

Internationalist Communist Review

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An analysis of class composition in the course of the crisis in Italy**

**Fascism and Anti-fascism:
The real Lessons of the Nazi
Seizure of Power in 1933**

A Brief History of the Fractions of the International Communist Left (from *Octobre*)

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Editorial	1
Where is the working class? An analysis of class composition in the course of the crisis in Italy	3
Fascism and Anti-fascism: The real Lessons of the Nazi Seizure of Power in 1933	19
Trotskyism and the Communist Left	28
A Brief History of the Fractions of the International Communist Left (from <i>Octobre</i>)	29
The Events in Spain - A Trotskyist Lesson (from <i>Octobre</i> 3)	32

Editorial

This year marks the seventieth anniversary of Lenin's death. It serves as a reminder not only of the distance of time that has passed since the working class last successfully overthrew the ruling class in any one country, but also of the long and difficult road which is still necessary before such another assault will be possible.

Lenin's own contributions cannot be ignored here. His insistence that "without revolutionary theory there can be no revolutionary practice" should be hung around the necks of all those who think that by expedients and tricks it is possible to advance the proletarian cause one iota. Lenin himself gave the classic example in the First World War. When it became clear to him that Social Democracy had betrayed the working class by dragooning it into imperialist war he did not join in the general humanitarian and pacifist swamp. Instead he called for the imperialist war to be turned into a civil war. If he had done only this we would still be saluting him today. But he went beyond accepting the ridicule and temporary isolation of his position in 1914-15. He also came up with a new analysis of the situation of world capitalism to show how the imperialist epoch was also the epoch of world war and proletarian revolution. It was the theory embodied in the Communist International set up by the Russian Communist Party in 1919, and which became a beacon for international revolutionaries to rally round in subsequent years.

Unfortunately the revolutionary character of those following years was to be short. The defeats of the proletariat in Hungary, Germany and elsewhere led to the isolation of the Soviet state and the very question of its survival meant the adoption of policies which gradually came into conflict with the idea of a world socialist revolution. By the time of Lenin's death the revolution was in full retreat, a process crowned by the official adoption of "socialism in one country" in 1926 and Russia's entry into the League of Nations, the "league of robber states" (Lenin).

After this "communism" was identified with the

Stalinism of the official soviet system and even three years after the collapse of the Soviet Union the capitalist media miss no opportunity to continue the comparison. And yet there were oppositions to the degeneration of the Comintern which attempted to keep the revolutionary kernel of Lenin's theory alive. The two most significant were undoubtedly that of Trotsky and that of our political ancestors in the Italian Communist Left. The Trotskyist movement has poured a barrel of bile and lies on the Fractions of the Communist Left as sectarian and abstract. To redress the balance and to provide a little insight into the unprincipled behaviour of Trotsky even at a time when the two tendencies were trying to find a common basis for their opposition to Stalinism we are publishing some texts from *Octobre*, one of the publications of the Fractions of the Communist Left in the 1930s. The first is a summary of the history of the Communist Left and its relations with the Trotskyists before 1938, the second demonstrates how the Trotskyists took the road of social democracy and ended up encouraging workers to take sides in the imperialist war in Spain, a fact which took them to the other side of the class barricades.

For social democracy, however, it was enough to say "defend the fatherland" for them to become embroiled in imperialist war. To mobilise workers in the West to a second imperialist massacre needed more than patriotism. The answer was anti-fascism. Today, as right-wing groups find fertile ground for their racist and nationalist poison the cry of "fascist" is being raised everywhere. But we would do well to ask "who is raising this alarm?" Anti-fascist magazines finaced by the state security services, small Trotskyist groups who continue to pretend that anti-fascism is the first step towards the overthrow of capitalism without ever examining the fact that fascism is just one form of bourgeois domination - the meaning of anti-fascism is the defence of democracy. And democracy is the quintessential form of the dictatorship of the capitalist class. It is to pose the revolutionary position on the issue of fascism that the article on the rise of Hitler was conceived. Its

major target is Trotsky since he alone provided the anti-fascists with their "proletarian credentials" so much so that the SWP have simply republished his writings on the issue as their contribution to the anti-fascist hysteria.

The bourgeoisie has no need of a fascist movement in the old sense to take advantage of the climate of despair and fear created by the economic crisis. Good old-fashioned nationalism seems to be doing a perfectly adequate job of genocide in the ex-Yugoslav and the old Russian border territories without the need to take on a fascist form. The so-called "peace dividend" which was supposed to be the payout for the end of the Cold War has failed to materialise as we and other revolutionaries predicted at the time. The same economic crisis which brought the old Soviet Union to its knees, the crisis of the end of the third cycle of capital accumulation continues. Everything the capitalists have tried to raise profitability has had no real success. Despite a thousand false sightings "the recovery" remains over the horizon. And will continue to do so. For, as we have maintained for the last twenty years, the only escape from this crisis of profitability are either war or revolution. At present neither looks particularly close. War in the local sense is always with us but a global war, the kind required by the accumulation needs of capitalism is also a long way off. The collapse of the USSR and the end of the post-war settlement means that a host of new or renewed conflicts are already with us. What is missing is the general realignment of the great powers which will be the prelude to war. The present manoeuvring over NATO and the paralysis of the European countries in the face of the Bosnian crisis are, however, due to a hesitation amongst the European powers as to the true nature of their real interests.

As to the question of revolution the economic crisis has forced on the capitalists the most widespread and radical restructuring this century, if not in the entire history of capitalism. After hesitating to attack a working class which had won a series of social demands in the 1950s and 1960s the bourgeoisie everywhere has been faced with no other option and throughout the eighties we saw a series of struggles of workers under attack and in retreat. The capitalists retained the upper hand because the crisis of profitability meant that they were prepared to abandon production rather than accept any limitations on their plans.

What has happened in the last twenty years does challenge revolutionaries to explain why a crisis that has left 30 millions in the OECD countries unemployed, which has seen declining living standards and is now seeing the dismantling of much of the welfare provision of the post-war capitalist world, has not produced a stronger revolutionary response from the working class. It

is this task which we address in the first article in this issue (and which will be followed up in the next *Internationalist Communist Review*). It is our contention that the old working class movement which related to a different epoch of capitalism is not capable of sustaining a revolutionary struggle. Heroic single factory fights or even fights along an entire sector are easily containable by the capitalist state as the experience of the last few years or even months shows. Our article on the restructuring of capitalism during the crisis tries to show the effect this restructuring has had on the working class and how the working class movement can and will revive.

The importance of the world proletariat to the process of emancipation of humanity has only been underlined by recent events. The desperate revolt of the Indian peoples of Chiapas state who have been made utterly destitute by the depredations of global capitalism will not worsen their conditions since malnutrition and genocide were an almost daily occurrence even before the Zapatista National Liberation Army came on the scene. The massacres that are now occurring as the Mexican Army takes bloody revenge on the defenceless only underlines the urgency of the working class everywhere being able to paralyse and overthrow these states which are nothing but janitors of imperialism. The issue is also not one of nationalism. There are no national solutions left. Only the destruction of the law of value on a world scale can liberate the peasant masses from malnutrition and semi-slavery. And only the world working class, as the collective producer class, remains capable of leading that fight. There is no immediate perspective of proletarian victory but our task is to fight for organised expressions of the working class everywhere who are linked to the communist programme - the sum of the historic lessons of the proletariat's struggles. This issue is another contribution to that programmatic work.

IBRP, January 1994

Where is the working class?

The Capital - Labour Relation in the Course of the Crisis in Italy

The article below first appeared in Prometeo 5, the review of the PCInt. (Battaglia Comunista) and is based on an analysis of Italian material and data. Nevertheless, given the appropriate statistical changes, the process under examination is essentially the same in all the advanced countries. It is therefore no accident that the article uses figures from Great Britain for the falling rate of profit and the rate of exploitation to contrast them with the growth of unemployment and the distribution of the labour force in the 'specific' Italian situation.

There is a general trend which is equally valid for the metropolitan countries as a whole as it is for Italy. Any differences which exist — and they certainly do exist — in terms of how radical the process is or its timescale can be attributed to differences in timing and methods adopted for industrial restructuring in the various countries. Great Britain, for example, initially chose — through Thatcher — to follow the United States and go the way of 'financialisation', or financial speculation. In terms of the fragmentation of the production process into ever-smaller and slimmed-down units it lags behind, though certainly not in terms of dismantling the process itself. (Coal is a case in point.) A follow-up article has already been published in Prometeo 6. This will be translated and published in ICR 13.

Over the last twenty years there have been significant changes in the capital/labour relationship in Italy which deserve analysis. However, the issue has either been systematically ignored or else grossly mystified by those who draw their profit from the existence of this relation of exploitation (the capitalists), and those who parasitically take their cut (politicians and union bureaucrats, as well as the usual petty bourgeoisie who today are more arrogant than ever). A detailed examination of what has happened, using Marxist method and analytical tools of enquiry, would require a voluminous book. Here we limit ourselves to the immediately useful: tracing the main lines of attack, the criteria to be used and the consequences to be drawn. This, in order to avoid mistakes in the political battle against the parasites mentioned above and to clarify the perspective of class recomposition around its revolutionary programme. We will therefore summarise in a few paragraphs work that in large part has already been developed, point by point, in the pages of Prometeo, in Battaglia Comunista and in our organisation's internal meetings and publications. We begin with the observation that, in the early

'70's, the economic crisis appeared in a capitalist economy which already operated on a global scale — both in the global operation of finance capital and in the division of labour. However, this was an economy still based on technological apparatus, levels of automation and the concomitant organisation of labour inherited from the post-war reconstruction period, even if these were being increasingly improved. This might seem banal. It is not, when we take into account that a true technological revolution (the microprocessor revolution) was to follow, and indeed is still in progress. This is having a very real impact on the composition of the class and on the relation between capital and labour, the subject of our analysis.

The Technical Revolution

Let us recall the general course of the crisis which first appeared in the greatest metropolitan centre of capital, the USA. The US reacted by devaluing the dollar, putting a protectionist tax on imports and declaring the inconvertibility of the dollar

against gold. It was an attempt to immediately face up to its internal crisis by offloading it onto its external partners, in particular Europe and Japan. Gold no longer played the part of universal equivalent in exchange. Henceforward the dollar was to be the universal means of payment, independently of its real content, and it is on this domination of the dollar that the USA's policies as an imperialist superpower have rested.

The others could do nothing but defend themselves and their economies by spasmodically trying to increase the productivity of labour and consequently the competitiveness of their goods.

The moment was favourable: electronics had for some time made the thermionic valve obsolete and had already enabled transistors to be widely used; integrated circuits had appeared and were already being miniaturised. In parallel with this, computer science too, after its "foundation" by Bell Corporation engineers in the already distant year of 1943¹, had already made giant steps. The big firms had already made provision for introducing computers into both administration and production. There were already those who were sceptical about the potential that was developing.

Thanks to the notable progress made [by the producers of miniaturised electronic circuits] we are able to produce independent, monolithic circuits, containing thousands, and sometimes even dozens of thousands of elementary circuits. Nevertheless, to offer equipment made in this way on the market means asking for a million dollars. To reduce the unitary cost of these sophisticated circuits to a commercially acceptable level, a massive demand would be necessary, or at least it is necessary to take steps to create the conditions so that such a demand of vast proportions will emerge. However, the more important, the more highly specialised its uses, the more limited the demand. This, then, is the dilemma.²

On the other hand, even the giant of computing, IBM, hadn't yet understood, in 1975, the importance of what was in the offing.

In March 1975 IBM publicly gave up on innovations envisaged in its FS (Future System) programme, by putting it back seven or eight years, because of a series of technological and economic problems. Rather than attempting its extraordinary technological innovations, the company decided to limit its activity to improving the existing large systems.³

Yet despite the scepticism of certain analysts and the erroneous calculations of a multinational like IBM, microprocessors - once they had been encapsulated in a square centimetre silicon chip - began to spread, both through the universe of machine

tools and in homes and offices in the guise of personal or home computers. It was the computing revolution. And we call it a revolution not because of excitement over the virtues of the computer, not because of all the talk about this in the '80's, but because the phenomenon shows all the characteristics of capitalism's great technological turns and a few more besides, completely peculiar to itself.

The Characteristics of the Latest Revolution

Technical innovation in electronics and computing and the previously unimaginable levels of automation of production processes which this allows, has had an enormous impact on the industries concerned. To the ingenuous and naïve they appear as the miraculous bearers of a new development and the creators of a world of new professions. In fact, new professions and new specialisations are emerging, linked both to the industrial world (from the design of hard- and software for automation and for the supply of office and domestic calculators) and to the world of services (new chains of shops, new services more or less directly linked to them). We are witnessing a relatively rapid change in the way of life of broad social strata in the socially advanced spheres. But immediately one of the peculiar, and less agreeable characteristics of this revolution becomes manifest, at least to those who know how to see it. Let us look at the two preceding great industrial revolutions: that of public railways and that of the private car.

The development of the railways meant the development of the extractive industries of coal and iron, of the steel industry and of engineering. The advent of the car as a private means of transport brought with it a further great development of the steel industry, and also the development of other industries, previously minor or even non-existent — one thinks of the rubber industry, the petrol industry (extraction, transport, distribution), the plastics industry, instrumentation and road building. Both these revolutions, like the latest one, modified life styles, the speed and means of communication, etc. (These are interesting aspects, but they are not relevant to our theme).

But the latest technological revolution appears to be shut in on itself. Its vehicle, and to a certain extent, immediate product (the electronic calculator), is composed of electronic circuits and other microcomponents supplied by four companies on a world scale. Although discs and diskettes have now entered millions of homes and offices, they have given work to nothing more than five or six factories (obviously all highly automated) which supply the world market. Certainly the associated development of telecommunications will (or

would) imply an almost complete reconstruction of the entire telephone network, with the generalised use of electronic exchanges to make connections and optical fibres for transmission. These are important changes, and they will have a great impact on civil society, which is witnessing the development of the global village for the bourgeoisie and the petty bourgeoisie and the further ghettoisation of vast strata of the proletariat and the marginalised. But, as for the kind of expansion of the productive base which accompanied previous great turning points, the balance of this last is negative.

In the face of the new extremely concentrated production, whole sections of production or of services disappear: the computer has made the typewriter vanish along with the mechanical adding machine and their supporting industries; it has rendered whole areas of work useless in almost all sections of production, together with all the instruments and materials which served these; it has replaced (or is replacing) an enormous number of occupations which earlier relied on the presence and activity of human beings (a single example: the use of remote controls, from railway lines to chemical plants).

Other great innovations, although they made some production disappear, also stimulated much more, with a consequent expansion of the productive base, of employment and of the quantity of goods produced. The microprocessor revolution is working in the opposite direction: while it is making some sections of production disappear and is dramatically altering the size of others, it is creating less new production, with a lower content of living labour, it is contributing to the reduction of the use of living labour both in the productive sectors and in the administrative and commercial services.

A further characteristic of the present microprocessor revolution, as opposed to its predecessors, is that it is coinciding with the crisis phase in the accumulation cycle, with the fall in the rate of profit and the tendential restriction of the market. The microprocessor revolution, therefore, has indeed resulted in a large increase in productivity and hence in the competitiveness of the goods produced in the advanced metropolises, but it has not contributed at all (rather the contrary) to the widening of the productive base and of the market, to the recovery, to the escape, that is, from the very crisis of the cycle of accumulation. This is staring in the face of all those who said that restructuring, the development of new jobs and professions in connection with it, would get Italy (and the other countries!) out of the crisis. It is also something to ponder for those who believe that at all times and in every manner the technological innovation brought by capitalism is the instrument of progress, development, of the wellbeing of humanity.

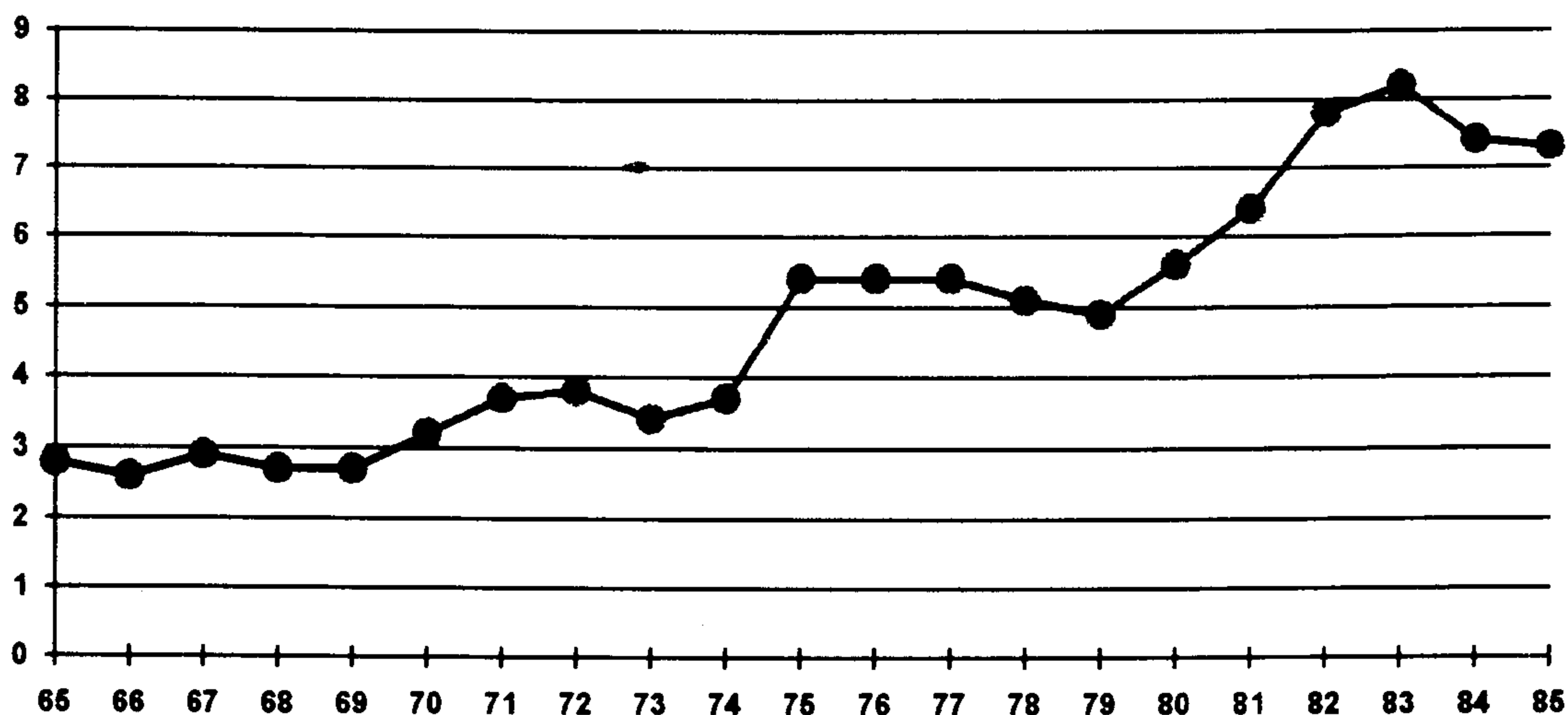
There is a certain truth (idealist illusions aside) in what the following writer says:

