

INTERNATIONALIST PERSPECTIVE



- **Class Struggle in Egypt**
- **Repainting Capitalism Green**
- **On Housing Struggles**
- **Raping the World to Feed the Bubble**
- **Remembering Cajo Brendel**
- **A debate on 'Progress'**

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Internationalist Perspective holds public meetings as part of its work of stimulating a real debate and discussion around vital questions confronting revolutionaries and the working class. For information on the next meeting, contact IP.

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We invite all readers to send comments on the positions in our publication. The development of a proletarian political milieu on the international level depends on the widest possible discussion and confrontation of ideas.

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The Greening of Capitalism?

In the 1980s, when U.S. schoolchildren were asked how they thought they would die, the most common answer was “in a nuclear holocaust,” which many believed to be imminent. This fear found echoes within the broader population, and a numerically significant, though politically questionable, peace movement developed. A decade later, the economic and political collapse of the Soviet Union and its allies eased the world away from imminent destruction, and the nation’s children briefly slept in peace. Nuclear war gave way to the war on drugs, which in turn made way for the war on terror: the fear has returned. But it is not destruction by jihad that tops the terror charts, but rather a growing awareness and despair about the environmental conditions affecting the planet.

It is impossible to escape the media focus on the issue of the environment. Hardly a day goes by without the publication of a study or a front page newspaper report on melting polar ice caps, expanding deserts, or diminishing rain forests, and the vast amount of human trash that seems to grow larger every day. Like the peace movements of the 1980s, “green” social and political movements have arisen. The question is are these movements actually able to challenge the dawning environmental holocaust, or are they tragic repetitions of previous failed social reform movements?

Although the concerns are similar, it is necessary to distinguish between the current environmental consciousness and activism and previous mass movements for environmental protection. In the 1960s, a broad yet seemingly more politically radical movement developed; the current green movements, while larger, are politically softer. Earlier environmental movements often advanced a radical political critique of the destruction of the planet and its root causes. Environmentalists were open about their “anti-capitalism” and about capital’s role as the primary cause of environmental destruction. (It’s important though, not to be too pollyannaish about these critiques – Inspired by the misanthropic Malthusian environmentalism of Edward Abbey’s *The Monkey Wrench Gang*, organizations like EarthFirst! saw humanity as the problem, and in some cases

welcomed diseases like AIDS as necessary population checks.)

The new environmentalism is of an altogether different sort. Being an environmentalist means participating in recycling programs and using green bins. Elementary schools practice litter-less lunches, and the world celebrates Earth Day. All contribute to green social practice. A person is far less likely to litter because of social pressure than as a deep commitment to a green environment. If pollution has become socially unacceptable why is the problem getting worse?

The greening of capitalism has not been limited to the social arena. Green political movements, themselves the outgrowth of earlier extra-parliamentary movements, have successfully entered the political stage. In the 1990s, Green parties in Europe in Finland, Belgium and Germany, among others, were part of governing coalitions. In other countries, while not contenders for power, Green parties are now a part of the mainstream bourgeois political process.

In addition to this electoral success with new parties, an apparent green consciousness has developed within some of the older political organizations. The best known spokesperson for a Green capitalism is former U.S. Vice president and now Nobel Prize winner, Al Gore, whose voice provides the narration for the award-winning film *An Inconvenient Truth*.

Released in 2006, *An Inconvenient Truth* won the best documentary Academy Award in 2006, and stands as the fourth most popular documentary in the U.S. In the film, Gore presents a chilling picture of the effects of global warming and climate change on the planet, and at the end of the film, calls on viewers to become involved in the struggle to save the planet. The film has been widely shown across the globe to the young and the old alike.

Yet, while the problem the film presents is undeniable, the viewer still needs to follow the standard movie trick of suspending his or her disbelief about the source of this information and the solutions it presents. It is difficult to watch *An Inconvenient Truth* without

recalling that for eight years, Al Gore was the second most powerful man in the world. And yet, in the two terms of Bill Clinton's presidency, Gore was to do less than nothing. Numerous critiques exist of Gore and Clinton's environmental policies, but it should be sufficient to note Gore's role in Kyoto. Gore makes reference to the Kyoto Protocol throughout the film, but fails to mention that the U.S. government he represented was successful in limiting its range and blocking its implementation. The exclusion of countries such as China, India, Brazil, from the "limits" set by Kyoto, guaranteed that pollution would continue unchecked, and that Western investors could move their plants to these countries, unaffected by the regulations imposed at "home."

The solution presented by Gore and his eco-capitalist friends is a very capitalist one. Under capitalism, every problem is presented as a problem of choice in production and consumption. Freedom for capital means the freedom of the consumer to choose between different brands of toothpaste, bread, or politicians, while each is essentially the same.

In the case of environmental protection, the solution is also deemed to be a problem of choice and consumption patterns: If *only* companies could pollute a little more reasonably, things would be fine. For individuals, the solutions range from turning the thermostat down, or the lights off in a room no one is in (Hillary Clinton's solution) to driving hybrid cars. In other words more responsible consumption: If we all pull together the problem can be solved.

Capitalism does not function this way. Or rather, it does not allow functioning in this way. Regardless of the desire to avoid an environmental holocaust, the capitalist system, based as it is on ruthless and relentless competition does not permit it. While some developed countries have taken small steps to clean up their own backyards, it has usually meant moving their most significant polluters to places like China. This allows developed capital to benefit from cheap imports while posing as good citizens as their factories poison residents overseas.

Capital has even been able to turn concern over the environment into a way of increasing profits. As an alternative to fossil fuel dependency, bio-fuel is promoted as a green alternative. Grain and sugarcane

are used for fuel (ethanol) instead of food. This has created profits for global agribusiness, but has led to skyrocketing prices on the world market, and actually contributes to global warming. According to Benjamin Senauer and Ford Runge of the University of Minnesota, this conversion will push hundreds of millions into hunger, especially landless labourers and subsistence farmers (*New York Times*, Sept 29 2007). In addition, as resources shrink, the potential for armed conflict, with the inevitable accompanying atrocities, increases. Even in the case of ecological concerns, capital stands ready to subjugate all to the cause of profit.

Why does capital function this way? As Keynes once joked, in the long run we're all dead. We might add, if capitalism continues, "and our children too." While capitalism is capable of planning and undertaking long terms projects, the increasing focus on the "short run" demonstrates the increasing incapacity of capital to offer solutions. Capitalism has no future.

Capitalism is obsolete. It is utterly incapable of managing the productivity it has engendered. Operating within the law of value, capitalism cannot avoid overproduction and a falling rate of profit; too many capitals claim a relatively shrinking pool of profit. In order to continue, value must be destroyed.

Destruction of value, and here we mean people and property, is a hallmark of the phase of capitalist "development" we live in. This destruction, through wars and *man-made* ecological disaster is nothing but a taste of what capitalism will lead to, if it is allowed to continue.

Capital has a rapacious appetite. From the rain forests of Central and South America, to natural wilderness throughout Asia and Africa, capital sees only untapped potential for development, transforming the natural world into a commodity. Green capitalism can never be. The only solution is the destruction of this cycle of capital and its law of value.

In a future issue of *Internationalist Perspective*, we intend to publish a longer critique of the relationship between capitalism, technology and the environment.

Internationalist Perspective

A Lively Debate: A Report about I.P.'s Discussion Meeting in Paris October 20, 2007

The theme selected for this meeting was the denunciation of the “green” turn being undertaken by capitalism today. That subject is closely linked to the editorial in this number of IP.

Everyone present was in agreement with respect to the environmental destruction caused by capitalism. The problem is very real and constitutes a direct attack on the living conditions of the human population of the planet, seriously mortgaging the future of humanity, and representing a significant problem for the capitalist mode of production itself. Capital cannot ignore the danger, and the quest for other ways to produce will open new markets for the economic system, which will be grabbed by the most technologically and scientifically advanced economies. That will accentuate the domination of the most developed countries, and in particular the US.

Confronted by such an environmental degradation, the question of what perspectives are available must be posed. How can we envisage a new society that will be heir to such a liability? Two theses were put forward in the discussion to account for this environmental destruction. For some, it is the product of natural causes, that is to say, unprecedented demographic expansion, to which must be linked urbanization and the development of the productive forces, which account for that demographic explosion. That is a vision that pits the growth of humanity against the reality of the limits imposed by the planet. For others, such an analysis harks back to the positions advanced by Thomas Malthus, whereas for them it is primarily the capitalist socio-economic organization that creates this profound contradiction between humankind and nature. For those who hold this latter position, man is a product of nature. The contradiction is not born from

his existence, but rather from the type of social development that conditions his links with nature.

How can we envisage the creation of a new society on the bases of such an objective situation? Is communism a “simple” reorganization of growth? Or, on the contrary, must it take into account that heritage of destruction and put in question that very growth and the development of the productive forces? Some comrades, defending that second vision, spoke of a “relative scarcity” or “decrease” [*décroissance*] to characterize the birth of a new society.

What was clear to all the participants was the necessity to re-think the problem of the link between growth and the environment. Few texts exist in the literature of communism. But, for certain comrades, Marxism, in presenting communism as the end of scarcity, the development of the productive forces, and progress in the service of man and human needs, provides the basis for a mistaken vision of unlimited growth, which is the vision that capitalism has of its very own development. A heated debate took place, confronting the defenders of a Marxist perspective – for whom Marxism is a necessary tool to “think” the world and to forge a revolutionary perspective, a body of non-monolithic ideas that cannot be taken as a dogmatic and completed set of ideas – and those who had a critical perspective on the way in which Marxism envisages communism. From that confrontation, three questions arose: What are we talking about when we speak of “human needs” that will be satisfied by a new society; can there exist a harmonious relationship between the humankind of the future and nature; how can we restore the link between utopian theories and the vision of communism?

Internationalist Perspective

Class Struggle in Egypt:

The Fundamental Antagonism Remains Class against Class, not “Democracy” against Terrorism

1. Introduction:

In this period when the ideology conveyed by the ruling class tries to convince us that social classes and their antagonism have disappeared and that the only opposition from now on is the struggle between “democracy” and terrorism, it is important to take another look at social movements that remind us of what is really at stake. The more so, as certain groups or proletarian elements also defend this vision of a working class having become “non-essential” to the functioning of capitalist society. Related to this subject, we direct our readers to the two articles published in this issue on the housing and ecological questions.

The class struggle continues to arise throughout the world as the only means of resisting the worsening of living conditions, of work and of exploitation. Overall, one can cite the social movements that have continued to erupt in China, the strike of the subway workers in Buenos Aires, the struggle of Sri Lankan workers in Mauritius, an extremely violent conflict in a textile factory in Phnom-Penh in Cambodia, the teachers’ movement in Peru, and the wave of strikes in Bangladesh. In Canada, there are the construction workers in Edmonton, Alberta, who are wildcatting against the will of the union leadership and opposing the legislation regulating the right to strike in that province. In Europe, strikes have broken out in automobile factories in Romania and Russia, in the postal system in Great Britain, and in public transport in Germany. Finally, in France, a vast protest movement against changes in the regulations affecting workers retirement has erupted.

The broad-based movements that have shaken Egypt must be situated in this global context of resistance by the working class throughout the world. Nevertheless, if we highlight the movements in Egypt it is because of their massive character, but especially because they are occurring in a region, the site of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, where the ruling class has contained social tensions within the opposition between radical

nationalism and “democracy.”

Since December 2006, Egypt has been the cutting edge of a reaction by important sectors of the working class. These movements are exemplary in more than one way.

On the one hand, as we have indicated, they show the global dynamic of world capital, which consists of an ever-increasing exploitation of the working class. The capitalist system is a global social relation resting on the exploitation of the proletariat, the class that produces surplus-value. The generalized use of the sciences and new technologies in production propels the capitalist system ever further into that contradiction where it produces more and more wealth but less value. Viewed superficially and without an understanding of the way capital functions, this leads some to see a system which is not in crisis inasmuch as it continues to develop its productive forces, and to see an “integrated” working class, one less exploited since benefiting, in certain industrialized zones, from this production of wealth. This superficial vision results in not understanding the far-reaching evolution which is transforming capitalism, the implications of these transformations on the forms of exploitation and to a tendency to forget that the system remains based on an antagonism between two classes; indeed to fail too see that this antagonism constitutes one of the fundamental internal contradictions of the capitalist mode of production, and that the only way of overcoming that exploitation and that class antagonism is the constitution of a new society. That exploitation appears in different forms according to the level of industrial development. But, even if the form is different, the exploitation always remains the same and is no less fierce. In the industrialized zones, like the United States, Japan or Europe, the exploitation of the proletariat manifests itself by an increase in work rates, a degradation of the conditions of existence, and the extraction of relative surplus value. The rate of suicide recorded in these zones, however drowned out by an overproduction of consumer goods, as well as the use



Strikers in Mahalla

of medications and various drugs, are indicators of this deterioration in the quality of life and of the increasing pressure exerted by the system. In the so-called emerging countries - and China is a prime example - the exploitation appears in a much more open and brutal way, under forms close to that of a slave system. The Chinese “miracle” has been made possible by workers working up to 17 hours per day for starvation wages, living in the factory to be constantly available. Expropriated and famished peasants go to the cities to try to find any kind of work there. Underground parking garages are arranged as collective rooms in Beijing “to accommodate” these precarious workers, sometimes even with their families. The fantastic development of the productive forces in China goes hand in hand with the rapid enrichment of a new bourgeoisie, the brutal exploitation of workers, and the complete elimination of systems of social assistance such as the Stalinist epoch provided, which has been replaced by no other network of pensions or health care. This situation often generates thousands of very violent social conflicts, which pit workers and peasants against the forces of repression. It is thus crucial to remember that capitalist society rests on this class antagonism and on the exploitation of the one class by the other. The proletariat constitutes one of the fundamental contradictions internal to the capitalist system and the struggle of the working class is thus an unavoidable fact of life for the ruling class.

