

'IT WAS TWENTY YEARS AGO TODAY'

"Bliss it was in that dawn . . ." Wordsworth's sentiment about the French Revolution might well have been written by those who lived through the political ferment of the late 1960s. This was a time when to would-be revolutionaries everything seemed possible. Imagination was the guide and it looked as if reality could be made to conform to its demands. But twenty years on the world has changed. Gone is much of the light-hearted euphoria and naive optimism. The dream of 1968 has turned into, if not a nightmare then at least something which is more hard-faced, grinding and "realistic". The goal remains that of the classless society but not only has our understanding of how this is to be achieved changed, the very context of action is dramatically different from the days when "to be young was very heaven".

Twenty years on from the May Days of 1968 is a convenient moment to reflect upon the development of the revolutionary movement, to ponder its strengths, its weaknesses and its future.

Firstly, let's say something about the politics and the context of the upsurge of 1968. The decade of the 1960s was the period when the apparently unstoppable growth of post-war capitalist reconstruction began to falter. The economic "miracle", of little more than 15 years duration, was coming to an end, the rate of "accumulation" went into decline and there re-emerged the old capitalist bogey of general economic stagnation. In the 1950s economies had grown considerably, particularly those of western capitalism. They had gone far beyond not only the trough of the 1930s Depression but also the war-time accumulation of the '40s. The bourgeoisie gained not only by extending the structure of capital but also it seemed as if significant sectors of the working class were gaining unprecedented material benefits from the post-war reconstruction. Paradoxically these gains made by the working class were predicated upon the massive historical defeat it had suffered two decades earlier. Economic growth of the kind witnessed in the 1950s was only possible because of the existence of two earlier mutually complimentary conditions: the defeat of the European proletariat in the '20s and '30s and the subsequent ability of imperialism to unleash war upon the world. The destruction of class consciousness, increased exploitation and the devaluation of capital in the war was just the shot-in-the-arm that the bourgeoisie needed to restart a period of accumulation.

From 1945 until the mid 1960s it seemed as if not only had the bourgeoisie of western capitalism solved their economic problems but also that mass class wide proletarian struggle was a thing of the past. This vision of a "classless society", of the emergence of social consensus within a managed economy, was epitomised in the bourgeois notions of the 'End of Ideology' and Keynesianism. Ironically, part of the would-be revolutionary movement of the 1960s was profoundly impressed, or rather blighted, by these visions.

Despite what bourgeois ideologists believed and irrespective of the tendency for greater accumulation to occur in the West, class struggle had

not gone away. Strikes and other manifestations of the proletariat's existence litter the period (not to mention the massive struggles which swept the Russian block). At the same time there emerged in the West mass inter-class movements which were, to a large extent, the breeding ground for revolutionary militants. Nuclear Disarmament in Europe, Civil Rights in America, to some extent both coalescing in the Anti-Vietnam War struggles, were the ferments within which the consciousness of many were formed and which ultimately had explosive force in 1968.

The general condition which underpinned the events of 1968 was the slowing down in the rate of capital accumulation and the subsequent need to boost the rate of exploitation. Thus there emerged conditions for social upheavals which went beyond region and sector.

Where did revolutionaries stand in relation to this post-war melange? Before revolutionaries could effectively work in this environment certain basic realities had to be more or less grasped: the defeats of the Twenties and Thirties and the existence of the so-called "Socialist World" of Russia. Some sort of understanding of these two elements plus an explanation of the period of reconstruction were essential parts of revolutionary life in the 1960s.

One example of how a revolutionary organisation confronted and resolved these problems is that of the British based **Solidarity**. Despite its main strength being in Britain this organisation not only had influence beyond one capitalist state it was also the mouthpiece for the theories of Paul Cardan a thinker whose views influenced events in 1968. Also it is true to say that the core of the re-born revolutionary movement in Britain in the 1970s was largely formed from ex-**Solidarity** militants.

