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A Socialist Strategy for Western Europe

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A SOCIALIST STRATEGY FOR WESTERN EUROPE

The debate over socialist strategy in western Europe must start from the prior assumption that, during the next decade, there will be neither a world nuclear war nor an economic crisis of comparable gravity with that of 1929-1933. It is not hard to see why we must limit our discussion by making this assumption: either one of the two alternatives would mean that the problem was completely transformed, in both its objective and subjective aspects. Nor need we waste much time on the reasons why it is plausible to make such an assumption. If the United States ruling class chose to unleash a world nuclear war in any *concrete* situation, except one in which it was directly threatened with extinction, it would simply be committing suicide. Even if the possibility cannot be entirely ruled out—and there is also the possibility of a war unleashed through error or insanity—it is not one on which we could (or need) build a strategy for the workers' movement.

As far as an economic crisis or catastrophe is concerned, it has been emphasized and re-emphasized that there are strong reasons why this can be avoided by neo-capitalism for a considerable time to come.¹ To go over the principle points very briefly: the size of the State budget and State intervention in the economy; the use of a whole arsenal of anti crisis techniques; the use of "public investment" (particularly armaments) to compensate for any sagging in private investment, etc.

¹ Ernest Mandel, *L'Apogée du néo-capitalisme et ses lendemains* in *Les Temps Modernes*, August-September, 1964.

Certainly, the capitalist regime cannot transform threatening crises into mild recessions completely unscathed. There is a twofold price to pay for the conversion: first, a lasting tendency towards inflation and a loss of purchasing power of leading currencies; second, an increasingly widespread surplus productive capacity (the other face of the coin of over-production). Without doubt, these two factors will make themselves strongly felt during the coming decade; already the United States payments deficit, and the ensuing dollar crisis, are giving the neo-capitalist success story a sharp jolt. But there is no reason to doubt that the system will be able to go on functioning, though rather bumpily, through several more monetary crises and anyway for a decade.

Finally, it should be said that, during the next decade, the colonial revolution will probably make further advances and we can also expect spectacular developments in the socialist countries; however, neither of these will *basically* alter the economic and social situation of the imperialist world (though of course they will have an undeniable influence, which there is no need to go into here).

It should also be remembered that those taking part in this discussion do not believe that social reforms of the type associated with the Swedish social-democratic government or the post-war Labour government in Britain can change the capitalist character of the economy or society in any way or serve as models for a socialist strategy whose purpose is the overthrow of capitalism.

Discussion must take place within this limited context; the various proposals on socialist strategy in western Europe cannot be evaluated outside this framework.

It does not follow that because there are no catastrophic economic crises there are no crises at all.

The first problem for marxists to face is the following: since we have established, as our initial hypothesis, that we cannot expect any catastrophic economic crisis comparable with 1929-1932 (or any near collapse of the bourgeois state, as occurred after defeat in war: Germany 1918-19, Italy 1943-45, etc.), does this imply that there will be no crisis at all to threaten the capitalist economy, society and State?

This is a crucial question, because only idealists—in the philosophical-sociological sense—can envisage the overthrow of capitalism without any kind of social, political or economic crisis. In such a case, the overthrow of capitalism would follow simply

on a *prise de conscience* by the great majority of the working population (or else a putsch!) To accept a hypothesis of this kind would mean backsliding into utopianism.

For a marxist, there is no doubt that we can only approach the problems of the overthrow of capitalism and the conquest of power by starting with the objective conditions in which the masses could be mobilized and the situations of breakdown in which the balance of social forces within bourgeois society is upset. These are what we call "crisis situations". But these situations are not necessarily the same as crises of catastrophic over-production, except for mechanistic determinist economists, who are far from being marxists.

First of all, it should be emphasized that, though we consider that neo-capitalism is perfectly capable of converting serious over-production crises into milder and briefer recessions, we do not think it capable of suppressing its repeated short-term fluctuations. The American economy experienced regular recessions, in 1949, 1953, 1957-58, 1960-61. And I have tried to explain elsewhere the reasons for the *temporary* shortening of the cycle, and the reasons which suggest that there can be no *conclusive* shortening of it.