On the other hand, in spite of certain inward-looking tendencies, and the development of nationalist, religious or terrorist ideologies, into which certain

segments of the proletariat without hope become mobilized at certain times, this same working class shows that it does not identify in a generalized way with these kinds of practices and that these latter do not constitute its means of resistance to exploitation. In contrast to terrorist practices, whose dynamic is that of destruction and a retreat into an “identity” community, or even into an individualist dynamic, the action of a class is a collective action, based on solidarity, and tending towards a perspective of social transformation.

The social movements which unfolded in Egypt should therefore be highlighted in two senses: on the one hand, by their massive character -- and in that, they testify to the resistance of the proletariat which appears throughout the world; on the other hand, because they unfolded in a geographical zone marked by the rise of radical Islamism, contaminated by the nearby Israeli-Arab conflict. The fact that resistance to exploitation manifests itself in class conflict, and not in an opposition between “democracy” and terrorism is something that needs to be emphasized.

2. What is the origin of these conflicts?

In the ‘60’s, in Egypt the bulk of industry had been nationalized by Nasser. But, during the ‘90’s, following the pressures of the IMF, Mubarak began a policy of privatization. The sector most affected was the textile industry, with 58 % now private. Recently, a new wave of privatizations has taken place. It was essentially wage demands that were at the heart of the recent strikes, and more specifically the failure to pay the promised bonuses linked to the profits made by those enterprises linked to the state. More generally, threats linked to these privatizations adversely affect wages, job levels, and working conditions, and were a direct cause of the current social movements.

The movements began in December 2006, with a strike in the Mahalla Al-Kubra textile mill. The workers occupied the factory and the police intervened. A significant element was the call for solidarity put forward by the workers to other sectors of the class, and to the population at large. The result of that call was not long in coming: 20,000 people encircled the factory, the police retreated, and the strikers prevailed. This first movement, both in its outcome, and in its dynamic, indicated to other workers the path of resistance and instilled confidence in the rapports de force that could be established. This led to the

mobilization of tens of thousands of workers in the textile industry in Alexandria and in the Delta.

But, if the consequences of privatizations in the textile industry constituted the reason for these conflicts, other sectors linked up to this dynamic. Still in December 2006, workers in the cement plants at Helwan and Tura went on strike, as did the workers at the Mahalla auto plants.

What is completely remarkable in these claims is that overall they exceed the partial claims. They concern all the population and aim at a general improvement of the conditions of existence.

Following the start of this strike, the workers of Kafr Al-Dawar organized a strike in solidarity with the factory of Mahalla and the workers of the flour mills of the South of Cairo published an official statement of support for this strike and marked their solidarity by a short work stoppage. Last January, the truckers went on strike, spontaneously supported by the conductors on the Cairo metro, to which we must add other public sector workers. Everywhere, demands for wage increases and better working conditions were at the heart of the struggles.

If the movements began in December 2006, the wave of social agitation has not stopped. This September, the 27, 000 workers at the textile plant at Ghazl Al Mahalla went back on strike, the second strike in a year at that company. Once again, the demands basically concern wages: the workers are demanding the payment of the bonuses linked production quotas. But these demands went beyond that: they included the demand for the freedom of five strike leaders; for the resignation of the trade union committee and the factory management; the demand for the inclusion of bonuses as a percentage of one's base pay; the increase of bonuses to include food and housing; a demand for a minimum wage, for a provision of transportation for workers living far away, and finally a demand for an increase in medical care. What is striking in all these demands is that they go way beyond what are usually considered "partial" demands. They concern the whole of the population, and seek a general improvement in living conditions.

Following the start of that strike, the workers at Kafr Al-Dawar organized a solidarity strike with the Mahalla workers, and the workers at a flour mill south of Cairo put out a communiqué in support of that strike

and marked their solidarity with their own short work stoppage.

Currently, the authorities claim to see, behind all this agitation, the destabilizing hand of the Muslim Brothers. The Egyptian ruling class is thereby using an already well-known ideological tactic: trying to cover up the *class* origin of the opposition by tying it to religious or terrorist movements. But, what is exemplary is that the Egyptian workers have clearly refuted this charge of manipulation by the religious opposition and, on the contrary, have reaffirmed the *class* nature of their movement and their demands.

After six days on strike, The Egyptian government agreed to virtually all the demands of the strikers. The members of the strike coordinating committee who had been arrested were freed, and the workers won an agreement that they would be paid for the days that they were out on strike. According to the BBC, the government feared that the strike would spread to other industries. (BBC News, September 25)

3. What to say about these movements?

Beyond the specific demands, it is necessary to emphasize the much more general tendencies present in the dynamic of all these struggles.

- The awareness of the need to struggle against the policy of the government, i.e., the beginning of a refusal of any kind of economic logic.
- The will to build organizations independent of state trade unions. For example, workers at Kafr Al-Dawar launched a call for the extension of the collaboration between workers having struck "to create bonds of solidarity and to share their experiences." On the one hand, it's a question of a very clear line of demarcation from the official trade-union organizations, of a dynamic of self-organization, and a beginning of political thinking (about the action of the government, the official trade unions, on the need to create a "site" outside of them to preserve the traces of their experience).
- The massive character of these movements in a

country where repression appears in a direct and brutal way.

- The existence of an active solidarity between workers, but also with the population as a whole.
- The mobilization of women, both on the level of the population as a whole, and the workers of one of the
- textile mills (which contrasts with the image that our own bourgeoisie regularly provides of veiled, submissive, mute, Muslim women that the Christian West must “save”).
- The often spontaneous character of the beginning of a strike.

Of course, these movements contain the usual weaknesses that we can find elsewhere in all the great movements that we have recently analyzed (Argentina, Oaxaca, the anti-CPE movements in France). These weaknesses are primarily the result of maintaining illusions in partial demands (to ask for another governmental policy, to create better trade unions, etc.). But these weaknesses result from the zigzag process and historical development of proletarian consciousness that is always situated in a contradictory movement between refusal/rupture related to the current mode of functioning of capital and the difficulty of articulating perspectives outside the global capitalist social relation.

Again, we see that the economic situation is a powerful factor in the process of revolt of the exploited class, that it can constitute the element that unleashes struggles, but that political consciousness remains a determinant element with respect to the articulation of perspectives within these movements.



4. In conclusion:

The social movements that are unfolding throughout the world, even in zones where opposition tends to crystallize into religious or nationalist extremism, demonstrate that capitalist society is built on a fundamental antagonism between the classes and that no transformation is possible within that system itself. The capitalist mode of production rests on a basic contradiction: it needs the existence of the proletariat to produce surplus-value and thus to ensure its survival, but, at the same time, that exploited class is led to struggle and to destroy the bases of its exploitation, i.e. capitalism itself. All those who see the working class as a class “integrated” into the system, or as a “non-essential class”, even if they have indeed grasped the profound transformations that give capitalism and its social classes a new “face,” have not been able to integrate these transformations into a coherent theory that accounts for the continued operation of the law of value and its class contradiction, at the very foundation of this mode of production. And for us, who are convinced that political consciousness is not the prerogative of the Party or of revolutionary minorities, the world working class learns by its struggles what constitutes the bases of the functioning of society, and the perspective for its transformation.

Rose.

On Housing Struggles

Introduction

The presentation below on the housing question was given in January '07 to a group of Seattle activists who genuinely aspired to create some "urgency and action" among working class people around the issue of rising rents and indifferent absentee landlords. The meetings were organized primarily to discuss the local housing situation, and lasted for approximately 2 1/2 months before the group agreed to disband with many of them realizing that their enthusiasm and their desire "to do something" was insufficient to keep them together. As one of them said at their last meeting: "these meetings are like a bad date with a lot of people," while another commented that he did not want to be part of the group "...because he [could] not handle the level of incoherence and general mish-mash of ideas" and further, "that even though they had come together to create 'productive actions' none had been created."

Even before the group officially disbanded it was apparent that it was going nowhere fast, and, as is often the case, demoralization and a sense of frustration at the inability to be "productive" set in, as is reflected in the quotes above -- also blame. But if there is any "blame" to be acknowledged it would be "collective" blame because the group as a whole, at their first meeting, explicitly agreed that it was not their intention to delve into political differences; the purpose for them was to come together around the issue of "Seattle's housing crisis...in discussion that will lead to action, not abstract philosophical debates". It's not surprising, therefore, that the absence of political discussion evolved into further incoherence and frustration which was articulated in a general feeling of "enough already."

In an attempt to provoke discussion around the issue of housing as a class issue and housing struggles historically, a presentation was given by one of the members who disagreed with the overall activist orientation, but who was looking for an opportunity to discuss with other Seattle radicals. This member dropped out shortly after the meeting at which the presentation was given; the majority of the group voted to continue with an action oriented agenda which included calling attention to Seattle's high rents

through a poster campaign. However, only a few weeks later the group stopped meeting altogether. Individuals in the group, some more than others, were unhappy with the fact that "nothing ever happened in Seattle," so one can only imagine that their frustration with each other became frustration with the working class, from whom it would seem they expected something but got nothing. The disillusion came full circle here, disillusion within the group, and disillusion with the class ... both stem from the same source, an impatience for change, which can only really come from a growing awareness and a collective resistance by the class as a whole to the increasing intensity of attacks on its living conditions.

The common thread of such activist groups is their need to "do something", to "create a spark" or "light a match," in order to show the class (or whomever) the way forward; in other words, "voluntarism". They believe that the power of their example can create a collective struggle where there was none, and so they focus on that, rather than on intervening in struggles that spontaneously develop, and they downplay the need to have a theory and do the theoretical work that makes an effective intervention in such struggles possible. This confused approach to activism is common within the anarchist milieu. On the one hand, they want to engage in open, militant struggle as "ordinary" proles, yet also as a vanguard, since the rest of the class is quiet. On the other hand, they don't actually organize themselves on such a (class) basis, but rather, on the basis of their anti-capitalist or anarchist political perspective. Such groups refuse to understand the distinction between class-based struggle organizations and political (or anti-political) minorities, a distinction which the past hundred years of militant class struggle has amply demonstrated.

These discussions took place at the beginning of the year, *before* the present sub-prime mortgage crisis and the velocity of millions of home ownership foreclosures. Overall the group's identification with "tenants," as opposed to "homeowners," coupled with an interest in the poorest sections of the working class, created divisions based upon income and status, as

opposed to what the class has in common. This illusion was further emphasized by the false idea that homeowners had more options and were better off. They saw housing problems from the standpoint of those who rented, period. This division between tenants and home owners does not take into consideration the historical changes that capitalism has entailed, including changes in the living conditions of the working class: being able to pay one's mortgage today is not that different from being able to pay one's rent 40 years ago. ("The rates of homeownership [in the US] rose dramatically after WWII, from 45 percent to 65 percent in little more than a decade fueled by the now-classic 30 -year fixed-rate mortgage; many of these homes were outside of cities, in the suburbs, ...today that figure has increased to 69 percent and has been fueled by the sub-prime mortgage boom.") (Urban Institute: "America's Second Housing Boom" by Edward Gramlich, 1/30/07). Home ownership today is certainly not indicative of bourgeois or petit-bourgeois existence - and the sense that it is, seems indicative of a pronounced nostalgia for a bygone age of proletarian life.

An article from WWSW, "Wall Street Hides Impact Of Subprime Mortgage Meltdown" by Cesar Uco, clearly outlines the tragedy and the devastation wrought on "...millions of working families, single mothers and immigrants who see their modest savings wiped out" Moreover, if we take "... the poor and elderly who took out second mortgages to make ends meet" the picture becomes even bleaker. Although some manage to hang onto their homes, "...they do so [only] by cutting back on other basic necessities like food, healthcare, clothing, education and transportation." Some comparisons are given that apply to New York City, but could definitely be applied to other big cities as well. For example, "...in the trendy Manhattan districts of Greenwich Village, Soho and Chelsea, as well as in the more traditional quarter of wealth and privilege, the Upper East Side, the percentage of home purchases and refinancing loans that are sub prime amount to only about 1 percent, and foreclosures are less than 1 in 1,000. In contrast, in the South Bronx -- the Mott Heaven-Melrose district -- where the median household income stands at \$15,500, home purchases with sub-prime loans have grown from 7.1 percent to 40.9 percent between 2002 and 2006; refinancing with sub prime loans has escalated from 29.4 percent to 42.4 percent. The home foreclosure rate here hit a high of 23.7 per 1,000 in 2005, which will soon be eclipsed by

the current crisis." Figures published in the *New York Post* last week indicate that foreclosures have soared in the city's predominantly working-class outer boroughs. For the period July 2006 to July 2007, the paper reported, "foreclosure filings increased by 54.3 percent in the Bronx, 50.6 percent in Brooklyn and 126.1 percent in Queens... In the final analysis, the spectacular growth in sub-prime mortgages in New York City's poorest districts -- as well as elsewhere across the country -- has amounted to a usurious instrument for transferring wealth from the working class straight into the pockets of the banks"



What needs to be stressed, and what the present crisis illuminates, is that decent housing is increasingly threatened for a growing part of the working class, not just in poor countries but even in the richest ones; that this tendency will increase as capitalism's crisis deepens, so class struggle around housing problems in working class neighborhoods may become a serious issue, an important aspect of a generalizing break with capitalist normalcy and legality. That said, one cannot deny the fact that working class neighborhoods in the US (and elsewhere) are fast disappearing, the capitalist class have dismantled the manufacturing sites and working class neighborhoods have disintegrated. As foreclosures mount, as houses are boarded up, working class families are dispersed outside of their old neighborhoods with a decreased sense of identity as productive working people. This will impose hardship on struggles that are based upon housing conflicts alone. But for now, the present crisis, for millions of working class homeowners, demonstrates exactly how insecure they are.

