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Achieving tactical success without a strategic vision

10 December 2000, by **Gerard Greenfield**



Samsung workers demonstrate

Lately, however, this confidence has been shaken, if not shattered. The lead editorial in a recent issue of the *Economist* views anti-capitalist protests as "angry and effective." More importantly, the editorial warns that globalisation is not inevitable and irreversible as the neoliberal ideologues have insisted for the past two decades. Rather, the very fact that globalisation can be reversed is what makes anti-globalisation movements so dangerous:

"The protesters are right that the most pressing moral, political and economic issue of our time is third-world poverty. And they are right that the tide of 'globalisation', powerful as the engines driving it may be, can be turned back. The fact that both these things are true is what makes the protesters - and, crucially, the strand of popular opinion that sympathizes with them - so terribly dangerous." (*The Economist*, September 23, 2000)

The *Economist* makes it very clear that open declarations of capitalist confidence are harmful at the present time. Instead, the legitimacy of globalisation - and, crucially, of capitalism - must be restored. The

tactic for achieving this is to focus on Third World poverty. That's why the magazine goes on to argue that the greatest beneficiaries of globalisation are the Third World poor, and it's the anti-globalisation protesters who are condemning them to continued poverty.

The post-Seattle WTO has also recast itself as the ally of the poor and marginalised. As Mike Moore, the Director-General of the WTO, declared: "It is poor people in poor countries who are grasping the opportunities provided by trade and technology to try to better their lives. Mexican farm hands who pick fruit in California, Bangladeshi seamstresses who make clothes for Europeans, and South African phone-shop owners who hawk time on mobile phones to their fellow township dwellers. They and countless other real people everywhere are the human face of globalisation." So it seems that restoring the legitimacy of the WTO, after what they called "the setback in Seattle", involves greater emphasis on world poverty as the main issue. At the same time, some of the world's largest TNCs - with the worst records of labour repression, cultural and ecological destruction and genocide (of which Nike and Shell are just two examples) have founded a new partnership with the United Nations to

save the world's poor. Helping the world's poor under the UN corporate partnership makes it a commercial activity - a commodity like everything else. Without having any effect whatsoever on what these TNCs actually do to the planet and the mass of the people on it, this tactic serves to restore the legitimacy of corporate rule and regain the confidence of previous years.

But Mike Moore has gone a step further in these troubled times. In sharp contrast to the days of ridiculing our internationalism by misusing our slogans, we now find Comrade Mike talking about our internationalism as the shared tradition of the WTO: "We on the Left have a lot to be proud of. We built the Welfare State that looks after people when they are sick, poor, or old. We fought for the equality of women and minorities. We argued passionately for internationalism, for solidarity between workers in Sweden and those in Africa." (Mike Moore, WTO Director General, July 26, 2000)

At one level this is just a change in rhetoric. It's a tactical maneuver, not a change in strategy. It's certainly not a fundamental shift in the nature of the globalisation project. This tactic seeks to restore a degree of legitimacy and limit the damage done by the anti-globalisation movements. In other words, it's a way of making us less

dangerous.

However, it's important to recognise that the protests in Seattle also produced its share of rhetoric. The slogan "Shutdown the WTO" may have meant "abolish the WTO" for many progressive labour and social activists, but for more conservative unions and social groups it meant "shutdown this particular WTO meeting." In this sense it was merely symbolic. Dozens of WTO-related meetings among technocrats preceded the Seattle meeting, and as many have taken place since.

The rhetoric was even more apparent when the president of the AFL-CIO, John Sweeney, declared at the start of the protests, "Today we are making history!" Even before the protests had ended he announced, "We have made history!" It was less a first step than the last. The WTO was shaken, but not broken, and it was time for the AFL-CIO to get back to the negotiating table to insist on a reformed WTO - with a social clause and without China. The tactics behind the slogans were not only lacking a strategy, but lacked a common goal.

It no longer makes sense to simply accuse the WTO and other agencies of global capitalism of neglecting the poor, failing to recognise the importance of ... (insert any social or environmental issue here), or lacking democracy. Since Seattle there have been numerous speeches and publications churned out by the WTO technocracy which assert the importance of democracy, human rights, environmental protection, social needs, the primacy of "the social market" over the "the free market", and the need to eradicate poverty. Meanwhile, since Seattle, five more countries have joined the WTO (Another 25 will join in the next couple of years). Key agreements have been expanded, and the number and intensity of trade talks and backroom deals has increased - not decreased. So where does that leave us?

