

COMMUNIST REVIEW

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INTRODUCTION

Since the publication of Communist Review no. 1 the work of the International Bureau for the Revolutionary Party (IBRP) has proceeded apace. In particular, the comrades in France have consolidated themselves and taken up the task of publishing a regular journal which will act as the mouthpiece of our tendency in France. Thus, Revue Communiste now serves as the Bureau's political organ in France while Communist Review in English remains as the IBRP's International publication. Practically this means that the French publication will appear more often than the central organ (3 times a year initially) and will contain material which, although not unimportant internationally, relates more directly to the theoretical and practical political problems posed by the French situation.

However, the IBRP does not confine its work to those areas where it already has a political presence but aims to promote discussion and clarification of the communist programme internationally as a step towards drawing increasing numbers of revolutionaries into a common political framework with a unified political practice. Since the appearance of CR 1 we are pleased to have received correspondence from groups in Mexico (Colectivo Comunista Alptrau), Argentina (Emancipacion Obrera), and India (Revolutionary Proletarian Platform) as well as from individuals throughout the world. In keeping with our aim of publishing any correspondence which may contribute to international political clarification we are publishing the Theses we received from the Mexican comrades together with our reply. In future we hope to be able to publish political dialogue with other groups and we welcome any comments (from organisations or individuals) on this or any other aspect of the Bureau's work.

In this edition we have also outlined what we believe is the Marxist perspective for the crisis and class struggle and which defines the global and historical context in which emerging and existing revolutionary groups must frame their activity. It is in this overall context that the Theses on the Miners Strike in Britain must also be situated.

The article on Bordighism and the Italian Left should clear away any misconceptions about our tendency's view of the nature of the international class party we are seeking to create. Although much of this article has waited more than 30 years to be translated into English, there will no longer be any justification for English speakers in the international proletarian camp equating our views on revolutionary organisation with the mechanical dogmatism of Bordighism. The accompanying article, originally published by the PCInt on the occasion of the virtual disintegration of the International Communist Party (Programma Comunista) in 1982, clearly shows how a Marxist understanding of the relationship between party and class avoids seeing the organisation's role as the preserver of abstract communist principles on the one hand or the simple tail-endor of the masses on the other. Only a dialectical analysis can avoid these twin pitfalls and create the theoretical and political basis for linking up the communist advance guard with the rest of the working class. It is from just such a basis that the Bureau intends to elaborate its strategy and tactics for intervention in the struggles which lie ahead.

IBRP, FEBRUARY 1985

PERSPECTIVES OF THE BUREAU

To all but the blind it is clear that we are living in a period of profound world economic crisis whose effects are not limited to any single country alone. For over ten years - from the days when it was fashionable to reject the concept of economic crisis as outmoded - revolutionaries have been analysing the crisis and situating it in decadent capitalism's barbaric cycle of world war - reconstruction - crisis - world war. The two groups who helped to form the International Bureau (PCInt and CWI) have followed Marx's method to show how, in the age of imperialism and the world economy, the law of value still operates, that the rise in the organic composition of capital and the subsequent tendency for the rate of profit to fall is still at the root of 20th century capitalism's world crisis, just as it was the basis of the more limited national crises of the 19th century. And just as in the 19th century capitalism's crises culminated in the devaluation of existing capital (through bankruptcies), allowing a new cycle of accumulation based on takeovers and mergers to begin, so the 20th century crises of world imperialism can only be resolved by a correspondingly more massive devaluation of existing capital at the level of the economic collapse of nation states. The economic function of world war is precisely this. It is imperialism's inexorable "solution" to the crisis of the world economy just as in 1914 and 1939.

For revolutionary Marxists however, the economic crisis is not only the harbinger of war, it also provides the material basis for the development of a revolutionary response on the part of the producers of surplus value - the international working class. Faced with ever-diminishing rates of return on capital invested and the increasing inadequacy of the methods employed by the imperialist metropolises to offset this decline by raising extra-profits from the peripheral areas (use of cheap labour, cheap raw materials, monopoly price controls), the advanced capitals themselves are more and more forced to try and increase competitiveness by attacking the living standards and working conditions of their own working class. The current "rationalisations" and restructuring of economies in the imperialist heartlands are part of this process, involving massive lay-offs and increased exploitation through speed-ups and the introduction of "new technology" as well as more direct attacks via wage cuts, dole cuts, reduction

in social services etc. To the extent that the working class fights against these attacks we have the basis for a revolutionary response; to the extent that capital finds itself limited on the one hand from fully revolutionising the productive forces by inadequate profit levels and on the other from cheapening the cost of production through, for example, working class resistance or their absolute impoverishment, we have the basis for the opening of World War 3. Thus the crisis provides the impetus towards both war and revolution. While it is a truism that only the working class can prevent a further imperialist war (when by this we mean a working class revolution to overthrow the system which depends on war for its survival) it is a fallacy to assert that the reason World War 3 has not already broken out is because the class struggle is preventing it. On the contrary, a militant working class can lessen the room for manoeuvre of the capitalist class, limiting the range of austerity measures it can apply for fear of the social and political repercussions to the established order. And the less room for manoeuvre imperialism has the closer we are to World War 3.

In general then the trajectory of the crisis is pushing the bourgeoisie towards war without it being able to understand this process. (For the bourgeoisie the arms race is the result of the ideological rivalry between two competing political systems, not the result of competition between two imperialist and equally capitalist blocs). At the same time the international proletariat is being pushed onto the stage of history as it responds to the effects of the crisis. However, unlike the bourgeoisie's "solution" to the crisis, the proletarian solution is not inevitable. Militant class struggle and "social unrest" may shake but can be contained within the capitalist framework so long as the working class is without revolutionary political consciousness and the practical corollary of this - its own political weapon in the form of an independent class party.

During the Seventies the popular post-war myth of the capitalist heartlands that living standards would keep on gradually rising evaporated. Bourgeois sociologists who theorised the 'embourgeoisification' of the working class, its disappearance as an independent social or political force have

been silenced. Silenced too were their would-be revolutionary political counterparts who argued that the basis for revolution in "modern capitalism" lay in the "social movement" rather in the material reality of the end of post-war reconstruction and the subsequent attacks on the living and working conditions of the working class.

While the crisis itself destroyed such non-Marxist notions as the possibility of a crisis-free capitalism its continuing development undermined the assumptions of organisations which emerged in the 70's announcing that the crisis was here ergo the revolutionary period itself was upon us. What these organisations failed to realise was that the end of the post-war boom in the capitalist metropolises signalled the beginning of a new period in the economic cycle which meant that world capitalism was heading towards economic collapse but not that this collapse was immediately imminent. Combining economic immediatism with political spontaneism and confusing the general truth that the era of capitalism's decadence is also the era of proletarian revolution, these organisations overlooked the fact that only when the working class begins to break from the ideological stranglehold of the ruling class and act outside of the capitalist framework can a revolutionary period be said to have opened up.

The history of the crisis to date has shown that the working class does not respond in a linear fashion to increasing austerity. While the history of even the most significant of these struggles (e.g. from Portugal '74, Iran '78, Poland '80, Tunisia and Morocco 83/4) confirms that mass revolutionary consciousness does not arise automatically out of the experience of struggle itself. Nor do proletarian organisations with a potential for development necessarily emerge, even indirectly, from such struggles. The relationship between the crisis, class struggle, the growth of the revolutionary party and the development of class consciousness cannot be understood in terms of mechanical schemas. Even if we are not yet in an immediate pre-revolutionary period this does not mean that revolutionaries must remain isolated from the working class until the morning of the insurrection. Over a decade of economic crisis has opened up small, but widening opportunities for revolutionaries to gain a hearing amongst the broad mass of workers. In the capitalist metropolises the traditional left parties are losing the allegiance of the working class while the trade unions' inability to defend even the immediate economic interests of the class is the basis for communist work in factories and

workplaces. In the peripheral areas, despite the end of colonialism, the crisis is imposing ever-growing dependence on imperialism by local economies. The growing evidence of the impossibility of achieving national liberation under capitalism, including the failure of Maoism, is leading to renewed political questioning and attempts to clarify the communist programme on the basis of Marxism. Proletarian minorities are coming into existence and it is incumbent on revolutionary organisations to relate to them as part of the task of clarifying the tasks of communists internationally.

Whilst we cannot overcome at will the objective limits to our work imposed by the material situation, the current period imposes on revolutionaries more than simply the task of theoretical clarification. Today the situation facing the working class demands that revolutionaries understand not only the general principles of the communist programme but that we learn once again how to transform them into a concrete guide for action in the class struggle. An analysis of the economic crisis, using the tools of Marxist economics, is essential for clarifying our perspectives and helping to define our tasks in the period ahead.

THE EVOLUTION OF THE CRISIS

After a period of unprecedentedly low growth rates (amounting to minus rates for the major Western industrial countries in 1982) the last two years have been described as the beginning of economic recovery by the bourgeoisie. In particular an upturn in the US economy has led Western economists to talk of the American locomotive which is pulling the rest of the world (or at any rate the Western bloc) out of recession.

According to the estimates of the IMF, US industrial output increased by 3.3% in 1983 and by 5% in 1984. The equivalent figures for all Western countries are lower: 2.3% in 1983 and 3.9% in 1984; and for Western Europe separately lower still: 1.3% in 1983 and 2.25% for 1984, according to the more generous OECD statistics. In the US 6½ million new jobs have been created since December 1982 and the official unemployment rate has dropped from 10.7% to 7.2% over the same period. At the same time the volume of world trade has risen by 2% and a more rapid rise in exports to the US has led to a slight reduction in the 1984 trade deficit of what are known as the "non-oil exporting developing countries" (from \$53bn in 1983 to \$45bn last year). There is evidence then that the upturn in the US economy has provoked higher rates of growth in the world economy. But do these facts

bear out the view that the world economy is on the road to recovery? The answer to this question requires more than a comparison of growth rates in the Eighties. It demands an appreciation of how the present period differs from earlier stages in the post-war period as a whole as well as an understanding of the basis of the current upturn in the fortunes of the US economy. A more historical overview will therefore help us to put the present 'recovery' into perspective.

If the present rise in industrial output is situated in the post-war cycle as a whole we find that at the same time as the IMF was announcing that the world economy had taken "a decided turn for the better" the Financial Times was pointing out that 1983 growth rates were only equal to half the annual average between 1966 and 1976. Even the higher rate predicted (and eventually achieved) for 1984,

"would be close to the average annual rate of growth between 1967 and 1976, but well below the growth rate in the years of peak activity." (Financial Times survey on World Banking 21.5.84)

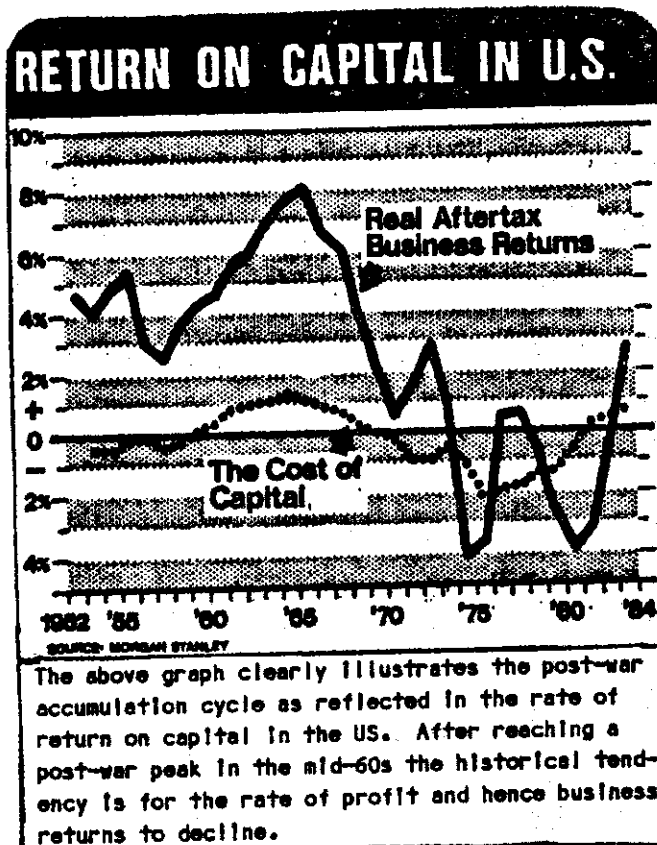
And the bourgeoisie's own predictions for 1985 are for a slowing down in the growth rate, to around 2.75% according to the OECD which pointed out last year that this would be the "slowest since World War 2 for the third year of an economic recovery". All this empiricism bears out the Marxist perspective that, despite the specific ups and downs in world growth rates, the overall tendency is downwards, confirming the present period as one of permanent crisis and that imperialism is drawing to an end of its 3rd cycle.

Again, the empirical researches of the bourgeoisie lead its economic commentators to acknowledge that this tendency for growth rates to decline is the result of declining investment connected to the falling rate of profit. (For example in the Financial Times of 17.9.84 one could read:

"Several studies of the long-term development of the industrial economies have pointed to the decline in the overall rate of investment since 1973 ... associated with the erosion of profitability."

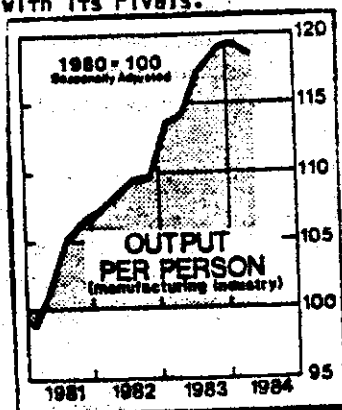
Yet the necessarily limited world outlook of capitalist economists makes it impossible for them to comprehend that this decline is intrinsic to the dynamic of capitalism itself. Instead the inevitable conclusion of such reports is that measures must be taken to "encourage profitability and productive investment"; the first amongst these measures being the need to provide a more

"flexible" labour force which is not "over-paid". That is, a recommendation to increase the rate of exploitation of the working class via unemployment, wage cuts, speed-ups, et.al. And this is exactly what the capitalist class is doing, with greater or lesser success, worldwide but nevertheless these attacks on the working class have failed to produce the amount of surplus value which would provide the level of investment necessary to achieve the higher growth rates of the early years of the post-war period.



In fact, as far as Western Europe is concerned the 2-3% growth rates envisaged for the next year or so will not be enough to prevent a further rise in unemployment (which is expected to increase by 1m to over 20m in 1985). It has been calculated that in the UK alone 20,000 new jobs a month are required simply to stop unemployment rising further. But despite the restructuring which is taking place in Western Europe at the moment, involving shut-downs and massive lay-offs in traditional heavy industries, new investment is being directed towards increasing output per individual worker from a reduced industrial base, rather than towards increasing capacity. The introduction of more advanced technology combined with absolute increases in exploitation have resulted in a dramatic growth in the rate of exploitation (or, from the capitalist standpoint, in output per person) of West European workers over the last few years as each national

capital seeks desperately to remain competitive with its rivals.



This illustration for the UK economy is indicative of what restructuring involves for workers as a whole.

Again, the Financial Times reports that "there is probably now insufficient capital equipment in Europe to provide anything like full employment" (29.10.84). Even in the US the official percentage of the workforce unemployed is still higher than in the so-called oil crisis recession of 1974, while youth unemployment has actually risen in the last 2 years.

THE CRISIS IN THE PERIPHERY

If the US 'locomotive' is proving unable to pull Western Europe out of recession the situation of the economically backward states, the so-called 3rd World, more than ever reveals the depth and extent of capitalist barbarism. For states which throughout the post-war period have been unable to escape the domination of imperialism, from their economic role as suppliers of food and raw materials and their political role as pawns in the strategic manoeuvres of one or other bloc, any talk of economic recovery appears like a bad joke. Once more we can let the bourgeoisie's own facts speak for themselves.

