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The political situation in imperialist Europe

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I. The new European crisis

1.1. A new period of instability

The political instability which struck the whole of Europe within a few years constitutes a new and important aspect of the international situation. It is the result of profound and rapid modifications, which - in the context of a long depressive wave - affect all the social structures, political-state institutions, the workers and social movement, and the behaviour and consciousness of social classes and individuals. It has a deep and lasting character.

There undoubtedly exist some big general trends. But at the same time, this is reflected very unequally in different countries. Thus, and paradoxically, we note a greater heterogeneity, from which we go, country by country, to a concrete analysis of the political system, of the trade union movement, of Social Democracy, of the recomposition of the left-wing landscape in respect of this, etc.

1.2. Two social crises

The European continent is gripped by two broad social crises, different in their concrete content and their geographic scope:

In the East, the collapse of the Stalinist bureaucracy was combined with a defeat of the working class. But, the transition to capitalism thus begun is confronting enormous obstacles. It has created a chaotic situation, posing the possibility of enormous social, national and military explosions.

In the West, harsh bourgeois austerity policies are coming up against multiple and strong resistance from a workers and social movement, which, although weakened, remains "too strong" compared to the economic and political needs of European Capital. The European Union, on which were focused hopes of a way out of the crisis, is now associated - in the eyes of the masses - with social regression and an arbitrary technocracy. Paradoxically, in the East, it continues to appear as a life raft in the context of shipwreck and total destabilisation.

1.3. The risk of an uncontrollable breakdown in the East

The complete and rapid assimilation of the East European countries and the ex-USSR in western capitalism is highly improbable in the short or even medium term. Imperialist Europe, in economic crisis and politically divided, does not have sufficient means to stabilise the countries of the East with an "external" intervention. The interaction between the two parts of Europe continually feeds this instability. The risk of sudden and uncontrollable crisis in the East (wars, internal conflicts, social explosions, coup d'état, military of Fascist dictatorships), exerts strong pressures on the Imperialist West and its relatively stable but precarious political regimes. These include migratory flows that could transform into floods of refugees; the formation of a unified but segmented labour market, and the reorganisation of investment policies (often accompanied by relocation) undermine the social conditions of the workers in the West; the rise of nationalism spilling over to the West; the absence, in the East, of an independent and mass workers and social movement, is a factor which divides and weakens the organised working class in Imperialist Europe; the disorderly dismantling of the nuclear apparatus in the East constitutes a direct menace ecologically and militarily, etc.

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From now on, the workers movement and its revolutionary wing, in developing its programmatic positions, its tactics, and its activity, can no longer avoid giving consideration to this continental reality.

1.4. The European Union is coming up against numerous difficulties, giving rise to periodic crises of greater or lesser severity. These crises are linked to three factors which tend to intermingle:

– the intrinsic difficulty of putting in place, from above, a supranational proto-state based on a broad unified market.

The important transfers of national sovereignty (currency, budget, political competition, fiscal policy, police, army, diplomacy) are in conflict with the too-widely divergent structures of the countries and their national states (socio-economic structures, specific insertions in the global market, mode of domination and social and ideological relations, specific place of the workers and social movement, etc.) and therefore, their governments.

– the many forms of resistance on the part of the workers, women, and youth who identify the E.U. more and more as an instrument of the anti-social offensive of big capital. They constitute an important obstacle to the downward homogenisation of the E.U. area. To this we can add, according to the country, the opposition of minority sectors of the bourgeoisie and petty-bourgeoisie.

– the international economic context which tends to intensify all these difficulties and forms of resistance.

The original promise of European unification (to create a zone of peace and stability, of prosperity and democracy for the whole of Europe, and even to allow a way out of the economic crisis) has not been honoured.

Despite the difficulties, the dominant sector at the heart of the European bourgeoisies has nevertheless the firm political will to follow the process of unification on the basis of the E.U., because it corresponds to colossal economic interests (intra-communitary exchange, centralisation of multi-national capital, world economic competition). But this is combined with a permanent battle between the imperialist bourgeoisies of the big countries (Germany, France, Britain), where contradictory short-term interests emerge, but are re-absorbed, bit by bit, by certain medium term common strategic objectives. For them the break-up of the E.U. through a conscious political process is excluded. External upheavals (banking or international monetary crash, widespread war on the European continent, inter-imperialist commercial war), with a sharp destabilising impact are not excluded. But they are not predictable.

The inter-governmental conference of the E.U. planned for 1996- playing the role of a despotic constituent assembly - will be a major centralising event of these tendencies and various options in debate.

Finally, a new leap forward for the European Union requires a two pronged reactionary offensive:

– a drastic social pruning of the “Welfare State” or the “Social State”.

– a drastic reduction in democracy, with the establishment of a semi-authoritarian state structure capable of controlling this melange of states - more and more dissimilar.

The workers and social movement watches these jolts and advances of the E.U. like a totally passive spectator. It's state is worrying in more than one respect:

(1) It lags far behind the bourgeois class

The reformist leaderships (social.. democrat, Christian democrat, and ex-communists) have given up any independent policy concerning the European Commission, to which they ascribe all the modernist and social virtues. And in order to do this they also renounce, in the name of Europe, any social struggle on a European level. On the national level in each country of the E.U., they try to stop mobilisations, to help “their” bosses occupy a better position at the heart of the E.U. They have thus put a two-fold obstacle in the way of the emergence of an active workers movement on a European level.

(2) As a result, competition between the working classes of the different countries is very strong, since no institutionalised or organised barrier exists on the scale of the E.U., whether minimal social legislation or an active and vigilant workers movement. For this reason there exists a generalised retreat. That is why it is through broad social struggles on a national level, that the working classes resist, but in a dispersed way and without having any unified response or demands.

(3) A partial success of the European Union -as a European protostate- would reinforce, by an internal logic, all the ongoing authoritarian mechanisms in each state of the EU (anti-democratic, anti-trade union, anti-immigrant laws, etc.).

(4) The delay in the development of an alternative promoting solidarity and ecology, democracy and internationalism in the face of the European Union creates the space for the development of a nationalist and social-populist right and extreme right, which succeeds in polarising the widespread disaffection with liberal and social-democrat Europeanism.

1.5. The working class in imperialist Europe remains -in spite of its partial integration into the state and the capitalist economy- the best organised core of the world proletariat. Its degree of organisation on the union level continues day to day to bear on the bourgeois state institutions and on the bosses in the workplace. Its capacity to pass to social struggles with big, important demands and, in certain countries, to profound social confrontations- despite mass unemployment and the ideological and practical demobilisation brought about by the social democratic apparatuses- constitutes a big obstacle to the European bourgeoisies' projects. Thus, the working class and youth in imperialist Europe play a key role in defending their working conditions and its existence, in fighting the emergence of a unified imperialist superpower and maintaining strong links with the popular masses of the South and the East,

The Achilles heel for the proletariat of imperialist Europe resides in the triple hiatus between this capacity to resist on the one hand, and on the other, the absence of a general political perspective of starting it, the absence of a genuine alternative Socialist programme, and the delay in the emergence of mass and vanguard organisations of the workers and social movement to match the scale of these stakes. A historical cycle is finishing and the new cycle is late arriving.

Blazing a trail in the reorganisation (mutation) of the workers and social movement on a new base is decisive in engaging in the big social and political battles to come.

II. The crisis in the West

2.1. The dynamic of the crisis in the West

Spurred on by inter-imperialist competition, exacerbated by the globalisation of the economy and by the long wave of recession,- the ruling classes in Europe are driven to confront a working class which overall is better organised and

which has won more social gains than their principal competitors in Japan and the USA. The social impact is thus all the deeper and more difficult to impose. The bourgeoisie aims to limit drastically the redistributive function of the state by (partially) dismantling the welfare state. Then again, it deepens the exploitation of labour through a vast reorganisation of its economic apparatus.

What started, in the seventies, as a simple austerity offensive, overturning the balance of forces in the years 1968-75, increasingly focused on the social cohesion of the working class. Mass unemployment and the collaboration of the reformist structures helped in this.