As an oppositional strategy, pointing out what is missing in the WTO doesn't really tell us very much about what it is we're up against. Those unions, NGOs and social coalitions which want to reform agencies like the

WTO employ tactics of lobbying, alternative policy input, and social clauses. The tactic of including those things they believe are missing from the WTO agenda is based on certain key assumptions about what the WTO is and what it does. For a start, they assume the WTO and agencies like it are institutions or organisations. They also assume that the main function of institutions like the WTO is to make and implement policies or trade agreements. Based on this, the problem becomes narrowly defined: in running these institutions and making policies and agreements there is too much corporate control and not enough control by social, labour and environmental groups (collectively called "civil society"). This then means that globalisation itself is not seen as a problem. It's the kind of globalisation that is in question. This then becomes a contest between corporate globalisation and a people-centred or more humane kind of globalisation.

By accepting globalisation and focusing on the rhetoric of poverty, democracy and social inclusion, these civil society groups are in fact helping the WTO out of its crisis of legitimacy. This occurs at a time when the very thing we should be doing is deepening the crisis. More importantly, these civil society and social groups are creating conditions that would render the anti-globalisation movements less dangerous both for themselves and for the political and economic elite. They've clearly missed the point. We can only be effective if we continue doing whatever it is that makes us dangerous - and do it better. It's in being uncivil society that we find we can challenge the WTO and what really lies behind it.

To launch such a challenge it's important to understand that the WTO is not about institutions and agreements. It's not even about trade. The following is an example of the changes under globalisation which suggest that trade is not the primary issue. In 1999 the value of global exports totaled US\$7 trillion. In the same year the value of sales by the 690,000 foreign affiliates of the world's 63,000 TNCs was nearly double, at US\$13.5 trillion. It's also significant that while worldwide exports tripled in the period from

1982 to 1999, the sales by TNCs' foreign affiliates increased six times - at twice the rate (UN World Investment Report 2000). What this suggests is that free trade is not really about increasing the flow of goods and services across borders, but in increasing the dominance and control of local markets by TNCs. More fundamentally, it increases our dependence on these TNCs.

This dependency reflects a critical dimension of what the WTO, NAFTA and other free trade agreements really are. They are not just institutions and agreements, but are regimes. Basically, a regime is an arrangement of political power. In this case free trade and investment regimes refer to an arrangement of political power between countries and between corporations and governments. For example, under the WTO regime the arrangement of power between countries freezes the members of the WTO into a hierarchy of **developed', developing' and least-developed.'** **By banning certain kinds of industrial and development policies in the developing' and least-developed' countries and increasing overall dependency on TNCs, the WTO regime ensures that only those countries which are already developed' stay at the top of this hierarchy.** Free trade and investment regimes also establish an arrangement of political power between corporations and governments. It's already well understood that the free trade agenda is about increasing the power and freedom of corporations, especially TNCs. This kind of freedom is what defines globalisation:

"I would define globalisation as the freedom for my group of companies to invest where it wants when it wants, to produce what it wants, to buy and sell where it wants, and support the fewest restrictions possible coming from labour laws and social conventions." (Percy Barnevik, President of the ABB Industrial Group)

Getting rid of these restrictions has meant redefining domestic regulation in ways that protect the interests of TNCs while placing new restrictions

on the ability of governments to regulate them. For example, between 1991 and 1999 there were 1,035 changes worldwide in laws on foreign investment. Of those changes, 94 per cent increased the freedom of foreign investors and reduced government regulation (UN World Investment Report 2000). The effect of such changes is not only to force policy-making and the judicial process to become more like the US, but to restrict the future possible actions of governments and isolate them from the pressure of labour and social movements.

As we saw in the NAFTA challenge by Ethyl Corp against the Canadian government in 1997, and in the recent NAFTA ruling in favour of Metalclad Corp against the Mexican government, it's not just an assault on environmental regulation that we should be concerned about. It's an assault on the original local struggles that brought this legislation into being in the first place. In this sense, rolling back social and environmental legislation under free trade means rolling back the past victories of labour and social movements.