"(For the 3rd World) the total growth expected in the first four years of this decade is hardly more than that achieved in a single year on average in the decade up to 1976.

For the debt-ridden countries the position is worse. They are expected to grow by a little under 3 per cent this year, less than half their historic growth rate." (Financial Times 21.5.84)

For the populations of these areas these figures mean desperate reductions in living standards, dragging increasing millions down to the point of absolute poverty - i.e. to starvation levels. In Latin America alone there was a 10% drop in income per person between 1980-83. For the majority of African states the mass of the population are now worse off than they were under colonialism.

This is not an argument for colonialism but evidence of the development trap which modern imperialist relations have imposed on the "new nations" which have supposedly gained independence from imperialism. The need for foreign exchange in order to fund development projects has led the economically backward areas to concentrate on growing cash crops for export which in turn has led to a reduction in food output for the local populations. Over the last seven years per capita food output in Latin America has gone down 12%; from 1981-83 the figure is 14%. In Africa per capita food output fell 11% between 1970 and 1980. At the same time the crude and often forcible replacement of traditional agricultural techniques by capitalist farming methods is producing the same sort of soil erosion in the "3rd World" as the dustbowl in the USA created by intensive wheat farming. Every year the earth is losing 25bn tons of top soil but while the population of the US can remain oblivious to the effects of the 1.5bn tons lost from the US, for the rural masses in places like the Sahel the encroachment of the desert means starvation and imminent death. 35 million Africans in more than 20 countries are currently under threat of death through starvation - a fate which is not the result of geography or natural disaster but the consequence of declining capitalism's inability to develop its backward areas. The African drought only highlights that it is the imperialist relationship which prevents a solution which is technically within its grasp.

There is perhaps no greater example of the irrationality of capitalism and its barbarous effects in the decadent epoch than the world food situation. In December last year, at the same time as the UN Food and Agricultural Organisation was forecasting a record world cereal crop (1,761m tonnes - 8% up on 1983) the US Agricultural Department stated that nevertheless the outlook was not good "because of the low level of demand as developing countries face continued financial problems and large debt servicing requirements" (ibid 5.12.84). In terms of human need "demand" has never been higher but in terms of capitalist production demand only exists when a profit can be made. Thus, while US output of coarse grains is predicted to increase by 96m tonnes this year and while coarse grain harvests in southern Africa have been cut by 22.5m tons between 1981-84, the US Agricultural Department is providing financial incentives to farmers to leave croplands idle in order to limit its stock of unsold grain surpluses at a time when "it seems that future capacity to produce agricultural products far exceeds the likely level of demand" (loc.cit)

The laws of capitalist economics have placed the

dependent states in a vicious Catch 22 situation. Faced with the need for foreign exchange in order to "industrialise", an increasing proportion of agricultural land is put over to cash crops which increases the need to import food and therefore for foreign exchange. Increasingly indebted to imperialism through the various "development" agencies and banks, the dependent states find that the only way they have of servicing their debts is by exporting more. Now all this is happening at a time when cash crop and raw material prices are being lowered and imported goods are costing more (Uganda, for instance, must grow 30% more coffee today to buy a tractor than 10 years ago.) which tightens the Catch even further.

FROM PERIPHERY TO CENTRE

The total world debt has now reached colossal proportions (\$800bn by 1984). By far the largest part of this has been run up by countries outside the capitalist metropolises. In 1971 the outstanding debts of the "developing" countries was \$71bn. A decade later this figure had jumped to more than \$520bn with the cost of servicing the debt (\$110bn) amounting to 20% of their export earnings. Today Latin America alone owes \$350bn (of which Brazil owes \$100bn) and Black Africa's total debts are \$150bn. In 1980 Poland's inability to pay its debts to Western banks and governments when they were due opened up the prospect of bank collapses, especially in West Germany, and forced Western negotiators to reschedule (postpone) payment of the debts. Today Poland's \$27bn debt which appeared to bourgeois commentators at the time as "the most immediate threat to the system" seems relatively insignificant. Now rescheduling and restructuring of debts, and even of interest payments on debts is a regular occurrence. But these attempts to postpone the day of reckoning by both debtor and lender states alike do not mean that the threat of economic collapse has disappeared. On the contrary, the "3rd World debt crisis" provides an increasing threat not just to the capitalist periphery but to the heartlands of imperialism, including the strongest imperialist power, the USA. While the US government was not so eager to see the rescheduling of Poland's debts (when it was largely European banks which were threatened with collapse) today, with US banks said to have four times their real capital loaned out to Latin America, the world's most indebted states have ironically found themselves in a position to renegotiate terms for the payment of their debts because of the catastrophic implications their renegeing would have on imperialism's financial structure.

"Already Mexico, Brazil and Argentina are technically bankrupt and have only been saved from being officially declared so by the US government's realisation that if they default on their debts then the US banking structure would collapse as well." ("The Crisis of Finance Capital" in WorkersVoice 17 June/July 1984)

Last year the US government had to step in and bail out two major American banks - Manufacturers Hanover (4th largest) and Continental Illinois (10th largest) and now the rules of the game have changed so that banks have to have a higher deposit:lending ratio while more fixed term loans are being negotiated with the dependent states (to avoid debt payments rising with US interest rates).

Meanwhile, as the fear of the repercussions on the system as a whole has "saved" the largest debtor states from officially being declared bankrupt, the very weakest economies are left in the position of being too poor to increase their debts and their populations are left to starve. Last year the US government refused to support a World Bank fund for sub-Saharan Africa and the Financial Times envisages a decline in net capital flows to this region from \$10.8 bn in 1980-2 to \$5 bn in 1985-7 (\$2bn less than the US Federal Reserve Bank pumped into Continental Illinois last year).

Nevertheless, imperialism doesn't hand out loans or reschedule debts without imposing strict conditions on the borrowing governments. While the burden of paying off the debts itself is enough to induce enormous suffering on the working and unemployed masses (Many countries, for example, have cut back on food imports to service their debt while trade surpluses - such as Brazil's last year - are eaten up by debt servicing.), the IMF and the World Bank continue to impose austerity riders with their loans which inevitably mean higher prices, wage cuts and harsher working conditions for the working class. In Argentina, for example, the fall of the military Junta and re-introduction of "democracy" has been accompanied by an explosion of wage demands which the IMF has opposed as inflationary. Argentina presents a special problem for US imperialism in that it wants to be seen as supporting "democracy" and does not want the IMF's conditions to be seen to bring about a return to military rule. However, the problem of IMF austerity conditions exacerbating the lot of the working class and oppressed masses is a more general and deeper one which threatens to undermine Western imperialism. The IMF's answer to the plight of the "3rd World" - the imposition of currency devaluations, withdrawal of food subsidies, higher productivity and yet more concentra-

tion on export industries - results in increasingly unbearable conditions for the proletariat and the sub-proletarian masses of the dependent states. Western Imperialism which, despite Reagan and his allies' talk of the defence of democracy, is only interested in the form of government in power when its economic and strategic interests are threatened, is faced with the prospect of governments collapsing as a result of the economic crisis and "social unrest" on the part of the super-exploited, unemployed and starving masses. As the Financial Times aptly put it last October:

"For Western governments it is a disquieting prospect ... Existing investment is threatened, sources of raw materials and commodities jeopardised and security interests - particularly for the US - potentially undermined by the prospect of radical changes in key pro-Western states..." (3.10.84)

Clearly the US locomotive has done nothing to prevent the decline of the dependent states. In fact high US interest rates which have been responsible for the US sucking in surplus value from all over the world, thereby enabling it to fuel its own economic "locomotive", have only exacerbated the crisis of the debt-ridden states and increased the threat, not just of their own collapse, but of a financial crash in the US itself. (1) Yet without high interest rates the US would be unable to attract the foreign investment which has recently fuelled economic growth and allowed the government to run up a \$205bn budget deficit (by the end of 1984) without it provoking massive inflation. Last year one third of the demand for credit in the US (from both government and business corporations) was met by foreign investors. But while the relative strength of US capital allows it to draw in surplus value from outside itself, thus reducing the impact of the crisis for the moment in the USA, this only further weakens its allies in the Western bloc as a whole and has led to a record trade deficit by the US with the rest of the world (\$130bn by November 1984).

As the dollar's value increases in relation to other currencies so more US manufactured goods become uncompetitive on the world market, inducing a search for further means of increasing the rate of surplus value (output per worker). The US cannot escape the laws of capitalist production which demand continual investment in new constant capital in order to produce individual commodities more cheaply and compete on the world market. What is happening in the US shows that the massive amount of surplus value required to equip industry with more advanced capital equipment cannot be

generated by US industry itself. US capital has come to depend on surplus value from abroad for expansion and cannot afford to let this dwindle away on unproductive expenditure such as financing the government's debts.

Military spending forms a large part of the US government's deficit. Under Reagan the proportion of the Federal budget spent on arms has increased from 24.1% to 30%. It is no coincidence that Washington's post-election discovery of the need to reduce the government's budget deficit should be accompanied by new moves to limit the arms race.

THE CRISIS IN THE EASTERN BLOC

Although the figures are not so easily available the fact remains that the Eastern bloc states are experiencing the same crisis of profitability as the West. There are signs also that, as in Western Europe, the recent unprecedently low post-war growth rates which were highlighted by Poland's crisis were followed in 1984 by higher output. But, like the West, the economic basis for the "recovery" is precarious while the improved national growth rates themselves do not match earlier figures in the post-war period and are accompanied by declining living standards for the working class. As in the Western bloc, austerity is the order of the day. Thus, after large cutbacks in investment by Russia's European satellites in 1982,

"all but Poland (which could hardly reduce further) and East Germany (buoyed by West German credit) did so again in 1983." (ibid, 17.9.84)

It is not just in Poland then that the 1980's are proving to be a decade of economic crisis and the 1984 improved growth rates (an average of 3.3% in GNP for Comecon as a whole) have to be seen in the context of the previous two years of stagnation or actual decline as well as the overall historical context of the post-war period as a whole. Thus if we take Russian capital itself the 4.4% rise in industrial production announced by the State Planning Commission in November 1984 (1% more than planned) can be seen to be part of an historical tendency for growth rates to decline.

Russia's industrial production (% change)

[Source: D. Oyster The Soviet Economy & Financial Times]

1950-55	13.1
1955-58	10.3
1960-65	8.6
1965-68	8.9
1968-72	7.4
1970-72	7.1
1980-81	2.0
1983-84	4.4

Although the amount has been reduced recently, Comecon as a whole is still indebted to Western governments and banks (to the tune of \$63.3bn at the end of 1983; compared with \$71.3bn in 1982 and \$45bn in 1980). In countries like Poland and Hungary this has meant more and more belt tightening for the working class as industrial production becomes increasingly directed to exports (to service the debts) while cuts in government price subsidies (in order to reduce state spending) continue to fuel inflation. Having learned from experience that a sudden increase in prices can provoke mass protest from the working class, endangering the stability of the state, the Polish government has now taken to "social consultations" (with the official trade unions and the media) before introducing price rises. In 1984 an average rise of 10% in food prices came into force (after "consultations" on 15%) while this year the government is proposing rises in the price of basic foodstuffs and fuel which would mean an overall increase of a further 12-13%. In Hungary, which has had a 29% inflation rate since 1981, price rises on food (20%), domestic fuel (25%) and transport (55-100%) introduced in January will mean a further 7% rise in the cost of living for the Hungarian working class. Even for relatively prosperous East Germany the writing is on the wall. While state subsidies have kept the price of basic foods at 1960's levels this means that 15% of the State budget now goes on subsidies at the same time as imports of more advanced Western technological goods has led to a mounting foreign debt (over \$13½bn) which has to be serviced.

Yet the relative backwardness of Russian state capitalism leads it to rely on its European satellites for a large part of its more advanced machinery and equipment - either by their direct import from the West or by purchasing Western "knowhow". Like the USA the Eastern bloc leader sucks surplus value in from its satellites, though not through the "free market" mechanism of floating exchange rates. At a Comecon summit meeting last June Moscow stipulated that supplies of Russian energy and raw material deliveries would henceforth depend on Eastern Europe providing Russia with more food and better quality machinery and equipment. The need for foreign currency to buy such goods is an added impetus to the Comecon states to divert production to the export market and mount up further debts.

However, the crisis in the Eastern bloc is not just the result of Comecon indebtedness to the West. It is rather that the latter is due to the chronic lack of surplus value available for re-investment in new capital equipment which would

allow greater competitiveness with the West. Thus the relative backwardness of the Russian economy can be seen not just from its lower agricultural rates of return and reliance on imported Western grain but by its low level of investment in relation to a lower organic composition of capital than its Western rivals. In fact the latest Five Year Plan (1980-85) is based on "intensification" of the use of existing machinery and labour as the main source of growth in industrial output. This year the state calculates that 96% of the increase in industrial output must come from an increase in labour productivity. No less than anywhere else the Russian working class is being forced to pay for the crisis. In 1984 more workers' wages were linked to productivity, managers were told to sack "surplus manpower" while Andropov urged them to "tap the tremendous reserves we have for growth in labour productivity".

ARMS LIMITATION TALKS: A REVERSAL OF THE DRIVE TO WAR?

Reagan's new-found desire to go down in history as a "President of peace" and Russia's return to the arms negotiating table at Geneva have led to speculation in the capitalist press of the beginning of a new period of detente and sighs of relief about the reduced danger of nuclear war. However, for the real meaning behind these moves from a US President who has increased military spending by 40% in three years and a Russian Politburo which instructed its representative to walk out of the last Geneva talks we have to look beyond the personal desires of this or that politician and take account of the material circumstances in which they are operating.

With US military spending at an all-time high for the post-war period and a colossal budget deficit to reduce it would seem that unproductive spending on arms would be the first to be cut back. In fact this is not the case. In the first budget of his second term of office Reagan will propose cutbacks of \$44bn in non-defence government spending. Apart from \$8.7bn already taken off the military budget, the "President of peace" prefers to cut domestic spending which leaves the annual arms budget at around \$218bn.

For Russia too military spending imposes an enormous burden on the national economy. Although in monetary or value terms Russian imperialism cannot match US expenditure on arms, as a proportion of annual GNP (13-14% according to the latest CIA figures) Russian arms spending is relatively greater than the US. With declining economic growth Russia's increasing difficulty in maintaining its side of the arms race is evident. From an average annual increase of 5% in the Sixties and during the first

half of the Seventies, the growth was 2% a year between 1977-81. By 1983 this had risen to 2.8% but even the CIA admits that this is much less than the growth in US military spending.

For both Russia and the US then it would appear to make economic sense to cut military spending. But imperialist economics is not basically a question of the "allocation of scarce resources" as the academic textbooks propound. In the real world the two rival "super-powers" are obliged to vie with each other to protect their economic and strategic interests throughout the world, interests which are daily being threatened by the local economic, social and political instability which accompanies the deepening of the world crisis. Imperialism is no more able to disarm than it can turn production over to the direct fulfilment of human needs. The same crisis of profitability which has produced lower national growth rates and increased the burden of military spending on each national capital exacerbates the drive to war. Thus, while the US budget deficit and the strain of ever-increasing arms production on the Russian economy provide a powerful impetus to the negotiating table - where the more fantastic aspects of nuclear war are discussed (e.g. the militarisation of space) - preparations for the time when the myriad proxy wars existing today are overwhelmed by direct military confrontation between the two blocs are proceeding apace. While Russian military leaders stress the need to keep up with US developments in high technology weapons the US is re-equipping its conventional forces and stipulating to its Nato allies that they must increase their military spending in preparation for a "conventional war".