On the base of this first important retreat in the years 1980-85, technological innovation could be used by the bourgeoisie in its multi-directional offensive of flexibilisation and deregulation. This brought about a real social and cultural upheaval which now affects the whole social and political field, and even individual behaviour. This conscious policy of fragmentation and social inequality, in the context of prolonged economic stagnation, has undermined the social tissue. It affects social organisations in the broad sense ("civil society"), but also the intermediate para-state bodies (family, school, army). Those political instruments associated with the operation of this policy have been visibly discredited (crisis of "the body politic"). The political system which came out of the second world war has become very unstable.

The maintenance of social cohesion in western societies has become a bugbear for the ruling classes.

Big social confrontations and political convulsions will be unavoidable in the coming period.

2.2. The European bourgeoisie: between class collaboration and an authoritarian state

2.2.1. The nature and forms of the bourgeois offensive

The bourgeoisie has unrelentingly increased its offensive against labour concerning its fundamental objectives: sharp rise in labour productivity; relative and absolute reduction in direct wages; reduction in the broader labour costs (social benefits); reorganisation of public services (privatisation, submission to the rules of the market) and of the state apparatus in general; fiscal policy favouring the better-off parts of the population; support for an aggressive commercial policy; etc. It has no hesitation in announcing , and eventually carrying out tests of strength whether on the national or the sectoral level. But it avoids a definitive rupture of the framework of class collaboration with the reformist apparatuses.

Combining successes and defeats, this policy takes forms which vary according to the country (and its traditions).

Alone in Europe the Thatcher government has pushed confrontation with the working class to the point where it has finally inflicted a major defeat on the British trade union movement. But it has largely been helped in this by Labour which had previously weakened it itself, successfully leading a violent political struggle against the left-wing of the Labour Party and the TUC.

In Italy, Berlusconi, trying to impose an anti-social programme (similar to that of any government in the EU) had to resolve at the same time the enormous crisis of the regime in Italy. He opted in favour of a Bonapartist solution, combining use of plebiscites and the media, with a reactionary parliamentary base (Forza Italia plus MSI plus the right of the Christian Democrats). This was incompatible with the pursuit of class collaboration with the trade union bureaucracies, who moreover, were confronted with a raised level of workers militancy.

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In France, the Balladur government, sustained by an enormous right-wing parliamentary majority, has retreated three times in two years, faced with the size of the social mobilisations, particularly of youth, and fearing a social explosion so much more unpredictable and uncontrollable than the weak and unreliable system of class collaboration.

The big bourgeoisie is acutely aware of what the (organised) strength of the working class still represents, and consequently of the blow it must inflict in order to carry out its counter reform. Lacking the power to act brutally and abruptly, it pursues relentlessly and in many different ways its objective of inflicting a lasting and institutionalised weakening on the working class, in the workplace and in society.

On one side, it breaks up the high level of “objective” class solidarity which has combined, since 1945, social legislation, trade union power, muted power over the work process at the enterprise level and political weight (pressure) in state and para-state institutions. On another side, the bourgeoisie dissolves the main bastions and vanguard sectors of the working class, and tries to stop the “new” sectors and new proletarian generations from joining up with what remains of the militant and organised tradition of the traditional workers movement.

From a political point of view, the European bourgeoisie is not seeking to destroy the organised workers movement under its reformist leadership through massive and direct repression.

Its political-structural objective is to weaken it through a profound reorganisation of the organised workers movement, often termed “Americanisation” of the social conflict.

It consists of a double separation:

The first is that between the union movement and the social democratic party, the latter becoming a democrat/progressive party, “relieved” of the organised pressure of the working class. The second is that between, on the one hand, the national/central union bureaucracy, continuing to “represent” the workers in its links with the bosses and the government, and on the other hand, the sectoral and workplace unions, functioning exclusively in terms of disagreements between bosses and workers in the workplace and of immediate socio-economic demands. Social conflict -inevitable and sometimes violent- will thus be limited geographically and socially; all institutional meaning or political dynamic will be stripped from it.

This option obviously fits in with the profound transformation of political life in general: withdrawal from active involvement and passivity of citizens; de-ideologicalisation of society and disappearance of party political allegiance; transformation of the latter into electoral cartels; “commercialisation” of electoral campaigns subject to “marketing”, “control” of public opinion by TV and opinion polls, etc.

Social fragmentation and strengthening of the state apparatus thus go hand in hand. But they can only go as far as the passivity and the weakening of social and popular resistance allows it.

2.2.2. A crisis of the political regime without precedent in 50 years

Its depth is partially hidden by the inability of the workers movement to exploit it. It is a matter of a historic crisis of the bourgeois national state, shaken by a whole set of economic, social, national-ethnic, cultural and military processes, on the national and international level. The socio-political equilibrium established after the second world war, has been permanently affected. Faced with the length of the economic crisis, globalisation of the economy, the development of international proto-state institutions, the tensions due to the global social crisis and the loss of social framework for the reformist apparatuses (weakening of traditional union organisations, crisis of Social Democracy),

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the bourgeoisie strives, in parallel to its policy of class collaboration, for the establishment of a more authoritarian regime. This is different from the Fascist option, in that it rests fundamentally on the reinforcement of the state apparatus, and not on the elimination of the workers movement and democratic freedoms through a violent extra-parliamentary struggle.

The political crisis appears above all as a crisis of political representation: parliament and government (on the European, national, regional and local level); the traditional political parties; the big social and popular organisations. But this massive disaffection does not relate primarily to the organisational form or the so-called political culture of these organisations, but to their incapacity to resolve social problems, or worse, to seek to resolve them by brutally attacking the living conditions of the ordinary masses. Corruption scandals aggravate this situation and have a powerful demoralising effect on society in general and on the workers movement in particular.

It is also a crisis of democracy in its deepest sense, that is to say of the growing impossibility for workers and citizens in general to actively intervene and to decide what is in the “common interest”.

(1) Universal suffrage to assemblies which in turn choose the executive, has been shown incapable, after 15 years, of stopping neo-liberalism

(2) Money (i.e. the market) uniquely and openly makes the economic and choices directly affecting peoples' lives, and in the direction of a growing inequality.

(3) “Social” democracy is in disorder, because its trade unions are ineffectual, leaving workers voiceless.

(4) Television and PR have largely absorbed the political sphere, rendering void the free choice and autonomous activity of the citizen both during and outside election time

(5) Globalisation of the economy and the emergence of pre-state institutions at this level undermines what remains of the transmission belt between the population and power (in the workplace, in the municipality, in the national state, etc.).

At the most basic level, it is a profoundly anti-democratic operation, because it is anti-political. But even the “political”, as a choice of society and of concrete economic, social and cultural orientation, loses its point. A solid economic rationality (the market) is substituting itself, aided by an invisible and uncontrollable technocratic apparatus. In these conditions, “democratic” activity itself -i.e. the capacity to influence, through the self-activity and self-organisation of society- can only wither in its turn. The bourgeoisie only believes in half of this political anaesthetisation, because it implies a total mastery of the objective social contradictions. Hence the pursuit of multiple forms of legal restrictions on democratic liberties and the reinforcement of the state apparatus.

The outline bourgeois solutions appearing do not in any way go in the direction of readjusting the old parliamentary system. On the contrary, they reinforce the executive state apparatuses to the detriment of the elected deliberative assemblies:

– direct election of the prime minister, mayors, governors, etc.; government by legislature (i.e. a government reduced to a majority in parliament is immediately replaced by an alternative majority - without elections); numerous “finance laws”, “budget laws”, “competition laws” (deriving notably from laws coming from international institutions: the EU, the World Trade Organisation, etc.) which decide the concrete choices instantly and for a whole period; etc.

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– electoral reform attempting the remoulding of the political parties to the detriment of free and integral expression of the opinions of society represented by universal suffrage: limitation (read abandonment) of proportional representation; raising of the electoral threshold; majority system, uninominal majority system in two or even one round, financial threshold raised for deposit,...

– unequal access to the media, in particular television. Restrictions on democratic liberties (press, strikes, demonstrations, workplace union activity) and growth in practice of constraints and controls over day to day life add to this. The construction of the European Union and the treatment of immigrants form important levers for progress.