Either we let ourselves be submerged in a sea of information technology and not just at work, then humanity itself will be nothing but the robots of our electronic computers. Or else we will offload onto these machines all the thankless, repetitive, automatic and mechanisable tasks and make of our mechanical slaves, those perfect manipulators of information, the instruments for the flowering of the human essence.⁴

Restructuring and Employment

Nevertheless, despite the scepticism among bourgeois intellectuals, in the first half of the '70's. at

Graph 1 Unemployment trends in the 7 most developed OECD countries (USA, Japan, France Germany, UK, Italy and Canada)

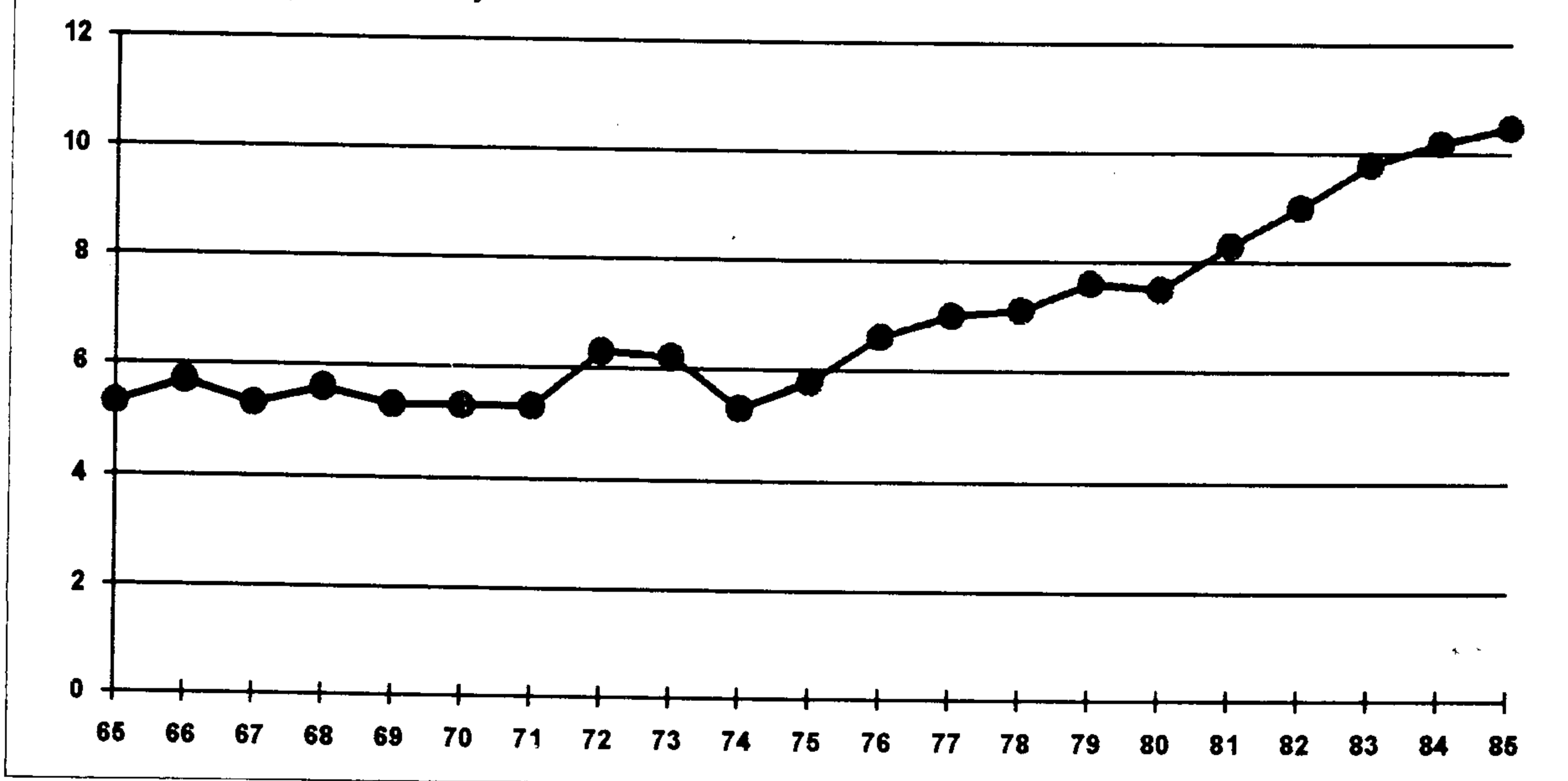


the same time as the so-called oil crisis of 1973, there was the beginning of a powerful process of industrial restructuring, which affected all European countries including Italy. Evidence of this includes legislation for the transfer of large sums from the state to companies, data extrapolated from a series of balance sheets for certain firms and the progress of the production and sales of new machinery and the instrumentation relating to it.

The first effect of restructuring, which was immediately perceptible, was the increase in unemployment. This is no longer conjunctural, but has proven itself to be a tendency. The graphs which

exploitation of wage labour and it is therefore represented by what we call the rate of exploitation, which is the ratio between the surplus value produced and the variable capital that produced it (s/v). It would be interesting to concretely measure the trend in the rate of exploitation, of productivity, in the Italy of the last twenty years, and in the terms appropriate to the critique of political economy. We would be delighted if someone attempted what is an extremely difficult task in Italy. For us it is virtually impossible, simply because we do not have access (nor does the Italian bourgeoisie) to the ordered collections of empirical and statistical data which would make the calculations possible. As we have already

Graph 2 Unemployment in Italy



we are using here have been created by us, using the data provided by the OECD,⁵ just as the OECD supplied it, i.e. discounting the enormous approximations (differences in national methods of surveying, dubious criteria used for surveying and in the method of calculation). We are not relying on the naked figures as such, but rather on the overall tendencies they reveal. Since the approximations and errors in the data will be repeated from year to year we can assume these tendencies indicate a real trend.

Restructuring and Productivity

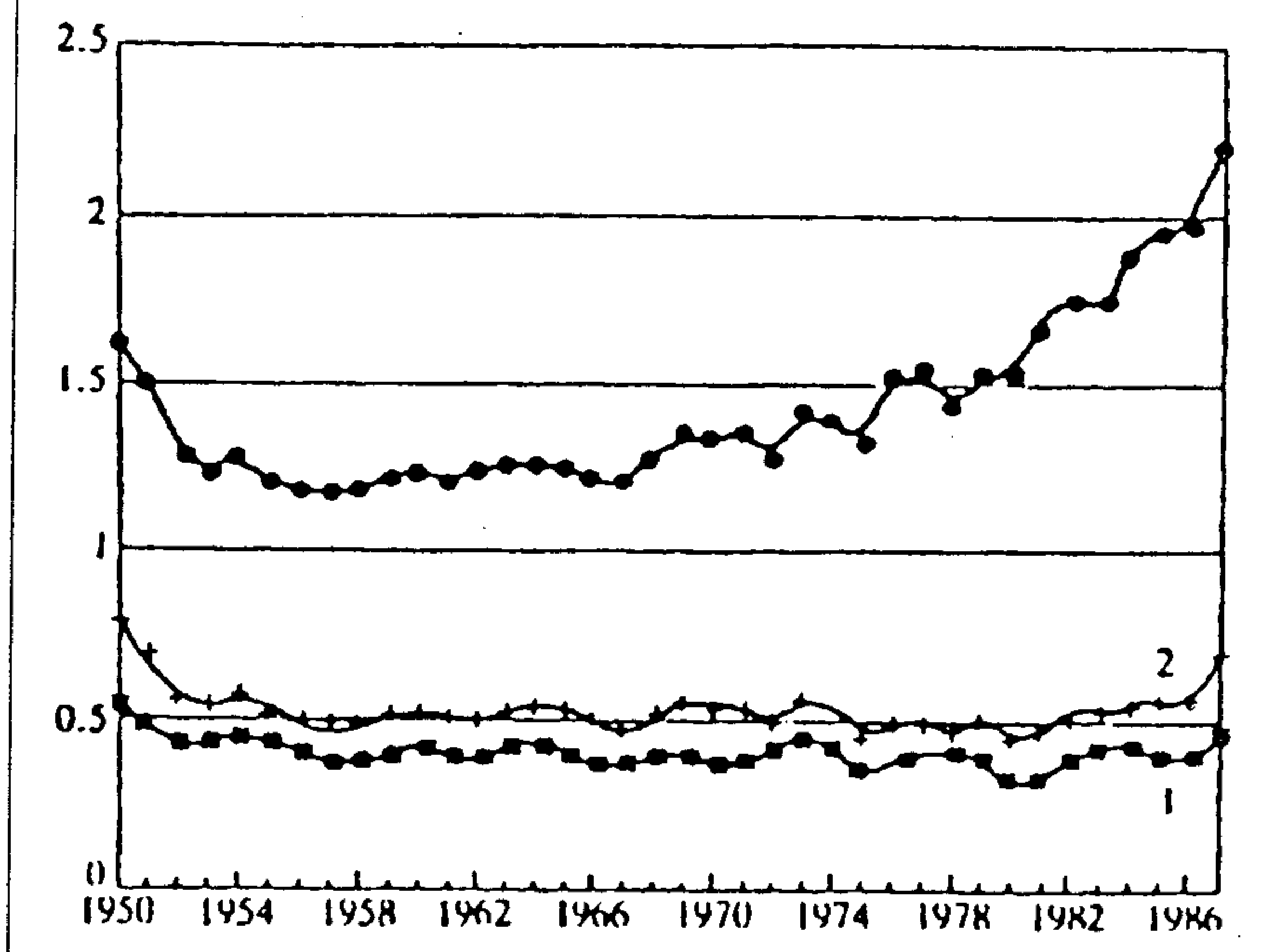
Another result, which was really the aim of the system or rather of the capitalists, was the increase in productivity. Productivity is a term very dear to the capitalists. It is ceaselessly pursued and it is the basis for every firm realising its final goal: making the greatest possible amount of profit. Capitalists and their ideologues express and compute it in various ways: value added by employee, the number of products per employee per year (or per day or per hour), ... For Marxists, the productivity of labour measures the degree of

said, however, the phenomena which the crisis has given rise to are substantially similar in all the advanced metropolises and almost completely interchangeable across Europe.

For this reason, graph 3 on page 6 (taken from an interesting study by Alan Freeman)⁶ will be sufficiently meaningful, dealing as it does with the rate of exploitation in Great Britain between 1950 and 1986 (upper curve, which is curve 3). It might be worth noting that curve 1 represents the trend in the ratio between profits and wages as reported in the British national accounts. Curve 2 represents the same ratio corrected to take account of various taxes and benefits. Curve 3 represents what really interests us - the ratio between wages and surplus value in the productive sector alone, that is, removing the mystifying influence that unproductive labour exercises on bourgeois economic science. It is the unavailability of certain figures and the unreliability of others that makes analogous work in Italy almost impossible.

The sudden rise in the rate of exploitation starting in 1972 is obvious and thus its strict correlation

Graph 3 Trends in UK Exploitation Rates



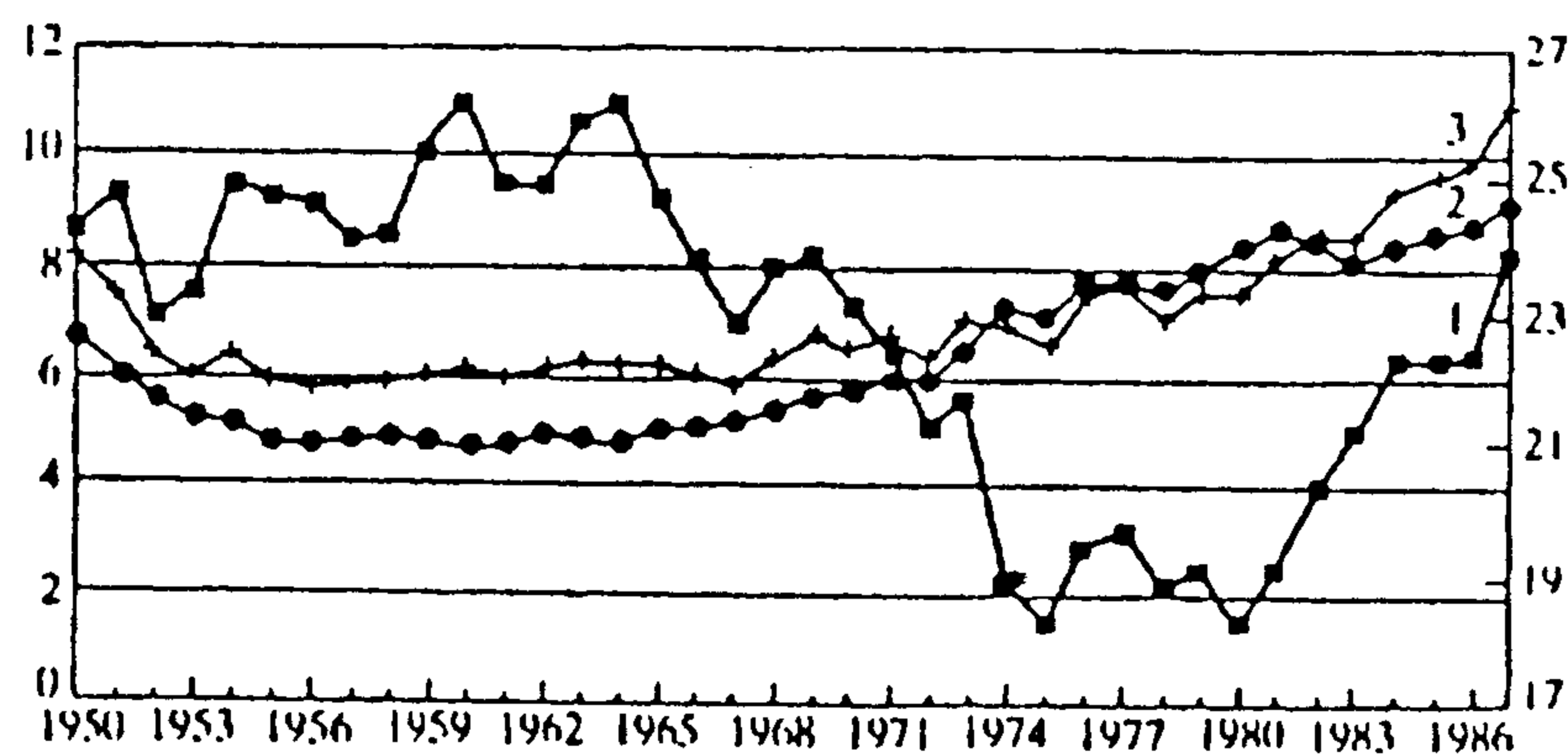
with the process of industrial restructuring launched in that year. We will not discuss here the link between the increase in the rate of exploitation and the increase in the organic composition of capital with the fall in the rate of profit. (For this, we recommend the article *Capitale produttività e saggio di profitto* in *Prometeo 2*.) Here we are concerned to observe the simultaneous rise in the rate of exploitation and in unemployment. Capital is seeking to counteract the fall in the profit rate $[s/(c+v)]$ — illustrated by graph 4 — by lowering v while being forced to increase c .

geoisie have accumulated sufficient experience to know that for technological restructuring to have some chance of success, social peace is necessary. They knew that it was necessary to activate and sustain sufficient social shock-absorbers, at least insofar as was possible. Every advanced country has therefore followed the same skilful path: attacking variable capital and, at the same time, putting in place the measures necessary to contain the fall in family income and overall living standards. The forms, the tools adopted were diverse, but the substance is identical.

In Italy the principal tool was the *cassa integrazione*⁷ (and it still is, although with a few more difficulties). Alongside this there was the possibility of adding to official income from secondary activities in the "black economy". This is

easier the greater the spread of income, or, more correctly, of the three forms in which surplus value circulates (industrial profit, revenue, interest). The tertiary sector's great development — far from being the new basis for capital's valorisation as the bourgeoisie's ideologues and a few crypto-catholics in revolutionary dress like Antonio Negri believe or pretend to believe⁸ — reveals precisely the growth in society of those activities and those essentially parasitic strata who take their considerable share from the surplus value produced elsewhere and in a different fashion.

Graph 4 Rates of profit (curve 1), organic composition of capital (curve 2) and rates of exploitation (curve 3) increased in value by a factor of 5, in UK.



Total variable capital is being reduced through the double manoeuvre of redundancies and the simultaneous freezing or cutting of real wages.

Social Countermeasures

An attack on employment of this weight risked provoking social disorders which would be difficult to control. The leading centres of the bour-

state in the form of government bonds.

All European countries, and Italy in particular, have seen a growth in the public debt throughout the 20 years that we are considering, at first imperceptibly, and then ever more dramatically, up to the present entry into a spiral, in which the state can only pay the interest on the previously contracted debt by adding to its total debt with new

These are activities which "create" income, not value, and for the same reason do not require accumulation or considerable reinvestments, etc. Their "profit" (only such by analogy with the relation between boss and employee) is destined for the consumption and private savings of the recipients. Throngs of lawyers, business experts, advertisers, consultants, dispose of elevated incomes — which may return to circulation in society, still in the form of income and partly going to sustain those in the *cassa integrazione*, the unemployed, strata more or less marginalised in society — or they may return to the

issues. Graph 5 illustrates this phenomenon clearly.

