism? Is the proletariat able to make a break and oppose itself to the relations of capitalist exploitation and to move in a revolutionary direction? JW doesn't seem to think so.

That is what informs his comments: any manifestation of the working class is seen, not as an attempt or a possibility of a development of revolutionary consciousness, but only as an occasion to reinforce its own alienation.

JW postulates that the revolution is no longer possible because the law of value, as a result of the real domination of capital, has invaded all the pores of society and has integrated the workers in a system of consumption, while the ideology (nowadays: anti-terrorist campaigns) is there to assure their submission to capitalism. There is no hope that a development of revolutionary class consciousness can occur.

If the working class cannot through the development of its struggles develop its consciousness, as JW seems to think, if it cannot break with its situation of being exploited and subject to the law of value, how is revolutionary change possible?

JW champions the struggle of those who are excluded, those who engage in pillaging stores and other forms of recuperation, which he considers attacks on the logic of the law of value. But while such forms of social radicalism are not to be condemned, they essentially affect the circuits of distribution, and often express the feelings of individuals being overwhelmed, who are improvising to survive, and all too often reflect, and reinforce, their atomization.

But can one claim, as JW does, that they are part of a fundamental questioning of the law of value?

Furthermore, is it not paradoxical that JW praises the leaflet of "Mouvement Communiste" which invites the worker "to sell his skin dearly" by demanding the continued integral payment of his wage, as a break with the commercial logic of this system of exploitation? It is because he is placed within the capitalist relation that the worker is forced to see himself as a simple object: he is a commodity in the social relation and sells his labor power as a commodity. Therein lies the dialectic of his situation: it is because the human being and his labor become an object that the human being can think of this object outside of himself. Just as it is the inhumanity in which

capitalism places the individual, which impels him to seek his humanity again, it is the fact of being placed in a situation of being an object that impels the working class to extricate itself from this status. It's not by demanding the sale of this object for an excessive price that this goal is advanced. Besides, the workers of VW recently accepted a "fat" severance bonus in exchange for their acquiescence. Hardly a victory.

Our view is different. One can say indeed that the workers struggle remains within the framework of capitalism. But there is a process that, starting from the reality of exploitation, contains the potential for a collective reflection and thus perception and questioning of the social relation in which proletariat and capital are situated. It's not because this process begins that it is bound to lead to a development of revolutionary consciousness, but such a development is not possible outside of this process. The first is a condition to the second.

The immediate struggle of the workers is against effects, not against causes. It's only after many repetitions, detours, errors, and defeats, that the "lesson learned from history completes the process of working class consciousness".

I think we should distinguish the content from the process. The process is the capacity, of isolated individuals, to come together for a common interest, and to think together about how to fight, how to obtain something that is denied to them (a wage raise, the retention of one's jobs) What is it then that makes it possible to go from a movement for economic demands to the understanding that the class is a part of the social totality within which those demands can never be met?

There is no opposition between them, no qualitative leap from one to the other. Their relation is rather one of dialectical contradiction between the immediate and the final goal, between the more immediate particular moment and the more historical totality.

The immediate goal, the particular moment, implies that the working class remains submitted to the economic structure and its laws. The proletariat will express its revolutionary nature only when it becomes part of a total process, that is, when it forges a link to the final goal, which will propel it beyond capitalist society, by going beyond the law of value and acts of recuperation. The workers can only seize the social

productive forces when they eliminate the mode of appropriation of their labor to which they have been subjected until now, and with it the whole old mode of appropriation.

It is indeed this internal dialectic which makes the situation so difficult for the proletariat: it can only meet its needs by abolishing the social and economic relation in which it finds itself, and not, as JW seems to defend, by acts of recuperation.

Why does consciousness not develop in a linear way? Why are the same mistakes, the same limitations, so often repeated? How to get out of this apparent deadlock?

Fighting collectively is a first attempt to move from a state of being a passive object, subjected to a socio-economic relation, to a state of being a subject taking control of its own existence. It is an awaking to the social reality. It is the passage from the isolated individual facing its immediate situation, to becoming a human, by changing the relation between its labor and society, becoming part of the social whole. The simple fact of being able to see oneself as object, is therefore a factor of transformation, because it allows the individual to become conscious of his position, her

situation, the interests he has in common with others, and, as a result, to bring those interests to bear on the whole of society. In this way, the individual links him/herself, little by little, to the totality.

This again shows the dialectical nature of consciousness: the immediacy which constantly goes beyond itself so that *workers can incorporate, into the immanent movement, elements that are further removed from their immediate consciousness*. It is concrete elements that trigger the awakening of consciousness and this consciousness in its turn transforms the working class. The more the economic crisis progresses, the more the unity of the economic process can be grasped in practice. The concrete element of the immediate situation impacts the perception of the totality.

As for solidarity, it goes without saying that it should not be confounded with charity, with trade union benevolence, or with isolation...But, as far as I know, the unions don't call for an extension and generalization of the struggle in order to move to the next stage of becoming conscious, in which the workers manifest themselves as subjects, and no longer as objects for sale, objects of "negotiations".

