

3rd Congress Draft Resolution (Oct 1999)

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Draft Resolution for the Third Congress of the Workers International to Rebuild the Fourth International

General comments

The new and much deeper stage in the crisis which recently opened up in Asia is neither isolated nor simply monetary and financial. It is a brutal and open expression of the general world-wide crisis of imperialism which started in 1973 after 30 years of almost constant boom. The boom was based on the historical conjunction of certain conditions, particularly the general recovery after World War II, reconstruction, etc. It was only possible within the framework of a wholesale deal between the world bourgeoisie on the one hand and the Stalinist bureaucracy, in competition with Social Democracy, on the other.

However, around 1973 capital accumulation started to flag and the rate of profit began once again to fall, while the working class was in an economically strong position. Since then, capitalism has found itself in the same general crisis, only worse, which began when its imperialist epoch started, the "highest stage of capitalism" as Lenin analysed it.

This deep crisis, which was and is not simply a cyclical crisis of over-production but strikes at the very foundations of the capitalist-imperialist system, entered a qualitatively new stage with the collapse of Stalinism in 1989-90. This deprived imperialism of its main internationally organised collaborator and pillar within the working class itself, (which does not mean, as we shall see later, that the social democratic – Labour and socialist – and ex-Stalinist

leaderships in different countries have lost all their influence or ceased their harmful activity).

The politicians, economists, sociologists and journalists of the bourgeoisie are today in complete disarray. In this they are joined by former Stalinist and "socialist" ideologists who not so long ago declared that Marxism has failed and socialism collapsed, and on this basis sang the praises of neo-liberalism (as many of them still do!).

At the beginning of the recent crisis they arrogantly claimed that it would be transitory and brief. Now, however, none of them can anticipate what its ultimate impact will be and where it will end. They themselves acknowledge how deep it is and wonder aloud how to keep the present system going. Already they have had to conclude that they must restore the Bretton-Woods arrangements for the world monetary system established at the end of World War II.

Many of the solutions put forward are based on a mongrel hotchpotch of neo-liberal and Keynesian ideas and measures in an attempt to overcome the most discredited "aspects" of both. In fact, however, the bourgeoisie's actual response to the crisis has already produced massive unemployment, devastating inflation, the destruction of whole branches of the economy, of welfare systems, of the health and culture of working people, and attacks on their unions and democratic rights and all their previous gains, even in countries which not so long ago were presented as models of successful capitalism.

The spectre of Indonesia, Korea and Russia, reduced to abject poverty, now directly haunts Japan and is finally starting to worry the countries of North America and Europe. This is how imperialism tries to "solve" its crisis. No country or individual can escape this barbarous prospect merely by protestations or spontaneous resistance.

Recent developments in the crisis more and more lay bare the real nature of all the traditional parties of the working class (socialist, Labour or Stalinist and ex-Stalinist) whose leaderships mislead and deceive their members and are very often directly responsible not only for the crisis itself, but

for the destructive way the bourgeoisie tries to "solve" it. These "socialist" parties form or participate in the governments of a whole number of countries. Even those which are in more or less critical opposition share the same basis of general acceptance of the capitalist-imperialist system. All they can propose is to correct, ameliorate or, as they say, "go beyond" its worst features, and to establish, or sometimes re-establish, the so-called welfare state or social market economy.

These parties have sided with the capitalist system under conditions of its worsening crisis. Meanwhile Stalinism has collapsed and most of its leaders and cadres have gone over to the side of the bourgeoisie. Even before the recent turn for the worse in the crisis, these facts had convinced more and more workers and their vanguard in each country of the need to build and organise new, genuinely working-class parties of the proletariat

This general trend corresponds in all essentials to the chief proposition of the Fourth International, whose very existence, thanks to its foundation in 1938 and despite the crisis it later underwent, provides a theoretical and practical response to this need. Not only did this new situation not surprise the members and cadres of this International; it created a broad basis on which a historical meeting between this general trend in the working class and the Fourth International became an objective possibility.

However, the long decades during which reformist and Stalinist leaderships dominated the working class movement, the physical persecution and destruction of revolutionary working class organisations and activists by the Stalinist apparatus, and the prolonged inculcation by it of class collaboration in theory and practice did severe damage to the working class movement, causing fragmentation, weakness and the loss of class consciousness almost entirely in many countries and internationally.

The decimation of the ranks and leaders of the Fourth International by the Stalinist killers, first and foremost

Leon Trotsky's assassination, must be seen in this context. This is how we should understand the protracted crisis of the Fourth International after World War II, following its marginalisation within a weakened working class movement and the mistakes and deviations of its young and inexperienced leaders.

Our aim in founding the Workers International in 1990 was therefore to try to meet the needs of the working class today in and through a positive response to the historical requirement of the solution of the protracted crisis of the Fourth International.

That was why at the founding congress of the Workers International (Budapest 1990) we adopted the formulation that the necessary reconstruction of the working class movement requires the rebuilding of the Fourth International, just as the task of rebuilding the latter itself passes necessarily by and through the reconstruction of the working-class movement. Therefore these two processes form an inseparable unity of the same movement. They are distinct but unified in the same line of march: neither of them could proceed without or against the other without disrupting and perverting the whole.

Today the openly deepening crisis of imperialism and the prolonged and worsening crisis of the Fourth International oblige us to examine carefully the path and tasks we have chosen in the light of the present objective situation and the lessons of our experience.

On the crisis of imperialism

This is not the place for a detailed description of the crisis, nor is it possible to analyse it as a whole here. We can say that this work is extremely urgent and call on all Marxists to undertake it. We ourselves have done so from the start and will continue to do so. Yet we do need to present at this point a general picture of the crisis and how it is to be understood so that we can renew our understanding of the position of the working class and how it can defend itself, and of its historic goal and the instruments needed to achieve it.

The open crisis convulsing this system and the complete inability of its representatives to understand and explain the crisis and how to overcome it glaringly reveal how incompatible capitalism is with the needs of humanity, how opposed it is to them. The so-called economic and sociological sciences of the bourgeoisie are exposed as meaningless fairy-tales, whether like the many neo-liberal trends they directly express the nature of that class, or whether they take the shape of empty arguments inspired by the more or less Keynesian outlook of the social democratic or ex-Stalinist champions of the bourgeoisie. For long months they simply denied the evidence, then they asserted that a crisis in Asia would not affect the major imperialist countries which, they claimed, would greatly gain from it. As late as September 1998 there were so-called "socialists" in France who prophesied economic growth of 2.8 per cent there in 1999. Even as they spoke, the crisis was directly affecting not only Japan and China, but the ex-Soviet Union, Brazil and even the US, whose principal leaders were really beginning to panic.

These same people are now forced to admit that the neo-liberal ideas and practices of Thatcherism have failed to resolve the prolonged crisis following 1973 or provide humanity with harmonious development and progress. Not only that, the "results" of these policies are downright disastrous. A recent report by a UN body openly acknowledged that world economic growth benefited only a tiny minority of humanity. A mere 20 per cent of the world's population enjoy 86 per cent of the total spent on consumption. More than one billion are unable to satisfy their most elementary needs. One third have no drinking water. According to the International Labour Office (ILO in Geneva) there are 140 million (officially!) unemployed in the world, 10 per cent of whom lost their jobs in the past year in Asia, etc., etc., The sad list goes on and on. The inequality between rich and poor countries as well as inside each country has grown more quickly than total consumption, and has reached gigantic proportions. Even in the richest country, the USA, 38 per cent of the population live below the

poverty line, and 16 per cent live in dire poverty. One fifth of the population is illiterate!

Only Marxism can describe the crisis accurately and correctly analyse its causes and content and thus show humanity a positive way out. Today, on the basis of the historical failure of Stalinism and "socialism in one country", Marx is cynically falsified and repudiated by a whole legion of, very often ex-Stalinist, leaders and bourgeois scholars. But that same Marx more than one hundred years ago clearly demonstrated, above all in "Capital", that the main cause of the recent crisis lies in one of the most significant characteristics of the capitalist system. He established and analysed the inherent law of capitalist economy, i.e. the tendency of the rate of profit to fall. In order to escape from that contradiction of the accumulation process, capital has more and more deserted production, which has become less and less and less profitable, and escaped into the sphere of finance (creating even more powerful contradictions in the process). This was possible because of the relative separation of money capital from productive capital. But Marx pointed to the danger – analysed later by Lenin and others – that this separation, becoming more and more inherent to the nature of this system, becomes a division and, finally, an opposition in which finance capital becomes more and more autonomous and then assumes uncontrollable weight and mass in relation to production, whose expansion is limited by the tendency of the rate of profit to fall, and of course, by the limited capacity of the market. Thus at a certain point the whole artificial money-construction collapses and a general correction is operated through a crisis which reduces all superfluous money capital to its real value, i.e. nothing or next to nothing. We are now undergoing just such a general "correction", and not a single bourgeois economist or politician can explain it. Even if some of them on occasion denounce the excessive and "uncontrolled" moves of this speculative, fictitious capital, they are unable to provide a consistent and wholesale analysis. Desperately they polish up this or that plan to

“improve” the system and its institutions (IMF, World Bank, etc.): they cannot get to the fundamental contradictions of capital itself. In order to increase the rate of profit, they do everything they can to increase the rate of surplus value. And here the capitalists and their servants suddenly stop telling fairy tales for propaganda purposes and eloquently explain the “necessity” of the ferocious measures they take to increase exploitation.

But Marxism cannot remain on the pages of “Capital”, even if that book supplies rather more than just the key to understanding the present. It was a basis for the development of the analysis and explanation of capitalism step by step with the main historical evolution of the system itself. So to grasp the present crisis, one has to incorporate the development of Marxist theory represented by Lenin’s “Imperialism” and later Trotsky’s analysis of imperialist decay during the first ten years of the Communist International as well as the “Transitional Programme” and the work done preparing and following that. Without these contributions it is impossible to have a full understanding of the current crisis.

If nowadays, therefore, there are thinkers whose work helps us to understand present-day imperialism, it is because what is useful in what they say is based on Marxism. However, these valuable contributions often only take Lenin’s and Trotsky’s analysis into account one-sidedly if at all. In order to obtain a complete picture of imperialism it is therefore necessary to understand these strengths and weaknesses. Scholars who seek to understand and to explain present-day capitalism and its crisis by reference only to “Capital” and other works by Marx, ignoring, neglecting or dismissing its later development, cannot form a correct picture of it and therefore cannot propose an adequate solution. They refuse to apply the essential element of the Marxist method to Marxism itself by examining all theory in its development in relation to the development of the reality examined, and so they turn it into a mere academic doctrine, scarcely, if at all,

suitable to act upon reality.

In his examination of present-day capitalism ("La mondialisation du capital", Paris 1994) and subsequent books and articles, the French economist Francois Chesnais and a group of economists around him (Richard Farnetti, Claude Serfati, etc.) have done important work for understanding the recent development of the present imperialist system. They enrich our understanding of how it functions, the actual role of direct investments, of capital circulation, of financial globalisation and so on. This work can and must be used to understand important details concerning the evolution of imperialism so that we can act successfully in this or that sphere against this system of exploitation.

The main weakness of Chesnais' and others' account of the globalisation of capital is not so much that they make concessions to bourgeois interpretations of the crisis as a purely geographical globalisation of capital, denying its class content of exploitation. In fact they energetically differentiate themselves from such bourgeois globalisation theories, which they oppose. But they leave unexamined the relationship between globalisation today and what Lenin and Trotsky said previously about the organically international character of capitalism. They do not explain clearly what the differences are between these previous analyses and their own globalisation theory. Do they see fundamental, qualitative differences between imperialism as explained by Lenin and Trotsky and as they explain it, differences which amount to a change in the nature of imperialism? After all, Marx and Engels wrote 150 years ago in the "Manifesto of the Communist Party": "The bourgeoisie has through its exploitation of the world market given a cosmopolitan character to production and consumption in every country...it has drawn from under the feet of industry the national ground on which it stood...(and) we have intercourse in every direction, universal interdependence of nations". And what about Lenin's "Imperialism the highest stage of capitalism"? The globalisation theory suggests a new, even "higher" stage in which, perhaps, new

features of capitalism appear which change it fundamentally, making it necessary to change the conclusions that Lenin drew. This ambiguity leads Chesnais to concede that imperialism was in the past able, if not to overcome, at least to ameliorate its crisis by its own economic efforts, whereas now, in his view, the theoretical potentiality postulated by Marx of an economic collapse or breakdown of capital has become a practical outcome. One would conclude from this that the exploited masses can do no more than resist the attacks upon them and in this way push forward and exacerbate these inner contradictions. Responding to some criticism, Chesnais has denied what Lenin emphasised, that capitalism is always able to find a way out of its crisis. According to him, Lenin was referring only to political crises of the bourgeois system and not the capitalist economy.

This is a kind of economic determinism which neglects Marx's essential idea that human activity, concretely the class struggle, is an integral part of economy, that only the relationship of forces, the concrete result of a constant class struggle, determines the outcome of economic contradictions. That is why, as it does today, the bourgeoisie tries to resolve its crisis at the expense of the working class and the exploited masses. If it can overcome its inner political contradictions and then defeat the proletariat, the bourgeoisie is and always will be able to impose its solution, even if that means economic, cultural and physical devastation, i.e. barbarism. The choice facing humanity therefore is and remains socialism or barbarism. Capitalism is not going to break down on its own. The idea that it will do so provides a theoretical underpinning for political scepticism which, on the basis of bitter experience, rejects the necessity and possibility of the revolutionary party of the proletariat. Here lies the profound significance of Lenin's characterisation of imperialism as the epoch of wars and revolutions which is so important for understanding this system and its present critical situation.

This substantial Marxist view was developed by Trotsky as the

crisis of imperialism itself deepened. As early as the 1920s he had concluded, as he put it later in the "Transitional Programme", that our epoch is that of the "death agony of capitalism" in which "mankind's productive forces stagnate". Consequently "the objective prerequisites for the proletarian revolution have not only 'ripened'; they have begun to get somewhat rotten". A glance at present-day imperialism and its actual open crisis proves, not only that this view is correct, but that the situation has become seriously worse. The stagnation of the productive forces has intensified into their massive destruction not only in war but even under "peaceful" conditions. "Without a socialist revolution", Trotsky continues, "... a catastrophe threatens the whole culture of mankind". In our epoch, this catastrophe is already assuming very concrete forms, which lend urgency to his warning: "The turn is now to the proletariat, i.e., chiefly to its revolutionary vanguard". And dismissing that determinism which is so alien to Marxism, he expresses the real content of the situation: "The historical crisis of mankind is reduced to the crisis of the revolutionary leadership".