It would be interesting to reconstruct the trend in the quantitative relations between the various uses of the public debt, by examining the national accounts and those of public administration and in particular of the transfers from the state to companies, to the credit agencies and insurers. This would reveal the extent by which the overall administrator of capital (the state) is, on the one hand, helping the restructuring and, on the other, mitigating its heavy social costs. As the *Censis* puts it:

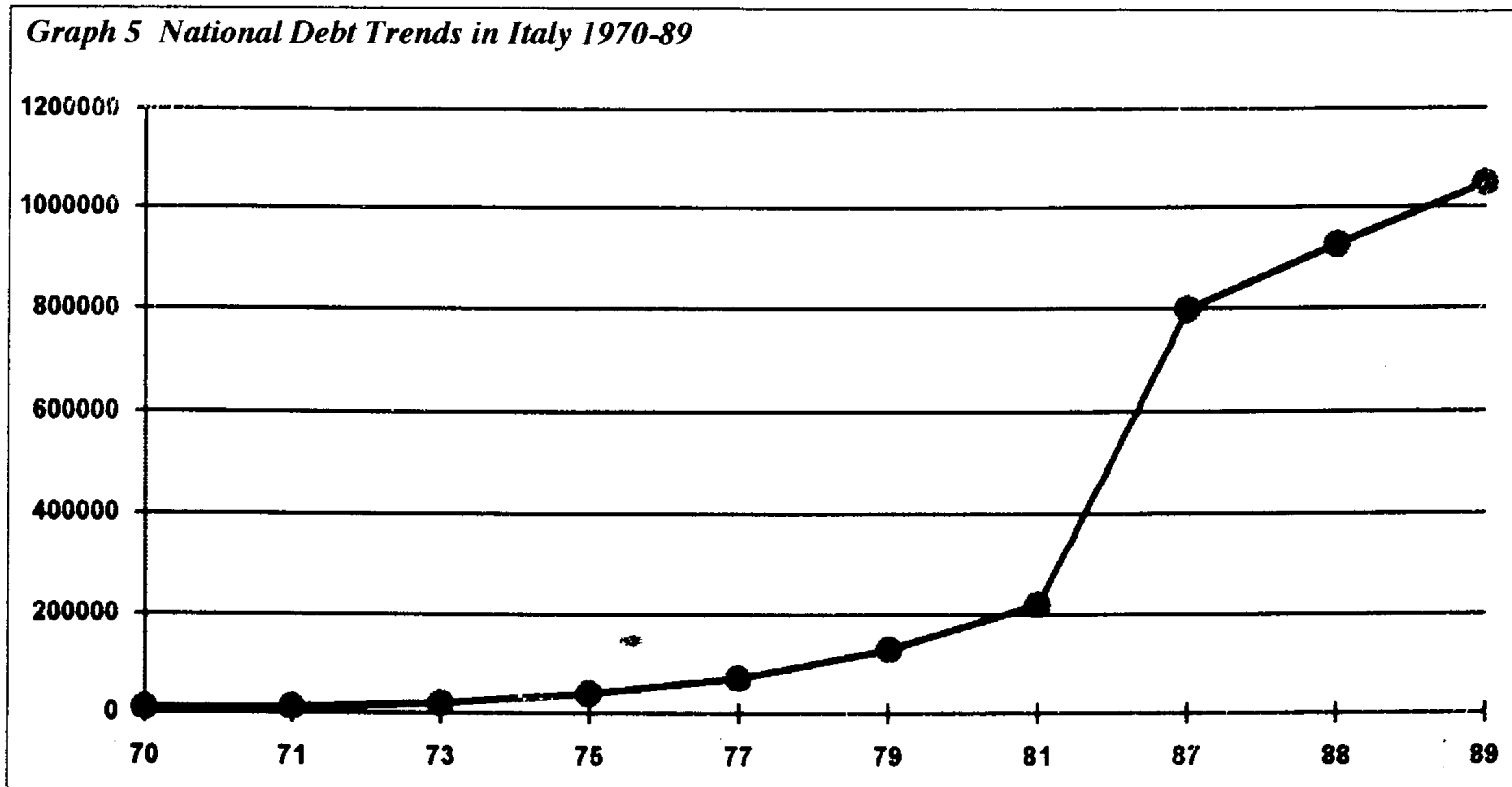
The cassa integrazione (largely, the state), through the extraordinary interventions created to sustain companies in conditions of structural crisis, has, without doubt, favoured a process of restructuring aimed at acquiring higher levels of productivity and competitiveness with the noted positive effects on our economy.⁹

The Social State?

Here we need to make something clear. When we talk about the state as the overall administrator of capital we do not mean that famous 'social state' which is so much talked of, both by those who want to cut it down to size and those who want to defend it or renew it. In reality there is no social,

conservative ideology and programme which this implies.¹⁰ Here we will only observe that the state is restricted to administering the part of surplus value and of wages that it raises fiscally and the part of indirect wages which it receives from the capitalists in its garb as central administrator. These funds are used, when required, for the services and functions necessary to ensure the reproduction of labour power in the conditions of its maximum effectiveness for the valorisation of capital. What used to be called the social state was the state's administration of indirect wages and the part of direct wages which it raised fiscally in order to return them in the form of services, and not even completely, to those entitled. In fact, it was incomplete because it also used the wages of proletarians for the benefit of other strata in society, even of the exploiters. This is the case with social security and health provision, which were and are utilised by business people, artisans and farmers, with different contributions but with the same service. Social state because it socially distributes funds? Yes, but in large part these are part of workers' wages, part of v , distributed to others.

The proletariat has no interest in defending this social state. It would be in proletarian interests to defend its own living conditions and therefore the services which are being wiped out for it, despite having paid for them already and still having to pay for them now. During this battle it would be



or democratic, state which can be contrasted with an antidemocratic and antisocial state. There exists only the bourgeoisie's state which administers society and its economy, as it likes and how it can, but always within the requirements of the capitalist mode of production and the relation between capital and labour.

We have demonstrated elsewhere the falsity of the concept of the social state and denounced the

in the interest of the proletariat to recognise the true nature of the bourgeois state as the instrument of the domination of capital, the first obstacle to overthrow on the road to its own emancipation.

Changes in the Structure of Industry

Let's return to our central theme by observing

these contradictory and typical characteristics:

— The state, therefore, sustains the restructuring to “get Italy out of the crisis” through direct transfers to companies and various interventions to support workers’ incomes. The first of these was made possible through a small indebtedness propping up the state’s balances; but an increase in indebtedness was then necessary;

— Neither Italy, nor the other countries, really escaped the crisis. The indebtedness of the state proceeded to the present point of no return.

Meanwhile, precisely because the basic cause of the crisis is not overcome (and cannot be), another characteristic of crisis is being confirmed. The fall in the rate of profit — which we Marxists locate in the ratio $s/(c+v)$, where s is surplus value — is leading small industry (small in terms of size, financial means and political power over finance capital) to see a large reduction in its “net profit”, i.e. the portion of industrial profit which remains after the portions taken by interest (paid to the banks) and rents, etc. (paid to the owners of land and to the multiplicity of services), have been taken from surplus value. The “financialising” process of capital also implies a growing disequilibrium in the division of surplus value between industrial profit and interest to the advantage of interest, and, obviously, this happens all the more in the crisis periods of the cycle of accumulation. What better brake on investments and the dynamism of the inventive, fantastic Italian entrepreneurs?

Calculations done by some bosses’ associations estimate the average return on their investments as between 5% and 7%. Where is the small entrepreneur who doesn’t judge it more profitable to “invest” his own liquid billion lire in government bonds at 10% rather than buy new machines and plant and put themselves deeper in debt by leasing? In fact, small entrepreneurs, on whom many respected economists and economic journalists have wasted many words and dreams, are becoming extinct. Superficially, this is in contradiction to the increase in public companies and small firms, as shown by the increase from 702,000 local industrial units in 1971 to 1,005,000 in 1981 (source: *Istat dei censimenti*). In reality, we have witnessed a tumult of closures, fusions and split-

ting up of companies.

As well as real closures, with the employees being made redundant, we have seen fiscal closures, with the shutdown of a company and the suspension of its activity (once again with redundancies) followed by the resumption of trade, under a new name and ownership, generally that of another, larger company. Amalgamations of companies not registered by *Istat*, but by industrial and artisan Chambers of Commerce, to form new companies which control their predecessors, have been and still are commonplace. Finally, the splitting up of the activity of a firm amongst various specially created ‘decentralised’ companies contributes to the increase in the “local industrial units”, and hides from the eyes of those who are unable to see (or read the true data) the real stagnation and narrowing of the productive base. For instance, in a company which produces bolts and small metal parts there are several productive departments as well as an internal administrative apparatus: a personnel and sales department. If the productive departments are even minimally differentiable in terms of their products and the machines used it is quite easy to hypothesise the splitting up of production between two or more firms. Once this is done, it is even easier and more useful to hive off the sales department to a further company, specialising in sales. Now, administrative and fiscal convenience is converging with a political convenience which is directly antiproletarian and turning this legal and theoretical possibility into reality over a wide range of sectors. Tables 1 and 2 illustrate clearly the disproportion between the growth in the number of productive units and in the number of employees already obvious between ’71 and ’81 in a number of individual sectors and over the whole of manufacturing industry.

Other data which could have been taken into consideration are those relating to the formation, dissolution and amalgamation of companies in various sectors. However, we do not intend boring the reader with these.

The Fragmentation of the Class

The attack on wages and employment will succeed all the more easily, the more the working

Table 1 — Industrial Units by number of employees in the textile, paper and publishing, and rubber and plastics sectors — 1971 and 1981

Units	Textiles		Paper/ Publishing		Rubber/ Plastics	
	1971	1981	1971	1981	1971	1981
≤2	33239	3663	5787	10045	6031	8725
10-19	3311	4996	1984	3096	1157	2182
20-50	2445	2444	1202	1217	804	1078
500-1000	87	49	30	26	20	19

Table 2 — Units, employees and employees per unit in the whole of manufacturing industry, 1971 and 1981, and percentage changes

	Units	Workers	Workers per Unit
1971	631600	5305435	8.4
1981	911398	6115038	6.7
% increase	4.3	15.7	

class, the object of this attack, is fragmented. This is true both on the national scale, in the overall relation between capital and labour, and in the relation between the employer and employees of a single enterprise. The experience of two centuries has now taught the most obtuse of the bourgeoisie that it is easier to control a few tens of workers and employees than it is to manage several hundreds or even thousands of employees, concentrated in the same place of work, employed under the same contractual conditions, capable of rising collectively even against the most commonplace general contract. If, despite this lesson, capital was unable to avoid great concentrations of workers in the past, this was because this constituted one of the conditions for the initial development of the concentration of capital and technology.

With the drawing to a close of the third cycle of accumulation and the search for increased productivity which has coincided with the microprocessor revolution, a new period has opened up in which a concentrated workforce has become less important. Consequently it has been to a certain extent made possible, and to certain extent made necessary, to move to the fragmentation of the productive process and to isolate this from the activities of sales and services. The concept of flexibility of production is triumphant in business ideology (and it has immediately been transmitted to the union), along with the idea that one must adapt oneself to the market demand. On a global level this was contracting but in the metropolises, where demand was duly stimulated, it led to marketing - the science of market investigation and, at the same time, stimulation - an infinity of segmenting and differentiating of the target to which production should be dedicated. The smaller the firm, or rather the productive unit, the easier it will be to adapt it to a demand changing in its quantity, quality, or even type of product. Small matter that in the meantime the overall demand fell, that growing strata of the population were marginalised by triumphant consumerism throughout the '80's. The important thing is to produce and sell some rubbish or other which shrewd market surveys reveal to be saleable or which marketing action made saleable.

Tertiarisation

Advertising and all the services connected to it are growing, and with them the part of surplus value

which is transformed into *faux frais* of production, into the income of those petty bourgeois strata we discussed above. To what extent? By 147.5% between 1980 and 1989, to 7301 billion lire (£3 billion) in 1989 (57,425 billion lire (£24.5 billion) in Europe).¹¹ Hence, capital's servants and parasites are prospering and some are talking about the tertiarisation of society, about post-industrial society, while others, in recognising the end of the mass worker, mistake this phenomenon for a widening of the ambit for the valorisation of capital to the world of services¹².

The most obvious effects of all this are visible to everyone: the shrinking of the number of "workers and their dependents", which, according to the data of the *Censis Report*, have reduced from 9,656,000 in 1980 to 8,161,000 in 1989. Those employed in production as manual workers dropped in the last decade by 15.5%, while the number of "managers and white collar workers" grew by 29.1%. Oh, the power of Italian statistics! White collar workers are counted together with the managers, and among the white collar workers there is everybody, from accountants to technicians in white coats working in quality control, to someone working in an automated warehouse. Moreover, the surveys are conducted on the basis of the declarations of those interviewed and so on the basis of their feelings and how they think of themselves. The *Censis* states:

*It is to be presumed that the intensive development of the tertiary sector has on the one hand increased the component of employment constituted by self-employed workers and, on the other, caused the reduction in demand for particular occupational categories of employed labour.*¹³

So, there is a change in demand for the occupations which predominated previously because others have become necessary in the new period opened by the profound restructuring.

Disaggregation

These new "occupations", opportunistically lumped together with white collar workers by Italian statistical science, who, in their turn, are lumped together with management, are really the proletarians, with all the characteristics which will always hold for proletarians. They do not own capital, but labour power which is sold to capital-

ists in exchange for wages; they are present in large numbers on the market, to such an extent that they can be replaced and interchanged; they ensure the large scale reproduction of labour power, with its specific characteristics. Here, it does not matter whether the acquisition and use of labour power occurs within the framework of the valorisation of overall capital, the productive framework, or not. In bourgeois capitalist society, all working activities are subsumed under the relation of capitalist work. In unproductive sectors (commerce and a large part of services), labour power "valorises" the individual capital, even if this is in reality constituted by a portion of surplus value produced elsewhere and appropriated by the firm's boss in the form of revenue. Thus, if tertiarisation has reduced the quantity of living labour engaged in production, it has not for this reason quantitatively reduced the proletariat and annulled the typical class relations of the capitalist mode of production. Rather, what is evident is the fact that a smaller number of producers produce the wealth on which the whole of the metropolitan social formation is founded.

There remains the not insignificant fact of a fragmentation of the great productive concentrations and a change in the internal relationships of the proletariat between the directly productive strata and those linked to the unproductive sectors of capital. These are today, in Italy too, much more numerous than they were yesterday, and certainly more than prior to yesterday. It is nevertheless difficult to quantify the numerical relationships between the various components of the proletarian class on the basis of the *Istat* surveys, which in the totally idiotic and useless fashion of this bourgeois "science", divide labour power between...employed and self-employed.¹⁴

This change in the numerical relation between the various components of the proletariat was immediately utilised on the ideological terrain by the bourgeoisie and its media of the left, right and centre to shout and prate on with impunity about the attenuation, or even the end, of the division of society into classes. In this campaign the bourgeoisie found its most valuable allies in those left political forces which, as a result of the proletariat's historical defeat between the two World Wars, still function as ideological and political reference points for the working class: substantially the PCI and the unions linked to it.

Workers are therefore seeing themselves dispersed and their numbers reduced, the growth of the tertiary sector flaunted in front of them as a process which marginalises them, while the union appears to be doing everything but defend the centrality of the workers' question and limits itself to making itself the interpreter of the needs of "Italy PLC", only modifying when and how it can, that is, very

sporadically, the most dramatic effects of restructuring. Whilst the revolutionary advance guard remained almost totally isolated, the PCI complemented the material blows delivered by capital with the relatively easy game of mentally and ideologically disarming workers. One of the great tragedies of our epoch is precisely this: while capital's attacks on workers in production continue and increase, the workers themselves are progressively losing their faith in their capacity for collective defence, to the point of losing their very consciousness of their own class identity. As for the new strata of the proletariat, neither the objective conditions nor the subjective ones, the political ones, exist for them to recognise themselves as proletarians and come to the rescue. There is no absence of struggles even amongst these strata, although they are rare and isolated. However, there is an absence of sufficient material pressure and an adequate counter-campaign to enable them to recognise in such a dislocated proletarian whole the affinity with their own struggles, the identity of the enemy and the possibility of reconstructing the class force.

The material pressures are absent, as we have seen, because the rapid and complicated circulation of revenue allows the containment of marginalised strata and the attack on the material conditions of families to be limited. The political campaign against the bourgeoisie is absent because there is no sufficiently equipped force sufficiently rooted in the class itself. The primary overall result is the material and subjective disaggregation of the proletariat, its temporary but effective annihilation. The microprocessor revolution has, however, another more profound impact on the composition of the working class. Something which the new legislation on the labour market, which is being worked out while we write, is intended to codify.

Characteristics of the New Labour Process

The new machines are not just quicker and more automated. Their greater automation carries with it a greater alienation of the relation between workers and the means of production in the work process. Let's read again what Marx had to say on mechanisation:

In no way does the machine appear as the individual worker's means of labour. Its distinguishing characteristic is not in the least, as with the means of labour, to transmit the workers's activity to the object; this activity, rather, is posited in such a way that it merely transmits the machine's work, the machine's action on to the raw material - supervises it and guards against interruptions. Not as with

*the instrument, which the worker animates and makes into his organ with his skill and strength, and whose handling therefore depends on his virtuosity. Rather, it is the machine which possesses skill and strength in place of the worker, is itself the virtuoso, with a soul of its own in the mechanical laws acting through it; and it consumes coal, oil etc. (matières instrumentales), just as the worker consumes food, to keep up its perpetual motion.*¹⁵

The microprocessor revolution with its extreme automation of the entire production process not only leads to the maximum expression of this domination of the machine over man, as recognised by Marx a century and a half ago; now it is the very substance of this domination that is completing a qualitative leap. Even under the production line system workers' activity presupposed and carried with itself the consciousness of the technical relation between their work and the mechanical process, no matter how automatic the machine. In factories automated by the microprocessor even these skills are no longer necessary. Here the production process is incomprehensible to workers, whereas before they at least understood a fragment of their tasks. This is despite all the chattering about the new professionalism which deafened the class throughout the '80's!¹⁹ The production process is no longer directly monitored by workers, or any other human being, even the foreman working according to a set of rules and various commands. The machine itself commands and controls, according to the program that it is executing. All its tools and the rhythm of their operation, their replacement when necessary are determined by the program and in many cases it carries out the diagnosis of the whole system, making interventions for self-maintenance (from lubrication to various adjustments). All this has had immediate repercussions on the organisation of work, even before the bosses thought of codifying it and managing it for their own convenience, that is, even before they began to theorise about it. The first outcome is the growing uselessness of production line work based on individual tasks within collective work. Now it is up to the work group - which combines those who run the machines and those who set them up and maintain them - to represent the working unit in the productive process. The reality of the new productive combinations precedes the theory of the "new organisation of work" which is to supersede the now useless "scientific organisation of work" of Taylorism (see below).