Japan, for example, which theoretically has no army, has increased its military spending beyond the 1% limit set by its US-framed constitution. In December last year Nato announced a doubling of its "conventional" arms spending to enable it to implement US directives to improve facilities for US planes at European bases and to boost stocks of ammunition in order to "improve the Alliance's ability to fight and sustain a conventional war in Europe". While the leaders talk of peace and the media blasts us with the consequences of a nuclear holocaust the population is being prepared to accept the advent of "conventional" war - as if this reduced the danger of nuclear war, or as if world war were any less barbaric for being waged with "conventional" weapons.

War is an integral part of imperialism and the drive towards world war is part of this internal dynamic which operates independently of the

subjective will of individuals. Imperialist war cannot be abolished by demands for changes in the policies of governments. It can only be abolished once the system which depends on war as the solution to its crisis is overthrown. And only those who produce the world's surplus value - the international working class - have the potential power to do this and establish the basis for the development of a more advanced mode of production.

AN OVERVIEW OF THE CLASS STRUGGLE AND THE TASKS OF REVOLUTIONARIES

To idealists the struggle of workers to maintain their living standards in the face of the economic crisis may appear a poor basis for the beginnings of a fight to transform the world. For Marxists, however, this basic struggle of the working class is the material starting point for a higher, revolutionary struggle.

Since the onset of the present crisis we have seen something of the power of the working masses when they struggle together. Governments have tottered or collapsed (e.g. Iran, Poland) and on occasions specific attacks on the working population have been temporarily withdrawn (e.g. after the food riots in Morocco and Tunisia last year). yet without exception the working class struggle has been contained within the existing capitalist framework. This is inevitable, given the absence of a revolutionary party to put forward the communist programme and develop revolutionary consciousness inside the class movement. However, it is not for revolutionaries to bemoan the defeats but rather to draw the lessons from them and use them as the basis for posing concrete steps towards the revolutionary goal.

This is not simply the task of propaganda. It means establishing an organised political presence within the working class which is seen by workers as offering, not only an alternative political aim for the future, but an alternative method of struggle in the here and now fight to defend themselves against capital's attacks.

While the patent inability of the trade unions to defend workers against the effects of the crisis has produced a certain scepticism towards these organisations amongst workers, trade unions and the mentality of trade unionism remain powerful weapons against the development of an independent class struggle. In Western Europe for example, the so-called economic recovery has been accompanied by massive lay-offs and increased exploitation with which the trade unions have complied as they follow the dictates of economic restructuring of their national capital. After a period

of relative passivity these increasingly vicious attacks and the fear of unemployment have provoked resistance from the working class - but a resistance which has been contained by the trade unions within industrial, national and even regional boundaries. Thus, the longest strike in British working class history has been fought and lost on the basis of "save our coal"[2]; Belgian and French steelworkers have fought separate battles for a defence of "their" industry and in France itself for a defence of "their" region within the country as a whole. Even now Spanish shipyard workers are conducting a determined but isolated fight to save their jobs. Taken in isolation the working class can only lose such battles while the bourgeoisie congratulates itself on acquiring a more "flexible" and compliant workforce. Yet despite the temporary exhaustion which struggles like this must lead to the disastrous outcome of following trade union tactics provides ammunition for revolutionaries in their call for the working class to fight without the trade unions. This is true universally and not just in Western Europe - whether it be in the Eastern bloc where the experience of Solidarity shows how trade unionist "realism" worked to quell the class struggle and got Polish workers to accept austerity, or whether it be in a peripheral area like Bolivia where the trade unions last year persuaded workers to accept increases in food prices in the "national interest".

Trade unions everywhere are perpetrators of nationalist ideology - an ideology which plays into the hands of capitalism because it works against the development of independent working class struggle and because it pits workers in different areas against each other. In the same way capital's left-wing parties, through their identification with the interests of the national capital, work to derail the class struggle by preaching the message of austerity and self-sacrifice for the sake of the national economy.

Thus, while the increased austerity measures imposed by imperialism on the debt-ridden states are laying the basis for massive social explosions (food riots and mass looting are becoming commonplace. In Brazil, for example, many supermarkets now employ armed guards to ward off attacks from a hungry populace.), the bourgeoisie is increasingly resorting to nationalist "anti-imperialist" ideology to control the class struggle.

It was in such a way that Argentina's new Radical Government was able to put the lid on widespread class struggle which broke out last summer (in

public service industries, meat cutting, sugar and engineering) after the "restoration of democracy" by claiming that it would have granted real wage increases if these had not been opposed by the IMF. At the same time the government was also claiming that "Raul Alfonsín has begun the battle against imperialism and international financial usury". But today the battle against imperialism cannot be fought on the basis of nationalism. Imperialism's domination of the world economy in the 20th century means that so long as capitalism survives the peripheral areas of that economy are doomed to remain dependent on one or other imperialist master. Whether it is couched in terms of anti-IMF radicalism as in Argentina, Islamic fundamentalism as in Iran, or in straightforward national liberation ideology as in Nicaragua and much of Central America, anti-imperialism based on nationalism in practice means class collaboration and operates to divert workers from fighting for their own international interests.

It is the task of communists to fight the nationalist illusions and ideologies which exist everywhere inside the working class in one form or another. In a more precise sense too our task is the same the world over. Revolutionaries everywhere are faced with having to develop revolutionary political consciousness inside the working class and of building a revolutionary organisation in their "own" areas. Such a task cannot wait for the outbreak of mass class struggle nor does it disappear in the event of war breaking out. On the contrary, the need for the proletariat to organise against its own bourgeoisie remains paramount during capitalist war as well as in times of capitalist peace.

However, while it is true that without strong local organisations firmly rooted in the working class the revolutionary party cannot mature, it is equally true that the proletarian revolution is international or it is nothing. The task of building the international party with an international programme therefore goes hand in hand with the "local" tasks of revolutionaries.[3] It is the responsibility of existing organisations to work towards defining the communist programme at the same time as strengthening their capacity to intervene in the daily struggle and to prepare to intervene in wider class battles as they occur. None of this can be done simply by propagandising abstract generalities. The question of concretising the revolutionary way forward is being posed and it remains for each organisation to develop appropriate tactics for the situation in which it finds itself as well as to contribute politically and practically to the development of the international party of the

proletariat.

It is with both these tasks in view that the International Bureau for the Revolutionary Party was formed. By organising on the basis of a generally agreed platform the Bureau's aim is to define the framework for the forging of a common programme and strategy within the working class, in keeping with the task of the proletarian vanguard to re-establish the international party of the working class.

But the Bureau is not the Party, nor indeed is it a regroupment. It is part of a process towards both these goals. It seeks to avoid the errors of the past where one national centre, by virtue of its prestige imposed its will on the other constituent organisations (as happened with the Comintern in the 1920's); and more immediately, it seeks to avoid a situation where the process of the formation of a world proletarian party is held up because of this or that conjunctural analysis. It does not seek to establish postboxes for itself in this or that country but

rather to foster the growth of real organisations which are the product of a living struggle in each geographical area. In this way the Bureau aims to be an agent of, not a barrier to, the formation of a party which is international in every sense and which has solid roots in the struggle of the working class wherever it is present.

Footnotes to the article

[1] For a more detailed Marxist analysis of the present crisis and the operation of Imperialism, see "Crisis and Imperialism" in Communist Review 1.

[2] See "Theses on the Miners' Strike" in this issue for an overview of the lessons to be drawn from this struggle.

[3] The article "Bordigism and the Italian Left" in this issue deals more fully with the nature of the revolutionary party and the framework for defining its tasks. The next issue of Communist Review will contain an article on the tasks of revolutionaries in capitalism's peripheral areas.

COMMUNIST REVIEW

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THESES ON THE MINERS' STRIKE

1. The heroic determination of the British miners is just one more example of the heightening class confrontations created by the onward march of the world capitalist crisis. Since the great Polish events of 1980-81 the torch of class struggle has passed from the unemployed (in Britain, Hong Kong, the Maghreb and Brazil to name only the most well-publicised) to the employed of the advanced capitalist countries, such as the 1 million Belgian public service workers who paralysed that country, the French car and steelworkers, the US transport workers and most recently, the Spanish shipyard workers. The number and militancy of the struggles shows the capacity of the world working class to fight as a class after years of capitalist attacks.

2. These attacks are part of a desperate initiative by the world capitalist class to solve the economic crisis of their system. This crisis, which is part of the 20th century capitalist cycle of boom - slump - war - reconstruction is deepening and all efforts of the bourgeoisie to cure it have failed. The current world-wide process of capital restructuring is part of the bourgeoisie's attempt to revive rates of profit in the competitive environment of rival national capitals. This involves the expulsion of vast numbers of workers from the productive process and replacing them with capital intensive, highly automated techniques. Although this cannot cure the crisis the huge numbers of workers expelled from the productive system creates a "reserve army of the unemployed" whose very existence enables the capitalists to intensify their attacks on those in work via speed ups, changing shift patterns (i.e. increased hours) and real wage cuts.

3. This restructuring explains the nature of many of the present struggles. The British miners' strike, like the French steelworkers' strike in Lorraine and like the strikes in the shipyards of Northern Spain, essentially broke out as a

defence of a particular community and specific industry. Such economic particularism is used by the unions to limit the aims of the struggle (for example, the NUM's campaign has been based on not buying "foreign coal"). Such economic nationalism helps to hide the international interests of the working class as a whole and prevents it from expressing its solidarity by taking strike action together.

4. Nevertheless, the State's preparations in advance of the miners' strike indicate the new intensity of the class struggle as the stakes become higher with the deepening of the crisis. The cohesive determination of the bourgeoisie was perfectly expressed in the Ridley Plan against the miners while the unprecedented violence of the British State stripped aside its democratic mask. Its riot squads terrorised communities with impunity; road-blocks prevented freedom of movement and all this was accompanied by a propaganda campaign to justify the arrest and imprisonment of thousands of miners for trivial offences. In response the workers have had to adopt new methods of class violence via commando raids on scab buses protected by the police, setting up barricades against police convoys and seizing local radio stations to get over their point of view. This class violence is a foretaste of how the working class will have to respond to make an effective fight in future struggles - and an effective fight means ignoring the cries of "illegal" from the ruling class which blatantly uses the legal system and the police against its "own" working class.

5. The secret ballot is now one of the bourgeoisie's strongest weapons. It is used by capitalists and unions alike to buy time and fragment the working class response. Ostensibly democratic, the ballot is based on workers responding as isolated individuals and not in the collective interests of their class. Thus, when the NUM withdrew pickets from Notts. to hold a ballot the State was given time to bring in 8,000 police to stop the strike spreading;

when NACODS men twice voted to strike the union did a deal with the NCB to keep the miners isolated.

6. The miners' strike fully confirms what revolutionaries have argued for decades. Though trades unions still retain the support and faith of millions of workers today they are capitalist organs which no longer serve even the immediate interests of the working class since they exist to negotiate the price of wage labour. In these days of austerity and decay there is nothing for the unions to negotiate because capitalism has nothing but sacrifices to offer. Unions today are part of the means for transmitting the requirements of the capitalist state to the workers and of limiting their struggles to this or that trade. In the present strike not only the NUM has limited the fight to a single section of the working class, other trades unions have specifically prevented effective solidarity with the miners - the most blatant example being the TGWU's definition of the two solidarity strikes by dockers as simply a dispute over the Dock Labour Scheme and nothing to do with the miners. Today the struggle for the immediate interests of the working class is a struggle for its longterm interests. In order to succeed the struggle has to go beyond the limits of a single industry or a single trade - i.e. beyond trades unionism. Every strike today is a political strike.

7. The miners' strike was not called by the NUM but grew out of the large numbers of wildcat strikes which had already broken out in Scotland and Yorkshire. Cottonwood miners extended their strike by taking a leaflet to the rest of South Yorkshire and Yorkshire miners in turn brought out South Wales (after the latter had said "no" in a ballot to strike). The longer the strike went on the greater was the union's control over it. This was particularly due to the fact that the workers created no organs to run the strike themselves but left it in the hands of union officials. With not even branch meetings taking place many miners had to rely on the lies of the TV for their information, and without the initiative that mass assemblies and strike committees reflect, it was all too easy for the NUM to define the strike's purpose and tactics and for the original dynamism to be lost. The mass meetings of proletarian democracy are not just a nice alternative to the passivity and isolation of the capitalists' ballot box democracy, they are an essential basis to wage an effective fight against the centralised strength of the modern capitalist state.

8. The evolution of the miners' strike shows that workers' struggles do not necessarily lead of their own accord to the creation of proletarian organs of mass democracy and a battle outside of the trades union framework. While the duration of the strike is testimony to the determination of the miners, it is also a sign of the flexibility of the NUM and its ability to bring expressions of genuine class struggle into the framework of trades unionism.

9. Thus, although the miners themselves showed a tremendous will to fight and while other workers saw the need to unite, in an elementary way (many of them for the first time in their lives), this instinctive class solidarity lacked the consciousness to break through the lies and manoeuvres of the bourgeoisie. In this sense we can speak of the working class in the present period being undefeated in struggle but since it lacks the continuity of awareness of its historic task - to destroy capitalism - we can still say that it has not yet lifted the burden of the counter-revolution as reflected in its support for trades unionism and social democracy (or the Labour Party).

10. With the miners completely isolated and the State triumphant the propaganda machine of the bourgeoisie is switching from attacking the miners to attacking the whole of the working class. On the one hand the Tory press is putting forward the defeatist idea that the fate of the miners' strike shows that all struggles by any workers are a waste of time. Reinforcing this from a different angle, the TUC and Labour Party are insisting that the miners' defeat is a defeat for trades unionism and they are already trying to channel workers' struggles into the defence of trades union rights. The response of revolutionaries is that it was the trades unions who isolated the miners and what the miners' strike shows is that no group of workers can fight a determined state on its own. The lesson of this strike is that every strike must link up with other workers in struggle. Unification of the struggles is the only path forward.

11. Given the strength of trades unionist ideology during the strike, the possibility of the existing weak revolutionary forces directly influencing it was remote. However, our task remains to expose the role of the trades unions as agents which act against the interests of the working class. The aftermath of the miners' strike will open up an opportunity for revolutionaries to spell out the lessons of the strike as workers face the consequences of following the union - albeit a "militant" union like the NUM.

12. In this work we not only have to counter-act the defeatist propaganda of Left and Right but also to increase our activities in the workplaces. This cannot be done only by propaganda and exhortation to generalise the struggle and form strike committees. We must also try to concretely expose the role of the unions, not just by criticising their specific actions, but also by supporting or putting forward specific slogans and demands which tend to unify workers in different industries as well as with the unemployed. In this way the union stranglehold over the class can be broken. More than ever

there is a need to establish workplace groups of the most conscious workers who will recognise in every struggle the necessity of the elementary task of combatting union manoeuvres to postpone and undermine workers' actions against capital's attacks. In this way we will be forging a living link between the communist minority (the "memory of the class") with the present class struggles. Only such a unification can guarantee the class' future - communism.

International Bureau for the Revolutionary Party
February 1985

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ARTICLES IN FARSI

Readers from Iran may be interested to know that the following texts of the IBRP or the PCInt/CWO have been translated into Farsi:

1. Letter from PCInt to SUCM (published in English in Revolutionary Perspectives 21).
2. Money, Credit and Crisis (originally published in Revolutionary Perspectives 8).
3. IBRP Statement on the Iran/Iraq War (published in English in Workers Voice 18, in Italian in Battaglia Comunista 12, year 42, and in French in Revue Communiste 21).