What the NAFTA challenges also showed was that federal governments are often willing to lose these cases so that they discipline provincial, state or municipal governments which have adopted progressive social and environmental policies. Where federal governments do not have the legal or political power to reverse such legislation, it can allow the external intervention of NAFTA and the WTO to act on its behalf. The WTO is often accused of secrecy and a lack of democracy. This easily leads to proposals for greater transparency and openness. Yet such an approach ignores the fact that we need to have the ability to do something about what we see, otherwise we'll just be spectators in a transparent process. It's not just the absence of democracy in the WTO and NAFTA that is the problem, but the outright hostility towards democracy. Aggressively cutting back our ability to impose democratic priorities on capital is not an afterthought - it lies at the very

heart of the globalisation project. It also reminds us that the entire WTO process of becoming a member and obeying the rules rests on threats and coercion. It's the threat of trade sanctions that drives it, not human needs or common sense.

The continued spread of international and local protests against globalisation in recent months has deepened the WTO's crisis of legitimacy - a crisis which was most apparent in Seattle in November 1999. This is not only an external crisis. There are serious disagreements between the governments of developing and developed countries over the WTO rules, deadlines and procedures which have stalled several negotiations. Despite this, key governments (especially the US, EU, Japanese and Canadian governments) are attempting to expand the scope of WTO agreements and to strengthen its powers. To effectively challenge this we must not help the WTO out of its crisis of legitimacy by calling for its reform. Instead we need to deepen the crisis and create the political conditions necessary to abolish the WTO and the free trade and investment regimes which lie behind it.

We should be clear that a world without the WTO and NAFTA would not be a world without rules on international trade. Rules already exist at the local and national level in most countries, providing much needed social and environmental protection and regulating the trade in goods and services in ways that are less harmful (and sometimes even beneficial) to working people. What is needed now is that these rules are strengthened and expanded to manage trade more effectively in the interests of working people on both sides of any trading relationship. But this isn't simply a matter of replacing free trade with fair trade. Having fair trade makes no sense if a country has been forced for the last hundred years to grow and export coffee, or if people are starving and exporting rice at the same time. What this suggests is that

we need a fundamental rethinking about why we trade, what we trade and the need for local alternatives.

However, for the countries in the South such alternatives can't even be considered as long as they are burdened by international debt. The pressure of debt repayment is a driving force behind exports, locking these countries into the free trade and investment regime of the WTO and the structural adjustment policies of the World Bank and IMF. The total and immediate cancellation of Third World debt and increased, unconditional international social assistance is necessary before any system of fair trade can be truly effective.

The claim that a world without the WTO would be a world without rules is untrue because at the international level we already have a wide range of rules: treaties and conventions on human rights, labor and trade union rights, economic, social and cultural rights, as well as rules which restrict harmful forms of international trade such as toxic waste and military arms. These international rules were the result of a long history of popular struggles worldwide, and it's necessary now more than ever before to reassert the priority of these conventions and principles. We should do so not by including them in the WTO or NAFTA so that our principles and rights are absorbed, distorted and commercialized under free trade and investment regimes, but by reasserting the importance of fundamental rights and freedoms over and above trade and investment, and regaining ground against the globalisation project.

To move forward labour and social movements must first regain their ability to force governments at all levels to regulate trade and investment in ways that subordinate the activities of TNCs to the broader social needs and interests of working people. This makes it necessary to abolish those free trade and investment regimes which lock the state [upwards' into the global interests of TNCs](#) and away' from popular pressure from below.

Reflections on globalisation

10 December 2000, by **Fausto Bertinotti**

We have to pose ourselves the question of why and how a movement born for the freedom of all was able to end up in reality in forms of oppression. The historic movement of Communism has to give a response, in spite all the difficulties that this involves.

It would be easier, indeed more acceptable intellectually, to develop a critique of the outcome of an openly oppressive ideology. However we must approach the contrary case: that of an ideology and of a culture of liberation, which represents the highest point reached by the idea of liberty in the history of human thought. We should then suppose that in the course of events the forces which identify themselves with this ideology, in most of their experiences, have contradicted radically the project from which they originated (...)