December 19, 2006

JW's Second Response to FD

I maintain indeed that the working class cannot liberate itself from this dependence on the capital pole of the capitalist social relation. It can, at best, as a class, only reverse the relation of force and affirm itself as the dominant pole, which was finally its program in historical social democracy, then in Bolshevism and in certain councilist fringes. It is also this perspective that opened the way to the theorization of a "transitional phase". But what was still possible at the time of the formal domination of capital is no longer possible in the phase of real domination. (I point out that our characterization of formal domination/real domination is not primarily chronological, but structural, and approaches that established by Camatte or more recently of B.Astarian or C.Charrier of *La Matérielle*) and particularly since the great struggles of the 60's - '70's which marked the last proletarian assault, its defeat and, at the same time, the rupture of an historical thread ("Temps critiques" n°12). In this configuration, it, along with others, is not a question of saying that "any manifestation of the working class seems to be considered (by us) the occasion to

reinforce its own alienation", but to recognize that there is no longer any possibility of affirming an identity of struggle which is a working class identity; that one can no longer base oneself on the traditional distinction between defensive struggles and offensive struggles, these latter being the point of departure for the assertion of the class and for a revolutionary perspective. "Workers" struggles are hopeless today. I do not particularly pit the struggles in the suburbs [last year] (I never employed the term "excluded," because it is inappropriate) against workplace struggles, since except for those that disrupt the "public function," which retain their importance insofar as they carry this struggle into the sector of reproduction, a sector where the crisis of capitalist society is played out today, they often express the same despair.

That FD still distinguishes between sectors of production and sectors of distribution shows to what extent he is unaware of the process of the unification of capital that Marx nevertheless anticipated in the *Grundrisse*. In an epoch where capital is in a state of flux, he still reasons in terms of accumulation and

stocks. Apart from the blockage of production (material to be sure), he thus sees nothing coming and wonders "what revolutionary change is possible?" But what I know is that the strikes of the present period, Celatex, Kronenbourg, and others that test the limits, the revolts in the suburbs, the anti-CPE struggle, and even that of VW, are not struggles of producers, but precisely of individuals who do not produce or whom we prohibit from producing.

To imply, as FD does, that the working class is at the center of the revolutionary process from its position in production and by its capacities to block production, is today worthy of the FO and the CNT Vignoles ["radical" unions], the aficionados of the general strike! While waiting, as FD recognizes, the workers of VW pocketed the bonuses, but that simply reinforced their own alienation. And to say that that does not open a perspective is not to recognize that the revolution is not possible?

FD appears not to understand what I understand by the law of value (there is however the possibility of procuring our texts on value: "Value Without Labor", "The Evanescence of Value") and willfully or not to constantly confuse value and "value" when I speak about the nullity of the law of value (implying "value-work" in my remark related to the leaflet of MC), and he responds by saying to me that value is everywhere! That is exactly what we claim and it is indeed for that reason that the law of the value does not apply (or no longer applies, according to the angle of criticism). I would not like to engage in mockery, but how is one to react to a phrase that says, "It is not by asking for an excessive price that we advance things?"

I invent nothing, but I see from here the bad old days which would await us in a "transitional phase" according to FD, in which socialism would be marked by its non "excessive" character, and one does not see which kind of "mosquito" might bite the proletarians so that they go into action.

Several dogmas are condensed here: belief (religious) in the law of the value, but revisited by the point of view of a moralist and a Proudhonian of the "just price"; labor power conceived as a pure commodity, independently of the relations of force. This mythical viewpoint is found when he tells us that capitalism is inhuman and that the proletariat will have to rediscover its humanity. Capitalism is not seen as a

social relation, but as a kind of monster against which a particular class (symbolizing the humanity of productive work, I suppose) having a "revolutionary nature" (FD) must rise up and bring the revelation: the humanity of man ("My God, make it happen, and quickly").

It persists when one says to us "the more the economic crisis progresses, the more the unity of the economic process can be grasped in practice. It's a matter of a concrete element of the immediate situation which also has an impact on the perception of the totality." This last point provides me with a transition to finish with the question of consciousness: the fact that value seems to triumph everywhere (I will not develop here the fact of whether there is, indeed, a triumph, autonomization, or evanescence, according to the critical perspectives stated) is not what blocks consciousness.

Here again, FD does not understand capital as a social relation. He opposes a human nature (he speaks of "satisfying needs," another way of saying that use value is good) to a system of exploitation from outside that dominates it (the "system of consumption," another way of saying that exchange value is bad). The second covers over the first as a false consciousness that must be torn off, so that the use value can be freed. On the one side there are proletarians and on the other society; on the one side, proletarians and on the other a state, a simple emanation of the ruling class, and so forth. Consciousness is then the product of the practical and collective struggle against the false consciousness that is ideology. But then consciousness would have to have accumulated a veritable war chest in the course of nearly two centuries of struggle, and the mask of ideology would have been torn to shreds a long time ago. In a more general sense, it is not ideology that opposes us, but the world, our world, the one that we produce and reproduce (and here lies the reciprocal dependence of capital/labor), the one that we can also subvert – though nothing is ineluctable, neither the crisis (how many times has it been announced under the form of the "final crisis," or the softer form of the "deepening crisis," or FD's "economic crisis that is worsening"), nor the revolution.

December 26, 2006

Second Response from FD to JW

I continue to refer, in spite of the changes intervening within capitalism, to a working class tradition of discussions where one can take into account different appreciations without having to ridicule, to deform the thought of the other. In the answers that I formulate to JW, I refer to that which he writes, and suppose that he does the same. It is true, that in responding I did not refer to the works that he quotes. In the same way, he did not take into account the texts of IP that are the bases for my reasoning.

One can consequently understand certain distortions in the understanding of the thought of the other.

The question at issue is relatively simple and does not demand abstract circumlocutions; and I will repeat it: if the proletariat is no longer the revolutionary subject, in the process of becoming, who can fulfill that function?

The response given, such as I can perceive it through what is probably an alienated reading, and an interpretation which I hope is non-dogmatic, somewhat eludes the problem. JW situates the problem without grasping, it seems to me, the question of reification. The working class is a class for capital, to take up old formulations, and is destined to remain so, because of its real submission to capital. This assertion must be discussed, and various explanations have been provided to try to understand this situation. But what I raise as a problem is not that of the nature of the alienated connection with capital today, or of its historical evolution, or of the changes which have taken place within capitalism, but that of the possibility (or not) of going beyond reification.

