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Challenges of the new world situation

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a) We must take the measure of the changes that have been going on for a decade, instead of comforting ourselves with some routine idea about economic cycles or cycles of struggles. We are involved in a global (economic, social, institutional and cultural) transition. The reorganization of basic social forces and their political representation involves a long process, in the course of which new forms of struggle and organization will develop as a function of the structural changes (of a breadth comparable to those which shook up the workers' movement when it was confronted by imperialism and war at the beginning of the century) and the evolution of social formations. This means that there have to be new experiences and new generations.

b) We have to verify the existence among us of a basic agreement on events and tasks, in light of the major problems that we have been confronting over the past few years. Without this basic agreement, an organized international militant current would quickly lose its usefulness for action and would be reduced to a think-tank based on affinities left over from the past.

c) We have to begin the necessary work of programmatic redefinition. Thanks to our traditions and our heritage, the world that is taking shape remains largely intelligible for us. Nothing would be more sterile than forgetting our whole past in order to rave about empty novelties. On the other hand, an international movement that did not help analyze this major transformation and help respond to problems that are really new would quickly be seen as useless.

The problems are real and substantial: consequences of globalization, reorganization of the international division of labor, crisis of the nation-state, formation of regional economic and political entities, development of international institutions and development of new juridical relationships. While we should be cautious with analogies, the tasks that confront us are comparable to those the workers' movement faced at the turn of the 20th century, when its theoretical and political culture was forged: the analysis of imperialism, debates on the national question, and battles over forms of political, social and parliamentary organization.

I. A new epoch?

1. Behind the major political events of the last few years (fall of the Berlin Wall and German unification, collapse of the USSR, Gulf War and military interventions in Africa, war in the Balkans) lies the exhaustion of the period of growth and development that followed the Second World War. From 1945 to 1970, the average rate of growth of the industrialized countries was exceptionally high: 5 percent on average, compared with roughly 2 percent between 1914 and 1950 and 2.5 percent since 1973. Worldwide production multiplied sevenfold, worldwide trade fourfold. This headlong growth supplied the foundation for social compromises in the world's different sectors. It shaped the protagonists of these social compromises (reformist parliamentary parties, trade union movement, populist and anti-imperialist movements in the Third World):

- Development of the welfare state and the cult of progress in the imperialist centers, with the reinforcement of reformist positions, imperisocial pacts, and a deepening of bureaucratic phenomena;

- Euphoria on the part of the bureaucracy in the East in terms of a short-term perspective of catching up and going beyond the capitalist West (the Sputnik years in the USSR); and

- The Bandung turn and projects for decolonization and development in the Third World (a New World Economic Order, technology transfer, import-substitution industrialization).

This configuration encouraged the expression of radical challenges to the system of domination: national liberation struggles (Algeria, Cuba, Indochina) against the traditional forms of colonization and dependence; mass anti-bureaucratic struggles in Czechoslovakia or Poland; youth movements and mass strike movements in most of the developed countries.

2. The big change taking place is frequently summed up with the notion of globalization: sometimes in order to sing the modernizing praises of a free-

market liberalism «without borders», just as often on the contrary to use globalization as a bogeyman justifying backward-looking reflexes (economic protectionism, the social clause, backward preventive measures to guard against immigration). It is therefore important to specify the reality, limits and contradictions of the changes under way. Accelerating globalization is real. International trade is growing more quickly than the GDPs of the countries involved. Since 1975 foreign direct investment has grown more quickly than domestic investment (from 1980 to 1988 foreign direct investment within the US-Japan-Europe triangle tripled). Corporate interpenetration and mergers are creating oligopolies whose links to their states of origin are fraying. International trade is replacing development of domestic markets as a basis of accumulation (François Chesnais, La mondialisation du capital, 1994, p184). Can we conclude that "the world market has been created"? The formula is so general that it is bound to be ambiguous. While accelerating globalization cannot be denied, international trade makes up only 20-30% of the total volume of exchanges, and foreign direct investment was 1% of world GDP in 1990. While capital and good markets are more and more unified, this is not true for the labor market (350 million workers in the rich countries earn an average hourly wage of $US 18, compared to an average hourly wage of $US 1 or $US 2 for 1,200 million workers in the poor countries). While a number of multinationals operate on several different continents and produce in several dozen countries, they are still dependant on the dominant imperialisms' political, diplomatic, monetary and military power. Finally, globalization of capital has been going on in recent years on the basis of its sweeping transformation into finance capital, rather than on the basis of development of productive forces. We are therefore facing an intermediate, transitional situation, a crisis of the old modes of regulation whose effects are already perceptible:

a) mutation of social formations;

b) disjunction of political and economic spheres (leading to a crisis of the nation-state and ruling classes); and

c) attempts at regional reorganization of markets and institutions.

3. The players in the social conflict who were fashioned by the previous period and mode of growth have been partially and unevenly destructured by the effects of the crisis, the liberal offensive, and the reorganization of the productive apparatus. The industrialized countries have registered a significant drop in industrial labor (change in the organization of work and skills, individualization and flexibility) and a rise of services with a spectacular increase in permanent unemployment and durable exclusion, the reorganization of urban space and the partial dismantling of working class concentrations (the factory-housing relationship, which used to determine social solidarity), marginality in suburbs, the situation of women and youth. Nobody can predict the effect of these phenomena over several decades in societies where wage labor represents more than 80% of the active population and where certain traditional elementary mechanisms of solidarity (extended family, links to the countryside) have been smashed.

In the ex-USSR and Eastern Europe, the appearance of dependent capitalism will have devastating effects on urbanized and industrialized societies, with new forms of third or fourth worldization. This process has been slowed down for the time being by the partial character of the privatizations (low official unemployment linked to the hybrid character of the property forms), but the urban crisis is already severe and may very well provoke a reverse rural exodus (an urban exodus) or migratory movements to the West.

A series of dependent countries have seen the end of the model of the industrialization by substitution as well as the emergence of increasingly severe dualization (free zones, informal economy, agrarian question) and the degradation of their primary exports (technological changes in the North, unequal exchange, and financialization of these markets). The urban and rural crisis is such that it does not seem to be controllable without serious agrarian reforms that can only directly clash with the ruling classes who are linked to the landed oligarchy. Massive displacements of populations and refugees are reaching unprecedented proportions, at the same time as interventions trying to control these movements (Haiti) and xenophobic regulatory measures (the Schengen agreements, Proposition 187 in California).

The organized forces (social movements, parties, unions) that came out of the preceding cycle of struggles have been socially weakened. They have undergone significant defeats in the wealthy countries (British miners, sliding scale in Italy, steel industry in France) and the in poor countries (Bolivian miners, agrarian counter-reform in Mexico) without the new organizing poles of the next cycle of struggles having made their appearance yet. From this point of view, the Brazilian PT is more a heritage of the preceding period of growth (industrial miracle) than a general model for what is to come (even if the question of an independent class party retains its full propagandistic, and in some cases agitational value in a number of countries). The loosening grip of «national compromises» forged during the period of growth and the weakening of class movements facilitate the outbreak of panics over identity and quests for other kinds of communities (national, ethnic or religious). The social forces and forms of organization forged during past cycles of mobilization are virtually exhausted, while new activist generations have not yet clearly emerged. The role of youth (for traditional reasons) and women (for more specific reasons - see "Women and Economic Integration" in Women's lives in the New Global Economy, NSR 22, IIRE, 1995) will be decisive in the initiation of a new cycle of mobilization.

4. One of globalization's major consequences is the tendency of the political and economic spheres to come apart. During the 1950s the dominant national economies formed relatively coherent wholes, linking together a market, a territory and a state. International competition and

deregulation bring about fractures between economic logic and political sovereignty. It becomes difficult in many cases to say what a product's or company's national identity is. Social inequalities between winners and losers in globalization are deepening, not only on an international scale but also within the dominant countries, to the point that the social compromises of the welfare state are being put to a rude test: "Are we still part of one community even when we're no longer part of one economy?" (Reich). A question like this contains much exaggeration, specially concerning the USA, but it expresses a real tendency and real anguish.

The crisis in fact affects the redistributive function of the state, which in the past fostered a certain social cohesion. This has led to a loss of legitimacy for institutions that have been driven back by the combined impact of privatization (the reinforcement of private economic power), globalization (loss of control from above of economic and monetary relations) and deregulation. This phenomenon is not limited to dependent states or to still fragile ruling classes. It has also begun to affect some of the European bourgeoisies. Neo-liberal market restructuring, national (e.g. US, Italian and Belgian) and local debt, displacement of the tax burden onto the poorest people, and the severe crisis of public finance all produce a challenging of the mechanisms of the welfare state (cost-of-living allowances, public services, social security, cutbacks in wages, benefits, private insurance and charity) and an increase in regional inequalities.

The privat-ization of economic and financial power at the expense of public service and the public good have produced galloping corruption and the proliferation of mafia-type phenomena. In the dependent countries, this general tendency has produced a generalized crisis of populist systems (Mexico, Arab countries, Sub-Saharan Africa), a process of privatization, dollarization and loss of sovereignty under the pressure of the debt and the erosion of export-driven resources (raw materials), and an "involuntary de-linking" for some countries (from 1966 to 1987, while the Newly Industrialized Countries' share of world exports rose from 1.1% to 5.5%, the South's overall share fell from 23% to 15% and Latin America's share fell to 3%). The debacle of weak local "elites", incapable of homogenizing and stabilizing themselves around a viable national project, exacerbates corruption, redistribution of sinecures among protegés, and a tendency toward dismemberment of some countries (Somalia, Ethiopia, Rwanda) along clan and ethnic lines. The crises that Mexico and Algeria are going through are particularly revealing, since these are countries that have experienced a revolution or a radical war of liberation, countries that seem to be among the best situated to overcome the handicaps of dependency. Today Mexico is looking for salvation in a socially costly association with its big northern neighbor, while Algeria is sinking into the chaos of disguised civil war, under the arbitration of its former colonial rulers. This is the context in which we can understand social violence and political violence, and the rise of "shadowy identities" that is inversely proportional to the weakening of class identification and solidarity.

5. Divided by competition, the ruling class only exists as such through the state project that unifies it. The nation-state project (which emerged in the course of the last century in the dominant countries, and in the course of this century with decolonization and independence) has exhausted its integrating and unifying effects without any alternative project emerging. The existing states remain the necessary form of class domination, but are already no longer the appropriate form in terms of the main tendencies of globalization. This explains the destabilization of the ruling classes and their political personnel, which is perceivable everywhere: Galloping corruption, clientism, drug trafficking; the rise of adventurers (Fujimori, Collor, Berlusconi); the tendency of those petty-bourgeois and bourgeois layers who are least able to accept a loss of state sovereignty and to adapt to the effects of liberal competition to challenge the rule of the dominant forces, producing a crisis of identity in bourgeois parties and some signs of fragmentation among their leaderships; and signs of division within big business on immediate perspectives and solutions (Europe, NAFTA, WTO and Ross Perot).

In spite of its specificity, Italy is symptomatic in this respect. In Latin America and the Arab countries (in the Indian subcontinent?), the bureaucratic populist cycle is at the end of its rope. In Africa, a number of decolonized states have not succeeded in consolidating any national reality or dominant bourgeois class. The redistributive effects and inter-class solidarity that corruption and clientism produced in the past are disappearing. The comprador elites are also disappearing. Caught between the demands for structural adjustment and social decomposition, a number of dependent countries have become increasingly fragile (Ethiopia, Sudan, Afghanistan, ex-Soviet republics). Even in those countries where the struggle for independence was the most radical in its forms and in its long-term consequences (Algeria, Mexico, Angola, Mozambique), the populist regimes have exhausted their historic dynamism and their bureaucratic and bourgeois elites have reached an accommodation with a partial loss of sovereignty either in fact or in law. The aggressivity of the neo-colonial discourse, which would have been unthinkable only twenty years ago, on the immaturity of the child-peoples and the necessity for "benign" guidance is simply a reflection of this situation.

In the bureaucratic regimes, the emergence of a entrepreneurial and dynamic bourgeoisie has run into enormous difficulties. The decomposition of the different levels of the bureaucracy has rather given birth to a mixture of speculative capitalism and bureaucratic clientism, to a kind of comprador and mafioso proto-bourgeoisie.

6. The socialist project is not the only one in crisis, so are the different world visions that co-existed, clashed and complimented each other in the preceding period: Bandung, bourgeois democratic universalism and illusions in progress, productivist communism that will be victorious in the year

2,000. The triumph of the tandem of the free market and parliamentary democracy has not survived very long. Even if historical analogies are somewhat inevitable in military and political thinking, it is not useful to reason through analogies (references to the beginning of the century or to the 1930s) given the depth of the historic mutation going on and uncertainties in terms of what will result. We have to remain very attentive to the unforeseen, to the specifically contemporary forms of old contradictions. We are no longer in the political period of 1968. We are not out of the long wave depressionary economic cycle and we are at the end of an epoch (including the political culture it generated) that the First World War and the Russian revolution culture opened. The break-down of the unstable balances created at the end of the last world war have not produced a new order, as Bush proclaimed. But new and inevitable conflicts in an unjust world (inequalities, dependency, apartheid) as well as violent (Gulf, Yugoslavia, Rwanda) and unstable ones. We are now dealing with a type of regressive (cultural, political and economic) Counter-Reformation which we have to begin to resist. Capitalist Counter-Reformation against all democratic and social conquests: long-term unemployment, precariousness, old and new forms of poverty, exclusion, epidemics, the absolute pauperization of certain populations, ecological catastrophes, new technologies and a moral crisis. There is always a way out of an economic crisis. The question is, at what cost and to whom. The present crisis will not necessarily produce a general cataclysm, but the slow strangulation and worldwide deepening of inequality can take on equally violent or barbaric forms. Within the cyclical movement, the growing contradictions come down to the essential characteristics of the system: the inability of market measurements to regulate the exchange of complex work and organize the long-term relationship between society and its natural environment. In the midst of the crisis, the elements of potential new modes of regulation are making their appearance (new technologies, new products, a new division and organization of labor). Nonetheless these elements remain partial; they have not been systematized.

Reestablishing the conditions for a new phase of accumulation and lasting growth depends not only on a modification of the relationship of forces in the key countries, but also on a reorganization of markets, territories, institutions and legal systems. The crucial question is thus the change of scale that is on the agenda: the redistribution of relationships of dependency and domination, the emergence of regional entities and blocs, and the consolidation of international agreements and bodies capable of disciplining the neoliberal order. This leads to several, more and more ominous problems:

a) The problems of the political and institutional instruments of globalization (the role of the IMF, World Bank and World Trade Organization), of alliances and of new forms of imperialist military intervention;

b) The problems involved in the emergence of regional entities with nonetheless very different characteristics: an attempt at monetary and political unity (the European Union); a common market under imperial hegemony between rich countries and a dependent country (NAFTA); a dependent regional common market (Mercosur); and a more or less organized free-trade zone (APEC); and

c) The crisis and dismemberment of several countries, the rise of nationalism, the problem of the relationship between nation, ethnicity and state, and the multiplication of regional conflicts. We will briefly go over each of these three major headings. One of the functions of an international organization, even a modest one, is in effect to contribute to steering us through this transition by pushing through a programmatic updating that must be comparable, within certain limits, to the great controversies of the turn of the 20th century, which determined for almost a century the political culture of the various different components of the workers' movement.

II. New problems?

7. For almost two centuries, the nation-state has been the functional form in which a goods and capital market, a labor market, and a space of political institutions were articulated. There is no guarantee that globalization will lead to a simple transfer of this relationship between social and political spheres to a larger scale. One sector of capital is directly internationalized. At the same time, mergers and concentration are sketching the formation of a regional (in Europe continental) sector of capital. Still another sector of capital remains national. The processes are combined; there is no automatic economic mechanism involved. The political will to organize markets and forge new governments also plays a role, without anyone's being able to predict what institutional political forms will prevail in the future. For the time being nation-states, federal projects (Europe) and institutions linked to globalization are combined during the transition. Whether we look at world trade (GATT-World Trade Organization), political concertation (the proposed reorganization of the UN), management of the debt (World Bank/IMF), even management of the ecosphere (the Rio summit), international institutions seem to be more and more visible and active. Some people go too far, and conclude that a kind of organized superimperialism has arisen, with a growing role for stateless organioligopolies and planetary proto-state institutions. We are not there yet, far from it. But the tools of globalization are already raising problems for our analysis and interventions, problems that we should face.

a) From GATT to the World Trade Organization. An integral part of the system established at the end of the war (Bretton Woods system, IMF, World Bank), GATT is one of the mechanisms for liberalizing trade controlled by the dominant powers, which perpetuates unequal exchange and dependency. Behind the hypocritical free-market credo lies the reality: structural adjustment diktats, hidden protectionism on behalf of the rich, cultural and financial hegemony

reinforced by the deregulation of services, "patenting" of the genetic heritage, etc. The discreet shift (stealth parliamentary ratification) from GATT to the World Trade Organization in the framework of ratifying the Marrakech accords means new ways of subordinating states, elected governments (including bad ones) and laws to the lords of the world market and their regulatory edicts (article XVI-4 of the treaty).

b) Under pressure from the IMF and World Bank, the debt continues to play a disciplinary role for the dependent countries. Even if the World Trade Organization retains a dimension of national representation, at the level of the IMF and World Bank there is no such thing. They embody capital's undisguised law: one dollar, one vote! Of course these institutions have limited decision-making powers, relative to the weight of the main multinationals: while the IMF controls liquidity equal to less than two percent of world imports, ten transnationals secure for themselves profits almost as great as the 190 next-biggest, and the 500 biggest companies in the world have laid off an average of 400,000 employees per year, despite their increasing profits. But the IMF and World Bank have the power they need to police the Third World and Eastern countries. Another mode of planetary cooperation and growth is conceivable: international regulatory bodies replacing WB/IMF/ WTO/G7; bodies to develop international trade bet-ween countries on the same level of productivity; planned transfer of wealth from those countries that have accumulated it over centuries to the detriment of the poor countries; new trade regulations allowing for diversified development projects; partial and managed disconnection from the world market as long as it remains dominated by commodity exchange and a corrective pricing policy; and an immigration policy negotiated within this framework.

c) The perversity of the system is clearly illustrated by the debates on a hypothetical "social clause" against imports from the dominated countries. In the rich countries, any tariff barriers would only be admissible as a way of punishing industries that move elsewhere in order to take advantage of cheap, defenseless labor (the European code of conduct or the Sullivan principles for businesses investing in South Africa during the sanctions period). Invoking Third World competition to explain unemployment in the industrialized countries is pure sleight of hand.

Trade between rich countries and dependent countries, even Newly Industrialized Countries, can be accompanied by loss of jobs, but it is generally beneficial in terms of capital flows. The problem of employment is therefore not mainly a problem of competition that is portrayed as unfair, but a problem of the economic logic itself, and a problem of higher productivity in jobs that respond to social needs.

Because of the effects of deregulation, the relative benefit of moving to Third-World countries is tending to decline, while the benefit of moving to other areas of the rich countries, thanks to uneven development of social guarantees and norms, has grown. (Wage differentials have become substantial even within the European Union).

Besides, most of these imported goods in labor-intensive sectors (such as textiles or electronic components) come from runaway shops that belong to industrial groups based in the imperialist countries, not mostly companies based in the exporting countries (with the exception of South Korea). The key question is thus not a social tax on imports into rich countries (whose control and ultimate consequences would in any event be uncertain), but the strategy of multinational corporations that produce abroad and how they might be brought under control (receivership, total or partial expropriation, tax reform), or even projects that could be alternatives to the big capitalist projects (the G7 plans for telecommunications).

8. The reorganization of world leadership is one of the political conditions for emerging from the crisis. How far has the American decline gone?

– Since the Gulf War, the U.S. has used its military supremacy and the power of its state to reaffirm its military and diplomatic hegemony. It has also begun developing its productive competitiveness in certain sectors. But the survival of enormous budgetary and commercial deficits underlines the fragility of this evolution. The European impasse and Japan's limitations have blocked the short-term emergence of a real alternative to American world leadership. The contradiction between its political power and its economic weakening are reflected in the very contradictions of international institutions: the reorganization of the UN Security Council, the absence of a new monetary order, the redefinition of military pacts, the precariousness of WTO in dealing with the hidden protectionism of the powers that be.

– Since before the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, the U.S. (and the main European powers) had reoriented their military policies in function of the new strategic situation (Aspen doctrine), mainly against the instability of the Third World. The new doctrine had already been prepared and tested by the implementation of Rapid Deployment Forces, so-called low intensity wars (Central America), and direct short-term interventions (Grenada, Panama). The Gulf War was conceived of as the first illustration on a different scale of these massive one-time strikes in the context of the new worldwide relationship of forces. Imposed by European politico-strategic upheavals, the redefinition of NATO's role is, from the very beginning, subordinated to this overall policy.

– Legitimizing on a humanitarian basis military interventions is the fourth strategic level in the From Containment to Enlargement documents of the U.S. National Security Council. The concepts of rights and duties to intervene (and reciprocity) oscillate between moral duty and political right. The duty postulates the existence of an impossible innocence of the interveners as though the past, the interests, the hierarchy concentrated in the UN Security Council and its permanent members no longer existed.

In reality, what we are dealing with here are the gropings of a new international law reflecting the new relationship of forces and restoring legitimacy to the maintenance of the world order that colonial wars, and particularly the long intervention in Vietnam, had eliminated. The interventions in the Gulf, Somalia, Haiti, ex-Yugoslavia, Rwanda have clearly revealed the practical contradictions in this legal-ideological scaffolding. Who decides and who applies (UN decisions and the operational military command in the field)? What happens to the officially proclaimed sovereignty of states? What would be the reciprocity of this one-way right: not simply the intervention of the rich in relation to the poor, but the opposite?

– The UN, supposedly the cosmopolitan authority in the new world order, very rapidly revealed itself to be what it remains the "gizmo" that covers and legitimizes imperialism's undertakings. The UN produces the communiqués. The legal loopholes from the point of its charter and of international law allow for a multiplicity of interventions, each with a different status. In the most burning cases, the States intervene under NATO command (Bosnia) or U.S. command (Gulf) or any state which decides to intervene, taking advantage of UN positions (France in Rwanda, U.S. in Haiti). The end of the bipolar partnership of Yalta clearly reveals the problems of representatives of these international bodies and the difficulties in re-defining their composition on the basis of criteria other than the relationship of forces that presided at the end of the last world war (i.e., the Security Council, zones of influence, military power, demographic weight?, etc.).

The hierarchies inherited from Yalta are null and void, but there is still no form of foreseeable international democratic sovereignty that would go beyond the mediation of states or alliances of states. The contradiction thus remains explosive between the necessity of a proto-world wide state regulation linked to the globalization of goods and capital markets, formal or informal transfers of goods and capital markets (of sovereignty) on the one hand, and the principally national social regulation linked to the fragmentation of the labor market.

