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Marxism

# The strategy of transitional demands

- Features - Ernest Mandel Archive -

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**We have particularly highlighted this aspect of the international dimension that every socialist strategy needs because it emerges unequivocally from the experiences and struggles of the European proletariat. [1]**

### 1. On the dialectics of productivity, relations of production and emancipation

A red thread through the history of the labour movement of Western Europe is the break between daily demands and struggles on the one side, and the struggle for the end goal (or the conquest of political power to achieve that final goal) on the other. Only during rare moments, such as the German November Revolution of 1918, the deep crisis of 1923 in Germany or the initial response of the Spanish working class to the fascist military coup in 1936, does a certain fusion between the two take place.

It is true that daily demands were not always purely economic in character. There were important struggles for universal suffrage (including general strikes in Belgium and Austria), struggles to ward off reactionary attacks on democratic freedoms (the general strike against the Kapp-putsch in Germany, against the return of King Leopold III in Belgium), there were even mass movements against the threat of war (those are mostly forgotten today: for example, Italy 1911 and 1912). One can also think of the political mass strike in Britain against the proposed anti-strike law of the Heath government [in 1971].

But characteristic of all these struggles for direct demands is that their realization does not immediately endanger the survival of the capitalist mode of production. No matter how strongly the bourgeois class may oppose such demands, however much capitalists may bemoan the fact that such-and-such an increase in wages will ruin them: capitalism has endured and will continue to endure such struggles because they do not attack the two essential pillars of bourgeois society: the power of capital's disposal over the means of production and labour power on the one hand, and the bourgeois state apparatus, the political power of capital, on the other.

One illusion which recurs again and again in the history of modern class struggle is that capitalism has become so exhausted that it simply cannot digest a 10 per cent (or 15 or 20 per cent) increase in wages or a reduction of the normal working day by another hour, and that struggle for such demands must lead to the fall of capitalism. History has shown the incorrectness of this argument.

Not, for example, that there could not be situations determined by cyclical or structural crises in which a significant increase in wages would affect the 'last substance' of surplus value (e.g., in the economic crisis of 1929–32). During such situations, the capitalist class will under no circumstances grant such a demand – not even in the face of fierce struggle (another question, by the way, is whether such situations create favourable conditions for the struggle for economic demands). However, if the struggle of the working class reaches such proportions that a pre-revolutionary or revolutionary situation is imminent, then the attitude of bourgeoisie towards direct demands will immediately change. Faced with the risk of losing power, the bourgeoisie, perhaps with a heavy heart, will be ready for any concession in the field of daily demands, as a lesser evil.

And it can consider all concessions in the field of everyday demands as lesser evils since it has two mechanisms at its disposal to digest them, i.e. to reverse their negative impact on the rate of profit, on the valorization [2] of capital: on the one hand, via the thousand levers of the economy and economic policy controlled by capital (price increases, inflation, monetary devaluation, increase in productivity, increase in the production of relative surplus value, etc.); on the other hand, via the lever of the state apparatus, of political power which can be used to attempt to suppress and

atomize the working class in order to overcome a crisis of the valorization of capital.

Behind the binary opposition 'daily demands vs final goal' lies a specific diagnosis of the objective situation and a certain perspective. This was most clearly expressed in classical social democracy before the First World War. Social democracy explained its concentration on immediate demands (good election results plus successful trade union activity) with the double hypothesis that the subjective conditions for the fall of capitalism were not yet ripe, because the 'organization of the working class' was still too weak (electoral action and trade union activity would increase this organizational strength) and that the system itself was 'drifting towards a catastrophe' which had to be waited for before 'one could go on the attack'. [3]

Those who no longer believed in the catastrophe because they were convinced of a gradual softening of the contradictions (both domestic and international) quite logically did away with the 'final goal', as did, for example, Bernstein. Those who still believed in the catastrophe were content to wait for it while in the meantime proper organizing was carried out (Kautsky). But for the one as for the other, the restriction to everyday demands, to a reformist daily practice, corresponded to an assessment of the stability of bourgeois society in which there could be no short- or medium-term revolutionary prospects.

Today we find the same ideological background in those so-called communists (Lenin would hardly recognize them as such) who limit themselves to reformist daily practice (some—the Maoists—while zealously pursuing revolutionary propaganda which is completely detached from daily demands; the others – the 'official' Communist parties – in simultaneous revisionist abandonment of even this propaganda). They tacitly agree with what Brezhnev told representatives of the Czechoslovak Communist Party: that there is no chance of a socialist revolution in Western Europe in the coming fifty years. [4]

Some give a purely economic explanation for this (the ability of monopoly capitalism to resolve crises; the backwardness of the Soviet economy which first must catch up with the capitalist world, etc.). Others argue with formulas that include the subjective factor ('As long as there is no strong revolutionary party there can be no truly revolutionary crisis; such a party can be created only over a long process. Consequently, no truly revolutionary crisis is possible for a long time', etc.). In practice, at best this means a return to the classical pre-1914 social democratic approach, at worst this means an approach akin to that of post-war social democracy (consider the participation of the Finnish Communist Party in a coalition government which, after devaluing the currency, introduced a wage freeze at the expense of the working class).

The absence of revolutionary perspectives or, what amounts to the same, arbitrary and subjective definitions of pre-revolutionary and revolutionary crises in the imperialist and late capitalist era, form the not always consciously recognized, objective basis on which the dualism 'daily demands vs final goal' rests.

## 2. The epoch of imperialism as an epoch of structural social crisis

Revolutionary Marxism starts from the position that since the beginning of imperialist epoch – taking into account the inevitable 'lag' of consciousness and the social superstructure in general behind the development of the base – this dualism no longer corresponds to the objective demands that the development of bourgeois society makes on the workers' movement. At the latest since the Russian Revolution of 1905, what Lenin called the epoch of the 'general crisis of capitalism' is characterized neither by a straightforwardly deepening economic crisis, nor by a complete end to the growth of the productive forces, nor by constantly worsening mass misery. It is rather characterized by a growing contradiction between the development of the productive forces and the self-sustaining capitalist relations of production.

This growing contradiction leads to a *growing structural instability of the system*. A severe economic crisis (1929, 1937), monetary crisis (United States 1970), political crisis (Spain 1936, France 1968), or military crisis (France: Algerian War 1955-58; United States: Vietnam War since 1966) can suddenly plunge a seemingly stable society into a generalized social crisis. If this crisis coincides with a growing wave of self-activity, self-confidence and combat readiness of the working class, then objectively a pre-revolutionary crisis arises. This is not always the case (it was not the case in the 1929, 1958 and 1970 examples just cited but it did happen in 1918, 1936 and 1968). Under conditions of cyclical rising and declining waves of class struggle this is periodically the case. In the era of the general crisis of capitalism, inevitable periodic outbursts of gigantic mass struggles (mass strikes, general strikes, general strikes with factory occupations, etc.) are inevitable and to a large extent independent of the coming of a deep economic crisis.

