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The Struggle for Socialism in the Imperialist Epoch

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I. Imperialism and the course of the world socialist revolution

1. Imperialism and the role of the labor bureaucracy

The rise and consolidation of imperialism, as the highest stage of capitalism, around the beginning of the twentieth century has introduced significant changes to the character and course of the worldwide struggle for socialism as foreseen by Marx and Engels in the **Communist Manifesto**.

The imperialist epoch has been an epoch of wars and social revolutions. Today over one-third of humanity has been liberated from capitalist rule. However, this achievement has been the result of revolutionary victories in industrially backward countries, where the peasantry was, and in most cases still is, the majority of the population.

Although Marx and Engels both died before the epoch of imperialism and its decline, the founders of scientific socialism analysed the most important phenomena that prefigured the modification of the class struggle as a result of the consolidation of the imperialist system.

In the revolutions of 1848, they noted the inability of the bourgeoisie, because of its fears of the proletariat, to carry through a consistent revolution against any and all forms of feudal refuse; this phenomenon was to be generalised to a greater or lesser degree throughout the backward countries as the penetration of imperialism created proletariats that were strategically powerful even when numerically small.

Marx and Engels — and especially the latter in the years after Marx's death — also called attention to the English bourgeoisie's use of superprofits derived from its privileged position in the world market to conservatise a layer of the working class and its leadership; even before Engels' death, the conquest of colonies by other advanced countries had begun to make this a more general process.

Marx and Engels nevertheless expected proletarian revolutions to occur first in the advanced capitalist countries, where the proletariat was most numerous and powerful and where the contradictions engendered by capitalism were sharpest. The Paris Commune and the development of powerful working-class parties, particularly in Germany, demonstrated that this perspective was not unrealistic. The objective prerequisites for socialist revolution did exist in the more developed countries already during the later years of Marx's and Engels' lifetimes.

The chief obstacle to socialist revolutions in the advanced capitalist countries proved to be the degeneration of most parties of the Second International. The use of part of imperialism's superprofits to conservatise a relatively privileged layer of the proletariat eventually corrupted the leaderships of these parties.

During the long years of boom in the world capitalist economy prior to the outbreak of World War I, the imperialist bourgeoisie accentuated the racial, national, sexual, age and other divisions within the working class by granting some workers better wages or working conditions from the fund of imperialist superprofits. A relatively more privileged layer of workers was thus created, out of which a bureaucratic layer was consolidated and renewed deliberately by the capitalist state through the distribution of additional privileges.

Lenin outlined the origin and nature of this process in the "Draft Theses on the Fundamental Tasks of the Communist International":

"One of the chief causes hampering the revolutionary working-class movement in the developed capitalist countries is

the fact that because of their colonial possessions and superprofits gained by finance capital, etc., the capitalists of these countries have been able to create a relatively larger and more stable labour aristocracy, a section which comprises a small minority of the working class. This minority enjoys better terms of employment and is imbued with a narrow-minded craft spirit and with petty-bourgeois and imperialist prejudices. It forms the real social pillar of the Second International, of the reformists and the 'Centrists': at present it might even be called the social mainstay of the bourgeoisie. . . ." (**Collected Works**, Vol. 31, p. 193)

The labor aristocracy formed the primary social base for the labor bureaucracy, which constituted a major obstacle to the unions playing their potential role as militant defenders of working-class interests. The labor bureaucracy was a product of objective processes and the deliberate pressures of capital in the imperialist countries. Lenin went on to describe how this objective economic fact would inevitably lead to political consequences. He stressed that part of the labor aristocracy, a stratum, had deserted to the bourgeoisie:

"... The important thing is that, economically, the desertion of a stratum of the labour aristocracy to the bourgeoisie has matured and become an accomplished fact; and this economic fact, this shift in class relations, will find political form, in one shape or another, without any particular 'difficulty'."

The exact composition of this stratum will of course vary from country to country and from time to time. Here is Lenin's description of its makeup in the early years of the century:

"On the economic basis referred to above, the political institutions of modern capitalism — press, parliament, associations, congresses, etc — have created **political** privileges and sops for the respectful, meek, reformist and patriotic office employees and workers, corresponding to the economic privileges and sops. Lucrative and soft jobs in the government or on the war industries committees, on the editorial staffs of 'respectable', legally published newspapers or on the management councils of no less respectable and 'bourgeois law-abiding' trade unions — this is the bait by which the imperialist bourgeoisie attracts and rewards the representatives and supporters of the 'bourgeois labour parties'." (**Collected Works**, Vol. 23, p. 117; *Emphasis in original.*)

Of course, while the labor aristocracy remained exploited through the sale of its labor power at a price lower than the value its labor created, its consciousness could be changed by its position of material privilege and its concern to preserve its relative advantages. Capitalist ideology deliberately reinforced the labor aristocracy's conservatism by portraying its well-being as a natural and just reward for its contribution to "national unity," "social peace" and similar mystifications of the capitalist state.

In a period of capitalist crisis the weakening of the social and political weight of the labor aristocracy would in turn tend to subvert the control of the labor bureaucracy.

In such circumstances the bureaucrats would be driven to maintain their position by further curtailing union democracy and by relying ever more directly upon the state as they increasingly acted as policemen for capital within the labor movement. The role of the labor bureaucracy in convincing workers to sacrifice their lives for "their own" bourgeoisies during World War I and the role of the labor bureaucracy in crushing, in alliance with the capitalist state, the revolutionary workers' upsurge after the war, were graphic illustrations of

the truth of this point.

During the decades before World War I the parties of the Second International, which originally upheld the socialist program of proletarian revolution developed by Marx and Engels, were gradually transformed into the political vehicles of the labor bureaucracy, as their leaderships became dominated by union bureaucrats and parliamentary careerists. Over a period of years the Marxist program of revolutionary proletarian struggle was pushed aside by the utopian assumption that the transition to socialism would be achieved by a prolonged process of gradual reforms of capitalism. This petty-bourgeois reformist theory expressed the class-collaborationist outlook of the labor bureaucracy. The wholehearted support that the reformists gave to "their own" bourgeoisies at the outbreak of World War I in 1914 proved that the bureaucratic degeneration of the Social Democratic parties was irreversible.

But the labor bureaucracy formed a pole lying at one end of a highly stratified spectrum: at the other end stood the revolutionary proletarian organisation. Between these two poles, in a period of crisis, whole sections of the working class, including workers who were part of the labor aristocracy, could be expected to break from their traditional attitudes as the old social certainties were destroyed. As to the end result of this process Lenin wrote:

"Neither we nor anyone else can calculate precisely what portion of the proletariat is following and will follow the social-chauvinists and opportunists. This will be revealed only by the struggle, it will be definitely decided only by the socialist revolution. . . ." (*Collected Works*, Vol. 23, p. 120)

That is, the political consequences of the development of the labor bureaucracy could not be fixed in advance. There would be no automatic determination of the political complexion of a section of workers as a result of their economic situation. Lenin analysed a general tendency which would find a political expression "without any particular 'difficulty'." But the formula was algebraic. Just what the precise result would be depended on struggle.

As well, the layer of privileged workers created by capitalism is constantly being eroded as particular skills become outmoded or come under threat from a more successful capitalist economy.

So while the consolidation of a reformist current in the labor movement constituted an enormous obstacle for the working class on the road to socialist revolution, Lenin did not consider it an absolute obstacle, only a relative one. Indeed, by constantly combating every political manifestation of this trend, he developed the revolutionary strategy that could defeat the class-collaborationist misleaders and win a majority of the working class to the socialist revolution.

At the heart of this strategy was Lenin's plan for building a tightly organised party that would be composed of the vanguard of the working class. The advanced workers thus assembled in their party would be capable of providing leadership to the proletariat in every area of the class struggle, forging the necessary alliances with the exploited non-proletarian masses and organising the struggle for power. This strategy was successfully tested in November 1917 when the Russian workers, led by the Bolshevik Party, took power and proceeded to construct the world's first socialist state.

2. The Russian Revolution and its degeneration

The Russian Revolution marked the beginning of a new era in the history of humanity — the era of the revolutionary transition from capitalism to socialism. Under the leadership of the Bolsheviks, the Russian workers and peasants, organised in factory committees, army committees, trade unions and, above all, in the broad councils or soviets of workers', soldiers' and peasants' deputies, victoriously struck at the weakest link in the

chain of world capitalism. They proved in action the capacity of the proletariat to carry through a revolutionary struggle for power, abolish capitalism and reorganise society to begin to meet human needs.

The victory of the socialist revolution in Russia gave a powerful impetus to the working class and oppressed throughout the world, particularly in Europe, and inspired a whole generation of working-class militants to seek to emulate the Bolsheviks' example.

As upholders of the revolutionary internationalist outlook of Marxism, the Bolsheviks saw their victory in Russia as only the first step in a world revolutionary process that would require international revolutionary leadership. Even before their victory in November 1917, they had begun to lay the groundwork for an international organisation that would replace the discredited Second International. In March 1919 they convened the founding congress of this new organisation — the Third, or Communist, International. Within a year of its founding, the Comintern and the newly formed Communist parties had won over hundreds and thousands of working-class militants from the Social Democratic parties and were beginning to challenge the reformists' control of the organised labor movement.

However, due to the mistakes of the new and inexperienced Communist parties and the treachery of the reformist Social Democratic misleaders, the revolutionary upsurge which followed the Russian Revolution did not lead to further revolutionary victories. At the same time, the European, Japanese and US imperialists intervened with troops, arms and money on the side of the Russian capitalists and landlords in the civil war which followed the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia. While the imperialists and their Russian allies were defeated in their attempt to overthrow the Soviet regime, the three-year-long civil war produced tremendous damage to the already backward economy inherited by the Bolsheviks and resulted in the deaths of thousands of the best working-class militants.

All these factors created the conditions for the usurpation of political power by a parasitic layer of bureaucrats in the Soviet state apparatus and the Communist Party. This layer was the product of a merging of interests and outlook between the old tsarist officialdom, which the Bolsheviks were forced to retain due to the lack of skilled administrative personnel, and an increasingly conservative layer among the cadres and leadership of the Soviet Communist Party represented by the Stalin faction. In the years after Lenin's death in January 1924 the Stalin faction consolidated its control over the state and party apparatuses, strangling soviet and party democracy and murdering or imprisoning the remaining revolutionary cadres in order to prevent any challenge to its enjoyment of material privileges.

The conservative and narrowly nationalistic outlook of the Soviet bureaucracy was expressed in Stalin's theory of completing the construction of socialism in one country — the USSR — a theory which was directly opposed to the revolutionary internationalist outlook of Marxism upheld by the Bolsheviks under Lenin. This theory led to the view that the primary role of the Communist parties was not to lead socialist revolutions in their own countries but to assist the foreign policy goals of the Soviet government, chiefly by offering political support to any wing of "their own" bourgeoisie which was deemed by Moscow to be more friendly to the USSR.

Unable to follow or understand the significance of the political struggle in the USSR, the majority of the members and leaders of the Communist parties took the Stalin faction to be the legitimate representatives of Leninism, as claimed by the Soviet government. Stalinism thus gained sway over millions of revolutionary-minded workers. The sectarian and, later, increasingly opportunist policies of the Stalinist leadership of the Comintern led to disaster after disaster for the world working class, the most significant of these being the defeat of the 1925-27 Chinese revolution, the triumph, without serious resistance by

the Communist Party, of fascism in Germany, and the defeat of the 1936-38 Spanish revolution. These defeats and the totalitarian nature of the regime established by the Stalin bureaucracy in the USSR, later extended to the newly formed socialist states in Eastern Europe, repelled many workers in the imperialist democracies from the Communist parties, giving the Social Democratic parties a new lease of life and reinforcing the workers' illusions in bourgeois democracy.

The class-collaborationist policies of both the Social Democratic and Stalinist bureaucracies have thus had a profound influence upon the course of the world socialist revolution. In particular, they have delayed the overthrow of capitalism in the imperialist countries and made far more difficult the task of building revolutionary parties.

3. The Leninist view of the world revolution

By bringing the colonial countries into the capitalist world market and developing capitalist production in combination with various precapitalist forms of production and social relations, imperialism began to transfer the sharpest of capitalism's contradictions to the colonies and semicolonies. Inevitably, this led to revolutionary struggles by the exploited and oppressed, the most notable prior to 1914 being the 1905 revolution in Russia, the Mexican revolution of 1910 and the Chinese revolution of 1911.

The fact that the first successful socialist revolution occurred in Russia, a state which combined the features of an imperialist and an underdeveloped country, is symbolic of the character of the world revolution in the present epoch. Led by the Bolsheviks and Lenin — who was the first to develop a thorough Marxist analysis of imperialism and a political orientation flowing from that analysis — the Communist International adopted a strategy based on the close interaction and combination of the class struggle in the imperialist countries with the national liberation struggles of the colonies and semicolonies.

In a speech to the Second All-Russia Congress of Communist Organisations of the Peoples of the East in November 1919, Lenin explained this combination of struggles like this:

“... It is becoming quite clear that the socialist revolution which is impending for the whole world will not be merely the victory of the proletariat of each country over its own bourgeoisie. That would be possible if revolutions came easily and swiftly. We know that the imperialists will not allow this, that all countries are armed against their domestic Bolshevism and that their one thought is how to defeat Bolshevism at home. That is why in every country a civil war is brewing in which the old socialist compromisers are enlisted on the side of the bourgeoisie. Hence, the socialist revolution will not be solely, or chiefly, a struggle of the revolutionary proletarians in each country against their bourgeoisie — no, it will be a struggle of all the imperialist-oppressed colonies and countries, of all dependent countries, against international imperialism. Characterising the approach of the world social revolution in the Party Programme we adopted last March, we said that the civil war of the working people against the imperialists and exploiters in all the advanced countries is beginning to be combined with national wars against international imperialism. That is confirmed by the course of the revolution, and will be more and more confirmed as time goes on. It will be the same in the East.

“We know that in the East the masses will rise as independent participants, as builders of a new life, because hundreds of millions of the people belong to dependent, underprivileged nations, which until now have been objects of international imperialist policy, and have only existed as material to fertilise capitalist culture and civilisation. . . . That majority, which up till then had been completely outside the orbit of historical progress, because it could not constitute an independent revolutionary force, ceased, as we know, to play such a passive

role at the beginning of the twentieth century. . . .” (*Collected Works*, Vol. 30, pp. 160-1)

The existence of the Soviet state and the conflict between it and imperialism added another new element to the world revolution. In his Report on the Theses on the National and Colonial Questions to the Second Congress of the Comintern, Lenin began with the conflict between imperialism and the colonial and semicolonial countries:

“First, what is the cardinal idea underlying our theses? It is the distinction between oppressed and oppressor nations. . . . In this age of imperialism, it is particularly important for the proletariat and the Communist International to establish the concrete economic facts and to proceed from concrete realities, not from abstract postulates, in all colonial and national problems.

“The characteristic feature of imperialism consists in the whole world, as we now see, being divided into a large number of oppressed nations and an insignificant number of oppressor nations, the latter possessing colossal wealth and powerful armed forces. The vast majority of the world's population . . . about 70 per cent of the world's population, belong to the oppressed nations. . . .”

He then went on to explain how the world revolution was further modified by the conflict between imperialism and the Soviet state:

“The second basic idea in our theses is that, in the present world situation following the imperialist war, reciprocal relations between peoples and the world political system as a whole are determined by the struggle waged by a small group of imperialist nations against the Soviet movement and the Soviet states headed by Soviet Russia. Unless we bear that in mind, we shall not be able to pose a single national or colonial problem correctly, even if it concerns a most outlying part of the world. The Communist parties, in civilised and backward countries alike, can pose and solve political problems correctly only if they make this postulate their starting point.” (*Collected Works*, Vol. 31, pp. 240-1)

This Leninist view sees the world revolution as a unity of three sectors: the struggle between proletariat and imperialist bourgeoisie in the developed countries; the conflict between imperialism and the oppressed nations; and the struggle between the socialist states and imperialism. The unity of the three sectors is based on the ripeness of the objective prerequisites for beginning the construction of a world socialist society and the reality, corresponding to those objective circumstances, that the chief enemy in each sector is the same: imperialism. The varied tasks confronting each sector, or even different countries within the same sector, have the common framework of requiring a struggle against imperialism, and revolutionary victories are therefore the more likely the more that unity is achieved between struggles in different areas.

The possibility of socialist development in the semicolonial countries depends directly upon close ties with the existing socialist states and the proletariat in the imperialist countries: Without Soviet aid, the Cuban Revolution could not have survived long enough to enter its socialist stage, and the antiwar movement in the imperialist countries contributed substantially to the Vietnamese defeat of US intervention and the extension of socialist revolution to southern Vietnam. But it is equally true that the radicalisation of the proletariat and its allies in the imperialist countries is directly and indirectly encouraged by the advances of the colonial revolution, while the latter also weaken the imperialist bourgeoisies in their struggles with their own proletariats and in their ability to threaten the socialist states.

Conversely, a failure to appreciate the anti-imperialist axis of the world revolution in each of the three sectors can lead to costly mistakes: Workers in the imperialist countries who have not learned to solidarise with the colonial revolution and the socialist states can be disoriented and defeated in their own immediate struggles by war or war threats; national liberation

struggles that do not establish ties with the socialist states and the workers of the developed countries may be isolated in the face of imperialist intervention; workers in the bureaucratised socialist states will not win socialist democracy and may lose the gains of their revolutions if they mistakenly view imperialism as an ally rather than an enemy of their struggles.

4. The course of the world revolution in the twentieth century

The world revolution since 1917 has gone through four broad periods. This does not imply that there was anything automatic or inevitable about the overall course of the class struggle at any time (as the Stalinists claimed about the "third period"), or that the outcome of any particular struggle was predetermined by the "character of the period." But victories by the working class, the socialist states and/or the oppressed nations tend to inspire further struggles and further victories, while defeats similarly sow demoralisation and relative quiescence. The accumulation of victories or defeats determines the overall evolution of the relationship of class forces.

The period from the February 1917 revolution in Russia to the defeat of the German revolution in 1923 was one of upsurge that sharply altered the world relationship of class forces to the advantage of the working class and its allies. It included not only the Russian Revolution itself but also the growth of a communist movement in Europe and a corresponding decline of reformist influence and the beginnings of a generalised colonial revolution, especially in Asia.

The upsurge began to ebb as the proletariat suffered a series of defeats through the deliberate betrayals of Social Democracy and the inexperience of the young Communist parties. These defeats, which included the crushing of the Hungarian revolution, the smashing of the March 1921 putsch in Germany and the fascist coup in Italy, led to the restabilisation of European capitalism. By 1923, the evolution of the relationship of forces had begun to develop in favor of capital.

The two decades following 1923 were a period of defeats for the world revolution, despite often bitter defensive struggles waged by the proletariat and its allies. In many cases — the crushing of the Indonesian Communist Party, defeat of the second Chinese revolution, the victory of fascism in Germany, the defeat of the Spanish revolution of 1936-39 — the defeats were largely the product of errors of leadership. These defeats were in part caused by and in turn contributed to the bureaucratisation of the Soviet Communist Party and state apparatus, which continually undermined the basis of the proletarian dictatorship.

By 1941, the relationship of class forces had deteriorated to the point that imperialism was able to attempt its "final solution" to the existence of the Soviet state. But the defeat of the German imperialist invasion, the openings created for the colonial revolution by the interimperialist war and the growth of a resistance movement in Nazi-occupied Europe based largely on workers and poor peasants, combined to create the conditions for a new rise of the world revolution.