Cardan, the **Great Man of Solidarity**, was a reconstructed Trotskyist who managed to blend elements of Keynesianism, bourgeois sociology and degenerated proletarian positions. The success of Cardan's theories was built upon, to a great extent, the very shaky foundations of a flourishing capitalism, a capitalism which had shown significant growth over a period of not much more than one and a half decades. Cardan and his organisational acolytes were mesmerised by the period of reconstruction. They both fell victim to the belief that as economic growth was now continuous, as states were now able to intervene and manage economies so the classic marxist theory of crisis and exploitation was no longer relevant. Indeed Marxism was characterised as not only historically redundant but also a "traditional" theory which was essentially bourgeois. The notion that the exploitative class relations of capitalism were inevitably economically unstable was dismissed as so much nonsense. Cardan believed that the "gradual increase in living standards is inevitable", this because economies were under rational control and not subject to the vagaries of hidden laws. In this type of analysis the hallmarks of Keynesianism are clear for all to see. Cardan's empirical observation of the post-war

development of capitalism was mediated by Keynesian economics. Apart from this he worked with theories on bureaucracy promulgated by sociologists such as Michels and Weber, also notions from the Frankfurt School and libertarian councilist views found in the works of revolutionaries such as Anton Pannekoek. This eclecticism produced a theory which banished the marxian proletariat from the stage of history. The very idea of a revolutionary class had no real meaning in the work of Cardan. Although **Solidarity** often directed itself at workers there was no necessary reason why this should be so. Once the classic marxian theory of exploitation had been rejected to be replaced by one based on alienation and which saw revolts against alienation as the central contradiction of "modern capitalism", so any attempt to intervene in industrial struggles was merely a question of contingency.

Cardan's notion of alienation has little in common with that found in Marxism. His philosophy hinges upon an individualist ontology which has more in common with the empiricism of David Hume than the historically constructed one avowed by Marx.

Not surprisingly, when tens of thousands of "de-classe" students and millions of workers all over Europe took to the streets and went on strike in the 1960s **Solidarity** believed that this finally validated its political and philosophical programme. Paris in 1968 was seen as the great struggle against alienation:

"undoubtedly the greatest revolutionary upheaval in Western Europe since the Paris Commune (N.B. not since 1917) . . . thousands began to query the whole principle of hierarchy . . . There wasn't an 'economic crisis' even in the loosest sense of the term . . . The falling rate of profit just didn't come into the picture . . . The central conflict to which all others are related is the conflict between order-givers and order-takers".

Ironically, at this moment of apogee, at this moment when **Solidarity** seemed to find its historical justification the ground upon which it had established its historical reality began to slip from under it. And in this process of dissolution many revolutionaries, not only those who had followed the precepts of Cardan, were thrown into a state of some confusion. They found themselves faced with problems which, whilst they were not wholly new in the history of revolutionary struggle, were articulated in a new environment.

The very condition which Cardan claimed was no longer of any relevance, economic crisis, began to re-emerge in the heartlands of Europe to haunt both the bourgeoisie and revolutionaries. The wave of strikes which swept across Europe in the late 1960s rather than being the product of some individualist "alienation", workers separated from the decision making process, was in fact a response to direct attacks upon workers in industry. Certainly striking workers made "decisions"; they resisted the demands of "order-givers" but this was no more than the "traditional" collective class response to increased rates of exploitation. Without this the working class is nothing. **Solidarity** and Cardan missed the point that collective action arose from the universal condition of exploitation which identifies the class situation of workers. In the

late 1960s the re-emergence of the economic problems of capitalism pressed down upon the working class. Although atrophication of **Solidarity's** political brain prevented it from grasping the dynamics of the growing crisis it was, nonetheless, capable of sensing that something was happening to capitalism. By 1971 one of the organisation's experts in economics could write:

"The problem of continued stability in advanced capitalist economies need not imply that economics is no longer of interest to socialists. Some economic problems are still relevant".

Still relevant! In 1988 the naivety of this statement is somewhat startling. But for a Cardanist to even hint at such a thing was akin to preaching heresy.