Since the First World War, the most important of these waves has occurred in the imperialist countries: in Germany 1918-19 and 1922-23 (with an interlude, the general strike in 1920 against the Kapp Putsch); in France 1936-37, 1944-1948 and 1968-70; in Spain 1931-37; in Italy 1943-48 and 1968-70; in Britain since 1966. Equally huge mass strikes, which, however, did not yet threaten the fundamental stability of bourgeois society, occurred in the United States in the years 1936-37 and in 1945-46, as well as in Japan in the early 1950s. It is important to underline that the wave now sweeping across Western Europe (10 million participants in the 1968 general strike in France; 15 million participants in the various general strikes in Italy 1969-70; an ascending wave of mass strikes in Britain) quantitatively and in terms of objectively endangering bourgeois society far exceeds all previous ones, with the possible exception of the threat to Spanish bourgeois society in 1936 (when the urban proletariat constituted barely 30 percent of the Spanish population; it now constitutes over 50 per cent in Spain itself and more than 70 per cent in the countries mentioned earlier).

One could, considering this rediscovered 'actuality of the revolution' in the imperialist countries, dig out the old Kautskyian scheme and apply it to the present time with only slight changes. A socialist strategy would then consist in focusing on daily struggles that prepare ('fertilize', 'accelerate', 'illuminate': the variations are innumerable) such periodic pre-revolutionary crises. Since, as is well known, Marxists have never believed that one could evoke, produce, provoke pre-revolutionary or revolutionary crises – all, the infamous 'objective laws of motion of the capitalist mode of production' do this – such a strategy wisdom once again amounts to waiting: while waiting for the pre-revolutionary crisis, one does something else, namely, the traditional, familiar routine: wage struggles, electoral struggles, propaganda and education and above all organization. It is of no importance whether many neo-Kautskyians emphasize this part or that part. Many even want to eliminate an element (e.g., the electoral struggle) completely. Fundamentally, one waits for Godot – just as Karl Kautsky and Otto Bauer waited for the 'final catastrophe' (or even more grotesquely: for the 'decisive error of the enemy' which turned out to be the decisive initiative of the enemy).

The crucial error in this reissue of the strategy of patient waiting is its underestimation of the subjective factor in the class struggle and especially the dual nature of the subjective factor. The Subjective factor includes not only the organization of the vanguard of the working class, but equally working-class consciousness, its understanding of social and political developments and its capacity for political struggle. As is well known, among broader masses consciousness is only to a limited extent the product of written propaganda and education. Mass consciousness is determined decisively by experience, that is, by lived self-activity. In this sense, Rosa Luxemburg was absolutely right in her criticism of Kautsky during the debates on the mass strike (which at the time included a justified criticism of certain polemical positions of Lenin, positions which he had overcome since the 1905 revolution). It is unrealistic to hope that without experience of struggle by the masses before the revolutionary crisis, these same masses during such a crisis will show revolutionary consciousness and launch revolutionary initiatives. What the masses will do during a crisis is to a considerable degree a function of what they have done and experienced before this it. [5]

A socialist strategy based on the inevitable periodic outbreaks of mass struggles – the theoretical foundation and empirical confirmation of this thesis seems clear to us – must therefore concentrate on forms of daily agitation that

convey to the working masses the experiences of struggle and insights that are necessary for revolutionary initiatives and consciousness to unfold as widely as possible at breaking points. Such breaking points are the outbreak of mass strikes, at the beginning of major financial, monetary, military crises, at the onset of a serious economic recession, etc. *This is the central function of the strategy of transitional demands, with the struggle for workers' control as its axis.*

By this we do not mean to deny the necessity of traditional everyday demands in questions of tariff policy, reduction of working hours, sickness and social insurance, etc. What Marx said about this more than a hundred years ago remains as true today as it was then: if the working class were to give up the struggle for immediate demands, then the sale of commodity labour power below its value would become the general rule and a process of atomization and demoralization of the working class would begin. What is decisive here is whether one limits oneself to this traditional routine or includes in the daily struggle goals with a twofold character. These goal most correspond to the educational and emancipating role of the qualitative needs of the working masses, needs that are born, so to speak, from the objective development of late capitalism. Second, they need to be goals that cannot be integrated into the capitalist system because of *their immediate anti-systemic character.*

### 3. Two different ways of rushing forward

As an alternative solution to the central task of today's workers' movement, that of overcoming the old dualism between immediate demands that can be integrated into the system, and goals that remain detached from the daily struggle, different strategies are being defended by socialists. Two strategies which differ from the strategy of transitional demands need to be commented on.

The main weakness of the strategy of 'counter systemic or transformative reforms' [6] is the failure to understand the structural character of the capitalist mode of production, i.e. the fixed nature of the two central pillars mentioned above: the relations of production and state power (the state apparatus). Neither can be changed gradually. They can either continue to function or be paralyzed during a severe social crisis. But if this crisis does not lead to their abolition, they will inevitably work their way up from this paralysis to a renewed normalization.

Marx, in his attempt at a simple explanation of his value theory in the famous letter to Kugelmann, based himself on the assumption that no society could continue to exist if all producers stopped working. [7] But the way in which the work of the producers is organized is not random, they work in a particular mode of production, under specific relations of production.

If one were to begin to dissolve existing relations of production without immediately replacing them with others, it would only mean that production would cease to function, that producers would cease to work. It would be physically impossible for this to continue for a long time. *Since any onset of the dissolution of the existing relations of production renders the existing mode of production incapable of production, i.e. leads to the rapid decline of productive activity, there are during a severe social crisis only two possibilities: either a rapid dissolution of the existing mode of production and the introduction of a new one, or a return to the 'normalized' relations of production.* There is no third solution: that is the lesson of all revolutionary crises in the West since the First World War. [8]

The advocates of a gradual taking of power do not understand this rigidity of production relations in the complex totality characteristic of modern class relations in bourgeois society. To believe that one could erode the profit-determined nature of investment the same way in which one can introduce urban tramways, generalize primary education or nationalize (at a loss) individual branches of industry, means not to understand that under such conditions, the investment activity of entrepreneurs ceases completely and the whole capitalist economy comes to a standstill. This is the concrete content of the thesis that the onset of the dissolution of capitalist relations of production renders capitalist production incapable of functioning.

If the proponents of transformative reforms were to think their ideas through to the end, they would be faced with the following alternatives: Either such reforms can be accepted by capitalist firms, although under relationship of forces particularly favorable to the workers, while the capitalist economy continues to function (or even flourish: see Sweden). That would prove that these reforms are humane, liberal, progressive but not transformative. After all, a system that continues to function is one that has not been overcome. No one has yet mastered the art of forcing capitalists to continue to invest and to ensure high levels of employment and technical progress while at the same time reducing the rate of profit to 1 or even zero per cent.

