

REVOLUTIONARY PERSPECTIVES 12

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Journal of the C.W.O.



and

JOHN MACLEAN: From Communist to Nationalist

plus

**BRITAIN TODAY • THE WORLD CRISIS
INTERNATIONAL MEETING REPORT
SOME QUESTIONS FOR THE ICC AND CWO**

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USA - DOLLAR CRISIS OR WORLD CRISIS?

Ever since the late 1960s, with the first signs of the approaching economic crisis, the U.S.A., no less than the weaker capitalist states, has been experiencing economic problems which have proved immune to both traditional Keynesian, and the now fashionable monetarist, solutions alike. In 1971 President Nixon devalued the dollar and this marked the end of the post-war Bretton Woods monetary agreement, designed to stabilise the world economy by linking exchange rates in fixed ratios. With the current decline of the dollar on the world's money exchanges the U.S.A. is showing that it too, like its weaker satellite states, must succumb to the effects of the crisis.

Today businessmen and government officials in the U.S. worry about the same problems that we are familiar in Britain; a lack of investment in industry, massive unemployment (over 7 millions) and an inflation rate creeping up to double digits. The attempt to resolve the crisis by a colossal expansion of domestic credit has led inevitably, at a time of slowing capital accumulation, to the depreciation of the dollar. Carter's failure, in the eyes of the international bourgeoisie, to put his own house in order, led, at the end of October, to massive sales of dollars by international creditors which precipitated an even more rapid decline in the dollar itself. With a balance of payments deficit of \$24 billion and a sagging currency, the U.S.A. is now clearly one of the sick men of the capitalist world.

But even though every country is now feeling the effects of the crisis, the recent dramatic fall of the dollar did not herald a round of competitive devaluations and subsequent erection of tariff barriers, as similar devaluations did in the last crisis in the 1930s. The international bourgeoisie have learned from history and know that trade wars precipitate economic collapse and eventually lead to world war. At the moment the bourgeoisie is straining every nerve to prevent a repetition of the 1930s situation. The stronger countries in the Western bloc (West Germany, Switzerland and Japan) began to talk of the "under-valuation" of the dollar in November and intervened with their Central Banks to support it, in return for the promise of "tougher" anti-inflation measures inside the United States. Thus, the U.S. Federal Reserve Board instituted a credit squeeze by taking \$3 billion out of circulation and in return Switzerland and Germany stemmed the fall of the dollar by increasing their dollar holdings. By making use of international "swap lines" and the Bank of International Settlements, Switzerland increased its dollar holdings from 1.4 billion to 4 billion, and the Bundesbank increased its dollar holdings from 4 billion to 6 billion. In addition, both countries are expanding credit in their own countries by purchasing a combined 925 million S.D.R.s (Special Drawing Rights) in U.S. dollars. The overall effect of all these moves is to boost the value of the U.S. dollar and to give America a breathing space by transferring some of the burden of the crisis from its own shoulders to those of the stronger of her client states. The latter, by holding devalued dollars and increasing domestic credit, will now be faced with renewed inflationary pressures.

Such international "stabilising" measures cannot resolve the contradictions of capitalism which caused the crisis, but they do mean that its effects are being "equalised" throughout the nations comprising the international economy. Whilst for the bourgeoisie, equalisation is a means to try and avert trade wars and economic collapse, for the proletariat it is creating the situation where every section of the

class, irrespective of nationality, is experiencing similar cuts in its living standards and rising unemployment. (Note, for example, that the West Germany economy is proving to be equally susceptible to the crisis as the recent strikes and lock-outs in the steel industry show.) This equalisation of the effects of the crisis can only help to lay the basis for an international revolutionary response by the proletariat.

At the same time as the U.S. bourgeoisie is asking its client states to share some of the burdens of the crisis, it is asking the American working class to do the same. The Carter administration has recently followed the example set by the British Labour government of imposing sanctions against companies which break pay and price guidelines. Workers in the U.S.A. are being asked to accept cuts in their living standards by restricting wage claims to 7% when inflation is officially at 9%. But such measures are doomed to fail in the U.S., just as they have in the U.K. and elsewhere.

As world capitalism staggers on, and all attempts to find a solution to the crisis are tried and found wanting, the deepening of the crisis will eventually push capitalism towards an inevitable build up for world war. Despite the reopening of Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT) the imperialist powers have already begun to make tentative steps towards political preparation for war. The recent ditching of Taiwan in favour of China by the U.S. is perhaps the most striking example of this. China has already rewarded the U.S. by attempting to woo Romania from the Soviet bloc. There is yet some time before these political preparations are followed by serious military preparation. Ultimately, however, the only obstacle to the capitalists' "final solution" to the crisis is the world working class - the only class which can resolve the crisis - by the destruction of capitalism itself. And the American workers have once again taken the road of struggle. Following on the recent miners' strike, struggles have broken out amongst municipal workers, postal workers and West coast pulp and paper workers. The American bourgeoisie may soon discover that its economic measures have roused a sleeping giant.

UK: THE MIXTURE AS BEFORE

In "Britain, Marking Time" (Revolutionary Perspectives 11) we surveyed the rash of strikes occurring in Autumn 1978, and asked whether a new wave of class struggle was beginning. But the limited nature of most of the strikes then showed that the initiative still lay with the bourgeoisie. Since then, the strike movement has intensified; were we too pessimistic three months ago? Has the class wrenched the political initiative from the hands of the ruling class and its functionaries?

Had the present ripple of class struggle turned, or threatened to turn, into a wave, then the bourgeoisie would have responded by calling an election where the trades unions would have attempted to defuse any class movement and channel it into a campaign for the return of a Labour government. This would have resulted in either a Conservative regime with a "democratic" mandate for anti-working class repression; or in another Labour government, strengthened, and with its policies for a 5% ceiling on wages endorsed by "public opinion", able to pick off any isolated section of the class and capable of steeling itself for renewed struggle. The fact that no such election took place shows that the

ruling class still feels in command of the situation.

The strikes which have occurred since our last issue confirm this. Although these have often been bitter struggles, lasting, as in the case of the Ford's dispute, several weeks, none of them have threatened to break out of the union jail, or have contained the possibility of being the springboard for a general class movement. In contrast, for example, to the struggles in Britain in the years 1972-74, the two vital aspects of a positive class movement were missing; these are a tendency for regional, craft and industrial barriers to be broken down, and a tendency for the creation of independent class organisations, such as strike committees, flying pickets, etc.

In the Ford's struggle itself in October/November the 55,000 workers never challenged union control of the strike or negotiations, or of the unions' (the AUEW and the T&GWU) sectional approach to the struggle, which emphasised that Ford's could pay a 15% wage rise. Ford is now the only profitable car company in the U.K., and since the others clearly cannot afford a similar rise (witness Vauxhall's offer of 8%), such an approach does nothing to prepare the basis for class unity. And just as the Ford's workers accepted 15% with "strings" passively, so too did those at Vauxhall accept the deal negotiated by the union without a fight.

Other sections of the class too have engaged in struggle since we last wrote. Probably the most successful (in the short term) was that of the B.B.C. workers, who, by hitting the radio and T.V. networks at Christmas, gained a 12% deal. But the most positive, in terms of militancy, was that of the bakery workers, which saw much violence on the picket lines between strikers, police and scab labour. This industry is divided between giant companies, and small workshops which are traditionally strike-free. The bakery workers' union did its best to prevent pickets closing down the non-striking bakeries by force, and this, plus police protection of scabs, helped to defeat the strike. Here again, however, the workers failed to go beyond the union during the strike, or to reject the union-management agreement to end it. At the moment the most serious headaches for capitalism are the unofficial strike of lorry drivers in northern Britain and the oil delivery workers' work-to-rule. At the time of writing, the oil drivers are considering the compromise formula agreed to by their union and the oil companies.

The British working class at the moment is sufficiently restless and combative to force the trades unions to defuse the situation by calling for strikes or other actions, which lead to settlements which lessen the impact of inflation (though still lowering living standards). It is not yet sufficiently combative to go beyond the unions and wage a generalised struggle which would lead it to confront the capitalist state. When the unions and employers cannot even deliver their paltry 5%, the workers will be forced to take the road of independent class-wide struggle which will be the first step along a road leading eventually to a class-wide struggle for power.

Death to the Shah?

or

Death to Capitalism?

It is only a few years since Shahanshah (King of Kings) Mohammed Reza Pahlavi invited the world's rulers to witness his lavish celebrations of 2,500 years of unbroken despotism in Iran. Today an explosive mixture of riots, demonstrations and strikes threatens to end that despotism.

The demonstrations have hit all Iran's major cities, the largest being that on Ashura (December 10th) which involved one million Tehranis. Such demonstrations have often become riots, attacking buildings such as banks and cinemas, symbols of western imperialism. Not the least explosive element has been the action of the Iranian working class. Not one sector of industry has escaped strikes, and there have been particularly important movements in the oil industry, airports, banking, transport, electricity supplies, the metallurgical industries, and the postal and telecommunication services.

The demands of the strikers and demonstrators have been similar in many respects; the abolition of SAVAK (the secret police) and amnesty for political prisoners, a return to the parliamentary constitution of 1906, freedom of the press and expulsion of foreigners. All these are overshadowed, however, by the single, recurrent demand of "Death to the Shah!"

THE MATERIAL BASIS OF THE PRESENT DISCONTENTS

Whilst the demands of the demonstrators have been entirely nationalistic, the basis for the present upheaval lies with the impact of the world economic crisis on the Iranian economy. The Shah's boast of the highest economic growth rate in the world, his building of impressive monuments to his dynasty, were all tolerated so long as the better future he promised seemed to have some chance of success. Today the bogus nature of his claims has been harshly felt by the Iranian masses.

Around 75% of the population have less than the minimum level of income for bare existence. Half of all families earn around 50p a week and live in hovels and shanty towns, whilst an ordinary two roomed flat in Tehran costs £500 a month. Unemployment is at 25%, creating a sub-proletariat in the shanty towns which surround the big cities, and inflation is running at 30%. Iran is a living example of what we mean when we say that economic development is impossible under a capitalist system which is more and more visibly in decay. (1) When capitalism was a growing economic system in the 19th century it found no difficulty in expanding production and developing outlying areas. Capitalism had to expand or die, possessed of a dynamism produced by its own contradictions, the result of the falling rate of profit. However, each expansion only increases the tendency for the rate of profit to fall, and thus each expansion only makes death more certain. Today no state, however oil rich, can break on to the world market in the manner of Britain, Germany or even Italy in the 19th century. The composition of capital is so high, the costs of investing in productive forces (not to mention the cost of providing an infrastructure) so great, that not even a country which earned £828.7 millions in oil revenue in 1977 can diversify and

(1) For an explanation of decadence, see out texts in R.P.2 and R.P.10 "The Economic Foundations of Capitalist Decadence" and "The Meaning of Decadence"

develop its economy.