The first period of this new rise lasted from about 1943 to the mid-1960s. The rise was based primarily in the colonial world — the winning of political independence by most of the colonies, the Chinese, Yugoslav and Cuban revolutions — and to a lesser extent in Eastern Europe, where occupation by the Soviet army prevented the re-establishment of stable capitalist states and eventually led to proletarian revolutions that were, however, bureaucratically deformed. An additional factor in the rise was the relatively rapid recovery of the Soviet economy from the destruction of World War II and the consequent strengthening of the Soviet and later the Eastern European proletariat's material well-being and self-confidence; this in turn led to powerful upsurges against bureaucratic rule in East Germany,

Hungary and Poland in the 1950s and laid the basis for the subsequent anti-bureaucratic struggles in Poland and Czechoslovakia.

However, this new rise did not proceed as rapidly as was objectively possible. The class-collaborationist policies of the Communist parties in France and Italy sabotaged the opportunities for socialist revolutions that existed in those countries in the 1945-46 period and allowed imperialism to restabilise Western European capitalism. This restabilisation in imperialist Europe was a factor limiting the rise of the colonial revolution and was a necessary precondition of the long boom in the postwar capitalist world economy, based on the rise in the rate of surplus value brought about by the working-class defeats of the 1930s and 1940s and on the vast market opened up by the destruction of World War II.

This exceptional economic situation was conducive to the spreading of reformist views and bourgeois ideology in general within the working class. Its long duration eroded traditions of militancy, undermined the base of working-class political parties, reinforced illusions in capitalism's ability to provide a rising standard of living for the masses and fostered the rise of the most timid, corrupt and procapitalist elements within union organisations. The relative quiescence of the proletariat of the imperialist countries facilitated imperialist military interventions against the colonial revolution. In many cases, labor movement leaderships openly supported imperialist attacks on colonial countries, the AFL-CIO bureaucracy in the United States not only offering political support to US imperialism's wars but also directly collaborating with the counter-revolutionary schemes of the CIA. Thus the rise of the colonial revolution tended to be matched by an escalation of imperialist wars and preparations for war, without major resistance by the proletariat of the developed countries.

The present period, which began in the mid-1960s, is marked by a continuing upsurge of the colonial revolution and a radicalisation within the imperialist countries. This radicalisation began under the impact of the colonial revolution, above all of the Vietnam War. Because of the effects of the long boom, it first struck root outside the proletariat, primarily among youth who, not having experienced the crises and defeats of the 1930s and 1940s, were less reticent about criticising the reality of life in the imperialist "democracies." The radicalisation among youth steadily undermined the ideological props of capitalist society, calling into question such long-established norms as national chauvinism, racism, sexism and environmental destruction.

As youth who had experienced the radicalisation joined the labor force, the basis was laid for its extension into the organised proletariat. But there is a complex interaction between the different components of the overall class struggle.

The defeat of US imperialism in Vietnam and the reversal in direction of the capitalist world economy led not merely to a broadening of the radicalisation but also to a degree of polarisation within the working class. As capitalism's long-term economic prospects continued to worsen, capital attacked first the weakest and least-organised sectors of the workforce. This has tended to bring about a sharper stratification of income levels within the working class. The industries in which capital's attacks have been sharpest are often primarily composed of youth, women and/or oppressed nationalities — that is, the same layers who had been most profoundly affected by the radicalisation of the '60s and '70s. More secure layers of the workforce may even experience a temporary conservatism if capital succeeds in portraying the demands of particular sectors as threats to the well-being of the layers not yet directly affected by the crisis.

While the centre of the class struggle has shifted toward direct conflicts between capital and labor, this is not always reflected in political struggles, because the major union organisations remain dominated by conservative

bureaucracies. Many of the new challenges to capitalist rule still occur primarily outside the organised labor movement. Thus political life in the imperialist countries is similar in many respects to that of the late 1960s, with the rise of new movements (ecology, antiwar) not directly linked to the mass working-class organisations.

While the deepening capitalist crisis and the capitalist austerity and war drives which flow from it have produced a polarisation within the layers radicalised in the 1960s, with some of these forces moving to the right, the majority of these forces continue to play a progressive role in political life, as evidenced by their continued activity in fighting against the imperialist war drive and in their continuing involvement in the movements for women's liberation, for defence of the environment from the destruction caused by capitalism etc. These movements have had an important impact in changing the consciousness of broad layers of the working class and are themselves more conscious of the need to relate to the labor movement and draw it into their activities. Important elements of these social movements will combine in the future with the class-conscious workers to provide the leadership of the socialist revolution in the imperialist countries. The colonial revolution has continued to achieve victories since 1975: defeat of the South African invasion of Angola and the Somalian invasion of Ethiopia, the Iranian revolution, growth of the Palesti-

nian resistance, the revolutions in Central America and the Caribbean.

The growing strength of the working class and its allies is also evident in the socialist states. This has been most evident in Cuba, where steady gains have been achieved in material well-being, the institutionalising of People's Power and internationalist consciousness. But it is also true that the economies of the socialist states as a whole are outgrowing those of the capitalist world, thus strengthening the proletariat and undermining some of the social base of the bureaucracy.

As a result of all these factors, the relationship of class forces has evolved against imperialism with special rapidity for the past decade. Despite the fact that imperialism retains vast economic, social, military and political resources, it is on the defensive, and the world revolution, while still bearing the marks of past defeats, is moving ahead. As the bitter experience of missed opportunities demonstrates, without a strong revolutionary leadership, organised in a Leninist vanguard party, there is nothing inevitable about the replacement of capitalism by socialism. But the possibility of constructing such a leadership exists, and struggles today develop in a situation in which the objective and subjective conditions favoring a revolutionary outcome are more favorable than they have been since the ebb of the 1920s and the degeneration of the Communist International.

II. The class struggle in the imperialist countries

5. The capitalist economic crisis

The imperialist system is caught up in a long-term crisis based on the conflict between vast accumulations of capital and the productive power they represent on the one hand, and on the other the declining scope for capital's application as a result of gains of the world revolution.

Within the imperialist countries the crisis is dominated by the effects of the long economic downturn that began at the end of the 1960s and which has already been marked by a series of increasingly serious recessions (1970-71, 1974-75, 1980-82). Given the logic of the capitalist industrial cycle, there can be short phases of recovery in production and national income like the one which began in 1983. But the tendency is still one of a decline in the average long-term rate of growth.

The main characteristics of the downturn are a downward pressure on the rate of profit, the rise of long-term structural unemployment and the persistence of inflation. Taking just the imperialist countries, official unemployment has gone up from 10 million at the beginning of the 1970s to 20 million in 1975 and 30 million in 1982. It will probably reach 40 million in the years to come without even taking into account all those — and especially women — who "voluntarily withdraw from the labor market" and are no longer registered in the unemployment figures. While inflation has declined a little, particularly under the effects of credit restriction measures taken by nearly all the imperialist governments, it continues at levels incompatible with a "stable monetary system." Up to now inflation has prevented a fall in prices and incomes really corresponding to the decline in values expressed in stable monetary terms. Consequently the decline in production is still inferior to that of the 1929-32 period. The persistence of inflation, however, threatens the world system of credit and banking with collapse.

This threat presents the international bourgeoisie with a harrowing choice. If it chooses to limit inflation at all costs, it will continue to accentuate credit restrictions, which would threaten important sectors of world capitalist industry with collapse and

cause a catastrophic reduction in world trade, and could result in a dislocation of the world market. If it lets inflation rage in order to absorb the crisis, it runs the risk of a headlong lurch to a financial crash. This is why the safeguard measures prepared by organisations like the IMF and the International Settlements Bank tend to come up against a decisive obstacle: how to divide up the costs of the rescue operations between different central banks, i.e., between the different imperialist powers in the eventuality of a threatened collapse of a major bank.

The imperialist bourgeoisies have drawn the lessons of the 1929-32 crash by creating national systems controlling the banks, with the latter being bailed out in case of crisis by the central bank. But on the international level there is no such "lender of last resort." A real central bank of the central banks on the international scale would require the existence of an international capitalist state, that is, the disappearance of inter-imperialist competition. In a period of crisis this intensifies rather than declines. Whatever measures are prepared and inter-imperialist compromises are made (after increasingly tough bargaining and sharp conflicts), the threat of a banking crash continues to hang over the capitalist world.

The increasingly problematic character of all economic "progress" of world capitalism is indicated by the recovery that began in 1983. Economic recovery in the United States has been purchased by a massive escalation of government and private debt. In 1982, the US was a net importer of capital for the first time since World War II, to the amount of about \$8 billion. The following year, net capital imports quadrupled to \$32 billion, and in 1984 they are expected to reach \$80 billion. Before the end of 1985, the US will be a debtor country. In effect, other imperialist economies are loaning the US the funds with which to purchase the former's products, and are thus able to use the US recovery to overcome their own recessions. But these vast debts are held in overvalued US dollars, creating the possibility of a run on the dollar and a catastrophic fall in its exchange rate, with unforeseeable consequences for international trade and the world capitalist economy.

The "normal" economic mechanisms are unable to create a new period of capitalist boom, although of course the normal business cycle fluctuations continue. The overriding task facing the imperialists is that of decisively reducing working-class living standards in order to permit a recovery of the rate of profit. The reductions of real wages required are of such magnitude that austerity programs of cuts in the social wage and increased taxation of workers, while an important component of the capitalist offensive, are not sufficient in and of themselves.

The other aspect of the crisis that must be overcome before world capitalism can enter a new boom period is the present saturation of markets and the limitation of investment outlets that necessarily accompanies it. For the imperialist system as a whole, this problem tends to be aggravated by any successes achieved in the task of reducing real wages. Nevertheless, each national capitalist class attempts to solve this problem for itself by outdoing its competitors in reducing costs and through various protectionist measures and export subsidies. This conflict intensifies the need to attack workers' living standards.

But it is obvious that the market problem cannot be solved radically within the imperialist countries short of a depression of catastrophic proportions, i.e. through the destruction of vast amounts of capital. The "solution" from the standpoint of capital is therefore an expansion of its field of operation. It is driven, not merely to contain, but also to roll back the colonial revolution, preparatory to the attempt to overturn the nationalised economies of the socialist states. Hence the bourgeoisies of the advanced countries must break the will and ability of their proletariats to resist imperialist war.

6. The proletariat and the capitalist crisis

The proletariat and other laboring classes (small farmers, urban petty bourgeoisie) cannot escape the capitalist offensive against their living standards through compromise or retreat. The depth of the capitalist crisis and the intensification of inter-imperialist competition dictate that there is no a priori limit to the concessions that will be demanded by capital. In the final analysis, this limit will be set only by the extent and effectiveness of working-class resistance.

In a period of capitalist offensive, defence of the immediate needs of the proletariat assumes an importance much greater than that it possesses in more tranquil periods. This necessarily involves defence of direct wages and of working conditions: the fight to keep the rate of wage rises at least equal to inflation and to prevent speedups, the deterioration of health and safety conditions etc. It also requires a fight for the right to work — including opposition to forced part-time or "shared work" schemes, which seek to make workers share among themselves the burdens of the capitalist crisis.

Resistance to austerity programs is necessary to defend the real living standards of the proletariat and to mobilise against the capitalist offensive the social layers and classes that can be allies of the proletariat. In most cases, capitalist cutbacks in public transport, health, education or other social welfare measures can be counterposed to the demand that these services be funded at the expense of socially undesirable government spending on militarism or subsidies to capitalists.

The workers movement likewise needs to support the demands and struggles of specially oppressed layers such as women, whose gains of the 1960s and 1970s are under increasing attack. The mobilisation of women against the capitalist offensive takes on added importance because of the increased number of women in the workforce.

Youth are also particular victims of the crisis, especially in the area of unemployment. If the labor movement fails to lead a struggle for the right to work and for the particular demands of young people (free education, against police harassment etc), sections of working-class youth can become declassed and

serve as fodder for right-wing and fascist movements.

The intensification of the capitalist crisis has already produced a considerable increase in racist and chauvinist propaganda directed against national minorities and immigrants, and in the activities of racist groups that are capable of developing into fascist movements under appropriate conditions. The frustration of capitalist efforts to create divisions within the working class and to divide the working class from immigrants and oppressed nationalities can be achieved only if the proletariat consistently supports the demands of these groups and opposes every manifestation of racism or chauvinism.

The working class is necessarily in competition with capital for the allegiance of other laboring and exploited classes and therefore requires a strategy for forming enduring alliances with them. In most imperialist countries, small working farmers continue to produce a not insignificant share of agricultural commodities; many of these farmers are subject to a process of proletarianisation because of their need to supplement declining incomes through part-time or full-time wage labor. An alliance with small farmers requires the proletariat to champion demands that are directed against the capitalist exploiters of agricultural producers: nationalisation of agribusiness and distribution monopolies, nationalisation of banks and the provision of cheap credit, government guarantees of minimum prices for agricultural produce from small farms. Layers of the urban petty bourgeoisie are also potential allies who can be won by the proletariat's support for demands directed against big capital: cheap credit; nationalisation of monopolies; reduction of taxes through the ending of war spending, subsidies to big business and tax evasion by the rich.

The capitalist offensive does not proceed solely through frontal assault, but also involves attempts to weaken proletarian militancy and organisation through "social contracts" or similar projects (e.g. "co-management" or "industrial democracy") designed to persuade unions to accept responsibility for the maintenance of capitalist prosperity. These can be alternated or combined with government intervention in union affairs and punitive measures against strikes or particular militants. The proletariat's political and organisational independence of the capitalist state and capitalist "solutions" to the crisis (social contracts, protectionism, subsidies to industries etc) is a precondition for a successful defence against the capitalist offensive.

To maintain this independence, the proletariat will increasingly be forced to defend democratic rights — those of its own organisations and of other oppressed sectors — which are increasingly in conflict with the needs of imperialist capital. In particular, the deepening of the crisis will more and more encourage sectors of capital to look to some form of fascism as a way out. Fascism is a particular weapon developed by imperialist capital to resolve acute economic and social crisis by mobilising petty-bourgeois and lumpen layers to crush every organisation through which the proletariat might resist the requirements of capital. To accomplish this, the bourgeoisie must convince the layers most threatened by the crisis that its prolongation is the fault of the working class or some other scapegoat that can be associated with the working class. A successful resistance to the fascist danger therefore depends on the ability of the labor movement to mobilise masses in a broad, united campaign not only for the defensive struggle against fascist organisations but also in support of the proletarian solution to the crisis — that is, in what is objectively a struggle for socialist revolution.

Because war is central to imperialism's plans for resolving the crisis, opposition to imperialism's preparations for new wars is as central to defence of the proletariat's interests in the imperialist countries as it is to the continued advance of the colonial revolution and to the defence of the socialist states. The

fight against war, as well as being an immediate question of life or death for large numbers of workers, is directly linked with the fight against austerity, since a major function of the latter is to pay for imperialist armaments.

7. From defensive to offensive struggles against capital

Defensive struggles of the working class can, either objectively or subjectively, develop very rapidly into offensive struggles against capital. A strike to prevent further cuts in real wages can develop into a struggle to recover past losses; capitalist attempts to destroy jobs can spark a fight for improved unemployment insurance or other social welfare measures; the imperialist military build-up can touch off, and to some extent has already, a struggle to disarm the warmakers. This is also true of the methods of struggle needed to fight the capitalist austerity drive: a strike to defend jobs can involve the need for aggressive mass picketing with the setting up of workers' self-defence squads to combat attacks on the picketers by police or the capitalists' extralegal gangs. It can also pose the need for the strikers to reach out to the broader layers of the labor movement and the community through mass demonstrations to exert pressure on governments to take action to stop sackings.

The aim of a program of transitional demands such as that presented in the founding document of the Fourth International ("The Death Agony of Capitalism and the Tasks of the Fourth International") is to provide a bridge from the defensive struggles of the proletariat to offensive battles that begin to make serious inroads on the profits and especially the power of the capitalists. A particular demand has a transitional character if it is necessarily linked with further demands and is a step in a program that culminates in the taking of power by the workers and small farmers.

Transitional demands are linked vertically. For example, the slogans of strike pickets, workers' defence guards, workers' militias and disarming the bourgeoisie and seizure of state power are linked in an order implying an increasing level of class consciousness and class struggle. But this does not mean that a demand at any particular level becomes appropriate only when the preceding demand has been widely accepted or implemented. The transitional demand that is appropriate for revolutionaries to raise at any point is that which is objectively necessary to defend the working class and its interests at a given stage of the struggle. What makes a transitional demand **transitional** is that it leads beyond itself. Workers' self-defence guards, for example, are likely to call forth the escalation of bourgeois preparations for civil war, and hence lead on to the objectively necessary step of workers' militias and the overthrow of capitalist state power, replacing it with a workers and farmers' government resting on the armed masses.

Transitional demands are also linked horizontally. The demand for useful public works instead of war spending, for example, can realistically be carried out only through the institution of economic planning. Economic planning in turn necessarily requires abolition of business secrets through the institution of workers' control of production.

Contrary to the illusions deliberately fostered by reformists, there are no partial demands that can solve the problems created by capitalism, and a revolutionary transitional program does not pretend that any of its partial demands is sufficient in and of itself. For example, the problem of unemployment cannot be solved by the demand for the nationalisation of individual companies that are carrying out sackings. But each transitional demand is objectively linked, in the conditions for its fulfilment, to the others, and the program as a whole cannot be implemented except through the overthrow of the

bourgeoisie and the institution of a nationalised, planned economy. Revolutionary strategy therefore requires full participation in the struggle for partial demands in order to broaden the struggle by linking each demand to others. Propaganda and agitation for transitional demands corresponding to the most pressing needs of the working class and its allies will help to prepare the way for a proletarian counteroffensive. Through their role in these defensive and offensive campaigns of the proletariat, revolutionaries will have the opportunity to provide the leadership that is indispensable to a decisive victory.

In this period of imperialist crisis, in which the capitalists are seeking to take back past concessions rather than diverting the class struggle by granting new ones, advances by the proletariat will be resisted with increasing ferocity. The capitalists will be quicker to invoke the overt aid of the state and of extralegal gangs. This will pose before the workers the need to go from strike pickets to the organisation of armed self-defence guards to protect not only strikes, but also their meetings, demonstrations, headquarters, press etc., against the police, army and fascist gangs.

As the movement of the masses takes on a revolutionary sweep, the workers and their allies will increasingly feel the need to co-ordinate and unify their diverse struggles. The breakdown of the economy, due to the capitalist economic crisis and the capitalists' deliberate sabotage and hoarding, will confront the working people with the need to find a means to centralise their struggles. The solution to this problem lies in the formation of broad united action committees or councils. Such committees of struggle, united on a national scale, will enable the workers and their allies to effectively meet the centralised offensive of the capitalists and their state machine.

Under the impact of working-class mobilisations, antimilitarist work in the capitalist armed forces and the struggle for democratic rights for soldiers, such action committees may appear within the armed forces, creating a major obstacle to the functioning of the capitalist repressive apparatus and making it possible to win soldiers to the side of the workers and to arm the revolutionary masses.

The extension and centralisation of the workers' councils, the widening of workers' control beyond the framework of isolated workplaces to the economy as a whole and the formation of popular militias will create a counterpower to the capitalist state. Such a situation of dual power will inevitably lead to a decisive confrontation between the classes. The capitalists will seek to drown the revolutionary masses in blood, through the imposition of a brutal dictatorship. The only way for the working masses to defeat the capitalists' counter-revolutionary terror will be to overthrow the capitalist government and replace it with a government of their own — a workers and farmers' government.

The formation of a workers and farmers' government is the logical culmination of a period of bitter class struggle, corresponding to the objective requirements of the proletariat and its allies. As the Transitional Program explains, "Each of the transitional demands . . . should lead to one and the same political conclusion: the workers need to break with all the traditional parties of the bourgeoisie in order, jointly with the farmers, to establish their own power."