The American economy is the typical economy of the neo-capitalist system in the imperialist countries: it is the model which western Europe and Japan imitate with a lag of several years. It therefore seems very likely that when these countries emerge from the special cycle of the re-construction period, their economies will experience the same kind of recessions, although this has not happened as yet (I am talking of countries such as Great Britain, Belgium and, recently, Italy and France).

These economic fluctuations will then themselves produce the mechanisms which *can* periodically disturb the balance of the capitalist societies and States; the difference between these milder recessions and more serious crises mainly being that the socio-political consequences are *much less automatic* (after the 1929-33 crisis there were serious political and social repercussions in every capitalist country).

The explosive factors in present-day society are not restricted to those coming from these short-term economic fluctuations. There are also a number of unanswered structural problems: the problem of the *Mezzogiorno* in Italy and the general problem of under-developed or declining regions; the problem of German unification; the problem of the downfall or extinction of the semi-fascist regimes of Spain and Portugal and the repercussions

which would follow their revolutionary overthrow; attempts to establish "strong government" in other European countries; the constant possibility of monetary and financial crises, which on occasion can have very sharp effects (cf. the consequences of the banking crisis which has recently occurred in Uruguay, "the Switzerland of Latin America"); the constant possibility that any major social conflict will take a political form and provoke retaliation by the State (with the possible ensuing counter-retaliation of the working class movement and the working masses).

To put it in more general terms: we need not believe, simply because the neo-capitalist system has succeeded in avoiding catastrophic economic crises, that it is therefore capable of *solving all the economic and social problems* which face it. We do not believe that this system has, in the slightest way, resolved the basic contradictions of the capitalist mode of production. And we believe that, to these classical contradictions, it adds a whole series of new contradictions of its own.

In analyzing neo-capitalism, people often make the mistake of thinking that "solutions" which in fact create sharp new contradictions are evidence of a "conflict-less situation". I have already given one example,³ which springs from one of neo-capitalism's apparently spectacular successes: long-term high employment. This "solution" inevitably leads to constant wage-rises, which finally end up by threatening to cut the rate of profit in a decisive way. Hence the necessity for the bourgeoisie of limiting or abolishing trade union independence in negotiating wages (incomes policies, etc.). Hence also the tendency to replace extensive by intensive investments, substituting depth for breadth, in order to economize on man-power (automation). All these developments tend to bring the crisis in the trade union movement to a head, rather than integrating it further into the State and eliminating conflict.

The problem of incomes policy gives rise to a larger problem which, in fact, has grown more serious under neo-capitalism than under classical capitalism: how can there be a constant and harmonious rise in the purchasing power of the wage-earners in a capitalist regime? To the extent that the capitalist system requires a multiplicity of decision centres, regarding both prices and investments,⁴ it will be unable to avoid periodic fluctuations

³ Ibid.

⁴ "Capital only exists and can only exist in the form of numerous separate capitals and, for this reason, its self-determination will be manifested as the mutual inter-action of these capitals". (Karl Marx: *Grundrisse der Kritik der Politischen Oekonomie*, p. 317, Dietz-Verlag, Berlin, 1953.

in real wages, out of step with the periodic fluctuations of the real cost of living. And, as the system becomes more and more a prey to international competition, there will also be periodic lags in the levels of real wages in different imperialist countries, which means that management will have to launch periodic attacks on "excessive wage rises". And as long as there is an independent working class movement (and, above all, an independent trade union movement) these periodic attacks by management will create at least objectively favourable conditions for the explosion of more far-reaching social struggle, which challenge the whole operation of the capitalist economy and might even lead to victorious workers' counter-attacks.

Similarly, if neo-capitalism cannot survive without periodic management attacks on "excessive" wage rises, it will not be able to avoid attacking the level of employment; it might even be said, under neo-capitalism, that recessions are more or less deliberately *provoked* by the bourgeoisie—principally as a result of deflationist squeezes—as well as occurring through the internal mechanisms of capitalism. Thus we have another example of objectively favourable conditions for an extensive struggle, particularly *at the turning-point when the recession sets in*, which has always been the most preferable time for working class struggles under classical capitalism.

Affluence does not mean that the workers feel there is nothing left to fight for.