9. The Maastricht Treaty represents a strategic choice: that of advancing toward a political organization of Europe under the constraint of a monetary straightjacket and the criteria for convergence that it involves. In the course of the ratification proceedings we fought against this treaty, not by screaming about national sovereignty like the chauvinistic right, but from a class point of view in the name of social solidarity that Euroliberalism was attacking and in the name of a project for a Social Europe of Solidarity. A Social Europe of Solidarity compromised by the selective and anti-egalitarian effects of their non-democratic and financial Europe. The initial Maastricht project is dead in the water, as much for economic reasons (the technocrats had not foreseen the brutality of the crisis that destroyed the European monetary system and the criteria for conversion since 1992) as for political reasons (the collapse of the Eastern bloc and the geo-political imperatives of expansion), but the process has been put in motion. The concept that has since been publicly put forward by the German Christian Democrats for a multi-speed Europe (a free-trade zone and a network of political association all the way to Russia, organized a proto-state Franco-German hard core) is a response to this new situation within the continuity of the Single Act and the spirit (if not the letter, since that has become unworkable) of Maastricht.

– Although we are not starting from scratch, and although we are in part the prisoners of decisions that have already been made (the Single Act, Maastricht, enlargement), from which the German Christian Democrats' document incidentally drew some of its arguments, we have to put the European project back on its feet. Europe will be different depending on the social forces that take the initiative and determine its content:

– Broadening and deepening political adherence and social convergence against the monetary straightjacketing; a coordinated reduction in work time to an immediate maximum of 35 hours; European wage indexation and a European minimum wage; harmonization of social security based on the highest acquisitions; a plan for major public works in transport, communications and energy; industrial projects and "Europeanization" of strategic multinationals;

– a democratic Europe of citizens: European citizenship and institutions (right of vote for all residents; genuinely equal social and civil rights for women; a European assembly and the right of veto for national parliaments; suppression of the Schengen agreements and of all discriminatory measures like the Pasqua laws.

– The proper use of subsidiarity: defining the democratic content of subsidiarity as a new distribution of power and of the attributes of sovereignty on the levels of the states, the European Union, and internationally.

Such a framework would make possible resolving both advancing toward supernationality and recognizing collective national rights (Euzkadi, Corsica, etc.);

– a peaceful Europe of solidarity: nuclear disarmament, cancellation of the debt, new forms of cooperation, ecological measures.

10. In the present conditions of the internationalization of production and trade, of the crisis of efficiency and legitimacy of existing states, of a redeployment of the division of labor, of new minglings of populations, those nations which accede to a state existence can no longer play the integrating role that the nation-states of the past century or the decolonization period played. This explains the tendency to search for a mythical legitimacy (our land and our martyrs), an ethnic or identity-based (chauvinistic and xenophobic) legitimacy with its full load of purifying fantasies. Yugoslavia is not an exception (Israel, Germany). Under these conditions, the nationalism of the oppressed can be quickly converted into an oppressive nationalism against one's own

minorities. A class alternative requires more than ever a close relationship between national democratic projects and an close international perspective (regional responses, redefinition of exchanges, alternatives to the WTO and the IMF's structural adjustments), as well as inserting regional or ethnic democratic demands within the framework of broader solidarity so as to avoid the devastating impasse of micro-nationalism:

– primacy of citizenship over nationality;

– the right to self-determination and voluntary association (subsidiarity);

– guarantees for (linguistic, scholastic and cultural) minorities.

11. Transitional demands are bridges from immediate demands that respond to urgent needs to the seizure of power. But these bridges and passageways are quite shaky today. Where is the power to be seized? It is still concentrated in the really existing state apparatus, but it is already being delegated to regional and international institutions. This is a problem for the ruling classes.

– The idea of a homogeneous political, economic and territorial space has gone out of date, and it is by no means certain that any such space will be reconstituted on a higher (continental or regional) level. Divisions within the bourgeoisies are already showing the contradictions among capital that is directly globalized, capital that is still protected by its national institutions, and capital that aims at a middle-level reorganization (the European Union), with all possible and imaginable intermediate forms between these three sectors of capital.

– It is a major strategic problem for the workers' movement, whose policies were shaped for decades within the framework of national states, with revolutionary variants (nationalizations, a single bank, monopoly on foreign trade, dual power) and reformist variants (democratization and Keynesian policies). Today the disjunction between economic and political power, the dispersal of decision-making centers (on the local, national, regional and worldwide levels) are such that the gateways established by immediate demands tend to go off in all directions. It is striking to note that the Brazilian PT's program was far more moderate than the radical reformist program of the Chilean Popular Unity in 1970, or that what would now be a radical program in certain European countries (reduction of the workweek, immigrant rights, debt moratorium, demilitarization) is often far weaker than the reformist programs of the seventies (nationalizations, elements of workers self-management and control). Faced with the impotence of reformless reformism, the majority currents in the workers' movement waver between adaptation to free-market logics (modernizing social democracy) and nationalist turns inward (various Communist and ex-Communist parties).

Defense of social rights and gains depends on existing laws and institutions, but effective measures to reduce unemployment and for an economy in the service of human needs require a directly regional or international dimension (coordinated shortening of the work week, joint training policies, investment projects and control or socialization of multinationals). So what we have to do, starting from people's struggles and experiences however modest and partial they may be, is formulate and implement a transitional approach for the 21st century. This is how, around simple and accessible themes, we can give a dynamic content to the recomposition in progress and lift it out of tactical and self-seeking ruts. Once again, we have to reformulate the basic elements of an approach that leads to an challenge to the whole of the established order:

a) Citizenship/democracy (political and social). Against the restricted universality of human rights, civil rights and equality of rights (immigrants, women, youth), civil rights and social rights (male-female parity); social rights and public services.

b) Against the dictatorship of the market, its short-sighted consequences, its anti-egalitarian logic: the right to exist, beginning with the right to a job and to a guaranteed minimum income; recycling the gains of productivity, (housing, education and health services), which implies a broadening of free services and incursions against private property rights. The right of citizens to social property, of businesses including the choices and decisions which have a major impact on their present and future living conditions; this right to social property does not necessarily involve nationalization, but rather effective socialization (the right to user self-management, decentralization, planning).

c) Solidarity between generations (social security, ecology).

d) Solidarity without borders: disarmament, debt, regional political spaces, internationalization of social rights.

Similar work should be done starting from the most burning issues for the dependent countries (debt, land reform, regional cooperation) and for the Eastern countries (alternatives to privatization, democracy, the national question).

III. By way of a tentative conclusion

12. Of course there are economic cycles. Of course there are upturns and downturns in struggles, and we will take part here and there in explosions, mobilizations, and fierce resistance. But these good-sense reminders must not make us forget that the changes under way are not conjunctural: we are witnessing a historic mutation of the mode of capitalist accumulation, whose full strategic consequences we cannot yet foresee. At least it is not too soon to take stock of the magnitude of the problem. The "crisis of revolutionary leadership", which has become a crisis of the workers' movement as such, acquires all the more importance in this historical perspective. The world situation is always the scene of contradictory tendencies. However, it is not possible over the previous decade to balance out the good points

and the bad points: Nicaragua with Chiapas, Palestine with South Africa. The terms are not equivalent. One need only listen to and read the declarations of the Zapatistas: an insurrection of despair against the effects of liberal modernization. A number of factors were at play in the end of apartheid as well as the collapse of the bureaucratic dictatorships. Mass mobilizations and the expression of democratic aspirations, of course, but these were also combined with the specific needs of capital: the system of apartheid was increasingly came into conflict with the whims of liberalization and deregulation.

Once this dynamic set in, its evolution was largely determined by the world relationship of forces. So one tendency is clearly winning over the other, not on the basis of calculations but as proven by major events: the dislocation of the USSR without even the beginnings of a political revolution, the dominant restorationist dynamic in the East, the imperialist reunification of Germany, the defeats of the Central American revolution, the Gulf War, the Israeli-Palestinian agreements, the increased isolation and exhaustion of the Cuban revolution. The crisis of leadership and of the workers' movement's political project thus results from a combination of three factors: long-term social effects of the crisis (social mutation); the cumulative disorganizing effects of the policies of the reformist and populist leaderships confronted with the first shock of the crisis; and the profound effects of the bankruptcy of "actually existing socialism".

In the imperialist countries, the Stalinist parties discredited revolution and social democrats discredited reform. Neither presently fulfill the same function as in the past. The former no longer base their identity on the reference to the socialist camp, and can only transform themselves into national reformist parties if they have the chance to supplant social democracy in this role. At the same time, the traditional social democratic parties, caught up in the liberal whirlpool of loyal management and the impasse of national Keynesian potions, are closely associated with European capital and want to be the active wing of Maastricht Europe. More and more, they are the incarnation of reformless reformism. This crisis of representation of the working class movement is also seen in a crisis of efficiency and representativity of the union movement (which varies according to country) and by the fragmentation and atomization of class consciousness. In the countries of East Europe and in the ex-USSR, the fact that class discourse was that of the old power and that words have totally lost their meaning, that there was no merger between the democratic their aspirations of society and the class movement, that the low level of mass anti-capitalist struggles in the advanced capitalist countries was hardly a positive reference (compared to what happened in 1968) constitute so many obstacles to the rebirth of a social movement that would be independent of capital, which is finding its rebirth in fractions of the bureaucracy.

In the dependent countries where progressive anti-imperialist currents were able to enter into conflicting alliances with the nationalist sectors of a potential (petty) bourgeoisie, the change in the international relationship of forces has led to a cascading "realistic" realignment (accommo-dations and compromises with the IMF and World Bank). The period when OPEC appeared to be a beacon and where the international division of labor inherited from colonialism allowed for a certain margin of maneuver and bargaining seems to be definitively over. Although for a time it was hidden by the rise in oil prices, the collapse of this system began at the end of the 70's with the collapse of raw materials prices, which undermined both the social basis and the self-confidence of this anti-imperialism. The changes in world political relations following the fall of the Berlin Wall, the dislocation of the USSR and the Gulf War were the final blows. There is now an outright and not conjunctural crisis of the forms of the preceding phase of radical anti-imperialism (confusion in Panama, in Haiti) and a strong tendency to destructively adapt to a fall-back position in the name of an illusory "realism" (El Salvador, Nicaragua, South Africa). For now, the dominant tendency on a world scale is the weakening of social movements (first of all of trade-union movements). Although large-scale electoral shifts are taking place (as in Italy), they rarely benefit workers' parties, still less often radical alternatives to these parties. Caudillos and populist formations, even parties of the far right, are usually the first to profit from disaffection with the traditional parties. Compared with what we noted at the last World Congress, the revolutionary left itself has largely fragmented and become weaker (witness the crisis of the Central American organizations, the break-up of the Philippine CP, and the retreat of the South African trade-union left). We are setting out to rebuild a revolutionary project and an international in considerably deteriorated conditions.

13. Our previous discussion requires the addition of a few clarifications in order to try to avoid the worst misunderstandings. Comrades have carried on a great deal over the idea of a new epoch. Let's keep it simple. Historians have invented extremely refined, sophisticated categories in order to express the periodization of rhythms (cycles, phases, stages, etc.). Here we are merely trying to emphasize that what we are going through is not a routine alternation of upturns and downturns. A configuration is coming to en end, and the changes linked to capital's reorganization really pose new problems. Even if the theme of globalization is used in an ideological way (to defend free-market liberalism without borders and resignation in face of the constraints that follow from it), globalization is still something real. It determines the dynamics of social transformations, political fractures and the destabilization of states.

Other comrades have stressed the emergence of elements of an imaginable new mode of regulation. This is true as well as logical. There are no clean breaks in history. The new emerges from the old, and elements of a solution are maturing in the midst of the crisis: technologies, organization of labor, new markets and new products. But right now these

phenomena have neither the magnitude (i.e. generalization) nor the coherence required to launch a new phase of lasting growth. This is why we emphasize the political and institutional conditions required for any exit from the depressive long wave. This does not mean that these exit conditions necessarily have to take the form of a single catastrophe or a new world war. We brought up in the report the hypothesis of slow strangulation, of which local conflicts with global implications (such as Bosnia) could be one aspect.

To conclude, is it really necessary to spend so much time on a sterile polemic over the "New World Order", as if some people (the majority) were swept away by a desperate pessimism and believed that such an Order had come to stay, while others (true to their revolutionary faith) kept to their faith in the capacity of the masses? The majority resolution from the last World Congress already stressed (beginning with its title) the new disorders (like the Gulf War and future ones). You would have to be cross-eyed to open your newspaper each day and find proof in it of an orderly world! Antagonism, conflict and struggle are inherent in the system: that is not about to change. But this is just where the problem begins. We can only foresee the struggle, Gramsci said wisely; we cannot foresee its outcome.

Revolution is necessary. We are struggling in order to make it possible and make it victorious. But it is not certain, and above all we are forced, like generals who are always behind the times because they have forced to reason on the basis of the last war, to imagine a revolutionary project in the shape of past revolutions, whereas a renascent social movement will probably bring answers that no one could foresee.

14. Some comrades seem to have been shocked by the question the report asks: Where is the power to be seized? True, one can simply answer that class struggle still begins, as the classics from Marx to Trotsky said, in the national arena and that its strategic horizon is still first of all the seizure of power on the national level. This is not yet false, but it is already no longer entirely true. We have clearly rejected in the report the idea of a super-imperialism that would really reduce nation-states to the status of vestiges and make struggles on the national level futile: a situation in which the praiseworthy but distant goal of a globalization of struggles (or a renewal of internationalism) would serve as a alibi for resignation, passivity, and adaptation to the neo-liberal dynamic. On the other hand, these states and the power that they express is losing control of a growing part of the production process, monetary flows, and movements of capital. This means that the national dimension of the struggle for power is more and more immediately entwined in regional and global dimensions. We can no longer respond to the question of so-called "external constraint" in the same way we did at the time of our first polemics about the Common Program of the Left in France in the 1970s.

From now on a transitional approach must directly combine demands that defend gains in a national framework and that propose transformations in at least a continental framework. Otherwise we are leaving the initiative to the bourgeoisie. A comparable problem is posed for the dependent countries, who are trapped in the new international division of labor and whose tactical space has been considerably narrowed. We have already emphasized that the Brazilian PT's program (meaning the program that we adopted too, not Lula's campaign) was already far more moderate that the programme of the Chilean Popular Unity. And this was Brazil. What can we say about countries that do not have this level of industrialization and productive capacity? In what conditions can de-linking from the world market still constitute a way to launch development? What are the effects of what some economists call involuntary de-linking: the throwing of whole countries or regions onto the margins of the world market?

Building the International today

1 February 1996

The final collapse of the Stalinist system in the USSR led to a broad offensive of pro-capitalist sections of the bureaucracy and other supporters of the generalization of the market economy and privatizations. The chauvinistic and bellicose drift of most of the national movements proliferating in the debris of bureaucratic "socialism" has been accentuated. This reactionary evolution is explained in large measure by the decline of the workers' movement and the radicalization in the imperialist countries, since the recession of the mid-1970s.

More generally, all the social movements which are still developing at different rates in different countries-against imperialist oppression, austerity, the harmful effects of the market economy, environmental dangers, women's oppression, militarism, etc.-are still very fragmented. The project of a socialist society offering an alternative both to capitalism and to the disastrous experiences of bureaucratic "socialism", lacks credibility: it is severely hampered by the balance sheet of Stalinism, of social democracy, and of populist nationalism in the "third world", as well as by the weakness of those who put it forward today.

In a large number of dominated countries, broad vanguard forces are now sceptical about the chances of success of a revolutionary break with imperialism; and sceptical about the possibilities of taking power and keeping it, given the new world balance of power. Other forces, and

not the least important, have broken openly with this perspective: in Latin America alone, this is true for parts of the former leadership of the ERP/FMLN and of the FSLN leadership, as well as one current in the Brazilian PT.

In such a context, the main trend is adaptation and compromise in the name of realism. Under the impact of the crisis and of the inadequacy or sheer lack of perspectives, a chain reaction of political forces moving rightward has turned into a landslide. This is the result both of transformations resulting from changes that have accumulated over a long period, particularly affecting the mass base of the big parties, and of more or less sudden turns by movements whose kind of social roots makes drifts in any direction possible. Thus bourgeois populism, like social democracy, has veered toward a "social" version of neo-liberalism; the Stalinist parties have completed their social-democratization; and many ex-revolutionaries have adopted the most right-wing, stageist Stalinist positions, when they have not actually "leaped over stages" in their own way in order to merge into the "social" neo-liberal haze.

In these circumstances, revolutionary internationalism appears as utopia. But the historically unprecedented globalization of the world economy-capital internationalization, role of multinationals, globalization of the market which functions now simultaneously under the development of communication technology, growing share of international exchange in relation to national economies, etc.-; the globalization of labour, whether it is brought about through work-force migration or through the movement of capital and industries; the globalization of politics and of imperialist war, in the epoch of grand coalitions under the leadership of the US world cop: all of this combines powerfully to make the need for a workers' International, engaged in the fight against planetary capital and its local detachments, more compelling than ever.

Since political cycles are never entirely detached from socio-economic cycles, intransigent revolutionary hopes can draw sustenance from the strong tendency toward worsening social tensions, in the context of a capitalism which will be incapable of preventing impoverishment from being immediately seen for what it is. Illusions about a triumphant neo-liberalism rising up over the ruins of the Berlin Wall have thus already largely given way to a deep scepticism, which today is turning against really existing capitalism. The swaggering vainglory of imperialisms that, without the slightest danger to themselves, defeated the mirage of "the world's fourth largest army" in Iraq, has largely been dissipated today by the impotence that they have shown in Bosnia, Somalia and even Haiti. Bush buried the Vietnam syndrome too soon. The advantage gained from the impressive mobilization against US aggression in Vietnam continues to restrict the interventionist capacity of the greatest military power of all time.

So there is no lack of reasons for keeping the flame of revolutionary hope burning. But a new accumulation of mass experiences, partial victories and radicalization of new generations is needed to bring together all the conditions for a new leap forward in building vanguard organizations that will be both revolutionary and internationalist. The crisis of the revolutionary vanguard can in fact no longer be posed in the terms of the 1930s. Today it is not only a matter of changing the bankrupt leaderships. The necessary recomposition will not be limited to a change in the balance of power within the organized workers' movement as it exists today. It has to go through the gradual reorganization of the different emancipatory social movements internationally. This will be a long process, which may be accelerated by certain big events in the world class struggle.

2. Nonetheless, the general trends of the global situation weigh on the different national situations in an unequal manner, combining with the local structural or temporary specificities.

What is in any event certain is that a world without mass struggles or big social clashes is a chimera. The-often catastrophic-social and environmental impact of the world crisis of capitalism both in the advanced and in the under-developed countries, the breakthrough of new generations in the arena of social struggles as well as the emergence of relatively young workers' movements in the newly industrialized countries or the countries undergoing partial industrialization, the catastrophic consequences of the transition to a market economy for the inhabitants of the post-Stalinist countries, are all factors of struggle which, far from withering away, are growing.

The collapse of the Stalinist system has had the positive effect of seriously shaking sectarian prejudices against us in the ranks of working-class, trade-union and political vanguards. The triumphalism of capital has also had the effect of encouraging the unification of all anti-capitalists, who are now conscious of their weakness. We are better able today to build up relationships of activist solidarity and unity in struggle with forces who until quite recently balked at the very idea of talking to us, particularly in the industrialized countries. Our international network gives us the advantage of being able to make a decisive contribution to the coming-together of anti-capitalist forces-particularly at the European level, where the need for such a coming-together has become completely obvious in face of the capitalist unification taking place, whatever its stops and starts. But our weakness is still a serious hindrance in this area, and social-democratic reformism, which is involved in building up capitalist Europe, still has a credibility that is incomparably greater than ours, despite its rebuffs in dealing with the crisis.

Besides, insofar as, since the collapse of the Soviet Union, there has not existed a state which can be presented in any credible way as a "rearguard" or a "big brother" of the anti-imperialist movement, it will be possible to enter into a renewed and-hopefully-more serene debate with our revolutionary interlocutors in the dependent countries on the definition of a new internationalism, free of any bureaucratic or paternalistic domination. It is true, however, that in

the current situation, after experiences such as the isolation of the Nicaraguan revolution, the process of partial and negotiated solutions in South Africa or the suffocation of Cuba, social-democracy will not fail to use its diplomatic networks and its position in national and international institutions to undermine the traditions of militant solidarity.

So, we should grasp the scope of this contradiction: the current situation combines a crisis of the international workers' movement, which opens new perspectives for discussions and political recomposition in the medium term, and a social and ideological balance of power which blocks, for the time being, all possibilities of a qualitative growing over in building a revolutionary vanguard on a world scale. This contradiction is what should guide our policy for building the International today.

3. Many organizations coming from traditions other than ours and which maintain their revolutionary aims are led to revise their historic reference points in the light of the final balance-sheet of Stalinism and the crumbling of the so-called "socialist camp". Even though we are convinced that our own analysis of Stalinism has, essentially, stood the test of time and done it better than any other theory, we do not deny the fact that the global political turmoil has affected, on this question, the considerations which in the past served to historically delimit the "Trotskyist" current from the others within the far left of which we are a part.

Thus, the analysis of the Stalinist Soviet Union, the identification with the historical struggle of the Russian Left Opposition, and with the trajectory of the Fourth International since the Second World War will little by little lose their distinguishing character in the constitution of revolutionary organizations. Although for us this is still a considerable political asset, it is however losing an important part of its direct and determinant relevance for the future fights, insofar as new militant generations are educated in a radically changed world context. On the contrary, our analysis of Stalinism, of the bureaucracy as a social layer with specific interests and our conception of socialist democracy have imposed themselves as unavoidable elements in any comprehensive study of the bureaucratic and substitutionist phenomena which can always threaten to corrupt the social emancipation movements before and/or after the revolution. This is now a decisive question in the formation of revolutionary organizations.

Thus, such a marker which in the past could seem a singularity of "Trotskyism" can in the future be considered in a totally different way. Certain historical references to splits and complex cracks within the communist movement of the 1930s will become relative, yielding to a revaluation of the classical and fundamental division between "revolutionaries" and "reformists", if not between social-democrats and anti-capitalists.

This tends thus to change the possibilities of certain groups and currents joining the International, as well as the conditions for a political and/or organizational convergence with others in the long run. Currents, groups or factions of Maoist, Castroist or even neo-Stalinist origin could move closer to our positions. We can now envisage more easily winning them to our project and programme, meaning for them a deeper break with the Stalinist part of their heritage, without their necessarily having to identify with "Trotskyism" or fit themselves into its continuity. However, we should be aware of the fact that current changes in world politics are not leading in most cases to adoption of more revolutionary positions, but to capitulation and rapid integration into dominant bourgeois ideology.

We should also take up the new topics of political thought that interest the young generations, which will develop, from now on, in a "post-Stalinist" context, where new ideological concerns and experiences must be combined with the century old lessons once more confirmed by capitalism in crisis. Taking up new topics is not simply a question of "pedagogy" towards the struggling youth, but much more a fundamental question of our capacity to elaborate theory, update our programme and assimilate the new political experiences, original forms and themes of struggle, socio-economic changes, etc.