It is now three quarters of a century since oil was discovered in Iran, and a quarter of a century since the oil industry was nationalised, yet in that time no meaningful economic development has taken place in the country. It is not that "the oil boom has been mismanaged" (Financial Times), rather it is today impossible to generate the necessary mass of profit to industrialise a backward economy. In the same year that £828.7 millions were earned by the oil industry, only £18.8 millions were earned by other exports. These consisted mainly of traditional products such as textiles, opium and caviar, whilst the main new export was washing powder to China! In fact the Shah's dream of Iran being a superpower by 1990 has been rudely shattered. About 60% of all projects started in the Fifth Five Year Plan (1973-8) have been dropped. In the key areas of steel and petrochemicals heavy investment has had poor returns; the steel industry was supposed to reach an output of 25 million tons by the 1980s, but has not yet surpassed 1.9 million tons, while the petrochemical industry, far from being an export earner, still cannot meet domestic requirements. Moreover, most of these new industries only survive through massive subsidies from the oil revenue; when they collapse, so will this artificially maintained industrialisation. As one Iranian businessman stated,

"What's going to happen to us when the oil revenue runs out in twenty five years? Are we going to live off pistachios and carpets? ... What's Iran going to make that the world will want? An oil-less Iran will be worse off than Bangladesh. At least they still know how to grow food for themselves. We would have forgotten how to even do that." (Quoted in Observer magazine 22.10.78)

Typically, this bourgeois laments over problems for which he sees no cause or cure.

Capitalist decadence is not only about the failure of economic development, but also about the development of economic failure; nowhere is truer than in Iran today. The oil wealth and the promise of high wages in industry has attracted Iran's agricultural labourers to the cities in the past fifteen years. Whilst most of them have ended up eking out a miserable existence in the shanty towns, the old labour-intensive agricultural system has collapsed. The underground irrigation system has silted up, and in only ten years Iran has passed from being an exporter of grain to importing 30% of its needs. Much of the damage can be traced to the Shah's agricultural "reforms" of 1963. These were used by the Shah to undermine the social basis of the landed oligarchy (which now supports the National Front), but far from being progressive, this type of land parcellation is reactionary, though it was highly popular amongst the Iranian peasantry. The Shah hoped to create a peasant backing for himself in the manner of Napoleon III. Economically, the reform led to a diminution of the productive forces, since about 40% of the land was given to peasant owners with less than 11 hectares each. The failure of the petrochemical industry to provide sufficient fertiliser, as well as the Shah's plans to solve the irrigation problem made matters worse. The giant Dez dam, for example, was supposed to irrigate 100,000 hectares but has only managed to irrigate 18,000 and Iran's area of cultivated land diminishes each year. Today it is not much greater than it was under Cyrus the Great in 550 B.C.!

THE IMPERIALIST IMPERATIVE

"By 'imperialism' we do not mean war, conquest or annexation in general - such a definition "explains" nothing because it "explains" everything - from the conquest policy of Alexander the Great to that of Russia and the U.S." (R.P. 2, page 34)

Iran has seen at least three different forms of "imperialism". In the first place the Iranian Empire was built on the "Asiatic mode of prod-

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uction", where the Shah's despotism acted as the centralising force necessary to hold together a huge underground irrigation system. The Empire of the ancient Persians was destroyed, not by its internal contradictions which produced a new dynamic class, but, due to its very static nature, it was conquered from the outside by a more dynamic civilization.

Imperialism is conditioned by the mode of production, or even by the stage of development of the mode of production. When Russia defeated the Shah in 1813, it brought the Tsars into conflict with the British Empire in India. At this point the capitalist system was still at its youthful beginning - and had not yet even entered Russia which was feudal - so for neither power was domination of Iran imperative. The interests of both were to have a neutral buffer zone between their empires in order to avoid war.

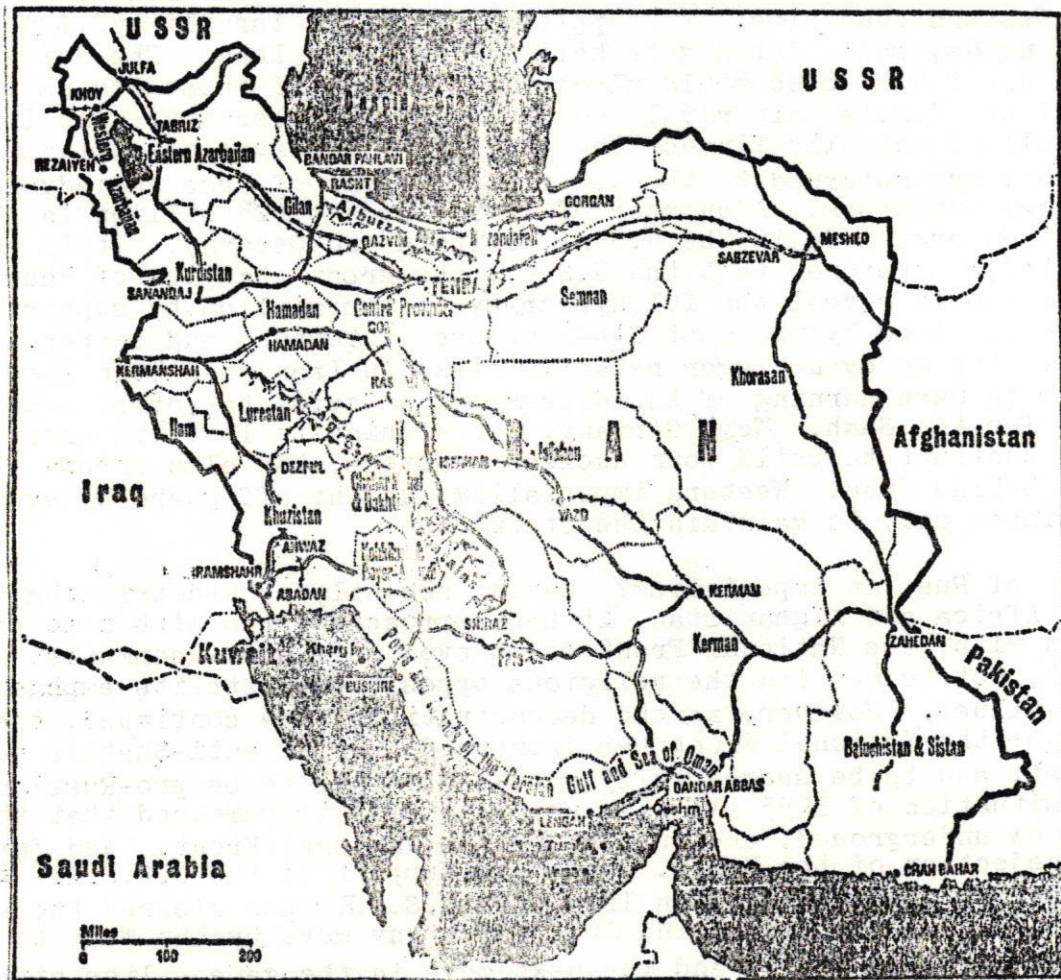
However, by 1870 British capitalism had reached its apogee. Whereas the early search for colonies in the 18th century had been merely to maximise the mass of profit on commercial capital, often simply by looting or by onerous taxation, the new imperialism was dictated by other considerations. The diminution of living labour in the productive forces, and the swollen organic composition of capital, in a situation where several capitalist powers were competing with each other in the world economy, brought capitalist competition to that between nation states, often to the point of armed force. Now imperialism needed to offset the falling rate of profit by investing in the extraction of cheap raw materials in the backward areas, and also by using them as markets for the maximisation of the surplus value realised from each product.

From 1873 onwards, British interests in Iran changed from those of strategy to those of economic necessity. Russia fell behind in this race since her economic development was unable to match that of Britain. By their policies of granting concessions in tobacco, opium transport, textiles and banking, the successive Shahs became the agents of British imperialism, and Iran a British colony in all but name between 1870 and 1914. However, the real attraction of Iran for imperialism came with the development of the oil-fired internal combustion engine. Britain was the first to benefit from oil concessions, since the Shah was heavily in debt to British bankers. The Anglo-Persian Oil Company was formed in 1902, and nationalised immediately before World War One, as it was essential for military purposes. Any pretence that Iran was a junior partner in this was dispelled during the war, when both British and Russian troops occupied Iran along the lines of a partition agreement of 1907. The aim of the occupants was to prevent the Turks taking the oil installations at the behest of their allies, German imperialism, and to maintain the Shah as a puppet against the threats posed by pro-German Iranian nationalists.

This was a pattern which was to be repeated in 1941, when the present Shah's father, Reza Shah, sought an all-Aryan alliance with the Nazis and the British and Russians invaded to prevent this; after three days the Iranian army capitulated to the Russians. The invasion of Iran was essential for Allied imperialism, since the country was needed as a supply route for aid to Russia. Additionally, in 1941 it looked as though Hitler might break through from north Africa to the oil rich areas of the Middle East. Reza Shah saw a chance to shake off British imperialism, feeling that German imperialism would be less onerous. The British forced him to abdicate in favour of his son, who was so much a puppet that he and his government were not even told of the Tehran Conference between Roosevelt, Churchill and Stalin in 1942.

With Hitler defeated the Allied thieves soon began to fall out over the domination of the globe, and Iran became a focal point in this struggle. During this struggle the tactics of the two major imperialisms were determined by their respective military and economic strengths. The U.S., with its economic strength undamaged by the war, felt confident enough to withdraw its troops, even when the British announced that they could no longer afford to keep their army of occupation in Iran. British

imperialism was now thoroughly exhausted, and could only function as a client state of the U.S.A. In the oilfields the U.S. share increased in relation to the British. Russia, on the other hand, with its weaker economy, could not hope to compete in Iran with the U.S. and at first sought to keep its troops in Iran, and backed pro-Soviet breakaway regimes in Azarbaijan and Kurdistan, controlled by the pro-Moscow Tudeh party. But after warnings from the U.S., Stalin withdrew his support from these breakaway regimes and respected the letter of the Yalta agreements which left Iran in the Western orbit (though of no direct danger to Russia, since foreign bases were prohibited in Iran). So, instead of engaging in dubious battle with the U.S., Russia exchanged her occupation of northern Iran for an oil concession in 1946, and the Tudeh invited the Shah back into Kurdistan and Azarbaijan. The oil concession was later cancelled.



IRAN AND WESTERN IMPERIALISM

U.S. imperialism's victory in Iran was completed by 1953. The Shah was forced to accept a parliamentary regime under the 1906 constitution. In 1951 the Iranian Nation Front came to power, with the backing of the religious leaders. Representing the nationalist, rather than the comprador section of the bourgeoisie, the National Front nationalised the oil industry against the opposition of the Shah. Violent street demonstrations in favour of Mussadegh, the Front's leader, forced the Shah to leave the country. But Mussadegh soon found himself out on a limb. He was a rabid nationalist who wanted to deliver the coup de grace to British imperialism, and a rabid anti-"communist", who hated the Russians. He wanted to consolidate U.S. influence in Iran, but his policy of nationalisations worried the U.S.A. Abandoned by all imperialisms, it was easy for the C.I.A. to come to the Shah's aid and organise a military coup to

overthrow the National Front. America now poured in financial and military aid to the Shah who has been loyal to the interests of U.S. imperialism ever since. However, this does not express the full totality of Iran's importance for, and dependence on, Western imperialism.