Photocopies of these are available from the Bureau.

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BORDIGISM AND THE ITALIAN LEFT

The recent crisis of Communist Program (henceforward Programma Comunista) in October 1982 - undoubtedly its most serious yet - has led to the re-emergence of the ever-recurring polemic about the nature of the Bordigist diaspora; a polemic which has always been based on the false assumption: Bordigism = the Italian Left.

Everyone has challenged us from this basis, whether it was in far-off 1943 on the birth of the Internationalist Communist Party (PCInt) or today, on the occasion of the last respects being paid to Programma. The game is always the same: someone fires an initial shot hoping that the others will fire at the same target. But these snipers have got to understand, and everything possible must be done to make sure that they remember one thing: that their guns only know how to fire in one direction. Because the fact is that from the end of the 2nd World War and more clearly since the split of 1952, the joint name Bordiga - Programma can no longer be identified with the Italian Left, either in terms of organisational continuity or, still less, in terms of its politics and programme.

By extending "Bordigism" to include the early Bordiga, the 'Bordigism' of Programma and then the PCInt all the fundamental political issues are left wide open. First of all, the question of the role and function of the party, whether in actual class struggles or as regards its tasks in a given period. Secondly, the ever-problematic "national question" and its not unimportant corollary of the analysis of imperialism in its most recent period of two opposing blocs. Finally, the trade union question remains open since for Bordiga and his followers the "tactical" problem is reduced to the never-resolved alternative of reconquering the old unions by kicking out the office-holders or the creation of new ones - i.e. they have never left the old framework of the 3rd International. These are not small points, especially when one considers that out of these

three fundamental issues others emerge which, in order to simplify the discussion, we can define as "tactics".

In spite of the bilious outpourings of these "snipers" the Italian Left, in its confrontations with Bordigism, has very often had the same aim as the latter had in the Thirties when confronting Trotskyism. During those years of violent counter-revolution Stalin, after having liquidated or rendered harmless any internal opposition, had elevated the physical and political figure of Trotsky to enemy number one of his "domestic socialism". All the oppositions abroad who, either in deeds or in words, rejected the counter-revolutionary course which the new Tsar was imposing on the ex-Soviet Republic, came to be denounced for that most "heinous" of crimes: Trotskyism.

Just as Bordiga after 1929 certainly could not be confused with Trotsky, so the Italian Left after 1943 could not be confused with Bordigism, but the snipers kept on firing. On more than one occasion we were obliged to distance ourselves from the confusion between Bordigism and the Italian Left. As we wrote in 1953,

"Habit and theoretical inertia have meant that until now Bordigism has been confused with the Italian Left, especially amongst communists abroad. Or rather, the Italian Left has been confused with the name of Bordiga and with his personal theories.

The perpetual isolation of this comrade, due to his having been the most "worshipped" and the most "betrayed", coupled with the fact that the comrades close to him were silenced by his exceptional eloquence ... prevented the formation of a critical awareness amongst the comrades of the Left and with it the continuity, including the organisational continuity, of a healthy communist nucleus. In the struggle against Bolshevism and then Stalinism Bordiga was only an obedient and tired supporter, never an initiator. Thus

It is possible to argue that from the expulsion of the Left (1923) until his partial and interesting re-emergence not so long ago - largely due to cajolings from our party - Bordiga was apparently the fighter who preferred to remain for almost thirty years buried under the enormous ruins of the 3rd International which collapsed historically with the rise of Stalinism in Russia and the rest of the world.

A time of retreat in a great experience is characterised by a jumbled assortment of "isms" (Leninism, Trotskyism, Stalinism, Bordigism). The "ism" is the distinctive sign of this or that "church" which the disciples of the doctrine, those masters of every tactical innovation, are always defining more precisely and giving new life to - typifying a process of decadence, if not of degeneration.

In recent decades the history of those parties whose fate has been linked to that of the Communist International has confirmed our observation that only a few people have been able to avoid contamination by the ideology of retreat. Only a few have remained true to well-taught ideas rather than to the personal work or pretensions of the "educators". Among these few it is only right to count the Italian Left who, either exiled in France or Belgium or imprisoned by Fascism, openly distinguished themselves from the arbitrary and polemical epithet of "Bordigist".

Our object here is simply to finally "render unto Caesar that which is Caesar's". We are not going to deal with Bordigism in general but with the most well-known and best-documented experiences of the years in question. Thus, Bordigism, as a particular and "original" line of thought has had more impact with the parties of the International than with us because of the polemics conducted by the leading organs of the Comintern. It was convenient for them to characterise and systematically confuse the movement of the Italian Left with the personal positions of Bordiga.

Everyone recognises that four-fifths of the theoretical work of this current was due to Bordiga and thus he always contributed his four-fifths to political and organisational activity, at least until 1923. Having said that we will see when Bordiga's thinking really only reflected his own views and when, on the other hand, it was a part of the whole theoretical and tactical heritage of the Italian Left. In other words, we will see how the falsifications of Stalinism, both inside and outside Russia, identified Bordiga

with the Left.

But first of all, how must the work of a militant of the revolutionary vanguard be considered? - His more or less relevant contribution to the elaboration of theoretical problems in general, to economics and history, or to more strictly political and tactical praxis? We believe these issues must be considered in a strictly impersonal way, even when they are highly personal: in the sense that the revolutionary, in whatever epoch he makes his contribution, whatever his name, works with the instruments accumulated by the scientific work built up by the class. He takes up the themes which others before him have outlined and elaborated as far as was possible given the specific level of maturity of the working class at any given point in capitalism's existence. The revolutionary intellectual must learn to rid himself of any traces of intellectual elitism, the notion of putting himself on a pedestal. This is a bad habit picked up from the world of academia when it isn't more directly linked to the sectarianism of the masonic lodge. In this sense we can still take a wise piece of advice from Marx who did not consider himself to be a Marxist when confronted by certain theorisations of "Marxism". We must clear our house once and for all of the theory of "the leader" (ducismo) and the mentality of the brotherhood, symbolised by the infallibility of one and the spineless passivity of the others.

In sum, we can state what for us is taken as read, that the Italian Left sunk roots in the living terrain of socialism which itself was put to the test by the hard formative experience of the 1st World War. In keeping with a mature critical experience, the Italian Left went on after the war to encapsulate socialism's earlier revolutionary initiative and clearly articulated the sometimes open, sometimes latent, opposition to the largely "Russian" direction of the 3rd International. It acted, and still acts, as a pole of attraction for the very few forces which remained on the terrain of revolutionary class struggle after the tragic disintegration of the International as a unified force and its passage over to the imperialist war front.

There is a basic methodological distinction between seeing the formation of the Left Marxist current as stemming from a theoretical and political consciousness, itself connected to events of the 1st World War; and seeing it as the result of the interpretation of this or that comrade, or of this or that regroupment. The first is a dialectical formulation in keeping with Marxism while the second

goes back to Idealism and subjectivity.

The infancy of the Italian Left was characterised by abstentionism. Such initial ideas were to have a strange and unforeseen metamorphosis as they were put under the test of hard reality. The current was abstentionist until the Congress of Livorno (1921). Its abstentionism lay somewhere between a theory and a tactic.[1] From 1921 until 1924 it was electionist with a more or less pronounced nostalgia for abstentionism. By the Imola Convention the Italian Left had finally sharpened its theory and tactics with the dissolution of the abstentionist fraction and, more decisively, with the founding theses for the constitution of the party at the Congress of Livorno (1921) and Rome (1922).

Bordiga shrewdly steered a middle course during the process of clarifying the tasks of the party (a problem which also aroused passions in several sections of the Communist International). This would be a commonplace fact if it did not also show something of the glibness and theoretical instability of this comrade who was continually oscillating between a determinist analysis of the facts (which came to him naturally) and a convenient dialectical interpretation borrowed from Marxism and therefore expressed deterministically, according to the canons of a greatly over-used positivist scientism.

We will see that wherever the Italian Left is forced to disagree with Bordiga the origin of the disagreement lies every time in a different interpretation of Marxism. At the same time, the party's politics from the Congress of Livorno to the ousting of the Left in 23 - for the most part reflecting the ideology of our current - are not only still valid but constitute that which has survived the ideological and organisational disaster which overwhelmed the International of Lenin.

The years 24 and 25 were a time of intensive Bolshevisation of the parties of the International. The beginning of this process had been dramatically signalled by the change of guard at the top levels of those sections which were considered to be "infected" by Leftism. Inside the Russian Party opposition to this policy was hidden and did not exist internationally apart from our open denunciation with the formation of the Committee of Intesa (Entente or mutual agreement Committee). This was something new in the history of the Italian Left. For the first time the initiative for taking up frontal positions of struggle came from the membership, giving a collective and de-

personalised lead to our current, with Bordiga dragging behind. This situation will remain until the day that the comrades of the Left no longer have to take any further initiatives to defend Bordiga's own theoretical contribution against the Bordiga who went into voluntary self-confinement.

The hard battle fought by the Committee of Intesa until the Lyon Congress (1925) in fact served as a timely alarm bell regarding the policies being imposed by the central organs of the International and deserves to be examined in the light of events which followed. However, it is certain that no theoretical disagreement existed then between the comrades of the Committee and Bordiga - apart from a tendency by this comrade to "give in" in the face of the enormous pressure coming from Moscow who viewed this type of pronouncement by the Italian Left as a break with the formal discipline which existed in the name of real revolutionary discipline - an example which could have "influenced" other countries, particularly the German Left.

The Naples Convention, which was given the task of deciding whether or not to continue the work of the Committee of Intesa, was obliged to proceed in accordance with the majority. Bordiga was thus put in a minority so that the party could carry on the battle until the Lyon Congress and not capitulate to the proscriptions of Zinoviev, then Secretary of the International. In the space of a few months the Left, which at the National Convention of 1923 had been in the majority at all times and had felt itself to have the solidarity and sympathy of the official apparatus (a term which didn't have the same significance as it later assumed in the history of the workers' movement), found itself stranded in the desert. This fact itself merits a page in the history of the Italian Left. However, for the first time the most conscious comrades began to recognise, in all its gravity and importance, that the very existence of this current was slipping away and becoming wrapped in that largely artificial atmosphere in which Bordiga's thinking had become isolated and which now existed like a silkworm in the cocoon it had woven for itself.

It is too easy and, moreover, too convenient to attribute the dissolution of the Left to Fascism on the one hand and to the Stalinist reaction on the other. The fact remains that from 1926 the Left had practically ceased to exist inside the Stalinist International. In addition, all subsequent developments in the ideas, the publications and the organisation of this current occurred without the physical presence of Bordiga. For the most part they diverged from his line of thought and especially from his political "attitude", an attitude

that was not accidental on his part and which would last until the fall of Fascism.

What we are dealing with then is the root cause of isolation and its connection to a particular way of seeing the ideological and political problems of Marxism. Bordiga never ceased to consider Russia as an economic entity whose overriding character was socialist. For him it was only Stalin and the International's policies which had degenerated.

From this point the positions began to diverge: While the Left would continue to move along the traditional line inspired by a dialectical view of history in general and of the struggle of the proletariat in particular - which led them to see that the party and the tasks of the revolutionary militia had been reduced to nothing as a result of the changed objective conditions - Bordiga remained consistent with his completely determinist outlook and conformed to it here. We have written "consistent" without wishing to split hairs about whether this courtesy to him serves as an a posteriori justification of his "doing nothing" or whether the logic of his own personal interpretation of a rigidly determinist premiss was to withdraw and wait for a radical overturning of the new situation before he felt it would be possible to once again speak of the party and the revolutionary militia.

Anyway, Bordiga was to meticulously obey this imperative which meant that he took no part in what the comrades organised in the Fraction Abroad were doing, just as he had nothing to do with the work of re-forming the first clandestine nuclei which would eventually lead to the constitution of the party. And, what is worse, immensely important events like the insurrection of the Spanish proletariat, the collapse of the International and the 2nd Imperialist War, went by without clarification or criticism and without his theoretical contribution. Yet this work was needed in order to demonstrate the power and continuity of Marxism and, above all, to prepare the indispensable means, in the shape of experience and ideas, for the future revival of the class party.

We are not trying to launch a personal polemic here but are only emphasising that the path of Bordigism diverged from that of the Italian Left for the same reason that the dialectical method diverges from determinism - a method which assumes that the revolution can do without the will of man.

Thus it was that Bordiga's over-long absence from

political struggle, his formal and sentimental attachment to the International and to the Russian economic experience, would lead him into serious errors of perspective. Thus, instead of the counter-revolution and the solid role played by Imperialist capitalism in the war Bordiga theorised a distinction between the capitalist powers which were divided on a scale of different degrees of responsibility (capitalism number 1, capitalism number 2, etc); instead of the war being universally capitalist and objectively counter-revolutionary - the idea that the belligerents could be backward in relation to one and progressive in relation to others.

Thus, for us on the Left a really paradoxical situation arose - of having to defend that part of Bordiga's thinking which had legitimately come to be part of the tradition of the Italian Left and of rejecting that which we understood to be un-Marxist and against the interests of the revolutionary struggle. In a word, the Left found themselves with the responsibility of having to defend the Bordiga of before the decline against the Bordigism of the rotten masonic lodge.

Thus it was revealed just how much of all this could be convincingly attributed to a particular flaw in his mental make-up and how much, on the other hand, should be put down to the "whim" of the intellectual. This was an intellectual who would fill his time with speculations about the class militia interrupted by facile paradoxes or historicism typical of someone who is a complete bourgeois academic engaged on dilettantist research and who has earned himself the title "progressive" in academic circles.

It remains a fact that, from the constitution of the party until today, the distinction we have drawn here has become more precisely and clearly defined. The party militants are very clear about the problems which have in the main confirmed such a distinction, to the point of provoking practical and organisational repercussions. However, it is not a bad idea to look at them again from a distance and subject them to an objective critique which nevertheless is conscious of an Italian Left too often confused with Bordiga and, what is worse, with Bordigism.

Below is a summary of the ideological and political standpoint of the Italian Left, defined in an unequivocal way.

1. The dialectical interpretation of existence and the world which comes from Marxism and whose validity has been confirmed by the vicissitudes of the proletarian struggle is the indispensable instrument of revolutionary theory and praxis. From the, by now obvious, consideration that the party is devoid of any historical content if it

is detached from the class comes the recognition of the permanent need for concrete and indissoluble links between party and class. It is equally obvious that the class, left to itself, is confused and disoriented and is therefore incapable of accomplishing its historic tasks without the leadership of its party.

The revolution, the exercise of the dictatorship, as well as the construction of the socialist society, are the results of the successful combination of these two fundamental subjective forces and the interdependence between them. In fact nothing would have happened in history without the intervention of human will, just as will would act in vain if it ceased to be the element which realises the objective forces by which it has been determined and in which it has its origins.

Amongst the subjective forces in the revolutionary process there is no determination (will) which in its turn is not determined. The Left has interpreted this theoretical postulate of Marxism to mean that the links between the party and the masses, between their struggle and their interests, must be permanent. For the Left there are no objective conditions under which these links with the masses must be broken, not even in the darkest periods of reaction, because once you bow down and submit to the enemy's pressure the historical unity of the class ceases to exist and you have passed bag and baggage over to capitalism.

