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ДИКТАТУРУ КПСС -
на скалку истории

Миллерды КПСС-народу

ХОТ
ЕСТЬ
ОБЕЩАНИЯ
УЖЕ С

Will Russia's Workers Fight?

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BY WAY OF EXPLANATION

This is the first edition of the Communist Bulletin to appear since Summer 1989. The past two years have seen momentous events in the Capitalist world. We have seen the collapse of one entire capitalist bloc, that of the Russian Empire, the descent into turmoil of those states which once constituted the satellites of this bloc and the internal chaos in Russia resultant from the same causes. A capitalist bloc has been plunged into catastrophe as a result of the onset of an economic crisis so severe that the existing economic and social mechanisms of capital in that bloc have been unable to prevent them.

In the so-called Third World we have seen the policy of abandonment, so often noted in our pages over the last decade, produce famine and misery on a scale not seen these past three decades. The western bloc, forced to face up to its own economic problems, has progressively abandoned support for whole stretches of Africa and Asia allowing the economies of these regions to collapse at the first sign of recession.

In the western bloc we see the bloc leader stricken with economic woes, now the world's biggest debtor and facing another great crisis in the world economy. Since the seeming abandonment of the world stage by Russia we have seen an increasingly stricken US bourgeoisie seek to proclaim their mastery of the world, disciplining recalcitrant servants, dealing out death and destruction to those who will not, cannot, accede to the new world order and creating just such a new world order where it can, in Ethiopia, southern Africa, Central America etc.

Such events could not but have dramatic effects on the proletarian milieu, ourselves included. But it must be said that whereas the onset of crisis in the capitalist world had in previous situations led to an upsurge of communist activity, the events at the end of the Eighties have had the opposite effect. The way in which the crisis of capitalism has expressed itself, the collapse of one of the blocs without world war, in fact the receding, it would seem, of any threat of war between the blocs, the lack of any real proletarian response on its own terrain, as yet; these all seem to confound many of the theoretical underpinnings of the communist milieu. The effect on this milieu has therefore been one which has depressed the milieu rather than inspired it. At one extreme we have seen organisations desperately seeking to redefine reality so as to keep their theoretical structures intact. Here, such as in the CWO, the results have been the loss of militants, some of them founding members and for over a decade the leading lights of the organisation. In others we have seen an equally frantic effort to construct an entirely new theoretical framework overnight in order to make sense of what has been going on - such as in the ICC. Others have chosen to bury their heads in the sand pretending it doesn't matter so long as they continue to exist.

Key questions are being asked. Does the alternative of war or revolution still stand in a situation where one of the protagonists is no longer capable of playing the part of a competing bloc? How can such a situation have occurred without an explosion of proletarian discontent? Does this force us to re-examine whether the proletariat is capable of defending itself against capitalism? Is the proletariat still a revolutionary class? In the absence of a proletarian response will a two bloc system reassert itself or have we entered a completely new period of capitalism where new dynamics, new structures and new possibilities must be examined.

Clearly the confusions, uncertainties and resultant depression has not passed the CBG by. We have been as affected by the doubts produced by these events as any other fraction within the milieu. Though other factors are also relevant this is essentially why this is the first Bulletin for two years.

In this Bulletin we want primarily to reflect some of the discussions which have been going on within the CBG and within the milieu as a whole over the past two years or so on these events and their implications for the revolutionary movement.

gulf war and after

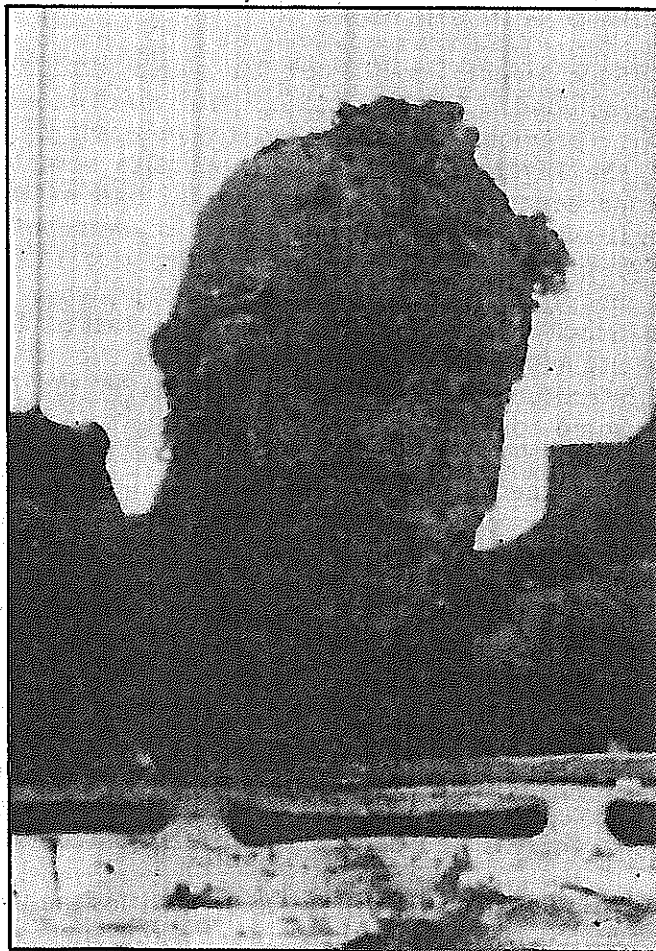
First of all the war itself. There have been tentative Western estimates that somewhere between 80,000 and 100,000 Iraqi soldiers, the vast majority conscripts, fathers, brothers and sons, were killed in the saturation bombing both at the front and in the rear. It is believed a further 50,000 civilians, men, women and children died, mainly in the cities of Iraq from the bombing and Cruise missile attacks. Up to 30,000 Kuwaiti civilians have disappeared, moved as hostages to Iraq, murdered after torture by Saddam's secret police or slaughtered as they were driven north by US air attacks. An, as yet unknown, number of Palestinians and other foreign workers are being arrested, tortured and murdered daily by the vengeful Kuwaiti regime. American military spokesmen have admitted that, as a policy decision, they will make no attempt to count the dead they encounter on the roads and in the bombed trenches but will merely bulldoze them into the ground where they lie, uncounted in their thousands.

Why did all these human beings perish in this war? The British soldiers blown up 'in error' by US A-10 planes - did they die to defend democracy, a cause the US has been trumpeting for years now in the wake of the collapse of the Russian Empire. There never has been any democracy in Saudi Arabia where Amnesty tells us opponents of the regime are systematically and routinely imprisoned brutalised and tortured. Where even to be a Christian is illegal.

The women and children burned so badly that they couldn't be told apart in the shelter in Baghdad, hit by 'smart' bombs didn't die, asphyxiated and incinerated, to protect the sovereignty of Kuwait and the 'principle of non interference in the affairs of other countries' as Bush would have us believe. The US has a long and brutal history of directly intervening in the affairs of other countries when it suits them all across the globe, from the fostering of coups such as that in Timor by the Indonesians which led to a genocide on a par with Iraq itself, the murder of democratically elected leaders such as Allende in Chile right up to the actual invasion of such as Cuba (failed), Grenada (successful after obliterating a hostel for the mentally handicapped) and Panama (successful after inflicting tens of thousands of casualties on the civilian population). The American bourgeoisie feel only too free to intervene whenever and wherever it serves their interests.

The literally thousands of soldiers and civilians massacred from the air and by US tanks on the road north from Kuwait at the end of the war, of which the photographs were so graphically horrendous that British newspapers decided not to let us see the full horror, didn't die saving Iraq from foreign domination, or for the cause of the Palestinians. Saddam has never been interested in the Iraqi or Palestinian people only in holding onto power by whatever bloody means he can - as the cellars of his torture chambers show.

The US marines killed by the Scud in Dahran didn't die fighting International Terrorism. Bush's best friends are terrorists. Only a year ago Assad of Syria was being denounced as the worst terrorist in the world by the US, as the man who was behind the Lockerbie bombing and whose diplomats were expelled from Britain. Now he's a favoured member of the Alliance against Saddam. In Israel we see Bush's closest ally led by a Prime Minister who started his political life openly as a terrorist blowing up British squaddies in the Forties and who only a few years ago organised and authorised the slaughter of undefended women and children in the massacre at the Chatila refugee camp in the Lebanon and who even now revels in how successfully he has turned the West Bank into a gigantic concentration camp for the Palestinians, patrolled by the Israeli Gestapo of the Shin Bet.



Buried Alive in the Defence of Capital

And what about the tens of thousands killed by fuel air bombs - they certainly didn't die to ensure that lethal weapons of mass destruction weren't left in the hands of people who might use them indiscriminately. This was a weapon which, a few short months ago was being described by the US as a

poor mans atom bomb, which by mixing aircraft fuel in a fine spray with air, dropped from planes could kill everyone over a wide area once it was ignited. We were told that only a complete bastard like Saddam would use such a weapon since it had effects like the nerve gases and mustard gas he had used against the Kurds. We were told that the US would never contemplate using such a weapon, indeed we were told that they had abandoned research on it years ago. Then, Lo and Behold we find that much of the slaughter in the concentrated bombing campaign against the Iraqis was carried out by American aircraft using such weaponry, repeatedly and indiscriminately. So much for ethics!

And that was only the war itself. Since the ceasefire the war after the war has raged throughout Iraq. Basra, Karbala lie in complete ruins. the Kurdish cities of the north look, from the TV pictures, to have been pretty well obliterated. The dead lie unburied on every street of practically every city, even in Baghdad where riots have been put down with concentrated bloodshed. The living have no power, no water that isn't a breeding ground for dysentery and cholera, no medicine and no food. Thousands are literally starving to death. The refugees poured into the American lines in the south desperate for food and medication, pleading for their napalm burns to be treated before they die of neglect and in the north hundreds of thousands are still seeking escape from what everyone confidently predicts will be the renewed genocide of a vengeful Iraqi elite.

This wasn't a war, this wasn't a rebellion, this was a slaughter. The population of Iraq hasn't just been beaten in war, or defeated in rebellion it has been slaughtered. The infrastructure of both Kuwait and Iraq lie completely in ruins.

Yet Iraq was, and is no military giant to have suffered on a scale with Germany after World war 2. Yes, it had a large army as a result of the US backed war against Iran but it was and is a poor small country with the population of Holland and the GDP of Portugal. It has been irredeemably smashed by the greatest assemblage of military might since WW2 - and then some again by the civil war within it.

The hypocrisy pumped out on all sides has been literally mindboggling. Yes, Saddam was a murderous thug, steeped in the blood of his many, many victims over the past twenty years or so. The recent revelations of whole families including mothers and up to five children, hanged after torture in the cellars of his secret police, of dogs trained to bite at prisoners' genitals are merely the latest in a long line of exposes of this thug. But this is the man and this is the regime which was supported to the hilt by all the western bourgeoisie in its attempts to bring Khomeini's Iran to heel in the Eighties. This is the man who was supported both militarily and financially by the US, Britain, France, Germany and many others throughout this period despite the fact he was clearly a disgusting murderer. It didn't matter to them then just as it doesn't matter to them now that Assad is, if anything, worse than Saddam - a man who happily destroys whole cities and their inhabitants as he did in Homs. Or the fat torturer Faud of Arabia. It was and is of no relevance to them that he is one of the most appalling despots in the area lording it over a country where it is even illegal for women to drive a car. And of course we cannot be surprised at that. For Bush and his cronies are no better than these minor gangsters. Only the scale is different. Saddam

can hold a country in terror and gas a village, Assad can brutalise both his own country and the Lebanon and can murder the population of a city - Only the Godfathers of the west can destroy a whole country and subvert continents. These are the real Godfathers of terrorism.

Terrorists are not evil outcasts in capitalist society - terrorism pervades capitalism. In its decadent phase capitalism is terrorism. War is not some unpleasant, unlooked for event which intrudes into a normally peaceful world - it is the very lifeblood of the capitalist empires as they struggle to survive in the decadent phase. Those who supported Saddam throughout the world weren't blood crazed lunatics but people, like the Palestinians, whose lives are dominated and brutalised by imperialism and who were willing to support any one, even this bloody monster, if only he would attack that centre of imperialism the USA. Those who supported Bush weren't evil westerners committed to drowning the Arab world in a bloodbath but, for the most part, ordinary workers, who believed the lies they were told about the war being a just one against invasion and oppression. As if restoring the rule of the Kuwaiti sheiks and the Saudi king had anything to do with right and wrong.

Even after the war the hypocrisy continues. After calling for the Iraqi people to oust Saddam during the war, no sooner had the Shites in the south and the Kurds in the north set out to do just that than Bush brazenly declared that there could be no further involvement in Iraq. Saddam's helicopters were free to blitz the uprisings. The two Republican Guard Divisions he had purposely left out of the fighting in Kuwait were free to attack the rebels, slaughter the population and even better, the continued release of Iraqi prisoners of war meant that his shattered forces could now grow again to do the job. This wasn't a mistake by Bush. While he and the American bosses want Saddam to go, even less did they want a pro Iranian Shiite government in the south and a destabilising Kurdish one in the North. Saddam is better than that and so from castigating the present government of Iraq as the font of evil it now, in effect, supports them against their own people in revolt, a revolt the US rallied them to in the first place.

What a wonderful example of capitalist hypocrisy the US gives us here. What an exhibition of the callous inhumanity of the bourgeoisie. In the north up to two million Kurds have been displaced by this war after the war; almost a million are clustered in the freezing mountains on both the Iranian or Turkish border, most without even the most basic of necessities, food, clothing or shelter; reports tell of 1500, mainly the wounded, women and especially children dying each night as Bush and his friends decide how to disguise their contempt for this human tragedy of their making in a frenzy of legalisms (we can't interfere in the internal affairs of a sovereign country - as if calling on the Iraqis to oust Saddam wasn't just that) or of handwringing (as if it were not in their power to help). As it is their idea of 'help' is to get the Kurdish ruling class to make a deal with Saddam which will allow them to go home to their devastated villages and towns where Saddam's secret police await them. Meanwhile they are to be placed in guarded camps 'for their protection' - another nation transformed into refugees.

But enough. Why? This is the question we must ask ourselves. Why this war, this revolt, this mass

destruction of property, natural environment and human beings? If, as we have seen it had absolutely nothing to do with democracy, bourgeois international law, or the rights of man what was it, and is it, all for?

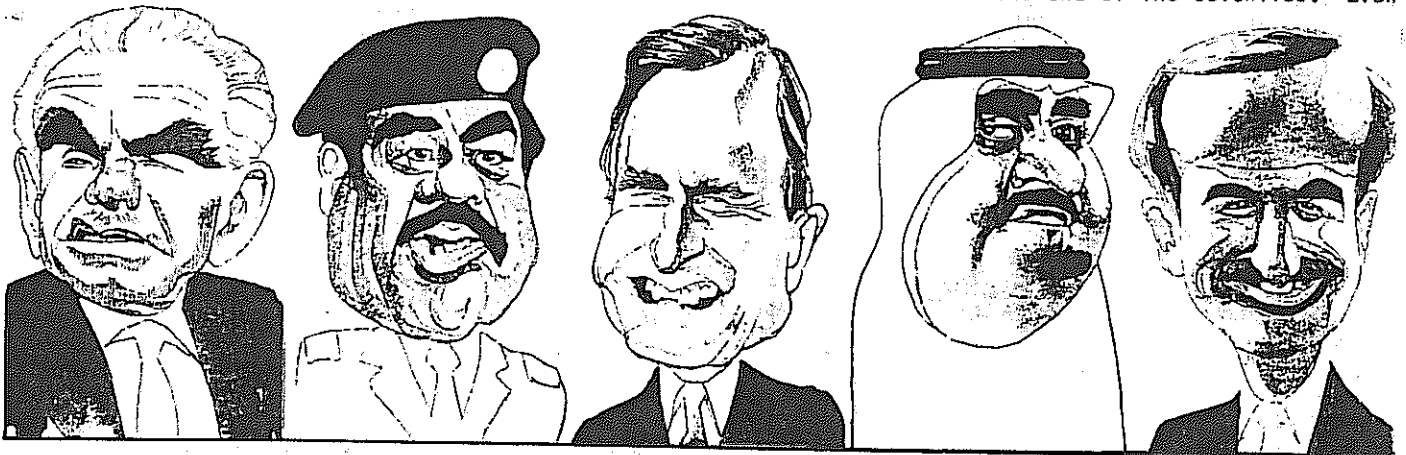
At one level it is about oil, about the control of one of the most important, if not the most important natural resources. As the dominant partner in the western capitalist bloc the US seeks to dominate both the areas which produce this vital resource and its rivals, actual and potential by controlling the source of oil. Throughout the post WW2 era the US has sought stability and control in the region. Elsewhere we have written at length on the methods it adopted. With the collapse however of the Russian Empire as a major player on the world imperialist stage, two tendencies emerged, deepening policies the US had already engaged in for a decade or so previously. Without an opposing bloc for them to turn to the US could afford to refuse to bail out the regime in Iraq, beggared by the war against Iran. It might have offered them a bit of Kuwait but Saddam's economic nightmare was so pressing he went the whole hog, and in doing so threatened the rest of the Gulf. And such a threat to the economic lifeblood of the west could not go unchallenged. Secondly the control the US has over its partners is increasingly based upon its military might. Japan and Germany are increasingly economic giants but compared to the US they are military pygmies. Any tendency, now that the Russians no longer pose a threat to US hegemony, to pose as a rival to the US on their part comes up against the complete stranglehold the US bourgeoisie has militarily, not just directly in competition to them, with troops based both in Germany and in the Pacific, but in the US' ability to physically control areas like the Middle East where such resources as oil are and, by means of its huge fleet, the seas over which these potential rivals' trade runs.

Syria. An even wider band of states contributed to the economic naval blockade. An unprecedented bargaining and threatening campaign, offering blandishments such as remission of debts, membership of the EEC etc as well as threatening with dire consequences got the show on the road. China could forget world 'outrage' at Tianenmen Square, it could even put the last remaining dissidents on trial during the war if it wanted to. If it voted at the UN; Assad could have a free hand in the Lebanon, Turkey might even be allowed into the EEC.

But if the strength of the US was shown both in terms of its military capabilities and its economic and diplomatic leverage then so too has the war now shown its weaknesses and the problems it continues to face.

Within the Middle East the US sought stability, or if that were impossible, at the very least an unstable situation which was under control. After the war, after the devastation of Iraq and Kuwait, after the massacre of Iraqis, Kurds and Shiites the last word that could be used to describe the situation in the Middle East is stability.

The war, of course, has allowed Iran back into the fraternity of 'acceptable' nations. The war has given her back all the territory she lost to Iraq and she has seen a hated rival humiliated. However the looked for renewal of links with the west which Rafsanjani has been pressing for will not lead to the massive western investment in his shattered economy he hopes. Similarly the war has produced a new and dangerous situation for the sheiks of the Gulf. They have been shown to be the catspaws of the west. In Kuwait the infrastructure is so badly damaged that its repair may prove impossible. Certainly whatever funds are available are most unlikely to be enough to rebuild Kuwait, Iran and Iraq after the devastating series of blows the Gulf has suffered since the end of the seventies. Even



Murderers, Torturers, Terrorists, Capitalists!

But on top of all this the demise of Russian Imperialism from the world stage, whether temporary or long term, allowed the US, in this new era, to demonstrate to the world who is now indisputably top dog. Backed to the hilt by its poodle Britain, it showed its muscle openly in an expression of military might specifically designed to show others what will happen to them if they so much as think about getting out of line. For all the whining from various major capitalist players ALL were forced to toe the US line. Its economic and political dominance of the bloc was demonstrated by its ability to cobble together a heterogeneous collection of allies - from its lapdog Britain to such as France, Egypt, Turkey, Pakistan and even

Syria, Egypt and Turkey, which have largely escaped direct involvement are in a sorry economic state. Turkey desperately needs the protection of membership of the EEC, Syria has just spent its blood money from the Gulf on arms rather than economic development, fearful that Saddam, crippled though he is, is not yet crushed, or that the Israelis still harbour Lebanese ambitions and Egypt has been in the throes of an economic nightmare for some years now and the cancelling of part of its debt, which was the price of its support for Bush, has granted it only a temporary respite.

In Iraq itself the process of destabilisation is most apparent. The economic and social system has

completely collapsed. Saddam now rules almost exclusively through the use of force over a demoralised, cowed population without even the most basic of necessities. The south is a complete wasteland where Baathist militia and Shiite guerrillas are still sniping at each other across a blighted landscape. In the north millions of Kurds, whether in Turkey, Iran or in Iraq in US protected camps or just freezing and starving on the mountainsides, demonstrate the collapse of the infrastructure. The towns are deserted save for Baathist police while the countryside is still full of Kurdish guerrillas. Here Bush desperately needs a solution. At a domestic level the kudos he had from the 'near bloodless' (sic) war has quickly dissipated in the horror of the Kurdish tragedy. Bush has been forced to send the Marines back into northern Iraq, with all the fears of another Vietnam in mind. It is therefore no surprise to find that meetings are being held between Saddam and the Kurds to find a solution, meetings undoubtedly guaranteed by Bush.

At a more general level the effect of the War on the population of the Middle East has been immense. It has clearly intensified the hatred for the West in general and the US in particular that has characterised this area for decades. The West was always seen as the plunderer of the Arab countries, but now it is seen as the destroyer of the area too. Without an alternative bloc to turn to in the USSR the elites who run these states can only, in the face of the might of the US, "kiss the hand they cannot bite". The populations however, increasingly pauperised in a region overflowing with oil, homeless, starving, without any reconstruction supported by Western finance, are turning more and more to ideologies antithetical to the West. The last decade has seen the inexorable decline of secular Arab nationalism, of looking to the future in order to liberate the area from the rule of the West. Instead, since the victory of the Iranian mullahs, we have seen the fellahin, scraping an existence in rural poverty or merely surviving at best in the huge shanty towns surrounding the cities, turn more and more to fundamentalist Islam as an answer to their misery. Though there have been proletarian expressions from the Arab proletariat in the past they have increasingly been submerged under this reactionary rhetoric, dragooned behind medievalist ravings which offer a mystical, yet earthly paradise as an alternative to the rape of their culture and lives by the West and their Arab lackeys. Given the creeping victory of the mullahs, the imposition of the Sharia in places as diverse as Sudan and Pakistan, for example, it is very difficult indeed to see how any positive ideological development, might manifest itself among the Arab populations of the Middle East. Armed with such an ideology it is difficult to see how the US can create any kind of stable situation, or any balance of instability to extend and consolidate its control over the region.