We hope to carry out a real mutation of the Fourth International. We hope to develop the Fourth International further, while at the same time carefully keeping its conquests from almost 60 years of existence. We want to change, but not as most left organizations have changed in the past years: retreating faster and faster backwards from positions as they are challenged by the aggressive bourgeois offensive. We would like to confirm and deepen an advantage that our anti-sectarian attitude has increasingly allowed us to have during the last years: no longer to be simply perceived as one "Trotskyist" grouping among others, but as a component of the world revolutionary movement, putting internationalist solidarity and the interests of the struggle against the oppressors over any factional calculation or any ideological difference. We hope to welcome into our ranks revolutionary Marxist organizations which do not necessarily claim to be "Trotskyist" nor identify with our history, but which join us on the basis of a real programmatic coming together. In the longer term, we hope to assert ourselves as a pole of attraction and international regroupment for all the healthy, militant, radically anti-capitalist vanguard forces which continue or are renewed in an original way through the current turmoil in the world workers' movement.

4. The Fourth International is still, today, the only organic international grouping of revolutionary formations sharing a same general programmatic orientation.

This orientation includes fighting:

– For the immediate and transitional demands of the wage-earners.

– For democratic rights and public freedoms.

– For a revolutionary break with capitalism; for the replacement of the bourgeois state by producers' own

state administration; for the growing over, in the dominated countries, of democratic and national struggles into revolutionary, anti-capitalist ones.

– For democratic socialism based on the social property of the social means of production, the self-organization of workers, the self-determination of peoples and the protection of public liberties, with the separation of parties and the state.

– For the unity of the mass, people's and working class movement on democratic basis, respecting multi-partyism, the diversity of tendencies and ensuring independence vis-a-vis the bourgeoisie and the state.

– For extending self-organization and respect for democratic rights in the struggles.

– Against all parasitic bureaucracies (Stalinist, social-democrat, trade-union, nationalist...) dominating mass organizations.

– Against women's oppression and for an autonomous women's movement.

– Against oppression of lesbians and gays and all forms of sexual oppression.

– Against national oppression, for the respect of the right to self-determination and the independence of oppressed peoples.

– Against racism and all forms of chauvinism.

– Against religious particularisms and for the separation of religion and state.

– For the environment from an anti-capitalist and anti-bureaucratic perspective.

– For active internationalism and international anti-imperialist solidarity, for the defense of the working masses' interests in every country, with no exclusions, no sectarianism, without any submission to diplomatic or utilitarian considerations.

– To build revolutionary, proletarian, feminist, democratic parties of active members in which the rights to free expression and tendency are granted and guaranteed.

– To build a mass, pluralistic, revolutionary International.

This programmatic orientation includes as many elements resulting from the new revolutionary and protest experiences of the last thirty years as from previous periods, from the revolutionary assets of the Third International and the Trotskyist current from 1925 to 1940. Our political coherence has thus been forged along the years by continuously taking in new gains and re-assessing the old ones. Of course, new problems and experiences arise all the time, demanding a continuous effort of understanding and elaboration. That is the only way in which the revolutionary Marxist heritage can avoid sclerosis, and become enriched in order to serve as a guide for mass action.

5. Based on this common programmatic orientation, the revolutionary organizations in the Fourth International today work together to build it.

Our International is still very modest, given the tasks needed from the world revolutionary movement. It constitutes however an indispensable and irreplaceable instrument for sharing the very diverse political experiences of national organizations with a not insignificant militant existence, especially in relation to the rest of the revolutionary movement. This capacity for synthesis is one of the raisons d'être of an International. It is one of the best remedies against national isolation and theorizing from local experience alone. In this sense, the decision to contribute building the International is, for the organizations which form it, an aspect of their own "national" party-building and a way of limiting the constant national pressures and the deformed vision that these can induce.

Of course, the International is not in itself a sufficient guarantee for having a correct view of world reality, and thus of the national situation which is part of it. A mistake can also be collective, but it is the less likely to occur the more there are different points of view participating in the discussion and development of positions. Seeing and correcting mistakes are also easier. In that sense, the International is a necessary condition for having a balanced grasp of world reality.

Only an organic framework, with collective discussion rules and means of elaboration, really offers this advantage, and does so in a much more systematic and general manner than bilateral dialogues between organizations. By such a process, the member parties give as much to the International as a whole as the latter to each of them.

6. The effort to strengthen the International must begin by strengthening and broadening our parties in each single country. Just as in the separate countries the building of the International is a question of reorganizing the labour movement. There is no ready network in place, just waiting to be used by revolutionary groups.

The two mass Internationals were built in periods of upsurge. For the Second, Social Democratic, International its base was the rise of a new million headed labour movement. For the Third, Communist, International it was the Russian revolution that attracted workers throughout the world.

The Fourth International experienced on a much smaller scale a similar upturn in the years after 1968. But the differences were great. The upturn was more limited, especially among workers. The labour movement had already gone through several splits and the Fourth International seemed to be just one of many possible forms of organizing. There is also an immense difference between building an international organization based on a theoretical program and an organization with a program that is continuously tested in practice.

To build a stronger and broader International today implies different kinds of unity work, both in different countries and across the borders. But what do we mean by "unity"? We distinguish three different kinds of united work:

a) The united front in concrete struggles and mass movements

This is and has always been the most important level of unity. When we work within a trade union, when we form a committee to stop an environmentally harmful road construction, when we help organize a student demonstration, then we seek the broadest, concrete unity.

The fundamental question is always: what is best for the advancement of the cause? Rather than seeking the most ”revolutionary” platforms, we try to build movements with a broad participation of working people, rallied around their own interests. In these struggles we participate with our parties and the Fourth International but with humility and respect for those who fight on our side, not manipulatively or in a sectarian way. This kind of unity work is the most important level of our daily work - and even with more restricted party building aims it is the most important. For given the fact that our task today is to reorganize and reconstruct the workers movement, this can only be done as this movement is formed in today’s and tomorrow’s struggles.

b) Unity with other revolutionary organizations

The Fourth International has never pretended to have the monopoly on revolutionary thought and action. Other revolutionary organizations exist around the world; some lead heroic combats that we support totally. The fact is nevertheless that no big organization outside our ranks shares with us, for the time being, both in theory and practice, the whole programmatic framework listed above.

Nonetheless, some organizations would tick off almost all these points, with an exception or a nuance (generally on the conception of the national or international organization). In general we seek to hold friendly and solidarity relations with these organizations, excluding the ultra-sectarians. That they do not join our International can derive from the fact that they come from a political tradition other than Trotskyism, from another historical evolution or other experiences… If that is the only problem, we can have no doubt that with the current political shake-out we should work towards unifying our forces.

Nothing can justify maintaining an organizational division on the sole basis of how to interpret the degeneration of the Soviet Union and the Stalinist phenomenon to which it gave rise-that is to say, if these differences of interpretation do not in fact hide contradictory programmatic orientations in current struggles (for example the attitude towards the ongoing privatization in the post-Stalinist societies). Any approach which tries to take analytical conformity as the condition for organizational convergence, without demonstrating the existence of important political consequences flowing from theoretical differences, stems from a dogmatic, sectarian and monolithic conception of the organization, often related to a not very democratic internal functioning and to manipulative practices.

Political coming together in concrete struggles and the pluralistic and democratic conception of the revolutionary party that we have to build are, as we see it, much more important than common adherence to a whole theoretical programme taken abstractly. From that point of view, we do not identify with a so-called international “Trotskyist movement” which would constitute a separate entity encompassing the constellation of organizations labelling themselves as such. Therefore we definitely do not see as a priority the “reunification of the Trotskyist movement” on the sole basis of common references; we submit our relations with the other claiming-to-be-Trotskyist organizations to the above mentioned general considerations.

In the last decade there are however very few examples of successful projects of unity with other revolutionary organizations. It is no hazard that our experiences of joining other, much broader class struggle forces with a mass influence have been so far more positive. The pressures on small organizations with few members and too few possibilities to really have common experience testing out lines in practice are much stronger.

In general we think there are reasons to be particularly cautious in joining with other small left forces in a period like this. Things like common historical references, organizational culture and language which we would like to overcome, do however play a significant role in times of decline and defensive struggles. History shows that they can-and must-be more easily overcome in periods of upturn, when organizations are welded together by imperative needs to answer the problems of class struggles and to cooperate.

This should not be taken as an argument for sectarian attitudes. But it is an argument for seeing parties not as robots that can be made to perform the most efficient motions, but as living organisms held together by “subjective” things like pride, self-esteem, common experience and habits. In a period like this of a harsh offensive from our enemies we must understand the risk of losing all that.

c) Broader regroupment with other left organizations

This kind of cooperation is not meant to replace our work in mass organizations like trade unions, student organizations, women’s movements, etc. Broad regroupment with other left organizations can have different purposes. Firstly, we get in touch with the membership of the other organizations and have common experiences with them. Secondly, we increase our common audience in society, and become more credible and powerful. Even where our forces are numerically weak, the crisis of the workers movement, of the other social movements and of the traditional leaderships-in a context where the still important social resistance puts a political outcome on the agenda-creates a situation in which it could become possible to unite forces, in order to weigh together on political life and to impose ourselves as participants in the debate on strategy within the workers movement and the left.

The conditions that could allow these kinds of regroupment to take place

can obviously not be determined in advance, neither in their scope, their political platform nor their organizational forms, all of which depend on national realities, if not on regional and local realities. It could be a question of either new political movements, regrouping anti-capitalist vanguard forces in a non-party framework, or of unitarian electoral initiatives leading to a collaboration beyond the elections; or of joining parties coming out from the crisis of the workers movement, which have kept a mass influence and develop in practice a line of resistance to neo-conservative policies. In all cases, it is a matter of developing a view of the recomposition of the left and the workers movement, as a dynamic process in which not only politically organized forces intervene, but also individuals (trade-unionists, feminists, intellectuals, social workers, etc.). The Fourth International commits itself to taking such initiatives of unity and to answering others' initiatives favourably, every time that we find it possible to establish links between radical forces on concrete tasks.

On the international level, we take part in all forums held with the stated aim of allowing the left political forces to debate, even if the forces involved are far from being all anti-capitalist or anti-imperialist. Such is the case, for instance, of the Latin American Left meetings. Such could be the case, tomorrow, with European, African or other meetings. Despite the fact that they are very heterogeneous in their composition, these meetings are nonetheless useful landmarks for the redefinition of the revolutionary current in the new period. We can ourselves also promote these kinds of meetings in areas like Eastern Europe, the Indian sub-continent, Black Africa or the Arab region. But when doing this, we constantly give the priority to bringing together the forces and tendencies with whom we are in strategic convergence. The important thing is to have clear and visible goals with such campaigns and meetings. It is also decisive that the initiatives are democratic and not just run from the top down.

7. Could these forms of unity work lead to the formation of a new and broader International?

Successive Internationals corresponded, each time, to new tasks linked to very big socio-political evolutions. Now, the least one can say about the turmoil in the global situation since 1989 is that it has deeply changed the framework in which the problems of the revolution, and thus previous differences, were posed. To start with, we have to evaluate such mutations and agree both on the general lessons to draw and their consequences for revolutionary activity. It will also be necessary to test in action the political agreements which could flow from a reaction to events. Thus, it will be perhaps possible some time to define the tasks and structure of a new International, qualitatively broader than what we have now.

For the time being, a world conference of revolutionary forces with no precise aims-such as solidarity with an endangered revolution, for instance-would only be, at best, a futureless cacophonous gathering. For it to be something else, participants in such a meeting should have a minimum of programmatic and political homogeneity, and a true interest in pursuing a common organizational goal. What is more, to bring together all the possible candidates for such a gathering, without discriminating against the poorest, there would have to be a prior agreement on equal distribution of the financial burden that such an initiative would imply, which would not be easy.

The actually existing world revolutionary movement is the result of decades marked by Stalinism and its decomposition. Its components are much less homogeneous than were the participants in the Kienthal and Zimmerwald conferences during World War I, all of whom came from the Second International and its tradition. So a long genesis will be required, with common debates and experiences allowing it to develop reciprocal confidence, before the conditions for a large regroupment of revolutionary forces mature, something that we very much want.

For now, in this historical perspective, we commit ourselves to taking initiatives or to answering others' initiatives favourably, every time that we find it possible to establish links between revolutionary forces on concrete tasks and take their discussions forward. This can apply to new forces as well as to revolutionary organizations of different origins evolving under the impact of the current world developments. This concerns as much a mass force like the Brazilian PT as embryonic revolutionary currents like the radical socialist left from Eastern Europe and the former USSR. It can be expressed at first in political campaigns, or else in public meetings. It can take the form of regional meetings, national regroupments, or close bilateral or multilateral relations. With this same outlook, we have regularly opened our international cadre school to other forces of the revolutionary movement.

8. Not only is there no contradiction between building our own current, the Fourth International, and working for setting up in the future a broad international regroupment of revolutionary forces, but there is a complementarity which is, we think, essential. We reject any sectarian approach to building our own movement, we also reject any monolithic, non-pluralistic view of the international regroupment to be built, be it a simple forum or even a new International.

We recognize and defend tendency rights at both levels, national and international. Besides, the heterogeneity of the world revolutionary movement is such that the broader an international regroupment is today, the greater chance there is that we will be led to maintain our international tendency-this free choice will depend, in the last analysis, on our assessment of the common platform of the regroupment and the weight of our current's specificity in relation to our allies.

In any case, a discussion on this point is absolutely premature. What is essential is to agree first on the principle itself of a world revolutionary regroupment on the basis of democratic pluralism. Today, even though it is possible to make progress in the unity of the revolutionary movement in one country or another, the unevenness of

these processes is such that the world-wide regroupment of revolutionaries unfortunately will not be on the agenda in the coming years. This, of course, should not stop us from continuing our efforts in that direction. But one should not confuse what can be achieved nationally with what is possible beyond state borders or continents: there is an obvious qualitative difference, an essential discontinuity between the two levels, weighing on both sides.

To sum up, we should always avoid two sorts of errors:

– Taking only into account building the International and hence turning our backs to the possibilities of fusion of the revolutionary left which can appear in some countries;

– Taking only into account the national framework and thus watering down, or abandoning, our specific and intangible programmatic principle of the international organization of revolutionaries.

Moreover, our rejection of monolithism is not limited to a defense of the right of tendency. In a broader sense, pluralism is the inclusion of new methods of functioning that are not simply juridical rights. Issued raised by attempts to feminize our organizations (irrespective of the degree of success in any individual case) represent a means of responding to the diversity of experience. The emphasis on feminization is never simply a drive to improve women's statistical standing in the organization. We have learned to introduce new internal traditions and methods of integrating and valuing the contributions of all members and their sectoral experiences in a single organization which depart from the models of previous generations.

Continuing to enrich our understanding of pluralism in this broad sense will be critical to the urgent task of renewing our ranks from the present new generation. Given the objective situation and the prevailing lack of belief in the socialist project, young militants do not (and should not) judge the anti-bureaucratic, democratic traditions of a revolutionary organization on the basis of tendency rights alone. These are seen as an integral part, which is necessary but insufficient, of a modern conception of organizational democracy and pluralism.

9. The main feature of today's international context for our party-building tasks cannot be the weakening of immediate revolutionary perspectives, real and undeniable fact though this is. By definition, immediate revolutionary perspectives fluctuate enormously, depending in large part on volatile political phenomena. On the other hand, the general recomposition of the political landscape of the world left affects a much more important structural factor. In that sense, and regardless of the main trend which appeared immediately after it, the downfall of Stalinism is, first of all, the freeing of an immense class potential chained for many years by Stalinist bureaucracies in power or in the opposition. It was also followed by the ruin of the anti-Trotskyist prejudices propagated by the Stalinists. A real, although modest, expansion of our movement is still possible, both in the countries where the International could not work in the past and in those where our sections can gain credit and influence among the vanguard and in the mass movement, despite the present difficulties in recruiting.

In the cases where we join other forces in a common party building, we involve ourselves-unlike in the purely "entryist" intervention in the mass reformist parties-in the long term building of a common organization, on the basis of a real militant experience. However, for this process to run smoothly, it is indispensable for us to have a mechanism whereby we can monitor, in a democratic framework, the progression of political and strategic agreements with our allies. This is why we demand for the supporters of our current the right to confer and maintain their Fourth International membership in ways which of course can be negotiated, but which must allow them to participate fully in the International's life-while being entirely loyal to the common national organization and its own discipline. Only political homogenization at the highest level-that of the platform laid out above, for which we will always fight untiringly-could justify the complete elimination of our distinct existence in the framework of a common organization. But in that case the common organization should be able to be closely associated with our International, if not to join it. When these conditions are not fulfilled, premature self-dissolution is always a very risky and dangerous gamble. The failure of the experiment by our comrades in the Spanish state bears witness to this.

At the same time, we need to convince our partners that ongoing membership to the International should not be a source of tension in the unified framework; it is rather a pre-condition for healthy and frank relations. We should be able to convince them that our International membership is not moved by some sort of dogmatism nor sectarianism, but that for us it is a critical aspect of the general revolutionary socialist project to which we adhere and that there is no way we can abandon it. An aspect that we cannot be asked to abandon in the name of the fusion without putting into danger the inviolable principle of democratic pluralism in a united revolutionary organization.

The proof of our loyalty and revolutionary frankness lies precisely in the fact that we push for the tightest teamwork possible between the unified organization and our International. It is with this aim, in particular, that we invite our allies in the united organizations to attend our international meetings as observers. And the International as a whole has to show its usefulness, and convince the united organization that the participation of Fourth International members as such in a national organization is a plus and not a handicap.

Certainly, each national case is different from the rest. The political conditions in which the local recompositions take place are always different. The programmatic, political and organizational process is thus always specific. We do not want, in any way whatsoever, to elaborate a general theory of regroupments and fusions. Besides, the international

situation nowadays does not favour the homogeneity of national regroupment processes (that could have been the case, for example, if building a new International was to be articulated around a victorious revolution in a big country, as in the historical precedent of the Third International).

10. True, the whole argument above is only valid and credible when related to our own conception of the Fourth International such as it has been shaped through the years, by its experiences and mistakes.

Especially in our 12th World Congress in 1985 we again rejected the idea of an International in which the national party-building policies were decided centrally and the sections had to apply the same universal or regional orientation. We have rejected the pretension, born in other times, of being the "world party of revolution" in favour of a much more sober self-definition as a minority, though specific and essential, tributary of the world revolutionary movement; a framework for common thinking and political and militant coordination of national organizations; an international grouping with a flexible, democratic and pluralist functioning.

The Fourth International is not formed of local agencies in thrall to a "centre". Its national organizations are anchored in the real class struggle of their countries, though working together to build the International, and even allocating members and material means to it. International democratic centralism is not-and cannot without falling into bureaucratic centralism-be the replica of it in a national organization. The defence of majority positions by Fourth International sections is not imperative; it is consented freely. It is not imposed through discipline, and sections can publicly express their own opinions when in minority, insofar they do not breach the limits of anti-capitalism and anti-imperialism, which would be tantamount to breaking with the International.

In fact, we have practised pluralism within our organization for a very long time, and we claim it to be an integral part of the current revolutionary programme. Far from being a handicap for us, the democratic diversity of points of view in the Fourth International is one of our main strong points. This plurality is exercised in the framework of a strategic convergence which naturally flows from our common programmatic orientation, and which shows through the essentially identical reactions by our sections on different major global political events, often before any consultation.

11. Even though the centralist conception of the International, even that of the Comintern of the first period, has to be abandoned nowadays, revolutionary internationalism cannot be limited to simply promoting solidarity and exchange networks. The foundation of proletarian internationalism has always been, and is more than ever, the need for the working class from all countries to unite to jointly confront capitalism, which has an increasingly global concrete existence. This is even clearer when the international institutions dominated by imperialism, be they political like the UN or economic like the IMF, are more active than ever; at a time when capitalist institutions are being set up in vast global areas, such as Maastricht Europe, or the North American Free Trade Agreement.

At present, and taking into account historical evolution, what is needed is not less internationalist practice, nor simply maintaining what has existed up to now, but more internationalism, more political and organizational coordination, activities conceived and organized jointly by revolutionary organizations beyond state borderlines. This demand becomes even more urgent and acute with the disastrous rise of narrow nationalisms and ethnic particularisms, and the ravaging series of insane massacres and destruction that they bring about. Internationalism is today, once again in the century, the outright antithesis of barbarism. However, an adequate internationalist consciousness cannot wholly flourish without an adequate political and organizational practice, without taking part in building an international organization at the same time as building national organizations.

The International that we should build must be:

- An organic instrument, capable of making commitments to joint work, setting up political campaigns and activities of several sorts at the level of the whole world, the main areas, and groups of countries;

- An instrument with the means and cadres to offer solid aid for building the revolutionary movement in many countries where it is still embryonic;

- An organized instrument to work for developing revolutionary socialist currents within the reformist-led workers' movements or in nationalist-run national movements, etc.

The delay accumulated by the world revolutionary movement is immense. Unfortunately, it is not the revolution which is making the most progress in today's world but the right-wing extremism which is emerging all around the world in this new and terrible epoch of capitalist decay. It would be a crime to rely on mere spontaneity or simple solidarity to cope with all the above mentioned tasks, using the alibi of respecting national specificities. We should consciously work for this, and to achieve it an international organization is needed.

12. That is why-regardless of the present possibilities for regroupment in some countries and the necessary debate with our allies on building an international regroupment, or even a new International-we must unbendingly pursue-on the national and world levels-our task of building the Fourth International, the only "really existing" one. We must pursue the effort we started to improve its inner functioning, as well as the solidity and efficiency of its structures and bodies.

We must keep up the effort to help the development of new organizations tied to our International in the countries where we do not exist and where the independent constitution of such organizations would constitute a step forward in the revolutionary struggle. It is appropriate here to quote the resolution on organisational functioning that we adopted in 1991:

"… deciding to build a section proclaiming itself as such, as an immediate task in a country, is not a timeless, dogmatic principle. This is the method of sects, who consider sections as "local agencies" of a world centre (which is often, de facto, an all-powerful national leadership). For us, sections are determined first of all in relation to the revolutionary tasks in their country; it is according to these tasks that sections will build themselves. Outside of the problem of choosing between autonomous party-building or building a tendency in a larger party when it is possible to do this in an open way, in some countries there is also the problem of making a judgement about a revolutionary organization that actually exists: is it on a trajectory of responding to revolutionary tasks in its country and therefore converging with the tasks that we have set ourselves? Or is it degenerating? In the latter case, has it reached a point of no return?

"Thus, the decision to build a section is not automatic in the short- or medium-term in every country. On the other hand, any decision to the contrary must necessarily be accompanied by an effort to diffuse our programmatic gains and our press in the countries concerned, notably among revolutionaries, with the goal of convincing the greatest possible numbers of our ideas. In the same way the International has to develop collaborative and trustworthy relations with revolutionary organizations existing in a number of countries that can help win them to the perspective of reconstituting a mass, revolutionary International."

It could in fact be much more positive for the future of the revolutionary movement and for a positive change of our own International to be linked to the fate of revolutionary or radical currents which already have a real social implantation, in order to help them, learn from them, and finally to envisage together building a revolutionary organization - rather than rushing to plant a flag in what could turn out to be a barren little allotment.