2. In semi-peaceful periods, just as much as during reactionary torment, the Italian Left has repudiated the theory of "temporary retirement". That is, the idea that the operation of capitalism itself, by means of its own internal mechanical process, will inevitably lead to a reversal of the objective situation and will allow even retired revolutionaries to take up their place in the revolutionary battle once again, having suddenly and almost miraculously been brought back to life. Such a spurious and false anti-dialectical determinism which takes no account of the oscillating nature of the struggle - the high and low points of the proletarian movement; which, in difficult situations, cannot work out what to do or what not to do but instead theorises "preventive desertion" - this has never been part of the tradition of Marxism as practised by revolutionaries such as Lenin. The October Revolution was possible not as a result of the sudden appearance of the Bolshevik Party, but because this party represented - at a time when the masses were moving towards insurrection - the climax of decades of struggle. This struggle had involved gruelling theoretical training, disputes and splits, but during these

the party had never lost the least confidence in the working masses, even when they seemed to be absent or corrupted and dominated by counter-revolutionary and treacherous forces.

3. The Italian Left considers the Russian experience as never having gone beyond capitalism. In particular, economic planning under the auspices of the state, which was initially oriented towards the construction of socialism, has provided the basis for the first major example of state capitalism: an organic unification of economics and politics which is characteristic of the final phase of monopoly capitalism's development.

4. The Italian Left considers capitalism as economically, socially and politically an integral whole, with an objectively monolithic structure. This is the case even in those countries which seem less advanced and where the external signs of capitalism's unequal development are more obvious. From this consideration, which stems from the most elementary Marxism (and which, because it is so elementary, cannot satisfy the theoretical hairsplitters), it follows that the American economy is no different from the Soviet economy - when viewed in terms of capitalist practice. In the same way, American political policies are no different from those of the Soviet Union, when viewed in terms of the criminality of a class which survives on war and the exploitation of the working masses throughout the world." [2]

THE PARTY

From 1964 to 1982 the question of the party has been a common element in all of Programma's crises. This is something of a paradox when one takes into account that Programma's Bordigism has always presented this problem in peremptory and presumptively "invariant" terms. In the second half of the 40s, when the task of reconstituting the politics and organisation of the Italian Left was underway (without the support of the great leader who was still suffering from the effects of the collapse of the 3rd International), Bordiga - the "super-partyist" - continued to turn his nose up at the Party for the simple reason that in a period of post-war reconstruction there "could not be a place for a revolutionary force to the left of the PCI [Italian Communist Party]"! In such a period it would have been better if Bordiga had continued the experience of the Fraction through an organised party form which would have always had to take the class struggle into account, whatever happened. (Rather than a study group which, as such, could not take upon itself the task of intervening in those limited areas where the class struggle was then being fought.)

After the 1952 split which perhaps occurred more through necessity than choice, Bordiga was converted to the idea of the necessity for the permanence of the class party. This absurdity meant that the one who saw no possibility of the politico/organisational continuity of the party - and in this respect his enthusiasm for the split was second to none - contributed, despite himself, to the division of the parent party into two would-be internationalist parties.

Thus, points 7, 8 and 9 of Section IV of the Theses Distinguishing the Party elaborated in 1952 soon after the split state:

"... the Party, even though numerically small and only weakly linked to the mass of the proletariat and whilst still jealously guarding its theoretical tasks as a duty of the first order, absolutely refuses to be considered as a circle of thinkers or simply a study group whose members, having considered yesterday's truths to be insufficient, have lost sight of them altogether in their search for new truths.

The Party, despite its restricted numbers determined by the prevailing counter-revolutionary conditions, does not cease to proselytise and propagandise its principles in every written and oral form, even if its meetings are sparsely attended and its press has only a limited outlet.

It is events, not the will of men which thus determine the extent of penetration into the broad masses and limit this to a small corner of the overall activity. Nevertheless the Party never misses an opportunity to enter any chink or crack since it well understands that there will be no revival until this part of its activity is greatly increased and becomes dominant."

This doesn't say very much - it's only a small step in the right direction but formally it stands in open contrast to the nihilist positions of a few months previously. In spite of this the political existence of Programma in the decades which followed was marked by strict isolation from the class struggle and they even abandoned those "chinks" which only constant work inside the class can allow to become "dominant" in future.

In fact it was in this period that Programma retraced its steps, gave up intervention and renounced "that small corner of the overall activity" in order to dedicate itself to reiterating the invariance of the "sacred principles". The theoretical formulation which best expresses the essence of the organisation throughout this period is that of the "historical party" and the "formal

party". At first glance it seems that this distinction would help to define more precisely (though from a rather obvious basis) the possibilities for intervention by the revolutionary vanguard in relation to the objective conditions. Or, more exactly, in an openly counter-revolutionary situation, when the economic, political and social domination of the bourgeoisie is total and consequently the response of the working class is at its lowest level, or even non-existent (class in itself), the opportunities and possibilities for the party are reduced to almost nothing. The very links between party and class can be broken and an ever-deeper gulf develop between the working masses and their advance guard. From the evidence of frequent similar situations in the history of the class struggle it is impossible for the party to go beyond the conditions imposed by reality by appealing to will or by outbursts of voluntarism.

In such conditions the party must struggle essentially for its own continuity, organising on the basis of its chosen priorities the better to adapt to the force of circumstance. At the same time it has to continue to hold together, where they exist, those finest of threads which keep it linked to the life of the class; re-tying them the moment they are broken; creating them anew if it is starting from a condition of absolute backwardness.

In opposite circumstances, in a situation of powerful resurgence of class struggle, the party can more easily carry out its role as a political leader, as a reference point for the struggle, acting more and more incisively in those spaces for intervention which "naturally" begin to open up.

If the "historical/formal" distinction refers to the real possibility of intervention in relation to a change in the objective conditions, which means that in counter-revolutionary periods the party is primarily an organ for the conservation of the programme and of theoretical elaboration which relegates - not by choice but through necessity - intervention in the class to sporadic episodes; and if by "formal party" it means the powerful and effective role of real leadership in the mass movement; then the distinction can be accepted - on condition that the second situation is understood to be a consequence of the first. The passage from the "historical" to the "formal" stage is not only determined by the maturation of the objective conditions, but also by the party's capacity to grow with the contradictory evolution of events, otherwise the two phases cease to be two aspects of the same process and assume a crystallised autonomous form. Taken separately, the first ends up becoming a slave to the negative consequences of the counter-revolutionary period; the second becomes enthralled by a mirage which gets increasingly out of reach.

In other words, if the party is intended to be the political instrument of the class struggle and always exists at different levels of intensity whatever the situation (so long as capitalist relations of production last), then the lowest points and the periods of upsurge are not the only moments of class struggle where the party must understand how to act and tactically shape its interventions. If this is not the case then it means that the party is a political instrument only in particular moments of class struggle (the most favourable), making it an intermittent and episodic weapon for the class. In this case, even though acting in good faith, there is an inevitable risk of creating the conditions for the liquidation of what already exists and what could potentially be developed from it.

It is not a case of some disciples, more "Bordigist" than Bordiga, having carried the original distinction between "historical" and "formal" party to absurd lengths. In formal logic such an 'extreme' conclusion is possible but it is, however, mistaken and has extremely dangerous implications for perspectives. It inevitably leads to the theory that the party, the instrument of and political leader in the class struggle, is not just restricted to acting in times of upsurge in the class struggle but that it "must" be born in such periods, or rather in pre-revolutionary and revolutionary periods. On the other hand, its presence in counter-revolutionary periods would be judged not so much useless as dangerous - since in these periods the party is more easily contaminated by opportunism.

This is a typical example of theoretical elaboration leaving the dialectical method behind in the search for mechanical laws. Having rejected the hypothesis that in the least favourable periods the political vanguard must do its utmost to maintain or, wherever possible, to create those small, fine links with the class, there remains only one other hypothesis: that the objective conditions, besides having the capacity to move the class into action, also have the power of spontaneously creating all the conditions most favourable to the birth of the revolutionary party. The mechanical sequence: crisis - revival of class struggle - birth of the party is the extreme conclusion which results from theoretically breaking up historical phases into watertight compartments - i.e. the separation of the emergence of class struggle and the class's main political instrument, the party.

It is one thing to state that the class struggle experiences high and low points historically,

according to the degree of conditioning by the bourgeoisie. It is another to state that the class struggle disappears and with it the class and thus the permanent necessity for its political instrument disappears. Even though Programma has not followed this path to its limit it is always bringing itself into line with the imagined historical party, concerned more with the reconstruction of the 'talmudian' political programme than with the necessity to intervene in those chinks of struggle which open up from time to time. Or, more exactly, Programma is concerned with combining both necessities (the historical and the formal party) thus maintaining itself ready to plunge into desperate activism when the presumed crucial hour comes (from 1975, sic praedixit Amadeus Bordigamus).

This raising to unquestioned dogma of the separation between a counter-revolutionary today and a revolutionary tomorrow, between the historical and the formal conditions for the organisation's existence, meant that the more the historical party moved away from the material and social conditions of the class, whether in terms of praxis or in terms of mental attitude, the more the formal party came to have metaphysical connotations.

The more the historical party came up against its own inevitable limits, locked as it was in the vice of an unfavourable situation with a proletariat which could hardly raise its head, the more the projections of the imagination shaped the formal party. This powerful, monolithic, omniscient entity in which everything had been foreseen and resolved, was so puffed up with its own invariance that it no longer considered itself simply as a political instrument of the class struggle, but as the prefiguration of socialism itself, or rather as a political monad. As such this single self-enclosed entity overcomes every type of contradiction and, as the organised expression of infallibility, it alone can be the subject of the proletarian dictatorship: a subject which doesn't tolerate any form of internal discussion, much less democracy, even direct democracy.

While Programma's daily existence has been characterised by tactical interpretations more in accordance with the laws of mechanics than with a historical determinist view, its future activity - because it is not bound by the possibility of immediate confirmation or non-confirmation - is wide open to idealist outbursts of great intensity.

If the party is understood as the conscious vanguard of the class, the only instrument capable of elaborating tactics, strategy and a programme (political conditions for the revolutionary over-

throw of capitalist society); if it is seen as representing the maximum level of class consciousness, this is all a correct Marxist formulation. If the formal party is understood as embodying its "historical" to the absolute limit, almost as a demiurgic figure, rivaling God for all his powers, then this is the material for idealist speculation.

The logical consequence of this supposed infallibility is the conception of the party as pure and perfect, immune from any possibility of error, exercising its dictatorship outside of and over the class while its internal life proceeds without any need for checking against reality or discussion because "everything" has been thought out and predicted beforehand (the theoretical presupposition of organic centralism - the bureaucratic expression of invariance). This is closer to the definition of a religious order than to a political conception of human beings struggling for their emancipation.

Given these positions it was inevitable that when different periods of class struggle presented the party with the problem of defining its role two distinct and difficult-to-reconcile tendencies would emerge on the terrain of intervention. - The "nothing can be done" viewpoint, followed by the activist viewpoint; precursors of dogmatism on the one hand and opportunism on the other.

Programma, notwithstanding the innumerable splits - all centred round the question of the role of the party and intervention - has never escaped from this dualism. Its two "souls" have always co-existed and when their irreconcilability has emerged there have been irreparable breaks with all the attendant after-effects.

Footnotes to the article

[1] Because the PSI (Italian Socialist Party) had not been faced with some of the historic choices faced by other parties of the Second International in 1914 there was no obvious breaking point with the Right Wing of Turati and the Centrists of Serrati. After the Bolshevik Revolution abstentionism in elections against the corrupting parliamentary practice of the Socialist Party seemed to the Italian Left the correct tactic to distinguish itself from the bourgeois social democrats and a means of heightening proletarian awareness of the need for its own organ of government - the Soviet. For more information about the Italian Left in English, see Revolutionary Perspectives 19: "The Italian Left and the Permanent Need for Party".

[2] In fact this quotation comprises an article which originally appeared in Prometeo under the title "Crisis of Bordighism? - Perhaps. In any case it's not a crisis of the Italian Left".

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A NEW ERA FOR COMMUNIST PROGRAM

The latest crisis of Programma Comunista highlights the analysis of the previous article. Yet again Programma's confusion over the party's role and tasks have led it to split. Here we are taking the opportunity to re-publish in English an article which was originally published in Battaglia Comunista no. 18, 1982 and no.1. 1983.

To admit one's errors is certainly a sign of maturity. For revolutionaries a critical examination of method - even when it is inspired by exceptional circumstances, such as an internal crisis - is a practice as necessary as it is healthy. Communist Program (henceforth Programma) appears to have entered on this path. Its self-criticism is all the more surprising, given the seriousness of the reasons for it and the open admissions Programma has had to make concerning its own crisis. "Above all there is an obvious political and organisational crisis, in the second place there appears, on the surface, to be two antithetical ways of considering social contradictions and the intervention of the Party in them.

"This political and organisational crisis", the self-criticism continues, "is therefore a reflection of a political vagueness which it is claimed accompanies organisational precision Alongside this aspect there is another, also linked to the vagueness of the tactical lines defining our activity: i.e. the development of two different conceptions of activity to be followed in relation to the working class and to movements of social struggle, which are already expressions of the contradictions in social reality. From this point of view the Palestinian question, which was so important in the internal crisis, is only one of the knots to be unravelled."

To sum up: they admit having been mistaken in everything. The first error was that of not knowing how to give the organisation a homogeneous political line for analysing social phenomena and, thus, intervention; the second was attempting to get round this obstacle (and what an obstacle!) by an administrative, bureaucratic and centralising practice aimed at containing and smoothing out every internal contradiction.

Are these problems caused just by a false way of looking at the internal organisation of the Revolutionary Party, which goes by the name of organic centralism? Or are there other, more profound directions which Programma's re-thinking must take?

It is by now passé, not to say banal, to shut the door after the horse has bolted by saying: "a party which makes no mistakes cannot exist, it is very difficult to create a party which knows how to correct itself. It is this that we are attempting to do. On the other hand, Marxism teaches us that he is right who makes the least mistakes, not he who never makes any." Is this genuine self-criticism? Perhaps. But we don't want such an attempt at modesty to be merely a temporary inversion of the arrogance that has always characterised the Programmists' political being.

On the subject of party errors and

misconceptions, in the "Ecclesia Programorum" of the recent past, whenever the problem of intervention was considered it was as the basis for a rhetorical exercise and one heard talk of the crystalline purity of the doctrine, of the desired ideological monolithism, of the infallible Party, of the prefiguration of socialism, etc.

Our doubts remain. Too often we have seen about-turns, accompanied or unaccompanied by self-criticism (usually unaccompanied), regarding problems of major significance, like those of the unions or of national liberation wars, without witnessing an adequate corrective analysis. But this is certainly not the point. Here we limit ourselves to taking note of self-criticism, whether or not it is Programma's, since the issues treated are of general interest, and we intend making our contribution to them, whether or not this has been requested.

Dualism as Always

Very often in the history of the workers' movement, today as in the past, and especially when the class struggle stagnates (that is, when the bourgeoisie's political and economic domination does not allow the expression of working class aspirations except in a limited and episodic way), parts of the vanguard have believed they could interpret the "feel" of the time in ways which are not only different but opposite. Either they have believed nothing is to be done, or they have embraced the most frenetic activism. In the first case, even where this is completely undeclared or just hinted at, the way of relating to the class' confrontations, its problems and needs, is indifferentism. In the second, the necessary and unavoidable activity of the political vanguard even if it is situated within a framework of a very weak class struggle, is transformed into an activism which is the more frenetic the more the external situation appears to be unassailable.

The indifferentist position completely divorces the tasks of revolutionaries

from the external situation and arrives at the conclusion that there is nothing to be done "outside". The tasks of a vanguard are thus necessarily limited to preserving the principles, to the most absolute observance of their invariance, to the theoretical elaboration of the most important political and economic questions, to the development of the future cadres, without taking any of this to the outside world - because to do so is considered not just useless but even dangerous for the organisation and its militants.