In the first place, Iran is central to the West's encirclement of Russia, with which it has a 1,000 mile common border. The U.S. has recently established an advanced early warning system in the mountains above Tehran, and the Iranian army, the most advanced technically in the world after the super powers, is expected to keep a check on pro-Soviet regimes in Afghanistan and Iraq. Iran is also the key member of the Central Treaty Organisation. In short, despite the absence of American combat troops, Iran is a military outpost of U.S. imperialism.

In the second place, Iran's oil is crucial to the economies of a number of key Western countries. It supplies almost all Israeli and South African needs, while Japan gets half her oil from Iran. The defection of Iran to the Soviet bloc would place the lifeline of these states in the hands of the U.S.'s main rival and could not be tolerated. And Iran's petro-dollars actually finance the short-term survival of capitalism, since they are returned to the West in the forms of arms and advanced technology purchases. A quarter of Iran's budget (\$8 billion in 1977) is spent on arms made in the U.S.A., Britain and Germany. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that the U.S.A., the great champion of "human rights", should reveal the full hypocrisy of imperialism by supporting a regime maintained by the most flagrant use of torture and terror. Britain, with an even bigger relative stake in Iran, has been less equivocal, with Owen warning of the dangers of a Soviet takeover, and pledging support for the Shah. West Germany, not wishing to lose its arms sales and the contract to build four nuclear reactors, has also thrown its support behind Iran. Western imperialism, caught off guard by events in Iran, wishes only to maintain the status quo.

And what of Russian imperialism? Having recently scored triumphs in the Horn of Africa and Afghanistan, it has approached Iran with some caution. To begin with, the National Front seems even more anti-"communist" than the Shah, not to mention the religious opposition, with its emphasis on Islamic values. However, as the demonstrations have continued, the dilemma of the National Front has increased. To be anti-Shah is to be anti-West, and to be successfully anti-West means to be pro-Russian. It is the situation of 1953 all over again, and it is rumoured that the Tudeh, now underground, are supporting the National Front. And for the Front, rejection of the U.S.A. must mean support of the U.S.S.R. As the mass movement has increased in Iran, the U.S.S.R. has cleared the ground for its next move by denouncing in advance any move by the West to save the Shah. But his fate - and the next move in the game - lies with the U.S.A.

CLASS COLLABORATION OR CLASS STRUGGLE

The Shah's attempts to save himself have so far taken every conceivable form. On September 7th he introduced martial law, whilst at the same time announcing measures of liberalisation. One thousand political prisoners were released, gambling casinos were closed to placate Muslim law and the activities of the notoriously corrupt family of the Shah curtailed. In addition, corrupt officials are being tried and the Shah has, like all autocrats, sought to blame the country's woes on his subordinates by arresting his former Prime Minister, Hoveida and the leader of the secret police, Nassiri. This, and the use of brutality in which untold hundreds, perhaps thousands, have been killed, has done nothing to end the opposition.

The Shah can't rely on martial law for ever and even now the death toll is enormous. In addition, the repeated strikes and violence have led to the flight of foreign technicians and capital, thus making worse the economic crisis which brought about the riots in the first place. One

of the chief reasons for the protracted nature of the crisis is because imperialism simply has not known what to do. Whilst most other "trouble spots" in the world today are created as offshoots of the imperialist struggle for the globe (Would there, for example, be a guerrilla movement against the Rhodesian government if it were not for the provision of arms by the Soviet Union?), neither of the leaders of the imperialist blocs wanted Iran to become unstable. The present crisis is almost solely the creation of the global crisis of world capital. Both imperialisms would have liked to preserve the status quo; Russia because the Shah is a rather inactive opponent(1) and therefore any other government might be worse; and the U.S.A. because they don't want to lose control of an entirely committed Western regime. However, the status quo has already been shaken and the U.S.S.R. has prepared its first moves in the new game. The U.S.A. would ideally like to keep the Shah and will continue to support him until it seems finally impossible for him to continue. When this happens the C.I.A. will turn, as it did in 1953, to the army.

The army appears to be the key to the situation. The demonstrators can't get at the Shah until the army either crumbles or goes over to the opposition. Hitherto, the army officer caste has remained fanatically loyal to the Shah who, by use of a special secret police, has previously prevented the emergence of an opposition among the officers. In addition, they have been pampered with the best toys of destruction in the world and they do not want to have their 25% share of the national budget cut. Thus, they have continued to defend the Shah. However, half the 450,000 strong army are conscripts and they have not reflected the loyalty of their masters. Already there are reports of mutinies and barracks massacres, though the only public evidence so far has been the revolt of twenty-five soldiers in Tabriz (Azarbaijan) who massacred their officers. If these mutinies increase then the officers must act to save their own position. To this end they are likely to seek the support of the C.I.A. and American imperialism in order to depose the Shah and produce a government which will maintain the privileged position of the officer caste.

Once the army removes the Shah it will be in a position to drive wedges between the religious opposition as led by Khomeini, the ayatollah exiled in 1963, and the National Front which is backed by the agricultural and bazaar interests. Already the alliance is rather unsteady as many of Khomeini's rival ayatollahs support the National Front. The religious movement has taken on a mass character and now even the National Front is calling for Islamic law to be restored. (Only the ayatollahs can criticise the Shah without fear of arrest and this has led to the religious leaders becoming the focus of the popular resistance.) Khomeini has never mediated with the Shah and has thus become a symbol of the masses. However, if the Shah was overthrown the National Front would be likely to return to supporting U.S. imperialism in return for a share in power. It is not beyond the C.I.A. to arrange this marriage and Khomeini, without a practical alternative, would soon lose his mass support. If the army deposes the Shah, the National Front will return to the American orbit; if civil war erupts, the National Front will be driven towards the Russians.

The one class which has no interest in whichever faction rules Iran is that class which has lost more lives and done more to bring down the Shah than any other. Iran's workers will have to face the same system of exploitation whoever rules in Iran in the months ahead. Whilst it was possible in the nineteenth century for the workers to unite with the national bourgeoisie against the feudal order, today the workers have no interests within the present system. Their only interest is to destroy it once and for all.

(1) To the extent that China's Hua Kuo Feng tried to get him to be more aggressively anti-Soviet when he visited Tehran last summer.

The particular tragedy of Iran is that the workers, through class solidarity between groups of workers and intransigence in the face of State repression, are carrying out the form of a proletarian struggle, yet the content of their struggle has been totally bourgeois. Slogans like "Freedom and National Independence", "Foreigners Out", and demands for amnesties, freedom of expression and all the other hypocracies of the Iranian bourgeoisie have nothing whatever to do with the proletariat's interests. Equally reactionary has been the attempt by Iranian leftists to try to capture the "yellow" trades unions. Trades unionism today is a reactionary mystification which has nothing to do with forwarding working class interests. It is an attempt by the bourgeoisie to impose order on the class struggle in order to control it. Today one of the reasons for the combativity of the Iranian workers is the lack of "effective" (for the bourgeoisie) trade unions which would negotiate away a class movement and prevent it from learning that the real enemy is the capitalist state.

No autonomous movement appears to be emerging in Iran. Although ad hoc strike committees have been formed in the oil industry, it is only councilists who would praise the form in abstraction from the content of a movement. The first real autonomous act is for the proletariat to fight on its own ground. So far, xenophobia rather than anything approximating to an independent class movement has emerged. This is illustrated by a couple of leaflets which have reached us. In one, Tabriz car workers have declared their support for the "Islamic revolutionary movement" and conclude with the words "For a strong solidarity between workers and all the Islamic movements of the world"! In the other, issued by the Union of Revolutionary Islamic Workers of Iran, the message is clear: "the butchers of the Pahlavi regime must know that they can't stop the Islamic revolution and its leader Khomeini ..." When it is remembered that Khomeini has frequently called for industrial sabotage and, unlike the National Front, has never called for "law and order", it is not surprising that the class struggle in Iran has taken the road of religious mystification.

This criticism of the nature of the Iranian workers' movement is not made simply to dismiss it, but to draw a clear perspective for revolutionaries not only in Iran but everywhere. The Iranian working class is still inexperienced in its struggles and as such it has not been difficult for one bourgeois faction to pretend that all theills of capitalism are caused by another. This, however, is a manoeuvre which the bourgeoisie cannot repeat too often. Once this struggle is over and Iran's workers begin to assimilate the lessons it will not be long before they produce their own class conscious minorities ready to fight for real autonomy. Only then will the mystifying slogans like "Death to the Shah" be replaced by the only proletarian slogan "Death to Capitalism".

SOME COMMENTS AND QUESTIONS FOR THE ICC AND CWO

C.W.O. INTRODUCTION

For some time the C.W.O. has been engaged in political exchanges with a comrade in Seattle, U.S.A., on various issues of revolutionary politics. The comrade was involved for some time with a political discussion circle in Seattle, which engaged in political debate with the International Communist Current (I.C.C.). Recently, some members of the discussion circle indicated their decision to move towards the I.C.C. (See Internationalism 16). The comrade in question felt this to be a premature decision, and wanted to engage in further political clarification, widening the debate to include the politics of other groups such as the C.W.O. In an effort to do this he sent us various texts, including the one printed here, to which we add our reply attempting to clarify the issues raised. We feel that this serious effort at political clarification merits a response not only from ourselves, but also from the I.C.C.

SOME COMMENTS AND QUESTIONS FOR THE I.C.C. AND THE C.W.O.

1. Economics

The political program of the proletariat is not based upon an economic theory. It is based upon the material interests and historic experience of the proletariat. Economic theory is a key to understanding the interests and experience of the class. Economic theory considered by itself is a method that is not really being applied. Likewise in evading economic theory it remains a method unutilised.

Making reference to an economic theory (e.g. saturated markets) while refusing to elaborate on it presents unanswered questions. It leaves a mysterious aspect to the decadence of capitalism. One can see from historical experience that there is a pattern of crisis, war and reconstruction but it is hard to understand why without some understanding of economic theory. To label interest in that theory as academicism and differences over that theory as sectarianism strikes me as a convenient means of sidestepping what is an essential element to developing a coherent political perspective.

I think that the study of economic theory must be an ongoing part of the activity of revolutionaries. It is not a preliminary step to becoming a revolutionary though it is part of the preliminary process of clarification required for one to achieve the coherent perspective needed to actively intervene in the class. The current sketchiness of my economic understanding is a definite roadblock to political clarification. At one point we undertook the study of Capital in order to improve our economic understanding. This was repeatedly criticised by the I.C.C. without any definite alternative course of economic study being proposed. In addition to specific points and questions raised in this text I would like to raise a more general question of how best to approach an understanding of basic Marxist economic theory.