Three elements directly favour this bourgeois policy:

– the greater and greater role of television;

– the re-legitimizing of certain repressive state bodies (humanitarian missions for the army, the judiciary against corruption in the political sphere, the police/army against drugs and organised crime);

– the appearance of modern Bonapartes (on the right and the left)- optimist, careerist, media friendly- filling the political vacuum like saviours from political impotency and despair.

The fundamental weakness of this authoritarian “solution” -beside the continued strength of the working class and youth- is that , should there be a major social and political confrontation surpassing the established framework of the political regime, the bourgeoisie has only greatly weakened political instruments (party or movement) at its disposal to mobilise and organise its social base. The repressive state apparatus and the anaesthesia induced by television do not give sufficient guarantees. The evolution towards such an authoritarian regime will not be gradual and painless all the way. Hence the attempts in several countries at reactivating or reorganising a militant and active (bourgeois-democratic) party. With the appearance at their heart of more active personalities, incarnating the perspective of a strong state (Pasqua in France, Berlusconi and Fini in Italy, personalities in the CDU and CSU in Germany etc.).

2.2.3. The rise of Fascist and extreme right parties

In most European countries, the Fascist right has achieved its electoral breakthrough and managed to form parties with a consolidated organisation, programme, and party-building tactic. This success is above all the result of reactionary anti-immigrant sentiments, which have developed to a massive extent in society. The most underprivileged and weakest layers of the masses (impoverished, excluded, personally isolated, desperate) and certain middle layers -property owners or salaried workers- afraid for their future, have all seized on these parties to show their dissatisfaction with “the system”. Some of them undoubtedly share the central idea of the current platform of the extreme right: the expulsion of the “immigrant” population.

But this electoral breakthrough has not resulted, for the moment, in the construction of an extra-parliamentary movement adopting Fascist agitation against the workers and social movement, social struggles, the exercise of democratic freedoms and so on, with the aim of seizing political power. Fascist activity is really the occupation of nazi groupuscules which float around the periphery of the extreme right. On the contrary, the option chosen by these parties is that of a demo-cratic, parliamentary detour, of a presence in the elected state assemblies, the search for a united front with (the right of) the right, and legal participation in political power even in a junior position.

This “democratic” detour and low profile correspond to the objective political situation, to their weakness at the

activist level, and to the project of the big bourgeoisie.

The latter seeks to impose its policy, to stabilise society and to preserve social cohesion by collaboration with the summit of the traditional labour movement combined with a measured reinforcement of the state apparatus. This policy is manifestly incompatible for the time being with the inclusion of Fascist parties in its political line-up.

But this orientation of the bourgeoisie could radically change under the impact of two factors:

- a sharp aggravation of the social crisis and the rise of new social conflicts exceeding the capacity of the parliamentary system and the control of the reformist structures;
- the tactic of imposing the massive counter-reform through the gradual and measured weakening of the working class and its organisations could reach its limits.

In this case, the installation of an authoritarian state would become a concrete perspective. This would be a major political turning point. probably taking place in a single country first, it would certainly provoke a major jolt in the whole of Europe and would have big consequences for the EU.

Such a turning point would naturally enlarge the political space for the Fascist parties and the conditions for their agitation. And that independently of whether the bourgeoisie appealed directly for their collaboration in building a strong state and supporting it in a systematic confrontation with the workers and social movement.

In the mean time, the Fascist parties have an important but contradictory impact on bourgeois policy: on the one hand, they help build on the discredit and instability of the political system (this is the dominant aspect at the moment); but in doing this, on the other hand, they already play a useful role for the bourgeoisie:

- they have taken a part of the social base of the reformist workers parties, thus contributing to the weakening and division of the working class;
- they contribute to sharpening competition between workers, and to destroy feelings of class solidarity in favour of a national identity consciousness;
- they have drawn to the far right the elementary radicalisation and dissidence of a sector of the population regarding the political regime, including youth - which particularly affects the revolutionary left;
- they exert an ideological and politico-electoral pressure on all the traditional parties (bourgeois and reformist).

The existence of Fascist parties -already recognised by a section of society, including youth, legitimised by universal suffrage and present in the wheels of the state apparatus - is particularly dangerous because they are ready should the bourgeoisie need to save its system through repression.

3. Retreat, destructuring/break-up and mutation of the workers movement

3.1, The “really existing” workers movement is in an unprecedented historic crisis, from which there is no visible exit.

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This crisis weakens the reformist currents leading it, but just as much the working class in the respect that an alternative left leadership (with programme, political line, cadres, and organisation) is late in breaking away.

The Crisis is due to three factors:

– mass unemployment under-mines the social foundation of the political and trade union wings of the workers movement;

– changes to the very structures of the working class - in the concrete conditions of the bosses offensive - penetrating its “natural” social cohesion and reducing its intrinsic weight in society;

– the crisis of the organised workers movement is fed by the end of three political cycles:

- that opened by 1968, which has hit head-on the revolutionary left;
- that opened by 1917, which has certainly destroyed the Stalinist world model, but also sowed a generalised doubt as to the “feasibility” of an alternative society to capitalism;
- that opened by the last quarter of the 19th century with the creation of a mass proletariat, the starting point for the roots of Social Democracy, trade unions and a “Socialist counter-culture”, now all in decline.

These sociological and historical considerations would not be able to conjure away the decisive political reason which has guided these social mutations towards a change in the balance of forces: the policy of the reformist apparatuses of jointly managing the crisis, implying precisely the stifling of working class response and counter-offensive.

The overall effect is no less a menace directly to the social cohesion of the working class, its living conditions, and the activity of the workers movement - i.e. to the accumulated gains of more than a century of very hard struggle for the working class.

The retreat of the reformist currents- notwithstanding their electoral scores hereafter in “permanent flux” with sometimes catastrophic falls- is important in terms of ideological influence, of the allegiance of their traditional bases and capacity to socially order labour.

The “communist” satellite movement, in decomposition for fifteen years, has broken up and is taking various routes to recycle itself. This threatens politically and organisationally the union movement wherever they have significant weight. Quite as spectacular is the decline of Social Democracy, which had in the south of Europe successfully fed off the decline of the communist parties to strengthen its electoral and union audience.

This is a mutation of historic proportions. Because these two currents have in their own manner (the one tied to “its” imperialist bourgeoisie, the other to the Stalinist bureaucracy), from the beginning of the 20th Century, played a decisive role in the rescuing of capitalism, through their capacity to channel struggles and demands towards objectives and forms compatible with the capitalist system, and through their readiness to smash any attempt to construct a revolutionary-Socialist alternative.

This mutation is taking place in a situation of great political disarray, of decline in mass political consciousness and of decline in the political-organisational involvement of the broad vanguard.

A new period has opened in the history of the workers and social movement.

However, it is no longer a question of replacing one (reformist) leadership with another (revolutionary and anti-capitalist) at the heart of a stable traditional workers movement which is active and getting stronger, but of bringing about this political reorientation through a mutation of the whole of the workers movement in a historic crisis.

This will not come about without a radical upturn in the activity of the masses and the explosion of new forces. And immediately, through the adoption of tactics adapted to the start of the current recomposition.

3.2. The internal structure of the traditional workers movement is changing.

Through the loss of representativity and allegiance of the reformist parties (Social democrat, Christian democrat, post-Stalinist), the union movement (in the broad sense) is becoming the centre of gravity of the overall workers movement. It is not only the principal instrument of defence against the bosses offensive, but also the principal place of activity for the great majority of conscious workers. This distance arisen between the union activity of the practical vanguard of the workers and the “political sphere” constitutes a big obstacle to the emergence of a new political force.

3.3. The traditional trade union organisations are themselves stalling, indeed in sometimes dramatic organisational decline, through

- the intrinsic crisis of union activity due to massive and long-lasting unemployment, and to the harsh offensive of the bourgeoisie (“counter-reform”). This is a major difficulty, including for the anti-capitalist and anti-bureaucratic left.
- the particular crisis of reformist trade unionism without reforms
- the absence of an overall political perspective.