To receive from the outside, to elaborate, without returning the fruits of its political work was the formula through which the Party was supposed to remain uncontaminated and escape all forms of opportunism. The corollary of this position could be nothing other than sectarianism, the most obscure "invariantism", with a metaphysical conception of a pure and infallible Party. Such a Party was not intended to be the political instrument of the class struggle, reflecting and conditioning the contradictory movement of the class, but rather the fruit of a laboratory investigation, photographing the contingent aspects of social events in negative and postponing their development until better times.

Apart from the problem of method, one of the most serious consequences of the attendist thesis (i.e. that it is necessary to wait for favourable conditions before engaging in political work in the class) is the distortion of the rôle and function of the Party by a false interpretation of the class struggle and the way in which it is expressed.

Revolutionaries are not given the task of deciding when, but only how to intervene. The Party, or rather the political vanguard of the class, when it is in a position to act at all, does not choose when to intervene in the class, even less does it choose not to do so. Instead it adjusts the way in which it intervenes, the tactical aspects of its intervention, in line with its internal forces and the external situation. All

this takes place on the basis of unavoidable objective conditions which the Party cannot change, but which, nevertheless, it cannot fail to form a part of, on pain of diminishing its rôle as a political vanguard.

The "there is nothing to be done position" and its attendist appendix, once theorised and codified as the vanguard's mode of existence in the class struggle, gave birth to the political "tendencies" which today are aligned in the revolutionary "milieu". The first such tendency is that which gives the vanguard the task of organising in fractions not Parties, or rather of studying, elaborating, of pointing the way forward, but not of entering the life of the class struggle. The second, the legitimate daughter of the first, foresees the necessity of the Party only in historical moments when the level of the class struggle autonomously supplies the effective conditions for the seizure of power. Finally, there is a third tendency which, although admitting the need for a Party even in counter-revolutionary periods, limits its rôle to that of being a mere spectator of events, a more or less qualified commentator on the political reality which surrounds it.

The activist tendency, conversely, has been much more businesslike. In the midst of the class it has never made "distinctions" of the sort just described as to the type of organisation that the vanguard should provide, but only on its rôle. Although admitting that external factors exert some sort of conditioning effect which, willy-nilly, must be taken account of, the voluntarist side of the activist position ends by wanting to force, without success, the mechanisms which lie behind this external immobility.

In other words, activist voluntarism, believing it has found in the vanguard's immobility the primary cause of all disorders, whether internal (organisational) or external (tenuous or non-existent links with the working class), throws itself into every situation, pursues any and every episode

and commits the opposite error: that is, of becoming enveloped in the situation and aspects of the merely contingent, and remaining ensnared therein. Workerism, spontaneism, economism, in a word, opportunism, are the most immediate dangers faced by the voluntarist tendency, as soon as it enters on the road directly opposite to attendism.

In both cases we are in the presence of theoretical elaborations and political practices which, each in its own way, fail to answer the question of intervention, of tactics, of the correct relation between Party and class, independently of the intensity of class struggle.

The Question of Tactics

Returning to *Programma*, it seems that its self-criticism takes the bull by the horns, by admitting that within its breast there dwell two souls, whose existence can somehow be traced back to the methods of voluntarism and activism.

Thus, indeed, we read: "Alongside this aspect," (the political-organisational crisis - editor's note) "there is another, also linked to the vagueness of the tactical lines defining our activity: i.e. the development of two different conceptions of activity to be followed in relation to the working class and to movements of social struggle, which are already expressions of the contradictions in social reality." Further on, to make the concept explicit, the text continues: "The problem is posed in these terms: how does the Marxist Communist Party intervene in movements which necessarily do not have a purely proletarian character (here we have in mind the Palestinian national demands) or which advance demands which are so limited that they therefore are unable to overcome the contingent framework dominated by bourgeois or opportunist or collaborationist forces?"

And here the background question unequivocally emerges: "Here we limit ourselves to observing that (with regard

to the Party's activity) two convergent errors have traditionally been committed: 1) that of ignoring in practice the real movements as not sufficiently mature and limiting oneself to explaining their maturation in propagandist terms; 2) despite the formal homage paid to Marxist theory and the allegedly more radical future struggle involving the entire proletariat, that of seeing only the present movement and in practice abandoning oneself to it. They are two tendencies" - the author concludes - "which start from a common theoretical flaw, which condition each other in turn, giving a single organisation's activity the dual character of the antithesis between both 'activism' and 'academicism'. Within this false antithesis the history of our formal organisation has been fought and is partly still being fought." Not bad as admissions go. Quite apart from polemics, it seems to us, at the time of the thirtieth anniversary of the formal existence of Programma, that such important problems have remained unsolved for an inordinate length of time. For an organisation which believed and claimed that it had resolved, both on the formal and historical plane all the problems inherent to the construction of the world Communist Party (here reference to Bordiga was mandatory), admissions of this type are not a tribute to sincerity and to the fecundity of self-criticism, but are rather a hymn to political irresponsibility.

Independently of this serious split and all the others preceding it, the organisation's politics have led it into the dilemma of either opening itself to class struggle in the ascetic guise of contemplative academicism, or else of throwing itself into the fight regardless and thereby joining with all the other movementists.

This reveals not only the manifest lack of a correct and unitary method for facing and resolving the problem of the rôle and function of the political organisation of the class struggle, but also the sorry situation that the

supposed Party recognises itself as such only in these two extreme positions, without ever being able to consider a third "hypothesis" and thus correct itself.

In other words, one asks Programma how to bridge the gap between one bank - on which there lies strategic visions, analytic capacity, fundamental theoretical acquisitions - and the other, on which there cavorts the spontaneity of the class struggle; how to face up to "movements which necessarily do not have a purely communist character".

If the class struggle was able to autonomously express itself in terms of communist aims, even if through the purifying crucible of partial defeats and retreats, then there would be no need for a Party, the class would not need to have its vanguard expressed as a political reference point which knows how to make the immediate and final goals compatible and how to pass from one to the other. If things were like that, the only task of revolutionaries would be to dissolve themselves into the movement, making sure they remained attached to it, and working individually to ensure that the final aims contained in the movement were not dispersed.

If the twists and turns in the class struggle do not occur like this, and for Leninists this is irrefutable, the necessity for the effective presence of the class Party, far from conforming to one of the two positions defined above, stems from its sole aim of bringing about the maturation of communist objectives from those aspects of the class struggle which do not and cannot have such aims. Whatever the time or place the class struggle is impeded and influenced by the economic and social circumstances which produce it. "Pure" movements exist neither at the beginning nor at the end of a class movement, and this is even more true in the absence of a class Party.

In Poland as in Palestine the birth of a class response must start from the particular "objective" conditions, which

do not correspond in any way to the aspirations of "pure" communists. In Palestine the masses move on the terrain of nationalism, in Poland on that of democratic and economic demands. The rôle of the vanguard, if it exists, and of revolutionaries in general, is to change the political content which these movements spontaneously give themselves so as to direct them onto communist terrain, neither abandoning them as "insufficiently mature", nor tailing them as the "real" expression of the class struggle or as the only possible area for action.

To repeat, the correct dialectical relation between the Party's work (i.e. its capacity for intervention given its own limitations) and the spontaneous, sometimes chaotic and contradictory, but never pure, movement of the class based on specific economic and political demands (which not even the class itself has chosen, but which are obstacles in the early stages of its development), is found neither within the movement as such nor outside it.

The rôle of the Party consists of: interpreting the initial conditions, discovering in them their limits, and surpassing them by embracing a tactic which takes account of the specific conjuncture and the available opportunities. This is in order to prevent the class movement from losing momentum or, worse still, from reacting against the original economic demands and extinguishing them with false political aims.

In practice, what this means for national liberation wars, once the historical period of the progressive bourgeoisie is definitely closed (for us this period has been over for some time) and for economic demands, is that revolutionaries neither have the task of tailing the nationalist movement nor of limiting themselves to the level of the economic demands of union struggle. Rather, their task is to start from this existing basis and raise the level of the class struggle so that it aims for higher goals, taking good care not to fall into the attendant error for fear

of dirtying their hands, or into the activist error of jumping in and fighting to the death for the sake of "concreteness" without being able to jump out again. At first glance it would appear that Programma is embarking on a third road, which although still a long one, is certainly more direct: "In the real dialectic, the revolutionary Party is that force which, although starting from positions obscure to the mass movement, assists the real pressures in history which allow the approach and finally the union between the real movement and the communist movement."

The formula is a bit obscure, but, apart from the alleged existence of two movements within a single process, we seem to be in the presence of a correct approach for dealing with the questions the class struggle poses.

But we read further on, on the Palestinian question: "it is necessary, on the other hand, to recognise the whole meaning of a struggle in action: we consider positive the victorious outcome of the basically bourgeois struggle against Israel's colonialism whether or not we, or the proletarian movement in general, are able to influence it." There is no doubt, given the state of the international revolutionary forces, that Programma speaks without any real possibility of influencing the Palestinian events in any way: nevertheless, it is not the task of revolutionaries to adjust themselves to the situation by saying that it is "positive". Even if only in words, one does not work for "the approach and finally the union between the real movement and the communist movement" by judging the former positive in the absence of the latter. The doubt is whether, for Programma, the positive aspect remains even when influential communist forces manifest themselves.

With regard to union activity too, the method is unchanged: "In fact, our activity of intervention in struggle has, for years, been limited to the level of union demands. This is the truth. But this basis, the problems it

has posed, its obvious narrowness, made us realise the necessity for widening our horizons, caused us to discover all the other practical bases for intervention, and these - women's demands, housing, antimilitarism, repression and all the other manifestations of social contradictions - gave us new weapons and greater confidence in facing the very same economic and union struggle."

Very good! But this does not take account of the fact that the primary task of a communist Party lies not so much in the search for new and wider horizons for its commitment to struggle; not so much the search for practical economic bases alongside other practical bases dealing with general politics, but of giving a political meaning to economic struggle.

It is obvious that, given a struggle with certain limits, all possible efforts should be made to organise and extend it, but it is just as obvious that if these limits are not overcome through effective political propaganda, one could organise and extend all the struggles in the world without making the slightest contribution to the revolutionary maturation of the working class.

What has always distinguished communists from all the bourgeois-radical forces, in the past and today, is not their propensity for struggle (this should be a given fact) but their political contribution, without which all expressions of social revolt would end by being irredeemably defeated.

The Palestinian Question

Among the several reasons for Programma's devastating internal crisis the Palestinian question could not fail to be enormously important. First of all, whether they liked it or not, the issue of the Middle East, as all practical issues, came into conflict with those two self-acknowledged souls which, when faced with a "real" situation, were incapable of making an analysis that avoided either

indifferentism or uncritically following the movement. In the second place, the Palestinian question became important because in an organisation such as Programma, which pretends so much to be monolithic and invariant, tendencies ranging from almost unconditional support for the bourgeois objectives of the PLO to an attendism, religiously awaiting the emergence of "true" class struggle, could not be tolerated. The existence of a third hybrid position, conditionally supporting the Palestinian bourgeoisie and making an ill-concealed distinction between the progressive rôles of the bourgeois and proletarian programmes, only added to the problem. Above all, it is unacceptable that amongst such ideological confusion, the split in the organisation only takes place when one of the "tendencies" decides to give up on the grounds that it is useless, not to say harmful, to remain inside the organisation, while the latter hasn't prevented it in any way from opportunistically reconciling the orthodox with the unorthodox, the real with the unreal, the possible with the impossible.

Up until two years ago it was much easier for Programma to contain various approaches to the "social question". If one accepts the Bordigist axiom that bourgeois revolutionary movements (as the political expressions of the economic superseding of feudal relations of production) are always progressive, it follows that revolutionaries must support them. This means that, whenever the level of class struggle allows it, the international proletariat and its political guide (always Programma) must give direct assistance to such movements. In addition to this Programma also adds the concept of support for the political victory of these bourgeois forces, whenever it is not in a position to give any concrete aid.

Now, without there having been any significant changes in the relations between the national interests of any national bourgeoisie and imperialism, Programma suddenly announces the end of this historical period. This is in the

context of international market processes that were consolidated decades ago, and, moreover, without providing any explanation whatsoever. They describe the bourgeoisie which still works on the terrain of national independence as non-progressive and, consequently, deserving of neither support nor acclaim. The tactical conclusion is that today communists should not subordinate the cornerstones of the proletarian revolution to bourgeois national interests, even in situations where - because of underdevelopment as a consequence of imperialist domination - the first manifestations of class struggle inevitably assume a bourgeois, nationalist character.

And here the problems start.

In *Programma Comunista* no 20, October 1982 we read, in deference to the new approach "We will treat this national struggle not as a bourgeois revolution to be completed, but as the consequence of a national factor within a situation where capitalism is already established. In this situation therefore the bourgeoisie and the proletariat have no common tasks and the Arab bourgeoisie confronts the non-Arab bourgeoisie within the framework of world imperialism, demanding a Palestinian national state: a demand which also corresponds - as we shall see - to the present interests of Palestinian and Arab proletarians and which for them is a necessary bridge in their passage towards the communist revolution."

There is an obvious contradiction between the premise that "the bourgeoisie and the proletariat have therefore no common tasks" and the conclusion that admits of a coincidence between "the present interests" of the two classes on the national question. On the previous page there is a different, blatantly contradictory approach to the same question: "Applying this concept to the struggle of the Palestinian proletariat - which naturally does not intend to renounce fighting for a return to the territory it was driven from - means that

communists not only do not contrast the primary aim (the proletarian struggle in the strict sense) and the secondary (the struggle for national self-determination) but they do not even formulate a consistent strategy for using the second as a sort of stepping-stone to the first." And just to make the transition from the struggle for national self-determination to the communist revolution even more confusing, ten lines below one reads: "it is necessary, on the other hand, to recognise the whole meaning of a struggle in action. We consider positive the victorious outcome of the basically bourgeois struggle against Israel's colonialism whether or not we, or the proletarian movement in general, are able to influence it."

At first they consider the struggle of the Palestinian proletariat for national self-determination "an essential stepping-stone", a kind of springboard towards the communist revolution; subsequently, the same struggle, with its partial objectives, is not to be understood tactically as a "stepping-stone" for a future transformation into the communist revolution. And to complete the circle, disregarding the original approach, which declared the end of the historical period of progressive bourgeois-democratic revolutions, which implied that the tasks of revolutionaries no longer consists of support or acclaim for these historical experiments, they consider positive "the victorious outcome of the basically bourgeois struggle against Israel's colonialism".

Even if one reads the sentences twice, the confusion remains. It seems as if *Programma's* writers are more interested in remaining trapped within two opposing positions, tolerating all the contradictions, than they are in attempting to escape via a more thorough consideration of the question. *Programma* lacks a clear perspective on how the Arab proletariat, as well as the Palestinian proletariat, should begin to act, on the basis of its own specific reality, against the interests of imperialism and the national

bourgeoisies. Given this lack of perspective, they address themselves to the false and irrelevant question of up to which point and in which form bourgeois demands should be supported or directly advocated.

This is the only way to explain Programma's approval for the Palestinian bourgeoisie's possible victory over the Israeli bourgeoisie, and its obvious difficulty in defining the rôle of communists (given they exist and are organised) in the bourgeois-democratic revolution. They do not know whether or not this revolution should be used as a stepping-stone, as an essential bridge, towards the objectives of the socialist revolution. But there is something else to be emphasised, another gem from this very rich source. "It has emerged from internal discussions that it is very difficult to act in a consistent fashion in such a way that the Party is able to recognise the limited nature of a struggle, without this meaning in practice that it has to give it up. This has been markedly illustrated by the Middle Eastern situation, where in *Programma Comunista* we are primarily concerned with showing the tendency of an on-going struggle to assume a social and proletarian nature in practice. This tendency is for us the most important component of such a struggle."