Yet it is desperately trying to do just that. Its attempts to support the Iraqi regime after the war, even if it would have preferred Saddam to be deposed are increasingly obvious. Its attempts to find some resolution of the Palestinian problem is also increasingly obvious. They are also increasing frantic, and increasingly problematic. For any solution forces the US bourgeoisie to face up to the Frankenstein monster it itself created, Israel. Israel could not survive a day without the massive financial contribution the US makes to its economy. Yet the Israeli/Jewish vote is increasingly important to the Republican Party in particular and the US bourgeoisie in general. This

Gordian knot has to be broken somehow but is proving an intractable problem. Hence Baker's shuttle diplomacy to Tel Aviv - six times already this past couple of months. But the Israeli ruling class know their power and have set their face firmly against a resolution. Hence the much publicised opening of new Jewish settlements in the West Bank and the steady refusal to negotiate with the PLO. At some point something has got to give here producing either turmoil among the Palestinians or the Israelis rather than the stability Bush wants and needs.

At a global level the events in the Middle East provide crucial information about the state of capitalism. The extent to which the USSR has been forced to abandon a world role was made very clear indeed. The strengths and weaknesses of the western bourgeoisie were also demonstrated and the contrast between the war that was fought and Global War clearly shown. To fight the war the US and its allies used only its regular forces, though many reservists were included too. The effect of this was to practically denude the west of military force - and that just to take out a tin pot dictator of a minor Middle East power. There was great difficulty in getting enough supplies even to conduct the war. Britain had, for instance, to scurry around the world to get enough equipment to fight it and had to go cap in hand to Belgium to ensure they had enough tank shells to feed their Armoured Brigade. France had a hard job finding enough troops even for their minuscule contribution and the US had to scour the planet to find enough reservists to replace the regulars it used. They were even forced to use the Pakistani army to garrison some of the Gulf States during the conflict. As for the losses in planes, missiles, bombs and tanks they, we are told, are going to take not months, but years to replace, in Britain at any rate, so parlous is the state of military expenditure. And this wasn't World War Three but, in essence, a glorified police operation against a recalcitrant slave.

And this is an important point to note. Revolutionaries have posed the alternative for capitalism of War or Revolution in this epoch. Events over the past few years, in particular the seeming collapse of the Eastern Bloc, have thrown this central element of revolutionary theory into question. We deal with this important question elsewhere in this issue of the Bulletin but one specific contention can be dealt with here. Some have wondered whether the ability of the West to fight the Gulf war has demonstrated that the proletariat have already been defeated so as to allow the bourgeoisie to fight.

But the war which is the counterpoise to revolution isn't such as this war. When we speak of the bourgeoisie being able to go to war on the back of the defeat of the proletariat we are talking about the enormous militarisation of the economy based upon the defeat and pauperisation of the proletariat which the bourgeoisie must achieve if they are to fight the opposing bloc in a global confrontation for mastery of the world, not the mobilisation of merely standing forces for the disciplining on a recalcitrant lackey. And this too gives the key to the general failure of the western proletariat to produce much of a response to the war.

Though there were marches and demonstrations in many countries, just as with the Falklands, these were drowned out by the ideological facade of the defence of small countries against aggression, the need to defeat little Hitlers, the need to defend

the oilwells etc etc. At a direct level the war failed to impinge upon either the economic standing of the proletariat or the ideological hold bourgeois ideology has over the working class. The bourgeoisie was very fortunate that it could conclude the war without immediately effecting either of these. Conscription wasn't necessary, extra taxation wasn't immediately apparent, nor were there massive losses in manpower to dent the ideological straitjacket. The War in the Gulf didn't turn out like WW1 where the bourgeoisie too went into it with hopes of early victory which turned sour and forced the transformation of the economies of the belligerents. Had Saddam killed thousands of allied troops and forced a long term military conflict the West would have had to directly assault the living conditions of workers, spend more on arms and seriously consider how to mobilise part of its populations for the war effort. It was spared this scenario. The cost of

the war of course, won't be escaped likewise. The working class globally will still pay for the war, increasingly so as the western economy continues its plunge into recession, through higher taxation, through the continued squeeze on the social wage, through increased unemployment caused by the lack of funds to cover state investment in industry and infrastructure. Thus the ability of the US and its allies to fight and win the war with Iraq does not in itself give us any clarification on the validity of the alternative War or Revolution. Such clarification, explanation, justification or otherwise must be sought at an altogether higher empirical and theoretical level.

Ingram



Only Greater Instability Beckons After The Gulf War.

The Communist Bulletin Group is eager to engage readers of the Bulletin in political discussion about any of the issues and concerns dealt with in our press. If you want to question any of the political positions defended by the CBG or discuss any of the issues here you can contact us at our NEW group address: Box C.B.G.

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MORE QUESTIONS THAN ANSWERS

In the Autumn of 1990 the **Communist Bulletin Group** held a Public meeting jointly with the **EFICC** in London entitled **The Eastern Bloc: The Middle East - Scene Shifting on the Imperialist World Stage**. A report of the meeting appears in the Fraction's publication **Internationalist Perspective 18**. Here we publish the **CBG's** presentation at the meeting followed by an update on the discussions on the situation in the Eastern Bloc and the implications for revolutionaries and the proletariat.

It is not my intention in this presentation to present a fully fleshed out answer to the many questions which the events of the past year or so, particularly in the Russian Empire have raised. No one who claims to have all the answers to events which raise so many questions for the proletarian milieu can expect to be taken seriously, especially organisations whose track record of getting things right is as poor as some. However at the other extreme surely it is now impossible for anyone to assert that nothing much is really happening, or that even if something dramatic is happening there are questions which should not be asked as to do so would call into question understandings deemed fundamental to our theoretical underpinnings. This presentation will attempt to outline the questions which world events this past couple of years positively forces upon us.

Since 1968 capitalism has been forced into more and more desperate measures to stave off economic recession and collapse. In the west the enormous extension of credit mechanisms in the Seventies, lasted until the early 80s. Then came a policy of retrenchment which turned the screws on the third world, now deemed weaknesses rather than strengths, forcing entire continents into desperate pauperisation, starvation and economic misery. Africa in particular was left to rot and, in general finance to support tottering regimes was cut to the bone while the inexorable march of fiscal pressures forced them deeper and deeper into debt.

To a great extent this was successful for the West, given that the economic plight of the east was such that it was unable to move into the gaps. The years of stagnation under Breznev, as they are now called in Moscow, were a time when the ills of stalinist state capitalism, one arm of world capitalism, not some alien aberrant growth on the world economy, deepened to an extent hitherto unknown.

Externally the Russian bourgeoisie was forced to reassess control of its empire. The peripheral zones were the first to be abandoned as net wasters of scarce resources. Only those which had a nuisance value to the US were held onto, Cuba and Nicaragua in the Americas, Ethiopia in East Africa, Vietnam in East Asia. Support for such as Mozambique, Angola etc collapsed and drove these war shattered economies to seek support from the west, a west which was offering its own possessions only the spectre of bankruptcy unless investment could immediately produce a profit.

At the same time the US, under Reagan, dramatically upped the military stakes, intervening in Afghanistan via its proxy Pakistan and surging ahead in the arms race. This merely exacerbated

the Russian economic disaster as the latter strove to keep up until by the middle of the Eighties the Soviet economy was on the verge of collapse. Even the most hidebound sectors of the Russian bourgeoisie were forced to admit that new policies were needed to stave off collapse. Most importantly the KGB, the state organ most in touch with reality in the Russian empire through its enormous network of informers, but which had hitherto been the organ most resistant to change, now, perceiving the extent of the crisis, put its enormous weight behind Gorbachov and his policies. (see our text in Bulletin 12. "What is Gorbachov Up To in Russia?")



MIKHAIL GORBACHEV ... "Changing of the guard had to mean more than just faces."

The reasons thus for the policies of Perestroika and Glasnost are unmistakable. The depth of the economic crisis in the E Bloc is so profound the ruling class is inextricably caught between a rock and a hard place. Carrying on in the old way had become impossible. The military option - either total global war aimed at the destruction of the American bloc, or a limited drive for physical control of the industrial heartlands of W Europe to bring about a profound strengthening of the E Bloc - was, temporarily, at least, ruled out as too risky by them. Perestroika was the only remaining option. Its purposes were:

- a restructuring of the economy.
- a drastic cutback in the pace of the arms race.

- a cheaper "political" method of controlling the satellites.
- the hope of economic aid from the west.
- an influx of superior technology from the west.

In other words we are looking at something which is entirely familiar to us when we observe the bourgeoisie confronting economic crisis. If they can't respond by making their competitors pay for the crisis - either by economic dominance of the market place, or naked military victory on the battlefield - the only choice left is to confront their "internal" enemies - 1) their own citizens (primarily though not entirely, the working class - 2) their imperialist puppets.

However in assessing the success or failure of their policies it is crucial that we distinguish between what they think they are doing, what they intend, their reasons for doing what they are doing and what has really happened as a result. The two need not be the same and any assessment of the trajectory of the Russian Economy and political empire will be sadly at fault if it fails to realise the feebleness of the Russian bourgeoisie's grip on the events it triggered.

By this stage in the process it is clear that Gorbachov's "gamble" is failing on a dramatic scale. Although perestroika was CONSCIOUSLY embarked upon it almost immediately unleashed uncontrollable forces. Gorbachov grabbed a tiger by the tail. The notion that each step was foreseen and planned up to and including the breakup of the Warsaw Pact (as a plan to destabilise NATO) is simply untenable. Despite his skill in extracting what advantage he could at each stage - vis a vis his own position within the soviet ruling class, and in diplomatic relations with the west - Gorbachov had essentially lost control at a very early stage. The end result has been on every level a massive retreat for the Soviet bloc. Perhaps the most profound defeat possible outside of a defeat in all out war.

Defeat in the Empire

We can see the defeat most clearly precisely in the area where the implementation of perestroika is most advanced in the Empire. The intention was to cut the costs of empire by (I) Thatcherising the economies of the satellites in order to transform them from an economic drain into areas of profit and (II) change the nature of the Russian hegemony from physical control dependant upon the hugely expensive, gigantic armies of occupation to a more western form depending on economic and political leverage plus the THREAT of the military. Hungary and Poland was the test bed and the successful integration of Solidarnosc - a political institution which could control the forces of civil unrest, both in the working and professional classes - into the Polish ruling structure without apparently threatening Russian control, was the signal for Gorbachov to implement the Polish model throughout the satellites. (see our text in Bulletin 14 "Poland and Hungary: Capitalism's Way Out in the East")

However events did not follow the Polish model. Whenever it became clear that Russia would not militarily support the existing regimes, the entire legitimacy of the ruling structures collapsed and along with them went Russian hegemony. Instead of the emergence of political elements and institutions which could simultaneously undertake the restructuring of the economies and the control of the working and middle classes whilst remaining

broadly under Russian control, within a single year the Warsaw Pact was functionally KAPUT.

This was NOT the intention. This is a profound defeat for the Russian bourgeoisie. Short of their military recapture this process is irreversible. Whatever economic and political leverage remains to Russia will inexorably be overwhelmed by the more advanced and economically stronger West. That after all was the point of the Iron curtain and the standing armies of occupation. Clearly we're still at an early stage in the process, but we can ask how far the process of political, economic and military integration into the western bloc will go. The short answer is - as far as the West wants it to because Russia can only stop it militarily. Even if that were to be attempted and the West acquiesced in it what would be the point for Russia? They've already decided that the old way was untenable, how could they go back to it, especially in circumstances which are now much more unfavourable than they were even a year ago? A military re-occupation of the satellites could only make sense as a drive for all of Western Europe - in other words for WW3.

What other sort of leverage is left for Russia? Economic leverage, although not non-existent given the huge size of the economy, will eventually be steam rolled aside by the West. Political leverage? We should be clear that for the internal politics of the former satellites - the destruction of Russian hegemony is total. The Communist Parties are totally discredited and destroyed. Certainly many of the same personnel, even many of the same institutions filled with the same personnel, still lie at the heart of the ruling structures (eg the secret police etc.). After all the state has not been overthrown in these satellites. But it has been transformed. The political and economic programme which defined it has disappeared. In particular they don't have any credible reasons for fighting for alignment with the E Bloc.

Therefore integration into the west is largely at the behest of the west. How far it goes depends to a large extent on the economic potential and capacities. Does the west have sufficient resources to transform the east? Is there sufficient potential in this process to reverse or at least slow down the global economic crisis? Our best answer seems to be that the potential is severely limited. The third world has proven incapable of transformation, why should the E Bloc be any different? The special circumstances of E Germany might just make something dramatic possible - but for the rest, little enclaves of development seem to be the only hope - a factory here, investment there, cash crops instead of subsistence farming, raw material exports etc. Will this deepen the global crisis or give it a breathing space. The answer probably is - we don't know, although we're fairly certain that it cannot be the basis for a new cycle of accumulation a la post-war reconstruction. When one looks at the sheer volume of capital which would be required to even make a start at renewing the industrial infrastructure of even one country, East Germany it is difficult to imagine that a Western economy, itself on the brink of recession, will be able to fund such structural changes without any prospect of profit for a decade at least.

Back in the USSR

The other area where we can clearly see the defeat of the Russian Empire is inside the USSR itself.

Here despite extended and successful manoeuvring by Gorbachov inside the ruling bloc over the past five years, the process of Perestroika has hardly started. There are two major reasons for this. The first is the state of the Party itself. Despite Gorbachov's bureaucratic successes over the past five years the Party machine, (the state machine) has proven enormously resistant to change. They simply won't give up their power, their petty empires and the whole way of working which it depends upon. The tensions within the Party are so acute that disintegration seems very likely. Whither Party hegemony then? Can the Party survive in Russia? Already the peripheral Republics are busy ousting the imposed governments from Moscow for in addition to the difficulties of implementing the economic reforms, the departure of the satellites has had a direct echo within the USSR itself with nationalist and ethnic tensions reaching such a pitch that the retreat from the Warsaw pact to the borders of the USSR looks likely (possible) to continue to the borders of Russia itself. This process is finding a direct political echo within the Party itself with the Yeltsin wing arguing directly for the acceleration to save Russia the 'cost' of subsidising the Baltic States etc. How far can this process be allowed to go without threatening the rule of the CP?

And that leads to the second major reason for the tardiness of perestroika in the USSR. Absolute fear of the working class. The consequences of confronting a working class already pauperised by Western standards, with an almost unthinkable deepening of that pauperisation, without the various softening mechanisms that are provided in the West by surplus fat and a greater sophistication on the part of the ruling class (TUs etc.) has been almost terminally daunting. Asking the party elites in the satellites to do it is one thing, but tackling it themselves in the motherland was something else altogether. For one thing the ability to cobble together institutions like Solidarnosc, and graft them onto the State machine is much less in Russia. Apart from anything else the lessons of the past year are stark. Any attempt to dilute or disguise party rule is likely to lead very quickly to the demise of the Party.

Obviously the virtual collapse of the Russian Empire has had an enormous impact upon the balance of force between the blocs, as well as raising both strategic political and theoretical questions for the proletarian milieu. The virtual abandonment of the world stage by the Russian bourgeoisie and in particular from the third world has allowed the US to attempt to exert its hegemony unimpeded by any riposte from Russia or by any threat from those regimes on the margins between the blocs. Though they may not have all been in accordance with the US schedule it is NO ACCIDENT that the three areas where the reassembly of US hegemony is farthest advanced and where it has been most eager to play 'up front' have been Nicaragua and the Caribbean, the Indian sub continent and the Gulf three key areas where in the past the USSR has had a key presence and where states have been able to utilise their position to oscillate between the blocs, vying for favours from both.

In the first the loss of Russian financial and economic backup to the Sandanista regime and US pressure led swiftly to complete economic collapse and an election giving the result Bush wanted. In India and Iraq we see two players who for years, due to their size, location and resources, while unable to play an independent role, have been able to offer themselves like a common whore to whoever

of the blocs was able to pay most. With one customer gone the other, like any pimp, has been able to come the hard man and coerce compliance. Thus we see Pakistan's army, having disposed of the nuisance of Bhutto, being used as enforcer on the political swamp that is the Indian political scene, turning up the heat over Kashmir, doing US bidding just as it did in Afghanistan.



Iraq Strikes Out

In Iraq, at the very limit of the US locus of power in the Middle East we see a bourgeoisie who, because of the volatile, yet vital to the US, situation there has been able to play an oscillating role. Support from Russia, offers to take on the Shah's role against Iran etc. Now after years of war with a crippled economy and huge debts there was no Russia to turn to in order to force the US to help. With no need, as it saw it, to bail out Saddam Hussein, whatever his sacrifices in America's contest with Iran, the American bourgeoisie, itself facing economic problems unprecedented for over a decade left him to rot. For all its sacrifices in the Gulf War Iraq had ended up in a far worse situation that it had been in before the war. However Iraq still had an army. And so it struck out. While this may or may not have been a surprise to the US this was immediately seized upon by Bush as a golden opportunity to openly impose US hegemony in the new, post Cold War, world.

Questions

The events of the past few years have been more significant than any that have occurred in our lifetimes. These events have presented us with a whole range of different questions which we must attempt to answer if we are to make sense of the future for ourselves and our class, questions which must be seriously approached. The events of the past three or so years are unparalleled in our personal experience and we must accept that real questions which we must seriously address collectively as a milieu now stare us in the face. We can neither allow ourselves the luxury of thinking we know all the answers and that the instantaneous production of an elaborate new world vision is already completed or that nothing much has really happened so that many of the questions now being posed do not need to be addressed at all.

At the risk of repeating some of what I have already said in the presentation here are some of the questions we must address.

First there are questions about the Gulf. However we regard the abilities of the US in the "post cold war era" will the US take this opportunity of demonstrating its new perceived global hegemony by whipping Iraq into line, by force if necessary. For me it seems unlikely that all that hardware and manpower has, with infinite patience and expense, been lifted to the Gulf just to come home again a few months later having accomplished nothing - unused. Whatever the political consequences of war for Bush the consequences of such a miserable failure would be even greater. For me therefore the questions is not whether war but when, and with what effects in the Middle east and beyond given the possibility of nuclear and chemical warfare on a grand scale.

There are the questions about Russia's former empire in Eastern Europe. First of all can these economies survive? As we've said above their integration into the west which is what they want will only proceed as and when the west wants it to. But it appears extremely unlikely that this can proceed in any determined fashion. Quite simply the costs would be staggering. Even East Germany is going to be a nightmare for West Germany to swallow. Certainly there will be private investment where a profit can be turned, a pepper potting of industrial and commercial involvements all over the east but to transform an infrastructure quite literally decades out of date and crumbling is going to take the kind of capital investment that not even the West, and a West facing the prospect of recession itself, can afford. The East German telephone network alone is reported as needing £80 BILLION to upgrade it. No private investors, no state, can afford that scale of expenditure without some level of return that doesn't demand waiting a decade or two.

It has been argued that there are existing economic links with Russia which will remain. Well certainly there are existing economic links, but for how much longer? Recently the Czech government asked the EEC to lend £53million to Russia so that Gorbachov could buy the Czech washing machines etc that they couldn't sell to the West since they were out of date etc. This, they argued, would allow the Czechs to get the money they so badly need to upgrade these industries so that they would be able to then sell the same types of machinery in the west. Russia has nothing to buy with and in any case has enough problems at home. The countries of Eastern Europe want only to gear themselves up to join the west. The only way Russia could regain its empire there would be by military might and it was precisely the uselessness of that type of control which began the whole process of perestroika in the first place. To send back the troops now would not merely be a tremendous admission of failure. It would at best reproduce the intolerable situation Gorbachov sought to escape from in the first place. At worst it would unleash a Pandora's box of conflict and war.

There are questions we must ask about Russia.

1. Can perestroika be made to work? If we can see that it hasn't even been attempted thus far it is difficult to see how any planned programme can be attempted in a situation which just gets worse and worse with the potential for even greater social dislocation if it is.

2. It has been argued that rather than waiting for the domestic situation to clear before 'moving to the market' Gorbachov is waiting for western capital and technology, using Eastern Europe as a bargaining chip with the prospect of some form of alliance with his western backers esp. Germany. But given the kind of resources Germany will have to shell out to sustain East Germany its difficult to see when the scale of finance he needs will ever be available. And the longer it takes the worse his domestic situation gets.

3. This brings us to the real question. Will the collapse of the empire stop at the borders of the USSR. Will Russia survive at all and if so as what? The nationalities are already revolting though the extent to which they can ape Eastern Europe is debatable. More importantly whether perestroika is attempted or not the economic situation in Russia continues to deteriorate at a frightening pace. Even within the bourgeoisie there are large sectors whose power will disappear if changes are made and who as yet fail to realise the same will happen, but more catastrophically, if nothing is done. They constitute, within the heart of the ruling class, a mass who would have to be eliminated. In such a situation where the bourgeoisie itself seems divided can the CPSU survive as a state bourgeoisie? Certainly to some extent the competition and rivalry between sections of the bourgeoisie at a political level are fronts designed to test out political strategies and Gorbachov has a history of allowing opponents to raise their heads above the parapets so as to make it easier to chop them off, but recent events in the heart of Russia itself would appear to be leading to not merely economic disintegration but political disintegration too.

There are Global questions.

Starkly we have to ask whether what we have seen is the US winning World War Three without fighting the Russians? Further, can it, on the strength of this victory (if that is what it is) slow down the world recession it is entering, reorganise the world in hegemonic fashion and 'save' capitalism for a while longer. The Gulf seems to have been one of the first attempts to reshape the world but the difficulties economically and politically, at home and abroad, that Bush is having would seem to suggest that the disappearance from the world stage of the Russian bloc hasn't eliminated all the structural problems the US faces.

What then is left of the two bloc system? Is Russia being reduced to just another player, and an economically bankrupt one at that. Will one or more rivals emerge from a realignment of alliances either in the Pacific and/or in Europe? What then are the prospects for World War Three? It seems perverse to argue that what we are experiencing is merely a sharpening up process by Russia for WW3. There is no question that the bourgeoisie themselves believe that WW3 is not on the agenda. The diminution of inter imperialist tensions between the blocs is genuine. Arms cuts are taking place. If a future global war between the blocs is to take place its contours are certainly not yet clear. Fundamentally the possibility of new blocs emerging or of the US extending its hegemony over the world depends on its ability to do so. Given the march to recession has it the time and resources to attempt this and to succeed? Have the potential members of any new bloc the same? If the US were to see some part of its empire threaten to break with them and, possibly in conjunction with

Russia form an opponent would the US just sit back and let it happen. Surely it would move to prevent this. What better time than before the new bloc forms to nip it in the bud. On the other hand the demise of Russian hegemony has laid the basis for political and economic chaos of such depth that a period of smaller scale conflagrations looks eminently possible with nationalism, ethnic violence, religious forces, both within states and between states, having the potential to spark into military confrontation. In E Europe in particular there is a real possibility of such confrontation spilling over into the West.