The workers and farmers' government is created by the revolutionary seizure of state power by the proletariat and its allies and constitutes the form of rule during the period of transition from the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie to the socialist dictatorship of the proletariat. Its tasks consist of creating the material and social infrastructure (development of mass organisations, workers' control etc.) for socialist property relations and of using, as the **Communist Manifesto** explained, "political supremacy to wrest, by degrees, all capital from the bourgeoisie."

8. Transforming the unions into class-struggle instruments

The trade unions are today the central arena and focus of our activity. It is here that the initial sharp struggles will be fought out, working-class gains of the past defended and a fight back against the capitalist austerity drive, which has the potential to lead to a revolutionary struggle for working-class power, will be prepared.

The long rise of capitalist world economy following World War II undoubtedly eroded proletarian militancy and class-struggle traditions in the imperialist countries, but it also facilitated the growth of large, well-organised unions and accustomed the working class to a gradually rising standard of living. In addition, it provided the conditions for a further period of consolidation of the labor bureaucracy's hold over the unions and their subordination, through the bureaucracy, to the capitalist state. This process was already well in train when Trotsky wrote his 1940 article "Trade Unions in the Epoch of Imperialist Decay":

"There is one common feature in the development, or more correctly the degeneration, of modern trade union organisation throughout the world: it is their drawing closely to and growing together with the state power. This process is equally characteristic of the neutral, the social democratic, the Communist, and the 'anarchist' trade unions. This fact alone shows that the tendency towards 'growing together' is intrinsic not in this or that doctrine as such but derives from social conditions common for all unions.

"Monopoly capitalism does not rest on competition and free private initiative but on centralised command. The capitalist cliques at the head of mighty trusts, syndicates, banking consortiums, etc., view economic life from the very same heights as does state power; and they require at every step the collaboration of the latter. In their turn the trade unions in the most important branches of industry find themselves deprived of the possibility of profiting by the competition among the different enterprises. They have to confront a centralised capitalist adversary, intimately bound up with state power. Hence flows the need of the trade unions — insofar as they remain on reformist positions, i.e., on positions of adapting themselves to private property — to adapt themselves to the capitalist state and to contend for its co-operation. In the eyes of the bureaucracy of the trade union movement, the chief task lies in 'freeing' the state from the embrace of capitalism, in weakening its dependence on trusts, in pulling it over to their side. This position is in complete harmony with the social position of the labor bureaucracy, who fight for a crumb in the share of superprofits of imperialist capitalism. The labor bureaucracy do their level best in words and deeds to demonstrate to the 'democratic' state how reliable and indispensable they are in peacetime and especially in time of war. By transforming the trade unions into organs of the state, fascism invents nothing new; it merely draws to their ultimate conclusion the tendencies inherent in imperialism." (Leon Trotsky on the Trade Unions, p. 68-69)

Marxist revolutionary activity in the unions aims to transform them into effective weapons of defence and offence against capital. This necessarily entails the removal of the bureaucracy. But this task must be subordinated to the struggle against the capitalist class itself. The problem is to convince the ranks of the unions that it is necessary and possible to fight back against capitalism; the displacement of the bureaucracy will emerge as a result of that conviction and developing fight back.

In struggles between labor and capital, the bureaucrats stand in an intermediate position. Their power and material well-being derive from their posts in proletarian organisations; but in political outlook and conditions of life, they stand much closer

to the bourgeoisie than to the working class.

The further development of capitalism has given to this bureaucratic layer a particularly virulent form and further entrenched it in the labor movement. The resources of modern imperialism ensure that a significant proportion of wealth is diverted to the apparatuses of the modern state, its courts, its boards, its semi-governmental bodies, on all of which are found willing servants drawn from the labor movement.

The labor bureaucracy in these circumstances becomes more and more an active participant in the class struggle, helping to shape the course of events. Thus, even after the economic and social conditions that allowed a particular grouping of union leaders to consolidate their hold on a union may have receded, their control of the apparatus, their reliance on the capitalist state and their curtailment of union democracy prolong their existence and distort the shape of the class struggle.

Such processes can demoralise would-be militants, convincing them that struggles against the employer are doomed to defeat, and can encourage acceptance of capitalism's anti-union propaganda by less-conscious layers of the proletariat, seeming to justify the age-old claim of the bureaucrats and their bourgeois mentors that the workers themselves are "conservative." But the truth is different. Leon Trotsky's summary of the relationship between the bureaucracy and "conservative" workers retains all its validity today:

"The masses are better, more daring, more resolute than the leaders. The masses wish to struggle. Putting the brakes on the struggle are the leaders who have lagged behind the masses. Their own indecisiveness, their own conservatism, their own bourgeois prejudices are disguised by the leaders with allusions to the backwardness of the masses. Such is the true state of affairs at present." (Leon Trotsky on the Trade Unions, p. 68)

The deepening crisis of imperialism undermines the material basis of the bureaucracy, sharpens the contradictions inherent in its role and prepares the social explosions which can sweep it away. But the removal of the bureaucratic obstacle will not be achieved spontaneously or by purely objective processes; it requires the conscious leadership of class-struggle militants organised in a revolutionary party. The revolutionary party must actively seek to build itself by including in its ranks the vanguard of the working class, won by intervention in all struggles, including those waged by the more "privileged" workers. As the German metalworkers' strike and the struggle of the British miners have demonstrated, it is often the relatively better-off workers — who may have won their position through past struggles — who will go into battle more readily and more confidently than workers demoralised by years of low wages, bad conditions or little or no unionisation. The struggles of the better-paid workers can in turn act as an inspiring example for the less affluent, less organised and less confident workers. For this reason, Marxists reject any strategy that subordinates the struggles of the better-off workers to the poorer and weaker workers, and counterpose a strategy that seeks to unite all those who have to labor to survive against the tiny capitalist minority and its agents within the trade unions.

In the present period of escalating capitalist offensive, Marxists seek to strengthen the unions along three fundamental lines: class independence, working-class unity and trade union democracy.

Democracy is indispensable if the workers are to reclaim and keep their unions from the hands of the bureaucracy. But democracy is more than simply a method of ensuring a free selection of union leadership. It requires active involvement of the entire membership in the union's activities on a daily basis and is therefore inseparable from a militant fight against the capitalists.

Trade union democracy implies for its realisation the complete independence of the unions from the capitalist state, which

in turn requires the removal of the bureaucracy's hold over the unions. The concept of class independence must not be confused with syndicalist illusions about the possibility of simply ignoring the state and its activities. The working class cannot afford to leave questions of politics and the role of the state to the bourgeoisie. Marxists advocate that the unions carry their struggles against the capitalists into the political arena, as part of the struggle to overthrow the capitalist state and replace it with a workers state.

The need for working-class unity against the capitalists is the reason for the existence of the unions. Strengthening such unity is a key task of Marxists in the unions. It necessarily involves campaigning for the unionisation of the unorganised workers, agitating for the breaking down of craft divisions between existing unions through their amalgamation into unions which embrace all the workers in a given industry, and a conscious and consistent effort to involve the specially oppressed or exploited groups of workers, such as women, immigrants and youth, through the championing of their rights and interests.

Marxists advocate specific measures in each of these areas, linking them to the defence of proletarian interests against the attacks of employers and the state. Such an approach, like the tasks objectively posed for the working class and its unions, goes beyond purely economic questions to include all social and political issues affecting the welfare of the proletariat and its allies.

This approach is based on a perspective of mobilising militant forces broader than the revolutionary party in order to transform the unions themselves into instruments of revolutionary struggle. It seeks to bring together a class-struggle left wing — a tendency composed of class-conscious militants which can influence and provide leadership for still broader layers of the working class and link the proletariat with progressive social movements that are presently based outside the labor movement. Such a current does not presently exist on a national scale in any imperialist country, and it would therefore be schematic to be too categorical about either the organisational forms in which it may appear or the specific programmatic positions it may adopt, particularly since these are likely to differ between countries or at different times within a single country. But in view of the tasks that are objectively posed, it is clear that the class-struggle left wing will need to be firmly based within the unions rather than set apart from them, and to make its programmatic axis the fundamental positions of support for class independence, working-class unity and union democracy.

Recent struggles such as the Belgian general strike, the German metal strike and the British miners' strike are evidence of powerful pressures for a counteroffensive beginning to build within the proletariat. But it cannot be expected that the proletariat will in one leap reach a qualitatively higher level of consciousness and organisation.

At the present level of working-class resistance to the capitalist offensive, currents within the unions offering opposition to the bureaucracy and its policies can be expected to represent at most potential nuclei of a class-struggle left wing. They will often combine elements of a class-struggle program with reformist and class-collaborationist ideas. Our attitude to such formations is one of seeking to encourage to the full every, even hesitant, move towards a class-struggle program through comradely discussion and collaboration on common objectives. These may, for example, include support and participation in such a grouping's campaign in a union election if the party considers that the campaign contributes to strengthening the union and its ranks against the employers and the bureaucracy. Our work with oppositional currents focuses on aiding them to develop a more complete and consistent class-struggle program and a strategy for fighting the capitalists and helping them to avoid the pitfalls that await opposition groups (ultraleftism and

substitutionism on one hand or a preoccupation with official positions and opportunism on the other).

There are no a priori formulas that can dictate whether or not it is appropriate for revolutionary Marxists to present themselves as candidates or support other militants in particular union elections. An election campaign which is seen by its supporters as a means for making the union a more effective weapon against the bosses can help to activate broader layers previously demobilised by their justified cynicism concerning the bureaucrats. In these circumstances revolutionaries actively seek formal leadership of unions as well as real authority with the ranks. An election campaign that improves the influence and authority of revolutionaries or other class-struggle militants with the ranks of the union and raises consciousness about the way to struggle against the capitalists is a useful tool, even if the office sought is not won.

Because the strength or weakness of the proletariat and its organisations is so closely linked to the degree of unity in action it is able to achieve, the tactic of the united front plays a central role in the defence against the capitalist offensive. The main aim of this tactic is not to "expose" the union bureaucracy, although such exposure may well be a byproduct of it. The main aim of the united front is to mobilise the greatest forces possible in opposition to the bourgeoisie and its projects for resolving the crisis at the expense of the proletariat and its allies.

Even a small revolutionary party, if it is flexible and audacious in seizing opportunities, can help to bring about formal and informal unity in action — within unions, between unions, between unions and allies of the proletariat, between organised political tendencies within the labor movement, etc.

The united front tactic is, of course, not an end in itself, but a means for mobilising the workers and their allies, for winning influence over them, and for wresting them away from the domination of reformist parties.

9. Social Democracy

Since their betrayal of 1914, Social Democratic parties have been consciously used by the imperialist bourgeoisies to weaken the class consciousness of the proletariat. Social Democratic ideology reflects the specific consciousness and material interests of the trade union bureaucracy. It teaches, in various guises, subordination of the working class and its allies to the needs of capital and uses its influence over those it leads to secure this subordination. For this reason, the bourgeoisie may favor the installation of a Social Democratic government in times of developing economic or social crisis, to forestall major working-class struggles.

The influence of Social Democracy within the proletariat, however, is based upon its claims to represent a realistic and practical method of defending the interests of working people. In the long boom period of capitalist economy following World War II, Social Democratic parties and union leaderships in the imperialist countries could give a semblance of reality to these claims by winning gradual increases in real living standards despite their class-collaborationist methods.

With the downturn of capitalist world economy, which became clear in the international recession of 1974-75, imperialist bourgeoisies have begun to use Social Democratic governments to carry through austerity policies that would meet greater resistance if imposed by openly capitalist parties. This tactic is designed to demoralise and sow confusion in the working class, disarming it politically for the subsequent attacks of more right-wing governments. Used successfully in Britain in the form of the Wilson-Callaghan Labour government and in West Germany in the SPD-FDP coalition, the stratagem is now being repeated in such diverse countries as France, Sweden, Spain, Australia and New Zealand.

However, Social Democratic parties called to government to administer capitalist crises can be subjected to severe strains as a result of the contradictions between their policies and the expectations of the workers at the base. Leaders who owe their positions to reformist illusions but who are no longer able to produce significant reforms run the risk of rapidly eroding their own support and thus losing their usefulness to the ruling class, whose support is necessary if they are to continue to govern.

This contradiction may occasionally produce demagogic left turns by Social Democratic leaderships seeking to restore their credibility with the ranks of the party and unions, particularly when their parties are in opposition. But in the present crisis, in which capitalism needs above all to persuade the proletariat to accept responsibility for the well-being of the system, the bourgeoisie is not inclined to accept even demagogic leftism from mass parties of the working class.

The contradiction is therefore more likely to express itself through the development of left-wing, semioppositional currents such as that of the Bennite wing in the British Labour Party.

It is clearly of crucial importance to the bourgeoisie to prevent such left currents gaining a mass following and developing politically towards a consistent class-struggle program. The fury of the attacks on the Benn current and the decision to split the Labour Party despite the still-limited influence in it of the former are evidence of how seriously the British bourgeoisie views this possibility.

Revolutionary Marxists should place a high priority on consistent efforts to influence developments in the mass Social Democratic parties. This work requires a clear understanding of the character of such parties. The mass labor or Social Democratic parties that presently exist are contradictory formations, as summed up in Lenin's phrase "bourgeois workers' parties." They are primarily proletarian in composition, and may even be formally subordinate to the trade unions. But their leaders and programs are dedicated to serving the interests of capital. When elected to office, they form bourgeois governments, defending capitalist property relations and the specific interests of their own imperialist bourgeoisies.

As such, these parties are obstacles to the development of revolutionary working-class consciousness and organisation; they will have to be cleared from the road before the proletariat is able to advance to the goal of socialist revolution. But their mass working-class base requires a tactical approach by revolutionaries different from that towards an openly bourgeois party. It is necessary to support every manifestation of class independence while explaining why such progressive actions need to be made consistent through the adoption of a socialist program and leadership. Revolutionary Marxists, for example, will normally urge the election of Social Democratic parties when they compete against the bourgeois parties, but at the same time will call for a change in the policies which make the former incapable of adequately defending the interests of working people. This will require flexible tactics making use of the united front approach and paying close attention to the mood of the working class both inside and outside the mass party.

Such an orientation to the mass Social Democratic parties is necessary to help counter the moods of confusion and demoralisation that can be engendered in the working class by Social Democracy's betrayals. The bourgeoisie and the reformists both seek to convince the proletariat that there are only two practical alternatives: the austerity of the bourgeois parties or the austerity of the reformist parties. To oppose this false dilemma, carefully planned activity by revolutionaries, based on familiarity with events inside these parties, will aim to encourage the ranks' dissatisfaction with the class-collaborationist policies of the leadership and to present an alternative, class-struggle program of transitional demands. Such demands can become part of the platform of class-

struggle militants in the reformist parties and help them achieve a broadening influence within the party and the proletariat as a whole. The alternative program of demands culminates in the demand for a workers and farmers' government. This can be expressed in various specific slogans, but its content is the idea that workers and farmers require a government that acts in their interests but are deprived of such a government by the refusal of the Social Democratic misleaders to truly represent the party's mass base.

Revolutionaries must be aware that the process by which workers break with Social Democratic ideology and its political representatives is not foreordained to take any particular organisational form — by a union or group of unions breaking with the reformist party, for example. Disillusionment with reformist politics will affect different layers at different times and will involve different specific issues. It may impel those who break with Social Democracy to do so in either a right-wing or left-wing direction, or as the Green Party in West Germany demonstrates, with a confused mixture of progressive and reactionary ideas. The revolutionary party has to be alert to developing conflicts within the reformist party and be able to help layers breaking from it to find their way to revolutionary politics.

The need to present a clear alternative program and a pole of attraction for workers who have reached revolutionary conclusions will in general make inadvisable any long-term tactic of entrism that includes dissolving the public face of the revolutionary party. Where it is possible for revolutionaries to join mass Social Democratic parties and to gain a hearing for their proposals within them, their activity will benefit from the existence of an independent revolutionary Marxist organisation outside the mass party that can tell the full truth about the Social Democratic misleaders, their program and the revolutionary program counterposed to it, and which can demonstrate the revolutionary Marxist alternative to reformism through its practical activity in the class struggle.

10. The Communist parties

The other major reformist trend in the world labor movement originated in the Stalinist degeneration of the Soviet Communist Party and the use of the latter's authority to change the programs and leaderships of the parties of the Communist International. The parties aligned with the Stalin faction typically sought to carry out a class-collaborationist program in conformity with the diplomatic arrangements which the Soviet bureaucracy was seeking with the various capitalist regimes. The Stalinist version of reformism in the capitalist countries differed from the Social Democratic version, however, in that the former's subordination to capital was less direct, being mediated by the specific needs of the Soviet bureaucracy. This made Stalinism less reliable from capital's standpoint, since it is possible for the needs of the Soviet bureaucracy to correspond, even if in partial and distorted ways, with the real needs of the Soviet workers state and the world revolution. At the same time, Stalinist reformism for that very reason had an even greater potential than Social Democracy for diverting the revolutionary potential of the working class.

The mythology upon which classical Stalinism was based — the idea that the CPSU was the incarnation of Marxism-Leninism — began to shatter after Khrushchev's partial denunciation of Stalin's crimes at the Twentieth Congress of the CPSU.

The open hostility between Communist parties holding state power, particularly the Sino-Soviet split, accelerated the disintegration of Stalinism as a more or less monolithic trend by giving greater room for manoeuvre to parties formerly totally

subordinate to Moscow. This permitted them to establish, if to a lesser degree, their own independence of Moscow's dictates. This process was to a large degree inevitable, at least for those parties which succeeded in attracting a following and intervening in the political life of their own countries, thus becoming subject to influences more pervasive and immediate than those exerted on them by the Soviet bureaucracy.

In a majority of cases, these influences — trade union or parliamentary posts, bourgeois public opinion etc. — have served to push the pro-Moscow parties further to the right. The Eurocommunist phenomenon, of Communist parties adapting to bourgeois "democracy" and even openly accepting imperialist military armament against the Soviet Union and the colonial revolution, typifies the resulting evolution. But these parties are also subject to more beneficial pressures stemming from the needs of their working-class memberships and the events of the class struggle nationally and internationally.

The present differences between parties whose origins, directly or indirectly, lie in the Stalinisation of the Communist International are themselves not fixed. Further evolution under the conflicting pressures exerted by their environments is inevitable. Their professed allegiance to Marxism and socialist revolution may make a transition towards consistent class-struggle positions easier than in the case of left-wing currents in Social Democratic parties. This can also be the case to the extent that they have not established a base in privileged sectors of the working class or in the petty bourgeoisie because Social Democracy has hegemony within these layers. Conversely, the difficulties of attempting to orient themselves with an inadequate program in a period of intensified class struggle can produce further opportunist and/or sectarian adaptations.

These considerations make it necessary for revolutionary Marxists to be alert for opportunities to influence in a progressive direction the evolution of parties originating in Stalinism, or sections of these parties, particularly where these parties have significant followings. As in the case of seeking to influence Social Democratic parties, this will require a complete lack of sectarianism and careful attention to the use of flexible united front tactics. The forging of a united front for even quite limited aims, if these are well chosen, can help to subject these parties to additional progressive influences.

Flexible united front tactics are also needed in relation to forces radicalising outside or breaking with the framework and political domination of the reformist Social Democratic and Stalinist parties in the movements centred on such issues as opposition to imperialist war, ecological destruction, the oppression of women etc. By participating in these movements and winning influence in them, the revolutionary party can begin to more rapidly alter the political relationship of forces between itself and the reformist parties, and also increase the political weight of left-wing ideas within these currents.