The Revolution in Occupations

Within work groups like this the role of the machine operator has changed. At this level qualifications are no longer even minimally necessary;

one job is equivalent to another and none requires more than the briefest period of training, which would be better described as adaptation. High mobility between jobs within a firm and between firms was made possible by the nature of the work even before it was requested by the bosses. At the level of the machine operator qualifications are disappearing, the necessity for a classical apprenticeship is vanishing, and the flexibility of workers is being praised. Within the totality of the employees of a firm there has also been a change in the numerical relationship between different groups: between those employed in the operation of the machines, that is, in serving the machines, and those who prepare them for the job ("programmers", workers in the control room and in command of the system), see to their maintenance and prepare and plan the productive process.

In addition there are two other aspects worth mentioning. One is the transfer of a number of tasks which previously were carried out by the machine operators to the preparation personnel. The other is a closer cooperation between research, the preparation of production and the factory.

All these are phenomena in the real world which are no longer mere tendencies and - for the reasons seen above - firms with organisation scarcely more complex than that of a small artisan venture have split up the activity of their various departments.

In fact, a new hierarchical order is establishing itself within the structure of the overall work group. The hierarchy which linked the specialised worker to qualifications and the nonspecialised is disappearing. Now the entire group of machine operators, reduced to occupations which are emptied of all skilled content, finds itself hierarchically below other, often new, occupations in various sections of production where there is still a scrap of specialist knowledge required outside that of top management. In other words, the sort of relationship between specialised and general workers on the production line is apparently reproduced in the relation between the production group and the preparation group in the computerised factory, but there is a rather more marked distinction between the two components. The information supplied by the sphere of preparation for the operators is no more than instructions for starting the functioning of the means of production, whereas the information flowing from immediate production towards the personnel in preparation and control enables them to have an exact representation of the production process and its functioning. Here, in fact, is the distinction which is the basis of vile speculation on the boss-union front, between those who have or might have "professionalism" and those who are in reality

excluded from it.

The operatives sphere, the sphere of the work which in the traditional factory was (and still is, where this system still survives) of a manual type, is now made up of workers who are completely deskilled, and therefore can be easily and rapidly replaced. The difference between manually feeding a machine tailoring line and manually, or with the help of particular equipment, feeding a line for automatic lathing, which in its turn feeds an assembly line, lies solely in the quality, the form and the volume of what must be loaded onto the system. The same is true for the "manual" attachment of specific parts or special panels on an assembly line, the application of a measuring instrument which is automatically premounted on some apparatus or other, or the checking and possible transfer by compressed air of semi-worked materials from an inspection system to a finishing system, if and when the diversity of the rhythms and operating speeds allows of such checking. The operators can pass from one occupation to another without great time for apprenticeship or...professionalising. It is this type of labour power which plays a large role in the reform of the labour market which is being prepared, and the particulars of which we will examine within the overall framework.

The Intervention of the Law

Here we will limit ourselves to describing the contours of the framework within which the paragraphs of the reform law should be considered.

In broad outline, this is moving towards making conditions more precarious for those strata of workers who have already been deprived of any skilled identity. This operation is clear and obvious: they are starting by penalising the weakest, least qualified strata who are most subject to the blackmail of replacement (sometimes by foreign labour power, coming from the weakest countries, the so-called extracomunitari): the passage from contracted labour to "temporary work" is objectively automatic. The pressure is blindly and immediately economic, the consequences are also political.

What further contributes to the upheavals we have discussed is the official, legislative sanction given to the separation between the labour of machine operators, which has been deskilled and is therefore precarious, and more stable labour, which is more "professional" (the inverted commas are no accident) and which can escape, at least in theory, this manoeuvre to make work less secure. It is natural to see the permanent state of crisis as the cause of temporary work which is also affecting those occupations under the illusion of being more professional. Meanwhile, the fact remains that capitalist society legally approves the separation

of work roles and, above all, to differences in workers' status.

It is necessary, then, to foresee, or better, to recognise a situation in which the working class will have to begin a process of its own subjective recomposition. This will have to begin with its most general component: the operatives (no matter how precarious or how mobile they have been obliged to become within the firm and between firms in the same territory) as well as labour which, although still manual, enjoys greater recognition on the...professional level and, in the final analysis, in wages.

However, before dealing with this aspect of the question, we must dwell upon the presumed professionalism of the labour which does not directly serve the machines. It is indisputable that the level of technical or "cultural" knowledge required of an industrial expert who has to control the quality of the material that enters the production process is higher than that of the machine 'operator' or of the employees who clean the machines. But it is also true that the difference is only one of different levels of training of labour power, and it remains the case that both are objects, more or less fortunate, of the process of formation of labour power, as part of the more complex reproduction process of variable capital.

The same can be said about the difference between the manual worker and a worker in a firm's accounts department. Here too accounts clerks are no longer such: they are simple computer operators (typists) who press the sequence of keys which enter the data into a pre-existing frame and the computer works on this in the predetermined manner and, after a new command on the keyboard, prints it in the form of a wage packet or list of the movements of goods or products. If the above mentioned accounts clerks feel themselves to be very different to the worker who carries boxes of plastic beakers or pre-addressed packets of magazines with a fork-lift truck from the plants exit to a store or a lorry, this doesn't change one iota the fact that both are just as much deskilled and that both are just as much functioning for the accumulation of others' capital. The one's schooling in computerised accountancy and the other's third form in secondary school are both regarded as necessary by capital in order to provide the labour power appropriate for its needs. To say that politicians draw up the laws on education and compulsory attendance as a result of the concerns stemming from civil society is as true as saying apples come from apple trees. This doesn't say anything about apples and their characteristics and it doesn't say anything about the nature of civil society and the concerns which stem from there. Civil society is nothing other than capitalist society and the concerns of its politicians are nothing other than the

demands of the market (in this case, of the market for labour power). Schools have to mould new workers with the appropriate degree of understanding and, above all, of adaptability needed by capital or (which is the same thing), the labour market. This is a large market and for this reason it is supplied by masses of school leavers.

Restructuring Wages

As we have seen, the process of change in the division of labour is complex and presents the natural contradictions of every social process. Thus the law intervenes to bless the deskilling of labour on the factory floor, irrespective of the fact that deskilling as a result of the microprocessor affects almost all occupations below those which are strictly managerial. This aspect of things will become clear in social practice after the new regulations have been passed. We will then see how many technicians and white-collar workers in occupations which were once considered "professional" will be taken on with short-term contracts as temporary labour. However — this must be stressed — the reform of the labour market is not presented for what it is nor are the real aims articulated. Obviously, the media's powerful sounding boxes propagate completely different ideas and suggestions. They call them measures for employment; ways of easing youth's entry into the world of work and of recycling those, less young, who find themselves "superfluous" in one firm so that they can transfer to other firms and occupations. The theme of professionalism doesn't play a great role in the discussions on the reform of the labour market.

It does, though, exert all the fascination of the word in the debate over wage reform.

The first big alterations to the old wages system have been carried through: the scala mobile has been dismantled (with a consequent reduction in legal wages which even Istat has recently noticed) and the conditions for a complete overhaul according to capital's rigid requirement of a reduction in the cost of labour power have been put in place. The negotiations still in progress have, from capital's viewpoint, two reference points or guidelines: the reduction of the cost of ~~v~~ through a net cut in the total wages bill and the adjustment of the wages structure in line with the new organisation of labour. We will have to examine in more detail the form of the new wages and the mechanisms employed for their reduction once they have been defined by the negotiations and "approved". On the other hand, one should not deceive oneself and believe that they won't be approved. If they are not passed legally, they will be passed in practice, as is already happening in more than a few firms of the famous entrepreneurs spread through northern Italy. The blackmail of unemployment is too strong and the working class

too weak to hypothesise an opposition to the capitalist manoeuvres strong enough to stop or even only hinder it in the medium term. Nevertheless, a few pointers for interpreting it have been published in the pages of the Marxist press.¹⁷

To sum up, the manoeuvre is as follows: they are trying to keep the cost of living labour to a minimum for capitalism, by cutting the rate of social contributions and eliminating automatic wage increases. Contributions, or rather the indirect wage, are being eliminated so that services will be paid for just like any other commodity (and thus substantially reducing the value of labour power). Age-related increments will also be abolished by linking any wage increase to the famous 'professionalism'; or rather, concretely, to the position filled in the new organisation of labour no matter what its requirements for professionalism are, as this is just an ideological tool of capital.

Wages and the New Organisation of Capital

Wages, we said, are to be restructured so that they adapt to the new organisation of labour. What does this mean? We have seen that the technological revolution carries with it a new organisation of labour that bourgeois science wants to codify once it is already clear in reality. Taylorism has been superseded by the material pressures stemming from the microprocessor revolution and the thinking heads of the bourgeoisie want to construct the theory which will replace it. The new organisation of labour thus takes on a charming name: 'the total quality system'.

In essence this has one clearly defined aim: restoring productivity margins by saving on the use of living labour. We should immediately tell our readers what even the theoreticians and consultants of the bourgeoisie try to tell their clients: total quality and the total quality system have little to do with the quality of the product itself. Controlling the quality of the product is simply a matter of ensuring the consistency of a predetermined quality, which might be fairly low if the final consumer is satisfied with this. It is thus a matter of systematically rationalising, codifying and controlling all the operations which make up the production process (and so the use of labour) by maximising the use of living labour's capacities and abilities in relation to the power and potential of the machinery, machine systems and tools. The crux of the matter is precisely here. The increase in productivity caused by the new machines has certainly been great, but it is less than it could have been because of the delay, or rather the natural inertia in adapting the organisation of labour to the new productive combinations. The new organisation of labour according to the canons of the 'total quality sys-

tem' leads to the recovery of the margins of productivity laid bare by technological change.

Now, if the increased productivity obtained up to now has brought with it a corresponding increase in constant capital and thus in the organic composition of capital as a result of the conspicuous investment in machines and systems, an increase in productivity due to a more efficacious organisation of labour costs nothing! Returning to look at graph 4, and especially curves 2 and 3, we see the approximately parallel growth of the productivity (curve 3, the rate of exploitation) and of the organic composition of capital (curve 2), up to 1982. Then the two curves begin to diverge: productivity grows faster than the organic composition of capital. Correspondingly, we see a marked recovery in the rate of profit, confirming the fact that increasing productivity can, under certain conditions, provide a valid countertendency to the fall in the rate of profit.¹⁸

According to the experts in company organisation, if a good total quality system is instituted, then there will be a saving in operatives (read workers, technicians and staff) and there will be a substantial increase in the output of the remainder. It is true that the Italian industrial system is rather backward in this sense and this is due in large part to the very structure of the system, which is still fragmented into thousands of formally independent little firms. Despite being (they say) very dynamic and creative, it certainly does not shine for the scientific content of its organisation nor for its readiness to pay consultants. Other countries are more advanced and Japan is ahead, because the Japanese capitalists, guided by the legendary MITI, have put into practice ideas adopted from the theses of the American Dr. Deming.

It is a fact that in Italy there is still much to be done in this direction and the general restructuring of wages can be a very useful part of this. Once automatic career increments have been eliminated, wages will be linked to professionalism and productivity. The productivity might be that of the group or of the entire firm and therefore directly correlated with the firm's profits; or if it is of the individual it is reduced to diligence in attending work (low absenteeism) and to the readiness, when necessary, for overtime or flexibility, etc. Professionalism, which, we have argued, is becoming extinct in almost all occupations, is, in reality, being subsumed under the membership of a specific group of workers within the firm's entirety: operatives, planning, inspection, administration...

Here there unfolds the other great fraud worked to the disadvantage of workers: putting wages on an individual basis related to productivity, something the unions have not seriously opposed. Considering what 'professionalism' really means,

individual wage contracts are nothing other than delivering the workers into the hands of the bosses in a relation which is to the complete and exclusive advantage of the latter. This only fails to be the case when workers are able to make the exclusivity of their profession felt. This does not concern the average worker, who sells reproducible labour power. It is rather when the worker becomes a subject on the market who sells to another, entrepreneurial, subject something else: the use of intellectual means of production. This subject, although called a worker, who actually works, does not form part of the working class. By playing on this, they want to get away with the idea that all spheres outside of purely manual workers have a professionalism to sell to the bosses. This will not be so easy. The bosses' little speech is this: "Leave the old form of workers' organisation, come to us with your professional skill, we will discuss your remuneration with you one by one." Afterwards the reality will be more bitter than these words of milk and honey.

The bosses, or their representatives, will throw the reality in the faces of the individual and isolated technicians who have submitted to such contracts: there is a glut of professionals like you, you can compete, and if you don't like it, another ten or twenty are waiting. To sum up: wages restructured in this way will make it easier for the bosses to reform the organisation of labour (or even force them to redefine occupations) in conformity with the needs and opportunities stemming from technological restructuring.

Great Innovation ... for the Worse

Wages, then, will be strictly linked to what happens to capital: they will be made dependent variables and will be directly coupled to company productivity; wages will be made dependent on the ups and downs of productivity. Now, productivity is precisely given by the ratio p/v ; linking the value of v to the ratio p/v means linking wages to the level of profit of capital. They wanted wages to be variable and they have succeeded. Wages can rise or fall on the basis of the company's level of return.

The mechanism is relatively simple and insidiously anti-working class. The union federations take care to negotiate the minimum wage threshold and the additional items which enter into the company's wage packets but the actual quantities of these items are then left to contracts at other levels. Naturally, this is one of the primary aims of the negotiations, because it is about finding the satisfactory middle ground between the unions maintaining their own role and their widespread presence and the demand of the bosses to be left to define "accessory quantities" within terms of the single employee and employer. The substance of

the manoeuvre implies a great change. Wages, which measure the value of labour power or rather the quantity of value (represented by goods) necessary for the maintenance and reproduction of labour power, will no longer be defined on a national scale, but on the level of the company (or group of companies) or on a regional scale. Another blow suffered by the working class in the incessant struggle with the bourgeoisie, which is now, and has been for some time, on the attack.

These measures have been carried through, or are being carried through, precisely because the class is absent as an autonomous political subject, is incapable of drawing together its ranks to resist the attack. The material decomposition of the class, which we have tried to outline within the development of the crisis and of the capitalist response to that crisis, is having its effect here.

The "Wage Cages" Return

Recently we have seen further new developments, if the return to the situation of thirty years ago can be called new. Fiat, in its new and very advanced plant in Melfi, has set rolling what the German employers have done with regard to the East: they will keep production going on the condition of lower wages. "Flexibility and remuneration different from other parts of Italy will be of use" the Director General of Confindustria, Cipolletta, has declared¹⁹ so that the South can be industrialised. In fact, the labour contract which is in operation in Melfi leads back to the "wage cage" model which lasted until the '60's, when it was abolished. This too is being presented as a "measure for employment", like the short-term labour contract. And in fact it is: this is what capitalism in crisis offers. Every national fraction of the bourgeoisie, in its hunt for its own space for competitiveness on international markets, manoeuvres how it can - in contracts on the national, regional and company level - to strike at wages by using the blackmail of unemployment. This is why the manoeuvres are essentially successful: there is no room for any possible action on the basis of unionism, that is, of contractual negotiations. Negotiations, any negotiations, are possible when both parties are in some way constrained by or interested in them. In the case in question, the bosses can comfortably avoid negotiation by counting on three connected things which imply each other:

- the overall weakening of the working class;
- the literal work famine in the South;
- and the consequent susceptibility to blackmail of the "lucky" few admitted to direct exploitation.

Could the Southern workers (in Melfi and elsewhere) have rejected Fiat's conditions for the yoke? Yes, but only on the condition that they were compact, that they were organised as a

"counterweight". But organised by who, on what basis? The unions are neither interested in, nor adequate for, such organisation, nor have the workers begun the process of their own self-organisation. So the blackmail at Melfi was successful. On the national scale, as we have seen, the problems of the Southern fraction of the class are magnified: the same weakness, the same lack of organisation, and, in addition, on the basis of the decomposition described above, a defuse turning in onto the "particular" with a consequent antagonism towards their comrades in the South (it is no accident that the ignominious reaction of the Lega del Nord has also affected proletarian strata). The "wage cage" will return, as it has in Germany between East and West.

Summing Up

As we are approaching our political conclusions, we will sum up what we have been dealing with. Within the dynamic of capitalism's response to the crisis and in the related technological revolution, a process of material decomposition of the class has confirmed itself. This is in the sense that the class's preceding internal relations have been upset, occupations typical of the previous structure have disappeared, some new ones have been formed, some professional figures which were previously outside the working class have been proletarianised and have recently entered the social group which is the object of capitalist exploitation, new hierarchies have established themselves within the ambit of work groups, and what was previously the pulsing heart of the proletariat, the class of factory operatives, has either been scaled down or has become insecure, almost marginalised. Within the material process of de-structuring, the working class has lost its previous concrete points of reference for its own self-recognition. We have witnessed a working class which has been dramatically deprived of its political programme, separated from its revolutionary road, as a result of the counterrevolutionary process following the experience of October '17, and is substantially disarmed.

The material process has been therefore relatively easily supplemented by an ideological campaign against the working class (against the very concept of the class) by the bourgeoisie. In this campaign the dominant class has been enormously aided by the tertiarisation of society, that is, by the enormous development undergone by services (which, as we have seen, do not in fact exclude exploitation), as the recipients of growing portions of surplus value. Moreover, to this must be added the collapse of the Soviet Union, which, in the mystified consciousness of the workers, had been seen as a step towards the creation of socialist society. The failure of what in reality was nothing but state capitalism has thus been presented as the demon-

stration of the impossibility of every project based on a class ideology.

Demystification of the Soviet Union would not upset us, if it was a question of a real clarification within the class, in the sense of a recognition that this experience had an antiproletarian nature. The fact is that the collapse of the USSR is insistently presented as the failure of the communist project and for the moment this is how it is perceived in the consciousness of the mass of workers. No matter how temporary and contingent this might be considered, the consequent confusion following the loss of the myth necessarily had to accentuate the weakening effect of the restructuring process on proletarian consciousness.

