

FRENCH TROTSKYIST ON LOTTA CONTINUA

Read all about it...

This is a long translation from the theoretical magazine of the French section of the Fourth International (mainline Trotskyists - the FI section in Britain is the International Marxist Group) on Lotta Continua. It takes the Congress theses of LC (November '74 - Jan '75) and makes out an overall criticism of LC's politics. Despite the translation and the rather difficult language of the writer, it presents a coherent Trotskyist stance towards the politics of which LC is the main European example. It's a distilled form of the slugging we get from the Trotskyist groups over here, too. In taking only the theses from Congress, the writer misses out LC's actual practice, which means that a lot of the points he makes - on the vagueness of LC concerning tactics - are rather easy pointscoreing.

I hope that it will produce some discussion about LC and also some more circulation of documents and articles from LC by those comrades who have the skill and knowledge to do the work. A brief summary of the article is included. I'd like to hear if LC have bothered to reply.

It's worth having handy a copy of the bits from LC congress which came out in BF last year.

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Structure: -

SUMMARY

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- on National Independence and National Sovereignty

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(14-26) - United Front, Outflanking, Stageism
- CP in Government

Part IV On The Building Of The Party
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Part I On Violence... A discussion of the 'ultraleftist' violence of the late '60s, especially derived from Latin America (Debray's theories of Castro/Che). LC's self criticism of the idea of violence as an example to inspire the masses to action as opposed to being inside the mass struggle. But Bensaïd (B) argues that LC have gone too much the other way and fail to pose the question of insurrection correctly - criticism of the failure of MIR to pose insurrection at a moment of revolutionary crisis, having instead (like LC) only a perspective of protracted struggle. LC's failure to be concrete on the tactics for preparing the offensive of the masses, 'the axis of workers' self-defence'. B concludes there is a danger in LC of 'military spontaneism'.

On The Army... Agrees with LC's call for organisation within the Army, and the need for vanguards of the working class to make the first move, going to the soldiers in their barracks, but argues that 'its systematic application by LC risks suffering from more general ambiguities in the orientation of LC towards the working class movement as a whole, in particular in relation to their intervention in the Unions'.

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Part II The International Strategic Line

- On The International... Several criticisms! First, that the method by which they characterise the Internationals (First, Second and Third...) is 'pseudo-deep', in that the theses of the congress on the International criticise the theoretical 'essence' of their politics (economism - emphasising the forces of production, as machines etc, over the relations of production) and make this the key to understanding the failures of the Internationals. B argues that this approach is dishonest, cos it allows one to fudge over the concrete history of the USSR and the 'bureaucratic counter-revolution' of Stalinism.

B also criticises the two conclusions of the theses, that the Chinese experience offers the only 'critique from the left' of Stalinism (not surprisingly, for a Trotskyist). Second, that the conditions for a new International (of a mass international proletarian upsurge) have not yet reoccurred.

Of course, for the Fourth International, the LC line is an affront to several of their reasons for existence. E.g. - Stalinism (which includes for them socialism in one country versus the Fourth Internat., stageism versus permanent revolution, bureaucratism etc etc). See the Liverpool document on Trotskyism for an assessment of the FI, and how T saw it as a desperate gamble launched in an atmosphere of proletarian retreat.

LC is finally criticised for nationalism more or less cos they don't come to terms with the FI. What B - and the Trots generally - seem to pass over is the truth that despite the internationalisation of capital and class struggle, class struggle still takes place within nationstates.

- AntiImperialism and the Role Of China... B regards LC's position of support for China and (critical) support for its foreign policy (as being aimed at weakening imperialism) as compromise.

- On National Independence and National Sovereignty ... B argues that LC's position on China is tied in with their assertion for the need for 'independence and national sovereignty' versus US imperialism. He says - either the FI (which = proletarian internationalism) or the bourgeois/Communist Party line of 'national sovereignty'. LC are consequently supporting the reformists. ("It is by no means certain that a revolutionary version of national sovereignty is today possible") and fail to distinguish themselves from the consequent Popular Front politics (alliance with national capital against monopolies) of the European CPs, and the orthodox Maoists (for example, the KPD in W Germany who call for strengthening of the Army against the threat of Russian social-imperialist aggression.)

Part III On The Notion of a Prolonged Crisis & Its Consequences

LC argue that the Italian proletariat is in a protracted struggle which is 'relatively autonomous' of the capitalist (economic) crisis. In other words, according to B: they dilute the key Marxist concept of the determinacy of 'the economic' on class struggle and make class struggle seem like a purely 'voluntary' thing: and discard the Leninist concept of a revolutionary crisis for the notion of a protracted crisis in which 'workers' autonomy' can grow in a progressive fashion.

The main conclusion that B draws from all this is that LC fail to make a serious analysis of reformism, just implying that it will be eroded by the progressive growth of workers' autonomy in the course of the prolonged crisis.

- United Front, Outflanking, Stageism... The Trotskyist answers to reformism are encapsulated (or fossilised) in the concept of the United Front. B argues the necessity of unity in action with the reformist leaderships/organisations from a position of proletarian power in order to outflank them in action and win away those working

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class militants under their influence. This means treating the Unions as 'an elementary structure of the United Front of the class'.

B uses this as a stick to beat the LC theses on Tactics with, saying that they present no clear tactics towards the CP or the Unions, but are instead condemned to slip and slide from tactic to tactic on a purely localised basis, evaluations of power. Perhaps it is usually a compliment to be called 'opportunist' by a T.. There is also the real danger of localised, inconsistent, always short term tactics, with a vague reliance on the inevitable growth of autonomy making the problem of the reformists irrelevant. The abstract idea of 'workers' autonomy', according to B, favours gradualism, in relation to the reformist organisations, and implies a passive role for the vanguard organisation(s) of the working class. A caricature, yes: but I feel it fingers some things we are less than clear on.

B lets himself down by saying that 'It has all happened before, in the debates of the early '20s between Lenin and the Council Communists (Pannekoek, Gorter). ' That isn't enough.

- The Communist Party to Government... B argues that these problems are most clearly brought out in the stance taken by LC towards the elections and the CP. Lacking the tactics (in the congress documents), pushing the PCI into government to 'heighten the contradictions' is dangerous: it could be the trump card in a severe crisis for the bosses to play against the working class, to contain mass struggle. B counterposes to this the slogan of a 'Government of Workers' Organisations' backed up by the workers' organisations of dual power outside the parliament. (ie the maintenance of the independence of the class). For B, LC's position remains one-sided and therefore exposed to the dangers of reformism subverting the independence of the working class.

This section is the one in which the technique of using only the LC congress documents shows up weakest - it misses out the precise forms of agitation and organisation pushed by LC in their campaign around the elections.

Part IV On The Building Of the Party
Some general questions concerning LC's constitution and internal organisation eg the right to form tendencies and so on.

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R BBF
FEB '76

NOW READ ON!

10/10/54

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LOTTA CONTINUA - THE UPS + DOWNS OF A CERTAIN REALISM - DANIEL BENSARD (F.I.)

The first Lotta Continua (LC) Congress, reconvened in Rome at the start of January, seemed to bear witness to a double evolution, even in the eyes of a fairly uninformed observer. The evolution of a movement originally grouped around a paper, through an organisation born out of a wave of social radicalisation, to a small party with defined contours. The evolution of an ultra-left current which becomes conscious of its responsibilities and, in the face of majority reformist organisations of the class, starts to deploy a complex tactic.

To illustrate this trajectory, we'll only take two examples that we see as significant - the question of violence and that of anti-military work.

1/ ON THE QUESTION OF VIOLENCE

The structure of the congress itself had something surprising about it. Of the six days of debate, the first four were given over to amendments and voting on a series of theses that, though juxtaposed, seemed to be disparate (On Materialism, On Anti-Imperialism, On The International, On the Middle Layers, On The Army, On The State, On Tactics, On The Question Of The Party and its statutes). The last two days were given over to a discussion of the report on the situation of struggle and the political context, and the election of the leadership.

These theses seemed to clarify a certain number of points of dispute, after a slow process of maturing over 6 years, brought to an end by the congress. It's in this perspective that the debate on violence must be understood as having a deep-going significance. Especially since certain militants, among them several delegates from Milan, seemed to assume in this connection that the past of the prganisation was contrasted with its present evolution.

The history of these last 10 years has shown how the claiming of the right to revolutionary violence, which has had and keeps a subjective value, cannot be understood as a strategic discriminant and proves itself to be insufficient to base a real autonomy of political line on. The theoretical oscillations, the slips, the errors of voluntarism and subjectivism which have characterised the revolutionary movement of the '60's are the reflexion of a lack of autonomy. This has shown itself in a general way in the underestimation of the role of the masses in the political and military spheres.