III. The continuing advance of the colonial revolution

12. The world capitalist economic crisis and the semicolonial countries

In the present period, the colonial revolution remains the most dynamic sector of the world revolution. The underdeveloped countries, which include the overwhelming majority of humanity, are the area in which the contradictions of the imperialist system are sharpest and capitalism's exploita-

11. Preparing for revolutionary upsurges

A revolutionary struggle for power is not on the immediate agenda in any imperialist country today. But as the events of May-June 1968 in France demonstrated, the highly developed contradictions of imperialist capitalism can produce such a revolutionary situation in a brief time span. The working class in the imperialist countries has not lost its revolutionary potential or been "bought off" by the crumbs from imperialist superprofits, despite the undoubted penetration of bourgeois ideology. The semiprofessional layers and various white-collar employees who are often initially the bearers of that ideology have themselves been subjected to a process of proletarianisation and in a number of countries constitute a growing sector of the organised labor movement. The capitalist austerity programs implemented since the 1974-75 international recession have often hit first and most directly at these layers, undermining their illusions and encouraging a militancy often surpassing that of industrial workers whose wages and conditions have not yet been so profoundly affected by the crisis.

The degree to which the crisis, with its erosion of living conditions for both blue-collar and white-collar workers, has already weakened ruling-class ideological hegemony cannot be judged solely from the level of overt class struggle. The delay in a generalised fight back against the capitalist offensive derives from a number of factors. These may include illusions in what can be accomplished by the mass reformist parties, or at least a willingness to wait and see what they are capable of. A desire to resist the austerity drive can also be rendered ineffective for a longer or shorter period by a lack of confidence in the bureaucratic misleaderships; this is the more likely to be the case the smaller the size and the corresponding ability of revolutionary forces to put themselves forward as a credible alternative leadership. But in this period of intensifying crisis of the imperialist system, such obstacles can be broken through in short order by ruling-class provocations or an example of successful proletarian struggles. Explosive upsurges leading to a revolutionary crisis and a rapid growth of anticapitalist consciousness can occur even more abruptly today than in 1968. While the tempo of such explosions cannot be predicted, the social contradictions tending to produce them will continue to strengthen until there is a fundamental resolution of the existing crisis.

These considerations underline the importance of using the present period, whatever its duration, for the construction of a strong revolutionary leadership prior to the eruption of revolutionary crises. Through their participation in the present day-to-day struggles of the proletariat, however limited and defensive their starting points, revolutionary parties must begin to win leadership authority among militants and thus lay the foundations for acquiring a mass following as rapidly as possible in periods of upsurge.

tion is most intense and unbearable.

The shift in the long-term direction of the capitalist world economy has had its most catastrophic effects in the semicolonial underdeveloped countries, which were already mired in poverty before the reversal.

They have experienced a drop in production, a decline in the volume and value of their exports and a drastic cut in employment in a situation where they were already chronically

plagued by unemployment and underemployment. The number of unemployed and underemployed in these countries may now reach 500 million — one-third to one-half of the labor force.

Their per capita income is further reduced by the demographic distortions inseparable from underdevelopment — the continual reproduction of a relative surplus population in the countryside producing an exodus into overcrowded urban slums. Proletarian and semiproletarian layers are hit hard and directly. The income of the urban and rural petty bourgeoisie is falling rapidly. Social inequality increases relentlessly. The scanty infrastructure of public equipment and services is in process of being dismantled. The nutrition and health situation is deteriorating dramatically. Capitalist and imperialist superexploitation have made a new leap forward.

Insofar as these countries underwent a more thoroughgoing integration into the world market over the last few decades, the first effects of the 1974-75 recession were reflected in growing balance of trade and balance of payments deficits. Thus in 1973 the oil-importing underdeveloped countries had a deficit in their balance of trade with the imperialist countries of \$3 billion; by 1980 this had quadrupled to \$12.2 billion. Moreover, the exports of the underdeveloped countries are primarily agricultural and other primary commodities that have experienced a steady deterioration in the terms of trade; the 1980 figure was made up of a \$48.2 billion surplus on primary commodities and a \$60.4 billion deficit on manufactured goods. The limited industrialisation that has occurred in the underdeveloped countries is distorted both in its distribution and its composition. Only five countries accounted for 79 per cent of the increase of industrial production of all the underdeveloped countries between 1975 and 1980. And manufacturing growth typically occurs in industries such as garment and textile, which return a high profit to the multinational corporations but contribute little or nothing to development.

These circumstances combined with shifts in imperialist investment patterns to produce the present debt crisis of the underdeveloped countries. These shifts were outlined as follows by Fidel Castro in his report to the Seventh Summit Conference of the Non-Aligned Countries:

"As known, the main investment trends of the developed capitalist countries before World War II were directed to the then colonial, semi-colonial and dependent world. Since the end of that war, a new phenomenon started to develop: **international capital flows showed a tendency to move mainly within the developed capitalist countries.** In 1946, for instance, Latin America absorbed 43 per cent of all direct US investments abroad and Western Europe barely 19 per cent. By the mid-'70s, Latin America received only 17 per cent of these investments while Western Europe was already receiving over 37 per cent.

"In addition, by the early '70s another process began: **private capital, representing then only a little over 40 per cent of total financial flows to underdeveloped countries, some ten years later absorbed over 65 per cent.** On the other hand, another unprecedented process occurred in the '70s: of all private capital flows to underdeveloped countries, direct investments decreased (from 56 per cent in 1970 to only 28 per cent — exactly half — in 1979), while the financial flows of the transnational commercial banks (loans and credits), practically non-existent in statistical terms in 1970, increased to the point of absorbing 44 per cent of total private flows in 1979. That is why in 1979, according to UNCTAD, underdeveloped countries were paying, on account of the interest on their fabulous external debt, an amount three times the earning from direct foreign private investments." (Fidel Castro, *The World Economic and Social Crisis*, Havana, 1983, p. 19. Emphasis in original.)

These debts have continued to snowball, giving imperialism the means to press for and impose extraordinarily brutal austerity policies, thereby aggravating the social and political crisis. For an increasing number of countries, these debts are reaching or have already passed the point at which not even the

most extreme deprivation of the popular masses suffices to pay interest, let alone repayment of principals. In 1983 the total amount of capital coming into the underdeveloped countries was just equal to the interest charges on their debts. In its relations with the underdeveloped countries, capital stands more and more nakedly revealed as the "right" to the wealth, labor and even lives of the poor, without even the pretence of mediation by production.

Already in 1974-76, according to the United Nations Food and Agricultural Organisation, average consumption of calories in the underdeveloped countries as a whole was only 95 per cent of requirements. Today in the poorest countries, mainly in Africa, but also in South Asia and Latin America, the crisis has taken on the dimensions of a catastrophe. The standard of living of the popular masses has fallen below the "minimum threshold" set by the thugs of the World Bank. Broader and broader layers are not getting the daily food intake specifically needed by inhabitants of these regions.

Famine has struck the bulk of the people of whole countries: the Sahel, Ethiopia, Uganda, Chad, Bangladesh, north-east Brazil, Zaire and Ghana. The scourge of famine has never struck so massively in recent decades, yet imperialist countries are implementing a policy of subsidies to reduce their grain-producing capacity and keep prices up.

Wherever market relations developed in the countryside, they have led either to the near-destruction of food production or to a considerable reduction of the share of that production consumed on the farm — farmers must first produce for the market to secure the goods needed to reproduce their labor power. As a result of the profound changes of their agrarian structures produced at least in part by agribusiness, these countries have to import an ever-increasing share of their food. These imports weigh heavily on a balance of payments already skewed by the drop in the prices of their export goods and the increase of the prices of manufactured goods, energy and interest on their debt. In 1980 alone, food imports of the underdeveloped countries exceeded food exports by almost \$14 billion.

The limited industrialisation that has occurred in a few of the underdeveloped countries is an adjunct of imperialist needs and offers no perspective of self-sustaining growth out of underdevelopment. The transfer of value from repatriated profits, interest and unequal exchange makes underdevelopment self-perpetuating within the framework of the capitalist world market. The productivity gap between the imperialist and underdeveloped countries is in fact increasing rather than decreasing. Indeed, it has been calculated that, at the rate of growth experienced in the 1970s, the underdeveloped countries would require 225 years to reach the present per capita GDP of Great Britain and another 200 years to reach that of the United States!

The intensifying contradictions within the semicolonial societies, and between the semicolonial and imperialist countries, combined with the revolutionary gains of the recent past, particularly in Central America, make the semicolonial world the arena in which the imperialist world system is weakest and in which new revolutionary victories are most likely to occur in the next period.

13. The role of the semicolonial bourgeoisie

The combined character of the world revolution places the bourgeoisie of the semicolonial countries in a highly contradictory situation. Insofar as it is national (and the bourgeoisie always identifies the nation with itself), the bourgeoisie wishes to escape the poverty, exploitation and oppression which imperialism imposes on the underdeveloped countries. To the extent that it acts on this sentiment and opposes imperialism, the bourgeoisie aids the advance of the revolution. But the semicolonial bourgeoisie is also always bourgeois and therefore frightened by and opposed to the class forces and program that

alone can win real national liberation. In the struggle of the workers and peasants against imperialism and its effects, the bourgeoisie is therefore capable of being an ally, but a timid and inconsistent one. This unreliability is multiplied by the often direct economic links with imperialist capital and the knowledge that imperialism provides the ultimate military guarantee of continued bourgeois rule in the semicolonies.

It would be shortsighted for the proletariat to reject the assistance of any ally, however temporary and inconsistent, in its struggle against imperialism. To the contrary, a revolutionary leadership of the workers and peasants will seek to intensify the contradictions between imperialism and the semicolonial bourgeoisie, offering the latter every assistance for any concrete action against imperialism. This was explained by the Theses on the Eastern Question of the Fourth Congress of the Communist International:

"The workers' united front is the slogan advanced in the West during the transition period, characterised by the organised gathering of forces. Similarly in the colonial East at the present time the key slogan to advance is the anti-imperialist united front. Its expediency follows from the perspective of a long-drawn-out struggle with world imperialism that will demand the mobilisation of all revolutionary elements. This mobilisation is made all the more necessary by the tendency of the indigenous ruling classes to make compromises with foreign capital directed against the fundamental interests of the mass of the people. Just as in the West the slogan of the workers' united front has helped and is still helping to expose the social democrats' sell-out of proletarian interests, so the slogan of an anti-imperialist united front will help to expose the vacillations of the various bourgeois-nationalist groups. This slogan will also help the working masses to develop their revolutionary will and to increase their class consciousness; it will place them in the front ranks of those fighting not only imperialism, but the remnants of feudalism."

The condition for such an alliance, as Lenin's writings and the resolutions of the Communist International repeatedly stressed, is that the revolutionary party retain its political independence and freedom of action.

The effectiveness of this tactic of the anti-imperialist united front was demonstrated during the Malvinas war, in which the Argentine junta attempted to reassert Argentine sovereignty over a portion of the national territory occupied by British imperialism. Such a struggle is progressive, regardless of the motives or political character of the government that leads it, and it was correct and necessary for the Argentine working class to throw itself fully into the war effort. Its temporary tactical alliance with the Argentine bourgeoisie served to exacerbate the contradiction with imperialism, strengthen the workers and peasants politically, mobilise sections of the middle class and expose the hollowness of the bourgeoisie's claim to embody the national interest.

The Malvinas war also provided the Cuban government with the opportunity, which it used quite skilfully, to develop the fight against imperialism in Latin America. In his capacity as chairman of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries, Fidel Castro called on member states to act to end "Anglo-American aggression" against Argentina. A meeting in Havana of the Coordinating Bureau of the movement, which was attended by more than 90 delegations and addressed by the Argentine foreign minister, "deplored the military operations being carried out in the South Atlantic by the powerful military forces of the United Kingdom, supported and assisted by the United States." The clear stand of Cuba played a central role in mobilising support throughout South America for the Argentine national struggle. By offering its solidarity with this struggle, the Cuban government further weakened the junta's ties with imperialism and made it more difficult for the junta to seek an unprincipled compromise with the Thatcher government. Another important result of this approach was the withdrawal

of Argentine troops aiding US imperialism in Central America and a marked improvement in relations between Argentina and Nicaragua.

14. Revolutionary nationalism and bourgeois national-reformism

At the Second Congress of the Communist International in 1920, Lenin pointed to the need for Marxists to distinguish between reformist and revolutionary currents in the national liberation movements of the oppressed countries. He pointed out that the "bourgeoisie of the oppressed countries, while it does support the national movement, is in full accord with the imperialist bourgeoisie, i.e., joins forces with it against all revolutionary movements and revolutionary classes." Lenin proposed that nationalist movements that based themselves on the masses, "educating and organising in a revolutionary spirit the peasantry and the masses of the exploited," be called "national revolutionary" in order to distinguish them from bourgeois reformist movements. (*Collected Works*, Vol. 31, p. 242) The latter seek to subordinate the anti-imperialist struggle of the masses to the goal of achieving a deal with imperialism that would lessen the subservient and unequal relationship of the colonial bourgeoisie to imperialism, without ending imperialist domination or exploitation. They therefore hold back the revolutionary mobilisation of the workers and peasants. On the other hand, Lenin explained that revolutionary nationalist movements, while not communist, deserve the support of Marxists because they promote the mobilisation of the masses of the oppressed countries against the imperialist bourgeoisie. As the experience of the July 26 Movement in Cuba demonstrated, through a consistent struggle for national liberation, revolutionary nationalist forces can come to a Marxist perspective on the need to carry this struggle over into an anticapitalist social revolution.

The upsurge of anti-colonial struggles that has developed since World War II has been accompanied by the growth of revolutionary nationalist movements. The Palestine Liberation Organisation is an outstanding example of such a movement. Since the revolutionary nationalist leadership of Fateh won decisive influence in the Palestine Liberation Organisation in the late 1960s, the PLO has waged a consistent fight to educate and organise the dispossessed Palestinian people in an independent struggle for their national rights. It has demonstrated its willingness to fight not only the Israeli imperialist state, which occupies the Palestinian homeland, but also, when forced to, the bourgeois Arab regimes in Jordan, Lebanon and Syria in order to preserve its unity, independence and freedom of action. The PLO leadership has steadfastly opposed the repeated plans of imperialism, particularly US imperialism, to impose a "peace" settlement in the Arab East that would deny the Palestinian people their national rights and bypass the PLO as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian nation.

The PLO calls for the destruction of the racist Israeli state and its replacement by a democratic, secular Palestine in which Jews and Arabs would enjoy equal rights. Marxists support this revolutionary democratic demand since its attainment would create the best conditions for advancing the struggle of the Arab and Jewish workers of Palestine for socialism. Similarly, Marxists support the PLO's call for the establishment of an independent Palestinian state on any Palestinian territory liberated from Zionist occupation, as a transitional step towards the liberation of all of occupied Palestine.

The course of the Iranian revolution demonstrates the validity and importance of the Comintern's distinction between reformist bourgeois national and national revolutionary movements. The Iranian revolution was a massive anti-imperialist upheaval, drawing historically unprecedented numbers of people into struggle and inspiring workers and peasants throughout

the semicolonial world. It dealt a major setback to imperialism by overthrowing the brutal regime of the shah, which was, after Israel, imperialism's most important bastion in the region. But further progress of the revolution has been gravely hampered, and existing gains are threatened, by the bourgeois reformist leadership of the Ayatollah Khomeini and the Islamic Republican Party. This leadership has sought to hold back and block the popular movement in order to re-establish a stable bourgeois state structure and restore the normal conditions of exploitation for capitalists and landlords. It has therefore steadily chopped away at the democratic rights won by the workers and peasants in the course of the struggle against the shah, particularly the rights of unions, women and oppressed nationalities. It has gone so far as to use brutal tortures and executions against supporters of the revolution. The effect of such measures on the masses can only be to obscure the far greater brutality that would necessarily be imposed by a victorious imperialist-backed counter-revolution.

Nevertheless, imperialism has remained unremittingly hostile to the revolution and to the IRP regime, which it does not believe can control and drive back the mass movement sufficiently to recreate a situation of imperialist "order." Imperialism still seeks to replace the IRP with a counter-revolutionary regime which would decisively crush the popular struggle. Without giving any political confidence to the bourgeois nationalist IRP government, and while calling for its replacement by a workers and peasants' government, revolutionaries should defend it against the attacks of imperialism, which are aimed at the regime only in order to strike the revolution. The task before the Iranian workers and peasants is to resist imperialist attempts to destabilise the IRP government while seeking to replace this government with one of their own.

We oppose the stance of groups such as the Mujahedeen, which have fallen into the trap of objectively aiding imperialism's attacks through their campaign to destroy the regime without the support of the masses and in alliance with the Iraqi government. A similar error, based on their failure to understand the anti-imperialist axis of the Iranian revolution, is committed by the Fedayeen, who regard the Khomeini regime as worse than that of the shah and who take a position of "neutrality" in the war between Iran and Iraq. This objectively anti-revolutionary position and the sectarianism that characterises the group both flow from a conception of revolution that seeks to leap over the national-democratic revolution against imperialism.

The imperialist-inspired Iraqi invasion, which continues to be funded by the most reactionary Arab regimes, has so far been the most serious attack on the Iranian revolution, wreaking immense material and human devastation. The counter-revolutionary character of the Iraqi war has not been changed by the Iranian victories and the subsequent carrying of the war to Iraqi territory, a fact that is confirmed by the build-up in the Arabian Sea of an imperialist armada threatening intervention against Iran. Recognising that an Iranian defeat in this war would represent a terrible setback for the revolution, we unequivocally side with the Iranian forces so long as the fighting continues. This defensive war is one that has been forced on Iran by imperialism and its agents, and its continuation inevitably causes further material and human losses to the revolution, without any realistic prospect of gains that could compensate for these losses. In this situation, we favor a speedy termination of the war on terms providing the maximum possible guarantees against a renewal of the Iraqi aggression.

15. Leninist revolutionary strategy in the semicolonial countries

The course of the colonial revolution continues to confirm the

validity of the Marxist strategy developed by Lenin as a guide to revolution in the underdeveloped countries during the imperialist epoch. This strategy is based on four basic premises:

(1) The national-democratic revolution in the backward countries cannot be consistently led by the national bourgeoisie. If it is to carry through a thoroughgoing agrarian reform and the destruction of the old neocolonial state apparatus, it must be led by the working class, in alliance with the broad masses of the peasantry and other petty-bourgeois strata, united around a revolutionary democratic program.

(2) On the basis of such a worker-peasant alliance, the military and political power of the bourgeoisie and large landowners must be overthrown and replaced by a workers and peasants' government resting on the armed power of the worker-peasant masses.

(3) Such a workers and peasants' government first solves the national, democratic, agrarian and anti-imperialist tasks, improving the workers' conditions and expanding their control over the economy at the expense of the capitalists.

(4) As the organisation and class consciousness of the workers and their alliance with the poor peasants deepens, the revolution develops as a permanent process, growing over uninterruptedly to the specifically socialist tasks of expropriation of the bourgeoisie and establishment of a socialist state based on a nationalised, planned economy. The workers and peasants' government is thus the transitional form of the state power of the proletariat and its allies preceding the consolidation of a socialist state. As Trotsky pointed out in 1922, it is a "transition to the proletarian dictatorship, the full and completed one." (*The First Five Years of the Communist International*, Vol. 2, p. 324)

There are no a priori rules dictating the pace at which a workers and peasants' government must proceed with the nationalisation of capitalist property; this is determined by the specific course of the class struggle nationally and internationally and by the concrete demands of economic and social development. The key consideration is that political power remain firmly in the hands of the workers and peasants. Given this condition, which requires the continued political mobilisation of the masses, the confiscation of capital can proceed at the pace best suited to minimise economic disruption and to maintain the political alliances the proletariat has established with other exploited classes. The experience of the Algerian workers and peasants' government in the early 1960s, on the other hand, demonstrates that a workers and peasants' government cannot indefinitely coexist with bourgeois property relations. A workers and peasants' government is by its very nature an unstable and transitory formation: It must either move forward to the establishment of a socialist state or — failing to decisively break the economic power of the bourgeoisie — fall back and open the way to a reassertion of bourgeois political power.