There are questions about Class potential both in the East in the wake of the collapse and in the West. Clearly the impending pauperisation and decay of social and political institutions in the east is likely to mobilise the proletariat into some form of activity. On the other hand the barriers hindering the class from moving onto its own terrain are formidable. Ethnic forces, nationalism and domestic mystifications are probably more powerful than ever. Democratic mystifications are rife even to the extent that Thatcherite Britain is seen as some form of perfection. This last may be unlikely to last long since their bankruptcy will be exposed wherever they come to power and implement the policies they are based upon. However the other elements are likely to be much more destructive to class consciousness. Most significantly for assessing potentialities for the class the complete lack of a revolutionary presence, of a revolutionary tradition or awareness must weigh very heavily on the proletariat and make the prospects for the future at best unclear. Certainly mass class upheavals, huge levels of militancy are possible but the lack of any awareness of a revolutionary alternative is likely to be crucial. Revolutionary consciousness and action do not spring from militancy alone no matter how deep and widespread. A growth and development of consciousness and of revolutionary fractions is essential. This cannot happen overnight.

Most fundamentally there are questions about the theoretical analyses which have underpinned the understanding of the revolutionary milieu of capitalism in its decadent period.

War or Revolution? If we have seen one bloc collapse without a war and the threat of war between the blocs postponed at least for a time does this mean that the development of capitalism in decadence and the collapse of a bloc actually prevents war breaking out? How do we now assess the possibilities, the opportunities for capitalist states after such events? What has the fact that one of the two blocs dominating the world has collapsed done to our assessment of the future of capitalism? Socialism or barbarism? Or the collapse of a bloc and the reconstitution of blocs or the world wide hegemony of one bloc? What has the collapse of Russia done to the possibilities of capitalist reconstruction. Can the 'peace dividend' allow the US to stave off collapse or are we seeing a US bloc on the same tramlines as the Russian but a few years only behind on the journey to collapse? Essentially what is the future now for the capitalist class and the proletariat and to what extent do we have to re-examine our theoretical bases in the light of what has happened. We cannot stick our heads in the sand, as I said earlier, pretending that nothing has fundamentally changed. Nor can we throw everything out the window in exchange for completely new analyses without explaining why what we have

abandoned has been abandoned and why what we have now asserted stands up to scrutiny. At one end to say that nothing fundamental has happened, Russia is merely reorganising in order to return to the world stage stronger than ever seems to deny a reality that is staring us in the face. At the other the bizarre notion that, as one writer has put it, "sex and drugs and rock and roll" have finally doomed the world do not seem to be based on any rational analysis based upon marxism, more on the fertile imaginings of senile dementia.

A Preliminary Attempt at Assessing What Has Happened.

We are faced with the paradox that what has occurred has, in a very real sense, been a culmination of two trends/situations that many of us in the milieu have been attempting to grapple with for over a decade. On the one hand, some of us within the milieu have, since the Seventies, been arguing that one of the contradictions which face a capitalist world order faced with crisis, with the collapse of profitability, is that, as its situation gets worse it needs increasingly to gear itself up for its solution to the crisis, global war, the militarisation and pauperisation of labour etc. Of course this doesn't mean it cannot start a war tomorrow but Global World war isn't any old war, it necessitates the complete transformation of society, its militarisation so that the entire state is organised for production to sustain the war. Though it can carry out the preliminary stages of such preparation, the development of technologies necessary etc this reorganisation cannot be accomplished without the pauperisation and militarisation of the proletariat. This can only be achieved by the defeat of the proletariat on a political and ideological level by means of, in effect, a frontal attack on their living standards, organisation etc. It must carry out this attack successfully before economic collapse renders it impotent. However the bourgeoisie faces the contradiction that its ability to confront the class is increasingly compromised by the very decline in economic etc., situation which necessitates the attack in the first place. A declining economic, political and military strength tend to fatally weaken the state as it needs greater and greater surpluses to spend on military preparations, greater political control to mobilise its slaves both at home and in its empire, and greater military might with which to fight the opposing bloc with any chance of winning.

The collapse of the Russian Empire is in many ways a stark vindication of this assessment. Economically bankrupt the Russian Empire has seen its military machine starve for lack of capital, its empire disintegrate as it became more and more unable to afford to dominate it either economically or militarily. At home it has seen its grip on the populace weaken substantially in the face of shortages to the extent that its attempts to mobilise for defence, if it were necessary, would be a catastrophic failure and its attempts at economic reform have faltered in the face of the threat of class action.

On the other hand the CBG, amongst others, have written at length in the past decade about the historically unprecedented situation both the working class and its communist fractions find themselves in. Cut off in a historically unprecedented manner from their own history and from each other with little if any tradition of conscious class struggle not encompassed by bourgeois forces and controlled by bourgeois organisations the working class is unable to

respond in any other than a defensive manner to attacks by the bourgeoisie. It is, as yet, due to the lack of any tradition in living memory, to pose any positive alternative to a society which is visibly crumbling around it. When we look at the proletariat of Eastern Europe and especially that of Russia we can very plainly see the truth of this.

What we have in effect seen therefore in the collapse of the Russian Bloc has been the verification of both these analyses. What we failed to do was to realise the effect of each on the other and both on the trajectory of decadent capitalism in crisis. Looking at Russia now we see a bourgeoisie unable now to implement its historic solution to the crisis (whatever options were or were not available pre-1989) AND unable in any positive active manner to agree on attacking the working class to save itself, a bourgeoisie terrified of the potentiality of class response to any policy that would lead to further immiseration. But at the same time the option of 'doing nothing' does not stop the march to destruction. Doing nothing will not stop the collapse. The very fact of economic collapse, developing under its own steam, is even now pauperising the proletariat and leading irrevocably to a situation where the potentiality for a class response can concretise. Whether the Russian bourgeoisie implements its plans or not matters not one whit anymore. Both will have the same result, an attack on the living standards of the proletariat in Russia, a proletariat which has yet to demonstrate the extent of its combativity. The proletariat in Russia have certainly not been defeated, whatever the situation of their brothers in Eastern Europe and it is this fact which, as I have said, has been the major reason for the Russian bourgeoisie's unwillingness to attack them frontally. Each hesitant approach to the market has seen Russian workers threaten a response and the bourgeoisie has paused while it had second thoughts. But during these delays the terminal crisis hasn't stopped, it has deepened immeasurably.

Further it is wrong to imagine that because the proletariat is sundered from its minorities and its own history it is already defeated. It has not been defeated because it has not yet been attacked. It has not yet demonstrated whether its historic solution (revolution) is on the agenda or not for in the heartlands of the world empires, both East and West it has not yet been engaged in combat - a combat which bourgeoisie first in Russia and then elsewhere must start if they are to survive, and which still has the potentiality, despite all the dangers, to lead to the development of revolutionary consciousness. Certainly the prognosis for workers in the sectarian and nationalist bastions of Eastern Europe, especially in the Balkans isn't good - but in that things are little different from the period of the last revolutionary wave. The proletariat of Russia has yet to enter the stage of struggle against a bourgeoisie of a collapsing economy forced to attack them. And of course we are not speaking solely of Russia. The situation in Russia isn't some isolated occurrence, peculiar to Stalinism, or to the State Capitalist bloc, but a manifestation of a World Recession, a World Crisis. Just as in the last revolutionary wave it was the weakest who went to the wall first, so too it has been this time around. But it won't stop there. The West faces essentially the same crisis, its turn is due - all the indicators are there that they too face the abyss.

In such circumstances it is vital that the milieu as a whole faces up to these issues and engages in the process of clarification for us all and for our class so that when the next phase comes we are ready. For our part we in the CBG seek to engage in the process of discussion and clarification which is urgently needed. We would extend an invitation to everyone else in the milieu to take part with us.

Ingram

The C.B.G. has a considerable amount of material on the German Communist Workers Party (K.A.P.D.) already translated into English. Reports from delegates to the Comintern Congresses, interventions there, Public responses to Comintern Open letters and pamphlets issues by the K.A.P.D. as well as pamphlets by Gorter and Pannekoek. In addition we are at present having translated the transcript of the First Congress of the K.A.P.D. and have copies, in German for the moment only, of the transcripts of two further Congresses. Some of this we have already published in the Bulletin. This issue we have published Reichenbach's History of the K.A.P.D. and we would hope to publish more in our Blast From the Past Spot. However such is the size of most of the material that it will not be possible to publish it within the Bulletin. Ideally we would like to publish this material separately. This would be an expensive enterprise. If you would like to support this possibility and could aid it financially contact us at the group address:

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ARE THINGS ANY CLEARER NOW?

We used our presentation in London last year to ask questions, questions about the unprecedented events which have occurred, especially in the former Russian Empire, these past few years, and questions of theory which these events have thrown up. As revolutionaries we seek to understand the dynamic that underlies the evolution of capitalist society and to trace that dynamic to the destruction of the capitalist system itself. Less than a year has passed since that presentation, yet the situation in the east has not stopped evolving, has not ceased to develop in ways which, in our opinion are unprecedented within our lifetimes. We must seek to discover whether that continued development has answered any of the questions we advanced last year, or whether events have deepened our understanding of these events or our tentative analyses.

First of all we asked questions about the situation in the states of the former Warsaw Pact. Have they indeed been able to make their desired move to the West now that they have emerged from under the domination of Russia? Have they managed to get the western funding they so desperately need to revitalise their devastated economies so that they can enter the market economy of Western Europe? Or if they have not yet done so, do events give us any idea of whether they look likely to? Well, it certainly doesn't look like it at this juncture.

The D.D.R.

The state with the best chance of attaining solvency as part of the West was East Germany, the former DDR. It had the largest and most advanced technical and industrial base of all the satellites to start with. It has now been politically linked with West Germany, the industrial powerhouse of western Europe and therefore in terms of financial potential it stands as the best candidate for economic integration into the west. However if we look at the situation of the former DDR at present we see unmitigated disaster. The industrial base lies idle, unable to compete with the superior technology of the west. Even in those sectors where there was a substantial trade with the west in the past this has been revealed as the result of labour intensive activity which cannot be funded in the new situation. These industries have collapsed throwing hundreds of thousands out of work. Unemployment is in excess of 40% (and this in a society where both sexes habitually work and most people are formally workers) and likely, we are told to rise to 60% or more.

Throughout the spring we have seen massive demonstrations in many of the cities of the East in stark contrast to the delight at re-unification last year. Even the financial giant of West Germany is visibly reeling under the financial cost of just sustaining the east, let alone the potentially horrendous cost of integrating it with the west and re-financing its economy. Even the most optimistic West German politician is frankly horrified at the costs of a solution. The mass rallies of discontent of earlier this year seem now to have given way to a wave of political discontent in both east and west, Ossies and Wessies, in part at the effects of the legal transformation (with

Wessies reclaiming land their parents owned in the East before 1945) and in response to the enormous discrepancies between the two parts of the now united Germany, divergences which seem set to widen rather than narrow. And we must remember that Germany is overwhelmingly populated by Germans alone and is in the best economic situation to deal with the costs of regenerating an entire economy.

If then the situation looks so dire for Germany what of the other economies of the east? The Polish economy seems to be in a desperate situation, reduced to allowing tourists to fly Migs for \$300 in order to generate western currency. In many regions barter would appear to have become the norm once more. In most of these states increasingly frantic efforts have been made to persuade Russia to release its dwindling stock of western currency to buy their manufactured goods but without even this subsidised market, and with little if any internal market, the manufacturing sectors of the economies of eastern Europe have all but collapsed. This collapse has been dramatic and there are absolutely no signs at all that the west is going pick up the tab for changing that situation. Western involvement seems to be restricted to a few token efforts pepperpotted here and there and the badge engineering that nowadays counts as investment.

The social effects of this continued deterioration have been enormous. The peasants have, not unnaturally, begun hoarding again, only selling at prices well above what most can afford to pay and falling back into subsistence farming when they can find no buyers for their goods. There have been wave after wave of strikes against the increasing pauperisation, from the Albanian miners who recently went on hunger strike to the coal and steel workers who told Walesa to his face that he was no better than those he had succeeded. More of the same is bound to happen.

The Poison of Nationalism.

However what has been seen more than anything else is the effect of nationalistic hatred. Even in countries where there are no sizable minorities we have seen instances of nationalist poison. The rise of neo-nazi groups in Germany blaming (well who knows who?) for the ills they are suffering have been vividly shown on our television screens this past month or so. In Poland the rise of anti semitism (and this in a country where there are only a handful of Jews left after the Holocaust), in even the election campaign has been astonishing. Walesa's main attack on his principal rival was the implied one that he was Jewish! (ie. not a real Pole).

Elsewhere, of course, where nationalities live cheek by jowl with one another the fervour of sectarian viciousness has been all too often crystal clear. Rumanians blaming Hungarians for the state of the economy, Slovaks blaming Czechs blaming Germans. The best (or worst), certainly the clearest, example has been the virtual disintegration of Yugoslavia. In the south Albanians in Kossovo fight it out with the Serbs, who are now deadly enemies of the Croats and

Slovenes. All sides seek a solution to their problems in the committing of brutal atrocities against one another and a pure homeland filled only with their own ethnic brothers. Certainly bourgeois politicians are taking advantage of such strife to divide and confuse the proletariat, to divert them away from any realisation that all bourgeois avenues for resolving the crisis are blocked, but at the edges it seems that the bourgeois have, to some extent, lost control of the situation altogether. No one in the ruling class wants the state to collapse in a welter of competing nationalities slaughtering each other, though some elements of the bourgeoisie clearly see it as the only means by which they can rise to power. At best they seek to ride this whirlwind which increasingly threatens to break out into open warfare. Indeed they are using this threat to cajole the west into giving them what they need, using the fear of it all spilling over into the west as a bargaining tool. Thus far, however, the west's natural reluctance to fund restructuring is only reinforced by the prospect of complete collapse and the loss of whatever they may have already invested. We see here a spiral which it is impossible to see any way out of for the bourgeoisie of the east save a bloodbath "to restore control". Hardly the best basis upon which to reorganise the economy.

And in Russia

But if the situation in Eastern Europe is grave and deteriorating, it is more seriously in difficulties in Russia itself. As we said in our presentation last year merely to stand still and do nothing does not prevent the actual situation getting worse. Not pushing Perestroika through merely means that any renewed attempt to do so, later, when finance might be available, will have to start from a much worse position. The move to the market, the vitally needed restructuring of and reinvestment in the economy still has not even begun to be implemented. The past year has seen absolutely no advance whatsoever. Gorbachov's much bruited plea for \$250 BILLION over five years from the G7 fell upon absolutely deaf ears and brought forth the offer of a few million from Bush so as to allow Russia to buy wheat from US farmers to stave off famine. The likelihood that the G7 are going to come up with the kind of money Gorbachov says he needs are non-existent. America is now the world's largest debtor. The US needs help itself even now to bail out the savings and loan banks and will need even more if it is to try to fulfil its role as World policeman.

On the edges of the empire, the Baltic states may have pulled in their horns a little when they realised that the west wasn't going to bail them out and that muscles were being flexed in the Kremlin. In the south the Georgian bourgeoisie too are playing it cautiously. The Armenians and Azeris continue to massacre each other and thus cancel each other out as a force for change but in the Russian heartlands the situation is now looking catastrophic.

At the level of production the decline continues. Though we are told the harvest was very good last Autumn there continue to be severe shortages. But it is at the political level that the situation is changing dramatically. By mid 1990 Gorbachov had created for himself a position balancing the old apparatchiks of the CPSU, those he hadn't managed to oust already, with the radical wing of the Party typified by Sheverdnadze and even Ryzkov with Yeltsin playing a lone role out on point. With one

hand he threatened the forces within and without the Party seeking rapid movement towards the market with the return of the apparat if they moved too quickly or threatened his rule. With the other he threatened the Old Guard, formalised to some extent round 'Soyuz', with unbridled radicalism if they threatened him. This past year saw dramatic shifts in the balance of power inside the Party. The depth of the crisis and the enormous rise in working class discontent demonstrated in the wave of strikes in almost all the industrial and mining heartlands was conceived as so threatening to the continued power of the Nomenclatura that, within the Party, this middle ground, occupied by Gorbachov and his allies, was practically wiped out.

The old guard, increasingly backed by the neanderthals of the military, forced Gorbachov to toe their line. Ryzkov had a convenient heart condition, Sheverdnadze made his amazing speech and resigned and Gorbachov looked a captive of 'Soyuz'. The balance between the wings of the party which had been a crucial element in staving off social discontent disappeared. But this did not lead to the victory of such as 'Soyuz'. The ideological transformation taking place in Russia today has already gone too far to be halted by decision of the Kremlin. All that happened was that the debate and the conflict moved from being within the Party to being between the party and the radical bourgeois forces outwith it. The recent Presidential victory of Yeltsin and the call by Sheverdnadze for the formation of a new party are all signs that the political conflict within the bourgeoisie in Russia is maturing speedily. But it is only able to do so on the backs of a proletariat who are, as yet, unable and unwilling to put their own class demands forward. Though there have been massive strikes the preponderance of bourgeois ideological slogans in them represents a severe handicap for the Russian proletariat. They continue to be dragooned behind radical bourgeois factions extolling the market, the turn to private enterprise etc. etc. With conceptions of communism erased by seventy years of Stalinist counter revolution and what seems to be the consumerist miracle of Western Europe constantly paraded before them and with, so far as we can tell, no revolutionary fractions available to present a proletariat alternative, the working class of Russia have major problems in front of them if they are to sweep away the weight of bourgeois ideology and take hold of their own class demands and actions. The prospect of the continued deterioration of the economic and political situation in Russia and the continued failure of the Russian bourgeoisie to confront the proletariat continues to argue for major class confrontations in the near future there.

The Global Level

At a global level the victory of the US in the Gulf War (assessed elsewhere in this issue) and the utter inability of Russia to have any impact in the Middle East situation confirms the effective victory of the US. But this is not a defeat in the sense that the occupation of Germany after World War Two was a defeat, meaning the occupation of the defeated enemy and the taking hold of and control of its economy. Russia has not been occupied, nor even has Eastern Europe so in that sense, and despite the fatuous comparisons such as the ICC have drawn, the situations are in no way comparable. But we have to accept that the balance between two blocs that lay at the basis of the revolutionary milieu's assessment of Capitalism since WW2 has fundamentally changed. These changes

have, in their turn, potentially fundamental implications for our theoretical underpinnings.

In particular the whole concept of the alternatives in decadent Capitalism must be looked at anew. Even if we discard the panic assessments which have led even some long time militants to abandon political activity altogether in despair, questioning whether the proletariat is really a revolutionary class anymore, whether capitalism can survive and rebuild itself etc. etc., the milieu still has major questions to address.

War or Revolution

One of these questions, if not the main question, which the events in Russia in particular has brought to the fore is the question of war or revolution. Revolutionaries have argued that in its attempts to escape from its historic crisis Capitalism has but two options Global War or the outbreak of proletarian revolution. Thus the bourgeois and proletarian solutions to the crisis stand in opposition to one another, being alternative results of the same process. Now this is shorthand for a more elaborate analysis really.

For groups like the ICC who base their understanding of the crisis upon a Luxemburgist analysis, war has been on the immediate agenda since possibly 1968 when the postwar reconstruction ended. All that has prevented global war breaking out has been the undefeated proletariat. However for those of us who base our analysis of the economic substructure of decadent capitalism upon Grossman and Mattick this is incorrect. Essentially it is agreed that as the capitalist crisis deepens eventually the bourgeoisie will realise that it must mobilise and militarise in order to wage world war against the opposing bloc. This necessitates an assault upon the proletariat to politically defeat it so that it can be pauperised and militarised so as to allow the war to be funded and waged. If this assault is successful war then can be launched. If unsuccessful then the attack produces a fighting response from the proletariat which lays the basis for a transformation of the defensive struggle of the workers into an offensive revolutionary one.

Unlike the Luxemburgists however, we do not believe that this has been on the agenda since 1968. Before the point of needing to engage in this life or death struggle the bourgeoisie has tried, largely successfully, various other options since the late Sixties such as the Credit mechanism, selective abandonment of support for whole regions of the world etc which have, along with attacks on the working class, enabled them to recuperate to some extent. Of course such recuperation has been on the basis that the next round of economic difficulty is at a higher level than the one before and needs an even greater response. Part of this has been attacks upon the living standards of workers, attempting to reduce what they would call the surplus fat available but not yet a desperate attempt to pauperise them in preparation for WW3. This would not be attempted until all other temporary solutions had been tried.

If we now look at the experience of Russia we can see that when Gorbachov took power there was a real debate going on within the Russian bourgeoisie about how to get out of the economic mess they were in. It goes without saying that such is the weakness of the Russian bloc that many of the quite sophisticated techniques and policies available to

the West were just not available to them. Similarly such is the existing pauperisation of the Russian (and E European) proletariat that there is little if any fat there to chop off. We know from Sheverdnadze's recent revelations that the policy of Perestroika was not the only one discussed. We all know that by that time support for the old Brezhnevian policy of 'do nothing', 'more discipline' etc. had all but disappeared within the Russian ruling class but it is now clear that at least some sections of it discussed the possibility of a limited war. This wasn't to be WW3, but a preemptive strike with the forces then available at Western Europe from the launching pad of E Europe in an attempt to gain the industrial heartland of Germany at the very least, to halt at the Rhine at the earliest, hopefully only at the Channel. This, it was argued, would gain Europe as a whole, apart from the US aircraft carrier, Britain. At that point overtures would be made to the US saying that this was as far as Russia was intending to go and putting on Reagan the onus of deciding for global, possibly nuclear war. Obviously the incorporation of the German and at least some of the French industrial heartlands with eventual control over the rest of Western Europe would have been an enormous support to tottering Russian capital. However this option was not chosen, and no wonder. It was very risky indeed with a distinct chance that it would lead directly to global war without militarisation having been achieved, without the proletariat defeated and mobilised. It is thus not surprising that this option was not pursued. What was pursued was the move to the market. However we can now see clearly that this has failed completely. And we can see that the critical reason it has failed has been the fear of confronting the Russian proletariat. But they desperately need to do so. Only by demonstrating the defeat of the proletariat can they hope to attract finance from the west and only by defeating the proletariat can they hope perestroika to succeed.

The attack on the Russian proletariat, given their present economic condition, can but have two ends. If it succeeds and western finance is forthcoming then, just as in the west, the Russian bourgeoisie will have delayed the effects of crisis for a time. But this is very unlikely for all sorts of reasons. Primary among them is the economic crisis the west is moving into itself. The only other alternative for a victorious Russian bourgeoisie, it could be argued, would be to go to war. If however, the attack on the working class fails, it may well stimulate a response from the proletariat which could lead to the possibility of revolutionary upheavals.

Is this not a scenario familiar to us - for war or revolution?