The problem, on these general lines, is correctly posed. The fetishism of the forms of struggle, in particular of violence, is the response of the emerging vanguards and the expression of their impatience in a situation where the self-activity of the masses remains limited. The danger of ultra-left substitutionism which results from this is shown by the example of the Red Army Fraction (Baader-Meinhof) in Germany, which has carried this substitutionism to extreme lengths in the European country where the awakening and mobilisation of the masses is at its most limited.

The theory of the exemplary nature of armed action, the theory of the party-as-detonator, the fetishism of the gun . . . are the traits under which the militarist deviation appears at the margins of the movement as a rearguard phenomenon. The ignorance of the internal contradictions of the class-enemy, the over-estimation of the control and the repression of the revisionists goes alongside the real underestimation of the autonomous strength of the masses.

We ourselves have made the same kind of corrections, little by little. The experience of, and the rapid check to, the proletarian left in France, have broadly contributed to clarifying these debates.

In Italy, there is also the fact of the existence of the Red Brigades and the Armed Nuclei of the Proletariat. If, in general, we share the judgement of the LC comrades on the origin of militarist deviations (the gulf between the emerging vanguards and the mass of the workers still under the yoke of reformism), we think we have to go deeper to get to the root cause, in particular from the point of view of the international balance of forces.

... in Latin America in the '60's

The ultraleft voluntarism of the new European vanguards was profoundly marked, from the start, by the figure of Che, the very symbol of voluntarism. Now, Che's voluntarism, his theorisation of necessary empiricism ("many will die, victims of their own errors...") can't today be rejected as the manifestations of a simple infantile phase of the revolutionary movement. They are also inscribed in what he called 'the illogical movement of human history' where the Vietnamese revolution seemed so isolated, so tragically isolated and little defended by the so-called 'socialist camp'. The uneven development of class struggle on the international scale has made of Che's exemplary action and of its last suicidal form, the Bolivian guerilla band, a perhaps necessary rejoinder to the betrayals of the reformists.

It is this that explains the powerful attraction of responses, politically and strategically in error, certainly, but written into this illogical moment as an attempt to break the circle.

So: the guerilla project of those years - just voluntarist and hopeless? The matter isn't so simple. Régis Debray, talking of 'rushed Leninism' (Leninisme presse) a little lightly, states that the assault of the vanguards was then anticipating the mobilisation of the masses, still in the process of recomposing themselves in the face of the imperialist offensive. And yet, the dialectic of the world revolution imposes objective tasks which cannot be put off (defence of the Cuban revolution, support for the Vietnamese revolution). It is the betrayals of the Chinese and Soviet bureaucracies which deepen the chasm under the feet of the young vanguards. There is a certain despair in the last letter he wrote to Tricontinental, where Che denounces the guilt of those who "wage a war of abuse and snares" instead of solidarising with the Vietnamese revolution. The solitude of Che himself in the Bolivian mountains is certainly the reflection of this Vietnamese isolation. The call offstage to our generation waiting in the wings ('Create 2, 3, many Vietnams!') can seem beyond measure on the very tick of political reason. But didn't it need all the force of this self-aware sacrifice to make the call heard, as far as the depths of the youth of Ceylon? The struggle and death of Che himself are a terrible indictment against all those "who have hesitated to make of Vietnam an inviolable part of the socialist world".

Today, if the resurgence of the proletariat has modified the balance of forces, certain characteristics of the world situation persist. It is there that these of LC in respect of Violence encounter one of their weak points. They write

The revolutionary party does not organise the class directly, but only the advanced part of it; in the same way, it doesn't organise the proletarian army, but only its leading cadres.

If the remark appears to us to be necessary to erase several confusions, its application remains too limited. In fact, a part of the thesis given over to the evaluation of the Latin American experience makes the critique of the guerilla that it was 'an element outside of participation in the social conflict, like a catalyst'. But the same party salutes the experience of the MIR uncritically, and above all that of the Argentinian PRT-ERP as a positive correction to this. Now, it'd be wrong to see in the people's army directly organised by the party nothing more than the result of a confusion in the conception of the party and its relation with the masses. After all, behind every coherent strategic vision, there is that of protracted revolutionary guerilla warfare which combines national emancipation and social revolution, which makes liberated zones into the base of dual power and the people's army into its political expression.

Let us acknowledge, to start with, that a number of castrist groups have taken their name from national liberation (MLN, ELN). In The Critique Of Arms, Debray emphasises that this organisational reality reflects the ambiguous status of the Latin American countries, roughly characterised as neo-colonies, and ranged by Tricontinental alongside African and Asian

countries which are subject to direct colonial dependence. Now, the Latin American countries are politically independent even though economically dependent and even though the tight relationships between the various weak national ruling minorities and imperialism make the threat of direct imperialist intervention an ever present military threat.

It is in this peculiar situation which feeds the confusions of strategy of which the castroist current has made itself the vector. Even if he doesn't make it any clearer, Debray well describes the difficulty: -

The revolutionary way in Latin America is riding on two historical classicisms - an uncomfortable dizziness: mixing certain traits of the revolutionary guerilla war with those of the people's war of liberation, it must combine the short and the long term, the popular insurrection in the big industrial centres (the revolutionary general strike) and the formation of the people's/peasants' army in the countryside, work in the heart of the standing army (as in Russia) and the building of another type of army (as in China)...

An elegant way of conjugating the classicisms... Certainly, the weakness of the national oligarchies in power is such, and their economic bonds to imperialism so tight, that they will inevitably lean on their yankee protectors or on Brazilian sub-imperialism. But this particular situation pushes the revolutionaries into telescoping the rhythms, into confusing the tasks, into taking for their point of departure what is as yet only a future probability. In a word, it consists of anticipation. Debray grasps this too, quite clearly:

Instead of moving from the concrete moment to its possible development, the tactic to follow in the concrete moment is deduced from the analysis of resulting strategic conditions... In taking foreign intervention as a certainty, one takes as already given precisely what is to be shown; that people's war is possible.

There is a risk in this of evading the most immediate tasks and compromising, in the same blow, the accomplishment of future tasks. Worse, though we can agree with Che that in Latin America 'The revolution will be socialist or it will be nothing', one can return backwards as it were to making ambivalent alliances which set up the bases for a popular nationalist 'democratic anti-imperialist movement', as illustrated by the support given by the Tupamaros to the Broad Front of class collaboration, and the politics of the PRT (Peronist Leftists) who, without capitulating before Peronist populism, made of the CP, which represented nothing but the pettybourgeoisie, a 'strategic ally'.

In Chile, it seems that the MIR itself hesitated between several strategic perspectives (guerilla, prolonged war leading to a seizure of state power, insurrectional strike). What seems to have prevailed in practice was the hypothesis of a limited putsch which would have unleashed a process of prolonged war. That would explain why neither the content of its central directives nor its practice really prepared a counter-offensive leading on to the problem of state power after the crisis of October '72. Thus, even though the entry of the military into the government concretised in the eyes of the masses the reformists' capitulation in the face of the manoeuvres of the bourgeoisie, the development of the industrial cordones and community commandoes was not presented as the embryo of a structure of dual power, but as a structure parallel and complementary to the UP government. Thus too, the development of self-defence and of the organisation of proletarian militias from the start of the commandoes and cordones does not seem to have been put forward as a central perspective. So much so that after the aborted putsch of June '73, at the very time when Miguel Enriquez judged the moment exceptionally favourable for a generalised revolutionary counter-offensive, the conditions for it had not been prepared. Far from drawing the lessons, Debray contents himself with an opportunistic apology for the politics of the UP, in conformity with his new political adherences.

In fact, faced with the military arsenal of the bourgeoisie, the revolutionaries of Latin America have too often under-estimated the capacities for

mobilisation and struggle of the proletariat.. Correctly considering civil war or a war of liberation as probable, they think it's already been declared - although as yet only by the vanguard. It is the masses who declare war on capital; how to bring it about that, by their experience and their mobilisation, they come to this level of consciousness and determination - that is the whole problem. An insurrectional conquest of power in Chile, when faced with the manoeuvrings towards a counter-revolutionary coup, certainly wouldn't have saved a civil war - but the battle would have been engaged from the start with an incomparably more favourable balance of forces. We must never forget that the war of resistance in Vietnam was built on the successful insurrection of 1941 which founded the legitimacy of the new power. This is what Giap recalls in 'People's War, People's Army':

Since 1939, our party has devoted itself to preparing the people for insurrection, for uprising. The insurrection triumphed in 1945; soon, during the next 9 years, the party is to direct the long war of resistance of the people and lead it to victory.