If we accept that, although there will be no catastrophic crisis of the 1929-33 type, this does not mean that there will be no economic and social contradictions which could arouse far-reaching workers' struggles, then it follows that the vanguard forces within the workers' movement must put forward a whole series of objectives to galvanize the masses. The examples given above—struggle against rises in the cost of living, against various kinds of wage-freeze or "controlled growth of incomes", against recurrent waves of lay-offs—must be prominent features of the appropriate campaign.

These are essentially *defensive* objectives. But neo-capitalism is bringing with it, nationally and internationally, a new phase in the development of the productive forces. There must be a new roster of workers' objectives, corresponding to the development of these forces and qualitatively and quantitatively different from those of the past.

Wages are the price of labour power; the price of labour power oscillates around its value. Now, Marx stresses that this

value is not a stable physiological datum but a datum made up of variable historical and geographical factors. And he insists on the fact that new needs can and should be incorporated from time to time into the variable element of wages, which is evidence of the civilizing quality of trade union action.⁵

As the undeniable rise in the standard of living and real wages of the working class has reduced the proportion of purchasing power expended on basic nourishment and everyday clothing, the working class in the imperialist countries has developed a whole series of new needs which play an increasingly important role in its daily preoccupations: housing, transport, children's education, holidays, safety and, especially, protection against disease and unemployment. Corresponding to all these needs—whose satisfaction is under-developed or warped under capitalism—there are new forms of social consumption and socialization of the costs of satisfaction, which suggest a quite different model of distribution of the national income.

The more affluent he becomes, the more the worker runs up against new forms of alienation, supplementing the old. He is not alienated only as a producer; he is also alienated as a consumer. Any number of examples could be given of the way in which the so-called "successes" of neo-capitalism create new problems: the deterioration in quality of a whole series of mass consumption goods; the traumatic effects of increasingly intrusive advertizing; the danger that new forms of leisure (such as TV!) will lead to class atomization. The working class movement can and must apply new solutions to these new problems—solutions which challenge the capitalist mode of production as such.

But, although workers are undergoing increased alienation as consumers, they are nonetheless alienated, first and foremost, as producers. During the neo-capitalist period, this alienation is given new dimensions arising from the very mechanisms which, for the time being, bring neo-capitalism its successes: the permanent technological revolution, the third industrial revolution, ever-spreading automation. The problems involved—control over speed-up and lay-offs; control over the organization of production; the effective role of the producer in the system—descend from the heady realms of philosophy to take their place, poten-

⁵ Rosa Luxemburg, "The chief function of trade unions is that, by adding to the needs of the workers and raising them morally, it creates a cultural and social vital minimum in the stead of a physical vital minimum—in other words, it creates a definite level of cultural life for the workers". (*Einführung in die Nationalökonomie*, p. 275, E. Lauböche Verlagsbuchhandlung, Berlin, 1925).

tially at least, in the day-to-day trade union struggle. Everything connected with this group of problems is becoming increasingly important to the workers: the opportunity follows of raising the struggle for union demands onto a new level. If I may quote my own work: "In the same way that the daily experience of the nineteenth century worker taught him how the net product of each enterprise was divided between wages and profits, the daily experience of the worker in the neo-capitalist period teaches him how the national income is divided between the total of earned and the total of unearned income and how these mechanisms can only be mastered by the seizure of the means of production, the "levers of power" of the whole of economic life."⁶

All the objectives I have listed above are *potentially revolutionary*, in the sense that they challenge the capitalist nature of the economy and the nature of the private ownership of the means of production themselves. And they are not merely ideological issues, but immediate aims of the masses. So, far from postponing the socialist revolution till the very distant future, neo-capitalism actually brings to fruition a series of circumstances which present revolution as an immediate and urgent necessity, demanded *by the facts*, without having to wait for the workers to understand the Theses on Feuerbach or the Third Volume of Capital first.

The Strategy of Structural Reforms.

The main purpose of the strategy of structural reforms—invented by the left wing of the Belgian working class movement and now increasingly adopted by its counterparts throughout Europe—is to effect an integration between the immediate aims of the masses and the objectives of the struggle which objectively challenge the very existence of the capitalist system itself.