Up until two years ago Programma, when confronted by similar problems, would have taken up a defensive position around its two "souls" and everyone would have been happy. One, the attendist (maximalist) soul would have remained huddled on the shore of unsullied Marxist principle whilst waiting for the Palestinian events to give birth to pure proletarian movements, uncontaminated by bourgeois and nationalist ideology. The other, the movementist (Menshevik) soul, would have supported or acclaimed (depending on the circumstances and the balance of forces) the PLO, or would have preached that the Palestinian proletariat take up nationalist demands as its own, seeing that the Palestinian bourgeoisie had shown itself incapable of pursuing those.

Today this no longer seems to be the case. No more attendism with regard to social conflicts, even where these are politically backward, no more tailism when considering the particular, secondary, features of a situation. Now Programma is taking account of and is interested in "the principal element", the dynamic of the class struggle. "But" - the article continues - "to respond correctly to situations it is necessary also to see what is the most important element - not so much in our eyes, as theoreticians of the proletarian movement - but in those of the participants in the struggle. And this is how the 'secondary' question, historically destined to become less important, assumes all the importance of a principal issue."

The confusion continues, the premises never agreeing with the conclusions. But before considering the relationship between primary and secondary issues, it is necessary to get rid of the false antithesis between what is important, in "our eyes as theoreticians of the proletarian movement", and in the eyes of those inhabitants of another galaxy, the "participants in the struggle".

In the era of rotting imperialism, with the decadence of international capitalism making a third world war imminent, there are no general "theoretical" interests, the exclusive property of a political vanguard, and other, "this worldly", contingent interests, with their overwhelming burden of wretchedness for the oppressed, without there being the possibility of overcoming the gap between the first and the second. This is true of the class struggle wherever it occurs, even in areas least favoured by economic development and with unfavourable political circumstances.

The alternative is not that either we are faced with a politically mature struggle where the appropriate strategy and tactics are the primary sort - such as would delight the "theoreticians of the proletarian movement"; or that we are confronted with a struggle where the combatants are fighting for limited,

sectional interests, thus giving priority to the latter - that is turning secondary into principal interests and at the same time waving goodbye to the communist revolution.

As soon as you split the particular (because it exists) from the general (because it is always imagined to be merely potential and nothing is done to make it real) you have made an enormous step towards opportunism. In fact this distinction between theoretical and concrete interests does not correspond to the reality. There is no logical schema which supplies a communist strategy, which will be valid tomorrow, and a tactic for the concrete situation to which all else is subordinate in the short term. The class struggle doesn't consist of a communist movement and a real movement running on parallel lines with people setting out either on the one (primary) or the other (secondary). What exists is the spontaneous, confused and very often contradictory self-expression of the working class, based on partial and contingent interests both in the economic sense and on the level of political demands. The political vanguard of the class, or rather the Party, if it exists and if it is capable of operating, must, no matter how difficult and how long the process, intervene in this struggle to move it beyond its original content and provide it with a general revolutionary perspective. Any other standpoint is highly dangerous and all the more so if it is turned into a formula.

Moreover, as far as the Palestinian question goes, Programma's banal either-or schema cannot account for all the economic conditions: from the presence of international imperialism to the interests of the Arab bourgeoisie, from the Palestinian bourgeoisie's aspirations for independence to the proletariat's living conditions. Still less can the theoretical justification of the alternation between primary and secondary issues be accepted.

On the other hand, Programma's opportunism regarding the modern analysis of imperialism, national

liberation and bourgeois movements is not a new thing. The only novelty is in the theory of contradictions which reveals a surprising affinity both in form and content with another, more influential, opportunism - Maoism.

When Mao found himself carrying out in practice a war of national liberation in the conflict with Japanese imperialism during the middle of a civil war, he was aiming to install a dictatorship which, in political and economic content, was bourgeois. Having had to divert the great majority of the Chinese poor peasantry and proletariat onto this capitalist terrain, he was obliged to develop the theory of contradictions, of the alternation between primary and secondary questions in order to defer to an ever more distant future the dictatorship of the proletariat and to bring ever closer the dictatorship of "the four revolutionary classes".

Let's turn from Programma for a moment to quote Mao: "In capitalist societies the two contradictory forces, the proletariat and the bourgeoisie, form the main contradiction. The other contradictions, for example the contradiction between what remains of the feudal class and the bourgeoisie, the contradiction between the petit-bourgeois peasantry and the bourgeoisie, ..., the contradiction between imperialism and the colonies, etc., these are all determined and influenced by this primary contradiction.

In semi-colonial countries such as China, the relationship between the primary contradictions and the secondary contradictions forms a complex picture. When imperialism unleashes a war of aggression against a country of this type, the various classes of such a country, apart from a handful of traitors, are able to temporarily unite in order to carry on a national war against imperialism. The contradiction between imperialism and that country then becomes the main contradiction, whereas all the contradictions between the various classes in the country (including the primary contradiction)

are temporarily relegated to second place and assume secondary importance."

Transferred in time, place and situation, but not in content, the Maoist argument about the transformation of primary issues into secondary ones, emerges as follows from Maoism's unintentional heirs. In the Lebanon, as in all capitalist countries in the world, the class struggle expresses itself between bourgeois and imperialist interests on the one hand and proletarian interests on the other and this represents the primary contradiction. But in reality this does not happen. The Palestinian proletariat, under the political influence of its "own" bourgeoisie, expresses nationalism, which should be a secondary issue. But, according to Programma: "it is necessary also to see what is the most important element not so much in our eyes as theoreticians of the proletarian movement but in those of the participants in the struggle. And this is how the 'secondary' question, historically destined to become less important, assumes all the importance of a principal issue."

Perfect, as long as the logic of the argument is accepted and no doubts assail the reader. According to Programma, the national question, not proletarian revolution, is now on the agenda in the Lebanon. The primary issues give way to the secondary. Why? First of all, because in Programma's eyes, national liberation is a concrete issue which inspires both the bourgeoisie and the proletariat to act, whereas the proletarian revolution and the subjective condition for its development appear to be far away. In the second place, Programma argues, they cannot underestimate the impulses that spark off social events.

All this is true, but it is also true that the task of the revolutionary minority is not to adapt to a situation because it is a given concrete fact, nor still less to close its eyes to the basic causes, which as such can only bring into being partial and politically erroneous economic demands. Its task is

rather to develop a tactic of intervention in the real dynamic of what is happening, starting from the "objective" situation, and pointing out both its economic and political limitations, in order to bridge the gap, which is not temporal but political, between the confused, and spontaneous, manifestations of the class struggle, where bourgeois and petit-bourgeois ideas predominate, and class struggle with a communist content.

This all assumes the unproven hypothesis that there are political revolutionary forces in a position to operate in the situation in question; if this is not so, the main issue would be to create the subjective conditions or to encourage those which are there embryonically, without for all that throwing oneself into the arms of the bourgeoisie, inventing or re-inventing opportunistic theories about social contradictions, in the style of Maoism and its new variants.

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THESES OF THE ALPTRAUM COMMUNIST COLLECTIVE (Mexico)

Since the publication of Communist Review 1 the following theses have been sent to the IBRP by the Communist Collective of Alptraum in Mexico. They were originally published in Battaglia Comunista 14 and 15 (Year 42). We are re-publishing them here, together with the introduction written by the PCInt for the IBRP, in order to make them and our response available to a wider international audience.

The general principles underlying these theses undoubtedly come within the class compass of the proletariat. Certainly the theses open up ample space for discussion and clarification on essential points, although the Mexican comrades have sometimes set them out in a rather schematic and mechanistic manner. In general though we are very pleased to note that this group adheres to the method and content of the Marxist critique of political economy with its overall analysis of capitalism's economic development and the crisis of the capitalist mode of production. The Collective therefore recognises the structural nature of the present crisis stemming from the real tendency for the rate of profit to fall. In the first part the comrades articulate the crucial thesis of contemporary historical reality: that the only way out of this crisis left open for capitalism is the violent destruction of the forces and means of production. In short, war.

While it is true that the open contradiction between the development of the forces and relations of production means that capitalism contains "its own internal obstacle to the progressive development of the productive forces" (thesis 6), it should never be forgotten that in the absence of a revolutionary alternative - i.e. if capitalism isn't consciously overthrown by the proletariat, it will only be able to recreate the conditions for a new cycle of accumulation by a progressive barbarisation of society.

Thus the definition of the problems associated

with "the crisis of capital" and the relationship between crisis and war are substantially correct. However, the political conclusions reached on the first point (in paragraph c of thesis 2) sharply demonstrate a dangerous schematism that in other organisations (e.g. the ICC) has led to positions outside the real dynamic of class relations. In fact the assertion that the destruction of all forms of proletarian consciousness is a necessary precondition to the outbreak of imperialist war rules out any revolutionary possibilities during the course of that war. Such an affirmation excludes the fact that war could function as a means to give vent to dangerous social tensions, as was very much the case with the 1st World War. Thus formulated, the thesis gives credence to the theory that the 3rd World War has not yet broken out because of the stand taken by the proletariat (since it is the only force capable of preventing the conflict).

With this we come to thesis 3. If we agree that the crisis today is provoking increasingly severe social tensions and is inflicting ever-harder conditions on wide sectors of the class and forcing it to act, we must also emphasise that the first responses of the class have been under the almost complete control of trade-unionist and neo-Social Democratic organisations - i.e. of the forces of counter-revolution. In the majority of cases these forces succeed in imposing a nationalist content on the class struggle, exactly in line with the bellicose tendencies and preparations of the bourgeoisie for war. In other words, the crisis creates exceptionally severe conditions for the proletariat, wide sectors of which become prepared to act. But activity in itself can easily be diverted onto a conservative course, sometimes openly nationalistic, by the unions. (For example the recent struggles in the French and Italian steel industries, or the ports of northern Europe.) The unions are still in a position to operate on the fragmentary bases of the struggle and on the prevalent illusion among the working masses about the virtues of democracy and the efficacy of trade unionism. The present

signs, therefore, cannot yet be seen as examples of a "reawakening of the proletariat ... in its historical continuity as subject", but rather as the initial announcement of the possibility of such reawakening, realizable only when the present limits are overcome. And in this the revolutionary forces must play an essential role.

This difference of definition is important since it is strictly related to the principles bound up with the role of the revolutionary party and its organisation and not just to the interpretation of the present historical period as a whole. If it is true that the situation of the class in Western Europe is the key to a definitive victory of the communist revolution, it is not at all true that the explosion of class conflict in other parts of the world depends on the class in Western Europe. Undoubtedly a victory for the Revolution would turn out to be ephemeral if an active and functioning solidarity in the form of revolution in Europe were lacking. However, this does not mean that the first link to be broken in the capitalist chain must of necessity be in Europe. Neither does it mean that a passive class in Europe mechanically determines the passivity of the proletariat in other geopolitical regions. If this were the case our Mexican comrades would be justified in having a wait and see attitude and in following a policy of organisational disengagement from proletarian struggles in that country of Central America.

A final consideration on point 3(a). Once again there appears to be a tendency to absolutise phenomena. The formulation of the thesis doesn't take into account the dialectical dynamic of situations - without which communists cannot draw a complete picture or determine the overall tendency of a movement. This is not the place to repeat our analysis of the events of the late Sixties. However, it is a serious error to mistake a movement of the middle class, of petit bourgeois intellectuals making use of a specific propensity to act by the proletariat, for a resurgent movement of the working class as such - i.e. for a proletarian movement which is independent of its class enemy. This is not denying the existence of widespread workers' movements during this period. It only means identifying prevalent tendencies and recognising - from the firm standpoint of class autonomy - the predominantly petit-bourgeois direction and neo-social democratic character of these struggles. At that time we had not fully entered into the cyclical crisis of capitalist accumulation, which hits the proletariat hard and directly. Rather we were wit-

nessing the initial skirmishes, basically the outcome of capital restructuring its administrative apparatus and the upsetting of the post-war political, diplomatic and military equilibrium. This situation was to affect the petit bourgeoisie and push it into action; particularly its intellectual strata who - given the isolation of revolutionary political forces and given the widespread existence of social democracy and the influence of potentially new centres of imperialism (China) - placed themselves at the head of workers' movements and acted as stimuli to them. But this was still completely within the logic of social democracy and trade unionism.

What the Alptraum Collective calls "successive waves of offensive and retreat" of the proletariat, beginning from the 60s, were in reality the ups and downs of a completely economic struggle - i.e. a struggle within the framework of bargaining and negotiation between capital and labour. Every economic struggle, independently of the historical period in which it takes place, is potentially a class struggle, carries within it that is, the logic of the historic collision between the classes. But it's not for this reason that the struggles of the late 60s can be distinguished from previous ones or favourably compared to present movements - no matter how fragmented and 'dominated' these may be. The situation of capital today is different from that of 68 and so also is the objective possibility of today's movements which have a potential for development and growth beyond the boundaries revealed in the struggles of 68.

On the question of the party, the wording of thesis 4 side-steps the issue of the active and guiding role of the revolutionary party in workers' struggles and in the totality of the class's struggle (not only economic). It seems to us that the theses remain at a very general and abstract level on which we can reach perfect agreement, but as a definition of the role of the party they are inadequate - hence also as an active contribution towards its international constitution, no matter how much this is openly avowed. Thus, although identifiable as coming within the "marxist revolutionary camp", these theses have not begun to take account of those substantial differences which have already determined the political separation between our organisations and that of the ICC (see thesis 5). On the other hand, we warmly welcome thesis 5 which states a determination to discuss and co-ordinate work on an international scale on the basis of the only possible assumption: that this is part of a process towards the political and organisational homogenisation of revolutionaries

throughout the world.

We find ourselves in complete agreement with theses 7 and 8, at least at the general level they are formulated. The position of rejection of parliamentarism and trade unionism has long been our tradition. The general premise that they are instruments for the conservation of the capitalist mode of production is the necessary starting point for defining other aspects of the problem, including a line of action for revolutionaries to take when they fight against them. The comrades in the so-called internationalist milieu all know that the serious, substantial differences between our tendency and others really develop political implications when it comes to the issues dealt with in thesis 8 of the Mexicans.

Considered as it stands, this formulation of the comrades appears far too general. It tends to place on the same level two institutions of bourgeois society which actually have different origins and roles, although at the same time they both display an essentially conservative and counter-revolutionary function. The one, parliament, as an institution is a true child of the bourgeois state, guarantor of the unity of the social body around the organisation of bourgeois domination (i.e. the state). It is an expression of the political and ideological domination already reached by the bourgeoisie over the whole social collectivity - i.e. over all classes, strata and fractions of classes into which society is divided. Its task - given the acceptance of the rules of the game by the vast majority of society - is to define the particular legislative norms in which the administrative, social and political sectors of bourgeois society must operate.

The other, the trade union, was born as an expression of the discrepancy between the immediate interests of a class - the proletariat - from those of the bourgeois class. That is, it expresses the daily antagonism between the interests of labour and capital; its function is to negotiate demands of one class with (or against) the other. The trade union has never been, in itself, a revolutionary organisation, not even in 19th century mythology. Its task is, in its given capitalist context, the immediate defence of labour, as a variable component of capital, and therefore of the immediate interests of the workers over and against those of the bosses. However, with the narrowing of the limits of negotiations, with capital's co-optation of wage bargaining as a mechanism in the concentration

of capital, with the integration of the unions into the institutions of economic planning, as a third party (in addition to the state and bosses) - all phenomena inherent to the dynamic of decadent capitalism - unions have in effect been transformed into anti-worker institutions, independently of the social composition of their bases. This, of course, does not alter the fact that they are made up of workers, that, in other words, the union is an organisation supported by members of a class. Certainly the reason workers support them and are organised inside them is that they are dominated politically and ideologically by capital and by the forces which express the historic and immediate aims of capital. But this means that a) the revolution will pass ineluctably over the corpses of these institutions; b) the passage from the present situation of trade union domination to a revolutionary situation is through the political victory of the revolutionary programme; c) the revolutionary programme can only be put forward by agitation, propaganda and the political struggle of revolutionaries within the working class, wherever they find themselves and hence also at the rank and file level of the trade unions, if and when the life of the class preponderantly expresses itself through these.