Standing back from the events then it seems possible that the alternatives of war or revolution may still be valid. Indeed if we could substantiate these assumptions we would be led to suggest that we are now much closer to a resolution of these, vis a vis Russia at least, than we ever were.

All the argy bargy going on within the Russian bourgeoisie is essentially about how to prevent the collapse of the system into 'anarchy', about how to confront and defeat the Russian proletariat so that whatever the bourgeoisie need to do can be achieved. For one section which still believes in perestroika this will enable it to be begun and western finance got. For that section which

believes this is not on, or will mean giving the west too much - well its not possible to say what their plans are. But for both sections, if we believe perestroika will not succeed and going back to Brezhnev and/or Stalin wont work either, what alternative once they have defeated the workers is there but war?

But another theoretical framework for understanding the situation is also available. We may deny the logical progress outlined above and argue that in the collapse of the Russian bloc, the clear retreat from the prospect of Global War between the blocs we can see counterposed the economic and social fragmentation of Eastern Europe - with the prospect, as their crisis deepens, that this will inevitably spread to Russia itself. Elsewhere in the world the 'Third World' is already far along the path to absolute pauperisation and chaos and even within the confines of the West the recession is getting deeper and deeper.

In such unprecedented circumstances can it not be argued that the alternatives of War or Revolution are no longer valid? The blocs are less and less capable of mobilising their economies for war and their populations are far less willing to fight a war. But the proletariat has, thus far, been unable to face up to the crisis and their class enemy on their own class terrain.

War or Revolution was originally a specific theoretical development of a more theoretical framework from the last revolutionary wave that the only alternatives for Capitalism as it lurched into its decadent phase was Socialism or Barbarism. Its transcendence by the victory of its slaves in a revolutionary transformation or its decline into a barbaric rule seeking at all costs to keep power in an ever worsening situation. The notion that the alternatives 'socialism or barbarism' could be more specifically identified as 'revolution or world war' was based upon an assessment by the revolutionary movement that the specific way in which decadent capital had shown and would show its

barbaric alternative was and would be through world war to be followed by a new cycle of accumulation based upon victory in that war and on the ruins of the defeated.

It may well be that events this past few years have found that this "tightening up" of the general theory was incorrect and that the particular manner in which the alternatives "socialism or barbarism" will present themselves to the proletariat and the bourgeoisie will be different. If this is the case, then as revolutionaries trying to comprehend the dynamic of capitalism we will have to approach these issues with an open mind and in a spirit of free and fraternal discussion.

For the crux of all these questions is how we understand the present circumstances of the proletariat internationally, what the balance of class forces is and what prospects there are for proletarian action against the slide into capitalist crisis. Throughout this text we have claimed the present situation to be unprecedented. And this lies at the root of our problem. We have no real comparisons with the past to relate to in understanding a situation where the world is moving deeper and deeper into recession, where a bloc has collapsed, but where the proletarian response has been so muted, so hamstrung by bourgeois ideologies like nationalism and 'democracy', 'free market' etc. A situation where there has been no major appearance of class conscious struggle, no appearance of communist minorities. At root this refers back to the circumstances of the late Twentieth Century and the separation of the proletariat from their own history and minorities about which we have spoken many times before in the pages of the Bulletin. But we have now reached the point where it is no longer merely a theoretical question. The capitalist world is collapsing before our very eyes. Where is the proletarian alternative being posed?

Ingram

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emphasises and defends the process of clarification and not simply this or that point of possible clarity. We need to be able to encompass as much of the milieu and as much of the debate as we can within any organisation and that means keeping our programmatic identity as wide as possible. Every time an organisation programmatically incorporates a position it necessarily cuts itself off from other parts of the milieu and limits its own internal debate. In such circumstances it must be doubly sure that any such incorporation is justified. We have nothing to fear from political diversity and nothing to fear from debate.

The Fraction have clearly drawn some of the political lessons from the splits from the ICC. they have emerged with a strong desire to deal with the reality of the fragility of the revolutionary

movement and to confront the horrifying destructiveness of sectarianism and monolithism which dominates the milieu. However, good intentions are not sufficient. Without a comprehensive rejection of the ICC's political practice, internal and external, and a clear understanding of the organisational consequences which flow from that rejection they face the danger of being saddled with a method of work and organisation which, for all their good intentions, will easily fall prey to the same sectarianism they believed they had escaped from.

Cormack

The C.B.G., the FRACTION and Regroupment

Over the past eighteen months, since the last issue of the Bulletin, the CBG has held a series of three meetings with the **External Fraction of the ICC**. The Fraction published a report of the first three of these meetings in their magazine *International Perspectives*. The two organisations also held a Joint Public Meeting in London on the crisis in Eastern Europe. An account of this meeting as well as the interventions made by members of the ICC and Subversion can be found in IP 18.

Since the CBG's formation we have discussed and corresponded with a number of revolutionary groups and individuals such as the Tampa Workers Group, Wildcat in Britain and LL Men in Hong Kong. The basis for these discussions has been an acceptance of class lines: the bourgeois nature of Parliament, trades unions and leftist political organisations and the revolutionary potential of the working class. At issue have been the programmatic gains of the current which traces its origins to the German, Dutch and Italian Left Communists: the proletarian nature of the Bolsheviks and the Russian Revolution, the central importance of decadence and the dead end of councilism. We argued that without such an analysis these groups were led into academic theorising and short term localist activism. Our discussions with them have, in the main, been unable to advance beyond these questions.

In contrast the discussions between the CBG and the Fraction are at a qualitatively different level. Our two organisations share a common platform and can agree on which issues need to be discussed and how to approach that discussion. We have been able to meet and put on the agenda the international situation, the level of class struggle and how revolutionaries should organise.

These meetings have also been in marked contrast to the relationship we have had with other organisations with whom we might seem to share a common analysis. In Britain the Communist Workers Organisation was happy to talk to us privately or as individuals but never acknowledged our existence in its press except as a 'pseudo-group', far less engaged us in public debate. The International Communist Current fell back on denouncing us as counter-revolutionaries on ever less convincing grounds. Their latest position is that there is no longer any basis for saying that we are a bourgeois group but since counter-revolutionary groups cannot become revolutionary we have no alternative but to dissolve the CBG. (?)

Malaise.

The beginning of the discussion with the Fraction therefore marked the end of a long period of isolation for the CBG. We might have expected as a result to have seen an increased level of activity by the group and a greater frequency and regularity of our press. In fact, as our readers will know, the opposite has been the case. The CBG has failed to respond publicly to some of the most important events in post war history - the dismantling of the Russian bloc in Eastern Europe and the reunification of Germany, or to intervene in

domestic issues such as the Poll Tax campaign. Until this issue of the Bulletin we have made no statement on the Gulf War and its significance. A revolutionary organisation which ceases to intervene loses its reason for existence and discussions within the group which do not find an external expression are lost to the movement.

It is easy enough to find reasons for this malaise, the pressures of work and family are always present and can have a profound effect on a small group; revolutionaries are not immune to the ideological onslaught of the bourgeoisie which recent events have given rise to, and the absence of a clear response from the proletariat on its own class terrain to the attacks on its living standards makes intervention more difficult.

Paradoxically a contributory factor could be the discussions with the Fraction, or at least the importance which the CBG has placed on them. For a number of years the CBG ploughed a lonely furrow defending the gains of the ICC's Platform against the aberrations of the ICC and the 180 degree turns of the CWM. We attempted to develop an anti-sectarian and anti-monolithic theory and practice of organisation.

Then the EFICC appeared making a very similar critique of the ICC's bureaucratic organisational practice and methods of discussion claiming that the ICC had degenerated politically and calling for a 'renaissance of Marxism'. It looked as if reinforcements had arrived.

Furthermore the Fraction had a presence in four different countries and published regularly in two languages. It was quite consistent with the views we had expressed since our formation that we should initiate discussions with the Fraction with a perspective of an early regroupment of forces. Such an outcome has not yet materialised. In fact it took some time before the Fraction even responded to our initial contacts and agreed to hold the present series of discussions.

There are a number of reasons for this. To begin with there was a history of suspicion arising from the splits which took place in the ICC in 1982/3. The Fraction's article in IP 15 deals with this in some depth and we have written at length on these questions in many issues of the Bulletin in the past. At the time of these splits and the formation of the CBG most of the present members of the Fraction were and remained in the ICC. Our different perceptions of these events were discussed at our first meetings and while it may not yet be possible to reconcile our differing views of these events there is agreement on the relative importance of any continued disagreement and on the yet greater importance of political questions.

If we have been able to calm the questions raised by such as the Chenier affair another issue has run on through the discussions between us without reaching any conclusion. This is usually referred to as the problem of organisations taking positions.

For us it is quite clear that the political basis for an organisation's existence is its platform. But a platform is neither a complete nor a finished answer to every question which faces the organisation and the working class. There are always going to be questions of interpretation, of the evaluation of current events and of attempts to theorise from the experiences of the working class which are incomplete and inconclusive in themselves. Discussions will go on within organisations on these questions using empirical evidence, reference to historical events and debates. Showing how certain arguments contain implicit contradictions with the platform is part of the cut and thrust of debate.

No one should expect this internal debate to produce complete agreement. There will always be differences. Only when historical experience shows which side of an argument is correct, when one or other becomes a class position, can we say that a question is no longer open and continued disagreement forces organisational separation.

However, this does not mean that a revolutionary organisation can or must remain silent on these questions. They must be made public, comrades must be free to express their views publicly. At the same time an organisation cannot limit its effectiveness by at all times giving equal weight to all the views expressed by its members. There will be times when an organisation must take action or express a view. In 1917 the Bolsheviks could not at the same time argue for insurrection and against it. Organisations are forced occasionally to take positions, to speak with one voice. For that purpose they have mechanisms for ensuring that discussions reflect the views of the majority or for electing representative bodies empowered to make decisions where an immediate response is required.

Questions of organisation, of how to carry on the internal life of the group must of necessity be positions of the organisation. The Fraction part company with us on this. It believes that taking positions, and putting forward the view of the majority is one and the same thing. Furthermore the Fraction argues for the taking of positions as a way of sharpening discussion, of ensuring that they are taken quickly to either resolution or to a clear statement of differences. An example of this is given as the differences which have emerged in its own organisation over events in Eastern Europe, namely to what extent the bourgeoisie in Russia is in control of developments. By attempting to arrive at an organisational position on this important question the Fraction feels it has deepened its understanding on a number of questions.

While the CBG would applaud the openness with which the Fraction has carried on this discussion we would point out the dangers that over formalising a discussion can lead to - that setting up minority and majority positions forced other views into one or other camp, that the differences became as important as the shared ground and that publication of debates takes place when events have already moved on and cut the ground from one or other position.

Our differences with the Fraction on this question of positions may relate to our different origins. Although both our organisations were formed from splits from the ICC, the CBG left on grounds which were clearly seen as disagreements on questions of "organisation".

The comrades of the Fraction on the other hand spent a long time in the ICC engaged in arduous debates over political questions; the consciousness of the class, the meaning of centrism and what kind of intervention was appropriate. In a direct sense the Fraction felt its split to be on political grounds. But reading the accounts of these discussions and hearing of the barriers which were placed on the Fraction's freedom to organise, and of the final act of the charade when the Fraction members were asked to take some sort of loyalty oath, then the CBG would draw the conclusion that the Fraction's split was as much over organisation as our own.

What our organisations do agree on is that the freedom to hold different views was curtailed within the ICC, that they had not developed the mechanisms to allow differences to co-exist in the organisation. This was encapsulated in the ICC statutes which stated that differences were either a sign of immaturity of presaged a split. The CBG and the Fraction have both agreed that this sentiment must be well and truly buried.

A Call to the Fraction

Which takes us to the matter in hand, namely whether the Fraction and the CBG? Undoubtedly neither organisation has been able to intrude itself into the larger world. The only area that we can immediately influence (and this with the long term intention of influencing the larger world) is that of our political-organisational direction.

Why have we been meeting? It is not simply that we believe dialogue is a necessary component of revolutionary activity. Dialogue has an organisational goal. We seek to convince others of the correctness of our analysis but not (we would hope) via dogmatism. We do try to keep ourselves open to counter-argument and persuasion where we might be found to be weak. At the same time we acknowledge that some questions will not produce consensus and can be left unresolved. By clarifying and extending our political analysis we better arm ourselves for intervention in the class struggle.

But to be fully armed we require organisation and thus the meetings between the Fraction and the CBG have (for us) had as their immediate goal the possibility of organisational regroupment. We believe that there are no political reasons for the two groups remaining separate, that greater strength is possible by the Fraction and the CBG coming together. This has surely been clear in all our texts which argue for openness and centralisation.

Obviously the Fraction seeks the same political goal as the CBG but what of the organisational means to achieve it and the imperatives which accompany it? Does the Fraction want to regroup? To be frank we find it hard to accept that the re-organisational vision which motivates us is endorsed by the Fraction. There is evidence of a willingness to discuss but no clear reason why and wherefore.

Is it that you see clear political differences which separate us - the economic foundations of decadence, the state in the period of transition or some other points? Whilst we recognise differences we do not see them as barriers to regroupment. Those that exist can and should be contained within one organisation. If you believe otherwise then spell it out. Be direct and clear.

On the other hand, given the record of the CBG it is possible (likely?) that reticence to regroup is based upon the Fraction's uncertainty about our viability. In other words you think we are not up to the job; that we could not carry out the tasks which go with regroupment; that we would be a dead weight. If this is the case then say so and if you think that individual assimilation is a more realistic target then state it.

One further possible scenario is that the Fraction is concerned that the collective identity of the CBG would remain within a regrouped organisation.

There is a history of members of the CBG working as a continuous political unit from the time of the CWO in the 1970s to the CBG today. There might be genuine grounds for fearing that this identity would remain in a new format and consequently be an ever-present threat to political stability. We do not see this ourselves but if you do then say so.

There is little point in discussion for discussion's sake. We should continue our dialogue yes, but let us clearly set out our immediate respective goals. Ours is regroupment. What is yours?

what positions?

The central stumbling block, to date, in the discussions between our two organisations has been the CBG's stand on the question of organisational adoption of positions.

" This tendency (of the CBG) to pose and then hold open many questions stems from a reluctance to take positions, as an organisation, unless the current situation is posing an immediate and burning question. The CBG has a positive desire to encourage the diversity of views which always emerges in discussion on such a complex reality, but they push this to a fault. They do not see that in taking a position an organisation can also be assisting discussion both within itself and within the milieu as a whole"

(Internationalist Perspective 18)

We should say immediately that this criticism is on a profoundly different level from the distortions of the ICC who argued in International Review 55 that we want to:

" ..dedicate ourselves to a work of study and 'open' debate in which will participate, at a level of formal equality, militant organisations, individuals and circles who have nothing better to do."

And that we want to build

" ..an open, democratic party in which everyone is free to say and do whatever they please"

As we argued in our response to these witless slanders in the last Bulletin this is absolutely not our position. Members of the CBG, while they remain members, are absolutely bound to the defence of the class lines contained in our Platform. There is no place in our organisation for anyone who does not accept the reality of capitalist decadence and its political consequences:

- the inevitability in this era of state capitalism and imperialism.

- the bourgeois identity of trade unionism, parliamentarism and reformism.
- the impossibility of progressive factions of the bourgeoisie.
- the counter revolutionary nature of all national liberation struggles.

For us these lessons have been definitely decided by the blood of the working class. Members are required to accept the indispensable role of Marxism in the struggle of the working class and its revolutionary minorities and must defend the notion of the unavoidable necessity for a centralised international party to play a leading role in the revolutionary process.

In addition, it is not sufficient for members to simply accept these positions in the abstract. They must accept the political **practice** within which these positions are defended and promulgated, what the role of revolutionary fractions is, and how that role is carried out. That is something we have detailed at length in past issues.

With regard to the internal life of our organisation it demands and understanding that clarity is a product of the whole and depends upon the widest possible debate and that centralisation, which is inevitable in a political organisation, exists in order to facilitate that. Central organs are neither the creators nor the repository of clarity. They are not the ideological thought police of an organisation. They do not exist in order to take up positions on behalf of an organisation within the debate, nor to decide who is right or wrong in any particular debate. However their task is not simply the collation of votes. They are charged with a **political** task. They must try to impose a coherence on the discussion, to draw out the lessons and try to point out the most fruitful direction for the development of the debate.

When the immediacy of the class struggle and the needs of intervention demand it they have the responsibility of speaking for the organisation. But in doing so they do not, and cannot, fix that as a permanent position of the organisation.

On the question of minorities and tendencies there is no room in the CBG for the ICC's conception that

tendencies are an expression of immaturity or weakness. On the contrary we think that they are an inevitable expression of the process of clarification. The terror of tendencies expressed by the ICC is entirely alien to a living healthy revolutionary life. It has its roots in the period of the most profound defeats of the class and is entirely absent from revolutionary practice during the periods when the revolution itself was unfolding. In 1917 Lenin argued strenuously that all elections within the party, both for the executive organs and the deliberative ones, should give expression to the formal confrontation of tendencies. Now, in an organisation whose life blood is debate, could it be otherwise?

"... the history of Bolshevism is a history of the struggle of factions. And indeed how could a genuinely revolutionary organisation setting itself the task of overthrowing the world and uniting under its banner the most audacious iconoclasts, fighters and insurgents, live and develop without intellectual conflicts, without groupings and temporary, factional formations."

(John Molyneux *Marxism and the Party*)

The Milieu.

As far as the external life of the CBG is concerned members must share the clearly stated orientation towards the rest of the milieu we have established in past issues of the Bulletin. They must accept that no single organisation can possess or be responsible for producing political clarity. The process of clarification must involve the whole milieu and that demands a recognition of the fraternal commentary which exists and the responsibilities which flow from that. Sectarianism can have no place in our life. The CBG is committed to fraternal, open, public debate and to ongoing joint work with other elements where possible.

Part of the CBG's political identity is the understanding that the Party of the future will not emerge from any single organisation or currently existing body of positions. Like the Bolshevik party in the past it will be a product of many elements from within the milieu. It will be the end result of a long process of clarification involving the unceasing efforts of revolutionaries now towards its creation. Therefore we think it is necessary that revolutionaries today regroup their forces on as wide as possible a basis, but it must be a regroupment which does not place chains on the very process of clarification which is required for the final regroupment of tomorrow. Of necessity, we think that demands an organisation both more open and less narrowly defined than the model on offer from organisations like the ICC and the CWO. The basis for regroupment which we defined in the founding texts of the CBG and which we state again in this text is a defining position for the CBG and its members.

The Class.

In addition, members are obliged to accept a well defined conception of interventionary work in the working class based on the understanding that revolutionaries play a leading role within the proletariat by virtue of the clarity of their programme and slogans and not on their capacity for physically organising the struggles of the class

and the unfolding of the revolutionary process. Although the freedom of debate and the expression of political differences remains an absolute, even at the height of the class struggle, when the need for determined and coherent action becomes paramount, there is no room in the CBG for members who use their differences to refuse to undertake aspects of the organisation's work. That is a stance alien to a marxist organisation.

Taking all this together then, it is very clear that nothing remains of the ICC's accusation that we are an organisation in which:

"... everyone is free to say and do whatever they please."

However the criticisms of the Fraction clearly do not lie at this level. Rather, they are concerned that our caution about taking up an organisational position might hinder debate by leaving it fragmented or shapeless and render us less able to speak and act decisively when required. With hindsight, it is clear to us now that much of the discussion between us has been bedevilled by a certain amount of talking at cross purposes. When the CBG talk about taking up positions, we use the phrase in a very precise sense. For us, to take up a position, is to programmatically incorporate that position into the identity of the organisation. It becomes part of the definition of the organisation in a way which clearly separates it from other organisations and the rest of the milieu. It becomes binding on members who become obligated to defend it in public and forms a barrier to political recruits who do not accept it. It commits the central organs to using it as a foundation for debate (internal and external) and intervention. Although, on positions falling short of class lines, dissenting views could still exist and be expressed internally and publicly, it would happen within the influence of organisational discipline. The whole weight of the organisation's energy and direction stands behind an organisational position.

This is part of, but not identical to, the process by which an organisation puts forward conjunctural analyses as part and parcel of its ongoing life.

An organisation does not remain silent in the face of events. It is part of the task of revolutionaries to analyse and pronounce upon the world outside it. To do this is not the same as taking up a position programmatically incorporating the pronouncement into the organisation's identity. Rather, it is to contribute to the debate within the milieu, to participate in the process of clarification. Such analyses can carry varying degrees of certainty and conviction, depending on the nature of the issue and the circumstances of the debate. It can be the product of a minority view, a majority view and might even be unanimous. But even in the latter case it remains a contribution to the debate and a statement about the current state of understanding within the organisation. It is not binding on members and does not stop or hinder differing contributions. It does not become a requirement for integration. For example the current issue of the Bulletin carries a text analysing the events of the eastern bloc. The essentials of the text are endorsed by the bulk of the CBG and would be defended in public debate but it is in no sense a position of the CBG. It is both a contribution to the wider debate, a summing up of current thinking within the group. In such a complex and fast moving situation it seems to us that taking up a position risks

freezing the discussion into a false polarisation. We can not see the point of any organisation having to speak with one voice in such a situation.

Certainly in the event of action being demanded in any particular situation, foregoing analyses will be drawn upon as a guide and the action decided upon will be binding on individual members. However the analysis will not be, and debate will be free to continue.

Debates within a centralised revolutionary organisation are not simply a collection of individual contributions. Discussion exists for the purpose of political clarification and that can not meaningfully take place simply on a show of hands and a totting up of positions. A political synthesis has to be made and a 'bilan' drawn up to give direction and shape to the process. No organisation can avoid this. It is a necessary part of political life. But when an organisation, or its central organs does this it is not the same as the taking up of an organisational position. It does not have the same organisational consequences.

We cannot understand the argument that an organisation must take a position in order to:

" assist discussion both within itself and within the milieu as a whole"

As we have just pointed out perfectly good mechanisms for achieving that already exist in normal political life. On the basis of ongoing discussion, central organs synthesise, make a 'bilan' lay down orientations; to the outside world the organisation speaks, pronounces, states what it thinks. Depending on the circumstances that can be with one voice, majority and minority positions or even simply the presentation of a spectrum of debate.

Organisational positions, on the other hand, are not simply contributions to debate. By definition they are what separate one organisation from another, on issues where an organisation is convinced it must speak with one voice and must separate itself from what other organisations are saying. We can see the necessity for this on the class lines which have been definitely settled by the class itself and demand a very specific political programme. We can see the necessity on the question of organisation, on what the role of an organisation is and how that must be carried out. But can the comrades of the Fraction tell us why we need to speak with one voice on the question of Rosa Luxemburg's economic analysis? Do we need organisational separation on the debate between saturated markets versus falling rate of profit? Do we need to speak with one voice on the Left in opposition theory, or on the Machiavellianism of the bourgeoisie? Do we need organisational separation on the question of the definitive date of the death of the Bolshevik Revolution? Do we need to speak with one voice today on the issues of the Period of Transition? Does ongoing analyses of events in the Eastern Bloc require to become part of organisational identity?