I did not receive any response, except that of being treated dogmatically, following my reaffirmation, perhaps being too schematic, that the proletariat continues to constitute, for capitalism, a contradiction.

If this is not the case, it is necessary to accept reification as an inescapable mode of thingification, rendering any movement going beyond it impossible, making unthinkable any situation of the autonomization of thought, any attempt at putting in question the situation of alienation, any concrete possibility of doing away with reification and thus opening the possibility, starting from the material conditions of the working class, of constructing other social relations. It is for that reason that IP formulates no demands, minimal or maximal, of the sort of

"selling oneself dearly." What we defend, is the necessity of unification, of solidarity, which seem to me to be elements that necessitate a conscious determination making it possible to overcome atomization, fragmentation, what post-modernity sets in motion today.

At VW, what is posed is not the closing of the factory, but its maximum profitability, by replacing the human factor with the machine. It is the normal process - historical - for the accumulation of capital. And it is true that the trade union demands can come to nothing; and so too the shutting down of the factory. On the other hand, what occurs between the workers (whether the future excludes them from production or not) raises something else and risks provoking something else. Indeed, all these workers (on strike, working, independent, active, or not...) are likely to develop, in word and in acts, a questioning which can lead to this other thing, to imagine that the pure and simple acceptance of restructuration cannot be the only solution.

Overall, the bourgeoisie in Belgium has understood this. It does everything possible so that this questioning does not arise, while reinforcing the ideological discourse through its traditional organs which are the trade unions, but also by sending into the streets the governmental Socialist Party, while sending the Liberal Prime Minister "to negotiate" with "German" employers. The height of this ideological offensive was the speech from the King of Belgium, at Christmas, who began his short speech with a kind thought addressed to the workers of VW!!!

To what does all that correspond? Why such a media barrage, if is not to try to attenuate the risks of reaction of this working class which by stopping work, also cuts the bonds of reification, overcomes, in fact, by this negative act of NO WORK the thingified relation to valorization, positioning itself, even if still in a minimal way, no longer as an extension of the machine, but as a possible artisan of an solidaristic reflection opening up other possible horizons.

Unfortunately, there is no "accumulation" of class consciousness, but the lessons can be drawn from past experiences and conveyed within the class. On the other hand, the bourgeoisie has university crucibles where its ideological weapons can be remodeled, readapted to its needs.

December 26, 2006

A Revolutionary Conference in Korea

In October 2006, Internationalist Perspective participated in a conference of internationalists called by the Socialist Political Alliance in Korea. Below, we publish the report of our delegate, followed by the texts IP presented as introduction to the debate on revolutionary strategy and perspectives at the conference. On our website, readers can find other texts IP contributed to the conference, as well as a declaration adopted regarding the nuclear test by North Korea. Those who can read Korean can go to the SPA-website at <http://spri.jinbo.net>

On October 27 and 28 2006, the internationalist revolutionary Korean group Socialist Political Alliance (SPA) organized a conference under the title: 'Marx and Revolution: Decadence, Class Struggle and Revolutionary Strategy'. The group invited other organizations in Korea to participate, as well as three left communist organizations from abroad: The International Communist Current, Internationalist Perspective and the International Bureau for the Revolutionary Party (IBRP). The latter organization declined to participate (we would like to hear from it why this refusal was not sectarian). The ICC and IP submitted texts which were translated into Korean, and sent delegates. The very fact that a conference of this kind took place – for the first time in Korea, or even in East Asia as far as we know - is a milestone in itself. A wide range of opinions was expressed in the lively debates and ties were forged between revolutionaries in Korea and abroad that will be built upon.

The conference took place in two different cities. The first day, devoted to a discussion of Capitalist Decadence, was held in a university auditorium in Seoul, the capital city. The format was more that of an expanded public meeting, in which all interested persons were welcome to participate. The ICC, and IP, delegates gave abbreviated presentations of their positions, while a comrade of the SPA presented an overview and interpretation of the debate on Decadence between the ICC, IP and the IBRP. He concluded with a set of well chosen guidelines for further study and debate, based on the recognition that the concept of Decadence is essential for revolutionary theory; that it cannot be understood with quantitative economic criteria alone; that the relation between decadence and the real domination of capital should be analyzed thoroughly; that the theoretical gaps of Marxism should be addressed. IP concurred with his view.

The debate was quite general, since the positions presented were new to many in the audience. The issues that were raised ranged from the lessons of the October Revolution to how to explain Decadence in the face of increased affluence in countries such as South Korea. As was to be expected, the answers given by the ICC and IP (the first basing itself on a static view of Decadence, the second defending a dynamic understanding of the period) were quite different. The last part of the day was devoted to a debate over a declaration, presented by the ICC, on the recent nuclear test by North Korea. The declaration denounced the test, as well as the actions of all the other countries involved, as an expression of decadence and of the capitalist nature of all the parties in the conflict. The IP delegate wholeheartedly endorsed the declaration, which brought the concept of decadence home to the concrete and actual situation in Korea. In the debate, objections were raised: some argued that the actual war danger is not that great, others stated that the declaration should finger the US' aggressive containment strategy as the main culprit. In response, both the ICC and IP argued that the declaration was not an analysis of how imminent the danger of war was, nor which of the parties in the conflict was the most aggressive; that such issues were secondary compared to the need to be clear on the fact that the actions of all the countries involved were an expression of the tendency of global capitalism in crisis to seek a solution for its problems through inter-imperialist conflict, that the working class should not support nor find excuses for any of them, but oppose them all.