While some Marxists envisage the concrete perspective as, sooner or later, a collapse of capital, others, like Istvan Meszaros, talk about a "structural crisis" as a qualitatively new stage of imperialism. This conception, too, suggests that up to now capital has been able to overcome its contradictions but that now a new era, the, period of its structural crisis, definitively condemns it to perish.

The idea of "structural crisis" has been uncritically and unreservedly accepted and adopted by a whole faction of members and leaders of the Workers International. On this basis they not only repudiate all our previous theoretical struggles and their results – for example, against the revisionist idea of Ernest Mandel that there is something called neo-capitalism which is capable of overcoming its contradictions – they also reject the central idea of the founding programme of the Fourth International. In this way they also obstruct a constructive discussion with Istvan

Meszaros.

Istvan Meszaros has produced a series of valuable analyses of present-day imperialism dealing with the collapse of Stalinism and the consequent freeing of the working-class movement from its heavy grip, with the growing millions of unemployed people and their permanent expulsion from the production process, the constant and growing over-production of capital, etc. etc.. His latest books, "The Power of Ideology" and "Beyond Capital" present what are in many ways useful contributions to Marxist understanding. However, the group in the Workers International do not use these strong sides of Meszaros' work but lean on his congenital weaknesses, which have some legitimacy in a scholar who has always remained outside of a revolutionary party but mean something quite different in those who claim to be Trotskyists fighting for the revolutionary Fourth International. So Cliff Slaughter exploits Meszaros' theory of "structural crisis" to put into question the theoretical foundation and history of the Fourth International. Writing in the Internal Bulletin of the Workers International he goes further than Meszaros to assert that imperialism "... until now had made possible the postponement or displacement of its internal contradictions". Furthermore, according to him, we are "... in a qualitatively changed objective situation (where) an analysis which was basically correct in the previous situation must now be surpassed". And to avoid any misunderstanding, he declares that "... there was a certain objective basis for the failure of the first, second and third (Internationals) in that the structural limits of capital had not been reached."

Such assertions, based on a false representation of what imperialism and its crisis are, negate the whole development of Marxist thought on capital after Marx, including Lenin's contribution, not to speak of the Transitional Programme. Incidentally Social Democracy and Stalinism are absolved here for their historical collaboration with capitalism, which makes it impossible to achieve a positive clarification with those who were or still are members of these movements who are

now seeking a way out of the working class's crisis of political leadership.

It is important to stress that Meszaros' (and Slaughter's) economic determinism is the same as that of Chesnais, even if they differ in emphasis and form. The determinist conception which Chesnais and Meszaros share turns out to be a kind of academic approach which underestimates the role and importance of human activity (class struggle) and the conditions under which it takes place. However, they draw different conclusions from their respective analyses. Before taking a closer look at them, which in turn will assist in better defining what our tasks are and under what conditions they are to be carried out, some further general consideration must be given to the overall picture of imperialism and its present crisis.

The content of the crisis of imperialism and some of the forms it takes

The exploitation of poor countries by the richest ones is a chief characteristic of capitalism which took on the qualitatively new and extended form of imperialism, as Lenin, Trotsky, Rosa Luxemburg and others analysed. As a consequence of this exploitation, the division of the world between the great majority of poor countries and a few rich ones has now taken on the exacerbated shape of a more and more gigantic unevenness between them, a real and sharp social polarisation. According to the already quoted UN report, the 15 richest people in the world have in their possession more than the gross domestic product of the 48 poorest countries of Africa! And 3 billion people live with less than 2 dollars per day! This division – between what Lenin called “rentier states, the usurer states” on the one hand and the great number of countries in Africa, Asia and Latin-America (now extended to the ex-Soviet Union and eastern Europe) on the other- grew wider and wider during the previous period of boom from 1946 to 1973 and then in the ensuing crisis. Now with the latest development of the crisis it has assumed dramatic proportions. One of the principal means of pillaging the poor countries is the enormous and growing debt and the huge interest payments

which must be made to the banks of the richest countries and mainly to their collective bankers, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank and other international institutions, as well as to the rich states. More than 80 years ago Lenin was already talking about “...a handful of usurer states and a vast majority of debtor states” which in our days has become a real gulf between them. This parasitic character is dealt with in the light of new data and in its developed form by, for example, François Chesnais and others but these scholars do not establish where Lenin’s work stands in this development, although he clearly dealt with this parasitism a long time ago. Even before the latest stage of the crisis the development of the parasites had taken on huge proportions and become the source of important movements. Workers International completely supports the general demand that the debts of all debtor nations should be cancelled and those movements which fight to achieve that aim. We are also in the front rank of those who campaign for a tax on the international movement of capital – about \$1,500 billion are exchanged each day on the currency market! – and for the abolition of all tax havens and offshore refuges for capital. These demands become an integral part of our transitional programme.

But a ferocious struggle also unfolds between the big monopolies and therefore the great powers themselves. Now that the crisis is out in the open, competition has intensified and become more violent under increasingly cut-throat conditions. The struggle for primacy in the fight for what Lenin called “division of the world among capitalist combines” and then “among the great powers” has over recent decades produced three poles of imperialist concentration and centralisation: the United States, Japan and Europe.

Taking advantage of the situation created by the deep crisis in Asia and the difficulties of Japanese imperialism which is most deeply committed in those countries, American and also European imperialism are trying to oust Japanese capital or, at least, reduce it to a secondary role and make deep inroads

in Japan itself. They are using this crisis to establish a direct hold on Asia's productive and financial assets in order either to incorporate them into their own concentration and centralisation processes or destroy them as sources of competition. This direct predatory intervention worsens the lot of millions of working people through mass unemployment, starvation and the shameful exploitation of human beings, particularly women and children, affecting whole peoples and a great number of countries. The historical unevenness between rich and poor countries is a veritable plague of capitalism, spreading pauperisation and misery on the one hand while enriching "people who live by clipping coupons", as Lenin called them, on the other. It has become a mass social polarisation which turns into open opposition.

Long before the present open crisis, this polarisation had already fully developed. It now leads to heightened tension between the major imperialist countries and Asia, Africa and Latin America. From now on they all confront the same merciless exploitation, the same mass unemployment and misery, the same starvation and pauperisation, the same plundering of their natural resources to a degree which amounts to the destruction of nature itself. This great majority of humanity in Africa, Asia and Latin-America constitutes an integral part – the strongest one – of the international proletariat. The powerful working class, for example, in Brazil, in South Africa or in Korea, can and must be united in a common struggles with the proletariat of the rich countries for a determined refusal to pay all debts and interest, for the expropriation of foreign capital in those countries and for an international anti-imperialist movement.

The case of the ex-Soviet Union and of eastern Europe is particularly important in connection with the crisis and the take-over of a series of countries by the dominant and richest imperialist powers. The recent crisis has revealed not only the enormous difficulties imperialism faces in incorporating these states into its world system but exposes more and more how these efforts themselves become an important source and

element in the crisis of imperialism. Regardless of economic and social differences between the countries of the ex-Soviet Union and the eastern European states, and indeed between the latter themselves, world imperialism has invested colossal amounts of money in those countries without being able to bring to a successful conclusion their transformation into capitalist economies. It has therefore not been possible to turn this enormous amount of finance capital into really productive capital, mainly because of the social structure of those countries which experienced the October Revolution and its subsequent effects. In these circumstances the best part of these "investments" finished up in the pockets of the new ruling groups and the Mafia. In return, the banks and other financial institutions with big commitments in Russia have seen their crisis seriously worsened. It is enough to mention the example of the big American hedge fund, the Long Term Capital Management (LTCM). The bankruptcy of this investment company because of its big commitments in Russia created a real panic in the American bourgeoisie, forcing them to undertake an immediate united intervention, despite their mutual competition. The way all the big American banks, regardless of their rivalry, rallied round to save LTCM also provides a convincing argument for rejecting economic determinism which could, rightly, "foresee" the complete failure of this financial firm and many others but is unable to grasp the whole reality.

At the root of this powerful element in the imperialist crisis is the huge difficulty world capital faces in transforming the ex-Soviet Union – and to a lesser extent the eastern European countries – into finished capitalist societies. Finance capital has integrated them into the world-wide imperialist economy (and at the same time, plunders them) and governments there and comprador elements in the service of capital give all the help they can, but even so it has not been possible to completely transform the social structure and the social relations corresponding to it. Therefore the penetration of capital has meant a general move to destroy the productive

forces on a mass scale, with the colonisation of those countries accompanied by the massive demolition of the less profitable enterprises, of entire branches of the economy, of cultural institutions and of the health service, the ejection of millions from the productive process into poverty.

Capitalism has not brought a peaceful and harmonious economic and social transformation but destruction and pauperisation. Even in the east European countries, which are in a better position than the ex-Soviet Union, very often almost half of the population, if not more, lives in poverty and unemployment and there has been a terrific growth in social disparity and inequality. Many of those who are still working, like teachers, miners, etc., are not paid. For example in Russia the miners of Vorkuta have not had their wages for a year! In these countries, above all in the ex-Soviet Union, the choice: socialism or barbarism takes the form of a daily life and death struggle.

Consequently the prophets of "state capitalist" theories old and new are incapable of grasping the reality in these countries, what capitalist penetration means and what contradictions it involves, what progress it makes and what its weaknesses are. But above all their ultra-left and sectarian views isolate them from the great majority of those people who know and feel that they are being deprived of something precious which they previously possessed.

The bureaucratic dissolution of the Soviet Union did not in and of itself directly strengthen world imperialism. The attempts to re-establish capitalism actually tend to undermine the system and constitute a mighty factor in its crisis. At the same time they also lend vigorous impetus to struggles between imperialists for a new division of the world under conditions of a profoundly changed relationship of forces and of the recent crisis. Competition between US and European imperialism has intensified because of the new and worse stage of the crisis, because of the possibility of carving up the ex-Soviet Union, and also because of the approach of European "unification". The struggle for primacy between European and

American imperialism is highly exacerbated. The USA has made significant gains in the Middle and Near East and elsewhere in Asia, and more recently in Africa at the expense of European imperialism. This imperialist rivalry is in the background to all the wars and civil wars which are ravaging a whole series of countries like Rwanda, Congo, etc. These wars cannot be simply reduced to rivalries between imperialist powers, especially since those powers themselves are united against the peoples, but in fact US imperialism has generally succeeded in weakening its rivals and turning them into its subordinates.

Threatened by deep crisis since the 1970s, European imperialism has had to speed up its unification. This was and is a savage drive by Thatcherite-Reaganite neo-liberalism to increased destruction of the productive forces, dismantling education, culture and health services and attacking trade unions and their rights. Faced with increasing competition from American and Japanese imperialism, European capital has had to compress its own severe inner conflicts to lay down in the Maastricht and Amsterdam treaties and other deals what had to be done to achieve concrete unification. It created further downward pressure on the general conditions of all the peoples of Europe. The pace of this move has picked up significantly in recent years under conditions of developing crisis and with the working class freed from the class-collaborationist Stalinist apparatus.

Mass privatisations followed by the extended and rapid international concentration and centralisation of big monopolies, with a massive transfer of production towards countries with lower wages and less effective social protection bring about the destruction of the productive forces, mainly the living-conditions and gains of the working class. This is accompanied by massive unemployment and intensified attacks on workers' and trade union rights using all the instruments of Thatcherite neo-liberalism. This is the very essence of the so-called unification of Europe. The more the pace of unification is accelerated, the further the

destruction advances. The European bourgeoisie has been unable to suppress its inner contradictions and rivalry, but it has been able to "unite" more and more in order to intensify its exploitation with a tremendous common effort to solve its crisis at the expense of the working class and maintain and reinforce its position in a savagely competitive world.

The recent crisis acts as a vigorous accelerator of this process. The European working class, like working people all over the world, faces a new wave of savage attacks against their working and living conditions, against all of its gains and rights, against even its right to a human existence. More than that! Capital is, and will be, more and more determined to reduce, truncate and suppress even all the so-called classic bourgeois democratic rights, violating and distorting their institutions. If the working class fails to intervene, instead of more democracy, "united" Europe will also degenerate into the barbarism of poverty and dictatorship.

At a certain point, the common efforts of the bourgeoisie to achieve unity will arouse and sharpen its inner contradictions. This will reach a climax with the application of the artificially created common currency. The various and uneven components of European capital will not be able to put up with the strait-jacket of the Euro. The pitiless internal conflicts of the bourgeoisie will produce severe tensions and even worse conditions for the working class as a whole and, in particular, its most vulnerable components: immigrant workers, women and youth.

The short history of the process of European unification has already demonstrated that the more it advances, the more its bourgeois leaders, namely its most active German and French ones, have had to reduce its breadth, the number of countries participating in it. The historically accumulated unevenness will not permit a complete bourgeois unification of all the countries of Europe without an immense social explosion. Therefore the main "European" bourgeois leaders have had to exclude the great majority of European countries from this "unification" from the outset. They need to be "prepared" very

carefully.

This bourgeoisie learnt a bitter lesson when it burned its fingers on German unification, which very nearly plunged Germany into a devastating open crisis and could have dragged Europe down with it. It is therefore now cutting Europe into slices. The whole of eastern Europe is excluded from the circle of initial candidates to the Euro, because they are not economically and socially "mature" enough for such a severe test, which could provoke big social explosions. So at least the first group of them – there is also a second, even less "prepared" group – must be prepared for admission to the ranks of the chosen by several years of a slower process of economic and social destruction.

On the other hand, almost half of the European bourgeoisie still remains outside of at least the first stage of unification, reflecting the deep inner contradictions and conflicts of European imperialism. In reality, "unification" means also a bitter struggle for primacy between the big monopolies and between the leading countries accommodating and defending them. The rivalry between the German, French and British bourgeoisies does not disappear at the threshold of a "united" Europe.