On the other hand, in mixing war to come with war present, the before and the after, in collapsing the present into the future, tactics into strategy, a key Leninist concept is excluded - that of the revolutionary crisis. It's a question we shall find again later in relation to strategy in Europe. By not opening up these debates to their foundations, one risks confining the polemic on violence and militarism to a superficial level, in only taking for one's objects of criticism the most caricatured forms of the problem. The setbacks of a coup remain possible. This is the first limit that we shall discover in the IC congress these

The second limitation is the fuzziness that they maintain on the concrete tasks, once these necessary corrections to their previous perspectives have been made. In effect, Adriano Soffri's report returns to the same questions, in relation to the analysis of the current political situation:

We say that a coup d'etat can be defeated, not that it isn't possible. The difference is decisive. It is an invitation to put this problem on the agenda, in order to confront it politically, as it must be confronted, with the masses, in mass work. The general keys of our line (mots d'ordre) - on getting the MSI banned, on the democratic organisation of soldiers etc and their working out in practice, are the weapons of the political armoury of the masses on this terrain. The experience of the early days of November, rich in lessons, has brought out the difference between a way of confronting the possibility of a reactionary coup (in just demagogically proclaiming its impossibility) thus assuring such a coup of success, and preoccupying oneself with the security and survival of the organisation, and an offensive fashion of confronting it, which calls on the consciousness and activity of the masses.

Once again, we share the general problematic. Class struggle is literally, for real, a struggle. That means that the outcome is not established in advance, victory is in no way assured. If there must be defeat, better a defeat after having joined battle, a defeat which enriches the historical experience of the masses, than a demoralising defeat without a battle. Better the Paris Commune than Indonesia, Spain than the Sudan. These generalisations have practical consequences for the construction of the party and the preparation of the masses.

Once again, Latin America has offered us enough examples of groups, who, having estimated defeat as inevitable, have begun to prepare for their tomorrows, out of touch with the real movement of the masses; the Bolivian guerrilla of Teoponte.

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But what doesn't clearly emerge from the LC congress these are the concrete means of preparing the offensive of the masses. Soffri cites two examples, the 'keynotes of policy' that of getting the MSI banned, and concerning the democratic organisation of soldiers. It's not enough, or not precise enough. The banning of the MSI, it seems to us, takes up an old PCI line, in itself neither correct nor incorrect. But if one doesn't want to feed legalistic illusions as to how they must be effectively dealt with by the state, it is further necessary to define the correct means by which the masses themselves by their own self-activity must bring about the ban on the MSI - vigilance committees in the quarters, mobile self-defence pickets in the factories, co-ordination of these pickets. A struggle must be fought in the unions for the unified control of these pickets and under certain conditions, the vanguard must be prepared to take on this self-defence themselves, if the reformists refuse (this is what we of the LCR did in France on 21 June '73). In a general way, the axis of workers' self-defence is not thrown into relief in the LC theses as the axis of the response to militarism and vanguardism. And at the level of tension now reached in Italy, this is a central question. Not only because it answers an objective necessity, but because it gives coherence to an alternative strategy to that of prolonged war; it gives flesh to a strategy for the insurrectional seizure of power which is based directly on the proletarian organs of dual power (factory committees, councils); it maps the path of an alliance, under the leadership of the proletariat, through the forms of organisation to hand - area committees, support committees. It is of course possible that the insurrection is only the starting point for a civil war. But, we repeat, that's another matter when it is engaged upon with incomparably more favourable balance of forces. It is also in this perspective that the development of mass committees of soldiers and clandestine cells in the army takes on full meaning.

By failing to carefully define these tasks, illustrating them by examples, one risks passing from militarist positions to positions that are militarily (if not politically) spontaneist which, renouncing every role proper to the vanguard in this area, end up by throwing responsibility for the whole affair onto the shoulders of the reformists. This is not, in the congress theses, the only symptom of a correction that, in our opinion, goes too far the other way. We will return to this later.

2/ ON THE QUESTION OF THE ARMY

On this point, the congress these effect a correction similar to one that we ourselves have effected...

Against the positions of the Italian ultra-left, they defend the need to weaken the Army by a democratic organisation of the soldiers which comes into direct confrontation with the army's hierarchical structure and military discipline -

The struggle for the freedom of democratic organisation of the military, allied to just material demands, is the test of a correct mass line in the armed forces.

We agree, and we did just this, with the call of 100 soldiers, with the soldiers' councils, with the demonstrations in uniform at Draguignan and Karlsruhe, which carried the antimilitary struggle to its highest level since 1945 and - finally - in advancing the perspectives of a union of soldiers under the command of the workers' movement. The LC theses go further

To reduce revolutionary organisation in the Armed Forces to its conspiratorial aspect alone would be a grave error.

We fully agree.

And we agree too when the comrades explain that it is up to the working class itself to ally itself to the struggle of soldiers, proletarians in uniform; and that it is the duty of militant workers to address themselves to the soldiers, in their barracks, through pamphlets, papers, opening the dialogue. We agree on this step. It just seems to us that its systematic application by LC risks suffering from more general ambiguities in the orientation of LC towards the working class movement as a whole, and in particular in relation to their intervention in the unions.

What interests us immediately, out of the two examples that we have considered, is to put in relief the whole trajectory of LC, and its attempts to define a mass line. Even if, in our view, the strategic line remains too little-defined, and if ambiguities result from it which will find their full weight in the matters of internationalism of the electoral question and of the formula of government.

SECTION TWO

THE INTERNATIONAL STRATEGIC LINE (LE CADRE STRATEGIQUE INTERNATIONALE)

Two these, on Imperialism and on the question of the International, illuminate the international strategic line of LC. It's not a matter of a simple decorative accessory, but a matter in fact of a strategic horizon which orientates the concrete politics.

1/ ON THE INTERNATIONAL

This thesis develops from a general characterisation of the historic role of the first three Internationals. /_ see LC conference documents for this thesis /

The First is the 'instrument of theoretical affirmation' of the emergence in the heart of the workers' struggles of an international communist tendency. Its role is limited to the affirmation of strategy 'independently of the necessity of tactics'.

The Second International

was born under the conception which substitutes for the theory of the working class as a whole the theory of the productive forces and of stages, from which flow the tasks of the proletariat. In the theory of the productive forces, lay the roots of the separation between political struggle / economic struggle, maximum / minimum programme, between the everyday tasks and the final battle.

Further, the Second International appeared ^{as} the expression of 'a limited sector of the proletariat,' to the exclusion of the 'disqualified and unorganised' mass.

Finally, the Third International appears as the instrument of the imminent insurrection, in a Europe strategically unified by the First World War. There was a risk for the masses of throwing themselves into a premature assault, without direction or programme (as the events in Berlin of January 1919 showed)

In the framework of this hypothesis, the Communist International was born as a world party of insurrection, as a tactic of civil war, through a violent rupture with social democracy, all the while keeping the theoretical matrix of social democracy.

This pattern leads to two conclusions. The first, is that these conditions. The first, is that these conditions for a new International have not since been re-unified. The second, is that only the People's Republic of China breaks the theoretical continuity of the economism founded on the theory of productive forces which links the third international to the second.

Let us consider this second conclusion first. It is not only LC's and it adds up to an evasion. In his Reply to John Lewis, Althusser speaks of the 'posthumous revenge' of the Second International, in connexion with the economic deviation which seized hold of the Third. (*)

In his book, Fascism and Dictatorship, Nicos Poulantzas in his turn makes of this 'deviation' the matrix of the degeneration of The USSR. For him, it's the 'economic general line of the Comintern which constitutes the 'breach' through which the 'reconstruction of the soviet bourgeoisie' passed. We have replied to him on this matter (see 'Poulantzas and the politics of Ambiguity' in Critique of Political Economy Nos 10-11).

In effect, this argument allows them, for Poulantzas as for Althusser, to duck the concrete analysis of Stalinism, reduced in their hands to the level of being a function of a 'theoretical deviation'. And better to whitewash the Chinese road. Let us xxxp rapidly pass by the stale smell of this idealist piss. The comrades explain that the Comintern inherits those strategic limitations which had allowed, in the bosom of the Second International, the co-existence between reformists and revolutionaries. They emphasise the separation between the economic and political struggle, the wrenching of tactics between the two poles and the

ever more dramatic oscillations of tactics expressed in the directives issued by the Comintern to the national sections, which were the first symptoms of an involution which led to the assumption of the defence of the USSR as determining strategy in face of social democracy, and to the slow conversion of the International into the instrument of Stalin's foreign policies.