It does not mean in the slightest that the workers' movement abandons wage claims, demands for shorter hours, the insistence on a sliding scale to combat the rising cost of living, etc.—all the traditional demands of the movement (or at least of its left wing). But it does mean that the movement does not *limit* itself to these immediate objectives or to a combination of struggle for these objectives together with vague propaganda for the "socialist revolution", the "socialization of the means of production", even "the dictatorship of the proletariat", which, while they are not part and parcel of the daily struggle,

⁶ *Traité d'Economie Marxiste*, II, p. 198.

can exert no influence on the practical development of the class struggle.⁷ It means that the working class movement, *in its day-by-day struggle*, combines the fight for immediate objectives which, rooted in the immediate interests of the masses, go on to challenge objectively the operation of the capitalist system.

There is no doubt that this is a daring strategy; it carries grave risks. The main risk is that we live in a period of development of the productive forces, in which the representatives of the most dynamic and aggressive sectors of capitalism themselves have an interest in various structural transformations of the economy. If the workers' movement is not vigilant, *it therefore risks lending its support to neo-capitalist strata*, who are engaged in a struggle against more conservative capitalist forces, whose interests are best served by the existing structures.

In other word, the formula of "structural reforms" can be interpreted in two diametrically opposite ways: either it can mean *a reform of capitalism whose purpose is to ensure that the economy will function more satisfactorily* or it can mean "reforms" extorted by the working class struggle, completely incompatible with the normal operation of any kind of capitalist economy. These latter inaugurate a period in which there is a duality of power, whose conclusion must be either a defeat for the working class (in which case the "reforms" are destroyed) or a defeat for the bourgeoisie (in which case the "reforms" are consolidated by the conquest of power by the proletariat and the socialization of the means of production, democratically managed by the workers themselves).

In the first case, we are dealing with "*neo-capitalist structural reforms*", the principal trap into which the socialist left in western Europe could fall; in the second case we are dealing with "*anti-capitalist structural reforms*", which are the main way forward for a socialist strategy in Europe.

Since the term "structural reform" is naturally ambiguous, it is not good enough to try and distinguish an aggressive socialist strategy from a reformist social-democratic policy (essentially

⁷ We should not forget that the classic reformists of the beginning of the century did not in the slightest turn their backs on socialist propaganda. Reformism only abandons this propaganda in the final phase of its degeneration and then starts to jettison all references to socialist ideals or actually recants from them. So the real difference between socialist and reformist action cannot be seen in terms of whether there is socialist propaganda or not. The essential question is that of objectives for practical struggles: either these are limited to what can be achieved within a capitalist regime and digested by it or else they challenge the very existence of the regime, both by their goals and by their size.

a support or even temporary consolidation of neo-capitalism) simply by applying different labels or even by making more comprehensive definitions. But, without claiming to have said everything there is to say, I would like to put forward five characteristics of a strategy of anti-capitalist structural reforms, which go together and which are indispensable if the neo-capitalist trap is to be avoided:

1. We must not try to capture "outlying positions" from capitalism as a first step, under the illusion that we will thereby lessen resistance and be able to advance "step by step" towards the heart of the capitalist fortress. Experience persistently teaches us that the nationalization of non-central sectors, or of raw material and energy producing sectors, if it is carried out apart from a general forward movement on all fronts, can be integrated without any trouble into the general scheme of rationalizing (and hence consolidating) the capitalist economy.

Moreover, it is utterly impossible to operate an economy "at the same time" according to the criteria of collective interests and the criteria of the private interests of the big capitalists. There cannot be any consonance between these two criteria, when basic economic choices are at stake. Either the criterion of profit is uppermost, in which case the operation of the whole economy must necessarily be *subordinated* to the demands and profitability of the major monopolistic groups (which is perfectly compatible with the nationalization of specific sectors, socializing losses and providing state subsidies or hidden savings for the monopolies) or else things are taken to a different conclusion and private property must be abolished, if the whole economy is not to grind to a halt.

So the attack must be made, not on outlying sectors, *but on the key sectors*, the sectors which provide the bulk of the national income and the greatest volume and dynamic of investment, the "commanding heights" of the economy. Unless we try to seize these key sectors from capitalism, our policies will be not anti-capitalist but neo-capitalist, whatever our intentions may be.