Regardless of what the Cardanist Canutes believed the unfolding of the economic crisis could not be stopped. If we take the British economy as a particular example of a general trend we can see that all the classic manifestations of decline were more and more to be found: declining rates of profitability and a growing pool of unemployed. Glyn and Sutcliffe calculated that pre-tax rate of profit (not directly equivalent to the marxist rate of profit) declined by about 30% between 1964-71. Not surprisingly, as profitability declined so also did the rate of economic growth, falling by 50% in the same period. Simultaneously, and as a consequence, unemployment soared. At the time of the French May Days of 1968 unemployment in Britain stood at about half a million; by 1971 this had risen to almost 800,000 an increase of 60%. By today's standards this is small beer. But in 1971 it was unprecedented in the post-war period. Hundreds of thousands of workers on the dole marked not only the bankruptcy of capitalism but also that of Cardanism and its related ideologies.

At one and the same time the onset of crisis presented revolutionaries with severe problems and new possibilities. The problems boiled down to coming to terms with the end of capitalist reconstruction and the possibilities were presented by the global nature of the crisis.

Like the life of the May-Fly the optimism of May'68 was briefly experienced. But it was not all in vain, for there did emerge from it the core of the revolutionary movement which exists today.

The reassertion, albeit at a low level, of the economic crisis of capitalism meant the eclipse of the movements of the 1960s. Many revolutionaries found themselves faced with the need to reconstruct their visions of what constituted the class dynamics of capitalism. The simplistic libertarian nostrums so important in the 1960s no longer worked. New organisational principles and practice were needed as was a coherent critique of bourgeois society. Only the much despised marxism could supply this.

But it was not some imprecise marxism which could come to rescue the disorientated movement. It could only be a marxism which was aware of the real revolutionary legacy of the period 1917-20s; a marxism which reclaimed the historical experience of the working class and which pointed the way forward to a re-born international communist organisation. There were, and this remains true today, only two strands of marxism capable of supplying clarity on lessons of the past and giving guidance for the future; the traditions of the

Italian and German Left Communists were the only ways forward. In effect this meant that if a new orientation was to be achieved it needed the intervention of existing organisations which defended these traditions, either those Italian groups which looked to the bordighist tradition for inspiration or the hybridist stance of the French group **Revolution Internationale (RI)**. In the event the Italian groups were either unable or unwilling to take up the challenge of the defeats of 1968-70. It fell to RI to take the initiative, to try and organise and lead the disparate and confused revolutionary minorities which survived into the early 1970s and which realised the inadequacy of the tired old libertarian myths.

As far as the British experience goes RI made a crucial intervention in 1973 when it set out perspectives for a revolutionary realignment to a meeting of militants in Liverpool. At the time a number of revolutionaries resented the certainties and the "arrogance" of RI which seemed to drop into the meeting like a parachutist. But in retrospect it is clear that the certainties and the arrogance were simply greater clarity. It was an organisation committed to marxism in general and the Left Communist tradition in particular. The perspectives it offered were to become the guiding principles for the greater part of the revolutionary movement of the 1970s.

From 1973-75 the nascent movement developed and grew in size and coherence. I will not detail the trials and tribulations of this period suffice it to say that at this time there emerged two groups which were to make fundamental contributions towards defining and organising revolutionaries. These groups were the **International Communist Current (ICC)** a direct outgrowth of RI and **Revolutionary Perspectives (RP)** later transmuted into the **Communist Workers Organisation, CWO**. Regardless of how the CWO has viewed the ICC and assessed it the latter's contribution to the reformation of the revolutionary milieu made it by far the most important revolutionary organisation of the 1970s. Not only had it a genuine international presence but it was also imbued with a political critique which was firmly rooted in an historical appreciation and appropriation of the class dynamics of capitalism. Working from the insights of RI the ICC eschewed a-historical absolutes such as trades unionism is and always has been anti-working class. In opposition to this sterile approach it argued for the necessity of recognising the difference between progressive and decadent phases of social and historical development. It was only by grasping the meaning of the present decadence of capitalism that revolutionaries could understand the nature of reformism in all its manifestations: trades unionism, labourism etc. At the same time this historicisation of working class experience forced revolutionaries to reassess the nature of the Soviet Union in general and the meaning of Bolshevism in particular. This latter problem presented itself as a crucial issue to the born-again revolutionaries of 1973.