Let us note straight away that to speak of 'a slow conversion' allows one to slip over the sequences of events and the historical breaks of a burcaueratic counter-revolution, involving social forces, classes and class fractions. Where is the jump in this 'slow conversion' which makes the politics of Stalin topple over to the side of the counter-revolution? The question isn't a secondary one, at least if one isn't to dilute political responsibility, the clash of lines, the alternatives expressed within the struggle from the start of the process and - even more important in our eyes - the fact that they are a living proof, and not by explaining from effect to cause, that Stalinism was not absolutely inevitable. On this, all we can do is to repeat some criticisms that we have addressed to Althusser -

Tracing back the analysis of Stalinism to theoretical deviation, common to the 2nd and 3rd internationals, * published in Marxism Today in 1973 or '74. John Lewis gives one of the few Humanist critiques from the position of the CPGB of Althusser, who, Lewis, believed, had written human/class activity out of history and marxism. True - but Lewis went towards all kinds of horrible CPGB type twists and sentimentality to prove it.

is aimed at giving the impression of going to the bottom of things, 'theoretical criticism' being though by intellectuals always to be more profound than politico-historical criticism.

(see Contre Althusser Editions 10-18)

A deviation in relation to what? by what norm? Just a 'deviation' this conservative and reactionary orientation of the workers' movement which has to its credit the crushing of the Chinese CP in 1926, the abandoning of Spain, the Moscow trials, the betrayal of the Greek revolution, the crushing of Budapest and the tanks in Prague. After having half-opened a few doors and reeling back before the dizzy spaces opening up behind them, there remains just this of the Althusserian chit-chat: that Stalinism is fundamentally a 'theoretical deviation'. That is what usefully clarifies 40 years of the history of the workers' movement (Contre Althusser pp 299 ff). If we take up this argument again, it's only to show better the underground front lines in the theoretical analyses, which cannot remain without serious political consequences.

So the theoretical simplification of the analysis of Stalinism leads for LC as for Althusser to rating the Chinese road:

In China, the autonomy of the direction of the revolutionary process was founded in an ever-increasingly clear way on the recuperation of strategic autonomy in relation to the 3rd International. This recuperation began with the rejection of the theory of the productive forces and with the affirmation of the political over the economic. This has led to the deepening, even after the seizure of power, of the relationship between the party and the masses, and to the decisive character of the intervention of the masses in the contradictions in the heart of the Party and the State. The refusal of the Chinese CP to set itself up as the central organiser of a new International cannot be seen in isolation from the character of the Chinese revolution. This refusal is far from being the symptom of a nationalist deviation. It is not aimed at restraining but rather favouring the development of world revolution.

For Althusser too, the 'sole historical critique from the left of the Stalinist deviation is that silent but active critique of the Chinese revolution, a critique from afar, a critique from the wings'. Althusser doesn't like the corpse as a corpse; to save the last sticks of Stalinist furniture, he comes on the apology of a 'masked politics' (theatrical joke). The time is long past for him when only the truth was revolutionary.

But let us come back to the role which the reference to China can fulfill for the LC comrades. We have long been convinced that the Chinese road, to seize power, had to shatter the schemas of international Stalinism, in particular the stageist theory of revolution. And we are aware that this transgression was already perceptible in Mao's writings of 1937-8-9 on the new democracy. All the same, we know that it wasn't simply a matter of escaping certain theoretical limits, but of ambushes and material, of diplomatic and political obstacles, multiplied by Stalin between 1945-49, stabs in the back of the Chinese CP.

We also know that the first attempts of the People's Communes and the Great Leap Forward constitute a hesitating exploration of another route towards the building of socialism after the shock of the 20th congress of the CPSU and the Hungarian and Polish uprisings. Alongside this must be ranged the self criticism of agrarian collectivisation in North Vietnam, stimulated by Giap against Truong-Chin after the Nghe An riots of 1956.

But this attempt at resolving the contradictions of the socialist project in an economy which was still dominated by world imperialism remains limited and empirical if it fails to engage two courses: the deepening of mass proletarian democracy (a condition of the elaboration of the plan), and the projection of the world revolution in the heart of the imperialist metropolises themselves. On these two points, the Chinese revolution has not delivered decisive answers. In relation to the first point, it is proved as much by the secret character of the confrontations at the top of the hierarchy (as illustrated by the Lin Piao episode), as by the very classification of the structures of power. The statutes of the PCP adopted at its 20th congress and the text of the revised constitution in no way approach the direct democracy on the lines of the Paris Commune so vaunted in 1967. The statutes confirm the leadership of the Party over the assemblies, the organs of the state, the workers' organisations . . . The constitution puts it precisely -

The CCP is the leading cell of the entire Chinese people as a whole. Marxism, Leninism and the texts of Mao Tse-Tung constitute the theoretical foundation on which the state guides its thought. The right and duty of all citizens is to be for the leadership of the CCP, for the socialist regime, and to abide by the laws and constitution of the People's Republic of China.

We are far from the sovereignty of the Soviets, and much nearer the 1936 constitution (called the most democratic in the world), which consecrated the triumph of Stalinism in the USSR, the constitution which delegated 'all power to the Party'.

As for the development of the world revolution, ping-pong diplomacy, the support for the regimes of Sudan, Iran, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, for the Angolan FNLA and, to end with, the theses exposed by Teng Hsiao Ping at the United Nations (1975), not to mention their recent defence of the American presence in Thailand against the principal 'Soviet enemy' - this, and the recognition of the Chilean regime, hardly seem to us to contribute to the world revolution.

What interests us now, is that a muted critique of Stalinism reduced to a theoretical deviation leads to a far too uncritical support for the Chinese road. And, curiously, that this support is perfectly recuperable by and assimilable to, the revisionist tendency of certain CPs, since it doesn't put at issue the strategic foundations of their politics - socialism in one country, peaceful co-existence.

We won't pretend that there is no open debate on Leninism, that if the relations between vanguard parties and the masses remain in principle unchanged, they can't remain so in form, given the profound changes in the proletariat itself. All the same, this debate is at best, just a rediscovery, in the light of new factors, of the old polemics of the young Trotsky, of Rosa Luxemburg and the German council communists against Lenin. But this debate would be poorly engaged in and would stop short if it was to result in a fundamental deception. Sure, there are elements of continuity between the 2nd and 3rd Internationals; the co-existence in them of Lenin and Kautsky their theoretical commerce, the relative blindness of the former

10/10... until the famous capitulation of 4 August 1914, and his incredulity
even when confronted with the treachery of Kautsky, are the index
of real problems. But in no way can they supply an excuse for
minimising the profound rupture between the 2nd International and
the Communist International (3rd). If the Communist International
presents itself as the instrument of the period's revolutionary
struggles and revolutions, it is nevertheless characterised more by
voluntarism than economism. In this respect it is worth reading
the first congresses of the Communist International (in particular
on the question of syndicalism) or the little book on Lenin by
Lukacs. It would be too simple and a really false dialectic to
reply that economism and subjectivism are two sides of the same coin.
For the strategy of the 3rd International rested at that time on
the experience of the most formidable and unprecedented socialist
constructions, on attempts themselves marked by voluntarism, of
transformations of the way of life which show, to whoever wants
to think about it, that maoism doesn't take the palm for originality
in this matter. And all this in conditions of disastrous civil war
and economic and cultural desituation.

Undoubtedly, the debate always returns to the question of Stalinism
and it is impossible to avoid grappling with it. Otherwise, one
inevitably falls into superficial arguments. So, turning towards the
Chinese road, the LC comrades have got to explain that today true
internationalism consists in not building the international since
none of the conditions of 1919 are repeated today. And since the
strategic field would not be unified as it was on the scale of the
European situation by a generalised revolutionary upsurge and
imminent insurrection coming out of the War; the situation would
be more differentiated, fragmented and complex.

For us, this is even more reason to maintain the principle of an
International, as necessary as the Party itself, strategically just
as indispensable. The necessity for it doesn't flow from the
conjunctural homogeneity of the political situation, it is a response
to a world imperialist system, to the interpenetration of capitals,
to the defining of an international imperialist strategy, to the
co-ordination and centralisation of the military/police instruments
of counter-revolution. The necessity for it is made still stronger
by the existence of a bureaucratic system which suurps and disfigures
the idea of socialism and which plays an active counter-revolution-
ary role under the pretext of peaceful co-existence. All that
makes the common laboration of theory and strategy,
a unified front of revolutionary forces, indispensable. Lacking
that, at one moment or another, the political slips and slides of
opportunism and sail trimming are inevitable.

2/ ANTI IMPERIALISM AND THE ROLE OF CHINA

During the LC Congress we attended the Commission report on the
question of Imperialism given by cde Bobbio. The theses dealt with
the relations between the USA and USSR but the debate in the
Commission centred on China's foreign policies. An amendment was
adopted of which we haven't got the full text, but which appeared
to us to be very important.

Concerning the first points, let us first of all note that the USA
is defined as
the principal and most powerful imperialist power in the
world, that is to say the Number One enemy of the peoples
of proletarians and of revolution in the entire world.
- which doesn't fit too easily with the Chinese position which
makes the USSR Number One Enemy.

/11...