2. We must raise the question of the hierarchic structure of the enterprise, of the power of decision over the organization of work, of workers' control over production (which can as easily spring from micro-economic problems, at enterprise level, as from such macro-economic problems as profit levels, price and credit policies, causes of inflation, etc.), the abolition of commercial and banking secrets and the opening of the books.

This is the only way to avoid giving the strategy of structural reforms a technocratic character and giving it life in the factories, on the shopfloor and in offices, of tying in closely to the mass of workers themselves. It is also the only way of making the duality of power a real threat to the survival of capitalism.

3. We must resolutely reject the institutionalization of workers' control and the institutionalization of anti-capitalist structural reforms in general. First and foremost, because otherwise we would be being utopian; it cannot be emphasized enough that no economy can function in practice according to two criteria, two sets of demands, two models of consumption, two opposed and contradictory powers in each enterprise. Secondly, because this is a trap, a very dangerous trap, which recalls the most vulgar reformist illusions: Léon Jouhaux imagined that he had already "started" to change the nature of capitalism the day he was named governor of the Bank of France! An army cannot be taken apart "battalion by battalion" any more than capitalism can be abolished "step by step". In practice, the institutionalization of workers' control in a context in which big capitalism would still control the main wealth and power points of the economy as a whole would quickly deprive it of any real substance and would turn it into a means of corrupting working class militants.

4. The programme of anti-capitalist structural reforms must be closely connected with a clear governmental formula, defining the replacement in power of one class by another (in Belgium, we use the formula: a workers' government based on the unions).⁸ This is of the utmost importance, for it is essential to bring home to mass of the workers that the question of structural reforms leads on to *the question of power* and that it is the struggle for power which will finally decide the issue of the battle. There is no need here to point out how illusions about putting through structural reforms "stage by stage" find their reflection in illusions about coalitions with the bourgeoisie which could put through this programme "bit by bit".

⁸ This is an algebraic formula, unaffected by the form of organization adopted by christian workers (a key question, in both Belgium in Italy) or by the establishment of an independent christian workers party, or by their entry *en bloc* into a socialist organization or by their alliance with other working class parties.

5. Propaganda for anti-capitalist structural reforms must be accompanied by an intense and systematic critique of capitalism as a whole, of its contradictions and its ludicrous methods of production, of its more and more idiotic and alienating model of consumption, of the monstrous social inequality which it continues to sustain—in short, by a systematic socialist education, which opposes the idea of socialist planning to the idea of capitalist “programming”. This propaganda must also *play its part in demystifying*, in revealing the reality hidden behind phrases like “improving the workings of the economy” (read: the capitalist economy), “stabilizing the purchasing power of money”, ensuring “a steady rate of growth”, and so on and so forth.

The working masses are ready and waiting for a strategy of this kind.

The relatively high standard of living which the workers enjoy during the neo-capitalist period (until the long-term cycle marked by economic growth reaches its end and the financial crisis caused by incessant inflation brings about new explosions) is often said to make a strategy of anti-capitalist structural reforms, such as I have outlined, a utopian prospect. It is argued that, since it is no longer impelled to action by hunger, misery and massive unemployment, the working mass is destined for “americanization”, that is to say, de-politicization, the loss of its class consciousness under the influence of the mass media, which feed it ever more homogenous and co-ordinated propaganda, or, at the very least, for a persistent process of fragmentation, both at and away from work, as a result of automation.⁹

This is an important objection, which must be fully dealt with. I have shown above how neo-capitalism does not in fact put an end to the causes of workers' discontent and that it is still quite possible to launch powerful campaigns—perhaps even inevitable. But can these campaigns take on a revolutionary complexion, in the context of a welfare society? Or are they necessarily restricted to reformist objectives, as long as they

⁹ There is obviously a great difference between the situation in the United States where, for well-known historical reasons, the proletariat has never attained political class consciousness—so that the class struggle is only a trade union struggle—and western Europe, where working class political apathy means that there has been a *loss* of class consciousness built up over half a century. It is quite likely that the American proletariat will end up by being politicized before the depoliticization of the European working class has become complete.

take place in an atmosphere of more or less general prosperity? In other words, can "americanized" or "depoliticized" workers respond to anything else than reformism, even when they are fighting a wage-freeze, murderous speed-up or snowballing technological unemployment?