As the presentation below emphasizes it is the “coming together of the class as a whole,” tenants and homeowner alike, connected to workplace struggles, that will give the class struggle “the power ... to overthrow capital”.

Some Thoughts on Housing Issues

1. Is housing a class-issue?

Yes. Capitalism attacks our class both in its living and working conditions. There are many examples in the history of class struggle of rent strikes, collective resistance against evictions and of appropriations of housing. Furthermore, we can expect the issue to gain in importance in the future. Rents have been going up tremendously in the past years and many working families have to spend 30% or more of their income on it. Already more than a quarter of the homeless men in the US are people with jobs and their number is bound to increase. Millions of workers, pushed by high rents and lured by low interest rates, went deep in debt to buy homes at inflated prices in recent years. When housing prices fall, as they have already started to do in some parts of the US, they will find themselves with debt-obligations higher than the nominal value of their houses, which will force many of them out of their homes. The level of indebtedness of the working class has increased tremendously and in the US especially. This is a real time bomb, ready to explode when the next recession arrives. It seems quite possible that this will happen in a not too distant future and that the shock will be hard. Housing will then most likely become a burning issue, which workers will have to face in a collective way.

On the other hand, we also must take into account the impact of the changes that capitalism underwent in the last quarter of a century. The capitalist work process changed, creating new jobs and eliminating many others. The law of value penetrated every aspect of society, every corner of the earth, turning all social activity into a capital-labor relation, thereby turning hundreds of millions of doctors, scientists, educators, researchers, freelancers, caregivers, peasants,

craftsmen, independent producers, etc., into proletarians. The working class has grown but also is recomposed. The industrial proletariat has shrunk in the US to no more than 17% of the total work force. Even more so than work, housing has become dispersed. The dense urban proletarian bulwarks are receding into the past, at least in the West.



Furthermore, the differences in income within the working class (due, amongst other things, to the oversupply of unskilled and low skilled labor and the scarcity of some specialized kinds of labor) inevitably result in differences in living conditions. However, these differences do not arise from a difference in interest between those categories: they are both exploited by capitalism and can only free themselves by coming together as a class. It is imaginable that there could be situations (for example when young, better paid worker families move into a poor neighborhood) in which there would be a “gentrification” conflict pitting workers against workers. I don't see what could be gained from this from a revolutionary point of view. (Pro-) revolutionaries do not have a fetishist interest in the poorest segments of the working class. While it is true that these are the first to suffer and may therefore be the first to resist, if their struggle remains a struggle for the poor, it is doomed. What interests us, as revolutionary militants, is the coming together of the class as a whole, because only from that can the power come to overthrow capital. That brings me to my next point:

2. What is the potential of housing conflicts from a (pro-) revolutionary point of view?

We are interested in housing conflicts for the same reason as we are interested in workplace conflicts: because they can lead to an empowerment of the class, a break with normalcy, a questioning of the capitalist order, the collective imagining of a different society -- but only if the struggle is waged on a class-basis. In a struggle around housing, this can be less evident than in a struggle at the workplace, for the reasons mentioned above. To the degree that it is possible for pro-revolutionaries to participate in such struggles, they should stress the class nature of the conflict and plead for connecting the struggle with resistance at the workplaces. It seems unlikely that a strong movement just around housing could arise in the absence of unrest at the site of production. If it would, it would be condemned to recuperation and defeat.

3. Should pro-revolutionaries try to organize housing actions?

Should they undertake direct action against bad landlords in the hope of scaring them into making concessions, so that small victories demonstrate to the

renting population, which is too “backward” to fight unless someone shows them how, the benefits of direct action? To think so, one would have to believe that a determined minority could transfer its will to fight to the masses. It implies a vanguardist confidence in the belief that the masses can be dragged onto the path of revolution, and a corresponding underestimation of the creativity of the class. In that respect, groups like the CLAC are the same as classic Leninists. It is one thing to say that, when the conditions are ripe for housing struggles, we should encourage them and enthusiastically support them, but quite another to say that we should instigate them and organize them. What interests us is not so much the immediate result of a struggle (a landlord promises to abide by the rules, or to make repairs, or to cancel an eviction) but whether it contributes to the self-awareness and self-confidence of our class, to a growing consciousness of its potential power. That requires self-organization, a break with the ingrained social practices on which the perpetuation of the status quo rests, which make workers believe that they cannot act on their own, that they need the support and leadership of unions and other specialists. If we only replace this dependence on union or church leadership by a dependence on direct action-specialists, we will have contributed nothing fundamental to the challenge to capitalist normalcy.



In Europe, there was a peak in housing struggles in 1975-1980, with, amongst others, a strong, politicized “krakers” (squatters) movement in Holland in which anarchists and even some left communists played a leading role. This followed after a decade of very intense class struggle in the factories, strong anti-war protests, etc. The energy generated by this eventful decade was still palpable, even though the class struggle was declining. By focusing on housing, a

politicized minority was trying to keep that energy alive on another terrain for action. Some hoped that the spark of the housing movement would rekindle the broader fire. That didn't happen.

To some extent, the focus on housing today of some anti-capitalist activists, impatient for change, may be similarly motivated by disillusion caused by the lack of struggle in the workplaces and by illusions in what can be accomplished on the terrain of housing alone.

But if the squatter movements of the late '70's can arguably be seen as a last gasp of the wave of class struggle of the '60'-70's, could housing struggles today not be the beginning of a new wave? Well, who knows? Nobody has a crystal ball. But if that were to occur, it would arise from a collective will. That is what is still lacking today. It would be much simpler if people would want to fight but needed the example of activists to show them how, but that's not reality.

There is no doubt that more intense attacks on the living and working conditions of our class are coming. Only within a context of collective resistance to those attacks can housing struggles have an anti-capitalist dynamic. Without that context, they can easily be repressed and/or recuperated.

The Dutch capitalist class showed itself very adept at recuperating the krakers movement without any damage to its rule. Some creative agreements with landlords were struck allowing squatters to stay and legalize their situation, but many other squatters were evicted or dispersed. A part of the movement was incorporated into the left of capital, a part found a niche in social services, and the rest evaporated. In the absence of a renewal of class struggle in the workplaces, nothing else was possible. It is true that performing social services (giving direct support or legal advice to tenants threatened by eviction, etc.) can be very useful from a humanitarian point of view but that doesn't make it anti-capitalist. It can even be supportive to the capitalist order by forcing the "rotten apples" to become "good landlords," thus being a part of the self-correcting mechanisms of capitalist democracy. Participation in housing struggles can only be anti-capitalist if it recognizes that such struggles must arise from and be organized by the workers households themselves and if it seeks to connect such conflicts with resistance to capitalist rule in the workplaces.

Carol

Internationalist Perspective Web site

<http://internationalist-perspective.org>

The Internationalist Perspective web site contains articles and discussions in both English and French. The site contains the most recent issues of our magazine, as well as debates and discussions in the organization, leaflets, and texts which do not appear elsewhere.

It is important to stress that we do not see this site as solely "our" property, and hope that readers will take the time to respond to the posted articles and participate in the debates.

Raping the World to Feed the Bubble



Ecological devastation, decay of infrastructure, a widening gap between rich and poor, enormous global unemployment, intensification of work and falling wages, extreme exploitation spreading from the periphery to the center, a gigantic shift of wealth to the financial sector, bursting bubbles of fictitious wealth, war ...these are some of the defining characteristics of our era. Understanding that these phenomena (and those worse, yet to come) are all connected by capitalism's urge to survive will be essential for the struggles against them to find common cause and purpose. So it's up to the pro-revolutionaries to analyze and explain the connections. Loren Goldner did so, in an article entitled "Fictitious Capital for Beginners: Imperialism, "Anti-Imperialism", and the Continuing Relevance of Rosa Luxemburg", that was, this past summer, debated on several internet discussion lists.

On the web the reader can find the article at:

<http://home.earthlink.net/~lrgoldner/imperialism.html>,

as well as some discussion at:

<http://libcom.org/forums/thought/fictitious-capital-beginners-imperialism-anti-imperialism-continuing-relevance-rosa-luxemburg-27082007>.

In his response to some critiques on the Libcom-list, Goldner summarized his position as follows:

"Boiled down to its simplest, my article says that capital accumulation, in the course of a cycle, necessarily generates titles to wealth (stocks, bonds, property deeds and leases, and more recently securitized mortgages, etc.), capitalized anticipations of income in excess of available surplus value, and that it makes up that gap with "loot", i.e. goods, labor power, raw materials not paid for at their reproductive value, by running down (not reproducing) C (means of production and infrastructure) or V (labor power) past their point of depletion. When available surplus value and loot

no longer suffice to support those paper claims, capitalism undergoes a deflationary crisis that wipes out claims (and ultimately real capital, and labor power) until those claims are once again in some [relation of] equilibrium with available surplus value. That's exactly what we are seeing today. In a nutshell, in the era of the proliferation of fictitious capital, capitalist paper expands, while the material reproduction of society goes backwards."

The text was discussed in IP as well. We agreed with much of Goldner's analysis, but we also thought he made some mistakes which led him to some wrong conclusions. Sander wrote the following reply.

Fictitious Capital and Imperialism: Some Comments On Goldner's Text

I liked this text because of its ambitious attempt to analyze the totality, in contrast to all the punctual observations on the internet lists that Loren animates. His engaging text makes important points but I also have some disagreements, both with its framework and with some of its conclusions.

Primitive accumulation?

LG can be a bit eclectic and sloppy in the use of theoretical concepts. I criticized him earlier¹ for giving the concept of "unproductive labor" a different content than Marx while claiming to defend the same. Now he does it again with the concept "primitive accumulation". For Marx, this is "nothing else than the historical process of divorcing the producer from the means of production. It appears as 'primitive' because it forms the pre-history of capital, and of the mode of production corresponding to capital"². It is "an accumulation which is not the result of the capitalist mode of production but its point of departure"³. For the capitalist mode of production to begin, there must be capital, which can't be the product of the not yet existing capitalist mode of production; therefore it must be accumulated from other sources. That capital must also be in a position to command productive forces, in the first place, workers. But workers imply the capitalist mode of production, which had yet to begin, so the proletariat had to be created. That meant the massive expropriation of independent producers, mostly, peasants. It is true that capital-formation based on plunder and theft of extra-capitalist areas and the forced proletarianization of independent producers did

not stop once capitalism got out of the starting blocks but continues to our day - in that sense one can indeed speak of a "permanent primitive accumulation." Rosa Luxemburg was one of the very few who tried to integrate that reality in an overall analysis of the historical development of capitalism's contradictions. I agree this is necessary even though I think her attempt was flawed. Loren tries it also, in a way that is more different from Luxemburg than he acknowledges. For him, primitive accumulation is the looting that compensates for the lack of surplus value creation within capitalism. It is in his view especially important in our days, because "Keynesianism" has sabotaged the self-corrective mechanism of devalorization through crisis, thereby compounding the problem (lack of surplus value). But he defines primitive accumulation quite differently than Marx. For him, it's all accumulation which results from exchanges of non-equivalents, including the looting of nature (which is not an exchange of value) and "running capital plant and infrastructure into the ground" (how this can be construed as an non-equivalent exchange or a source of extra-value I fail to see; it is, however, a form of devalorization), and including exchanges within the capitalist mode of production, such as paying wages below the value of labor power.

But contrary to what LG seems to assume, the law of value does not imply an exchange of equivalents, only a tendency in that direction from which the law of value continuously offers escape to capitalists who lower the individual value of their commodity below its market value. The fact that surplus profits flow to the most productive capitals hardly needs to be explained by primitive accumulation. Furthermore, within economies, the movement of capital leads to a tendential equalization of the rate of profit so that the same quantity of advanced capital yields the same rate

¹ Fictitious Capital and the crisis of the Global Economy, *IP* 41.

² Marx, *Capital*, Volume 1, p.875 (Penguin ed.)

³ *Ibid*, p.873

of profit, regardless of the specific quantity of value they produced. This certainly implies exchanges of unequal value. Finally, inequalities in supply and demand make market prices deviate from market values, again making the exchanges non-equivalent. This is especially true today. In a world of general overcapacity, there can be no equivalent exchange between commodities. On the market, surplus value flows in such a way that relative scarcity (artificially created or not) is rewarded with surplus-profit and that oversupply drives price below value.