The other possibility is that capitalists will not accept these 'transformative reforms' since those are in fact threatening the valorization of capital. In this case, large-scale capital flight, investment strikes, mass layoffs, currency speculation, rapid inflation, etc., will follow. The transformative nature of the reforms will be proven by the fact that the system indeed ceases to function. But no modern industrial nation can survive for long as production facilities lie idle, and there is rapidly increasing unemployment, continued wastage of resource reserves and stagnant technical progress. A government that began to introduce such transformative reforms under exceptionally a favourable relationship of forces would then either need to substitute itself for the 'striking capitalists', or allow the working class to substitute for these capitalists by socializing the economy and replacing the dysfunctional capitalist economic system with a functioning socialized system. [9] The only other option is to convince the capitalists to make the economy function again, or in other words to capitulate to them and undo the transformative character of the reforms.

This is not a purely theoretical question. Many social democratic governments or governments under social democratic leadership have been faced with such choices: in 1919 in Germany, in 1936 in France, in 1945 in Italy, in 1950 in Britain and again in 1965 in Britain. We know how such governments, without exception, have reacted. And we also know that the bourgeois nature of the state apparatus (ministry officials, the upper echelons of the central banking system, the repressive apparatus, all closely intertwined with the ruling layers of big business) plays a significant role in convincing the reforming comrades that the 'unusually favourable' relationship of forces (for example, not just 50.1 per cent of the electorate votes, but as much as 52 per cent or, who knows, maybe even 55 per cent) on closer inspection is not at all as favourable as it seemed....

We call the strategy of transformative reforms a strategy of rushing forward because it is based on the unrealistic premise that socialism can be built, so to speak, city by city, department by department and firm by firm, without first having abolished the capitalist relations of production and the bourgeois state. The theory, now widespread in French left-Catholic circles, of an immediate introduction of 'self-management' in companies (admittedly less is spoken of *workers'* self-management) without abolishing the capitalist mode of production in its totality and the capitalist state apparatus that defends it, has a similar character of rushing forward. [10]

From this strategy can emerge, at best, independent cooperatives that are subsequently forced to engage in capitalist competition in a capitalist market with capitalist enterprises. Such cooperatives must then introduce capitalist rationalization, capitalist acceleration of the assembly line, capitalist cost-cutting and capitalist redundancies, or face their demise. This is what Marx explained to Proudhon more than 125 years ago and it has been confirmed again and again since then. Free competition and private labour still prevail, i.e. generalized commodity production with its delightfully humanist motif: *homo homini lupus* - man is man a wolf. The direct social character of labour and the genuine association of all producers – the two main conditions for a socialist transformation of economy and society according to Marx – is something else entirely.

The strategy proposed by the Italian spontaneists of Lotta Continua of not only conquering company by company but also refusing to pay rent and taxes, occupy lawns for the children, etc., has the same character of rushing forward. Exactly like the left reformists, these comrades share the illusion of a step-by-step replacement of bourgeois society, they do not understand the structural character of capitalist relations of production and the bourgeois state.

A similar character of rushing forward can be seen in the attempt of the Italian Manifesto group to promote a demand belonging to the *communist phase* of the post-capitalist development of society and economy, namely the abolition of the division of labour between manual and mental labour as a central *immediate* demand. [11] If such a demand were to be taken seriously and made a direct goal of the struggle, it would mean either pure utopia (with the existing technology it is impossible to completely abolish the division of labour immediately after the socialist revolution without a preceding revolution of the entire educational and labour system, to say nothing of such an abolition in individual companies under capitalism), or it is simply a piece of ideology, meaning, in the last instance, a deception. If, as in for example Chinese companies after the Cultural Revolution, managers and technicians work one day a week in direct production while manual workers deal with management, the division of labour is not abolished but confirmed and strengthened. At most, it is now even more concealed from producers than before. But as is well known, Marxists do not believe that it is possible to abolish social phenomena by thinking them away while odious reality continues to assert itself.

If, on the other hand, such a demand has a propagandist-educational character, it would have a certain use as it draws the attention of public opinion (and primarily of the working class) to the enormous emancipatory potentialities hidden in the present state of development of the productive forces. But the consciousness and needs thus awakened do not in themselves solve the central problem of the subjective factor. They can only contribute to a solution if they are included in a programme of transitional demands, a programme based on the complex totality of economic and social problems that preoccupy the toiling masses. This totality not only awakens these masses but by necessity periodically leads to mass struggle.

But such a complex and coherent programme of transitional solutions is missing from the programmatic statement of the Italian Manifesto group. If under such circumstances the slogan 'communism – now' is applied in a propagandist, educational fashion (and on this slogan turns the demand for the abolition of the distinction between manual and main labour), it leaves the central task unresolved because it does not give rise to mass actions of workers that can break up the system. This slogan will never lead to a general strike, the formation of workers' councils in a country (to say nothing of a continent), the conquest of political power, or the transformation of capitalist into socialized relations of production.

#### **4. Development of the means of production as the origin of the intensifying crisis of late capitalism**

There is some truth in the reasoning that led the Manifesto group to this forward rush. To draw up a socialist strategy today in the same terms and with the same slogans as in the 1920s and 1930s means turning one's back on the new elements emerging from the growth of the productive forces over the last twenty years. This would demonstrate a conservatism unworthy of a Marxist.

Nothing underlines more strongly the systemic crisis of the late-capitalist social order than the fact that even under seemingly favourable conditions for capitalism of accelerated economic growth and only moderate overproduction crises (demonstrable for the first period after the Second World War), this crisis of society actually intensified. [12] While one could imagine that the large-scale workers' struggles in Western Europe after the First World War and in the 1930s were partly no more than explosive reactions to misery, hunger, oppression, war, mass unemployment and fascism, this is impossible for the wave of mass strikes rolling across Europe since May 1968. This wave came not after a long phase of stagnant or declining real wages and living standards, but after one of an almost uninterrupted rise in real wages, one that raised living standards faster than ever before in history. [13]

This is exactly what is so ominous for capital about this wave of mass strikes: if the toiling masses are acting so energetically and militantly under conditions that are still relatively 'stable' and 'favourable' for the capitalist economy, what will be their reaction when the conjuncture turns, when real wages begin to stagnate or decline, when mass long-term unemployment re-appears?

For thousands of years, economic history unfolded under pressure of a dialectical contradiction and unity of opposites. On the one hand, every advance in labour productivity is accompanied by a deepening division of labour (and for the most part it was determined by it. The development of irrigation technology in agriculture; the development of handiwork leading to blacksmiths and the utilization of metal in tools of labour; the emergence of trade over long distances; technical progress, determined by the use of water power as productive energy; industrial revolution). On the other hand, the more the division of labour increases, the more labour productivity increases. This increase means also the increase of material needs, of mutual dependence and the objective cooperation of individuals in economic life. On the one hand, the increasing division of labour tears apart total social labour power into innumerable types of private labour, all carried out separately from each other; on the other hand, the growing interpenetration of economic life across an ever wider field leads to the objective socialization of labour. In the capitalist mode of production, the two poles of this dialectical unity unfold and reach their sharpest contradiction. The producer is made to be a part of the machine; but labour is at the same time increasingly objectively socialized, not only nationally but also internationally.