On the second day, the conference moved to the Casual Workers' Center in the industrial city of Ulsan. The first session was devoted to "Class Struggles Worldwide." Presentations were made by the ICC, IP,

Loren Goldner, by a member of the Korean group “Solidarity for Workers’ Liberation,” a group of Trotskyist origin, yet anti-nationalist in its orientation, and finally by a member of the Ulsan Labor Education Community. The latter gave a detailed and fascinating overview of class struggle in Korea between 1987 and 2006, of which unfortunately only an outline was available in English. A lot of discussion was about the trade union question. Some participants criticized the ICC and IP afterwards for being too general and not relating their interventions enough to the concrete concerns of Korean workers. The language barrier may have been a factor but there was some validity to the critique. We have to do a better job in keeping our finger on the pulse of the class struggle, not in order to invent grand theories on how to struggle, but by learning from the experience of workers in different parts of the world and transmitting what the workers are inventing themselves. On the question raised by one of the participants, how to integrate precarious workers in the workers’ struggles, Goldner argued that, with the elimination of permanent contracts for a rapidly growing part of the workforce, and almost 2 billion people excluded from the point of production, capitalism has created a new, mobile kind of worker. He gave different examples of struggles in Argentina, Australia and Italy, in which such workers are turning this mobility into an advantage, by involving themselves in different struggles, as the *piqueteros* did in Argentina. The ICC responded to this by saying that this was nothing new, that flying pickets and precarious work existed before. Goldner replied, correctly in our opinion, that what is new is that today’s unemployed and precarious workers have little hope of full employment and therefore tend to fight from the perspective of the working class as a whole; and that flying pickets used to be organized by workers at the point of production to generalize their struggle, while the flying pickets in the examples he cited, were organized by the precarious and unemployed workers themselves, bridging different struggles.

The third session of the conference was about revolutionary strategy. Presentations were made by the ICC and IP and by a member of the Korean “Militants Group for a Revolutionary Party.” The latter, which

also seemed Trotskyist inspired, was titled “The council movement strategy in the present period of South Korea, how to put it into practice”. While sympathetic to the goal of workers’ councils, it defended a rank & file unionist strategy of conquering “workers’ control” on the shop floor as the way to get there. This perspective was criticized by the ICC, IP as well as by Korean comrades. The discussion also touched upon the party question, which highlighted the difference in the positions of the ICC and IP on this issue. Finally, the declaration proposed by the ICC was discussed again. Some of the same reservations as in Seoul were expressed. One participant proposed to change the characterization of the North Korean regime from “bourgeois” to “despotic,” which was rejected by others, because it is essential to see all the regimes involved as expressions of the same rotten worldwide system. At the proposal of IP, “bourgeois” was replaced by “capitalist,” to indicate that, even though there is no classic bourgeoisie in North Korea, it is, nevertheless, a capitalist class system and state, antagonistic to working class interests. At the proposal of local comrades, a sentence was added to denounce the use of the war threat by the South Korean regime to repress working class militants. The declaration was signed by the ICC, the SPA and IP and by several other participants. Others felt that more discussion on the question was needed.

In its introductory remarks to the conference, the SPA had stated: “Although Korean workers express their difficulties on the shop floor and the revolutionary political forces in Korea are in the midst of confusion on the perspectives of a future communist society, we have to accomplish the solidarity of the world proletariat beyond one factory, beyond one nation”. The conference was an important step in that direction. This first meeting between revolutionary Marxists in Korea and left communists from abroad holds a promise for the future. The SPA and IP have agreed to stay in contact, to continue discussions and to intervene together at important moments. IP thanks the SPA for its invitation and warm welcome and congratulates the comrades in Korea for their excellent work in preparing for and organizing this conference

Contribution to the Debate on Revolutionary Perspectives

1. Any serious analysis of the perspective of revolution today must be grounded in the reality of today. It is not enough to say, 'we've been in decadence since 1914, therefore, revolution is on the agenda'. Today's capitalism is no longer 'your daddy's capitalism', and today's working class too, has undergone drastic changes. Decadence has a history. If we don't understand that history, we will be confronting the challenges of today with yesterday's obsolete recipes.

2. This history has accelerated since the reappearance of open crisis in the world economy, in the late 1960's/early '70's. Since then, this crisis has grown, not in a straight line, but with ups and downs, recessions and recoveries. Yet underneath this jagged course, the fundamental contradictions, which capitalism cannot overcome, have continuously deepened.

3. At the onset of this period, many revolutionaries assumed that capitalism would be unable to respond to its crisis and to the resistance of the working class against its manifestations with any other means but political ones; that ideology and repression would be its only weapons to maintain control while its economy would sink deeper and world war would become its only perspective. Reality has not exactly confirmed this schematic perspective. Instead, during the last 30 years, we have witnessed an accelerated economic development and accelerated changes within the production process itself. These changes diminished the vulnerability of capitalism to working class struggle. To some extent, that was their inadvertent by-product, but often, it was their conscious purpose. The massive workers struggles of the late '60's/early '70's certainly made capitalism realize that the Fordist organizational model of the labor process, with its huge concentrations of workers and its dependence on the smooth, uninterrupted operation of its giant factories, only worked to the extent that the working class remained docile. Hence the shift from the vertically integrated company to a 'network'-form of production (by means of outsourcing and other forms

of decentralization), accelerated automation and globalization.

4. In this way, capitalism succeeded in making it more difficult for the working class to fight back. It has used its strengthened position and the opportunities offered by new technology to exploit cheaper labor power worldwide, to lower the cost of variable capital; in other words, to increase profits at the expense of the working class.