All trade union orientations are simultaneously in crisis, although for different reasons: the (social democrat) union apparatuses associated with austerity politics; those preferring protest without follow-up (French CGT type); and those prepared to fight in terms of partial struggles or widespread mobilisations deprived for the moment of political or programmatic meaning.

3.4. The policy of the reformist leaderships induces a dangerous social and ideological decline in the workers movement, reducing further and further the social base and ability to generate demands of the unions: their priorities are

- to the workers as producers (in the workplace); with an inability to tackle new areas of exploitation and the sphere of reproduction;
- to the workers in work (to the detriment of the unemployed and youth who have never worked)
- to wages (of those who have a job), giving way to the massive destruction of jobs and neglecting working conditions (rhythms, hours, intensity,...)

The trade union leaders have proved themselves incapable of taking responsibility for all the social effects of the crisis. They are therefore unable to fully address the demands of women, youth and immigrants. In some sectors however, e.g. health workers, these groups join the unions and force some of their concerns on reluctant union leaders. In other sectors these groups are confined to part-time, temporary jobs and are open to super-exploitation.

This regressive dynamic aggravates the sclerosis of the traditional workers movement:

– there is a risk of reinforcing a “labour aristocracy” spirit amongst the most privileged layers of workers (male, of a certain generation, still in full-time work and with an open-ended contract, earning a relatively high salary), but who also are often the best organised and most class-conscious workers, and historically, the base of trade unionism in imperialist Europe.

– the development of “new” social movements in areas forsaken by traditional trade unionism feeds the crisis of the latter, by showing up its inability to present a genuine alternative society; but these social movements do not have sufficient social force to change the unfavourable balance of forces, government or the capitalist system. If they are not, by definition, more progressive than the workers movement, they appear today less “integrated”, and thus less compromised with capitalism.

3.5. The reorganisation of trade unionism is on the agenda

The deep discrediting of the traditional leaderships and the reduction in the socialisation of their own activist base has created a wider space for debate and action.

To occupy this space means first to defend intransigently the living and working conditions of the working class -a terrain abandoned by the reformist leaderships. We have to develop a radical democratic practice: “glasnost” at the heart of the union organisation; democratic organisation in times of struggle; complete information, especially concerning negotiations with the bosses; development of workers self-activity. Finally, we need a radical mutation of the programme, of the political position in society, taking responsibility for all the exploited and oppressed layers, a mutation of methods of leadership and functioning, of public activity.

Clearly, there is a double dynamic -juxtaposed- which varies from country to country, or even within one country. In practically every country, the big union federations are essential for large-scale mobilisation. This is certainly the case where they have kept a quasi-monopoly on trade union representation (in so-called Northern Europe”. But even in countries where the trade union landscape is more complex, the central union bureaucracies have been forced, under pressure from the base (relayed by union tendencies or by independent unions) to take the lead in big social movements (cf. Spain, Italy).

Significant union reorganisations have taken place in certain countries. They should be studied in detail in order to advance along the path of a new trade union perspective: the struggle, defeat and current renewal of the TUC (Britain); the failure of Essere Sindacato (in the CGIL) in Italy which was on the threshold of forming a new inter-professional “mass, class trade union”, but didn't make the leap; in France, with the left majority split in the National Education Centre (FEN). “Class struggle” trade unions have developed outside the big confederations, minorities but with an impact and strong legitimacy in their sector, notably in Italy (COBAS, etc.) and in France (SUD, health sector, etc.). They have not so far constituted a new mass workers union.

We need an overall vision of the particular tactics combining (according to the country) a battle to straighten up the existing union organisations and the regroupment of militant forces outside them. A difficult problem to resolve remains the particular link between the battle for union reorganisation and the recomposition of political currents or

parties.

4. The historical exhaustion of Social Democracy as a current of the working class: separation from the organised workers movement and the working class

4.1. 1989-1992 was marked by a double turning point in the evolution of European Social Democracy.

First, between 1975 and 1990, it had an unprecedented extension of its influence in the working class, and on a global scale. It succeeded in marginalising, everywhere in Europe, the CPs and the revolutionary left on the electoral and institutional level, and often on the trade union level; in pulling “Gorbachevism” into its orbit, and in winning over big revolutionary or third world liberation organisations. Then, from mid-1991 on, started an unprecedented decline, beginning with the electoral level where a series of grave electoral defeats followed in several countries, revealing a wholesale crisis of orientation, an organisational sclerosis, indeed a deep identity crisis.

This historic crisis does not at all imply the linear extinction of Social Democracy. Because, as long as a big wage-earning class still has to struggle for its living conditions, to use mass trade union organisations inside a democratic capitalist system and thus brought to “cement” its on the legislative and institutional level, there will be space for a political party to organise, detached from the workers movement.

The dominant trend is for a half-spontaneous, half conscious separation between the social-democrat parties, on the one hand, and on the other, the trade union and workers movement and working class. This speeds up the evolution of a working class social democrat party into a democratic and progressive party, which tries as hard as it can to escape from the pressure of the working class (and its demands, its mass organisations, its social weight, at the same time as directly capturing the popular vote and staying on top of the social movement when it chooses.

4.2. This dynamic works on four levels:

– its classic electoral tactic of “unfailingly” occupying, regularly and mechanically, state institutions through the “opposition cure governmental participation” pendulum has failed for 15 years. The bourgeoisie is in the position of pushing the social democratic party into opposition, or of keeping it there or even dictating severe conditions for its participation in government. Any distancing from the bourgeois state affects the *raison d’être* of a “modern” social democratic party and its apparatus.

– entire sections of its popular base have disappeared on the electoral level (towards the right or extreme right); the traditional allegiance is declining, and is not compensated for by the arrival of salaried or comfortable and “modern” petty bourgeois layers, whose support is more unpredictable and limited;

– fissures and sometimes spectacular rifts at the heart of the social democratic bureaucracy, between the political and trade union sectors; have resulted in an organic weakening of the two compared to the bourgeoisie, but also in the eyes of the working class;

– a real programmatic mutation has taken place through the explicit abandoning of any notion of “changing society” and of the traditional arsenal of “left Keynesian” measures - the basic platform of Social Democracy. The latter remains voiceless before neo-liberalism

4.3. This evolution has changed the social position of Social Democracy, in the triangular “bureaucratic apparatus -working class bourgeois state apparatus”.

The political situation in imperialist Europe

The social democratic leadership, trying at any price to stay in or re-enter the seat of power, has been put under very strong pressure by the bourgeoisie to openly and at great length confront the working class, to align the latter according to the requirements of a harsh austerity policy and of a reorganisation of the economic apparatus.

This has been a formative political experience for the working class.

Social Democracy has crossed to a new stage in its integration with the capitalist system -an essential factor in its long process of into a movement independent of the working class. With the weakening of its organic links with the working class and the growing instability of its electorate, its existence as a privileged bureaucratic apparatus depends more than ever on its insertion into the state apparatus; and now its access to private financial resources. In these conditions (to which should be added scandals with a devastating effect on morale), a whole (new) section of its traditional Socialist-reformist identity has disappeared.

This displacement of Social Democracy at the heart of capitalism has provoked a social displacement at the heart of the social-democratic apparatus itself: the 80's selected a new leadership layer, who lived in close liaison with the bourgeois, administrative, management and media elites. Its rise, its living standards and career prospects are directly linked to the "modernisation" of capitalism, and to its capacity to reduce the weight of the trade unions in society and to impose an impoverishment on the masses. This social existence of a privileged layer in capitalism has a big effect in the social democratic parties.

This new stage for social democracy is linked to the new historic stage of capitalism in the 80's. It came about through the political struggle that social democracy lead all through the years 1980-1992, against the working class and youth. In sum, it represents a radical deterioration of its organic and socio-psychological links with labour.

4.4. The limitations of this trend of separation should be underlined.

There is no situation without outcome, either for capitalism or the social democratic apparatus. We have to understand it in terms not of possible disappearance, but of a new stage in its history. On this level, we are talking about a real qualitative jump. If it crystallises and follows through, it would mean separation (total or partial) with the real workers movement. That would be a real historic turning point, because the fusion between the two, at the end of the 19th century, was the origin of social democracy.