Only two mechanisms, fundamentally different from each other, exist that can partially bridge the growing gap between an increasing division of labour and the necessity of cooperation in labour. This can be done either by conscious leadership *a priori* or by spontaneous market laws *a posteriori*. In the first case, the private character of labour is abolished as labour acquires a directly social character in spite of the division of labour. (In the case of primitive societies, this gap has not yet emerged). Independent from their individual effort, through conscious leadership, individuals can acquire a right to a share in the social consumption fund. In this case, economic resources are distributed among the different branches of the economy on the basis of predetermined social criteria and not on the basis of the relative 'profitability' of each branch.

In the second case, spontaneous market laws are dominant. The private nature of labour is confirmed by the private ownership of the fruits of production (and later the private ownership of the means of production, later still of capital). The contradiction between the private nature of labour and objectively necessary social cooperation is realized through a shared nexus: exchange value (the commodity form of production). [14] The law of value distributes economic resources between different branches of the economy 'behind the backs of the producers' through the detour of the market, solvent demand and – in capitalism – of the swings of the rate of profit (i.e. deviations from the average rate of profit in individual branches of the economy).

When society is poor and the productive forces relatively undeveloped, the industrial and human potentials are almost unlimited. In such a situation this mechanism has a semblance of rationality. But in an era of growing social abundance, of a high degree of development of the productive forces and the beginning elimination of living labour from the production process (the use of automation), it has clearly become irrational. Today it is not merely irrational and senseless, but even dangerous to the survival of civilization, if not for the physical survival of humanity, to allow the 'free buying and selling' of atomic bombs and harmful products in food, 'free initiative' in the production of passenger cars, 'free' pollution of air, water and seas. And yet this is what it means to bring about the 'unification' of private labour and total social labour *a posteriori* through market laws and the search for profit by individual firms. As long as it concerns such special cases, every child is can see it is irrational. But is it really only about special cases?

As the productive forces develop while capitalist relations of production (i.e. the compulsion to valorize capital) remain in place, the waste of material and human resources takes on unprecedented proportions. This is so during peacetime, not to mention the wastage that is arms production. Seen from the point of view of social development, the production of a second or third passenger car for the average household, a second refrigerator, electric knives and electric shoe-brushes which save at most seconds of labour, is as pointless, as much a waste, as the orgies of the Roman nobility in the period from Tiberius to Diocletian, or the excesses of the French nobility under Louis XV and Louis XVI. This is all the more so when millions of human lives are lost, especially in the Third World, lives that could be saved with a fraction of those wasted resources. At the same time millions of the world's youth are not given the education that would bring them up to the optimum level of technology and science since resources are lacking



and the system is afraid of producing a too numerous and overeducated academic proletariat.

The development of the productive forces implies that the decisive social tension that drives the working masses to revolutionary action – and is in the first place expressed by the youth – *is no longer the tension between what is and what was, but between what is and what has become possible*. Not coincidentally, in the French [events of] May [1968], for the first time in the history of political struggle, the slogan *L'imagination au pouvoir* (imagination to power) surfaced. This slogan is not a product of overexcited Utopian dreamers. It is a product of late-capitalist technology and production itself. The growing saturation of rational needs leads the market economy ad absurdum. This leads to questioning and then the breaking of capitalist relations of production, long before a stage of general saturation is reached.

### 5. Neither economism nor voluntarism

Under such circumstances, a question that played an important role in the post-capitalist societies of the East is re-emerging among the radicalized intelligentsia of the West, namely the question of the causal relations and interactions in the sequence 'relations of production/productive forces/consciousness'.

For some, the factor of productive forces is decisive: Roger Garaudy represents the more 'optimistic' variant of this view, Herbert Marcuse the more pessimistic one. The first believes in a more or less automatic transformation of the relations of production as a result of changed productive forces (the 'technical-scientific revolution'); the second believes in the inevitable enslavement of the workers (of humanity really, except for a marginal minority) as a result of a specific form of machinery and economic 'automatism' (in the double sense of the word). [15] Consciousness appears for both as more or less directly determined by the relations of production. With Garaudy this takes the form of the belief that the 'new productive forces unfolding in the womb of the old social order' more or less automatically create the consciousness appropriate to them. With Marcuse it implies that consciousness is more or less condemned to be manipulated, integrated and destroyed by the old relations of production.

Still others (especially the so-called spontaneists and some of the Maoists) regard the factor of consciousness as autonomous to an almost absolute degree, especially under the relations created by the third technological revolution. Since the opposition between productive forces and relations of production has intensified to an unprecedented degree, they argue, revolutionary initiative, the revolutionary will, can achieve practically anything. At any arbitrary point – for example, free spaces, the refusal to consume, and through individual 'indulging in collective joy' – the system can be destabilized. While with the hippies this attitude is harmless as it is without effect on society as a whole, it becomes harmful where through voluntarist formulas it attempts to prevent forms of workers' struggle and workers' organization that actually could destabilize the system. 'Down with the delegates, let us all be delegates' cried the Italian spontaneists at the height of the strike wave. Of course, the consequence was not that all workers acted permanently as 'delegates'; they simply cannot do that under capitalist relations of production. The consequence was that the trade union bureaucracy, the traditional parties, the bosses and the state apparatus were able to 'normalize' the situation much more easily and quickly than if the workers had been able to establish permanent organs of struggle (embryonic organs of dual power).

There is an element of truth in both tendencies, which is to say that they are both completely wrong as they tear apart two arbitrary aspects of a single unitary reality and provide a distorted picture of this reality.

It is true that the increasing tension between growing productive forces and frozen relations of production increasingly undermines the latter. At one blow, as in the French May, their exhaustion can be revealed. Almost 'out of a clear sky', 10 million French workers spontaneously occupy workplaces and show their objective tendency to eliminate the capitalist entrepreneur, meaning capitalist relations of production. But entrepreneurs, the private ownership of the means of production, the commodity nature of labour power, the generalized market economy, the

command power of capital over labour: all these features of capitalist relations of production disappear neither automatically nor by themselves. They must be abolished, i.e. replaced by other relations of production, brought about by a social revolution that wrests state power from the bourgeois class. If this does not happen, everything will return to the same old pattern – despite the technical-scientific revolution and the growing contradiction between productive forces and productive relations.

The conscious act, the consciously directed and planned ‘qualitative leap’ at the height of generalized mass action, is not only indispensable, it is decisive. If this act is missing, then even the most favourable objective conditions are wasted. On this point the voluntarists and the subjectivists are entirely right and can quote numerous prominent witnesses. [16] The lapidary thesis of the Cubans that ‘It is the duty of all revolutionaries, to make revolution’ remains an indispensable truth. Only incorrigible fatalists believe that ‘subversion carried out by the objective developments’ could replace revolutionary initiative.

