

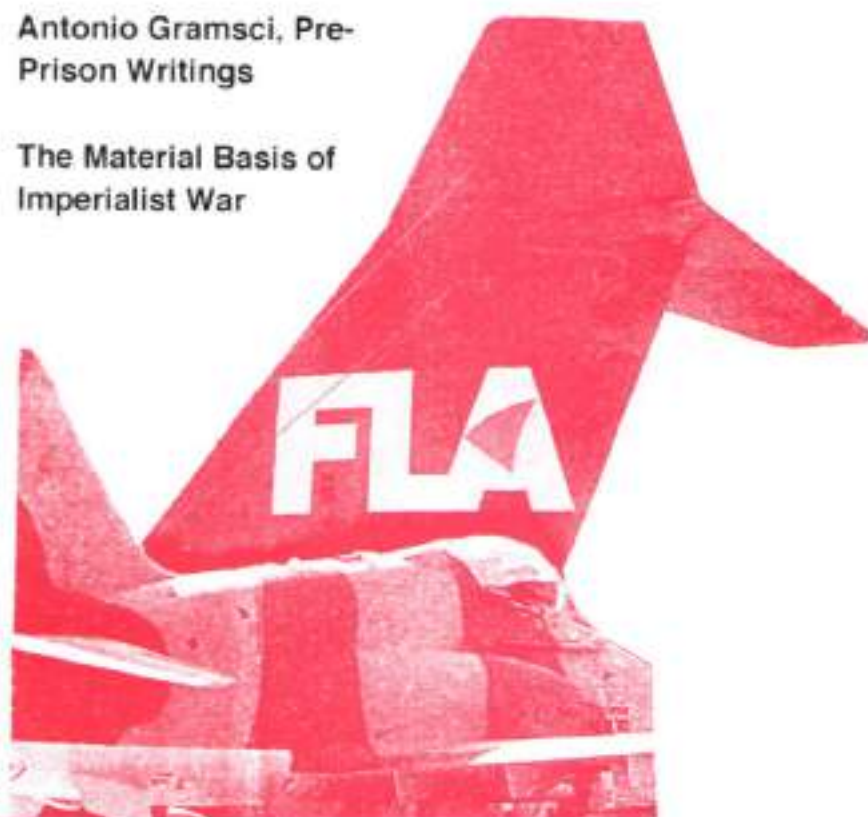
Internationalist Communist Review

Towards the Revival of
the Proletariat: The
Recomposition of the
Working Class after
Restructuring

Capitalism: the Final
Frontier?

Antonio Gramsci, Pre-
Prison Writings

The Material Basis of
Imperialist War



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Editorial

For the proletariat in the 'advanced' capitalist states 1994 proved to be the year of the recovery that never materialised. Whilst there has been something of a revival in the capitalists' profit rates this has been quite blatantly achieved at the expense of the working class. In the UK for example, the *Financial Times* was able to report that by 'downsizing' the workforce (more redundancies) and upping productivity rates (increasing exploitation), not to mention 'holding down' wages, "unit labour costs were 1.7 per cent lower than a year ago" and profit margins are "near a historic high". [16.1.95] This picture is by no means limited to the UK. Throughout the capitalist heartlands capital is busy tightening the screws on all those who work for a wage.

At the same time capital's imperialist imperative remains. The search for more profitable areas of investment and quicker capital turn-over which has led to the much talked about globalisation of capitalism (in reality the intensification of a long-established tendency) continues. Thus last year was also the year when GATT gave way to the World Trade Organisation (WTO), when the realities of the New World Order were further impressed on the more marginal zones of the world economy. Any remaining pretence at national economic development has been rudely shattered as states like India and China are finding themselves obliged to join the rest of the world in 'opening up' to the multinationals and the global capital investor. Yet easier access to the cheaper labour of the periphery will not provide the answer to the crisis that capital is looking for — as the recent panic withdrawal of capital from Mexico vividly shows. Just as *The Economist* was predicting that 1995 would be "a great year for growth in Latin America" the over-valued Mexican peso collapsed and the financial press started to run articles on the high risk of investing in 'emerging markets'. So closely tied-up is US capital in Mexico that (with a little help from the EU) it has pledged over \$40bn in loan guarantees to prevent the collapse of the Mexican economy. (Not that that will improve the conditions of life of Mexican workers or the desperate peasants of Chiapas state.)

The fact is that more and more of the wealth produced by the world's workers is being eaten up by debt repayments — where it isn't being eaten up directly by the capitalists themselves. Despite improved growth rates global capitalism cannot generate a high enough rate of profit to secure a real recovery from economic crisis.

Even so, the failure of the working class to effectively combat the onslaught of the last twenty years or so has given capital a breathing space (at least in the West) in which to offset the falling rate of profit by

introducing new technology and thoroughly restructuring its productive apparatus. Without supposing for a moment that the working class has disappeared into some sort of 'post-industrial' societal mish-mash — the wage labour/capital relation remains central — it is incumbent on revolutionary marxists to first of all recognise and then try to understand the significance of the changes going on in the world of work. Perhaps it is not surprising that it is our comrades in Italy (the EU state which is the farthest ahead with technological restructuring of industry) who are addressing this problem. In the second part of an analysis of the effects of restructuring on the Italian proletariat the question of the revival of the working class as a class "for itself" — i.e. organised round its own political programme — and the role of revolutionaries in that process is addressed. There are some thought-provoking pointers from the Italian experience about how that revival might come about in this new period when there can be no easy assumptions about the growing concentration of capital being accompanied by increasingly socialised labour.

In 'Capitalism, the Final Frontier?' we have a reminder that restructuring applies equally to the aerospace industry. Here — where strategic, military and strictly economic interests overlap — the whole process is inextricably bound up with military restructuring and reshuffling of imperialist alliances as a prelude to the emergence of new imperialist blocs and ultimately serious preparations for global war. Yet, as the article says, the capitalist space industry has been built on "several generations of human labour and science", not all of it in the service of diabolical weaponry and surveillance systems. It is possible to envisage that at least some of this might be of benefit to a post-capitalist, i.e. communist society. For example satellite communication could facilitate the operation of proletarian democracy and the administration of the global economy according to human needs. Even decadent capitalism, which in many ways is destroying the planet, can produce something that is potentially positive for humanity as a whole. Which brings us to the ICC. No doubt the comrades would deny this on the grounds that there is nothing positive about 20th century capitalism. However as we argue in 'The Material Basis of War', recognising that there has been economic growth since 1914 is not to say that capitalism today is historically progressive...

Finally, the review of Gramsci's early writings will, we hope, dispel any illusions that these can be the basis for a revival of the communist programme today. The starting point for this can only be made by learning from those revolutionaries who resisted the so-called 'bolshévisation' of the parties of the IIIrd International, not someone who tried to carry it out.

IBRP, January 1995

Towards the Revival of the Proletariat

The Recomposition of the Working Class After Restructuring

In our last issue we ended our examination of "the capital-labour relation in the course of the crisis in Italy" by recognising the need for a revival of the class movement as the proletariat is reorganised into a new social shape. We also indicated the necessity for the revolutionary movement to prepare itself by clearly recognising the real condition of the class and adapting its interventions accordingly. This is the theme of the present article.

Impact on Class Composition

Let's summarise the major impact of restructuring on class composition:

1. The hierarchical relations between the various constituents of the labour force have been modified and the constituents themselves have changed. In the modern factory (disregarding the widespread survival of traditional ways of organising production and labour), internal hierarchies within the labour force actually engaged in production have almost ceased to exist. The hierarchical relationship has shifted to one between the workteams assigned to running the machines and the workers who are responsible for their programming and more or less remote monitoring.
2. Despite enormous increases in production, there has been a noticeable reduction in the number of workers directly running machines. Conversely, the number assigned to programming and monitoring has increased. Both groups are fully part of the working class.
3. The service sector and the number of workers employed in it has grown. Whether or not such services are directly connected with production; whether they produce or distribute surplus value, the workers still represent the variable part of the individual capital engaged in the self-valorisation process. Like workers elsewhere, wage workers in the service sector — no matter the social productive nature of their labour — are exploited and are therefore components of the growing proletarian class.
4. Figures are now becoming available which show that strata who were previously part of the

petty bourgeoisie or artisans have been proletarianised. (With all the characteristics of the proletarian workforce, such as being easily replaceable, present in large numbers and consequently with low wages.) Recall, for example, software engineers or electrical engineers who maintain and repair electronic equipment: they might still have the illusion of being people with a high level of skill and professionalism but they are actually reduced, for the above-mentioned reasons, to the conditions of the "new proletariat".

Impact on Class Distribution

The microprocessor revolution has not only led to the destruction of the old form of class composition but also to a new form of territorial distribution of production and thus of the social class linked to it. We have already seen that in the decade 1971-1981 alone there was an initial fragmentation of production with a clear contrast between the growth in the number of productive units and the shrinking of employees per unit. After '81 this phenomenon became even more striking. The general outcome is a fragmentation of the productive whole as a result of the splitting up of single productive processes into subsystems which are co-ordinated but geographically dispersed, each of which employs a reduced number of workers. Apart from a few sectors, such as motor and steel manufacturing, there is no longer any need for large complexes which concentrate considerable masses of workers at every stage of the production process: manufacture and finishing of components, assembly, inspection, etc. Let's consider an example from Japan which well

illustrates the operation of this tendency.

The Japanese Vanguard

Dainippon Screen is one of the world's largest producers of layout systems for printing. As well as offices throughout the world it also has production plants in Great Britain and the US. At its plant in Kumiya it produces high performance scanners and desktop systems for working on text and images for colour testing, which are then distributed throughout the world (a few dozen are in operation in Italy). Its plant, however, consists of three buildings. It employs around 250 people. The breakdown of the labour force is: 20% in mechanical construction, 70% in design and 10% in administration. We will let the factory director, a certain Yamamoto, have his say as he addresses an international delegation of the specialist press for this sector:

Your are surprised, then, at the disproportion between the number of workers and the number of machines produced. This is the fruit of a greater use of robots in the productive phase, in assembly.

It is better to speak of 'assembly' since manufacture of the individual parts of the machines and the majority of the circuit boards using Screen designs are contracted out. This allows the almost automatic assembly of the mechanical and electronic parts. One of the three buildings in Kumiya is used as an inspection centre for the parts: it receives, inspects and sorts the supplies. However, before reaching this department, the individual components pass from another centre or warehouse where, in a space of 700 square metres, thirteen people work: three proper warehouse people and ten assigned to inspection. These figures speak for themselves: the progress of the parts is almost completely automated. Here is the famous 'just in time' system: the contractual supply of components as required and according to specified standards. Here also is confirmation of the two phenomena we are interested in: a) the dramatic change in the ratio between machine operatives and those working in inspection and/or programming; b) the just as massive redivision of the overall productive process into many geographically dispersed centres.

Forms of Class Struggle

Freeman and slave, patrician and plebian, lord and serf, guild-master and journeyman, in a word, oppressor and oppressed, stood in constant

opposition to one another, carried on an uninterrupted, now hidden, now open fight that each time ended either in a revolutionary reconstitution of society at large, or in the common ruin of the contending classes. (The Communist Manifesto)

The above is a powerful summary of the historical trajectory of class societies and serves to introduce us to the theme of the concrete forms of the struggle between classes. In all epochs the ruling class, the class of oppressors, has at its disposal all the means and instruments of domination over society. Above all, it has the legislative weapon, the power to fix the laws which regulate society, and — closely connected to this — the coercive instruments to make sure these laws and regulations are respected. In parallel, the ruling class also possesses the instruments of ideological domination over society. These are expressed in forms determined by the given society. (The ideology of the feudal aristocracy was certainly not the ideology of the revolutionary bourgeoisie of the French Revolution. At the same time, the social relations which gave rise to feudal ideology were not static: the social structure of Europe in the 6th to the 13th century was certainly not the same as between the 17th and 18th century.) The way the ruling class moves to defend its own interests, thereby going against the interests and living conditions of the oppressed classes, continuously changes. (One thinks of war, which even the feudal lords did not launch to attack the peasantry but which brought with it hunger, violence and death as immediate consequences for this class.) Conversely, the response of the oppressed class is often expressed in a fragmentary, incoherent, and above all, sporadic way and still within the ideological frame of the existing social relations. Furthermore, while the general objective (its **programme**) for the ruling class is clear and generally accepted — and it is in terms of this that it rules and defends its immediate interests — the oppressed class lacks an equivalent or superior unifying basis. In general the subject and oppressed class lacks a programme, and so its initiatives in the struggle appear as responses to the specific initiatives of the enemy or as particular, limited demands. Spartacus rightly gave his name to many of the revolutionary organisations of the bourgeois-capitalist period because his war was an attempt to liberate the slaves from slavery, to rupture the economic and social framework of Roman society.

In ancient Rome we have patricians, knights, plebians, slaves ... in almost all of these classes, again, subordinate gradations. (ibid)

But this attempt failed and it had to fail, even if the military defeat had not happened or had been delayed. On the whole there were two oppositions: the free versus the slaves, the patrician versus the plebians. Freeing the slaves not only implied rupturing the social framework, it demanded that this already be superseded, for the whole complex of class antagonisms to be superseded. This is why Spartacus remained isolated: the plebians were indeed plebians but they were free, and as such, along with the patricians and the knights, they set themselves against the slaves and their struggle (and rushed to swell the legions hunting Spartacus).

We could continue with the peasant war in Germany (to which Mehring's work gives a precise and highly instructive framework), or with the Pugachev rebellion or with the Tai Ping revolt in China, and all of them would fit the same criteria: brought about by particular circumstances, they tried to spread; they remained within the ideological and political schema of their time. This was because the conditions did not exist for the development of a practical programme of counter-attack, whether on the economic, social or political plane.

Our epoch, the epoch of the bourgeoisie, possesses, however, this distinctive feature: it has simplified the class antagonisms. Society as a whole is more and more splitting up into two great hostile camps, into two great classes directly facing each other: Bourgeoisie and Proletariat.. (ibid)

The *Manifesto* was the first programmatic document of the revolutionary proletariat. Today it is possible to break the capitalist framework, to revolutionise the social structure that goes with it, within the programme of communist reconstruction. The class can and must make this programme its own and launch its own initiatives on the basis of it. It can do this, but it may not necessarily do so. The communist movement recognised this in its first *Manifesto* (the revolutionary recomposition of society at large or the common ruin of the contending classes) and in other basic documents (e.g. socialism or barbarism). It is useful to recall the conditions for this happening. First, the ruin of society and its economy, making it possible for proletarian struggles to emerge, even if only defensive ones. Second, the spreading and co-ordination of these struggles. Third, the simultaneous development of the communist programme (i.e. of its hold on the working class) with the struggles themselves until the class struggle is identified as the struggle for revolution.

A Note in Brackets for Confusionists

The class struggle has always existed and still lives. So long as the proletariat remains in a condition of subjection, however, the initiative in the use of violence is entirely with the bourgeoisie. In some countries the form in which the class struggle expresses itself is a thousand miles remote from the historic interests of the working class. Much less than being 'for itself', the class 'in itself' expresses its opposition to the existing state of affairs in a confused fashion. Not only does it adhere to bourgeois ideologies but often it supports the most reactionary of them. (Islamic fundamentalism and the support it gets from the poorest strata of the populations in question is a significant example.) The point is to recognise the attraction such ideologies can exercise when the pressure to struggle felt by the oppressed — a pressure which stems from the material relations between classes — does not manifest itself on its own autonomous ground, but instead takes up ideologies associated with the worst interests of some stratum or other of the bourgeoisie. In addition, the various impulses which push workers into action must themselves be recognised, along with their underlying causes. Only in this way will it be possible to intervene appropriately and prepare for revolutionary conditions.

We have mentioned Islamic fundamentalism but the rise of racism and nationalism in other countries is similar and is reminiscent of the dangerous success of the Northern Leaguers amongst Italian proletarians. The class does not develop its own programme by starting from its daily experience in the workplace. This cannot be repeated too often. The revolutionary programme is both developed and sustained by the revolutionary party which bases its own existence on it and organises itself around it. Thus the class struggle is transformed into revolutionary struggle when it travels in the same direction as the party. In other words, class struggle is revolutionary when it is influenced and steered politically by the revolutionary party. If this party does not exist class struggle does not acquire revolutionary content, but it certainly does not lose its objective character of being class struggle. Close brackets.

Class Struggle and Communist Strategy: Before October

Picking up the thread of our discourse once more, it is clear that the general conditions required for the development of the revolutionary struggle for communism remain the same throughout the

whole history of the adversary, i.e. of bourgeois-capitalist society. Revolutionary strategy has to be articulated on the basis of these general 'rules'. Initially the strategy of the communist movement was envisaged in the following terms:

- a) The general organisation of workers on the basis of economic demands and therefore still within the capital-labour relationship; conceived as a task of revolutionaries themselves.
- b) This extensive organisation to be the minimum condition for the growth of the revolutionary programme, which would be on the basis of the economic struggle and thanks to the presence and activity of communists.
- c) Political preparation was conceived as working for what was both desirable and possible — the generalised struggle of the working class transformed into "the assault on the heavens".