13. The organizational challenges in this period of far-reaching political recomposition raise another related aspect: theoretical and programmatic elaboration take on a particular importance. This flows from our conception of open and critical Marxism, from the conviction that we do not have the answers to everything, that a re-examination of the old concepts is necessary. The documents that we have written on women's oppression (1979) and on socialist democracy (1985), our Manifesto (1992) as well as the document now being developed on socialist ecology, bear witness to this wish to bring our programme up to date. So does the document on socialist ecology that we are currently drafting.

There are very many questions-sometimes very complex ones-opened by the evolution of the world in the last decades which are today open fields of work for Marxism. We should contribute with all other energy to this research and to this effort of programmatic updating. This effort will be all the more fruitful to the extent that it is a collective effort. Collective in our own ranks, which is neither obvious nor automatic, but also collective with our allies in the world revolutionary movement and with our privileged partners in the milieu of research of Marxist orientation. Our International Education - and Research! - Institute, through its different study sessions and seminars (on women, economics…) is already modestly but surely the place of such a collective effort in both senses.

We have to demonstrate that an International is an irreplaceable instrument on this terrain as well.

14. The credibility of a new international socialist project, in today's world, will largely depend on the demonstration made in the main imperialist countries of the capacity to relaunch mass anti-capitalist struggles and to embody a revolutionary social and political project faced with capitalism and its state structure. The countries of the "centre" remain the decisive link in any world-wide anti-capitalist strategy. The balance of power between the classes which are established there are of major importance for the outcome of struggles throughout the world. The only ally which can hamper to or paralyse the action of the imperialist powers on which the struggles in the dominated countries can call is the mass movement in these same imperialist countries. The Gulf War was a striking and tragic demonstration of this reality.

– For the International to be seen as a pole of reference it has to be able to assert itself as a credibly political force in the main imperialist countries. But at the present time, and not unrelated to the socio-economic changes in these countries over the last decade, the organizations of the International there are very weak. In Germany, Japan, and in the United States our sections are very weak and divided. In Britain we are largely outstripped by two revolutionary organizations which have traditionally been sectarian towards us. In France our organization has been weakened during the 1980s and suffers from internal divisions.

It is an urgent priority to reverse this trend. Great attention should be given to this question because we cannot claim to exist as an International in the world today without a significant presence in the main industrialized countries. Our organizations in the dominated countries will themselves rapidly be threatened, given the usefulness of the contribution constantly made to them by the sections in the imperialist countries through the International.

– Another factor which will weigh heavily in the fight to give back credibility to the socialist project is the emergence of a significant socialist current, both anti-capitalist and anti-Stalinist, in the post-Stalinist societies. We have put party-building in these countries, conceived in a non-sectarian fashion, among the priority tasks of the International. Our balance sheet, like that of the anti-capitalist left in general, remains overall very limited. The first reason is that it is precisely in these countries, for obvious reasons, that the loss of credibility of socialism has been the greatest and that illusions in capitalism are most wide-spread. But sooner rather than later these will fade away confronted with the concrete experience of the torments of capitalist restoration. That is to say

that above all we must not give up our efforts in that part of the world. We should, on the other hand, discuss with our comrades in the countries concerned on the methods of propaganda and party-building the most appropriate to their countries-a frequent error is to reproduce the traditional forms used in capitalist countries.

– It is still the dominated countries which are today the weakest links in the world imperialist system. It is still in these countries, at the present time, that there are the biggest possibilities for building revolutionary or potentially revolutionary mass parties. It is in the direction of the dominated countries that our International has directed the greatest share of central resources, both material and human. It will continue in this direction, exploring in particular the possibilities offered in countries experiencing a new radicalization.

15. The emergence of a credible socialist current will also rely on its ability to be seen as representing the aspirations of all sectors of the exploited and oppressed populations. This is not a simple banality that it is enough to repeat.

The Fourth International has progressed in its understanding of women's struggles and the mass women's and feminist movements. For the first time at the last World Congress, there was a specific resolution concerning the dynamic of women's exclusion from the political process and political parties and its effects within the Fourth International. The Congress adopted this resolution, thus specifying the positive action needed for women to take their place within the Fourth International.

This resolution represented an important advance in our understanding of how to build our organizations, and relate them to mass movements etc.

However, we have not adequately explored the implications of how the struggles of women express the changes taking place in society, and how the priority given to feminization is directly linked with the new tasks and renewed forms and themes of struggles that we have and will encounter.

In analysing the potential outcome of any given social and political situation, we must integrate a number of elements that arise from women's specific situation as women, combined with their class, ethnic or age status.

A starting point should be the continuing mass integration of women into the workforce-whether formal, informal or unemployed workers-although in sharply gender-defined forms. This in turn increasingly involves women in social struggles, whether as workers, urban dwellers, peasants, consumers, etc.

However, the recent arrival of women in the workforce, and indeed in social movements in general, combined with the general trend of women's exclusion from public and collective life, tends to place women in a marginal situation within the traditional organisations of social and political life. They can thus, at times, be pushed in a more radical direction and act in defiance of the traditional leaderships.

The continuing penetration of general ideas of women's equality and rights, as a result of battles fought by the women's movement, throughout the population, influences the way in which women raise and defend "traditional" demands (for example linking the fight for pay rises with a fight to increase the status accorded to what is seen as a specifically "female" job). However this wide-spread acceptance of women's right to equality is not unchallenged. The right-wing, and in particular the growing religious fundamentalist movements, target questions of women and the family particularly. Without a determined response from women such attacks will not be defeated.

This determined response is however not guaranteed, given the decline of a radical, organised feminist movement. The growing institutionalisation of the movement through recuperation by sections of bourgeois political formations or integration into NGOs, as well as the ideological attacks of the "post-feminists", has weakened the revolutionary, subversive aspect of feminism that played such an important role in winning women to revolutionary perspectives in an earlier period. The failure to renew feminist discourse, demands and ideals makes this situation worse.

This is not however simply the result of developments specific to the feminist movement, but a reflection of the general decline of revolutionary radicalism and the lack of a liberation perspective. In certain cases it could be the reaction by women to attacks on them that stimulates a general political radicalisation. The contradiction, especially for the younger generations, between the prevailing ideas of women's rights and specific attacks, for example on abortion rights, could be such a spark.

For the organisations of the workers' movement, including revolutionary organizations, to be able to attract these potential new radicalising layers, they must overcome the specific dissatisfaction expressed by radical women with traditional forms of political and social organisation and rebuild themselves on a different basis, including the idea of parity, i.e. that women should have their full place in decision-making. Such a programmatic and organisational renewal is vital for these organisations in the present period. Without such an effort including the integration of women's contributions it will be impossible to develop a fully-rounded socialist alternative.

Our commitment to integrating these parameters into our analysis is not simply an abstract one. It should determine how we understand the priorities for revolutionary intervention. This should be one of the major elements of the profile of all the sections and sympathising organisations of the Fourth International; but this will be impossible unless we act on the proposals contained in the resolution of the last World Congress, both at an international level and within all our national organisations.

16. A good number of today's revolutionary organizations, including those of the Fourth International,

were built under the impetus of the struggles and discussions of the end of the 1960s and beginning of the 1970s. Not only has this impetus died away now but the political generation which it produced desperately needs to be renewed. This will depend essentially on a new wave of youth radicalization. But this does not relieve us, quite the contrary, from the need to make an urgent and priority effort to recruit youth, to educate young political cadres and to rejuvenate our leaderships. "Give their place to women and to youth" are principles that are more relevant than ever.

Certainly is it not simply a question of renewing leaderships. The struggles and revolts which develop among women and young people express the change in society in the most striking fashion. The priority given to our organizations' feminization and rejuvenation will also thus be a way of putting us more in tune with the new tasks and renewed forms and themes of struggles and emancipation movements.

Confronting capitalist globlisation

1 February 1996

1. The phases of the long wave

Since the first generalized recession in 1974-1975, the world capitalist economy has gone into a recessionary long wave, from which no way out is foreseeable, and which, thus, characterizes the overall economic framework of the present period.

1.1 The turnaround

But within this long wave, several phases can be distinguished, the development of which should be analyzed so as to specify precisely where we are at the present time. The end of the expansionary long wave dates back to the beginning of the 70's. The turnaround was clearly marked by the generalized recession of 1974-1975 which sent all of the imperialist countries into what can be called the "crisis" which has lasted since then. The first phase, which immediately followed that recession, corresponded to the pursuit of Keynesian policies attempting to treat the recession like those that had occurred following W.W.II. At the same time, petro-dollars were recycled and generously loaned to Third World borrowers, such that the attempts at boosting the economy were both internal and transnational.

1.2 The neo-liberal turn

The inadequacy of this therapy became obvious with the explosion of the second generalized recession at the beginning of the 80's. This is the second important turning point, whereby neo-liberal policies spread throughout the world with a remarkable similarity of objectives and means. The Third World countries which, for a few years, had served the function of amortizing the slow-down of the world economy, were violently hit by the debt crisis and the rise in interest rates. In the imperialist countries, a period of profound restructuring opened up accompanied by the rise of unemployment, notably in Europe.

The neo-liberal phase, that we are still clearly in, can be broken down into several sub-periods: offensive (1980-1986), apparent success (1987-1990), relapse (1991-1993) and then revival. The first half of the 80's witnessed a systematic anti-labour offensive the catchword of which was flexibility. This not only involved wages, hammered by austerity and the elimination of cost-of-living allowances but, more generally, the overall living conditions of salaried workers (the social security net, the right to a job, etc.). Real advances and the resistance met were variable but the generalization of such policies made plausible a rapid relapse into a new generalized recession, provoked by the smothering of wage demand across the world.

1.3 The reasons behind the passing success

The outbreak of the third generalized recession was delayed until the beginning of the 90's thanks to the world demand that the Reaganist policy involved, particularly in terms of military expenditures. A dissymmetrical configuration of the world economy was set in place wherein the substantial American deficit was financed by Japanese and German capital at the cost of a rise in interest rates to unprecedented levels. At the same time, international commodity trade and investments intensified but mainly between imperialist countries.

Within each imperialist country, the normally recessionary effects of wage austerity were offset by an increasingly unequal distribution of incomes. The rise in interest rates also played a key role here: it not only ensured the financing of the American deficit and the pillaging of the Third World debtor countries but also served to modify the distribution of incomes in favour of bond- and shareholders. What some have called the financialization of the economy thus reveals itself to be a gigantic process of redistribution of surplus value.

The 1986 oil counter-shock trimmed the non-producing countries' oil bill. The October 1987 stock market crash, which was correctly controlled by the international bourgeoisie, paradoxically doped up the real economy. As a result, the second half of the 80's registered a recovery of accumulation. This was presented as the triumph of the neo-liberal theses: austerity and unemployment were merely the price to pay for adapting to technological change, bearer of a new economic order and a new logic of growth. Millions of jobs were, in effect, created across the capitalist

world and the rate of unemployment began to decline.

At the same time, the cracks in and then the collapse of the bureaucratic societies made it possible to present capitalism as the heretofore unavoidable horizon of humanity. Only the Marxists correctly pointed out the limited and contradictory character of this recovery: rather than sustainable growth, it involved a cyclical movement based, for the main part, on a practically mechanical jump-starting of investment, buttressed by the world-wide redistribution.

1.4 The relapse

The third generalized recession at the beginning of the 90's settled the debate and opened up a new phase, characterized by important reversals. The role of the Gulf War from this points of view appears to have been secondary, since the recession began before the oil crisis in several countries and has gone on much longer than the war, the strictly economic repercussions of which have finally been of little importance. The characteristics of this third recession clearly illustrate the present period: it has been particularly deep, durable and costly in jobs; it has brought about, compared to the two previous recessions, a relative desynchronization which reveals a growing contradiction between the globalization of the economy and the persistence of national trajectories.

Despite initiatives like the Rio summit, the negative effects on the environment of out-of-control neo-liberalism have continued to increase in virtually all parts of the world.

2. A contradictory homogenization of the world economy

2.1 The re-centering on the imperialist countries

The 80's were marked by a growing globalization of economic activity. This can be measured, for instance, by the growth in world trade which is approximately twice as rapid as that of the sum of the national markets: there has been an intensification of commodity trade mainly between the more developed capitalist countries. The same process can be seen in direct investment movements and in mergers and alliances between large international groups. This movement does not take place following the vertical logic of a segmentation of the international division of labour: the investment movements essentially concern the imperialist countries as does the movement of commodities. Delocalizations towards the Third World play a very secondary role in this process.

In opposition to this interpretation, some have put forward the reappearance of investment transfers towards countries in Asia and Latin America, either to prove the success of the World Bank's structural adjustment policies, or to dramatize the competition from low-wage countries. In the case of Latin America, these movements of capital correspond for the main part to investments attracted by the stock markets and by the wave of privatizations. It is an influx of speculative and very volatile capital.

The case of Asia is different and combines a number of elements. South Korea and Taiwan have followed their own trajectories which have allowed them to escape from the category of dependent countries. This is obvious no matter what criteria are used (income levels, the structure of the productive apparatus, etc.). If we add the two mainly financial centres, Hong Kong and Singapore, this creates a pole of powerful growth. But it is Japan which continues to structure the region based on a very compact network of trade and investment. On the periphery of this imperialist centre are to be found countries like Malaysia, Thailand or the Philippines which are integrated into an international division of labour and whose roles are well defined. This is why the Korean path is not reproducible: the second-rank countries in the region serve the function of supplying the regional Capital with low-wage labour and are not able to accede to the rank of industrial powers.

But the major economic success story of the last decades is, in reality, China which has registered more than a 10% growth in production over a decade, an exceptional performance given the size of the population involved. This success is based on a very specific mixture of liberalizing the peasant economy, developing a mass domestic market, a voluntaristic effort to export from free zones and, finally, brutal repression.

2.2 International Finance

Consistent with neo-liberal doctrines, the decade of the 80's saw a frenzied financial deregulation which underlay and even amplified the globalization process. Contrary to what the theory forecast, this movement did not lower real interest rates which have consistently remained at extremely high levels for which there is no historical precedent.

To talk about financialization in order to deplore the fact that Capital has preferred speculative financial investments over productive investments would be very superficial and show a lack of understanding of the real nature of capitalism. The rise of interest rates served as a tool of economic coherence in the redistribution of incomes within each country as well as on the world level. High interest rates were the price to pay so that the US deficit could sustain the growth that delayed the onset of the third generalized recession for several years. In Europe, it has been the key role played by the German economy and currency as a fulcrum of stabilization for the second lever for the upward trend.

This world-wide financial totality fulfils specific functions. But there are not only benefits. This is why we have seen the bourgeoisies discoursing unanimously on the overly high level of interest rates, a discourse which has only partially been followed up by effective action. High interest rates represent an obstacle to recovery and nourish the global monetary instability which led to the collapse of the European Monetary System. The main effect of the rise in interest rates has been to swell budget deficits in Europe and to nourish the growth of public debt which is the counter-part of the de-taxing of financial income.

2.3 Inter-imperialist Rivalries

The globalization of the capitalist economy is literally unmanageable, but for reasons that are not principally related to the instability of finance and currencies. The main source of the imbalance resides in the historically new fact that this process of globalization puts into direct relation economic regions with very different levels of productivity. This situation is distinct from the internationalization of Capital: the multinationals were, until now, the agents of imperialist metropolises in the dominated countries and instituted one-to-one relationships with them, completed by a system of political domination. With globalization, relationships are multilateral from the very start and the multinational groups have crossed into another stage in internationalization which is leading them little by little to becoming autonomous in relation to their States of origin.

So it is not surprizing to note the appearance of a counter-tendency to the constitution of regional zones, under very diversified forms. What some have called the Triad does not only designate a tri-polar domination of the world economy (United States, Japan, Europe) but also a certain type of relationship between the three poles and the structuring by each of them of their own zone of influence. The configuration, however, is not at all harmonious and stable since it is accompanied by fundamental asymmetries. The three major zones vary considerably in their cohesiveness.

The Asiatic zone is both the best protected and the best organized. While Japan and Korea are present in all world markets, penetrating their domestic markets is in practice extremely difficult. The organization in concentric circles of the region's economies and the way in which China has taken its place in the set-up provide the ensemble with a formidable economic efficiency and commercial aggressiveness.

Europe differs completely. Here we are dealing with a conglomerate of capitalist Nation-States of comparable rank, which, in addition, is largely open to external competition. Europe is less present in third-party markets and above all has shown itself to be incapable of dynamically structuring its natural periphery, the Mediterranean and Eastern Europe. As for the United States, its vocation to run the show on the entire American continent was once again reaffirmed by the Treaty signed with Canada and Mexico. But the gap between the development of the North and the South of the continent are too important to go much further than relatively secondary complementarities.

These differences are accompanied by a disproportion in the political functions assumed on the world scale. Between the strictly economic relationship of forces and the hierarchy of political domination, a complex dialectic has been established. Its latest developments lead to the following remark: the present tendency seems to indicate a re-establishment the politico-military as well as economic supremacy of the United States. This movement has taken on the form of an American-Japanese condominium due to the slowing down of the Japanese economy and American technological revival. If the imbalances subsist, this configuration renders plausible the emergence of a Pacific zone which would constitute a dynamic pole in the world economy in the years to come.

2.4 The contradictions of building Europe

Europe seems to be the weakest pole in the Triad for reasons that are not simply due to its level of intrinsic economic development. The basic difficulty the European countries have to resolve consists of building something that would fulfil on the European level the elementary functions usually reserved for the State. The other poles of the Triad are organized hierarchically around a Nation-State, which still constitutes the base of operation for the dominant groups. The situation is different in Europe particularly since multinational groups there rarely have the vocation of functioning with a specifically European logic. The process of building Europe thus has a different nature than the treaties signed in America and Asia.

This process is a response to clear requirements for the European bourgeoisies but it is not free from contradictions. The path chosen by the Maastricht Treaty was perhaps the most rapid. In any case, it was the most constraining. Its failure results from an under-estimation of national economic particularities but, even more so, from the different forms of class social relations in each of the countries that make up the European Union.

This absence of cohesiveness shows up every time Europe comes face to face with the two other imperialist powers. The latest GATT negotiations made it possible to measure to what degree these relations are lacking in symmetry. Europe is the only one to fully play the free trade game. The permeability of its economy weakens it vis-à -vis its competitors. The imperialist condominium is thus potentially a conflicting one by reason of its multiple imbalances. Unless it develops a European "nationalism" which does not correspond to the interests of either the major groups or of the peoples, the European bourgeoisies will be durably exposed to witnessing processes of falling back on more traditional nationalisms.

2.5 The East and the South: similar insertions

The very different performances of the various countries of the South and the East do not make it impossible to examine their situation as a whole. One absolutely striking trend is the almost universal choice of an export-driven mode of growth. This convergence is not accidental since these policies have been to a large extent imposed on the countries involved by international institutions like the IMF and the World Bank. As a result, the whole logic of the world economy is based on competition between these countries, on the basis of low wages or other specific advantages, for extremely volatile investments or very unstable markets. This leads to a new form of dependent development, delineating what can be called a neo-imperialism.

Every country cannot be a winner at

this game. The main reason is arithmetic: the capacity of absorption of the imperialist countries is limited compared to the countries of the South and will remain so, as long as they succeed in selling to them by reason of the social effects of such successes. In such a market, the "offerers" that are the low-wage countries are caught in an circular logic which reduces them to their "comparative advantages" which reside above all in their low wages. So this type of configuration is not a model of development. It is very different from the Korean trajectory and it is practically excluded that any new countries will accede, on the basis of the international division of labour, to any complete mastery of industrial sectors. Less systematic successes are not impossible, but they will always be successes against neighbouring competitors.

This evolution is not just a source of inequality and differentiation. It poses a series of supplementary questions: the tendency to produce goods far from the place where they will be consumed is not a new phenomenon, but it now involves much greater quantities of raw materials and commodities. This represents a significant ecological cost, in terms of superfluous consumption of energy, development of road networks, gas emissions, and so on.

Such a model also leads to a degradation of working conditions, security, health and life. There is an increase in workplace accidents and ecological catastrophes. In some cases, factories which pollute or are dangerous are simply transported from the North to the South. So is toxic or radioactive waste.

Alongside their economic protectionism, the rich countries impose protectionism in immigration, which is to a large extent a response to the negative effects of the global system which the se same countries support and develop.

The same considerations are at play in the restoration process going on in the Eastern countries, which are largely over-determined by the new ordering of the world economy. Far from constituting a new frontier, a limitless zone of expansion for the accumulation of capital, the Eastern countries represent, to a certain degree, a burden that international capital is not really in a position to take up. The experience of German re-unification is there as living proof: even with a strong political will and enormous financial resources, its assimilation remains a contradictory and difficult process. This would be even more the case for countries too poor or too vast to be assimilated in such a fashion. Here again, the dominant logic is going to consist of choosing among these countries those which present a sufficient interest and can, to a certain degree, be agglomerated with capitalist Europe. Hungary, the Czech Republic and Poland appear to be the best positioned, which means that other countries will be set aside if not set upon. The Yugoslav precedent is undoubtedly a borderline case, but its internal tensions were clearly reinforced by the differential attraction exerted by Europe on the different components of Yugoslavia. The ex-Soviet Union will have to recover, up to a certain point, its role as an economic centre for countries such as Ukraine, without be able to stabilize at the same time the zones of imbalance or tensions.

The absence of external relays will give the restorationist process a specific colouring, by accentuating the trend to developing a parasitic capitalism that is relative incapable of seizing the reins of any central core of the economy. The specific advantage attributed to the Eastern countries, in terms of the training and skills of their labour force, have already to a large degree evaporated at the same time as these countries have undergone a very deep process of social decomposition. The hypothesis of their "Third-World-ization" is rapidly becoming a reality.

3. The present mode of functioning of the capitalist economy

3.1 A regressive functioning

The recession of the beginning of the 90's presents the proof that neo-liberal solutions do not lead to putting the capitalist economy back on a similar road to that of the 60's. No edifying combination between profits and outlets has been able to emerge and the present situation is dominated by a relatively new phenomenon: the conditions for profitability have been re-established but they have been accompanied by compromising the possibility of sustainable development and the persistence of mass unemployment. Capitalism now looks like what it really is: a profoundly contradictory system with a concrete mode of functioning that tends to dissociate and even counter-pose profits and outlets.

This contradiction takes on the form, today, of a growing inadequacy between what capitalism can and knows how to produce profitably and the most urgent needs of humanity. The enormous gains in productivity, largely accumulated during the expansionary wave, have run into difficulty in finding sectors in which they can be reinvested with the same profit outlook because of the displacement of social demand towards goods that no longer make possible such gains in productivity. In other words, the growth of real wages compatible with maintaining the rate of profit is limited by the perspective of a relative surplus value, such that the combination of the 60's, usually called Fordism, cannot be re-established. This difficulty is regulated in its own way by the logic of capitalism which consists of not producing anything that is not profitable. This is the root of unemployment which has to characterized as a capitalist unemployment.