This does not mean that social democracy is irredeemably incapable of "turning" politically.

Firstly, social degeneration and electoral disappearance should not be confused. With the generalised discredit of all the governmental parties, a return of the electoral pendulum is in the end probable. But it will be necessary to check, with every "re-launch", how the links between social democracy, the working class and its organisations have changed. Secondly, some sectors of the leaderships also understand the mechanics of the situation. They will seek to distance themselves from neo-liberal politics and to tie up again with a certain autonomy, but without risking leaving the orbit of political power. In fact, the possible contradictions amongst the bourgeoisie as to a change in economic policy follow the exact outlines of the possible daring of social democratic policy (cf. the enthusiastic political rallying to "Clintonism", including left currents of European social democracy).

Despite the tendency to separation and destructure, we should not underestimate, particularly when compared to our organisational and electoral weakness, the maintained material and social strength of this social democracy on the level of members, activists, its indirect impact on workers and youth, in the union movement, and especially, in local and municipal political life, etc.

4.5. This overall evolution of social democracy explains why no socialist left wing (“centrist”), solid in terms of size, of political platform and combativity, has been able to form all through the 80's, in any party in imperialist Europe. An internal reform of these parties is more than ever an illusion.

4.6. If separation constitutes the fundamental tendency of social democracy, we have to be aware of its concrete form, its rhythm, contradictions, and concrete policy. In particular, there is at the start a difference between the social implantation and history between the countries of the North and the centre of Europe and those of the South. In certain countries (Northern and central Europe) where social democracy has historically been a majority in the working class for more than a century, it has succeeded in sending deep roots into the working population, to the point of forming a real “counter-society”, and has undergone a process of fusion with the state apparatus, and to a certain point, with the economic apparatus over 70 years. The distancing of the social links with the working class and its extinction as a party of workers activity has been accelerating over the last 25 years. But it is a gradual process which is taking place in a very big and very compact social body. In the countries of Southern Europe, the roots of the social democratic current have been weaker, since the origin of the workers movement. Between 1970 and 1990, on the other hand, it went through a spectacular electoral and organisational rise. Its political and social crisis is today all the more spectacular and dangerous (France, Italy, Spain, Portugal). It is the crisis and the mutation of the communist parties -in relation to the development of social democracy over the last 30 years- which determines the concrete dialectic of the “traditional” workers move-ment.

III. Our Construction

5.1. The current period and the crisis of the subjective factor

The bourgeois offensive, multi-directional on a world scale, has undeniably carried society to the right, pushed the workers movement on to the defensive and considerably weakened the revolutionary and anti-capitalist current.

It means not just a simple decline in the balance of forces, which could be rapidly overcome by a social mobilisation. It is the “subjective factor” as a whole which has been hit head on.

This crisis is composed of three important aspects:

(1) an acute political impotence, as the economic and institutional globalisation of capitalism takes place in the absence of efficient political and organisational instruments to confront it.

(2) a profound crisis of the Socialist perspective for humanity(as much from the point of view of which society to construct, as which concrete strategy to get there). This factor is a constituent element of the political impotency.

(3) unprecedented modifications affecting the workers movement -its strength, its identity, its confidence, its consciousness -and a political mutation affecting all currents in a particular way (Social Democracy, Stalinism, revolutionary left). A historic cycle is closing without a new one opening.

This enormous crisis of the “subjective factor” has two practical effects which are important for the workers and social organisations, including the revolutionary left:

(1) a dramatic ebb in the degree of spontaneous Socialist consciousness of the masses -with consequences for the

energy and radicalism of struggles;

(2) a very clear ebb regarding the degree of genuine political activity and organisational involvement of the most advanced elements.

In summary: we are passing through a very particular non-revolutionary period, with the following as principal interconnected elements:

(1) an unrelenting offensive of international capitalism, the spearhead of which is its political economy (globalisation + deregulation + unlimited competition);

(2) a pronounced instability of the "new world order, at different levels: economic (with strong inter-imperialist contradictions), political (absence of institutional instruments for regulation on a global level; upheavals in the big countries in each regional zone, particularly in Europe), social (threat of response to the offensive, of explosion, of mobilisation etc.).

(3) the maintenance of a multitude of oppositions with many different forms, whose activity remains remarkably high compared to the unfavourable subjective conditions, but whose level of politicisation and organisation is on a completely different level compared to the period before 1980 and certainly, 1989-90.

The major feature of this non-revolutionary period is not the disappearance of struggles, but above all their fragmented and staggered character, and their non-resolution and, in this respect, the (partial) retreat of the vanguard between two (waves of) struggles or mobilisations.

The weakening of this broad (political and trade union) vanguard, traditionally functioning amongst the workers as a relay /memory/ substrata/alternative, has aggravated the deterioration in the balance of forces between the classes. This contributes, for the moment, to the weakening of the links among the class and its mass organisations and, indirectly, to the fact that the big mobilisations and accompanying radicalisation no longer spontaneously produce an increase re-politicisation and political involvement (particularly amongst youth).

The ebb of political conviction, of militant energy and organisational involvement of the broad vanguard derives more directly from this crisis in the subjective factor. It is clearly more acute than the ebb of the "crude" social balance of forces on this terrain.

We need a radical, visible and spectacular breakdown of the machinery of the class enemy to open a breach, reverse the flow of things and to reopen the Socialist perspective. As long as this intermediate period lasts, struggles must be strengthened, resistance organised and cadres recruited. That should be on a par with the reorganisation of the social movement through a series of defensive battles and the accumulation of political experiences.

Thus this non-revolutionary period allows us an intervention into struggles and an opening for audacious political initiatives. At the same time it places a great handicap on the construction of a revolutionary organisation but opens the way to a regroupment policy responding to the current level of consciousness and organisation.

5.2. Defending the political and organisational gains of our organisations

5.2.1 Our organisations have accumulated big political and organisational gains, but in an uneven way from country

to country. But not to the point of being big, significant parties in the workers movement. That the collapse of Stalinism and the deep discredit of Social Democracy has not pushed the revolutionary Marxist alternative to the forefront is a disappointment. Our programme has not become the axis of a new regroupment in the workers and social movement and its vanguard.

On the contrary, the overpowering emergence of a new non-revolutionary period has cut into these political and organisational gains. It leaves us temporarily without a perspective of redevelopment. The political generation which made this effort is all the more hit by this decline and this political stalemate than a new political generation late in arriving in numbers to take up the relay.

5.2.2. The battle to defend our organisations thus becomes fundamental. In general (according to the size and political place of the section), it does not mean a struggle for survival in the strict sense of the word, but of maintaining a critical mass in order to redevelop the organisation in the best subjective conditions, once the political cycle reopens.

The cycles of radicalisation (revolutionary or semi-revolutionary) since 1945 in western Europe, have been extended in time and limited in their scope for political confrontation. This slowness of history tends to destroy the gains won, stopping a process of growth, a lasting social implantation, a visible political existence for the duration.

5.2.3. We must resist the pressure to dissolve our organisations. Our own experience has shown that to give way on programmatic or organisational principals has not helped us to maintain or develop ourselves.

The whole objective and subjective situation demands the retention of an organised revolutionary Marxist current both to understand reality and to guide our day to day intervention in the class struggle. And also to maintain the perspective of Socialist revolution, because it is precisely the abandonment of this perspective which is the base of the real liquidationist currents on the revolutionary left.

The defence of the structural organisation and of the general programme of our sections does not resolve any of the questions of concrete analysis, of political line, of mass intervention and of the concrete organisational system of the party. But a party-building project is based around the "preservation of our gains" (self-affirmation of our political identity, propagandist activity, campaigns without root in the real social movement) will lead to sectarian marginalisation and demoralisation.

The real stakes of the debate about the defence of our organisations rest in the redefinition of our party-building tactic in the current conditions.

The problem is not so much one of "conserving to survive" as one of "evolving in order to grow".