Since then the situation has changed somewhat. The workers' general economic organisation (the trade union) and the very party which predicted the revolution have changed sides, have in fact joined the camp of those who defend the continued existence of capitalism.

The union tends to perpetuate its own existence as a negotiating organ and therefore to perpetuate the capital/wage-labour relation. (The communist movement was slow to recognise this.) In addition, party organisations, once they became part of the political machinery of the bourgeois administrative apparatus, adapted themselves to it, abandoned the revolutionary programme and went along with bourgeois undertakings, war included.

The revolutionaries, those who continued to uphold and defend the revolutionary programme from inside the old socialist (or social democratic) party, left it and founded the new party. However, the strategy remained the same as before. The only difference being that the trade union must now be conquered. The union would be won over to communism by starting from the level of wage bargaining, something which was in the political hands of the pro-capitalist reformists and the old Socialist Party apparatus.

After October 1917

Once again the situation changed. The Party which had made the revolution in one country, Russia, did not succeed in making it elsewhere. Thus it remained isolated and found itself having to manage a necessarily capitalist accumulation process and was overwhelmed by this. This party too crossed the barricades and won a large part of the unions to its leadership. This time it was not a question of betrayal by social democracy to

which the response had been the creation of a new party by many revolutionaries, thus maintaining the continuity of the communist movement. This time, it was rather a question of the revolutionary movement itself crumbling: a heavy defeat which the class paid for by passively lining up with the fronts of the Second World War. Above all, the communist movement paid for this rout with a dramatic thinning of its ranks coupled with the necessity to draw up a balance sheet of the defeat.

The general points, a, b and c, above still apply. Obviously, the process of establishing the revolutionary programme within the working class means starting again from scratch, but it is not historically hopeless. The conditions for the organisation of the party itself have necessarily changed. It is no longer possible to conceive of the kind of mass party that actually existed at the start of the century. On the other hand, this is perfectly in line with Marxist theory concerning ideological domination... Today, the fact that unions are no longer utilisable instruments in revolutionary strategy has to be taken into account. That is, the only mass organisation where the leadership has to be won by revolutionaries is the workers' council, the soviet, or whatever one wishes to call it.

The most difficult, almost insoluble, problem is that of fighting the counter-revolutionary influence and leadership of struggles while they are in the process of extending and generalising themselves. It is extremely difficult because struggles (mainly strikes) break out initially at the level of the factory and, for this reason as well, are led from the first by the reformist enemy who is also at the forefront of any possible extension. In fact struggles are extended only when the most militant workers (the vanguard) are safely in the hands of the union. Usually these militants come from the large factories with a concentration of labour. It is here that big strikes have always started: here in fact, is where the contradictions between the workers and the owners or managers emerge most easily. (The atmosphere of conflict in large factories is certainly not comparable to the quiet life of the paternalistic super-exploitation in small workshops or in offices with a few employees.)

Hitherto the expectation has been, therefore, that revolutionaries would intervene in such struggles and reinforce their influence, both numerically and organisationally, as the struggle extended. They would be able to reach a position where they could wage the decisive battle for revolutionary leadership in what might possibly be the last stages of the process of generalisation. Thus would the limits imposed by the unions be overcome within the organisational form of the workers' council. That this is indeed a possibility, once

workers' struggles actually start defending wider proletarian interests, has been demonstrated by various episodes in the material struggle of the class over the last few decades throughout the world. From the French May to Poland in 1980; from the Iranian workers' councils of 1989 to the more recent committees of Russian miners. It is in these sorts of situations that if a sufficiently prepared and organised party were present, it could and would have to reconnect with the class and thus bring together the material mass struggle and the political struggle for communism.

After the Microprocessor Revolution

The changed structure of the class — or, as yet, the end of the old composition — naturally alters the objective situation in which revolutionary strategy is defined. We can identify at once where change is taking place; a change which can be verified by the modified possibilities for the way struggles can break out and unfold. Equally clearly, we can see there are immediate political implications.

Meanwhile, however, we repeat that the strategic perspective which emerged at the end of the Second world War, and which we summarise below, has not changed:

1. The crisis is destroying economic stability and consequently political and social stability. This makes the emergence of social struggles a possibility and, what is more important for us, raises the possibility of class struggle, whatever the political direction it takes at its birth.
2. The communist political organisation must act within the material movement of the proletariat and use its influence as far as possible to get that movement to stay on its own class terrain.
3. During the process of extension, generalisation and co-ordination of struggles the revolutionary leadership must grow by means of open theoretical, political and organisational opposition to capitalist forces both inside and outside the class movement.
4. The critical revolutionary period opens when the programme has penetrated the working class to the extent that it finds the strength to make a final assault on the bourgeois state. In other words, when the party leads sufficient class forces for a victorious assault on power.

Points 3 and 4 become possible when what we foresee under point 2 becomes true: a growth of the workers' movement on its own class terrain and the active working presence within it of the revolutionary vanguard. The crisis is already in

full swing and there are no shortage of threats, sometimes dramatic ones, to social and political stability. We need only look at what is happening in the world to see this. But we are still miles from the appearance of an autonomous proletarian movement. In fact, and we have fully examined this in these pages (*Prometeo*) and in the pages of *Battaglia Comunista*, the class has suffered further blows to its self-identity, both in a material and subjective sense. In short, as far as the changed composition of the class is concerned, we have already said enough to explain how the new and multiple divisions of the class have negatively influenced its capacity to recognise itself.¹ On the subjective level, on the level of expectations or ideals, the wretched collapse of the USSR has done the rest.

This seems an appropriate point to pause and note a few things of great interest.

The Collapse of the USSR and the Working Class

The withering of the Russian Revolution and with it the Soviet State as the Party led it towards counter-revolutionary state capitalism was a dramatic historic defeat for both the Russian and the international proletariat. It was not just that the State or the Party abandoned the class they were supposed to represent; they also practised a massive deception by continuing to call themselves communist. As such, they were admired and even worshipped by all the other Parties in the International. If these parties, themselves the vanguard of their respective sections of the class, did not realise what was happening in the "home of socialism", it is foolish (as well as idealist) to expect the working masses, slaving away to eke out a living in factories throughout the world, to realise what was going on.

In the meantime an infernal war was being prepared where these same masses would be called on to butcher each other in the name of ideals concocted in the most dishonest way by the ruling class.

At the end of the war the USSR, still calling itself 'the home of socialism' found itself in competition with the bloc headed by the USA over the division of the world. The structure of the working class remained the same as before, excluding the sort of familiar changes associated with technical progress. Moreover, the industrial apparatus of many of the belligerent countries was in pieces and in need of rebuilding.

Thus the class continued to see the 'Communist

Parties' as their own, not least because they presented themselves as such, in line with the USSR's interest in undermining their Western rivals from within. (This is not to credit them with a revolutionary communist perspective.) The Communist Parties acted as the political reference point of the working class in the real sense of the term 'political', i.e. in the bourgeois sense of the administration of society, leaving its productive and social relations intact. In this context political activity for the working class means finding a compromise between its interests and those of the other classes inside the existing (capitalist) social relations. Incidentally, this is the reason why it is more correct to talk of revolutionary militancy than revolutionary politics: revolutionaries do not bargain over the proletariat's interests since these can only be fulfilled by revolution, not by mediation.

However, the Communist Parties presented themselves as workers' parties, who, in turn, saw the Communist Parties as 'their' parties, the political expression of their class life. Italy provides a particularly dramatic example of this. Here the PCI was the largest Western Party, exercising the greatest weight on the class, up to and during the Seventies, when the working class still remained faithful followers of the myth of their historic organisations (the PCI and the CGIL).

In other countries, such as Great Britain, Germany and the USA itself, where the CPs were a long way from having the PCI's power and organisation, the parties of mediation were the Labour Parties. Here events before and after the war bequeathed a different political legacy: the USSR was almost out of the game and so were its parties.

However, by the Seventies forces which would bring significant political change were maturing inside those countries with strong CPs. These Parties, brought up first with the politics of the Comintern, and then of the Cominform, began to experience a contradiction on their "national roads to socialism": the contradiction between the necessity for every good bourgeois party to defend and interpret the higher interests of its national state, and their original role as agents of the USSR. This is what kept them strictly outside the area of government; this was the Cold War. When the whiff of political power began to get stronger (in the mid-60s) guarantees needed to be given to both the domestic and American capitalists: the 'break' with the USSR began. It seemed to be a success: 1976 was the year of the PCI's semi-victory in the elections. Shopkeepers, artisans and free professionals united with the broad strata of workers who already voted PCI, hoping for a change to the left which would be more demo-

cratic and cleansed of the corruption and hypocrisy of the past. But as luck would have it, the PCI began to meet with difficulties from workers. Between U-turns and convivial lunches with the bosses, the unions had been signing contracts which hit the workers and in the main the PCI supported them. Glorifying sacrifices, the great Party behaved in a manner increasingly at odds with the defence of workers' interests (even in terms of compromise and negotiation) and ... it began to lose them. Moreover, since it had almost always been a mass bourgeois party it behaved as such when confronted with new situations and new crises. In the midst of its break with the USSR and as the working class was finding new ways of struggling, the PCI piled stupidity upon stupidity: writing first one thing and then saying the opposite and losing its thread. In about a decade the PCI moved from being a party of workers, to a 'clean hands' party; from an alternative democratic party to a party of compromise. Finally it ended up directly refuting class divisions and the struggle that goes with them until even the existence of the working class was denied.

Meanwhile, this class, the personification of variable capital which its 'own' party no longer recognised, found itself facing attacks in which the PCI was the sordid accomplice. It is not surprising that the working class ended up losing its political bearings. On top of this, the collapse of the USSR brought added disgust as the present and past miseries of the socialist homeland opened the eyes of even the most unquestioning. "If that was socialism ..." trumpeted the bourgeoisie, and the masses could do nothing but repeat this refrain. Even in a watered-down and confused way the USSR had remained their model for superseding capitalism — a model which we know had to be radically corrected, for heaven's sake — but with the collapse of the model even the hope of overcoming capitalism was shipwrecked.

The Working Class Disarmed and Reaction on the Rise

These factors were enough to leave the working class completely disarmed in the face of the increasingly violent storm battering it. This has gone so far that, at the time of writing, there are demonstrations by tens of thousands of shopkeepers and small employers protesting against taxes which could hit them without touching workers' rights and which would continue to allow unemployment benefit for those who can't find work. That the crisis is also hitting the smallest of the petty bourgeoisie hard is a fact, that a considerable number of them are approaching proletarian conditions is true, but when these

strata move on their own, without, or even against, the proletariat, then this too is a drama, but one carrying the imprint of darkest reaction. When the petty bourgeoisie moves this is another sign of bourgeois solidarity breaking up. (It is no accident that this always begins to crumble when a common front against the enemy is not so crucial.) Several years ago we wrote that the Italian bourgeoisie needed to create a new political class for itself. This was no easy thing, given the rigidity of the political framework imposed by the Cold War, but it was still necessary. The bourgeoisie, the big bourgeoisie which controls the banks and Confindustria, believed it had found the way by unleashing judicial war against the old apparatus of political power.

However ... the substitution is not yet complete and meanwhile the economic crisis continues to get worse. In these circumstances there would be nothing easier than for the tensions inside the bourgeoisie to go unchecked and grow into a small earthquake. Basically the government is entrusted with the task of mediating between various, often conflicting, interests and pressure groups, in the interests of the ruling class as a whole. When this mediating and governing force, previously trusted for its clear-sightedness, is severely weakened the splintered forces of the bourgeoisie start to come into conflict with each other as each promotes its own political preference. The same thing occurred in the USSR after Gorbachev was overthrown along with the 'red', but enlightened, bourgeoisie that he represented. It is also what happened in Yugoslavia with the end of Titoism.

What is happening in Italy is certainly less dramatic, at least at the moment. Shopkeepers and small firms are with the League; the private big bourgeoisie spasmodically seeks a more credible reference point than it has so far found (with Ciampi and his gang); the big state bourgeoisie and their clients are for the old political set-up, defending their positions from attack by privatisations. And what of the "people", the workers employed by one or other of these? They are divided along the same lines as the bourgeoisie — just as quarrelsome and reactionary, devoid of principles and consistency.

We are witnessing a kind of 'plebeianisation' of the proletariat which, as it fails to recognise its own class characteristics, is dissolving into the citizenry of the bourgeois state. Without its own cultural and political resources, it is dividing along the lines of the 'big bosses'. And, since the material conditions of the plebeian citizenry is not so rosy, the citizens are often inclined to be taken in by the demagogic promises of any bourgeois

who is more "opposed" to the present state of affairs, no matter how unlikely and reactionary the direction from which these promises stem. In essence, the recomposition of the proletariat has to start from almost nothing.

For the Return of the Working Class

Once again the working class has to become the subject of history. To do so it has to start by fighting elementary defensive struggles on its own autonomous terrain; because a class incapable of defending itself from its enemy in the everyday struggle neither deserves, nor can ever hope, to defeat it in the struggle for power. The problem, therefore, is to identify how that revival might occur, given the present levels of fragmentation and decomposition. Our hypothesis is clear. The objective process of break-up and fragmentation has reached its limit or is close to it, and the possibility of a counter-tendency emerging already exists. This leads to a further problem, from the point of view of communist strategy, that of indicating how the material class struggle (as it broadens and intensifies) will meet up with the proletarian party (as its influence grows) until the strategy and tactics outlined in the revolutionary programme converge with the objective activity of the proletarian masses, or at least of their effective leaders. In other words, it is a question of identifying when the movement of the class in itself is towards its revolutionary programme and vice versa.

As we said, up until now it has been assumed that the coming together of the revolutionary programme (the party) and the material movement of the class would be in the period of expansion of the struggle. (Obviously "assumed" means that this is what was being worked for.) In essence this boiled down to the initial link-up between the strategic programme and the real movement (given that the isolation of the revolutionary vanguard is an inevitable result of previous history). It was also a question of extending the struggles themselves. Despite being generated by the permanent state of conflict which held sway wherever there were large concentrations of workers, their struggles were dominated by reformism right from the outset. Thus, the process of revolutionaries and the working class movement coming together was very difficult but all the more necessary.

Now we are in the position where those large productive concentrations are disappearing. So, therefore, the starting point of proletarian struggle is also changing. The big factory is no longer the 'natural' environment where proletarians can come together in defence of their immediate interests. On the other hand, the small productive unit or

workplace is not only traditionally incapable of fulfilling this role but is currently at the centre of those deadly changes in the wage structure which are leading to individual work contracts whose effect is to further divide workers.²

Perhaps we are approaching a situation where the material conditions for proletarian struggle are completely absent and productive workers are no longer of central importance? Perhaps the above-mentioned process of plebeianisation is fated to continue indefinitely? If this were so, we could all go home and busy ourselves with something else. And not just that, we should do so, and for this reason alone join the chorus which sings of the death of Marxism. In reality, however, it is Marxism itself (historical materialism and the critique of political economy) which teaches us that so long as there is an exploited class it never ceases to struggle, despite all ups and downs; and so long as the working class remains the only force capable of making a revolutionary change in society, the possibility really exists for it to once again take its destiny into its own hands. It is thus important to discover today the possible basis for tomorrow's revival. This is a necessary precondition if the revolutionary vanguard is going to contribute to the development of new forms of class struggle. However, this presupposes being 'inside' the class struggle from the very beginning which means overcoming the enormous barriers, mentioned above, between revolutionaries (and their programme) and the class. Even so, the prospect is not as dark as might appear from a first glance at the material and political situation of the class. But where do we see the signs of new ways of workers coming together? Paradoxically, some signs can already be found in the final outburst of struggles emanating from the death throes of the old-style workforce. We are referring to rank and file organisations like the *Cobas* (Base Committees), *Rappresentanze di Base* (Representatives from Below or from the rank and file) and the *Autocconvocati* (Self-Organised). All of these have had some impact and, despite being examples of the new trade unionism and thus of a certain kind of reformism that has nothing to do with a real revival of the class, they also contain features worth discussing. We will examine these two aspects separately.

New Unionism or Old Reformism

The above-mentioned are the three most representative examples of a whole archipelago of bodies opposed to the existing unions. They all share the same basic features, which can be listed schematically so as not to lose ourselves in distinctions of little relevance between one example and another. All of them aim at rebuilding a

national organisation capable of representing workers more directly in negotiations with the bosses (i.e. more democratic). Whether this is conceived as a union or a co-ordination of partial or local organisations does not change things much. The crux of the matter remains negotiation. Their maximum political objective is direct representation of the workers (or their elected spokespeople) at the negotiating table as a means of achieving the partial demands (economic and administrative) of the workers themselves. This is always in terms of what is 'compatible' (with capital's interests); though this is opportunistically renamed 'realistic demands' as the infamous word 'compatibility' is left to the official unions. These organisations were born either in the big factories which are disappearing or being drastically reduced in size, or else in the public services which, although operating in small units, have always been confronted by a single large and direct opponent (the state or state bodies). We shall see that the public services, precisely because of their structure, have for some time now pointed towards new forms of working class realignment.