For the I.C.C., decadence is based upon the inability of surplus value to be realised within the capitalist market. The falling rate of profit intensifies this basic contradiction by requiring even greater output:

"... the threat of the falling rate of profit forces capitalism to develop the means to constantly accumulate capital and thus to acquire new markets. Increasing the volume of production, which is only possible with the acquisition of new markets, constitutes the principal means of counteracting the falling rate of profit." (Decadence of Capitalism, p.19, emphasis mine.)

Hence the global expansion of capitalism exhausted these necessary new markets bringing on the period of capitalist decadence.

Unfortunately this basic contradiction is never adequately explained. In the "Texts and Proceedings of the International Conference" on page 44 we are told: "Under capitalism the problem of realising surplus value can't be resolved by the consumption of the workers."

This is the same basic assertion often used without theoretical elaboration. Closer examination raises serious questions regarding its validity and without further clarification it can only be rejected. To demonstrate that "the inherent contradictions of capitalism are centred and manifested at the level of the market" (Decadence of Capitalism, p.20) you must show that the producer goods purchased by the capitalists of Department I and II cannot equal the total product of Department I or that the consumer goods purchased by the workers and capitalists of Department I plus those purchased by the workers and capitalists of Department II cannot equal the total product of Department II. I haven't seen this demonstrated by the I.C.C. The C.W.O. has raised some historical points which challenge the asserted relationship of new markets to the realisation of surplus value necessary for continued accumulation.

"To argue that capital accumulation is possible in a closed system is best validated by the accumulation of capital in Russia from 1921 to 1941. In this period of fastest economic growth in Russia, it virtually withdrew from the world market ... Also there is no correlation as is claimed by Internationalism between the proportion of exports in the social product and the proportion of surplus earmarked for capitalisation." (R.P. 1, page 13)

In relationship to this period, how significant were the "grants of capital and equipment ... made to Russia" by Germany and the "widespread military, economic and political relations between the countries that continued till 1933, in fact till 1940"? (R.P. 4, page 29) Also, the "large orders with industry in Britain to help rebuild Russian industry" (R.P. 4, page 28) resulting from the Anglo-Soviet trade agreement of March 1921? I am interested in some further elaboration on this question of capital accumulation in a closed system in Russia from 1921-41.

Though the C.W.O. has been more direct in dealing with the economic functioning of capitalist decadence and have been more careful to explain the concepts they introduce, there are still some problems for the person basically unfamiliar with Marxist economic theory. It is difficult to come to a general understanding of capitalist crisis simply from the articles of R.P. I do understand how competition forces an increase in the organic composition of capital (c/v) and that with a constant rate of exploitation (s/v) this increase in the organic composition of capital involves a falling rate of profit ($s/c+v$). I can also see that the falling rate of profit eventually approaches an absolute limit where further accumulation would take all the surplus value produced. Is this then what marks decadence? How do you explain crises short of this point?

In "Texts and Proceedings of the International Conference" on page 44 the I.C.C. asks: "how are we to explain wars if the problem of capitalism is limited solely to the level of production?" I think this can be answered by the falling rate of profit. War is an understandable response to decadence because of the role of foreign trade in tending to counteract the falling rate of profit. This is not necessarily a question of realising surplus value but rather of maximising surplus value. Trading with a national capital with a lower organic composition results in a flow of value to the capital of higher organic composition. This phenomena involves the process of the equalisation of the rate of profit which is a process which I don't recall the I.C.C. discussing. As economic stagnation increases so too do imperialist rivalries (greater need for foreign trade to offset the falling rate of profit and facilitate renewed capital accumulation) leading to the

ultimate capitalist solution of war. War does produce a devaluation of capital through its physical destruction thus giving capital breathing space (period of reconstruction) for further growth. Eventually a higher organic composition of capital results in renewed crisis.

2. The Degeneration of the Russian Revolution, the Nature of the State in the Transitional Period and the Role of the Party in the Class-wide Organs.

I think that the period of war communism entailed a dismantling of capitalism. This isn't to say that communism had been achieved overnight. Obviously the establishment of priorities and the allocation of resources in the midst of a civil war within an isolated proletarian state facing the hostility of the capitalist world will be quite different than within a world communist community. Nevertheless economic policies in this period are extremely important. It is not merely a question of the proletariat holding state power but rather using that power to attack capitalist relations of production in spite of the limitations of the period. If workers councils renege in the task of dismantling capitalism they will embark on the same path as a strike committee that outlives a strike.

The N.E.P.* didn't constitute the reinstatement of capitalism in that capitalism never had been totally destroyed but it did involve the re-institution of capitalism in that it marked the abandonment of the task of dismantling capitalism which had begun. I don't think the N.E.P. constituted a mistake for the proletariat. Rather it reflected the defeat of the proletariat. Likewise the repression at Kronstadt was not a mistake of the class but rather signified its defeat. Trade agreements with capitalist states and alliances with European social democratic parties were consistent with the economic policies of the N.E.P. and the use of the state apparatus to slaughter the proletariat (Kronstadt). These major historic events are as clear an indication as is possible that the proletariat had been defeated.

Though workers councils are the base of the proletarian state they can create specific organs to carry out particular tasks. The proletarian state includes the workers councils and the agencies it creates. These specific agencies as creations of the workers councils are subordinate to them and constitute organs of the working class. Though the proletarian state is not merely the workers councils, it remains dominated by the workers councils and there is no reason to separate the dictatorship of the proletariat from the dictatorship of the proletarian state. The proletarian state is defined by the activity of the proletariat and constitutes the formal means through which the proletariat exercises domination over this transitional society.

Establishing territorial soviets which provide representation to non-proletarian elements seems to reflect a different concept of the state. It seems to give the state a function of mediating between classes rather than destroying classes through the absorption of all of society into the proletariat which dominates through the state. It is not by separating itself from the state but rather by dominating the state that the proletariat protects its interests and carries out its historic task.

There is no contradiction between being a member of the revolutionary party and a member of the class. Party members can participate in the organs of the class without coming into conflict with the class. Through its active participation in the organs of the class the revolutionary party strengthens rather than weakens the class. The revolutionary party is not an end in itself. It is part of the class and ultimately responsible to the class. Its active participation in

* The New Economic Policies inaugurated by the Bolshevik Party in 1921

classwide organs does not constitute substitutionism. You cannot guarantee the vitality of the class by drawing artificial lines between the proletariat, the proletarian state and the revolutionary party.

3. Class Lines, Open Questions and the Process of Regroupment.

Class lines represent the lessons learned by the proletariat historically in its struggles. They are based on the experience of the class and indicate where its activity moves it away from its own historic task and onto the terrain of the bourgeoisie. The revolutionary party as the most conscious expression of the experience of the class fights uncompromisingly for these basic class positions. However, as crucial as they are, each class line on its own does not establish the class nature of an organisation. With over fifty years of counter-revolution and a complete break in its organisational continuity since the last revolutionary wave, the working class contains many confused elements groping about for a coherent perspective. These elements may cross class lines and still remain within the proletarian camp. These confused elements must be considered distinct from the bourgeois organisations of the left that are firmly committed to directing the proletariat into the counter-revolution.

As important as an economic understanding is to a coherent political perspective I don't see that the historic experience of the class has settled questions of crisis theory as they have class lines. This is not to say that the questions cannot be resolved or that they don't have implications significant to an organisation's activity. If the questions haven't been resolved within an organisation then they remain open questions within that organisation. But that does not mean that the questions should not be fully discussed. Declaring something an open question should not be used as a means of burying it and evading discussion.

The process of regroupment involves the interaction of a large number of individuals, small groups and defined political organisations internationally. It is not defined exclusively by the activity of any one organisation. Any organisation can declare itself a "pole of regroupment" but it is only through its perspective and its activity that it can actually serve that function. I feel that the I.C.C. has failed in a couple of important ways to serve as a "pole of regroupment". In evading discussion of economic questions it has failed to elaborate on an important aspect of its perspective and has left contacts unnecessarily frustrated and confused. By not promptly replying to correspondence it has unnecessarily added to the isolation and demoralisation of contacts. It has repeatedly apologised for this problem of correspondence yet the pattern continues right up to the present time. Waiting up to three to five months for a reply from New York seems inexcusable from an organisation claiming to be a "pole of regroupment".

The process of regroupment requires an open and thorough discussion of issues internationally. Such discussion should not be limited by organisations evading issues (as has the I.C.C. on economics) nor by cutting of debate with groups (as has the C.W.O. in the past with the I.C.C.). Nor should individuals or small groups isolate themselves locally from the debate going on within the class (as we have here in Seattle). I am hopeful that future correspondence with the I.C.C. and the C.W.O. will further the process of political clarification here in Seattle as well as contribute something positive to the international regroupment of revolutionaries.

A Seattle Comrade.

A REPLY FROM THE C.W.O.

Dear Comrade,

We shall deal with your two recent communications, i.e. "The Seattle Discussion Circle, Another View"* and "Some Comments for the I.C.C. and the C.W.O."

On the issue of discussion circles, as yet we have not been confronted directly with the question of relating to any such grouping, and our ideas are still unformulated. It seems, however, that the experience of any discussion circle will of necessity be traumatic, and that the people involved in such circles will always be "wise after the event". When an awareness of the limitations and perspectives of such a grouping is gained, the experience is inevitably ending, and the lessons will be difficult to pass on to another discussion circle till they themselves have gone through a similar experience. A commitment to international relationships and to ongoing discussion of basic divergencies within the revolutionary camp could hardly be expected to exist as such a group is forming - otherwise it would to a great extent lose its reason to form as a "discussion" circle.

Recognising the inevitably painful evolution of such groupings does not obviate the need for revolutionary groups to intervene and aid their development, in fact it makes such an obligation all the more pressing. In this sense we can only endorse your criticism of the lack of responsibility of the I.C.C. in America towards the Seattle group over the years of its existence: an irresponsibility that is clearly hinted at in the text of Internationalism 16 itself:

"The absence of militant intervention at a crucial time in the development of the Seattle Discussion Circle ... made it difficult for the Seattle people to avoid the fragmentation of their ranks." (p.27)

Naturally, we also criticise the content of much of the intervention which did occur, including that which led to a virtual taboo on discussion of the economic question.

Let us say that on the economic issue there is little need for the excessive modesty assumed in your letter. Discussion on that question has progressed when you write that foreign trade:

"...is not necessarily a question of realising surplus value, but rather of maximising surplus value." (Some Comments)

- this already indicates a level of coherence on the economic issue which has surpassed that of the aficionados of "saturated markets". Before dealing with the "status" of this issue, we'll briefly comment on one or two points you raise regarding our economic analysis.