Towards the Revival of the Newly-Structured Class

It is useless to expect new proletarian mobilisations signifying a revival until the new strata recognise, in the material conditions they are already facing, their membership of a class in some way opposed to the bourgeoisie. Certainly, this process of self-identification can and must be encouraged by political, agitational and propagandistic intervention by Marxist vanguards, which should clearly recognise the real conditions of the class in order to adjust the forms of the intervention itself. But, because it is the determinant from the strategic point of view, the present balance of forces between the above-mentioned Marxist vanguards (us) and the enemy (bourgeois ideology and forces in their varied colours - the left, the centre, the right...) must be taken into account.

With our present numerical and organisational weakness, with our great separation from the enormous masses who should be involved in the ripening process, there is not even the minimum possibility of our influencing events, which instead are leading to a progressive barbarising of political life and the regression of its language and content to forms that are as coarse as they are demagogic.

One should not imagine here — we wrote in our last Congress's Theses — that the coming storms, in clearing away the inconsistent ideologies and tendencies of the false left which today [1982] pollute the workers' environment, will, by themselves, lead to an organisational strengthening of the Party with a new orientation on the part of those who are commonly considered vanguards...²⁰

The storms have begun, even if for the moment only on the level of bourgeois political equilibria and of electoral upheavals, and those who were then commonly considered vanguards are now

torn between the vote for Rifondazione and support for the new progressive line-up from Occhetto to Orlando (every reference to the class is anyhow banned). In order to prepare for the sort of intervention we were discussing, remaining firm on the centrality of the productive working class (and here too, in a way that the new composition makes practicable), means giving absolute priority to the strengthening of the vanguard itself so that it can reach the position of being able to agitate and reinforce itself in terms of people and organisation by gathering up all the weak and presently extremely dispersed forces which are nevertheless available.

Any other 'line' would be an illusory attempt to find a short cut, stupid adventurism and in any case wasteful, both on the strategic and tactical level.

Mauro jr. Stefanini

1 See, in relation to the development of the new technologies and the related sciences, *Mutation technologique, stagnation de la pensée* in "Vers une révolution du Travail" — *Le Monde Diplomatique* No.468, March 1993.

2 Stanley Hurst in an article in *New Scientist*, No.1037, 1977, cited in O. Giarini, H. Houberté *La delusione tecnologica*, Est-Mondadori, Milano 1978, p100.

3 O. Giarini, H. Houberté, *op. cit.*, p76.

4 Jacques Robin, in *Mutation technologique...*

5 From *Perspectives économiques de l'OCDE*, nos 30 (Dec. '81) and 47 (Oct. '87).

6 A. Freeman, *La contabilità nazionale misurata in grandezze di valore marxiane: il salario sociale e il saggio del profitto in Gran Bretagna (1950-1986)*, now in *Plusvalore* no.10, May 1993. The graph is taken from the English original because the graph reproduced in *Plusvalore*, as a result of a paging error, interchanges the definitions of the curves, exchanging nos 2 and 3 of the original. In English, see Alan Freeman *National Accounts in Value Terms: The Social Wage and Profit Rate in Britain 1950-86*

7 A redundancy scheme organised by the big Italian companies in conjunction with the State, whereby laid-off workers were entitled to a substantial percentage of the going wage whilst on a 'waiting-list' for re-employment with the company in question.

8 See, in this regard, *Introduzione a una analisi di classe* in *Prometeo* 4, series IV and *Crisi e ristrutturazione: l'impostazione ideologico borghese dell'Aut. Op.* in *Prometeo* 5, series IV.

9 XXIV Rapporto sulla situazione sociale del paese 1990, Franco Agnelli, p.225.

10 See *Ma quale attacco allo stato sociale? Qui siamo in presenza di una rapina del salario* in *Battaglia Comunista* 4/93.

11 XXIV Rapporto..., *cit.*, p658.

12 This is one of the theses we have criticised as anti-Marxist in Antonio Negri's ideology, which has

been adopted by Autonomia Operaia. See *Prometeo* nos 4 and 5, series IV, already cited.

13 *XXIV Rapporto...*, cit., p247.

14 In this regard we also note the fact that some partners in companies are able to receive most of their profits in the form of a salary, taking good care to appear as employees of their company (administrators, general directors, directors of production). This returns to the typical Italian method of systematic statistical confusion, which, as we noted above, leads it to count managers and clerks together.

15 *Grundrisse*, pp692-3, Penguin 1973 (Notebook VI, p44 of the manuscript).

16 For a first critical response along Marxist lines, see *Professionalità, un mito che marxismo ha liquidato da tempo*, in *Prometeo* 12, series IV.

17 See above on the social state and the relevant note 7. Also see *Riforma del salario e della contrattazione*, in *Battaglia Comunista* 7/8, 1993.

18 Also see *Capitale, produttività e saggio del profitto* in *Prometeo* 2 of this series, for a discussion on this topic, in reply to those who polemicise against us on this thesis.

19 Reported in *Al Sud come all'Est* in *Il Manifesto* of 6th May, 1993.

20 *Tattica d'intervento del partito rivoluzionario* in *Prometeo* 7, series IV.

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Fascism and Anti-Fascism: The Real Lessons of the Nazi Seizure of Power

Men make their own history, but not of their own free will; not under circumstances they themselves have chosen but under the given and inherited circumstances with which they are directly confronted ...

In the same way, the beginner who has learned a new language always retranslates it into his mother tongue; he can only be said to have appropriated the spirit of the new language and to be able to express himself in it freely when he can manipulate it without reference to the old, and when he forgets his original language while using the new one.

Karl Marx *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*

In January 1934 the Hitler regime in Germany introduced its so-called Law on the Ordering of National Labour. It put a final seal on all the actions taken against German workers and the organisations (trades unions and political parties) which claimed to represent them. The Law forbade strikes and dismantled the last workers' rights. Instead it gave control of the economy to an alliance of monopoly capitalists and Nazi functionaries. It was not just another direct attack on the German working class, it was also a preparation for the still further attack of imperialist war.

Today, exactly sixty years later the spectre of a new Nazi menace is once again being raised throughout Europe. The rise of well-orchestrated racist attacks and the electoral growth of right-wing nationalist and racist movements in Italy, Germany, Russia and France in particular, have sent a frisson through the Western democracies. So after recently gloating over their triumph in the Cold War they are now turning back the pages of history in the most crass fashion. Take for example James Morgan in the *Financial Times*. Commenting on the success of Zhirinovsky's Liberal Democrats in Russia he appeals to history

It all looks curiously like Germany in 1932. Then the economy was in a total mess. There had been great inflation. Recommended western models were not working. The middle ground was squeezed and the communists did everything possible to ensure that Hitler took over in 1933.

(*The Liberal Democrat Menace. Financial Times* Weekend Dec 18/19, 1993)

True he later takes a small comfort that "historical parallels always turn out to be wrong" but as he can't tell us why it is an unconvincing disclaimer.

And superficially there are some parallels. Sixty years ago there was a global capitalist crisis which had created mass unemployment (although in 1933 unemployment was about double what it is today in percentage terms). Similarly governments throughout Europe, but particularly in its Eastern half, had become more authoritarian and nationalistic.

However what Morgan says is also a distortion of history which leaves the communists (he means the Stalinised German Communist Party) as the midwife of fascism. This we might expect from a bourgeois democrat. But running at the coat tails of the traditional bourgeoisie are the Trotskyist groups of the capitalist left who, with a similar crassness, have also raised the spectre of a Nazi revival and the need to defend democracy. No comparison with Germany sixty years ago, no hyperbole about the "fascist menace" has been overlooked in this campaign — the sum total of which is the defence of capitalist rule. The traditions of the dead generations certainly weigh here like a nightmare on the minds of the living. It is to lift that weight from a working class perspective that the following article is intended.

Since the Trotskyists claim to act on the terrain of the working class and since the formulae of Trotsky on the fascism question are the main ideological arguments for today's anti-fascists we will have to take them as our starting point. In 1989 the

Socialist Workers Party republished Trotsky's writings on the rise of the Nazis in the volume *Fascism, Stalinism and the United Front*. In their introduction they give us the following rationale;

...his work remains significant today, and not only as historical analysis which has rarely been excelled. For as capitalism moves again towards a crisis which is part of its inner nature, it recreates conditions in which fascism may grow. (op. cit. p.27)

This is oversimplified nonsense which takes no account of the changed historical circumstances operating today. These simplistic notions are not simply misconceptions. The anti-fascist mobilisation is part of a concerted attack on the working class in its attempts to achieve any advances in its own revolutionary consciousness. The Trotskyists and ex-Stalinists, the Labour Party and even some anarchists are all coming to the defence of the democratic state. In the face of a political and economic crisis of gigantic proportions the anti-fascist mystification is not just a diversion. It is a positive barrier to the working class understanding clearly that the principal class enemy is the democratic capitalist state. It is this which has to be destroyed if it wants to banish the threat to its own future.

The Defeat of the Working Class?

According to Trotsky's beguilingly simple (but, as we shall see, contradictory) logic the situation in 1933 in Germany was basically revolutionary. Economic crisis in which millions were unemployed (by 1933 the figure was 6 millions) was compounded by the self-evident political collapse of the political system. The Weimar Republic was supported by no party except one or two small liberal outfits and the SPD. The President, Hindenburg, was a quasi-senile, 84 year old monarchist, desperately seeking to ensure that the old Junker aristocracy which ran the Army should not lose its grip on the state institutions. As no government after 1928 could get a majority in the Reichstag (parliament) the Weimar Republic was governed by Presidential decree (i.e. it was a dictatorship in a legalised sense). In short, parliamentary democracy had collapsed in all but name. In this context of political and economic crisis there already existed the so-called revolutionary party. The working class voted in millions for a party, the German Communist Party (KPD) which openly proclaimed revolutionary aims. Obtaining two million more votes than the KPD was the German Social Democratic Party (SPD) and the majority of these votes were from the working class. According to Trotsky the KPD should have been able to win over the workers of the SPD to a united front against fascism. This

would not only have prevented the Nazis from gaining power but would also, by virtue of the magic formulae of "permanent revolution" have led the workers to go on to the overthrow of the Weimar Republic from a revolutionary point of view.

However a more detailed analysis of Trotsky's prognoses reveal that, despite some brilliant insights his whole position is based on inconsistent and rickety foundations. His fundamental premise was that

The strength of the German proletariat has not been drained. Its powers have not yet been brought into play. The logic of facts will make itself heard more imperiously with every passing day.'

But "the logic of the facts" was that the working class **had** already been defeated in the post war period that led up to the establishment of Weimar. This is not the place to recall all the events of that revolutionary period² but we can briefly state that when the revolutionary council movement which started at the end of the First World War reached Berlin the Prussian ruling class realised that the game was up. The Chancellor (i.e. Prime Minister) Prince Max of Baden realised that there was one force in German society which could save the German capitalist class in all its reactionary forms. This was the Social Democratic Party.

German Social Democracy

Marx had many times criticised the unrevolutionary nature of German Social Democracy from its founding in 1875 onwards. In his long-suppressed *Critique of the Gotha Programme* he had denounced the bourgeois democratic aims of Social Democracy as a sell-out to the reactionary ideas of George Lassalle. In fact the SPD was a home for many democratic liberals who had seen their programme crushed by Bismarck and its nationalist component hi-jacked by the Junker aristocracy of the Wilhelmine Empire. But the Social Democratic Parties also contained genuine revolutionaries like Rosa Luxemburg and her followers. This convinced many that despite the dominance of the right-wing through its control of the trades unions and the reformist centre through its control of the party press the basic marxist inheritance of the SPD would make it follow a revolutionary path when the situation demanded it.

Such wishful thinking was rudely dispelled by the outbreak of the first world imperialist war in 1914. The guardians of German imperialism did not dare take the war path without ensuring the neutrality of the German working class. For this the then Chancellor, Bethmann-Hollweg turned to the SPD.

After a meeting with him on July 29th 1914 the SPD leader Südekum wrote to Bethmann-Hollweg that he had discussed the attitude of Social Democracy in the coming war with the main SPD leaders, Ebert, Braun, Müller, Bartels and Fischer and they confirmed the assurance which he had already verbally given the Chancellor,

That - because of the wish to serve the cause of peace - no action whatsoever (general strike or partial strike, sabotage or anything similar) was planned or need be feared.³

It is not surprising that Prince Max of Baden could call upon the same SPD in November 1918 to once again save the German ruling class. Even before Prince Max resigned and passed the Chancellorship on to the SPD leader, Ebert, the SPD and its trades union movement, had been busy trying to snuff out the spirit of proletarian revolution. As the historian of German trades unionism wrote

In the closing weeks of the Great War the determination of the union leaders to do all in their power to prevent industrial chaos overwhelming the nation as a result of a dictated peace caused them to throw in their lot with German industry.⁴

And when persuasion failed, trickery and deceit were employed. Ebert's gamble was to create a provisional government of six "Peoples Commissars". The use of the term "peoples' commissars", borrowed from the Russian Revolution illustrates the sophistication of the German ruling class who quickly grasped the value of using revolutionary phraseology for counter-revolutionary ends. Ebert now invited both the Independent Socialists (USPD) who had been the former centre of the SPD before the war, as well as Rosa Luxemburg's Spartakists to join the government. The latter, clearly seeing it as a manoeuvre, refused but the USPD did join and the SPD were thus able to present themselves as a revolutionary force uniting the vast majority of the working class. The proclamation of a republic by Ebert's colleague Scheidemann on November 9th helped to convince the working class that real change was on the way. Although this proclamation outraged his more conservative colleagues Scheidemann's move was timely since to have done otherwise would have been to open a space to Karl Liebknecht and the Spartakists who had proclaimed a "socialist republic" on the same day.

The SPD stranglehold on the revolution was thus maintained. The result was that despite all the heroism of the workers, and many of the soldiers and the sailors, the lack of political experience of many who had never been on strike, let alone fought a battle for political clarity, allowed the party apparatus of the the SPD to take the initia-

tive. Their previous claim to be a workers' party enabled them to maintain the deception that they stood behind the revolution but in reality they were already aiming at preserving Germany's existing social and political order. The SPD was not by this time a workers' party that had become short-sighted or was simply reformist, as the Socialist Workers' Party's Chris Harman implies.⁵ It was a capitalist party which stood above everything for the nation and the preservation of the existing social order. It was not surprising that it soon entered into a secret deal with the Army High Command.

The SPD's alliance with the military was not a desperate act of weak movement. It was a conscious choice of Social Democracy for capitalism and its social order. It was entirely consistent with the support of German Social Democracy for imperialism in 1914. But it was not the only act undertaken by Ebert and his cronies to shore up the old order. On November 25th Ebert explained why they had retained the monarchy's civil service

We had to make sure once we had taken over political power that the Reich machine did not break down ... We therefore urgently appealed to all Reich officials to continue to exercise their duty until further notice. Only in that way was it possible to avoid collapse and surmount the difficulties.⁶

Thus the Kaiser and the other German princes went but their states survived. This meant that the bureaucracies, the Army, the police and the judges all remained at their posts. The SPD didn't even resort to the sop of nationalising industry and big business remained in almost total control of the press. The SPD saved the German ruling class by joining it. The counter-revolutionary success of the SPD was not simply a question of it having a bad leadership. This is another theme dear to present-day Trotskyists but which entirely misses the point. The problem was one of class consciousness. The working class in Germany and elsewhere in Western Europe had been accustomed to follow the instructions and directives of the German Social Democratic leadership. In the course of the war the party had split but the majority of the splitters followed the so-called "Independents" in the USPD. They still clung to the idea that capitalism could be reformed out of existence. For them the war was a regrettable interruption of the steady march of progress towards some future "socialism" (i.e. a big brother nationalised state with some elements of welfare and workers control). They did not understand that war is an attack of a bankrupt capitalism on the working class often timed to head off social convulsions. They did not see, as Lenin did, that imperialist war and class war are intimately connected. As a result the USPD simply became a

prisoner of the SPD and was eventually to split, with the majority returning to the SPD fold. Thus Social Democracy in all its guises had completed its task by 1923. It had seen off the revolutionary onslaught at the end of the First World War. Its creation was, however, inherently unstable since it had created a state based on the old officialdom of the Kaiser. Its judiciary, its civil service, its armed forces and police were all of dubious loyalty to the new Republic. Only the SPD were committed to Weimar and when its final crisis came they were more interested in using the Prussian police force which it controlled against striking workers than in preventing Nazi violence against the working class.

The German Communist Party(KPD)

The fact that the German Communist Party(KPD) was not formed until December 1918 and then on a minority basis was another indication of the weakness of revolutionary ideas amongst the bulk of the German working class. Here one of the biggest errors was the long-delayed split with Social Democracy. Luxemburg's attitude, even as late as 1916 was "better the worst working class party than none at all". This was to become for her a fatal error because, even when the November Revolution gave her Spartakists freedom of action, they did so as a fringe group within the USPD. The German workers in November 1918 had no nucleus to rally round once they themselves had taken the revolutionary road. This was critical since revolutionary moments don't last for ever. In November 1918 there was an acute economic crisis caused by two years of near-starvation rations, there was a political crisis of the bourgeoisie as it moved from one form of rule to another. What was missing was the revolutionary consciousness of the class and the concomitant political party. The KPD was not formed until the last fortnight of 1918. Thus the workers councils, which had sprung up spontaneously, lacked the preparation and the consciousness to see through the manoeuvres of the SPD.

In December 1918, at the very first National Congress of Workers' and Soldiers' Councils the SPD/USPD majority voted the councils out of existence and their replacement by parliamentary elections. This was in total agreement with the Groener-Ebert alliance which had demanded parliamentary elections in December. It did not however mean that revolutionary enthusiasm had been exhausted. Many workers were now beginning to realise that the election of "Peoples Commissars" did not mean a workers government. This was especially confirmed when reactionary soldiers were allowed to murder revolutionary workers on the streets of Berlin without opposition. However the SPD had bought the German

bourgeoisie time and a vital breathing space.

They could now arm ex-officers into a Freikorps to shoot down the revolutionary working class. The provocation of sacking the USPD police chief of Berlin, Eichorn brought hundreds of thousands on strike. But when the revolutionary shop stewards and Karl Liebknecht mistakenly then called for an insurrection against the SPD only a few hundreds responded. Having already armed the Freikorps to replace the unreliable Wehrmacht troops the SPD launched a massacre which also claimed Liebknecht and Luxemburg as victims. Their cold-blooded murder robbed the newly-formed KPD of its most experienced leaders.