Those who came from the libertarian tradition personified by Cardan had at one and the same time weakness and strength in facing up to these issues. Their strength lay in Cardan's rejection of notions of the Soviet Union as a form of socialist society. Unfortunately this recognition was rooted in the idea that being an hierarchical society Russia was simply a variant of "modern capitalism". And, flowing from this, logically concluded that the Bolsheviks had always been part of the

capitalist project for they were organised as order-givers and had played a crucial role in the emergence of the Soviet Union. Before revolutionaries could successfully move forward this mistaken analysis had to be jettisoned. Not an easy act for some. For example the grouplet **Council Communism** proclaimed to the Liverpool meeting in 1973 that:

" Bolshevism is as socially reactionary today as it was in 1917 . . . Socialism requires the self-activity and autonomous organisation of the working class."

Cardan was alive if not wholly well and haunting the meeting in Liverpool. In a similar vein RP could include in its Platform of October 1974 the statement that:

" though Bolshevism was at one point part of the class movement, it is not part of our own political origins."

This is certainly clearer than the position of **Council Communism** but it is nonetheless resonant with the sounds of the pick and mix eclecticism of Cardanism. Fortunately this refusal to assimilate Bolshevism to a central part of the revolutionary tradition was short lived and by 1975 not only had the CWO moved towards a better understanding of the Bolsheviks but **Council Communism** had developed and become part of the ICC (founded January 1975).

By the mid 1970s a movement had emerged committed to defending the lesson of 1917, to extending the political positions of the German and Italian Left Communists and to building an international presence capable of intervening coherently in the struggles of the working class. In the short space of two years many of the disparate elements which had been associated with the debates being held in Liverpool in 1973 had managed to make an enormous political leap. The "hot house" atmosphere of the deepening economic crisis and the heightened class struggle had forced rapid growth. A bit like garden plants some of this forced growth was not entirely healthy, nonetheless, the overall balance was towards greater rigour and revolutionary well-being. The movement grew not only in its theoretical horizons but also numerically. Admittedly numbers were not startlingly large but they were real and, given the immense difficulties faced by revolutionaries, such as the historical rupture of the 1930s-60s, were significant. An optimism was re-born, welling up from the strength of clarity, the obvious militancy of the working class and the universalization of the crisis. By 1975 it seemed as if they way forward for the working class and its political expressions were set fair. This optimism was exemplified by the CWO when it reflected upon the deepening of the economic crisis and the effect this had upon the class struggle. It had resulted in:

" the most advanced outbreaks of class struggle for many years in Argentina, Spain and Portugal."

Continuing optimistically:

" as the crisis deepens we can expect to see further upheavals there and advances by the class. The possibility of a fully developed seizure of power by the

proletariat cannot be ruled out and the preparation for such a 'bastion' must be bleak..However, as the crisis levels out over the next few years the advances made and lost in one area will be regained in another."

This perspectives article concludes with the confident assertion:

" Although the coming period contains many imponderables, one thing is clear - the long night of counter-revolution is ending and we stand on the brink of the second revolutionary wave of our century."

In the year of its formation the ICC showed a similar, if a less cataclysmic, optimism. It was committed to the perspective of accelerating and continuous growth of class consciousness:

" No capitalist organisation can withstand an almost continuous wave of strikes and proletarian self-activity without becoming demoralized. Thus the class as a whole will begin to reappropriate the communist struggle and begin to deepen its global consciousness in real confrontations. The time lag between mass class actions will shorten, and a growing memory and lessons will be placed at the disposal of the working class."