5.3. The necessary mutation of our organisations

We must bring about a real programmatic mutation and a political reorientation which puts the party building project in tune with the changes in today's world.

5.3.1. The reformulation of a new Socialist ("emancipatory") project and of an overall political perspective is a decisive question.

This is not a preliminary to the unleashing of struggles. But it is completely indispensable to give them their full force of social transformation and their visibility, which they have largely lost.

The Socialist project is going through a profound and unprecedented crisis. "Real Socialism" -in the absence of an anti-bureaucratic revolution has a much more devastating effect than predicted.

Marxism itself is being questioned by the left of the workers and social movement. It is today marginalised in the workers and social movement, and in society. Its presuppositions are no longer accepted as evident: the existence of an exploited class of wage-earners, the decisive force in the radical transformation of society; its emancipatory capacity through collective action, the conquest of political power and the replacement of the ruling class; the possibility of building a new Socialist society, identified with a planned economy based on the collective ownership of the means of production and new forms of collective life.

Other emancipatory "paradigms" (ecology, feminism, third worldism, humanist ethics, etc.) have moved to the left, showing up the gaps in Marxism as propagated by the different currents of the traditional workers movement. They have commenced an ideological struggle against Marxism on its own ground. They have won a large audience amongst the critical left. They open up vital social questions which have taken on a new dimension (the global ecological crisis, persistent women's oppression, the descent into the abyss of the "third world").

Updating our Marxism implies the abandonment of a "standardised" Marxism immediately useful to day to day activism and which could function with a certain efficiency in society and the social movement, as long as its fundamental presuppositions were not put into question and the Socialist perspective was universally acknowledged, notably by the class enemy. This updating necessitates a patient reformulation of the fundamentals of Marxist theory and of its capacity to adjust to the novelty of today's world. and to turn boldly to the future. In order to "defend Marxism" we have to proceed to a renewed radical critique of the actual "modern" contradictions of bourgeois society in order to strengthen our identity and to make it a weapon of revolutionary struggle.

5.3.2. Our programmatic answers are not sufficient.

Sections of the Fourth International have engaged, stepped by step, through their intervention into struggles and their political reflection, in the elaboration of a new programme. The experience is meeting with great difficulty in progressing the analysis and finding a new consensus amongst the broad left to act together.

The transitional programme is directly affected:

– first, we are not in a period of "pre-revolutionary agitation, propaganda and organisation" (Trotsky, 1938), but moreover in a non revolutionary period of real political impotency where the masses and their struggles are bereft of adequate political and organisational tools and without hope of being able to change society; "the transition" is obviously not on the agenda for the popular masses, and the definition of the new society, resulting from the new transition, is not evident today.

– second: how can we build the "bridge" today which starts from the "ACTUAL conditions and the ACTUAL consciousness of broad layers of the working class" to lead to "the one and only conclusion...: the conquest of power by the proletariat". What is this today's "consciousness" and how can we effectively "convince"?

– three: how precisely should we address ourselves to youth, in a situation where "a generation is wearing itself out, having carried on its' shoulders the old programme".

The difficulties of going to a new programme, based on the transitional method, are considerable.

– One: the updating of our programme cannot consist of additions to a pre-existing programme. We have to reformulate a new programmatic body responding to the new world situation and to the social movement, the agent in the transition to Socialism.

– Two: Obviously, the large programmatic base and a series of demands which were shared for 50 or 70 years, at least verbally, by the workers movement in its diversity, has broken up. It is very difficult today to put together a set of anti-capitalist demands, to address ourselves to the mass of workers and their organisations, and to move on to agitation, i.e. to effectively bring about the unity in action of the whole workers and social movement.

– Three: the workers movement under its reformist leadership is not a self-evident lever to contribute to the revolt of society today. Where will “the real movement” (K. Marx) of the class happen? The political situation does not give clear indications for the moment as to the path that the working class and youth will take, when they get started again.

Rebuilding the links within the existing social movement, through debate, proposals, common action, etc., is an obligatory path to apply the transitional method on the terrain.

5.3.3. We have to rethink our party-building tactics.

The balance sheet since the middle of the 80's is clear: we are meeting difficulties in building revolutionary organisations. These difficulties grew dramatically after 1989-91. The reduction in number of our activists and practical means puts the political space we have conquered as a party in danger.

This has provoked a discussion on our party building tactic. There is no easy answer, no quick way out, no short cut. It can be neither general nor continental. It will have take into account concrete aspects: national conditions of class struggle, peculiarity of the workers movement and the left, size and influence of our organisation, and our practical militant means.

6. Our party building tactic

6.1. The independent tactic.

It is possible to continue a party building project through independent tactics based on intervention as a party in struggles and the social movement with the objective of direct recruitment to the project of Socialist revolution. This is true especially where a threshold of influence and organisation has been crossed. It is possible to intervene in struggle, to use certain specific instruments (cf. the youth organisation), and to make revolutionary Socialist propaganda. But we cannot avoid being aware of general subjective difficulties which affect any such project today. Neither can we avoid concerning ourselves with the effects that a prolonged independent construction, in the current conditions will lead to in the political and organisational functioning of our organisations.

6.2. The tactic of political regroupment

Several sections have engaged in a policy of regroupment or have opened this perspective: a protracted electoral bloc, permanent political alliance, entry into another party, confederation of autonomous political organisations, “new”

political movement, rapprochement “from the outside” with a current of a traditional workers party, etc. In each case, the organisation has to redefine its political functioning and to rethink its internal functioning.

By regroupment tactic, we do not mean a uniform tactic, but a political understanding of the very important mutation affecting the workers and social movement, and the political necessity, whatever the precise organisational form, of approaching the left currents breaking away from it.

Two considerations should serve as guidelines:

- placing ourselves in the best political position in the workers movement, to participate in the break-through that happen;
- being at the heart of an organised coming together of all the left currents, and having regard to the decay of the big traditional organisations;

The organisational aim is to find new levers to build our organisations, their strength of numbers, their political influence, their self-confidence.

6.3. The concept of “regroupment” is not new

Since the 30's, we have never conceived the construction of the Revolutionary Party as a linear process, since a very small revolutionary Marxist nucleus was confronted with a workers movement, solidly built, with deep roots, a mass character and controlled by a bureaucratic reformist apparatus.

In the 30's, our “unity work” was not limited to the sole tactic of a united front with the big reformist organisations, but also involved a political and practical rapprochement with centrist /left centrist organisations or currents, open to making a qualitative leap with us towards a mass revolutionary party. The “short term” entryist tactic was the organisational conclusion of this method.

In the post-war years, the tactic of entryism in the big reformist parties (Stalinist and social democrat) was based on the same general presuppositions, but in a different political period (dramatic reduction in class activity; quasi-monopoly of the traditional apparatuses in the workers movement; perspective of world war; then the slow maturing process of a workers vanguard taking place exclusively inside the CPs or Socialist Parties).

The period opened by 68 had imposed a turn to independent party-building: the actuality of the revolution in the world, including in capitalist Europe; the possibility of rapidly winning many activists from the radicalising youth; initiatives and mass campaigns which influenced society and the workers movement; the possibility of outflanking Social Democracy or Stalinism, in certain sectors of political and social life; a pole of attraction towards the base of these parties and the trade union movement.

If some regroupment tactics existed (whether towards the left in the traditional workers movement or towards other revolutionary currents), they were conceived as subordinate and complementary to the independent tactic.

Afterwards, with the worsening political situation, it became a means of intervening in the crisis of a declining revolutionary left, to save a section of it.

6.4. The actuality of a regroupment policy, as an axis of party building in the new period

Two major subjective factors lead in this direction:

(1) The revolutionary left has clearly stopped growing. It is struggling for survival although it has accumulated a significant capital of members.

(2) Important shifts are taking place inside the traditional workers movement, still clearly a majority in the working class, or of groups leaving it.

This time, the recomposition is not taking place in a workers movement on the rise and which is differentiating on this basis; on but in a traditional workers movement which is weakening and breaking up

6.5. Some general trends appear in today's workers' and social movement

6.5.1. The political dynamic which had pushed the radicalisation of the broad vanguard (between 1966 and the end of the 1970's) towards the revolutionary left has stopped and gone into reverse.