The ideas of Marx have experienced an at least three-dimensional development. The first dimension is that of ideal communism, that is the development of the overall doctrine, of the ideology, of the culture which flowed from the Marxian approach; the second is represented by the post-revolutionary state experiences which followed the 1917 revolution in Russia (...); the third is that of the history of the workers' movement as a whole and, inside this latter, the history of the movements, the class struggle and its political expressions such as they developed in western Europe. These elements as a whole configure the history of a century of the workers' movement. In this global balance sheet, instead of starting from the errors and the bankruptcy of the countries of the East, the reasons and motor causes of this bankruptcy, which poses, moreover, gigantic questions, it is opportune and necessary to reflect first on the thought of Marx.

I share the opinion of Marxist

researchers who, in the course of the last decades, have argued that Marx represented the highest point of political thought, which resides precisely in the concept of revolution.

Nonetheless, judged on the basis of historic experience, it should be said that his thought also contains elements in need of development and gaps, which, certainly, does not explain the tragic events which have marked the history of the workers' movement, but should not be minimized to the extent that these "gaps" paved the way to errors which happened subsequently.

Marx and his heirs

But first it is necessary to reflect on the heritage and the heirs. So far as ideal communism is concerned I continue to believe that Marx's thought on freedom has not been surpassed, even if there have been some great Communist thinkers in the past century, for example Gramsci, who, at a determined historic moment, marked a new evolution of Marxism, without forgetting the gigantic contribution of the great revolutionaries who combined action and thought in the first decade of the 20th century, from Kautsky to Rosa Luxembourg, from Trotsky to Lenin, not to speak of great contemporaries like Sweezy and Marcuse. It is above all in the course of the last decades that there has been an obscuring of the most radical kernel of Marx's thought. This obscuring is not only determined by a great historic event, that is the defeat of the last great movement which has raised the question of revolution: I refer to the worker and student revolt of the late 1960s, whose defeat indisputably closed a door to the evolution of Marxist thought. But even before this defeat - and still more after - the theme of freedom was advanced in terms similar enough to those that had

been used before Marx, that is by a juxtaposition of freedom and equality and an attempt at composition between these two terms which, in the Communist movement itself, seems closer to democratic thought than the original thought of Marx.

After the advent of Fordism-Taylorism Marxist thought experienced a scientist turn, which led to its conceiving the development of the productive forces and technique, fundamentally, as a necessary basis for the pursuit of a process of social emancipation and of liberty. (pp. 29-32)

(...) Despite the obscuring of the project that Marx conceived as the basis of human liberty and despite the limits of his thought and the errors which occurred throughout a whole historic experience... Marx is confirmed as having discovered a fundamental law of history, that is that capitalism is a negator of liberty and that the liberty which can be produced in its framework is the result of a historic process which had links with communism, the struggles and the attempts to realize it. (p. 42)

(...) I remain convinced that our principal critique of the experience of the countries of actually existing socialism concerns their lack of socialism (...). Nonetheless, this lack of socialism does not entirely explain the shortage of democracy and the existence of forms of oppression against persons.

But all this cannot be really explained without the spirit, the idea of liberation in Marx, who indicates as the polar star the human perspective of a free activity for all.

Yet, while affirming this, we should be absolutely conscious that more than ever we need a theory of legality. (...)

There is then a supplementary,

specific element which should be approached in the process of transformation of capitalist society, whose center remains the transcendence of private property and the socialization of work, in other words, liberation from work. This aspect should not be neglected: we need a theory of the state, of legality and of democracy. In this respect the liberal and democratic thinkers were right, while being wrong for the essential. (p. 45)

(...) In the preceding phase of the development of capitalist society there was a confrontation between reformist projects and revolutionary projects. Both have suffered a defeat. So far as the reformist project is concerned, I refer as much to the reformism of the workers' movement as to bourgeois reformism (in relation to this latter our critique is still more practical and pertinent). But today we should have a still more radical attitude. We are not witnessing an attenuation of inequality but its accentuation. Yet this process develops without being contested by the center-left governments. (p. 65)

Class consciousness and crises of Marxism

(...) As we know, there have always been two critical interpretations, one which attributes to Marx a completely progressive reading of capitalism, the other which only grasps the negative side which the full development of the class struggle alone can reverse. This paradox helps us even today to reflect on the complexity as much of capitalism as of the class struggle, but undoubtedly also on the social and human condition under capitalism.