5. These changes were a shock for the proletariat. The more so because they were accompanied by a major recomposition of the working class which made it more difficult for the class to recognize itself. This recomposition resulted from changes in the global production process and was further enhanced by the importation of labor power from other countries and by favoring female employment where a male workforce used to be the norm. This was confusing for the proletariat in the most developed countries while the new proletariat in countries where a substantial part of industry was moved to, did not yet have the tradition and experience of struggle of workers in the West. But while globalization had thus, in the short term, many disadvantages for the working class struggle, in the longer run, it makes the prospect of the working class joining together internationally stronger. Today, the world economy is a global assembly line. This can only make it easier for the working class to recognize that it is truly international too; that its struggle is the same as that of its class brothers and sisters in other countries.

6. The crisis of capitalism will deepen – of that we can be certain. The attacks on the working class will intensify. But crisis alone, no matter how deep, does not lead to a revolutionary outcome. The depression era of the 1930's made that all too clear. The first requirement is the will and determination to fight on a class-basis. Obviously, that is essential, since no real struggle is possible without it, but also because of the consciousness it reflects: the understanding of having the same interests as other workers, the understanding

that management, the state and its police are the enemy. But this understanding must broaden: the enemy is not just the boss, or the government, or US imperialism, but all the parties, unions, churches, judges, armies, media and so on that together constitute capitalist society. It must become the understanding that the working class can only count on itself. The realization that the working class stands alone, that it has no allies among the existing powers in society, can be frightening to the point of momentarily dampening the will to fight. Yet the proletariat (all those who have no other option but to sell their labor power to survive) has the strength of numbers and the power to impose its will on society, which it reproduces. But it can understand its objective condition, its position as a class that produces everything and can produce for a different purpose than the one imposed by capitalism, for human needs instead of profit, only through the practical manifestation of its unity. The political organizations of the working class cannot ignite the will to fight where it does not exist. Their task, their reason for being, is to relate the objective reality of the working class' condition, which implies the necessity and possibility of revolution, to the subjective experience of the class.

7. The Korean working class is known all over the world for its combativity. But combativity is but the first step. In Poland we have seen a highly combative working class struggle generalize and develop self-organization, only to be led back to capitalist normalcy by unionists and priests. In Yugoslavia, just before its breakup, there was a wave of combative strikes but what followed was a ferocious, anti-proletarian war. Capitalism continuously secretes its own pseudo-alternatives offering the false hope that worker's needs will be met in a different version of its rule. These pseudo-alternatives are varied and highly adaptive, using nationalism, religion, race, culture, ethnicity and even socialist rhetoric to persuade the working class to give up its autonomy and enlist in intra-capitalist fights. The one thing they have in common is that they require the submission of the working class. That is the essence of all capitalist ideology.

8. Argentina is another country where workers combativity reached great heights in recent years, even to the extent that at one point, according to some, a situation of dual power arose. Yet no revolutionary perspective emerged from that situation. Some say that

the reason for this was the absence of a revolutionary party to lead the class. We disagree. When the working class is not convinced of the possibility of revolution, it will not reject non-revolutionary pseudo-alternatives. As in Argentina, it will be radical but still influenced by nationalism. The only way then for any party to get mass following is to make concessions to nationalism, to corrupt itself. But when the working class is becoming convinced of the possibility of revolutionary struggle, it does not need or want to submit to the leadership of a party, no matter how enlightened the latter pretends to be. It is breaking with submission, not just submission to bosses and capitalist parties, but with submission, period. Political organizations must encourage this dynamic and reject the Bolshevik model of organization.

9. The fight against ideologies that seek to perpetuate the submission of the working class in one form or another, and in particular against nationalism in all its variants, will remain a central task for the political organizations of the working class. Likewise, they must fight against all other attempts to divide the working class. In this regard, they must strive to bridge the subjective experience of the employed and unemployed. Globalization is at the same time a movement of integration – drawing in new proletarians from the peasant class and middle layers in less developed countries - and of expulsion – throwing out millions for whom it has no use in the global production process. While all sorts of capitalist ideologues try to convince those different sectors of the working class that they have nothing in common and try to pit them against each other, the political organizations of the working class must point out their essential communality.

10. The political organizations of the class must come together internationally. But, rather than seeking to fuse all into one party that speaks with one voice, they must speak with many voices, provided that these voices speak to each other. Rather than simply relying on the theoretical achievements of the past, on the work done in the 19th and early 20th century, before all the tremendous changes that took place in the last 50 years, they must realize the shortcomings of that legacy and adopt a renewal of Marxism as their common goal. To do so, they must facilitate public debate, within their organizations as well as between them, and reject the sectarianism and competitive spirit that, unfortunately, are still scarring our movement.

They must be open to new forms of struggle, rather than expecting the past to repeat itself, and to the use of new technology for revolutionary purposes. Only in

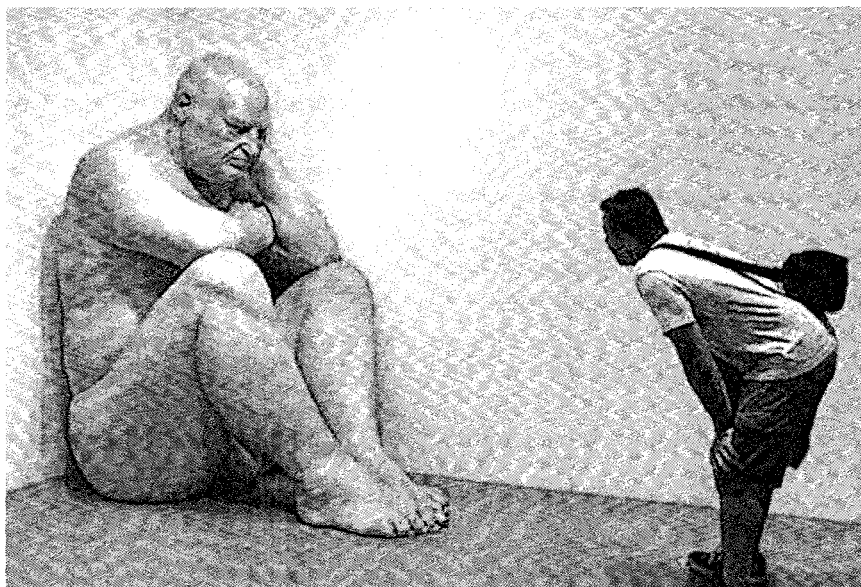
that way will they be able to carry out the tasks for which they exist.