New organs have appeared which are animated and led by the old political network of the reformist extreme left. Despite its profound ideological crisis, this has not ceased to be politically active. The bankruptcy of Stalinism and the end of the mystification that statism is socialism have certainly ended their more long term political prospects, but their reformism is also being accentuated: i.e. their persistent search for solutions within the capitalist mode of production. It is characteristic of this political animal that even if it sheds its skin it continues to practise politics, in the sense of co-management (see above). Certainly, the reformist nature of the political caste which was largely in at the start of these experiences is reflected in the present movement.

It was predictable, however, that the first reaction to the now obvious sell-out of workers' interests by the official unions would be the search for new union forms. "The union is no longer any good, let's have another." This is natural: the problem is not seen in 'trade unionism' as such but in the particular form. Thus the task of the reformist activist: — taking the organisational leadership and the struggles themselves outside the official unions — was made easy. There was no shortage of workers sick to death with union sell-outs and ready to struggle in this way, especially in the large, crisis-ridden plants (Fiat-Alfa, Maserati, Dalmine, Breda, etc.) and in various parts of the public services. This is the reason for the relative success of such experiences, despite their profound internal divisions over what should be considered the most appropriate form. Moreover,

it is symptomatic that these divisions cut through political parties, to the extent that supporters of *Rifondazione*, for example, could be found amongst delegates of the *Autoconvocati* (aiming to change the existing unions) and amongst leaders of the *Cobas* (fierce opponents of any such idea). Bitter political quarrels amongst members of a single ultra-reformist party would lead to the collapse of the whole pan-union experience whenever there was insufficient support to sustain them from below, or where no single body had the requisite number of associates and sympathisers.

The New Forms

In substance these forms of union opposition reflect the old class composition. As such, they are fated, at best, to exhaust themselves along with the exhaustion of the base which determines them. But we shouldn't fool ourselves. Any positive experiments by the newly-constituted working class will certainly encourage the old and new exponents of neo-union reformism to carry on under the new class composition too. Even though the *Cobas* and the *Autoconvocati* began where there are large concentrations of workers and in the public services, they were also able to draw in workers from medium and small firms. This gives the old political caste the chance to go on making converts, even after the movement from the large workplaces is exhausted. And it is precisely here that 'new' ways of workers combining together to organise their struggles can be identified.

It is not the first time, nor is it at all surprising, that clues for revolutionary tactics can be found in experiences which originate in reformism and the preservation of capitalism. Basically, as we have already emphasised, the direction taken by the old political caste coincides with objective pressures inside the working class and with a concrete movement which needs to be taken into consideration and examined.

In that case, what is significant about these experiences? Their overriding significance is that they were created by militant workers combining on a **territorial** basis. The *Rappresentanze di Base* and the *Autoconvocati* in particular, but also to a certain extent the *CGIL* part of *Essere sindacato*⁵, were created by union activists and/or militant workers from separate workplaces (certainly with the organisational and logistic support of the left-wing politicians) who came together to co-ordinate their struggles on some sort of territorial level — whether this was local, provincial, regional or national is not important.

Obviously the *Autoconvocati* who were already

inside the unions, as was *Essere sindacato*, were at an advantage here and their experience is nothing special. More significant (and sometimes politically more radical) was that of *Rappresentanze di Base* and the *Cobas* in the public services. They did not enjoy the facilities furnished by the union structure (pre-existing contacts, availability of equipment and venues for meetings) and the 'originality' of the organisational experience is more obvious. They were not federations of 'factory' organisations which had grown up on the basis of inherent workplace conflict, but territorial groupings of worker activists and militants who had been isolated in the workplace or at any rate prevented from any perceptible action. It is these which have given life to new unionism, a new mode of trade union organisation. Even so, the 'diabolical invention' of the reformists boils down to their having quickly taken over concrete ways of organising and linking up: the fact that the organisation and linking up took place remains and has a certain historical import.

The 'founding fathers' of the revolutionary movement saw the limitations of the Commune but they recognised in the dictatorship of the proletariat — first expressed by the Commune — the form of political power necessary for carrying out the revolution. The soviets in Russia were born under the impetus of the most disparate political groups and had an almost purely Menshevik leadership. But first Trotsky, and then the Bolshevik Party were able to recognise in them the form, the concrete instrument, of the dictatorship of the proletariat. It was not the soviets as led by the Mensheviks or the SRs (much less by Cadets or priests) but the soviet as an organisational form which became the basis of the proletarian dictatorship once it was oriented on a revolutionary path, or rather led by the revolutionary party. Our task is to define the future organisational forms for the revival of proletarian struggle and we certainly do not see them in the various sets of initials of the present trade unionist opposition to the unions. Instead we see them in the territorial organisations and combinations which for the moment have been taken over by the reformists.

In the Public Services

We have already mentioned that militant workers from various branches of the public services were involved from the start in the new organisational forms. Perhaps it would even be correct to say that the first experiments were in the public service sector. As early as 1987 the schools *Cobas*⁴ and Unified Railway Drivers (*Macchinisti uniti*) had shown a considerable display of strength before falling victim to radical unionism. But it is the

genesis of these movements which can lead in so many different directions that is of interest to us.

In the case of the above, the new forms were born when a few militants went beyond sectional boundaries and held political/organisational meetings on a territorial basis (i.e. outside the workplaces). These meetings were to decide what to do about the strong feeling of resentment at worsening conditions and/or the economic demands building up in their own sections. In a short time the calls for mobilisation and struggle emanating from these bodies drew in hundreds (in the case of the train drivers) and tens of thousands (in the case of the schools), leading to a demonstration of 50,000 on the streets of Rome. This was before the Wall fell and before the campaign about the disappearance of the working class; before the wave of disillusion and reflux which struck the left in general and before the latest brutal evidence of economic crisis with its associated campaign about the necessity for sacrifices.

The corporatist limitations of these experiences were obvious, locked, as they were, within the restrictive boundaries — sometimes laughably so — of category and, in the case of the railway drivers, of subcategory. It was precisely against these limitations that we fought at the time, from the inside.² The question was: either the movement would grow from below, or it would inevitably become exhausted and identified with the National Executive Commission which was pre-occupied above all else with establishing a legal political existence for itself. The clash came over whether to negotiate or not, with the dominant group striving for the first option. As we predicted, this led into a cul-de-sac. The political manipulators had neither the ability nor the real possibility of forming their new union: there was too much competition, and not only from the existing union federations. So they kept away from the longed-for negotiating table and lost the movement. Their initials survive to this day, but the proletarian elements in the schools (only these are worth bothering with, the rest of the teachers being petty bourgeois) will have to start from scratch with their rank and file organisations and co-ordination of militants.

Towards New Unions?

As far as the industrial world is concerned, the process of unifying the various forms of opposition to the unions has followed a slightly different course. Partly this has been to repeat the experience of the now defunct workers' committees (*Comitati operai*) of Fiat in 1980. Here, more or less powerful factory committees were formed in

the big factories which began to act as unifying nuclei and the minorities who were organising on a territorial basis gathered round them. The result was the creation of another form of territorial coordination.

Such origins betray the strongly unionist and essentially reformist character of these organisations which were often initiated by crypto-Stalinists and the so-called new Left desperate to recycle itself. (From supporters of the invasion of Afghanistan to the Trotskyists who now belong to *Rifondazione*.) In fact their origins brand these organisations as a kind of last material reflex of the old class composition. Nevertheless, it must be stressed that nowadays any opposition (even of the unionist/reformist type) to the historical and daily sell-out of proletarian interests by the unions can only come about if it goes outside the structure and internal dynamic of the unions. This is an appropriate point to reply to the facile and extremely naive objection that says: "If these structures end up being one or more new unions, we will be back where we were before but with the difference that they will be more capable of looking after the workers in small and medium concerns than are today's official unions." Granted that the official unions do not look after workers in medium and small firms — who, it must be said, have shown no very great desire to be looked after — the question is really about the very possibility of instituting a new union which is significantly different from the present unions. If a union capable of negotiation (and therefore recognised) were to emerge from the *Cub* (Unified base committees) and its allies, it would have to follow the same route as the present ones. There is no room for mediation which is not mediation between the bosses' interests and the workers. There is no room, that is, for even a genuine defensive struggle round wage demands and conditions to succeed. However, it is a rule of the game that swindles are depicted as successes. Political animals who choose a career in the unions will always play with words and make, for example, the wage cuts required by capital seem like a gain for the workers and something for them to value.

Never assume anything in history. It is possible that the *Cub* and its allies could start a fourth union and that this might even manage to become the sole "workers' representative". But this does not alter the question one iota. Not only is it the case that even the minimal defence of the working class is impossible if the struggle is not taken up outside and against the unions, but also this must start from the territorial organisations created by working class militants themselves. This is no small point. It has both tactical repercussions and implications for the possibility of concrete openings

for revolutionary work.

New Possibilities and Old Dangers

On the tactical level, the prospect of consolidating class interests on a territorial basis changes the starting point for a struggle that could lead to a revolutionary assault. We have already said that communists must act inside the real proletarian movement to influence it as much as possible, and that as this material movement develops the revolutionary leadership must also develop. (Points 2 and 3 above.) Having revolutionaries present right from the start of the proletariat's defensive movement would certainly make their task easier than in the previous scheme of things. Like the embryonic organisational expressions of proletarian unification, revolutionaries are a tiny, geographically scattered minority. Any potential for the extension of the former translates into the potential for expanding revolutionary influence. Let's be clear, however, this is not a question of realising the movement's idealist immanence. The **potential** for the extension of proletarian organisation and struggle should not be confused with its actual realisation.

If it is true that the beginnings of a revival of the class struggle can only come with some sort of geographical unification by militant workers, it is not inevitable that this will actually result in the mobilisation of the mass of the proletariat and those being proletarianised. The road will be far more tortuous than we could possibly wish. No doubt there will be more cases of the new territorial organs falling back into 'negotiating' unions and further obstacles will be thrown in their path by the union federations which are already trying to find a way of re-establishing themselves on a geographical basis.

The fragmentation of the productive apparatus is so obvious that it hasn't escaped the attention of the unions. It's no use expecting a great analysis of the reason for this from the unions: political economy has never been part of their tradition and they are not going to examine the dynamic of capitalism or the crisis in the cycle of accumulation which has provoked the present changes. The unions simply see the problem in terms of its formal appearance. Their response to the striking growth of small and medium firms as large scale industry declines is to adapt their bureaucratic apparatus accordingly. A certain number of bureaucrats have been thrown out of their old sectional posts and are being told to find themselves a 'district' where they can hunt new members. That is, they are looking for areas with a high density of small to medium productive units with

a variety of workers.

Trentin, the CGIL General Secretary, has called for an urgent debureaucratisation of the union. This has already been translated into explicit initiatives in parts of the North, with "worker unionists" fishing in the sea of small industry and amongst artisans, reiterating their claim to be representing workers. It is interesting that "representing the workers" — for these worker unionists — is interpreted as taking up the interests of those "hundreds of thousands of entrepreneurs who are often unaware of the possibilities for support and finance that the law guarantees them". (From a radio interview by one of these unionists.) It shows that even if the unions' organisational structure changes, their role as mediators of capitalist interests with the working class does not change one bit.

In the present political situation such a comprehensive penetration of the class by the unions will undoubtedly prove an obstacle, if not to the actual emergence of genuine forms of class reunification, then to their extension to the mass of the working class. As workers become more dispersed in microscopic workplaces the close relationship with the bosses makes them more sympathetic to the bosses' problems and generally more susceptible to their ideology, an ideology which is more stupidly reactionary the smaller and more insignificant the firm. All this, together with the general tendency of the bourgeois citizenry to close itself off in the pettiest of interests, makes for a difficult situation for anyone attempting to revive the struggle for the autonomous interests of the working class.

The Role of Revolutionaries

On the other hand, the overall framework also demands the presence of revolutionary, internationalist minorities. In fact we cannot conceive of independent workers' organisations unless they are based on the following two premises.

The first is the distinction between workers own interests and those of the "national economy" or even worse, their firm. In small or medium firms the unions cover the whole industry and no-one is better at identifying the interests of the proletarians with those of the bosses (for they too are workers, poor things!) than the unions.

Our second premise is connected to the first. This requires that workers abandon any illusions about the reformability of capitalism. The present leadership of the *Cobas*, *Rappresentanze di Base* and the like (let alone the rogues in *Essere Sindacato*)

are saturated with such illusions. They are constitutionally reformist. And in the present crisis phase of the accumulation cycle, reformism is even more pointless. This is another reason why experiences like the *Cobas* are destined to fairly rapid exhaustion.

Thus, on the concrete level of struggles the class' attempts to organise itself autonomously starts by making the active presence of revolutionary minorities not only possible, but even necessary. This doesn't need much explanation. The historical importance of the tendency to go beyond sectional divisions is confirmed by the fact that the unions themselves are tirelessly working to get control of it. We only note this here to underline the contradiction, in organisational terms, between trades unionism, which is by definition reformist, and our perspective of militant defence of the class.

Going beyond purely sectional organisations doesn't mean that there is a tendency for sectional strikes to disappear. Union federations might change, they might reorganise themselves, but they will not disappear. They are as essential to capitalism as the wage-labour relationship. In conclusion, the union carthorse will continue to regiment the more inert proletarian masses on their level. The more agile, territorially-based, organisations of the class vanguard should not attempt to compete with them on this level but should explicitly develop, as far as possible, the historic and immediate antagonism between bourgeoisie and proletariat, on the level of class struggle. The condition and principal motor force for this too is the presence of revolutionaries in the struggles.

A further clarification is necessary if we are to avoid misunderstandings. We are not proposing here a new type of general, non-party economic organisation (or union) simply based on a territorial rather than a sectional basis. An unavoidable obstacle on the road to the revival of the class is the general tendency for every organisation created in bourgeois society to crystallise in defence of its own existence as an organisation, no matter what the original reasons for its formation. In other words we mustn't forget, even for a second, that proletarian struggle organisations are only possible and necessary for the organisation of class struggle. Once a particular struggle is halted or has to retreat, the *raison d'être* for the organisation it created diminishes and this organisation must either fold up or transform itself into something else. Here we should remember the unhappy fate of the unemployed organisations in Naples as well the end of the schools *Cobas* which is now trying to unite with other organisations, from the

FLMU to the *Alfa Cobas*.^{*} The present attempts at opposition to the unions are still characterised by this tendency to sectionalism or even factory localism. But even those that begin from a more widespread geographical basis run this risk. It is the task of revolutionaries to spot this and fight it.

Proletarian Unity

The territorial organisation of the proletarian vanguard holds out another important possibility: the real unity of various strata of the class (employed and unemployed) as well as those of different "citizenships" (native and immigrant). The importance of such solidarity should be obvious. The degree of unity of class interests determines the possibilities for the success of working class emancipation. This must be translated into organisational unity, and solidarity in struggle, at least for the class vanguard. When this happens the road to the final, decisive class battle will be open.

Our political perspectives envisage that the new forms arising from the future defensive struggles of the class, will be the "schools of class struggle" once considered the preserve of the economic struggles carried out by the unions. Such organisations won't be permanent or institutionalised in competition with the unions. They will be the form the revival of the class struggle takes, bringing together and unifying workers as they:

- generalise their struggle and
- reappropriate the revolutionary programme.

The nucleus of revolutionary militants, however, has to have a permanent existence. It will have to give the lead in the battle against the bourgeoisie and in so doing act as the focal point around which combative workers will regroup.

All this makes the existence of internationalist factory groups, the central focus of internationalist tactics, even more essential and relevant. By becoming local proletarian groups factory groups would in no way alter their role as political creations (though not of a mass character) of the proletarian vanguard. Around them this anti-capitalist political vanguard can draw other layers of the class into the daily struggle, via the wider geographical forms of organisation we have been discussing.

In conclusion, looking again at our picture of the course towards the revival of generalised class struggle:-

* The genesis of the new territorially based organisations which we have outlined implies a starting point which is on a much higher political

level. If in the big factories the struggle against speed-ups draws workers together irrespective of their different levels of class awareness, workers coming together in territorially-based organs of class struggle outside and against the unions will reach higher levels of class consciousness.

* This initial decantation implies the absence of the more dogged conservative proposals and thus, in general, less difficulty for revolutionary militants to gain a hearing.

* Thus revolutionary political action within the class becomes less difficult than in the past.

* The development of a revolutionary leadership openly opposed to the political defenders of this system, both inside and outside the class, will be needed until a movement strong enough to overthrow capitalism exists.

Up until now, and we can never tire of repeating this, the new forms of proletarian organisation, have only been hinted at in the present class dynamic. The present struggles are still very firmly rooted on the terrain of reformist mediations. However it is highly probable that these will become more explicit as the present social order fragments (see the *Theses* of Our Vth Congress). The important thing is to be ready — in terms of both theory and analysis, as well as politically and organisationally. Even under the present course of events there is still time to prepare for more testing circumstances. This is how we need to go forward and learn to draw from today's signals the message for our tomorrow, however far away it is.