The possibility of carrying through the transition to the stage of socialist construction under the dictatorship of the proletariat in the industrially backward countries is dependent not only upon the proletariat using its possession of state power to forge an anticapitalist alliance with the poor peasants and other semiproletarian elements, but also upon the establishment of close economic relations with the existing, and particularly the more industrially advanced, socialist states.

This strategy was outlined by Lenin in the Report of the Commission on the National and the Colonial Questions at the Second Congress of the Communist International:

"The question was posed as follows: are we to consider as correct the assertion that the capitalist stage of economic development is inevitable for backward nations now on the road to emancipation and among whom a certain advance towards progress is to be seen since the war? We replied in the negative. If the victorious revolutionary proletariat conducts systematic propaganda among them, and the Soviet governments come to

their aid with all the means at their disposal — in that event it will be mistaken to assume that the backward peoples must inevitably go through the capitalist stage of development. Not only should we create independent contingents of fighters and party organisations in the colonies and the backward countries, not only at once launch propaganda for the organisation of peasants' Soviets and strive to adapt them to the pre-capitalist conditions, but the Communist International should advance the proposition, with the appropriate theoretical grounding, that with the aid of the proletariat of the advanced countries, backward countries can go over to the Soviet system and, through certain stages of development, to communism, without having to pass through the capitalist stage." (*Collected Works*, Vol. 31, pp. 243-4)

The above considerations determine the character of the anti-imperialist alliance which the proletariat led by a revolutionary party will seek to forge with other classes.

The proletariat's alliance with the peasantry is a long-term, strategic one, because of the two classes' common objective interests in opposition to both imperialism and exploitation by national capital.

The anti-imperialist alliance with sectors of the bourgeoisie is a tactical one. It serves primarily to draw into the struggle middle-class forces who look to the national bourgeoisie for leadership but whose conditions of life and patriotic sentiments can persuade them to follow a powerful movement of the workers and peasants. This form of tactical alliance is illustrated by the FSLN's bloc with the Broad Opposition Front (FAO) during the final battle against the Somoza regime and the inclusion of FAO leader Alfonso Robelo in the Government of National Reconstruction from July 1979 to May 1980.

The differing class alliances characterise the different stages of the revolutionary process. During the national-democratic revolution, sectors of the bourgeoisie may remain allied with the workers and peasants even to the extent of sending their representatives into the workers and peasants' government, as happened in Nicaragua. The more firmly middle-class layers can be won to the revolution during this period, the easier will be the carrying through of socialist tasks in the next stage and the more isolated will the national bourgeoisie be, when the alliance with bourgeois sectors is broken.

This Marxist strategy for revolution in the backward countries was explained by Lenin in his 1919 polemic with the German centrist leader Karl Kautsky. Referring to the experience of the Russian Bolsheviks, Lenin wrote:

"... The Bolsheviks formulated the alignment of class forces in the bourgeois revolution as follows: the proletariat, winning over the peasants, will neutralise the liberal bourgeoisie and utterly destroy the monarchy, medievalism and the landlord system.

"It is the alliance between the proletariat and the peasants in general that reveals the bourgeois character of the revolution, for the peasants in general are small producers who exist on the basis of commodity production. Further, the Bolsheviks then added, the proletariat will win over the entire semi-proletariat (all the working and exploited people), will neutralise the middle peasants and overthrow the bourgeoisie; this will be a socialist revolution, as distinct from a bourgeois-democratic revolution. . . .

"... To attempt to raise an artificial Chinese Wall between the first and second, to separate them by anything else than the degree of preparedness of the proletariat and the degree of its unity with the poor peasants, means to distort Marxism. . . ." (*Collected Works*, Vol. 28, pp. 294-5, 300)

"With all the peasants right through to the end of the bourgeois-democratic revolution; and with the poor, the proletarian and semi-proletarian section of the peasants, forward to the socialist revolution! This has been the policy of the Bolsheviks, and it is the only Marxist policy." (*ibid.*, p. 311)

Summarising the experience of the Russian Revolution, Lenin

wrote in this same work: "It was the Bolsheviks who strictly differentiated between the bourgeois-democratic revolution and the socialist revolution: by carrying the former through, they opened the door for the transition to the latter. This was the only policy that was revolutionary and Marxist." (*ibid.*, p. 312)

Lenin also warned in the same article against attempts to force artificially the pace of transition from the national-democratic stage to the socialist stage of such a revolutionary process:

"... if the Bolshevik proletariat had tried at once, in October-November 1917, without waiting for the class differentiation in the rural districts, without being able to prepare it and bring it about, to 'decree' a civil war or the 'introduction of socialism' in the rural districts, had tried to do without a temporary bloc with the peasants in general, without making a number of concessions to the middle peasants, etc., that would have been a Blanquist distortion of Marxism, an attempt by the minority to impose its will upon the majority; it would have been a theoretical absurdity, revealing a failure to understand that a general peasant revolution is still a bourgeois revolution, and that without a series of transitions, of transitional stages, it cannot be transformed into a socialist revolution in a backward country." (*ibid.*, p. 304. Emphasis in original throughout.)

Ultraleft attempts to leap over the necessary democratic stage of the revolution in the backward countries have, as the tragic experiences of the Hungarian revolution in 1919 and more recently the Grenadan revolution demonstrate, only alienated the masses, particularly the rural and urban middle classes, and provided an opening for imperialism and its local counter-revolutionary agents to destroy the revolutionary process. In Grenada, the ultraleftism of the clique centred on Bernard Coard was all the more harmful because of the predominance of petty commodity producers in the population. The small size of the working class and the fact that the New Jewel Movement came to power without a prolonged mass struggle affected the level of popular consciousness and mobilisation adversely and slowed the development of firm links between the party and the masses. In these circumstances, the Coard clique was able to manipulate sections of the party and the state apparatus and carry out a coup that demobilised the masses and destroyed the workers and farmers' government.

16. Stalinist strategy and the Communist parties

With the victory of the Stalin faction in the Soviet Union and the extension of its domination over the Communist International, Communist parties in the colonial world were deprived of international assistance in applying the Leninist strategy of revolution in the backward countries. Most of them came to accept the distortion of this strategy introduced by the theory developed by Stalin and former Menshevik ideologist Aleksandr Martynov, who was admitted into the CPSU in 1923, of the "bloc of four classes" in the national liberation revolution. This theory converted tactical alliances with bourgeois nationalist forces into a long-term strategic alliance, the latter entailing that the interests of the workers and peasants be subordinated to maintaining the support of bourgeois nationalist forces during the national-democratic revolution. At times, as during the "third period" line of the early 1930s, this class collaborationist perspective alternated with an ultraleft approach that only served to make more difficult the establishment of the necessary tactical and strategic alliances against imperialism.

The Stalinist strategy of a "bloc of four classes" was first applied by the Comintern during the second Chinese revolution of 1925-27. The Chinese Communist party was instructed by the Comintern to maintain its alliance with the Kuomintang, including keeping its members inside the KMT, even while the KMT was brutally suppressing the revolutionary mobilisation

of the workers and peasants. The 1927 Platform of the United Opposition in the CPSU, led by Zinoviev and Trotsky, summarised the effects of this line as follows:

"The decisive cause of the unfavorable outcome of the Chinese revolution at the present stage was the fundamentally mistaken policy of the leadership of the Russian Communist Party and the whole International. The net result was that at the decisive period there existed in China, in actual fact, no real Bolshevik Party. . . .

"We had in China a classic experiment in the application of the Menshevik tactic in the bourgeois-democratic revolution. . . .

"All the decisions made in Lenin's time by the Second and Fourth Congresses of the Communist International — the decision on soviets in the Orient, on the full independence of workers' Communist parties in countries with a national-revolutionary movement, and on the union of the working class with the peasants against 'their own' bourgeoisie and the foreign imperialists — all these decisions were completely forgotten." (*The Challenge of the Left Opposition, 1926-27* [New York: Pathfinder Press, 1980], pp. 368-9)

In the decades after this demonstration of the bankruptcy of the "bloc of four classes" strategy, the majority of Communist parties in the semicolonial countries have continued to adhere to it. This has led to continuing defeats, the most significant being that suffered by the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI) in 1965. With the full backing of the Mao regime in China, with which the PKI aligned itself after the Sino-Soviet rift, the Indonesian Communists pursued a class-collaborationist policy toward the bourgeois-nationalist Sukarno government. When General Suharto launched a right-wing military coup in October 1965, the PKI, still hopeful of maintaining its alliance with the Indonesian bourgeoisie, refused to arm and mobilise its members. The result was that the PKI — the largest Communist party in the capitalist world, with three million members — the trade unions and other mass organisations it headed, were subsequently destroyed by the new military regime without serious resistance. The defeat in Indonesia in turn paved the way for the massive military aggression launched by US imperialism against the national liberation forces in south Vietnam and the socialist state in the north.

In the context of the weakening of imperialism during World War II, the Yugoslav and Chinese Communist parties, while remaining loyal to Stalinist theory of a "bloc of four classes," were able to lead a revolutionary struggle for power, which subsequently led to the consolidation of socialist states in those countries, because the major bourgeois forces with whom they sought to form a long-term alliance refused the offer and, relying on imperialism, confronted these CPs with the alternatives of mobilising their mass bases or abjectly capitulating.

In the present period, the deepening crisis of imperialism, which leads to mounting pressure from the masses in the semicolonial countries for a way out of its catastrophic effects on their lives, and the simultaneous crisis of Stalinism, have created increased openings for revolutionary Marxist forces to win mass political influence in the colonial world. This is most immediately true of Latin America, where the positive example of the Marxist-Leninist leaderships of the Cuban and Nicaraguan revolutions is most directly felt. Moreover, it is not excluded that under the revolutionary pressure of the masses, particularly where bourgeois democracy is weak or nonexistent, or where revolutionary Marxists have a relatively strong influence, that a substantial section of a Communist party, or

even the party in its entirety, will go all the way to a revolutionary orientation in both practice and theory, as the recent experience of the Salvadoran CP demonstrates.

While most of the parties originally aligned with Beijing following the Sino-Soviet split have become little more than hardened and irrelevant sects, some have shown a more positive evolution. The most outstanding example of the latter has been the Communist Party of the Philippines, which, through the experiences of conducting a struggle against the neocolonial Marcos regime, has gradually left its original Maoism behind and evolved in the direction of revolutionary Marxism.

17. The contradictory role of religion

The backward social relations of semicolonial countries often include a more-or-less institutionalised religion with a correspondingly great influence in the lives of the masses. Marxists of course recognise that all religious ideologies are forms of false consciousness. But this false consciousness is the product of the same social conditions that impel the workers and peasants to seek revolutionary solutions. Religious belief and revolution are responses to exploitation and oppression on the subjective/individual and objective/social levels respectively. This is the origin of the contradiction that the working masses may pursue progressive social struggles under the banner of religion, a phenomenon which becomes even more likely when the religion in question serves to distinguish a semicolonial country from its imperialist oppressors. As earlier happened during the bourgeois revolutions of Western Europe, the masses' aspirations to carry out the tasks of the national-democratic revolution become identified with their religious beliefs, to which they give a new content even while retaining the old forms. (In Poland the same process occurs under different social conditions. Because of the Catholic Church's historical association with Polish nationalism and its degree of independence from the bureaucracy, the anti-bureaucratic struggle has a strong religious coloration.)

This contradiction, which is only a particular form of the inevitable lag between changing objective conditions and changed consciousness, can undermine in peculiar ways the religious institution itself, which of course is a defender of conservative and reactionary interests. It may produce vacillation or fissures within the religious hierarchy between layers closest to the masses and their revolutionary actions and layers who most closely identify with the existing social order and its ideology. Thus in Central America and the Philippines, clergymen have been successfully integrated into the revolutionary movement even as the church takes increasingly more open counter-revolutionary positions, while in Iran sections of the Islamic clergy led the anti-imperialist struggle that overthrew the shah, but now attempt to drive the revolution back within bounds that would mean its eventual defeat. Given the complex and contradictory character of relations between the masses, their religious beliefs and different layers of religious hierarchies, it would be schematic, sectarian and ultimately idealist to attempt to judge social struggles by the religious views of the masses or their leaders rather than by their effects in material reality. The workers and peasants influenced by religious ideology and institutions cannot be expected to break with them until prepared for this through their own experiences, gained in political and economic struggles.

IV. The socialist states

18. Imperialism versus the socialist states

Since the creation of the Soviet state and its successful defence against the landlord-capitalist counter-revolution and imperialist intervention, the conflict between imperialism and the workers and peasants of the world has taken place in additional forms and new arenas. The existence of proletarian states is a permanent weight in the international balance of class forces on the side of the workers and oppressed nations, although the magnitude of this weight varies with the successes or setbacks met by the workers and peasants in consolidating and extending their power, developing the economy and other areas.

A permanent contradiction exists between the socialist states and the capitalist environment in which they must exist until socialist revolution triumphs in the imperialist countries. This contradiction exists first of all in the imperialist military and political threat to the socialist states, which imposes a major burden upon them through the need to divert their economic resources to military defence. Imperialism continually seeks to isolate the socialist states from their natural allies, the workers and oppressed in the capitalist world, in order to prepare the military overthrow of proletarian dictatorships. The contradiction exists as well on the economic level: To the extent that a socialist state finds it necessary to buy and sell on the capitalist world market, it suffers indirect exploitation through the process of unequal exchange. This unequal exchange will continue so long as the productivity of labor in the socialist state is lower than that of the imperialist countries.

These realities condition the major tasks confronting the workers and peasants of the existing socialist states and will condition the tasks of new socialist states. These tasks can be summarised as follows:

- a. Completion of unfinished bourgeois tasks. Chief among these are agrarian reform, ending the oppression of national minorities and the extension of democratic rights. Historical experience has shown that these tasks must at least be begun even prior to the establishment of the proletarian dictatorship, during the transitional period of the workers and peasants' government, in order to mobilise the proletariat and its allies in revolutionary struggle.
- b. Economic development. This task is the more important the more backward the economic base inherited from capitalism. Experience has shown, however, that even extreme poverty and technological backwardness can be gradually overcome through socialist property forms and the mobilisation of the workers and peasants to build a new society. The speed of this progress also depends on the extent of aid available from the proletariat and peasantry of other countries.
- c. Development of education and culture. In order to consciously construct a new society and to be masters of it, working people need both individual and collective understanding of technology and the social, biological and physical sciences. The needs of economic development also require a rapid lifting of the educational level, particularly if imperialism is able to entice large sections of the old educated classes into emigration. For these reasons, the literacy campaign and continuing encouragement of educational development that have characterised the Cuban Revolution are an important model for subsequent revolutions.

- d. Development of egalitarian social relations. Every socialist state inevitably inherits from capitalism a society that is divided not only by class lines but also by numerous stratifications within classes. Elimination of these stratifications and the attitudes to which they give rise is necessarily part of creating a society based on human solidarity. Success in this task ultimately depends upon development of the economy and culture, but can be facilitated by a conscious leadership and policies designed to eliminate the effects of past discrimination, limit the scope of material differences between individuals or sectors and prevent the development of privilege.
- e. Increasing mass involvement in and control over the state and economy. Such mass involvement and control is the best method of preventing errors and disproportions in economic plans, enlisting the full creativity of the workers and peasants for economic development and combating any tendencies to bureaucratism or privilege. The development of culture and egalitarian social relations forms an objective limit to the possibilities of direct control by the masses, but conversely a policy of encouraging mass control will speed the development of culture and egalitarian relations.
- f. Strengthening the defence of the socialist states and encouraging extension of the world revolution. These tasks are closely related, since the spread of revolution directly undermines the ability of imperialism to launch military attacks against the socialist states; defence of the socialist states is therefore a political task as well as a military one. The existing socialist states of course cannot "export revolution," but they can encourage it by the example of their own successes and assist it with material and, if necessary, military aid.

19. The nature and role of the bureaucratic castes in the socialist states

The states in which capitalism has been overthrown are usually described as socialist, and this description is accurate insofar as it refers to the fact that the state concerned defends socialist property relations. The countries concerned have not, however, reached the stage of socialist society, which requires a development of the productive forces achievable only through a planned economy embracing the entire world.

Moreover, in the Soviet Union, Eastern Europe, Mongolia, China and North Korea, privileged bureaucratic castes monopolise political power and act as an obstacle to the accomplishing of the tasks outlined above and therefore as an obstacle to their advance towards socialism. The bureaucracies defend inequality, distort economic development, block scientific and cultural development, undermine the political defence of the socialist states and the extension of revolution etc. Removal of these bureaucratic obstacles through a political revolution is therefore an additional task confronting the workers and peasants of these countries.

In the Soviet Union, the rise of the bureaucratic caste, whose political representative was the Stalin faction, was conditioned by the isolation of the Soviet state and the poverty, destruction and cultural backwardness inherited by the Bolshevik government. Trotsky, who led the fight against bureaucratisation within the Soviet Communist Party, viewed the Stalinist regime as one of crisis, which would either lead to the restoration of

capitalism or be swept away by the workers and peasants when a new rise of the world revolution broke down the imperialist encirclement and repoliticised the Soviet proletariat and peasantry:

"Since of all the strata of Soviet society the bureaucracy has best solved its own social problem, and is fully content with the existing situation, it has ceased to offer any subjective guarantee whatever of the socialist direction of its policy. It continues to preserve state property only to the extent that it fears the proletariat. . . . As a conscious political force the bureaucracy has betrayed the revolution. But a victorious revolution is fortunately not only a program and a banner, not only political institutions, but also a system of social relations. To betray it is not enough. You have to overthrow it. The October revolution has been betrayed by the ruling stratum, but not yet overthrown. It has a great power of resistance, coinciding with the established property relations, with the living force of the proletariat, the consciousness of its best elements, the impasse of world capitalism, and the inevitability of world revolution." (*The Revolution Betrayed*, pp. 251-2)

The course actually followed by history, however, lay between the two sharply posed alternatives outlined by Trotsky. The Stalinist reign of terror was more successful than foreseen in atomising the proletariat and preventing the development of an organised revolutionary vanguard, while the rapid growth brought about by nationalised, planned economy provided the bureaucracy with the ability to make material concessions to the masses when this was necessary to relieve social pressures. The socialist revolutions following World War II, occurring under direct Soviet influence or, in the case of Yugoslavia and China, being led by bureaucratised parties modeled on the Soviet CP, to some extent legitimised the socialist pretensions of the ruling caste even while the bureaucratic distortions of those revolutions prevented them from serving as an inspiration for the political revival of the Soviet population.

The bureaucracy has thus survived far longer than was considered possible by Trotsky and his co-thinkers in the 1930s. The prolongation and further consolidation of its rule has modified both its objective situation and its subjective outlook. Its material privileges are greater and less subject to challenge by the memory of the October Revolution than was the case in the '20s and '30s. The more or less consciously restorationist wing of the bureaucracy that existed in the 1930s no longer remains a significant force largely because the planned economy provides the bureaucrats with a standard of living not markedly inferior to what they might hope to achieve in a capitalist economy — even assuming that younger generations of bureaucrats, who have grown up in the Soviet system, are able to contemplate capitalist restoration as a realistic possibility. In these new circumstances, the bureaucracy has proved capable of carrying through a limited self-reform which, while not altering the fundamentally parasitic character of the caste, nevertheless appears as a concession to the workers and peasants.

The bureaucracy is an obstacle to the necessary development of the socialist states not because it is subjectively counter-revolutionary, but because it regards itself as the embodiment of socialism and therefore subordinates the real interests of the state and the independent activity of the workers and peasants to the preservation of its narrow privileges. This is why it can act to aid or extend socialist revolution in particular circumstances in which such actions do not jeopardise its own material well-being.