Whilst Luxemburg, as editor of *Die Rote Fahne*, had been insistent on the need for the workers to make their own revolution opposed to all the capitalist parties, including the SPD, she did not believe that the working class was ready and prepared in terms of consciousness in January 1919. She was caught between the impatience of Liebknecht and some revolutionary communist workers and her own earlier failure to split from the SPD and form the kernel of a communist organisation in the course of the First World War.

The rest of the history of the KPD in the period up to 1921 is a sorry tale. Under Paul Levi the left-wing, which made up half that party, were expelled and went on to become the Communist Workers Party (KAPD). Levi aimed at reuniting with the USPD and thus creating a larger though less revolutionary organisation. This was achieved but Levi resigned as Chairman and was expelled after criticising the so-called March Action of 1921. Although there was a genuine class movement in 1921 this was not strong enough to pose an assault on state power. The KPD, as the party which had eschewed any sort of offensive policy for two years now launched what was effectively a putsch. This ended up with the employed and unemployed sections of the working class in Hamburg gunning each other down. From this time on the KPD leadership found itself increasingly under the aegis of the Comintern and at its behest another failed attempt at a putsch (which had enjoyed Trotsky's support at the beginning) ended in defeat in November 1923.

The Communist International

The Communist International had itself changed its character in the period 1923-8. From being the spearhead of the international efforts of the world working class in 1919-20 it was slowly being transformed into a mere agent of Russian foreign policy. This process was complete by the official declaration of "socialism in one country" in 1926 but before then there had been a number of tactical

shifts which were departures from the revolutionary politics of the Bolsheviks before the October Revolution. In 1921 Trotsky had been the spokesman for the first tactical retreat of the Comintern. At the Third Comintern Congress Trotsky had declared,

It is realised that the post-war revolutionary ferment is over ... the turn is taken to winning the masses, using the united front, that is, organising the masses on a programme of transitional demands.⁷

This was followed up by the so-called "united front" a year later. As a tactic it was a nonsense. The new Communist Parties had painfully emerged only after a determined struggle against Social Democracy. They had wasted a great deal of time trying to win over Social Democrats who had no intention of either joining the CI or abandoning support for capitalism. The Communist workers who had struggled to belatedly establish revolutionary parties were now told that after a few months of separate existence, and at a time of retreat, they should attempt to form united fronts and even joint governments with these pro-capitalist parties. The confusion was naturally widespread, and the policy led to splits and expulsions in the revolutionary camp. It gained not a single victory in terms of an advance of the revolutionary cause. Indeed it only aroused the deepest suspicion amongst non-communist workers that the communist were an unprincipled set of intriguers. A fact which the bourgeois press was not slow to pick up on and still refers to fifty years after the official death of the Comintern.

These arguments are not simply made with the benefit of hindsight. They were made at the time by the leadership of the Italian Communist Party, headed by Amadeo Bordiga. Contrary to Trotskyite slanders that Bordiga was "intransigent and dogmatic"⁸ the Italian Party saw the value of workers solidarity and attempted to carry out the united front in the factories with rank and file Socialists, the so-called "united front from below". This did not stop Bordiga from arguing for a change in what he regarded as a mistaken tactic but the CI so trusted him to maintain discipline on the issue that he was sent to Marseilles in December 1921 to persuade the hostile French CP to carry out the united front in the same way as the Italians were doing.⁹ However the adoption of the united front showed that the long-term development of revolutionary consciousness was now being sacrificed to the Comintern's attempts to gain an immediate mass base. At a time of revolutionary retreat this could only mean a retreat on principles. Thus instead of basing their existence on the development of the revolutionary capacities of the working class vanguard, Communist Parties everywhere were told to try to regroup with larger

"centrist" parties. In Germany the consequences of the fusion between the USPD and the KPD (called the VKPD) led to more than half the USPD's former members joining the SPD. And though the VKPD was much larger it was also ideologically much weaker. It was totally unprepared for the March Action of 1921 and the November Revolution of 1923, both of which were pushes which led to the deaths of hundreds of workers and dissipated the organisation of the German class conscious workers. Henceforth the KPD was but a shadow of the Comintern and twisted its policy inside Germany to every demand of the Comintern. Thus the physical elimination of the cream of the German revolutionary working class by the SPD was compounded by the ideological defeat inflicted on the German working class by the KPD.

This long explanation of the fate of the German working class has been necessary to show that, despite the existence of large organisations which had working class support we can say that the revolutionary movement of the German working class (and that of the rest of the continent) was defeated by 1923. And the expulsion of our political ancestors, the Italian Left Communists and the other oppositions, including Trotsky's from the Comintern in the next five years only underlines that it was no longer possible to maintain a revolutionary programme inside that body. Trotsky's insistence that these mass parties only required a new leadership and the working class would be on a revolutionary road is one of the major differences the internationalist communist left had with the Trotskyist current. Proletarian organisation cannot be reduced to a question of an inert mass following a dedicated leadership. A revolutionary movement involves the active participation of all its members as well as many who are not adherents. Outside of revolutionary moments the programme of the working class will only be defended and developed by smaller workers organisations. These will be the kernels of a future internationalist revolutionary party which will unite and grow as the working class becomes more generally conscious of the need to alleviate its continuing misery under capitalism.

The Collapse of Weimar

After 1923 the period of capitalist stabilisation began in Germany. By this time the USSR had secret deals with the German Army to allow it to train and develop its weaponry in Russia. The USSR also hoped for an alliance with the West and to obtain it the "united front" reached new heights in the Anglo-Russian Committee of 1926. When it became obvious that this policy had failed the so-called Stalinist "third period" began. This was to conclude that capitalism was once again ripe for

revolution and that the Social Democrats were the main obstacle to revolution since they deluded many workers into supporting capitalism. Indeed their actions after the First World War had paved the way for fascism and were thus no better than "social fascists".

The basic outline of the role played by Social Democracy after World War One was true. Even Trotsky agreed that,

The Social Democracy has prepared all the conditions for the triumph of fascism.¹⁰

But Social Democracy's role was now played out. The Comintern had not suddenly rediscovered revolutionary principles nor, as Trotsky maintained, taken on the positions of the Communist Left (although even Bordiga believed for a fleeting moment that it was coming round to his positions). Behind all the rhetoric about rejection of the Weimar Republic and making revolution against the SPD lay the national interests of the USSR. Now that the West had rejected all his overtures Stalin turned back towards the Germans (i.e. the German Army General Staff). As the SPD were determined to improve relations with France and Britain they were the number one threat to rapprochement between the USSR and Germany. Thus all these twists and turns by the KPD represent not the desperate and incompetent efforts of a revolutionary body to find a path to revolution. On the contrary they represent an attempt to defend the national interests of USSR within the orbit of a crisis-ridden capitalist system. Thalmann, the KPD leader was even forced to justify this to his more reluctant comrades at the the KPD's 12th Party Congress.¹¹ This explains why the KPD voted on 73% of all occasions alongside the forces of the German Right including the Nazis in the period 1929-33. None of this appears in Trotsky's analysis of what was really going on in Germany. To be fair to Trotsky it would have been difficult in 1933 to see all this but that was not the main reason for his blindness. Whilst the ancestors of today's internationalist communists were stumbling towards a class critique of the USSR,¹² Trotsky was looking for a new mass base within the existing parties and within two years he was to find it in the so-called "French turn". This took place when his followers entered the French Socialist Party where it was hoped that they would capture the leadership.

Leaving aside the subsequent failure of this policy it was an extraordinary step for a revolutionary to take. Trotsky after all seemed to understand the class nature of Social Democracy in Germany in 1932.

The Social Democracy though composed of workers is entirely a bourgeois party which under "normal conditions" is led quite expertly

from the point of view of bourgeois aims, but which is good for nothing at all under the conditions of a social crisis.¹³

So the policy of entryism was not just a mistaken tactic but an entry into a clearly bourgeois current. Even if Trotsky had never supported the imperialist role of the USSR in war this would have been enough to wipe out his attempt to establish an alternative revolutionary tendency.

What we are faced with in the early 1930s are two reactionary policies which have little to do with the growth of working class consciousness. On the one hand, Trotsky's advocacy of a continued united front with what he admits is an overtly bourgeois democratic party, on the other Stalin's Comintern's policy of "socialism in one country" was the motive for an imperialist policy disguised only by the proletarian origins of the October Revolution. Only those who slavishly followed the line of defence of the USSR were to be tolerated in the Comintern and it is no surprise to find that the last remaining defenders of proletarian revolution are ousted from the Comintern in this "third period".

The harsh fact (and one Trotsky found it increasingly difficult to accept) was that the defeat of the working class took place ten years before the bourgeoisie turned to fascism. World revolution was not on the agenda in the 1929-33 period. Yes, there was an acute crisis of the end of a cycle of capitalist accumulation after the Wall Street Crash in 1929. Yes, there was in Germany (and many other states) an accompanying political crisis of the bourgeoisie. The factor that was missing was the revolutionary consciousness of the working class. The defeat of the post-war wave of revolutions and the mystification that the USSR was a workers' state had robbed the working class of its own programme and its own organisation. The sum of this defeat was total ideological confusion.

In the last analysis therefore Trotsky's arguments to form a united front against fascism are not the arguments of proletarian revolution. What we are left with is Trotsky's ultimate argument which states that one form of bourgeois rule is better than another. He expressed it thus

In the course of many decades, the workers have built up within the bourgeois democracy, by utilising it, by fighting against it, their own strongholds and bases of proletarian democracy: the trade unions, the political parties, the educational and sports clubs, the cooperatives etc. The proletariat cannot attain power within the formal limits of bourgeois democracy, but can do so only by taking the road of revolution: this has been proved by both theory and experience. And these

*bulwarks of workers' democracy within the bourgeois state are absolutely essential for taking the revolutionary road. The work of the Second International consisted in creating just such bulwarks during the epoch when it was still fulfilling its progressive historic labour.*¹⁴

This is absurd and not supported by the history of the revolutionary working class. The working class made their revolution in Russia with a party but without a huge mass party. The places where mass parties existed were where the greatest betrayals of the working class took place. Trotsky seems to have forgotten the role played by the Second International in sustaining imperialism during the First World War. These "strongholds" had in fact become prisons because as Trotsky himself knows "the progressive historic labour" of Social Democracy had been played out. But the central thrust of his argument, that bourgeois democracy is the best preparation for the proletarian revolution betrays a Menshevik view of history (disguised only by the figleaf of "permanent revolution"). History is seen as a series of stages where democracy is the highest form of capitalist rule which provides the pre-conditions for socialist organisation and thus the future communist revolution. If only history did follow such a simple linear and progressive course! This nonsense remains the basis of the anti-fascist movement today and real working class revolutionaries have to reject its explicit defence of democracy. It is also contradicted by the facts in Germany in 1933. Where was the mass strike of the trades unions against Hitler's suppression of democracy? There was none called. The so-called Free Trades Unions instead hoped to do a deal with the new masters and were fooled by Hitler into believing that, he would let them coordinate the labour force for his Third Reich. By May 1933 they had been smashed. The subsequent lack of resistance to Hitler is not just down to mere fear but also confirms what we have argued here, that the working class had already been defeated.

In 1934, a year after the Nazis took over power in Germany, Trotsky finally did recognise what the real historical score was.

The defeat in 1918 raised a wall in the path of German imperialism. External dynamics changed to internal. The war passed over into revolution. Social Democracy, which aided the Hohenzollerns in bringing the war to its tragic conclusion, did not permit the proletariat to bring the revolution to its conclusion. It spent fourteen years in finding interminable excuses in its own existence for the Weimar democracy. The Communist Party called the workers to a new revolution but proved incapable of leading it. The German

*proletariat passed through the rise and collapse of war, revolution, parliamentarism, and pseudo-Bolshevism. At the time when the old ties of the bourgeoisie had drained themselves to the dregs, the dynamic power of the working class turned out to be impaired.*¹⁵

This is brilliant writing but it still disguises Trotsky's failure to see the depth of the defeat of the German workers in 1923. This means that his analysis, just like that of the KPD and the Comintern, lacks a sense of reality. If the KPD and the SPD had formed his united front this, as one recent historian has noted¹⁶ would only have driven a rather reluctant bourgeoisie even more quickly into the arms of the Nazis. For in the last resort it wasn't Hitler's success at the ballot box that brought his party to power but a sordid deal arranged, as so much bourgeois politics is really arranged, behind closed doors. There is no need to take our word for it.

*It is correct that it was not the electoral results which brought Hitler to power (the November 1932 elections were a setback for the Nazis) but the policy of the power elites, and that in January 1933 an important part in Hitler's appointment as Reich Chancellor was played by the Prussian Junkers, a pre-industrial group, living, like the President under the cloud of an Osthilfe scandal. On the other hand, it is no less true that important business groups also participated (e.g. through petitions to Hindenburg, and via Papen and Schroder) in the process whereby power was bestowed on Hitler.*¹⁷

Hitler was not accepted into the German ruling circles for his party programme. While his party adopted a sort of petty bourgeois anti-capitalist programme on the hustings Hitler himself was being touted around all kinds of businessmen's meetings to have the views of monopoly capitalism put to him. It has often been erroneously thought that Hitler got funds from the big businesses but this was not really significant. Only Thyssen of the big industrial barons backed him before he became Chancellor. What the other capitalists like Hjalmar Schacht did was to force Hitler to adopt a pro-industry "economic construction programme" which offered tax cuts, wage cuts and large scale rearmament as a source of capital for heavy industry. Once Hitler was in power his petty bourgeois and unemployed workers' constituencies were sacrificed. The Night of the Long Knives (June 30th 1934) in which Hitler got rid of his paramilitary apparatus and those who wanted a social revolution was Hitler keeping his tryst with the capitalists and the German Junker officer class. Both of these would be necessary for Hitler's plans for German imperialism's domination of Europe. Germany's monopoly capital-

ists were not yet ready for war but did support the demands for German domination of "Mitteleuropa". It was only in 1937 that some, like Schacht resigned when they realised that Hitler's aims were wider, and more dangerous than they anticipated. The fact that Hitler's stated policy aim was invasion of the East including the USSR also woke Stalin to the danger of Hitlerism. The sorry story of anti-fascism was now about to really begin.

In 1935 the Comintern now took up its anti-fascist crusade when Dimitroff outlined the strategy of the Popular Front at the Seventh Comintern Congress. In reality it was the same as the united front except that this time the Comintern was wooing bourgeois parties further to the right as well. This new turn, like all the others that preceded it had more to do with the defence of the USSR than the international working class. Whilst Trotsky fulminated against it it was no more than a logical step on from his own position. It was the beginning of the mobilisation of the European working class behind the USSR and its erstwhile ally, capitalist democracy. It was under this slogan that workers would go to Spain to be massacred as a dress rehearsal for the greater imperialist massacre of the Second World War. The recognition by the bourgeoisie that it cannot simply mobilise the proletariat with its real imperialist aims means that in each imperialist confrontation it needs a rationale which can explain why the working class should lay down their lives for the bourgeoisie. In the fascist states this mobilisation was effected around the nationalist idea that the nation had been cheated in the Treaty of Versailles. This was more effective in Germany than in Italy where Mussolini achieved very little support for war. On the other hand the Western European bourgeoisie needed a stronger ideology than mere nationalism (although it also forms part of the armoury). The answer was anti-fascism. The working class, having still come under the ideological domination of Russian state capitalism, were more enthusiastic for this than many of their rulers.

In Britain, for example, the hesitations to oppose Hitler were not down to pacifism but as to what was the best route to defend the British Empire. The Anglo-German Naval Treaty of 1937 and the policy of appeasement were all from the faction of the ruling class which hoped to allow Hitler Europe (especially if he could be persuaded to attack the USSR) whilst the British would retain world dominance. The fact that the USA would have opposed this division meant that a substantial portion of the ruling class rejected a deal with Hitler as unrealistic. This debate inside the ruling class is why the anti-fascist crusade was embarked on relatively late by the British bourgeoisie.

The Meaning of Fascism Today

From the *Financial Times* to *Socialist Worker* the cry is today the same. The fascist menace is once again amongst us. They all have a common aim — the defence of bourgeois democracy. And today we are seeing a repeat of history. The first time we saw the tragedy of a one-time proletarian thinker like Trotsky succumbing to the ideas of defence of democracy as a lesser evil. Now we are witnessing the farce of left-wing capitalist groups who take their inspiration from Trotsky openly defending the capitalist system. We are well aware that racist thuggery is also increasing and support all working class attempts at self-defence because we know that it is useless to appeal to the capitalist state. But we are not going to join in any anti-fascist crusade to politically defend democracy. Too many millions of workers have died defending democracy this century for us to repeat that mistake.

But whereas in the Thirties fascism was a real response to the capitalist crisis by the traditional mainstream bourgeoisie of monopoly capitalism, the supposed rise of today's authoritarian right is a chimera which only gives the democrats an excuse to make propaganda for the wonders of capitalist parliamentary rule. The truth of the matter is that capitalist democracy, in the face of the growing cynicism of the working class has more need of anti-fascism than fascism. Democracy is hand in glove with right wing authoritarian attacks on the working class from Germany to Guatemala. The genocidal massacres of so-called ethnic cleansing in ex-Yugoslavia are not done under the fascist flag but conducted in the name of the nation. Fascism, with its corporate programme, is not only not necessary for capitalism it is also outmoded.

In the 1920s and 1930s the bourgeoisie in the states which had lost out in the First World War saw they needed a mass base. Given that most of their parties were simply leaderships without a mass following and only financially backed by a few millionaires, the fascist movement which mobilised the petty bourgeoisie and lumpen proletariat had something to offer them. Hitler's ability in Germany to aggregate large numbers of small subscriptions gave modern capitalism a model which it could copy — elitist politics for a mass society. Now all democratic parties of right and left follow such a model and there is no need for fascism. Even the neo-fascist party in Italy, the MSI, which has so recently revived on the back of that state's acute political crisis has a programme based not on Mussolini's corporatist state but on Thatcherite restructuring. The victims of this restructuring everywhere are the working class.

The only programme for the working class is its historic struggle for communism. But if workers are conned by their false "friends" into fixating on the past and are drawn into the anti-fascist movements which support democracy they will be unable to find their own class programme and their own demands. This is what the real threat is today rather than antics of a few racist thugs on the fringes of capitalist society.