Nevertheless, they really are united in a common opposition to the self-determination of small nationalities, always favouring the nationalism of those oppressors whose strength can provide a guarantee for future exploitation. Even in the very Europe they claim to "unite", the British army prevents the Irish people from freely uniting their country while the French and Spanish bourgeoisie divide the Basque people between their two states and do everything to hinder their free self-determination. And while European imperialism prepares to incorporate the bloodstained Turkish state in its "unification", it denies the Kurdish people their self-determination and prepares to drag their leaders into court. In this respect particular emphasis must be placed on imperialism's shameful policy in ex-Yugoslavia. Here they do and have done everything they possibly can to stabilise and

strengthen the jingoist Milosevic regime because they hope that, in association with fascists, it will be able to secure the capitalist order against the "turbulent" peoples of Bosnia and Kosovo fighting for their self-determination. The united European imperialist powers, acting slavishly under American leadership and accepting the blackmail of the rotten Russian regime, put a stop to the liberation movement and now occupy ex-Yugoslavia in order to prevent its peoples from fighting for their freedom and national rights (see the supplement on Kosova which will be issued as an addition to this resolution).

The Workers International does not recognise the capitalist Europe of class and national oppression, and fights all over the world for the freedom and rights of all peoples and liberation movements in every country. It firmly stands for the Leninist principle of self-determination for all peoples, including their right to secede and form their own states. As for Europe, the Workers International is not content merely one-sidedly to reject and denounce imperialist Europe. It fights to revive the old socialist slogan and policy of a United Workers States of Europe! Workers International must work out a concrete policy and plan for this struggle under present conditions, participating in all practical fights and movements aiming to unify the working people of Europe. It was present at the formation of the Workers Aid for Bosnia campaign and stands in the front rank of other international movements, as now in fighting for the self-determination and arming of the Albanian people of Kosova.

World imperialism and all of its components, separately and collectively, more and more use the bourgeois state and its political power, and the corresponding international economic, political, military, etc. apparatus, in the fight to resolve its crisis. Their first and principal aim is to subjugate and put down the working class and peoples in revolt. This whole mechanism has had to be reorganised in the wake of the breakdown of the Stalinist bureaucracy and the dissolution of the Soviet Union. In the place of a certain world-wide balance

of forces within the framework of “peaceful co-existence and co-operation” between world imperialism and the Stalinist bureaucracy, the American bourgeoisie has announced the need for a “new world order”. They urgently needed to put something in place of the collapsed Stalinist bureaucracy in order to contain the working class and the liberation movements which, freed from this constraint, threatened to increase and spread over the planet.

Over recent years the world has seen a significant and constant reinforcement of the hegemony of American imperialism as the most powerful both in general and in and through a reinforcement of its role in the international network and institutions of the bourgeoisie. It has assumed a leading position, relegating the official institutions (UN, NATO, etc.) to a less important role or simply pushing them aside, as has been the case for example in Iraq, Somalia, Bosnia and Kosovo. Whether the exponents of economic determinism like it or not, the American bourgeoisie was able to overcome its political differences during the recent crisis in order to save the IMF from insolvency. Only American capital could take this important decision, which allowed the IMF to hold back for the time being the outbreak of an open and drastic crisis in Brazil – which would have spread first of all to the USA – and also restored its capacity to intervene in Russia and elsewhere.

All over the world the dictatorship of capital takes place under the reinforced direct economic, political and military leadership of the American bourgeoisie imposing the same destructive Thatcherite liberal policy.

Predicting the future is a risky business. One cannot tell in advance whether the Chinese bureaucracy, for example, will devalue the yuan or not, whether the Japanese bourgeoisie can take the necessary steps to overcome recession, whether world capital can prevent the general spread of recession and deflation, etc., etc. Nothing is inevitably fated to happen just because this or that economic premise exists. According to Marx, humanity makes its own history in the given material

conditions and in and through the circumstances prevailing in the class struggle. As we have seen, American capital faced with mortal danger was able to refloat the IMF so that the latter could provide financial assistance to Brazil in return for imposing very severe austerity measures on the Cardoso government as its solution to the crisis. But on the other hand the recent elections gave significant gains to Lula's working class party and it is not at all clear that the government will be able to carry out its anti-working class plans. The issue is open, as it is more or less throughout the world. That is why the relationship of forces between imperialism and the international working class and what is tried and undertaken to influence its development are of paramount importance.

Bourgeois and Proletarians

We were right to affirm at our second congress and afterwards that the collapse of the Stalinist bureaucracy was a great step forward possessing enormous historical significance because it meant the freeing of the working class, its revolutionary capacity and energy from the heavy burden of the internationally organised class collaboration and oppression of Stalinism. We were also right to say that the breakdown of this pillar of the bourgeoisie heightened the crisis of imperialism. The international relationship of forces between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat was transformed because the conditions within which it exists were radically, qualitatively changed in favour of the proletariat. It is timely now, nearly ten years later, to check our assertions and examine the situation.

All over the world the working class has been able express its real purposes. This was seen, for example, in the big miners' strikes in Russia and Ukraine, in the working people of Bosnia and Kosova in ex-Yugoslavia, in the great actions by South African and Brazilian workers, the French workers' movements of the autumn and winter of 1995 (the biggest since 1968) and in the long and exemplary strike of the Liverpool dockers. Independent revolutionary organisations and groups were able

to intervene and develop their policy in these movements because the Stalinist physical oppression and terror that we knew of old had disappeared. Even the various Trotskyist organisations and militants were able to participate in them freely without risking their lives. The policy and practice of class collaboration and of intimidating revolutionary workers had to be done in other ways. In all respects, it really was a qualitative change.

However it has not yet been possible to turn the objectively new and favourable opportunities for the proletariat into a real significant advance of the class. On the contrary. During the last ten years, world imperialism in general, and the bourgeoisie in each country have been able to reorganise themselves and impose their reactionary solutions, even if it was not without difficulties for them.

Even if the so-called "peace" deals and treaties imposed by imperialism, for example, in Ireland, Palestine or Bosnia could not settle the contradictions and ended in an explosive situation of neither war nor peace, postponing more virulent explosions, nevertheless the temporary settlements based on military occupation codify the advanced position of imperialism and reinforce the aggressors. Now the people of Kosova is threatened by a so-called "peace" agreement which is even more drastic, involving a draconian and massive military occupation and a partition of the country organised as a protectorate of the imperialist powers.

All over the world the bourgeoisie has been able to impose its reactionary plans and austerity measures. Even though the masses have initiated big movements and strike actions in many countries throughout the period of "restructuring", as well as in places like South Korea and Indonesia in the recent open crisis, the bourgeoisie has in the end, acting internationally, been able to channel these movements and impose its own arrangements. Not a day passes any more without news of accelerated concentrations at a world level between big international monopolies and massive privatisations of even those enterprises which were traditionally state-owned,

like the postal service and the railways. As a logical consequence of these concentrations and privatisations, massive redundancies are continually taking place everywhere and expanding exponentially. Those who still have a job find that casual work has become a general practice in hiring or changing the workforce. At the same time the destruction of social welfare systems involving substantial gains of previous working class struggles like pensions, health services, and education proceeds on a world scale. All this so-called "restructuring" and destruction takes place with the active co-operation of the leaders of the trade union and "working-class" parties whose support has been and still is essential in demolishing these gains. So while the world relationship of forces has changed in favour of the proletariat, the bourgeoisie still has the initiative and it greatly benefits from that. All over the world the working class and the oppressed peoples are on the defensive.

The political side of this evolution is even worse. Following the collapse of the Stalinist bureaucracy and the dissolution of the Soviet Union, beliefs and hopes in reformist politics have been, at least temporarily, reinforced. The consequence of the great historical change has not been a "natural" turn by the masses towards revolutionary politics but, on the contrary, the reinforcement of their illusions that reformism can "improve" capitalism. They expect a better life from the traditional Left. As a matter of fact social-democratic, Labour and left bourgeois governments have been elected in the majority of industrially developed capitalist countries. In Russia and eastern Europe, the heirs of Stalinist parties have done very well in elections and in many cases have been put into government. This general move to the left, which is not restricted to Europe (see Brazil, Venezuela, previously Namibia, South Africa and even Congo), expresses a widespread desire to resist the capitalist offensive. This is a very precious and relatively new element, an expression of the favourable relationship of forces for the working class.

Nevertheless, the contradiction between this major fact of the

relationship of class forces and its very limited reflection in the political consciousness of the working masses, which disarms the working class, makes possible the general bourgeois offensive and its advance. At the root of this limited class consciousness we find the prolonged process of the destruction of class consciousness by the reformist and Stalinist leaderships. It has not yet been possible to overcome the long decades of theoretical, political and organisational – and physical – destruction.

The Stalinist bureaucracy and its international apparatus bear the highest responsibility for that. The cowardly capitulation to bourgeois pressure by its overwhelming majority in recent years, without a major crisis in its ranks, accepting the bourgeois order and becoming its principal protagonists, has had a tremendously ruinous effect on the consciousness of millions of workers who followed the Stalinist parties, not because of their Stalinism but because they – wrongly – saw in them the successors and guardians of the October Revolution and of the workers' state.

Working class consciousness cannot be reduced or limited to theoretical and political studies, important as they are. It has its material incarnation, the workers' organisations, which define this class in opposition to the bourgeoisie, shape and construct the class itself. One cannot speak of class consciousness without its bodily manifestation as organisation. Founding its unions, then its class party and, finally, its state, the proletariat has been able to develop these material bodies of its class consciousness during a long historical movement.

The bureaucratic decision of the Stalinist bureaucracy and its remnants to dissolve the Soviet Union had a great destructive effect on the consciousness of the world working class. More than sixty years ago, when Trotsky established the counter-revolutionary bourgeois character of the Stalinist bureaucracy, he also explained that despite this bureaucracy, the Soviet state itself preserved its working class character, that precisely because of the power of bureaucracy and this

proletarian character of the state, the Soviet Union had a dual character: working class by its history and social structure, but bourgeois by the power of the Stalinist bureaucracy. This latter dragged the whole Soviet Union down with it in its collapse. Rightly welcoming the breakdown of this parasitic caste and the explosion of its international apparatus as a really great advance, we neglected the negative effects of the dissolution of the Soviet Union on the consciousness of the world working class. As the events of the last few years have shown, this was a great weakness of our second congress resolution and of all our subsequent analysis. But today it is continued uncritically and taken for granted by the current in our ranks led by Cliff Slaughter, who sees the working class as getting stronger and stronger all the time without any problems.

But the loss of the first workers' state, even a degenerated one like the Soviet Union (and the other east European states), meant a terrific blow for the class consciousness even of those workers who were not members or followers of the communist parties. It shook the confidence of the world working class in the perspective of socialism, in its own strength, in its revolutionary possibilities and capacity. The bourgeoisie and its old and new servants immediately exploited this advantage to develop a vigorous attack, denying that the proletariat could represent and provide an alternative to humanity in the struggle against capital.

Here is the root of the evil which – as an initial reaction to the capitalist attacks – was the basis for the world-wide turn towards reformism by big sections of working people. It also helps us to understand the growing influence and strength of fascist organisations and ideas advanced by the most determined forces of the bourgeoisie (see Germany, France, etc.). The virulent resurgence of nationalism and racism opposes the necessary unity of the working class on a class basis. There is also an increase in the influence of religion, not only Islam, but the Catholic church too in the less developed countries. The general growth of all these anti-

socialist and anti-working class ideas and organisations is not only the painful expression of a diminished, damaged or in some cases lost class consciousness, it is at the same time the most active agent in poisoning class consciousness, alienating the working people from its class basis and tying it to the bourgeoisie.

The international working class finds itself therefore in a major contradiction between, on the one hand, the favourable relationship of forces and, on the other hand, its badly damaged class consciousness. In view of this, the primary task is without doubt the reconstruction and development of the class consciousness of the proletariat in relation to the bourgeoisie, its states, its institutions and organisations. This means concretely the reconstruction of the working-class movement and its parties. This is the first major step on the road to the new workers' states and the International Socialist Republic.

The proletariat and its party

Under pressure from the bourgeoisie in crisis and in the footsteps of the collapsed Stalinist bureaucracy, the reformist, ex-Stalinist and other petty-bourgeois servants of capital have gone ever further along the path of betrayal. The dissolution of the Soviet Union has robbed them of any basis for even apparent independence from the bourgeoisie. The fact that no real reforms are possible at the present stage of capitalist decline makes it all the more impossible to talk about class independence in relation to such parties. The basis for reformist politics has definitively disappeared. Indeed such parties have become wholly integrated into, and constitute an organic part of, capitalist society and the bourgeois state. In a great number of countries they form the government and are in the vanguard of the bourgeois attacks on the working class. In South Africa, for example, the so-called Communist Party, in power with the "progressive" ANC, try to subjugate and discipline the working class in order to save capitalism in crisis. The high rate of unemployment – officially 35 per cent! – is but one disastrous result of this

bourgeois policy. In Brazil the social democratic Cardoso government tries to impose the diktats of the IMF. The process of capitalist "unification" in Europe, with its viciously anti-working-class plans and measures, is taking place under the leadership of reformist and ex-Stalinist parties! In France the so-called Communist Party is in the reactionary "socialist" government alongside its Green colleagues, while in Italy the ex-Stalinist party of D'Alema is actually running the government. A great number of renegades coming from their left wings or even from so-called Trotskyist organisations play a leading role in all these parties. With all these elements the total degeneration of these parties confirm their totally bourgeois nature. The only thing which distinguishes them from other bourgeois parties is the special role they are called upon to play, which is to tie and subordinate the working class to the bourgeoisie using their position inside the workers' movement – both directly and through the union leaderships.

But precisely the deep class contradiction in their function as servants of the bourgeoisie and, at the same time, leaders of the working class, exposes them to a growing and violent crisis. The more capitalism is obliged to use barbaric measures to save itself from the unfolding and deepening crisis, the more this contradiction turns into increasingly vehement opposition. The situation is therefore developing positively in the direction of oppositions, conflicts and clashes between these bourgeois leaderships fighting to impose counter-revolutionary crisis measures and the working masses who belong to or follow these parties.