It is, however, now a question of determining which act, by whom, and when makes a social revolution possible in a highly developed industrial country. All those who attribute this task to a few arbitrary fringe groups forget that such groups do not possess the objective power to abolish the capitalist relations of production. The anarchists and their progeny, the hippies of every kind, ‘instead of waiting for the revolution, make it an everyday reality’ and do not in any way abolish capitalist relations of production. Neither will a million hippies retreating from consumer society into a subculture bring the goal of ending the compulsion for workers to sell their labour power closer. At best, they will have formed a ‘subsidiary society’ in the pores of ongoing capitalist exploitation, a subsidiary society that, moreover, lives mostly off the waste products of this exploitation. What matters is not the liberation of the few, but the liberation of all. After all, the emancipation of the social individual can only mean the emancipation of all social relations, not withdrawal from society.

Attempts to begin emancipation among fringe groups are sterile, however sympathetic they may be. The ability of students and the revolutionary intelligentsia to be the fuse in revolutionary crises stems precisely from the fact that, in the wake of the third technological revolution, in the context of late capitalism, this social group tends to lose its character as a fringe group. Only that social class which is capable, first, of actually abolishing the capitalist relations of production and, second, of replacing them in the production process and economic life with more progressive relations of production, can constitute the decisive revolutionary subject of liberation, of the social revolution. This social class is more than ever the modern proletariat. The fundamental flaw of modern society, alienated labour, cannot be undone outside the actual labour process.

Using the criterion of the fall of the capitalist mode of production, revolutionary initiative, ‘activism’ or ‘voluntarism’ is only productive when it directly or indirectly strengthens the self-consciousness of the proletariat. Such actions need to contribute to how proletariat itself learns about its capacity to transform society. This brings us back to our starting point: the central task of revolutionary Marxists in the imperialist countries is to induce, through education, propaganda, agitation and the experience of struggle, ever wider layers of the working class to fight for demands (mass strikes, general strikes, general strikes with factory occupations) that cannot be integrated into a normally functioning capitalist mode of production. Only in this way, when the inevitable waves of mass struggle occur, can a social revolution in an industrially highly developed society actually be put on the immediate agenda.

### **6. The crisis of capitalist relations of production as a crisis of the authoritarian workplace structure**

One of the clearest signs of the deepening crisis shaking capitalist relations of production is the increasing contestation of the authority of the capitalist boss in the workplace and the whole economy. The reasons for this are clear: they lie in the contradiction between, on the one hand, the ever-increasing objective socialization of labour and the rising objective need for cooperation between individuals, firms, industries, nations, even continents and, on the other hand, the embittered attempt to maintain the grip of private initiative, private property and private profit over

this massive complex.

More and more branches of industry only exist thanks to state orders. More and more research projects are financed by public money. More and more companies are saved from bankruptcy only through state subsidies. But at the same time, we stubbornly refuse to speak the truth about this situation: that the logic of contemporary technology corresponds to the immediately social character of labour. Recognizing this would make it possible to eliminate countless sources of waste, save huge amounts of economic resources (especially the most important resource: working time) and allow labour productivity to take a tremendous leap forward. The elimination of individual corporate profit in favour of prioritizing benefits for society as a whole would make it possible to recognize phenomena like environmental pollution for what they are: 'savings' or 'increased revenues' for individual entrepreneurs at the cost of increased expenditures for society as a whole.

With the increasing objective compulsion to socialize labour, there is a growing criticism of the attempt to continue to subject social labour to the tyrannical control of a few. We owe nothing of what we are exclusively to our individual selves. Even the most brilliant inventors, researchers and scientists would not be able to achieve what they do, if hundreds of thousands of workers did not create the necessary laboratories, rooms, machines and devices. Through the surplus value squeezed out of them, such workers provide others the necessary leisure time. Those hundreds of thousands of workers keep the complex whole of the economy going. The social needs called forth by this serve as stimuli and thousands upon thousands of other inventors, researchers, scientists perform the mental work that provides the foundation for the achievements of 'geniuses'.

*We can realise our personal talents only as part of social labour power.* But this capacity is not the labour capacity of freely associated producers: it is subjugated to centralized command power in a pyramid-shaped hierarchy in which, as in an army, there are foot soldiers, non-commissioned officers, officers and a small general staff. This general staff is not democratically elected and cannot be revoked by the mass of the producers – and the notion that the mass of shareholders would be able to do this has long since been recognized as fiction. Instead, capital relations reproduce this general staff again and again. [17]

In the workplace and the corporate group (to say nothing of the financial sector), the noble principles of 'pluralism' that the apologists of the 'free market economy' offer in the marketplace of ideas do not apply. Here, the ruling principles are secrecy rather than openness (because the 'enemy', i.e. the competition, is listening in) and obedience rather than freedom is imperative. Here, in fact, lies the Achilles' heel of late capitalism: for the more labour is objectively socialized, the more the productive forces grow, the more scarcity disappears, the higher the level of education and the average degree of qualification of the wage-dependent becomes, the more unbearable such direct 'subsumption of labour to capital' must appear.

This is the root cause of the French May [1968], of the Italian 'hot autumn and winter' of 1969-70 and the wave of wildcat strikes sweeping across Europe. The root is not the demand for higher wages and certainly not opposition to the 'consumer society' (it is at least distasteful of academics or students, who claim to be 'revolutionary', to tell workers that they consume too much – the capitalist entrepreneur already does this, not without success). The root cause is the hidden, slowly but surely emerging, *revolt of the people in the workplace against capital's command over machine and worker*. Making it clear to the workers that this is a revolt against capitalist relations of production, i.e. an anti-capitalist movement, and proceeding from this to the demand for workers' control that will lead to the formation of workers' councils, to the emergence of a dual power, meaning to a revolutionary situation: that is the central task of revolutionary socialists who have understood the strategy of transitional demands and its link with periodic waves of mass strikes.

The concrete starting points and historical examples are innumerable. [18] Workers are beginning to question the right of the bosses to close down companies, to send machinery elsewhere, to lay off workers (see the case of

General Electric in Liverpool and at least two dozen cases of company occupations in France, Belgium and Italy in recent years). Workers deny the right of the boss to set or increase the speed of the assembly line and nullify it on their own initiative (Pirelli/Milan and Montecatini Edison in Porto Maghera, Italy). Workers question the right of factory owners to determine what will be produced, for whom (even in 'stable' United States comes the striking case of the protest by Black workers at Polaroid against the manufacture and sale of devices that facilitate the South African government's oppression of the African majority in that country).