Mauro jr. Stefanini

Footnotes

1. In particular, see *Where is the Working Class? An Analysis of Class Composition in the Course of the Crisis in Italy* in *Internationalist Communist Review* 12.

2. See *Strumenti di Battaglia Comunista* 3 which is about wage negotiations and the union's role in them.

3. Literally "to be the union" — the movement to revamp the old Communist Party trade union, CGIL or General Confederation of Italian Labour.

4. For more in English on the school *Cobas* and other aspects of the early *Cobas* movement, see *Communist Review* 7.

5. As well as participating in the provincial and national assemblies, and for a brief time in the National Executive Commission of the *Cobas*, we produced various manifestos and a few documents, which are still available (*L'accordo intercompartimentale per il pubblico impiego del dicembre 1985* and *Intervista sui Cobas*) and took part in editing the two issues of the bulletin *C'erano una volta i Cobas*. The first of these included the text of the minority motion we presented to the national conference of 20th March 1988. In this "struggle motion" we stated,

The movement has a platform and it should carry out its struggle on that basis with the aim of

obtaining the most important points, outside of union rituals which alternate fake struggles with sitting at the negotiating table. If we end up sitting down with the unions and the ministers and making concessions this will really be the by-product of the the negotiations of others..

6. In this respect, general assemblies, in reality general meetings of these organisations (like the one held in Milan on 21st November, 1993) are important.

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Capitalism: "The Final Frontier"?

Given the 'mundane' problems of terrestrial capitalism: mass starvation in the undeveloped periphery, mass and growing unemployment in the metropolitan centres, the wearing down of infrastructures leading to 'natural disasters' and so on; what should communists' political attitude be to the capitalist space industry? Its abolition or even freezing in a post-revolutionary situation would be to negate several generations of human labour and science. The implications of its dynamic cannot be ignored or dismissed either from the standpoint of those masses of workers involved in this sector or from the broader societal impact and consequences of their labour.

Crisis of Accumulation

The crisis in capitalism's accumulation cycle has appeared in different forms in different economic areas of the world. But its dramatic sharpening in the Soviet bloc has assumed a particularly explosive character. This is nowhere better illustrated than in the virtual overnight paralysis of the aerospace industry in Ukraine, formerly an integral part of the USSR's military/industrial complex. Due to the implosion of the Russian imperialist bloc under the impact of the crisis and its attendant political dismemberment, the Ukrainian aerospace industry was suddenly bereft of its technical-economic *raison d'être* as a functioning part of the Russian war machine. Effect: thousands of highly skilled workers thrown onto the streets, economic dislocation on a wide scale.

Capitalism has reached the downward trough in another cycle of accumulation and this crisis of the economy, global in extent, has engulfed the USSR, which for a period appeared relatively immune. All attempts to manage this crisis have at best merely ameliorated its effects whilst in the long run fuelling its most explosive contradictions.

Despite agreements by the leading group of Seven economic powers and international debt postponements; despite the microchip revolution and restructuring cushioned by welfare benefits and redundancy payments, the fundamental problem of capitalist accumulation remains and cannot be solved within the system that breeds it. This is the chronic shortage of surplus value, a shortage which is driving capital to find ever more means of increasing the exploitation of the working class

both relatively and absolutely.

Attempts by the capitalist state to regulate its own law of value, much less the unattainable fantasy of giving it free expression (the so-called law of the market), cannot do away with the world crisis of the capitalist economy.

The collapse of the USSR brought an end to the Cold War. However, it did not bring an end to imperialism or the threat of global war. Capitalist accumulation cycles in this century have only been revived on the basis of a massive destruction of surplus value, the like of which can only be achieved in global war. This is why the 1st and 2nd World Wars became 'total wars', involving entire economies and societies. The incisive destruction of Europe and Japan was the prelude to the biggest boom in capitalist history which lasted throughout the Fifties and Sixties. It was a boom which the capitalists boasted had consigned Marxism to the dustbin of history but by the end of the Sixties the old problems of profitability were returning. It was not that the system was no longer profitable for individual capitalists and companies, but that its overall rate of profitability was insufficient to fund renewed accumulation on a big enough scale. One of the first signs of this was the US devaluation of the dollar in 1971 in an attempt to begin to make its allies pay for the crisis; the accompanying collapse of the Bretton Woods agreement which had shaped imperialism's post-war economic order, signalled the definitive end of the post-war boom. The economic collapse of the Russian bloc was accelerated by the growing technological gap between the USSR and Western capitalism. Subsequently Western capital, temporarily relieved of the sort of military imperatives which accompanied the Cold War, has been able to intensify its

current trend towards technological restructuring. It is symptomatic of the depth of the economic crisis, however, that the job losses as a result of new technology are not being offset by the development of substantial new industries. The boost to profit rates owes as much to wage cuts and longer, more intensive, working hours as to the employment of more technologically advanced equipment and machinery. The capitalist crisis has not been solved. On the contrary, the so-called globalisation of present-day capitalism is a sign that cut-throat competition is the order of the day.

End of Cold War: Beginning of New Imperialist Alliances

The "victory of the West" in the Cold War has not and could not open up a new era of peace, for imperialism has not disappeared with the collapse of one imperialist power. Russia is still imperialist but the boundaries of its spheres of influence have virtually retreated to within the frontiers of the old USSR.

The same economic base continues to exist and the conflict supported by it must also continue even if the probable sides in the conflict have changed. At the moment the surviving major imperialist powers co-operate to plunder the produce of the world's proletariat. But this 'peaceful' division of the world is merely the precondition for a warlike redivision.

For forty years during the Cold War the European map was stabilised and the imperialist blocs fought their proxy wars elsewhere. The collapse of the Stalinist bloc has opened up the way for the surviving imperialisms to start a new scramble for power. As part of that process the 'common front' which had united separate imperialist interests (USA, Britain, Germany, Japan, France, etc.) has split apart.

The reality of the New World Order has been the re-emergence of tentative alliances which have all the hallmarks of those alliances which united the various powers into opposing camps right from the birth of modern imperialism. These alliances are not yet fixed as the various state machines are buffeted by a matrix of, sometimes conflicting, tactical and strategic interests. That lack of permanence in the emerging alliances, however, offers no comfort to those who try to deny that imperialism's New World Order really means inter-imperialist rivalry. History has shown that modern imperialist alliances, in common with earlier formations will shift and evolve with erstwhile partners withdrawing or even switching to other camps.

It is of course only within this context of a generalised and intensifying crisis that results and prospects for the space industry can properly be evaluated. Given its close relation to a wider military-nuclear infrastructure, and in a state of inter-imperialist flux and confusion (for example, Russia and its former vassal Ukraine), this sector may assume not necessarily a crucial, but certainly a significant role in determining alliances when inter-imperialist tensions finally break out into outright military confrontation. At the same time, of course, the strategic and military aspects of the aerospace industry mean that its development is never a simple reflection of "the laws of the market". The recent 'promise' by the British government to buy forty or fifty of the "Future Large Aircraft" (FLA) when it is eventually completed a decade or so hence is a case in point. The British are not just trying to conserve their economic interest in this project — designing and building the aircraft's wings — but are keeping their more long-term strategic options open. At present the British bourgeoisie is uncertain about how much it will have to throw in its lot with Europe and ditch the US (which is anyway ditching the "special relationship" with Britain). While they continue to maintain their old trans-Atlantic links by "buying American" to replace worn-out Hercules transport carriers, they do not want to be excluded from the development of an 'independent' European defence system (i.e. independent from the US). Within Europe the need for such a development is already being felt. In particular, US monopoly of satellite intelligence during Saddam Hussein's supposed preparations for a second military incursion into Kuwait have provoked calls for a viable European network of spy satellites. Even the British Foreign Secretary, Douglas Hurd, revealed the cracks in Britain's loyalty to US imperialism when he openly acknowledged that "we only have their word" (the US) about what's going on in Iraq.

For French capital, however, this was only the confirmation of its desire to have the military means to act independently of the US — a desire which has apparently been rekindled in Germany "following its failure to get satisfactory information on last autumn's Iraqi military manoeuvres in the Gulf from the US" (*Financial Times* 16.1.95). Since 1993 French military spending on space has increased by 35%, in part due to their financing the bulk of the £120m *Helios 1* spy satellite system (with Italy and Spain as junior partners). *Helios 1* has been described by the French Defence Minister, Léotard, as "the first stone in the edifice of an autonomous European space system" (*FT* *ibid*) and now, after the demonstration of the consequences of US global hegemony in Iraq, German capital is showing interest in

helping to put the next stone in place. (By contributing to the *Helios 2* optical/infrared satellite and possibly a subsequent all-weather radar satellite.) At the time of writing participation in *Helios 2* is not a hundred per cent certain. What is certain, though, is that German imperialism is not going to ditch its European option in order to keep on indefinitely following the coat-tails of the US. It is also equally certain that without the financial and economic weight of German capital France will be unable to continue footing the bill for an independent European satellite system.

Crisis in Aerospace

The overarching context of the development of space technology was the post-war inter-imperialist stasis known as the Cold War. The detail of this development, the place of space programmes within the broader process of accumulation, its continuities and discontinuities, all these are less well known. The main body of what follows will consequently attempt to fill in some of these gaps.

To properly understand current and future prospects, space programmes require to be seen within the context of the aerospace industry as a whole. In industrial terms they are just one rather small part of the aerospace sector, per se. A peculiar outgrowth of the post 2nd World War settlement, global capitalist economic rivalry in space, and in aerospace as a whole, has developed as a predominantly trans-Atlantic affair. Thus today, West Europe's Ariane rocket, built mainly by Aerospatiale and SEP, is up against US Corporations General-Dynamics and McDonnell-Douglas, while in satellite construction US aerospace corporations Hughes and Martin Marietta are currently being challenged by the Euro-American consortium Space Systems/Laval and the Anglo-French company Matra-Marconi. The hybrid national composition of the capital formations concerned does not in any way remove it from the laws of competition and all that that involves.

Military aircraft production is dominated by US corporations and European consortia. The civil airliner business is dominated by Boeing, McDonnell-Douglas and the European Airbus Industrie consortium. The regular accusations bandied back and forth, however, about protectionism and hidden subsidies in these markets is little more than an oblique statement about the actual economic structure of this sector: that for the sustenance of industry on this scale, with a magnitude of capital that is comparatively immense, the imbrication of private and state capital is indispensable.²

Despite this close involvement, including a whole host of credit or fiscal measures whereby the state deflects the actual costs onto the taxpayer, all of these companies are currently experiencing a massive upheaval as the aerospace industry, as a global sector, is going through its worst ever recession. The end of the Cold War, with its sharp decline in military contracts, has coincided with an overall downturn in the civil airline business. For the past four years the industry as a whole has been running at a loss. In 1993 for example, it was 'hoped' that losses would only be \$2bn, compared to \$5bn in 1992. (*Financial Times* 19.8.93.) Now the industry's consensus is that 1996-7 will be the start of the "turn round".

On top of this, the break up in that formation pattern of compromises that made up the institution of the old inter-imperialist alignments, means the arrival of new competitors on the global market. Russian aerospace manufacturers Tupolev and Ilyushin are looking for ways to break into an airliner market formerly dominated by the West and in the space sector, Russia is potentially a dominant force. The responses of US and West European capital to the current crisis and specifically to Russia's new role, will determine prospects in space for the immediate future.

The US Response

The American aerospace industry is now going through a drastic process of restructuring, involving technological specialisation and both geographical and capital concentration. Missile production has become concentrated as Hughes bought up General Dynamics' missile division; Laval has bought up LTU Missiles and Martin Marietta has acquired GE Aerospace. Military aircraft production is now concentrated in just two companies: Lockheed and McDonnell-Douglas, the former recently taking over General Dynamics' military aircraft division.

Over the past four years the US aerospace industry has therefore transformed itself, with corporations moving into or out of whole product areas, shedding 340,000 jobs in the process. (*Economist* 20.3.93) However most companies are holding on to their space operations. For example, General Dynamics and McDonnell-Douglas are still marketing launches on their rockets, Hughes still aims to be the dominant force in satellite technology and Boeing and McDonnell-Douglas are still involved in the space station programme.

California, and especially Southern California, has relied for its prosperity on aerospace and

related military industries since the 2nd World War. Now it faces its worst economic recession since the 1930's: 162,000 jobs gone due to defence cuts (*Economist*, 17.7.93). But at the same time, the aerospace corporations' activities continue to be wholly or largely based in Southern California. This regional concentration of space technology related production, in the context of falling military and civilian aircraft orders, makes the space sector an increasingly important factor in holding together the critical mass of Southern California's high-technology base.

Clinton's decision to reprieve the space station - renamed 'Alpha' to break the Cold War association of 'Freedom' - must be seen in this overall context. It was a political decision to protect

tion include Rockwells' work with NPO-Energia to enable the US Shuttle to dock with MIR and McDonnell-Douglas involvement in a Russian designed 'rover' vehicle for future missions to the moon or Mars. Most significantly perhaps, the USA has stopped blocking Russian access to the world launch market. And recently the USA and Russia have even reached a market sharing agreement on launch quotas and pricing. (*Financial Times*, 3.6.93)

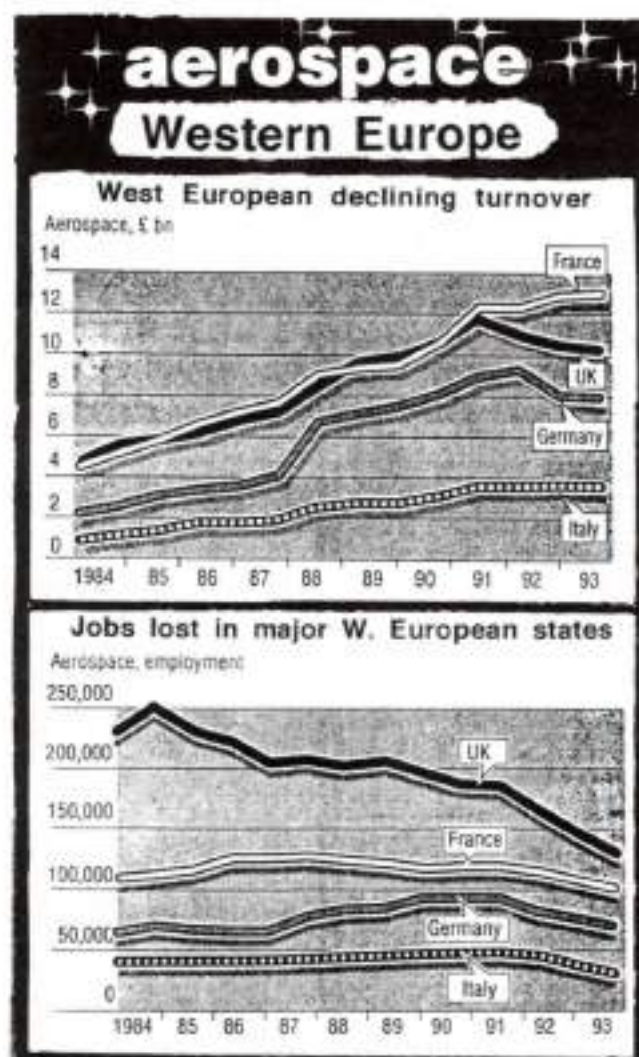
The West European Response

With their much smaller domestic economies, industrial nation states in West Europe have simply been unable to support aerospace companies on the scale of their US competitors. In the late Eighties even a company like British Aerospace (BAe), a giant in European terms, would only have ranked seventh if it had been a US company.

The difference in scale is compounded by different policies and patterns of accumulation. Thus the turnover of the aerospace sector in the US has consistently been double that in the EU. With this greater turnover, the proportion of government military and space contracts in the US has consistently been double that of equivalent EU contracts. The imbalance is especially stark in the space sector: 80% of US commercial satellite launches are for state agencies compared to 15% for West Europe. (*Financial Times*, 18.5.93)

West European aerospace is therefore made up of smaller units, all of them more exposed to unmediated commercial pressures than their US counterparts. Consequently European companies have sought to compete through a series of transnational project based consortia. For example, with the Tornado the partners were BAe, Dasa [Deutsche Aerospace] and Italy's Alenia). More recently, in aircraft manufacturing, BAe has embarked on a 'joint marketing venture' with the Franco-Italian group ATR (parent companies Aérospatiale and Alenia). By pooling their sales facilities both sides aim to reduce losses.

Given the tradition of transnational corporate alliances, restructuring in West Europe has appeared less dramatic than in the USA, but a similar process is underway. And as in the USA, this has meant plant closures and thousands of jobs lost. A series of takeovers, mergers, vulture swoops and so on has meant a new concentration of capital, e.g. in sectors such as missiles where BAe, Francis Matra and Aérospatiale and Dasa have merged one entire sector. The upshot of all this, an ineluctable expression of the tendency of monopoly capital, has been the emergence of Germany as the



industrial resources and the 20,000 jobs directly dependent on the station.