We do not need positions on all these, we need clarity, and that is produced by wide ranging, continuous debate within and without each organisation. We cannot produce clarity by organisational measures, by voting, passing resolutions or adopting positions.

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To argue that the very act of taking a position is an aid to discussion seems grotesque in the light of our own history. We know from bitter experience within the ICC that positions were taken precisely to stop debate and to smother dissent. It became the primary tool for sniffing out heresy and building an edifice of horrific monolithism in which every nuance, every exposition of a theoretical point became a position and where to disagree with a position was to identified as an alien presence. Even before this profound degeneration took place, our shared history in the ICC contains compelling evidence that adopting a position crippled debate. On the question of the state in the period of transition, for example, the imperative to produce a position, firstly produced an artificial polarisation, reducing a complex debate to two poles, and finally, when a position was adopted, stopping debate altogether.

However we don't have to confine ourselves to the ICC. The monolithic sectarianism of the CWO has been just as destructive from its earliest days. At one point it even reached the staggering conclusion that the only revolutionaries in the world were the dozen or so individuals who accepted the positions of the CWO!

We know that the EFICC agree with us that this malady is not a product of individual organisations but is an expression of the condition of the entire revolutionary milieu, which today is in a state of crisis. After two decades of existence it remains entirely stagnant, without growth, cut off from the class, afflicted by political degeneration and a crippling and rancorous fragmentation. There exists little or no sense of fraternal community, no forum for direct discussion and no possibility of joint work. The imperative for the regroupment of revolutionary forces remains entirely blocked by the blind and wilful insistence that a bewildering and changing myriad of specific positions demand organisational separation. We have seen group after group presenting set after set of "essential" positions which make regroupment impossible, debate difficult and joint work a non-starter, but which ultimately turn out to be transitory as morning mist.

If revolutionary forces are to go forward we must find a way of surmounting this. We have to be able to distinguish between what is historically necessary and inseparable from revolutionary identity (the class lines and organisation), and what is, for the moment, purely conjunctural (ie. the analysis of a particular situation), or simply debatable (in the fullest sense of the word), like the economics of decadence or the date of the death of the Russian revolution. This has always been true of revolutionary work but in the present period it has become of overriding importance.

We have argued many times in the past that we cannot properly approach the task of how to organise our work until we grasp the historically unprecedented situation which confronts revolutionaries. The material, political and social conditions of the period of capitalist decadence has produced a rupture in the relationship between the proletariat and its revolutionary fractions unique in working class history. The ability of revolutionaries to function, and prosper, within the day to day life and struggles of the proletariat disappeared when the Second International and the mass class organs which comprised it passed passed irrevocably into

the camp of the bourgeoisie. With the passage of three score years and ten since the Third International followed suit on the death of the last revolutionary wave the political basis for the existence of a revolutionary tradition within the working class, of a familiarity with revolutionary fractions and their positions, also disappeared.

The revolutionary milieu as a whole has yet to get to grips with what this means for the development of class consciousness in the period but its significance for the life of revolutionaries is unmistakable. Today we exist on such a minute scale it is scarcely comprehensible. Fourteen years before the outbreak of the revolution in Russia the Bolsheviks had a membership in tens of thousands. Relatively small within a class of perhaps five million but they represented only a part of a much wider healthy and vigorous political milieu. Their existence and their politics were widely known within the class. Their militants were on every shop floor, they were prominent in every strike. On the eve of the revolution they were numbered in hundreds of thousands.

Today in a world wide population of workers numbered in hundreds of millions, revolutionaries number in their hundreds. The class have no idea we exist, no knowledge of our politics. We have only the most minimal of contact, confined largely to the distribution of a few thousand leaflets outside factory gates and marches. When we speak we are not heard.

This situation produces an unavoidable weakening in the process by which revolutionary fractions give voice and shape to the clarity which emerges from the activity of the class as a whole. When revolutionaries of the past reflected on, and pronounced on, the lessons of the proletariat's experience they did so as a living part of the class, in a fashion which allowed them not only a sensitivity to the twists and turns of the development of the class's consciousness, but more importantly, provided them with an immediate feedback on the validity of their 'reflections'.

All this is denied to us however. Not only are we condemned to carry on the process of clarification from the position of virtual bystanders, but the fruits of this process, the political positions which underpin our activity, are not subject to the same testing in the forger of the actual struggle. We have no way to judge the validity of any particular position by virtue of the class' response because the response is always the same - zero.

In this situation there is almost nothing to guard against an **ARBITRARINESS** in the evolution of discussion, the adoption of positions and the weight we accord them. In an organisation with only a dozen or a few dozen members, the process of clarification can be badly skewed by irrelevances - by the influence of a guru figure, by a militant with a bee in his bonnet, by the emergence of a clique or even the political behaviour of married couples always supporting one another. Laughable perhaps, but there is not one of us in the **Fraction** and the **CBG** who has not seen examples of all of the above.

None of this is an argument for organisational impotence. But it should lead to the exercise of great caution about programmatic commitment and to the understanding that once the adoption of a position becomes inescapable it must not be used in a sectarian fashion against the rest of the milieu or as a monolithic weapon against internal debate. There is a world of difference between the partisan

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defence of a position as an element contributing positively to the overall process of clarification within the milieu as a whole and the defence of a position as a means to build a barrier against that milieu. Certainly an organisation can claim, must claim, the correctness of its political positions and analyses and hence must fight for them. But this must be done within the understanding that for Marxism a number of possible interpretations can coexist at any time. We must guard against the illusion that the definitive marxist interpretation is easily and finally located.

However the need for caution about programmatic commitment does not simply derive from the specificities of the present period. It springs directly from the role that revolutionaries must play within the revolutionary process. We stand with Luxemburg and the German left in insisting that it is not the Party's capacity to **organise** the class that is essential. We are not the general staff of the proletariat, we have no blueprint for the revolution, no detailed battle plan. We have no need to build a unified executive machine capable of carrying out with military discipline the manoeuvres and instructions emerging from Communist infallibility.

What we bring to the revolutionary process is a **political** leadership based on programmatic clarity. It is not the Party's instructions which are vital to the revolution but our ability to give political shape and direction to the class' own activity, to absorb the advances made by the class in action, to **transcend** those advances in a way that the class as a whole cannot (lacking as it does the historical overview and programmatic clarity unique to revolutionary fractions), and then to incorporate these advances into a clear vision of the way ahead. In this way revolutionary fractions act as the political compass of the class, able to point the way forward by accentuating what is positive in the class' own activity and fighting against the cul-de-sacs and dead ends.

Our only weapon here is our political vision, our clarity and that is not a fixed, immutable entity, either in its totality or its constituent parts. It lives and develops in ways impossible to foresee, inextricably linked to the life and struggles of the class. Clarity is not a finished product, it is a process, inseparable from living open debate, as wide and as thorough-going as possible, allied to an openness and responsiveness to the class itself. If we look back at the history of the last revolutionary wave it is fruitless to search for programmatic and organisational perfection. What we see is an entire process of clarification, more or less confused, with moments of clarity appearing here and there, with the differing experiences of different branches of the revolutionary movement highlighting only partial aspects of the problem. No one got everything right. Although the Bolshevik Party was pre-eminent in the revolution in Russia the organisation and programme it took into the events of 1917 was a product of many elements from within the milieu as a whole.

Likewise today no fraction can imagine that the clarity it contributes can be anything other than partial and fragmentary. The only thing we can be certain of is that some of what we defend will prove to be useless or wrong and that some of what other elements defend will prove to be valuable and correct. We need a method of working which

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believes this is not on, or will mean giving the west too much - well its not possible to say what their plans are. But for both sections, if we believe perestroika will not succeed and going back to Brezhnev and/or Stalin wont work either, what alternative once they have defeated the workers is there but war?

But another theoretical framework for understanding the situation is also available. We may deny the logical progress outlined above and argue that in the collapse of the Russian bloc, the clear retreat from the prospect of Global War between the blocs we can see counterposed the economic and social fragmentation of Eastern Europe - with the prospect, as their crisis deepens, that this will inevitably spread to Russia itself. Elsewhere in the world the 'Third World' is already far along the path to absolute pauperisation and chaos and even within the confines of the West the recession is getting deeper and deeper.

In such unprecedented circumstances can it not be argued that the alternatives of War or Revolution are no longer valid? The blocs are less and less capable of mobilising their economies for war and their populations are far less willing to fight a war. But the proletariat has, thus far, been unable to face up to the crisis and their class enemy on their own class terrain.

War or Revolution was originally a specific theoretical development of a more theoretical framework from the last revolutionary wave that the only alternatives for Capitalism as it lurched into its decadent phase was Socialism or Barbarism. Its transcendence by the victory of its slaves in a revolutionary transformation or its decline into a barbaric rule seeking at all costs to keep power in an ever worsening situation. The notion that the alternatives 'socialism or barbarism' could be more specifically identified as 'revolution or world war' was based upon an assessment by the revolutionary movement that the specific way in which decadent capital had shown and would show its

barbaric alternative was and would be through world war to be followed by a new cycle of accumulation based upon victory in that war and on the ruins of the defeated.

It may well be that events this past few years have found that this "tightening up" of the general theory was incorrect and that the particular manner in which the alternatives "socialism or barbarism" will present themselves to the proletariat and the bourgeoisie will be different. If this is the case, then as revolutionaries trying to comprehend the dynamic of capitalism we will have to approach these issues with an open mind and in a spirit of free and fraternal discussion.

For the crux of all these questions is how we understand the present circumstances of the proletariat internationally, what the balance of class forces is and what prospects there are for proletarian action against the slide into capitalist crisis. Throughout this text we have claimed the present situation to be unprecedented. And this lies at the root of our problem. We have no real comparisons with the past to relate to in understanding a situation where the world is moving deeper and deeper into recession, where a bloc has collapsed, but where the proletarian response has been so muted, so hamstrung by bourgeois ideologies like nationalism and 'democracy', 'free market' etc. A situation where there has been no major appearance of class conscious struggle, no appearance of communist minorities. At root this refers back to the circumstances of the late Twentieth Century and the separation of the proletariat from their own history and minorities about which we have spoken many times before in the pages of the Bulletin. But we have now reached the point where it is no longer merely a theoretical question. The capitalist world is collapsing before our very eyes. Where is the proletarian alternative being posed?

Ingram

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emphasises and defends the process of clarification and not simply this or that point of possible clarity. We need to be able to encompass as much of the milieu and as much of the debate as we can within any organisation and that means keeping our programmatic identity as wide as possible. Every time an organisation programmatically incorporates a position it necessarily cuts itself off from other parts of the milieu and limits its own internal debate. In such circumstances it must be doubly sure that any such incorporation is justified. We have nothing to fear from political diversity and nothing to fear from debate.

The Fraction have clearly drawn some of the political lessons from the splits from the ICC. they have emerged with a strong desire to deal with the reality of the fragility of the revolutionary

movement and to confront the horrifying destructiveness of sectarianism and monolithism which dominates the milieu. However, good intentions are not sufficient. Without a comprehensive rejection of the ICC's political practice, internal and external, and a clear understanding of the organisational consequences which flow from that rejection they face the danger of being saddled with a method of work and organisation which, for all their good intentions, will easily fall prey to the same sectarianism they believed they had escaped from.

Cormack

PLATFORM of the Communist Bulletin Group

The past few years have seen tremendous changes in the Capitalist world. Articles in this issue of the Bulletin explore some aspects of these changes. Below we republish the Platform of the CBG last published in **Bulletin 4** in 1983. Revolutionaries must respond to the developing situation by constantly testing their political understandings against reality and it is to aid in this process of comprehension that we publish it once more.

Class Society

The exact age of humanity is unknown, but current estimates put it somewhere between one and four million years. Class society, a society in which one class of men dominates all other classes, is perhaps only six thousand years old: in terms of human history an extremely short period of time.

For the vastly greater part of his existence on Earth man has been a cooperative communal-living being. Class society, in an attempt to make legitimate and to perpetuate its existence, has thrown up an elaborate ideological facade which tries to peddle the lie that how man is today is how he has always been, conveniently forgetting the thousands of years before class society. Human nature is portrayed as base, brutish and unchanging, rather than as a product of the base, brutish nature of Class society.

The high point of Class society - Capitalism - has, as is to be expected, spawned the greatest refinement of this lie: that the pinnacle of human potential is - Capitalism. It is Marxism alone which has challenged this lie and which has pointed to the historical movement of all Class societies: Marxism alone which has shown that all such societies have gone through periods of ascendancy which are then inescapably followed by a period of decadence. Ascendant when they have served a progressive function in developing man's potential to develop the productive forces and control the world and enjoy freedom from want; decadent when the revolutionary thrust of the particular class society has come up against the limits of its own historic period and has thus become a barrier to further human development.

Thus Slave society, which destroyed the hundreds of thousands of years old communal society of primitive man, was revolutionary and progressive in that it laid the foundations for a subsequent development of thought and technology which, after subsequent centuries of decadence and stagnation, gave birth to Feudalism. And Feudalism in turn gave birth, with its further creation of both a potential proletariat and a productive surplus, to Capitalism; a Capitalism which, through revolution, swept aside Feudalism's decadence.

Capitalism's ideology would have us believe that this latest and most profound class society is eternal. It is not. Capitalism is based on the creation of and the exploitation of a collective producer class - The Proletariat. Despite the barrage of capitalist ideology which attempts to

fragment, privatise, isolate and individualise workers, that collectivity is absolute and is as international as Capitalism itself. Capitalism has, as Marx noted, produced its own gravediggers.

The proletariat, as with all previous classes which would become revolutionary, threw up a political expression - in this case Marxism - which even in the period of Capitalist ascendancy was able to identify the logic of previous human development and predict the finite nature of Capitalism.

The Development of Capitalism.

Capitalism, up to the end of the Nineteenth Century, despite all its appalling exploitation and horrific conditions, was progressive. It created a world wide social system, created a world wide revolutionary class and developed technology and man's control over the environment to the point where all mankind's material needs can be potentially met. It also during this period of ascendancy was able to provide real gains for the working class upon demand, for the proletariat could, and did ally itself to progressive factions of the bourgeoisie to further its own, and Capitalism's ends.

Decadence.

But 1914 marked the definitive end of Capitalism's progressive period. Up until then its wars had been wars of Capitalist expansion; its crises had been crises of growth. By 1914 the world was already carved up between the Capitalist states. Expansion could only take place at the expense of rival capitals. And Capitalism had to expand to fuel the accumulation that is the motor of its existence. From 1914 Capitalism began to feed upon itself - it had become decadent. The working class it depended upon now became a revolutionary class, a fact dramatically driven home by the victorious Russian revolution, and indeed by the Europe-wide upheavals of the revolutionary wave of 1917 to 1921. As the Third International proclaimed:

" A new epoch has opened - the epoch of proletarian revolution."

The Revolutionary Wave

It is within the political expressions of this wave that we locate our roots. From Lenin and the Bolsheviks of course, who played such a major role in the initial unfolding of the revolutionary wave and in the efforts preceding that to break from the decaying elements of the Second International, but

more specifically from the left fractions of the communist movement - the KAPD, the Dutch Tribune group and the Abstentionist fraction of the Italian Left, who fought a rearguard action against the decay of the Third International which rapidly became a defender of the counterrevolution in Russia with the downturn and defeat of the revolutionary wave.

The Counterrevolution

This counterrevolution was a direct product of the failure of the workers of other countries to successfully make revolution. Russia, trying to exist, isolated in a capitalist world, could only do so by becoming capitalist. The workers who rallied behind the cries of internationalism in 1917 were soon to be crushed in the interests of the Russian 'Motherland'.

The Communist Tradition.

The Left Communist tradition built on the gains of Marxism of last century - the understanding of the revolutionary role of the proletariat, the realisation that the capitalist state must be toppled by force, the recognition that a dictatorship of the workers must oversee the transition period between Capitalism and Communism, the understanding that Capitalism's very process of accumulation would lead to its death crisis. To these understandings the Left Communists added the working class' experiences during the 1917-21 revolutionary wave and the appreciation of the political and historical changes that Decadence had brought, to lay the foundations that we, and all today's communist groups, build our platform on. More than fifty years separate us from the last revolutionary wave but once more these political gains of the working class are being presented as the class intensifies its battle with Capitalism.

Thus our political activity is based on the following:

The Cycle of Decay

This century Capitalism is locked into a cycle of crisis - war - reconstruction - crisis. Capitalism this century has no solution to its crisis other than preparation for war and war itself. Only on the back of reconstruction following war has it been able to stagger on. The onset of Decadence at the beginning of this century forced Capitalism worldwide into a frenzy of mass murder in World War One; the defeat of the revolutionary wave of 1917-21 allowed Capitalism to force the proletariat into the misery of the Great Depression and then into the further bloodbath of World War Two. Only on the bones of millions of workers and on the destruction of whole economies was Capitalism able to carry out the post-war reconstruction which lasted until the 1960s and the end of which presents Capitalism once more with the horror of its own decay.

The impossibility of Reforms

Decadent Capitalism cannot grant meaningful reforms to the working class. The 'gains' that workers appear to have made this century are both localised and temporary (see how quickly they disappear). They are won by only a small percentage of the world's workers and, above all, are paid for by the blood of millions of workers who have died in Capitalism's wars.

The Unions.

The trade unions which were set up last century when the winning of reforms was a possibility have fundamentally changed this century when such gains and reforms are no longer possible. They now act to tie workers to the state, policing them in the interests of capital. In times of war they have dragooned workers to the Front; in times of peace (and this century the world has known no peace) they have acted as brokers for the state dictating levels of exploitation. Whenever workers have struggled this century, the unions have been at the forefront of the state's defences - dividing, isolating, fragmenting workers, locking them into the 'National Interest'. This role is practised not, as the leftists would have it, because of 'bad leaders', (as Marxists we recognise that leaders are thrown up by the logic and drive of social organisations, they don't determine that logic and drive), but because the whole union apparatus defends a bourgeois political programme for the organisation of capital which forces it to act as an arm of the capitalist state. Indeed it is the grass roots of the union machine which are the most dangerous to workers. Few workers have any deep confidence in the bureaucrats at the heads of the unions, but many stewards and union militants, because of their militant words and radical stances, are able to tie workers to the union organisation. Workers in struggle constantly find themselves in conflict with these stewards, who, in turn, are forced to adopt ever more radical poses so that they and the union machine can ultimately fulfil their role of derailing struggle and confining it. There is nothing Machiavellian about this: some stewards are obviously stooges and toadies, but many others are well intentioned individuals trying to defend workers' conditions. However their subjective intentions count for nothing. Their objective role is to prevent workers breaking out of the union stranglehold, joining up with each other and recognising that Capitalism can offer nothing but austerity and war.

The Capitalist State

The State in Decadence dominates all social life. The economic crises and collapses of last century led to a centralisation of capital. This century, where national capitals confront one another for survival, has led to the state more and more controlling all aspects of the economy in an effort to make it as resilient and responsive as possible and this domination has been mirrored in all aspects of society: education, health, planning etc. State Capitalism is not to be found only in China and the Iron Curtain countries, it is universal - as developed in America as Angola, Britain as Brazil.

Parliament and Democracy

Parliament, once a vehicle for workers winning reforms, under Decadence, can offer workers nothing. Even the bourgeoisie uses it only for its role of mystifying workers, pushing the lie that 'Democracy' has some meaning. It is the state's executive and permanent organisation that fundamentally dictates policy. Parliament is an attack on the struggle and consciousness of workers and acts to encourage them into a passive, individualised acceptance of their exploitation. The readiness of the bourgeoisie to dispense with it completely - in time of war, for example, or when it is no longer an appropriate form of control for them - shows the emptiness of its content.

Factions of Capital

Under Decadence all factions of the bourgeoisie are reactionary, all are equally mortal enemies of the workers. To pick and choose between them is for workers to pick and choose their own executioners. The 'democratic' and 'liberal' factions are every bit as drenched in workers' blood this century as the 'right wing' and 'fascist' factions. Campaigns by radicals, Stalinists or Trotskyists to 'critically' support one capitalist faction against another are merely manoeuvres by these bourgeois groups to lead workers away from the real battle ground and disarm them. For these 'leftist' organisations, far from being part of the proletarian movement, are, by their explicit defence of Capitalism - East or West - shown to be merely the left wing of the International bourgeoisie. By their failure to separate themselves from the decaying Comintern and the advocates of state capitalist programmes they show themselves to be merely offering workers yet more bourgeois programmes for the survival of Capitalism and for the continued dominance of Capitalism worldwide.

The impossibility of 'National Liberation'

With Decadence, all the world is capitalist. Last century workers could support some bourgeois national liberation movements since these aided the development of Capitalism and eliminated pre-capitalist social relations. Today this is no longer possible: Capitalism cannot develop any more. Two world wars have seen the formation of imperialist blocs: after WW1 some half dozen blocs - after WW2 this had been whittled down to two, the Russian and the American, which have carved the world up between them. National Liberation movements against one of the blocs serve only to turn workers and peasants into cannon fodder for the interests of the other. The revolutionary cry of World War One; "Turn the imperialist war into a civil war" can be the only watch-word of the proletariat everywhere, the 'third world' included.

Partial Struggles

The decomposition of capitalist material life has led to a decomposition of capitalist social life in reaction to which all manner of partial struggles have arisen, focussing on race, or sex, or age. These, far from contributing to revolutionary struggle merely serve to defuse it. Only by destroying the material base of Capitalism can its cultural oppression be destroyed. Partial struggles act to veil the real conflict between classes today, hiding this beneath the myth of inter-class units of blacks, gays, women or the young.

The Barbarism of Decadent Capitalism

Decadent Capitalism is barbaric. It can only survive through a remorseless drive to war - even though the next world war may destroy humanity. This drive is inescapable; it doesn't result from irrationality or lunacy on the part of a particular faction of the bourgeoisie, or the intrigues of an

entrenched military; it is endemic in a system which is based on competition and accumulation. A peaceful Capitalism is no more a possibility than a Capitalism which stamps out poverty and oppression. Thus, peace campaigns are reactionary campaigns - attempts to blind workers to the real nature of Capitalism, to tie them to the state with the myth that the state can be appealed to and is susceptible to popular feeling, to hide the fact that war under Capitalism is inescapable. The only way to end war is through the civil war which will overthrow Capitalism, for if this fails Capitalism will destroy all humanity in the holocaust of World War Three.