3.2 A limited legitimacy

The corollary of this analysis is the limited legitimacy of this mode of functioning of capitalism. Without idealizing in hindsight its performance, the strength of the capitalist mode of production was, during its years of expansion, its ability to deal with needs and aspirations within its own logic. It was able to ensure a very sustained development while redistributing, in a

relatively egalitarian fashion, the gains of this in terms of increased purchasing power. In any case, it did so sufficiently to give itself the appearance of efficiency. As time goes by, it becomes increasingly clear that this period - in the last analysis, a rather short one on the scale of history - was only a quickly closed parenthesis. Capitalism has gone back to functioning "normally", i.e. with slower growth submitted to wildly swinging cycles, with massive and permanent under-employment, and increasing social insecurity, not to mention a sharpening, on the international level, of the most classical characteristics of combined and uneven development.

The heightening of inequalities is, from now on, and even more so than in the past, a central characteristic of the reproduction of capital including on the international level. The Marxist critique permits understanding why this is so: the growth of inequalities represents the way of adjusting the structure of outlets to the structure of profitable production. The present-day capitalist vicious circle literally involves the refusal to produce and the setting aside of entire social layers and populations. The ugly face of severe divisions is part of every social formation. The mechanisms of exclusion function everywhere even if under different modalities. Beyond the differences of social context, the rise of unemployment in the imperialist countries and the swelling of the informal sector in the dominated countries arise out the same structural determinants.

3.3 An unrestrained capitalism

The downfall of the bureaucratic societies constituted the predictable end result of a long process of degeneration of the workers' States. The latter had such disastrous balance sheets, their social acquisitions seemed to be so little worth defending, that the road of capitalist restoration appeared to be the easiest one. This unchallengeable historical verdict will probably be completed, once time has gone by, with another aspect: the threat of revolutions in Europe in the post-war period and then in the Third World during the following decades, will undoubtedly have constituted an important element in the implementation of components that made up a better regulated capitalism which, in particular, was able to guarantee full employment in the advanced countries. But now, everything is proceeding as if the failure of the supposed alternatives, whether bureaucratic or reformist, has left the field wide-open for the regressive functioning of contemporary capitalism.

3.4 The decline of the Welfare State

The progressive dismantling of what could be called the Welfare State is one of the primary objectives of the neo-liberal offensive. Potentially, all the elements of the codification and socialization of the wage relationship are up for grabs today. This does not mean that this offensive is advancing without running into obstacles: the balance sheet on this point seems to be rather ambivalent. There have been some considerable setbacks that have to be as considered as defeats even if they remain only partial. Thatcher's policies, for example, profoundly modified the relationship of forces by institutionally weakening the unions. But there exists, at the same time, a very strong social resistance which has held back the implementation of agendas that would destroy important parts of the social security nets. In some cases, the very successes of neo-liberal policies have lead to such severe dysfunctioning that the theme of the Welfare State is making a comeback, even if this comeback is closer to charity for the poor than social regulation.

This trend combines with the effects of globalization to develop an economic framework likely to produce a resurgence of nationalism. The disarticulation of Nation-States and their relative loss of substance expose the mass of workers to living conditions that are increasingly unstable and precarious, thus creating a desire for a more reassuring social order.

3.5 The end of full employment

Its inability to ensure a return to full employment centrally illustrates capitalism's loss of legitimacy. The major novelty here is the bourgeoisie's clearly and loudly declaring that, henceforth, any such return to the "good old days" is no longer part of their objectives because it has simply become impossible. This admission profoundly changes the ideological relationship of forces, because the bourgeoisie no longer has an adequate explanation for unemployment in this day and age. Until now, it had always attributed unemployment to an excessive regulation of the labour market, to excessively high wages, to the inadequate training of youth and workers, to the demands of modernization and technological change. Since unemployment has continued after 15 years of wage austerity and improvement in the average level of skills, the root causes of unemployment must be sought in the economic system itself. It is becoming increasing easier to prove this to workers insofar as those social layers and even those countries that appeared to be best protected from unemployment are now in the process of "catching up" to the rest.

The beginning of the 90's can thus be characterized as being a phase of revelation of capitalist contradictions, with a gradual disappearance of false explanations and illusions about the capacity of the system to get itself out of the misadventure. Some elements of a recovery are showing up in several countries and the bourgeoisie is certainly not going to miss out on crying victory for every half of 1% in growth it can point to. This is an inevitable process that might even be fairly deep in certain countries given the seriousness of the recent recession but it will in no way modify our views in the middle run. All these movements of recovery are of a cyclical nature and occur within a middle term trend toward sustained social regression.

To qualitatively reverse the course of events, it would be necessary to imagine the return over several successive years of growth rates in the order of, or higher than, that of the years of expansion, i.e. 5 or 6%. The structural conditions for such a scenario do not exist and are not within reach of contemporary capitalism.It goes without saying that the alternative which would consist of

massively reducing working hours and reorganizing production on the basis of the satisfaction of human needs is by its very nature foreign to the logic of capitalism.

3.6 An unsustainable model

The unrestrained consumption of resources is part of an inegalitarian system, which forms a whole. It cannot, therefor, offer everyone in the world the same standard of living. But, even if things were different, it would be impossible to generalise this model of consumption, because it is simply not sustainable from the point of view of the exhaustion of resources and the generation of waste. The consequences of intensive agriculture, over-exploitation of the seas, use of non-renewable energy sources, contaminating products and nuclear waste all fix certain physical limits to the extension of this model in space as well as in time.

4. The Crossroads

The parenthesis of the post-war long wave of expansion has been closed. The possibility of returning to what now appears to be a "Golden Age" has disappeared and capitalism has, in a certain fashion, come back to its "natural" mode of functioning, characterized by inequalities, anarchy, social insecurity and wars. But this regression has occurred based on social acquisitions and a technological potential that are qualitatively different when compared to all previous epochs. Today, it would be possible to ensure for everyone decent conditions of existence and this is why a stabilization of capitalism on the basis of its present functioning is impossible.

In this context, it is not absurd to eventually envisage an recovery of a social movement that could take advantage of the conjunctural as well as structural conditions that can be anticipated in the coming years. From a conjunctural point of view, the coming recovery, in spite of its limited character, will favor a fresh upsurge of wage struggles and struggles against the most immediate forms of flexibility.

But, given the persistence of the deep-rooted failings of the system, the limits of which the workers have already felt, and which even the bourgeoisie recognizes as such, we find ourselves in the situation of a new beginning, where illusions have, in part, disappeared and where it has become possible to put forward demands opposed to those of the dominant economic system. From this point of view, we can say that the conditions have been created whereby the labour movement will pass, at least for certain of its sectors, from a defensive attitude weakened by a certain demoralization to a positive expression of demands addressed to the system and its mode of functioning. It is in the course of this turnaround, for which the evolution of capitalism is producing the objective conditions, that a renewed anti-capitalism may be born. What would be its basis?

The central difficulty concerns the emergence of a new internationalism. This is objectively necessary and possible, insofar as capitalist globalization, which pits the workers of the entire world against each other, creates the condition for unifying their fight. The model of development that contemporary capitalism has everywhere imposed is, at one and the same time, extraordinarily systematic and incomplete. Very systematic, it applies indifferently to all countries: the prevailing neo-liberal model in the imperialist countries does not differ fundamentally from the structural adjustment policies imposed on the countries of the South and the East. The three sectors of the world revolution, hithertofore relatively distinct, have in practice been unified by capitalist globalization. The workers of the world have a common interest in putting an end to the process of levelling down to the least common denominator which concerns all of them.

Objective conditions obviously do not suffice, and the delay in consciousness is one of the most serious dangers of this fin-de-siècle. It has not spared the European workers, put into competition among themselves by the logic of Maastricht, who have not, for the time being, found the path to a united and coordinated response on the international level, in the same way the bourgeoisie's offensives are coordinated. The main material obstacle to this consciousness resides in the durability of the functions left to each State. More and more, the socially regressive policies are carried out in the name of external constraints (Maastricht, NAFTA or IMF) but they continue to be applied by national States. This submission to the logical of globalization is, moreover, contradictory even within the bourgeoisie; there exist non-hegemonic sectors of the bosses who are opposed to the neo-liberal overture. There are some outlines of potential bourgeois alternatives developing but they have not yet gelled except when polarized to the far right. The neo-liberal agenda does not respond to all the necessities of the reproduction of bourgeois domination, but is internally highly consistent and eliminates self-centred variations since it is based on the dynamics of accumulation of the most powerful and dynamic factions of international capital.

Looked at from the point of view of the exploited, there is a major risk of slipping into nationalist-populist temptations, the attraction of which resides in two elements: on the one hand, the fact that, within this generalized competition, not everybody can win and so you have to protect yourself; on the other hand, the vague feeling that nobody controls the process going on world-wide and that it is necessary to give back to the national States the means needed to once again regulate the economy. This idea is not without some basis but it is, in the original meaning of the term, reactionary, since it attempts to return to a previous stage in the structuring of Capital and can only base itself on minority, even retrograde, sectors of Capital. We have to avoid like the plague any convergence of this criticism of Capital and ours and distinguish ourselves by setting clearly progressive objectives for our rejection of savage free-trade.

The best way of doing so is to use the logic of a renewed transitional approach which corresponds perfectly with the requirements of the moment. The starting point is the idea that a different economic orientation is

possible, everywhere in the world, one that would be better able to satisfy social needs. The main flaw of contemporary capitalism is that it introduces a deepening distortion between what it finds interesting to produce according to its own criteria and the priority needs of humanity. This distortion is present in both the imperialist and the dominated countries and putting forward basic and specific demands on capitalism brings out its limitations and shows the necessity of organizing the economy otherwise, whatever we want to call the thing.

In the imperialist countries, the central line of such an approach is the reduction of work time: mobilizing for such a demand if correctly posed leads increasingly to a critique of the system as a whole. This is not sharing unemployment. It raises the necessity of fighting for a redistribution of incomes. Nor does it mean accepting an intensification of labour, which raises once again the concept of workers' control over the organization of labour. It rejects cheap jobs which means little by little demanding the implementation of different standards of economic efficiency, specifically, the right to oversee the social usefulness of investments.

In the dominated countries, the main lines of a popular agenda are rather easily identified: denouncing the debt, agrarian reform, wage increases, tax reform and social budgets. Once again, the resources of each country must be used differently and specifically be reoriented toward the domestic market and the satisfaction of local needs, breaking with the tendency to accord absolute priority to exports. The central economic rule consists of rejecting any alignment with the norms of the world market as the unique economic criterion. Its blind application can only, in fact, lead to the eviction of entire social layers. On the contrary, we have to accept and find the means to produce for the domestic market even if this implies being less competitive than world standards. Real development is simply impossible without a certain degree of disconnection and if there are countries which need social clauses they are certainly the countries of the South which have been forced to contend with unequal arms with the most competitive industries in the world.

The fight against GATT and the World Trade Organization (WTO), the first function of which is to prohibit any measure allowing the countries of the South to realize any disconnection with the world market, lays out the road to a convergence of interests among peoples, which raises the possibility of a new internationalism. Indeed, there is no objective contradiction between the satisfaction of workers' needs throughout the world. The well-being of some is not nourished by the abject poverty of others and pitting one against the other only leads, in reality, to the degradation of everyone.

At the ecological level, global well-being cannot be compartmentalised. The greenhouse effect, weakening of the ozone layer and deforestation may not affect everyone to the same extent, but there could come a moment when the very future of the human species is threatened.

Reciprocally, an improvement on the world level of the fate of workers could produce relationships of cooperation, of mutual support. The idea that trade is to the advantage of everyone would take on a real meaning but only if there is a radical reorganization of the world-economy. The necessity for such radicalism is not ideological; to the contrary, it is the product of the evolution of a system that has transformed the most reasonable and elementary aspirations to dignity and equity into unattainable objectives. The very existence of such a gap has put on the agenda the reactualization of a revolutionary project without which this gap may very well be filled by barbarism.

The political situation in imperialist Europe

1 February 1996

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 he 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.

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 on 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.

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), 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.

- 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-legitimating 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 their is no visible exit.

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 intransigeantly 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 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 destucturing, 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 it's 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 it's 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 revo-lutionary 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 interventionshould that prove necessary.

6.8. The policy of recomposition oriented towardsother 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.

Our tasks in imperialist Europe

1 February 1996

2. the struggle against unemployment has become a permanent trait in the countries of imperialist Europe. It has had disastrous effects - social, political and moral - on the whole of society and notably on youth. The bourgeoisie has neither the capacity nor the will to resolve this appalling problem. The suppression of unemployment is then at the heart of any alternative strategy. Knowing the current relations of forces between Capital and Labour, in society but also in every workplace, our response cannot be routinist. It does not only concern the workers and the unemployed. The suppression of this mass unemployment must become a stake for the whole of society. It must mobilise all its resources of resistance, energy and creativity. It must base itself on the workers and trade unions movement, but also go beyond it, addressing itself to the whole of the social movement. The solution proposed cannot be routinist.

The right to a job for all is both a social and a democratic demand, for it is the road to a decent income, a useful place in society, a recognition as citizen. As revolutionary Marxists, we take it up in all its subversive potential in relation to the current dominance of the market economy; it obligates a global reversal of political priorities and consequently a social revolution. The struggle for the reduction of working hours presents itself under different aspects. In the first place, the demand for "the reduction of working hours without loss of wages and with compensatory hiring" can take several concrete forms as response, either to a reduction imposed by the bosses or by the neo-liberal policy of "work sharing" or as part of the list of demands made by the trade union movement during collective conventions in and enterprise or a sector.

A second aspect concerns the possibility, at certain times, of creating the widest united front, including with the reformist leaderships, around a unifying slogan of "35 hours without loss of pay" to be realised through legislation. It amounts in this case to a slogan of a more limited social impact, even if it could be a trampoline to retake the offensive on this terrain, to unify all the sectors of the working class in its exceedingly various statuses and to reinforce the global relation of forces.But these two types of "reduction of working hours" do not really suppress unemployment at the scale of society. From whence a third aspect of the struggle, namely a very much more radical reduction of working time (say to 32 or 30 hours) - without loss of salary and with compensatory hiring. A tough demand, efficient and inspiring, it appears unrealisable given the current relation of forces. It can only be convincing if it takes up from the beginning a whole range of social and technical conditions of its implementation; workers (and social) control) over the enterprise in relation to the intensity of work, the environment and the economic finality; reorganisation of labour to assure its feasibility from the technical-economic point of view and that of the life of the workers; financial aspects given the unequal conditions of competition (compensation funds); financing of such a plan (which raises the question of taxation).

Such a plan, as global as it is radical, only makes sense on the European level, not only because of the impossibility of putting it into practice in a single country given current economic conditions, but also because it assumes an economic recovery and reorganisation on a vast scale in terms of social needs on the international plane, throughout Europe to begin with. It raises moreover some very much wider questions of society; the meaning of work even; the level of wages maintained in relation to the conditions of existence of the proletariat in the rest of the planet; the mode of consumption and its relation to the alienation of leisure time and the limited resources of the planet; male-female relations in general and in relation to household work in particular; the role of the public services(notably the collective equipment). In the background there is the question of political and economic power within society, and the necessity of a social revolution.We must approach the other major social questions in the same spirit; social security; the school and permanent training; housing, health, life in the cities . It is at the same time the means to fuse these problems with the different aspects of the world ecological crisis.

3. The struggle of women against their oppression and patriarchal structures will also be a powerful factor of struggle against capitalism and the re-launching of an emancipatory perspective for humanity. The cycle of the feminist movement of the 1965-1980 years was closed by some significant advances; the suppression of legal inequality; the massive presence of women in public life, notably on the labour market; the conquest of a certain economic independence; the entry into crisis and the decline of patriarchal structures, in particular the family. Meanwhile, the women's movement as such has decomposed, notably by the recuperation of a sector of the movement and its integration into the cogs of the bourgeois state, thanks to a certain number of reforms "from above" . Only a small active nucleus of socialist feminists and radical feminists subsists which resists the attacks against certain gains of the movement. The oppression of women persists, although being displaced; legal equality has not suppressed the social inequality de facto present everywhere in society including in the social movements; inequality of wages for comparable work persists.

Moreover, the prolonged crisis imposes a growing burden on the backs of women and the bourgeois policy puts in question a certain number of gains of the preceding period. In addition to this, there is a

crying contradiction between the progress of women on the legal and in part economic and social planes on the one hand and their marginalisation indeed total exclusion as to the political processes and leadership bodies.With the question of work (notably night work, household work) sexual and physical violence (harassment in the workplace, the rape of children and women inside the family), the political democratic question is already a key aspect of these debates (quotas, parity) of the future. International solidarity is manifested by a new raising of consciousness of the role of women in war and massive repression (ex-Yugoslavia, Rwanda, Chechnya, Argentine, Guatemala….). this multitude of resistance has not yet led to the redevelopment of a true overall organised movement, but it is certainly on the order of the day and we should contribute to it with all our forces. This confirms the urgency of the reform of our own organisations so that women can play their role.

4. Youth have not ceased to mobilise throughout the 1980s and 1990s. But this mobilisation concerned the great moral questions (the threat of) war (Such as the installation of the missiles); against racism and fascism; aid for the third world; or in a more sectoral sense around the school. It is the ecological question which has penetrated profoundly the two most recent generations, creating a more global political consciousness. All this activity has taken place, in very many countries in total rupture with the ideological climate of 1968. The "market" and "post-Socialist" atmosphere, with a spectacular loss of historic, social and political landmarks, has strongly weighed on the level of radicalisation and the type of politicisation among youth. An enormous distance thus appears between the degree of consciousness and political engagement and the revolutionary Marxist programme, except for a very small nucleus of youth. The discredit into which the "market economy" has again fallen after the brief euphoria, reopens a broader space on the properly ideological plane for a left, and in particular, Marxist explanation.This globally unfavourable evolution contrasts with the fact that the young generation comes up socially against actually existing capitalism. This generation will be the first, for some decades, whose future perspectives will be more modest than those of the former generations, in particular those of their own parents. Moreover, more precociously "emancipated" in relation to the tutelage of their parents, it is less able to win its own economic independence, unable to find a stable and complete job. This contradiction creates considerable social tensions which have already led to widespread struggles, but it also provokes a number of acts of despair, unequalled since the post war period (drugs, suicides, flights from the school and the family, total social marginality).

Our intervention among youth, inasmuch as it is in struggle, is a decisive question for the construction of a revolutionary socialist organisation. It must start from the real movement among the youth - its social existence, its cultural behaviour, its forms of organisation and expression, its specific level of radicalisation - and be extricated from the sometimes complicated tactical considerations which our parties need to find their way in the workers' movement today.The organisation of an international youth camp is a striking success both in the level of participants, the internationalist and enthusiastic spirit, and the recruitment of a layer of youth steeped in this experience.

5. The left intelligentsia has massively deserted political engagement and capitulated before neo-liberalism during the 1980s and 1990s. This has constituted a factor of deterioration in the relation of forces for the working class and its anti-capitalist wing. It is all the more important to enter in dialogue with the sectors or individuals who have resisted, and with those who, on their own professional terrain, resent the disastrous effects of the progress of "commodification", passing from an ethical opposition to a wider social comprehension, and are susceptible to engagement at the sides of the anti-capitalist social movement.

6. We have a particular political task in relation to the third world.Beyond efforts of solidarity against repression, of support to the significant struggles and mobilisation to contain imperialist attempts to crush or smother a (semi-) revolutionary breakthrough. We must alert public opinion, put pressure on our governments, alert the workers and social movements to relieve immediately the terrible poverty which affects a growing part of the ex-colonial countries. The struggle for the cancelling of the debt and against the IMF and the World Bank constitutes a concrete and useful objective for these countries, at the same time raising the question of their dependence/ recolonisation and opening the road to new forms of anti-imperialist struggle.

7. Our organisations are strongly involved in the anti-racist and anti-fascist struggles and movements. The objective must be to place this combat on the European level. This applies in particular to the struggle against the Schengen accord which furnishes by itself a unifying objective. While some very representative networks exist in our respective countries which are co-ordinated at the level of the EU, to is necessary to note that they have not had the capacity to organise a concerted and combative action. This was and remains our objective. On the level of anti-fascism, the active movement consists of the radical nuclei which act regularly in all the countries and which enable, punctually, an "enlarged" mobilisation thanks to the strong sensibility and openness of the "democratic" and "left" organisations on this question. Some attempts at co-ordination exist on the European level. Overall there exists a certain level of alertness on which it is necessary to build so as to respond in a united and international manner to the events which are to come. Given the persistence of the fascist parties and far right and their installation in society and in the state apparatus, an important debate on political orientation exists in which we must intervene.

8. We have to note the extreme weakness of the anti-war movement, in relation to the military conflicts in eastern and central Europe (ex-USSR, ex-Yugoslavia) above all if comparison is made with the response to the Gulf War. If the passivity of the workers' movement under reformist leadership

is not a surprise, on the other hand, the "peace movement" - active, massive and radical for two decades - has entered into deterioration. Forces in a very small minority, like our own, have tried to react in the context of an indignant but passive public. The pursuit of the International Workers Aid campaign is all the more important, by its exemplary character (both here and in ex-Yugoslavia) and in order to form links with the best elements which resist in ex-Yugoslavia. An analogous activity should be launched against the brutal war of the Yeltsin government against the Chechen people.

9. We have to note the almost total absence of the active workers movement on the European scale. The reason is not technical (absence of material means) but political; the subordination to the national state and the EU which are imposed by social democracy and the (trade union wing) of Christian democracy in the traditional workers movement, which paralyses any extensive action around fundamental demands (like the widening of the struggle for the 35 hour week at IG Metall) all European solidarity with a particular struggle (the delocalisation of an enterprise inside the EU) and any overall social alternative at the level of the EU. We must put do all we can to break this lead fetter, by solidarity action with strikes, the circulation of information on struggles, on demands, of trade union platforms. Three elements must be singled out:

– the use of European enterprise committees which are multiplying and which, despite all their limits, furnish the means for meetings between (combative) trade union militants;

– persuading trade unions to take European initiatives of co-ordination of their sector (like the telecommunications meeting at Brussels at the beginning of 1995)

– working towards a demonstration and an assembly of the European left as a social and internationalist alternative at the intergovernmental conference planned for 1996.The construction of an active workers' movement in Europe starts from a modest scale. It necessitates on our part

– a programmatic and political elaboration, going beyond our as yet very general position (see the resolution on the EU at this world congress) so as to influence the traditional workers' movement and

– an effort at political and practical rapprochement with those left currents which reject the Maastricht policy of the EU and its member states.

10. This activity of our organisations - multiple and by definition dispersed - must find its unity and its strength by a political battle to break the neo-liberal (and "Europeanist") political programmatic yoke of the Social Democratic and Christian Democratic apparatuses. The credibility of the neo-liberal policy does not reside in the strength of its content or in the militant organisational strength of social democracy, but in the difficulties which strike the active and radical left wing of the social and workers' movement; a feeling of the political impotence of the mobilisations and struggles and consequently of alternative programmatic propositions; a lowering of the average "socialist" consciousness of the popular masses; a fallback in the organisational engagement of the practical vanguard; ideological weakening of the radical left; and all this takes place whereas the working class, the women and the youth maintain an exceptionally high level of activity making allowance for the poor socio-economic conditions which persist.It is in this general situation that we must contribute to the programmatic rearmament of the social and workers' movement. This must become a decisive task in the period following the world congress.