Internationalist Perspective

October 2006

Human Nature, Class Consciousness and the Material Imagination

Our efforts to understand how is revolution possible in today's world, given the extreme alienation that the real domination of capital inflicts on the working class, have led us to a debate about "species being" or "human nature." In our past issues we have published no less than ten texts on the subject. The debate has been rich and lively and far from conclusive. It needs to be pursued, but in order to keep a balance in the content of this publication, IP has decided to continue it on our website for now, and to return to the question in print only when we feel that substantial progress has been made. We want to conclude this first, "public" phase of the debate with a thoughtful contribution of a reader, which we reprint below. We urge our readers to visit our website in order to follow the continuation of the debate and to participate in it.



Without question the current discussion in IP on species being and its relation to class-consciousness is a vitally important discussion for Marxists today. The discussion, at least the portion that I have read, is full of interesting insights but it seems generally flawed by a lack of focus and ultimately method. I would like to make a very small contribution to a discussion that can be easily dispersed into irrelevance due to its sheer complexity.

As it appears in part 3, the discussion swings from sometimes mechanistic reductionism to nearly metaphysical meta-narratives with subjects ranging from the social organization of pigeons to the universal essence of being, all interesting and valuable in themselves, but difficult to maintain the actual thread of the argument.

The importance of the question has been clearly established, what is at issue is nothing less than the possibility of human liberation. Equally clear is the fact that the question has never been adequately resolved.

There has always been something mystical about the treatment of the problem of class-consciousness by Marxists of every variety. It seems if it is not reduced to a mechanistic positivism (Pavlovian in character) it remains trapped in the web of Hegel's "objective idealism." Class-consciousness has always been difficult to describe and nearly impossible to explain. But, somehow, there remains the faith that the class will one day realize in practice what revolutionary Marxists have long understood in thought; practice and theory will converge and we will leave it up to the proletariat to work out the practical details. But, substituting the proletariat for Hegel's absolute spirit does not do away with the idealistic conception of consciousness. No matter how one cuts the stone in this approach, we still locate truth in thought to which practice must conform. And the conclusion of this thought, as we all know, was implicit at the beginning of the story. Thought consciousness, which can only exist in the individual, somehow, at critical junctures, is expected to make an ethereal leap and become collective consciousness; we don't know how, it is just the way it works, but in the end, it is history realizing its own necessity. What can we do with a theory like this other than pray?

My somewhat undisciplined comments below are not intended to solve any riddles but only perhaps to point in a different direction, one that remains within the framework of historical materialism always privileging the active ingredient in what I would call

the material imagination, the precise point at which human nature reveals itself.

In keeping with what I believe to be a Marxist approach to the question of human nature/human consciousness, I would suggest the following:

1. The discussion must first historicize the question
2. There must be an attempt to establish a criteria for analysis and evaluation of the question, specifically, what is the material manifestation of the phenomenon?

As to the second part, one might rightly argue that all human activity is the manifestation of human nature/human consciousness. So, lest we lose ourselves in a sea of undifferentiated phenomena, it is essential to establish how one places each expression of human activity in a theoretical framework that reveals its/our nature.

To historicize the question--a fertile ground to explore--I would suggest a very schematic outline. First of all, the assertion that there exists an essential human nature has nearly always been on the front line of the ideology of class power; from the long dark night of original sin into which man was born, to the secular expression of the same self-centered greed or the economically inspired pleasure/pain principal of the utilitarian to scientifically oriented subconscious of Dr. Freud and on to the selfish genes of today. It is not difficult to see each of these as cornerstones in the ideology of contemporary power. Each, in its own way, promotes passivity before an unchangeable essence. But, specifically, these and many other expressions of the debate have always been directly linked to the current conflict in power/economic/class relations. Leaving aside for now an exegesis of Marxist texts, I would like to suggest a few examples that might serve to enrich the discussion.

The first attempt, of which I am familiar, to break free from the sinful essence of Judeo-Christian man was found in Renaissance thought in the rather obscure works of Pico della Mirandola, Ficino, Pomponazzi, Leonardo etc. all of whom privileged the self-creating nature of man by placing the imagination in the very center of human essence. It is no accident that these ideas corresponded quite well to the "heroic" age of capitalism or age of the buccaneer merchant. It was a revolutionary turn that allowed the free play of the strong, imaginative and audacious individual. This short-lived attempt to challenge the fixed nature of

man gradually mutated into the secularization of original sin with the discovery of the “gravitational principle” of human behavior and coincidentally the birth of economic analysis and relative stabilization of the capitalist mode of production: greed, self-interest, pleasure/pain principles, acquisitiveness etc. Hume, Kant, Smith, Bentham, Verri, Beccaria, and others sought to simplify, universalize and homogenize the invariable essence of man. These and many other writers of the period were motivated by the need to apply Newtonian principles to an analysis of man and one might point out here the perfect conformity with the development of equivalent exchange value in practice and in theory. The fixity of man’s nature was interrupted by the appearance of the proletariat and the emergence of Marxist theory, again, I believe, by placing the imagination and the self-creating nature of man in the center of the question. Darwinism as social ideology emerges at the moment colonialism appears to demonstrate the superiority of various groups over others. Freud’s subconscious is as much derived from the principles of thermodynamics and the emergence of scientific production as it is to clinical dream analysis and so on and so forth. Each development, moving all the way to selfish genes and even perhaps post-modernist discourse theory, places consciousness (most especially class consciousness) and the imagination further and further from the active principal in human experience; each time the deeper and nearly always fixed essence of man satisfies the needs of economic organization.