Workers and the Dictatorship of the Proletariat

The form that the proletarian dictatorship will take has been made clear by the experience of workers' struggles in the past: workers councils, centralised and based on elected and revokable delegates which will enable the working class to wield its power in a truly collective manner. The working class cannot yield up its power to any minority, no matter how proletarian that minority may be. Only class-wide involvement in the running of the state will ensure the continuation of the surge of consciousness which revolution brings and which alone will ensure the destruction of Capitalism.

The Task of Communists

The communist groups thrown up by the class before the revolution will always be small - the mass workers' party belongs to the period of ascendancy. Numbers are likely to grow significantly only in the revolutionary period. The recognition of the need for a centralised international party is accepted by almost all communist groups today - but only the heightening of the class struggle can ensure its creation, though the preparation for that moment is an urgent task today. We, unlike some other communist groups, don't see the party's role as one of organising and directing the class. This view stems from a lack of confidence in the class, an inability to grasp the lessons of past insurrections which showed how the full revolutionary potential of the class frequently left even the most clear communist organisations far behind. Only the complete involvement of the whole class can offer guarantees against reaction; the clearest party programme is no substitute for this. The role of revolutionary groups, as it will be of the party, is to give a political leadership to the class, to make clear the communist goal and to point the way forward, showing clearly the dangers that face the proletariat today, in the revolutionary period and in the period of transition to communism. As the party will be in the revolution so it must be today: centralised and disciplined yet careful not to let such discipline be confused with conformity, rigidity or monolithism. The guarantees of the party's, and today's political fractions' work must always be political clarity and not just organisational practice.

Communist Bulletin Group
June 1983.

Death of a Communist

One of the many personal and political tragedies from the experience of the last revolutionary wave is the way in which the rise and fall of the consciousness of the proletariat and their capacity to destroy bourgeois society and to replace it with socialism was mirrored by the rise and fall of political clarity as represented by some of the individual militants who took part. In the same way that, through the experience of the working class itself, there developed a greater and deeper understanding of the period, of what had to be done to destroy the rule of capital, of how and what forms of organisation were required to succeed in this, the first stage of the socialist transformation, so too these understandings, these theoretical and practical gains were progressively lost as the revolutionary wave faltered and was defeated, obscured beneath a resurgence of bourgeois ideology whether of liberal or Stalinist hue. Even more clearly we can see redundant political positions which the new era threw onto the scrapheap of history reappear with the downturn, used to justify the retreat, and subsequently become the ideological underpinnings of the betrayal of the proletariat.

These political positions, denoting at one extreme the highpoints of the revolutionary experience and at the other the resurgence of counter revolution, are best identified in the political stances of individual revolutionary organisations - indeed individual revolutionary militants in some cases. As an example Trotsky is the most obvious, but perhaps Bukharin is the best. Here was a revolutionary who, as the world lurched towards the abyss, developed an astonishingly clear understanding of the nature of state capitalism and of the fact that the war had propelled capitalism into its decadent phase - and what that implied for the working class and humanity. These are theoretical gains which remain central to the understanding of revolutionaries today. Through the developing revolutionary experience he stood at the left of the communist movement, bitterly criticising any concession to bourgeois ideology, exposing the reactionary nature, in the new period, of such as nationalism and arguing for the development of organisational forms which allowed the consciousness of the class to develop, and for the extension of the revolution as far as possible at all hazard.

And yet, with the defeat of the revolution and the slow death of state capitalism in Russia, this Bukharin, one of the clearest of militants, became the arch proponent of the reintroduction of capitalist forms and capitalist relations. Standing at the very right of the new bourgeoisie in Russia he was a key figure in the destruction of the proletariat as a conscious class, a key figure in sending thousands of workers and revolutionaries to the living death of the concentration camps and one of the shrillest in his denunciation of those revolutionaries still free, demanding their execution whenever their arrest gave him an opportunity.

The paradox we have to confront then, is how someone so clear could fall so low. Any historical assessment of Bukharin has to take into account both high and low, good and bad, how it was the

period and his experience of it which changed Bukharin and how and to what extent the seeds of degeneration already existed in his theoretical armoury, upon which this defeat could act to transform such a vital individual in the development of clarity into a murderous capitalist executioner.

At one level it can be argued that Bukharin merely took the fact of the defeat of the revolutionary wave to its logical conclusion in the same clear logical way in which he had discerned the rise of the proletarian opportunity. This, unrealised by him however, necessitated moving out of the proletarian camp into that of the bourgeoisie. In that sense we can say that Bukharin had an excuse. This does not of course excuse him but we can see here the enormous weight of the counterrevolution on even the clearest of revolutionary militants. At another level we can say that some of the detritus brought into the new period from social democracy was able to come to the surface precisely because of the downturn in the revolutionary wave, just as the progressive elements of theory came to surface as the class moved forward. In this sense we can see how the reality we operate in as militants encourages the quality of the theoretical analyses we make.

The Death of MC

But what is true for such a giant of the proletarian experience as Bukharin is also true for lesser mortals.

We have recently been made aware of the death of MC, one of the founders of and leading light of the ICC. Of his immense contribution to the development of a revolutionary milieu in the early seventies after all organic links with the last revolutionary wave had been cut, and after fifty years of counterrevolution, there can be no doubt. In Britain, for instance, the end of the sixties saw a milieu tentatively groping towards a communist understanding, not only of the present, but also of the history of the proletarian movement. Predominantly formed from the libertarian movement of the early and mid Sixties, there was little appreciation of any historical perspective to the essentially moralistic positions we defended. The long night of counterrevolution had extinguished any contact with the proletariat's revolutionary past and our understanding of proletarian politics was essentially an selection of rights and wrongs, good and evil, from our own direct political experience, without any understanding of how these might fit together coherently or where they had come from in the history of our class. Into this confusion the clarity of Revolution Internationale came like a thunderbolt. The dynamic of the last revolutionary wave and, most crucially, the concept of decadence, immediately allowed many disparate conceptions to fall into place to form a coherence which was to be at the root of all the regroupments which took place in the Seventies.

Ascendancy and Decadence

The most crucial concept was to understand that, like any other mode of production, capitalism had

an ascendant and a decadent phase. An understanding of what this means, has been, and still is, crucial to the proletarian movement's understanding of capitalism and its revolutionary transformation. But this was, and is, not some vague, grandiose theoretical construct. On the contrary it is in the explanation of real events and social processes that the notion of decadence stands or falls. With the emergence of imperialism, national capitals, having extended the capitalist system throughout the world, were forced to compete with each other militarily and economically for mastery of the globe. Unable to expand further except on the basis of destroying competing capitalisms, the system had entered its phase of historic crisis, its decadent phase. The interests of the bourgeoisie forced them to use the resources at their command in unproductive competition and war rather than in further extension of the system. The capitalist mode of production therefore had reached the point where it contradicted its own dynamic, where it could expand further only by periodically destroying part of itself. The history of the capitalist system this century therefore, has been the struggle to combat, escape from its inherent contradictions - contradictions which have led to massive destructions of capital, and of humanity, in World War One, World War Two etc., etc.

Social Democracy

In the Sixties and early Seventies we had cut our political teeth on the realisation that Social Democracy, the Labour party etc., was an agent of bourgeois rule as it attacked the working class. In or out of power it merely competed with the Tories for the defence of the capitalist economy. Similarly, our experience on the picket lines had demonstrated once and for all the anti-working class activity of the Unions, selling out workers whenever they got the chance - at best traitors to their class, at worst, in Russia for instance, a part of the ruling echelons of the bourgeoisie itself. The belief that they and Social Democracy were enemies of the working class, divorced from any historical understanding of whether they had always been so, meant that we failed to have any historical dimension to our understanding of these concrete conceptualisations.

We saw the world divided into competing capitalist states. One of these, Stalinist Russia, despite the protestations of such as the Trotskyists etc., was clearly seen as a capitalist state with a capitalist ruling class. Without any historical perspective we were led inexorably to the conclusion that Stalinism was a direct consequence of Leninist substitutionism and that there could not have been a proletarian revolution in Russia in 1917 since what had occurred had been led by a bourgeois organisation. We were inextricably left with, therefore, no coherent historical point of reference for the history of our class this century. The concept of decadence, with its ability to show that with the onset of World War One and the inability of capitalism to survive thereafter except by periodic destruction, gave us the understanding of how decadent capitalism and its internal logic had transformed hitherto proletarian institutions into organs of capitalism. Without that we could envisage no class content in Social Democracy, the unions or the revolutionary experience in Russia. We were thus left with no historic examples of our own class in action on its own class terrain this century, except for episodic experiences of industrial strikes etc.

Proletarian Revolution

RI laboured long and hard to bring about the key understanding that what had occurred in 1917-21 or so had been a proletarian revolutionary wave that had threatened to engulf bourgeois Europe and within which the events in Russia had been a specific example, a wave predicated upon the collapse of the capitalist economy into its period of decay consequent upon reaching its apogee at the turn of the century, a transformation epitomised by the descent of capital into the bloodbath of World War One. The proletariat had attempted to destroy this rotting carcass in Russia, Hungary and Germany in a wave which was initially successful in Russia, but which, with the failure to destroy capital elsewhere, was doomed to defeat.

The Bolsheviks

This was of crucial significance for a comprehension that the Bolsheviks, for all that they had trailed behind them from Nineteenth century Social Democracy, had been a proletarian organisation, an expression of proletarian consciousness which had, with the defeat of the proletariat, and just like Social Democracy and the unions earlier, been transformed into agents of capital. This had taken place as a historic process rather than a once and for all time essential characteristic. This led directly to a clearer understanding of the role of revolutionary fractions both then and now, taking into account both negative and positive lessons from what was now clearly seen as the flawed, but highest point of proletarian revolutionary expression. In attacking the leftists for their support of the unions, of social democracy and, however critically, of Stalinist Russia, we had zeroed in on substitutionism as an explanation of why they were enemies of the proletariat. Only with the realisation that this had been a specific error carried over from social democracy, an error actually identified by elements of the proletarian movement at the time like the KAPD, and not the source of any essentially bourgeois nature; only with the realisation that proletarian organs can and do become transformed into bourgeois ones, did a crucial barrier to our understanding of the role and history our class and its fractions fall away.

Moreover this real historical experience of our class illuminated yet further areas of theory. Decadence explained why national liberation struggles, which had in certain circumstances, been progressive in the period of ascendancy, had degenerated into becoming the lackeys and assassins of this or that bloc this century, unable to escape from the thralldom of one or other of the Imperialist blocs.

Regroupment

MC and his contribution to the clarity of Revolution Internationale and their intervention in that milieu gave us this critical dimension which allowed vital regroupments to take place. The high point of this process was the creation and development until the late seventies of the International Communist Current. Even those who did not regroup within the ICC, the elements for example which formed the CWO, then based on the experience of the German left, were what they were as a direct result of taking up a stance vis a vis the ICC and the intervention of RI. The fundamentals of the proletarian political platform were agreed by all, only parts of the assessment of our history were in dispute.

If the appearance of the new proletarian milieu in the Seventies was to a large extent due to the developing clarity of RI, then, at their own admission, much of that clarity came from MC and his experience within the Italian left before World War Two. For this the revolutionary milieu had, and has, much to thank him for. But we must remember that MC was in no way a direct organic link with the revolutionary wave of 1917. Certainly he was a direct link with the Italian Left and tragically brought into the new period and milieu not merely the gains but the catastrophes on that period at the end of the Thirties. Clarity comes from the self activity of the class and the reflection of revolutionaries on that activity. By the Thirties the working class was defeated and while the Italian Left developed some understanding of that period and of how to survive it it would have been impossible for them not to have been scarred both theoretically and organisationally by having survived such a period. MC, naturally, as a militant of the Italian Left, exhibited all their degenerations too, both theoretically and organisationally.

Organisation

In an organisational sense he did represent an organic link with the past but it was to a Stalinised past and to a Stalinised practice of the Thirties and Forties. At a formal level he was instrumental in forming the ICC into a parody of a huge bureaucratic organisation with a plethora of Bureaus, Commissions etc., more suited to an organisation with hundreds if not thousands of members, but which were totally inappropriate for national sections of the ICC whose numbers lay in the low tens at most. Members would find themselves on two or three Commissions at once and this undoubtedly contributed to the burn-out of a whole generation of revolutionary militants in the ICC. It was a clear case of wishful thinking; the assumption that these elaborate structures were necessary before the huge influx of members appeared in the period prior to the massive rise in class struggle and class consciousness which would presage a revolutionary outbreak. A failure to understand the present period and the isolation of revolutionaries from the proletariat meant of course that these structures were in most cases complete frauds. In real life these structures were hollow shells; the reality of the ICC was completely different. What really existed was a sect-like organisation built up of a submissive membership dominated by and controlled by a 'Holy Family' clustered round MC, the Guru of the sect. The membership was able to cope with this, indeed trivialised its relevance, partly because there was an anticipation that the revolutionary situation was rapidly developing and so either the formal structure would then become more appropriate and eliminate these personal excrescences and partly because that kind of sect is a self fulfilling prophecy in the sense that it attracts precisely the kind of membership which need such paternalistic structures and will support them, eliminating any thinking response to the dictates of the Holy Family and the Guru in exchange for a reason for existing, an escape from the nothingness of their lives.

The Decline of the ICC

Of course all members of the ICC, as it expanded during the Seventies, weren't unthinking drones. But as the reality of capitalist survival became clearer and clearer and the collapse of the system more remote, any voice critical of the monolithic sectarian aspects of the organisation were

virulently attacked by the Holy Family in a conscious attempt to drive them out of the ICC, if possible out of political life altogether; to ensure that what was left was the Guru, his Holy Family and a collection of accepting, adoring acolytes who would do as they were told. The success of that effort is clearly seen today in the debris that is the ICC in 1991 at the point of the Guru's death. MC played a crucial role in this destruction of an organisation which, at its highpoint, represented the greatest gain of the revolutionary movement since the last revolutionary wave. Its transformation into a whining degenerating corpse must, to a very large extent, be laid specifically at his door, and at the door of the poodles he surrounded himself with, poodles who were happy to act as the GPU of the organisation, sniffing out dissent and eliminating all opposition. Tragically they have been all too successful. The world is littered with good militants driven not merely out of the ICC, but out of political life altogether. These Chekists have much to answer for. Those who survived this assault and have determined not merely to remain revolutionaries, but to go beyond the ICC and its Stalinised behaviour are, of course, reserved for special treatment, insulted at every turn.

Such has been the negative side of the organisational legacy of MC who turned into a parody of a Stalinist gangster, presiding over an ICC which was, in the words of one ex-founder member:

" the complementary, symbiotic product of an atomised and dispersed membership. A membership which has been trained to accept the rules of the game in a sectarian structure . . . a membership that needs a set of bureaucrats to organise them and chastise them; a membership that feels thankful when others get the full works from the enraged and vindictive bureaucrats! A membership that wants at all costs to belong because 'out there' there's 'nothing but the void' . . . A membership whose real life is a permanent altered state of alienation and anxiety. A membership made indifferent to the inner, and moral, meaning of proletarian socialism."

Theory

But it was not only at the organisational level that MC did enormous damage to the post '68 revolutionary movement. Theoretically too he could not help but bring theoretical confusions from the Thirties and Forties into the movement. Theoretical clarity, it cannot be too often stressed, comes from the real experience of the proletariat. It is no accident that the correct line of march is almost always demonstrated by the class taking it rather than by revolutionaries showing it to a class which meekly follows. This latter misconception lies at the very heart of the substitutionist myth. Certainly a theoretical assessment often comes only with the mature reflection by revolutionaries on the activity of the class but it goes without saying that theoretical innovations and 'gains' from periods like the Thirties and Forties, from the depths of defeat, from the very nadir of the period of counterrevolution, are far less likely to be

correct than reflections on revolutionary events taking place then and there or in the recent past. When we look at the experience of the Italian Left, isolated from the proletariat, cut off from the massacred revolutionary fractions of Russia and Germany, battered by exile etc. we can understand the confusions that abounded. But when these confusions are introduced into the revolutionary movement today and are uncritically taken on board they become dangerous parasites which hamper the development of clarity. MC dragged a number of these with him into the movement in the Seventies.

Machievellianism

The notion that the capitalist state was so powerful that it could mystify the proletariat at will in the political sphere via political parties which were really state constructed fakes, organising which would take power and which would consciously stay in opposition with, when required, fractions of the bourgeoisie voluntarily choosing suicide on occasion as part of some gigantic integrated bourgeois plan; this was a clear leftover from the horrendous experience of forty years of defeat when the defeated proletariat looked impotent before the power of the victorious bourgeoisie.

The Period of Transition

So too with the State in the Period of Transition. This is probably the best example of a theoretical stance derived from the very nadir of the period of counterrevolution. When we look at the Italian Left and see that it was only very late on that they even accepted that Russia was capitalist at all, something the KAPD recognised during the revolutionary wave itself, and that most of what remains of it today still have substitutionist positions not only on the role of the Party but on its infallibility, it comes as no surprise to us that they failed utterly to comprehend the role of the Bolsheviks in the transformation of proletarian Russia into a capitalist state. The fact that the Bolsheviks, in defeat, were transformed into the new bourgeoisie could not in the slightest way be blamed on their misconceptions about the relationship between party and class. Thus a complex theoretical edifice about the need to separate the proletariat, (and ipso facto the party of the proletariat) from the "proletarian" state, and about the "essentially reactionary nature" of all states, was constructed. This may have got round this problem for the Italian Left, but it did so at the expense of clarity. The failure of the ICC to jettison such a theory, absolutely stinking of the depths of defeat, has produced an incalculably damaging effect - and a potentially counter-revolutionary one in the event of a proletarian revolution. The notion that the problems of the proletarian state cannot be understood as being proletarian problems but must be identified as problems outwith the working class, problems of an alien entity, is a deeply mystifying one and its importance, if only as a dangerous obstacle, must be laid principally at MC's door and at the door of those who so uncritically accepted everything he said, good and dross, as gospel.

Decomposition

The most recent example of this paramountcy of MC's though is the astonishing way in which the ICC, over night, and without seemingly any internal opposition, has adopted the notion that Capitalism has entered its final phase, the phase of decomposition. This has prompted the ideologues of the ICC into a veritable frenzy of history rewriting and we shall no doubt see the fruits of this in the months to come. Recent statements in the press of the ICC show that this was MC's latest contribution to the ideology of the ICC.

Assessment

In assessing a militant we do not simply tot up the good and bad, the positive and the negative, and come out with a score. Nor do we, as the bourgeoisie do, try to reach a balanced picture encompassing good and bad. For the revolutionary movement what is important is what the effects today and tomorrow are of his militant and theoretical contribution. These have still to be tested on the case of MC and in very large part it will be the direction, post Guru, that the ICC takes, that will provide us with the true balance sheet of his contribution.

Last Chance for the ICC?

For his death provides the ICC with a unique opportunity, probably their last opportunity, to take stock of where they are and what they are - an opportunity to either descend deeper into the pit they have dug for themselves or to stop in their tracks and think again.

The most likely course is that in the months and years to follow we will see a most unholy struggle within the ICC's bereaved Holy Family, a bare knuckles fight for the mantle of MC, just as in any other religious sect once its Guru has died. Though the struggle is unlikely to destroy the ICC it will certainly jettison more militants into the void and leave the ICC even more isolated and politically and morally bankrupt than it already is.

But another option is available - for the ICC to critically reappraise their past in the light of the reality of their present. To clear away the cobwebs that their Guru inspired collective trauma has held them in and to reassess - everything. To put their money where their mouth is, to act openly both internally towards their own membership and externally towards the rest of the proletarian milieu. The coming to terms with a reality that has long since escaped them and a conscious effort to abandon the sectarian practices MC bequeathed them.

The choice is theirs: in all honesty the prognosis for the patient is not good but this is the only thing that will save them from their continued slide into confusion.

Tuinév

TOWARDS A HISTORY OF THE GERMAN COMMUNIST WORKERS PARTY (KAPD)

1 The Motives for the Foundation of the Party and the Period of Revolutionary Action.

The German Communist Workers' Party (KAPD) arose from a period of the fiercest revolutionary struggles: its history is therefore a part of the history of the German Revolution. Its development was influenced by the fact that when the German proletariat was propelled into actively revolutionary mass action for the first time, the bourgeois dictatorship was still using all the methods of the 'state of siege' which had characterised the war years (suppression of speeches, meetings publication etc.). This made the process of political clarification impossible. It was only with difficulty realised that the workers' organisations (which in the years before the war, because they were based upon a Marxist theory of class struggle, of history and their destiny, were supposed to grasp the developing revolutionary situation) had instead made a pact with the power of the old state on the basis of the patriotic 'Burgfrieden' concept. The unavoidable consequence of this pact was that the pre-war leadership had to stop popular opposition to the war and to force through, at all costs, an anti-revolutionary policy in line with the war aims of Ludendorff and they had to abandon any idea that revolutionary action was a factor in the creation of socialism. Through this policy they won legality of operation and an unlimited ability to collect funds and publish their press. The Party and Trades union leadership were assured of the use of their enormous organisational apparatus in the pursuit of their aims. Thus it was shown, as clear as day, that when the downtrodden masses came to struggle for their liberation, they would have to fight not just against the state and its war but also against the leading figures of their own organisations. These complications led to the miscarriage of the most important task of the awakened proletariat, the task of transcending the element of confusion that inevitably exists in every revolution and of moulding the conscious action of the class.

If these considerations are set out here at the beginning of this study it is not in order to polemicise, or to construct a revolutionary critique, but because these connections, inasmuch as they were the starting point for the revolution, were important in the creation of divisions within the proletariat, and therefore for the particular structure of the individual parties whose birth and development can only be understood by a knowledge of these points of departure. From this knowledge comes the understanding that for a long time the negative response to the old workers' movement dominated inside the opposition and that it only tardily moved towards positive standpoints, right from the time when the mood of the proletariat was ready for solidarity action to the time when complete confusion and despair prevailed, and always in opposition to a bourgeoisie which never lost its power to resist.

In this confused situation the *Spartakusbund* split

off at the end of December 1918 from union with the *USPD* and joined with the *IKD* to form the *KPD(Spartakusbund)*. Its leaders, Karl Liebknecht, Rosa Luxemburg, and soon also Leo Jogisches, were shot down by White Guards, and it was not possible to elect a new 'Zentrale' under the conditions prevailing at that time. The 'Zentrale' was therefore augmented through co-option and fell presently under the leadership of Paul Levi who, under the influence of Karl Radek (the Russian emissary under the pseudonym Bronski), led the Party from activity to passivity. This, at any rate, was the assessment of a gradually growing opposition which was voiced in the Party press, especially in the important Districts of Berlin, Saxony and Hamburg. The 'Zentrale' considered that this opposition was but an erratic and indeterminate movement, that it isolated struggles and squandered their potential, and therefore were blameworthy. This was in contrast to how the opposition saw itself, as using its strength to push the broad masses into activity and thus bringing clarity and concentration to active revolutionary tendencies.