Before replying to this objection, we must first look at it more closely. If the objection is referring to the fact that, in the present economic atmosphere, there are going to be no repetitions of the 1918 German revolution or the 1941-45 Yugoslav revolution, then it is no more than a truism. We have already admitted this truism and included it in our prior hypothesis. And that brings us to the real point: are these particular kinds of revolution the only ones which can achieve the overthrow of capitalism? Are "catastrophic" conditions necessary? No. There is a different historic model which we can refer to: that of the general strike of June 1936 in France (and, to a lesser extent, the Belgian general strike of 1960-61, which came near to creating an analogous situation to that of 1936).

It is perfectly possible that, in the present general economic climate—that of "neo-capitalist affluence" or the "mass consumption society",—the workers will become more and more radicalized as the result of a whole series of social, political, economic or even military crises (incomes policies, wage-freezes; anti-union measures, authoritarianism; recessions, sudden monetary crises; protest movements against imperialist aggression, imperialist military alliances, the use of tactical nuclear weapons in so-called wars, etc.) and that, once they are radicalized, they will launch more and more far-reaching campaigns, during the course of which they will begin to link their immediate demands with a programme of anti-capitalist structural reforms, until eventually the struggle concludes with a general strike which either overthrows the regime or creates a duality of powers.¹⁰

Naturally, all this pre-supposes a growing *prise de conscience* rather than a relapse into political apathy. But there is nothing unrealistic or utopian about this hypothesis. The experience of the last five years has shown how there is no automatic correlation between high wage rates (comparatively high on an international scale) and political apathy. In Italy, an unprecedented climb in wage rates has led to the strengthening of the Communist Party at the polls. In Belgium, the 1960-61 strike

¹⁰ It would require a separate study to deal with the particular problems raised by the duality of powers.

was called at a time when Belgian wage rates were among the highest in Europe, and its staunchest adherents were the best-paid sector of the Belgian working-class: the Liège iron and steel workers. And it could hardly be claimed that it was any fall in wages which led the working masses of Britain to elect the 1964 Labour government and oust the crestfallen Tories.

Furthermore, the present situation of the western European workers' movement is extremely variegated; there are a multitude of nuances between its two extremes; on the one hand, there is the workers' movement in West Germany; the Netherlands or Switzerland, where autonomous class action and a comparatively high level of consciousness are only to be found among small, isolated groups (which does not necessarily mean that this will be the case for ever); on the other hand, there is Italy, Great Britain or Belgium, where, for all its weaknesses (and I am only too well aware of those in Belgium!), the workers' movement still displays a high level of autonomous class action, with a rich and diverse ideological life, a remarkable and widespread degree of combativity and genuine opportunities for making a real breakthrough.

Now, it is not possible to explain the differences between these two different sets of examples, simply by referring to their different objective conditions. Average wage rates in Britain are still among the highest in western Europe; the same is true of Belgium (and since Belgian rates have relatively begun to fall back, the aggressive dynamism of the workers' movement has also fallen back with them, rather than surged forward); Italian wage rates have been rising faster than any others in Europe, for many years. It is quite untenable to explain the enormous differences in dynamism between the movements in Belgium and the Netherlands by referring to the objective conditions (and, in any case, Dutch wage rates have been comparatively low for two decades); the same is true of the differences between the French and Italian movements, over the last five years. It is quite clear that we are dealing with a whole complex of factors, among which that of "relative prosperity" cannot be shown to be particularly dominant.

It follows that *it is above all the subjective factor which plays the key role in deciding whether or not the workers' movement makes use of the opportunity which neo-capitalism provides for an anti-capitalist strategic offensive.* That is to say, in the last analysis everything depends on the action of the working class movement itself.