In tandem with this, the Americans have opened up the possibility of linking it to a new Russian space station MIR-2 (*Spaceflight* July 1993) and using Russian spacecraft during construction. Other examples of US-Russian space collabora-

new centre of gravity of the European aerospace industry.

In 1989, after protracted 'public debate', the German industrial conglomerate Daimler-Benz acquired aerospace compounds MBB, MTU and Dornier - that is to say it acquired the entire German aerospace industry. This was reorganised into a new company, Dasa. Dasa was born with a stake in all Europe's key aerospace projects and a monopoly in German space technology, including the experience of building spacelab, project leadership in Columbus and participation in Hermes.

Dasa is now Europe's biggest space company in terms of sales (*Spaceflight*, October 1993) and its parent, Daimler-Benz, is also closely linked to the powerful Deutsche Bank, which owns over 28% of its stock. Together they sit at the heart of the interlocking web of German financial and industrial capital.

Both these companies are committed to a careful programme of global expansion. On the one hand they are turning West - Daimler-Benz has recently broken new ground by seeking a listing on the New York Stock Exchange (*Financial Times*, 23.9.93). On the other hand they are also turning East. Deutsche Bank has been the leading force in pushing for German investment in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union and in representing wider German interests: its chief executive played a key role in persuading Gorbachev to accept German reunification (*Financial Times*, 16.1.91). On the other hand Dasa has bought up the former GDR's aerospace industry (Lovering '90) and is working with Deutsche Telecom on a major project to upgrade Russia's telecommunications system with satellite links. (*Spaceflight*, February 1993)

From 1991, Germany began to break from its alliance with France to argue within the European Space Agency (ESA) for cost-sharing cooperation with other space powers and especially with Russia. This was certainly prompted by the need to meet the costs of reunification and to offset the losses being borne by Dasa as it restructured.³ But we can now see that it was also certainly consistent with the wider corporate aims of Deutsche Bank and Daimler-Benz. Both are seeking to expand into Russia, to rebuild German capital's traditional sphere of interest in the East.

One element in this strategy is to gain access to the accumulated scientific and technological assets of Russia's space industry. Thus ESA's Hermes project is now being pursued as a joint project with Russia and ESA's research contracts have been

placed with several Russian space institutes.

Since the early Seventies the German space effort has concentrated on the design and construction of orbiting micro-gravity work stations with both scientific and commercial aims in mind. The Columbus module - and here there has been renewed talk of developing this with Russia rather than the US - was originally envisaged as a commercial operation until the USA forbade it. However Dasa now has the option of collaboration with Russia which, with its long experience on the Salyut and Mir space stations, has much to offer. It may be significant that each of the first two joint ESA-Russian missions on Mir will include a German astronaut. (*Spaceflight*, June 1993)

New Patterns of Conflict

Russia has inherited from the USSR a space programme which leads the world in terms of accumulated scientific and engineering expertise, working experience in orbit and proven technology. Enormous investments - at the expense of the Russian proletariat - were made in this programme by the USSR, but a much-diminished and geographically shrunk Russian capital now lacks the means to reap the benefits of these investments. It even lacks the means to pay workers' wages at its space facilities and control centres.

US and West European aerospace corporations recognise the window of opportunity now open in Russia, the chance to buy into, if not openly plunder - depending on the level of competitive weakness of Russian capital on a global market - the accumulated assets of three decades of Soviet space investment and labour. It is conceivable that US and European capital may cooperate in this venture, following the example of the civil airliner business, where Boeing of USA and the European Airbus Consortium are seeking Russian partners for their joint development of a new 'super-jumbo airliner'. (*Financial Times*, 7.9.93).

But ranged against this is a history of trans-Atlantic tension which has always surrounded space technology even at the height of the Cold War. With the Cold War over this is unlikely to disappear. On the contrary, we are probably now seeing the start of a furious struggle as US and West European aerospace companies compete for privileged access to Russia's space assets.

Capital in Orbit

Does the end of the Cold War mean that the space sector will develop along a trajectory more

thoroughly economic than political-military, i.e. on a more 'purely' capitalist basis? The example of satellite communication may provide some pointers.

Satellite communication has followed the classic route of other new communications technologies from the telegraph onwards. Firstly it was sponsored and funded in its infancy by the State and specifically by the military. More importantly, once introduced, it has tended to intensify and consolidate existing patterns of accumulation and domination.

Satellite communication based itself on pre-existing clusters of dense telecom links in the metropolitan capitalist countries and it then fed upon and intensified these links. It broadened and accelerated the pace of global business, speeding up deal-making — the velocity of commercial capital — through creating the capacity for global direct dialling by phone or fax, for computers in different continents to speak to each other and for the multiplication and increasingly naked commercialisation of T.V. images.

This process is now entering a new phase as space technology moves out beyond the metropolitan clusters to achieve a global reach for, and on terms dictated by, Western capital. Thus the US Motorola Corporation plans to spend £3.4bn on 'Iridium', a system of 66 mini-satellites in low earth orbit providing a global mobile telephone network (*Financial Times*, 4.8.93).

Space may simply be used as a place to put more and more communication satellites and orbiting advertising billboards until saturation point is reached. Yet there are potential industrial profits to be made in deep space, if not uses, as with micro-gravity production or lunar mining, if only capital can muster sufficient investment. The obstacles to such ventures are political and financial rather than technical. There is nothing new about micro-gravity manufacturing — the Russians have been doing it for years. There is nothing exotic about a lunar base: existing space hardware is quite adequate to the task.

But setting up an orbiting factory or a lunar base are high risk ventures: private capital alone will not undertake such projects. A commercial expansion into deep space will only take place on the back of a publicly funded infrastructure providing regular and cheap access to Earth orbit and beyond. Private capital, as elsewhere, will require to use state capital to underwrite its operations in space.

It is clear, however, that state capital, certainly national state capital, is insufficient in concentra-

tion to fund such a project. Multinational co-operation would be required and this could conceivably be a factor in the jockeying for position that would be the transition to new imperialist alignments. Whichever way they choose to work it, a fruitful exploitation of the vast resources of outer space will flounder on the Achilles Heel of the profit motive itself, the most fundamental brake on the national expansion of society's productive forces.

Conclusion

Outer space is an expanding productive zone with enormous potential. The bottleneck of capitalist social relations of production, more specifically the continuously downward spiral of its economic crisis, mean however that the exploitation of the vast sector of the unknown, still in its infancy, is consigned to remain a Jules Verne type speculation, a province of science fiction, until a unified humanity under the proletarian revolution can realistically address the issue.

It will of course require to be seen within an overall context of the prioritization of resources required for the resolution of humanity's most pressing needs. A closer look will then need to be made at precisely how, why and where these particular swords can be turned into ploughshares designed for the optimum benefit of our species.

At this point we can do little better than to indulge in some good old fashioned 'ideological graffiti':

The Social Revolution ... cannot draw its poetry from the past, but only from the future. [Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire*]

Footnotes

1. Martin Marietta has since merged with another US giant, Lockheed, to form Lockheed Martin (September, 1994) thus becoming the world's second largest aerospace company (after Boeing). This has put even more pressure on European consortia to further concentration of capital.
2. It is reckoned that the US aerospace industry as a whole received up to \$22bn in indirect research subsidies between 1976-1990. The civil sector alone receives up to \$3bn annually via Nasa and the Department of Defense. By contrast, the European Airbus has received \$10bn — most of it in loans which have to be repaid. (*Guardian* 5.9.94)
3. In 1993 Dasa's losses of DM694 million were double that of the previous year on a 10% smaller turnover — "largely as a result of non-recurring restructuring costs of DM1.1 bn for 1993-5. Behind these figures lie a further agreed 10,300 job cuts on top of 8,000 in 1993 and the closure of six of its 45 plants." (ibid)

Review Article

Antonio Gramsci Pre-Prison Writings

Edited by Richard Bellamy; translated Virginia Cox. Published by Cambridge University Press, 1994

Yet another academic work devoted to Gramsci. At first glance this seems a strange time for a publisher like Cambridge to be bringing out a volume of Gramsci's writings. In the wake of what the editor refers to as "the collapse of Communism" and the lost allure of "the EuroGramscian thesis", not to mention the current disillusion and lack of interest in all things 'Marxist' in academic circles. The book can't exactly be selling like hot cakes. Possibly Cambridge have been so slow in preparing the translations that they've simply missed the gravy train of what was until very recently a thriving commerce in Gramsciana. Or maybe all this has just confirmed Gramsci as a 'safe' subject for an ivory tower series in the history of political ideas which, "aims to make available to students all the most important texts in the history of western thought ..." but which includes neither Marx nor Lenin, nor even more radical bourgeois revolutionary figures like Rousseau or Tom Paine. In any case the *Introduction* offers the reader no new insight into Gramsci. For the most part it is content to churn out established clichés: there is Gramsci, that more humanistic and idealist 'Marxist' who welcomed the October Revolution as a "revolution against Karl Marx's *Capital*"; Gramsci, the supposed initiator of the concept of the 'Italian road to socialism'; Gramsci, the master of contemporary political analysis with a superior insight into fascism and a "far more complex account of the nature of the bourgeois state than many of his Marxist colleagues". Above all there is Gramsci, ambivalent and ambiguous, the unending subject of academic speculation and generator of obtuse philosophical and sociological jargon. Try this, for instance:

He seems to have been more concerned with overcoming anomie by having the worker assimilate the norms he believed, in quasi-Durkheimian fashion, to be inherent to the integrated work processes of industrial production. (p.xxii)

Instead of clearly raising the **real** question of Gramsci's limited view of proletarian revolution — a view which alternates between workers' self-management of the capitalist workplace and the Communist Party simply taking over the state — all we get is a demonstration of the editor's 'erudition'. This is only to be expected from an academic introduction. Even from academia, however, we might have expected a more serious attempt to explain the significance of this particular edition of Gramsci's 'pre-prison writings'. (Well over half of which are already available in English.) The period in question is from Gramsci's early days in the Italian Socialist Party (he joined in 1913), up until 1926 when, as General Secretary of the Communist Party of Italy (PCd'I), he was arrested under Mussolini's 'Exceptional Laws' alongside other prominent leaders and hundreds of other Communist Party activists. When the 1st World War broke out Gramsci, at twenty-three years old, was by no means a fully-fledged Marxist and he had neither the necessary materialist framework to recognise its significance as an inter-imperialist conflict nor any previous identification with the anti-militarism of the PSI's left-wing. However, when Mussolini — left-wing editor of *Avanti* and effective leader of the PSI — began to ditch all his previous anti-imperialism and militant anti-militarism, arguing that Italy should enter the war (preferably on the "progressive" side of France and the Allies) Gramsci chose to try and defend his position. Gramsci's October 1914 article, *Active and Operative Neutrality* (following Mussolini's title) is usually seen as something of an embarrassment by commentators and shrugged off as a more or less naive mistake. Not so this present volume which absurdly comments, "It was characteristic of Gramsci that he did not falter from holding unpopular positions." This is absurd because any serious student of Gramsci knows that when he came to realise the implications of defending Mussolini (who was eventually expelled from the PSI for his interventionist stance) Gramsci succumbed to

a characteristic bout of nervous exhaustion and didn't engage in political activity or write another political text for a year. It is also absurd because the article itself is confused, reflecting both Gramsci's own incoherence and the wider state of bewilderment Mussolini's turn-round had created inside the PSI. This episode in itself is not so significant even if it does show that Gramsci was no Italian Lenin. (Amongst the confusions of the 1914 article there is no sign of proletarian internationalism, the basis of Lenin's revolutionary defeatist opposition to the imperialist war.) What is more significant, at least for anyone wanting to trace the development of a revolutionary marxist current in Italy, is that Gramsci did not clarify his thinking on the war, much less develop an analysis of its imperialist character. When he returned to political life in 1916, after Italy had joined the belligerent states, Gramsci concerned himself with 'cultural' issues — writing articles advocating universal free education or the setting up of a 'cultural association' (which he compared to the Fabian Society) as a means for intellectuals to contribute to the socialist movement and discuss,

... problems — philosophical, religious and moral — which underlie political and economic action, but which economic and political organisations are not equipped to discuss or to promote solutions for.

(From 'Socialism and Culture', originally published in *Il Grido del Popolo* 29.1.16, p.9.)

These are the sort of concerns dear to university academics. For a revolutionary marxist in the middle of imperialist war, seeing the international working class embroiled in mutual slaughter, whilst the socialist parties of the IInd International acquiesced in or openly supported the war aims of their 'own' national capital, they were not exactly the central issues of the day. Whilst it is true that in Italy the crisis of social democracy was more blurred as a result of the PSI's official position of 'neither support nor sabotage' for the war, it is a fact that Gramsci saw no particular implications for the Party's failure to unambiguously oppose the war, or indeed of the centrality of the war itself. Like Kautsky, Gramsci preferred to view the biggest conflict so far in human history as a contingent event which was not intrinsic to capitalism's development. Unlike Lenin, Luxemburg and in Italy Amadeo Bordiga, he never analysed the war in terms of capitalist imperialism. In terms of concrete political activity it is above all to Bordiga that we must look for the revival of what was known as "revolutionary intransigence" inside the PSI; for the attempt to force it off the political fence by repudiating the idea of the bourgeois 'fatherland' and adopting a "strictly

and sincerely revolutionary tactic", which means putting itself at the head of strikes and anti-war demonstrations and recognising that "violence is the midwife of every society pregnant with future life". The quotations are from the manifesto of the newly-revived intransigent revolutionary fraction issued in July 1917, after the PSI leadership had announced its support for the 'democratic bloc' (following US entry into the war) and when news of the February Revolution in Russia was inspiring more and more workers to take to the streets to demonstrate their opposition to the war. Gramsci had nothing to do with this manifesto or the revolutionary current which produced it. For our academic commentator this is all part of his attraction — an indication of his "more idealist", "non-determinist" Marxism which, in contrast to the vulgar positivism of "orthodox" Marxists, emphasised "the role of ideas and human will" and was "anti-deterministic". So how did this man whose preoccupation with things 'cultural' in 1917 kept him apart from the initial struggle to revolutionise the PSI from within, later come to identify with 'orthodox Marxists' and their revolutionary cause which eventually led to the creation of the Communist Party of Italy (PCd'I) in 1921?

For all Gramsci's philosophical idealism and emphasis on self-development the answer is not that he went through a process of rethinking and intellectual conversion to Bordiga's arguments. Indeed, apart from the bizarre occasion in 1917 when Gramsci, the 'Centrist', found himself accidentally representing the Turin section at a meeting of the intransigent fraction (most of the Turin leaders were in jail or in the army following working class unrest in the city), Gramsci never showed any signs of opposition to the war. In typical PSI fashion, this meeting had attracted a much wider political spectrum than those who wanted revolutionary class struggle against the war. Also present were high-up Party leaders such as Serrati and Lazzari who were quite prepared to come under the 'intransigent' umbrella if it meant they could undermine the development of a clear revolutionary fraction. Whilst they argued for 'realism' and managed to secure a reaffirmation of the official Party slogan of "Neither Support Nor Sabotage" Gramsci is supposed to have impetuously sided with Bordiga's call for class action against the war — the only other delegate to do so. For this he was, not unsurprisingly, accused of voluntarism. The *Introduction* says nothing at all about the context of this charge — probably the author does not know the context — but no matter, it's a useful term to seize on to show "Gramsci's emphasis on the role of ideas and the human will", (p. xiv) Emphasising ideas apparently does not mean valuing their consistency. In March 1918

demonstrations of popular opposition to the war once more gripped Turin. Gramsci's response was to dismiss this as "proletarian and defeatist barbarity and stupidity" (In *The Club of Moral Life* p.51.) and carry on with his plans for a socialist study group-cum-debating society. In fact, right through 1918 and well into 1919 this remained his main preoccupation: while the working class seethed and increasingly looked to Russia and while Bordiga called for the expulsion of reformists from the Party. Then, no sooner had Gramsci's ambition of setting up a "review of socialist culture" been obtained (along with Angelo Tasca, Palmiro Togliatti and Umberto Terracini) than the industrial working class in Turin began to transform the workers' commissions into organs of workers control and take over the factories. For the first time Gramsci became involved in the living class struggle and the cultural review — *L'Ordine Nuovo* (*The New Order*) — was transformed, in Gramsci's own words from, "an incoherent mess, the product of a mediocre intellectualism, fumbling around looking for an end to aim at and a direction for its action to take" (p.180) into a mouthpiece of the Turin workers' movement as well as a source of information on revolutionary events and ideas from outside Italy.