To a certain extent this can be grasped if one reflects on the fate of the working class itself. It has been the basis of capitalist accumulation through its labour power and at the same time it is the subject of transformation in its condition of class and acquired class consciousness. We should nonetheless understand that it amounts to a simplification inasmuch as it is in this historic process itself that we can resolve a question which,

if not, would have no solution. If a total capitalist alienation existed, it would be impossible to conceive at the same time the possibility of freeing oneself from this alienation.

We should then take up a formula used by Claudio Napoleoni, [1] that is to admit that there is a residue, something which in some measure escapes capitalist alienation while being connected to this latter. (pp. 88-89)

(...) Without the critique of wage labour there is no possibility of materializing a radical contestation of the system capitalist, nor of founding a new revolutionary subject, nor of grasping these two big questions.

I believe still that the different crises of Marxism have had a link with the evolution of class consciousness. For example, at the beginning of the 20th century, contrary to predictions, the growth of class consciousness did not have a linear and uninterrupted progression. This has had some important effects on theoretical certainties in the evolution of Marxist thought.

While not sliding towards a determinist approach, it is indisputable that the different crises of Marxism are in relation to the fundamental changes in capitalist society. Thus, class consciousness can be related to a serious defeat or an effect of displacement provoked by capitalism's ability to change its own structures. That can happen as much through a direct hegemonic process as through an obstruction of antagonistic projects. This effect of displacement has resulted from several elements: notably the setback represented by the defeat of the movement of students and workers at the end of the 1960s, the collapse of the eastern regimes and the development of the capitalist revolution today known as "globalisation".

These three elements have determined a change of scenario which has implications for the question of work. The thesis of the end of work has been completely disproved. It is necessary, nonetheless, to ask the question of why it has been raised. My response is that precisely the appearance of this

thesis demonstrates that it is the question of work that is at stake here. In other words, to give value to the idea of the end of conflict in a global model of society it is necessary to try to make work itself disappear from the social scene.

Nonetheless, work has not disappeared: it has been profoundly revolutionized. We can henceforth bring together numerous elements of enquiry and analysis on the new condition of work, a real overall picture as much on the world as on the regional level. We can also observe the modifications which have taken place in both the organization of work and its social composition. However, we do not yet possess a unitary key of interpretation. (pp. 93-94)

Current stage of capitalism

(...) At the current stage of the development of capitalism, it is necessary to grasp another aspect of the reorganization of work, which determines, downwards, a change of social composition, stimulated by the effort to buy labour power at the lowest price. We should add here the revolution in information technology and communication.

This component of the revolution of capitalism directly concerns the organization of work. In fact, it modifies not only the relationship of the productive process, of space and time, but also the relationship of finance and productive capital, in the sense that financialisation is a process originating to a decisive extent from the possibility of moving capital across frontiers in real time.

That implies a significant push towards a deterritorialisation of production. Thus, the relationship of material and immaterial factors of production changes radically and the distinction between manual and intellectual labour is also undergoing an upheaval.

It is enough to consider the typographer and the journalist to understand the depth of the changes

in space, in time, in the relationship between material and immaterial bases in the process of production.

But this structural modification of work and of production, of their relationship with society, is part of a more general change in the relationship between production and culture. It seems to me that this is happening in two directions. The first is that analyzed by Ignacio Ramonet, which stresses the progressive construction of an organic and functional viewpoint to this revolution of capital and the technologies subjected to capital. The second tries to destroy the spaces of autonomy which, while they are integrated into the capitalist division of labour and strongly marked by the rise of the subaltern classes, had characterized the preceding cycle. Significant spaces were conquered in the cultural, scientific and artistic process, sometimes inside even the institutional frameworks, like schools, influencing, through the conflict of classes, the organization of work at an overall level.