20. The Polish workers' upsurge of 1980-81

The growth of a powerful independent union movement in Poland following the strikes of July-August 1980 and the government's hostility to this movement demonstrated that the bureaucracies stand in more or less permanent contradiction with the interests and needs of the great majority of the working

people.

The origins of the Polish crisis go back to at least 1970, when a wave of strikes was touched off by a rise in food prices. In the following years, the government sought to relieve the pressure through a rapid expansion of industry based on borrowing from imperialist banks and exports to the West. But bureaucratic waste and mismanagement, combined with the eruption of the world capitalist recession in the mid-1970s, left the country with a massive external debt, shrinking orders for industrial exports and a shortage of many agricultural products. This situation provoked another wave of strikes in 1976 and the birth of the free trade union Solidarnosc in 1980. The emergence of Solidarnosc was a legitimate and necessary response to the impasse into which the bureaucracy had led Polish society. The declaration of martial law in December 1981 was further proof of the bureaucracy's complete isolation from the masses of workers and peasants and of its inability to tolerate their independent action even when that action did not directly challenge the continuation of bureaucratic rule.

By strengthening the workers and peasants and challenging the privileges of the bureaucracy, Solidarnosc strengthened the Polish socialist state and prefigured the sort of mass struggles that will be needed to overthrow the bureaucrats and create a regime of socialist democracy. The development of such a mass movement requires time and the accumulation of experience and understanding by the workers and peasants; it cannot be summoned into existence by the actions of leaders. During the period of the union's legal existence, its leadership followed a necessarily cautious policy of attempting to avoid premature confrontations while at the same time encouraging the mass actions of workers in defence of their immediate collective interests and therefore in defence of the Polish socialist state.

The struggle of Solidarnosc was observed sympathetically by millions of workers in the imperialist countries, who began to learn from this struggle that socialised property relations are not at all incompatible with democratic and trade union rights. This support for the rights of Polish workers is a progressive sentiment, despite all the inevitable attempts of the imperialists and their agents in the labor movement to distort the meaning of the struggle. It is therefore necessary for revolutionaries to seek to build broad labor movement solidarity with the Polish workers, as an objective aid to their struggle and in order to fight against the pro-imperialist schemes of the labor misleaders.

21. The conflict between bureaucratic rule and socialised property relations

Poland is an extreme example of the inherent conflict between socialised property forms and bureaucratic rule. The legal and illegal material privileges of the bureaucracy and distortion of the economy brought about by bureaucratic planning created an economic crisis on a scale not seen in a socialist state since that produced in the Soviet Union by the forced collectivisation of the peasantry. Mismanagement carried to this extreme has the potential to threaten the very survival of a socialist state, particularly if imperialism is able to intervene directly or indirectly.

It is also true, however, that even in the most highly bureaucratised socialist states the bureaucracy has been a relative, not an absolute, brake upon the development of the productive forces and the fulfilment of the tasks outlined in the preceding section. While a small number of underdeveloped capitalist countries have achieved high growth rates because of specialised imperialist investment, none of them have matched the balanced and sustained growth and the improvement in mass living standards achieved by the less-developed socialist states. The growth rates of the socialist states consistently sur-

pass those of the imperialist economies.

This record confirms the Marxist view of the superiority of socialised over capitalist property forms even in the economically backward countries. Socialised property relations and the dictatorship of the proletariat that defends them have to date proved stronger than imperialist attacks and bureaucratic sabotage.

Hence there is no reason to set a priori limits to the economic growth that can be achieved despite bureaucratic parasitism. On the contrary, the fundamental dynamic is that economic successes directly and indirectly undermine the bureaucracy by increasing the self-confidence, material well-being and independence of the workers and peasants. Thus the recent decline in the rate of growth of the Soviet economy is in part due to a shift of investment to consumer industries that has brought about a significant rise in the standard of living of workers and peasants; this concession by the bureaucracy increases the opportunities for and willingness of workers to concern themselves with political and economic affairs.

22. The national question in the bureaucratized socialist states

Economic growth also sharpens the contradictions between the bureaucracy and oppressed nationalities. Economic development and the accompanying spread of education and culture in Soviet Central Asia, for example, lay the basis for increased interest in national culture and intensify resentment of the bureaucracy's Russifying tutelage.

In the more developed republics of the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia, the contradiction between the level of culture achieved and bureaucratic misrule is felt with particular intensity. Moreover, national oppression also takes the form of the transfer of wealth from more-developed nations (Ukraine, Croatia) to less-developed nations or regions. If they were truly masters of their own republics, the Ukrainian and Croatian workers and peasants might freely decide to make material sacrifices in order to aid less-developed regions, and Marxists would urge them to agree to such sacrifices as an act of international solidarity. But when such transfers of wealth are imposed by a bureaucratic caste alien to the workers and peasants, they necessarily appear as a form of exploitation that discredits socialism. And this is all the more the case in that much of the appropriated wealth goes to fatten the Great Russian or Serbian bureaucracies rather than to develop backward regions of the respective countries.

Marxists support the fight against national oppression in the socialist states, regardless of the economic level of the oppressed nation. As Lenin and Trotsky repeatedly explained, the ultimate guarantee against oppression can only be the right of secession. Thus Marxists have in the past called for an independent Soviet Ukraine and continue to support this demand insofar as it reflects the wishes of the Ukrainian people. Similarly, we defend the right of national self-determination, including the right of secession, for the nations of Yugoslavia and propagandise in favor of a Balkan Socialist Federation free of both national oppression and bureaucratic misrule.

23. The tasks and nature of the anti-bureaucratic political revolution

Marxists are not indifferent to the effort to achieve specific reforms in the bureaucratized socialist states, any more than they are indifferent to the expansion of the rights of members within a bureaucratized trade union. However, because the ruling parties are not representatives of the workers and peasants but of the bureaucratic castes, partial reforms of the state or

the party cannot fundamentally alter the situation of the workers and peasants since they leave the state apparatus under the control of the bureaucratic caste. This is why a political revolution is a precondition for a real reform of the state. In the preparation of this revolution, improvements won through struggle increase the self-confidence of the laboring classes and thus provide a firmer base for future and more far-reaching struggles. The fight for reforms and the political revolution are transitionally linked because real and lasting improvements in the situation of the workers and peasants require an end to the bureaucracy's material privileges and monopoly of political power.

The political revolutions required in the bureaucratized socialist states are qualitatively different from the social revolutions that constitute the way forward for workers and peasants in the semicolonial and imperialist countries. The latter involve a thorough reorganization of society from top to bottom, while the former consist merely of freeing existing society from the depredations of a caste of parasites. Marxists use the term revolution in regard to the bureaucratized socialist states not because of the character of the tasks involved, but because revolutionary methods will be required: The bureaucracies have shown in practice that they will not relinquish their power unless forced to do so by the might of the workers and peasants. It will therefore be necessary for the working masses to mobilise to overthrow the dictatorial power of the bureaucracy and purge the state apparatus, reorganising it on a democratic basis.

Social revolution in the capitalist countries requires the destruction of the old state apparatus because the state is the state of the ruling class, which has constructed it to defend the property forms necessary to its own existence. The bureaucracy is not a ruling class reliant upon its own property forms. It consequently cannot create its own state apparatus, but rather corrupts and distorts the institutions of the proletarian dictatorship in the service of its particular parasitic needs. The political revolution will of course modify greatly the operation of various institutions of the proletarian state, but it will not destroy them. On the contrary, it will strengthen them by ending the bureaucratic abuses that now undermine them. The bureaucratic ruling parties, on the other hand, are not proletarian institutions even when workers are a significant portion of the ranks; in the course of the political revolution they will be replaced by genuinely revolutionary parties.

The opportunities for economic, social and political development that will open for the workers and peasants of the bureaucratized socialist states once they have removed their misrulers is indicated by the achievements of the Cuban Revolution. The Cuban Communist Party and revolutionary government consciously lead the workers and peasants in accomplishing the tasks outlined in section 18, with the result that the Cuban people have made great progress despite the revolution's isolation for two decades, the extreme hostility of US imperialism and the disadvantages flowing from the country's small size and underdevelopment. For this reason, both imperialism and the ruling castes of the bureaucratized socialist states seek to prevent the realities of the Cuban Revolution from becoming generally known, while we join with other revolutionaries and all honest forces in the labor movement in building solidarity with revolutionary Cuba and spreading an understanding of its achievements. Our attitude to the Cuban Revolution and Cuban Communist Party is explained in more detail in the resolution "The Cuban Revolution and its extension."

24. The Vietnamese Revolution and its leadership

The decades-long struggle of the Vietnamese people for

national independence and unity against foreign imperialism and its domestic capitalist agents has played an epochal role in the advance of the world revolution since the end of World War II. The party which led this struggle, the Vietnamese Communist Party, both shaped it and was shaped by it.

The program of the Vietnamese CP when it was founded in 1930 called for a "national democratic revolution." It envisaged a "worker-peasant-soldier government" that would lead the "overthrow of French imperialism and Vietnamese feudalism and reactionary bourgeoisie," carrying out such bourgeois-democratic reforms as land redistribution, implementing the eight-hour workday, overcoming sexual inequality and bringing education to the workers and peasants, as well as measures transitional towards socialist revolution such as confiscation of the banks.

However, during the first half of the 1930s, under the influence of the "third period" line and of largely spontaneous peasant rebellions in 1930-31 the party's theory and practice tended towards ultraleftism. The party's journal *Bon So Vich* in December 1934, for example, criticised Ho Chi Minh because "he did not understand the directives of the Communist International . . . and advocated erroneous reformist and collaborationist tactics" supposedly based on a bourgeois nationalist outlook, and the manifesto of the March 1935 party congress criticised too great reliance on alliances with nationalist groups.

After the Seventh Congress of the Communist International in July-August 1935 adopted the popular front strategy, the Vietnamese CP sought to implement it by organising an antifascist Indochinese Democratic Front, but this project failed. It was not until it seized the initiative to organise resistance against both France and Japan during World War II that the CP became the leading force of the national liberation struggle. Backed by demonstrations of hundreds of thousands in Hanoi, Hue and Saigon, the VCP, even though it had only about 5000 members at the time, emerged at the head of an independent government in Hanoi in September 1945.

After a period in which it manoeuvred with considerable success between the Allied powers to bring about the withdrawal of Chinese occupation forces in the northern half of the country, the CP, through the Viet Minh, led the war of resistance against French imperialism that culminated in the victory at Dienbienphu in 1954. Under pressure from the Soviet and Chinese governments, the Vietnamese signed the Geneva agreements giving them less than they had already won on the battlefield but allowing several years of relative peace in the north during which the national democratic revolution was completed and the transition to a socialised economy begun.

As US imperialism replaced France in the south and consolidated a puppet regime that launched a reign of terror against Communist cadres, the party in late 1956 took the lead of the struggle against the new occupiers, urging and organising "revolutionary terror" against the counter-revolutionary terror of the Diem regime. By the beginning of 1959, the Central Committee judged that the struggle could pass over to the offensive, advancing towards a "general uprising to seize political power" and "overthrow the U.S.-Diem government."

In the subsequent civil war, transformed into a war of national liberation by the intervention of US imperialism, the Communist Party led the workers and peasants in a protracted and incredibly difficult struggle for national independence and unity. Since capitalism had been abolished in the North, the fight to unite the country was a fight to extend socialist revolution into the South. This struggle was pursued intransigently, without bowing before either the threats or the blandishments of imperialism.

The Communist Party originally projected a fairly gradual process of reunification following the 1975 victory, partly in an effort to obtain badly needed foreign assistance for reconstruc-

tion. However, the refusal of US imperialism to provide promised aid and the magnitude of the problems facing the country after three decades of war dictated a unified approach to their solution, and the two zones were united politically in July 1976. Two years later, the economies were united through the expropriation of merchant capital and the extension of planned economy to the south.

The progressive course followed in Vietnam contrasted sharply with that in Kampuchea, where the new Khmer Rouge government acted immediately to demobilise and atomise the workers and peasants and establish a new regime of incredibly brutal exploitation. As it became clear that the Pol Pot regime was headed directly away from socialism rather than towards it, Western governments began moving to improve relations with it, with a view to reintegrating the country into the imperialist system and using it as a buffer against the extension of the Vietnamese revolution. For their part, the dominant leaders of the Khmer Rouge saw the Vietnamese example as a threat to themselves and sought to guard against it through nationalist chauvinism and the launching of an increasingly damaging border war, particularly after the elimination of capitalist property relations in south Vietnam. At the end of 1978 Vietnamese forces allied with Kampuchean supporters of Heng Samrin, who had led an unsuccessful revolt against Pol Pot earlier in the year, struck into Kampuchea to remove this threat. The subsequent Chinese invasion of northern Vietnam was carried out in open collusion with US imperialism to punish Vietnam for its extension of revolution. Despite the threat of further such attacks, the Vietnamese government has continued to provide internationalist assistance to Kampuchea even though this assistance is a drain on Vietnam's meagre resources and is used as a pretext by imperialism to block development funds. It has similarly provided extensive material and technical aid to Laos.

Imperialism's continuing campaign against the Indochinese revolution involves support for the remnants of Pol Pot's forces on the Thai-Kampuchean border, the effort to starve the Vietnamese and Kampuchean peoples into submission and a major propaganda effort designed to undermine the solidarity for these revolutions felt by workers and peasants, especially in Asia. The seriousness of the imperialist hostility, which should not be underestimated, requires a major effort to counter it through international solidarity.

The building of such solidarity will be more effective if it is based upon an accurate appreciation of the Vietnamese government and Communist Party.

At the time the party was founded, Stalinism was the dominant force in the international labor movement, and it was therefore inevitable that Stalinist political views would have some influence in the VCP, at least initially. This sometimes led to political errors and/or gross violations of Leninist norms, as in the execution of members of other tendencies in the anti-imperialist movement in 1945-46.

But it would be incorrect to conclude from such events that the VCP or its leaders are therefore representatives of an entrenched bureaucratic caste. The Marxist analysis of Stalinism stresses that this phenomenon is based upon material factors that in Vietnam either do not exist or have been kept under control by the party itself.

The course of the Vietnamese national liberation struggle provided little or no possibility for the development of a privileged bureaucracy. In the three decades following World War II, the conditions of peaceful construction in which privilege might flower existed for only one decade and in one half of the country. From at least the mid-1960s, when US imperialism began the massive escalation of its aggression, the government of the socialist state in the North operated an economy of war communism, in which wage differentials or other institutionalised material inequalities were practically nonexistent. There was no possibility for the development of a

relatively privileged layer of the proletariat such as formed a social base for the bureaucratic caste in the USSR.

The VCP's origins in the Communist International and the ideological influences of Stalinism proved subordinate to the determination of the leaders and cadres to win national liberation and social revolution. In the course of their struggle they were able to develop policies that produced a revolutionary victory in one of the most difficult struggles of the twentieth century. The party's winning of leadership during World War II was in large part brought about by its evolution away from the Stalinist conception to a line quite close to Lenin's strategy for revolution in the underdeveloped countries; during the subsequent three decades of war against French and US imperialism, the VCP applied this strategy successfully in incredibly trying circumstances. Mistakes, which of course are inevitable in such a struggle, were corrected by the party itself as the need for this became clear from experience.

The fight against imperialism and its Vietnamese agents not only schooled the VCP in revolutionary political theory and practice but also acted as a cadre-selection process which demanded the highest standards of discipline, initiative and self-sacrifice. It was not unusual for cadres to spend years at a time in underground conditions (politically and sometimes physically), dependent for their survival upon the closest ties with the workers and peasants, and having only irregular and infrequent contact with the party organisation. Top leaders often shared in the physical dangers, deprivation and isolation.

In the decade since the defeat of US imperialism, the VCP has shown that it is aware of the need for consciously maintaining revolutionary morality and opposing the growth of privilege in the new conditions. Following the unification of Vietnam, in 1977-8 the party and government took decisive measures to remove cadres who had succumbed to corruption by capitalist elements in the South, chiefly in Ho Chi Minh City. Reports by

visitors, including in the capitalist media, indicate that party membership, far from being a source of privilege, entails considerable material sacrifice. Errors that have been made, such as attempts to collectivise agriculture and eliminate petty commodity production at too rapid a pace, have been corrected without major social disruption and without scapegoating lower-ranking officials.

There are of course other weaknesses in the Vietnamese party and state, which proved difficult or impossible to correct when all energies were concentrated on the struggle against imperialism. The party leadership is well aware of these, as Le Duan's report to the Fifth Congress in 1982 indicated:

"No small number of state bodies still act in bureaucratic, authoritarian, and arbitrary ways, and infringe on the people's rights to collective mastery. The activities of the mass organizations have also been bureaucratized; they have been slow to be improved, and no longer correspond to the new requirements of the masses. A number of party members and cadres who have been morally corrupted abuse their power, harass and insult the masses, and break the law, thereby undermining the prestige of the party and the state, and adversely affecting the revolutionary enthusiasm of the masses." (*Intercontinental Press*, July 26, 1982)

The Vietnamese Communist Party and the government it heads are the representatives that the Vietnamese workers and peasants have chosen to lead their struggle for national liberation and socialism, and over a half-century of extreme tests the party has proved more than equal to the tasks imposed upon it. As the Vietnamese revolution continues its advance, there is every reason for confidence in the ability of the party to overcome harmful legacies and lead the Vietnamese people in the construction of the society for which they have fought so tenaciously.

V. The fight against imperialist war

25. The causes and nature of the imperialist war drive

In the present period, the struggle against imperialist war directly unites the three sectors of the world revolution. As the crisis of imperialism deepens, war has been and will increasingly be resorted to as the "solution" to the problems of the imperialist system. War and preparations for war serve as the means for curtailing or rolling back the colonial revolution, weakening the planned economies of the socialist states and attacking the living standards and democratic rights of the proletariat and its allies in the developed countries.

The victory in Vietnam in 1975 represented a major shift in the world relationship of class forces against imperialism, especially in its confrontation with the colonial revolution. This shift made possible Cuban assistance to turn back the South African invasion of Angola and to defeat the Somalian attack on the Ethiopian revolution.

These setbacks for imperialism, brought about by the deliberate use of the state power of a socialist state to advance the colonial revolution, made it clear that on a world scale there was no adequate substitute for the military might of the United States as a policeman of imperialist interests. The Carter administration, contrary to its rhetoric, began the process of rebuilding US military strength. This task was correctly perceived as combining military and political factors. The

military build-up included not only nuclear weapons but also high-technology conventional armaments and forces — such as the Rapid Deployment Force — designed to permit large-scale military interventions of short duration, thus minimising the opportunities for the mobilisation of opposition within the United States or other imperialist countries.

But at the same time, the colonial revolution was continuing to advance. In April 1978, the PDPA seized power in Kabul, opening new possibilities for the development of the Afghan revolution. At the end of the year, the Vietnamese army and Kampuchean rebels quickly overthrew the Pol Pot regime, destroying the buffer which imperialism was attempting to establish against the Vietnamese revolution. Then in February the massive upsurge of the Iranian workers and peasants overthrew the shah, wiping out imperialism's most secure base, after Israel, in the Middle East. The Grenadan and Nicaraguan revolutions, followed by the rapid rise of the revolutionary struggle in El Salvador, began extending the long-isolated Cuban Revolution in the Americas. These latter victories took on added significance because they were led by forces who understood the central role of the proletariat in changing society and who sought to apply a Leninist strategy of revolution. At the end of the year, imperialist plans for the crushing of the Afghan revolution were forestalled by the intervention of Soviet troops. The debacle of the April 1980 US helicopter raid into Iran set back the attempts to undermine antiwar sentiment in the

United States and raised doubts about the wisdom of reliance on high-technology weaponry as a strategy for controlling the colonial revolution.