Looking back at 1975 we can see that at that point the revolutionary movement had reached a plateau. Most of the major theoretical-political work of reclamation had been achieved with greater or lesser success. At the same time its numerical size was not to significantly increase over the next thirteen years. The waves of struggle which we have witnessed since 1975 have not produced a reciprocal and continuous wave of new militants to feed the revolutionary movement. Apart from these features the movement of the mid-Seventies was marked by a variety of dogmatisms which, far from tending to produce a unified international organisation, were in fact increasingly appearing as a barrier to unification. Thus within the greater strength of development was to found a crucial weakness.

An expression of the inherent weakness of the movement was the extent to which it was buffeted by the rise and fall of class struggle; rather than influencing events as confidently predicted, organisations tended to be subject to knee-jerk responses to external events.

In 1977 the CWO was split. This split, well documented elsewhere was a product of inherent weaknesses within the organisation. Those who played a leading role in this split recognised the CWO as an organisation riddled with dogmatisms. Ironically, the same individuals had used this self same dogmatism to previously drive out a Liverpool based element in the CWO. Too late for the Liverpool comrades they realised their mistake and such was the nature of the CWO that their new-found clarity could not be accommodated within the organisation. Perhaps significantly these troubles within the CWO hit the group in a period of down-swing in class struggle. By 1978 the idea of a proletarian 'bastion', no matter how beleaguered,

appearing had disappeared. In the midst of the Firemen's strike of that year the CWO ruefully noted that:

" Both in scope and quality the class struggle has declined from the heights of the years 1972-1974."

And again in a text submitted to the Second International Conference (see below), in November 1978:

" The most remarkable fact about the class struggle in the past 2-3 years is its virtual non-existence ...the class has exhibited little more than passivity since the mid 1970s."

And on the 10th anniversary of 1968 the CWO remarked:

" For the moment the initiative lies entirely with the ruling class."

The ICC also recognised a change in class struggle. In fact this group decided to shift the short-term defeats pinpointed by the CWO back another seven years. The decade 1968-78 was one in which, according to the ICC, the working class had been "defeated"; as a consequence this had:

" allowed the bourgeoisie to regain the initiative through the unions and the parties of the left."

For the ICC the slow maturation of the crisis had wrong-footed workers whereas this slowness had worked in the bourgeoisie's favour by allowing it to develop strategies for attacking and containing the proletariat. Unlike the bourgeoisie workers were in a state of "apathy and disorientation". Paradoxically, despite this decade of defeat, the ICC believed that there had been a continuous strengthening of the revolutionary movement. In a passage which smacks of world-spiritism the ICC claimed that revolutionary groups:

" have strengthened themselves and their programmatic positions and have extended the scope and impact of their interventions...their progress is testimony to the advancement of consciousness within the class."

Despite the defeat, and unlike the CWO, the ICC still saw the way forward for the class and its revolutionary groups as generally unproblematic.

But what was the reality behind the rhetorical claims of the ICC? The CWO had split; numerous other individuals and groups had come and gone from the revolutionary scene; the ICC was still ostensibly a healthy organisation open to debate and pushing for an international realignment of revolutionaries. As is well known, from its very inception, the CWO had been openly hostile to the ICC. Up to the split of 1977 this remained the case; indeed the dogmatism of the CWO towards the ICC was the primary reason for the split. After the split this hostility did not change; what did alter was the international political orientation of the CWO. This change in orientation was to play a significant role in the development of the revolutionary movement.

The International Conferences.

In April of 1976 the Italian group **PCI (Battaglia Comunista)** invited a number of organisations to meet to discuss the social-economic crisis of capitalism. This was a major intervention by the PCI as it envisaged that the proposed conference would lead to the:

" creation of a centre which could co-ordinate everything that the conference considers possible and necessary on an international scale."

And this "centre" would allow revolutionaries to leave behind:

" the state of impotence and inferiority into which they have been led by provincialism fostered by cultural factors, by a self-satisfaction which denies the principle of revolutionary modesty, and above all by the depreciation of the concept of being a militant, which is rejected as a form of sacrifice."

Battaglia hoped that revolutionaries would:

" finally leave the Ideological Tower of Babel and avoid dismemberment of the existing groups."