On the question of capital accumulation in a "closed" system, we would today express ourselves differently from R.P.1 (written in 1974). In the abstract capital accumulation is possible within global capital as a whole, or within any theoretical capital inside which every possible raw material for production existed. Of course, this can never be the case in the real world, and you point where we apparently go against R.P.1 in R.P.4. Competition forces maximum accumulation and therewith maximisation of profits and foreign trade even in capitals like Russia which possess virtually every raw material within their borders. But the point made in R.P.1 remains. According to Luxemburg the accumulation of capital is funded by the "external" realisation of surplus

* We understand this is to be published by Internationalism.

value: only the latter makes the former possible. But if foreign trade is about 2% of G.N.P. and accumulation attains 25-30% the thesis must fall down.

On the issue: why crises in the past due to the falling rate of profit (rather than a gradual slow-down)? We have tried to explain the occurrence of these in terms of the credit mechanism central to laissez-faire capitalism in its ascendant period. The relevant text to which we refer you is "Money, Credit and Crisis" in R.P.8

On the "status" of the issue of economics, we find ourselves in broad agreement with the views you express. The study of "economics" cannot take place outside of an attempt to grasp the class positions of the proletariat which emerged from the class' struggles. These positions are not based upon an economic theory, but on the decadence of capitalism. However, this decadence itself must be explained, otherwise the whole edifice of our politics rests on faith and rhetoric. The issue can be resolved, and to proclaim it an "open question" can only be a tactic to avoid serious discussion. Indeed at times the desire to avoid economic discussion attains panic proportions: hence the I.C.C.'s warnings about "academicism" when you proposed to study Capital. Our own experience of the I.C.C. was even more disillusioning. The majority of the members were prepared to accept Luxemburg's ideas before having read a word of them. Clearly the Seattle comrades who moved towards the I.C.C. were relieved to be convinced that "historical manifestations" were enough to prove the theory of decadence. Their argument that those who argue otherwise must feel that the entire proletariat must read Capital (Internationalism 16, p.26) is false. But we do say that the proletarian vanguard must go through a study of these issues, and elaborate a series of perspectives based upon an understanding of "economics".

Another question we would like to respond to is that of the class character of political groups, one which we have only begun to broach in a serious way in the last year or so. We are in agreement that the lack of political continuity from 1917-21 means that the emergence of political groupings is a confused process, and that such groups don't emerge fully formed. Our own current thinking doesn't centre round the issue of "class lines", which are difficult to define exactly. We have adopted the following criteria. For us a group is bourgeois if it:

- 1) Defends any existing national capital, and/or
 - 2) Identifies socialism with state capitalism or self-management.
- We would not necessarily baptise other groups outside of these contained in the above framework as "communist", but we would feel that they were in some way reflections of the (historical) class struggle. Even some of the latter groups could be so confused as to be (without being capitalist) counter-revolutionary.

As to our past relations with the I.C.C., they are somewhat different from your picture that we "cut off debate" with them. Certainly we made a serious error when we concluded that, because we felt the I.C.C. would play a counter-revolutionary role in a revolution (due to their ideas on the state), that they were "bourgeois" now. On the other hand, this has to be placed within the context of their continued refusa to respond to our public and voluminous private criticisms of their political positions over a period of almost two years. Even later we were prepared to polemicise with the I.C.C. (despite our erroneous characterisation of them), provided they treated the issues which divided us with political seriousness; and since they have finally, reluctantly, begun to address some of these issues, we have felt no reluctance in responding and sustaining the debate.

A final point is on the issue of regroupment, to which we are committed in the same militant sense that you are. The I.C.C. has acted quite successfully as a pole of recruitment, by intervening in a milieu which

came from leftism, and by "recruiting" some elements from the demise of this transitional grouping. For us "regroupment" and the creation of an international proletarian party will arise from the organisational fusion - after a period of debate which, in the light of the class movement, settles the main issues of divergence - of several communist organisations, and will lead to the creation of a new organisation. Thus, the process of recruitment, which is one inevitably facing groups today, is different from that of regroupment, which is a task that lies further off, but whose foundations we have to lay here and now.

We hope this letter has clarified some of the issues which were troubling you, and that a fruitful political correspondence has been initiated between us.

Fraternally,
The C.W.O.

PUBLICATIONS OF THE C.W.O.

Copies of the following are still available:

<u>Revolutionary Perspectives 5</u> Spain 1936: Anti-Fascism; Spain 1976: Class Struggle	<u>Revolutionary Perspectives 8</u> Money, Credit and the Crisis History of the C.W.O.
<u>Revolutionary Perspectives 6</u> Capitalism in Africa Critique of Luxemburgist Economics	<u>Revolutionary Perspectives 9</u> Fascism and Anti-Fascism Terrorism and Communism Trotskyism and the Counter- Revolution (Russia 1921-28)
<u>Revolutionary Perspectives 7</u> The German Revolution Crisis in COMECON	<u>Revolutionary Perspectives 10</u> The Meaning of Decadence Latin America Imperialism in the Middle East
	<u>Revolutionary Perspectives 11</u> Revolutionary Wave in Italy Crisis Theory Texts of the German Left Review: "Pannekoek and Gorter's Marxism"

JOHN MACLEAN: From Proletarian Fighter **to Bourgeois Nationalist**

"... marxians do not fall back upon what Marx said here or there, but apply his principles to each set of circumstances as it arises. "Thus spake Marx" is not the marxian but the anti-marxian method." (John Maclean)

The recent publication of a collection of the writings of John Maclean, In The Rapids of Revolution, has contributed to highlighting the contribution of Maclean to the working class struggle for socialism. Of all the figures from "Red Clydeside" John Maclean emerges as the most important revolutionary thinker, gaining recognition from Lenin as the representative of revolutionary Marxism in Britain during the First World War:

"Liebknecht in Germany, Adler in Austria, Maclean in England; such are the best known of these isolated heroes who assumed the heavy task of precursors of the revolution."

(Quoted in In The Rapids of Revolution, page 15)

PRE-WAR SOCIAL DEMOCRACY

Maclean first became involved in the socialist movement in the early years of the 20th century by joining the Social Democratic Federation (SDF) which claimed, unlike the other social democratic organisations of the period (the Labour Party and the Independent Labour Party), to have its origins in Marxism. Even in this early period Maclean stood on the left of social democracy, taking a Marxist position against revisionism which was a growing trend within social democracy at this time and which attached more importance to improving capitalism than instituting socialism. Social democracy in the pre-war period had a revolutionary content which ceased with the outbreak of war. This was a period when capitalism was still a progressive system, and although causing widespread misery, still contributed towards the advancement of mankind by opening and expanding the productive forces. And as long as capitalism was progressive and had something to offer mankind, then revolution was never really possible. Thus, a realistic role for revolutionaries was to extract as many reforms as possible from the capitalists for the working class. During this period important reforms could be won (e.g. the shortening of the working day, abolition of child labour, extension of the suffrage) and were fought for by revolutionaries inside social democracy. (Rosa Luxemburg, Lenin, etc. were all social democrats before the War.) What divided the revolutionaries from the "revisionists" was that their view was not blinkered by reformism but had a further vision - that of the eventual overthrow of the capitalist system. As early as 1902 it is clear that Maclean was aware that being a revolutionary is not simply a comfortable affair of pressure groups, voting and getting majorities:

"That the class struggle is bitter, we need only reckon the annual death roll of workers ... It is more bloody and more disastrous warfare than that to which the soldier is used ... the workers have greater cause for a forcible revolution than had the French capitalists in 1789." (Quoted in In the Rapids p.31)

In this period leading up to 1914 Maclean was actively involved in the class struggle. He addressed the workers involved in the Belfast transport strike in 1907; in 1911 he was active among the striking miners in the Rhondda Valley; and nearer home he supported the women

textile workers on strike in Renfrewshire and Singers at Clydebank. This was a period of revolutionary ferment, when capitalism had been shaken by the strikes of 1911 and 1912 and when class consciousness had been given the necessary jolt. In the memorable words of Maclean:

"The times we live in are so stirring and full of change that it is not impossible to believe we are in the rapids of revolution."

But the bulk of Maclean's activity centred round his Marxism classes. He had an almost Calvinistic faith in the benefits of education (working class and not bourgeois education) and believed that a training in Marxist economics would turn the workers into revolutionaries. This misconception was later to lead Maclean to neglect the task of building a revolutionary party. Maclean had not grasped the Marxist axiom that consciousness is not something to be learned in easy lessons but is determined by material conditions - the class is shaken into consciousness when forced into a confrontation with the state. Maclean over-emphasised "economics" at the expense of historical materialism which he never fully grasped. Because of this weakness he failed to see how classes developed into self-conscious classes and he could not understand false consciousness except as a product of lack of education in Marxist economics.

WAR AND REVOLUTION

The end of capitalism's ascendant period did not come overnight. But by 1914 we can say with confidence that the system is decadent and can only exist by world wars and periods of catastrophic depression. From this time only communism is capable of liberating humanity from its misery. Revolutionaries can no longer fight for reforms because reforms are no longer possible. Capitalism has nothing to give; or what is given today is recovered tomorrow. Social democracy revealed its true colours in 1914 by supporting its "own" national capital. And thus we had the pitiful picture of worker fighting worker, social democrat fighting social democrat.

1914 and the outbreak of war was what divided the real revolutionaries from those social democrats who took the side of capital. John Maclean was one of the few (along with Lenin, Luxemburg, Gorter, etc.) who immediately denounced the imperialist war:

"... it is our business as socialists to develop "class patriotism" refusing to murder one another for a sordid world capitalism. The absurdity of the present situation is surely apparent when we see British socialists going out to murder German socialists with the object of crushing Kaiserism and Prussian militarism. The only real enemy to Kaiserism and Prussian militarism, I assert against the world, was and is German social democracy. Let the propertied class, old and young alike, go out and defend their blessed property. When they have been disposed of, we of the working class will have something to defend, and we shall do it."
(Quoted in In the Rapids of Revolution, page 77)

But like Luxemburg, and unlike the clear revolutionary position of Lenin and Bordiga, Maclean's position up until the outbreak of the Russian Revolution was for a return to the status quo or "peace without annexation". The inspiration of the Russian Revolution in 1917 made Maclean change his slogan to "Change the War into a Civil War". During the war years Maclean's activity centred on the struggle against imperialism, and he enthusiastically greeted the Zimmerwald Conference of anti-war socialists in 1915. On the outbreak of the October Revolution, Maclean at once declared his solidarity with the Bolsheviks and called for the extension of the revolution to Britain, a call repeated when the German Revolution broke out in 1918.

"It would be a very bad thing for the workers of the world if a revolution were developed and carried through to success in Germany, and no similar effort made in this country. The German workers' enemy is the same as our enemy in this country." (Quoted in In the Rapids of Revolution, page 110)

His unswerving opposition to the war won him support from the working class who flocked to his meetings and demonstrated and struck in their thousands when he was imprisoned for his anti-war activities. The main working class organisation on Clydeside at this time was the C.W.C. - the Clyde Workers' Committee, which carried on the economic struggle abandoned by the trades unions during war time. Heavily influenced by syndicalism, the C.W.C. carried out a militant struggle inside the factories, but failed to take up an anti-war position. Maclean particularly attacked their ideas on workers' control, especially of the war industries, and argued forcefully,

"We are not for the absolute control of each industry by the workers engaged (in it) ... the final control must be in the hands of humanity as a whole. If the Clyde workers took part control of the munitions works, they would thus accept part responsibility for the war."