Jock

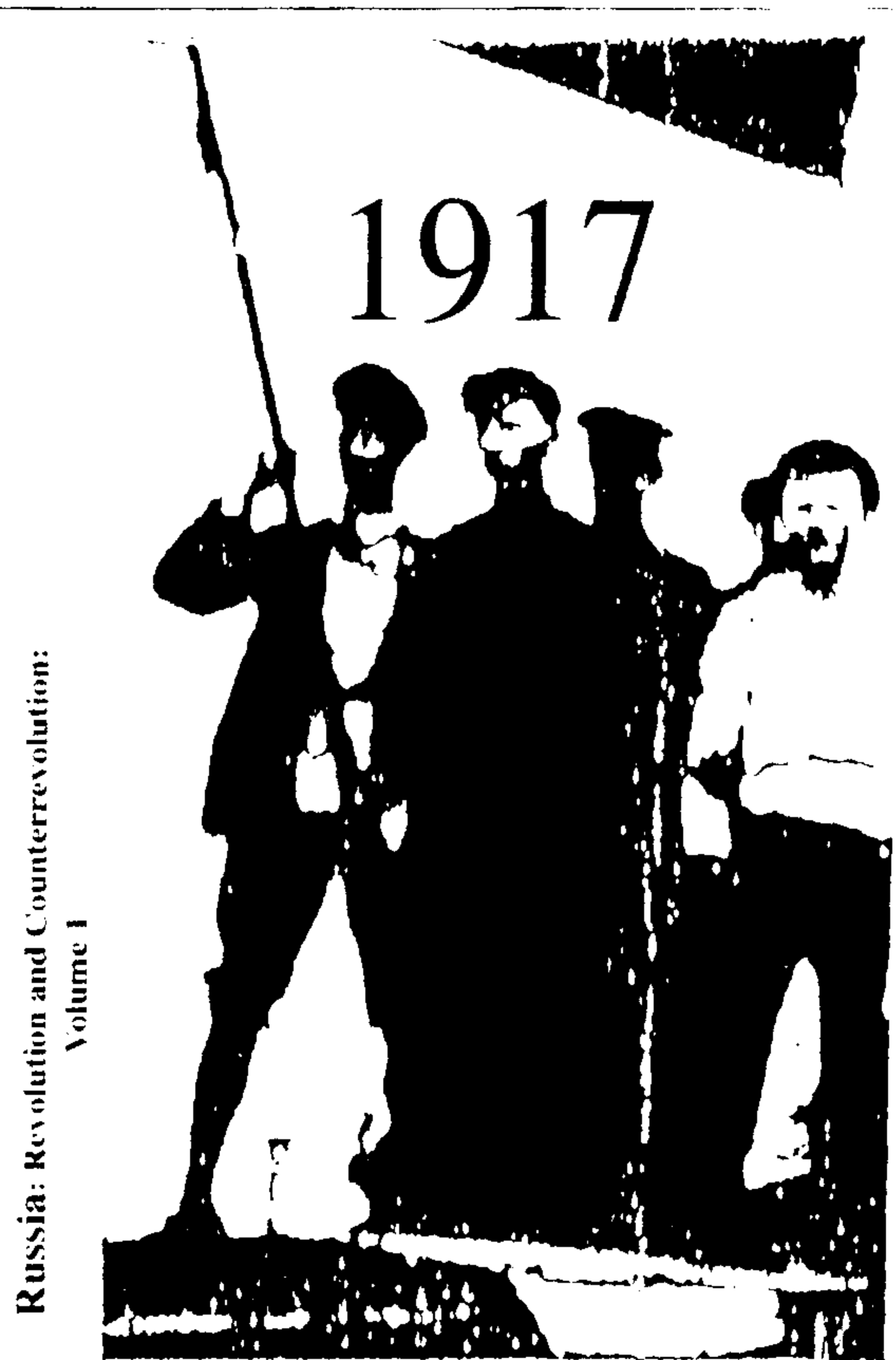
Notes

- 1 In *What Next? Vital Questions for the German Proletariat* (1932) published in *Fascism, Stalinism and the United Front* (Bookmarks, 1989) p.77
- 2 See *Workers Voice* 69 and *Workers Voice* 70 *The River of Blood that Separates Social Democracy from the Revolutionary Working Class*.
- 3 G.A.Haupt *Socialism and the Great War* (Oxford, 1972) pp.212
- 4 J.A. Moses *Trade Unionism in Germany from Bismarck to Hitler 1869-1933* Vol. 1 (New Jersey, 1982) pp. 218-9
- 5 See C. Harman *The Lost Revolution* (Bookmarks 1982).
- 6 Gerhard A. Ritter and Susanne Miller *Die Deutsche Revolution* (Frankfurt, 1968) p.320f.
- 7 Jane Degras(ed.) *The Communist International 1919-43 Documents* Vol I (London 1971) p.224
- 8 From the SWP Introduction by Steve Wright to *Fascism, Stalinism and the United Front* (Bookmarks 1989)
- 9 The documents for this can be found in M. Drachovitch and B. Lazitch, *The Comintern — Historical Highlights* (New York, 1966) pp. 319-43.
- 10 *What Next? Vital Questions for the German Proletariat in Fascism, Stalinism and the United Front* p.76)
- 11 See Conan Fischer *The German Communists and the Rise of Nazism* (Macmillan, 1991) p.105
- 12 In 1935 *Bilan* could write
It is obvious that the German proletariat could not conquer unless it could liberate the Communist International (through its left fractions) from the disintegrating influence of centrism (i.e. Stalinism — CWO) ...No struggle for a united democratic front could save the proletariat, only a struggle that rejected it; but such a struggle was bound to be dissipated once it was attached to a proletarian state working for the consolidation of the capitalist world as a whole.
(The Crushing of the German Proletariat and the Arrival of Fascism, March 1935, reprinted in International Review 71 (ICC quarterly 1992) p.12).
- 13 *What Next? Vital Questions for the German Proletariat in Fascism, Stalinism and the United Front* p.85)
- 14 *op. cit.* pp. 91-2. Trotsky's emphases.
- 15 *What is National Socialism?* *ibid.* p.260

16 See Conan Fischer *The German Communists and the Rise of Nazism* (Macmillan, 1991)

17 Fritz Fischer *From Kaiserreich to Third Reich* (Unwin, 1986) p.81. The Osthilfe scandal was an illegal compensation scheme for Prussian landowners. It has been suggested that the Nazis used this scandal to blackmail Hindenburg (via his son Oskar who was deeply involved in it) into making Hitler Chancellor. This should not obscure the real issue which is that Hitler's government was formed on the basis of German monopoly capital's needs and in alliance with the Army which allowed the Nazis freedom to overthrow state governments in Bavaria and elsewhere before awaiting anything so unreliable as the verdict of the electorate.

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The Fractions of the Communist Left, Trotskyism and Counter-revolution

(extracts from *Octobre* 1938)

The Communist (or Third) International was founded in Moscow in 1919. Its proclamation was the work of the Russian Communist (Bolshevik) Party, assisted by those communists from other countries who happened to be able to beat the imperialist blockade to reach Moscow. Even when, in 1920 and 1921 really representative organisations of the working class throughout the world were able to rally to the Comintern it remained a Russian-dominated body. This was understandable given the enormous prestige of the Russian Party in actually overthrowing its own ruling class. In practical terms the seat of a proletarian international has to be where the proletariat runs the state. However, as Lenin himself saw, this has clear dangers. Not only did the problems of extending the revolution to capitalist countries with a more sophisticated ruling class tend to be posed in Russian terms but when the Russian Party, through the failure of the world revolution to materialise, began to manage a state capitalist regime, this was to gradually undermine the Communist International. From being a body whose task was to extend world revolution it became, by 1926, a kind of appendage of the Russian Foreign Ministry.

This degeneration, both inside the Russian party and state, and in the Comintern, created a number of oppositions. The two most substantial of these from a working class point of view were those of Trotsky and the Italian Communist Party, which until 1924 was headed by its founders from the left-wing of the old Italian Socialist party headed by Amadeo Bordiga.

The two brief articles which are translated and reprinted here are taken from *Octobre*, the monthly organ of the International Bureau of the Fractions of the Communist Left. This organisation, which despite many errors was one of the predecessors of the Internationalist Communist Party which was founded fifty years ago. It still publishes *Battaglia Comunista* and *Prometeo* to-

day. It is the main inspiration of the present International Bureau for the Revolutionary Party of which Internationalist Communist Review is the central organ.

The first article gives a brief outline of the origin of the communist left after the Stalinists had taken over the Comintern and expelled all the oppositions (including both the Trotskyists and our antecedent organisations). In the 1920s the Italian Left Communists were in fact offered a deal by Zinoviev that if they joined in the campaign against Trotsky they could retain the leadership of the Italian Party. This was rejected on principle, a principle not reciprocated by Trotsky in the 1930s when he was seeking to build his own opposition. Despite having declared the basic documents of the Italian Left excellent he deliberately and systematically undermined any attempt of the two oppositions to work together, preferring phantom committees directly beholden to himself than real emanations of the working class.

Despite this the Fractions of the Communist Left continued to regard Trotsky as working class opponent of Stalin even if he committed opportunist errors (such as the attempts to work inside the French Socialist Party in 1935-6). The second article, written in 1938 shows how things had changed. The so-called Spanish Civil War was in fact the first round of the second imperialist war and after having dealt with opportunists in their own ranks the Fraction now analysed the positions of Trotsky. By putting the defence of the Spanish Republic as the basis of his strategy of so-called "permanent revolution" Trotsky had gone over to one side in an imperialist war in contravention of Lenin's call for revolutionary defeatism. The perception that Trotsky (who had written under the names Gurov and Crux) had crossed the barricades accounts for the bitterness and irony in the second article.

An Outline of the History of the Italian Fraction of the International Communist Left

It was officially formed at the Pantin Conference¹ in 1928 when the Communist International (CI), after innumerable expulsions of international communists from every country, finally decreed in its VI Congress that the defence of revolutionary positions and the CI were incompatible. In reality however the Italian Fraction had been formed throughout the civil war which resembled the struggles in Italy against centrism.

Towards the end of the 1914-18 war there appeared within the Italian Socialist Party (PSI), led by the opportunists of the famous "neither support, nor sabotage" formula at Zimmerwald,² the 'abstentionists' current led by Amadeo Bordiga and the Naples Federation which published "Il Soviet". Under the banner of abstention from parliamentarism appeared the first marxist fraction which solidarised with the Russian Revolution, not just verbally but through the elaboration of communist positions. This made them the earliest proponents of a split with the class traitors (in the PSI) and the essential basis for the foundation of the Communist Party of Italy. In *Left-Wing Communism - An Infantile Disorder*, Lenin did the marxists of Italy little service in judging them on the basis of fragmentary and incomplete information, only on their position of parliamentary abstentionism, and in giving credit to the opportunists of *L'Ordine Nuovo* of Turin³. Abstentionism, which was an aspect of differentiation between communists and socialists in relation to the capitalist state, wasn't then a position of principle but rather a position analogous to that which the Bolsheviks defended in the Duma boycott shortly after the revolutionary assault of the Russian workers in 1906. Moreover it was the Bordigist Left which advocated in 1924 in a different situation with the rise of fascism, electoral participation.

In January 1921, the Abstentionist fraction which

had split with Serrati's Socialist Party founded the Communist Party at Livorno. The Italian situation had already been settled by the Socialist's betrayal. This had liquidated a huge movement of factory occupations unleashing the bloody attack of the fascists in conjunction with the repression of the capitalist state. Faced with fascism the Socialists and maximalists disarmed the Italian workers so that the forces of the State were able to go over to the physical elimination and destruction of workers organisations.

A year later the Communist Party of Italy, which regrouped the best energies of the Italian proletariat adopted the Rome Theses at its Second Congress. These in an abbreviated form summarised the basic principles which gave to the Italian working class their first real class party. The internal organisation of this party, its relationship to the class and with other organisations, its tactics in the period of war and revolution, were to be found in these Theses. The centrists pretended to accept them in 1923 in order that they could reject them as soon as they could do so with impunity and the help of the CI. Let's simply note here that the Theses only carried on along the historic path followed by Lenin from 1903 to 1917 meeting opposition in the Comintern though the CI didn't openly refute them in the Lenin period. It is true that in Germany the Spartakists were forced to follow a different course being pushed into fusion with the Independent Socialists (the USPD).

At the Third and Fourth Comintern Congresses the Italian Party, led by the Left, opposed the policy directives which had led to the German defeat of 1923, but which had received the support of Lenin, and especially, Trotsky. It was at the express demand of Lenin that Bordiga and the Left did not resign from the leadership of the Party, though in a majority at the Congress, because for

marxists it isn't possible to solve revolutionary problems in one country if in a minority internationally.

After the defeat of 1923 the Left turned down Zinoviev's offer to leave them at the head of the Italian Party in return for support in the campaign against Trotsky within the USSR. To be sure they disagreed with Trotsky over many issues but even so he represented an internationalist reaction to centrism⁴ and this compelled the Left to give him their total solidarity. This led therefore to the resignation of the Left from all positions of authority within the Party even though they still held a majority. It was the start of the ideological struggle which began with the formation of an opposition current that ultimately gave birth to our Left Fraction. In 1926 the marxist currents who, with Bordiga, were opposed to the adventures of the centrists (the Aventine Secession, for example⁵) and who fought in the international arena against "socialism in one country", Bolshevisation, the Anglo-Russian Committee, developed a programmatic document which was presented to a Congress of the Italian Party. This document is known under the name of *The Platform of the Left*

The Rome Theses (now rejected by the centrists) and *The Platform of the Left* served as founding documents at the formation of the Italian Fraction at Pantin. This produced an organ in Italian called *Prometeo* which still appears today.

When the International Left Opposition was formed in 1930 directed by Trotsky from his Turkish exile, the Italian fraction participated through its basic documents. Trotsky praised the 1926 Platform as one of the best documents of the Opposition, a fact which didn't prevent him from unleashing a campaign of manoeuvre and intrigue to bend the Fraction to his policies.

From January, 1932 the profound crisis of the International Left Opposition had deepened the differences between Trotsky's fraction which used bureaucratic methods to divide and dissolve groups, replacing the international leadership and attacking the Fraction which had refused to take part in a game that prevented the formation of communist bodies in different countries. The contrast between fidelity to the first four Congresses of the Communist International, the credo of Trotskyism, and the marxist analysis of events in the post-war period which saw the international triumph of centrism found its expression not only in opposition to the policy of "correcting the parties" and that of forming fractions working within the party as the sole channel of marxist thinking, but also in the opposition between "democratic slogans" which Trotsky employed to champion imperialist war in Spain and China and class positions which made the proletariat and proletarian positions the only

slogans corresponding to the post-war situation.

At the end of 1932, on the eve of Hitler's arrival in power the break occurred when Trotsky (under the name Gurov) who saw a possibility of a Communist victory in Germany even under Thaelmann⁶, proposed to exclude the Fraction.

In 1935 the Congress of the Italian Fraction was held after the open break of betrayal by centrism (following the definite end of the Comintern as a revolutionary force and the entry of the U.S.S.R. into the League of Nations). From a fraction of the Communist Party of Italy it now transformed itself into a fraction of a future party which would be created by revolutionary risings of the working class. This transformation took place as Italian imperialism launched a war against Abyssinia and the Congress focussed on the problems of the transformation of the Fraction into a Party which the betrayal of centrism and the opening up of a period of imperialist wars made imperative. A current emerged which wanted to substitute for the real process of the class struggle a process which would create the conditions for the formation of the Party, a voluntaristic generator of opportunism and of revision of the communist programme. The leading elements of this current had to form a minority which in the course of the war in Spain went on to support the imperialist war and thus passed to the other side of the barricades.

At the end of 1932 the Fraction had concluded a period of common work with the Belgian Internationalist Communist League on the basis of a similar critique of the positions of the Trotskyist International Opposition, a critique which took in the central questions of the workers movement, the state and the party.

Events in Spain brought about a crisis with the Fraction and its relations with the Belgian League in the middle of which a marxist current appeared which joined up with the marxist current which dominated the Fraction. The exclusion of the minority dominated the discussion and led to a break with the League where the split was confirmed (see the resolutions of the Executive Committee, *Bilan* No.42). Parallel with its collaboration with the Belgian League the Fraction published a theoretical review in November 1933 which began the task of internationalist clarification before pushing those groups of the proletarian vanguard who had broken with Trotsky to follow its example of forming groups of the communist left. At this time all attempts to form an International Bureau foundered on the passivity and confusion of the existing groups and only the League appeared willing to take part in a serious international discussion.

With the war in Spain all the differences with the

League and other groups was expressed in a collapse of the other groups into the swamp of capitalist ideology. A new phase opened, that of the formation of the Left Fraction against all the existing groups on the basis of the programmatic ideas proclaimed by the Fraction in common with the minority in the Belgian League on the state and on the party. This effort culminated in the formation of the Bureau of Left Fractions and the transformation of *Bilan* into *Octobre*.

At present the Italian Fraction produces *Prometeo* and, an organ of discussion in Italian, and acts as the instrument of preparation for the Congress of the Fraction.

Octobre 1 (February, 1938)

Notes

1 Pantin is a suburb on the east of Paris.

2 A conference of anti-war socialists split between the pacifists and centrists, and the Left led by Lenin who called for the imperialist war to be turned into a civil war. The PSI were able to hide behind their formula because at that time the Italian ruling class was divided as to which side to support in the imperialist war.

3 This is actually inaccurate. Although Lenin did make some vague critical remarks about

abstentionism in *Left Wing Communism*, it was not in that text that he praised Gramsci's *L'Ordine Nuovo*. Lenin's praise was reserved for the Turin section of the PSI's text which he singled out as the basis for a Communist Party in Italy at the Second Comintern Congress. In fact, this text, though drafted by Gramsci and appearing in *L'Ordine Nuovo* (8.5.1920) was edited by the entire Turin section which was in fact dominated by the Communist Fraction (ie. who owed their allegiance to Bordiga and the Left).

4 The term "centrist" was used by the Internationalist Communist Left to describe Stalinism until the Second World War when they finally clarified the capitalist nature of productive relations in Russia.

5 After the murder of the right-wing Socialist MP, Giacomo Matteoti in 1924 the PSI and the PCI left the Fascist-dominated Parliament (thus imitating the withdrawal of the Roman plebs to the Aventine Hill protesting against patrician arbitrary rule in the seventh century B.C.) The PCI at first supported the secession then went over to returning to the fascist parliament to use it as a forum of opposition. Such tactical shifts only undermined working class confidence in the PCI now led by Gramsci.