11. This task cannot be conceived independently of the upheavals affecting the traditional workers' movement. The principal aspects are the following;

– the weakening of the organic and social links of the trade union organisations and the working class and consequently the weakening of the social control of the trade union bureaucracy on its own cadres and militant, and on the class - an unprecedented loss of legitimacy of the class collaborationist and counter revolutionary apparatuses (combination between the historic defeat of Stalinism and the mew stage of organisational, moral and political degeneration of social democracy) which henceforth puts in doubt their capacity to contain future upsurges or social explosions;

– the emergence of political currents and social movements, which do not belong to the historic workers' movement, but possess a critique of bourgeois society and a will for social change.Faced with the wide ranging crisis of bourgeois society, the historically new situation of the traditional workers' movement, and the potentiality of new extensive upsurges, the response of the revolutionary left, itself struggling for survival as a political factor in the workers' movement and in society, cannot limit itself to propaganda for the construction of a (small nucleus) of the revolutionary party and the revolutionary programme, opposed to the rest of the traditional workers' movement and its reformist variants, to some campaigns which call for the united workers front but which are in fact nothing other than a means of ideological and organisational self-affirmation.

Before any improbable short term break by social democracy with the neo-liberal and Europeanist line of the last 15 years, before a recurrent polarisation between the social democratic leadership and the trade union movement still capable and obliged to enter into struggle for the important immediate demands - the pertinent political cleavage - profound, broad and practical, affecting the everyday fate of the mass of the workers, women and youth - is not currently between "reform and revolution" but between this consistent neo-liberal policy of the social democracy and an alternative policy which refuses to subordinate the struggle for immediate demands and for radical reforms to the needs of neo-liberalism, and which in practice is opposed to the fundamentals of the market economy and its political institutions.

Between social democracy and the revolutionary left there is a vast ideologically reformist current either opposed to or more often "outside" the strategic question of the revolutionary crisis, the overthrow of the bourgeoisie and the conquest of political power by the working class and the organisation of the workers' vanguard in a revolutionary party based on such a programme. It is the product of the decomposition of the social democracy and Stalinism. It is politically heterogeneous and unstable but often very representative of the current social movement.

To the extent that these sectors of this current oppose social democratic policies and are ready to struggle for radical reforms, they constitute a very important element both for the social, political and electoral struggle, for the progressive emergence of a new anti-capitalist and socialist programme and for the convergent activities which can bring together these still disparate political currents and forces, opening thus not only some possibilities of unity of action but also an overall debate on political orientation and the need for a new political formation of the working class. It is decisive and vital for our organisations - revolutionary Marxist nuclei - to be participating in or initiating, under an appropriate form depending on the country, this process of re-composition of the social and workers' movement.

12. Our organisations and our functioning as the Fourth International in Europe must be adapted to this new political situation. This implies above all that we continue in the coming months a reinforcement of the links between our organisations in Europe. Faced with the weakening of the militant and material means of the national organisations, and the distancing of the links between them, it amounts to re-establishing at an elementary level the pooling of our analyses, our political and programmatic propositions, our political-intellectual resources, regularising the financial and material contributions of each national organisation to the international centre, as well as circulating information, generalising the activities of the campaigns already underway (notably making a balance sheet of their weaknesses) to seize the opportunity that the class struggle offers to act in common. This primary reinforcement has become, in the present situation, virtually a prerequisite - if not all the propositions for campaigns of action on the European scale smack of rhetoric.On the organisational level, it is necessary to give priority to the annual meeting of the European Political Bureaux and the two meetings each year of the European secretariat, and to set up the network of regular information between the sections and with the leadership of the International.

The European Union

1 February 1996

This Europe is not our Europe. We fight it not in the name of national solutions and the defence of the national (bourgeois) state, which is a reactionary utopia, but in the name of a Europe which is ecological, democratic, egalitarian and based on peace and solidarity. Our struggle against the EU is part of the anti-capitalist struggle for another society - a socialist society. This will be a Europe of the working class and of the free association of peoples, open to the East and in solidarity with the South. Such an alternative will not come about through existing state institutions - either national or European. It implies mass activity of the working masses and a major crisis of the EU itself. It therefore requires building and strengthening working-class and social movements on a pan-European level. And it demands a radical break with the dominant social democratic trend in the labour and trade-union movement, whose pro-EU-stance is linked to its neo-liberal economic policy.

Without such a break and advancement of this European-wide anti-capitalist alternative, there will be no future for the struggles of workers, women and youth who - whatever their nationality - are mobilising against injustice and rebelling against unemployment and misery, racism and war. The Fourth International and its organisations want to contribute to building this alternative, in the way best suited to each country.

2. The evolution of the EU remains very contradictory. On the one hand, the project of the European Union is moving forward. It corresponds to the globalization and regional centralisation of the world economy: new countries are joining; the Schengen agreement is being put into practice; the single market is advancing; the member states are working hard to meet the convergence criteria in the Maastricht treaty and there is no single member state (not even the UK) bourgeoisie that calls for abandoning the EMU; various bilateral agreements on concrete topics are being concluded between EU members; the EU is functioning as a strong pole of attraction for European countries outside the EU.

All in all there is a steady, sometimes hidden, progress towards a European federal state, but there are many problems and contradictions. The attempt to create a political union, with elements of a supra-national state, among the key EU countries (Germany, France, Britain, Italy), centred around a common currency, is meeting with big difficulties. There is no existing European nation, and the EU lacks democratic and social legitimacy. Also, there is no cohesive European capitalist class as a social force: the concentration of big capital in Europe goes far beyond European borders, linking up directly with competitors in Japan and the USA. And there is a major intrinsic difficulty in transferring important parts of

sovereignty of the national imperialist states towards a supra-national imperialist state apparatus.

Ever since the September 1992 crisis of the EU (crisis of the EMS; Pyrrhic victory in the French referendum after real defeat in the Danish one; the first big workers' struggles in some countries against the social policies implemented in the name of Maastricht), doubts have arisen in important parts of society, about the feasibility and desirability of the EU (the No vote in Norway; the narrow majorities in Finland and Sweden; rising denunciation of the social impact of the Maastricht criteria in the EU's core). The virtual collapse of the EMS in 1993 reconfirmed this.

The decisive leap forward to a common currency and a central European Bank is still before us. With only Luxembourg meeting all the Maastricht Treaty's convergence criteria, the common currency will not be introduced in 1997, not even by a "hard" core of the EU. For the next deadline, 1999, there are more doubts expressed and manoeuvres underway. In the meantime, plans to launch the ECU in (part of) the EU before the end of the century are still very much alive. This means that Maastricht-type policies will continue and that in any case we are in for a new battle around dismantling of social gains. Decisions about that will be at the heart of the 1996 Intergovernmental Conference, which will have a longer agenda than just the application and adaptation of the Maastricht criteria: a further reduction of national democratic institutions' powers in the EU, with the establishment of European quasi-state structures capable of controlling the more and more numerous and diverse mix of EU states. In addition, there will be attempts to strengthen the common foreign policy, European military cooperation and the common anti-refugee policy.

3. The EU's creeping crisis in its core countries is an important lever for a struggle against it. By linking up with these forces and strengthening social struggles that objectively make realising the Maastricht criteria more difficult, we can build and strengthen movements and campaigns for a left No and help make enforcement of the EU's projects more difficult.

Our aim is to defeat the EU from an anti-capitalist standpoint, on the basis of an internationalist solution of the current crisis, as a result of the struggle of the European working classes. This perspective is sharply opposed to the social-democratic "Europeanist" adaptation to the EU institutions, as well as to nationalist currents inside the right-wing bourgeois and petty-bourgeois parties and inside parts of the labour movement.

To advance in that direction we have to take three objective facts into account:

– the real social and political dynamic of the class struggle remains for the next period basically on a national level, in the absence of an active European-wide labour movement, of social struggles organized on a European scale, of generalised unifying demands with a European-wide audience and given the real stage of European integration today;

– the real solution of the economic, social and cultural problems of the exploited classes and oppressed masses is impossible on a national level and requires worldwide and continent-wide solutions;

– the concrete struggle against the EU and possible breakthroughs will be determined at first by national conditions in each country. Among these conditions are objective factors (such as the geo-economic and geopolitical situation of each national capitalist country), as well as the average level of internationalist consciousness among working people. It implies among other things that each country has its own mixture of social, democratic and national demands opposing the construction of the EU. Since we are convinced of the unstable situation and nature of the EU project, our task is not limited to making propaganda against the EU and in favour of European-wide immediate demands. We have to start from the EU's creeping crisis and the social mobilisations in different countries, to open the perspective of defeating the EU in practice, and to find transitional solutions, anti-capitalist and internationalist. As an international we recognize the need for each of our national organizations to have a specific tactic to orient the national class struggle against the EU, as well as the need for each national organization to participate in a European-wide strategy, based on the same overall program and the same concrete political alternative for the EU.

4. There can be no doubt that any attempt to break in one country with the reigning liberal-monetarist policies would quickly run up against the EU, which is the central organiser of these policies on a European level. Taking its position to its logical conclusion, social democracy closed off any possible way out for the working class by imposing the following dilemma: a break with neo-liberalism means leaving the EU (with all the presumed negative effects). The only possible choice was to accept the EU, in the h of improving its institutions and policies.

The development of a strategic response that can meet this challenge is vital for getting out of the situation of political impotence that currently paralyses the working class and social movements, particularly their left wing. No doubt, the absence of such an alternative will not prevent struggles from breaking out, but they will be left without an overall political perspective - lacking dynamism, unity and the will to win. This has become a practical question insofar as the EU is going through a very difficult period from which it will not emerge very soon. Moreover, all big social mobilisations in the future will put the problem on the agenda. This is very important: without a major revival of activity by the working class and its allies, without the beginnings of favourable changes in the relationship of forces on the ground, any alternative plan will be a purely abstract construct.

If the government of an EU country is caught in the grip of a wide-ranging social struggle (comparable to those that have broken out these last few years in Greece, Italy, the Spanish state, Belgium and France) and must retreat on an important point of its austerity agenda, it will inevitably

come into conflict with the institutional regulations and main policies of the EU. The matter will then fall into the tangled web of the EU's institutional framework. From this point onwards, the need arises for a left-wing alternative that breaks with the EU's institutions and member governments and that takes up social demands that workers struggling in one country can bring to the attention of the entire EU workforce.

Where would the opening of such a political breach lead? That would depend on a number of factors that cannot be predicted today. On the tactical level, three conclusions seem clear. First, to rely on the change in the relationship of forces through the activity of "those from below" means taking the social dynamic on the national level as the starting point. Second, we must understand how the political dialectic goes from the national to the European level. Finally, we must consider the opening of a crisis inside the EU institutions as being an obligatory part of the journey towards a social Europe - on condition that this involves a break-up of EU institutions and not their continuity.

Depending on the situation, country, themes, dynamics of confrontations and state of the movements, two different answers can flow from this approach:

– In some cases, for instance in the less integrated or relatively new EU member states, the national and international effects on the relationship of forces of a fight with the EU can be maximized by campaigning for withdrawal from the EU, as a first step to radically weaken the EU project. But at all times we maintain a clear, internationalist, European-wide perspective.

– In other cases, mainly in the EU's core-countries, where economic integration is much more advanced and a strong "integration" consciousness exists, it will be necessary to struggle for an immediate program of measures favourable to workers, women, youth and immigrants, and to make proposals on this basis to the other peoples of Europe in order to outflank the EU and start building a different Europe. We should make clear our propaganda that this cannot come about simply through a reform of existing institutions.

It is clear that what is key in both options is broadening and strengthening social mobilisations throughout Europe. The political axis of the propaganda, the concrete social and economic policies and the manoeuvres and negotiations, is to propose the re-organisation of Europe on other bases: as a continental European space unified on the basis of a model of growth based on social needs, full employment, respect for the environment and international cooperation. A Europe of free association between states and peoples, cooperating for specific solutions and purposes. Obviously, this will require - in one way or another - the building of alternative political institutions in the interest of working people.

5. As experience has shown, popular opposition is based on different motivations. Primarily it reflects a democratic sentiment and a more or less conscious understanding of the anti-social goal of this EU project. It is obvious that the new EU quasi-state in the making lacks democratic legitimacy. We share the "democratic" criticism of the EU with many others, but we are not falling back on idealizing national parliamentarism.

We connect the lack of democracy in the EU with the anti-social content of EU's policies and with the lack of democracy on a national level in the EU states, and promote an social, ecological, feminist, internationalist alternative based on real democracy and self-organization. This implies, among others.

A social Europe

– An immediate reduction of the length of the working week to 35 hours without a cut in pay, as a first step towards the 32 and 30-hour work week; this would be accompanied by a thoroughgoing re-organisation of work and life in society;

– Equal pay for equal work for women; against a reactionary family policy and for the establishment of individual and equal rights in the area of social security; for the development on a broad scale of quality child care and other such facilities; for a women's right to control her fertility;

– For upward harmonisation of social security systems, of norms of safety and hygiene, and of working conditions generally;

– For youth: the right to free studies and guaranteed employment without discrimination;

– A guaranteed minimum wage and a minimum unemployment insurance payment in all countries of the Union;

– Legally recognized trade-union rights in all countries of the Union: the right to strike, right to workplace representation, right to conclude collective work agreements, and setting up of European workplace committees in the multinationals.

– To counter obstruction from speculators and veto's against social policies from financial markets, financial flows and institutions have to be controlled and socialized, Central Banks have to be put under public control and the pro-cyclical monetary straight jacket of the Maastricht treaty has to be destroyed;

– Against fundamentalism, for secularism.

An ecological Europe

– For an upward harmonisation of environmental norms and a high level of consumer protection;

– For a policy based on development of renewable energy; against nuclear energy and for the dismantling of all existing nuclear power plants;

– Against the logic of more private cars and more roads: a policy of public transport, telecommunications and energy. They should be affordable, outside the logic of the market, deliberately oriented towards user needs, and respectful of the environment;

– For a break with the dynamics imposed by the agro-industry and chemical industry, to get an agricultural policy that assures employment and that discourages the massive use of pesticides, herbicides and chemical fertilisers.

A Europe of citizens

– Against all forms of ethnic cleansing, racism and xenophobia;

– Equal rights for immigrants from outside the EU, including the right to vote and to stand in all elections;

– Right to asylum, against the discriminating visa-policy, against fortress Europe, abolition of the Schengen treaty;

– Freedom of movement within the EU;

– Equality of social and civil rights for women; equal representation of men and women in all elected state institutions;

– Democratic right to cultural, religious, national, political and ideological expression;

– For recognition of the right to self-determination of peoples and the democratic rights of national and ethnic minorities;

A Europe of solidarity

– Against the ethnic division of Bosnia, which is favoured by the EU. Humanitarian aid, not bombs;

– Unconditional cancellation of the debt of the countries of the South and the East, to stop the mad race towards "structural adjustment", and a break from the market logic imposed by the IMF and World Bank;

– Bilateral trade and development cooperation to respond on a priority basis to the social needs of populations, in favour of development based on the best local conditions, and by working against the law of profit by opposing unfettered competition between countries of the South for access to the world market.

A Europe of peace

– Elimination of nuclear weapons and nuclear military units, as well as of all military units at the forefront of repression, hostage-taking, terror and torture (e.g.. rapid deployment forces, para-commandos, etc.);

– A radical reduction of the military budget;

– Against a European army, for dissolution of the Franco-German brigade , the WEU (West European Union), and NATO;

– Withdrawal of US troops and dismantling of US bases; withdrawal of the fleet of US warships from the Mediterranean, North Sea and Baltic Sea.

6. The inter-governmental conference in 1996 will be the main focus in Europe in the coming period, for which preparations and debates are already underway in all countries. Any new treaty or change in the existing treaties that comes out of the 1996 summit should be put to a vote in referenda in all EU countries.

Many old and new questions will be taken up in the these preparatory discussions and negotiations:

– We oppose from an internationalist position the neo-liberal measures and the authoritarian policies imposed by the EU on the Eastern European countries negotiating their adhesion, and support and dialogue with the forces in those countries that oppose joining the EU from a left perspective or that develop a socialist alternative to the Maastricht type of European unification;

– We stay opposed to the Schengen agreement and are in favour of an open, humanitarian policy towards people fleeing to Europe from oppression and famine;

– We oppose the military build-up in Europe, the transformation of the West European Union into the European wing of NATO and the establishment of international deployment forces and are in favour of overall de-militarisation.

– We are opposed to the third phase of the Maastricht treaty, because of the uncontrollable very mighty independent European Central Bank and the anti-social policies that are needed to meet the convergence criteria for the common currency, and because the introduction of one single currency has a consequence that the space and means for different social and economic choices on a national level will be reduced dramatically;

– We are against the extension of power of European executive instances and in favour of dismantling the almighty Council of Ministers and the uncontrollable Commission. Contrary to the illusions championed by Social Democracy and others, it is not possible to democratize the EU.

The 1996 conference must in any case be challenged by a huge opposition to the EU's policies. We will work for a pan-European demonstration against EU policies, against the inter-governmental conference and for a different Europe. At the same time, we want to use the occasion of this conference to strengthen the debates in the left and social movements about concrete alternatives to the Europe of the bosses, social insecurity, unemployment, decreasing democracy and ecological destruction. We will fight for a break with the neo-liberal policies of the EU and for a social Europe, with at its heart a radical struggle against unemployment. We want to take these initiatives with other left forces and will therefore involve ourselves in the preparation of an international left conference. For the European elections for the European parliament in 1999 we present lists in as many countries as possible, taking into account the concrete conditions of the sections of the International in each country. We will publish a manifesto that presents the common line of the sections in Europe.

Resolution on Latin America

1 February 1996

In the economic terrain, the crisis which erupted in Mexico in December 1994 dramatized the effects of the policies that had been pursued since the 1970s. Beyond the particularities of the Mexican case, we have now witnessed the collapse of a model undermined, in the strictly economic field, by its own internal contradictions. The trend towards more and more severe programs of capitalist restructuring, with the resulting worsening of economic, social and political conditions is stronger than ever and must, in the coming years, confront the new forms of struggle and resistance that are arising in the continent.

The political and social instability that emerged in our countries in the 1980s - in the aftermath of the controlled removal of the military dictatorships - combined with the negative effects of the "wasted decade" and the dislocations caused by the reinsertion of the Latin American continent into a new division of the world, has not only not disappeared, but in fact, is leading to a permanent social polarization. Far from experiencing an expansion of democratic rights and freedoms, we are faced with their reduction and by the re-emergence of sharper forms of authoritarianism.

1. The economic landscape

1.1. The "structural adjustment" programs imposed since the beginning of the 1980s have modified the regime of accumulation which had been dominant for 40 years and placed the continent within the framework of a so-called competitive insertion into the world capitalist market. These qualitative transformations imply centering the axis of the accumulation of capital around the development of foreign markets, promoting multilateral integration pacts, decisively altering the relations between labor and capital, as well as advancing in the creation of a new framework of relations between the state, society and the imperialist countries.

This so-called competitive insertion implies a process of integration subordinated to the imperatives laid down by the main imperialist powers, a process which, furthermore, generates and reproduces hierarchical forms of integration among the dependent countries themselves, as the cases of Mercosur, the free trade agreement between Mexico and the countries of Central America and the Andean Pact demonstrate.

The free trade agreement (NAFTA) signed by Canada, Mexico and the U.S. is part of the latter's strategy to shift the relationship of forces which, in the arena of international competition, has been unfavorable to it in recent years. Such an agreement is different from other processes of economic integration, such as the European Union, since it implies the subordinated integration of an economy as heavily dependent as Mexico's to the dynamics imposed by the main imperialist power. NAFTA is part of a larger project which seeks to modernize Mexico's capitalist economy, locating it within the international division of labor as a subordinate if privileged partner.

At the same time, the policies promoted by the U.S. with the objective of creating a free trade zone in which it would lay down the rules of the game, has continued to slowly but steadily advance. Although certain commercial sectors in Latin America face, or will face, obstacles in attaining their objectives, the world-wide reorganization of economic blocs is undoubtedly underway in the region.

One of the salient aspects of these agreements is the fact that they do not offer an alternative to the ever-growing economic, social and technological abyss which separates the dependent from the imperialist countries. The key features of the ongoing processes of restructuring and integration is their exclusionary, perverse and conflictual character.

The shift to an externally oriented economy has been coupled with indiscriminate trade liberalization programs which have deeply affected the productive structure as a whole. Deployed during a period in which the imperialist powers have both increased their protectionist measures (limits to steel, textiles, banana exports, "voluntary" accords...) and strengthened their control over the world market (GATT, WTO), trade liberalization leads to the break-up, collapse or disappearance of portions or whole sectors of production and to the exclusion of millions of people from the circuits of production, where it has not led to a real process of de-industrialization, like those experienced by Bolivia, Peru and Argentina itself.

1.2. The limits and range of capitalist re-structuring are evident. In spite of the growth in manufacturing production in most countries in the region, which is the basis of the increase in exports, Latin America's share of world trade - which fell from 12% in 1950 to 3% in 1992 - has been continually shrinking. The priority given to the development of external markets furthers the consolidation of a sharply-divided society. Similarly, in spite of the efforts of the Latin American bourgeoisies and of the disagreements which exist among certain countries, the main exports from the region continue to be raw materials, which are subjected to a slow but irreversible deterioration, caused by changes in the production process, which limits the ability to maneuver in the international market.

The crisis in Mexico and its international repercussions have demonstrated the structural fragility of the new patterns of accumulation. Factors such as the policies of privatization of state enterprises, high interest rates, the recessionary atmosphere which reigned in the imperialist countries, the liberalization of financial markets, and the presence of strict wage-control measures, attracted foreign capital, which began

to flow back into certain countries (notably into Mexico, Chile, Brazil, and Argentina). Nevertheless, only a small portion of that capital was invested productively, a fact which combined with an indiscriminate commercial opening-up, the absence of even the most minimally coherent industrial policies, and the linking of national currencies to the dollar (necessary to attract foreign capital), led to the growth of gigantic commercial deficits as well as to other contradictions which eventually undermined the economic model of which they were part.

In this sense the financial "rescue" of Mexico, unprecedented in terms of the amounts involved, is completely geared toward safeguarding the interests of international speculative capital, since it will be used to service the country's foreign debt. Furthermore, all of this implies an unprecedented and dangerous reduction in national sovereignty (complete U.S. control of the income generated by the sale of Mexico's oil).

1.3. The fact that most countries have again experienced positive rates of growth does not mean that they have regained the ground lost during the "wasted decade". The levels of capital investment remain lower than in 1982. Furthermore, the region is again entering a period of recession, as the cases of Mexico, Argentina, Venezuela, and probably Brazil, already indicate. The increase in GDP rate of growth and the reduction in the rate of inflation, often presented as the main "achievements" of neo-liberal policies, are taken as being synonymous with an improved standard of living and increased employment. Nothing could be farther from the truth: 8 out of 10 jobs generated in the region between 1990 and 1993 corresponded to the informal sector or to micro-enterprises. There is growth, but wealth is ever more concentrated in the hands of a very small social layer.