(Quoted in The War After the War, p.xiii)

Against this syndicalist position, he called for political strikes against the war, and the overthrow of capitalism. But in spite of his awareness of the limitations of factory-based organisations, Maclean never developed an understanding of the function of a revolutionary class party, never went beyond the idea of revolutionaries as the educators of the proletariat.

In spite of the fact that the pro-war faction of the British Socialist Party (around Hyndman) controlled the organisation, Maclean did not leave the organisation; he simply published a paper, the Vanguard as the organ of the anti-war Glasgow branch. This indicated (apart from the localism which always influenced his politics), an abdication of the responsibility of the revolutionary leader, to set up a communist party to act as the class' vanguard. His belief that an educated working class would be a revolutionary one led him to neglect the practical tasks of a communist group, and the provision for the class of a political direction for its struggles. During the general strike in the west of Scotland in January 1919, when 100,000 workers were engaged in struggle, and when the government had mobilised the armed might of the state against the working class, Maclean and his followers were not in evidence, Maclean himself having gone off to attend a BSP meeting in London. This was not coincidence, since Maclean never realised how a revolutionary situation can be sparked off when the workers are forced into a confrontation with the state, provided the necessary political leadership is available. A revolutionary party in 1919 would have called for the election of factory committees and a central Soviet to wage the struggle, as well as for fraternisation with the local troops who were confined to barracks for fear that they would refuse to fire on the strikers; not one of the socialist organisations in existence at this time did anything other than intervene at an economic level. Maclean later said that the strike was defeated "more by the lack of working class ripeness, than by batons, tanks and machine guns"; what he never understood was that it was also defeated by lack of ripeness of the revolutionary vanguard, including his own tendency.

DEFEAT

The defeat of the 1919 strike was the beginning of a process of demoralisation amongst the British working class, and of political decomposition among its revolutionary minorities. We have seen how the main strength of Maclean was in his unswerving internationalism; by 1920 he

had turned his back on this, and devoted his main efforts to the struggles for independence in Ireland and in Scotland. As his working class support evaporated, he found new associates, such as the nationalistic scion of the Scottish aristocracy, Erskine of Mar, and the nationalistic dilettante of the Irish aristocracy, the Countess Markievitz! His support for nationalism was given in the belief that such movements would weaken imperialism and so pave the way for revolution.

"I hold that the British Empire is the greatest menace to the human race ... The best interests of humanity therefore can be served by the break-up of the British Empire. ... The Irish, Indians and others are playing their part. Why ought not the Scottish?" (In the Rapids of Revolution, page 220)

Here Maclean abandons the clarity earlier attained that as far as imperialism goes there are no lesser evils; that the weakening of one imperialism simply means the strengthening of its rivals. Many, such as Nan Milton in her introduction to In the Rapids of Revolution, defend the new political orientation of Maclean, with the argument that "the majority of Marxists had always supported the right of nations to self-determination" (op.cit. p.139). But this is a travesty of the Marxist view of the national question, which is concrete and historical and does not proceed from questions of abstract "rights".

Even in the pre-imperialist epoch of the nineteenth century, Marx and Engels' view of the national question was more complex than this. In an epoch when capitalism was a progressive mode of production, Marx supported those national movements which either would lead to a progressive development of the productive forces, or which were politically progressive (i.e. an independent Poland as a barrier against Russia). Using this method he could both oppose the "liberation" of the Balkan Slavs from Turkey or Austria, since he felt that this would allow Russia into Europe, and defend as progressive the opening up of China and India to the world market, despite the fact that this led to their colonisation and violated any idea of "national rights".(1) But in the epoch of imperialism - the twentieth century - when a world economy, dominated by a few giant imperialist powers has been created, the progressive aspect of the national struggle disappears, and any states which break from one imperialism are soon forced to put themselves under the wing of another; "national independence", and any progressive, independent development of the productive forces becomes an impossibility - as can be clearly seen from the case of China today, now again firmly in the camp of U.S. imperialism. Of course, these lessons had to be learned from historical experience itself, and we can extend some indulgence to the communists of the past, and to their mistakes. But today the experience of sixty years of the counter-revolutionary effects of "national liberation" struggles has settled this question, which is now a dividing line between revolutionaries and the defenders of capitalism. Since they illustrate this point well, we will look at Maclean's positions on Irish and Scottish nationalism, to show how they led him into anti-working class positions.

IRELAND

Marx's concrete approach to the national question is clear when we look at his attitude to Ireland. At first, he opposed the idea of Irish Home Rule or independence, but gradually his position changed; even then it was a tactical one, based on the needs of the British working class,

(1) For a fuller analysis of the national question, see "Marxism and the Irish Question" in Revolutionary Perspectives No.2

"Thus the attitude of the International Association to the Irish question is quite clear. Its first need is to encourage social revolution in England. To this end a great blow must be struck in Ireland ... it is a pre-condition to the emancipation of the English working class to transform the present forced union, (i.e. the enslavement of Ireland) into equal and free confederation if possible, into complete separation if need be." ("Confidential Communication" by Marx, March 1870; quoted in On Colonialism, Marx & Engels pp.259-260).

But the development of capitalism made even this position obsolete by the time of the First World War. Although Irish nationalism was in origin Protestant, by this time the development of heavy industry in the north east of Ireland (Ulster), finding its raw materials and markets within the British Empire, had meant that this region was much more a part of the British economy than it was of any "Irish" economic unit. Nationalism in Ireland was not the ideology of a rising, dynamic bourgeoisie (the characteristic of nineteenth century nationalism), but of the chronically backward agricultural and artisan petty bourgeoisie of southern Ireland, which saw its only hope of salvation in protection from the outside world market. It was thoroughly in the interests of British imperialism to rid itself of the expense of maintaining this archaic sector, which it could hope to control by informal methods of domination. The development of Eire since partition in 1922 indicates the impossibility of national liberation; its economy today is as dependent as it ever was on imperialism.(1)

It was the events in Ireland that converted Maclean to nationalism. But even in this case, the capitulation came only after the defeat of the British working class. True, Maclean had supported the Easter Rising in Dublin in 1916, but this was mainly as he saw it as an anti-war demonstration, and since such prominent socialists as Connolly participated in it, helping to obscure its bourgeois character. Even in 1919 he denounced the bourgeois nature of the struggle for Irish independence,

"Irish labour would not be free under a Sinn Fein republic, but only under a socialist workers' republic, and that Irish labour should consequently support British labour in the campaign against intervention in Russia, and be prepared to play its part in the worldwide establishment of Bolshevism."
(In the Rapids of Revolution, pp.161-2.)

But despair, induced by a defeat whose causes Maclean did not understand, had led him to argue shortly afterwards that,

"The Irish Sinn Feiners, who make no profession of socialism or communism, and who are at best non-socialists, are doing more to help Russia and the revolution than all we professed Marxian Bolsheviks in Britain." (ibid, page 178.)

In his enthusiasm for bourgeois nationalists who were "at best" non-socialists, Maclean had no message for the proletariat. In the face of working class resistance in Ulster to being incorporated into a reactionary clerical state, Maclean retorted, "If Ulstermen cannot tolerate an Irish Republic, let them take a taste of emigration." Support for nationalism led logically to a position of dividing, or increasing the divisions within the working class. Meanwhile, the Sinn Feiners did their bit for the revolution by sending in the IRA to crush "Soviets" set up by workers who took over factories in Cork and Limerick. At the same time the Ulster bourgeoisie broke the general strike in Belfast

(1) For an account of capitalist development in Ireland, see the article in Revolutionary Perspectives No.2, cited above.

with the help of the British troops. These events indicate the anti-proletarian character of all nationalisms in our epoch, against which "class patriotism" is the only answer.

SCOTTISH NATIONALISM

If there were understandable (though mistaken) reasons for Maclean's support for Irish nationalism, there can be none for his capitulation to Scottish nationalism. There was no movement in Scotland for independence, apart from a handful of eccentrics; the bourgeoisie could not support such a movement as it had no material reason to do so. The Scottish working class on the other hand, was an integral part of the British proletariat, whose struggles it had shared for generations. Scotland had never been dominated by "English" imperialism, as had, for example, Ireland or India, but had developed as a junior partner in British capitalism's conquest of the world. Not only was Scotland not economically dominated by England, but the Scottish bourgeoisie also suffered no cultural domination, retaining its own autonomous systems of law, education and religion.(1) Here, as elsewhere, Maclean's weakness on the national question stems from his weakness in historical materialism. His speeches on nationalism were tinged with racialism. For example,

"Genuine Scotsmen recently asked themselves the question: "Are we Scots to be used as the bloody tools of the English against our brother Celts of Erin? And naturally the instinctive response was - No." (ibid page 217.)

Maclean developed a theory of the revolutionary superiority of the Scottish working class, ignoring the penetration of revolutionary ideas during World War One in such advanced areas as Sheffield and Barrow. Once again we see the pernicious effects of nationalism in dividing the working class instead of unifying it. The surest testimony to the class consciousness of the Scottish workers was that virtually none followed Maclean into the nationalist wilderness. However, just as nationalism, often with a sprinkling of "socialist" holy water has been resurrected in Ireland by sections of the bourgeoisie in recent years, so has Scottish nationalism undergone a resurrection, often given a "proletarian" twist by using Maclean as its idol. The lessons of 1917-22 are still valid today; the position of the class is, "Against all nationalisms; for working class unity, for communism."

CONCLUSION

Maclean's political career indicates that revolutionary clarity is a product of the class' movement; highest at times of intense class struggle, falling away in time of defeat. Maclean's inability to learn the political lessons of the defeat of the class after the First World War stemmed from his lack of clarity on the question of the revolutionary party; in fact this lack of clarity contributed to the defeat. His aberrant and reactionary positions in defeat have only negative lessons for us today, but his heroic fight for revolutionary internationalism during the imperialist war remains an inspiration. Let his own words from the dock be his epitaph and our cry,

"I have been enlisted for fifteen years in the socialist army.
It is the only army worth fighting for; God damn all other armies!"

(1) A full account of the development of Scottish capitalism is contained in Workers' Voice 20. (Copies still available from the C.W.O.)