It is precisely all this which is now being radically thrown into question. A diffuse intellectuality is being formed, with a new place in the social division of labour and of knowledge. It is no longer about intellectuals who operate a mediation between production and society, organize the consensus and, at the same time, produce. This classic role of the intellectuals is henceforth in crisis whereas at the same time there is the emergence of diffuse intellectuals, intimately linked to the new process of production which breaks down all the barriers between production of material goods, services and culture. Hence an increasingly totalizing dimension inside of which the internal specifications are quite simply technical or in any case deprived of any kind of autonomy. (...) The system demands a total renunciation of thought as such and the acceptance of a separation of the capacity of innovation of the system and of social progress. (pp. 107-9)

(...) [On the subject of the feminization of work] it should not be forgotten that at the same time there is a constant marginalisation of women on the labour market. The process of

privatization of social rights determines an ulterior deterioration of the life of women, as much directly as by the mediation of the family. It is not by chance that in the course of this process the family is hypervalorised as basic economic unit, as place of compensation, once more to the detriment of the woman. One can then speak of a feminization of work on the condition of not forgetting that it amounts to a poor feminization, which consists in externalizing numerous functions accomplished before by the organized welfare state and which today are assigned to the system of subcontracting and a distorted use of the "third sector", subject to the demands of replacement of the public sector by the private in the process of growing privatization.

On the other hand, it is through a completely different conception of social rights, of universal social rights, resting on a higher quality of guaranteed payments, that one can introduce the theme of payment as recognition of social benefit. I believe that this approach can concretize itself in the proposition of a social wage to the unemployed and to long term economically inactive, that the PRC's deputies put forward in a parliamentary draft bill in February of this year, which proposes an assured monetary income from the state to all those who are in such a condition twelve months after registering as unemployed, and guaranteed free services by local administrations. (pp. 114-115)

Different choices were possible

(...) It is not only through historic interest that it is necessary to make a balance sheet of the workers' and Communist movement of the 20th century. Posed at the same time is the problem not only of restoring credibility to the perspective of going beyond capitalist society and then advancing the reasons for which capitalism should not be conceived as a society without alternative, a sort of new end of history, but also to explain why the setback for the experiences of construction of socialist societies in the course of the 20th century does

not in itself imply the defeat of any hypothesis of the transcendence of capitalist society.

In my view, it is not enough to have an approach which is experimental, that is to explain that it is necessary to try and try again. In order to refound a trajectory, it is necessary to guarantee that the new attempts do not cover the roads already traveled. I think that, in relation to the past, we should propose a counterfactual history...

Starting from the hypothesis that, in the history of the construction of the self-proclaimed socialist societies, a different choice could have led to a very different outcome. (pp. 175-76)

Withering away of the national state

(...) The process of globalisation sweeps away the powers and competences of national states and throws up its own sites of government. These latter are distant and completely independent of the bodies of representative democracy, even under its most diluted forms (...). We witness, in fact, a process of profound and in some aspects irreversible crisis of the nation-state, which has less and less weight both in internal and in foreign policy. But the disappearance of states does not follow from this crisis. What follows rather is a profound modification of their role and a liquidation of the process of enlargement of democracy which developed in their framework as a result of the struggles of the workers' movement, at least so far as Europe is concerned. They have less weight, but some states still count for a lot and since the end of the war the number of states, far from reducing, has grown. The policy of the big powers, as we have seen during the events in the Balkans, in fact tends towards the multiplication of states whose territorial dimension is reduced to the least expression and which are sometimes defined on an ethnic basis, but these states have increasingly less power and authority. At the same time, although financial capital has an international dimension, its centre still has a predominant localization, above all in the US, whose military

superpower status and the forms of social organization which support it constitute the heart, the model and the motor of a new imperial system basing its power not on consensus, but on the integration of narrow social groups and the exclusion of very large sectors of peoples and populations from economic, civil, cultural and democratic life. The crisis of the nation-state goes hand in hand with the creation of a new imperial system, which has at its centre the United States and at its periphery a myriad of states subjected to this latter or being fought by these latter. (pp. 192-193)

Outline of an alternative programme

(...) A contemporary political programme should outline both an alternative way of governing society to that provided by neoliberal policies and an alternative of emancipation of significant regions of the world in contrast to the social model based on globalisation. Is it possible to define this programme without reopening the great question of capitalism and its transcendence?