During the 1980s poverty grew most strongly. More than 45% (196 million) of the people of Latin America are affected by this scourge, generated by capitalist restructuring. Although more prevalent in rural zones (61% of the people), poverty has increasingly hit urban regions. The favelas in Brazil, poblaciones in Chile, ciudades perdidas in Mexico, ciudades ocultas in Argentina, ranchos in Venezuela etc. have continued to grow. More than a mere economic and social "dualism", this implies that people increasingly live in two different social universes, a context in which the excluded constitute a growing majority.

The extension and deepening of poverty is not a minor aspect of ongoing capitalist restructuration. This process has seriously weakened the very social fabric of many forms of resistance. It does not strengthen the left electorally or otherwise. On the contrary, it tends to nurture an increasingly violent atmosphere, to create conditions favorable to the growth of political clientelism, and to reduce all democratic spaces as it denies individuals any guarantees regarding even the most basic living conditions.

Poverty is not gender neutral, as it affects women, "the poorest among the poorest", first. Women are furthermore faced with an unprecedented offensive of the state, the Right, and the Church hierarchy, against their social, reproductive, and sexual, etc., rights.

1.4. In Latin America the privatization of public enterprises accelerated after 1985. Branches and whole economic sectors, many of them of strategic importance, have been transferred into the hands of private capital. In this fashion, the 1970s notion of the public sector as a sort of "hospital for ailing enterprises" has been abandoned and replaced by the objective of placing a large part of the nation's wealth in the hands of the "free play of the market" which, in fact, fosters the concentration and centralization of capital in the hands of large monopolies.

Given the extent of the present crisis, a renewed "interventionism" by the state may be expected, as measures taken by several governments already indicate. Obviously, this does not imply a return to the past, nor does it go against the central aspects of the neo-liberal project. Nevertheless, a point had been reached at which the lack of state intervention in the economic sphere risked unleashing an explosion nurtured by runaway neo-liberalism.

Subordinated as they are to the imperatives of the world market, the governments of the region are also pushing through the privatization of lands belonging to peasant and indigenous communities. A veritable agrarian counter-reform has been carried out in Mexico, Guatemala, Bolivia and Ecuador which has deprived millions of people of their last remaining means of subsistence. The indigenista ideology, linked to the populist paternalism regimes in place for decades and used by the state to control important layers of the population, now yields its place to a brutal "modernization" which includes the destruction of the indigenous communities of the Amazon, environmental pollution and deforestation suffered by all countries, the destruction of our people's history, culture and traditions, a "modernization" which is the cause of the social explosions of the indigenous peoples of Latin America and the peasants of Mexico, Paraguay, Ecuador, Bolivia, Guatemala, etc.

1.5. The region's foreign debt remains one of the key factors which blocks any possibility of stable long-term growth. The measures taken during the late 1980s, with the implementation of the Brady Plan, have lessened the problem, but do not solve the dilemmas posed by the uninterrupted outflow of capital. Having accepted the discipline of the so-called "Washington consensus", the governments of the region remain committed to servicing the foreign debt - mainly its interest payments - while accepting the framework of separate, country-by-country negotiations. Through debt renegotiation accords, a considerable portion of the wealth to be produced early in the next century - and national sovereignty with it - has been pledged away. The foreign debt continues to play an eminently de-stabilizing role while keeping the door open for the interventions of the IMF and the World Bank as regulators of the economic policies to be implemented.

1.6. This is the context in which a

shift in the relations between capital and labor has taken place. Work reorganization, as an attempt to increase the rate of profit through an increase in the rate of exploitation (the principal mechanism for overcoming the crisis), seeks to dismantle the power and presence that workers wielded within the factories and to weaken trade union structures.

While neo-liberal discourse promotes free trade, all sorts of obstacles to the free circulation of labor power are introduced, just as internally the bourgeoisies and their governments impose strict controls to prevent wages from rising. Capitalist re-structuring and the continued attacks against past social conquests have permitted profits to recuperate as well as relative improvements in productivity to occur. The latter, however, remain well below the levels required by the world market. The project of relocalization of the Latin American economies in the world market thus largely relies on the limitation and reduction of wages.

Thus, only a few of the region's economies can hope to improve their position - without escaping their situation of dependence - as a result of the process of redistribution of zones of influence. Most are condemned to a passive role as providers of cheap labor power, raw materials or standardized manufactured products. In our continent, so-called economic modernization is by nature exclusionary. It promotes a social apartheid and deepens the contradiction between city and country as never before. Since it depends on the evolution of international factors, its capacity for self-expansion is rapidly exhausted.

The dynamic opened by capitalist restructuring generates the space for counterposing an alternative economic and social project. Such an alternative project would formulate as its priorities the satisfaction of the needs of our peoples, the homogenization of wage and social conquests along the lines of international norms, the creation of industrial protection programs for certain areas, etc. Nevertheless, no national economic program, advanced as it may be, can hope to solve the crisis if there is no shift in the relationship of forces within the imperialist countries.

2. Uninterrupted social and political instability.

2.1. The policies deployed by the bourgeoisies and their governments have failed to reconstruct or renew the mechanisms of domination which functioned until the 1970s. Unable to solve old or new problems generated by their situation of dependency and by the ongoing changes on an international scale, they have basically reproduced the worst aspects of any capitalist re-structuration, fueling social polarization. Unemployment, poverty and growing inequality are the main factors which promote social confrontation and radicalization.

Exclusion has a direct effect on social and political participation. For those excluded, whose main and immediate concern is survival, it is very difficult to act politically. This implies a systematic - and anti-democratic - reduction of citizenship as such. Nevertheless, this should not be confused with depoliticization, demobilization or the absence of popular initiatives, just as it is neither the case of communities or sectors resisting modernity, but rather of dependent capitalism being structurally incapable of satisfying the needs of the majority. This is why we speak of the perverse and conflictual modernization at the same time that we seek to understand how the terms and forms of struggle have been changing.

In the last few years it has been the more radically dispossessed sectors, such as peasants, indigenous peoples, pobladores (shanty-town dwellers), women, old people, the young that have led risings, struggles and revolts which stand out because of the forms they have taken (semi-insurrection, burning of government palaces, national marches), the organizational structures or means they have adopted or generated (collective leadership, processes of self-organization), as well as the demands they have formulated, with the question of democracy, in its widest sense, being at the center of the struggle.

2.2. As the channels to advance certain demands have been closed, social explosions like those of Caracas in Venezuela, Nicaragua, Santiago del Estero and Jujuy in Argentina, Paraguay and Ecuador have erupted. Although these outbreaks of resistance and agitation do not constitute a definite trend, they do correspond to a deep, undergoing process as they underlie a situation of political crisis and ungovernability. Similarly, mobilizations in which diverse social sectors have acted as citizens have been responsible for the victory of Aristide in Haiti, the resignation of Collor and C.A. Pérez (Brazil and Venezuela), the collapse of Serrano's attempt to arbitrarily remain in power in Guatemala, the partial blocking of Menem's initiatives in Argentina, and the restraining of the Mexican government's genocide against the Zapatista National Liberation Army (EZLN). In other cases the initiatives of political and/or trade union organizations have led to open confrontations, such as the general strike in Nicaragua, the popular mobilization which stopped the process of privatization in Uruguay after the referendum of 1992, the mobilizations in Puerto Rico which in 1993-94 led to defeats of the government in two referendums, the general strike in Paraguay (May 1995), the popular mobilizations which shook Bolivia early in 1995, as well as the land take-overs in Peñalolen and then the mobilizations of teachers and coal miners in Chile.

For a certain number of these situations, they were largely spontaneous, heterogeneous and discontinuous movements which lacked a definite class identity. This is why they are fragile and why it would be a mistake to turn them into a model; and yet they should not be underestimated, given their enormous de-stabilizing potential, evidenced by the victory of Caldera in Venezuela after the "caracazos" (popular riots in Caracas) or the deterioration of Menemism and the growth of the Frente Grande and the Marcha Federal of July 6 following the social explosions in the North-east of Argentina. In the case of Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities (CONAIE) in Ecuador and of the indigenous peoples of

Guatemala, the movements in question possess a clearly defined identity (peasant-indigenous), an organization, a political program. Above all, they have been able to provoke a political polarization while turning themselves into a reference point for an important part of society.

Several of these movements had as a starting point specific (health, housing, wage) demands which, in the process of becoming political demands, went beyond the narrow framework of an institutional struggle while simultaneously seeking new forms of participation which challenge political parties and their verticalism. An additional fact should be noted. During recent years, those struggles have pushed important social sectors to the left, a process which in turn has tended to radicalize those struggles and which has also manifested itself in the favorable electoral results obtained in several countries by democratic and left-wing currents.

Besides promoting growing social polarization, capitalist re-structuring has also brought with it another significant modification of the context in which those struggles unfold. While in the main countries of the region, the working class (wage-earning sectors with a steady income) constitutes an important social sector, it has nevertheless, as a class, lost part of its centrality as a driving force in the struggle for social change, either because its trade union organizations are in crisis, or have degenerated (through institutional corruption and/or betrayal by its leadership) or because, given the absence of credible alternatives among the political parties, workers have expressed themselves as citizens and not as class-conscious political actors.

2.3. In the case of Mexico, the emergence of the EZLN which challenges the regime of the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), declares war on the federal army, demands democracy, justice and liberty for all Mexicans, denounces the discrimination against indigenous peoples practiced by the whole of society and demands - arms in hand - the most elementary civic and democratic rights, the right to a dignified existence, the right to be an integral part of the nation, constitutes a specific expression of our peoples' resistance to a present and a future characterized by the growing poverty, exclusion, oppression and exploitation which imperialism seeks to impose on us.

Unlike social movements which have emerged in other Latin American countries, neo-Zapatismo represents a clearly defined national political project, with social and political objectives which are not limited to one town or region and which go beyond a single sector (even if the EZLN is deeply rooted in the indigenous communities of Chiapas). It is not by chance that the government and its army have been completely unable to question the justice and legitimacy of its struggle.

The neo-Zapatista insurrection has deepened the crisis (opened in 1988) of the party-state regime while also unmasking the contradictions of a neo-liberal project which had openly proclaimed its goal of leading Mexico, through a path of unprecedented prosperity, into the "first world". Through the formulation of a brief program which incorporates the aspirations of the Mexican people, the EZLN was able to attract the support of very wide and diverse social, political, ideological (both organized and un-organized) sectors, of almost all independent social organizations, a good part of the NGOs which have attained significant public presence, as well as of those Christians involved in and committed to popular struggles. The EZLN has sparked a powerful wave of national mobilizations for democracy with justice and dignity and against the war and the militarization of the country. This has awakened a wave of international solidarity which we must struggle to strengthen through all possible means.

All of this has been made possible, not only by the justness of the Zapatista demands but also by their tactical flexibility, which has made it possible for them to build bridges toward the whole of society around certain shared objectives: an end to the party-state regime, a struggle for a new constituent assembly and a new constitutional framework, in one word, around a struggle for achieving democracy in Mexico which does not exclude any path, even the peaceful one. This tactical flexibility has been linked to a strategic clarity and ethical dignity, which has not been common in the Mexican left.

Neo-Zapatism constitutes a watershed in the history of Mexico, not only because of its extraordinary contribution to undermining the party-state regime, but also because it represents a turning point for the left: on the one hand, it brings out the weaknesses, the deficiencies and shortcomings of the left which are obstacles to the growth and qualitative advance of the democratic movement, at the same time it underlines the need for a programatic, organizational and practical reconstruction of the left. The experience of the EZLN itself sheds light on some aspects of this necessary reformulation.

2.4. The armed conflict which erupted in early 1995 between the armies of Ecuador and Peru, countries which have had a territorial dispute for a long time, introduced a new element of instability in the region. This was the first conflict of its nature since the war between El Salvador and Honduras in the early 1970s.

International organisms once again showed their incapacity to stop a confrontation which has weakened the economies of both countries, and resulted in several hundred deaths, thousands of displaced among the indigenous communities and ecological damage that may be irreparable. Multi-national corporations have immediately sought to take advantage of the last two aspects of the situation through their attempt to create a free-trade zone on both sides of the border.

The war has been to the advantage of both governments. In Ecuador the President used it as an opportunity a "national unity and defense" rhetoric, which was taken up, not only by the general public but also by the majority of the left, thus contributing to an increase in the government's perceived legitimacy. In Peru the war played a key role in Fujimori's

electoral victory. The almost complete absence of any reaction by the left organizations is an indication of the precarious state to which they have been reduced in both countries.

2.5. Within a complex social situation it has been impossible to overcome the lack of synchronization between working-class struggles and the mobilizations of other social sectors. Important trade union struggles have occurred in Argentina, Uruguay, Paraguay, Colombia, Brazil, etc. which point toward the beginnings of a recomposition within the working class. Nevertheless, the main social mobilizations, such as the revolts in the Argentinean north-east, the struggles of the coca leaf growers in Bolivia, of the CONAIE in Ecuador, the Zapatistas in Mexico, and the mobilizations against C.A. Pérez in Venezuela have developed without the large labor confederations or the main sectors of the working class playing the leading political role that they had, for example, in the 1970s.

The relative weakening of a class dimension or point of reference, itself a product of the crisis of capitalism and of the drastic reconfiguration of social relations in the continent, opens the space for struggles by new social forces and thus for the active emergence of new potentially revolutionary subjects, which we must follow closely, taking advantage of every experience to overcome the lack of synchronization already mentioned. This is particularly important in those countries where the working class has considerable weight within the productive structure, since no radical social change can be conceived without a significant portion of that class being won over to the notion of a break with the status quo.

2.6. Inspired by the Sandinista victory in 1979, the launching of the Salvadorian revolution in the early 1980s, the political-social growth of the Brazilian Workers' Party (PT), the vitality shown by the social conquests of the Cuban revolution, while the rest of the continent sank into its "wasted decade", the social movements of the region made substantial advances in their process of recomposition. Although facing the searing consequences of the neo-conservative offensive, they exhibited, until 1990, a dynamic which made a revolutionary outbreak a credible option. But the substantial modification which took place in the international political arena after the fall of the Berlin Wall, the disappearance of the "socialist bloc", the defeat of the Sandinistas and the victory of Collor inevitably had negative consequences for the ongoing processes of recomposition. To these processes we must now add the evolution of the Salvadoran revolutionary process, leading to the signing of the 1992 Peace Accords, and the appearance of the deepest crisis in Cuba since the triumph of the revolution.

As in the rest of the world, capitalism in general and U.S. imperialism in particular presented themselves as the absolute winners of the Cold War, while the hope for social change through a revolutionary break moved farther away from people's minds than ever before. This is not, nevertheless, a one-way process: the inability so far shown by capitalism to solve its own crisis, the sharp differences which exist between the imperialist powers coupled with continuing social resistance place obstacles and delay the coming of the "new world order", so loudly proclaimed in 1989 in the aftermath of the Gulf War. Nevertheless, since the class relationship of forces favors capital and its agents, the dynamic of the social movement, in spite of the uninterrupted nature of the struggles which constitute it, does not at present pose a revolutionary break, particularly as many political organizations or important sectors within them have definitely abandoned any notion of revolutionary change.

2.7. Favoring, as never before, the sectors of the bourgeoisie linked to the world market, the governments of the region subordinate any national interests, even sacrificing the public functions the state is supposed to have, to private interests. In this fashion diverse regimes and their parties have amputated a considerable portion of the social base of support they had relied on for decades. Consequently, the crisis which in the 1980s had already swept away most nationalist-populist governments and parties has left no structure of domination unaffected. The most outstanding example of this is the crisis of the Mexican party-state embodied in the PRI. However, one may also mention the cases of Venezuela, Argentina, Uruguay, the Dominican Republic, Colombia and Brazil, countries in which the traditional party system is fractured and/or in open decompo-sition.

The key weakness of the political projects of the Latin American bourgeoises stems from the disintegration of their old social pacts, while they have not been able to propose a new long-term alternative project. To prevent the latter from emerging or imposing themselves is a key task of the revolutionary movement. Nevertheless, we must avoid any spontaneist impressionism. The crisis of the traditional parties and the existing social polarization do not in themselves lead to a crisis of the regime of domination; if a popular and democratic alternative which struggles for a break with the status quo does not emerge, the bourgeoisie will continue ruling, despite formal changes or changes in personnel.

3. Political environment and options in Latin America.

3.1. The defeat of the Republicans in the U.S. and Clinton's rise as head of the government of the main imperialist power has not been without consequences for Latin America. While preaching free trade and continental integration, the Democratic administration has reinforced its protectionist measures and, above all, strengthened the obstacles faced by immigrants, thus turning the stabilization of the regional migratory situation into a key aspect of its present strategy. Lacking a strategic enemy ("there is no communism anymore"), its traditional interventionist policy now disguises itself as an anti-drug or anti drug-trade campaign. Behind these maneuvers lies a systematic effort to prevent self-organization processes of sectors of the people from emerging or advancing, while they can also be used to blackmail governments immersed in the swamp of narco-politics, as is the case of Mexico, Argentina, Colombia, Paraguay, Bolivia.

3.2. The struggle against the Guatemalan, Nicaraguan, and Salvadorian revolutionary processes was a priority of the U.S. administrations during the 1980s. After the their defeat, imperialism has concentrated part of its attention on Haiti and Cuba.

Aristide's triumph in 1990 was based on a mobilized people, a people hungry for democracy, ready to sweep away all vestiges of Duvalierism. The military coup reduced to nought the measures taken by the new government. Forms of terror comparable to the worst moments of the Duvalier dictatorship were soon imposed with the objective of crushing a social movement which during the preceding decade (a unique case in Latin America and the Caribbean) had attained ever higher levels of consciousness. The almost unanimous popular rejection of the savage military dictatorship that had not weakened popular determination; the pressures placed on the U.S. government by the thousands that fled Haiti and sought asylum there; the firm position adopted by Aristide himself, and the role played by the Afro-American community in the U.S. electoral conjuncture; and Washington's plans for economic integration, were all factors that led Clinton to decide to invade the island in order to restore the legitimate government under the strict tutelage of U.S. troops.

Clinton's administration succeeded in presenting itself, not as a promoter of the coup, but as a champion of democracy, thus making the invasion seem the only possible option. This is the first time in which a U.S. occupation has gained such legitimacy - even if it is only temporary - in a Latin American country.

After going into exile, Aristide chose fundamentally to rely on the contradictions of U.S. imperialism to return to power in Haiti. He thus subordinated the growth of an internal resistance to the shifts and turns of his diplomatic activity. His return was a victory for the Haitian people, but it took place under conditions qualitatively different from those that characterized his election. His policies, which now assume the trappings of populism, locate themselves within a global program of structural adjustments, which is part of the U.S. strategy. The disillusionment of many, for whom Aristide had been a synonym of change, threatens to generate an even deeper demoralization. Nevertheless, the situation remains highly unstable.

3.3. The change of government in the U.S., on the one hand, and the feeling of political isolation generated by the fall of the Berlin Wall, on the other, created the context in which sectors of the Latin American left speak of significant changes regarding the first, and even come to regard it as a key ally. Such a radical shift in perspective is in principle explained by the enormous difficulty which the left confronts in elaborating a credible strategy for social change, but it must be forcefully opposed given the illusions it generates regarding the role of U.S. imperialism or the possibilities for social change without a radical break with the ruling power. Those positions place themselves within a perspective of conciliation, which subordinates the need for social mobilization, self-organization and a radical democratic break to the imperatives of "governability".

3.4. The crisis in Mexico is in many ways one of the most salient aspects of the present situation in Latin America. The party-state regime, and with it a whole system of political domination, is immersed in a crisis which may become terminal. The Salinas government, which had advanced the farthest in the integration of Mexico's dependent economy into the U.S. sphere of influence, until recently presented itself as a model to be followed by other Latin American governments. The signing and implementation of NAFTA offered a chance to mask the disastrous social consequences of the policies followed since 1982; the resources obtained through the privatization of public enterprises made it possible for the government to deploy its project of "social liberalism" through the National Solidarity Program (PRONASOL), which sought to ameliorate - not overcome - the extreme poverty suffered by a growing sector of the population and to, above all, co-opt social movements and leaders that had accepted the productivist discourse. The agrarian counter-reform unleashed in 1992 constituted a historical overturn for the country. It also became a watershed for the left, which split between those that supported or vacillated in their appreciation of this measure and those which correctly opposed it from the start, thus contributing to opening the path for the most radical social explosion in recent years.

The creation of a social, democratic movement organized around the National Democratic Convention (CND), a political-military force with national (and international) significance; a fractured ruling party - the major source of political instability in the country - with many of its leaders turned into narco-politicians, and the collapse of the economic project which has led to the devaluation of the peso and the worst financial crisis of the last few years, form the background in which the democratic and revolutionary left as well as the new government, formed after the fraudulent elections of August 1994, will have to maneuver.

The beginning of a democratic break embodied in the Zapatista uprising was temporarily interrupted by the electoral fraud of 1994 and by the left's underestimation of the Mexican government and bourgeoisie's continuing capacity to respond. A prolonged, conflictual and dangerous transition has now been opened. It will test the ability of Mexican revolutionaries to finish off the ancien regime. If the latter succeeds in neutralizing the ongoing social mobilizations, it will also open the path for the defeat of the EZLN and for recovering the ground it has lost. On the other hand, a coming together within a political movement of the social forces organized in the CND - the social basis of radical Neo-Cardenism - and the EZLN itself could, in the medium term, favor a radical democratic break which could put an end to the existing regime.

3.5. The main country of the region, Brazil, went through a prolonged social and economic crisis, a crisis which was used by the bourgeoisie to install a social apartheid in which

economic growth is built on the exclusion of a majority of the population. The deep political crisis among the Brazilian elites, social polarization, and the presence of a powerful popular-democratic bloc grouped around the PT, also made it possible for the social mobilizations which led to Collor's resignation in 1992 to deal a serious blow to the neo-liberal project.

After that date, the struggle between the coalition of conservative forces and the PT to build alternative social projects and to gain hegemony among the majority of the population became sharper and reached its climax in 1994, during the presidential elections. The result has been an important political defeat for the Brazilian people and the Brazilian left, as well as for the democratic and revolutionary forces outside Brazil that were hoping for a victory of the PT.

The Brazilian and international power elites carefully prepared themselves to prevent Lula's triumph. The Brazilian bourgeoisie subordinated its internal divisions to its strategic objectives, took advantage of the poverty and marginalization suffered by millions of Brazilians and found in Henrique Cardoso a figure capable of reconstituting a bourgeois center around the Brazilian Social-Democratic Party (PSDB)-Liberal Front Party (PFL) alliance, with which capital can now move forward in imposing its project of conservative restructuring.

Several elements explain the defeat of the PT and of the popular-democratic bloc. The neo-liberal project launched by Collor took Brazil into a deep recession, with the social consequences this implies. Social - and in particular working class - struggles went into retreat beginning in 1990, while the popular-democratic movement was not able to stop the offensive launched against it. To obtain Collor's resignation, the PT ably took advantage of the divisions of the bourgeoisie, of the means of mass communication and of popular mobilizations in the streets, but it was unable to redeploy that triumph in the struggle to take over the government. Mobilizations continued under Itamar's government, although at a much lower level.