On the basis of bitter experience in the struggles in which they engage, vanguard elements of the working class in several countries have already concluded that new workers parties are necessary. In some cases they have put such considerations into practice by setting up new political organisations and parties. They are also aware that the so-called workers' parties are turning hostile to them, that industrial class actions like strikes and other protests and demonstrations are

not being taken up and carried through at a political level. In the absence of a more general, political development of the working class movement, these actions remain isolated and are pushed back, especially as the union leaderships, in line with their own bourgeois character, act under the guidance of these very same parties.

In all these respects the experiences of the recent dispute of the Liverpool dockers are revealing. They were able to keep a strike movement going for more than two years despite the leadership of their union, the Transport and General Workers' Union (TGWU) which bowed obediently to the Thatcherite anti-union laws and isolated the Liverpool dockers not only from workers in other industries but also from their fellow dockers in other towns, not to mention internationally. If the dockers were able to maintain their heroic struggle and organise support and connections for it internationally, this was against the will of "their" union leadership and, also despite the so-called left tendency inside the TGWU led by ex-Stalinist and centrist elements, including, unfortunately, some sectarians belonging to the Workers International itself. It goes without saying that the Labour leadership sided firmly with the employers and the state against the dockers, who had the sympathy of the worker members of the Labour Party and the trade union movement and also a few rare MPs. However, despite great sympathy on the part of their members, the Labour and trade-union movement as a whole remained paralysed by their bourgeois leaderships. Many Liverpool dockers, independently of their previous political affiliation to the Communist Party, the Labour Party, etc. arrived at the conclusion that what is needed is to build a new working-class party.

In the absence of a genuine workers' party and therefore of the kind of trade union leadership that is needed, the Liverpool dockers had to call off their long strike, but they did so with their heads held high, enriched by invaluable experiences. Precisely these experiences contain all the problems the whole working class confronts today in its fight against bourgeois attacks and its own reformist and ex-

Stalinist leaderships, but also the sectarian, centrist and opportunist antics of the so-called left, "revolutionary" groups. The Workers International therefore intends to publish a pamphlet summarising this struggle and the experiences it contains, to which it invites the dockers to contribute.

Calls for a new party of the working class and an orientation towards it are heard more and more frequently all over the world. In some places new parties have been organised which claim to meet this need, in the Tupamaros and Lula's party in Latin America for example or Scargill's Socialist Labour Party and others in Britain. It is time now to review the most important experiences that have been made and, above all, to go beyond the simple general demands for a workers' party, examining more closely what kind of party the working class needs. Only in the course of the discussions, experiences and practical steps involving the nature of the party will it become clear who is really in favour of it, as opposed to those elements who merely try to avoid doing what must be done by endless talking, or who are busy diverting the workers into one or another limited and false path, cutting them off from their historical experiences, their theoretical and political legacy.

Workers International is therefore determined – as the most important task of the moment – to undertake, alongside the corresponding practical activity, a wide-ranging process of theoretical and political clarification concerning the nature of the new working class party. Workers International submits its views about the main characteristics of such a party to the working class, particularly to its vanguard members, as a subject for the widest possible discussion on the basis of common experiences.

The proletarian class character of such a party should be obvious to everybody. However, bitter experience makes it necessary to re-formulate what this means against misunderstandings, denunciations and attacks upon it. Basically the workers' party expresses and represents the class independence of the proletariat, i.e. a definite break

from bourgeois society and its institutions. It is fashionable among those who are moving away from the working class party to criticise Lenin's ideas on the party. But it is no accident that the very essence of Lenin's work lay in the historical break from reformist social democracy, which ties the proletariat to the bourgeoisie. Lenin's party was the political expression of this class independence. Such a break cannot be a purely verbal or formal rejection of the openly bourgeois policy of reformist and ex-Stalinist parties. Anybody can do that quite easily. A real break cannot stop at this negative stage of opposition, but must be carried through into a concrete perspective and fight for socialism.

The party's proletarian character has to express that the working class represents a historical alternative to capitalist barbarism and thus to reaffirm its goal – socialism – against any kind of programme that seeks merely to “correct” capitalism without going beyond its framework. This firm assertion of the socialist nature of the workers' party requires a firm opposition to the Stalinist degeneration of the Soviet Union as well as, at the same time, a vigorous defence of all the conquests of the October Revolution which survived in and through the Soviet Union. We resolutely reject, and ask every worker to do the same, all pernicious and injurious explanations and interpretations which try to identify socialism with its Stalinist negation and degeneration. It is not socialism but its Stalinist caricature of “Socialism in one country” which collapsed. This caricature was imposed by Stalinist trickery and terror against the united Left Opposition, which was exterminated by the Stalinist apparatus. The historical correctness of this Opposition based on Marxist conceptions has been proved in the negative, that unless the perspective and building of socialism is international, the national framework of Socialism in one country will lead to degeneration.

All bourgeois politicians and ideologists left or right raise an enormous hue and cry against socialism, which they identify with Stalinism. This is generally orchestrated by ex-Stalinist

and reformist "theoreticians" who have been joined by a legion of ex-or would-be "Trotskyists". They try to destroy this class perspective of the working class, undermined as it is by the dissolution of a defenceless Soviet Union. The world proletariat as a whole or in its large majority has lost its independent socialist perspective and confidence in its own ability to achieve it. "Trotskyist" "friends" or "representatives" try to deprive it of any lingering remnants. Therefore, while workers belonging to the reformist or ex-Stalinist parties have few hopes left that there will be any reform of society as it is, they also have no social and political perspective of their own that goes beyond the programme of these parties. The influence of reformist and, to a much lesser extent ex-Stalinist parties, does not any longer rest on the class's illusions, as it did in the past, but on the proletariat's lack of a social and political perspective. All those, like the tendency and faction led by Cliff Slaughter inside the Workers' International, who believe that the open move by reformist parties to the side of the bourgeoisie will lead the working class to make a rapid turn towards Socialism and a new party, are lining up with those false prophets of history whom our "Transitional Programme" calls "quacks" and "charlatans".

Leaning on Istvan Meszaros' conception of "structural crisis", that tendency – Cliff Slaughter and his followers – tries to persuade people that it is much easier to overthrow capitalism now that it is in its "final" crisis than it was in the past. They speak as if capitalism was weakened, shattered, mortally wounded by its "structural crisis" and on the point of collapse. And, on the basis that capitalism in its death agony can no longer grant any reforms, they conclude straightforwardly and mechanically that reformist parties will somehow quickly implode on their own. Dreams and fairy tales like this disarm the working class in the face of a ferocious capitalist system and bourgeois state which are forced to defend their existence even more brutally with tooth and claw in the crisis.

They underestimate the difficulties involved in overcoming the lack of perspective and of self-confidence of the working class, not to mention the powerful positions the traditional parties still maintain inside the working class movement. A strong workers' party is therefore needed which is capable of challenging and destroying these parties by re-arming the working class and reconstructing its movement and party against them.

Basing themselves on the so-called final or structural crisis and anticipating a more or less automatic breakdown, the Slaughter current and some others have drawn a revisionist implication which dangerously neglects the fact that in order to build a socialist society we have to smash capitalism with all of its institutions. We cannot go "beyond capital" without going beyond capitalism, and that means destroying its state. It is a lie to say that past socialist thinkers like Marx, Engels, Lenin and Trotsky did not work out theoretically and, in Lenin and Trotsky's case, practically too, the concrete tasks involved in socialist transition, in going beyond capital. From the "Critique of the Gotha Programme" (Marx) to the "Revolution Betrayed" (Trotsky), passing by way of "State and Revolution" (Lenin) Marxist theory always formulated these historical tasks as concretely as the general economical and social conditions allowed. Without such an orientation and practice it would have been impossible to mobilise the working masses in 1917 to break the capitalist state or, later, to organise the Left Opposition against Stalinism.

Istvan Meszaros perhaps genuinely believes that a better (?) theory and practice would have enabled the Soviet Union to go further "beyond capital". But followers like Cliff Slaughter and others in Workers International knew long ago that the development and victory of Stalinism, then the degeneration of the first workers' state, were conditioned by the isolation of the Soviet Union, which was used to put forward the Stalinist theory of "socialism in one country" and thus, by the victory of Stalin against the United Opposition. To "forget" this is tantamount to absolving Stalinism and accusing Lenin and the

Bolsheviks of being responsible for the degeneration. In reality just such a "better" theory for going "beyond capital" after the overthrow of capitalism was already invented long ago by anarchism, which wanted to establish socialism without the necessary mediation of the workers' state. It was reinvented also by the ultra-left currents inside the young Communist International like the Dutch Tribunists around Anton Pannekoek or the Italian Amadeo Bordiga and his followers. These issues were long ago clarified in decisive theoretical and political struggles against them.

Meszaros' followers inside the Workers International use his "beyond capital" conception as well as Marx's idea of "mass communist consciousness" to which Meszaros has returned, in order to apply them in practice inside capitalism itself. This is something new and even worse than ultra-left currents in the past because it is directed against the workers' party and proposes instead to establish associations, movements, loose gatherings, etc., which supposedly go "beyond capital" and in which the idea of "mass communist consciousness" can take shape. Workers International cannot be and is not against such movements and organisations of workers (provided they are genuinely working class, like some worker co-operatives). But it is definitively against the pretension that such movements can replace or supplant the workers' party and the process of building it. One cannot organise some kind of "islands of socialism" within capitalist society and under the capitalist state, nor achieve "mass communist consciousness" outside the party (or in the revolution itself), even less instead of it! The working class has tested out such illusions several times in its long history.

Given that imperialism and the bourgeois state are becoming more and more savage as the crisis develops, the workers' party cannot but be revolutionary. Only a revolution can smash the bourgeois state, break up capitalist relations and then undertake the socialist reconstruction. On the other hand it is a dangerous illusion to believe that, since reforms are impossible because of the repeated attacks by capital on all

previously obtained gains and conquests, the reformist and ex-Stalinist parties and leaders and the union leaderships in general are going to move to the left. On the contrary, as history and recent experiences prove, these leaderships and parties adapt more and more to the bourgeoisie and act as its political vanguard, open agents and guardians of its state.

Some practical attempts to form new workers' parties, like Scargill's party in Britain, finish in a dangerous dead-end because, on the one hand, they try to constitute a reformist party without the slightest possibility of a reform and, on the other (in Scargill's case) it makes a utopian effort to recreate the old Labour Party which was precisely the source and framework of its present-day degeneration.

Only a revolutionary party can stand against capitalism and its state and also against their reformist and ex-Stalinist defenders whom the supporters of an unfolding "mass communist consciousness" completely "forget". Indeed, as the Transitional Programme of the Fourth International says, a revolutionary workers' party can and must overcome "the contradiction between the maturity of the objective revolutionary conditions and the immaturity of the proletariat and its vanguard (the confusion and disappointment of the older generation, the inexperience of the younger generation)". Only such a party can build a "... bridge" which, as the same Programme put it 60 years ago, "includes a system of transitional demands, stemming from today's consciousness of wide layers of the working class and unalterably leading to one final conclusion: the conquest of power by the proletariat". This task is even greater and perhaps more difficult today than it was before the war, given the state class consciousness is in at present.

It is clear from all that has been written above that the workers' party must be Marxist. Workers International believes that anarchist organisations and even some other parties too can be considered working class or socialist. However, the International firmly sides with Marx's criticism of anarchism which has been historically confirmed in all great occasions.

Therefore it stands for Marxism although it never rejects common struggle with other parties against capitalism. But Workers International thinks that Marxism is a living theory which continually progresses in its historic development. It cannot be reduced or limited to what Marx once wrote down.

As a reaction to Stalinist falsifications and deviations there is today a relatively widespread turn, among those who have not explicitly rejected Marxism, to go back to Marx. While we welcome all references to Marx, at the same time we unswervingly reject all attempts to set Marx up in opposition to his followers, particularly to Lenin and to Trotsky. Therefore Workers International is against the international tendency which denies that Marxism has its own development. This is a profoundly anti-Marxist view which breaks with the Marxist conception of dialectical development and transforms it into a collection of dogmas. Some of its representatives like, for example, Cyril Smith in Britain or Kan'ichi Kuroda in Japan take Lenin, Trotsky and also Engels to be inadequately or not at all Marxist. Sometimes they go so far as to oppose the young Marx to his later writings. With astonishment one learns that, according to some of these enlightened critics, they themselves are the only real Marxists since Marx. In reality these dogmatic super-Marxists conceal the historically important fact that in the long history of class consciousness, and independently of this or that mistake by some thinkers, Marx settled the score with anarchism, Lenin did the same with reformism, and Trotsky with Stalinism under the objective conditions first of capitalism then of imperialism and finally of Socialism in one country. Throughout this long period, and even during Marx's lifetime, Marxism made constant advances corresponding to the development of objective reality and of science. Thus, although Marxism is not a collection of lifeless dogmas, it is nevertheless a historically formed body of theoretical observations and analysis valid as long as objective reality remains essentially the same. Therefore Lenin's theory on the dictatorship of the proletariat, for example, or Trotsky's

permanent revolution are not only essential parts of Marxism, but are absolutely necessary in order to comprehend our epoch and answer its challenges.

The attempts to “correct” Marxism or to reduce it to Marx’s writings (often the earliest ones) are components in a widespread theoretical war waged against every aspect of Marxism (philosophy, economy, sociology, history, etc.) by the bourgeoisie and its – frequently ex-Stalinist – “scientific” servants. Given that Marxism is based on the whole scientific development of humanity, the bourgeoisie now has to attack the basis of all previously-acquired scientific knowledge, including its own contributions during its historical ascent. The so-called “new” philosophy of Foucault, Derrida or the various tendencies of post-modernism are straightforwardly directed against historical materialism, rejecting its central idea of class struggle. In Derrida’s work or in post-modernism the “new” philosophers expressly reject the very idea of historical development and of scientific rationalism and replace them with all sorts of extravagant idealism and irrationalism. As for the economic “science” of the bourgeoisie, if one leaves aside open and cynical apologists for profit like Hayek or Friedman, whose works provided the theoretical basis for Thatcherism, it can be reduced either to some practical advice in the service of this or that sector of the bourgeoisie or to pragmatic examinations of tiny details avoiding any “dangerous” theoretical generalisation. As Meszaros has shown in his “Power of Ideology”, against the background of such poverty-stricken overall considerations, an arrogant and pretentious ideology is taught and peddled everywhere in opposition to Marxism but also in order to discredit all progressive ideas, to destroy the self-confidence of the working class and its creative capacity.