US imperialism nevertheless decided that it had no realistic alternative to massively increasing its military build-up under the Reagan administration. This build-up is still directed primarily against the colonial revolution, as is evident from the fact that the big majority of US arms expenditure is devoted to conventional weapons. The nuclear aspect of the escalation is itself, at this stage, also directed against the colonial revolution more than against the Soviet Union: The aim is to force the Soviet government to refrain from aiding semicolonial countries threatened with imperialist attack by intimidating it with the possible consequences of a US-Soviet confrontation and by forcing the USSR to participate in an arms race that consumes the economic resources which might otherwise be available to provide such aid.

There can be no doubt that the arms race forced upon the Soviet Union creates great strains and distortions in its economy. Furthermore, if imperialism were to succeed in decisively turning the tide of the colonial revolution for a period, it would then turn to using its hoped-for nuclear superiority in more direct efforts to reverse the gains of the socialist states and eventually destroy them. Reagan's strategic weapons build-up therefore is not, from the standpoint of US imperialism, an irrational accumulation of "overkill," but an integral part of longer-term US strategy. In the shorter term, however, the deployment of the Pershing II missiles in Europe, by reducing the warning time in which Soviet leaders could respond to a US attack, increases the danger of a nuclear war beginning by accident, particularly so in view of the fact that the bellicosity of US imperialism in this period gives the Soviet leaders greater reason to suspect an attempted first strike.

The governments of the other major imperialist powers have no fundamental disagreement with this drive towards war, however much they may feel obliged by popular political pressures or the particular interests of their own ruling classes to distance themselves from specific measures or the pace of the build-up. Thus Washington was able to secure unanimous NATO approval for deployment of its Cruise and Pershing II missiles, although massive protests have since caused hesitations in some governments, particularly the Dutch. The French government, which offered Nicaragua assistance in clearing US mines from its ports, itself plays an increasingly important role as imperialism's policeman in Africa and the Pacific, in the latter area aided by Australian and New Zealand imperialists despite some rivalries between them. Another indication of imperialist solidarity in confronting the colonial revolution was the Reagan administration's backing for Britain in the Malvinas war, despite the problems this solidarity created for its Central American strategy.

Nevertheless, the military build-up by the US can also be expected to cause increasing strains in the imperialist camp. On the US side, Washington will increasingly try to use its military predominance to reassert its interests where these come into conflict with those of its imperialist competitors. At the same time, US imperialism resents bearing the burden of military expenditures and seeks to transfer some of this burden to its allied competitors. (Japanese industry in particular has benefited from the fact that state subsidies have gone into the development of productivity rather than into weapons technology, which creates far fewer industrially useful spin-offs.) For their part, the US allies are concerned at the effects of the colossal US deficits necessary to finance the military build-up, while they are not above taking advantage of conflicts between the US and semicolonial countries to advance their own trade and investment opportunities.

Differences over the pace of the war drive are also related closely to the stage of the class struggle within each of the imperialist countries. The weakening of the trade union movement

during the long postwar boom and the lack of a mass working-class party make it easier for the US ruling class to drive ahead in this area, even though this advantage is still partially offset by the memory of the Vietnam War. Conversely, to the extent that the military build-up is financed by taxes on the proletariat or by cutbacks in social welfare spending, it represents a transfer from wages to profits and thus helps to raise the overall rate of profit. As these transfers increase and as the US administration girds itself to embark upon actual wars, the union bureaucracy will come under conflicting pressures for further concessions to the ruling class and for action to defend workers' interests, including action in opposition to imperialist war. While seeking to weaken proletarian organisation to the maximum before serious resistance can be mounted, the ruling class also has to be cautious that its attacks do not provoke such resistance. The same sorts of considerations apply in the other imperialist countries, but with a different specific weight in each case based upon such factors as the strength and recent history of the labor movement and the degree to which particular organised sectors of it are prepared to enter into struggle.

Imperialism has achieved several successes in its war drive. But none of these has been significant enough to reverse the evolution of the relationship of class forces, and most of them have involved considerable costs.

Britain's reconquest of the Malvinas Islands was an important political gain for imperialism in that the Thatcher government was able to wage a bloody and expensive war over a period of weeks without arousing massive protests. Thatcher correctly calculated that the leaders of the Labour Party and the union bureaucracy would cravenly co-operate in the campaign to whip up national chauvinism and support for the war. As a blow against the colonial revolution, the war was less successful. Despite the incompetence and treachery of the junta and the officer corps, the Argentine forces were able to inflict some severe losses on the British armada; the battle proved to be much less unequal than British imperialism had expected, and when the war ended the Argentine masses clearly felt, and with some justification, more betrayed than defeated. Two direct consequences of the war were the frustration of Reagan's plans to use Argentine troops in Central America and the fall of the junta. For its part, British imperialism now confronts the prospect of spending hundreds of millions annually to fortify islands that bring it a negligible economic return.

The invasion and occupation of Grenada by US troops was a more unqualified success for imperialism, but also a more limited one. The conquest was achieved at a cost of relatively few US casualties, and without it being perceived as an act of imperialist aggression by most US workers, only because of the previous overthrow of the workers and peasants' government by a military coup. Despite this peculiar situation, the resistance put up by Grenadan revolutionaries and a few hundred Cuban construction workers considerably exceeded what had been expected by the US generals. This makes it clear that a large-scale US military intervention in Central America, where it would confront a powerful and united popular movement, could not hope to succeed without a protracted and extremely costly war. Thus while the Reagan administration paid only a small political cost for the invasion, it has not won working-class acquiescence in the type of operation it would need to mount to achieve its goals in Central America.

The Israeli invasion of Lebanon was a partial military success for imperialism but a political disaster. The Zionist war machine again demonstrated the superiority of its weaponry over that of the Palestinian guerrilla forces and Syria, but the invasion failed to achieve its goal of wiping out the Palestine Liberation Organisation even though it did bring about some sharp divisions within the Palestinian movement, thanks largely to the disruptive role of the Syrian regime. The prolonged

resistance of the PLO and its Lebanese allies in Beirut allowed the bulk of its forces to escape the Israeli trap and won the PLO a further enhancement of its political standing internationally and among Palestinians living under Israeli occupation. The protracted fighting has placed great strains on the Israeli economy, and the occupation force continues to suffer casualties at a relatively high rate compared to past wars. These factors have brought about the beginning of major steps towards a breaking up of the Zionist consensus within Israel, as evidenced by the refusal of significant numbers of soldiers to serve in Lebanon and by the explosive growth of the Peace Now movement.

The attempt by US and European imperialist forces to consolidate the Israeli military gains and a stable right-wing Maronite regime in Lebanon were defeated by the leftist and Muslim forces within Lebanon. The large number of casualties suffered by the US marines and their withdrawal under fire will make it all the more difficult for US imperialism to renew a direct military intervention in the area.

The deployment of Pershing II and Cruise missiles in Western Europe leaves no doubt of the seriousness of the imperialist intention to escalate the pressures it exerts against the Soviet Union, for both the immediate and the longer-term aims described above. But this escalation has involved a heavy political cost for the warmakers, provoking the rise of a new peace movement involving millions of people in the imperialist countries.

26. The new antiwar movement and the tasks of revolutionary Marxists

The new antiwar movement that has arisen in the imperialist countries has as its prime motive force the fear of a nuclear holocaust. This fear is a rational one, for if the imperialists are not disarmed in time, they will eventually launch a war that threatens not only civilisation but also the very survival of the human species.

In its majority, this movement does not begin from an anti-imperialist consciousness, or even from a clear understanding of which governments bear the responsibility for the arms race. Its demands often reflect a conception that the so-called super-powers bear mutual responsibility for the war danger. But these limitations do not conceal the great potential of the movement to develop into a powerful obstacle to the imperialist war drive. Several considerations give cause for revolutionaries to view the possibilities of the peace movement optimistically:

(1) Objectively, the movement is a direct response to the war preparations of imperialism. The experience of struggles against specific aspects of these preparations — the fight against the Pershing II and Cruise missiles is an example of this — can begin to close the gap between objective reality and the consciousness of participants in the movement. The active involvement of revolutionaries in the movement will speed this process.

(2) Many of the activists are young people becoming involved in politics for the first time, who have not previously questioned the contradictions between imperialist ideology and the reality of war, poverty and oppression. The example of the movement against the Vietnam War shows that as they gain experience these young people can come to an understanding of imperialism and a revolutionary consciousness.

(3) The new peace movement begins from a higher level of consciousness than did the movement against the Vietnam War. The latter substantially undermined Cold War ideology, particularly the myth that imperialist military interventions are carried out for the purpose of defending "democracy." As a result, there is a greater identification with the struggles of workers and peasants in the underdeveloped countries and at

least the beginning of an understanding that the peace movement and the semicolonial nations confront a common enemy.

(4) The recent revolutionary victories in the semicolonial world tend to arouse support from workers in the imperialist countries, who sympathise with the efforts to oust brutal dictators and overcome poverty and oppression. This sympathy can impel workers and their organisations into the peace movement as the immediate target of the imperialist military build-up becomes more obvious.

(5) Despite the austerity policies being imposed with various degrees of success, in none of the imperialist countries has the working class experienced a crushing, demoralising defeat that could discourage it from taking up a struggle against imperialist war. On the other hand, capital's needs to drive down working-class living standards rules out the practicality of any strategy of buying the proletariat's acquiescence in military adventures with rising wages and full employment, such as was carried out in the two decades after World War II. Today preparations for war are directly and visibly linked with austerity, and each actual war will result in immediate attacks on the real wage through further austerity and/or the effects of inflation.

(6) Class-collaborationist forces within the peace movement who seek to divert it from an anti-imperialist direction will have their authority undermined by their inability to defend the interests of working people in other areas using the reformist methods they advocate in the struggle against war. This makes it easier for revolutionaries to gain a sympathetic hearing for their proposals and to win leadership.

The new mass peace movement has already created political difficulties for the imperialist military build-up. In the longer term, however, the movement cannot defeat the threat of nuclear annihilation, or even prevent new Vietnam-type wars, unless it fights for a sharply anti-imperialist program of demands. It is an illusion to believe that war can be eliminated without the elimination of capitalism, and a movement hamstrung by this illusion will be prey to impotence and disintegration when actual wars break out.

Given the objective reality that the war drive is presently directed primarily against the colonial revolution, the development of anti-imperialist understanding and demands will proceed most rapidly if the peace movement becomes involved in opposing the wars actually being waged or prepared by imperialism. The raising of demands related to imperialism's counter-revolutionary wars is in no sense a diversion from, or counterposed to, demands for nuclear disarmament, since the greatest threat of a nuclear holocaust at present lies in miscalculation and or escalation connected with a conventional war.

Revolutionary activity in the peace movement can help it develop in an anti-imperialist direction by focusing on three main goals:

- persuading the peace movement in each imperialist country to fight against the military alliances, the military build-up and interventions of its own government;
- instilling an understanding of the real character of the war drive and of the defensive posture of the socialist states so that the movement will not be disoriented by wars or war alerts;
- building solidarity with the colonial revolution, especially those sectors such as Central America and Palestine that are most immediately threatened with imperialist military intervention.

The development of the antiwar movement in this direction will not happen spontaneously even though such an anticapitalist dynamic corresponds to the objective needs of any real struggle against war. It will require the active intervention of Marxist revolutionaries who build the movement, seek to win leadership in it and seize every opportunity to push it forward politically.

Such an intervention requires understanding and patience in dealing with the illusions that often permeate the ranks of the movement and of those layers who may join the movement in its next stage. The pacifist and class-collaborationist ideas of many leaders of the movement must not be confused with the present objectively progressive dynamic of the movement itself, and they must be distinguished from the often similar ideas found among the masses of participants, as the Transitional Program explains:

"... it is necessary to differentiate strictly between the pacifism of the diplomat, professor, and journalist, and the pacifism of the carpenter, agricultural worker, and charwoman. In one case, pacifism is a screen for imperialism; in the other, it is the confused expression of distrust in imperialism. When the small farmer or worker speaks about the defense of the fatherland, he means defense of his home, his family, and other similar families from invasion, bombs, and poisonous gas. The capitalist and his journalist understand by the defense of the fatherland the seizure of colonies and markets, the predatory increase of the 'national' share of world income. Bourgeois pacifism and patriotism are shot through with deceit. In the pacifism and even patriotism of the oppressed, there are elements which reflect on the one hand a hatred of destructive war, and on the other a clinging to what they believe to be their own good — elements which we must know how to seize upon in order to draw the requisite conclusions.

"Using these considerations as its point of departure, the Fourth International supports every, even if insufficient, demand, if it can draw the masses to a certain extent into active politics, awaken their criticism, and strengthen their control over the machinations of the bourgeoisie."

The other side of supporting even partial demands that aid in drawing the masses into political struggle is uncompromising opposition to the pacifism of misleaders, a pacifism which, moreover, is often hypocritical in that it does not oppose imperialism's use of conventional military forces. Revolutionaries refuse to accept leaving the movement at its present level of consciousness. The present, largely abstract demands against nuclear war (which are often accompanied by demands directed against the socialist states as well as against imperialist governments) are the level at which the new peace movement begins and at which revolutionaries must therefore intervene — but intervene in order to help the movement forward to a struggle against the cause of war. Patience with the illusions of the ranks of the movement means patience in helping to overcome those illusions, never an acquiescence in them. This requires a consistent party intervention to build worthwhile activities of the movement and win authority in it, as well as regular propaganda explaining the source of the war danger.

27. The imperialist war drive and the socialist states

Viewed from the standpoint of its fundamental causes, war in the modern epoch is solely the product of imperialism. Directly or indirectly, imperialism is the instigator even of conflicts of which it is not the beneficiary, for it is the world imperialist system that maintains, as an inseparable part of the conditions of its own existence, the economic, social and political conditions in which wars are inevitable. In particular, the so-called arms race initiated by the Carter administration and escalated by the Reagan administration is a direct consequence of imperialism's inescapable need to defeat the colonial revolution and eventually to destroy the socialist states.

The economies of those states that have abolished capitalism, by contrast, contain no inherent need to expand beyond their own borders and therefore no inherent drive towards war. Nor

do these states require a large armaments industry for economic reasons; from the economic standpoint, military expenditure in a nationalised, planned economy represents pure waste. Armed conflicts between socialist states, such as those that have occurred along the Sino-Soviet border, are brought about by the misrule of bureaucratic castes, who in this regard as in others demonstrate that their parasitism is in contradiction with the objective needs of the states they govern. Such a misuse of the armed forces of a socialist state does not change the fundamentally defensive character of those forces — just as the waste of resources brought about by bureaucratic economic mismanagement does not alter the superiority of planned economy over capitalist anarchy of production.

The governments and ruling parties of the bureaucratized socialist states are threatened by imperialist hostility to the states which provide them with their material privileges. But as members of a distinct caste with its own interests opposed to those of the workers and peasants, the bureaucrats cannot develop an adequate defence of the socialist states, which is tied to the extension of socialist revolution. They themselves are therefore a danger to the long-term survival of the socialist states, objectively facilitating the imperialist threat. This objective contradiction is reflected in the way that these governments operate on the international arena. Their fundamental strategy aims not to destroy imperialism but to forestall the imperialist threat through military and diplomatic means. The latter can and often do include assisting imperialism or particular semicolonial governments by attempting to restrain or divert actual or potential revolutionary struggles in the capitalist countries. In performing this service, the bureaucrats also act in accordance with their own conservative outlook, which derives from their caste interest in the passivity of the masses. At the same time, however, there is a direct link between gains of the world revolution, which weaken imperialism, and preventing direct attacks on the socialist states. Tied by their self-interest to those states, the bureaucrats are also capable of specific actions that aid the advance of revolution, such as providing material aid to sectors of the colonial revolution involved in conflicts with imperialism.

The strategy of "peaceful coexistence" is an attempt to resolve the contradictions of bureaucratic foreign policy without touching their underlying causes. Insofar as it expresses the desire of the masses for peace and the fact that nationalised, planned economies have no inherent drive to war, peaceful coexistence can be given a progressive content, directed against imperialism's preparations for war. In the policy of a bureaucratic regime, however, it also has a thoroughly reactionary content, expressing the bureaucracy's willingness to betray the interests of the world revolution in the effort to reach a live-and-let-live arrangement with imperialism. In this aspect, peaceful coexistence can also spread pacifist illusions among the masses of working people. Revolutionary intervention in the peace movement must be careful to distinguish between these two sides of demands for peaceful coexistence, avoiding either sectarian denunciation of legitimate mass concerns or lending support to counter-revolutionary projects and illusions.

The foreign policy of the revolutionary government of Cuba provides a model of how to conduct an effective struggle for peace that is also relevant for revolutionaries in the capitalist countries. While constantly insisting on the need to prevent nuclear war and to curtail the arms race, the Cubans correctly place these goals in the context of a struggle to extend the world revolution and against imperialism, if necessary including the use of arms to oppose imperialist aggression.

In the case of the present imperialist war drive, the inconsistencies and contradictions inherent in the foreign policy of a bureaucratic caste prevent the Soviet government from developing adequate countermeasures, which would have to rely far more on political factors. The ugly results of

bureaucratic rule tend to undermine solidarity with the Soviet Union among workers and peasants in the capitalist world even when the Soviet government attempts initiatives that in themselves are politically sound. Equally dangerous to the socialist countries and to the fight against imperialist war is the Chinese government's overt political backing for the imperialist war drive and its willingness even to provide troops to aid imperialist goals, as in the invasion of Vietnam.

The task of mobilising a political defence of the bureaucratised socialist states against imperialist threats therefore falls upon revolutionaries in the capitalist countries, and especially in the imperialist centres. We should take the lead in explaining the defensive character of Soviet armaments and in building support for any specific Soviet proposals that would undermine the imperialist military build-up and thus strengthen the socialist states. Activities in the mass peace movement should place a high priority on explaining that the goals of the movement are not furthered by demands or slogans, such as that for nuclear disarmament "from Portugal to Poland," which imply that the socialist states share some of the responsibility for the war danger.

The inadequacy of bureaucratic defence against the imperialist war drive and the exclusion of the mass of working people from political decision-making in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe have combined to create a small but vocal "dissident peace movement" in several of these countries. These groups typically raise demands on their governments similar to those which the antiwar movement addresses to the imperialists, that is, demands seeking to reduce what they regard as the militarism promoted by their governments.

Many in the Western peace movement who fail to judge things by class criteria have welcomed this Eastern European "peace movement" as a progressive development, a new ally in the struggle for peace. Objectively, however, this movement is not a part of the struggle against war. Its calls for steps towards un-

ilateral disarmament by the socialist states fail to distinguish between the defensive character of Soviet and Eastern European military forces and the inability of the bureaucracies to organise those forces rationally or to defend the socialist states politically. These demands consequently undermine the military defence of those states against imperialism. The activities of the Eastern European "peace movement" also undermine this defence politically by encouraging in the West the illusion that the threat of nuclear war is caused by "the super-powers" rather than imperialism.

This movement has sometimes also been welcomed from a different standpoint, which sees it as part of the struggle to break the bureaucracy's stranglehold on politics and thus to create the conditions of socialist democracy in which the workers and peasants could mount an adequate defence of the socialist states. Such a view is based upon a failure to appraise correctly both the movement itself and Trotsky's warning to revolutionaries not to allow their hatred of Stalinism to blind them to the needs of the proletarian state: "We must not lose sight for a single moment of the fact that the question of overthrowing the Soviet bureaucracy is for us subordinate to the question of preserving state property in the means of production in the USSR; that the question of preserving state property in the means of production in the USSR is subordinate for us to the question of world proletarian revolution." (*In Defense of Marxism*, p. 21)

The curtailing and elimination of the bureaucracies' political monopoly is only a means to the strengthening of the socialist states. The program of the Eastern European "peace movement" objectively weakens the socialist states because it does not distinguish between the bureaucracy and the institutions of the state, especially the military forces. If successful, its activities would destroy the bureaucracy only by destroying the state on which it feeds.