1) Let us note that the LC theses' characterisation of the USSR opens up the whole debate on the nature of the USSR which we won't go into here:-

Confronting the USA is another imperialist power, the USSR. The specific form taken by the process of accumulation in the USSR (state capitalism) and the characteristics of its global expansion throughout the world have not altered the fundamental traits of the social system of the USSR. It consists of a system founded on the production of merchandises, on the exploitation of waged-labour, and on the accumulation of capital.

To this conceptually unrigorous characterisation, founded on superficial analogies, are added some more delicate considerations. So, the text emphasises that, if the Soviet working class has been rapidly robbed of political power, it 'remains the inheritor of a great proletarian revolution' - which limits the possibilities of raising the rate of exploitation or increasing unemployment. What does this heritage consist of? This is the whole problem, since if it had only been a matter of a moral heritage, no crystallised in the social relations, there is every reason to think that it would have fallen apart long ago ... But the text doesn't go far enough, beyond rather contradictory considerations, to actually laying out the programmatic tasks for revolutionary politics in the USSR, to enable one to measure the concrete consequences of divergences of analysis.

Without underestimating the importance of this debate (we have devoted a double issue of the Critique of Pol. Econ 7/8 to it) let us return to the problem of China's foreign policy.

The agreed position given in the reportback from the Commission and the sense of the adopted amendment start from the idea that in its general line, China's foreign policy is aimed at weakening imperialism. For proofs, they cite the Chinese positions on the question of territorial waters, on demography, even though the sum of its concrete political positions (Sudan, Pakistan, Iran, Ceylon and even Chile) is passed over in silence. If the general line is judged to be positive that should lead one to a position of support, at the cost of certain contradictions, brought up by the platform in the Congress, in relation to Europe in particular. In conformity with the general orientation declared by Teng Hsiao-Ping, Chou En-Lai in his report to the National Assembly took up again the theme of support for Europe against the USSR:

The USA and the USSR carry their rivalry to every point of the globe, and the key point of this rivalry is Europe. Soviet social-imperialism is making a big noise in the East, while all the while attacking the West.

He had already declared, when welcoming Pompidou to Peking

We support the European people's who unite to preserve their sovereignty and independence, and we are in favour, from this point of view, of the cause of European unity which, if it is to be brought to a successful conclusion, will contribute to the amelioration of the situation in Europe and in the rest of the world.

Chou En-Lai deliberately introduces a confusion there between bourgeois governments and peoples (he repeats it elsewhere in his speech last January to the National Assembly when explaining how the contacts between the two 'peoples, American and Chinese, have developed during the last three years'). We know how this Chinese international strategy has led orthodox Maoist groups like the PCMLF in France, to denounce anti-military work as weakening of national defence in the face of the Number One Enemy, the USSR, and to support the unity of the European bourgeoisies. The LC comrades agree that there is a contradiction between their orientations and the Chinese policy, particularly on the question of Europe. They conclude from this that they will have to take into account this aspect of Chinese policy (without writing about it in their newspaper) putting their positions alongside it. We regard this as a compromise on a question of principle.

At all events, the approval of China's foreign policies has consequences for LC's whole orientation. It logically illuminates the importance given in the Congress these to the theme of national independence. There, we touch on one of the central points marking out divergences.

3/ ON NATIONAL INDEPENDENCE AND 'NATIONAL SOVEREIGNTY'

The thesis on imperialism emphasises that

in our epoch, the capitalist bourgeoisie is not in a state to promote in any coherent or followed-through fashion a struggle for national independence. A

And the thesis on the International carries on:

In this perspective, the need for independence and national sovereignty, which the bourgeoisie has ceased to represent in order to make itself the more or less direct agent of imperialism, has not been surpassed. On the contrary, it is correct to assert that now, more than ever, only the armed proletariat can sustain the sovereignty and independence of nations.

This general orientation is justified by the particular place of Italy in the deployment of the international balance of forces. It is in fact emphasised that, confronted with the menace of a Middle East War, Italy constitutes an 'advance post of US military presence' or again, 'a country which is a frontier in the double sense of the term, territorial and class', (and above all since the crisis between Greece and Nato).

It's here that lies the proof that the argument on the current lack of an International leads to some strange ramifications. Fighting against US military presence and against atlantic alliances doesn't mean that one has to do it in the name of national independence. Even if the comrades, (in this they are different from the reformists) make the armed proletariat the sole defender of this independence, they are putting their finger in a dyke which was and remains the axis of reformist politics in Europe. It is in the name of national independence that the reformists justify alliance and class collaboration with non-monopolist and patriotic sectors of the bourgeoisie. It is in the name of national independence and sovereignty that they demand of the working class that it moderate its demands so as not to handicap nationalised industries, or the public sector, or even nationalised industries which must be a model of efficiency. It is by no means proven that a 'revolutionary'

version of 'national sovereignty' is today possible....

Consider the example of Portugal. The struggles against NATO, for the expulsion of the American bosses, for working class control over the movement of capital, for the expropriation of foreign capital and companies, for the purging of the Army and the Administration - all these are completely concrete tasks. They lead to the rejection of established alliances, including the Atlantic alliance. But the Atlantic alliance can't be rejected solely in the name of national sovereignty. The struggle against NATO, against imperialism, will not be brought to a successful conclusion by alliance with the middle bourgeoisie, but by the most resolute internationalisation of the class struggle against the multinationals and the CIA, by a strengthening of bonds between the different European proletariats. We say that it is this point that must be emphasised first: the internationalisation bourgeois repression and of its instruments (military pacts, policies of co-operation). Our response to it must be to reinforce proletarian internationalism. The current crisis of European capitalism must not lead on to the nation by nation defence of national sovereignty from which the reformists can draw their excuse for class collaboration with what they call the 'non-monopolistic' bourgeoisie. The interpenetration of European capital, the cement which immigrant workers can make, the common struggle against NATO and the Atlantic pact, must on the contrary put on the agenda a Workers' Red Europe, the United Socialist States of Europe. The marchers in France in May '68 were already shouting 'Duck the Frontiers!' The current situation must urge the revolutionary vanguards to go beyond conjunctural co-operation and to centralise their theoretical development and their action.

Whether the accent is put on the continental strategic framework or on the defence of national sovereignty leads to two different perspectives for struggle, two different orientations. For us, the choice that LC makes, emphasising national sovereignty, is linked with their refusal of the necessity for a new International and with their support for China's foreign politics. Before coming on to problems of their orientation in Italy itself, we will cite another passage from the thesis on the question of Imperialism which well illustrates how the emphasis on national independence always risks introducing an perspective of interclass alliance and of an intermediate stage ('new' or 'advanced' democracy) between capitalism and socialism: -

The reclaiming of neutrality and national independence as a necessary outcome of a struggle against NATO and the dependence of Italy on the USA is not simply a correct order of the day. It is a real perspective which finds a huge terrain of convergences with the political and social processes under way in other Mediterranean countries - Yugoslavia, Albania, Greece, Cyprus, Algeria and Portugal.

Here it is a question not just of independence, but of national neutrality, as a point of convergence between processes under way in countries with different social systems. With such a perspective agreed, not just as a 'pedagogic' mediation of denunciation of imperialism but as a 'real perspective', one is put foursquare into the strategy of three worlds as defined by Teng Hsiao-Ping, who gives the leading role to the diplomatic front, to the detriment of the class front.

SECTION THREE
ON THE NOTION OF A 'PROLONGED CRISIS' AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

The report of cde Soffri on the tendencies of class forces in the struggle reaffirms a point of departure we share. It rejects any idea of a lasting reflux of the movement of the masses which would justify a return to vanguardism, to substitutionism, in particular in respect of violence. According to him, the Italian working class is going through a phase of maturation and complexity, still confused about the practical outcome of its struggles; but that it would be wrong to conclude from that that its combativity is lessening:

It would be an irremediable error only to see in this return of the struggle to initiatives from the base (??? not sure what this means - 'dans ce retour de la lutte a l'initiative de la-bas), to a diversification of its objectives and forms, a retreat in relation to the dominant tendency of these last years.

For proof, he takes the fact that, during the demonstrations of 4 Dec 1974, the slogans which were widely taken up by the workers, were posing the question of power - 'Power to the Workers Now!'

But we find the whole problematic of the LC cdes is reflected in their concrete approach to their perspectives. Their congress thus has the merit of giving a really systematic expression to their method of procedure.