Workers International turns again to Engels’ advice that the class struggle takes place not only in the economic, social and political fields but also in the sphere of theory and ideology. It declares its commitment to develop Marxist theory in a constant struggle against all manifestations of bourgeois

ideology. It will therefore continue the preparation of an international conference in defence of Marxism that was started by our late comrade Geoff Pilling, the author of outstanding works against neo-liberal and Keynesian economics. A workers' party is and must be international in its essence and form. This is qualitatively higher than any general internationalism, however broad, limited to working-class solidarity actions. The international nature of the working class and its struggle against a world-wide social system and the world bourgeoisie require an international strategy, policy and organisation. At the present stage of historical development we believe this is embodied in the Workers International to Rebuild the Fourth International. However we are open, – indeed, we ourselves propose – to discuss with any working class activists, parties or organisations which are not yet acquainted with or cannot accept the totality of our programme how, and under what conditions, they can join us and participate in our work. The Workers International is convinced that we can continue our fight and our theoretical and practical process of clarification alongside both full members and sympathisers within the same International. The long and deepening crisis of the Fourth International has produced other international organisations based on the same programme as ours, such as the International Workers League (LIT-CI) together with whom, as we shall see later, we fight for the rebuilding of the Fourth International.

The decisive question is to acknowledge that a workers' party must be a section of an international organisation, that its working-class character is incompatible with national limitations; that its internationalism must go beyond general solidarity and contacts abroad. This is a fundamental point. It shows very clearly the narrow horizons of parties like Lula's Party in Brazil or Scargill's in Britain, not to mention other, less significant, organisations around the world, which are restricted to their own narrow national framework, whatever international "contacts" they may have. From this point of view too, we are radically opposed to the

conceptions and practices of the Movement for Socialism (MFS) as it currently exists in Britain. Some years ago we fought alongside the leaders of the MFS against sectarian opposition to set this organisation up so that we could march together with workers towards a new workers' party. Today, however, the sectarians are active supporters of the MFS and of similar groupings and persons, for example J.Borovi in France. A group of mainly British members of the Workers' International, led by Cliff Slaughter, had a different conception from ours. They succeeded in turning the MFS into a national organisation and, as such, into a weapon against the programme and organisation of the Fourth International. As early as 1996, before the foundation of the MFS, Slaughter said nothing about the existence of the Workers' International in his pamphlet on the new party question, nor did he say anything about the need for an International. At the time we thought this was "negligence", a temporary omission within the framework of our common overall understanding. We were seriously mistaken. We had to re-learn the fundamental importance of the attitude towards the International on the part of organisations striving for workers' parties. The MFS is now a very loose British organisation, opposed to Workers International but trying to organise some international "contacts" and actions around its narrow national framework. From every point of view it is merely a pale shadow of the centrist London Bureau of the thirties.

The organically international nature of workers' struggles is immediately recognised and consciously organised by the proletariat itself in all important fights it is involved in. The Liverpool dockers went so far as to directly organise two considerable international conferences. Despite sabotage on the part of their own Transport and General Workers' Union (TGWU) leadership, they made regular visits to dockers all over the world to organise international solidarity. Their conferences had the important result that an international network was set up as an organisational means of carrying out the struggle inside and outside the unions and their

international bodies. Confronted with the privatisation plans of the Bosnian government, miners there fully realised that only the international strength and action of workers in every country could successfully oppose them. They organised an international mineworkers' conference in Tuzla against the privatisation of the mines, together with Workers' International and others whose participation was a direct result of its campaign for Workers' Aid for Bosnia. Workers' International intends to continue this struggle. A similar international conference was also organised by African workers and youth in Durban in preparation for a much larger conference. Workers' International participates in it wholeheartedly and calls on all its members to work for its success.

The main characteristic of all these turns by workers towards not just international action but also international organisation is that they go far beyond work of a merely trade-union kind. The markedly political character of these initiatives and actions not only reveals the lack of a strong international party and a powerful international but most of all expresses the strongly-felt need among workers and youth for such an international.

When speaking of the necessity of an international working class party (in our view the Workers' International to Rebuild the Fourth International) one must take into consideration the substantial shift in the geographical distribution of the world proletariat. The social and political weight of the working class of Africa, Asia and Latin America within the world working class is equal to that of their brothers and sisters in Europe and North America. For instance, the struggles of the South African, Brazilian and Chinese working class, alongside their brothers and sisters in those continents, are now a decisive element in the world-wide class struggle. This considerable change must also be expressed in the organisation and work of the international.

Last but by no means least in relation to the workers' party, the organisational principle and method of functioning of the

international is democratic centralism. It is no accident that the attacks upon the working class and its party by the bourgeoisie and its old and new servants, the reformist and ex-Stalinist ideologists, centre on the principle, method and practice of democratic centralism. They associate it closely with Stalinism, identifying the two. Equating democratic centralism with Stalinism in this way is a monstrous lie because the way Lenin's party functioned, even during the turbulent 1917 revolution and the difficult conditions of the long civil war is well known. The discussions and controversies never ceased in that party and the expression of sharp disagreements was allowed. The ban on factions in 1921 was only temporary, and it was Stalin who turned it into a permanent rule. (Even as a temporary measure, however, it proved to be a mistake). Stalinist bureaucratic centralism was also adopted by some Trotskyist tendencies and currents for use against various oppositions inside their organisations (for example Gerry Healy in Britain or Pierre Lambert in France.) These negative experiences, wrongly identified with Trotskyism, have also made it easier to attack democratic centralism. Hostility towards it has even grown among those who in other respects are in favour of a new party, like several currents of would-be or ex-Trotskyists. On the other hand it should not be forgotten that reformist parties and unions also practice bureaucratic centralism and their leaderships use undemocratic methods against all oppositions which threaten their policies. This was the case for example when the Labour leadership expelled the Militant Tendency some years ago. This is what they always do when people dare to stand against official candidates selected by the leadership, putting forward a different programme closer to the workers. Even Scargill's party in Britain uses the bureaucratic centralist method. Whatever their politics, union leaderships as a rule hardly ever tolerate consistent opposition to their reformist policies.

By its very existence a genuine workers' party expresses a decisive break with capitalist society and all its

institutions. Furthermore, capitalist society and its state, struggling to "solve" its profound and developing crisis, are becoming ever more ferocious, violent, in a word, barbaric. Such a party, therefore, must be highly centralised and disciplined. This is a real obligation. This is the only way it can guarantee the necessary political cohesion on the basis of the Party's "common understanding of events and tasks", i.e. its programme. But, and this has been written and said many times, such centralisation can only be achieved by democratic methods. Thus in a working class party centralism finds its necessary counterpart in democracy. Without democracy it will inevitably degenerate into bureaucratic centralism; without centralism, any organisation can only be a loose, amorphous grouping unfit to exist as a political party. The sort of "free" discussion which takes place within them lead only to further discussions. Party democracy can only live by its centralisation. Without it, it has no meaning at all. Every worker who struggles against capital knows this very well. No consistent strike action is possible without democratic centralism. In this respect, too, the experiences the Liverpool dockers made during their recent long action must be taken into consideration. The method of work of their shop stewards' committee, with its complete democracy and at the same time effective centralism was an example of this.

In its struggle against sectarianism over a number of years Workers' International also had to fight against continuous attacks against democratic centralism by those very same sectarians. They wanted to establish everybody's "right" to criticise everything at every moment. Such people were and are incapable of or unwilling to understand that in a working-class organisation democracy cannot be reduced to a personal right. On the contrary, it is framed in by a regular organisational regime in order to establish and re-establish the centralism continually through a constant re-evaluation of the situation and the Party's tasks followed by disciplined action. The petty-bourgeois individualism of these sectarians, joined by other individualists, has now become a way of life

in the distorted and degenerate shape of the Movement for Socialism. This has gone so far that after two years' of existence that organisation has completely "forgotten" that it was set up purely and simply in order to build a working-class party. Its abandonment of that purpose expresses exactly its open opposition to democratic centralism. Real agreement about building a party takes a lot more than the occasional utterance of a vague wish.

Our "Transitional Programme" defines the principles of democratic centralism as "full freedom in discussion, complete unity in action". In the light of bitter experience we have to go further. The history of the working-class movement furnishes many examples of positive customs and practices refined and elaborated by its leaders. Basing ourselves on these and our own experience, we have to deal more specifically with a number of aspects of the above formulation in theory and practice. Against degeneration into bureaucratic centralism it must be emphasised that there can be no party democracy ("full freedom in discussion") without the complete right to be in opposition, up to and including the right to form factions. The leadership has an obligation to publish all critical articles in a regular internal bulletin. On the other hand "complete unity in action" requires strict discipline so that all elected bodies and leaders really can lead the party responsibly. The party must have a definite structure in which the higher elected bodies direct the work of the lower ones both nationally and internationally, instead of a parallelism or federation of so-called "equals". It must be a structure in which discussions are organised in and through the organisation of the party, not individually and definitely not in petty-bourgeois chaos. Since Marxist theory is not confined to political economy and materialist dialectics but also includes organisation, we must develop ourselves in this field too. As a practical application of this organisational development the Workers' International should work out proper statutes.

Finally, the most important attribute of a genuine working-

class party is, of course, the fact that it is based and arises, not automatically but naturally and mostly, from the struggles of the working class itself. The workers' party is the party of the vanguard of the class, that is to say it assembles, unites and centralises the best leaders and organisers of the fighting working class. Without this vanguard there can be no workers' party. A party which comes into existence outside of those workers who organise and lead the workers' struggles is not a genuine workers' party. Even less so if it turns its back on these fights and has a life somehow parallel but outside of them, bringing together a part of those who come from or represent this or that organisation or group.

From this essential point of view the path chosen by the Movement for Socialism (MFS) in Britain, staying aloof from workers' struggles and only participating in them occasionally or not at all, so that they cannot rally the vanguard of the class, cannot lead to a workers' party. The MFS is therefore reduced to vain discussions which in fact constitute its entire existence. Arthur Scargill's Socialist Labour Party (SLP), also in Britain, cannot be considered a real workers' party either, and for somewhat similar reasons. Although it calls on workers to fight the anti-trade union laws, its work is mainly directed towards "left" bureaucrats in the trade unions. The SLP too addresses only rhetorically the real problems workers face. Despite boasting of quite a few worker-members, the SLP too keeps at arm's length from rank-and-file leaders and struggles, placing its hopes for the future in the growing crisis in the Labour Party.

It goes without saying that, while the most important task is the unification of the fighting vanguard of the working class in and towards a new workers' party, such political activity cannot ignore the existence and evolution of other parties, organisations and groups claiming to be working-class in character. Any such attitude would be harmful sectarianism. This kind of sectarianism characteristic of the Lutte Ouvrière organisation in France and also of the group of members it

expelled ("Voix des Travailleurs") has its own narrow limits and is unable to unite the whole vanguard.

In taking the steps necessary for establishing a real workers' party, the latter has to achieve an organic fusion between the vanguard of the working class emerging in its struggles and those revolutionary elements or groups from various organisations who are fighting to defend and develop Marxism. The Trotskyists of Workers' International think that such a fusion can take place in and through the process of rebuilding the Fourth International, but at the same time recognise that many vanguard workers and activists think otherwise. To them we propose an honest alliance and a joint fight for a new party. In this fight we can and will also test out the validity of our respective programmes and ideas.

The Fourth International and its crisis

The working class has known various political programmes, currents and organisations in its long history.

Contrary to some idealistic thinking about "mass communist consciousness", which conceives vanguard workers only as an abstraction and not as living, thinking and fighting militants, this class is politically educated and trained. That is to say, its emerging vanguard today is only partly composed of young workers who have no political past or political affiliation. Precisely because they form a vanguard, these advanced workers and militants have come and in many cases are still coming from or are still in or influenced by various political parties, organisations and groups.

Today, the overwhelming majority of the working class and its vanguard prove what the Fourth International has said since its foundation, that after the bankruptcy of reformist parties, the whole Stalinist apparatus is unmasked as the pillar of capitalism; that the remnants of Stalinism, together with the reformist parties, are the most devoted supporters of the capitalist system or, in the case of a tiny minority, sterile defenders of parties and regimes definitively alienated from the international working class. Precisely for this reason, advanced workers and political activists are

seeking a way out of this situation, which we can characterise as a deepened crisis of the revolutionary leadership of the proletariat.

Bourgeois ideologists use this crisis as a weapon, and join with their most vociferous ex-Stalinist and reformist partners to roar in chorus that the Communist movement and Marxist parties are finished. They do everything they can to extend the collapse and discrediting of the Stalinist apparatus to include revolutionary Marxist parties, the whole communist movement.

Here is the historical importance of the Fourth International which emerged from the long and difficult struggles against Stalinist degeneration. It therefore represents the continuity of revolutionary Marxist theory and practice because it has opposed the attempts to pervert them ever since it was founded. Once Stalinism had physically destroyed Lenin's Bolshevik party (this in the sense of the successive Moscow trials) it was able to survive and develop mainly in the camps, prisons and in exile, giving rise to the International Left Opposition which founded the Fourth International.

It is impossible to go in to the whole history of the Fourth International here. Suffice it to say that under the leadership of Leon Trotsky this International defended and developed Marxist theory against Stalinist falsifications and decadence; that in the class struggle it maintained the continuity and development of Communist practice against Stalinist class collaboration in the form of "socialism in one country", "popular fronts", and then "peaceful co-existence".

This was the reason for Stalinism's profound hatred for the Fourth International and the use of physical terror to try and liquidate it. The Stalinist apparatus succeeded in killing many of its leaders, above all Leon Trotsky, and in isolating it by the use of slanders and attacks, so that the International was forced to the margins of the working class movement. Even today many workers and political activists who are firm and sincere anti-Stalinists are influenced by these falsifications and slanders.