Buying labor power under its value

In other words, equivalent exchanges are the rare exception, not the norm in capitalism. Capitalists have always manipulated the law of value when they could. In particular in regard to labor power: capitalists always try to buy it below its value and to create the conditions to make that possible. It was, and is, rarely sold at its value. Sometimes, it is sold above it (which doesn't mean the worker is not exploited, only that he gets more than the equivalent of his labor power but still less than the value he created), but more often below it. The main factor that makes that possible is that the supply of labor power exceeds demand and the policies of the capitalist class are often aimed at maintaining this imbalance (immigration policies, etc). Other factors, in particular class consciousness, or the lack of it, also impact that rapport de force.

The urge to drive wages below value is constant but as always we must take the historical context into account. During formal domination and the first phase of the transition to real domination, the payment of wages below the value of labor power was the rule, rather than the exception. Paying labor power less than its reproductive value is by definition destructive, like over-cropping in agriculture. But that posed no problem as long as the supply of labor power was plentiful (which was achieved mainly through primitive accumulation, the forced conversion of peasants into proletarians) and as long as capital's investment in it was small. But with the development of real domination, the labor process changed, so that over time, skilled labor power became increasingly important. That meant that capitalism couldn't drive wages below value without destroying its own investment in the formation of the skilled worker. This, together with the development of the working class' capacity to organize and defend its interests, resulted in

a tendential equalization of wages and value of labor power, although, in conditions of crisis, which decreases demand for labor power, the tendency to push wages below value re-emerges. Of course, in areas that remained stuck in conditions of formal domination (precisely because of the transition to real domination globally and the resulting decadence of capitalism), where the emphasis of capitalist exploitation remained on absolute surplus value and the oversupply of (unskilled) labor was permanent, the tendency of wages to be pushed below value remained permanent too.

In this regard, some comrades raised the question, "how can one determine what the actual value of labor power is in a given context?" The value of labor power is determined, like that of any other commodity, by the socially necessary labor time (snlt) required to produce it. Therefore, the value of the labor power of a skilled worker is much higher than that of an unskilled worker, given all the snlt that went into his training. That value is transferred into the product of his labor, just like the value of the technology used in production. However, if there is no demand for his skills and the skilled worker is employed for unskilled labor, the value of his labor power devalorizes correspondingly. The amount of value that labor power creates has in itself no bearing on its value.

Secondly, the snlt needed to reproduce the commodity labor power is obviously much lower in underdeveloped countries, and therefore its value is too. Conditions of survival are more complex in a high tech society than in a low- tech environment. The difference is even greater when the workers are only "semi-proletarianized" and it's considered a given that they grow part of the foodstuff they need on their own little plot of land, and that they get no health care and so on. So the same unskilled labor has a higher value in the former than in the latter. It needs to be emphasized that the difference is not entirely objective, that there is also a subjective quality to it, what Marx termed the "moral aspect" of the determination of the value of the worker's labor power, beyond just the formation of the necessary skills (education, training, etc.) It entails the cost of production of the worker as a subject of capital, as subjected to the law of value, not through coercion or even the constraints of the need to earn a living, but in his/her consciousness, values, beliefs, culture – all of which constitute him/her as a subject (this is a complex of issues that Marxism has under-theorized, and that the concept of ideology, understood simply as false

consciousness, is inadequate to comprehend). Historical legacy, class consciousness, culture (including propaganda for consumerism), religion, etc, also play a role in the constitution of what, in a given society, are considered “normal” means of subsistence (which is another illustration of the fallacy of a mechanistic separation of infrastructure and superstructure).

So there is a big difference in the value of labor power in Switzerland and Swaziland. This has to be taken into account when comparing the value of the commodities these countries exchange. The goods of the first contain less direct labor but the value of that labor is much higher than in those of the second. That labor also yields more surplus value, because the intensity of the labor process is much higher. The more real domination internalizes the law of value in the production process, the more surplus value is squeezed from the same quantity of labor time.

When one takes those factors into account, the difference in value ($c + v + sv$) between the commodities of those two countries appears smaller than at first sight. There is still non-equivalent exchange, because there is non-equivalent exchange in the normal operation of the law of value. Higher productivity is rewarded by the market with surplus profit. And while within economies, and today to some extent in larger zones, the rate of profit tendentially equalizes and creates a homogenization of the conditions of production, internationally many obstacles prevent that, so that the advantage remains.⁴

The exchange is made further unequal by the law of supply and demand: overproduced commodities are sold under their value. As we’ve seen, that was and is often the case for the commodity labor power and thus often also for the commodities made with that labor power (depending on whether the capitalist can pocket the difference or must pass it on to the buyer). Unskilled workers, in the US as well as in India, are paid under the value of their labor power, but in India they are the vast majority. The trade between developed and underdeveloped countries implies a

transfer of sv to the former and yet historically that trade followed a declining trend. The more real domination developed, the more technified the capitalist world became, the higher the threshold for capital-formation became, the more difficult it became for the latter to produce commodities that fit in the modern global market.

Aside from the limitations imposed by a growing dependency on skilled labor, Fordism posed particular challenges to capitalists desire to push wages below value. The vertical company, the huge factory, the vulnerability of the assembly line to interruptions, the heavy cost of unused capacity, all shifted the balance of force in favor of the working class and helped to make the struggles of the late ‘60’s and ‘70’s possible. While, in contrast to certain Italian theorists, I don’t want to reduce the main events of the decades that followed (the accelerated development of information technology, the rise of a post-Fordist organization of the labor process, “globalization,” the recomposition of the working class, the decline of working class struggle...) to that single cause, I think the desire of the capitalist class to recreate conditions to drive wages under value played a big role in them.

For the accumulation of capital, two positive things happened. First, these trends allowed a commodification of all sorts of activities and services that were still outside the realm of capitalist production. This expansion of the law of value was inward (integrating everything in the fabric of the market) as well as outward (integrating the whole world into global production). This has fueled value creation. Secondly, the shift of production to underdeveloped countries did indeed restore conditions to drive wages below value and provided unprecedented opportunities to combine modern technology with low value-labor power. This has been good for profits. I see no reason to assume that this trend will end anytime soon. It should come as no surprise that in this “post-Fordist” era, the bulk of the production that has shifted to low value of labor-economies, is typically Fordist. Even in the heyday of Fordism, there were more “pre-Fordist” than Fordist companies. The terms do not describe a general state of the economy, but its tendency, the direction it’s moving in. The cutting edge of capitalist production is not in China and India but remains in the US, Western Europe and Japan. It is there that the post-Fordist economy takes shape. Its characteristics and

⁴ I simplify a bit. This is a very complex issue, which I tried to analyze in my text on the law of value on the world market (*IP* 37). Not entirely successfully, I admit. I plan to post another text on this question on IP’s website.

implications still need to be analyzed in IP. We have different views as to what extent the post-Fordist economy is value-creating for global capital. We do agree that this cutting edge-position (which is not strictly economic), and the means of enforcement of monopoly-rights that come with it, yield surplus-profits, a transfer of value from the weaker competitors and consumers. I tend to think, more so than some others in IP, that a huge part of the labor in the post-Fordist economy is not productive, and that the product of the labor of another part tends, by its nature, to devalorize quickly. I think this accelerates the tendential fall of the general rate of profit and makes the compensation provided by globalization essential.



Plundering

After trying to understand the non-equivalent trade in labor power in its historical context, we should look at primitive accumulation, the violent expropriation of pre-capitalist society, in the same way. Beyond its function in providing the building blocs for capitalism, this has happened throughout capitalism, in proud continuation of the plunder-traditions of ruling classes before it. However, over time, as the most easily plundered riches were hauled away and developed society itself moved along to more technified needs (no more need to harvest those rubber trees), its profitability decreased.

There is still a debate over the question whether the last big wave of colonization (the “scramble for Africa” in the later 19th century) came up positive on a cost-benefit balance sheet for the countries undertaking these efforts. Most have concluded that it didn’t.

It was already questioned in its time and became more so over time. And, how surprising: the more the costs of colonial plunder rose in relation to the benefits, the more society developed “a consciousness” about the immorality of colonialism.

What about capitalist slavery? Was that primitive accumulation? The overpowering and selling of people from pre-capitalist societies was. But once the slave is used for the production of commodities, he is no longer in pre-capitalism. He stands in a relation with capital, but not as the owner of the commodity labor power, but as a commodity himself. He’s not the same as a “free” proletarian, but is closer to him than to the slave of antiquity. He fulfills the same function for capital: creating value beyond the value required to reproduce his labor power. Unless that labor power is so easily replaced that paying for its reproduction is a waste of money, as King Leopold II thought while he wasted 10 million Congolese in the rubber plantations. What separates the capitalist slaves from the workers is in the first place a legal framework that defines them as a commodity. It’s of course a lot more than just laws. What distinguishes them further are other obstacles to acting on a class basis, like isolation. It’s not a coincidence that capitalist slavery has existed primarily and persists to our day in agriculture, where laborers are more easily isolated from each other than in industry. Also isolated and therefore more easily enslaved to our day are domestics and sex workers. The fact that I use the term “workers” indicates that I think they (usually) are proletarians. Their extreme exploitation does not make them any less so. That is what slavery is today: not the exploitation of non-capitalists, but extreme exploitation of proletarians. To keep certain sectors like the sex trade in a (semi-) illegal sphere, that maintains that isolation, is a source of extra-surplus value.

But while the globalization of the production process of capitalism includes forms of slave labor and creates new opportunities for it, it is precisely the demand for greater and greater productivity on the part of labor that sets limits to this phenomenon (the historical failures of Russian, German, and Japanese capitalism in the 1930’s and 1940’s, where forms of slave labor were

widely used in public works projects and in war production (to compensate for the backwardness of these capitals relative to their imperialist rivals) is an historical confirmation of this).

Devalorization

Of course we agree with LG that crisis is a big incentive for capitalists to plunder and to push wages below value, but the degree to which they can do so depends a lot upon the historical context. Concerning his view of the cause of that crisis, Loren has less in common with Luxemburg than he seems to think. Despite the fact that he calls his disagreements with her “minor” and that we would say our disagreements with her economic theory are pretty serious, I think we are closer to her than he is, because we agree with her that the insufficiency of capitalism’s internally generated market is a fundamental obstacle to capitalist accumulation. But whereas Luxemburg saw this insufficiency as static, present in capitalism since its inception, we think that it is dynamic and that it develops as a result of real domination’s effect on value-creation (slowing the growth of exchange-value but accelerating the growth of use-values) and interacts with its other consequence, the tendential fall of the general rate of profit (tfrp). Capitalism becomes obsolete when capitalist wealth and real wealth no longer develop in harmony, when it becomes increasingly difficult and absurd to measure real wealth with abstract labor power. This contradiction manifests itself in the phase of production (in a relative decline of exchange value-creation) but also in the circulation of value (in a relative decline of productive demand). It seems undeniable to us that there are plenty of means of production available, technology as well as manpower, whose combined use would yield sv, and thus profit, if the (effective) demand for the additional use values they would produce, existed. LG, by contrast, doesn’t mention the market contradiction at all. Without explicitly saying so, he sees the tfrp as the primary cause of capitalist crisis. But his view is not the same as that of Grossman and Mattick, for whom the tfrp was a historical, long-term, trend. LG rather sees it like Andrew Kliman, who in his recent book⁵ (5) and other writings describes the tfrp as a cyclical phenomenon, in which devalorizing crises restore

conditions for accumulation. The crisis erupts because the value that is produced tends to fall under the value of the capital advanced for production. Loren makes essentially the same point. He also states that this shrinkage of value-creation is accelerated by what he calls techno-depreciation (what Marx called moral depreciation), the premature obsolescence of means of production, discarded long before they have transferred all their value to new commodities. He emphasizes that the capitalization that takes place at the beginning of the cycle represents claims to future value that, as a result of that value loss, does not materialize and thus becomes in part fictitious. Because of the “Keynesian” (some would prefer “state-capitalist”) money- and debt-creating policies by which the capitalist class has prevented the crisis from doing its job since the 1970’s, the overhang of fictitious capital has grown enormously, and weighs heavily upon industrial capital. The only thing which has prevented the collapse has been the infusion of value through what he calls primitive accumulation, which in his inclusive definition, contrary to Luxemburg’s view, does not come from extra-capitalist sectors but from within capitalism.

Despite the lack of an historical framework (for LG, crisis in the early 19th century seems not essentially different from crisis today, except for today’s fictitious capital-bubble), there is a lot we can agree upon. The relative decline of value creation in developed capitalist production is real, as is the accelerating effect of moral depreciation (enhanced by the increased rate of technological innovation), and the dangerous growth of the credit bubble, which is indeed larger than ever. I also agree that the increased access to low value-labor power and its impact on the rapport de forces between the classes and thus on wages explain why this house of cards hasn’t collapsed yet, as well as with his expectation that this compensating effect will, in the (not that much?) longer run, no longer suffice to prevent this collapse.

I want to be clear that when I use this word, I don’t mean a collapse of the capitalist system, not even an automatic improvement of the conditions for revolutionary class struggle. There is, as we well know, a capitalist response to such an economic collapse, and the power of capital’s subjectification of the mass of the population, and the power of nationalism and xenophobia, demonstrated so many times over the past century, is a warning that we need to take seriously.

⁵) Andrew Kliman, *Reclaiming Marx’s Capital: A Refutation of the Myth of Inconsistency*, Lexington Books, 2007.