2nd INTERNATIONAL MEETING OF COMMUNISTS (Nov. 1978)

On the 11th and 12th November in Paris there took place the second international meeting of groups of the "communist left", initiated two years ago by the Partito Comunista Internazionale (Battaglia Comunista). In contrast to the first meeting in Milan in May 1977, which was attended only by the P.C.I. and members of the International Communist Current (I.C.C.), (although the C.W.O. expressed its sympathy with the meeting and only failed to attend due to practical reasons), the second meeting was more widely attended. Delegates were present representing the P.C.I., I.C.C., C.W.O., as well as the Marxist Study Group (Sweden), Nucleo Comunista (Italy) and F.O.R. (France). Other groups such as Il Leninista (Italy) and Travailleurs Imigres en Lutte (T.I.L.) (France) identified with the meeting but were unable to attend. The meeting continued the discussion on economic analysis and perspectives started at the first meeting(1) and also broached the issues of national liberation and the organisation of revolutionaries. What follows is the C.W.O.'s account of the conference proceedings (which naturally gives prominence to our own contribution and viewpoints) along with our evaluation of the function of these conferences. The texts submitted by the C.W.O. are appended to this meeting report.

ECONOMICS

The conference was divided as to the cause of the crisis of capitalism. Militants of the I.C.C. argued with Rosa Luxemburg that this was caused by saturation of the world market, while the other tendencies followed an analysis based on the falling rate of profit. The discussion was opened by a member of the P.C.I., who argued that Luxemburgism was not capable of explaining the crisis of capitalism. The discussion was, however, not taken up on an economic level, but instead centred on the question of the perspectives for the evolution of the crisis and class struggle, and of the threat of war.

The I.C.C. criticised the adherents of the rate of profit theory for "pessimism"; e.g. both the C.W.O. and P.C.I. argued that there was a lull in the level of class struggle at the present time and saw war as a possible outcome to the crisis, just as was proletarian revolution. In reply the C.W.O. argued that only a dynamic theory like that based on the rate of profit allowed us to explain the complexity of capitalism's development. (e.g. How at one time, detente, and at another, war, was on the agenda; or how the class struggle rose or fell at different points.) Failure to explain ebbs in the class struggle could lead to demoralisation as the mechanical relationship between crisis and class struggle expected by the I.C.C. failed to materialise. Our own analysis, by foreseeing a bourgeois offensive against the proletariat, provides a framework for the re-emergence of a working class response, despite the present class passivity. Similarly, to deny that war was possible at the moment since the class was undefeated ignored the fact that military, political and economic - rather than class - relationships determined the likelihood of war. Against the I.C.C. who argued that there was no logical tie up between political positions and economic analysis, the C.W.O. affirmed that a group's economics influenced directly many of its political positions.

The delegates from F.O.R. at this point made a statement that the economic crisis was a myth invented by the bourgeoisie to defuse the

(1) Proceedings and texts of the first meeting are available from:
BM Box 809, London, WC1V 6XX.

proletariat's combativity, and denounced the "mystification" of the meeting in discussing it, and then left.

In conclusion, the discussion on economic analysis was unsatisfactory. Such a topic needs to be highly structured, with contributions on specific aspects of the problem and a disciplined discussion round the points in question. But as long as no common agreement on the importance and implications of the issue exists - as indicated by the I.C.C.'s relegation of the economic debate to a "secondary" position - discussions on the issue will remain at the level of polemical sloganising and contribute little to clarification.

NATIONAL LIBERATION

Discussion on this question was hindered by the inability of several groups, whose positions on the national question went against those of the majority of groups at the conference, to attend. This majority position was put by the I.C.C., who argued that though many national liberation struggles were progressive in the nineteenth century, today they could neither escape from the imperialist framework, nor lead to a progressive development of the productive forces.

The tendency for the I.C.C. to see all countries today as "imperialist" was criticised by the C.W.O. This is a logical Luxemburgist position, since "exports" and "force" (the two hallmarks of imperialism according to the I.C.C.) have existed since capitalism's birth and exist everywhere today. On the contrary, imperialism is a policy of the major capitalist powers, prompted, after about 1870, by overproduction of capital at home. The idea that all countries are imperialist undermines the idea of imperialist blocs. How could wars between countries that were only "formally" dominated by capital (e.g. Ethiopia and Somalia) be caused by "overproduction" in those areas, and how could it be argued that, for example, Israel was an independent imperialist power? The C.W.O. also rejected the idea that Luxemburg's economics lay at the base of her views on the national question: the latter preceded the former by over a decade.

The I.C.C. was convinced that unspecified dangers lurked behind the C.W.O.'s underestimation of the imperialist tendencies of the small powers, but argued that the views of the P.C.I., which called for the "national struggle to be converted into a proletarian struggle", were a positive confusion. The P.C.I. argued that mass popular ferment in the backward areas sprang from objective misery: these movements were harnessed to the national bourgeoisie and it was the task of the communists to break the proletariat from this impasse, and to ally with the world proletariat in the revolutionary period. For the C.W.O. this posed the problem of what communists actually say in such movements today, when there is no international proletarian movement for them to ally with. Slogans appropriate for a revolutionary situation would be utopian, so what concretely would the intervention of the P.C.I. be in these popular ferments today? It was this pre-occupation that seemed to lie behind the view of the Nucleo Comunista that, in spite of their inability to break with imperialism, or of the working class to break from the grip of the national bourgeoisie, some national struggles today (e.g. that of Angola) were progressive in that they ended the old colonial relationships. Since the Nucleo's texts were not available to us, it was difficult to be precisely aware of their position on this issue. The discussion on the national question ended inconclusively and it is hoped that it can be discussed in more detail later.

ORGANISATION

A lively - from the point of view of clarification, if not resolution - discussion took place on this question, and was introduced by the C.W.O. This introduction consisted of a clarification of point 1 in our conference text. By a "party" we meant an organisation with practical,

in addition to propagandist tasks; an organisation that is indispensable for (i.e. doesn't just speed up) revolutionary clarification in the class through its programme, which doesn't come to the class via its experience (though this experience prepares the class to accept it). Similarly, the party, through its slogans and aims, leads the revolutionary process, which it organises, i.e. by fighting for a majority for its views in the new council-state; and by organising the insurrection and smashing of the counter-revolution. The party is also centralised, in that differences are either resolved or lead to organisational separation. Although these views found some support from the P.C.I., they added that the party/class relationship was not just one for the revolution, but had to be tackled now. Abstract phrases - whether on the national question or that of party and class - were no substitute for concrete intervention. The party has tasks in relation to the class today, which it tackles via its intermediary organs in the factories.

The I.C.C. rejected the P.C.I.'s idea of factory groups as artificial, given that the class in struggle forms its own autonomous organisation, and also criticised the dangers of "substitutionism" in the views of the C.W.O. According to the I.C.C. the party intervenes to speed up the growth of class consciousness, but can't substitute itself for the class; in particular, it must renounce any aim to control the class state or any intra-class violence. The I.C.C. view was echoed by the comrades from M.A.G. who warned of the dual dangers of over and under estimation of the party. M.A.G. also argued that the class creates the party to homogenise consciousness.

Nucleo argued that there were strong sponteneist and councilist residues in the views of the I.C.C. which were a product of an over-reaction to the Stalinist counter-revolution. This view was echoed by a member of the I.C.C. minority on the organisation issue who traced the I.C.C.'s sponteneism to the organisational views of Rosa Luxemburg. The question of a political direction also posed practical problems (e.g. the October insurrection).

The final C.W.O. contribution on the political aspects of this discussion was to point out that in October 1917 the class took power; even though it was organised by the Bolsheviks, it was sanctioned by the class. The counter-revolution did not come from a party taking power, but from the isolation of the revolution. If the I.C.C. reject the prospect of winning a majority of delegates on the councils on the basis of their programme, they inevitably argue that a revolution can be carried out when a majority of delegates (reflecting class consciousness) are either militants or confusionists or leftists. If a revolution can be carried out in such circumstances, the need for a party disappears. To deny the fight to win state power is to deny the need for a party. Similarly, we can't necessarily reject as impermissible all intra-class violence. Only an idealistic view of class consciousness could foresee this as inevitably unnecessary.

FUTURE OF THE CONFERENCES

The I.C.C. wanted to end the meeting with a resolution on the vital aspect of the conferences, and a criticism of the groups which had rejected the invitation to attend. Both the C.W.O. and the P.C.I. rejected this, since the points in the resolution we agreed with were either obvious, or formal, and the basic political agreement for such a resolution did not exist. Similarly, the groups which absented themselves or, like F.O.R., withdrew, did so for political reasons, and their recognition of this was not necessarily a loss for the conference.

The C.W.O. explained its own ideas on the future of the conferences, which it recognised were as yet premature, and therefore we agreed we would not present them to the meeting for a formal vote. A series of "discussion" meetings would soon lose their dynamic unless a political

purpose and programme of work gave them some backbone. The conferences should recognise themselves as the precursors of a centre which would work to the creation of a new revolutionary International, and as an arena for the resolution of divergencies towards such an end. Therefore, strict criteria of exclusion of groups participating in the conferences should be drawn up. Some delegates were for very lax criteria, arguing that group was wholly without merit, but the P.C.I. argued (correctly in our view) that the criteria for discussion with a group in general were not the same as those for the attendance at the conferences. After a discussion it was agreed that the following criteria be added for attendance at future conferences:

- 1) Recognition of the historical need for a party.
- 2) The rejection of any possibility of the subordination of the proletariat to the national bourgeoisie.

These supplement the existing criteria, which are acceptance of Marxism, October 1917 as a proletarian revolution, the rejection of state capitalism and self-management, and the characterisation of social democracy and existing "communist" parties as bourgeois. It was emphasised that the spirit of the above criteria, rather than the letter, was the guide and that only groups which had definitely ruptured with them would be excluded.

The conference closed with the establishment of a commission to organise the next meeting and an agreement to publish the texts and proceedings in Italian, French and English.

The C.W.O. found the meeting successful, though the danger remains that a lack of political dynamic will lead to future meetings becoming areas of fruitless polemics. The need is for conferences to be organised round more specific issues, with carefully prepared texts, and with a genuine political will to resolve the issues in question. With this view in mind the C.W.O. will continue to participate in the meetings, hopeful that such a perspective will eventually be adopted.

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TEXTS OF THE COMMUNIST WORKERS' ORGANISATION
for the International Conference, Paris, November 1978

I- PERSPECTIVES FOR THE CRISIS AND THE CLASS STRUGGLE

In addition to developing a coherent explanation of the historical development and economic contradictions of capitalism - in order to demonstrate that it is a system with finite limits - revolutionaries have to develop a set of perspectives on the particular phase of the crisis they are living through. This is in order to map out a framework for activity, to define the issues that will be of crucial importance for the class struggle, and to have a realistic framework for political intervention. What follows is a summary of the views of the Communist Workers' Organisation on the present stage of the crisis, imperialism and the class struggle.

The Crisis: an End to Stabilisation?

The periods 1970-71 and 1973-75 were marked by intensifications of the economic crisis facing capitalism. Outside these downturns there has been a relative stabilisation of the crisis marked by a decline in inflation and the removal of the threat of collapse from any major capital. There are signs that this period of stabilisation is coming to an end.