The most important onslaught of the bourgeoisie on the consciousness of the working class consists in the continual attempt to separate the proletariat from its revolutionary history, from the rich legacy of its past. To this end they falsely and slanderously claim that there is an identity between, on the one hand, this past and its Trotskyist continuity and, on the other, the ideology and practice of Stalinism, whereas in fact there is a profound opposition between the two. They also try to equate Stalinism with the entire membership of Communist and ex-Communist parties. This counter-revolutionary propaganda provides the substantial "theoretical" ammunition for bourgeois ideologues and all the ex-Stalinists who have passed openly to the side of the bourgeoisie in their fight against Marxism and Communism. A deep and significant division was created and then widened between the misled majority of the working class and its vanguard and, on the other hand, the once-persecuted tiny minority representing Marxist continuity organised in the Fourth International.

This hostile propaganda and division have also greatly influenced those ex- and would-be Trotskyists who are doing everything they can to revise Marxist theory and hide their (formal) membership of the Fourth International under the table. Giving way to the pressure of the bourgeoisie and its bureaucratic servants, they feel quite ashamed of the International and any association with Trotskyism.

This is a central characteristic of the Movement for Socialism which, led by former members of the Fourth International, forms a rallying point for some British ex- and would-be Trotskyists while misleading some credulous comrades, and of similar gatherings in other countries.

This false identification between the Fourth International and Stalinism sows confusion in the consciousness of workers. This amalgam appears to be the most effective way of obscuring any revolutionary perspective and destroying workers' hopes for a better, socialist future. There can, therefore, be no serious move towards the reconstruction of the working class movement

and the building of new workers' parties without a return to this history which locates any such move in its historical continuity.

Nobody can escape or bypass this history, which is the balance sheet of Stalinism. In other words it is an assessment of the Fourth International as the continuity of Marxist theory and communist practice. Marxist and Communist continuity, surviving in the Fourth International and its struggles, is an essential part of the working class movement, it is and must be a vital component of a genuine workers' party.

The assimilation of its own history by the proletariat and its vanguard is not simply a question of useful knowledge in order to avoid mistakes. It has cardinal importance for the reconstitution and development of class consciousness, allowing its theoretical, political and organisational unity and re-armament; it is an essential requirement and condition for the new party and International. The reappropriation of Marxism can only be achieved through a qualitatively changed relationship between the working class and the Fourth International, whose past and future is not only a matter for Trotskyists alone. It is a matter of great concern for the whole working class, especially its vanguard. That is why the Workers International should wholeheartedly commit itself to work on the history of the Fourth International and make it known as widely as possible.

The new party (and International) will, as it should, come from the struggles of the working class through the emergence of its vanguard leading these fights.

On the other hand, this vanguard has to find its way towards Marxism and Communism, which have been maintained by the Fourth International. Therefore the Workers International resolutely opposes the conception of all those ex- and would-be Trotskyists who try to dissolve the International or deny its role in the building of working class parties on the basis of past errors and deviations, identifying themselves with those shortcomings.

This liquidationism means depriving the majority of the

working class of its historical-theoretical legacy, which is exactly what the bourgeoisie consciously wants. The Workers International is determined to continue and strengthen its struggle for the fusion of the emerging vanguard of the working class with that minority who are organised under the banner of the Fourth International.

In this fight Workers International is guided by the powerful advice of the 150 years old Manifesto of the Communist Party: "The Communists are distinguished from the other working class parties by this only:

(1) In the national struggles of the proletarians of the different countries, they point out and bring to the front the common interests of the entire proletariat, independently of all nationality; (2) In the various stages of development which the struggle of the working class against the bourgeoisie has to pass through, they always and everywhere represent the interests of the movement as a whole... (and) ...they also represent and take care of the future of that movement."

Today we have to add a third important point; that in the struggle of the proletariat the Communists, that is to say, the Fourth International "represent and take care of" the historical legacy of the working class, its accumulated experiences. Therefore the Fourth International is not exactly the same organisation as other parties of the working class. Contrary to those would-be Trotskyists who deny this and are ready to throw out this history, under the pressure of class enemy, Workers International stands for the continuity of the Fourth International.

Despite sad experiences of some Trotskyist leaders and organisers in the past (or even today in some cases), this distinction is not based on arrogance or haughtiness towards the working class and its other parties, but on self-consciousness on the part of those who are united in order to advance and carry on the necessary fusion between the whole vanguard of the working class and its Marxist historical experiences.

However, as we know, a whole range of organisations currently claim to be the Fourth International. This division is a product and a manifestation of the long and deep crisis of the Fourth International which started and developed after World War II.

The International is in a marginal position in relation to the working masses. This isolation from its class base provided the material basis for the crisis which made the International vulnerable to the influence of the class enemy, not directly but mainly (although not exclusively) transmitted by Stalinism. That is why the deformation of Trotskyism appeared as distortions of a Stalinist type, like Pabloism or its variants, for example Gerry Healy's and Pierre Lambert's currents which were themselves attempts to oppose Pabloism. This isolation also made possible the disastrous change in the International's social composition in favour of the petty-bourgeoisie, a shift which reinforced all deviations. After ruthless physical destruction at the hands of Stalinism and Fascism and the loss of the majority of leaders and cadres of the International, above all Leon Trotsky's murder, the young and inexperienced leaders could not stand firm. After the war, the majority of them yielded under the weight of hostile pressure and influence. As Trotsky had already said, the Fourth International had to swim against the current. But after the war, the current was too strong and the great majority of swimmers found themselves too weak.

From that time, a profound crisis developed whose outbreak in 1952-1953 inaugurated the long series of splits which seem so incomprehensible to the majority of workers. This crisis was part of the crisis of the whole working class movement and unfolded and deepened alongside it. Its principal, distinguished characteristic lies in the fact that it expressed (and continues to express) a constant struggle against opportunism and sectarianism in relation to the programme of the Fourth International and to Communist practice, and a struggle which requires continual resistance to these shortcomings and a fight against them. It is natural

that the majority of workers see these fights as vain, exaggerated quarrels, because they observe these various controversies and splits from outside. They are all the more likely to find them strange because many would-be and ex-Trotskyists, followed by some confused comrades, also consider these struggles as manifestations of personal animosity and rivalry between petty bosses.

As the crisis had and still has a definite social character and thus corresponds to struggles on precise theoretical-political problems, its development has a concrete historical meaning. It shows an incessant fight to maintain and develop the very essence of the Fourth International as the historical continuity of Marxism and Bolshevism against a multitude of attempts to alter, modify or change it. Therefore, in all these internal struggles which seem so confusing and so hard for many people to understand, there always were (and are) those who were right against mistaken or openly hostile and alien elements. This was clear in the continual struggle against political adaptation to the mainly Stalinist but also reformist, bureaucracy, and against attempts to do deals which compromised the independence of the Fourth International. Fighting against this type of opportunism (named Pabloism because its principal protagonist was Michel Pablo), organisations and leaders resisted it and maintained the continuity. But later the great majority of them fell to the other side of the same deviation and succumbed to sectarianism.

The entire existence of the Fourth International is marked by a long theoretical-political and organisational struggle plagued with splits, breaks and expulsions, and also unifications, against and with this perpetual oscillation between opportunism and sectarianism. It goes without saying that, in so long and difficult a fight, there were times when people's personalities exaggerated and artificially embittered differences, always on the basis of a general isolation from the working masses.

But this was the history of the Fourth International, this was

the high price paid for the continuity of revolutionary Marxist theory and Communist practice. Convincing proof of the profoundly progressive character of these fights is the fact that always, in all circumstances, it was on the basis of the programme and traditions of the Fourth International that organisations or groups of members resisted deviations and maintained the continuity of revolutionary Marxist and Communist traditions.

The historical failure and collapse of the old, traditional working class parties (Socialist, Social Democrat or Labour, Stalinist) as leaders of the working class, is obvious. The most patent expression of this bankruptcy is the leading role played by these parties as (or in) anti-working-class bourgeois governments, as well as the rapid decline of the working-class movement as a whole. Under their guidance, the leaderships of the trade unions, too, have abandoned even the conception of class struggle – like the French CGT, which used to be an organisation of class struggle, at its last congress – and have become important components, significant cogs in bourgeois democratic states. As a result, the majority of the working class is not even in the unions in a great number of industrially developed countries in Europe and North America. In the last analysis the general situation of the Fourth International belongs in this broad picture as part of the widespread crisis of working class leadership. Its prolonged and increasingly profound crisis has completely dislocated the Fourth International into a series of international and national currents and organisations.

Therefore those who fought against Pabloite revisionism have also had to fight for the reconstruction of the Fourth International on the basis of its programme. This was, and remains, the goal of all groups and organisations which took up the struggle against the successive deviations, later represented also by Gerry Healy and Pierre Lambert, or against all other sectarian and/or opportunist distortions.

A remarkable consequence of the collapse of Stalinism and, in parallel with that, of the bourgeois counter-attack against

Marxism and Socialism/Communism, is the defection of a great number of organisations and militants, often those who fought against the Healyite or Lambertist deviations, and who claimed (or still claim) to be Trotskyist and to belong to the Fourth International.

It is not a matter, here, of those renegades who passed openly to the side of the bourgeoisie, making a shameful career in the reformist parties and their bourgeois governments, but of those who in the past fought for the reconstruction of the Fourth International but now, under the pressure of the bourgeoisie and of its reformist and ex-Stalinist parties, openly or in a concealed way put into question the Fourth International and its programme.

There is an international move away from the Fourth International, initiated and organised by ex- or would-be Trotskyists, very often repeating old lies, accusations and slanders against Communism and the Fourth International (Kronstadt etc.) and putting into question its programme and theoretical foundations. It goes without saying that that one will never catch them making any significant effort to replace this programme with anything consistent or making any theoretical contribution that is of the slightest use. They are limited to very short and superficial general remarks or criticisms drawn from this or that new fashionable scholar or taken from the old reservoir of bourgeois ideologues. This kind of irresponsibility, jumping so easily from one "conviction" to another, so ready to accept any "new" formulae and to adapt oneself to the conformity of the day, is typical of the petty-bourgeois.

The international conference held in Cape Town in December 1997 organised by the South African Pabloite organisation WOSA with the Italian Socialismo Rivoluzionario and other similar ex- or would-be Trotskyist groups, like the Russian one that was previously a section of the Workers International, expresses this tendency.

They decided to set up an international "network" (which does not oblige anybody to do anything), and defined, as its main

goal, the "development of an on-going clear and fair discussion" (?) and "useful" (?) international activity. At the same time a relatively strong current developed inside the International Workers League (LIT-CI) aiming to give up the principles and organisation of the Fourth International. After a clarification process, this ended up in a split. The minority with the Argentinian, French and some other organisations has broken with the Fourth International and, thus, left the LIT-CI.

This list must include the magazine "Carré Rouge" composed mainly of ex-members of the organisations led by Pierre Lambert who, in breaking with it at various times and on various questions, in their majority are moving away from the Fourth International and are joined now by a group previously belonging to the LIT-CI. In Britain the ex-Pabloite Iranian intellectuals and their magazine "International Socialist Forum", managed by ex- and would-be Trotskyists, once members of the Workers International, also represent this tendency.

This inventory of seekers of "new" ways and programmes is not complete. The individuals, groups and organisations who, after and with the collapse of the Stalinist bureaucracy, discovered the "inadequacy" of the Fourth International and of its programme are legion. It became an international mode of thinking and behaviour among would-be revolutionaries, tired bureaucrats and disillusioned intellectuals, a real social phenomenon which must be analysed as such.

A wholesale international gathering of, mainly, ex- and would-be Trotskyists is under way whose characteristic is an open hostility to the Fourth International and its Communist programme. The political and social characteristic of this general tendency is clearly rooted in the new world situation. As the collapse of the Stalinist bureaucracy and the breakdown of the Soviet Union are used by the bourgeoisie as a weapon against Marxism, against Socialism and the organisations, above all against the revolutionary ones, of the working class, the abandonment of the Fourth International, its programme and reconstruction – when this move away is a

general socio-political phenomenon – means not only a passive resignation in the face of the pressure of the world bourgeoisie but expresses an active adaptation to it. Its precise political role consists in obscuring even more the revolutionary class consciousness of the proletariat. It represents a very serious additional obstacle to the proletariat re-appropriating its history and carrying out its fusion with living Marxism. Needless to say one can always discuss the motivation of this or that person, the concrete reason of his/her participation in this process, but as a whole, the petty-bourgeois class characteristic of this trend, and thus, the objective bourgeois meaning of this “questioning” of the Fourth International is clear, regardless of the personal will or confusion of this or that representative or supporter of this trend.

At its core is a general onslaught against the Fourth International and often against the very idea of a democratic centralist party. Together with their commitment only to discussions, this trait underlines the petty-bourgeois class nature of all these gatherings. That this is the substance of this international and general current is obvious even if one cannot speak of a complete homogeneity amongst and within these organisations and groups. Given the unprincipled nature of the alliance of their component parts, these groups are utterly heterogeneous. The only theoretical-political cement uniting them is their move away from the Fourth International, from its principles and organisations.

The emergence of a liquidationist tendency inside the Workers International must be seen in this framework as one of its segments and expressions. We set up Workers International in 1990 as a transitional organisation for the reconstruction of the Fourth International, with the historical task of changing the relationship between the working class, freed from the grip of Stalinism, and the continuity of the Fourth International delivered from and purged of the heavy sectarian burden of the history of its fight against opportunism.

On that point Workers International represented, and still

does, a qualitatively different trend among those who claim to be Trotskyists and/or to be committed to rebuilding the Fourth International. Its very name and the nature and composition of its founding congress exemplified a departure from sectarianism. At the same time, we pointed out the necessity of reconstructing the whole working-class movement and formulated that this can be done through and by the reconstruction of the Fourth International, as this historical task is not only inseparable from the rebuilding of the working class movement but can only be done through and in it. As the most marked obstacle to the historical task of rebuilding the Fourth International, a powerful and often dominant sectarianism developed in all Trotskyist organisations. This was the counter-balance to Pabloite opportunist revisionism. Long before the collapse of Stalinism, the isolation of the Fourth International from the working masses was already not merely the product only of Stalinist terror, slanders and pressure; it was also to a great extent the result of sectarian politics, methods and behaviour on the part of these organisations and their leaders. Even today a great many of them are still marked by this, unable to get rid of a sectarianism which has become second nature. The foundation of the Workers International and its founding resolution meant a resolute commitment to reconstruct the Fourth International, and therefore a firm break with this sectarian degeneration.