To begin with, the analysis of 'the primacy of politics' re-emerges in the analysis they have developed of the crisis. The battle against economism is elaborated in the affirmation according to which

the force of the proletariat always also tends to express itself in a relatively autonomous fashion in relation to objective conditions. Every economic conception which would make the movements of the working class depend in an automatic fashion on the variations of the capitalist cycle will always be given the lie by the facts

(Thesis on the International)

The whole trick of such a formula rests in the use of the adjective 'automatic' which suggests and immediately exposes its vulgar materialism. Faced with such an accusation, anybody, ourselves included, would defend themselves vigorously - we don't make it depend in an automatic fashion But the problem, for all that is in no way closed. To affirm that the period of capital's unbridled accumulation and expansion over the last 30 years is giving way to an unprecedented, generalised crisis of social relations is one thing. But isn't that also to recognise the breadth of this crisis as the coming to a head of a 'long' cycle following on from the 2nd World War?

To affirm the more than 'relative' autonomy of this crisis in relation to the capitalist cycle is another thing. This affirmation in effect illustrates a more general tendency to subjectivism that we have already noted in the thesis on the International. But it would only be an ideological argument of secondary importance if it did not occupy a precise function in the strategic problematic of the comrades. In effect, they reduce the contradiction of the mode of capitalist production to the contradiction which draws up the proletariat against the system. In the thesis on materialism,

the proletariat is defined as the principle, if not the sole productive force -

The principle productive force to which in the last instance all the others reduce themselves, is constituted by the proletariat, by its numerical and qualitative growth, by the class interests which are rooted in these material tasks, that is to say, in the historic conditions of its existence

Such a thesis allows one to make an out and out simplification of the social contradictions of a transitional economy, as we have already seen in the position on China and in the theoretical definition of the Stalinist deviation. And it moves towards Maoist voluntarism, according to which man is a blank sheet on which anything can be written. The struggle against economism conducted with this desperate enthusiasm, leads us to the borders of idealism. It would be difficult, besides, just to see a purely circumstantial sequence in the fact that the Belgian strikes of 1960-61 burst out just at the end of a recession, in a period of economic reconstruction, just as the general strike of May '68 came out of and towards the end of the European recession, and above all, think of Germany in '67...

LC's method of procedure leads to a series of quite concrete consequences. First of all, it leads to the dissolving of the Leninist concept of a revolutionary crisis into that of a prolonged (protracted) crisis (expressing the permanent crisis, relatively autonomous, of social relations). And this prolonged crisis provides the necessary time for workers' autonomy to progressively affirm itself, the direct result of the numerical and qualitative growth of the proletariat, the sole productive force - paradoxically, isn't that exactly the place of the real elision in the mechanism of vulgar materialism? The idea of a prolonged crisis, of the growth of workers' autonomy outside of the ascendancy of the reformists, introduces an evolutionist vocabulary which risks throwing us back on a stagist and gradualist strategy for the conquest of power. A danger which is not merely hypothetical, as we shall see.

1) United Front, Outflanking and Stageism

We find this question dealt with fairly systematically in the thesis on tactics. This thesis On The Question Of Tactics does its best to circumscribe its subject thoroughly -

We emphasise the strategic character of the content of workers' autonomy - of the negation of wage labour, of the unification of the proletariat under the leadership of the working class [...]. We maintain that, in general terms, the question of tactics has at its centre the relation between the autonomy of the working class and the majority organisation of the class.

And further on -

What is tactics? It is the way in which we think it is possible to gain the revolutionary leadership of the majority of the proletariat.

The problem posed here is exactly that faced by every revolutionary organisation today: how to forge the independence and unity of the proletarian class, on the basis of its historic interests, while the majority of the class is still under the sway of the

reformist - collaborationist and capitulationist - leaderships?
How to break the masses from their current leaderships and paths,
how to gain their confidence?

Every response to these questions presupposes a certain analysis of reformism, and a certain analysis of class-consciousness. Our own answers start from the idea that reformism (social democratic or stalinist) can't be reduced to a demonic invention of the bourgeoisie with which to manipulate the workers, but that it is first of all a product of the day to day struggles of the masses, alienated by wage-labour, dispossessed of their means of labour and of the product of their labour, and incapable of pulling themselves up to a vision which goes beyond the social system exploiting them. The idea developed in the Communist Manifesto, according to which the proletariat is a class under economic, political and ideological domination opens out directly on to the central strategic question of the formation of the consciousness of the revolutionary class, of winning its independence and unity in the face of the bourgeoisie. The bourgeoisie first of all draws its economic power and then its cultural hegemony, from the appropriation of the means of production and from the generalisation of exchange in the unifying framework of the market. Its conquest of political power is only the outcome of a long process. For the proletariat, on the contrary, the conquest of power politically is a beginning, is the key to its political and cultural emancipation. There is an evident contradiction here, one in which reformism roots itself: how can a despoiled and disinherited class pull itself up to the level of this task, and take the organisation of society as a whole into its own hands?

Certainly, it is on the basis of its own experience of struggles that its organisation is born and class consciousness is formed, and that the tendency to workers' self-emancipation develops - that which the LC cdes call the affirmation of workers' autonomy at the level of strategy. But when we pass on to the terrain of tactics, of the concrete organisation of the workers' movement, our answer to the central question of the conquest of the majority of the class revolves around two ideas: that of a united front of the class and that of a revolutionary crisis.

The United Front (Le Front Unique) Our starting point is not a 'virgin' working class, but of a working class already organised, in the main by reformist parties, already organisationally divided, in terms of diverse strategic projects, and worse still, consolidated, crystallised in its divisions by a network of international divisions and alliances by the influence of constituted state apparatuses.

But rooted in the existence and social practice of the proletariat is a profound aspiration towards unity. It is this aspiration that we rely on when we bring it into contradiction with the politics of the reformist leaderships, pushing forward the lines and forms of organisation which tend toward the unification of the class: equal rises across the board, sliding scale of wages and hours, unification of the Trade Union movement, sovereign general assemblies etc. Because this unification reinforces the self-confidence of the proletariat. But to lay bare the contradictions of the reformist leaderships, it isn't enough just to develop lines and plans for action in trying to entice away those militants who put their trust in the reformists.

It is necessary to propose to these reformist leaderships themselves unity of action on the bases of class struggle and the independence of the class. This is what we call the United Front, in direct contrast to class-collaborationist fronts ('union of the Left,' 'historic compromise', democratic junta' etc) advanced by the reformists. Whether this tactic can be realised in a systematic tactic of action from the base to the top, depends on the balance of forces. Too weak a revolutionary organisation which tries to practice such a tactic without the power to impose its fundamentals, will be reduced to tailism, to the opportunism of a pressure group which has now power on the reformist leaderships. But, even if it is not possible in any situation to systematise this tactic in a permanent way, it is possible, on subjects or terrains on which the ground is more favourable, to map out such a perspective by imposing or proposing unity of action. We have done this in certain youth mobilisations, in certain anti-militarist mobilisations, and around certain strikes (the LEP march). This is all by way of summing up our method of procedure on the problem of tactics.

The Revolutionary Crisis But then again, we don't think that the independence or autonomy of the class can affirm itself little by little, gradually, inexorably building along the 'red thread' of its accumulated experience. The power of the dominant ideology to dominate roots itself in the capitalist mode of production and, so long as they are not shattered, it regains vigour among the ranks of the proletariat itself. Those who believed that after May '68, the level of consciousness attained in the May general strike would stay as the point of departure for future struggles were deeply mistaken. Bourgeois society has managed to recuperate, seize back the terrain, because it kept hold on the essentials: political power and the capitalist relations of exploitation. That is why we continue to think that the majority of the masses do not escape the dominant ideology and submission to it, except in a period of crisis which transforms them. It's obvious how the workers in a factory on strike temporarily escape the despotism of the factory, find new resources in themselves, new daring. It is this metamorphosis which is reproduced on a mass scale in a revolutionary or pre-revolutionary period, when the tissue of bourgeois society is torn away. On this, we refer the reader to Lenin's writings 'On The Bankruptcy of the 2nd International' and to those of Trotsky on the History of the Russian Revolution. For us, the idea of a revolutionary crisis is a strategic concept which responds to the form of domination over the masses, and to the conditions of the conquest of power by the associated producers.

It seems to us that, in using neither the one nor the other of these two keys, the LC cdes confuse two ideas. They explain that "a progressive passage of the proletariat from the ranks of the PCI to those of the revolutionary party is totally impossible". True. The conclusions for the building of the revolutionary party must be drawn. In the texts translated and published by Les Temps Modernes, the LC cdes already explain that their strength was to be the first to understand that they could, to build their organisation, lean on the current of radicalisation of workers which passed largely outside the ranks of the PCI, without having to wait for a hypothesised crisis or split in the PCI.

But the fact that it's possible to build the bases of a revolutionary organisation outside of the traditional reformist parties does not signify that, from the point of view of the conquest of

power, it is possible to ignore or bypass them. Now, the cdes pass from the first idea to the second -

Not only the solidity of the revisionist edifice, but the prolonged character of the capitalist and imperialist crisis modify the hypothesis of a vertical precipitation of the political and social equilibrium, of a brisk change of camp by the masses, of a rapid insurrectional development led by the revolutionary party.