I suggest this simplistic outline only to insist that the discussion underway, draws from all of these developments and it is imperative to situate all of these references into a material historical framework. An understanding of the relationship between theory and social/economic structure and historical development applies to the current discussion as well as any previous.

Consciousness, Language and Imagination

As to human essence, we can only get at the question via a phenomenological approach that in practice can only reveal itself in material activity. Not an easy task to say the least. But, I would suggest a good starting point is to look at the relationship between consciousness, language and imagination. Marx once pointed out that the worst of architects surpasses the bee in the construction of her cell in that the architect must first construct in his imagination thus establishing

his *modus operandi*. The importance of this formula cannot be underestimated as it eloquently articulates the essential process of human development. We can suggest that the imagination resides in consciousness and that consciousness precedes all activity. But what is the nature of consciousness, how is it constructed, how does it develop and where is the imagination (the essential component of the self-creative principle) in this process.

Consciousness, I would suggest, while not the same, is inseparable from its material manifestation. And what exactly is the material manifestation of consciousness? In one of the most insightful attempts to answer this question while maintaining a Marxist methodology is the work of V.N. Volosinov (1929) *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*. Consciousness for Volosinov is inseparable from language. We think through words and words are the basic unit of language. And while Chomsky may be correct that we have a genetic predisposition for a grammatical structure, words and meaning do not arrive from this structure; they are external and entirely social in nature. The structure of consciousness is the structure of language and the specific meaning of its basic unit, the word. But language and the word, do not reside inside of consciousness they first and foremost have a material existence outside of consciousness, first in sound and then in the written text. Volosinov argues that the word as sign has a dual nature; it is itself as a material presence (written word or sound) and simultaneously refracts a meaning outside of itself. It is the material nature of the sign and its dual nature that may help to understand the nature of consciousness and thus the imagination. Word meaning is always placed inside of a sign system that is always defined by the social structure and its corresponding power relationships. Thus, various social groups, while sharing the general sign system (ideology) have different material interests and thus shifting meanings within the same sign system. Here is the origin of class-consciousness. There are two important implications that follow from this, 1) That consciousness itself must pass through signs and a sign system as the principal mediation between experience and the idea of the experience and 2) that consciousness depends on the social accumulation of signs.

As to the first point, the mind is incapable of reflecting sense experience directly, as Hegel has gone to great pains to demonstrate. There is always a gap, so to speak, between the experience and the idea of the

experience. Before the experience arrives as an idea it must be mediated by a sign system that by its very nature is unstable, both for the individual and the social class. It is in the very instability that the imagination arises. That is to say, all experience is necessarily reworked via signs that in turn have a refracted and variable meaning. Imagination is the necessary process of the reworking of all experience in thought. Thus, imagination is built into the very structure of consciousness. As to the second point, it is interesting to compare the possibility of dolphin language to human. Indeed, the evidence is that these animals have a complex sign system and are capable of highly complex thought. But, this is not enough. What dolphins lack that humans have is the ability to accumulate signs materially, socially and historically. Human consciousness is above all, historical consciousness because it is built on the ability of humans to accumulate written language, accumulate signs. It is not by coincidence that historical civilizations (class societies) are always accompanied by the appearance of the written language, nor is it by coincidence that the pace of social change accelerates dramatically with the ability to reproduce the sign system (first the printing press and then recording and then the binary language of computers). Societies where the accumulation of signs are entirely dependent upon memory were and are limited, whether dolphins or primitive man. The pace of change is limited as is the social imagination.

There are two mistakes that I believe are quite misleading and dangerous when applied to Marxist theory. The first is teleology and the second is positivism. While seemingly worlds apart they share an assumption that there is a substratum of truth that is independent of the human imagination and human will. For each, the imagination is nothing more than the mode for revealing an existing truth, not, as I would suggest, that the "truth" is inseparable from the active/material imagination. There is no privileged position from which the truth can be apprehended, whether scientific theory, Marxist theory or class position. From my point of view, Lukács' brilliant book on class-consciousness suffers from this flaw with his concept of contingent (false) class-consciousness and imputed (true) class-consciousness. If Lukács can know this, then why not the Party and why not impose the truth on the class? The "truth" the "essence" of the human is to be found, not in abstract theoretical structure or sign systems, but in the struggle to assert the imagination in its material form. So,

when and how is this material imagination liberated? Both individually and for the class at the moment that the prevailing ideology or sign system fails to adequately correspond to experience. The power of ideology to impose its logic over self-interest is nearly limitless. It is for this reason that victims willingly accept their own execution or millions passively starve because the prevailing ideology supersedes the survival instinct. Thus, there is never a direct correlation or mechanical relationship between economic crisis and revolution. And here we might suggest where a relationship between consciousness and human nature is to be found.

Antonio Genovesi, an obscure Italian abbot from the 18th C, once stated that man has two natures, one centrifugal and the other centripetal, but man also has reason and it is the job of reason to elevate one over the other. Man has many natures, even animal-like, but that their expressions and their necessity is dependent on the historically given social organization and social consciousness. The fact is that we would be hard pressed to find (outside of metaphysical speculation) an essential nature that is independent of socially constructed consciousness; the sheer variety and breadth of human organization and behavior make this a daunting if not logically impossible task.