What I mean by “collapse” is a giant wave of massive devalorization, breaking the global chain of transactions at countless places, leading to global disruptions of trade and production. It is the inevitable phase of destruction of value imposed by the inner logic of the system, which today is a threat to the survival of our species. What Loren points out, albeit still in a tentative way, is a very important insight: this devalorization has already begun. The rapacious way in which capitalism consumes resources (both constant and variable capital) because of a tendentially aggravating scarcity of profit, shows its willingness to destroy productive forces, its refusal to invest in their renewal, in the future. This tendency shows how the inner logic of the value system is translated into the practice of capitalism

Imperialism today

Where we differ with LG is on how this has impacted the rapport de forces between the different capitalist countries and possibly also on how close such a collapse is (but nobody can know that anyway). Part of the reason for that difference may be that in the economic changes of the last 30 years, LG seems to see only the hollowing out of (Fordist) industry in the developed countries and their shift to Asia, and not a major restructuring of the production process that has both created new avenues for value creation and reinforced the commanding cutting edge position of the traditional leading countries over the global economy. As a result, he is too “bearish” on the US and too “bullish” on Asia.

After pointing to the global presence and power of the US military, after claiming that mostly American multinationals constitute the lion’s share of world production and after noting the US’ dominance over international institutions, LG states “we see US world hegemony disintegrating faster than we generally imagined possible (almost recalling the speed of the collapse of the Soviet bloc).” Where is the evidence for this claim? It is true that the US is facing enormous obstacles, but they threaten the capitalist accumulation process as a whole, not the leadership position of US capital, despite setbacks in Iraq and other places (see Mac Intosh’s articles in *IP*# 42 and 47 on this subject).

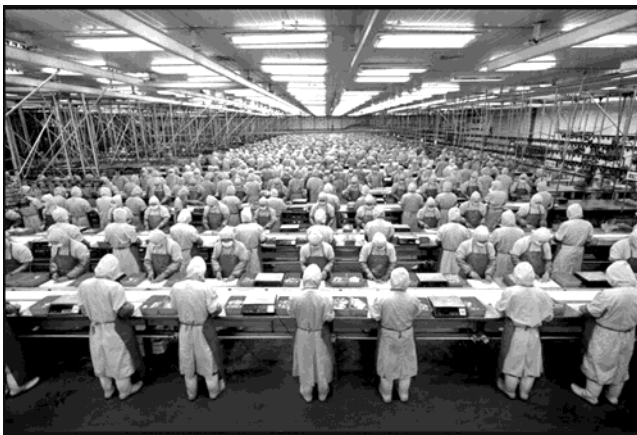
This August, the International Labor Organisation (a UN-branch) published a report on productivity in 2006 according to which it is again the highest in the US,

followed by the Western European countries. While it is true that such figures, which are arrived at by dividing the country’s gross domestic product by the number of people employed, do not tell us where most value is created, they do tell us something about where most profits are made, where the cutting edge is. Which is one reason why the US keeps attracting most of the net-savings of the world (the other is: power is an aphrodisiac).

In China and the other Asian countries that have been growing strongly in recent years (though not as strongly as LG believes – he takes the Chinese growth figures at face value, while many think they should be halved), productivity has doubled in the last decade, but it is still only one fifth of that of the US. It’s true that the difference would be smaller if only industry would be compared; it is so lopsided because of the huge gap in agricultural productivity. But agriculture remains the main occupation in those countries.

It’s a persistent myth that China, India, etc., are “catching up” with developed capitals, like Germany and the US did in the second half of the 19th century. In the latter countries, in the context of capitalism’s ascendancy, the domestic means of production grew hand in hand with the domestic market, protected from foreign competition, but happily financed by foreign capital, especially British, because these lesser developed countries had a higher rate of profit (because of the lower organic composition of their capital (occ): less constant capital, more surplus value creating labor power), so that capitalizing their development yielded a higher return than investing domestically (more on this in my text in *IP* 37). The development of China and other Asian countries today, by contrast, is the result of the internationalization of the capitalist production process and is conditioned by the need to fit in the new global division of labor, made possible by a convergence of political and technological developments at the end of the 20th century. Not domestic development but export to the developed countries is the motor and the low value of its labor power is the reason why it happens. Such a huge shift of value creation does have a multiplier-effect on the rest of the economy in those “emerging” countries. They become richer, capable of crossing thresholds of capital-formation that, until not so long ago, they could only dream of. They become increasingly savvy in their knowledge of the global market. More than 500 Chinese companies have branches in California alone. Even India, number 124 in the world according to UN

development criteria, now has first- rate global companies, powerful multinationals, such as Reliance and Tata. But guess what: the bulk of their investment doesn't go to India, but to Europe and other areas. India has some islands of development in a sea of stagnation. The IT-sector, so much in the news lately, employs less than 2 million people in a country of 1.1 billion, most of them living in poverty. Why do the Indian multinationals not focus on domestic development? Because it's not profitable. The stronger they become, the more they move away from India.



China is stuck

Mutatis mutandis, we see the same in China. There it's more than islands, the entire coastal area, home to a quarter billion people, has drastically changed. But behind it lies a vast, mostly rural, hinterland, where the majority of Chinese live. With 2 trillion dollars in the bank, why does China not massively invest in its development? Because, from a capitalist point of view, that would be just a waste of money.

But there's more to it than a lack of profitability. It's also the fear of too much transformation. If those countries invested massively in their hinterlands to homogenize conditions, they would risk serious threats. First, there is the threat of mass unemployment if agriculture were to shift to more productive, capital-intensive, exploitation. Second, there is the inevitability of a rising value of labor power if a homogenization of conditions transforms society as a whole, redefines needs and thus reproduction costs. And a low value of labor power is precisely the reason why they are where they are in the global assembly line. "Wages are on the rise in China", reported the *New York Times* on August 29. The reason is not

scarcity of labor power - there are more than a hundred million (internal) immigrants floating from city to city in search of jobs- but the fact that life in coastal China is changing and the survival conditions too, and the experience of the workers, the development of their hopes and expectations, as well. To be sure, wages are still very low in China. According to the NYT, "roughly \$1 an hour for better-paid workers near the coast, compared with as little as 50 cents early this decade". Still, it is a trend that must be reined in because countries with even lower value structures are breathing down China's neck. A third reason is that this spending would be inflationary. For instance, raising the overall level of education and health care would be largely unproductive for capital while such a massive investment would infuse a lot of money into the economy, without a corresponding capital formation. Countries like China, where there is a wide gap between a highly productive export sector and a low occ, low productivity, rest of the economy, are already particularly vulnerable to inflation. The bulk of its profits come from its export sector but when this sector spends its profits in the rest of the domestic economy, inevitably "too much money chasing not enough goods" scenarios unfold, hence inflation, speculation, etc. To avoid that, the Chinese state tightly controls the export sector and forces it to keep most of its dollar earnings in the banks.

So China is stuck. It has an ever-larger pot of dollars but it can't spend that capital freely on its national development.⁶ Meanwhile, the purchasing power of

⁶ This amounts to forced saving. In order to claim a larger role in the global chain of production, countries such as China have no choice but to hoard a disproportion ally large part of their earnings and to use that capital to finance spending by the developed world, primarily the US, which has the lowest savings rate in the world. According to Morgan Stanley economist Stephen Roach, "There can be no mistaking the dramatic shift in the mix of global saving in recent years. A particularly stunning change has occurred in just the past decade. According to IMF statistics, in 1996 the advanced countries of the developed world accounted for 78% of total global saving. By 2006, that share had fallen to 65%. Over the same decade, the developing world's share of global saving has risen from 22% in 1996 to 36% in 2006. Put another way, the rich countries of the developed world – which made up 80% of world GDP in 1996 – accounted for just 43% of the cumulative increase in global saving over the past decade. By contrast, the poor countries of the developing world – which made up only 19% of world GDP

that capital is eroding because the relentless debt-creation of the US inevitably leads to a declining dollar. It cannot seriously diversify – trade its dollar holdings for euros or other assets -- because that would accelerate the slide of the dollar. This would be disastrous for China, because it would cut deeply into its foreign reserves, it would make its exports to the US more expensive and thus less competitive, and it would cause a general confusion that would contract international trade. It is in China's vital interest to avoid this, therefore, the general answer to LG's question, "how much longer will the Chinese, the Koreans, the Japanese, the Middle Eastern oil sheiks, the Russians, the Venezuelans and the Medellin drug cartel – all major holders of dollars -- be willing to hold onto a depreciating asset?" is basically (although there are obviously some differences in the positions and options of the different players LG mentions), as long as its depreciation does not become so uncontrolled that global panic sets in.

Loren writes that those 2 trillion dollars in the bank of China are mere "little green pieces of paper" exchanged for real Chinese goods. They are of course more than that; otherwise their devaluation would not be a threat to China. As Loren notes, Japan suffered greatly when the devaluation of the dollar slashed its dollar-hoard. Yet when the Japanese bubble burst, its huge dollar-reserve was essential to rein in the downward spiral. It is true that, for decades now, the supply of dollars (currency and debt) has been growing ever more quickly than the value-creation it capitalizes and the value it circulates, so that a growing part of it has become fictitious from a value point of view. But that part is not greater or smaller depending on whether the dollar is in a Chinese bank or an American pocket. The mortgage-crisis in the US has hurt Chinese investors too. The growth of the dollar bubble is a problem for capital as a whole, given the entrenched

in 1996 – accounted for fully 58% of the cumulative increase in global saving over the 1996 to 2006 period, or approximately three times their weight in the world economy. This wealth transfer from the poor to the rich – the exact opposite of that which occurred in the first globalization of the early 20th century – is one of the most extraordinary developments in the modern history of the global economy." Still, Chinese capital is quietly increasing its purchases of assets in the US – a trend which, when it gains critical weight, is likely to increase inter-imperialist tensions.

position of the dollar as the international means of payment and reserve. Every country has dollars and would be hurt by their devaluation; everyone is hurt by its uncertain future. When the dollar sinks, when US stocks and other assets deflate, other countries do not profit but are dragged along.

While it's true that in the past (such as in 1985) the US forced a dollar devaluation upon its main trading partners (not so much to devalue its debt as to improve its competitive position on the world market), the present slide is not engineered to stick it to the Chinese, but is the inevitable weakening of a wave of asset-inflation which continued improbably long. As Loren notes, this asset-inflation went hand in hand with an ever- greater allocation of value to the unproductive FIRE (Finances, Insurance, Real Estate) sector, which further undermined value-creation. This asset-inflation, which was both a result and a cause of the widening gap between rich and poor, was not limited to the US but the dollar bubble was at the center of it all. It kept inflating for so long because the US, in terms of safety, stability, power and profitability seemed to owners of capital, in America as well as elsewhere, the best place to escape the threat of devalorization that hangs as a sword of Damocles over the entire world economy. This assumption is gravely challenged now. But the lack of any realistic alternative, for all players concerned, is sobering and paralyzing.

The relation between the US and China, and more generally between hegemonic America and other powers, is symbiotic and antagonistic at the same time. Seeing only one aspect, inevitably leads to wrong conclusions. The symbiotism has certainly increased and has imposed new limits on imperialism, while other changes (the overstretching of America's imperial "duties" and others) created new opportunities. But the context can change and the present financial turmoil may be a harbinger of that change. In a world sliding towards global collapse, in a debate such as the one within the Chinese ruling class that Mac Intosh described in *IP* 46⁷, the cost-benefit analysis might look differently.

Sander

September 2007

⁷ On whether to challenge American dominance in East Asia or not (see *IP* 47, p7-8)

Remembering Cajo Brendel

Last June, Cajo Brendel died. He was 91 and had a long full life behind him, in which his passionate belief in the revolutionary potential of the autonomous working class struggle was the leitmotiv.

For Cajo, as for Pannekoek and the other Dutch left communists who were his friends and comrades, the concept of autonomous class struggle had a meaning that went beyond the one which others in the internationalist communist left, especially the Italian left, gave to it. For the latter, it implied autonomy from the politics and organizations of the capitalist class and its state, but since they saw “the party” as an emanation of the working class, as long as it adhered to “the communist program”, they saw no contradiction between the defense of the concept of a party leading and organizing the working class revolution and the concept of autonomous struggle. But for Cajo and his comrades the contradiction was very real. For them, the latter concept implied the self-organization of the class.

The old concept of a revolution lead by the party that the Italian left continued to defend belonged to a by-gone era, so Pannekoek theorized already in 1916. Without developing a full theory of the periodization of capitalism, Pannekoek stated that in 1914 (the collapse of the International and the start of the inter-imperialist war) a new period had begun which required “a new socialism, a new workers movement with a new character”.¹ That new character was autonomous, not just from bourgeois politics but from leadership organizations in general. The new workers movement would arise spontaneously from its position in capitalist society and would take its struggle into its own hands, rejecting the (nation-based, parliamentary, trade-unionist, etc) tactics of the “old workers movement.” It is the only conceivable way in which the proletarian revolution can win. Only through the development of self-organization in and of the struggle, culminating in the workers’ councils, can our class acquire the power to overthrow capitalism and organize a new society. The 1920’s (the state-capitalist outcome

of the revolution in Russia and the huge development of self-organized struggle, especially in Germany where the Dutch comrades were very involved) confirmed Pannekoek’s view perfectly, in a negative as well as in a positive way.