Of course, one swallow does not make a summer, and one should not overestimate the extent of what has been achieved so far. These are still only the first modest steps on a road that will lead through many disappointments and many failures to the goal: namely, that in one of the coming waves of mass strikes, the workers will not return to work in exchange for this or that percentage of wage increase or some social reform but will instead occupy the factories, elect strike committees and give these committees a controlling role in the economic life of workplaces, regions and economic bodies, i.e. create an objectively revolutionary situation. What makes these first modest examples so important is the fact that they are not more or less products of abstract speculation or historical memories but signs of an emerging tendency of the class struggle itself, of the class struggle as extended by the specific problems of late capitalism.

### 7. Two counter arguments

In left-wing circles, two counter arguments are frequently raised against this strategy, one from the right, the other (apparently) from the left.

The first accuses us of exchanging a formula that is supposedly clear and meaningful to workers – 'co-determination' – for one that 'sounds revolutionary but scares away the broader masses' – 'workers' control'. One must be content with demanding 'co-determination in the workplace', Fritz Vilmar suggests, [\[19\]](#) anything else would be an only verbally radical aberration.

As is well known, the actual co-determination proposals of the DGB (the West German trade union confederation), the social-democratic SPD and the Christian democratic CDU are far from Vilmar's formula. Vilmar's formulation is the aim of 'successfully fighting for laws, collective agreements and ad-hoc decisions that make initial decisions of management dependent on the workers and on their representatives, and enable those as well to demand decisions in the company'). These actual co-determination proposals entail the illusion of the right of veto over entrepreneurs' decisions, linked to a series of provisions that sharply curtail the defence of the workers interests vis-à-vis the entrepreneurs: duty of labour peace; duty of consideration of so-called 'company interests'; 'duty of confidentiality', etc.

Even if there was a legally enshrined right of veto, allowing oneself to be imposed on and subjected to such restraints needs to be rejected. As long as there is an economic boom, the impression can exist that such restraints are merely 'formalities'. However, when lean years follow fat (such as the lean years 1966-67 in the German Federal Republic), immediately an intensifying conflict (e.g. the fight against dismissals) arises between wage-workers and the legally enshrined 'corporate interests'. The entrepreneur can at any time 'prove' that layoffs or a reduction of working hours are 'unfortunately unavoidable' in order to maintain the company's competitiveness.

The choice the works councils then face is either to renounce such restraining laws, or to go against their own class interests. Since not all will choose the same, the unity and fighting strength of union organization will suffer. And when the choice turns out badly, as it very often does, i.e. in favour of the law and against the class interests of the workforce, class solidarity and union organization are significantly weakened.

Such weakening does not take place more or less in exchange for actual additional rights, it takes place in exchange for crumbs from the table. Because even joint co-determination does not give workers' representatives a practical opportunity to exercise a veto against major strategic decisions by the entrepreneurs (in issues of 'social allowances', of course, this is not necessarily so, but these are simply not strategic decisions for the company or the business group).

First, workers representatives lack the data necessary. Works councils can only obtain this data by completely opening the company's books and correspondence, lifting banking secrecy and checking the accounts in the workplace to rectify manipulated or obscured data. [20] Workers representatives also lack actual social power. In a capitalist society, the economy functions under the incentive of profit. Strategic decisions of entrepreneurs are determined by that same drive. Staff representatives can neither legitimize this without trampling on their own interests, nor neutralize it without powerful struggle and mobilization of the wage workers against the entrepreneurs' decisions. However, such a mobilization is severely hampered or even blocked if workers' representatives are bound to silence.

It is therefore not a pure war of words between the spokespersons of 'workplace participation' and those of 'worker control'. The nub of the disagreements can be summarized in the following five demands:

1. No signing of legal obligations to protect 'corporate interests'. For class-conscious workers, the guiding principle must be: not corporate profitability but class solidarity. In the market economy there exists an inevitable contradiction between the two. Either workers' representatives are in solidarity with 'their' company – at first in opposition to workers of other companies and finally against at least some of their own workplace colleagues – or they put aside 'company interests', i.e. its competitive interests, in order to maintain class solidarity among all wage workers.
2. A veto power over business decisions but no co-responsibility for company management. In capitalism, under the pressure of competition, management is condemned to clash with the interests of the workforce.
3. Full disclosure of what is discussed in the supervisory boards, i.e. open reporting by workers' representatives to general meetings of the workforce at the workplace, during working hours, on everything that has been discussed and all information that has come to light. Otherwise, the workers' representatives are manoeuvred into a situation where they turn into representatives of 'company interests' against their constituents.
4. Systematic refusal to take the data provided by the bosses as credible or as arguments for decisions that go against the interests of the workers. Systematic demands and propaganda for the lifting of business secrecy and banking secrecy.
5. Focusing of the direct struggle on obtaining, in writing, a veto right of the workers over any acceleration of the assembly line, any change in the organization of work or wage settlement that does not correspond to the interests of the workers and intensifies exploitation and against all dismissals, widening of wage differences between workers of the same company, etc.

If one described these demands as 'co-determination in the workplace', it would be pointless to fight over words. But that leaves the difficulty of giving the official DGB proposals this content, rather than the one they currently have. Until this difficulty is resolved, it will only create confusion to use the same term for diametrically opposed projects.

It is of course no coincidence that the DGB proposals (not to mention those of the SPD) do not have this content. The DGB and SPD proposals come from social forces that want to mediate between and reconcile entrepreneurs and wage dependents, not fight for the class interests of wage dependents against those of the bosses. From the

standpoint of class cooperation, one arrives at the conception of 'co-determination', from the standpoint of class struggle, one arrives at the conception of 'workers' control'. To use these concepts without making a distinction means to give the impression that there is no real difference between class cooperation and class struggle.

While Vilmar's criticism comes from the 'right', the criticism of certain student circles and organizations originating in the SDS (Sozialistische Deutsche Studentenbund) comes seemingly from the left: workers' control cannot be achieved without the fall of the bourgeois state, and the fall of the bourgeois state cannot be achieved without a revolutionary situation and revolutionary party (many add: without armed destruction of the bourgeois apparatus of repression). Hence, if one incites the workers to struggle for workers' control without clarifying all this to them and without warning them of these obstacles in no uncertain terms, then one leads them to heavy defeats and even heavier disappointments.

The main error of the comrades arguing so consists in their building – pardon the pun – a Chinese wall between 'revolutionary' and 'non-revolutionary' conditions, between 'daily' demands for which one can fight in non-revolutionary times, and 'transitional' demands for which one can fight only in revolutionary times. We know our judgment will anger them. But in the end, all these scholastic, schematic distinctions turn out to be the good old 'tried and tested tactics' of pre-war social democracy, i.e. the reformist, revisionist practice of restricting oneself to immediate issues and leave the defence of 'higher interests' to abstract, literary propaganda.

Revisionists delight in the neat distinction between 'economic strike' and 'political strike'. They claim to know what are feasible and unrealistic demands for each of these cases: a straight line, now sixty years old, runs from Kautsky's polemic against Rosa Luxemburg's propaganda for mass strikes to Waldeck Rochet's polemic against the revolutionaries during the French May. This formalist argumentation removes the decisive moment, that of the movement, from analysis and strategy.