The appearance within the Workers International in 1993, almost immediately after the second congress, of a strong and active sectarian tendency was proof that a struggle against sectarianism is a long theoretical-political and practical process which requires much more than a formal agreement on its necessity. When the British members of Workers International, as the application of the International's resolution in Britain, adopted an orientation towards a new workers' party which included the suppression of the old Workers Revolutionary Party (WRP) and the fusion of its members with the emerging vanguard elements of the working

class it encountered every kind of sectarian hostility and reservation in Britain and internationally.

The sectarians refused to acknowledge the collapse of Stalinism, and thus, the qualitatively changed relationship of forces in favour of the proletariat which opened the way for a new development of Marxist forces. They tried to maintain our movement as a closed phalanx cut from the masses in its "comfortable" position as a sect. During a long discussion and clarification over several years this sectarian tendency proved not only incompetent to understand theoretically the anti-Marxist essence of sectarianism but also completely unable in practice to join workers in their struggles otherwise than as unbearable "teachers" from the outside.

Without declaring themselves honestly as a tendency or faction inside Workers International, the sectarians developed also a violent unprincipled campaign against democratic centralism on the leading bodies of the International. When the great majority of the Workers Revolutionary Party (Britain), with the agreement of the overwhelming majority of the International, put an end to the WRP and, with others, founded the Movement for Socialism (MFS), this petty-bourgeois undeclared faction, without the slightest critical analysis or even verbal written declaration, packed up and went to the majority. This was unscrupulously accepted by the leader Cliff Slaughter and his followers.

Once in the newly-established MFS, the sectarians fell to the other side, transforming the MFS, with the active support of Slaughter and his like, into an unprincipled conglomerate. Recognising that Stalinism really was dead, the sectarians reasoned that they no longer needed their ivory tower and suddenly gave free rein to their true nature – opportunism. The reconciliation of the group led by Slaughter and the sectarians was complete. Together they turned the organisational measure of dissolving of the WRP into an overall principle of giving up all Marxist organisations, first and foremost the Workers International. In their new role, the sectarians were joined rapidly by disillusioned

intellectuals deeply disappointed by the fact that the working class vanguard had not quickly merged with us in the MFS. They were also joined by some others who, having adapted themselves to the trade union bureaucracy, were already accustomed to this unprincipled and comfortable pusillanimity. The road was open to the degeneration of the MFS, to their attempt to alter, then to liquidate the Workers International.

The degeneration that followed was very rapid. Their group took over the Secretariat of the Workers International while we formed a faction to oppose this liquidationism. Under pressure from us they first declared that they merely wanted to be rid of the Workers International. Only a year later they were saying that the Transitional Programme of the Fourth International was obsolete, along with its founding principles based on the works of Lenin and Trotsky. They put a question mark against these works without the slightest attempt to replace them with anything more substantial than vague and superficial references to the books of Istvan Meszaros. (Since he is not and has never been a member of the Fourth International, Meszaros does not at all deal with it or its programme, which in fact he completely ignores). This time the revision of Marxism goes further than that of Pablo or his followers and successors. While these latter never formally rejected the Fourth International, today Slaughter and his followers, together with the whole international trend of ex- or would-be Trotskyists, repudiate it and its basic principles and traditions. Their precursors were characterised by Trotsky in the Transitional Programme more than 60 years ago,:

“As always during epochs of reaction and decay, quacks and charlatans appear on all sides, desirous of revising the whole course of revolutionary thought. Instead of learning from the past, they ‘reject’ it. Some discover the inconsistency of Marxism, others announce the downfall of Bolshevism. There are those who put responsibility upon revolutionary doctrine for the mistakes and crimes of those who betrayed it; others who curse the medicine because it does not guarantee an instantaneous and miraculous cure. The more daring promise to

discover a panacea and, in anticipation, recommend the halting of the class struggle. A good many prophets of 'new morals' are preparing to regenerate the labour movement with the help of ethical homeopathy. The majority of these apostles have succeeded in becoming themselves moral invalids before arriving on the field of battle. Thus, under the aspect of 'new ways', old recipes, long since buried in the archives of pre-Marxist socialism, are offered to the proletariat."

Reconstruction of the working class movement – Reconstruction of the Fourth International

Workers International is wholly aware of the necessity to unify (not to identify!) consciously the process moving towards these two historical goals which arise objectively from the present-day general economic, social and political conditions, as well as from the history of the working class movement, particularly of the Fourth International. This recognition was the main achievement and basic principle of the foundation of the Workers International for the Reconstruction of the Fourth International in 1990, and since then the course of workers' struggles all over the world and those of the world-wide Trotskyist movement, including our Workers International, have completely confirmed it. Everywhere, in all consistent workers' struggles, the necessity of a new working-class party arises quite naturally, and appears to leading workers as an essential requirement for the development of the movement. On the other hand, in the Workers International, as in all organisations which claim to be Trotskyist, a bitter struggle has developed between those who, adapting themselves to the pressure of the bourgeoisie and its servants, have decided to abandon the Fourth International and its principles and, on the other hand, those who fight against this liquidationism and are determined to reconstruct the Fourth International.

By its very nature as the organisation which embodies the continuity of Marxism and Communism and thus acts to rebuild the Fourth International, the Workers International is an integral part of the class struggle. This relationship between

the latter and the organised Marxists is a central issue, not just in principle but in the practical everyday life and struggle between them, so that it is the most prominent problem. We firmly believe that without a correct, dialectical relationship between them there can be no reconstruction either of the working-class movement or of the Fourth International. It was at the heart of the whole history of the Fourth International as the pivotal question in the fight against sectarianism and opportunism. Even today it is still the central point for all political organisations, in particular those which claim to be Trotskyists.

This relationship is above all a political one, as outlined already in the passage of the Communist Manifesto quoted above and developed afterwards by all outstanding Marxists, above all Lenin and Trotsky. It contains also the method of work and approach of the Marxist organisation with and to the working class in its fight. Thus it cannot be limited to a political conception, even to a correct one, against sectarianism and opportunism. These deviations have their practical expressions in the method of work of this or that group or organisation. Workers International had to fight against the strong sectarian legacy in its ranks which establishes a line of separation between the working class and the political organisation (party, International) giving to the latter the role of a self-appointed teacher whose role is to deliver "sound" advice from outside. In most cases such advice and suggestions are ultra-leftist slogans, cutting the fight off from the working masses and their organisations, but even "correct" policy cannot fructify the movement when it comes from the outside by incorrect methods.

Instead of participating totally and honestly with the workers in their fight, the sectarians arrogantly consider themselves to be the "natural" leadership of the movement, while the struggles themselves appear to them only to be reservoirs for their own recruitment. When the workers dismiss these self-styled leaders, they feel slighted and often withdraw from the fight. Workers everywhere recognise the sectarians, just as

the members of these sectarian organisations recognise also the sterile gesturing of their leaderships.

The intimate connection between sectarianism and opportunism was long since established in the workers' movement, which knows that the former is only the reverse side of the latter. While the sectarians try to impose their teaching, the opportunists accept everything that the workers say, giving up their own opinions and conceptions without the slightest resistance. These people – in the best cases – constantly adapt themselves to the actual general level of understanding of the workers, still influenced by all kinds of bourgeois ideas and conceptions conveyed by petty-bourgeois bureaucratic leaderships and organisations. In the worst cases they adapt themselves directly to those official leaders (bureaucrats) whom they take to be the genuine vanguard of the class.

Workers International underwent several long years of crisis and inner fight against both faces (sectarian and opportunist) of the same perverted relationship between the working class and the Trotskyist organisation. This struggle has now concluded in a definite split from the petty-bourgeois sectarian-opportunist group gathered today in the Movement For Socialism. In Britain, for example, this conglomerate represents, at the same time, a sectarian separation and absence from working-class struggles (except for the occasional and arrogant appearance of some of its members) on the one hand, and an unprincipled adaptation to some trade-union bureaucrats and petty-bourgeois intellectuals on the other.

Here a question arises: between the reconstruction of the working-class movement and that of the Fourth International (construction of the new parties) which one has the primacy? Should we advance with the second task in order then to undertake the first one successfully? Or do we have to develop a strong renewed working-class movement in order to be able to root in it, afterwards, the reconstruction of the Fourth International? To put the problem in this way means a dichotomy, a mechanical separation – hence an opposition –

between the two articulations, the two distinct expressions of one unified movement.

The construction of a new working-class party which, for us, internationally means the reconstruction of the Fourth International, is an organic and natural component of the reconstruction of the working-class movement. It is started and can be fulfilled in that movement because the only function of the party is this very movement.

There can be no workers' party or building of it separate from or outside of the working-class movement. In that sense this movement has the "primacy" over a sectarian type of "party building" in itself since, inevitably, such "party-building" degenerates into a petty-bourgeois sect, large or small. On the other hand, reconstruction of the working-class movement contains that of the party, of the Fourth International, as its necessary political part, alone able to accomplish a complete break with capitalism and open the way towards socialism.

But this party can be built, the Fourth International reconstructed, essentially by the working class in and through its struggle and not exclusively by and through separate theoretical and political discussions among organisations which already claim to be Trotskyist.

The reconstruction of the working class means a resolute, constant struggle for the reconstitution of its internationalism against nationalism and all such kinds of division and fragmentation among the workers and their struggles imposed and developed by reformist, Stalinist and ex-Stalinist leaderships and maintained and reinforced by them today. Therefore Workers International supported and supports the national liberation movements of the Bosnian and Albanian peoples against the jingoist Milosevic regime, as well as the Kurdish, Kashmiri, Irish, Palestinian and all other peoples against national or ethnic discriminations and for self-determination.

Therefore we condemn all allegedly "neutral" positions – like that of the would-be "Trotskyist" Lambertist party in France,

which identifies the nationalism of oppressor with that of the oppressed (the Milosevic-led Serb fascists against the Bosnian people) and rejects both nationalism in the name of supposedly "socialist" politics. This ultra-leftist attitude has nothing to do with Marxism and it is alienated from the Fourth International, just like its other form which refuses to defend, for example, Iraq against the imperialist attacks under the pretext that Saddam Hussein's regime is reactionary. These are expressions of the same sectarianism in international relations which we have to fight against in respect to the working class in each country and internationally.

Guided by these principles, Workers International – as a practical proposal of its Serbian comrade – initiated the Workers Aid for Bosnia campaign for international working-class solidarity against the actions of the imperialist powers and their accomplices in the reformist and ex-Stalinist bureaucracy in viciously backing the aggressive Milosevic regime. This campaign was joined by a great number of enthusiastic youth as well as some working-class organisations, some claiming to be Trotskyist, others not, and organised a series of successful convoys to Bosnia with the help also of some trade-union organisations from a great number of Western and Eastern Europe countries. This was a modest but important contribution to reconstructing working-class internationalism by also rebuilding workers' unity between West and East Europe; a step forward on the road of the reconstruction of the working class against imperialist division relayed by the Reformist and ex-Stalinist bureaucracy.

However, Workers' International is deeply convinced that no national solution can resolve any problem of working people, and that even immediate problems require the internationally united struggle of the working class in the perspective of its socialist aims. Workers International therefore initiated the first all-Yugoslav teachers' conference in Budapest in 1997. This was a necessary and logical complimentary and

supplementary action of the Workers Aid for Bosnia campaign. With some others from the international Trotskyist movement and with the help of a certain number of trade-union leaders, we, together with members of the Bosnian, Serbian, Albanian and Croatian teachers' unions – united for the first time since the war in ex-Yugoslavia – managed to get a statement at the outcome of this conference emphasising the necessity of multi-ethnic culture and education against all oppression and discrimination.

One year later, Workers International was at the origin of an international miners' and workers' conference in Tuzla (Bosnia) called and organised by the Bosnian miners against the privatisation of their industry with the participation of an important union delegation from Serbia and many other European countries.

Workers International is also completely involved in the organisation of a conference of African workers and youth whose first promising preparatory session took place in Durban South Africa in 1998. In all these campaigns and actions – which we decide to continue ! – we had, with very rare exceptions – to fight against the hostility of the union leaderships already notorious as conveyers of nationalism and organisers of working-class divisions on behalf of the reactionary plans of world imperialism.

Well aware of this situation and, thus, of the necessity of rebuilding the working class movement, Workers International proposed, just after its foundation in 1990 to set up an international network and organisation in order to develop a fight for the renewal of the trade unions. The following basic principles and purposes of this organisation – International Trade Union Solidarity Campaign (ITUSC) – still now indicate a way in which workers can struggle to regain control of their unions which has been usurped by the bureaucracy:

- Independence of unions from the state and the employers, diametrically opposed to the integration of unions into capitalist management and the state apparatus.
- Workers' democracy inside the unions, including the right to

organise oppositions and factions, as a necessity measure against their seizure by the bureaucracy from the working class.

- Internationalism as a struggle for the restoration of workers' international solidarity, abandoned and betrayed by the bureaucracy. This means first the re-establishment of elementary class solidarity to aid working people in each country who are under attack or injured, then also a fighting solidarity with their struggle against oppression and for better conditions, an international unity which is required by the fact that the bourgeoisie is organised internationally.

Without such international fighting solidarity, leading to a common international struggle, there is no really successful fight for any, even immediate, demands, nor any hope of building parties. The reconstruction of the Fourth International can advance insofar as it is integrated in this fight.

The ITUSC had a promising start, bringing together a certain number of workers, associations and unions from various countries, and organising important international conferences in its own name, as well as participating with others in organising all the above-mentioned conferences. Its principles include the rejection of the ultra-leftist and sectarian policy of creating new, so-called "free" and "pure" unions which would be desertion of the unions and an abandonment of the working masses and their unions to the class collaborator bureaucracy, bearing in mind the Transitional Programme of the Fourth International which declares: "...self-isolation of the capitulationist variety from mass trade unions, ...is incompatible with membership of the Fourth International."

Thanks to its principled fight, ITUSC was able to achieve some limited but real successes in its development. But from the beginning, this was restricted and seriously thwarted by a sectarian and conservative unwillingness on the part of certain of its leaders from Workers International to understand its open nature, then by a more and more bureaucratic method introduced also by some leading members of

Workers International who were incapable of breaking with their conservative-bureaucratic pattern of work and understanding.