It appeared as if a real opportunity was to be presented for revolutionaries to come together with their new-found clarity. This was not to be. It was an opportunity missed which, at the end of the debacle, left the movement weaker than it had been at the time of the original proposal.

At first it seemed as if something good was to come of it. A number of groups initially responded positively. The French group **Pour Un Intervention Communiste (PIC)** agreed to participate as did the ICC and the CWO. However, at the first International Conference sectarianism very soon raised its ugly head. PIC denounced the meeting as a "dialogue of the deaf" and left. One down, more to go. The conference ended with an agreement to continue discussion but there was a sour note and a hint of things to come when Battaglia and the ICC had an acrimonious "debate" over whether a Declaration should be issued.

A year later In November 1978, another Conference was convened. Like its parent of a year before this one was also plagued by sectarianism. The Spanish group **Fomento Obrero Revolucionario (FOR)** proudly proclaimed that it was "firmly convinced of the importance of an international organisation of the proletariat". This, however, was not to be achieved by discussions:

" we have other tasks to fulfil and consider ourselves outside the framework of this meeting."

Exit left, one more group. Once again it fell to Battaglia and the ICC to be the main protagonists of competing views of organisation and intervention. Yet again discussion broke down and this time, more disastrously than at the previous conference. Battaglia approved the ICC's proposal that a joint resolution be issued on the need for continued open discussion. In opposition it proposed a narrowing of the conditions for

participation in future conferences. In effect this meant accepting Battaglia's view of the party and class consciousness. Thus the Conferences were to be part of a process of "decantation" and "exclusion"; a far cry from the real needs of the revolutionary movement. Apart from the stance of Battaglia, of particular importance was the role of the CWO at the Second International Conference. The impact of the splits in the context of the perceived "non-existence" and "passivity" of the working class pushed the CWO towards an orientation akin to that espoused by Battaglia. As the class had apparently failed it was up to the party to be the class consciousness of the proletariat. Consequently, Battaglia's partyist stance was looked upon as an answer to proletarian passivity. At the same time the long term antipathy nurtured by the CWO towards the ICC made it easier for it to side with Battaglia at the Second International Conference and to conspire at excluding the ICC from future debates. A third conference was held in 1980 and this was little more than a stage-managed event aimed at asserting one political view. As a rallying point for international regroupment it was worse than useless. Under the tutelage of Battaglia and its minor partner the CWO the so-called International Conferences had become a barrier to revolutionary development. Such was the confused sectarianism of Battaglia and the CWO that at the Fourth International Conference (sic) the only other presence was the Iranian **SUCM**. This organisation defended a bourgeois programme; its saving grace in the eyes of Battaglia and the CWO was its adherence to their notion of the party. Thus the irony of history: proletarian groups were banished from participation but a bourgeois organisation was welcomed.

This was the emerging reality which lay behind the claim of the ICC in 1978 that there was a clear and continuous "advancement of consciousness within the class". Far from this being the case, the opposite was true for revolutionary organisations. It was bad enough that the ICC was being excluded from the International Conferences but worse was to follow. The ICC was on the brink of all but destroying itself, although to read the public statements of the period one would think otherwise.

The ICC's Degeneration.

By 1979 the ICC noted a change in the constitution of the class struggle. Once again workers were about to confront capital, notable examples of this new-found combativity being the steel strike in Britain and the nation wide struggles in Poland. Not unnaturally as the struggle re-emerged so the ICC's optimism reasserted itself. If there is one thing which the ICC is characterised by it is its ability to draw general laws from contingent events. During the Steel strike, for example, it was stated that "it is a general law in the life of proletarian organisations" that when the class is militant so proletarian groups tend to regroup. With the ferments of 1979-80 one could thus expect a strong assertion of this law. Certainly ICC militants were filled with euphoria during this period: struggle was said to be moving towards "international simultaneity", towards a "semi-permanent strike wave". Far from this leading to an international regroupment quite the opposite was to happen. As we have seen the initiative of Battaglia had fallen apart. This was bad enough. Worse was to happen to the ICC. Not only was international regroupment off the agenda but the ICC itself was about to discover that its much vaunted openness had become a sham and that this was to lead to major splits within the organisation.