Cajo Brendel came to these positions in the 1930’s. His father had gone bankrupt in the depression and young Cajo moved to a working class neighborhood in The Hague where he worked in a factory in between long bouts of unemployment, and where he eventually met members of the GIC. Discussing with them made him move “from kindergarten to the university” as he later put it, and he joined the group. The GIC (Group of International Communists), founded in 1926, was a regroupment of left communists in the Netherlands, after the defeat of the revolution in Germany and elsewhere, which tried to draw, on a Marxist basis, lessons from what they experienced and to deepen their theory of the new workers movement. But those major defeats had taken their toll on the working class and the tide had turned against the class struggle. The return of submissiveness, of passivity, condemned revolutionaries to isolation, and to inevitable debates over what should be done. The GIC understood that it could not swim against the tide and focused on theoretical work. But some sections found these debates on crisis-theory and on how society after the revolution could be organized too theoretical and split. Among them the section in The Hague, in which Cajo participated. So he went with the “activist” wing, quite surprisingly in light of his further evolution.

When the Second World War began, Cajo was mobilized and he distributed an internationalist leaflet among the soldiers. Later he wound up in Berlin as a POW. After the war, left communists in the Netherlands regrouped in the *Communistenbond*, which, after its paper, was usually called the *Spartacusbond*.² I remember as a kid reading a popular novel in which one character was talking about the

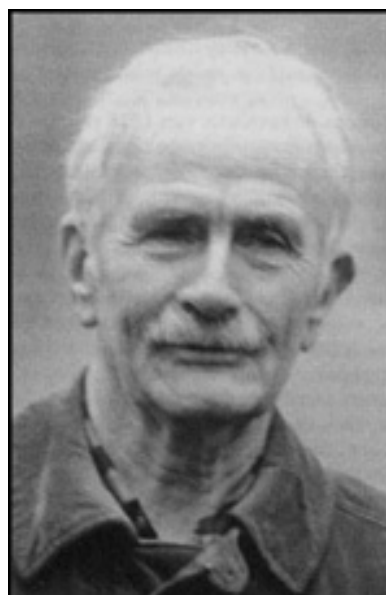
¹ Anton Pannekoek, “Der Imperialismus und die Aufgaben des Proletariats”, in ‘Vorbote, Internationale Marxistische Rundschau’, January 1916.

² Spartacus began in 1942 under the impulse of Stan Poppe, a survivor of a clandestine proletarian group that was crushed during the occupation. In 1944 most remaining members of the GIC such as Jan Appel and Canne Meijer joined the Spartacusbond.

Spartacuscommunists, who were the only ones to oppose the Dutch colonial war in Indonesia. Their stand for internationalism against the flood of chauvinist propaganda did not go unnoticed. Cajo was one of them. He remained on the editorial board of Spartacus until the group split in 1964. Cajo went with the dissenters who went on to publish the monthly "Daad en Gedachte" (Action and Thought). Unfortunately, the political disagreements behind this split were never made entirely clear (personal tensions seem to have played a role). But by the very choice of its name, the new group wanted to mark a clear difference with the Spartacusbond. With this name the group wanted to affirm its materialist view that action precedes thought, and that thought originates from action and thus differentiate itself from all idealist viewpoints, as well as from the Spartacusbond, which defended the need for revolutionary propaganda. D&G rejected this, at least in theory. In practice, Cajo and his comrades enthusiastically and energetically defended and propagated revolutionary positions all their lives.

I met Cajo in 1973, at a "council communist congress," where anarchists defended the idea that trade unions were working class organs and that we should work with them and within them to democratize them. In our common attack on this position, antithetical to council communism, we found each other. This and subsequent encounters, as well as Cajo's book on Pannekoek³, had a deep influence on me and others in the small group I was a part of. We were not the only ones. For many, coming to realize that Trotskyism had a bourgeois core or dissatisfied by the superficiality and lack of method of anarchism, Cajo was a breath of fresh air. He taught us to "think Marxist," to analyze events on the basis of the material conditions which gave birth to them, to understand social movements and political forces not on the basis of what they proclaimed and how they saw themselves but on the basis of their real position and role within the class contradictions that define society. The events of that period seemed a clear confirmation of Cajo's views. In the late 1960's and early 1970's, many wildcat strikes spontaneously erupted during which the trade unions unmasked themselves as defensive organs of capitalism against the workers' struggle, and in which workers organized themselves

on the basis of assemblies and strike committees. Cajo expected that this wildcat movement would become more and more extensive, that the state would use its coercive means to suppress it, and that this confrontation would give the autonomous workers struggle a revolutionary character. The class struggle would become a struggle against state power. The strike movements would move beyond what was specific to each and become extensive, general, conflicts in which the strike committees would become forced to take on general tasks, that is, to act as workers councils. In this way, the organizational expressions of the autonomous workers struggle would evolve into the organizational framework of the new society.



While he expanded our theoretical understanding, Cajo paradoxically also emphasized that theory played no role in that process. The working class struggle would become revolutionary, not because of its ideas but despite them, he stressed. "Theory", he liked to say, "does not show the way; it can only explain which way is followed and why". More than once our discussions turned to this question. To us it seemed that explaining which way is followed and why, was in effect showing the way forward, and that was in our view what council communists were doing and should be doing. The comrades of D&G disagreed and said it was contradictory to see the revolution as a development of collective self-organization on the one hand, and postulating the need for a politically based revolutionary minority on the other. You can't say that

³ Cajo Brendel, "Anton Pannekoek, theoretikus van het socialisme", SUN, Nijmegen, 1970 (Also published in German).

the workers struggle has to get rid of leaders and specialists and at the same time proclaim yourselves to be indispensable political specialists. One of us asked the D&G-comrades provocatively whether their rejection of any role for theory in the class struggle did not imply that their own activity was in essence a hobby, like collecting stamps. One of them answered indignantly that there was a huge difference between their social passion, grounded in reality, and the alienated, isolated activity of the stamp-collector. Cajo said he was all for going to workers struggles (and indeed he did so many times), yet not to teach the workers but to learn from them. But what do we do with what we learn from them, we would ask, is that not something we want to give back? And so on it went. It was a discussion that never came to an end.

A few years later, an international regroupment of groups and individuals who all shared our position that a working class revolution can only succeed if it is international and autonomous, outside and against all unions, parties, and states, that pretend to represent the workers, led to the formation of the International Communist Current (ICC). The circle I was a part of decided to join this process and this led to a cooling of our relations with Cajo and D&G. We joined the ICC because it seemed logical that, if the struggle of our class must come together internationally, so must we. We had to shed all localism, all “small-is-beautiful” tendencies. But we also joined the ICC because we saw in its positions and goals a continuation of the fight of Pannekoek and the Dutch/German left, of its insistence on autonomous struggle, on general assemblies and workers’ councils, instead of unions and parties. The only substantial difference between us, and D&G in this regard, so it seemed, was on whether politically organized minorities play a role in the revolutionary process. Pannekoek and the other theoreticians of the Dutch left never denied that they did, but focused on their critique of the Social-Democratic and Bolshevik party-model, the party that wants to organize and lead the working class, to take power in its name, which they saw as an expression of the bourgeoisie, not the working class, and an obstacle to the development of the latter’s autonomous struggle, which has to be a collective emancipation, getting rid of all dependence on leaders, or else fail. But what was the task of revolutionaries who rejected that party-model? Henk Canne Meijer, a metalworker who was one of the founders of the GIC, articulated the position of the GIC on this question in his text “Das Werden einer neuen

Arbeiterbewegung” (“The Rise of a New Labor Movement”).⁴ In this brilliant pamphlet, Canne Meijer devotes of course quite a bit of space on what revolutionaries should not do (the old party-model) but that doesn’t mean he saw them as irrelevant to the revolutionary process, as Cajo later would. On the contrary, in his view, the importance of the new revolutionary groups devoted to the self-emancipation of their class, “is much greater than that of the most powerful party propaganda could ever be. As long as only isolated groups sporadically here and there set about, through serious study, making themselves acquainted with the movement of social forces, so long will the importance of this work fail to directly make an impact. But as soon as they become more general, when they form a consciously widespread movement, when work groups arise everywhere for the purpose of imparting to the workers the true (scientific) insight into the social processes of life; then the picture is altered. Their task is then no longer small and modest, but gigantic and all mastering.” In contrast to the substitutionist parties, “the content of their propaganda does not convert the groups into organs of domination, but into organs through which the class itself derives the necessary knowledge and thus is in a position to shake off all dominance.” He insisted that such groups are “the organs through which the class strives to come to an understanding of its true situation” and are thus not standing outside the class, even though in times of defeat and passivity, it may appear that way. He wrote “at the present time it is only like-minded people who can combine in small groups. It is better that revolutionary workers in thousands of small groups work on the coming to consciousness of their class than that their activity be subjected in a large organization to the striving for dominance on the part of their leadership. That does not preclude collaboration of the groups among themselves, but rather makes it more necessary. If it shown in practice that such collaboration has been attended with success, then in truth is the smelting together into a great organization of like-minded persons surely accomplished. But this smelting together into an organic unity can only be the result of a process of development.” But Canne Meijer’s “at the present time” was 1935, a dark time for the workers struggle. We felt, in the mid-70’s, that

⁴ For a partial English translation, go to: <http://www.geocities.com/~johngray/canne.htm> (also in other languages).

times were different; we thought that we could sniff revolution in the air, that the process of development which Canne Meijer mentioned was taking place and “the smelting together into a great organization of like-minded persons” could be accomplished.

Cajo had a very negative view of the formation of the ICC. He had some important disagreements, such as on the Russian revolution, which he, like Pannekoek since the 1920's, saw as a bourgeois revolution, while for the ICC (pointing to the role of the soviets and factory committees) it was a proletarian revolution that was defeated. Significant as such disagreements were, the main divergence arose from the fact that D&G no longer shared the view of Canne Meijer and the GIC on the role of political groups. For Cajo, historical materialism implied that all can be reduced to consequences of the evolving production process and that by its very place in the production process, the proletariat will be forced to demolish capitalism, without a pre-existing conscious will to do so, and thus without any need for political groups to intervene in this inevitable dynamic. Cajo predicted that the ICC would become either an old-style party trying to lead the working class and thus become an obstacle on its way, or a sect beset by splits.⁵ In hindsight, his prediction was pretty much on the mark. It might not have been inevitable, but it happened. It might have been avoided, if the young ICC would have taken some of the warnings of Canne Meijer in the previous quoted text to heart. He warned new groups of the danger of being driven by the goal of their own growth (as the ICC increasingly was):

“Groups which still today wish to become ‘big’ -- big in the sense that the organization grows big and powerful -- find themselves on the same path that the old labor movement has taken. They still bear the distinguishing marks of the old labor movement, where the organization ‘leads,’ as an apparatus, and the individual member subjects himself to this leadership. The individual wants to subject himself to the principles which he holds to be correct; in reality he subjects himself to the organizational apparatus”.

⁵ Ironically, Cajo got along better with the ICC (at least according to the ICC-press) later on, after all those who had any affinity with him had either left or been expelled from the group, and after the ICC had adopted a resolution declaring “councilism the greatest danger for the proletariat.”

The first task of political groups, according to Canne Meijer, is to deepen their theoretical grasp. Without that, their likely fate is to succumb to an immediatist activism. “The insufficient theoretical foundation becomes so dangerous to the new groups for the very reason that it leads to unconsidered and aimless actions. When impatience instead of insight becomes the counsellor of action, one seeks to drive the workers into all possible actions. This becomes at last a consciously applied method for ‘revolutionizing’ the working class and ‘educating’ it to the class struggle. And so their language is fearfully ‘revolutionary.’ This gives them the feeling of being very revolutionary and the conviction that they are front-rank fighters in the proletarian revolution. But all that is accomplished by it is that the revolutionary impatience is discharged in strong words and explodes like loose powder, without injury to the ruling class. The attempt by such methods to make the proletariat ‘ripe’ for revolution merely demonstrates that these ‘front-rank fighters’ themselves still lack the most elementary insight into the conditions of the proletarian struggle for emancipation.”

In the subsequent decades, Cajo remained very active, despite the fact that his health was deteriorating. He wrote numerous articles and pamphlets, some of which remain very much worth reading. Some are available on the web.⁶ Échanges et Mouvement (www.geocities.com/echangesetmouvement), a group in which Cajo participated, has announced it will publish a political biography and a bibliography of Cajo, as well as an anthology of his texts. A laudable initiative. Cajo continued to participate in many debates and meetings, always ardently defending his views. I never participated with him in strike movements, but he was present in several, and, knowing Cajo, it's hard to imagine that he only listened without offering his opinions as well. Cajo always told us not to focus on what people say about what they're doing but to look at their real practice. Applying that criterion to him, I'm tempted to conclude that, despite his denial of the impact of revolutionary theory, he really worked hard to have a real impact. And he succeeded. His ideas are part of the bloodstream of ideas that are debated internationally and in which, in the words of Canne Meijer, “is revealed the reorientation of the thinking of the class.” He's dead now, but his ideas are very much alive.