All those who understand that, in the age of imperialism and the 'actuality of revolution', it is not enough to 'wait' for the revolutionary situation to fall into one's lap like an apple from the tree know that what matters most is establishing how, through conscious action, one can stimulate and accelerate the transition from the non-revolutionary to the pre-revolutionary situation, from the purely economic to objectively political mass strikes, from purely trade unionist to socialist class consciousness. In solving this problem, scholastic hair-splitting about what would be 'unrealistic' and what would be 'semi-realistic' does not help us any further.

Certainly, one must include the objective and subjective relationships of force in the calculation. But this means neither considering these force relations as static, nor submitting oneself to the given facts. One must start from general long-term development tendencies as they are clearly visible internationally. On the basis of the analysis of the objective contradictions of late capitalism, one must derive from these development trends certain general perspectives regarding the future attitude of the working class. Only when this has been accomplished can one take into account the specific national particularities of this or that imperialist country and not assume, for example, that there is any reason why the West German working class in the next 10 or 15 years would behave fundamentally differently from that of Britain (or of Belgium, France and Italy). When this analysis is made concrete, the 'weak links' of West German imperialism, its economy and society become visible. The question of under what circumstances a 'non-revolutionary' situation can be turned into a 'pre-revolutionary' one becomes much more concrete, and the incorrectness of a formula such as 'propaganda for workers' control should wait until day X' becomes clear.

Whether mass strikes remain 'purely economic' or become objectively political depends, among other things, in a decisive part on the consciousness of the most advanced workers (the informal leadership groups of the workforce), on the relative strength or weakness of a revolutionary vanguard organization, on the given degree of political interest and education of wider masses. That successful, sustained propaganda and recurring agitation for workers' control can change all these factors is clear.

Whether class consciousness is 'purely unionist' or 'semi-socialist' also depends, among other things, on whether it succeeds in breaking important layers of workers out of the false dilemma that counterposes an antagonistic, authoritarian state of the bosses to one of social-democratic class reconciliation and co-determination. And a gradually expanding and increasingly resounding campaign for workers' control (a campaign of propaganda, education and growing experience in practical struggle) can decisively contribute to escaping this false choice, this dilemma, in which the vast majority of West German workers remain trapped to this day.

### 8. Comprehensive revolutionary praxis

One of the characteristics of a society that has fulfilled its historical tasks and is ripe for replacement is that not only the revolutionary class(es), those who will play the decisive role in the creation of a higher social order, but a majority of social strata of society no longer expect anything progressive from the old society. The revolutionary class – in non-revolutionary times mainly through the mediation of its politically active minority, the revolutionary vanguard organization – becomes the natural focus point of all progressive demands of the community as such.

For a long time it seemed as if this role, fulfilled classically by the revolutionary bourgeoisie of the early 19th century, would not be repeated in the case of the proletariat. However, in the case of revolution in relatively underdeveloped countries, the proletariat does have the chance to establish an alliance with the poor peasants by acting as the mouthpiece of the historical goals of the bourgeois-democratic revolution (agrarian revolution, national liberation), goals that are no longer attainable without the conquest of power by the proletariat.

However, when it comes to the achievement of purely socialist goals, this alliance narrows down to that of the semi-proletarian and proletarian strata, and at best one can hope to neutralize a part of the poorer independent peasant strata and win them over to socialism in protracted discussions. As for the imperialist countries of the West, in the time between the two world wars and even more so in the time of the 'cold war', it seemed as if almost all of the 'intermediate strata' would en bloc reject a socialist transformation of society.

Twenty years have passed and now the situation is moving in a much more favourable direction than one could have hoped for in the time between the First and Second World Wars. The student revolt, which affected all imperialist countries and startled some of them, is only a sign of developments to come. More and more indications suggest that almost all strata of people who are wage-dependent but not part of the manual working class are becoming ripe for a global questioning of capitalist relations of production. The irony of this development lies in the fact that communist parties like that of France, which for years had based their tactics on an 'alliance with the middle strata' (and by that meant they meant the fundamentally conservative self-employed such as farmers, retailers, etc., whose economic direct interests often clash directly with those of the workers), are because of their own conservatism missing the chance of integrating these potentially revolutionary wage-dependent strata into a common struggle for socialism.

The social reasons that determine the change in attitude of the 'intermediate layers' – and in particular of those who do intellectual work, such as teachers, those in public services, office clerks, many technicians and engineers – are much like those that explain the student revolt: the growing industrialization of all non-industrial economic processes and superstructural activities, the increasing proletarianization of those working in such fields, and associated with this an increasing awareness of one's own alienation and growing sensitivity to the irrational and inhuman aspects of late capitalism, if not an intensifying rejection of late capitalism as such. This is certainly not a uniform process, and certainly some strata are by their objective function as direct accomplices of capitalist exploitation condemned to identify with the existing social order. Moreover, this is an incipient tendency that has progressed much further in France and Italy (as far as teachers, public service workers and academics are concerned, for example) than in Britain or the German Federal Republic. But again, it is important to recognize the general historical tendency towards the increasing socio-economic homogeneity of the wage-dependent masses and not – as numerous bourgeois and pseudo-Marxist sociologists claim – towards their increasing differentiation.

The potential incorporation of growing social strata into a common anti-capitalist front raises a series of strategic and tactical problems. Such questions are only now beginning to become clear but their resolution is essential not only for the elaboration of an effective socialist strategy, one corresponding to late-capitalist conditions, but also for building an adequate revolutionary organization.

It is possible that at points in the past anti-capitalist consciousness and a willingness to act accordingly existed more broadly among other social strata than they did among industrial workers. This should not surprise us as this has been shown repeatedly in the past. From the fact that the working class forms the only social class historically capable of overcoming capitalism does not follow that it is always and everywhere capable of doing so. Even less does it follow that it is always and everywhere aware of it. In some special situations (which, for example, characterize the German Federal Republic in the years 1967-68 and the United States today), it would be completely inappropriate to turn one's back on the real anti-capitalist mass movements on the pretext that the working class does not (yet) participate in them en masse. The point is to consistently drive these mass movements forward and influence them as effectively as possible. This is necessary not only so as not to miss the opportunity for the formation of numerous revolutionary cadres, but also to use the exemplary nature of these revolutionary dynamics as an important, indeed indispensable, pedagogical tool for the revival of the political workers' movement and to deepen the objective weakening of bourgeois society through such mass movements.

By giving such support Marxists can influence a progressive mass movement that did not arise among industrial workers and give it an anti-capitalist direction, but this is possible only if its own particular character is recognized. The importance of the movement's programmatic demands and its specific forms of struggle need to be recognized. In other words, one should not reductively see such movement as 'merely petty-bourgeois democratic'. All such movements raise social problems that seriously endanger the capitalist mode of production and create additional points of crisis for the bourgeois state and are not limited to 'anti-monopoly' struggles.