As with most splits within the revolutionary milieu this one has been well documented so there is no need to repeat here the whole sorry affair. Suffice it to say that it is important to reflect upon the fact that the ossification of the ICC's centre became apparent during a period of intensified class struggle. Particularly important was the steel strike in Britain. The emergence of strike committees and how they were to be understood was crucial in subsequent events. The pressure of external events highlighted two deficiencies within the ICC. One was the immaturity of the organisation vis a vis experience in going to the class and intervening. This inexperience manifested itself as a series of disagreements about the class nature of strike committees: were they simply tools of the trades unions; were they fully proletarian organs or were they hybrids which might go in either direction? Clearly, how these questions were answered, influenced how the committees were confronted. These debates were not in themselves a weakness. Without debates like this revolutionary organisations cannot develop. But for development to occur the debates must be capable of continuing in an open and fraternal manner. Tragically the ICC, cut off from the International Conferences and paranoid about losing its achieved clarity, put down the shutters on debate. The central organs refused to countenance any opinions which questioned their promulgated decisions. On the edge of the 'Years of Truth', as the ICC called the 1980s, the Current began to fall apart. By 1981 the ICC had lost a significant number of militants, through a mixture of "exclusions"(!), expulsions and resignations. Its paranoia had increased to the extent that it could no longer tolerate internal discussion and it became a joke (a bad joke) within the revolutionary movement.

The 'Years of Truth'.

The 'Years of Truth' have not been good for the revolutionary movement. Battaglia and the CWO have come together to form a so-called International Bureau which, to use Battaglia's own phrase was helping to "sort out" the revolutionary movement. This relationship has been far from fruitful, a case of will they/wont they, get "married". Whilst the Bureau has continued to function, working for example with new groups which have emerged in India and Mexico, it has not become the rallying point for an international regroupment. It has not grown in size, nor has it been able to significantly intervene in the waves of class struggle which have been seen in the present decade. At the same time it remains hidebound by the dogma of its partyism which occasionally manifests itself in an opportunist way. It remains proletarian but shows no sign of being able to respond to the demands of revolutionary regroupment.

The ICC has disintegrated even further. The emergence of the so-called "External Fraction" has further weakened this once important organisation. Its bunker mentality has grown to the extent that it is difficult to see it breaking free from its self-imposed paranoia and isolation. The waves of class struggle which we have seen over the past seven years have not had any positive effect upon the ICC. It's always possible that future events might confound this pessimistic view of the Current; however things do not look rosy.

This brief survey of the 1960s-80s has omitted much detail. It has not mentioned a host of groups and individuals which have fallen by the wayside over the period. If great detail had been given it

would merely have substantiated the picture of a revolutionary movement which had undergone rapid, healthy development up to the mid 1970s, thereafter to go into general decline, failing to live up to its own high hopes. If this was simply a product of external circumstances then this would be understandable, if unfortunate. Whilst external forces most certainly did shape the rise and decline, in themselves they do not explain every moment of revolutionary vigour and decline. The tragedy of the movement to date is that it has actively pursued policies of sectarianism. It has nurtured closed minds and has, as a result, suffered the consequences.

Looking Back...

Looking back at the past twenty years it is clear that the militancy in the working class constantly re-emerges. The working class has not let revolutionaries down to the extent that it continues to oppose the attacks of capitalism. Just look at the history of the World over the past two decades: from South America to China to Europe etc. every region of the world has experienced big waves of class struggle. Without this the class is nothing. But where is this struggle to go? Obviously to revolution; well, this is the goal. Achieving the goal and desiring it are not necessarily the same thing. For all those groups which the CBG consider to be the most important in the revolutionary milieu, especially Battaglia, the ICC and the CWO, the problem of achieving the goal is one which looms large. The CBG, along with these three other groups, holds that success in the revolutionary struggle can only be achieved by a unification, or a conjunction of the activities of the working class and the political programme of the vanguard organisation. For those libertarians who continue to believe in the revolutionary organisation as accelerator, the decade of decline in the proletarian milieu is more an aggravation rather than a necessary source of weakness. For the other groups however, this is not the case. For the CBG, the ICC and CWO and Battaglia all accept the premise that the political organisations of the proletariat are crucial for the development of extreme militant struggle into revolutionary confrontation. Organisations of the working class not only bring to the class its own history but from that history extrapolate the goal of a classless society and tactics and strategies for achieving this end.