Furthermore, the leadership of the PT underestimated how much the bourgeoisie had learned from the 1989 elections and the resources it was willing to invest in again preventing a victory of the PT. A triumphalist attitude (an electoral victory in the first round was taken for granted) prevailed during the first half of 1994, which demobilized many of the militants, while the party at the same time found itself paralyzed by the debate and the ambiguities of its position regarding the Real Plan. At the time of the elections the degree of social polarization was far less acute than it had been in 1989, when the PT came very close to taking over the government.

Cardoso's victory radically alters the socio-political landscape and threatens to close a period in the country's history. It forces the PT to re-evaluate its political orientation of the last few years, the way in which the party is constructed within society, its presence within bourgeois institutions, and above all, it poses the challenge of how to present itself as a consistent opposition to Cardoso and his party (PSDB), who have become its main adversaries and consciously seek to attract the support of some of the social sectors on which the PT has historically relied. From the first days of his tenure Cardoso has demonstrated his willingness to impose a radical program of capitalist re-structuration which requires breaking all social resistance. His response to the oil workers' strike of May 1995 has shown that one of the central objectives of the government is to decisively defeat the trade unions and in particular the Single Workers' Federation (CUT). This orientation, with its heavily authoritarian implications, requires constant blows against all points of resistance. It is thus particularly important that the PT maintain a policy of permanent mobilization and of no concessions vis-a-vis the government.

3.6. In Uruguay, after a virtual tie between the country's three main political forces, the traditional two party system has been irreversibly fractured, thus deepening the crisis of the political system. In a country with a culture of resistance and in which the left has hegemony over the popular movement, the campaign of the Frente Amplio has shown that, in spite of the unfavorable international situation, it is possible to deploy a discourse of open confrontation with the ruling system while at the same time growing electorally and socially.

Through a mass campaign based on mobilizations throughout the country, the presidential candidate of the Frente Amplio (FA)-Encuentro Progresista, Tabaré Vázquez, was able to polarize society by highlighting the nature of the projects proposed to the country: that of the Colorado and Blanco parties - the pillars of the traditional two party system - and that of the FA itself. The left received the votes of the most impoverished and marginalized social sectors, a fact which substantially differentiates this experience from other electoral processes in Latin America.

The electoral results constitute a shake-up of the Uruguayan political system in which instability and ungovernability may now become the dominant characteristics. Thus, an authoritarian turn by the Sanguinetti government should not be excluded, particularly if his coalition with the National Party fails and the economic crisis deepens. The Frente Amplio, and the forces of the revolutionary left grouped in the Popular Participation Movement (MPP), now face the challenge of giving concrete form to the demands of the popular sectors which supported them, which implies a rejection of all compromises based on the theory of "governability" promoted by the more conciliatory sectors of the Frente Amplio.

3.7. As in the case of Mexico, Brazil and Uruguay, recently held elections in several other countries determined the political conjuncture, since there were real possibilities that democratic and/or revolutionary left currents could form new governments (El Salvador, Venezuela), thus creating more favorable conditions in the struggle for a shift in the relationship of forces in the continent. The results are in and a balance sheet is in order.

The bourgeoisie and its governments,

without exception, formed a solid front to prevent a victory of the left. The state apparatus was placed at the service of the candidates of capital, by modifying existing laws (Mexico, Brazil), through terrorism (El Salvador, Mexico), or through electoral fraud (Venezuela, Mexico), to which one must add the media, the support from international capital (El Salvador, Mexico, Brazil), and the mistakes of the left itself.

The left underestimated this situation and in many cases used a discourse which - with the pretext of not scaring potential voter support - consciously sought to avoid polarizing society. Although the international context imposes certain adjustments in discourse, even on the program (the revolution is not around the corner), it must be pointed out that the obsession with the need to present a credible option has led to the notion that this requires limiting the level of social confrontation, while worrying more about the veto of those in power than the vote of the dispossessed, which in the end makes the latter feel excluded. It is true that the deepening economic and political dependence of our countries on imperialism allows the latter to exercise its political and economic blackmail from a position of increased strength, but it is precisely this fact which accentuates the importance of social mobilizations and, above all, of popular self-organization as key elements of any project seeking to achieve government power.

In this sense, it will be necessary to draw the lessons which flow from this and thus reformulate past strategies: it is impossible for the left to seek a democratic break while taking as its practical axis the search for "governability" over and above popular mobilization, or reducing the institutional struggle to the electoral question particularly when, as we know, the bourgeoisie has the means to alter the electoral game at any moment. The institutional spaces conquered by the left (it has obtained its best results in its history), if they are to be useful, must become true sources of popular counter-power. It is necessary to combat and reject the gradualist and conciliationist positions which, in the aftermath of electoral defeat, argue that victory was never possible and which now promote pacts with the governments in power, through "coalition governments," "national accords" or "co-governments."

3.8. The exclusion from citizenship rights which social marginalization implies once again poses the importance of democratic demands. Within an ever more polarized and exclusionary reality, these demands are imperative as the axis of any alternative project. Thus, in the face of the insulting celebration of 500 years of the Conquista, the indigenous peoples of the continent re-emerged to demand equal rights, recognition of their traditions, cultures, languages and, above all, the right to be recognized as different from the mestizos, thus questioning the concept of "nation" imposed by the West. These democratic demands are playing a key role in the struggles going on in Ecuador, Mexico, Bolivia, Chile, Paraguay and Guatemala.

These democratic aspirations were also present in the mobilizations and struggles which led to the fall of Collor and C.A. Pérez, as well as in Panama, Nicaragua, Uruguay, and the Dominican Republic, in the ongoing democratic re-birth in Chile around the trial of the assassins of Orlando Letelier, as well as in Argentina, as a result of new revelations regarding the genocide carried out by the dictatorship. If these democratic aspirations are to generate a dynamic tending toward a radical-democratic break, they must stimulate not only actions within the existing legal framework, but also a clear orientation of struggle against military tutelage or impunity as well as against all forms of authoritarianism. The continuity between those aspirations and such a break is not guaranteed, as political vacillations or lack of credible alternatives would permit the bourgeoisie and its governments to retake the initiative.

Like the rest of the world, Latin America is going through a transition marked by economic, political and social convulsions. Far from implying a uniform dynamic, this generates and reproduces diverse forms of struggle, new experiences, varied expressions of radicalism. It is in this framework, and without having recovered from the shock constituted by the collapse and disappearance of the "socialist bloc", that left-wing currents have had to re-examine many of the precepts which governed their action in the past. This has given rise to many ongoing discussions. Given that these conditions have produced a certain socio-political differentiation but which is as yet incomplete, the form and content of these discussions takes on greater relevance.

4. Debates and Situation of the Left

4.1. The creation of the São Paulo Forum in 1990 is the most important international attempt to create a shared point of reference and a common framework for discussion in the left. It is plural and democratic and it promotes necessary debates. Nevertheless, the five meetings which have taken place so far have demonstrated that its main weakness lies in the lack of connection between what is discussed and what is done, and in the distance - which was evident in the Fifth Forum which met in Uruguay - that separates the institutional left from the social left. It is the latter which, structured around the popular movements, carries most of the weight of the resistance against the neo-liberal project. The internationalism which many members of the Forum claim to defend has not gone beyond the limits determined by narrow interests. The refusal of the majority of the members and participants of the Forum to denounce the electoral fraud in Mexico (Managua, 1993), "justified" by the links of those forces with the Mexican government; the lack of any continental initiatives in solidarity with the Zapatista rising; the lack of criticism of the role of the Free Bolivia Movement (MBL), a member of the Forum, in the repression of the Bolivian people; the silence regarding the war into which the people of Peru and Ecuador have been dragged, cannot be passed over. Without losing sight of the fact that the Forum is not a homogenous movement or that the revolutionary currents within it constitute a minority, a debate must be urgently promoted regarding its composition and the ways in which it could bring some coherence and

substance to its declarations. Only thus could this valuable instrument be saved from becoming another failed project of the Latin American left. Regardless of political creeds, the crisis in Eastern Europe has dealt a blow to the Latin American and international left as a whole and its effects will persist for a long time. The few remaining CPs (with the exception of the Cuban CP) have been swept away by the crisis. Organizations which identified themselves as Marxist and/or revolutionary have turned to liberal positions. This is the case of the majority of the Salvadorian ERP (Renewed Expression of the People, formerly the Revolutionary Army of the People), Radical Democracy in the PT of Brazil, part of the leadership of the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN). In other cases, as in the case of our international current, they have been weakened, given the difficulties encountered in adjusting to the new political situation. To these factors we must add the effects generated by defeats in Nicaragua, El Salvador and the crisis of the Cuban Revolution.

4.2. In Nicaragua we have seen a qualitative reversal of the conquests of the revolution. The sector known as the "Area of Workers' Property" is highly bureaucratized; the achievements of the agrarian reform, in education, etc. have been totally or partially dismantled in accordance with the interests of the speculative and rentier sectors of the Nicaraguan bourgeoisie; the perspective of the army and police as defenders of the people has been eroded, while the country as a whole, wearied by the destruction generated by the war and its foreign debt, remains subordinated to imperialist pressures and to the blackmail of the U.S., the IMF and the World Bank.

After a painful internal struggle the FSLN has split. Some of its leaders have been converted to liberalism, others make apologies for the Mexican regime, in the name of "stability" some have ordered the repression of popular mobilizations while others have used undemocratic methods to impose their decisions, and this leaves out those involved in corrupt acts (the "piñata"). A portion of its social base has left out of dissatisfaction with the policies of its leaders or because caudillista methods obstruct any democratic functioning, as was demonstrated by the 2nd Congress of the FSLN.

When we held our 1991 World Congress we stated that the electoral results of 1990 constituted a significant political defeat but we hoped that the Frente would be able to resist and reorganize the people to regain power. Today, in spite of the break up of the National Opposition Union (UNO), this hypothesis is in doubt. The limiting of social mobilizations, the resistance to democratizing the FSLN, and its split into two opposing currents, which have weakened it politically and socially, make it all the more difficult to defend what is left of the conquests of the revolution. Even if one of the currents claiming the heritage of Sandinismo again takes over the government in 1996, this will not imply retaking the reins of power; in other words, it will not imply resuming the leadership of a process interrupted in 1990.

4.3. In El Salvador, where the International accompanied the revolutionary process from the start, it is necessary to formulate certain considerations in the aftermath of the Peace Accords, the results of the elections and the break up of the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN). During 10 years of civil war, the FMLN exhibited a political-military capacity which inspired a whole generation of militants. Neither imperialist support or death squads, nor the assassination of 80,000 civilians, were able to stop the momentum and capacity of this organization which became the undisputed vanguard of the mass movement.

The defeat of the 1989 offensive, the shift in the international situation, the war-weariness of the people, including its most politicized sectors, led the FMLN to seek a negotiated end to the armed conflict, through which it secured a peace accord without defeat, thus opening a conflictive transition in the aftermath of a bloody war.

The negotiations completed in 1992 counterposed two tendencies which had been crystallizing since the 1989 offensive. On one side were those that concluded that the revolution was not a break but a process (the majority of the ERP and the National Resistance - RN); on the other, those that argued that the accords were only one phase (the political revolution) after which the social revolution should be carried out (Popular Liberation Forces - FPL, Revolutionary Party of Central American Workers - PRTC), with both sides coinciding in the notion of unleashing a democratic revolutionary process (for a new economic, social and democratic order).

The Chapultepec Accords could not have been anything more than the beginning of a solution to the armed conflict, but the turn towards liberal and renegade positions by the main leaders of the ERP and the RN completely upset the delicate balance within the FMLN. After the failure in the 1994 elections, a crisis broke out over the support given by part of the ERP and RN to the National Republican Alliance (ARENA) government. Having lost the common objective which united it, the FMLN now moves around two differentiated projects: the project of the CP-FPL-PRTC and the tendency that broke from the ERP, on the one hand, and the project of the RN and of the Villalobos current, which have left the Front to create the Partido Demócrata, on the other. It must be underlined that a large majority of cadre and militants exists which correctly insists in giving priority to popular mobilizations to make sure that the Chapultepec Accords will be respected. It is this sector which the International must address, joining the fight to ensure that the Accords are respected while also struggling against those currents which now seek to deform the history of that proletarian revolution, presenting it as the adventure of a minority which for 10 years sought to "take power by assault".

4.4. The significance of the Central American revolutions must be assessed on the basis of the extremely weak and dependent character of its economies and of the existing international political situation. Both revolutions confronted the U.S.

political-military machine; the material and human consequences of the war (150,000 dead in the two countries in 10 years) must not be forgotten. The militarization of social structures as a whole led to a proportional and parallel militarization of the revolutionary organizations, thus favoring verticalism at the expense of democratic functioning, a situation which had (and has) consequences for the relations among revolutionary organizations themselves as well as their relations with other social organizations and sectors.

Furthermore, although there was a movement of international solidarity, it must be admitted that it did not match the needs of the two revolutionaryprocesses, particularly as imperialism and international social democracy, through different means, opted for sabotaging them. Thus, the international left, as well as the apathy in which workers of the imperialist countries have been submerged for the last 10 years and the generalized retreat of internationalism in all countries, are also responsible for the defeat of the Central American revolution. Given the extent of the crisis of the Central American revolutionary project, our current is forced to rediscuss its political orientation in this zone, to draw from the experiences of both processes as well as participate in the debate which at present involves thousands of militants committed to international solidarity, a debate in which questions such as whom to support and with what objectives must be answered.

4.5. Between 1991 and today our presence as a current became weaker in Latin America. As a result of the crisis mentioned above and of our own failings, we ceased to exist in several countries. The core of militants that for ten years ensured the continuity of our political work is not functioning in a structured fashion. A new collective leadership must be built. This crisis has not been compensated by the affiliation of those groups and organizations which in the same period have joined the International. The debate regarding our prospects in Latin America must advance in the context of the discussion regarding the future of the International as such. Our stronger social implantation in those countries where we retain organizations must be the basis for facing this challenge. New dilemmas, forms of struggle, and social actors have made their appearance, and the possibilities processes leading to radical breaks continue to exist. We are but one part of the revolutionary left that exists in the region. We must orient our efforts toward transforming those possibilities into realities.

On the Cuban crisis

1 February 1996

The generalized shortages of the “special peace time period” (a sort of sui generis war communism) in effect since 1990, and the constant aggravation of the living conditions of the population, forced the Castro leadership to begin a process of economic reforms in 1993. The opening to foreign capital, the development of tourism, the legalisation of the dollar were the first decisions adopted to stem the generalized economic recession and the brutal drop in the living standards of the population which was behind he flight of the balseros in August 1994.

2) The massive exodus and the demonstrations of August 1994, represented a turning point in the evolution of the situation and stimulated the acceleration of the reforms. For the first time since 1986 the free farmer’s markets were reestablished and the prices fixed according to offer and demand. The failure of the food plan, the constant degradation of the quality of food for the population which had been previously assured by the libreta, the development of an underground economy and black market in dollars, forced the Castro leadership to retract the decisions that it had imposed in the name of the “rectifiation process of negative errors and tendencies” decided by the third congress of the CCP.

Private initiative was henceforth reestablished and encouraged, at least for the small peasants as well as for the various artisanal or service activities. The continuing decentralisation was supposed to stimulate the development -on the municipal level-of independent activities and favor the development of an informal sector tied especially to the growth of tourism (for which prostitution is one of the most negative consequences).

The farmer markets assure supplies to the most well-off sectors: the prices are very high but they are set in pesos and therefore accessable (unlike the black market) to those who do not have dollars.

3) the general impoverishment is nevertheless dramatic and the acceleration of the adjustments in process, under the pressure of financial institutions of European and Latin-American governments, have further aggravated the problems of daily life. In addition to the inequalities which have resulted from the reforms, are the consequences flowing from the rationalisation of the State apparatus and of the enterprises that have resulted in around 500,000 lay-offs. The preservation of a portion of previous wages and the possibilities of alternative work under very strict conditions (essentially in agriculture) does not make up for the loss of revenues. As for the social gains in health and education they are not (for the moment) threatened, but the deterioration of the quality of services in considerable. The measures taken to expand labor productivity (suppression of excess personnel, productivity bonuses, bonuses in dollars, increased work discipline)

increase the pressure on wage workers without however, involving a compensation in terms of worker control in the enterprises or mass participation in the city governments or neighborhoods.

As for the unions, their role consists in stimulating production, to popularize the economic reforms in the framework of the well-known on-the-job "efficiency assemblies" while softening the consequences of the current changes.

In the mixed enterprises (joint-ventures), the wagearners do not have any other protection than the very limited ones granted the union or the CCP cells but they enjoy better wages and numerous material advantages in relation of the workers of the State enterprises which explains the increase in job seekers in this sector. The Cuban economy now functions at two speeds.

4) The current change is the result of contradictory political plans. The debates which took place in leadership circles, amongst intellectuals, researchers and professors have resulted in a provisional consensus on the inevitability of the economic opening. But the concepts are different. For some the economic opening must not threaten the political system: But the Chinese "example " which inspires them is not applicable in Cuba if only because Washington will not allow Havana to do what it allows Peking to do.

For the others (inspired by social democracy) the economic reforms must be a prelude to a radical political recasting of institutions. Only a parliamentary democracy and a generalized market economy will be able to bring about the lifting of the American embargo without which according to them, no economic recovery will be possible.

Only a minority of political leaders and researchers consider the current economic opening as a necessary evil given the international isolation of the island, but propose that this "NEP" be accompanied by political changes going in the direction of an expansion of the decision making powers of wage workers, of a rank and file democracy and of an antibureaucratic struggle which would have to involve changes in the current functioning of organs of popular power (OPP). This orientation which would involve giving the population expanded powers of control could allow the limiting of the aggravation of work conditions and the deterioration of the standard of living of the workers on one hand, and the enrichment of bureaucrats involved in trade or of the personel involved with tourism or of commercial agriculture on the other.

5) The current reforms are undermining the social base of the regime; the ideological disarray, the absence of perspectives and especially the erosion of revolutionary legitimacy have had effects as serious as the economic shortages; furthermore, the confusion is aggravated by the absence of debates and encounters which would allow the collective development of a middle term survival plan. Without such a democratisation of political institutions (the OPP) the possibilities to save the revolution are more compromised given the fact that the isolation of Cuba is nearly total in an international context marked by a generalized decline of revolutionary struggles;

It is true that the monopoly of power enjoyed by the Castroists is less absolute, the leadership teams are progressively rejuvenated, the role of the CCP has been weakened and intellectuals can express themselves more freely. But no organized political current is allowed including within the CCP. The written and oral expression of political alternatives to those of the regime remains prohibited in the press or in the media. The repression against dissidents is still in place;

The Cuban people has thus remained the prisoner for more than three decades of a contradiction that it can not resolve on its own: to defend a national sovereignty and hard won social gains by silently accepting the power of the figure who incarnates national and revolutionary legitimacy in the face of imperialist domination; or it can revolt against Castro, the father of the nation and in doing so threaten its independence.

This contradiction is the result of the geopolitical balance of forces which has been extraordinarily unfavourable to the Cuban revolution since the beginning;

6) The survival of the Castro regime is above all threatened by the unremitting harassment by the American government. No country has suffered as long an ordeal. In Vietnam, the US embargo has been lifted. China enjoys most favored nation status and, the US administration has not hesitated to negotiate with the North Korean regime. However, after 35 years of unilateral economic embargo and sanctions increased by the Torricelli law in 1992 and by measures taken by Bill Clinton in the summer of 1994, the new Republican majority is preparing to adopt the bill of Senator Jesse Helms, president of the Senate Commission on Foreign Affairs which aims at blocking foreign investments on the island, the sole means by which the country can receive capital and technology.

The avowed goal of the US administration is to eliminate Fidel Castro and his regime and to show that any socialist revolution in the Western hemisphere is destined to fail, as was seen in Grenada, Nicaragua and Central America. The fate reserved for Cuba in the event of the fall of the Castroite revolution could be worse than that of Nicaragua and would represent a significant historical setback. The Cuban people know this: their silence expresses the current impasse and the lack of perspectives. There is a risk that the only possibility in the region, that of Latin American economic integration will take place under the domination of Washington; a year after the signing of NAFTA the Mexican crisis shows the effects of a free trade zone running from Alaska to the Southern tip of the continent;

7) We defend the Cuban revolution because we are against the oppression of the weakest by the strongest, for the independence of a small country against the hegemonic will of the leading military power in the world;

The fact that this is a socialist revolution for which the initial project was one of the most internationalist of this century and for which the social

gains were amongst the most important ever acquired by a third world country explains why this nation could stand up to North American aggression. Certainly without aid from the USSR the island could not in the context of the Cold War hold out for long. But this aid had dramatic side effects. The "international socialist" division of labor maintained Cuba in a situation of subordination to the Comecon and prohibited the elaboration of autonomous economic development.

Prisoner of its geo-political borders, the country was protected somewhat by the cold war without however, ever being the master of its destiny. The dramatic episode of the missile crisis referred to by Che in his farewell letter was a tragic illustration of this. Like Vietnam, Cuba paid dearly for the squabbles between the super powers.

8) The bureaucratic deformations, the repressive practices and Caudillo-like functioning of Castro likewise contributed to the progressive decline of the influence of the revolution. But a country at war, besieged for 35 years, without energy resources could not be a model of socialist democracy. Socialism on a small island was obviously even more impossible than in the Soviet Union. But this doesn't mean that Castro's failures absolve him from not answering the imperialist campaign around human rights. He is guilty of not dissociating himself from Stalinism after the fall of the Berlin wall.

Our criticism centers on the absence of political pluralism and the repression of democratic rights, but in no case is it to be confused with those who demand "free" elections (with the Miami-based parties) and the restitution of expropriated property in order to assure the "democratic" victory of the counterrevolution like in Nicaragua. Under the current conditions in Cuba, a counter revolution would involve a civil war.

To demand the respect of democratic rights presupposes a struggle for the unconditional lifting of the US embargo which is the most basic of democratic rights, for the halting of aggression and blackmail without conditions. In this fight we are at the side of the Cuban people and the Castro leadership against imperialism. But this anti-Imperialist solidarity does in no way involve support of the Castro leadership when it deprives its people of all power to protest and self rule. In the resistance-for the time being silent-of the Cuban people against the bureaucracy, we support all struggles for reforms which involve a perspective of defense of the gains of the revolution. The institutions of popular power (from the local level to the National assembly must be democratized to allow the pluralist expression of different currents, the mass organizations must cease being transmission belts for the party, the factory assemblies must have control over the current economic restructuring.

The US aggression favors the preservation of bureaucratic domination. Only the halting of this aggression can stimulate the independent mobilisation of the Cuban masses, a necessary condition for the survival of the revolution;

On the other hand, the overthrow of Fidel Castro by the Miami forces will not be the signal of a Cuban revolution, but rather, the victory of the counter revolution.