The 'Zentrale' adopted, and remained true to the tactic of turning away from 'revolutionary assault politics' (this was the term used in the opposition press and in the complaints made to Moscow), and shrank back from every struggle where bourgeois society gave the working class an opportunity, and returned instead to political work in Parliament and economic work inside the Trade Unions. The opposition, for its part, felt that parliamentary and trade union activity was incompatible with being a revolutionary.

There were three issues in dispute: on the type of organisation the Party should have, on its orientation towards Parliament and on whether to act within the trade unions or to create new forms of economic struggle. These points of dispute led to the schism within the Party and the foundation of the *KAPD*. How this schism developed is shown in the following Report of the *KAPD* to the Executive Committee of the Third International in June 1921:

" The founding Conference of the *KPD (Spartakusbund)* decided by an overwhelming majority to set itself in opposition to all other parties by adopting a policy of non-participation in the elections for a National Assembly. After the struggles of Spring and Summer 1919, there was a noticeable shift of the *Reichszentrale* (leadership) towards parliamentarism. The opinion of the membership was opposed to such a shift, so a meeting of functionaries of the Greater Berlin region in August 1919 delivered an ultimatum to comrade Klara Zetkin to lay down her parliamentary mandate or leave the Party. (She was at this time still sitting as an 'Independent' member in the State Parliament of Wurtemberg.) Comrade Zetkin made no move and the Party leadership (of which she was a member) supported her. In fact they went further, and attacked those groups which held fast to the decisions of the Party Congress, sabotaging their agitational work through the cutting off of funds etc.

The development of the opposition on the question of the Trades Unions took roughly the following course. The proletariat had learned the lessons of the struggles of 1919, that the Trades Unions were not only completely unnecessary for waging great struggles and mass actions, but also acted as the strongest fetters on the revolution. Everywhere workers moved spontaneously to setting up their own proletarian organisations of struggle, built on the basis of the factory, not of craft, so as not to divide the working class and stimulate inter-class disputes, but instead to unite the revolutionary class where they were naturally one, in the factory. These '**Betrieb Organisations**' (BOs) arose spontaneously in the Ruhr, Upper Silesia, in central Germany, Berlin, in the Wasserkante, in short, in every industrial region of Germany. When the KPD leadership saw the rise and growth of this mass movement they tried at first by all means to promote these organisations.

At that point leaders such as Levi, Korting and Frolich put out the line of abandoning the trade unions and building BOs. With the change in direction of the leadership in the late summer of 1919, these same people, led by Paul Lange, called for the fiercest struggle against the BOs and demanded the entry of communists into the trade unions and for them to work there. From that point on those members of the leadership who had helped build up the BOs became their most determined opponents. The mass of the party membership however, supported the BOs which had come together in the **Allemagne Arbeiterunion(AAU)**; and the gulf between the Party leadership and the great mass of the membership, especially in the industrial heartlands, grew daily.

Then a Party Conference was called on 20-24th October 1919 in Heidelberg. There the Party leadership surprised the Party delegates with the famous, so-called, 'Heidelberg Theses'. These had not been discussed beforehand by the membership and were completely new to the delegates. The eighteen delegates who spoke out against all this were excluded from the Conference, after which a majority of votes were secured by various means for the leadership. The opposition areas did not at once try to found a new Party, but wanted to convene a new Party Conference where all these questions would be voted on after the membership had voiced their opinions. In order not to lose contact with each other they chose the North-West Region (Bremen) to operate as Information Bureau for the opposition. The following months were full of internal conflict - resolutions etc waged in the sharpest manner by the leadership. They called open meetings in Berlin, Bremen, Hamburg and other cities opposed to the resident groups of the Party. In February 1920 the Districts of Greater Berlin, North, NW and E Saxony were expelled from the Party by the leadership, which then attempted to found new organisations in those places. An example of how few adherents the 'Zentrale' had in these areas is shown by the District of Greater Berlin. Out of 8,000 members about 500 left and founded a new party organisation acceptable to the leadership."

For the moment the Districts which had been expelled did not want to form a new, independent party: they held back from that step for two reasons. It was hoped that as a consequence of the growing numerical strength of the opposition, it

would be possible to win a majority for their views and preserve the unity of the Party. In addition it was thought worthwhile to remain in the Third International where we could explain the theories of the opposition: this was also because of the fact that the members of the Amsterdam Bureau of the Communist International, Herman Gorter and Anton Pannekoek, who were held in the highest regard by the Russians, adhered to the theory of anti-Parliamentarism and were for the building of BOs. This expectation, however, was deceptive: Karl Radek, who had just come out of prison, took a robust stand against the opposition and also enforced the dissolution of the Amsterdam Bureau. Radek, who held conferences with industrialists like Rathenau and Deutsch, and with politicians of all tendencies, took the leadership of the German Revolution in hand and was the mentor of the 'Zentrale'. The decisive impulse for the constitution of the opposition as a new party was a result of the conduct of the leadership during the Kapp Putsch. At a moment when the opposition was in a condition of the greatest readiness, the revolution was thrown into confusion by the leaflet of the 'Zentrale', composed by Bronski (Radek) and at all later times defended by him: - 'Against the General Strike! Lay Down your Arms!' The next day however revealed that the leadership were completely isolated so they disowned their own leaflet. The Comintern too energetically disavowed them. These events had their well known aftermath. The KPD had two members in the discussions on the so-called 'Bielefelder Agreements' and sanctioned them. The opposition sought with every means to rouse the masses in opposition to these agreements, stating that once the military had succeeded in disarming the workers they would resort to their usual well worn methods. Now let us continue to quote from the aforementioned Report on the events which followed and which led to the founding of the KAPD.

" The Kapp Putsch had shown that the leadership of the official party was in agreement with the abandonment of revolutionary struggle and was slipping onto an opportunist road. It showed that two different parties had been created whose combination was as impossible as the mixing of fire and water. The Berlin organisation therefore called a conference of the opposition for the 3rd April 1920 to formalise their constitution as the **German Communist Workers Party**. About 30,000 members joined from the old KPD although some individual Regions only joined after the founding Conference. The tasks and activity of the new Party were clearly set out. In abandoning Parliamentarism it had to weigh up the national and international political situation in order to take up the struggle against the bourgeois state and, above all, to prevent the state strengthening itself, so that in the extraordinarily complex political and economic situation existing, the proletariat remained prepared and able to seize power.

An example of the activity of the KAPD in this direction can be seen during the Russo-Polish War in the summer of 1920. The KAPD called on workers in the munitions factories to stop work and to sabotage munitions which were destined for Poland. The KPD called this revolutionary romanticism until the Comintern's Executive Committee in Moscow made a similar Appeal. The KAPD urged workers to the highest pitch of activity, towards the election of political councils and for a programme of revolutionary action, for a united front with their Russian brothers as the Red Army neared East Prussia, for the building of a united front between Soviet Russia and Soviet Germany. We wanted an

uprising to come while the KPD merely gave out the useless slogan "Neutrality towards Russia". From verbal passivity they then passed over into action - not against the bourgeoisie and their state, but against the KAPD which was propagandising and preparing for an uprising. In 'Rote Fahne' and 'Freiheit' of 19th and 20th August, and in their provincial papers there appeared warning calls against the slogans of the KAPD. The working class, ready in many ways for a struggle, was confused and the movement died away at an embryonic stage. This is a typical example of how the leadership of the KPD produced confusion in the working class. With regard to the 'March Action' (about which we will have cause to speak later), and which was unleashed by the KPD itself, we will see the same dynamic in action, that of a movement that had the appearance of a putsch. We constantly sought to widen economic struggles into political struggles for the seizure of power. The greatest struggle of this sort was the electricians' strike of November 1920 in Berlin which finally collapsed as a result of the conduct of the KPD 'Zentrale' in refusing to call for a General Strike."

Co-operation between the two Communist Parties took place during the struggle in Central Germany in Easter 1921, in the events known as the 'March Action'. This movement was unleashed by the entrance of troops into the Central German industrial region, in order to occupy the factories, in particular the Leuenawerke. The struggle was conducted by a joint district commission of the KAPD and the VKPD (these events occurred shortly after the regroupment of the left of the USPD into the KPD at the Halle Conference), and the organisation of the fighting was in the hands of Max Holz who belonged to the KAPD. The result of the struggle is well known. The KAPD argued in its press and through its member on the Executive Committee of the Third International, that an essential factor which contributed to the wrecking of the Action was that the VKPD introduced confusion into the ranks of their unprepared members by, without any ideological or organisational preparation, completing reversing their tactics from those previously adhered to. When, month after month, you propound a parliamentary-trade union tactic, it is obvious that headquarters will not take the broad mass of the membership with them if these tactics are suddenly reversed. Great masses of workers don't react to a sudden change of command like a company of soldiers in the Wilhelmitic army. Instead of the dialectical play of forces involved in an upsurge of proletarian activity, the KPD 'Zentrale' had set up a putsch. The KAPD fought against the declared policy of the Third International that more than anything it was necessary to draw the broad mass of workers into a unified party and then revolutionise them by means of that party. It argued that this was a non-marxist view of the laws of mass psychology. The transformation of proletarian ideology into class consciousness cannot come by such a means.

The leadership of the KPD at that time excused every failure by this rationalisation: The time available to revolutionise the masses who came from the USPD was too short. But the passage of time showed that the reverse was the case: the dead weight of the broad mass who joined the party out of sympathy with Soviet Russia, but without a clear and firm insight into the politics of revolutionary class struggle were not revolutionised by the VKPD. on the contrary the VKPD was de-revolutionised by

those masses. This consequence was also made manifest by the struggle within the trades unions.

The March Action was to be the last attempt to unleash the latent revolutionary element of class consciousness on the widest basis in a struggle for the seizure of power. All these attempts failed for two reasons: the fundamental opposition of both Social Democracy and Trades Unions to any active revolutionary orientation of class struggle, and because of the behaviour of the KPD which wanted a dictatorship of leaders instead of a class dictatorship. In addition to this, this leadership, because of its vacillating and contradictory conception of revolutionary politics, repeatedly changed its positions and because of this introduced confusion into the working class and hindered the development of class consciousness among the broad masses. Further to these two factors, the failure of the revolution in Germany was the result of the opposition of the bourgeoisie only insofar as this itself was dependant on the forgoing factors. In the first few years after the war the bourgeoisie was completely split between the monarchical circle and the rising 'democratic' faction, both politically and economically, over the question of inflation and the economy. The concentration of and unity of the bourgeoisie is characteristic only of the present phase of development. This section does not concern itself with the influence of the Russians on the German Revolution. This comes under the heading of the separation of the KAPD from the Third International. We will now return to the inner development of the party after its foundation.



The German Revolution

2. Internal Factional Struggles.

It has already been shown how this party arose out of the opposition of the membership of the KPD to the party leadership. The party therefore gathered up almost all the groups which stood in opposition to the domineering conduct of the 'Zentrale', without any predetermined surety that this opposition was homogeneous or that it had become homogeneous in its conception and political tasks. The struggle against the old party was accompanied by a process of internal clarification which, above all, was directed against two tendencies: against the "national bolshevik" programme of the Hamburg opposition (Fritz Wolfheim and Heinrich Laufenberg)

and against the adherents of the so-called 'Unitary Organisation' and deniers of the need for a party (Otto Ruhle - Dresden).

Wolfheim and Laufenberg supported a programme calling for a revolutionary alliance between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat in favour of a generalised popular uprising against Entente imperialism, and regarded the call to desert issued by the Spartakusbund in the last months of the war as treachery.

Shortly after the foundation of the party the Northern Regional Conference, in a leaflet on 1st May 1920, came out with an open call in the spirit of this theory, signed by Wolfheim and Laufenberg. The Party Conference of August 1920 in Berlin - Weisensee took a firm stand against the theory of the national bolshevik group: The region was expelled and rebuilt anew in the course of time. Wolfheim and Laufenberg soon lost all influence in the proletariat and together with officers and businessmen founded a "Society for the Study of German Communism".

While with the national bolsheviks it was only a question of a small group which had only a small following of propagandisers and did not extend beyond one region, the controversy with the Unifiers under the leadership of Ruhle was with an outspokenly anarcho-syndicalist tendency which had a wide following throughout the proletariat. It was shot through with petit bourgeois ideology that above all denied the need for a party as an organ of the proletariat and merely called for a coming together of the economic organisations on a federalist basis with full autonomy for each region. This struggle was fought inside the AAU from which this group split off to form the AAUE. The adherents of this 'Emheits-tendency', who based themselves on the American IWW and their ideas of the "One Big Union", left the party. The KAPD well understood that in their ranks were many good and authentic revolutionaries who had fallen into the extreme position of opposing all parties because of the treachery of those mass parties built on leadership principles. But for the preparation of the revolution such an organisation is a prerequisite that can only be superseded in a classless society. The position of the KAPD on the question of the Party was laid out in the **Theses on the Role of the Party in the Proletarian Revolution** of July 1921. Because the meaning of this question is of the greatest importance, they are reprinted below:

Theses on the Role of the Party in the Proletarian Revolution.

1. It is the historical task of the proletarian revolution to bring the disposal of the wealth of the earth into the hands of the working masses, to put an end to the private ownership of the means of production, thus rendering impossible the existence of a separate, exploiting ruling class. This task involves freeing the economy of society from all fetters of political power and is, of course, posed on a world scale.

2. The ending of the capitalist mode of production, the taking over of this production, and putting it in the hands of the working class, the ending of all class divisions and the withering away of political institutions and the building of a communist economy is a historic process whose individual moments cannot be predicted exactly. Nevertheless, with regard to this question, on some points the role which political power will play in this process is settled.

3. The proletarian revolution is at one and the same time a political and an economic process. Neither process can be solved at a sole national level; the creation of communism on a world scale is an absolute necessity for its survival. Therefore it follows that until the final destruction of the power of capital on a world scale, the victorious sections of the revolutionary proletariat still needs political power to defend itself against, and if possible attack, the external political power of the counterrevolution.

4. In addition to these reasons which make political power necessary for the victorious sections of the proletariat, there are additional reasons relating to the internal development of the revolution. The revolution - viewed as a political process - has indeed one decisive moment, the taking of political power. The revolution - taken as an economic process - has no such decisive moment. Long work will be necessary to take over the direction of the economy on the part of the proletariat, to eradicate the profit motive and to replace it with an economy based upon need. It is self evident that during this period, the bourgeoisie will not remain idle, but will try to regain power for the purpose of defending their profits. It follows that in the countries with a developed democratic ideology - that is, in the advanced industrial countries - they will seek to mislead the workers with democratic slogans. It is thus essential that the workers possess a strong, unwavering political power until they have taken over, in concrete terms, control of the economy and broken the grip of the bourgeoisie. This period is the dictatorship of the proletariat.

5. The need for the proletariat to hold political power after the political victory of the revolution confirms, as a consequence, the necessity for a political organisation of the proletariat just as much after as before the seizure of power.

6. The political workers' councils (Soviets) are the historically determined, all-embracing form of proletarian power and administration: at all times they supersede the individual points of the class struggle and pose the question of complete power.

7. The historically determined form of organisation, which groups together the most conscious and prepared proletarian fighters, is the party. Since the historical task of the proletarian revolution is communism, this party, in its programme and its theory, can only be a communist party. The Communist party must have a thorough and worked out programmatic basis and must be organised and disciplined in its entirety from below, as a unified will. It must be the head and the hand of the revolution.

8. The main task of the Communist party, just as much after as before the seizure of power is, in the confusion and fluctuations of the proletarian revolution, to be the one clear and unflinching compass towards communism. The Communist party must show the masses the way forward in all situations, not only in words, but also in deeds. In all the issues of the political struggle before the seizure of power, it must bring out, in the clearest manner, the difference between reform and revolution, must brand every deviation towards reformism as a betrayal of the revolution, and of the working class, as giving a new lease of life to the old system of profit. Just as there can be no community of interest between exploiter and exploited, so there can be no unity between reform and revolution. Social Democratic reformism -

whatever mask it might choose to wear - is today the greatest obstacle to the revolution, and the last hope of the ruling class.

9. The Communist party must therefore unflinchingly oppose every manifestation of reformism and opportunism with equal determination in its programme, its press, its tactics and activities. Especially, it should never allow its membership to expand faster than the existing communist kernel can absorb.

10. Not only seen as a whole but in its individual moments the revolution is a dialectical process; in the course of the revolution the masses make inevitable vacillations. The Communist party, as the organisation of the most conscious elements, must itself strive not to succumb to these vacillations, but to put them right. Through the clarity and principled nature of their slogans, their unity of words and deeds, their involvement in the struggle, the correctness of their predictions, they must help the proletariat to quickly and completely overcome each vacillation. Throughout its activity the Communist party must develop the class consciousness of the proletariat, even at the cost of being momentarily apparently in opposition to the masses. Only thus will the party, in the course of the revolutionary struggle, win the trust of the masses and accomplish a revolutionary education of the widest numbers.



All Power to the Workers Councils!

11. The Communist party naturally must not lose contact with the masses. This means, aside from the obvious duty of indefatigable propaganda, that it must also intervene in any movement of the workers caused by economic needs and attempt to clarify such movements and develop them by encouraging appeals for active solidarity so that the struggles are extended, and where possible, take on revolutionary and political forms. But the Communist party cannot strengthen the spirit of opportunism by raising partial reformist demands in the name of the party.

12. The most important practical activity of the communists in the economic struggle of the workers lies in the organisation of those means of struggle which, in the revolutionary epoch, in all the highly developed countries, are the only weapons suitable for the struggle. This means that the communists must therefore seek to unite the revolutionary workers, (not merely the members of the Communist party), to help them come together in the factories and to build up the factory

34.

organisations (BOs) which will unite into Workers Unions ('Unionen') and which will prepare for the taking over of production by the working class.

13. The revolutionary factory organisations are the foundations for the outbreak of struggle and action, the nuclei of fighting workers, the forerunners and building blocks of the revolutionary workers councils.

14. In creating these class wide organisations of the revolutionary proletariat, the communists prove the strength of a unified, united body. And in the 'Unionen' they show an example of communist theory in practice, seeking the victory of the proletarian revolution and as a consequence, the achievement of a communist economy.

15. The role of the party after the political victory is dependent on the international situation and on the development of the class consciousness of the proletariat. While the dictatorship of the proletariat is necessary, the communist party must do all it can to push events in a communist direction. To this end, in all the industrialised countries it is absolutely essential that the widest possible number of revolutionary workers, under the influence of the spirit of the party, are actively involved in the taking over and transforming of the economy. Being organised in factories and 'Unionen', schooled in individual

conflicts, forming committees of action, are the necessary preparation which will be undertaken by the vanguard of the working class itself and will prepare them for the development of the revolutionary struggle.

16. Inasmuch as the masses, after the political victory of the revolution, are strong and ready in the 'Unionen' as their class organisation, to introduce the basis of the dictatorship of the proletariat into the system of councils, they will increase in importance in relation to the party. Inasmuch as the masses deepen the roots of their proletarian dictatorship in the consciousness of the broad masses, the party loses its importance vis a vis the workers councils. Finally, to the extent that the safeguarding of the revolution by political violence becomes unnecessary, inasmuch as the masses finally transform their dictatorship into a communist economy, the party ceases to exist." (from 'Proletarian' July 1921.)

All these faction struggles, which were waged with

great fierceness, as was general in that period, had been resolved by the end of 1920, and had led to a unified political line.

Now controversy also raged over the question of what position to take towards Soviet Russia and the Third International.

3. The KAPD and the Third International. Parliamentarism and the Trades Union Question.

Immediately on its foundation the party had applied for affiliation to the Comintern in the full knowledge that on the essential questions of revolutionary class struggle the German members of the Comintern, and the **Executive of the Communist International (ECCI)** informed by them, took a stand in opposition to us. But there was a belief in the possibility of a change in that. The proletariat saw in Soviet Russia the front line of the world revolution, with which it expressed solidarity and from which it expected that revolution would materialise among the masses of the western European industrial proletariat. For the KAPD the struggle within the Third International, which quickly developed into a tool of the Russian State for making agreements with the international bourgeoisie, became the struggle against the Third International.

Soon after the first Party Conference the KAPD sent Jung and Appel to Moscow, following an invitation from the ECCI which had proposed such a meeting: the outcome of this was entirely negative since their expert on German affairs was Karl Radek, and thus it was obviously impossible to come to a clear definition of positions. The leitmotiv of Soviet Russia was to influence broad masses of workers in the defence of Russia, since they despaired of them unleashing a struggle on their own.

The KAPD thought that while this might be appropriate for Russia, for the western European proletariat the first consideration of a Communist party was to have principles of the utmost clarity and to avoid every tendency towards compromise: to rely solely on increasing the mass of the membership was a mistake, since such a membership's understanding would still be rooted in the pre-revolutionary forms of parliamentarism and trades unions, and, in the exceptional conditions of a revolutionary situation, must go astray.

Russia denied the validity of this viewpoint, seeking to make contact as quickly as possible with the working class, its existing large organisations and their members who, if not adhering programmatically to communism, at least were strong enough as a political force for the influencing of their own governments in a pro-Russian manner, or at least so as to paralyse any tendency against Soviet Russia.

The KAPD criticised this attitude from the standpoint of the need to take power. They felt that all this had nothing to do with the creation of the proletarian revolution in Western Europe, that the Bolsheviks were trying to generalise on the revolutionary experiment out of their own experience. They themselves had led a tactic and a struggle that could truly be called one of the greatest experiments in history. But from a dialectical viewpoint the taking of power necessitates a period of struggle. The proletariat can only develop its own consciousness through this struggle - creating its own vanguard from within itself in these struggles.

After a few weeks the delegation returned accompanied by a series of admonitions to review our party's conceptions on the questions of parliament and the trades unions and to organise a provisional information bureau together with the KPD and to send delegates to the impending Second Congress in July 1920. In spite of a widely distributed "Open Letter to the KAPD" the attitude of Moscow had no influence on our party membership. Ruhle (who was still in the party at that time) and Merges were delegated to attend the Second Congress in Moscow, but they left after a few days without even making an attempt to put the viewpoint of the KAPD before the wide audience of the assembled foreign comrades. The Second Congress climaxed in the well-known '21 Theses' in which the KAPD saw only the strengthening of the development of reformism. They decided to wait until the next Congress to see whether these requirements would be retained.