When students attack not only the authoritarian form but also the alienating content of university education – subject as it is to the profit-seeking of big business – and when they demand self-government and self-management of the university; when women demand free, permanently accessible homes for children and kindergartens, as in the American women's movement; when consumers protest against the continued neglect and increasing cost of public transport and demand free transport (as in Paris and in the 'Red Dot' actions in the German Federal Republic); when socialist doctors or socialist health personnel denounce the scandal of commercialized medical care and fight for the principle of needs coverage in health care; when people come out against land speculation and rent usury, no longer by demanding wage adjustments but by demanding the socialization of building land: then a socialist, anti-capitalist consciousness is spreading in ever wider layers and the stability and continuity of bourgeois society is endangered. These examples concern, without exception, essential features of a bourgeois society that is built on generalized commodity production and the reification of all human relations.

Certainly, these demands cannot in the long run be realized without the fall of the capitalist mode of production, i.e. without a revolutionary mass mobilization of the working class. But this says nothing about the role that the struggle for such transitional demands can play in preparing such a mobilization. For Lenin, it was the alpha and omega of revolutionary politics that only a revolutionary practice aimed at transforming society as a whole can lead to the revolutionary goal. The proletariat cannot gain political class consciousness as long as it occupies itself only with its immediate concerns and problems, as long as it has not grasped the dynamics and attitudes of all social classes and strata. The 'ideal' condition is undoubtedly that which Western social democracy reached roughly between 1890 and 1910, when the great political activity of the working class and its organizations made it the natural centralizing factor of all mass movements. If such a state of affairs is not yet present, it will certainly not be brought closer by turning one's back on mass movements or by withdrawing from the task of leading these movements into an anti-capitalist direction with platitudes such as 'You can't achieve anything anyway as long as the workers don't get moving', 'We need to have an absolute priority for work in the proletarian milieu', 'In the end they will be integrated into bourgeois society anyway', etc. Such a practice will only reinforce the innate economism of the unconscious working class and,



instead of contributing to its politicization, will aid the bourgeoisie and the trade union bureaucracy in further depoliticizing workers and help restrict their attention to bread and butter issues.

All the more so if such mass movements raise issues that correspond to the new needs arising from the development of the productive forces, issues that affect the broad mass of the working population as well. Not only students, revolutionary intelligentsia, housewives and socialist doctors but a growing proportion of workers are increasingly aware of these new needs and are interested in solving them. As soon as the student problem is no longer seen as a 'student problem' but as a special form of the general problem of the education sector, this applies even to this most difficult case.

The main issue is mass action and mass mobilization to unleash the dynamics of self-activity and collective activity. That this creates examples that appeal to workers was unequivocally proven by certain forms of struggle (demonstration forms) that were invented by the student movement and were adopted in the 'wildcat strikes' all over Europe (including the German Federal Republic).

### 9. The international dimension

In imperialist countries the crisis of capitalist relations of production is also manifest in the crisis of the bourgeois nation state. We have analysed elsewhere [\[21\]](#) the causes and manifestations of this crisis. The productive forces have long broken through the narrow framework of the nation state. With current technology, there are numerous products that can only be profitably manufactured if there is no more than one production site for an entire continent (in the case of certain expensive and rather infrequently used drugs, even the North American market has become too small for profitable production). The concentration and centralization of capital is increasingly taking on an international character. We have entered an era in which control of the global market by several dozen multinational groups is a realistic prospect. [\[22\]](#)

The growing internationalization of capital ownership and of economic life leads to an increasing internationalization of the 'objective' class struggle. The traditional workers' movement has failed as lamentably in understanding (not to mention applying) the strategy of transitional demands as in responding to the new needs arising from the growth of the productive forces. Meanwhile, the inability of the trade union bureaucracy and of the social-democratic and communist party apparatuses to counter the international strategies of big business has severely weakened numerous strikes, if not condemned them to defeat (the French miners' strike, the Limburg miners' strike in Belgium, the British sailors' strike). In early 1971, we saw how the economic impact of the strike by British postal workers was significantly weakened as millions of postal items were brought to Irish, Belgian French and Dutch port cities from Britain by private intermediaries. There, they were delivered by unionized colleagues without the relevant unions worrying that they were blatantly strikebreaking.

Overcoming the compartmentalization of the workers and of the revolutionary intelligentsia in different nation states is necessary not only on defensive grounds. It is also of increasing importance for offensive struggles. In the wave of anti-capitalist class struggles in Europe since 1967-68, many radical experiments have been undertaken by sections of workers, of students, of revolutionary intelligentsia, both in terms of the demands of the struggle and in terms of the organizational forms and methods of struggle. Such experiments are of the utmost significance for the entire European proletariat but do not reach wider dissemination due to national, regional and often even local isolation of comrades. At the November 1970 Brussels conference for a Red Europe [\[23\]](#), the slogan of turning the uneven development of class consciousness in Europe into a combined development was formulated. It is about ensuring that the compartmentalization and fragmentation of class consciousness, organized by the bourgeois mass media and by the bureaucratic apparatuses, is broken through and that every radical experience of struggle of the entire workers' vanguard, of the entire mass of struggling workers can be spread on a European scale. That this must be a matter not only of incorporating experiences but that such lessons must also have a practical, radicalizing influence

on future struggles speaks for itself.

But to limit oneself to this aspect of the international character of socialist strategy would again mean to adapt oneself to the existing (and evidently insufficient) state of class consciousness, to follow the rearguard and limit oneself to economic demands. It would mean abdicating the educational and radicalizing tasks of the vanguard. Again, the radical student movement and the revolutionary vanguard organizations achieved a great deal by making the task of solidarity with the revolutions in the colonies and semi-colonies a daily practical issue, not just one of providing information. The failure of social democracy and the communist parties to stay true to their own traditions (those of social democracy before the First World War, those of the communist parties of the 1920s) created a space that was successfully filled by the youth vanguard. Certainly, for many it is an escape from the duty to build revolutionary consciousness and organization in their own country and among their own working class. Instead they are exclusively concerned with solidarity with the Vietnamese, Cuban, Palestinian, Latin American, etc. revolutions. But underestimating the need to support such solidarity, autonomously from the ongoing routine of class struggle at home, is misunderstanding the very essence of revolutionary Marxism in the imperialist era.

This applies not only to solidarity with the liberation struggles of oppressed peoples. It applies equally to the no less necessary solidarity with the anti-bureaucratic struggles in the bureaucratized workers states of the Eastern Bloc. It applies equally to the increasingly important coordination of the class struggle of the European with that of the Japanese and North American proletariat. But such tasks cannot be left to the random ups and downs of mass or vanguard spontaneity. They require an international revolutionary vanguard organization, just as the effective elaboration and application of a socialist strategy in the national framework requires a national revolutionary organization. What have already formulated what needs to be said on the question of organization after a century of experience and we therefore prefer not to repeat it here. [24]

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