In terms of inflation, after the marked fall in 1976 and 1977, the curve has again moved upwards in several important states, such as Britain, France and the U.S.A. Unemployment is also either static at high levels (e.g. Britain) or increasing (France, Sweden). The growth rates of the stronger capitals on which the hopes of the bourgeoisie were pinned have been disappointing or non-existent (e.g. Japan and Germany), while the decline of the dollar has pushed the strongest capitalist power - the U.S.A. - ever deeper into crisis.

Parallel with these empirical indices of intensification of the crisis we have had the beginnings of a breakdown in international co-operation, leading to squabbling amongst national capitals (e.g. over the rising number of protectionist measures, such as the U.S.A. against Japan, and disagreements within the E.E.C. over job protection schemes, agricultural policy, etc.). A further deepening of the crisis - of unpredictable magnitude - appears to be on the horizon.

The bourgeoisie enters this new phase of the crisis with less options than before. Initially their main fear was the resort to autarchic measures by the worst hit capitals; thus the weaker states were bailed out by the stronger (Italy by Germany in 1974; the U.K. by the U.S.A. in 1975) via loans or "voluntary" arrangements. These efforts to overcome the crisis by international co-operation, by economic summits and I.M.F.-style policies have, as we predicted, led only to more generalised stagnation, and not to the bourgeoisie's longed-for recovery. A repetition of these policies is more difficult now due to the fact that the stronger capitals are materially less able to bail out the weaker than they were five years ago.

But it would be wrong to conclude that we are on the verge of an outbreak of autarchy and trade wars which could rapidly descend to a shooting war. The bourgeoisie have another card to play before war is their only option. Whilst austerity measures have been implemented during the last few years, capital has been too frightened of any possible proletarian response to accept a head-on clash with the class since the crisis became overt in the early 1970's. (Those capitals that did so (Poland, Argentina) soon paid the price by provoking a massive class response.) Whether the bourgeoisie chooses between autarchy and increased austerity depends in part on the level of the class struggle. A militant class will cause the

bourgeoisie to deflect the crisis onto the petty bourgeoisie at home and other capitals abroad, while a passive class will face increasingly blatant austerity. Given the present low level of class struggle, the bourgeoisie feels that it can get away with austerity (e.g. the anti-tax campaign in the U.S.A., Barre Plan in France) and we can expect massive cuts in taxation to lighten the load on capital, combined with cuts in "welfare" measures, specifically attempts to cut the growing cost of maintaining the unemployed. Efforts to divide the class by attacking service and unemployed workers as "unproductive" and expendable must be resisted by revolutionaries and used as focuses for intervention.

The Class Struggle

The most remarkable fact about the class struggle in the past 2-3 years is its virtual non-existence. Save in the peripheral regions of capitalism (such as recently in Tunisia and Peru) where isolated and incoherent outbreaks (which often dissolve themselves into popular movements) have occurred, the class has exhibited little more than passivity since the mid-1970's, when epic struggles occurred in Portugal, Spain, Argentina and Poland. Certainly there have been some bitter, local fights, e.g. recently in Britain: but these have been sectional struggles with little possibility of generalisation into class-wide battles.

The proletariat is confused, disoriented and pessimistic about struggle. The optimistic perspective that consciousness would rise in parallel with the crisis and class struggle unleashed by it has proved to be false. After ten years the class appears less open to revolutionary arguments than before. The initial struggle of 68-72 led to great gains, but the failure of these to become permanent did not radicalise the class, but demoralised it because it did not understand why it had won little.

The growth of unemployment has also done little for revolutionary consciousness. For almost a decade over a million unemployed have been tolerated by the workers in France, Britain and Germany - a situation that would have seemed unthinkable formerly. Certainly the effect of unemployment has in general been minimised by the redundancy payments that capital can still afford, by sending back foreign workers (as in Germany), or by the exclusion of the young from the labour-force - creating a declassé, lumpenised youth rather than a radicalised mass of unemployed.

The last ten years have shown that the growth of consciousness is not a molecular process; it occurs by leaps and bounds, via class-wide battles and gains in understanding are rapidly lost again if the situation fails to become revolutionary and the heightened consciousness fails to find "institutionalised" support, i.e. soviets and a class party. We can thus expect a rebirth of class struggle when the bourgeoisie attacks the class frontally as a class with effects it will feel on a class-wide basis, not piecemeal leading to sectional responses.

The crisis is deepening to such an extent that the bourgeoisie is contemplating the introduction of measures of austerity that will hit the class on a generalised basis. Lulled into a sense of security by the class' passivity, the bourgeoisie feels that it can get away with more generalised austerity. Increasing the numbers of unemployed while trying to cut the cost of maintaining them could lead to their radicalisation, while those workers still employed could launch an offensive on the economic front to make up for losses in the so-called "social wage". A new wave of class struggle would then be on the agenda.

Detente: an End in Sight?

When the bourgeoisie denies us butter, it always offers us guns. One of the means used to convince the workers that austerity is necessary will be the "threat" posed to the nation by an external foe. And already the war drums of capital are beating their familiar tune.

Detente, like international "equalisation" was a product of the early stage of the crisis - that phase when capitalism felt that the crisis was a temporary affair. One way (it was thought) to make it disappear was to reduce the burden of arms spending and open trading links between the blocs - hence detente. But as the crisis intensified, and the sharpening of the rivalry between both imperialist blocs became more obvious, detente has gradually become less fashionable. On the onehand, in the state-capitalist Eastern bloc, bourgeois hypocrisy has taken the form of bleating about peace whilst arming itself to the teeth. On the other hand, in the West the imminence of the Russian "menace" has been exaggerated and the possibility of war increasingly talked about. The well orchestrated campaign for "human rights" and other forms of bourgeois hypocrisy has attempted to create a xenophobic mentality - a necessary prelude to war. Periodic scares about how ill-armed "we" are and how well-armed "they" are have justified increases in the U.S. and N.A.T.O. military budgets - a sharp reversal of the trend from the mid-60's to mid-70's. With the S.A.L.T. talks moribund, the way seems open to the production of yet more horrific weapons like the neutron bomb. Re-armament also figures as a stop-gap "solution" to some of the problems of unemployment.

The increase in the international arms trade is, of course, necessitated by the increase of proxy wars between the imperialisms. Africa is torn apart by the local agents of the U.S.A. and the U.S.S.R., while war again rages in S.E. Asia - a war that has continued non-stop for forty years!

As the crisis intensifies, so will the threat that some local imperialist war will spark off a general conflagration. However, the crisis is still not deep enough to make war a necessary step for the bourgeoisie. The bourgeoisie has not been plotting to unleash a world war since 1968, only being held back by the proletariat - the absurd scenario of the I.C.C. Thus, there is no need for hysteria; the proletariat still has time and opportunity to destroy capitalism before it can destroy civilisation.

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III - ON THE FORMATION OF THE REVOLUTIONARY PARTY

1. The revolutionary class party is an indispensable weapon of the proletariat. It brings back to the class, in programmatic form, the lessons of its own historical experience. It prepares the class, through its interventions, for the struggle for power, which the party leads and organises. The party is centralised and international in its structure and activities.
2. The party cannot be proclaimed or built outside the context of a revolutionary or pre-revolutionary situation. Prior to the formation of the party the fraction or current must orient itself towards, and develop via, the class struggle, but to claim that it can be a mass organisation in a non-revolutionary period inverts the basic premise of Marxism that being determines consciousness.
3. Until such a point as the formation of the party is on the agenda, there exists not a party but a milieu in which groups co-exist with varying degrees of clarity and confusion. Within such a milieu polemics are resolutely carried out in order to resolve the issues which are divisive and to prepare the way for the formation of the party.
4. It is impossible to draw up a set of criteria according to which any group can be baptised as "proletarian" or "communist". It is not possible

to insist on a set of "points" (e.g. the proletarian nature of October, or rejection of trades unions) to define the milieu. All that we can do to delineate the milieu where useful discussion can take place and whose elements have the potential to contribute towards the formation of the party. The delineation is thus inevitably negative.

5. Any group which supports any national capital and which does not call for revolutionary defeatism in every war today, cannot bring any useful contribution to the struggle for revolutionary clarity. Similarly, any group which argues that either "self-management" or "nationalisation" are socialist, or potentially socialist, cannot be of use in the struggle for communism. We feel that the adoption of the above two points as criteria for exclusion from the communist milieu is the only basis on which we can work.

6. The adoption of these criteria for negatively defining the milieu that can help towards the creation of the party does not exclude discussion with elements who lie outside of such a framework, with the perspective of winning over individuals or changing the ideas of the group.

7. It is necessary to define the relationship which we hope the series of Congresses, initiated by the P.C.Int., will possess in relation to the formation of the party of the class. No clear decision, or indeed discussion of this issue, appears to have emerged from the first meeting.

8. From the milieu (negatively delineated above) whose participation is valid at these Congresses, will emerge (from where else?) the proletarian party. The Congresses - and other political discussions which parallel them - will have as their tasks:

- to decide which differences are compatible and which are not, within a revolutionary organisation.
- to debate, and resolve those that are incompatible in the light of study and the class' activity.
- to prepare collective projects to test out in practice the real importance of differences.

9. It is necessary to establish a clear difference between regroupment of revolutionaries - the ultimate aim of our activities, and recruitment. Regroupment is the coming together of two or more groups on the basis of a political synthesis which dialectically goes beyond their previous positions. The evidence is that such a forging can only be carried out in the intense heat of the class struggle. Recruitment, the winning over of isolated individuals or incoherent grouplets, as converts to the unchanged politics of an existing organisation, is possibly all that is on the agenda at the moment. Regroupment is therefore a task for the future.

10. Regroupment should be seen as the ultimate aim of the milieu participating in these Congresses, once the basic divergences have been clarified in the light of the class struggle. Although regroupment historically has meant a synthesis of organisations and political positions, it is still usually the case that one group has provided the general impetus and stamp on this. (e.g. I.K.D. in Germany in 1918-19, "abstentionists" in Italy in 1920-21.) Each group will, of course, aspire to be such a centre, while realising that a new "alloy" will be created out of the various elements involved. Thus we can only reject the conceptions according to which the I.C.C. claims it is the "pole of regroupment" for the party, as well as that of the P.C.Int. which claims already to be the party.

11. In the light of the above we make the following proposals which we feel should be adopted by the elements participating in the Congress, in

order to provide it with a structure and an orientation. We wish these to be debated and voted on:

- a) A firm delineation of the criteria for attendance at these meetings should be established. We propose the negative criteria that groups who violate the points in thesis 5 should be excluded.
- b) The Congress should recognise itself as an effort to provide a structure where the issues dividing revolutionaries can be debated and resolved, with a view towards the eventual formation of the class party.
- c) A commission should be formed to draw up a plan of work for the future meetings, covering areas of divergence. Steps should also be considered towards the eventual attempt to issue joint interventions in the name of the participants.

Communist Workers' Organisation

October, 1978

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