(a) Although weakened and in a small minority (especially on the electoral level, it has succeeded, in several countries, in stabilising national organisations, with a capital of cadres and militants, often well rooted in the social movement, and with a certain public notoriety and capacity for initiative. This "minimum" result should be measured against the generalised decline of militant political engagement, the internal sclerosis of Social Democracy, the weakness of union teams in the workplaces, the disappearance or weakening of the CPs, and against the intrinsic incapacity of the Greens to build active political organisations (compared to their electoral results and their material means).

(b) The revolutionary left must take on the perspective of participating from the beginning in a new rise of the class struggle.

But this new take-off is conditional on the redefinition of the party-building project, permitting it to adequately get through the current period. This challenge produces a harsh debate inside these organisations. Struggling for survival, the battle for self preservation often reinforces political and internal sectarianism.

In general, a priority fusion process or one of regroupment in the direction of other extreme left organisations is of little use. This does not exclude forms of collaboration.

6.5.2. A major change: the traditional workers movement, still the epicentre of resistance to the capitalist offensive, is no longer the sole representative of the emancipatory project of a society free of exploitation and oppression.

(1) Other political-programmatic "hypotheses", other organisational forms and forms of activity, often breaking with the political culture of the organised workers movement (reformist and revolutionary), of "new" social and social movements (the Church, ecology, feminism, third worldism, peace, poverty, the urban question, humanism/ethics, etc.) occupy an important space. A whole series of radical politico-ideological ideas and currents exist inside them. They have their own ideological coherence and try to intervene in the political and institutional field. But often, they are not ready to form a party or political organisation, to bring together the existing political parties, or to put themselves under leadership of an organisational system with a "Leninist" type relationship between the party and

social movement.

To deal with them we have to fully take into account these specifics.

(2) The Green current is sometimes symbolic of the “low intensity” radicalisation, which, in several countries, began by capturing a big sector of youth, in the second half of the seventies.

Initially linked to the ecological crisis, the Greens have developed into a political movement. They have elevated ecology into a project of an alternative society and have intervened in politics with a full programme. As the revolutionary left had failed without exception, between 1968-75, to form a party recognised by the working class and sanctioned by universal suffrage, the green current succeeded in capturing the votes of a young electorate and/or breaking from the traditional workers parties (West Germany, Belgium, France certainly, elsewhere less so). They thus form a formidable barrier to our political-institutional breakthrough and our implantation amongst youth. Moreover, they have succeeded in extending their political influence amongst certain wage-earning layers and consolidating their links with sectors of the traditional workers movement.

In other countries, green sensibilities have partially or largely been channelled into left or extreme left organisations (Portugal, Netherlands, Italy, Spain), limiting their autonomous political expression.

Today, the Green parties are oriented towards participation in political power (central government, regional, municipal level) according to their strength. They are affected by the classic contradiction of workers' reformism. The more they progress in terms of integration into bourgeois state mechanisms and co-responsibility for the crisis of Big Capital, the more they generate conflicts internally (“neither left nor right”, politics in a different way, ecology as a self-sufficient programme). Intervening in this impasse of the green movement is an unavoidable part of the path to a broader political regroupment.

6.5.3. The present decline of the traditional workers' movement has a very negative effect on the formation of left wings (political and trade union) inside it. At this stage, that is much more true for Social Democracy than for post-Stalinism.

(1) Except for the Bennite current, defeated in 1982-83 by the right of the Labour Party, no left/centrist/left centrist current has formed since the 80's inside Social Democracy, with a substantial size, an anti-capitalist programmatic base and a degree of solid organisation. If individuals, local regroupments, symbolic personalities of the Socialist left undoubtedly exist, they have not succeeded in acquiring a minimum of coherence and cohesion. After 15 years of acute social crisis and a total alignment of the social democratic leaderships around neo-liberal politics, this constitutes a major fact. This is a major difference with what happened in the 30's and 50's-60's. It is the direct result of the new stage of political and organisational degeneration that Social Democracy went through in the 80's.

Conclusions:

This invalidates the tactical schema of the 30's (fusion with a left centrist current towards building a revolutionary party).

This shows the limited perspectives for work exclusively or as a priority inside the Socialist Parties, or from outside, towards the left of the Socialist Parties.

Nowhere is the membership of a social democratic party still a practical precondition for having access to common

work with the trade union left.

This invalidates (except perhaps in Britain) the schema of the 50's and 60's of entryism "sui generis".

The left in the Socialist Parties generally presents the same political weaknesses as the reformist left outside. The Socialist Parties however remain the strongest current electorally in the workers movement. In many countries, a majority of trade union/social activists are members. But contrary to what happened in the past (distant and recent), it is no longer the place where the practical vanguard is active and organises; it is no longer an obligatory passage to have access to the workers movement.

This generally points away from a total or primarily entry project in Social Democracy. On the other hand, it does not argue against common work with the Socialist left, nor for a politically abstentionist attitude to Social Democracy.

(2) The disappearance of the world Stalinist system has plunged the CPs into a lasting and complex crisis. This involves at the same time a balance sheet of the different cycles of the Stalinist past, a programmatic redefinition and an immediate political repositioning. It involves different generations and personalities with different trajectories inside the CP.

The result is a crumbling away of the CPs and an internal differentiation in each CP. The conversion varies greatly depending on whether the CP is a very minor voice or even a groupuscule, or a party with a significant presence in the apparatus of the union movement and in the elected (and sometimes executive) institutions of the bourgeois state.

(a) Certain parties or currents (ex-eurocommunists) have social democratised by dissolving into the Socialist Parties or the Greens.

The PCI (now the PDS), in changing its nature, is trying to occupy the function left vacant by a social democratic party, but in the conditions of the end of the century.

(b) Other currents or parties (again the ex-eurocommunists) pitch camp in an organisational autonomy on the basis of a reformism parallel to that of Social Democracy, but still marked by their particular origin and history.

(c) Certain currents combine an anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist course with a defence of a more or less explicitly Stalinist past and /or loyalty to the ex-USSR ("campism").

(d) Certain currents and parties (cf. France, Portugal) have understood that a certain political adaptation is unavoidable, but the consequent evolution happens without any true perspective for the party concerned or for the overall workers movement. Without being inspired by a real conviction (with opportunist and sectarian zigzags) this evolution takes place under the tight control of the apparatus. This is what distinguishes these parties from the others like the PCE, PDS (West Germany) and Rifondazione.

(e) Still others (individual militants and cadres, currents or parties), blame the social democratic path for the co-management of the economic crisis and adopt a line of opposition to bourgeois and social democratic politics and adopt a line of active resistance to capitalism/imperialism, but with great ideological and political confusion.

The biggest of them (cf. PRC, PCE, PDS -West Germany) appear as the centre of political gravity in the opposition to

bourgeois and social democrat politics, opening a wider political and programmatic discussion in relation to the real movement of the class struggle. At the same time the democratisation of their internal regime (breaking with the Stalinist tradition) has also shown their great heterogeneity on the ideological and programmatic level.

These parties have succeeded in forming a new pole of attraction inside a broader left.

The outcome of these evolutions is not predetermined. Without a solid reference point since the collapse of the world Stalinist system (because they also find themselves outside the bourgeois state and the central trade union bureaucracy), they are trying to stabilise themselves (notably their place on the national political chessboard and their politico-organisational apparatus) while finding a new centre of gravity. Their priority axis is their presence inside the elected assemblies (national parliament, European parliament, municipalities), and sometimes, in local executives, while supporting or stimulating an extra-parliamentary opposition.

These evolutions substantially change the links we have with the CPs and currents coming out of them. First because they unleashed a militant energy and radical conviction which is more or less important according to the country. Second, because they can reinforce an regroupment to the left of Social Democracy or even constitute the epicentre of an opposition to the system. Finally, because they can be interesting interlocutors in a political debate where we share common reference points.

6.5.4. The trade union movement is more than ever the privileged place of day to day militancy for the workers vanguard, and the instrument par excellence for labour to resist the bosses offensive.