VI. Building an international revolutionary leadership

28. The need for an international revolutionary party

The most pressing task facing humanity is to emerge from the anarchy of capitalism to the planned order of world socialism, completing the process begun by the 1917 Russian Revolution. Today, one-third of the world's people live in postcapitalist societies. But the fact that the overthrow of capitalist rule has so far occurred only in underdeveloped or war-ravaged countries, leading to the bureaucratic deformation of most of these states, has given world capitalism an undeserved extension of life.

Humanity has paid dearly for the delay in the development of the proletarian revolution in the advanced capitalist countries of North America, Western Europe, Japan and Australasia. The multiplication of capitalist wealth and the growth of imperialist power have meant more poverty, hunger and oppression for the vast majority of humanity. Two world wars, genocidal military interventions in the underdeveloped countries, fascism, economic stagnation, the poisoning of the oceans, rivers and atmosphere and the mounting threat of nuclear annihilation: This is what imperialism has to offer the people of the capitalist world.

The working masses, under the intolerable pressures brought to bear on them by the death agony of capitalism, have

repeatedly initiated struggles pointing toward the overthrow of capitalist rule.

What has prevented a decisive victory over world capitalism has been the lack of a world revolutionary leadership of the proletariat, the lack of a mass, international Marxist party. Without a resolution of the crisis of leadership, the proletariat will not be able to impose its solution to the crisis of capitalism. The pressing task facing the proletariat is the construction of a world party of socialist revolution.

A historic step forward was taken with the founding of the Communist International in 1919 by Lenin and the Bolsheviks. All the great events since have only served to confirm Lenin's view of the need for an international organisation based upon national revolutionary parties rooted in the mass proletarian movements of their countries.

Today conditions are maturing once again for the creation of such a party. All the basic elements are there — the program of proletarian revolution developed by Marx, Engels and Lenin, the examples of successful socialist revolutions as well as the lessons of catastrophic defeats, the existence of powerful socialist states, the radicalisation of the proletarian masses of both the semicolonial and imperialist countries, the deepening of the political and economic crisis of the imperialist system, the disintegration of Stalinism, the flaring of revolutionary conflicts throughout the world, the appearance of new

revolutionary currents that turn towards Marxism. This is the situation that the Fourth International was founded in 1938 to prepare for.

The Fourth International has its origins in the 1922-23 political alliance formed between the two central leaders of the Russian Revolution, Lenin and Trotsky, to fight the rise of the Stalin-led bureaucracy within the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. Lenin died in the early stages of that fight. But Trotsky carried on, organising the Left Opposition faction within the CPSU and the Communist International. After the victory of the Stalinists in the CPSU and the Comintern, Trotsky embarked on the construction of the Fourth International.

29. The Fourth International

Like other currents in the labor movement, the Fourth International has also been subject to the influences of its environment and its particular experiences. Because of the dominance of Social Democracy and Stalinism within the proletariat and the overall ebb of the world revolution, the Fourth International came into existence largely isolated from the major forces and events of the class struggle. The objective possibilities for beginning to overcome this isolation were severely limited during World War II, and when the world revolution resumed an upward course, the small sections were either bypassed or further isolated by the anticommunist witch-hunt launched in the major imperialist countries.

But objective difficulties alone cannot account for the fact that the Fourth International remains very much a minority current after four decades of rise in the world revolution. In no country does a section stand on a basis of rough parity of influence with Communist or Social Democratic parties except where the latter have themselves been reduced to relative insignificance. Instead of growing in step with the progress of the world revolution, the International and particular sections have repeatedly suffered crippling splits or committed political errors leading either to opportunist adaptations or to continued isolation from the class struggle. The fact that such setbacks have often coincided with or closely followed periods of encouraging growth in membership and influence is in itself evidence that objective difficulties are not the only source of these errors.

Without overlooking or detracting from the many real achievements of the International and particular sections, it must be said that as a current the Fourth International has not yet overcome the vices of the "circle spirit" against which Trotsky often warned. There is an inescapable pressure on small, isolated groups to retreat into the endless elaboration of the written program as a substitute for active involvement in the class struggle. Particular points of the program that set the group apart from other currents or the labor movement as a whole can then be elevated above their real importance — that is, they become sectarian fetishes serving to reinforce the group's isolation. The only way out of such a vicious circle appears to be the sudden junking of the program in pursuit of shortcuts. Moreover, the particular programmatic "points of honor" are themselves likely to include mistakes of greater or lesser importance to the degree that they were developed in isolation from the class struggle; such mistakes become self-perpetuating in that they prevent the group from intervening in struggles and thereby deprive it of the possibility of checking and correcting its program in practice.

These sorts of pressures on the Fourth International have been multiplied by a false conception of the way in which a revolutionary international can and should function. This conception was referred to in a resolution adopted by the International Secretariat in 1954, which described the Fourth International as "constituted exclusively on the basis of agreement of the cadres with a precise program, strategy and tactics."

(*The Development and Disintegration of Stalinism*, p. 26) The idea that there can be agreement on universal strategy and tactics — and this, moreover, prior to any real testing of them in practice — is utopian and if seriously pursued can only lead to hair-splitting and isolation. It has led to a false view of the role of the international centre as a democratic-centralist headquarters of the world revolution, prescribing strategy and even day-to-day tactics for national sections. This view has inevitably been an obstacle to the proper role of the centre, which should be to assist the building of sections and especially the building of strong leadership teams in each section by facilitating collaboration and discussion between them.

The processes referred to above do not, of course, represent the sum total or even the most important part of what the Fourth International is, but they have always operated as a tendency or pressure and will continue to do so while the International remains a small minority current within the labor movement. Their most harmful effects can be seen in several widely held views that tend to prevent sections from intervening in and influencing the class struggle to the degree that is possible in the present objective and subjective conditions. These errors are:

- an underestimation of the role of national liberation struggles within the worldwide fight for socialism, in particular a programmatic error of downgrading the anti-imperialist united front and the democratic stage of revolution in the semicolonial countries, from which flow a sectarian attitude towards national liberation movements; this error was largely responsible for the delay by the majority of the FI in recognising the creation of a workers and peasants' government in Nicaragua in July 1979;

- a tendency to view the united front as a weapon primarily against political opponents (to bring about their "exposure") rather than against the class enemy;

- an overestimation of the place, within the tasks confronting the workers states and within the world revolution, occupied by political revolution against the ruling castes in the bureaucratized socialist states;

- a view of program abstracted from the practice of parties, which leads to judging other currents by their words rather than their deeds and thus to the view that the Fourth International is the only Marxist revolutionary current;

- an attitude towards other class-struggle or revolutionary currents that downplays their achievements and seeks for programmatic differences rather than practical agreements;

- a reluctance to put our program into practice, as seen in the failure to orient to the industrial working class and establish a base there when the conditions for doing so exist.

While an understanding of these mistakes is helpful, they are not to be overcome primarily by refining programmatic documents. Without the immersion of sections in the day-to-day battles of the class struggle, the attempt to correct errors will lead only to new programmatic distortions. Marxists have always recognised that practice is the necessary corrective of theory, and the objective situation today offers us abundant opportunities to check our theories in practice. In doing this, the sections will of course be subject to pressures to adapt in an opportunist direction, and will need to call on their programmatic clarity to resist them. But the greatest danger of opportunist errors in the Fourth International today lies not in external pressures but in the failure to recognise sectarian errors: If these continue to be identified with Marxism-Leninism, frustration with continued isolation can lead to the discarding of the International's correct Marxist-Leninist positions.

The greatest progress in overcoming the sectarian circle spirit is being made today where sections are most deeply involved in the labor movement of their own countries and in internationalist activities supporting the workers and peasants in other arenas of the world revolution. Further efforts in this direction are made more urgent by both the development of the

world revolution and the needs of party-building in the present period.

The 1979 World Congress correctly urged sections to increase their efforts to gain an implantation in basic industry. Analysis of the main trends in world economy and politics accurately assessed the present period as one in which the International's long-term proletarian orientation could be advanced significantly through parties deliberately working to achieve such an implantation. Achieving an industrial base is also an increasingly important element of party-building in a period in which objective forces are impelling the industrial working class towards a higher level of class struggle.

The Congress was also correct in describing the turn as a tactic to correct the anomalous composition of the Fourth International brought about by years of isolation from the mainstream of the labor movement. If seen as a strategic panacea rather than a tactical corrective, the turn would inevitably disorient the sections.

The manner in which the turn to industry was projected, however, contradicted the above considerations. The resolution and report were overly mechanical, attempting to prescribe a universal recipe for all sections. They imposed a goal of having the overwhelming majority of members in basic industry in the shortest possible time, without taking sufficient account of the specific objective conditions sections faced or the stage they had reached in cadre development and party-building. For some sections this goal was realistic, but for others it clearly was not.

This projection of a universal tactic inevitably tended to interfere with the goal it was intended to achieve by setting many sections priorities not corresponding to their real needs or possibilities, with the result that the desirability and/or possibility of establishing a strong industrial implantation began to be put in question. In order to correct this situation, it should be made clear that gaining a base in the industrial working class continues to be a priority for sections that have not yet done so, but the pace and methods must be realistically adapted to the difficulties and opportunities facing each section.

Generalising this tactic led to even more serious errors by encouraging some parties to generalise it in time as well as in space and thereby to convert it into a permanent feature of party life rather than the relatively short-term measure projected by the World Congress. Experience has already shown that this converts the turn into a moralistic and suprahistorical fetish. The next step on this workerist path is for the party continually to shift its implantation into ever more-exploited layers, without regard for the real possibilities of party-building or influencing the class struggle, and without regard for the disruptive effect on other areas of party industrial work. This in turn produces pressures to regard broader and broader layers of less-exploited workers as part of the labor aristocracy and to adapt to the labor bureaucracy by dismissing the possibility of the party helping to initiate struggles that would undermine the bureaucracy's hold on the unions. And the latter outlook implies a doubting of the possibility of revolutions in the advanced capitalist countries and a retreat into an abstentionist, propagandist existence that reinforces the sectarian isolation which the turn was intended to help overcome.

30. Towards the construction of mass revolutionary parties and a mass revolutionary international

The conflict of class forces in the 1980s occurs in a situation far more favorable to the working class and its allies than during the comparable economic and social crisis of the 1930s. There has not been a defeat of any major section of the proletariat in the advanced capitalist countries such as occur-

red in Italy in the early 1920s, or Germany and Spain in the 1930s. To the contrary, the period since World War II has been marked by new revolutionary victories in Eastern Europe, Asia, and Central America, all of which have further reduced the isolation of the USSR that existed during the 1920s and 1930s.

Moreover, there is no easy way for the capitalists to resolve the crisis of their system. The choices confronting them are very limited: To launch new wars, or to launch the sort of massive destruction of capital that occurred in the 1930s — measures they will inevitably have to take if they are to resolve the crisis facing their system — given the current relationship of class forces, the example of the existing socialist states and the continuing rise of the national liberation movement in the colonial world, risks social explosions that could challenge the continued existence of capitalism itself. These factors undoubtedly account for the delay in the capitalist class taking decisive measures to overcome their system's crisis. But this delay has two sides: The capitalists try to manoeuvre to place themselves in a better position by weakening the working class bit by bit; on the other hand, it gives the proletariat and its revolutionary vanguard time to prepare and time to win further victories.

In spite of the fact that no revolution has taken place in an imperialist country, it is impossible to draw the conclusion that revolutionary situations will not arise in these countries in the coming decades. Developments are moving toward major confrontations between the imperialist bourgeoisie on one side and the socialist states and the national liberation movements in the semicolonies, on the other side. In these circumstances the proletariat of the imperialist countries will not remain passive. All of our experience since the mid-1960s shows that we can expect the working class, in alliance with the other oppressed layers in the imperialist countries, to play an increasingly important role in the world class struggle. The working class in the imperialist countries is affected and will be further radicalised not only by the economic crisis of capitalism but also by the social explosions and the struggles of the workers and peasants in other parts of the world. The clearest example of how this happens was the experience of the war in Vietnam, which led to increasing opposition by broader and broader layers of workers in the imperialist countries. The defeat of US imperialism and its allies in Vietnam strengthened the working class in the United States and the other advanced capitalist countries and laid the basis for a new resistance to the imperialist war drive in the 1980s.

The Vietnam War and the struggle against it also indicate what the role of revolutionaries in the imperialist countries should be today: not just to participate and attempt to provide leadership to the class struggle in their own countries, to bewail its present limitations, and to dream or despair of revolutionary explosions in the future. We must recognise the unity of the world class struggle and from this see the important contribution we can make today to new revolutionary victories against imperialism through building solidarity with those in the front line of this struggle, such as the revolutionaries in Central America.

The worldwide movement against the imperialist war in Vietnam, in which our movement played a prominent role, was an important factor in the victory of the Vietnamese revolutionaries. Our active, and often leading, participation in this movement allowed us during a relatively quiescent period in the class struggle in the imperialist countries to make a significant contribution to the advance of the world revolution. So too today, when workers in the imperialist countries go into struggle to resist the austerity measures of the capitalist class and its governments they make it more difficult for the capitalists to go to war against the colonial revolution. When workers and other progressive forces in the imperialist countries defend the colonial revolutions they help change the

relationship of class forces on a world scale and thus help to bring nearer their own victory against capital. Thus the work our movement carries out should not just be seen in the light of whether in the last decade, or the last four decades, we have succeeded in accomplishing a revolutionary victory in the advanced capitalist countries, but rather whether the world socialist revolution as a whole moved forward and we were a part of that process, helping to contribute to its advance.

The history of the international working-class movement teaches us that it does not advance in an even or linear manner. Every struggle, no matter how limited, contributes to weakening the capitalist class, teaching the working class, through its Marxist vanguard, new lessons and aiding those workers who are in the front line of the world revolution. Even the defeats that take place after battle is joined leave the working class better off than defeats that occur without any fight. This is true whether the struggle is for social revolution or simply a strike for limited economic demands. There is no way that the proletariat can develop its political consciousness and understanding of its historic role without engaging time and time again in struggle. To some extent this is also how the task of building Marxist parties in the advanced capitalist countries must be undertaken — by tenaciously returning to the attack again and again. But as we do this, we must be conscious of the role that our activities, no matter how modest in the overall balance of class forces, can play in the world revolutionary process and in preparing the conditions for revolutionary victories in our own countries.

Understanding these points about the stage of the class struggle in the imperialist countries and the relationship between this struggle and the struggles in the other sectors of the world revolution is central to the building of revolutionary parties in the imperialist countries, where the Fourth International has in general had its strongest sections.

We are fortunate to still have time to prepare stronger revolutionary parties before the decisive battles that will determine the outcome of the present crisis of world imperialism. At the time of the beginning of the radicalisation in the imperialist countries in the mid-1960s our forces were very weak. But out of the fight against the Vietnam War and the youth radicalisation which it spurred on, we won many new forces to our ranks. But we had to reconquer many of the political lessons of the past and also to discard aspects of our heritage that had hindered us from building the sort of parties that could intervene in the class struggle in the way that Marx, Engels, Lenin and Trotsky had taught us. This process is still not yet complete, but fortunately in the Fourth International today we have a continuity of fighters who came out of the 1960s and 1970s, who have learned many valuable lessons, often through taking the wrong course first, and who are now attempting to apply those lessons as more mature revolutionaries to the class struggle in the 1980s. We are fortunate in having had this period of training, of not having had to learn the strategy and tactics of revolutionary struggle and party-building in the brief period of five or 10 years, as a previous generation of revolutionaries in the 1930s did. Of course, out of the defeats and mistakes of the Fourth International some forces have been lost. But out of this process we have today a far stronger and far more experienced cadre force than has ever existed in the history of the Fourth International.

Moreover, and perhaps more importantly, the present period will bring new fighters into our ranks. This will especially be the case if we are able to learn the lessons of the past history not only of the Fourth International, but of the world revolution itself. If we are able to do this then we will be in a far better position to build the sort of revolutionary vanguard parties that are necessary to assure the victory of the socialist revolution. This involves a willingness to assume that we do not yet possess all the answers to the problems of revolutionary strategy, tactics and program. Moreover, the answers to these problems can

change from generation to generation as the conditions of the class struggle change, and perhaps the answers given in the past have been inadequate and are therefore even more inadequate today. A willingness to listen to, learn from and collaborate in action with other revolutionaries is the key to building the Fourth International. Such an approach necessarily involves a certain humility about our achievements and appreciating the real achievements of other revolutionary fighters.

It would be unrealistic in the extreme to expect the construction of mass revolutionary parties and a mass revolutionary international to proceed simply through the growth of the forces of the Fourth International. Sections that are able to intervene in important struggles of the working class and to mount effective campaigns on key political issues can become a pole of attraction for layers of militants. But other militants will be drawn to the large working-class parties or to smaller centrist or revolutionary formations, or will seek to organise their struggle through non-party or semi-party formations. Finding ways to united action with such militants is indispensable to the most rapid construction of a revolutionary party.

The objective need of the proletariat and its allies is the maximum possible unity of revolutionary forces to provide leadership in the struggles against capitalism and imperialism. This need is a pressing one and cannot be made hostage to organisational sectarianism or past programmatic disputes with little or no relevance to today's tasks. Marxists therefore seek to unite in action with all those forces that in practice seek to implement the specific measures that would lead the proletariat and its allies forward on the revolutionary path. Whether such unity consists of temporary united fronts, longer-term alliances or organisational merger will often be determined by circumstances outside our control, but the goal is the highest degree of unity to advance working-class struggles.

Our program can be a source of the necessary revolutionary solutions. But this can happen only if two conditions are met: The program must be a living one, constantly being checked and enriched by experience; it must be taken to workers and others in struggle by an active, interventionist party. These two conditions are of course closely linked, since much of experience depends upon interventions.

But the experiences that modify and enrich the program of the Fourth International are not solely those of its sections. They are also those of the entire world revolution. While the sections remain relatively small and with limited experience of leading important struggles, the primary source of new data for enriching the program will be the activity of other currents, particularly of course the activities that have produced revolutionary advances and victories. The gains of the Cuban Revolution and the advancing revolutions in Central America are today an especially rich source from which sections should seek to learn, as were the experiences of Vietnam.

Experience from the October Revolution onwards has repeatedly demonstrated the centrality of a revolutionary proletarian party to the likelihood of victory in the struggle between revolution and capitalism/imperialism. As this struggle is inescapably international, the construction of an international revolutionary leadership is an urgent task for the proletariat and its allies.

The conditions for building such a leadership are today increasingly favorable. The revolutionary Marxist leaderships in Cuba, Nicaragua and El Salvador, like the Vietnamese Communists, display a profound understanding of the Leninist strategy of revolution. For all of them, the dependence of their own revolutions on their extension internationally is obvious. They are already looked to as an example and inspiration by revolutionaries throughout the underdeveloped countries and, although to a lesser extent, in the imperialist centres. The power of their example can be seen in the evolution of the

revolutionary movement in countries such as the Philippines as well as in Latin America.

Because of the present influence of Stalinism in the labor movement internationally and the reliance of the Central American, Caribbean and Indochinese revolutions on aid from the Soviet Union, the formation of a mass revolutionary international like the Communist International in Lenin's time is not a short-term prospect. But further progress towards the creation of an international leadership can be made through an in-

creasing collaboration between these parties and revolutionaries in other countries.

A pressing task of our movement is therefore to seek active and growing collaboration with these leaderships and to encourage other revolutionary forces to do likewise. By making this task an inseparable part of party-building in each country, we will speed the construction of both national and international revolutionary leaderships.

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