Such a development seems to us to overestimate the solidity and cohesion of the revisionist (or Stalinist) edifice. And, lacking an adequate tactic to undermine it at the base, to exploit and undermine it by accentuating its contradictions, the comrades soon to fall back on what is in the last analysis, a defeatist position. Time will do its work, the changing of camp by the masses will not have the character of a sharp crisis but of a slow erosion. And we find once again, the idea of a prolonged crisis, the impressionistic extrapolation from the rampant May in Italy, in opposition to the idea of a rapid insurrectional development.

Anyway, the LC cdes - as distinct from vulgar ultralefts - are aware of the contradictory character of the reformist organisations. They explain that the FOI expresses a bourgeois direction, but that the understanding of its politics and its nature would be deficient if one didn't add -

that its fate, in the last instance, is tied in with its influence on the working class, which constitutes the condition of its strength and authority.

The comrades even put their finger on some real contradictions -

What is the correct revolutionary tactic in this situation? Certainly not that which consists in ideologically following revisionism into its bankruptcy with the intention of becoming its executors; but to reinforce the autonomy of the movement, to work in its struggles and base organisations, in order to win the revolutionary leadership (?to win it to a revolutionary leadership??? i can't work it out), to reduce the space left for revisionism to work in, and to emphasise, on the contrary the national and international needs of capitalist reconstruction, and in order to exploit the contradictory relationship between the revisionist organisation and the masses as a springboard for the general and united action of the masses.

But this definition of the correct tactic remains at a pretty high level of generality. Nowhere does one find any concrete exposition of the form that 'workers' autonomy' takes at the level of tactics - neither precise forms of self-organisation nor a perspective for work in the unions (? une perspective de tendance syndicale), nor a general formula for workers' government. We'll come back to this later.

But what surprised us most was to hear nothing throughout the entire congress of any systematic intervention or work within the unions or to do with the self-organisation of struggles.

On the unions, their "institutionalisation" is placed on the same plane as the advent of parliamentary democracy. They are thus both seen as an instrument of indirect state manipulation (de manipulation para-Etatique). Their contradictory

character is analysed less than that of the PCI. Resulting from this, their use, far from taking up a precise orientation, is limited to abrupt and timely or conjunctural intervention in the union structures, to a politics of presence where there are honest but misled militants, and indeed to an empirical support (not without its opportunistic slides) for left wing union elements. But in no instance does it consist of considering the unions as an elementary structure of a united front in the heart of which one affirms the tendency of class struggle on the basis of a platform of defence of uniting demands and of the independence of the class.

In the same way, the battle for the forms of selforganisation of the class (sovereign general assemblies, electable and instantly renewable strike committees) does not appear as a central axis. So that, confronted with the partial recuperation of the delegate councils by the union apparatuses under bureaucratic control, the LC does seem to have a variable stance towards the matter, of tactical utilisation of the councils according to the places and circumstances, without a comprehensive central perspective. In other words, the strategic perspective of workers' autonomy remains pretty disembodied, outside of the tactical mediations of its application. For us, we tie the battle for the democratic self-organisation of the class to the indispensable support for it in the experiences of workers' control. So, in his political report, cde Soffri states that it

would be a grave political error to abandon the struggle in the councils, at the moment when they are being forced to submit to a definitive bureaucracy and bureaucratic normalization. But the factory councils are today not, in any decisive fashion, the leading force in factory struggles, still less the springboard for their generalisation. The tendency is significant and fruitful, which defines a redistribution of the representativeness of workers in the direct initiation of struggles, and of a new communication of directives in the factory from the real vanguards.

If such an appreciation can give way to taking positions blow by blow, - that's bad enough - at any rate, it's no basis for founding a general political line on. And, lacking a defined line, clear and firm, opposing the reformists, the crumbling away into choices made on a purely tactical basis, left up to the local evaluation of forces, can only favour the most diverse adaptations, in relation to the reformist organisations themselves as well as more generally.

So, the general result of these lacks of definiteness in the stance towards reformism, is that the tactic that LC seeks to define for the conquest of the majority of the class dissolves and disappears. In its place, there remains just the general idea of working class autonomy - in sum, a strategy built around left-overs (cul-de-jotte). Instead of a trial of strength for the conquest of the masses, one returns to a kind of original spontaneism - workers' autonomy will see us through.... The outflanking of the reformists will be assured by the progressive growth, in the 'prolonged crisis' of workers' autonomy, without the united, concrete tactics needed to confront the majority reformist organisations ever becoming a central problem.

This skirting of a crucial problem can only favour a gradualist vision, which fits together nice and flush in several formulas. It is written again into the theses on Tactics.

To win the workers over to the revolution in a crisis of capital which takes a prolonged form (which excludes therefore a lot more, and makes it a different situation from 50 years ago when there was a sudden collapse of the capitalist regime and the sudden transformation of the balance of forces inside the masses between the revolutionary minority and the revisionist and reformist majority organisations of the masses) - this is the problem of tactics.

The comrades pursue this line -

In general, we orientate our tactic in relation to the majority leadership of the proletariat on the basis of its contradictions. In the last instance, these are reduced to the contradiction between a bourgeois leadership and the need to preserve the representativeness of the class movement. This contradiction is held in check by the revisionist organisation when the anti-capitalist autonomy of the working class is relatively weaker, but it becomes, inversely, increasingly difficult for the organisation and workers' autonomy grows.

It's difficult to see what is the tactical role of the organised vanguard, if the growth of working class autonomy of its own accord brings the contradictions in the reformist organisations to the point of rupture, supposing again that working class autonomy grows (effectively) in a linear fashion, which seems to contradict the history of the last century of the workers' movement. At least, unless the renunciation of the economist line, mother of all evils, and the opening of a prolonged crisis, relatively autonomous in relation to the cycles of the capitalist mode of production, are enough to assure in the future what has not been produced in the past: a growing wave of workers' autonomy submerging the old reformist bureaucracies, and of which the revolutionary vanguard would only be the most advanced point. We must emphasise here that the comrades talk of "the vanguard with a mass character" /mass vanguard/ in the same way that we use the term 'broad vanguard' in our writings. Certainly, we are at least partially pointing to the same phenomena: the formation, in struggle, of a vanguard. But for the LC cdes, this only designates an advanced part of the emergent movement of workers' autonomy, without making political criteria intervene practically which point to ruptures in the heart of the workers' movement. For us, the notion of a broad vanguard doesn't simply designate a certain degree of workers' combativity. It also expresses the idea of a rupture, still as yet partial or empirical, with the reformist strategy. It leads on to the problems of united tactics (de tactique unitaire) - how to give support to the broad movement, how to unite it, without dividing the workers' movement, but on the contrary with a view to imposing unity of action on the reformists. This absence of perspective, the lack of systematised thinking on this subject, is confirmed by the fact that none of the congress theses is given over to a precise analysis of the Italian revolutionary left and of the tactics to unify it and towards the reformists.

We think that it's here that we rediscover the oldest and most solidly theorised spontaneist illusions. That is, those illusions which are born out of making a theoretical' extrapolation from the given situation. Thus, the German council Communists, the Gorthons and Pannecocks, all believed that the crisis which battered Germany from 1919-23 would become permanent. They believed that the proletariat had entered into a kind of adulthood

in its organic growth, and that the councils born out of the crisis would thenceforth develop, outside and against the old bureaucratic apparatuses. Once the opportunities of the revolutionary crisis had been squandered, once the chance to seize power had been lost, the councils died, where they weren't institutionalised by social democracy in the form of works committees.

And the same too for the Maoists after May '68, who thought that the 'wind from the East had definitively brought on the wind in the West', that proletarian ideology had become dominant throughout the planet, that the reformist union apparatuses were on the run and that the bureaucrats were skulking round Renault in fear and trembling. They began by taking their desires for realities, by believing the privileged moment of the crisis to be eternal. Many of them ended up contenting themselves with taking fealty for their desires by rejoining the ranks of the Socialist Party, or the Union left, or the mandarins of the universities - or more simply their slippers.

The LC cdes seem to develop their theory along these lines, with their project marked of course by the peculiar characteristics of the rampant Italian crisis. If they can allow themselves to think of it in this way, it could be said that the endemic crisis in Italy feeds a more rich and profound workers' experience there than does the French situation. Nevertheless, this experience has a limit, in that it doesn't really come up against the problem of (State) power. The French strikers in May '68 caught a glimpse of the considerable leap they would have to take to raise themselves to the final test of force with the French state apparatus. The existence of the strong state as the other participant in the struggle stimulates in a contradictory fashion the tendency to generalisation and centralisation of struggles. May '68, the youth struggles of Spring '73, the struggles of the bankworkers and postworkers have all illustrated this in their own way. This political horizon for struggles is the best remedy against any and every gradualist illusion in the extreme left, against every lurking 'evolutionist' ideology.