In this framework, we have to consider two aspects of the union recomposition.

(a) First, the problem of building an alternative leadership of the workers movement - the decisive question-remains in its entirety, despite the formation of left wings in the mass unions and minority unions outside the federations.

The union left in the big traditional unions generally remains very weak, poorly organised and without an alternative programmatic response on these key questions (in the first place unemployment). The experience of "Essere Sindacato" -left sector of the CGIL, did not succeed in lifting the hegemony of the principal union organisation in Italy.

It is essential to pay attention, without prejudice, to trade union recompositions taking place inside these big federations, but also outside, which seem to show a real legitimacy and action on a mass scale.

Work in this direction remains key for the construction of our organisations and to intervene inside political regroupments.

(b) Second, the control of the union bureaucracy over the different strata of the apparatus, the activists and the workers has clearly weakened. With two unprecedented consequences (in several countries): an enlarged space for political debate in the union structures, with the possibility of fighting for alternatives; the possibility of taking initiatives with or through the union structures, addressing society and workers on the political-trade union terrain.

This idea is fundamental: the real foundation of a "Socialist" workers party will not happen without the participation of an important sector of the working class.

6.6. The present stage

6.6.1 Our political-organisational objective should be to be part of a pole of left regroupment an engagement in the prolonged crisis of the traditional workers movement and the dead end of the green current.

This perspective is thus different to that of advancing towards a new “communist” or “revolutionary” party based on a complete programme.

Practically, it means pulling together (or forming an alliance with) significant fragments coming out of the traditional workers movement, breaking with the social democratic policy of joint responsibility for the economic crisis. And we try to create a dynamic capable of attracting combative sectors of the social and union movement.

6.6.2. Whatever the strength at the start, the difficulty of take-off should be stressed, independently of the form that the regroupment takes.

First, such a regroupment should avoid the double danger of small group marginality (which implies the relatively rapid conquest of electoral and institutional legitimacy) and of a discussion club (which implies a genuine will to intervene politically and socially).

Second, regroupments coming out of the traditional labour movement, must overcome the characteristics of their origin and rapidly show their will to renew methods and symbols. The creation of new frame work is often indispensable.

To bring about this new stage, the role of certain sectors or personalities coming out of the social movement or the intellectual milieu is decisive.

Often, a “moment” of brewing is necessary to overcome the old organisational frontiers, to refound different political-theoretical bases, to mix the different militant practices. This corresponds to the idea that a new historical cycle of the left has to be opened, carried by a new generation, and looking to the future.

It does not mean at all that we have to abandon our own political conceptions and organisational frontiers. But it does imply a completely new capacity for dialogue.

Even the stronger and more stable regroupments -because they are anchored in a party type regroupment (PRC, IU, PDS in West Germany)- will not escape this dialectic of recomposition, which will impose a broad renewal on the level of programme, system of organisation, and more generally of political behaviour on them too.

This transitory aspect of political regroupment does not lead to a provisional presence for us, on the look-out for the first chance to go over to a tactic of independent construction. We must wholeheartedly participate in the regroupment as long as it corresponds to the function we have assigned it.

6.6.3. As for the tactic of independent party-building, that of recomposition brings its own risks, which we have to be aware of from the start: adaptation to the rhythms, the language, to the mode of intervention of the regroupment; the risk of our intervention being paralysed in the case of an important political disagreement; losses in terms of memory and capacity for autonomous organisation, getting bogged down in meandering debate with our partners to the detriment of abroad vision of society and the workers movement, etc.

6.7. The tactic of political regroupment is not in opposition to the construction of our organisation -on the contrary, it

aims to strengthen it.

6.7.1. The activity of our organisation is an indispensable condition for its success. Thus there can be no question of dissolving our organisations. Obviously, they have to be redefined in the framework of this tactic.

6.7.2. There are three good reasons for opposing any notion of dissolving our organisations.

First, and fundamentally, because the recomposition /regroupment does not on its own solve the problem of building a revolutionary party. It only creates another framework - hybrid and transitory - for us to move forward in today's particular period. Our political regroupment tactic demands the retention of a broad perspective of big class battles and the emergence of a new mass revolutionary party.

Second, in as much as the regroupment is a success, its open, broad and radical left character is not guaranteed. Neither is a non sectarian orientation to the big reformist organisations of the workers and social movement guaranteed. Getting through the political and organisational obstacles requires a big analytical and leadership capacity.

Finally, the recomposition by definition will include several currents and sensibilities with different political coherences. Internal political struggle will at times be inevitable, particularly when members are elected to positions in the institutions or during big social or programmatic battles.

New political and organisational differentiations will take place inside the regroupment and also outside, notably through the practical tests that the class struggle imposes.

6.7.3. Participation in a regroupment requires that we have a clear political project and a precise organisational system, defining our priorities, our activities and our system of organisation.

Despite the resemblances, the regroupments on the agenda are not to be identified with entryism (as in the 30's or 50-60's). This may be because the regroupment is limited to the point where we directly have strong political and practical responsibilities (Enhedsliste -Denmark; Solidarité -Switzerland; Gauches Unies -Belgium, etc.), or because we directly join a bigger party but which is nothing like a classical Stalinist or social democratic party, and that we loyally join in the construction of (e.g. Rifondazione, IU, etc.). Nevertheless, we are conscious of the limits of the political programme and the uncertainties of the political dynamic which affect every regroupment project today. We have to start from a realistic diagnosis under this double point of view. This can lead to being concerned with three autonomous politico-organisational priorities of our current (as it participates in a regroupment project):

– a journal (or other form of press) to develop our point of view on the current political situation

– a programme of Marxist education.

– an activity (if necessary: an organisation) amongst youth, motivated by a consideration as to the precise paths of its political involvement today.

The fundamental idea is to acquire a strong (on our scale) politico-organisational instrument which does not leave us without the political means to guarantee an autonomous intervention should that prove necessary.

6.8. The policy of recomposition oriented towards other left currents to the left of Social Democracy should not turn us away from the big reformist organisations in the workers movement, in deep crisis, and new turns in the socio-political conjuncture.

6.8.1. First, because the traditional reformist organisations, even in crisis and in decline, still largely represent the majority of workers and in a lesser respect, of youth. They continue to organise an important part of the politically active sectors on the left. The weakened traditional unions remain (with rare exceptions) the main and unavoidable instrument for the defence of material interests, and they continue to organise the vast majority of workers active in the interests of their fellow workers. Even parties like the PRC and the IU (without talking about the German PDS) remain a minority amongst the social vanguard.

6.8.2. It is very unlikely that the reformist leaderships will remain inactive faced with big events in political and social life: big attacks by the bosses against the union movement, the threat of the extreme right or attacks on democratic freedoms, the dead-end of neo-liberal politics and partial economic upturns, etc. The reformist parties and/or union bureaucrats could take important political initiatives, including regroupments of the whole of the left. This would immediately challenge any regroupment to the left of Social Democracy.

6.8.3. Although the emergence of a broad, solid anti-capitalist left in the Socialist Parties is not completely ruled out at this stage, this does not at all exclude new political differentiation and conflicts inside the social democratic apparatus (in the unions or between the political and trade union sector). Their political content will be restrained and polarisation limited (and without comparison to the battles of the “bureaucratic left” of the 20’s, 30’s or 60-1970’s). But coming from the top of the workers movement, such a conflict will have a big impact on working people. It could reactivate and (re)politicise a big layer of working class militants and push them to join the debate.

If this happens, it will create new conditions for political recomposition, including for the alternative left.

6.9. The policy of regroupment/ recomposition today concerns a limited circle of politicised militants of a particular generation and with a degree of experience.

The passage of the initial recomposition to a real launch and “refoundation of Socialism” will imperatively depend on two factors:

(1) the eruption on the social scene of the working class. The recomposition should address itself to the most conscious and energetic elements.

(2) the eruption on the political scene of a new generation. It will candidly cut out what appears obsolete in the heritage handed down to it.

As revolutionary Marxists, we put this battle for the “refoundation of Socialism” in the perspective of the formation of a mass revolutionary Socialist party.