From the point of view of the actual texts which span the period of the factory occupations (or rather the "two red years" (*biennio rosso*) of widespread class struggle in Italy) very few of them have not appeared in English before, notably in the rival Lawrence and Wishart series edited by Quintin Hoare. Whereas Hoare's collection has the merit of including some of Bordiga's criticisms of Gramsci's limited factoryist conceptions Bellamy's ignores this polemic and the wider context altogether and simply provides an abstract criticism. This is valid as far as it goes. In his pretentious, idealist way he sees that Gramsci's tendency to see the end-product of workers' self-management in terms of greater efficiency and productivity has nothing to do with "the growth of freedom". Typically he concludes that, "Unlike Lenin, Gramsci was saved the embarrassment of having to face up to these theoretical limitations of his scheme by never having to implement it." As if the failure of the Russian working class to establish communism in Russia was due to the weakness of Lenin's theoretical schemas!

From a revolutionary perspective Bordiga's criticisms are much more telling. First, he pointed out that Gramsci was talking about nothing more than factory committees, albeit democratically organised ones, not soviets. Whilst the first were a means for workers to organise their own activity in the workplace, soviets are **political organs of the whole working class** and are necessarily or-

ganised on a territorial basis to avoid dividing the class up on trade and industrial lines. Second, Bordiga was trying to convince Gramsci and other *Ordinovisti* that revolution was not simply a process of building up workplace democracy and proving that the working class could "responsibly and efficiently manage production". Rather it is a conscious political movement to overthrow the existing state that has to be centralised and co-ordinated by a party with a clear revolutionary programme.

We would not like the working masses to get the idea that all they need to do to take over the factories and get rid of the capitalists is set up councils .. These futile and continual outbursts which are daily exhausting the masses must be merged together, organised into one great, comprehensive effort which aims directly at the heart of the enemy bourgeoisie.

This function can and must only be exercised by a communist party which, at the present moment, has not, and must not have, any other task than that of directing its activity to making the working masses more conscious of the necessity for this great political step. This is the only direct way they will gain possession of the factory, while to proceed otherwise will be to struggle in vain.

(Bordiga in *Il Soviet* 22.2.20, reprinted in Antonio Gramsci: Selections from Political Writings 1910-1920 ed. Quintin Hoare; p.235.)

Above all he criticised Gramsci's failure to face up to the need for the proletariat to confront the capitalist state as a result of his view that the socialist state could be built up inside capitalism. ("The socialist state already exists potentially in the institutions of social life characteristic of the exploited working class." [Gramsci in 'Workers' Democracy' p.96]) None of this is mentioned in the Cambridge *Introduction*... Likewise, Gramsci's conversion to the idea of "renewing" and eventually forming a communist fraction inside the PSI is passed over in almost complete silence. (Why should he have been 'disillusioned' about the PSI's failure to expel the reformists and implement the International's 21 conditions?) Granted, an introduction cannot say everything but the way Bellamy presents it (p.xxv) there are two communist fractions — one round Bordiga and the other round "the *Ordine Nuovo* group" in the run-up to the Livorno Congress which resulted in the PSI split. This is not the case. There was a single communist fraction which came formally into existence on 15th October, 1920 by which time the *Ordine Nuovo* group had disintegrated. (Gramsci had been left in virtual isolation with his

'communist education' group of 17 workers in July/August 1920.)

The formation of a communist fraction was the result of several inter-connected factors: The International's growing disillusion with Serrati's 'maximalist' leadership (good at giving formal allegiance to the international revolution but short on revolutionary action and refusal to expel the 'reformists' who openly opposed the revolution); Bordiga's abandoning of the abstentionist tactic at the IInd Congress of the International (thus focussing on the fundamental question of what is a communist party rather than the side issue of abstaining from parliamentary elections); the increasing urgency of the situation as the class movement in Italy began to fizzle out after a series of isolated and uncoordinated upsurges. On Gramsci's part it meant abandoning the prime role he had placed on the factory committees and recognising that the first priority was for the proletariat to have a political weapon — a communist party.

At the beginning of 1920, at the same time as doing their best to isolate the Turin movement, the PSI and the unions came up with their own schemes for institutionalising workers' councils and socialists began to see that the Socialist Party was a dead weight round their necks. The abstentionists began to gain ground in Turin. Bordiga upped his criticisms of the council movement (coming personally to speak to the Turin section of the PSI in February) and the "illusions" of *ordinovism* were directly criticised by Niccolini (pseudonym of Nikolai Ljubarsky, one of the Comintern's representative's in Italy) in the pages of *Avanti!* For the first time Gramsci started to speak about the need to "renew the Party". After the section elections in February abstentionists outnumbered *ordinovisti* by eight to one in the Turin branch of the PSI. In April the national council of the PSI was to meet in Milan. Gramsci was delegated to draft the document representing the views of the Turin section. This was *For a Renewal of the Socialist Party* which was duly presented to the National Council and promptly rejected, along with calls for the PSI to back an extension of the general strike currently going on in Piedmont. The point here is that this was a document of the **whole Turin section**, not a reflection of Gramsci's personal position. As such it was a compromise which mentioned neither the factory councils (all references were edited out during a section meeting) nor abstentionism but concentrated on the failure of the PSI to act as a revolutionary party. Usually this is presented as simply a text by Gramsci (this is what Quintin Hoare does, for example), thus making it easier to claim that Gramsci did not

ignore the 'party question' and in general allowing the impression to be created that Gramsci's contribution to the formation of the Communist Party was much more central than it actually was. The Cambridge edition does concede something of this (in a footnote) when it says that, "Although clearly informed by Gramsci's ideas, one should bear in mind that as a Party document it had to take other views into account." But this is so obtuse that there is obviously no intention to undermine the myth of Gramsci's key role in the formation of the PCd'I. It is a myth that is partly perpetuated by Lenin's writings and the records of the IInd Congress of the International — where Lenin praised *For a Renewal...* as an *Ordine Nuovo* document and despite being informed of its real nature, continued to insist "that it is the line of *L'Ordine Nuovo* members that corresponds to the line of the Communist International" (*Speech on the Terms of Admission into the Communist International*. See Volume 31 of *Collected Works*.) There is evidence to suppose that as the Russian leaders in the Executive of the International became disillusioned with Serrati they would have preferred Gramsci to lead the communist split rather than the more independent Bordiga. Be that as it may. In practice it was Bordiga who really understood the need for the communists to split. In the event it was he who was the principle motivating force of the communist fraction which Gramsci joined and which was supported by the International's representatives in Italy.

Naturally Bellamy says nothing of this. He is content to repeat the myth shared by liberal democrats and Leftists alike that the split "divided the Italian labour movement at a crucial time, considerably weakening its ability to respond to the rise of Fascism." (p.xxv) This is a complete misreading of the situation. The question of the hour for the Italian "labour movement" was whether or not it was going to make a communist revolution against the whole of the Italian state set up, not just prevent the Fascists becoming part of it. As a point of fact it is also nonsense. Far from regretting the opportunity to lead an undivided labour movement against Fascism, in 1921 the PSI was busy signing a Conciliation Pact between its own parliamentary deputies and the Fascists in parliament. In 1921 and the early years of the PCd'I Antonio Gramsci had no such regrets. He didn't even speak at the Livorno congress, never mind voice doubts about the narrowness of the split (unlike Paul Levi who argued against a break with Serrati). More important, Gramsci actively participated in the Rome Congress in 1922 and showed no signs of concern at the political direction the Party was taking. Only after two years of political grooming in Moscow and Vienna, when he returned to Italy at the behest of the Comintern

to take over the leadership of the Party, did his tune change. In 1924 Gramsci began to describe the split at Livorno as having been "too far to the Left" and therefore "the greatest triumph of reaction" because it cut off the majority of the Italian proletariat from the International. This reassessment is echoed in the article, *Against Pessimism* (p.255), where Gramsci reflects on the errors of the *Ordine Nuovo* group for not having worked for a wider-based Party "even though we had the great authority and prestige of the International on our side". This is just a post-hoc rationalisation. In 1921 the *Ordine Nuovo* group had been in no position to lead any kind of split. By 1923, however, it was leading figures from the old Turin group — Togliatti, Terracini and then, in 1924, Gramsci himself — who provided the core of the new executive "chosen for the PCd'I by the Comintern". (From Bellamy's chronology p.xxxv.)

It is an irony of history that the Party which was founded on the necessity for the constituent parties of the International to recognise and implement the decisions of its Congresses that it should find itself almost immediately an oppositional minority inside those Congresses, as well as the Enlarged Executive meetings that were held in between them. The PCd'I was born in the wake of the defeat of the working class, not just in Italy but all over Europe. As the Communist International degenerated into opportunism and eventually into an out-and-out tool of the counter-revolution in Russia, the Left-leaning Italian Party found itself increasingly out of step with the Russian leadership in the Comintern. The first point of divergence was over the united front policy, first formalised by the Executive of the International (ECCI) in December 1921 following the decision of the 3rd Congress (June) to adopt the slogan of "To the Masses". The issue is more complicated than Bellamy makes out. Whilst Bordiga certainly found "collaboration with the socialists" (i.e. the PSI) "anathema" he was far from opposed to seeing the working class unified in a common struggle. For him 'To the Masses' and the united front tactic which followed could only be interpreted in this way — i.e. as an attempt to get the workers at the grass roots to struggle together, whatever their individual political or trade union allegiance. As for top-level deals, alliances and "collaboration" with other parties, however, this indicated an abandonment of the revolutionary programme altogether and a return to the sort of backstage wheeling and dealing that had characterised so much of Socialist Party activity before the war. The acceptance of the Rome Theses by the vast majority of the PCd'I in March 1922 shows that the bulk of the membership agreed. Already the Italian Party was a thorn in the side of the Russian leadership and as the shifting sands of

Comintern policy turned united front into a call for workers' governments the Italian Party leadership, still as one with Bordiga, found it increasingly difficult to acquiesce. In this case Bordiga only did so out of discipline and by insisting that the only way to a genuine "workers' government" was via revolution. This was in June 1922. By November, at the 4th Congress, the Italian delegates were pressurised into accepting the principle of fusion with the PSI which had just expelled the Turati-led Right and was now split into four fractions. (In fact Comintern emissaries in Italy were already negotiating with the PSI leadership. Fusion did not come about because of opposition from the Nenni fraction inside the PSI itself).

This was not good enough discipline for the Comintern. A more reliable and pliant executor of its decisions was required in Italy. Gramsci had already been singled out as a much more malleable alternative to Bordiga and had been asked to stay on in Moscow after the 2nd Enlarged Executive meeting. (Where Zinoviev, Trotsky and Bukharin had tried to persuade him to break with Bordiga's stance.) The opportunity for the Comintern to intervene directly and install its own choice of leadership came in early 1923 when Bordiga and other members of the EC were arrested or in hiding under threat of arrest. This step was eased by Bordiga's tactic of having the Italian EC resign *en masse* in protest against being told to implement fusion with the PSI. When the Italian delegation arrived in Moscow for the Third Enlarged Executive meeting they were all set to refuse to reassume their posts of responsibility on the EC so long as the International continued with its insistence on fusion with the PSI. The International did insist but all except one of the old EC members (Fortichieri) returned having accepted posts on the new, so-called 'mixed' EC which now included four new members: Togliatti (already acting as spokesman for the Party), Scoccimarro, Tasca (who had been the only voice of opposition, from a Right-wing standpoint, to the Rome Theses) and Vota. Now the ECCI had a more manageable situation in Italy. Although the newly constituted EC was by no means an obedient poodle there were now important figures ready to be persuaded of the Comintern line, especially when reinforced by arguments from Gramsci who was moved to Vienna in November in order to be able to keep in closer touch with Togliatti et. al. It is true that Gramsci had previously refused to contemplate substituting himself for Bordiga — mainly because it was impossible to conceive of the PCd'I without Bordiga at the helm. However, now that Bordiga's position had been undermined (and in any case Bordiga refused to rejoin the EC after his release from prison in October), Gramsci appears to have had few

qualms.

Even before he left Vienna one of his first moves, far from showing "he considered it important to obtain the active consent of the membership through mass democratic organization" (p.xxvi-xxvii) was to prevent the publication and discussion of Bordiga's prison *Manifesto*. (The rest of the EC, even Togliatti had been prepared to do that.) Gramsci returned to Italy just before the semi-clandestine Party conference held near Como. This must have revealed to him just how much work he needed to do to shape the PCd'I into the Comintern's mould. Although the upper echelons of the Party — the EC and the Central Committee (CC) — now technically belonged to the 'Centrist majority' (thanks to Moscow's intervention) the overwhelming majority of the federal secretaries, who were much closer to the grassroots, were with the 'Bordigist Left' as was the Youth Section. Gramsci promptly set out to change the political balance of the Party. First he aimed to incorporate new elements from the PSI. (In the event this boiled down to the admission of the *terzini*, Serrati's fraction which was ready to submit to the International and who were admitted en bloc in September 1924.) Second, in keeping with the call for "Bolshevisation" of the Communist Parties at the Vth Congress, he aimed to radically change the way the Party was organised so that the leadership would have much more control over the base. Not an open debate to persuade the membership and obtain their "active consent" to the directives sent down from above, but the dismantling of the territorial federations and their replacement with workplace cells (presumably with little contact with each other and under the control of 'trusted' cadres) was the method adopted by someone who was supposed to consider "it important to obtain the active consent of the membership through mass democratic organization." (xxvii)

However, before this organisational upheaval could get underway there came the Matteotti crisis. In June 1924 Giacomo Matteotti, a PSU (Unitary Socialist Party) deputy who had dared to criticise the regime for its electoral corruption, was kidnapped and murdered by Fascists. This led to a public outcry and the first spontaneous street demonstrations for years. The Fascists were

divided and Mussolini was forced to get rid of some of the more 'extremist' figures such as Rossi and Marinelli. For a time support from Salandra's Liberals hung in the balance as the industrialists took fright at the blatant lawlessness of the Fascists in the Matteotti affair. For a short while too it looked as though the King might demand Mussolini's resignation. Meanwhile the opposition parties in Parliament chose to protest by leaving the Chamber altogether — the so-called Aventine secession.¹ The PCd'I deputies were instructed by the EC to join them. This was clearly Gramsci's idea of a united front. What his "more subtler view of Fascism" (p.xxvi) boiled down to in practice was nothing more than bourgeois democratism: a policy of manoeuvring alongside the bourgeois democratic parties against the 'immoral' Fascists. In a report to the Central Committee Gramsci described the crisis as a "moral" one which had led to the "creation of a State within the state: and anti-fascist government against the fascist government". The report went on to say that the parliamentary opposition remained the "fulcrum of the popular antifascist movement". Gramsci might have been leading the Catholic Popular Party for all this had to do with the political agenda of the working class. Thus, while the handful of Communist Party deputies joined the Aventine opposition committees, reports were coming in from the regions that the working class was restless and ready to act. Information like this was discounted as Left-wing recklessness by the Party Centre which was now almost completely out of touch with the base.



It was, however, in touch with Moscow and the International whose Vth Congress had just presented a revised interpretation of the 'united front' whereby the social democratic parties were now viewed as "social fascists". Gramsci's policy of joining the Aventine secession was duly criticised and in an attempt to follow the Comintern line the Party leadership launched the totally inappropriate slogan of "Workers' and Peasants' Committees" without any preparation at the grassroots. Heaping confusion upon confusion and under instructions from the Comintern, Gramsci tried to rectify his Aventine 'mistake' by veering back to bourgeois politicking and directed the

PCd'I deputies to call for the Aventine secession to be turned into a permanent "anti-parliament". When they refused the Communist deputies re-entered the new session of the 'real' parliament alone where Repossi was given the task of reading out a speech condemning Fascism (for which he was roughed up and spat on). This was accompanied by yet another tactical turn-round: that of using the Communist deputies, who still legally had parliamentary immunity from arrest, to go and speak "to the masses" at factory gates and street corners. This new turn to the masses was too little too late and only exposed Communist Party militants to Fascist attacks. Moreover, it was during this shift in tactics that class conscious workers in Italy were further disoriented and demoralised by the sight of the Russian Ambassador holding a banquet for Mussolini and other top Fascists. By November 1924 trade treaties and official recognition by other capitalist states were more important for the Soviet Union than what was happening to the international working class.

After this fiasco and display of confusion and opportunism by the Gramscian leadership a core of militants from the Left (who still represented the majority of party members) decided that Bordiga's tactic of leaving the Party in the hands of the 'Centrists' was not enough. The very *raison d'être* of the Party was being undermined while comrades from the Left were being thrown out of the Party and substituted by 'Centrists' without any political debate whatsoever. In the Spring of 1925 a small group of comrades from the Left, including Bruno Fortichiani, Luigi Repossi and Onorato Damen, resolved to form the *Comitato d'Intesa* (translated in the Cambridge text as the 'Committee of Agreement') with the intention of trying to make sure there was a full debate about what was going on, both nationally and internationally, before the next Party Congress:

What can a Congress which is aiming at bolshevisation be worth if it is attended by delegates from the various federations where there has been no previous discussion, of a serious and informed nature, with the recognised representatives of the various currents about the "fundamental problems of national life on which basis the general programme of the party must be drawn"?

(Letter from the Committee of Agreement to the Party Executive, 1.6.25, in response to a statement of the Party Executive published in *L'Unità* of 26.5.25)

Here would have been a chance for the Cambridge work to say something new and deal with an episode otherwise avoided by studies of Gramsci.