Here we can put our finger on the objective conditions which confront us today and those of, say, the thirties. During

a period in which the worker is not irresistibly impelled against capitalism by hunger or misery, anti-capitalist action ceases to be the *automatic* result of his daily experience. But it can become so *through the mediation, the awakening of consciousness, which is the task of the workers' movement*. If the workers' movement is capable of fulfilling its task (not only little vanguard groups, but also those trade union and political forces which influence parts of the working class) it can throw a bridge, by action and education, between essentially defensive struggles (which are inevitable, though not "automatic") and struggles which can conclude objectively in the overthrow of the capitalist system. If on the contrary, it falls short, then undeniably there will be a process of gradual degradation and deterioration of class consciousness, of working class depolitization, until the West German or Swiss model is arrived at, in which, as far as can be seen, the great majority of the working class no longer wants any part in far-reaching anti-capitalist struggles.

International co-ordination of the struggle.

There are two further problems which remain to be discussed: the problem of periodicity and the problem of the implications of European economic integration.

Any socialist strategy which is *based on mass action* (rather than electoral campaigns or guerrilla wars) must necessarily pay great attention to fluctuations in mass psychology, state of mind and relative capacity to respond to blows from the enemy and move on to the attack. Obviously, this capacity is not static. No individual—and *a fortiori* no group of individuals—can live over a long period, uninterruptedly, in a state of extreme tension. Theoretically and empirically, it has long since been shown that there are periodic fluctuations in the degree of mass action, no matter which country is being considered.

There is no need, in this context, to describe the delicate mechanism of inter-action between objective and subjective factors which explains this periodicity. Evidently, this is *related* to the economic cycle; but this relationship certainly does not mean that the peak point of mass action occurs when economic activity is in a trough. I have already pointed out that this peak point is much more likely to occur *at the time when the economic trend is reversed* (first waves of lay-offs or the favourable effect of full employment on the balance of class power).

The problem is complicated, however, because there is both a short-term and a long-term cycle of mass action (for example,

in France the defeat of the workers' movement by the arrival in power of De Gaulle has led to conditions completely different from those prevalent in Italy). Various historical factors—the level of class consciousness attained in the past; the continuing influence of past forms of struggle—also have a considerable effect on the periodicity of struggles. The cycle can be slowed down or speeded up according to whether there is a greater or lesser degree of class unity. And there are many other important factors which might be listed.

It is of the utmost importance that *the internal logic of the periodicity of the workers' struggles* should be geared to the strategy outlined above. Obviously, a growing intensity of radicalization, enabling the struggle to be set more and more towards anti-capitalist objectives, must co-incide with a growing intensity of *mass* action in the cycle or else it will be doomed to failure, after which it may take as much as a decade or more to recover. It is also obvious that if we *let slip* the peak moments of mass struggle, without linking them to struggles for anti-capitalist reforms, we shall lose the chance of launching a decisive campaign for many years to come. In the present atmosphere, we cannot expect the proletariat, in western Europe at least, to launch a general strike every two years. A number of factors are of crucial importance: a correct analysis of the state of mind of the masses; the balance of power between the vanguard and the more retrograde and conservative forces within the workers' movement; the ability to produce the right slogans at the right moment, and so on and so forth. All these factors are crucial if a socialist strategy is to be applied with the least hope of success.

Concerning the European co-ordination of the struggle, I have already written at length elsewhere.¹¹ For as long as the working class in each of the six Common Market countries is able to exert pressure on the productive system of "its" country and "its" bourgeoisie, the best solution would be a country-by-country struggle, so that a victory in one would lead to favourable conditions for an international campaign against the movement towards the Common Market, NATO and other international organizations, sabotaging or destroying their effectiveness.

On the other hand, from the time that the interpenetration of capital reaches a certain point, there will be less and less possibility of an isolated victory in a single Common Market country and there will be a very strong likelihood that any

¹¹ Cf. my report to the seminar on *Intégration européenne et mouvement ouvrier*, organized by *Cahiers du Centre d'Etudes socialistes* in Paris.

isolated socialist experiment could be economically and financially strangled. From this point on, the possibility of a socialist breakthrough must be an all or nothing affair, involving the whole Common Market. It must be admitted that this means a turn for the worse, at least in the short and middle term (in the long term, it has definite advantages). For whereas the first alternative requires a high degree of mass action and a successful outcome in only one country, the second requires a high degree of mass action in each country simultaneously, *co-inciding* with a successful simultaneous outcome! Obviously this is the harder to come by.

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