The experience of the proletariat amply illustrates how disjuncture between the class and its political expressions can have a profound effect upon the cause of workers' fight against capitalism. See what happened in the 1920s and 30s when the counterrevolution swept revolutionaries aside and sowed not only defeat among the working class but also confusion within its political vanguard. When the new movement emerged in the 1970s it fought hard to re-establish much of the lost ground. It was successful in building a base upon which a larger revolutionary structure might be erected. Tragically, the story of the past two decades has not been one of general advance. As has been indicated above, the brief period of very positive development has been almost completely eclipsed by a larger one of almost internecine warfare between groups. In many ways the milieu is weaker now than it was a decade ago. Divisions which were emergent in the 1970s have now hardened into dogmatic barriers of such strength that it is difficult to see how they can be overcome. Certainly it does not seem at all to be correct to believe that greater militancy in the working class will draw revolutionaries together. This was not the case

with the Polish struggles, the Miners' Strike etc. Quite the opposite in fact happened. There was no concerted action to intervene in these struggles. Organisations constructed all sorts of reasons not to work with others. Of course the situation might be different if and when an international wave of class struggle sweeps capitalism, where the proletariat moves into direct and deep confrontation with trades unions and reformism generally. It is possible that in such a conjuncture revolutionaries could well move towards some degree of common purpose and unified action.

But it is easier to hypothesise this than to realise it. The course of history, if this is not too grand a phrase for the past two decades, does not bode well for the proletariat or its political expressions. Unified action will not spring from nothing. Continued action is a sine qua non for future activity. And this future is obviously marked by how we organise today. Consequently, it will not do to have blind faith in the belief that at some confrontation in the future all differences will be, if not resolved, then at least momentarily made secondary in the larger fight. To begin with the ability to recognise deepening class struggle and to be able to judge the extent, the breadth, of the revolutionary movement are perceptions which develop within living political organisations. An organisation which spends the greater part of its time tracking down heresy within itself or denouncing external variants is unlikely to be able to grow with the course of the class struggle. More likely it will become increasingly paranoid and less able to glimpse the commonality of purpose and activity which should unite the interventions of revolutionaries. Bad enough that such a sclerotic condition should be inhibiting the revolutionary blood of one organisation of the working class. Worse that it should be the defining feature of the past ten years. But this has indeed been the case.

...Looking Forward.

All is not, however, lost. There remains a way forward. Revolutionary marxism is stamped by a belief in the transforming power of consciousness. Not of course a transcendental-spiritual one which operates at a supra-historical level. Rather, consciousness as a product of large historical forces set within specific contexts. For the working class to throw off the chains of capitalism it is necessary for a set of general objective conditions to exist which cannot be finally specified beforehand, other than to say that they must be such that they effect large sections of workers as a class and thus tend to unify responses. As revolutionaries we are not affected in the same way as the proletariat. We have the ability to inaugurate major changes within our milieu without the need of large external objective forces. In other words, as revolutionaries we already start from the recognition of the uniqueness of the working class and its organisations. We have a critical awareness of the conditions of class struggle and the stakes being played for. This consciousness is the condition which allows us to change course before it is too late. We can actually stop this drive to self destruction which, if we are correct in our assessment of the importance of revolutionaries, would mean not only the destruction of the working class but also of more or less all mankind. These are the stakes. And as we continue to divide ourselves from each other so capital gains and so we move further away from realising our goal of a classless society.

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