However, despite the singular inclusion of one of Gramsci's published responses to the Committee, there is no explanation whatsoever about how Gramsci 'persuaded' paid Party organisers to withdraw from the Committee with the threat of losing their 'jobs'; there is no mention about how the Committee came to be dissolved with the promise of a full and open debate and how that debate was sabotaged by typical Stalinist tactics of delaying publication of articles from the Left and surrounding them with condemnations from the Centre when they were published. (Though the very title of the one text by Gramsci that is published here — *The Party Grows in Strength by Combating Anti-Leninist Deviations* — is nowadays enough to give a flavour of the sort of barrage they were being subjected to.) In short, there is no mention of how Gramsci preferred 'administrative' measures to political debate in order to achieve a very precise 90.8% of the vote at the Lyons Congress. But then this would be to reveal another aspect of Gramsci, Gramsci the Comintern hack — an aspect of his thinking that neither liberal academics nor erstwhile Stalinists have an interest in dwelling on.

If you are interested in what Gramsci had to say while he was actively involved in politics and you haven't already got or can't afford the two volumes of the Lawrence and Wishart collection which cover the same period then this Cambridge edition will suffice. Otherwise the Quintin Hoare collections, despite the basic hostility to Bordiga and the Left, come with introductions which give a clearer and more accurate picture of the political context in which Gramsci was working and writing. (Volume One even has articles by Bordiga criticising Gramsci's early 'councilism'.) If, however, you are looking for the political origin of the Italian Left communists this cannot be deduced from reading Gramsci and his interpreters. For revolutionaries there is another history which still remains to be written.

Footnote

1. Named after the 4th Century BC incident in Ancient Rome when the plebs withdrew to the Aventine Hill after rejecting patrician-dominated rule from the Palatine Hill.

Further Reading

For more about Gramsci in English, see 'Antonio Gramsci: Myth and Reality' and 'Gramsci: The Concept of Hegemony' in *Communist Review* 5 and 6 respectively.

There are still some copies of the CWO's translation of the *Rome Theses* — the document

Theses insisted that the 'united front' slogan could only be interpreted as the unification of the mass of the working class behind the communist banner, and not as political support for coalition governments which included social democratic parties. From the outset the Comintern leadership objected to this interpretation and pressure was put on the PCd'I to withdraw the document. In *Revolutionary Perspectives 22* (previously the CWO's theoretical journal). £1.50 from the CWO address. For a short history of the Italian Left who went into exile after the outlawing of the PCd'I by Mussolini at the end of 1926, see the extract from *Octobre* which we published in the previous edition of this journal.

In Italian:

Over the years the PCInt has published numerous articles on the early life of the PCd'I, notably *Il percorso ideologico della controrivoluzione in Italia* which appeared in serial form in *Battaglia Comunista* from December 1982 to June 1983. There is also a collection of writings by Onorato Damen on Gramsci and the period of his leadership of the PCd'I: *Gramsci tra marxismo e idealismo*. This contains the Platform of the Committee of Agreement (*Comitato d'Intesa*), the first organised opposition from what was later to become the Italian Left and which we will be publishing in English later this year.

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The Material Basis of Imperialist War

A Brief Reply to the ICC

In *International Review* 79, the theoretical journal of the ICC (International Communist Current) there is a 'Polemic with the IBRP' under the heading 'The Conception of Decadence under Capitalism'. Unlike most of the quibbling and misrepresentation which they baptise as "fraternal polemics" this particular one has the merit of at least being on a substantive issue for the international working class, touching as it does on both the nature of capitalism today, and our perspectives for working class revolution.

Wars - Ascendant and Decadent

Economic theory has never been an ICC strong point, so that in some respects this article has the them returning to a battleground from which they had to retreat fifteen or sixteen years ago.¹ They begin by attacking the IBRP's view of war in this century. At first sight it is not clear why they are doing this but if we look back through *International Reviews* and their polemics with the Bordigist International Communist Party we can better understand the ICC's concerns. Their debate with the Bordigists centres on the latter's apparent view that there is a mechanical causal relation between war and the cycle of accumulation. We say "apparent" because typically the ICC doesn't actually quote anything to show that the Bordigists view history so schematically.

We are even less inclined to accept the assertions about *Programme Communiste* when we see the way they interpret our views. The ICC first twists what we say into what we don't say then launches into a polemic (although none too coherently) against what we don't say! The article opens by saying:

The IBRP explains world imperialist war, which is a fundamental characteristic of decadent capitalism, as follows ... "And just as in the 19th century the crises of capitalism led to the devaluation of existing capital (through bankruptcies), thus opening the way to a new cycle of

accumulation based on the concentration and fusion of capital, in the 20th century the crises of world imperialism can no longer be resolved other than by a still greater devaluation of the existing capital, through the economic collapse of whole countries. This is precisely the economic function of world wars. As in 1914 and 1939, this is imperialism's inexorable "solution" to the crisis of the world economy." [IBRP quoted in *IR* 79, p.12]

This quotation from *Communist Review* 4 shows that we say that the economic **function** of world war (i.e. its **consequences** for capitalism) is to devalue capital as a necessary prelude to a possible new cycle of accumulation. But the ICC article alters the issue by its next comment that this means we are "according an economic **rationality** to the phenomenon of world war". Now this implies that we see the destruction of capital values as the capitalists' aim i.e. that this is a direct **cause** of war. But causes are not the same as consequences.² The ruling classes of imperialist states do not consciously go to war to devalue capital. On the contrary, they go to war to defend the existing capital values which they control. The causes of war stem from the bourgeoisie's efforts to defend those capital values against their rivals. Under ascendant capitalism such rivalry was largely on the economic level and between rival firms. Those who could achieve a greater degree of concentration of capital (capital's tendency to centralisation and monopoly) would be in a position — via price cutting, whilst still selling commodities at, or even below, value — to drive their competitors to the wall. This rivalry also led to an over-accumulation of capital which resulted in the decennial crises of the nineteenth century. In these the weaker firms would collapse or be taken over by more powerful rivals. Capital would be devalued in each crisis and thus a new round of accumulation could begin, but each time capital would become more centralised and concentrated.³

In the era of monopoly capitalism, however, that

concentration has reached the level of the nation state. The economic and political have now become intertwined in the imperialist or decadent stage of capitalism. In this epoch the policies which demand defence of capital values involve the states themselves and heighten the rivalries between the imperialist powers. Increased tariff barriers, preventing or gaining access to sources of raw materials and control of markets all lead to wars.

But if the nature of capitalism begins to change at this point, the nature of war too is different. Whilst the post-Napoleonic Wars of the nineteenth century world had their horrors (as the ICC correctly sees) the real difference is that they were fought for specific aims which allowed them to reach rapid and often negotiated solutions. The bourgeoisie in the nineteenth century still had its programmatic mission to get rid of old relics of previous modes of production and create truly national (i.e. bourgeois states). Slavery, serfdom, censorship and purely arbitrary government all succumbed in the nineteenth century as the result of war and no war lasted longer, or was more bloody, than the US Civil War (1861-65).

However imperialist wars have no such limited objectives. The bourgeoisie don't lightly enter them and once they embark upon them there is only a struggle to annihilation, until one nation or bloc of nations is militarily and economically destroyed. The consequences of war are, that not only has capital been physically destroyed, but that there has also been a massive devaluation of existing capital. Those powers which aren't physically destroyed (like the USA in World War Two) can actually use the war to devalue their own existing capital by taking advantage of the emergency conditions of war to print money to fund the war effort. They also gain by seizing the markets and sources of raw materials of their "allies" who are no longer capable of exploiting them (e.g. as the USA did with the British investments in South America, especially Argentina, during World War Two). Destruction of capital values both physically and as Adam Smith used to say "morally" lays the basis on which a new post-war growth can take place.

The ICC denies all this. They deny the renewed growth after wars. They deny the economic necessity of the process. They deny too that the forces of concentration and centralisation which brought capitalism into its imperialist stage continue to operate to create an even greater concentration of capital under decadence and with it bring new problems. To search for any kind of rationality in capitalism today is for them to deny the very idea that it is ripe for overthrow.

They continue their argument by saying that,

Imperialist war has no economic rationality. World war's "economic function" in destroying capital may seem analogous to what happened in the previous century but this is only in appearance. In the twentieth century war's function is radically different, and the IBRP must feel this confusedly since they put the word "solution" in quotes. Far from being a solution to a cyclical crisis "thus opening the way to a new cycle of accumulation" war is the clearest expression of capitalism's permanent crisis. It expresses the tendency to chaos and disintegration which grips world capitalism, and moreover it accelerates this tendency.

There is nothing confused about our use of the word "solution" in quotes. War is a "solution" for capital in the sense that it provides the possible material basis for a renewed round of accumulation. It is, as we have stated many times, not a solution for humanity. But to agree with the ICC that, after more than twenty years of this capitalist crisis there are increasing signs of chaos and social fragmentation, does not mean that there is no capitalist logic in operation. For the ICC everything is just "chaos" and "decomposition" and we need not trouble ourselves too much with a detailed analysis of anything. This is the crux of their position. In the course of it they unwittingly deny marxism as a valid method of analysis of reality.

The Growth of the Productive Forces and Decadent Capitalism

In their pamphlet *The Decadence of Capitalism* the ICC correctly reject the Trotskyist idea (it used to be a favourite of the old Workers' Revolutionary Party of Gerry Healey) that there has been a total halt to the growth of the productive forces but then try to prove, against all the evidence, that growth rates have slowed down dramatically since 1914. In the IR79 article they not only deny that capitalist growth rates since the Second World War are historically high warning that we shouldn't "be blinded by dazzling statistics" but also add

...world production between 1913 and 1959 (including arms production) grew by 250%, whereas if it had increased at the same rhythm as between 1880 and 1890, the period of capitalism's apogee, it would have grown by over 400%.

The ICC's statistical proof for these figures is their

own pamphlet. When you go back to check the original article this contains mere assertions or some badly cited source that is difficult to check.⁴ Their pamphlet on *The Decadence of Capitalism* is almost entirely based on a single source (Fritz Sternberg) and he only gives figures for 1880 to 1890. The ICC don't say where they conjure up their growth rates for the post-1945 period.

However, it is not just the statistics that are shaky. The whole way this discussion is posed is false. Cycles of accumulation are inherent to capitalism and they explain why, at different moments, capitalist production and capitalist growth can be higher or lower than in the preceding periods. Table 1 below illustrates this for the inter-war years where 1929 shows a universal peak by comparison with 1913. 1932 actually does show declining output but by 1937 (with the war economy already begun but the cycle of accumulation still unable to restore employment levels) the level of 1929 has been surpassed everywhere except France and the USA. This underlines the fact that capitalism, even as it grows, can still be in crisis if there is no fundamental shift in value relations.

Table 1:

Recovery from the Great Depression

	Industrial output [%]		
	1928-9 c.f.1913	1932 c.f.1929	1937 c.f.1929
UK	106	83	124
Germany	118	58	116
France	139	69	91
Sweden	143	89	149
USA	172	54	92

Source: I. Svernilson *Growth and Stagnation in the European Economy* p.28 and David S. Landes *The Unbound Prometheus* p.39

We can also see from this that although war devalues capital and makes a new round of accumulation possible, the First World War was insufficient in this respect, given that destruction was confined to a fairly limited geographic area. This partially explains the shortness and feebleness of the truncated cycle which took place between the two world wars. Table 2 (above right) illustrates this even more clearly.

Aldcroft's views are believed by other economic historians to exaggerate growth rates in the 1920s (See D. Landes, *The Unbound Prometheus*, for example.) However, this only underlines our case that the ICC's effort to argue that growth rates since 1945 are either well below those of the

ascendant period or are easily explained away by the growth of unproductive expenditure, especially armaments, is wrong. If we subtract the 1913-59 growth rates from the 1913-59 period the actual growth rates for 1945-59 must have been substantial in comparison with those of 1860-1913 (even taking into account the undeniable increase in armaments production in the period).

Table 2:

Global Growth Rates: annual compound % of national income

1860-1913	1913-29	1913-59
2.2	1.7	2.6

Source: D.H. Aldcroft *From Versailles to the Wall St Crash* (Penguin) p.98

The Meaning of Decadence

We do not argue that proletarian revolution is necessary because the growth of the productive forces is less than it was in the past or even that it has dramatically slowed down. Marx's conception of capitalism, the most dynamic system of production hitherto known to humanity, leaves little room for the idea of either a slowdown or a total halt in the growth of the productive forces. Even feudalism grew as it created the conditions for capitalism and, given the goad of the law of the tendency of the rate of profit to fall, capitalism has to "expand or die". Expansion is its general condition even in the present epoch. The capitalist system is not decadent because it cannot grow but because its continued existence is incompatible with the present and future interests of humanity and at the same time the objective conditions (a world economy and an international antagonistic class, the proletariat) for the creation of a higher mode of production already exists. The costs of further capitalist development of the productive forces are no longer materially inevitable. Moreover these costs have reached such a scale that they threaten the destruction of civilised life both in the short term (environmental decay, famines, genocide) and longer term (generalised imperialist war). Marx expressed the idea clearly enough in the *Grundrisse*.

Beyond a certain point, the development of the powers of production becomes a barrier for capital; hence the capital relation a barrier for the development of the productive powers of labour. When it has reached this point, capital, i.e. wage labour enters into the same relation towards the development of social wealth and of the forces of production as the guild system,

serfdom, slavery, and is necessarily stripped off as a fetter. The last form of servitude assumed by human activity, that of wage labour on one side, capital on the other, is thereby cast off like a skin, and this casting off itself is the result of the mode of production corresponding to capital; the material and mental conditions of the negation of wage labour and of capital... are themselves results of its production process. The growing incompatibility between the productive development of society and its hitherto existing relations of production expresses itself in bitter contradictions, crises, spasms. The violent destruction of capital not by relations external to it, but rather as a condition of its self-preservation, is the most striking form in which advice is given it to be gone and to give room to a higher state of social production.

And just to underline how he saw the overthrow of capitalism arising from the real movement of capital (i.e. cycles of accumulation) Marx finishes the same passage by saying,

These contradictions, of course, lead to explosions, crises, in which momentary suspension of all labour and annihilation of the greater part of the capital violently lead it back to the point where it is enabled [to go on] fully employing its reproductive powers without committing suicide. Yet, these regularly recurring catastrophes lead to their repetition on a higher scale and finally to its final overthrow. [p.749-750 Penguin edition.]

Today capitalism has accomplished its historic task. Capitalism has now produced the "agencies of its own dissolution" (Capital Vol I Ch.32), a globalised economy and a proletariat who are its "gravediggers". It is no longer a progressive social system, since the further development of the productive forces which still takes place is in the context of a productive technology which could be utilised by associated labour to reduce the labour time of everyone, to find meaningful employment for all and to satisfy the present starvation and undernourishment of millions under this system which destroys or stockpiles the necessities of life. **What we are seeing today is, not an arrestation of the growth of the productive forces compared with the past, but an arrestation of the productive forces compared with what is objectively possible if the fetters of capitalism were removed. This is the reasoning behind our statement that the objective basis for a higher mode of production**

exists.

The Wooden Schema of "Saturated Markets"

The ICC accuse Battaglia Comunista and the Bureau of being,

a prisoner of its schematic cycles of accumulation ... based solely on the theory of the tendential fall in the rate of profit, without taking account of the theory developed by Rosa Luxemburg on the saturation of markets. [IR 79 p.13.]

We have already shown how value analysis allows us to understand the movement of capital in both its ascendant and present epochs. The "schematic cycles of accumulation" in which we are happy to be imprisoned happens to be what Marx left us with. It is the ICC which is trapped in an analysis which owes little to the operation of capitalist laws. This explains why they have to resort to distorting statistics about capitalist growth rates. The quotation above illustrates some of the problem. The ICC repeatedly assert that they follow Rosa Luxemburg yet they have never once demonstrated how Luxemburg's theory can concretely operate today. Indeed their relationship to Rosa Luxemburg's theory is an odd, and fundamentally dishonest one. We cannot give a global critique of Rosa Luxemburg's *The Accumulation of Capital* here but a schematic overview is necessary to understand the rest of the discussion.⁶

For Marx the sources of all real crises lay within the capitalist system itself, within the relationship between capitalists and workers. He sometimes expressed this as a crisis created by the limited capacity of the workers to consume the product of their own labours. For example, in *Capital* Volume III he states,

The last cause of all real crises remains the poverty and restricted consumption of the masses. [Lawrence and Wishart p. 257]

He went on to add that this was not because of overproduction per se

There are not too many necessities of life produced, in proportion to the existing population. Quite the reverse. Too little is produced to decently and humanely satisfy the wants of the great mass. [loc. cit.]

And Marx goes on to explain that this crisis arises

out of the falling rate of profit.

Not too much wealth is produced. But, at times, too much wealth is produced in its capitalistic self-contradictory forms. The limitations of the capitalist mode of production come to the surface:

1) In that the development of the productivity of labour creates out of the falling rate of profit a law which at a certain point comes into antagonistic conflict with this development and must be overcome constantly through crises. [op.cit. p.258]

The crises devalue capital and allow a new cycle of accumulation to begin.