So, what is human nature according to this all too inadequate outline? I believe it is not only the existence of an historically conditioned material imagination, but the predominance of the social imagination over all natural and instinctual factors. Pirandello once wrote "nature uses human imagination to lift her works of creation to even higher levels." This odd, but highly insightful observation places the imagination where it belongs, as the active ingredient in the very construction of reality.

I will step out on a limb with one final comment. It is my opinion that the most damaging conception of Marxism is that it is a science, as the word is commonly understood. Marxism is neither a science nor does it reveal a preexisting truth. It is a highly imaginative "ideology/tool" describing experience in a way that links material potential to collective desire to will to action, and seeks to realize its truth materially in class struggle, revolution and collective human liberation; nothing more and nothing less.

B. York

November 20, 2006

Note:

1) In my effort to be brief, I am aware that some formulations are incomplete and could open the door to an interpretation of tilting towards post-modernist discourse theory. The essential difference is the insistence on the material expression of consciousness and the materially transformative power of the imagination when linked to labor, in addition is the

insistence on the historically accumulated consciousness. For the extreme versions of discourse theory, discourse is the only reality.

2) I am also aware that the riddle of mediation between thought and labor is not resolved here where the problem of necessity and contingency must be confronted as the imagination realizes itself concretely, again, a critically important area to explore.

Articles on the debate on 'Species Being' in *Internationalist Perspective*

Species Being, Social Being and Class Consciousness - Rose (IP 43)

Social Being and Species Being: A Response to Rose – Mac Intosh (IP 43)

Human Nature: A Work in Progress - Sander (IP 43)

Return to the Debate on Species Being – Rose (IP 45)

A conflict Within – Sander (IP 45)

An Innate "Human Essence" would be a Straitjacket – Mac Intosh (IP 45)

"Human Nature" and Revolution – Max (IP 46)

Humanity Becoming – Rose (IP 46)

Species Being and Class Consciousness - Marlowe (IP 46)

Class Nature, not "Human Essence", should be our Focus – Carol (IP 46)

On the web site (<http://internationalist-perspective.org/IP/ip-discussions/species-being.html>)

Reaction to the text of Rose: Humanity Becoming – A.

Notes on the Species Being Debate – E.R.

Internationalist Perspective

Internationalist Perspective is a publication defending Marxism as a living theory, one that can go back to its sources, criticize them, and develop hand in hand with the historical social trajectory. As such, if *Internationalist Perspective* bases itself on the theoretical accomplishments of the Communist Left, *IP* believes that its principal task is to go beyond the weaknesses and the insufficiencies of the Communist Left through an effort of incessant theoretical development. *IP* does not believe that that is its task alone, but rather that it can only be accomplished through debate and discussion with all revolutionaries. That vision conditions the clarity of its contribution to the struggle and to the development of the class consciousness of the proletariat. *IP* does not aim to bring to the class a finished political program, but rather to participate in the general process of clarification that unfolds within the working class.

Capitalism is a transient product of history, not its end. It came into being in response to conditions that no longer exist: inevitable scarcity, labor power being the only source of social wealth. Capitalism turned labor power into a commodity to appropriate the difference between its value and the value it creates. For centuries, this hunt for surplus value allowed for a relative harmony between the development of society and capitalist accumulation. Then it gave birth to a new production process, the real domination of capital, in which no longer labor power but the machine stands at the center of production. Science and technology, set in motion and regulated by the collective worker, became the primary source of the creation of social wealth. The giant productivity this unleashed, allowed capitalism to grow both inwards and outwards. It spread over the entire planet and absorbed all spheres of society – including the trade unions and mass parties that arose from the struggle of the working class.

Scarcity was now no longer inevitable, but instead of freeing humanity from want, it condemned capitalism to overproduction. Wealth-creation was no longer dependent on the exploitation of labor power but this plunged capitalism, imprisoned by the law of value, into a crisis of profit. These obstacles to accumulation force capitalism to increase the exploitation of labor and to create room for new expansion through self-destruction, through massive devalorization in depression and war. Capitalism entered its decadent phase when such cannibalistic destruction became part of its accumulation cycle. It is decadent, not because it doesn't grow – it has developed tremendously and profoundly modified the composition of social classes and the conditions in which they struggle in the process -- but because this growth, in its rapacious hunt for profit, became itself destructive. It is decadent, because it is forced to hurl billions into unemployment and poverty because it cannot squeeze profit from them; by the very productivity that could meet all needs. It is decadent, because its need for devalorization impels it to war and unceasing violence. Capitalism cannot be reformed; it cannot be humanized. Fighting within the system is illusory: capitalism must be destroyed.

Capitalism is also decadent because it has generated the conditions for its own replacement by a new society. Science and technology, yoked to the operation of the law of value, and its quantification of the whole of life, are not liberating in themselves. But the working class who sets it in motion, is by its very condition within capitalism impelled to free itself from the alienation that capitalism, as a social relation, subjects it to, and is, therefore, the bearer of the project of a society freed from the law of value, money, and the division of society into classes.

Such a project has never before existed in history. If the Russian revolution was a proletarian one, it did not result in the emergence of a communist society. The so-called "communism" of the former Eastern bloc, like that of China or Cuba, was nothing other than a manifestation of state capitalism. Indeed, the emergence on an historical scale of a new society can only be realized by the total negation of capitalism, and by the abolition of the laws that regulate the movement of capital. Such a new society entails a profound transformation in the relation of humans to themselves and to each other, of the individual to production, to consumption, and to nature: it entails a *human community* at the service of the expansion and satisfaction of all human needs.