From this point of view, it seems to me that the problem of Europe is posed precisely, a Europe where it is possible to construct an alternative

society, founded on the critique of war as the foundation of a new imperial world order, and an alternative to neoliberal policies. This passage - which could and should involve the construction of political forces for an alternative in a dimension which is not Euro-centric, but is capable of conceiving Europe as a necessary critical mass to advance on the road of an alternative - should be nourished anew by the critique of exploitation and alienation and by the formation of elements of community capable of realizing partial objectives, under non-utopian but concrete forms.

(...) I wish to take up here the Gramscian intuition of the "blockhouses" to be liberated in the "class war" against capitalist society. In my opinion, this concept of "blockhouses" recalls to us even today the necessity of occupying spaces and times with contents which are capable of escaping, albeit not completely, the logic of exploitation and alienation and to a certain extent referring to a future whose realization implies that the proletariat can only exist on the level of universal history. This dialectic, to use the phrase, of the community and of the world sketches two polarities in the framework of which it is possible to reconstruct a new idea of the class struggle, a new idea of the liberation of men and women, an idea of life which advances the theme of Communism made

historically necessary by the counter-revolution of capitalism of which we have spoken.

The most critical element of such a perspective - in a context of disproportion between its objective maturity and the dramatic immaturity of the organized subjectivity of the social movement, the workers' movement, of the forces antagonistic to the new capitalism - resides in the gap which exists, in the framework of the current capitalist modernization, between exploited and exploiters in the widespread perception and culture at a mass level.

The causal relationship between social malaise, on the one hand, and the powers of the bosses and the bourgeois classes, on the other - which were in the 19th century a determinant factor of the growth in proletarian organizations, of the transmission of class consciousness in the communities - is today dissipated following a historic defeat, numerous retreats and changes and a break, a tearing, of the social tissue, of class composition.

That is why this causal relationship, which before was to a certain extent the result of a historic process and a social process, must today be entirely rebuilt. In my view, it will not be rebuilt pedagogically or from the top, but through a new social, political and cultural experience. (pp. 206-208)

On Fausto Bertinotti's book

10 December 2000, by **Livio Maitan**

The book contains a series of general and punctual reflexions on the theoretical questions and accumulated experiences of the workers' movement in the 20th century, analyses of capitalism at a time of globalisation and sketches of social and political perspectives for the workers' movement today. In other words, the basic inspiration of the book is the reaffirmation of a necessary continuity with the conquests and struggles of

more than a century of history and a lucid assessment of the imperative necessity of a profound renewal, indeed quite simply a new beginning.

All those who, like us, continue to identify themselves with revolutionary Marxism, can only share such an approach. What is more, we are fundamentally in agreement on a series of methodological conceptions and essential ideas, which,

particularly in the course of the last decade, have been rejected or grossly distorted not only by the apologists of capitalism but also, on an unprecedented scale, in the ranks of the social-democratic parties, formations emerging from the old Communist Parties and the trade unions under their influence. Let us try in this commentary to underline what are in our view the most important points.

Essential convergences

First it is significant that Bertinotti, who had already reaffirmed the relevance of Marxism and Marx's idea of revolution in debates some years ago, recalls, with pertinent quotations, texts like "The Jewish Question", the 1844 "Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts" and the "German ideology", taking up the themes of alienation, liberation and the very basics of a new society, communist society. For our part, we appreciate in particular a quotation from the "German Ideology" which implies by itself the rejection of the idea of socialism in one country. Bertinotti also stresses that this same text, not to mention the "Grundrisse", advances a perspective on the dynamic of capitalism which helps us understand capitalism at a time of globalisation (pp. 170-171).

Moreover, numerous pages are devoted to a reaffirmation of the Marxian theory of value, with references to the classic critique by Piero Sraffa and to the remarkable contributions of the Italian Marxist economist Claudio Napoleoni, who Bertinotti and Gianni consider as their principal point of reference, correctly in many aspects. [8] Completely agreed: that is why, if one goes back to the tragedy of the Russian revolution, it is an obligation (including a moral one) to reassert the value of the contribution of men and women who not only have developed critiques on the theoretical level but also fought politically, even at the price of their freedom and their lives, so that radically different and opposite choices could be made rather than those which finally prevailed with devastating long term consequences that nobody would deny today.