Inversely, the idea that the growth of workers' autonomy will bring the reformists to an end seems to be a self-answering logic.

What will assure this growth of workers' autonomy and not its bureaucratic recuperation? This growth presupposes a homogeneous, linear time with the denouement coming in right on time. It limits the role of the vanguard party as a combat-detachment, a collective for elaboration of theory and a tactical instrument of strategy. The time of class struggle is, on the contrary, a syncopated time, of crises and trials of strength, where the problem of power is always posed on time and always comes too early. On time because it presupposes a working class already sufficiently strong. And too early because the effect of surprise, which fools the bourgeoisie, also supposes that the revolutionary vanguard is still little developed or strengthened in its roots. What should the tactic be in Italy, in the event of a revolutionary crisis, before the growth of workers' autonomy had assured that the majority of the class had a proletarian revolutionary orientation? It is this question above all that must be answered, since it poses the most likely situation and terms. Now, the complete strategic perspective developed by the LC cdes, the lack of definition of tactical orientations in relation to the reformists, leaves a yawning space open for tactical improvisations in response to each blow as it comes, so much the more open to opportunistic slips and slides as they are

considered to be just secondary, provisional, temporary.

2) The Communist Party in Government?

These dangers become particularly clear on the question of the perspective on government. The comrades take as their point of departure a rejection of formulas put forward by other currents on the extreme left -

The formulation of the type 'Government of the Left' in which a new grouping of forces between socialists, certain catholic sectors and certain sectors of the revolutionary left fits neatly, gives all the impression of being the candidate to replace the Christian Democrats in the role of Manager of The Crisis.

To these formulations of opportunistic interclass alliances (at worst) and rallying to the reformists under the banner of a united front, the LC cdes counterpose a politics which pretends to realism merely by avoiding giving support to illusions in the reformist leaderships and their eventual passage to the background of the revolution under the pressure of the masses.

But this care for realism, whatever the arguments, (which besides are different elsewhere) in fact comes down to being just a caution against the 'historic compromise' politics of the PCI. The comrades have put forward the slogan 'PCI To Government!'. We believed, at first, that it consisted of a transitory formula of the type 'A CP Government!'. After we had been enlightened on this in various ways, it seems rather that it consists of demanding that the PCI enter government, shoulder to shoulder with the Christian Democrats. It consists of demanding the immediate reliaisation of the historic compromise, at the level of government. The simplest and most reliable thing to do here is to refer back to the report of Adriano Soffri himself.

He says first -

A change of regime having as its axis the presence of the CP in government, through the very process by which it came about, would signify a drastic reduction in the possibilities of a dramatic management of the crisis.

Further on he expands -

All of that signifies that the majority role of the PCI is made more contradictory and vulnerable, but it doesn't tend purely and simply to dissolve. A government with the PCI in it wouldn't simply suppress this double tendency, but would on the contrary tend to exacerbate it, radicalising the contradiction between the PCI and the programme founded on the needs of the masses on one hand, and on the other, the contradiction between the PCI and the bourgeoisie. The tragic phrase of the Chilean worker ('The Popular Unity Government is shit, but it's ours!') would be worth more in our situation, even though the balance of forces and the maturity of workers' autonomy are different.

There are several ideas mixed in here. The idea that the coming of the PCI into government would be an expression, even though

deformed and indirect, of the power of the working class. The idea that the presence of the PCI in government would aggravate the contradictions of the capitalist system and of its direct political representatives. We agree with that to a certain extent. More precisely, if the PCI participating in government isn't exactly the willing choice the bourgeoisie would make, cold, as it were (to the extent that it fears the social dynamic that it foroshadows rather than the projects of the PCI itself). Nevertheless, the fact must not be minimised that, in the event of an open crisis, the CP will be exactly the final solution the bourgeoisie will choose. And that the CP is preparing itself better for this role in taking programmatic commitments in respect of established institutions, private property, and even in trying to forge an alliance with the party most representative of the bourgeoisie through the historic compromise. So, to present in the PCI's accession to government only the heightening of the contradictions resulting from it, remains one sided.

From this, cde Soffri is led to minimise the role that the reformists would be led to play -

Many seem to fear, in a situation of this type, the dangers represented by the repressivd role of the PCI. Its undoubtedly and irremediably repressive role (connected to its nature as a reformist organisation) cannot today win out over the autonomy of the masses confronting it, and would find it difficult to lay this repression on a mass movement coming out of a victorious offensive.

For us, the problem isn't simply one of the repressive role of the PCI (even though the example of the Spanish Civil War reminds us that it must be taken seriously), but more to do with the fact that this role can be better exercised to the extent that the masses will have been already disarmed.

Let us return to the two elements which intervene and are at times mixed together to justify the call for 'PCI To Government!'. Firstly, an argument deriving from catastrophe-politics (la politique du pire): the contradictions will be brought to the point of rupture. Further, a more dangerous argument: the passage of the PCI to government will be a necessary stage to show up its real role, to steel the masses, to free them from its influence, in a word, to carry forward workers' autonomy.

As for the first argument, we must understand the full import of the contradiction. Certainly, getting the CP in government can be interpreted by the masses as a victory and as an encouragement for their struggles. But for this same reason, the bourgeoisie won't accept giving them a place in government, except in a situation of extreme crisis, to cure the system, as is happening here and now. Its presence, then, in government, will act at the same time as an encouragement and as a brake, a diversion aimed at channelling the energy of the masses towards strictly democratic objectives, and not towards a revolutionary overthrow. Mobilising the masses in the perspective of governmental participation can only leave them, as a result, disarmed in the face of coalitions and alliances that the Stalinists are already busy hatching. It is essential that we insist from now on the contrary, on the fact that the self-organisation of the masses, the development of soldiers' committees and the struggle for workers' control, are the best guarantees with which workers can arm themselves against governmental combinations with bourgeois parties.

It would be even more dangerous to give credit to the idea that the

passage of the CP to government constitutes an indispensable step on the road of workers' autonomy. May '68 in France showed how the self-organisation of the workers can take a giant step forward in the situation of a general strike. It is educational to use these examples to show how, if an electoral victory can stimulate the mobilisation of the masses, the upsurge of their struggles and the development of their forms of organisation doesn't necessarily have to pass through that! Lacking that, the alleged 'political realism' would in fact be the best come-on to electoralism plain and simple.

We are completely aware of the problem confronting us. It isn't enough to promote the self-organisation at the base, councils, committees etc. The question of power can be posed to us even though these embryos of power are as yet only episodic and unevenly developed, and even when the reformist leaderships keep the confidence of the vast majority of the workers. We couldn't content ourselves with saying that we wouldn't yet be ready, and that all we should do is defer our responsibilities until the day after tomorrow. It is to this contradictory situation that the slogan, for us, of 'Government of the Workers' or 'Government of Workers' Organisations' is addressed. It is a matter of demanding of the majority organisations that they take power when the masses push them into it, without alliance with bourgeois parties, through electoral means or not. This formula is for us the crowning of the politics of the United Front of the class. It is not aimed solely at offering a concrete solution corresponding to the current balance of forces, but at showing to the masses that the reformists are not ready to go into government except under certain conditions

which guarantee the maintenance of bourgeois legality and the capitalist state and not to enact the anticapitalist programme which expresses the objective class needs born out of the struggle. But one fundamental criterion must be respected in order that this formula doesn't serve simply as a stepping stone to reformist collaboration: that of the maintenance of the independence of the class. So, to the union of the left with the bourgeois parties (radicals), we must counterpose the perspective of a government of workers' organisations without bourgeois ministers. In the same way, in Chile, after October '72, in parallel with the building of industrial cordones and community commandoes, it was necessary to fight to break the bonds between the reformist workers' parties and the bourgeoisie, to fight for the expulsion of military ministers, for the formation of a government including all workers' organisations based on the cordones and commandoes. Even when they remain in the domain of propaganda, these formulas insistently pose the necessity for the independence of the class. They resolutely oppose a united front of the working class against any interclass coalition or front.

That's why, when, on the basis of an upsurge of workers' struggles like in the 'Hot Autumn' of '74, we can demand of the reformist parties that they take government, we take care not to underwrite their politics of class collaboration by demanding the 'Union of the Left to Power'. We demand a government of the CP and the Socialist Party to satisfy the working class demands that have come out of the struggle.

To demand purely and simply that the CP enters into government alongside the Christian Democrats fails, on the contrary, to arm the workers in any way against class collaborationist fronts, pacts. This demand is all the more dangerous in that, in the prolonging of the struggle for national independence, there's the strong risk of its appearing as the stage of a renovated democracy and of the restoration of national sovereignty, since these themes