6 Leader of the German Communist Party (KPD) at this time. For more on this see the article on Germany in 1933 in this issue.

Octobre No. 3 April 1938

The Events in Spain: A Trotskyist Lesson

Everyone accepts that the war in Spain represents a decisive moment in the clarification of the political positions which the workers' movement has so far faced. The innermost nature and objective function of all currents claiming roots within the proletariat have been, in effect, unmasked by that war, and the lines of demarcation which have appeared between the different groups have been definitively consecrated by thousands of workers corpses buried in Iberian soil.

This is a time of "lessons" but only of class lessons. We have to rescue from the wholesale slaughter some ideological weapons so that a future revolutionary eruption won't end up in an imperialist war. Such a work of historical analysis cannot just be done by anyone. Its climate, the grounds on which it is based have been determined in advance, only those organisations which have not failed in their mission and have opposed the banner of revolution to that of imperialist war have kept a class nature which allows them to make this analysis and to arrive at a politically progressive solution.

Trotsky has openly involved himself in the discussions on the Spanish question. This he has done so "brilliantly" as a certain Crux with all the profundity of the time of his polemic against the "left extremists" or that against the anarchists at the time of Kronstadt. It is well known, of course, that we know nothing of marxism and moreover, nothing of permanent revolution, whereas Trotsky alone sees all, knows all and can fire his "final warnings" at those traitors who, instead of linking the war and the revolution, ally themselves with the Popular Front against the workers (isn't this so Mr. Anarchist?). That clarification made we can start to examine the problems opened up by the Spanish War, and to confront the Trotskyist movement and Trotsky himself with class responses to these positions. Our ex-great man will excuse us if we take liberties regarding him but when someone betrays the interests of the working class they merit only contempt, even if they were one of the architects of October 1917.

Within the workers movement the only organisations attempting to examine the causes of bourgeois democracy's problems using class criteria have been the Left fractions. These fractions have reacted against the deformation of Lenin's thought, understanding it as revolutionary in its tactical relation to bourgeois democracy, neither doctrinally fixed nor a compromise between various extremes. Other strategists think that their politics are 'proven', wrongly believing that Lenin always recommended hiding in intermediate positions. They relate as much to the democratic bourgeoisie as to the proletariat, as capitalist reaction sweeps the whole of society. Similarly using the 'masterkey' of 'permanent revolution' Trotsky attempts another such manoeuvre, thinking that it takes revolutionary method onto some higher plane, to succeed finally in insurrection. We aren't talking about the centrists or socialists who had to move over to the defence of capitalism's democratic domination, some in 1914, others with the victory of Stalinism.

All too often we have proved that freedoms acquired by the proletariat and "democratic freedoms" are two antagonistic notions separated by a class divide. That workers in defending their press, their organisations haven't walked hand in hand with bourgeois democracy but have taken the road to victory over the latter. It would be pointless to go back over the subject here. The problem lies in that the dispute becomes exhausted in a series of events and two wars. The Trotskyist movement has somersaulted to the other side of the barricades, despite the subtleties of permanent revolution. Admittedly this wasn't the only problem but a complexity of problems which proved that on the central points of marxist doctrine (state, class, party, dictatorship of the proletariat, period of transition) Trotskyism, far from being a continuation of Lenin has passed over to empiricism and has deformed, like a caricature, the work of the Bolsheviks. The events in Spain require explanation...

Taking the facts which preceded the events ... at the time of the Ethiopian War, the criterion ap-

plied by Trotsky consisted of choosing the less reactionary of the belligerents so that in Spain Caballero was chosen over Franco transplanting the proletarian struggle there. The justification? The Fourth international seeks to guide by "materialist criteria" and "if they (the Trotskyists [ed.])² have supported, for example, Ethiopia, despite the slavery which is practised there and the barbarous political regime it is, firstly because for a pre-capitalist country, an independent national state is an historically progressive stage, secondly because the defeat of Italy would mean the beginning of the collapse of the capitalist regime 'which lived on'" (*Quatrieme Internationale* No. 1 p.9).

We know what has happened! This 'materialist criterion' has allowed the mobilisation of workers for war. The "permanent revolution" has not manifested itself, this is because the days of miracles are long passed despite the incantations of the Trotskyists. Spain must be seen as the application of this schema on a grand scale. The independent nation state, pawn of British imperialism was to be replaced by the democratic state. To defend their 'freedoms' (even the freedom of the anti-fascists imprisoned in Barcelona), the workers were urged to work alongside democracy, without forgetting the permanent revolution which, in the name of the Kornilov Affair, was to give them their victory. Here, though, we must look at things more closely.

The Centre for the Fourth International was constituted officially in July, 1936 after the exclusion of the Trotskyists from the Second International, and their reconstitution of the League of Internationalist Communists. It is certainly the strangest mixture we have ever seen. Could a marriage though between Trotsky and the left socialist groups produce anything other than a headless, footless monster? The most important sections were to quickly become famous and thus attract the ire of Trotsky. The Belgians voted for the cleric, Van Zeeland, the lesser evil when faced with Degrelle. The Dutch have become the official advocates of the POUM, and the French, who, in July 1936 were inclined to such a position, diplomatically changed their point of view, without drawing breath. That Fourth International comic opera was to throw itself, during the Spanish War, with remarkable flair into the arms of the hard-line anti-fascists.

How was the problem posed? The workers of Barcelona struck back at Franco by launching a class struggle. The workers' parties turned themselves into a shield for the capitalist state and sent workers off to the battlefield. The universal cry was - beat Franco - and, without harming that fight, to realise social reforms, 'to make the revolution'. The central problem of the state was

conjured away. It wasn't only a 'facade'. Trotsky at this time had to bite his tongue, thanks to the attentions of the 'democratic' socialist ministers of Norway.³

It was then that the Trotskyist movement hit rock bottom by moving in the direction of the POUM and the anarchists. The directive was to enter the POUM and work to turn it leftwards. It would only be much later that the destruction of the state would be remembered.

Those charlatans of France and Belgium do not utter a word of protest - if they would like us to prove our criticisms of them and their positions then we can point to their own writings to do so.

Finally Trotsky starts to talk. The author of the permanent revolution has lost his eagle's wings and is now only a farmyard duck. In what was essentially an interview, he describes as cowards those who do not support the Republican army. Then we come to the theoretical justification of Mr. Crux, the shadow of a certain Gurov who, in 1932, forecast the possibility of a victory over Hitler even with Thälmann.⁴

"The victory of Caballero over Franco is not impossible!" This was written at the beginning of 1937, after the 'treasons' of the Republican military chiefs when, on different fronts, they failed to cripple Franco. We must also look at this position - "we have to aid the Republican troops with all our might" - if we are to be truly relevant. Oh, there is nothing to fear! Mr. Crux has the revolution in sight, but not following a republican victory. The theory of permanent revolution will be laid out before us - "in the epoch of imperialism democracy retains an advantage over fascism, in each case where they confront each other the revolutionary proletariat takes up the support for democracy against fascism." It is a question of exploiting the collision. But, as a supreme subtlety - "we will defend bourgeois democracy, not by bourgeois democratic means, but by the methods of the class struggle which prepares the replacement of bourgeois democracy by the dictatorship of the proletariat." To respond to such verbiage, while it is clear today that in Spain, as elsewhere, democratic forces, not so much colliding with the forces of fascism in a decisive manner, are joined by other currents for the massacre of the proletariat.

Moreover, this non-intervention has shown us that, even on the terrain of inter-imperialist competition, the democratic and fascist countries have been careful to absorb their confrontations so as to unify their efforts in finishing off the Spanish proletariat and imprisoning the workers of other countries in the Sacred Union.

Nevertheless Mr. Crux wishes to defend bourgeois

democracy by proletarian means. How? Although we have to evaluate the experiment made by the Trotskyists in Spain, what we question sharply is the sending of workers to the military fronts all in "proclamation" of the necessity for social struggle. So then, what do we hear from Crux - a politics he thinks worthy of the POUM, with the addition of advocating soviets and on top the verbal demagoguery we know so well. They don't even ask whether the proletariat could employ the means of the class struggle to defend bourgeois positions, whether in trying such, it does not quit its specific terrain and ends by leaping into the massacre of imperialist war. Why, in the epoch of imperialism, has democracy preserved for itself an advantage over fascism? and why, if the proletariat has the capacity to defend against fascism, does it not struggle for its own objectives directly? More concretely still - why has it been affirmed that Spanish workers are only capable of defeating Franco if they defend the bourgeois state and democracy? If that was true they would easily have been able to make the revolution because the state had placed itself under their 'protection'. We ask ourselves why didn't they do it? In reality though, even if it did not matter to us if the proletariat was dominated democratically or violently, the choice between forms of domination does not depend upon the will of the workers. Historical experience shows us that when workers are pushed to defend democracy, it benefits by making a bed for fascism. It is pure foolishness to invent a democratic "advantage", making the proletariat the champion of its own suicide, just as it is a permanent cretinism to believe that, after having struggled for bourgeois democracy, workers will move on to struggle for the revolution. In the Russian revolution, the April Theses were not inspired by a criterion similar to that which arose from the events of 1848 in France, and, moreover, in Russia a contradiction existed between the bourgeoisie and feudalism. Spain no longer has a bourgeois revolution to make and only the proletariat can resolve the economic problems that centuries of parasitism by the dominant classes has rendered insoluble by the Spanish bourgeoisie at present. For Crux though, the victory of the Republican armies would have provoked a certain explosion of civil war. His colleague Trotsky said the same thing concerning China, where he gravely explained that a victory for Chiang Kaishek would provoke a civil war in Japan. Conclusion - the Bolshevik-Leninists, banner unfurled, proud of their intransigence, defend the national independence of China along with the Kuomintang.

What remarkable 'marxists' are these, who ask proletarians to offer their lives for the bourgeoisie and who hope that the piles of corpses will lead naturally to insurrection at the moment of 'victory'. The Spanish example has no parallel - each military victory has been followed by a repression of

the workers. The May days of 1937 took place after the consolidation of the Republican army and the advance around Madrid. Lenin himself counted upon the defeats of Russian imperialism to orient the workers towards revolutionary defeatism. Trotsky-Crux count upon republican victories. But an army commanded by the bourgeois state is a capitalist army which has to be destroyed, as 'one' understood. The 'other' imagines that despite the bourgeois state it is possible to alter the nature of the army by propaganda without damaging the struggle against Franco.

In all of this the problem of the state is not approached seriously, as if the Commune and October 1917 had not existed, but is replaced by considerations of 'strategy', empty of any sense without the leadership of councils which it is necessary to create to push the struggle onwards.

In May 1937, the Centre for the Fourth International published a resolution on Spain. Within the Trotskyist groupings divergences occurred not on the basis of the Spanish problem itself, but on support for the POUM while struggling against its politics. Trotsky had given the signal to attack those POUMists within the Generalitat - the Bolshevik-Leninists were going, in the land of Don Quixote, off to tilt at windmills, to found their 'Spanish' section.

The resolution likened the May days of 1937 to July 1917 in Russia. Where is the party to prepare for October? No trace could be found because the workers have been betrayed by their own parties and by the repression aimed at making understood that the capitalist state is not an insignificant 'facade' and that it could create a respect for order. For the Trotskyists, the deviation of the Spanish revolution dates from the moment when the militias were militarised and the workers' committees were dissolved. Alas! but did that revolution exist when workers were unable to struggle for the defeat of the capitalist state? Of course the revolt during those first days had a sense of glory and a class character, but the militia were the channels carrying the workers off to the imperialist war. For these gentlemen

the most important problem rested with forging a bolshevik leadership in the heat of battle, which will have assimilated the lessons of past errors and will know, in continuing the armed struggle against Franco, how to mobilise the masses effectively in the committees and to raise them up against the bourgeois state, to smash it at the opportune moment (our emphasis - ed.) by insurrection...

The Trotskyists look to forge a party "in the heat of battle", as if Lenin had never existed and also that historical experience which shows us that a

party can not create itself out of the smallest Trotskyist section, but is the result of a selection of ideas, of cadres, of an evolution of events, the "heat of battle" is the decisive test for these groupings, not the time of its creation. Further, to insist on wishing to continue the struggle against Franco on a **capitalist terrain** and to mobilise workers in their **class terrain** - are these people able to explain how we can manage to do two different things, totally opposed, at the same time? Facts remain facts, do they not? The POUM has sung that song, performing it first in the ministries, then in the prisons. The anarchists have had to understand that it was necessary to go to war without musing over the revolution. So then, are the Trotskyists waiting to pick up posts in a capitalist state, some of them realising that their prattling is only a vile brainwashing?

The conclusion is simply all formula. It is necessary to destroy the state "at the opportune moment". Ah! as we all know, that formula is dear to reformists. But who will decide that 'opportune moment'? The events without doubt! A military victory for Negrin? But while waiting it is necessary to fight in the Republican armies, so the state reinforces itself, postponing the 'moment' indefinitely.

To illustrate this pure prose we have the Bolshevik-Leninists who launched a manifesto in August 1937 (the power of bluff!), explaining "that for as long as the proletariat is unable to take power, we will defend, in the framework of the capitalist regime in transition, the democratic rights of workers". The centrists alone are seen as the champions of bourgeois democracy!

Finally, with the last phase of events in Spain, whereas it is very clear that the imperialist war is underway and that it is ruthlessly massacring thousands of proletarians and their families, 'order' reigning in Barcelona, as in Burgos, Trotsky was to speak in solemn words. He launched his 'last warning'.⁵ These were the only lessons he could draw from two years of war on behalf of the Fourth International.

Trotsky promises much and is content with little. He would like to contradict Crux (and with cause!), limiting himself to doing it modestly. Leaving to one side such prattle, where he asserts that the essential duel in Spain was between Bolshevism and Menshevism. Of course the Bolshevik current was expressed "in an accomplished way" by the Trotskyist section. As it did not exist until these last few months (and then only in theory), it will group some elements freshly imported (witness the confession to be found in the "Workers' Struggle" of Belgium) to Spain, we can imagine the importance of the 'duel' between Menshevism and Bolshevism.

Trotsky, as he understands nothing, escapes from this situation by means of historical analogies. Treating us to wanderings in the labyrinth of Thermidor: at one time Thermidor is a perspective, at another we discover that it is behind us and all explaining the Russian situation which had no parallel in the French revolution. In Spain it was necessary to recall the schema of the Russian revolution to understand that we do not know how to explain the events of Spain. The reality is that the so-called Mensheviks, like the so-called Bolsheviks (in their version of 'perfect' or 'imperfect') have defended the same central position - today the defence of democracy and the defeat of Franco, while 'tomorrow' we will examine the problems of the revolution. That is how they become accomplices in the Popular Front - making war and smothering all revolutionary possibilities.

Trotsky shows in his article that when workers submit to bourgeois leadership, in the course of civil war, their defeat is inevitable. But doesn't Crux say that despite all, the victory of Caballero over Franco was not impossible? And, moreover, the workers have submitted themselves to bourgeois direction! Ah yes! We have to struggle with Caballero without submitting to him, isn't that so? Trotsky must be living in the clouds, because the capitalist state which took into its hands the Republican army posed the problem thus - it will lead the anti-fascist war according to bourgeois criteria or there will be no war, but it will do so on one direct front not concealed from Franco. We can not ally ourselves in war with bourgeois democracy and separate ourselves from it. Two years have proved that, on this terrain, proletarians have had to progressively abdicate their social aspirations, all in the name of war interests whose representative was the state, and to reestablish the rule of law.

It is only on the level of subterfuge that Trotsky will always find refuge. There has been an alliance in Spain with the 'shadow of the bourgeoisie', because the bourgeoisie has passed, in its fat majority, over to Franco. It is though, a very powerful 'shadow', because Republican Spain preserved the capitalist state intact and pledged itself to it, in addition to the parties of the Popular Front, the POUM, the anarchists and the Trotskyists themselves. No one dreamed of an assault on power, to destroy the state and to overthrow the bourgeoisie, because one does not fight with a 'shadow'. Nevertheless, with some speed, the 'shadow' took on form and body in the anti-worker repression and has at its disposal socialist and centrist agents acting with remarkable vigour, making each episode of the war an episode of the traditional reestablishment of the rhythm of bourgeois society, hot with the swirl of massacre.

Of course, we find here and there, in this 'last warning', some words which would allow us to suppose that an innovation had taken place, further taking a more serious stand, but they are only words. The problem of the state has not been dealt with. Must the workers struggle within the Republican army whose class content is determined by the class in power? Yes, Trotsky is understood, but it is necessary that the revolutionary masses have "a state apparatus which directly and immediately expresses their will". This apparatus is that of the soviets. Yet in Russia the soviets sprang up and passed to the Bolsheviks on the basis of a perspective of defeatism and the destruction of the bourgeois army. Yet it is a fact that to safeguard the permanent revolution, Trotsky must defend republican democracy against Franco and that excludes defeatism. Evidently, in these conditions the soviets will remain a dream, but at least we will have had the consolation of having posed the idea.

Further, Trotsky envisages some riposte to the civil war that the bourgeoisie set in motion against the proletariat within the Republican zone, but he forgets to tell us how. In fighting as 'the best combatants on the front', just as he explained it to the anarchists who will have found in that the chance to denounce before the masses the positions of the traitors? Yes! How can he push the proletariat into civil war with nothing, nothing to destroy the military fronts? The puzzle left by Trotsky is as dark at the beginning as at the end. Is it necessary to advocate the fraternisation of the exploited on the two fronts, to annihilate the capitalist state, in the first place? It is here that we find the line of demarcation between shameful partisans, enthusiasts of the imperialist war in Spain or China, and internationalists. Trotsky and his Fourth International have chosen. The events of Spain have proven this categorically. We have also chosen, which is why we separate ourselves from them, not on the questions of divergences but on the question of class. These Trotskyist 'lessons' are destined to repeat the experience in other countries, their 'warnings' are clearly deformations destined to confuse the minds of workers who may come across them.

Notes

1 See *Bilan 44 Un grand renégat à la queue de paon*.

2 The original editorial comments of *Octobre* have been left unchanged.

3 Trotsky had to eschew all political activity as a condition of his political asylum in Norway.

4 For more on this see the article on fascism in this issue.

5 The target of this article is a text by Trotsky entitled *The Lessons of Spain: The Last Warning*, written on December 17th, 1937. It can be found in the collection Leon Trotsky *The Spanish Revolution (1931-9)*, Pathfinder Press NY 1973 pp. 306-26.

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