A strategic problem which remains open

The three final pages of the book (207-209) pose the crucial problem that we call, in our own terminology,

that of the transitional programme. A critique is sketched of the conceptions of national roads to socialism. The most important passage refers to a well-known passage from Gramsci that the author still considers as an essential strategic reference. [9] Without denying the value of Gramsci's insights, we continue to think that two clarifications are needed. [10] The first is of the historic order: the characterisation of pre-revolutionary Russia is excessively simplified, even if the distinction between Russia and the societies of western Europe undoubtedly has a basis.

The second is that we should not forget that Gramsci's thinking on the conquest of positions refers to phases of struggle where the workers' movement accumulates forces and structures itself socially and politically. In this sense it does not approach the problematic of the revolutionary rupture. The falsification operated by Togliatti and the other leaders of the PCI in the 1950s consisted in presenting the approach of Gramsci as a reformist gradualist approach whereas this latter in no way authorised the idea that he had renounced a revolutionary perspective.

Today, we can precisely draw an extremely negative balance sheet: the positions of the workers' movement have been to a very large extent dismantled or deserted. With more reason we should be conscious that without the reconstruction of new positions any revolutionary perspective would only be a pious wish. Yet the problem of transitional objectives - that is objectives capable of stimulating an anti-capitalist dynamic starting from the positions conquered and the level of consciousness reached at the mass level - is far from being resolved.

For our part, we share Bertinotti's judgement: the crucial contradiction currently resides precisely in the fact that it is more than ever necessary to put the perspective of the overthrow of capitalism on the agenda whereas the relationship of forces and the regression of anti-capitalist consciousness constitutes a major obstacle in this sense. We draw even

more strongly the conclusion that the Party of Communist Refoundation should make some profound changes in its strategic approaches and its manner of building itself, emerging from the impasse it has entered: it is a *sine qua non* to enable it to contribute effectively to the renewal of the workers' movement, the reconquest of the lost positions and the conquest of new ones.

October 5, 2000

Post-script

The Italian daily *Corriere della sera* (of October 20) has published an interview with Fausto Bertinotti on his book, under the headline: "Bertinotti rediscovers Marx: yes, I believe in the world revolution". That the world revolution appears in a headline of the most important Italian daily is, all in all, agreeable. We would like, nonetheless, to make a telegraphic commentary on the following passage: "The revolution is not a revolt and should not be conceived as a conquest of state power. And it cannot be accomplished in a single country. We need to go back to the idea of the revolution as a global and long term process."

Agreed: the revolution is not the conquest of existing "state power". It involves a rupture of the given political-institutional framework and the construction *ex novo* of revolutionary democratic institutions.

Agreed also on the fact that the revolution would not inaugurate the construction of a society qualitatively different from capitalist society, that is a socialist society, within a national space (let Stalin revolve in his grave!). Agreed, finally on the necessity of envisaging long term processes. Nonetheless, a question mark: if the construction of mass instruments for a revolutionary struggle (and the construction or reconstruction of pillboxes) is necessarily a process and the building of the new society is also a process, how is it necessary to

conceive the transition from one to the other? Here is posed the unavoidable

problem of the revolutionary break, whatever form it might take. This is a crucial point on which it is to be hoped

that Bertinotti's book stimulates thought...

Seoul: a new stage in the struggle against neo-liberal globalisation

10 December 2000, by **Éric Toussaint**



Samsung workers demonstrate

Attending the summit were the heads of state and government of 10 Asiatic countries [11] and the 15 members of the European Union. Prodi, Chirac,

Schroeder, Blair and Aznar had made the trip to meet their Asian equivalents so as to finalise trade agreements dominated by the logic of deregulation, the opening up of the markets of the economies of the so called developing countries to the commodities and capital of the more industrialised countries, the flexibility of labour and complete liberty for all

holders of capital.

To oppose this logic, trade unions, student movements and NGOs were also meeting in the Korean capital.

The crisis of 1997-98 which shook the whole of Southeast Asia has had particularly harsh effects in Korea. [