⁶ <http://www.geocities.com/~johngray/indx1.htm#brendel>

Cajo advocated a “realism, which sees in the production of material necessities the key to a clear understanding of society; which understands that the way in which those needs are fulfilled determines the character of society, and that any change in the way in which the material necessities are produced, causes a change in the character of society, another relation between the classes that exist in it, another struggle between them.”⁷ Sound advice. However, since the last quarter of the 20th century, tremendous changes have occurred “in the way in which the material necessities are produced,” and Cajó contributed little to the understanding of how this has caused “a change in the character of society” and of the class struggle. Even his close friend Henri Simon of *Échanges* admitted, in his personal remembrance of Cajó, that in his later years there was a certain rigidity in his thinking, a lack of openness to new ideas, which, together with his physical decline, contributed to the demise of D&G in 1997.

At the heart of our disagreements with Cajó was his deterministic view of history. He thought so too. For him, the victory of the proletarian revolution over capitalism was as ineluctable as capitalism’s victory over feudalism. Far from us to want to replace such a vision with one that puts an autonomous will or idea in the driver’s seat. IP bases itself on the Marxist method and its historical materialism, so we agree with the general position that the mode of production shapes how humans relate to each other and thereby also how they think and what they want. However, over the years, IP has become increasingly critical of a mechanistic interpretation of historical materialism, of a teleological Marxism, that sees socialism as pre-ordained, programmed by history, of a productivist Marxism that sees revolution as the simple result of the productive forces developing to a critical point, of a vulgar materialist determinism that rigidly separates action and thought and sees the latter as a passive effect of the former. I admit that these ideas can be found in some of the writings of the best Marxist thinkers: Engels, Marx himself, Luxemburg, Pannekoek...but they have also written things that undermine such views. To explain the former ideas in an historical materialist way, we can point to the general influence of the industrial revolution on the

human mind. The tendency to construct “iron laws,” that were as predictable as a machine, was not limited to Marxism. As the role of knowledge in production increased, especially since the second half of the 20th century, the growing complexity of the productive process went hand in hand with a growing awareness of the complexity of other processes as well – including social processes. This complexity implies that contingent factors may play a role that makes those processes unpredictable. That doesn’t mean that all “laws” deduced by Marxist analysis should be tossed overboard. All these “laws” are tendencies that describe but a part of reality. The later Marx made that point. I think he understood, as well as Luxemburg and Pannekoek, that social being determines consciousness and that consciousness in its turn changes social being. His view of the relation between action and thought was dialectical, Pannekoek stressed. Marxists reject a dualistic (matter/spirit) worldview but that they also reject vulgar materialism for which only what’s tangible is real. “In human beings”, Pannekoek wrote in his text “Historical Materialism”,⁸ “the material and the spiritual [cultural] elements are always united, you can’t separate them... Human needs are not just those of the stomach, but also of the mind and the heart... in human labor, action and thought are always joined; it’s an artificial abstraction to want to separate them.” Yet this abstraction has an historical sense, Pannekoek continued. But if we separate, for the sake of historical analysis, something that is really one, we should be very careful not to fall into reductionist schematism. History is indeed propelled by man’s interaction with his conditions of survival but consciousness is an active part of that process:

“History consists of human acts. Man stands as an organism with specific needs –required for his survival -- in a natural environment, from which he must satisfy those needs. His needs and his environment have an impact on him; they are the cause of the acts through which he assures his survival. He has this in common with all living beings; but to the degree a higher stage of development in the organic world is reached, a spiritual element increasingly inserts itself in between impact and satisfaction, an urge and a will. In human

⁷ Cajó Brendel, op.cit., p.19, our translation.

⁸ This and subsequent quotes are from: Anton Pannekoek, ‘Het Historisch Materialisme’, *De Nieuwe Tijd*, 1919, reprinted bij Spartacus editions, Amsterdam, 1971 (Our translation)

development, to this an ever more dominant consciousness is added.

While now and then, need may cause original urges to flare up as spontaneous will, usually the process works its way through the human mind, through thought, the idea, the conscious will. The needs and the environment impact the mind and generate thoughts and goals, which in turn cause actions."

So instead of the idea that consciousness comes only after the act, Pannekoek offers a more complex view: "Thought, the idea, is the mediator between the impact of social factors on man, and his historical act." All the actions of humans occur through the intervention of the human mind". For Pannekoek, that implied that political groups are part of that mediation: "their propaganda joins itself to the direct impact of living experience and thus accelerates the understanding of its essence." Pannekoek stressed that consciousness is a product of history, not a mere reflection of the state of the production process at a given time. It does not start on an empty page: "... the impact of all previous situations is deposited into the content of consciousness." Not just the past and the present influence consciousness, but so does the future, because of our capacity to anticipate. The actions of humans arise not only from being forced to react to material conditions created by the development of the productive forces but also from our imagination, which distinguishes us from robots.

Pannekoek also warned against schematically equating "infrastructure," productive forces and "the material world" on the one hand, and 'superstructure', thought and consciousness, on the other. "Science, our knowledge of natural forces, our ability to work with them, is also part of the productive forces", he wrote, "Technology contains a material but also a very strong spiritual element." Today, in the age of information-technology, even much more so than when he wrote this. That they are intangible doesn't mean that thought processes are not an active, material force in history. They are and their role increases, together with the development of society. That too is a law, a tendency of which socialist revolution would be a logical expression. Furthermore, those thought processes as they evolve into different domains such as the sciences, arts, religion, and political discourse, maintain a relative autonomy. They are not only mediating between man's material conditions and his praxis, they

also have their specific dynamic and history, their own characteristics (which may open opportunities for praxis not necessarily favorable to capitalism) that differentiate them from being mere reflections of the stage of development of the productive forces. On the other hand it should be noted that the law of value has penetrated all these domains thoroughly, especially in the last few decades. In that sense it is true that the relative autonomy that they enjoyed under the formal domination of capital has been destroyed. The market has swallowed everything. The enterprise (the capital-labor relation) is now the framework of the development of knowledge; market-share is its goal. Yet at the same time, the growing dependency of capitalism on knowledge implies a growing dependency on a more educated, more informed, working class, which, for capitalism, makes it increasingly challenging to make that class act and think as variable capital, to make it look at the world and its own situation through the "eyes" of capital. This working class will not face the crisis into which capitalism submerges society as a situation in which the threat of starvation leaves it no choice but to overthrow capitalism. The gigantic strides in productivity that capitalism has made, makes it possible to avoid such that precise situation and this capacity may even remain somewhat intact after an economic collapse, at least in the stronger countries. The crisis informs the working class today in a broader, more complex way: attacks on its direct living conditions, but also the destruction of the global environment, growing unemployment and insecurity but also the general lack of a future; the increasing, unacceptable, accumulation of unnecessary pain. The working class needs the direct struggle in the workplace as source of growing self-awareness and confidence, but there's no guaranty that, through confrontation with state-repression, it will escalate into revolution, as Cajo expected. What also feeds the struggle and makes it possible for it to become revolutionary is a changing understanding of the world.

Consciousness is a material force whose importance in all social processes is greater than ever: in the production process, as well as in the revolutionary process. Genuine revolutionary groups and thinkers, such as Cajo, are a crucial part of that process -- more so than he wanted to admit.

Sander

Reflections on a Discussion about the Perspectives for Communism

Below, we respond to a discussion that has taken place on the Francophone internationalist discussion network between FM and RV, over the perspectives for communism. FM's text criticizes the positions defended by RV, and is quite complicated. It raises a series of interesting issues, however, that merit debate. The thrust of the text is a critique of the "classical" position of a materialism basing itself on an historical evolution of modes of production, in contrast to a contradictory vision to that materialism, one leading to a negation of material, historical, conditions. It thus becomes an idealization of the disappearance of the social relations engendered by capitalism, a disappearance that would be due to the class struggle alone.

FM's Text: Productive Forces, Progress, and Communism

The debate on progress, the productive forces, and the permanence of economic concepts in revolutionary theory is far from being just a matter of words. On the contrary, it comes down to the very way in which the class struggle, capitalism, the economy, communism, and revolution, are "thought."

The development of the productive forces as the nexus [fil] of history

"Marx spoke of the improvement of man and of his world. [That is] the sole nexus in history. The present dangers must not lead us to deny the existence of that historical nexus."

"The question of progress comes down to this other question: does history have a meaning?"

(RV at the discussion network meeting of March 9, 2007)

Communism is conceived as the normal condition of humankind, one whose establishment only awaited the means to satisfy human needs. The original scarcity, therefore, engendered the division of society into classes. History, then, is based on an inherent tendency to the development of the productive forces, a sort of pre-historic destiny, of an anthropological nature, linked to a definition of man and his relation to nature. And, that development of the productive forces would contain, in its outcome, the elimination of classes. The elimination of classes would, therefore, be

programmed from their very appearance. This is teleology.

The development of the productive forces would be a trans-historical process, indicative of a dynamic succession of modes of production that would one after the other disappear. On that basis, there would be created an historical teleology of a process tending towards its goal [fin] via a destiny that presided over its very course, and that had its roots in a definition of human nature.

In effect, according to the sophisticated progressivism of "programmaticism,"¹ within which RV's positions – along with others – are inscribed, capitalism is progressive because it works towards its own destruction. It is a progressivism that has as its criterion, not the progress of capitalist development for itself, but that this development writes its own obituary. If one could, or it is still necessary, to support the development of capital, if the development of capital was, or is still affirmed, as progress, if it was, or still is, on the way to the revolution, it is because capitalism produces its own gravediggers.

¹ "Programmaticism" does not reside in the fact itself that the proletariat acts as a class in capitalism, but in the specific historical form and content of its contradiction with capital, which at a given moment confers on this class, as a class, a programmatic content (a worker's community, class affirmation, liberation from labor, period of transition, objectivism, liberation of the productive forces, etc.)

Decadence and the productive forces

In positions defending a concept of “decadence,” like that of the ICC, decadence resides in the inability of capitalism to continue its progressive “mission” of the development of the productive forces. In heterodox positions defending decadence, like that of IP or the FOR (which RV seems to defend²), decadence would reside in the continued development of the productive forces in some sort of empty way, inasmuch as capitalism would already have reached, and surpassed, the level of development of the productive forces needed for the social transformation. In each case, capitalism would cease to be situated on the progressive line on which history had placed it at its origins, through its role of continuing to develop the productive forces; that development is a neutral tendency of which the modes of production that succeed one another in history are only the carriers, conforming first, in an ascendant phase, to their historical mission, then, in a decadent phase, opposing it.

The productive forces and the role of the proletariat in the revolution

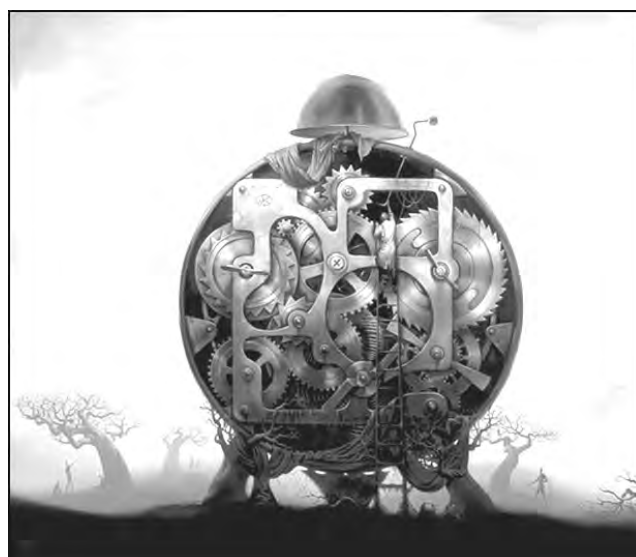
In *objectivism* the contradiction between the proletariat and capital is seen as an objective economic contradiction between productive forces and relations of production – a contradiction driving the proletariat to act. But the proletariat, even if it is considered to be part of the productive forces, is still understood to be outside the terms of the contradiction. The proletariat is a “being” constituted once and for all against capital, and is not a relation to capital.

The proletariat is seen, just like the bourgeoisie in its revolution, as the executor of a movement that

² “[...] the technological means of production and communication that would make it possible to master and reverse the situation [‘the world sunk in a condition of generalized disaster’] are developing as never before, without the situation resolving itself This is only one particularly glaring expression of the intensification of the fundamental contradiction between the social and political relations that regulate social life, on the one hand, and the development of the productive forces, on the other. The perpetuation of the old capitalist relations fetters and denatures the development of the [productive] forces that produce the means by which society lives.” RV, “On the Necessity for the Development of the Productive Forces.”

subsumes it, a movement autonomous from the productive forces. It is charged with doing what capitalism cannot do: the free development of the productive forces. In the objectivist vision of programmaticism, the struggle of the proletariat only executes the sentence that capital has pronounced against itself, at the end of its development.

The communist revolution is understood in a way similar to that of the bourgeois revolution. It’s a matter of a class, having developed within an old mode of production, having gained power and strength in and by what it is in that mode of production, having achieved a certain control over its own existence, liberating its conditions of existence from the old society, and making itself autonomous from it. The revolution is the liberation of something fettered [*bridé*] in capitalism. Once unfettered, that something (labor, the productive forces) must, therefore, immediately do what it was prohibited from doing. It must in a transitional period resolve the problems left in suspense by capitalism. But, it’s not clear how it can pass beyond that transitional period. In the revolution, so conceived, by resolving a contradiction of capitalism, of which it is not one of the terms, but simply the best situated executor, the proletariat, far from disappearing, triumphs as a class of capitalism.