Finally, when these people joined the liquidationist Slaughter group, the London centre of the ITUSC was overrun by the petty-bourgeois elements and together they made all positive development extremely difficult. When this factional majority sabotaged the organisation of a broad campaign in support of the Bangla Desh garment workers who had suffered enormous losses from flooding and whose union appealed for help, it became clear that in one form or another, we have to reorganise the ITUSC without these people simply in order to be able to carry on its principled tasks.

As the imperialist crisis deepens and the attacks against the working class intensify, the need for an organisation and network like ITUSC becomes more and more obvious. It represents an enormous opportunity to provide an instrument for the struggle of the working class inside and outside of the unions.

We are therefore ready to reorganise ITUSC along with all those who remain faithful to its principles and condemn petty-bourgeois narrow-minded sectarianism. Uniting with other organisations of the Trotskyist movement, we can continue the struggle. Each member of Workers International has to fight in the ITUSC (or whatever new form it assumes) in one way or another and strengthen it as one important lever and means of the reconstruction of the working-class movement and of the Fourth International.

One important task of solidarity is an internationally organised struggle against so-called "social dumping" which consists of the bourgeoisie using the sometimes great differences and unevenness between working and living conditions in different countries. There is a strong international trend to transfer factories and services from certain countries and establish them in those countries with backward social legislation and low wage levels and where trade unions are absent or tame enough to allow a higher rate

of surplus value and a higher rate of profit.

The reformist and ex-Stalinist union leaderships and their bureaucratic parties "fight" this general trend, if they fight it at all, with an utterly nationalist policy and campaign. They merely defend the domestic, national interests of "their" workers against such transfers. However, what is posed is an international struggle for equal wages for equal work, better conditions, and complete union rights and freedom everywhere, in each country. Here is an outstanding example of the necessity for an international organisation of struggle and of the reactionary, illusory character of a fight limited by national borders.

One of the most widespread and odious plagues of imperialism is the unemployment which in our days has become a massive and permanent phenomenon. Even the official statistics speak of dozens and dozens of millions of unemployed workers, but behind and in these deceptive figures (which exclude all those who "have employment" in some menial and degrading job), lies the fact that millions and millions of workers in each country have been definitively expelled from the process of social production. Thus it is a central task of the International and, we think, of the ITUSC and the unions in general to fight against this plague. At the centre of such a struggle we have to place the fight of the unemployed people themselves, organised by the unions or, should the unions refuse to do so, outside of them.

The members of Workers International put themselves at the service of such organisations and, if the union leaderships refuse to undertake it, as happens in most cases, they help and assist unemployed workers to construct their own fighting organisation. Workers International refuses to accept unemployment as a fatality, and considers the unemployed people as an integral, constituent and organic part of the working class, rejecting all bourgeois-inspired insinuations that their quality of being workers is suspended or has ceased.

By this repudiation we take up the fight with the unemployed,

convinced that these workers can resist demoralisation, atomisation and false "solutions" along the lines of individual or collective enterprise through their own self-organisation and struggle in or alongside the unions. For this reason, while Workers International is not opposed to co-operatives or any other "job creation" initiatives set up by workers, it considers that such ventures merely by themselves alone, accepting in reality the unemployment generated by capitalism, cannot solve the problem but only and at most postpone it.

Co-operatives of workers or any other similar undertakings can be useful for protecting workers from economic degradation but cannot be considered as a kind of "working-class solution" to unemployment. Beside them and above all, let us follow the initiative of French and German unemployed workers and organise the millions of unemployed people in their own fighting organisations in a struggle for their demands as part of those of the whole working class. The ITUSC has and must have its place in this fight.

The basic demands of a principled fight in and with the unions, worked out and adopted by the ITUSC, are founded on the general conception that the trade unions are the expressions and representatives of the class struggle of workers against capitalist exploitation and oppression. In that sense, and on the basis of the present-day experiences of the crisis and its development, as well as of the work and fight of the ITUSC itself, it is necessary to supplement them with a quite natural and evident demand: That the unions, while wholly maintaining their independence and special character, cannot remain neutral in the political fight between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie. They have their own place in it on the side of the proletariat. Without such commitment, as all experiences of history and of the present show, they cannot carry on their own specific tasks. History and all present-day struggles entirely confirm this analysis of Trotsky. Therefore, in the great general move of the international working class towards its new parties and its

International, the unions can and must take sides, wholly participating in it while maintaining their own particular character.

In a great number of countries the majority of the working class is composed of immigrant workers, and in all countries they represent a high proportion. The composition of the committee of the ITUSC, for example, faithfully reflects this characteristic. The defence of their basic working-class and human rights (equal wages for equal work, complete civil rights, etc.) against racism and national and ethnic discrimination is a duty of all working-class organisations.

We have to do everything possible to mobilise workers and their unions in defence of immigrant workers against fascist bands (Germany) or state organised attacks (Britain) and all attempts to criminalise those workers (France), or against attacks on and discrimination against black people and others (USA, etc.) Furthermore, without the organisation of these workers side-by-side with all their brother and sister workers there is no working-class movement.

It is a very important, elementary task. Therefore Workers International fights in the first line of all movements against racism and for civil rights like, for example, in Britain, or in the movement of "sans papiers" in France. There can be no reconstruction of the working-class movement, no ITUSC, without such an energetic struggle, and without the full participation of immigrant workers in them.

Capitalist attacks against the working class hit its more vulnerable component, the women workers, much harder than the men.

For example it is commonly acknowledged – and accepted! – that the proportion of unemployed women is much higher than that of men. Even bourgeois statistics emphasise this fact. Workers International upholds the old tradition in the working-class movement of considering women workers as equal partners of men in life and in the fight and also in our common move to construct new parties and the International. Against the false and hypocritical attitude of bourgeois feminism, which

consciously divides the working class by opposing working women to working men, we fight and work for their fighting unity in general and also against all discrimination against women – even if it appears in our ranks – first of all in their remuneration (equal wages for equal work), and then in every aspect of social life (law), regulated in each country more or less openly by the Church, which is a bitter enemy of women, and codified by the holy writ of all religions.

The hypocrisy of bourgeois feminism and its true class nature is unmasked by its unreserved adherence to the bourgeois system, which generates inequality, and its principal ideologue, the Church. Workers International, on the other hand, in struggle against its own liquidationist elements, collaborated with “Women of the Waterfront”, the movement and organisation of the Liverpool dockers women standing side by side with their brothers, sons and fathers in their long and difficult struggle.

It was a great example of women’s struggle, and of how it stands equal and unites with that of men. Workers International is also engaged alongside and with the Women of Srebrenica movement through which the sisters, mothers and daughters of the thousands of Bosnian men of Srebrenica, assassinated by the Serb army and fascists backed by the UN armed forces, fight for justice. This is now a broad international movement, and it is necessary to strengthen and organise it for the complete victory of its purpose.

It is essential to define our attitude and tasks in relation to the youth, the other oppressed layer of the working class who are among the first to be exposed to bourgeois attacks. Unemployment among young people is assuming appalling proportions. Millions of young people are unable to obtain a job upon leaving school, while the dismantling of the educational system condemns others to barbarism. The bourgeoisie cannot offer them any future except barbarism. It tries to annihilate the youth and its capacity to revolt by all kinds of physical and mental destruction (drugs, indoctrination, the military and the trap of fascism).

In various countries the capacity of the youth to revolt is misled – because of the rotten opportunism and betrayal of the traditional “workers” parties, of their reformist and ex-Stalinist bureaucracy, and of the union leaderships – into false and illusory issues but also towards fascist bands and organisations. The fascist-style corruption and perversion of “struggle” has taken on a disturbing dimension in Germany. The bourgeoisie is afraid of the youth. All its repressive state apparatus (the police, the courts) is directed against the youth. On the other hand the bourgeois policy of reformist and ex-Stalinist leaderships diverts the youth towards all kinds of more or less desperate revolts or towards secondary issues, or to reject all political activities and parties, including Marxist ones, and trade union struggles.

The greatest weakness of the Workers International and the whole Trotskyist movement and of the working-class movement in general is that it has not yet found a way towards the masses of youth. There is a dangerous separation between the working class movement, including our own International, and the youth. And yet the reconstruction of the working-class movement as well of that of the Fourth International will pass only through the youth and thus through the rebuilding of the continuity between the young and the older generation.

While there are some promising actions here and there on the part of and directed towards rebellious youth (for example Reclaim the Streets in Britain), the task of involving the masses of youth in the reconstruction of the working class movement is still entirely ahead of us. It can be said with certainty that the battle for the youth is decisive for the whole war for this reconstruction. Therefore Workers International has decided to commission special studies on the position and problems of the youth and, together with young workers, students and unemployed youth, prepare an international conference on these questions and their future. Although the reconstruction of the Fourth International is rooted in the working-class movement itself and its reconstruction, that does not at all mean that one can one's

turn back on the dislocated Trotskyist movement and on the organisations which claim to be Trotskyist. However, most of them are marked by just such sectarianism.

Each leadership considers its own organisation to be the only basis for and factor in the reconstruction of the Fourth International, and that it will achieve complete reconstruction merely by its own development, spreading like ripples in a pond. One extreme position is that of the leaders of the "official" Pabloite Fourth International, which still takes the existence of (its own) Fourth International for granted and rejects the need to reconstruct it, supremely neglecting its dislocation, and the reasons for it, as well as the successive developments in the crisis and dislocation, and the fact that the great majority of Trotskyist groups, organisations and international centres remain outside of their International. Workers International sharply rejects all such arrogant disdain which is very often coupled with a sectarian approach to the workers, and calls on Trotskyists in all organisations to work together to rebuild the Fourth International on the basis of its Marxist principles and programme.

In line with this conception Workers International, some years since, established a principled relationship with another international Trotskyist organisation, the Workers International League (LIT-CI) and, after a successful fight on our part against the opposition of some sectarians inside our International, we set up the Liaison Committee as the instrument of our common work and discussion on the basis of 21 points worked out for the reconstruction of the Fourth International.

Later the LIT-CI too had to fight against the same type of liquidationism in its own ranks as we did in the Workers International. Their fight resulted in a split, and the liquidationist minority (including the Argentinian and French organisations) resigned from the LIT-CI. As the struggle went ahead inside the Workers International as well as the LIT-CI between the liquidationist tendencies and those who defended

Marxist principles and the aim of rebuilding the Fourth International, the liquidationist wing in the Workers International led by Cliff Slaughter more and more obstructed the development or even maintenance of the activity of Liaison Committee.

When our comrades in the LIT-CI tried to develop and broaden the Liaison Committee and invited us to join them in doing so, this obstruction turned into real sabotage and the liquidationist elements used all the sectarian "arguments" against the LIT-CI to justify their hostility.

Liberated from this petty-bourgeois sectarian and liquidationist tendency, Workers International today participates with the LIT-CI and other organisations in the international Co-ordinating Committee (Koorkom) set up by the LIT-CI and some other organisations in order to develop the Liaison Committee and go towards the reconstruction of the Fourth International.

This reconstruction – as we have shown several times – cannot be seen as some sort of re-unification of all those activists and organisations of the dislocated Trotskyist movement who are fighting for the reconstruction of the Fourth International. Implanted in the working class movement, it is and must be its political component and expression, carrying on the fusion of the emerging working-class vanguard with the organised Marxists struggling for the reconstruction of the Fourth International. In that sense, while it will represent a negation, so to speak, of the previous Fourth International, and thus a qualitatively new stage, it nevertheless remains the historical and logical continuity of the same, living Fourth International.

The new world situation and our new tasks, as well as the requirements of the tremendous enterprise of rebuilding the working class movement and the Fourth International, imposes on us the great task of rewriting the socialist programme of the world proletariat, that of the reconstructed Fourth International. Throughout the sixty years of its existence the founding programme of this International, the "Transitional

Programme" has proved to be correct in its main lines. It goes without saying that if some group or other looks at it as a collection of prophetic forecasts, it can very easily say that this programme was mistaken in this or that prediction. But a programme is not prophecy.

Neither is it a cook-book giving recipes for better dishes. It characterises our epoch, its main trends and forces and then on this basis draws the principal lines of the class struggle, and mainly those lines along which the proletariat is to mobilise. But let us repeat, as Marx strongly emphasised: human beings themselves make their own history in their own struggles, and that history, therefore, does not follow a predetermined plan.

Our programme was correct because it correctly guided all principled Marxist analysis of the world situation and the practical fight of Trotskyists. Today, the qualitatively changed world situation of class struggle, characterised by the collapse of Stalinism, essentially requires and motivates the elaboration of another programme, and surely not a change of this or that detail.

Such a new development of the programme can be undertaken only on the basis of the "Transitional Programme" and as a logical-dialectical continuity of it. Our main difference with the liquidationist tendency of Slaughter and others on that matter is that they simply and definitively reject the "Transitional Programme", which they consider generally as a kind of catalogue of particular obsolete demands. They use some obviously outdated analysis in the Programme dealing, for example, with the ex-Soviet Union and the Stalinist bureaucracy (which is nevertheless the only key to understanding the present situation), and their confused conception on a new "structural crisis" of imperialism in order to set aside the whole programme not only for today but also for the past. Of course no programme, and that includes ours, can be considered untouchable Holy Writ. But Workers International sharply denounces not only the congenital inability of liquidationists to produce any other programme in

place of the one they reject – apart from a few obscure, dubious and hackneyed hints of suggestions -, but above all their idealist and metaphysical approach to this very serious theoretical-political problem.

They proceed only by mental observations and speculations without any analysis worth mentioning of the working-class movement and its actual development and characteristics. What is worse, their method consists in completely passing over the, supposedly, old programme, in a non-Marxist way without analysing it in the slightest degree, denying the new programme any possibility of dialectically overcoming it.

Thus the liquidationists, as it were, know only a break – as with all metaphysics – a total rupture, rejecting any kind of continuity within it. Our approach to the elaboration of a new programme is radically opposed to this liquidationism and its anti-Marxist method.

Workers International thinks that the movement for the reconstruction of the Fourth International has to develop, in line and in harmony with the practical struggle, the overall discussion, clarification and establishment of a new programme.

We therefore firmly believe that the congress that achieves reconstruction will be a congress that discusses and adopts such a new programme. Therefore Workers International now launches a broad overall campaign for the elaboration, clarification and discussion, by the working-class movement in the course of its reconstruction, of a new programme for the reconstructed Fourth International.