At the Gotha Congress of the KAPD where this decision was ratified the KAPD asserted once more its position as a 'sympathising' party against a minority led by Pfemfert and Broh who already proposed breaking off all discussions with the ECCI. But the party wanted one more opportunity to present its opinions in Moscow and to the other parties of the Third International: so it sent a new delegation consisting of Gorter, Rasch and Schroder to Moscow to take part in another meeting. The extended debates in Moscow and Leningrad found their outcome in Gorter's book "Reply to Lenin" (a reply to Lenin's 'Left Wing Communism'), Anton Pannekoek's "World Revolution and Communist Tactics", and in numerous articles in the party press, resolutions of Regional Organisations, all of which took their stand unanimously on the KAPD programme. Down with Parliamentarism! Smash the Trade Unions! Build up the BOs! Since these two questions lay at the basis of the KAPD programme the fundamental elements are given here from party literature.

(a) On The Question of Participation In Parliament.

"Such power as the bourgeoisie still possesses in this period resides in the proletariat's lack of autonomy and independence of spirit. The process of revolutionary development consists in the proletariat emancipating themselves from this dependence, from the traditions of the past - and this is only possible through its own experience of struggle. . . . parliamentary activity is the paradigm of struggles in which only the leaders are actively involved and in which the masses themselves play a subordinate role. It consists in individual deputies carrying on the main battle; this is bound to arouse the illusion among the masses that others can do their fighting for them. . . . Parliamentarism inevitably tends to inhibit the autonomous activity by the masses that is necessary for revolution. . . . Revolution requires social reconstruction to be undertaken, difficult decisions made, the whole proletariat involved in creative action. . . so long as the working class thinks it sees an easier way out through others acting on its behalf - leading agitation from a high platform, taking decisions, giving signals for action, making laws - the old habits of thought and the old weaknesses will make it hesitate and remain passive" (from Pannekoek's **World Revolution and Communist Tactics**.)

(b) On the Question of the Unions

" The Trades Unions arose in the period of ascendant capitalism and gave expression to the tasks possible in that era as an organ of struggle for better conditions of wages and work inside the capitalist system. Their propaganda admittedly pointed to the development of capitalism into socialism, but their real character developed in their reformist struggles against the excesses and abuses of the capitalist system. In accordance with this function the trades unions assumed, as time passed, an even more capitalist character in their organisational structure. A dominating bureaucracy arose which had control over all the reins of the organisation, without itself having any roots in the productive process. Bound up with the existence of this organisation for better or worse the bureaucracy, of necessity, had to fall victim to a system of operation which avoided serious disturbances thrown up by sharpening class struggle, and served the interests of confusion and compromise.

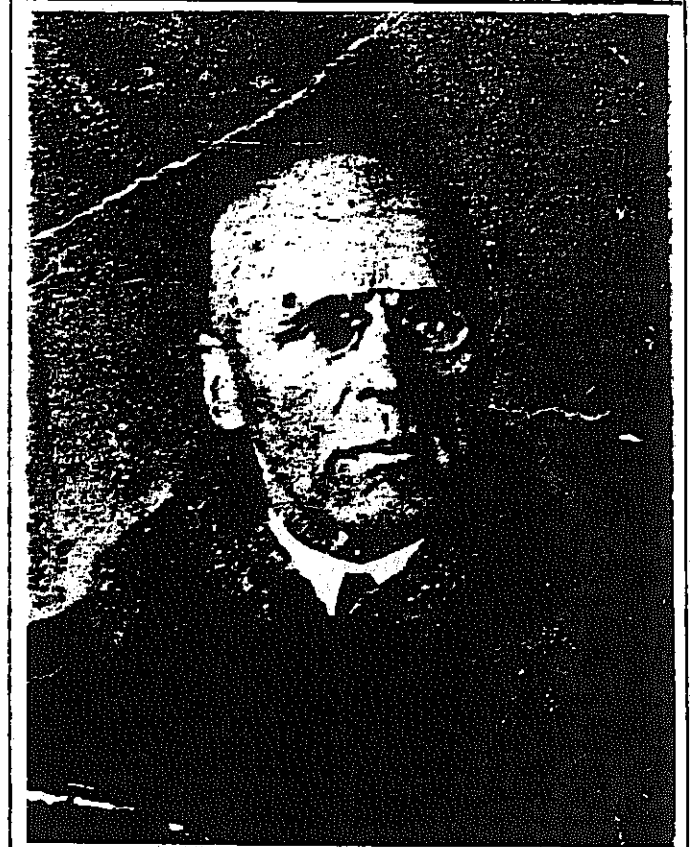
The membership of the trades unions are divided up according to occupation: the unions only had a class struggle perspective at that time, when Capitalism consisted mainly of small and medium scale factories, with a particular hierarchy of skills. But the arrangement of jobs in modern large scale capitalism, in giant enterprises, in horizontal and vertical trusts united at a national level, in a productive milieu of advanced technology and interchangeable categories, changes all this". (from the KAPD pamphlet *Trades Unions to the Rescue of Capitalism*)

(c) The General Workers' Union (AAU) and Factory Organisation (BO)

" The AAU is the first foundation stone in the building of the council organisation. It must thus build itself up in the factories as cells of production. In the factories the proletariat stands next to one another as class comrades. Here the masses stand amongst the machinery of production and the reproduction of society. Here the revolutionising of consciousness can be brought about solely on the basis of class interests, not of capitalist ones: the craft interests of the worker are submerged in his belonging to a mass and this awareness flows in an inexhaustible stream from man to man. The factory organisation is the predetermined cell of the 'Unionen': the 'Unionen' is the organisational unity of these cells. the individual BO - to which the unemployed also belong - are grouped according to geographical and economic areas, these economic areas conforming as far as possible to definite economically interdependent areas." (from the KAPD pamphlet *The General Workers Union*. Berlin 1923.)

As a result of the above mentioned negotiations the KAPD was, in the Autumn of 1920, given a fixed place on the Executive Committee of the Third International. The party also sent its delegates but no kind of practical consequence was attained, even though Bukharin, Radek and others shared, on many points, the criticisms of the conduct of the leaders of the KPD that the KAPD had. But they still promoted the entry of the KAPD membership into the KPD and, above all, activity in Parliament and the trades unions. They thus held the opinion that all that was necessary in order to turn these counterrevolutionary organisations in a revolutionary direction was the activity of real revolutionaries inside them.

They denied the validity of the opposing viewpoint, that from the viewpoint of the development of class struggle these historically bypassed organs could not be revolutionised, but rather this effort would absorb revolutionary energies needed elsewhere: a viewpoint which the KAPD believed it had demonstrated from its daily practice. The remaining six months close contact with Moscow circles allowed us deep insights into the structure of the Russian reconstruction, an understanding of the mentality of the leading as well as the most varied layers of the proletariat. For our delegates were given unlimited freedom of movement.



Herman Gorter

A deep impression was made on the KAPD delegates by the passionate interest which the Russian proletariat took at mass meetings in the events in Germany, all the more so since the Russian proletariat had been greatly confused by Paul Levi's pamphlet against the KPD leadership in the March Action and on the bases of dissent within the leadership between Klara Zetkin and the radical wing led by Reuter Frieslands. In personal discussions with Lenin, it transpired that though he resolutely condemned the general line of Levi, in relation to the March Action he thought him correct. The close touch kept with the non-Russian members of the ECCI showed clearly that though many sections adhered to the Third International out of genuine proletarian enthusiasm, this enthusiasm was not based on a clear Marxist understanding. This was especially clear with regard to the delegates of the English party.

In the summer of 1921 the Third Congress took place and at it the KAPD members Bergman, Hempel, Sachs and Seeman once more took part in the discussions, basing their contributions on the positions of the party, so far as this was possible in the shortened time allowed for speeches, and by the rejection of their proposals.

Apart from these discussions, in one particular case the KAPD were the only foreign delegation which supported the 'Workers Opposition' led by Alexandra Kollontai within the RKP on the question of internal Russian policies. The demand placed on the KAPD at the end of the Congress to merge with the KPD and accept the '21 Theses' was rejected by it. Since the delegation unanimously expressed this position, it was not allowed to say so in open session and at a closed meeting of the ECCI the following statement was read out:

" The KAPD delegates were given a renewed order by the concluding session of the Congress to merge the KAPD with the KPD and also regarding its relationship with the Third International. Fully aware of the seriousness of our responsibility the delegation has come to the following decision unanimously.

The tactical struggle of this Congress against the KAPD has taken the form of a struggle against a political opponent whose arguments were portrayed as useless and whose existence as a political factor was typified as irrelevant. Thus we see:

1) For several weeks the delegates to the Congress received a caricature of the KAPD through distorted articles in the Russian Press, in "Communist International" and in the newspapers of the Congress while our corrections and explanations are not even printed.

2) During the Congress the curtailment of free expression of our opinions was put into operation. The intention of this tactic was made clear at the end when during the discussions of the affairs of the KAPD, we were allowed only half an hour's time to speak. Thus we were forced to refuse in order not to become willing participants in a farce.

This formal behaviour is intimately connected with the political orientation which the Communist International, under the influence of the Russian comrades, is taking. The events of the Congress has shown that the political viewpoint of Paul Levi has triumphed. Formal adherence to the March Action is thus reduced to a revolutionary game. Without any guarantees the Czech party, under the opportunist leadership of Smeral, has been become a full section of the International on the basis of completely empty promises. We have already spoken of the Italian Socialist party, which has just concluded a deal with the Fascists. The principle of participation in bourgeois parliaments has been reaffirmed, despite the sad experience of this tactic in Germany, Austria, France etc., in spite of the caricature of 'revolutionary parliamentarism'. The doomed politics of work inside the old trades unions has been endorsed. This means, in spite of all the phraseology, a capitulation to the Amsterdam International, and has underlined the swindle of economic parliamentarism. The Congress even toyed with the notion of revolutionising the co-operative movement.

This, as is becoming clear to everyone, is a continuation of the path chosen at the Second Congress, the path of error, of abandonment of the revolutionary road for that of reformism, from the path of struggle to the tactics of negotiation and diplomacy, of the glossing over of differences. The protest registered by us to

the protocol on the adoption of the Theses on Tactics gives ample confirmation of this.

These are the considerations around which one must consider the demand for us to merge with the KPD in order to understand that, for the KAPD, such a demand is quite impossible. This merger would mean our submission to a party in the process of disintegrating, and in which, due to the influence of this Congress, reformism is now dominant. Our silencing by use of an organisation hostile to us (using press, finance, leadership cliques) gives no possibility of any kind of healthy entry into such a party on any kind of real basis. From these considerations, and without any other mandate from our party, the opinion of our delegation is that with one voice we refuse to merge with the KPD. In spite of our mandate our exit from the Third International is not the last word: our members will speak for themselves. They themselves will reply to this path of reformism and opportunism. The International proletariat will hear our reply.

We are quite clear about our responsibility to the German working class, towards Soviet Russia, towards the world revolution and they will not let us be bound by the Congress' resolutions. IT lives and goes on its way and we are going with it, 'in the service'."

When the outcome of this Congress was published the KAPD's membership answered with an unequivocal agreement with their delegates. The party formalised its departure from the Comintern on the basis of an almost unanimous agreement of all the individual economic regions.

Together with opposition groups from the Dutch and Bulgarian parties, who had likewise seceded from sections adhering to the Comintern, the Communist Workers International was founded in April 1922 which functioned as an organisation Bureau whose task was the keeping of contact between fraternal parties. The further development of the party will be only briefly mentioned here.

Considering the enormous havoc wreaked by bourgeois class justice in our ranks, the continued existence of the party through the decline of the revolutionary wave is itself a considerable achievement. At this time of defeat the party still regards its main task to be to propagandise among the proletariat and recreate an understanding of the character of the organisations necessary for the revolutionary class struggle and to hold on to the theory that in the next wave of revolution and deepening of proletarian consciousness, the class can only succeed in its tasks by completely breaking with pre-revolutionary methods of pursuing its interests.

Note. Many of the materials mentioned and quoted by Reichenbach are available in English. Some have appeared in *Pannekoek and Gorter's Marxism* edited by D.A. Smart, or in *Pannekoek and the Workers Councils* edited by Serge Brichaner, others have been published by such as the CWO and CBG in issues of their publications. Recently a complete text of Gorter's *Open Letter to Lenin* was published by Wildcat and the CBG has many other KAPD materials translated or in French and German awaiting translation including further pamphlets by Gorter and the complete transcripts of the first three Congresses of the KAPD in German. Aid with translation and publishing would be welcomed from interested readers.

AN OPEN LETTER TO THE C.B.G.

In a text written exactly ten years ago in which I contrasted our situation with that of the Bolshevik party, I wrote:

" In 1903 the Party could afford to pay about thirty full time distributors of ISKRA. (That is considerably larger than many organisations today). By 1905 there were just under 10,000 Bolsheviks. As a result of the Insurrection that rose to 34,000 in 1906. In the same period there were about 14,000 Mensheviks. In the RSDLP as a whole in 1907 there were 84,000 excluding the Bundist, Polish and Lettish sections . . . All this has to set against a total working class population of perhaps 3.5 million."

(Another Look at the Organisation Question. Bulletin Two)

In the founding text of the CBG, I quoted the above extract and added:

" Of course it is not just a question of numbers. The numbers are only an expression of the much more important political reality that the Bolsheviks, and the other revolutionary fractions, were a living part of the class. Noting the size and influence of the revolutionary fractions is merely another way of understanding that revolutionary politics were firmly implanted in the class' own consciousness and tradition.

Today we are almost unimaginably remote from that situation. We are confronted with - at best - a few hundred communists in the whole world attempting to intervene in a working class totally unfamiliar with revolutionary positions and its own revolutionary heritage and which remains totally unaware of our existence . . . We have to be clear that the situation facing us today is unprecedented for revolutionaries prior to a revolution."

(A New Regroupment. Bulletin Three)

If comrades will bear with me, I will quote myself one last time:

" The re-emergence of the revolutionary movement at the end of the Sixties had as its foundation the crucial assumption that 1) the economic crisis of capitalism was world-wide, inescapable and inexorably deepening; 2) in this period the proletariat was an undefeated, revolutionary class and would respond appropriately with the unfolding of the crisis; 3) the revolutionary movement would also grow in size, organisation and its influence on

the class. The past decade has seen the first two assumptions dramatically confirmed whilst the revolutionary fractions of the class remained tiny, fragile and isolated with no indications appearing of the mechanism which will take us from where we are today to the party which will be demanded by the revolutionary upheaval of tomorrow."

(Editorial. Bulletin One)

None of this was written in a defeatist spirit. It was part of an attempt to make a realistic assessment of how best to organise our work and to argue that we could only apply the lessons of the last revolutionary wave if we understood the crucial differences in the two periods. All of it was written virtually a decade ago at a point which stands almost exactly half-way between the first re-emergence of organisations of Left Communism and the present.

Where do we find ourselves today? The economic crisis has certainly deepened and proved inescapable. While the resilience of the major Western economies, particularly in the light of the staggering US budget and trade deficits, has proved surprising, the price has clearly been a catastrophic deepening of crisis in the Third world and the Eastern Bloc, which today stands on the edge of an abyss.

The working class remains undefeated and has maintained a militancy and willingness to fight the escalating onslaught on their standard of living, particularly in Russia and its former satellites. However it is true to say that we have seen a definite and continuing impasse in the maturation of political consciousness within the class. Even the high point of the Polish events, where an ability to sweep aside sectoral divisions and a high degree of self-organisation were displayed, dead-ended in nationalism and the birth of Solidarnosc. Disturbingly the highest levels of militancy in Russia and the Eastern Bloc co-exist with frighteningly strong bourgeois ideologies. Nationalism, ethnic divisions, democratic illusions of parliamentarism and reformism, myths about the benefits of a "free market", all weigh heavily on the proletariat. It is true to say that the development of working class consciousness has been a much more hesitant, lengthy and confused process than we imagined twenty years ago.

However when we turn to the revolutionary milieu we find our original assumption of a process of organisational gains, numerical growth and increasing influence, brutally confounded. In some respects we are actually worse off than we were at the very beginning, twenty years ago. Numerically, my educated guess would be that we have actually experienced a certain amount of shrinkage of the infinitely small several hundreds of the early Seventies. The largest proportion of militants currently active were founder members, or very early recruits, of the existing organisations. Very few new militants have appeared, certainly in the past decade. Today we could probably get every communist militant on a couple of jumbo jets.

Our influence on the class remains what it always was - functionally zero. The world proletariat is ignorant of our existence, let alone our politics. In practical terms, the interventionary work of the milieu as a whole, in terms of papers sold and leaflets distributed, has certainly diminished.

On an organisational level, the milieu has certainly lost ground. The International Conferences begun in 1976, had by 1980 been destroyed by the sectarian manoeuvres of the CWO and Battaglia Comunista. No other forum for fraternal debate and confrontation has appeared. The marriage of Battaglia Comunista and the CWO has dead-ended in embarrassing stagnation. The most important organisation within the milieu, the only one to establish a convincing international presence, the ICC, was almost destroyed by a series of damaging splits. Today, its sectarian, monolithic and paranoid practice has created such antipathy within the milieu, it is no longer a credible focus for regroupment. Within the milieu as a whole, sectarianism and monolithism is compounded by rancour and hostility.

On the question of political clarity, comrades have argued that there are signs of clear degeneration within elements of the milieu, particularly on the question of the party and on the understanding of the fundamental of capitalist decadence.

Part of the programmatic bedrock of the Left Communist milieu is a belief that the leadership of revolutionary fractions is an indispensable part of the revolution. We are not an optional extra, a useful accelerator, we are essential. No matter how militant the class are, no matter how advanced the gains made at any given moment in the heat of the struggle, without the historic overview and programmatic clarity unique to revolutionary fractions, momentary high points must remain cul-de-sacs. We do not believe it possible for a revolutionary programme to be generated spontaneously in the heat of struggle. Without a revolutionary perspective the class, no matter how militant, cannot continue to defend itself on its own terrain.

Without entering into any argument about what precise percentage of the working class is required for revolutionary fractions to be able to carry out their role, it seems beyond debate that a couple of jumbo jets-worth is absolutely inadequate to the task. If the proletariat were to enter its decisive struggles with the current revolutionary milieu, comrades, I think we would have to agree that the game was up. We do not have sufficient numbers and strength to exercise even a homeopathic influence. Even if we were to miraculously acquire the propaganda facilities sufficient to influence a significant fraction of the class, there is no way we could absorb the subsequent influx of worker members. A pre-existing organisational structure is required. The Bolsheviks, with a start of 10,000, managed to cope with an influx of several hundred thousand out of a class of 3.5 million. How could a group of dozens absorb millions?

It was always part of the CBG's understanding that the specificity of the proletariat's existence within the period of capitalism's decadence necessarily meant the isolation of revolutionary fractions from the day to day life of the class. We accepted that that probably meant a relatively smaller revolutionary milieu than in the run up to the last revolutionary wave and that growth would be slow, perhaps largely confined to the aftermath of high points of class struggle. What was

assumed, implicitly, was a dilute version of the process we saw during the period of ascendance. A slow, ongoing accumulation of those elements and individuals attracted to political and revolutionary work fortified by the converting of elements from those sections of the working class won over by our interventionary work at the high points of struggle. In other words, a slow but definite growth linked to a deepening crisis and growing militancy.

In fact, we have seen nothing like that. We have seen no growth, no gradual accumulation. All we have seen through the entire life of this milieu is a trickle of individuals and a handful of grouplets with a handful of members each, in total, insufficient to make up for our losses.

It has to be said that this is not a temporary phenomenon, nor is it confined to the lifetime of the current milieu. Since the death of the last revolutionary wave, throughout the period of decadence, we have never seen the independent emergence of a significant communist movement, capable of influencing and regrouping significant fractions of the working class.

In the history of the proletariat the emergence of such fractions has been confined to the period of ascendance, when revolutionary elements and politics could function alongside and within mass organs of the class, when the fight for the Minimum and Maximum programmes could happily coexist. As a consequence revolutionaries were a living part of the class and its struggles. They were a fighting element in the day to day life of the class. Their militants and their politics were familiar to the class. The revolutionary fractions which led the last revolutionary wave emerged from the decay of the mass organisations of the Second International which regrouped millions of workers. Likewise, the left communist fractions we trace our roots to, emerged from the decay of the mass organisations of the Third International, again regrouping millions of workers. We have seen nothing on that scale since.

Fundamental to our political understanding is the knowledge that mass organs of the class can have no permanent existence outside acts of struggle in the period of decadence. The specific conditions which produced the Bolsheviks and the KAPD will not exist in our period.

The rupture between the class and its revolutionary fractions in decadence has meant the inevitable diminution, if not actual disappearance, of revolutionary perspectives within the ranks of the class. Militancy, the willingness to resist the onslaughts of Capital is an essential prerequisite of the revolutionary process. But of itself it is insufficient. There must also exist at some level within the class, a belief, a knowledge, that everything must change and that change must be located in the interests of the class. The possibility of revolutionary change, of a communist goal must have some currency within the life of the class. The existence of revolutionary fractions is inextricably and dialectically linked to this. The material basis within which that link functioned in the period of ascendance has disappeared. We know the immediate consequences of that - minuscule fractions and an apparent lack of revolutionary perspective to the militancy of the class.

The question is, can we locate the material basis in our own period which will replicate the significant and vital revolutionary milieu of the

past? Comrades might argue that the crisis is not deep enough nor the class struggle sufficiently developed for the necessary favourable conditions. But what are we going to see in the future that we have not already seen at some level already in the past quarter of a century? In the Third World we have seen absolute pauperisation and explosions of mass violence in strikes and food riots. In the industrialised west we have seen the set piece struggles of the industrial proletariat, the steel strikes, the miners strikes, the disappearance of the shipyards etc. We've seen the street riots of the relatively pauperised poor and lumpen proletariat. In the eastern bloc, in Poland we have seen struggles embrace the vast bulk of the working class, sweeping away sectoral divisions and posing the question of state power. None of this has seen the emergence of revolutionary fractions. None of this has produced an increase in the existing milieu. We can expect the future to produce an increase in the scale of these events but can we see a qualitative transformation of them, whilst lacking a significant revolutionary movement? Today the proletariat of Russia and the Eastern bloc stand on the brink of immense conflict on a scale we have not yet seen. They do so

entirely without revolutionary fractions while the flags of nationalism, ethnic division, social democracy etc. are waving in the breeze. Our politics insist that they face at best an impasse and at worst bloody defeat while they are politically disarmed.

Our politics could be wrong of course. Perhaps revolutionary fractions are unnecessary, or can be generated within the revolution itself. But if we stand by our political foundations we are faced with the task of explaining where the revolutionary movement is going to come from, of locating and understanding the mechanism which will produce it and explaining why we have seen no sign of it so far. If we fail to do this we are left with pious hopes that something, somehow will turn up. It seems to me that wishful thinking is not a very impressive addition to the armoury of dialectical materialism.

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