Objectivism and Class Consciousness

In objectivist theories, the intervention of the proletariat arises from a development [*prise de*] of consciousness. The subjectivity of the proletariat arises

from the objectivity of the conditions to which it is subjected. By contrast, if one thinks that the proletariat, as a pole of the contradiction of the capitalist mode of production, coincides in its existence and its practice with the historic course of its contradiction with capital – itself a development of the mode of production – then the problem of the development of consciousness determining the class struggle disappears.

De-objectivation of the world

The activity of the proletariat against capital is a practical de-objectivation of the world in which human activity moves; a de-objectivation of all the social labor accumulated within capital, in which this latter, as a social relation, is necessarily an object. After capital has disenchanted the world, the proletariat de-objectifies it. It takes capital to produce those extravagant notions of activity-in-itself, products-in-themselves, or conditions of activity. The communist revolution constitutes a break with all the determinations of the economy. The social immediacy of the individual is the end of that separation between individual activity and social activity, which had made man into an objective being in the relationship between his individuality and his sociality. It is not objectivity in itself that is in question, the fact that the being of man is an objective being, but the separation between individual activity and social activity, which constitutes objectivity in the economy, in the mediation between individual and social activity, and defines human activity as labor.

As a manifestation of self, activity is free because it bears within it its own goal, production is self-production by each individual in the community. In communism, all relations are relations between individuals whose singularities constitute the reality of their relations.

Is that to say that there will no longer be production in the sense that the term has had until now? Clearly no. But to begin from production as such, leads nowhere. It is just as absurd to conceive of communism as an organization of production, which can infallibly only lead us to an abstract equalization of activities, as to conceive it as a pure inter-subjective relation in which humans would produce, but almost by hiding that fact, shamefully, and above all without doing so expressly. In both cases, in wanting to speak of communism, you end up speaking about capital, because you have not understood it. In the first case, you only understand it as a social relation, and not as a socially necessarily objectified relation, to the point where you only change the “forms” while preserving the necessary objectivation of the social relations. In the second case, you have not understood it as a social relation having the social reproduction of individuals as its outcome; you have only seen it as an effect of its necessary productive objectivation, such that you end up wanting to reach the point where human activity has its proper end [*fin*] in suppressing objectivation.

Fr. Maz, April 26, 2007

Our viewpoint

FM's text sees the action of the proletariat as determined by the conditions of the development of capitalism, denying the significance of the development of consciousness as a determining factor. He links up, then, with the positions developed by *Theorie Communiste*. We will not respond on the bases of RV's positions, but rather will just clarify our own theoretical evolution. We reject the concept of decadence, as articulated by the ICC, as well as the mechanistic determinism of certain currents claiming the patrimony of Marxism. Similarly, we do not share the position of those who claim that fundamental changes within capitalism came to an end by the

second half of the 19th century, thereby establishing a kind of socio-economic invariance, clearing the way for a static understanding of history, where the proletariat could never appear as an historical subject. The proletariat, and its party, is thereby reduced to employing tactics to adapt to the advances of capital. The proletariat is seen as essentially “trade-unionist,” unable to develop a class understanding of events. It must always make a tactical front with the bourgeoisie. By contrast, we believe, with Rosa Luxemburg, that if the proletariat does not intervene in a radical and revolutionary way by destroying capitalism, capitalism will necessarily lead us into barbarism.

To pose the question of communism as FM does, demands that the question of *determinism* be raised, as well as that of the contradictory relation between capital and the working class.

It is clear that capital entails the development of the productive forces, the accumulation of social wealth, in its most pure and abstract form. While previous modes of production were based on the production of objects of utility, use-values, of which only a surplus was exchanged amongst producers, capitalism has led to the penetration of exchange within the very process of production, labor-power being exchanged for a wage, and has made exchange-value, and its universal form, money, the goal of production, the absolute criterion of wealth, the new God on earth. Under capitalism, human relations dissolve into value relations, but while the capitalists derive power and wealth and make themselves into the agents of capital, the wage-worker “lives” this dissolution as a loss, an alienation of self, a form of slavery. This is an ongoing historical process, which has taken different forms linked to the actual development of the relations of production. Globalization constitutes such a major change in form, and has had an undeniable impact on the development of the class struggle. The penetration of the law of value into every pore of society is another significant change. Finally, ideology too plays an enormous role, as in the case of the ongoing “anti-terrorist” campaigns in which the populace is enveloped, and which we must continue to denounce.

The question that needs to be asked is whether one can *reduce* history to a simple deduction from, or emanation of, the economy. History is not a matter of pure *chance*; but it is also not regulated by some kind of pre-determined and inflexible *necessity*. As a whole, overall, says Marx, history follows a certain course, a general development, in which the consciousness and will of individuals play only a relatively modest role, at least up until now. The finally decisive, the fundamental, process, is the development of the material productive and social forces. It occurs in stages, through all sorts of detours and complications. The great historical phases succeed one another following an order that can be comprehended, because each one prepares the way for the next, though *not* intentionally. There is a “law” [*un constat*] a “law” of the succession of modes of production, of societal evolution. Interpreting that “law” as a basis for an eschatological vision of history is a step that we will

not take. Understanding the historical progress of “democracy” as an advance towards communism is an idea that we do not defend.

The changes

The hesitation about interpreting the changes at issue is not difficult to understand, especially because the Marxist thesis that has aroused the most objections and criticism is that the “forms of consciousness” more or less directly depend on the “material base.” The mode of production of material life conditions the processes of social, political, and intellectual, life in general. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being; it is their social being that determines their consciousness. However, we must not forget that, for Marx, if men are entangled in social “relations” that they have not consciously willed, they nonetheless “produce their own existence.” They pursue a goal, and in realizing it, they also attain another: for example, they create social relations that they have not first conceived. The fact that our thinking could be conditioned by something other than itself has not been easy to acknowledge since the Renaissance. Of course, all these elements risk being seen as humanist for those who remain committed to a strictly determinist interpretation of Marx. Our approach will have a definite impact on our understanding of class struggles and the development of class consciousness. Capitalism is a system that, although preserving the same bases (exploitation, extraction of surplus-value), modifies certain aspects of its own mode of existence. But, those modifications do not bring about a change in its nature. Moreover, there exists no *inevitability* leading capitalism to a revolutionary change resulting in communism. The only certain perspective that capitalism offers is barbarism.

That said, there does exist a necessity for revolutionary change if one wants to prevent the catastrophe of barbarism. That necessity is nothing other than that of general “social” needs and interests. The first in importance of such needs, and the most compelling, are “material,” in particular when masses of humans are at the limits of their very survival. This is not a matter of some “external” necessity; on the contrary, it is due to the internal pressure of *vital needs*. This necessity is not so much “mechanical” as vital: it is rooted in the very order of existence. It activates exploited and oppressed classes, just as it does ruling classes. The latter, to keep power, must reproduce the existing

social relations (exploitative relations, property relations, etc.) It is from that complex of vital needs on the part of both sorts of classes that the class struggles that mark history arise, sometimes latent and muffled, sometimes erupting into crises and revolutions when the most threatened social groups have no other possibility but the recourse to violence.

This claim that social, political, and ideological, life is conditioned by necessities of a vital order is not new. Materialists have propounded it, above in thinking about vital *individual* needs. Marx enlarged and modified what might be understood by “material” needs, seeing them as *socio-historical* needs that vary from one class to another, and depending on the given epoch.

IP has displaced the analysis onto the *social* plane. There exists close, *necessary*, link, and interdependence, between determinant social needs and determinant social relations (division of labor, property relations, etc.). A type of social relations defines a mode of production. For a whole historical period, those social relations are dominant: they define the social classes, despite a great individual and historical variability. For IP, it’s a matter of investigating the prospects for revolution, taking into account its “necessity,” so understood. How are the above concepts to be wielded? The materialist conception as we understand it is a vision of the material conditions for the transformative action and activity of man, making possible freedom from class subjugation. It is impossible to link such an understanding to the notion of *determinism*. What’s at stake is a freedom to act, and not a determined necessity; freedom as an affirmation and realization of self, as a liberation from any class constraint. That entails the free development [*épanouissement*] of the individual, and not his/her absorption into an indeterminate whole.

Communism is so conceived as a social emanation at the service of the individual, as a conscious and free undertaking. It is the possibility to create something completely new. It has nothing to do with determinism or with concepts often presented as the indispensable basis of a scientific pseudo-Marxism, with its allusions to “economic law” [*loi*] and “historical necessity.” Communism is just a possibility, one closely linked to the degree and forms of capitalist development at a given historical moment, but not dependent on that degree. No quantitative threshold makes communism

impossible or more possible, let alone absolutely necessary [*indispensable*]. Marx limited himself to asserting that “material” conditions were determinant up to his own time, but he added that such would not always be the case. And that “determination” was a global one: the material conditions of social life would be decisive, in a complex of other causes, overall, those of the division of society into various castes, order, and classes. Those same material conditions of existence of society would shape, more or less indirectly, the diverse spheres of human activity and thinking. And, those material conditions changed historically, as a function of a given socio-economic context. Their necessity is historical, and they are not immutable.

This has implications for the question of *contradiction*. Limiting it to the mechanism of economic contradiction alone, to a formula for mathematically determining the threshold for resistance on the part of the working class, entails denying the movement of contradiction, which does not just pertain to the prospects for valorization, but includes the opposition between living labor and accumulation. That implies a refusal to be an object, the recognition of a conscious pole as the expression of a negation, the strike – as an outward expression of the negation of alienated labor. It is that movement of contradiction that makes possible the overcoming [*dépassement*] of labor, to action, to solidarity, to the consciousness that there is another possibility. The possibility of the transformation of labor into a different activity is possessed by the worker *outside* of his/her labor, of which he has been dispossessed, from which she is alienated; outside of the commodities, the means of production, the value, that “belongs” to the capitalist, and which has made capital into the effective reality. Labor must be seen, then, as a simple possibility dependent on the contingent reality of capital, controlled by the owners of capital. None of the above excludes *chance* [*hazard*], which must certainly be taken into account. So, historical possibility can be a conjuncture of several factors, a combination of various causes, a meshing of more or less accidental circumstances.

Several questions arise concerning what is designated as the “classical” vision of Marxism. For FM, the proletariat is only revolutionary in its material situation, which opposes it to capital. Thus, paradoxically, FM ends up denying any objectivity to the social relation of class, and he liquidates the very

subjective relationship making possible the identification and position bringing about the negation. One then passes from a perspective in which the proletariat finds in itself – confronted by capital – its own capacity to produce communism, to a perspective in which that capacity is only acquired as an internal movement of what it makes possible to abolish, as opposed to the triumph of one of the terms under the form of its generalization. FM persists in an economist and determinist schema, although he speaks of history. In a sense, he denies the factor of change that traverses the history of humanity, and forgets – while paying lip service to what has been forgotten – the importance of the factor of consciousness. Indeed, he slips into a determinist structuralism.

For the proletariat to achieve self-consciousness, it must comprehend society in its totality, that is to say, that society is a social relation between individuals, within the terms of a particular relationship between them: worker or employer. Class consciousness is complex, because it can only be formulated in terms of a totality. Yet there is a contradiction between the idea of totality and the historical, momentary, character of the consciousness of that totality. Consciousness grasps something in relation to a global, historical, situation, but at the same time, inasmuch as it arises at a given moment in that situation, it is – by definition – transitory [*passagère*] with respect to the historical essence of the social movement. From that perspective, it misses the goal that it seeks (to grasp the historical totality), but at the same time it leads to objectives of social development hitherto unknown to that consciousness. Class consciousness is something that develops, and because it can arise, is potentially present. It is a determinant unconsciousness conforming to a class, to its historical and social situation, which leads Marx to say (apropos the unconscious of the individual: “what he does not know, he still says”): “they do not know it, but they do it.” What makes possible the existence of this “unconscious” or “pre-conscious,” is the place that the individual has in society, and which leads him/her to the perception of that very historical and social situation. It is therefore what is perceived from his/her place in the structural relations of society. It is therefore in itself the expression of the objective economic structure and of the social relations that it entails. We come back to the dialectic: the time-bound consciousness contains, in itself, the consciousness of the totality.

Man is objectified. He must be de-objectified. An idealist vision. But that does not make it possible to grasp all the snares that man, or the proletarian, encounters. Moreover, it does not specify the limits to that objectification. It simply eliminates the ideological problem, alienation and the process of reification.

The Marxist conception, that IP defends, is the following. A certain degree of the development of the productive forces entails social relations that correspond to them. All other institutions (property relations, right, political relations, forms of government, ideologies) must adapt to them, based on a complex set of inter-dependence. The economic base of society has a “material” character in the broadest sense; it also includes the geographical territory and its natural resources, as well as all the arrangements, instruments, and means, elaborated by humankind. That economic “base” – with its corresponding “superstructures” – pre-exists as a *given*, as the *materials*, that the next generation finds already *there*. That permits a theorization of the possibilities contained within the labor of the worker, from the moment that capital has become autonomous. We have here a dynamic vision, shaping whether things are possible or not.

That raises another question – to which we can only point here -- that of the technological revolution in the historical process. Technological changes have a profound impact, and provoke crises. It is that process, according to Marx, that makes the freedom from economic exploitation possible. It's an historical possibility dependent on technological innovations.

It is clear that, for Marx, just as men “make” events [*circonstances*], so events make men. That is what we can define as real possibility or freedom.

FD

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.