Initially Luxemburg supported the idea the cause of crises was to be found in the value relations inherent in the capitalist mode of production itself. In her book, *Social Reform and Revolution* (written in 1899) she could write:

It is the threat of the constant fall in the rate of profit, resulting not from the contradiction between production and exchange but from the growth of productivity of labour itself ... (which) has the the extremely dangerous tendency of rendering impossible any enterprise for small and middle-sized capitals. It thus limits the new formation and therefore extension of placements of capital. [In R. Looker *Selected Political Writings of Rosa Luxemburg*]

But the fight against revisionism inside German Social Democracy seems to have led her by 1913 to search for another economic theory with which to counter the revisionist assertion that the law of the tendency of the rate of profit to fall was no longer valid. In *The Accumulation of Capital* she concluded that there was "a flaw in Marx's analysis" (op. cit p.155) and she decided that the cause of capitalist crisis lay outside capitalist relations. She now insisted that capital could expand only as long as there existed "third buyers", who were not workers or capitalists. The continuing existence of pre-capitalist forms like peasant production were necessary for capital expansion. Once these were used up the capitalists could not realise the surplus value contained in the commodities they produced and it entered into its historic crisis as a mode of production, or as the ICC elaborate today, this explains the decadence of capitalism.

As we have pointed out before, this theory makes nonsense of *Capital* since Marx carried out his analysis assuming a closed capitalist system that

was already devoid of "third buyers" (and yet he still found a crisis mechanism). It also gives geographical rather than economic limits to capitalist self-expansion and finally, it cannot explain why there has been such a massive development of the productive forces under decadence. If markets were already saturated in 1913, if all pre-capitalist outlets had been exhausted no new ones could be re-created (short of a trip to Mars). If capitalism goes beyond the level of growth of the previous cycle how could it possibly do it in Luxemburgist theory?

We have already seen how the ICC resolve the dilemma — by empirically denying that there has been real growth. Luxemburg seems to have realised too that her theory virtually denied the possibility of any new accumulation but she was aware that it was taking place. Her solution was to abandon value analysis altogether. In her final chapter she concluded that arms production, or "militarism", was "a province of accumulation". Earlier in her book she had refused to consider workers as consumers of part of the surplus value destined for accumulation but now she concludes that taxation of *v* (variable capital, or that apportioned to workers for their means of subsistence) provides extra surplus value for capitalisation.

But as yet no opportunities for such capitalisation have come into being, no new market, that is to say for the surplus value that has become available, in which it could produce and realise new commodities. But when the monies concentrated in the exchequer by taxation are used for the production of armaments the picture is changed. [The Accumulation of Capital p.456]

This is a break with marxism. Marx clearly states that

...surplus value is only convertible into capital, because the surplus product whose value it is, already contains the material constituents of new capital. [Capital Vol I (Everyman edition), p.638]

Whilst machine tools, and food, for example, already contain "the material constituents of new capital", what part can arms play in the formation of new capital? They can be neither used to create new means of production nor eaten. They are unproductive or waste production. This isn't a moral question. By waste production we mean that they are a net loss for total social capital. The ICC themselves reject this weakness in Luxemburg's theory although until the CWO pointed this out they were rather coy in doing so.

In fact the ICC are still intellectually dishonest here since they quote the very chapter in *The Accumulation of Capital*, 'Militarism as a Province of Accumulation', to support their views on war yet they try to dissociate themselves from the main argument in the chapter. They definitely don't seem to be able to grasp that the argument about arms production as a province of accumulation was the crowning point of her analysis and not something that can be wished away. Luxemburg's arguments against militarism in this final chapter amount to moralism. She was anxious (for perfectly understandable reasons) to tie war and militarism to her theory of imperialism but this led her into abandoning the value theory which is the core of marxism. The ICC, by denying that we need to analyse the real development of capitalism in this epoch, also leaves us with nothing except moral outrage, a point we will return to below.

There is, however, no question that militarism is inextricably intertwined with imperialism. Whilst arms production is a net loss for global capitalism it can benefit those imperialist powers which can sell them to lesser players on the global stage. This enables them to drain the surplus value produced by the working class in the weaker states towards themselves. In concrete terms we saw this during the Cold War where arms sales by the USA, Western Europe and the USSR to their clients and satellites amounted to little more than a protection racket. However, since the end of the Cold War, and especially since the Gulf War, the absolute dominance of the US in global terms has no better confirmation than in its sales of arms. This, as the graph here clearly shows, has reached a position akin to monopoly in this field. Despite a global drop in arms sales, the US has managed to maintain the same level of sales by obliging its allies and competitors to leave the field free for US arms manufacturers.

The great bulk of these arms sales go to the Middle East where they are purchased by the oil dollars of the Gulf states. This, like the devaluations of the US dollar in 1971-3 actually pushes the US crisis onto its so-called "allies". However, such palliatives — like the other measures the US has used to make other states pay for its crisis (mainly evident in its massive foreign debt) — do not resolve the fundamental problem of over-accumulation at the end of the cycle. Whatever short term successes these policies enjoy, all the manoeuvres under the sun cannot restore capitalist profitability to the required level, outside of a major new imperialist conflict.

The ICC have been consistent since their foundation twenty years ago in dismissing all attempts to analyse how the capitalists have managed the current crisis. Indeed they seem to think that any attempt to look at the historically specific features of the present crisis is tantamount to saying that capitalism has solved the crisis. This is not the case. What is incumbent on marxists is to actually try to understand why this has been the longest drawn-out crisis in the present capitalist epoch and is now about to surpass that of the Great

Depression of 1873-96. But whilst the latter was a crisis created as capitalism entered its monopoly phase and was still soluble by purely economic devaluation the crisis of today threatens humanity with a far greater catastrophe.

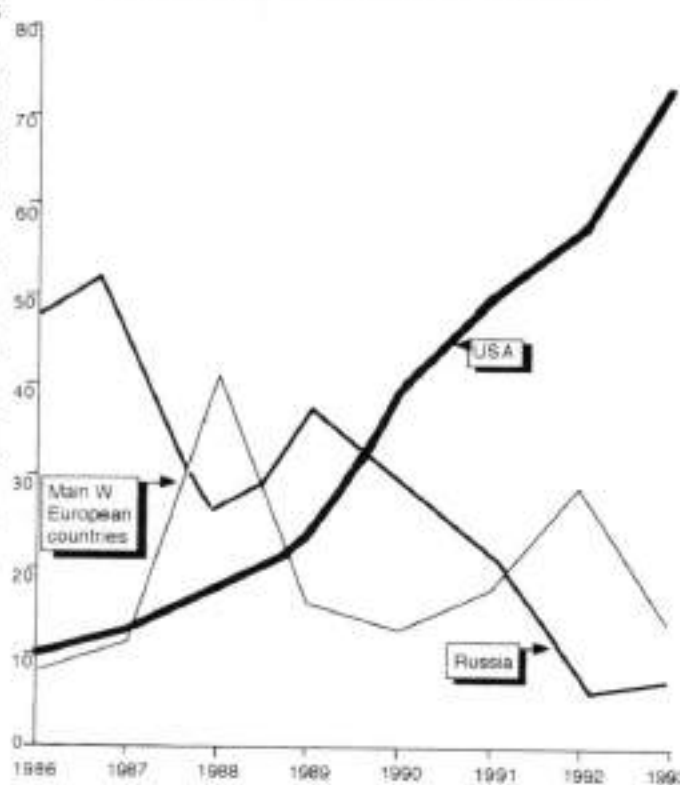
Reason and Unreason

Nothing discredits the idea of the operation of decadent capitalism under imperialist conditions more than the way in which the ICC presents the origins of state capitalism. Briefly, we see the tendency to centralisation and concentration that Marx identified as leading before the First World War to the beginnings of

monopoly capitalism. To quote the passage disliked by the ICC,

Graph 1:

Arms Sales as a % of World Total



Source: US Congress Research Service

It is precisely in this historic phase that capitalism enters its decadent phase. Free competition, sharpened by the fall in the rate of profit, creates its opposite - monopoly, which is the form of organisation that capitalism adopts in order to stave off the threat of the further fall in the rate of profit. [Battaglia Comunista's contribution to the Second Conference of Groups of the Communist Left.]

The ICC comment that

Monopolies survive in decadence but are far from constituting its essential characteristic ... It should be clear that this theory makes it difficult to understand in depth the universal tendency ... to state capitalism. [International Review 79 p.15]

This is a perfect confession of ignorance of marxism. Not only do monopolies "survive" but they are continuing to develop in the form of multinational financial conglomerates capable of disposing of more capital than many states. Furthermore monopoly is the consequence of the growth of concentration and centralisation of capital. Monopolies are able to use the law of value to threaten whole productive sectors of economic life (via the tendency to equalisation of the rate of profit). This is naturally a threat to the economic life of capitalist states and draws the state into the management of the economy, including the use of taxation to redistribute surplus value to strategically important areas (the so-called "sharing out of financial revenue"). Thus, monopolies are powerful forces in **creating** state capitalism. The state intervenes to preserve the national economic wealth from the threat produced by the tendency for the equalisation of the rate of profit. The ICC see this completely upside down. For them it is the intervention of the state that distort's the law of value, not the operation of the law of value which calls forth the intervention of the state. Of course the state then does go on to intervene in the operation of the law of value, by redistributing surplus value according to the needs of the national capital at home and carrying out various imperialist policies to defend the national capital (and especially its monopoly forms) abroad.

The ICC also cannot see that the tendencies which brought about capitalist decadence don't just conveniently stop at the beginning of the First World War. Concentration and centralisation of capital is going on still as the capitalists try to find new ways of restructuring the economy. We know this will fail because it runs up against the fact that it cannot escape from the crisis without the mas-

sive devaluation which only a world war can bring. The capitalists are trying everything they can to avoid this: Setting up the World Trade Organisation, writing off capital, as the British did in the 1980s, writing off Third World debt, implementing a technological revolution in both manufacturing and service industries. (The latter, *pace* the ICC **can be** productive for capital. They should re-read *Capital* Vol III.) These are all policies based on the lessons of the past. However, as the crisis continues new problems are arising and these need further analysis by revolutionaries. The restructuring (and, dare we say it, growth) of the working class, the tendency for capitalist states to be economically dwarfed by the volume of world trade and the amount of capital which is controlled by world financial institutions (which is now at least four times the budgets of all the states put together) have produced a further extension of the world economy of Bukharin and Luxemburg's day into a globalised economy.⁷

All of the above have to be subjected to a rigorous Marxist analysis which takes time to develop. The IBRP has been trying to get to grips with these in recent issues of its publications.⁸ This is our agenda. It is depressing that the ICC seems to think that nothing new is happening in the world that is worthy of analysis. Whilst we can all agree that there are tendencies for decomposition and chaos (after twenty years of the end of the cycle of accumulation it is difficult to see how there could not be) these should not be used as slogans to avoid concrete analysis of what **is** happening.

And this leads to the ultimate objection the ICC have to our use of Marxist categories to analyse the drift towards global war. For them "Imperialist war has no economic rationality". But this is not true. It may have no economic rationality from the point of view of humanity but it has a kind of distorted rationality for decadent capitalism. It is why we have always said that war or revolution are the only ways out of the present crisis. To argue that the disintegration of capitalism is so great that we have entered a world of irrationality takes us onto new ground. It is very difficult to answer arguments that claim that "irrationality" governs human actions. Such arguments are not susceptible to scientific proof or disproof. They must simply be accepted or rejected. They are, in short, simply religious. The more the ICC punctuate their sentences with the words "as marxists" the more they depart from historical materialism.

If further proof of ICC idealism was required their final accusation against the Bureau is that it has "no unitary and global vision of war" which leads to the "blindness and irresponsibility [sic]" of not seeing that the next war would mean "nothing

other than the complete annihilation of the planet". The ICC might be right, although we'd like to know the scientific basis on which they predict it. We ourselves have always said that the next war "threatens the continued existence of humanity". However there is no certainty about this wiping out everything. The next imperialist war may not actually lead to the final destruction of humanity. There have been weapons of mass destruction which have not been used in previous conflicts (e.g. biological and chemical weapons) and there is no guarantee that a nuclear holocaust would envelope the planet next time round. In fact the present war preparations of the imperialist powers includes the decommissioning of weapons of mass destruction whilst developing so-called conventional weapons.⁹ Even the bourgeoisie understands that a destroyed planet is of no value to anyone (even if the forces which lead to war and the nature of war are ultimately beyond their control).

Whatever the future capitalism has to offer, our task today is to agitate for proletarian revolution as the only alternative to it. Fortunately we have some time in which to get ourselves prepared but if imperialist war does break out we still have to fight against it (assuming we are practically in a position to do so). The ICC, whose predecessors in the French Gauche Communiste predicted the destruction of humanity and abandoned revolutionary work at the beginning of the Korean War over forty years ago, have got it wrong before. So far the two great historical pointers for the working class (the Paris Commune and the Russian Revolution) have come out of a war situation. This is not to say that war is a necessary condition for proletarian revolution but it would be a sorry state of affairs if so-called materialists simply gave up the revolutionary cause in the face of all-out imperialist war because they could see no further than some sort of religious Armageddon. In reality we have no alternative but to continue working for a future for humanity — whatever the circumstances — and at the moment that includes being able to demonstrate that we are in touch with reality. The ICC's reluctance to face up to the fact that capitalism has changed, not only during the twentieth century in general but over the last decade or more in particular, does not help the cause of communism one iota.

Footnotes

1. The Bureau as such has never debated the issue of the present nature of capitalism (although it was implied in the debates around the three International Conferences held between 1977 and 1980). The Internationalist Communist Party (Battaglia Comunista) wrote two brief articles called *Appunti sulla Decadenza* (Notes on Decadence) in *Prometeo* Series IV Nos 1 and 2 which laid out their view without polemics against any other positions except those

of today's so-called reformists.

The CWO, however, was formed largely under the political leadership of the small group, Revolutionary Perspectives (which published a theoretical journal of the same name). As this group had been influenced by *Révolution Internationale* (the French founding group of the ICC) it was obliged to confront ICC positions on economic theory much earlier. The CWO therefore wrote directly against the ICC *The Accumulation of Contradictions or the Economic Consequences of Rosa Luxemburg* (*Revolutionary Perspectives* 6) and *The Meaning of Decadence* (RP10) which were criticisms of the ICC's pamphlet *The Decadence of Capitalism*. The ICC responded in *International Review* 13 with an article *Marxism and Crisis Theory*. This was systematically demolished in *Crisis Theory - A Reply to the ICC* (*Revolutionary Perspectives* 11). The ICC now went silent. The CWO was dismissed as "the political economists of the communist left" and the CWO's pamphlet *The Economic Foundations of Capitalist Decadence* (written in 1974 and 1977) which the ICC promised in a footnote to another article to criticise, remained unanswered. Fifteen or sixteen years later the ICC is now resuming the debate.

2. Just as 'laws' and 'phenomena' are not the same thing. Something we explained to the ICC the last time we discussed this issue (see *Revolutionary Perspectives* 11).

3. This is more fully explained in *Marx Capital Vol III* and in the CWO pamphlet *The Economic Foundations of Capitalist Decadence* (which is at present being up-dated).

4. A more scientific discussion is precluded by these procedures. The ICC may be frightened to be seen using bourgeois statistics but then they are all we have to go on. The most important thing is to make sure that we publish the sources we are using so that we can scrutinise them to enrich the debate.

5. More on the Luxemburg-Marx issue can be found in *The Accumulation of Contradictions* in *Revolutionary Perspectives* 6 and *Crisis Theory - A Reply to the ICC* in *Revolutionary Perspectives* 11 p.33) and our pamphlet *The Economic Foundations of Capitalist Decadence*. As *Revolutionary Perspectives* is now out of print, a photocopy of the first two articles (32 pp.) will be sent to anyone sending £3 (includes postage).

6. The ICC's unilateral stress on this feature of state capitalism seems to permanently throw them into the arms of the neo-Trotskyist SWP. The SWP's one-time economic theoretician, Michael Kidron developed a similar argument in his *Western Capitalism Since the War* (Penguin 1969). The difference being that he thought that arms production could stave off the crisis indefinitely whilst the ICC sees it as the sole source of growth (based simply on revenue redistribution) in a permanent crisis economy.

7. This is another cause of misunderstanding. The ICC criticises our formulation of "the extension of imperialist domination over the world market" as if we meant that it had just happened. "Extension" for us is not a fixed event but a continuing process. But this brings us back to the ICC's wooden idea of economic development. If it happened in 1914 it is now finished!

8. See, for example, the texts in this and the previous issue on the changing structure of the working class.

9. This is illustrated by the policy of the Clinton government in the USA. Since January 1993 it has been concentrating on preventing the proliferation of nuclear weapons whilst at the same time proliferating conventional weapons all over the planet. (See *Le Monde Diplomatique*, January 1995 p.23.)