Defining where and when it is necessary to act within the rank and file of the unions is a question of tactics. The theses of the Fifth Congress of the PCInt have defined the limits and criteria for solving the problem. It was precisely round this choice political problem that the differences between ourselves and other members of the first three International Conferences were delineated and deepened; not round the vague and insufficient general affirmation that the unions by now are inexorably and objectively counter-revolutionary organisations; nor round the truism that they cannot be considered a means of proletarian struggle.

We find ourselves in complete agreement with thesis 9 which apparently refers to certain leftist claims that they are allying with the progressive bourgeoisie of Central and South America, a position which also supports their politics of armed struggle (the Sandinista Front is a good example).

We have to admit that the exact meaning of theses 10 and 11 escapes us. It is true that the notion of monopoly state capital does not contain within it a concept of the "essential determinants" for the development of capitalism, because they do not alter either in a "progressive" or in a regressive sense. But this does not prevent state monopoly capital from being one of the forms in which capital

appears historically, with all its characteristic social relations. On the other hand, this is exactly what the comrades go on to argue in thesis 1 where they correctly conclude that "in the end the state, as an ideal collective capitalist, proves itself to be a real collective capitalist." So why is the notion of state monopoly capitalism to be rejected as "an ideological subterfuge"? We shall risk an interpretation for the reader hoping that the comrades will clarify the point for us. It is a common thing for much of the left bourgeoisie (from the supposedly 'new left' to the American ultranationalists, e.g. in Nicaragua again) to consider state monopoly capital as something separate and somehow distinctive in itself. Starting from this view of state monopoly capital there are those who portray it as an intermediate phase between capitalism and socialism (in the 'best' Stalinist tradition) in order to establish it as a primary objective of proletarian struggle. On the other hand, there are those who, from the standpoint of nationalist and populist politics, consider state monopoly capital a monster against whom it is possible to mobilise the proletariat and small and middle capital in a common front. The reference the Mexican comrades make (thesis 10) to alliances of the "left of capital" with "sectors of the private bourgeoisie" seems to confirm our interpretation of the comrades' determination to take up positions against these two different mystifications which are based on the same premise.

Such determination is necessary and correct in a revolutionary group, but we cannot share the view that once the concept of state monopoly capital is subjected to obvious mystifications it must be rejected as "ideological subterfuge". Since the theses provide us with the very key to understanding capitalism's dynamic through statification, we see it as useless and contradictory to reject the concept of a capital administered by a regime of a collective state capitalist monopoly - all the more so since the comrades have established as one of the essential positions of a revolutionary group "the recognition that in the so-called 'socialist' countries the capitalist mode of production dominates - in its specific form of state capitalism." (Thesis 5).

Apart from these blurred edges, what ought to be underlined in the comrades' theses is the validity of the substance of what they say in regard to the capitalist dynamic and its moments of crisis.

As we have already said, our comments on the theses of the CCA are intended to contribute towards

international clarification amongst revolutionaries, something the comrades are prepared for, judging from their reference to "organised intervention on an international scale" (thesis 5). For us the importance of the growing emergence of revolutionary tendencies and groups in areas of the world hitherto exclusively dominated by counter-revolutionary forces - Stalinist, Trotskyist, Maoist, Castroist, etc. - justifies the emphasis we have placed on the work of these comrades and on this first step in the discussion process. It is an important task to establish serious relations between communists of the European tradition and these new internationalists. The prospect towards which we are constantly moving is the reconstruction of the international Party of the proletariat. We are still a long way from this, but the march has finally begun. Slowly, and with extremely small nuclei, with thousands of problems of all shapes and sizes, something has begun and is moving. Awareness of this should act as a spur to comrades who for years have been struggling inside the working class of the 'peaceful' European democracies for the acceptance of revolutionary ideas and organisation. It is an inspiration to go forward with a renewed sense of commitment and real determination in order to create, in each respective national zone, the political and organisational foundations for a firmly rooted and powerful international party of the proletariat.

For the IBRP, PCInt: November 1984

INTRODUCTION

The theses presented here are the result of discussions which the Collective has developed during the last four years. For almost two years the Alptraum Collective was the backbone of the activity of the Mexican Party of the Proletariat (PMP). Thanks to this the PMP has developed some revolutionary positions, for example on anti-parliamentarism.

In the last two years (1982-84) the Collective has pursued its work of discussion and theoretical/political clarification strictly in the framework of the international revolutionary milieu.

Mexico D.F. March, 1984
Colectivo Comunista Alptraum

"The life of industry is transformed into a succession of periods of normal activity, prosperity and stagnation". Marx, Capital

dimension and must be seen as a classic crisis of over-accumulation where the industrial cycle has necessarily seen its period of prosperity followed by crisis and stagnation.

b) The contradictory nature and movement of capitalism is clear from the unfolding of the periodic cycle of industry and its final result: generalised crisis.

c) Being a crisis of over-accumulation, it first breaks out in the field of speculation and later reaches production, trade and the financial market. But speculation is only a temporary solution for capitalist over-accumulation. The disorganisation of production which follows speculation is an inevitable result of expansion during the preceding period of prosperity.

d) The scenario of the crisis is universal, because of the worldwide extension of capitalism and the intensification of its control over all branches of production in the world economy.

e) The crisis has a world dimension because its trajectory has led it to expand in a spiral from the developed countries (with a greater organic composition of capital) to include all the rest of the countries in the world capitalist system. The effects of the crisis are being intensely felt by the whole capitalist economy.

f) The crisis we are now living through is the result of the conflict between the enormous development of the productive forces (existing wealth) and the capitalist relations of production which entails the private appropriation of production. Thus we can see how the development of the productive forces has become an obstacle for capital and how the relations of capitalist production have become a barrier to the development of the productive labour force.

g) The development of the crisis reveals the contradictory nature of capitalist reality and the historically limited character of its relations of production within which the progressive development of social productive forces cannot be contained. Moments of crisis occur when capitalism is obliged to destroy a growing mass of productive forces thereby revealing its decadent nature.

h) According to this logic, capitalism is forced to periodically and violently destroy a growing mass of the social forces of production, including the proletariat. From this internal tendency emerges the necessity for wars to prolong its

existence as a whole. Historically, we have seen that every war is followed by a period of reconstruction.

2

a) With the exacerbation of the crisis the capitalist system established the conditions for the possibility of its own overthrow.

b) The progressive deepening of the crisis creates the conditions for the development of proletarian consciousness and its self-organisation. As a consequence capital tries to destroy the germ of this consciousness by integrating the proletariat everywhere into its ideology. In this way it reinforces nationalist ideology and marginal ideologies such as feminism, ecology, the peace movement, the homosexual movement, etc in order to fragment and disperse proletarian consciousness which in itself is all-embracing and international.

c) Capital knows that the only way out of the crisis of over-production is war and that to get to this point it must first of all destroy every trace of proletarian consciousness.

d) In the past fascism and anti-fascism were an effective way of integrating the proletariat into bourgeois ideology. Today it is the myth of the "Socialist bloc" against the "democratic Western world". The defence of state capitalism in Cuba, in Nicaragua, and of liberation movements in Guatemala, in El Salvador, etc. have a clear meaning: mobilisation of the world proletariat for the cause of one of the two rival capitalist blocs and for a Third World War.

3

a) From the 60s on there has been a resurgence of the revolutionary activity of the proletariat on a world scale. An international movement has erupted in the form of successive waves of offensive and retreat where the various national fractions of the proletariat struggle against the power of the world bourgeoisie.

b) The historic course of the present class struggle is determined by the balance of forces between capital and the proletariat in Western Europe. This is because the extension of the class struggle to the rest of the countries which make up world capitalism as a whole depends on the balance of forces in Europe.

c) With the defeat of the proletarian movement in

Poland in 1981, basically due to the mediating activity of the Solidarnosc union, a period of reflux began. This was soon superseded by the development of struggles in Holland and Belgium in 1983 and the recent movements in France, Britain and Germany.

d) Today we are living in a period characterised by the reawakening of the proletariat, in its unity and its historical continuity as subject. This involves the resurgence of communist groups as a moment in the development of its self-consciousness.

4

a) Organisations which do not recognise the revolutionary role of the proletariat cannot carry out the tasks which the historic movement of the class imposes on them.

b) Communist organisations must become theoretical/political bridges for transmitting and assimilating the experience and revolutionary heritage of the proletarian movement and thus move its towards its historic direction. The programme of these organisations will develop and synthesise the experience and historical heritage of the proletariat as a whole. In this way, the proletarian class principles will express the historical dimension of the proletarian movement and will synthesise its theoretical /political experience.

5

a) We recognise the existence of an international revolutionary Marxist milieu made up of revolutionary organisations (ICC, CWO, PCInt) which, despite their many weaknesses, support and defend the essential political principles of the proletarian struggle.

b) Communists are not outside the proletariat, but rather are its most lucid elements. Their task is not merely to encourage the organisation of the proletariat as a necessary moment of its own self-organisation, but to work to develop the self-consciousness of the proletariat. Communists embody the continuity of the historical struggle of the class in its highest moments, such as the Paris Commune, the Russian Revolution, the German Revolution, etc.

c) In our view, the central points which distinguish communists from the bourgeois camp will be:

- * the recognition of capitalist decadence;

- * the recognition of the working class as the subject of the revolution;
- * the rejection of unions (by keeping outside them);
- * the rejection of parliamentarism and every kind of electoral opposition;
- * the rejection of any kind of alliance with any sector of the bourgeoisie;
- * the rejection of popular fronts and national liberation movements;
- * the recognition that in the so-called 'socialist' countries the capitalist mode of production prevails in its specific form of state capitalism;
- * the recognition that the communist revolution will have a pre-eminently international character;
- * the recognition that socialism will succeed only through the abolition of capitalist relations of production and specifically with the abolition of wage labour;
- * the recognition of the need to forge the party of the proletariat which will have an international dimension.

d) From our point of view, with the acceleration of the class struggle, discussion among revolutionaries and their organised intervention at an international level are necessary and inevitable.

6

We consider that capitalism is decadent. Decadence means the decline of the specifically capitalist mode of production, wherein industrial capital dominates as a social relation of production.

The decadence of the system implies the accentuation of competition and the anarchy of specifically capitalist production, as well as the general sharpening of all contradictions - given that capitalism has attained its historical limits; i.e. the limits determined by its own development and its contradictory nature.

This is expressed in the periodic and increasingly violent confrontations between the productive forces and the relations of production. The law that explains the development of the capitalist system of production is also the basis for understanding its decadent nature. In our view, both the development and decline of the system rests on two essential determinants: one expressing its form in the general law of the fall in the rate of profit; the other - the content - is expressed in the formal and real subjugation of the labour process to capital.

The decadent nature of the capitalist system is thus expressed by the tendential fall in the rate of profit. The aim of the system is that capital

be allowed to form and grow without interruption. This implies a growing expansion of capital and a concomitant increase in the social productivity of labour which means, in turn, an accelerated development of the productive forces.

To the extent that this growth in capital occurs, its organic composition changes. Thus, there is an increase in the volume of the means of production and in production itself in relation to the value composition of capital. This brings about the gradual fall in the rate of profit because the variable part of capital, which produces surplus value, diminishes.

This is when the capitalist crisis opens up - when the accumulated capital is higher than the rate of profit it is capable of generating, or rather, when the growing organic composition does not correspond to a growing generation of value.

In this way, the over-accumulation of capital in relation to its ability to exploit labour leads the capitalist system to crisis. This crisis can be counter-balanced by capital accumulation itself through the different measures inherent in its accumulation process. One of these means is the increase in the mass of surplus value obtained from an increase in the total mass of capital employing a greater number of workers. Another way it can be counter-balanced is by the growing productivity of labour, implying an increase in the rate of exploitation obtained by the extraction of both relative and absolute surplus value. But these counter-tendencies cannot continue indefinitely since there comes a time when the number of workers can no longer be increased, when working hours no longer be prolonged and when socially necessary labour time can no longer be reduced because of natural and/or social limits. The development of the productive forces thus leads to an open contradiction with capitalist relations of production which, if it reached absolute limits would mean an absence of surplus value in relation to the accumulated mass of capital and its requirements for expansion. Its contradictory nature has brought capitalism to these limits and shows that it is its own internal obstacle to the progressive development of the productive forces.

We recognise the proletariat alone as the revolutionary subject. At this moment of irreversible decadence of the capitalist system (see thesis 6) the proletariat must break any ideological or political entente with capital (whether private or state capital). We consider that any perspec-

tive which starts from a national framework is condemned in advance to go over to capital which bases its whole existence on the fertile soil of the nation. Above all, the proletarian struggle must set out to break with every kind of national barrier.

All bourgeois tendencies and parties (of the right or left) line up around inter-classist positions (feminism, popular fronts, etc.) in order to fight against the proletariat.

The proletariat struggles against capital as a whole and ignores its various fractions and sectors. Even if its struggle is formally carried on in a national framework, its content is international.

8

We consider that parliaments and the unions are not means of struggle for the proletariat, either in this country or in any other, because these forms are used by the bourgeoisie to mediate proletarian struggles and integrate them. Parliaments and unions are a further capitalist mystification which strengthens its domination over the working class, alienating its revolutionary activity.

9

We consider that progressive bourgeois factions do not exist and that the strategy of the proletariat cannot envisage an alliance with any sector of the bourgeoisie, however 'progressive' it may appear. The struggle of the working class must be the work of the working class itself.

10

We consider that the notion of monopoly state capitalism does not provide a concept for explaining the essential determinants in the development of capitalism. It is rather another ideological subterfuge for the interpretation of capitalist reality which serves as the basis for the left of capital to justify its alliances with private sectors of the bourgeoisie. The growing intervention of the state in the economy only obeys the anarchy of capitalist production itself: it expresses the exacerbation of the contradictions of the capitalist system.

11

We consider that nationalisation or statification of the means of production, far from preparing the way for communism, only strengthens the domination of capital over wage labour.

In the case of statification of the banks and specifically that which occurred two years ago in Mexico, finance capital as a specific relation of production is not eliminated since its role in the reproduction process of capital continues.

Still less has social capital been eliminated since statification only changes juridical property by means of a mechanism which organises the circulation of capital but which means that it is still within the overall framework of capitalist relations of production. In this way, the social capital becomes the juridical owner of capital as one of its reproductive expressions: the capital that draws interest. The result of this movement is the depersonalisation of the function performed by finance capital within capitalist relations of production and its reproduction logic, thus preserving it at a higher level of development.

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In this way we note that capitalist relations of production take on a more abstract and impersonal character, revealing even more clearly the inherent fetishism about them. In the end, the state, as an ideal collective capitalist, proves itself to be a real collective capitalist by integrating banking and salaried personnel in general into a more abstract and alienated scheme of domination.

Statification is a means of guaranteeing the logic of the national and international capitalist reproduction process over and above any particular bourgeois faction. In this sense, we can state that the measures taken by the Mexican state have one main aim: to maintain and preserve the capitalist social configuration.

Mexico D.F. March 1984

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